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BLOOD AND WOUNDS IN THE 'NIBELUNGENLIED'

J. Schwietering has drawn special attention to the religious background to the scenes of Kriemhilt's *Witwenrauer* in the *Nibelungenlied* and their 'central importance' for the poet of the early thirteenth century. In his estimation they are a 'worldly' reflexion of the 'Frömmigkeit des Herzens' of Cistercian mysticism.¹ It is, in fact, becoming more and more widely recognized, with fruitful results for research, that the *Nibelungenlied*, in the form in which it stands, should not be treated as a survival from the Germanic Heroic Age, but as a work of art composed around 1200, in which a basic story from another epoch is adapted and 'modernized' to provide entertainment and edification for a courtly public in Austria. The earlier tendency to concentrate on *Sagengeschichte* and fanciful mythological interpretations is giving place to a disposition to give the poet due consideration as a 'courtly adaptor', however different his methods of adaptation may be from those of the court epic poets.²

In the nature of things, any assessment of the *Nibelungenlied* must begin from the basic premiss that, in choosing his 'matter' from the Germanic Heroic Age, the poet committed himself within certain limits to an acceptance of patterns of situation and motivation of character in keeping with the ancient way of life and thought, which had survived through the intervening centuries of oral tradition. Some elements of the story, to say the very least, could not be discarded. Yet it is already taken as proved that he was also a poet of some calibre in his own right, and that he remoulded his material to some extent, consciously and unconsciously, in accordance with the spirit of the age in which he himself lived. As a courtly adaptor he was not loth to modernize and even to take up a modern standpoint in relation to the events he described. The immediate sources from which he worked, too, whether oral or written, must have incorporated their own modern elements, for the evolution from heroic lays to *Buchepos* had been a long one.³

The *Witwenrauer* scenes, with their strong emotive content, prove beyond all doubt that the poet's way of thought was essentially Christian, and that medieval Christian 'imagery' of a highly suggestive kind was second nature to him. But this does not apply to these scenes alone.

Such Christian imagery, for instance, is to be found in the description of the death of Sivrit, one of the crucial events of the poem. The treacherous act of Hagen is related as follows:

Er seoz in durch daz kriuze daz von der wunden spranc
daz bluot im von dem herzen vast' an die Hagenen wat.
so groze missewende ein helet nimmer mer begat. (str. 981, 2-4)⁴

¹ Cf. *Der Tristan Gottfrieds von Strassburg und die Bernhardische Mystik* (Abh. d. Pr. Ak. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl. 5, Berlin, 1943), p. 25.

² A. Heusler (*Nibelungensage und Nibelungenlied*, 5te Ausg., Dortmund, 1955), though concerned to show the development of the legend, devotes two-thirds of his work to the *Nibelungenlied* itself, and refers to its author as 'ein grosser Dichter' (p. 118).

³ Heusler's reconstruction of this evolution cannot be accepted in its entirety, but may be regarded as the most plausible so far attempted.

⁴ All quotations are from the Bartsch edition (9te Aufl., Leipzig, 1931). Signs of length are not included.

Here *kriuze*, *wunden*, *bluot* and *herzen* all occur in close proximity. Of these words the first three awaken Crucifixion echoes, if one's mind is receptive to them, while the fourth also belongs to the same group of associations in medieval mystical thought. The context as such bears little resemblance to that of the Crucifixion, except in so far as Sivrit is treacherously murdered, suffering a 'martyr's' death, but one cannot escape the impression that in using these words together in the way he does the poet has an ulterior motive, namely that of suggesting a 'worldly' analogy, however remote. The choice of a cross by Kriemhilt to mark Sivrit's vulnerable spot has nothing extraordinary about it, but the fact that it is through this very cross sewn upon his cloak that the warrior is pierced to death, and that the blood is said to spring forth out of the wound straight from the heart, suggests that Christian imagery has influenced the description. Moreover, the spot is the only place which had not been originally covered by the dragon's *blood*, from which Sivrit gained his virtual invulnerability. Hagen's behaviour is *ungetriuwe*, whereas Sivrit has never broken his oath of *triuwe*:

Do sprach der verchwunde	‘ja ir vil boesen zagen,	
waz helfent miniu dienst,	daz ir mich habet erslagen?	
ich was in ie getriuwe:	des ich engolten han.	
ir habet an iuwern magen	leider übele getan.’	(str. 989)

Sivrit, we are told, is lamented by all those 'die iht triuwe heten' (str. 991). Not long before the scene of the hero's death, the phrase *brot und win* occurs (str. 927), followed closely by *vleisc* and *vischen* (str. 928), and here again similar 'sacramental' echoes may be heard.¹ There seems the greatest likelihood that Christian imagery is latent in these allusions too, and that they foreshadow the act of treachery, which is a 'worldly analogue' of the betrayal of Christ, and awakens in the poet's mind echoes of the latter, in spite of the many differences between the contexts. Hagen is both literally and symbolically stained with innocent blood, symbolically in the sense that wide vistas are opened up by the 'reminiscent' words and phrases employed in the description. The *untruwe* of this act has repercussions which last until the very end of the poem.

The bleeding of the wounds of the dead warrior in the presence of his murderer is also inseparable from an ultimately 'sacramental' background. It is referred to as *ein michel wunder* and is substantially more than a mere relic of superstitious paganism.² To use Schwietering's term, it exemplifies 'das Wunder der Erneuerung', the concept of miraculous renewal fundamental to Christian mystical thought.³ A mortal wound, treacherously inflicted, the position of which is symbolically marked with a cross, bleeds anew. Again, there is no exact correspondence, but the phenomenon is nevertheless reminiscent of the mystical renewal of Christ's martyrdom. For this reason it seems to be not pagan, but Christian, 'magic', deeply rooted in a religious pattern of thought.

¹ *brot und win* needs no comment. *vleisc* 'suggests' the Incarnation, and *visch* (*ichthys*) is well known to be a symbolical designation of Christ, often associated with the Eucharist. The first three may also be found in close proximity in *Parz.* 480, 17, closely followed by *bluot*. The *Parzival* context has palpable 'sacramental' validity, referring to Trevrizent's renunciation of knighthood to help atone for the sins of his brother Anfortas.

² Hartmann refers to the same phenomenon in *Iwein* (ll. 1355 ff.), but there is no need to assume that the *Nibelungen*-poet is dependent on him. In any event, the latter makes his own special use of it.

³ Cf. *Parzivals Schuld. Zur Religiosität Wolframs in ihrer Beziehung zur Mystik* (Frankfurt a.M., 1946; first publ. in *Z.f.d.A.* LXXXI, 44 ff.), p. 26.

Suggestive also is the fact that Kriemhilt allows Sivrit's coffin to remain where it is for three days and nights, after which she orders it to be broken open. For a brief moment he is 'resurrected' as she bids him a final farewell:

Do brahte man die vrouwen da si in ligen vant.
 si huop sin schoene houbet mit ir vil wizen hant:
 do kuste s'also toten den edlen ritter guot.
 ir vil liechten ougen vor leide weineten bluot. (str. 1069)

Here again the word *bluot* appears, and this time it stands for tears of bitter grief, a striking illustration of the mystical piety referred to by Schwietering. *houbet*, *hant*, *ougen* belong with *herze* in the complex of mystical associations, while *kuste* needs no further comment. The substitution of blood for tears is not just an ordinary metaphor, but altogether more meaningful. In str. 1010 we encounter:

daz bluot ir uz dem munde von herzen jamer brast.

Here *herze* and *munt* are linked with *bluot*. In both these instances Kriemhilt's *Leidenstruowe* is given the fullest expression. In the natural course of events tears do not take the form of blood, nor does blood gush forth from the mouth as a sign of grief, but the poet is not concerned with literal truth. Both these references must be referred to a 'supernatural' background; they have a sacramental quality. In the passages quoted earlier blood was seen to have a similar significant emphasis. In the emotive imagery associated with the Crucifixion blood and tears go hand in hand; the sorrow of the faithful at the Passion is so great that their tears partake of the nature of blood, in a mystical sense. His blood shed and their tears become mystically confused. Their hearts are wounded as his body was wounded.¹ Logic, of course, has no part in this mystical complex. Its effectiveness, and therefore its justification, lie in its powerful emotional impact, its vividness and colour.

One of the most gruesome episodes in the whole poem is that in which Kriemhilt, after assaults by a number of her warriors have all proved unsuccessful, orders the firing of the great hall in which the Burgundians are besieged. Afflicted by a terrible thirst, they are advised by Hagen to drink the blood of the slain:

Do sprach von Tronege Hagene: 'ir edlen ritter guot,
 swen der durst twinge, der trinke hie daz bluot.
 daz ist in solher hitze noch bezzer danne win.
 ez enmac an disen ziten et nu niht bezzer gesin.' (str. 2114)

But, in a sacramental context, the drinking of 'blood' is far from being gruesome. It is one of the most meaningful acts in the Catholic ritual. The wine of the Eucharist mystically partakes of the nature of the blood of Christ crucified. Not without good reason are blood and wine here associated, the former being deemed more 'virtuous' than the latter. Once again we observe a 'mystical' equation. Wine and blood, like blood and tears, belong together in Christian sacramental imagery. The next strophe is equally suggestive:

Do gie der recken einer da er einen toten vant:
 er kniete im zuo der wunden den helm er abe gebant:
 do begunde er trinken daz vliezende bluot.
 swie ungewon er's waere ez duhte in groezlichen guot.

The blood is drunk as it flows from a wound, the act of drinking takes place in a kneeling position, and the virtue of the drink is again stressed. The example of

¹ As is the heart of Kriemhilt (str. 1104).

one is followed by all, and their strength is renewed. As the firebrands fall among them Hagen's advice is to tread them down into the blood and extinguish them. In so doing they survive, as if by a miracle, temporarily frustrating the designs of Kriemhilt. Their common *triuwe* in *leit* is sacramentally exemplified.

The Christian pattern of thought behind this description of a most unusual situation is unmistakable. Blood is shown to have the supernatural power to protect against harm, as had the dragon's blood in the case of Sivrit's invulnerability. By drinking it the Burgundians ensure their survival in the inferno. It affords protection against 'hell-fire'. The Burgundians are united in their common participation in this 'worldly' Eucharist, just as the love-potion in Gottfried's *Tristan* sacramentally unites Tristan and Isolde in a communion of sorrow. Hagen becomes the 'priest' who administers this 'communion'.¹ Under normal, natural circumstances newly-shed blood would not quench thirst and renew strength in this way. Taken literally the whole episode is absurd, but once again it is evident that the poet is thinking and imagining 'supernaturally'. The wounds of the dead do not bleed again, one does not shed tears of blood, and blood does not quench thirst, but neither do virgin births and resurrections occur under normal circumstances. All such happenings are essentially miraculous, and meant to be accepted as such. The drinking of human blood, moreover, would hardly have been tolerated by the poet's courtly audience if it had not had this sacramental, symbolical justification, which they would be expected to appreciate immediately. The blood drunk by the Burgundians, the tears of blood shed by Kriemhilt, the blood of Sivrit shed by Hagen and the renewal of its flow after his death, all these are component parts of a single sacramental pattern, which, although it is 'worldly' and analogical, is nevertheless full of meaning.

In all the examples of Christian imagery quoted, blood, the blood which flows from wounds in particular, is of central significance. These passages reveal a certain symbolical, though not logical, emphasis on bleeding and wounding which has implications extending beyond the limits of the actual contexts themselves, implications which are not difficult to fathom. Nowhere else in the poem is there anything quite comparable to this form of emphasis, but, at the same time, other evidence seems to point in a similar direction. For example, one cannot fail to be struck also by the continual mention of blood and wounds throughout. The references become more and more numerous as the end approaches. Statistics reveal the following interesting picture: the first mention of blood occurs in strophe 100, when reference is made to Sivrit's bath in the dragon's blood. In 188 *wunde* occurs twice and *bluot* once. From 199 to 257 one word or the other, or both (or a derivative, such as *bluotec*) appears at least once in sixteen of the fifty-eight strophes. Strophe 269 contains *wunde*, 458 and 675 *bluot*. From 899 to 1104 one or the other, or both, occurs at least once in twenty-one of the 105 strophes. From 1523 to 1726 nine strophes contain at least one of these two words. From 1932 to 2360 no less than sixty strophes are involved. As the figures show, in the latter part of the poem, where the content is especially grisly, few strophes pass without a reference to blood and wounds. If we add to these a number of cases in which the adjective *rot* is used to indicate the presence of blood (where the noun itself does not occur) an impressive tally is obtained. Very often *bluot* and *wunde*

¹ On the other hand, they are not permanently 'saved', nor indeed does Hagen become a paragon of virtue. The analogy must not be pushed beyond certain limits.

are used in the same sentence, or in the same strophe, more often, in fact, than would have been thought likely if no ulterior motive lay behind it all. Admittedly, as the figures also show, lengthy sections occur in the body of the poem where no reference is made to blood and wounds, or where they are mentioned only very rarely, but ultimately the theme is taken up again and the poem ends in a welter of bloodshed, a literal blood-bath.

In view of what has already been said, it would seem desirable to examine this reiteration closely. It goes without saying that blood and wounds are endemic to the Germanic, as to any other heroic age, and it is therefore not surprising that we should hear so much of them in the *Nibelungenlied*. The Austrian poet enters into the spirit of his tale, which is a bloodthirsty one, and lays the fullest stress on violence and cruel death, stirring the emotions of his hearers. We cannot be sure how much of this insistence derives from his sources and how much belongs exclusively to him. Clearly, he makes the most of his legacy from the past. In spite of this, however, it seems likely that much of this repetitive concentration on blood and wounds is part of what is generally known as 'epische Anschwellung'. The early, Germanic, lay form was notable for its brevity, whereas the later *Buchepos* is the result of expansion, largely by the addition of descriptive material. In this expansion repetition plays a large part and many of the references to blood and wounds occur in such descriptive passages. The general impression gained from this kind of concentrated emphasis is, therefore, that it is not genuinely heroic. It is not consonant with the terseness of early Germanic poetry, but apparently 'modern'. Moreover, although most of the references have no immediately obvious sacramental connexions such as those we treated earlier in this article, there is nevertheless in many of them a certain vividness and colour: the wounds inflicted are wide, deep and often mortal; the blood shed is warm, red and flowing; it is life-blood. Ultimately the warriors become immersed in it. The imagery is of a particularly compelling kind. The description of the shedding of blood is graphic and 'pictorial', and in this respect, too, it seems more representative of the 'modern' than of the ancient style. Blood and wounds are dwelt upon, made the focus of attention. It is impossible not to be gruesomely aware that much blood is being shed. For example:

Zuo Giselhære kerte	Wolfhart in den strit.	
do sluoc ir ietwedere	vil manegen wunden wit.	
so rehte krefteclichen	er zuo dem küenege dranc	
daz ime'z bluot under füezen	al über daz houbet gespranc.	(str. 2294)

Or:

Dar nach wart ein stille	do der scal verdoz.	
daz bluot allenthalben	durch diu löcher vloz	
unt da zen rigelsteinen	von den toten man.	
daz heten die von Rine	mit grozem ellen getan.	(str. 2078)

Many more examples of this gruesome, pictorial concentration on blood and wounds could be given, but the reader may discover them for himself without difficulty.

One is not obliged, of course, to go further and attach particular importance to such a frequency-count, or even to the vivid and compelling nature of the description of bloodshed. It may be argued that this concentration arises naturally from the fact that in certain parts of the poem much blood is shed and many wounds are inflicted, and that therefore these key-words may be expected to occur fre-

quently and to have a powerful emotional quality and impact. We believe, however, that there is more to it than this, and suggest that this reiterative emphasis is closely linked with the emphasis (of a different kind) encountered in the passages quoted earlier, where patent sacramental associations were observed. It is another indication of the poet's desire to strike a certain chord in the minds of his listeners. He is a Christian: blood and wounds are vital elements in the Christian emotive complex, invested with religious associations of unusual vividness and colour, and are inseparable from *leit* and *triuwe*. In other words, this 'quantitative' emphasis, too, is a form of Christian imagery suggestive of ultimate religious 'truth'.

But what validity has such Christian imagery in a poem which to all appearances is most un-Christian in spirit? Although the form and rites of Christianity are acknowledged and there is no overt paganism, the optimism of the Arthurian epics seems to be wholly absent. The *Nibelungenlied* is ominous and tragic. Death by the sword settles all accounts. Nowhere else in Middle High German literature is the inhumanity of man to man proclaimed with such insistence. Is there any justification for Christian sacramental imagery of any kind, even the most remotely analogical? Why should the poet wish to refer to ultimate religious truth?

The appropriate human reaction to the Crucifixion is, of course, *compassio*, that is, 'participation' in the sufferings of the Redeemer, experiencing a renewal of those sufferings in oneself. As we have said, Schwietering claims that Kriemhilt's lament for Sivrit stems from *Leidensfrömmigkeit*, which is, in the religious sense, centred in and derived from *compassio* with the agony of Christ: 'Leiden ist Läuterung, Sühne und Opfer, die die Erlöserliebe des Gekreuzigten in sich schliesst and daraus ihre Kraft schöpft. Leiden ist *triuwe* und trifft ins Herz. Tränen und Klagen, die vom Herzen kommen, sind sichtbares Zeichen dieser *Leidenstriuwe* und -frömmigkeit, die mit und in der Näherung von Mensch zu Mensch Näherung an Gott bedeutet, der durch das Leiden ruft und zu sich zieht.'¹ We would suggest, therefore, that *Leidenstriuwe* is not confined to Kriemhilt's lament alone, but is fundamental to the entire emotional atmosphere of sorrow which surrounds the poem, sorrow which is ultimately related to the greatest sorrow ever borne by Christians, the martyr's death suffered by One whose *triuwe* 'kindles human love and piety'.² Throughout the poem *bluot* and *leit* are linked together in the closest possible alliance. They are frequently cause and effect. *triuwe* binds them together. The *leit*, *jamer*, *not*, *ser*, *klagen* and *weinen* which reverberate through the *Nibelungenlied* are the outward manifestation and unmistakable sign of *triuwe*. It arises from sympathy with and participation in the misfortunes of others. Respects are always paid in this way to those who have suffered death; in particular, a tremendous wave of such 'sympathy' accompanies the deaths of Sivrit and Ruedeger, reaching its climax in the very last strophe of the poem, when all who have survived the universal calamity mourn its victims:

I'ne kan iu niht bescheiden	waz sider da geschach:
wan ritter unde vrouwen	weinen man da sach,
dar zuo die edlen knehte	ir lieben friunde tot.
hie hat daz maere ein ende:	daz ist der Nibelunge not.

The all-important words are *weinen* and *lieben friunde tot*.

It is clear that this form of *triuwe* is one of the most highly esteemed virtues of the poem. Both men and women, for all their difference of emotional constitution,

¹ *Parzivals Schuld*, p. 25.

² *Ibid.* p. 22.

are praised for their cultivation of it. The great Dietrich von Bern himself, who enjoys the most exalted reputation as a man of action, sheds profuse tears and is not shamed thereby. Laments for the dead may be as old as the human race, but the fact remains that the emphasis on tears in the *Nibelungenlied* is, like that on blood and wounds, Christian rather than pagan, 'modern' rather than ancient. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that the poem has been 'softened' and tempered by the strong tendency to lamentation, and that this is unquestionably a product of the later expansion.

Nor is this *triuwe* confined to the setting and framework of the poem itself. The poet shares the universal grief and suffering. Though on the one hand he admires military prowess and courage he is also appalled by the shedding of so much human blood. Rarely does he use the first person, but in spite of this he is no disinterested spectator. He has a definite personal standpoint, the standpoint of *triuwe*. He passes frequent comments on the events he describes, praising *triuwe* and condemning its opposite, as for example in str. 915:

sus grozer untriuwe solde nimmer man gepflegen.

He himself, one feels, 'participates' in the communal weeping and wailing, united with his fellow-men in the common bond of *Leidenstriuwe*. His attitude is a compassionate attitude, as might be expected from one born and bred in the atmosphere of mystical piety which prevailed in the second half of the twelfth and early thirteenth century in western Europe. It is his purpose to transmit this *triuwe* to his audience, to encourage them to 'participate'. They are invited to 'suffer with' him and his characters, to experience in and through his story the immense human misery it reveals. 'Leiden ist Läuterung, Sühne und Opfer...'

The key-word *friunt* occurs again and again with monotonous regularity in the *Nibelungenlied*. It is inseparable from *triuwe*, whether this be the *triuwe* between man and woman in the love-relationship, as that between Sivrit and Kriemhilt, or between man and man, as that between the members of the Burgundian group. *friuntschaft* and *triuwe* are synonymous. A *friunt*, like a *getriuwer*, is one who participates in and shares *liebe* and *leit*. Only in *leit*, however, can the full depth and breadth of *friuntschaft* reveal itself, that is, in a bond of sympathy or *compassio* in a common adverse situation. If the meaning of the *Nibelungenlied* is to be fully understood it must be realized that such *friuntschaft* in *leit* embraces all human relationships. Thus, *Leidenstriuwe* is not characteristic only of Kriemhilt's relationship with Sivrit after his death, but is also admirably exemplified in that between Hagen and Volker, whose *friuntschaft* becomes ever stronger as their *leit* increases, and in that between all the individual members of the doomed Burgundian group. When Kriemhilt offers to spare her brothers if they will surrender Hagen to her they refuse to a man. Their *friuntliche triuwe* is expressed by Giselher, the least militant of them all, in the following words:

'Wir müesen doch ersterben' sprach da Giselher.
'uns enscheidet niemen von ritterlicher wer.
swer gerne mit uns vehte wir sin et aber hie.
wan ich deheinen minen friunt an triuwen nie verlie.' (str. 2106)

They are quite inseparable: their bond of friendship, always strong, has been further strengthened by their common participation in *leit*. Almost immediately Kriemhilt orders the firing of the hall. If any proof were needed of the religious

basis of this *friuntschaft* the description of the events which take place during the fire provides it, as we have tried to show above. Like the love-potion in *Tristan*, the sacramental drinking of blood is symbolical of *Leidenstriuwe*. All partake of it: it is an act of 'communion', a sign of their undivided and indivisible unity in suffering. However worldly the context may be, however far their relationship may seem to be from the religious sphere, it has a spiritual quality which can only be explained in terms of *Leidensfrömmigkeit*, and which fully justifies the use of the analogical method. It is 'Näherung von Mensch zu Mensch'. However Germanic and pre-Christian their *triuwe* and *friuntschaft* may appear (and, of course, its roots are in the ancient philosophy of life), it is nevertheless transcendentalized and transmuted into an essentially Christian virtue, inspired by the mystical piety which also inspires Kriemhilt's lament for Sivrit and her subsequent behaviour. Rüedeger's words of consolation to Kriemhilt are not applicable only to her case:

'Waz mac ergetzen leides' sprach der vil küene man,
 'wan friuntliche liebe swer die kan began,
 unt der dan einen kiuaset der im ze rehte kumet?
 vor herzenlicher leide niht so groezliche frumet.' (str. 1234)

The burden of sorrow is lightened when friends 'participate'. Gunther expresses the same sentiments:

Do sprach der küene Gunther 'nie dienst wart so guot
 so den ein vriunt vriunde nach dem tode tuot.
 daz heiz' ich staete triuwe, swer die kan began.
 ir lonet im von schulden: er hat iu liebe getan.' (str. 2264)

Community in *leit* transcends death in the *Nibelungenlied*, as it does also in *Tristan*; the bond of *triuwe* formed in life extends beyond the grave. Here Gunther's statement is axiomatic; though Kriemhilt is opposed to him her behaviour is explained by it, since her feud with her brothers is the direct result of her *compassio* with Sivrit, her 'suffering with' him in his 'martyrdom'.

The *Nibelungenlied*, however, has another key-word, the antithesis of *friunt*, namely *viant*, which occurs almost as frequently. With *vriuntliche triuwe* and *liebe* may be contrasted *vientlicher haz* and *nit*. It is significant that *vriunt* and *viant*, like *liep* and *leit*, are often found in close proximity. Sometimes they appear in the same strophe, at others in adjacent, or almost adjacent strophes. A remarkable concentration of the two words may be seen in the passage 1394–1417, where scarcely a single strophe passes without mention of them. They are hardly less frequent between 1966 and 1998. There seems little doubt that this is intentional, the poet wishing to emphasize the antithesis by means of word-repetition, an antithesis which, like that between *liep* and *leit*, *triuwe* and *untriuwe*, reflects the basic formula of the poem, its dialectical polarity. If, on the one hand, the *Nibelungenlied* throws into sharp relief the concept of *triuwe*, *friuntschaft*, with its strong Christian emotive quality, its blood, sorrow and tears, the story also affords ample opportunity to observe the tragic results of a complementary *vientschaft*, *untriuwe*, *haz* and *nit*, also inseparable from blood, sorrow and tears. On one side is unity, on the other separation and conflict. At the beginning a note of discord is struck: *zweier edlen vrouwen nit* will bring sorrow to many (str. 6).

This, then, is the opposite pole. *untriuwe*, lack of *compassio*, absence of community in sorrow, is the cause of *leit*. It is just as closely associated with *leit* as is *triuwe*, though the relationship is different. And yet such *untriuwe* is often *triuwe*

seen from a different point of view. For example, Hagen's unswerving *triuwe* to his liege lord and lady, to the Burgundian cause against Kriemhilt, which, as we have seen, is *compassio*, leads him to commit many crimes in its name.¹ He is the treacherous murderer of Sivrit; he attempts to drown a priest of God in order to invalidate the prophecy of the *merwip*; he murders Ortliep, the son of Kriemhilt and Etzel. He has, in these situations, no *compassio*. Kriemhilt's *triuwe* to her murdered husband, equally unswerving, is also *compassio*, yet it drags her down to the depths of infamy. She becomes so consumed by her desire for vengeance that she refuses to extend mercy to Gunther and Hagen when they are completely in her power; she has no *compassio*. In both these cases *triuwe* 'without measure' becomes *untriuwe*. *leit* is inflicted on others by those who are, in one sense, conspicuously lacking in *compassio*, *caritas*, but whose compassionate, 'caritative' behaviour in another sense appears wholly admirable. The mystical origin of this paradoxical 'love without measure' is indisputable; the *Nibelungenlied* has this fundamental motive in common with *Tristan*.² From *Parzival*, too, we know that *triuwe* in one sense can often be *untriuwe* in another. One of the most striking illustrations of the paradoxical nature of *triuwe* in the *Nibelungenlied* may be seen in the case of Ruedeger von Bechelaren, who cannot be *getriuwe* without being also *ungetriuwe*. In order to keep his promise to Kriemhilt to come to her aid in time of need he must break his bond of *triuwe*, his *friuntschaft*, with the Burgundians. As a result his body, if not his soul, must perish. Yet he is acknowledged by all to be *triuwen staete* (str. 1997). Though most anxious to avoid bloodshed he is overwhelmed by the inexorable tide of catastrophe. So selfless is he, so full of *compassio*, that he gives his own shield to Hagen, an act which, in its turn, arouses the *erbarmen* of the latter (str. 2198). A close examination of the text of the Ruedeger episode is revealing: during the description of the events leading up to his death the word *got* appears perhaps more frequently than at any other time. In str. 2177 *got von himele* is found together with *genaden* and *triuwe*; in 2179 *got*, *triuwe* and *minne* all occur. In 2183 and 2184 *got* appears again. In 2190 *got*, *triuwe* and *genade* are used and in 2192 *got* and *genade*. 2195 shows *got von himele*, followed by *erbarmen* in 2198. In 2199 *got* occurs twice, and once in 2200. In 2205 *ane zwivel* follows closely on *got von himele*. These references to God and concepts frequently associated with Him are not merely formal and superficial, but full of meaning. They demonstrate the 'sacramental' character of the episode in which Ruedeger's death is described, where the 'mystery' of *compassio* and *caritas* is revealed.³

Dietrich von Bern also plays a vital role in the poet's *caritas*-scheme. He is the would-be peace-maker who does his utmost to remain aloof from the bitter conflict and understand the point of view of both sides. He actually succeeds in bringing about a *fride* with Gunther to allow Etzel, Kriemhilt and Ruedeger to leave the scene of battle (str. 1992-8). He never abandons the attempt to come to a similar arrangement with Kriemhilt to save the lives of Gunther and Hagen. He has a highly developed sense of justice and fair play. Above all, he is most reluctant to shed blood, deliberately refraining from killing Gunther and Hagen when they are

¹ Brünhilt's tears arouse the *erbarmen* of the Burgundians, particularly that of Hagen (str. 863 ff.).

² Cf. the author's article "'Vicissitudes'" in Gotfried's *Tristan*' (*M.L.R.* LII (1957), 203-13).

³ The stylistic device of meaningful word-repetition, so reminiscent of Der von Kurenberg, is deserving of a separate study.

completely at his mercy, even though they have robbed him of all his men (str. 2351 and 2360). His *compassio* is given full expression in 2351:

Do gedaht' der herre Dietrich: 'du bist in not erwigen:
 ich han's lützel ere soltu tot vor mir geligen.
 ich wil'z noch versuochen ob ich ertwigen kan
 dich mir ze einem gisel.' daz wart mit sorgen getan.

His *triuwe* is respected and admired by all. That two such characters as Dietrich and Rüedeger, so obviously imbued with Christian ideals of conduct, should play such an important role in the *Nibelungenlied* is proof of the significance of *caritas* for the poet. They are not just concessions to 'modernity', to be contrasted with other characters who may seem to behave according to a pre-Christian code (but do not, in fact, do so), but are conceived and portrayed with purposeful care and fully integrated into the scheme of characterization as a whole, the key to which is *triuwe*—Christian *triuwe*—in its various degrees and manifestations, its paradox.¹

Rüedeger and Dietrich have *compassio* with both sides. They form a bridge between Kriemhilt and Sivrit on the one hand and the Burgundians on the other. Although their 'unifying' influence remains only potential, and although both finally become immersed in the all-embracing *leit* with which the poem concludes, their two-sided 'participation' is an integral part of the structural unity of the poem. They strive to remain neutral, but are forced to become participants in the final struggle. Their very capacity to 'suffer with' both sides involves them in the universal *passio*, for *passio* and *compassio* belong together.

Leidenstriuwe is, therefore, the basic factor in the unity and integrity of the *Nibelungenlied*. For the Austrian poet the *leit* of his poem is Christian *leit*—*herzeleit*. It is the suffering—*passio*—inflicted on man by his fellows, and therefore on God, who became man. It is thus the result of *untriuwe*. It is also the sympathetic suffering of man with his fellows and therefore with God-in-Christ in his agony—*compassio*. In this sense it is *triuwe*. Participation in common *leit*—*triuwe* and *friuntschaft*—unites men (and women) with each other in fellowship, the fellowship of *caritas*. But the infliction of *leit* by men (and women) upon their fellows—*untriuwe* and *vianschaft*—divides and sunders. The bond of *triuwe* which unites Kriemhilt with Sivrit in life and death is of the same nature as that uniting the Burgundians in their common adversity, also in life and death. In this sense it may even be said that the two sides are united with each other. But in the sense that their *triuwe* to each other in their respective groups is identical with *untriuwe* in relation to their opponents the two sides are irreconcilably divided, a division which all the would-be 'impartiality' of the 'mediators' Rüedeger and Dietrich cannot overcome. Both sides, however, together with the 'mediators', just as they share the same virtue of *triuwe*, whatever may be the difference in degree, share the same unhappy fate, the same common sorrow at the end of the poem. This ultimate sorrow—in most cases *todes leit*, the final destiny of all men—is comprehensive and all-embracing, transcending their conflicts and differences and uniting Kriemhilt with Gunther and Hagen and Rüedeger, thus demonstrating the ultimate oneness of all human beings in the widest sense, their common *bluot*, common *liebe-leit*, common *triuwe-untriuwe*. In the blood and wounds of Christ,

¹ It is clear that here the question is one of 'ordinate' and 'inordinate' love, and degrees of *caritas*, but space does not permit us to enter further into this complex subject, though the characterization cannot be fully understood unless it is taken into account.

too, *liebe-leit*, *triuwe-untriuwe* are mystically reconciled. Such is the sacramental pattern of the poem, its unity-in-diversity, its 'vicissitudes' and mystical dialectic. It is possible to trace this pattern in greater detail as it runs through the work: at the outset Kriemhilt is united with her brothers in a 'Burgundian group', which Sivrit joins after his arrival in Worms. He demonstrates his *triuwe* in the Saxon war and in the aid given to Gunther in the wooing of Brünhilt. His marriage to Kriemhilt strengthens this bond of union. On the other hand, it is weakened and finally destroyed by Gunther's union with Brünhilt, with its complications in relation to Sivrit and Kriemhilt. It leads to the 'division' of Kriemhilt and Brünhilt, which crystallizes into a conflict between Kriemhilt, subsequently united with Etzel, and the Burgundians. Although, at the half-way point of the poem, a *suone* is achieved between Kriemhilt and her brothers, it does not include Hagen and is therefore shortlived, since it does not restore the unity of the Burgundians which had previously existed. All hope of reconciliation is lost when Kriemhilt is persuaded to accept Etzel's suit. The way of thought underlying this pattern of continually changing unions and separations, which is the poet's courtly adaptation of his pre-Christian, legendary material, is nothing if not medieval and Christian.

In short: through the *Nibelungenlied* runs a 'stream' of blood, its flow calling forth a profusion of tears, which are themselves 'heart's blood', a manifestation of *Leidenstriuwe* in its many aspects but fundamental unity of conception. The poet uses every opportunity to give emphasis to the fact that warm blood is being shed and deep, mortal wounds inflicted, and that this is the cause of the most profound sorrow. He does not spare his audience by passing over the grisly details of slaughter and carnage in discreet silence. Occasionally he employs imagery with sacramental associations, of analogical validity, in which blood and wounds figure prominently. As the story proceeds more and more blood is shed, or, to put it symbolically and mystically, *Sivrides wunden*, which Kriemhilt can never forget (str. 1523 and 1726), bleed ever anew. The stream of blood flows from the martyr's wounds. The conflict of Brünhilt and Kriemhilt sets in motion a chain reaction which ends in the almost total annihilation of all concerned, and of many innocent third-parties. None escape this universal sorrow, which reflects the sorrowful human condition, life in this 'vale of tears', sin and the price paid for sin. Salvation and damnation are not mentioned; in this respect the poet keeps strictly within the bounds of his 'worldly' context and of his inherited story. Yet, in spite of this, he has, like Gottfried, given his poem a Christian tone, imposed upon it a sacramental seal, and it would therefore be unwise to assume that he has no further interest in what happens to his characters. The poem, in its own way, is just as unfinished as *Tristan*.¹ Kriemhilt and Hagen have both loved and hated 'without measure', and no 'worldly' dialectic can solve the problem of their final destiny beyond the grave.

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¹ A detailed study of the affinities between the two poems would be of the greatest interest and value.