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Author(s): Lida Kirchberger

Source: *Monatshefte*, Vol. 48, No. 5 (Oct., 1956), pp. 261-272

Published by: University of Wisconsin Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30166181>

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THE CROWN IN THE NIBELUNGENLIED

LIDA KIRCHBERGER
University of Wisconsin

Among the many unsolved problems which continue to exercise the mind of the student of the *Nibelungenlied*, the one receiving directly and indirectly the greatest attention today is that of the position taken by the *Nibelungenlied* in relation to the other poetical works of the period in which it was given its final form. In the twentieth century such eminent scholars as Heusler, Schneider, and Ehrismann have adhered to the clear distinction made in the nineteenth century between the courtly epic and the popular or heroic epic, though they do not deny that the *Nibelungenlied* contains elements which might well be described as courtly. Such elements have been made the subject of several special studies, the most comprehensive of which is a dissertation by Nelly Dürrenmatt inspired by de Boor and published in 1945.¹ After giving a brief account of earlier research on various aspects of the same problem, the author devotes the greater part of her own study to a comparison of typical forms and ceremonies of courtly life as depicted in the *Nibelungenlied* with those described by the courtly epic poets. In the second and shorter part of her book Nelly Dürrenmatt compares some of the characters, notably the women, of the *Nibelungenlied* with their counterparts in courtly literature and examines their actions and motives in the light of courtly ethics.

Although de Boor can see little true resemblance between the women of the *Nibelungenlied* and those of Arthurian romance, he has, in *Die höfische Literatur*, 1953, the second volume of the *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* by de Boor and Newald, substantially accepted Nelly Dürrenmatt's findings and concludes with her that the *Nibelungenlied* is a courtly novel because courtly bearing and the outward characteristics of courtly life predominate throughout the poem (p. 159). De Boor asserts, moreover, that in spite of the differences between the *Nibelungenlied* and the works of Hartmann, Gottfried, and Wolfram, it is the task of literary history to see in the *Nibelungenlied* the "ritterlich-höfischen Roman eines ritterlichen Dichters." In his review of *Die höfische Literatur*,² Bert Nagel, himself the author of an extensive study of the *Nibelungenlied*, approves in principle de Boor's classification of the *Nibelungenlied* as a courtly epic, since he considers the intention of the poet to be the ultimate criterion for the classification of a work, and he is convinced that the poet's conscious desire to create a courtly poem is beyond doubt. Bodo Mergell, one of a number of scholars who

¹ Nelly Dürrenmatt, *Das Nibelungenlied im Kreis der höfischen Dichtung*, Bern, 1945.

² Bert Nagel, review of *Die höfische Literatur* by Helmut de Boor, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 74, p. 329.

in recent years have sought on the ethical plane the link connecting the *Nibelungenlied* with the courtly epics, questions Nelly Dürrenmatt's approach to courtly literature on the grounds that the portrayal of courtly forms of life is not in itself a measure of their ethical content and has only ornamental significance.³ It might be objected even more pertinently that one can scarcely classify the *Nibelungenlied* as a courtly novel on the basis of its many court scenes without risking some confusion of terms. Is a medieval poem depicting the actions of royal personages at court necessarily written in accordance with the literary conventions of courtly society? Even if it could be proved that the author of the *Nibelungenlied* was a nobleman or a distinguished cleric, this alone would not be sufficient evidence of his intention to write a courtly novel. Otto Höfler⁴ has in fact presented very convincing arguments in favor of the view that the anonymity of the *Nibelungenlied* is intentional and in itself places the poem in a different category from the epics of the courtly poets where the author accepts credit for his work.

In comparing court festivities in the *Nibelungenlied* with similar festivities described by the courtly poets, Nelly Dürrenmatt observes that in the *Nibelungenlied* scarcely anything is said about what she terms "gesellige Vergnügungen," and that festivities in the *Nibelungenlied* always have an official stamp (p. 129; p. 178); de Boor too misses on festive occasions in the *Nibelungenlied* the carefree joyousness which invariably characterizes the finale of Arthurian romances (p. 161). Both Nelly Dürrenmatt and de Boor, however, are too preoccupied with the significance of similarities to wish to draw conclusions from admitted differences. A closer examination of the description of certain details in court ceremonial might prove that they have in reality little to do with what is termed courtly in literature. Such an examination can most profitably proceed not from scenes, incidents, or episodes, where there is constant temptation to generalize, but from the actual words used by the poet. In rejecting Nelly Dürrenmatt's method, Mergell (p. 307 ff.) sets out in his own study to investigate a few individual basic concepts — he begins, for example, with the word *versuochen* — in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of individual characters or episodes, but his treatment of these concepts is far from complete. Meanwhile Maurer in his work entitled *Leid* has shown how much can be learned by the exhaustive study of one single word in a medieval poem and inversely how the imperfect understanding of a word can lead to entirely erroneous interpretations of motivation and of the poet's underlying intentions.

The present paper is an attempt to show in detail how the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* has used the word *krône*, in the hope of gaining new insight into the meaning of court ceremonial in the *Nibelungenlied*.

³ Bodo Mergell, "Nibelungenlied und höfischer Roman," *Euphorion*, 50, p. 307 ff.

⁴ Otto Höfler, "Die Anonymität des Nibelungenliedes," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 1955, 2.

Unlike *leid*, the word *krône* is easily defined: it designates what Webster calls a royal or imperial headdress or cap of sovereignty. Next to the throne the crown in medieval Europe was the outward and visible sign of sovereign power; it marked the ruler and manifested to the people his authority. By the tenth century in Germany the expression *corona regni* had actually become synonymous with *solium regni*, and as early as the sixth century *regnum* is known to have been used as a synonym for *corona*.⁵ The coronation of Charlemagne by the Pope in 800 was no mere ceremony, but was a highly significant political act which was destined to have far-reaching consequences. After Charlemagne, the coronation of a king by the right bishop was capable of assuring him of a material body of support, while conversely the unwillingness of a bishop to crown a claimant to the throne might well undermine his claim to the advantage of that of his rival. In an age when the cry, "The king is dead, long live the king," was meaningless, the years of a reign were counted from the date of the coronation, and not until the thirteenth century did it become customary to count the date of the accession to the throne.⁶ Because of the struggle for power between church and state which characterized so much of the Middle Ages a king could not always accept the sanction and support of the church implied in his coronation without risking the loss of approval elsewhere. Thus Henry the Fowler's refusal to be crowned in order not to be beholden to the church illustrates in reverse the political importance of the coronation in medieval Germany.

The first occasion on which a crown is worn in the *Nibelungenlied* is the coronation of Prünhilt as queen of the Burgundians. The ceremonial observed both for the marriage of Gunther and Prünhilt and for the coronation of Prünhilt begins with a banquet held on the day of Prünhilt's arrival in Worms. At this banquet Prünhilt is seen standing at the king's side, wearing the crown in the presence of his guests (604, 2-4).⁷ The normal course of the royal wedding celebration is now interrupted: first by the marriage of Sîvrit and Kriemhilt, and then by the unusual events of the following night. In spite of the fact that his humiliating experiences of the night have put the king in no mood for wearing the crown the next morning (643, 3-4), the public cer-

⁵ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom 3. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart, 1954 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Schriften* XIII), p. 386.

⁶ Percy Ernst Schramm, "Die Krönung in Deutschland bis zum Beginn des Salischen Hauses (1028)," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung*, XXIV, p. 294.

⁷ All references to the *Nibelungenlied* are from *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Karl Bartsch, 3rd edition, Leipzig, 1872; *krône* occurs 43,2; 109,1; 215,2; 604,3; 643,4; 645,2,4; 684,3; 695,2; 708,4; 713,3; 714,1; 715,2; 812,3; 829,3; 1075,3; 1086,2; 1149,2; 1170,4; 1199,3; 1212,2; 1217,3; 1235,2; 1237,2; 1374,4; 1675,2; 1678,4; 1770,4; *gekroenet* 704,2; 706,3.

emonies required by custom continue without delay. Gunther and Prünhilt go to the minster for the celebration of mass and are joined there by Sîvrit (644, 1-4). The scene in the minster is then described in the following strophe:

Nâch kûneclîchen êren	was in dar bereit
swaz si haben solden,	ir krône unt ouch ir kleit.
dô wurden si gewîhet.	dô daz was getân,
dô sach man s'alle viere	under krône vroelîchen stân.

While this brief account omits all detail pertaining to the exact order of the coronation within the cathedral, certain facts stand out clearly: all four participants in the ceremony are invested with royal robes which have previously been placed in readiness for them; to the accompaniment of appropriate prayers the two queens are crowned, presumably after having been anointed; crowns are placed on the heads of the two kings; and finally all four are seen standing with crowns on their heads. The next strophe opens with the report that many youths now receive their swords, and there follows a display of warlike exercises during which Gunther seizes the opportunity to appeal secretly to Sîvrit for help in his domestic troubles. No sooner are the private negotiations between Gunther and Sîvrit concluded than the public games are also brought to an end as chamberlains clear the path along which the queens are to proceed to the coronation banquet. Horses and men are ordered out of the palace courtyard, and each of the queens is then led by a bishop to the place where she is to appear at the table in the presence of the kings (658, 2-3). An official banquet marks the end of the coronation ceremonies.

If the coronation thus described by the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* is examined in the light of research based on records of actual coronations and on liturgical coronation orders it will be found that the poet has portrayed a scene which in none of its details deviates from the historical realities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the ceremonies at Worms crowns were placed on the heads of four royal personages. For the two queens it was their inaugural coronation on the occasion of their marriage to royal husbands. For the two kings the event was a festival coronation, comparable to the festival coronation described by Walther when he says,

Ez gienc eins tages als unser herre wart geborn
 von einer maget dier im ze muoter hâte erkorn,
 ze Megdeburc der kûnec Philippes schône.
 Dâ gienc eins keisers bruoder und eins keisers kint
 in einer wât, swie doch die namen drîge sint:
 er truoc des rîches zepter und die krône.

These lines are quoted by Klewitz⁸ in a study published in 1939 in which he traces the development of the festival coronation in Germany through

⁸ Hans-Walter Klewitz, "Die Festkrönungen der deutschen Könige," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung*, XXVIII.

the Saxon, Franconian, and Hohenstaufen dynasties to its swift decline after 1200. Supported by the conclusions of Schramm in his studies of the coronation in medieval France and England, Klewitz proves that the festival coronation was not, as was hitherto believed, merely a matter of courtly ceremonial, but was a significant ecclesiastico-legal act. The rise of festival coronations in the early eleventh century was closely connected with the growing influence of the church on the monarchy and reflected now the attempt of the church to increase its temporal power and now the desire of a king to secure the support of the Pope. An interesting illustration of this state of affairs can be seen in an incident from the reign of William the Conqueror. At Easter, 1070, William held court at Winchester, and on this occasion he permitted the papal legates who were in England at the time to perform the customary festival coronation, thus proclaiming publicly the fact that the Pope recognized the legality of the position he had so recently obtained by conquest.⁹ Festival coronations took place mainly at Christmas and Easter, on the days of saints who happened to have some political significance, and on family occasions such as the marriage or remarriage of the king or one of his sons.

When Prühilt became his queen, Gunther had undoubtedly already been crowned king of the Burgundians, but according to Klewitz (p. 62), it would have been unthinkable for a king to stand uncrowned while his consort wore a crown, and therefore Gunther had to be crowned again with Prühilt. Klewitz shows that even a king whose official coronation had not yet taken place could take part in a festival coronation if political expediency seemed to dictate such a course (p. 64), and thus the festival coronation of Sîvrit was also in keeping with historical reality. At the time of his marriage Sîvrit had not yet been crowned king in his own country (43,2). He had, however, been elected by his father's vassals to succeed to the throne (42,2-3), and, as he told Gunther on his arrival in Worms (109,1) and as was shown by the crown painted on his shield when he went to the Saxon wars (215,1-2), he possessed the undisputed right to wear a crown. What crown he actually wore in Worms is purely a matter of speculation. It is quite possible that the Burgundian kings had four crowns, since the Carolingians, for example, are known to have had a number of crowns in their possession.¹⁰ On the other hand it is quite conceivable that Sîvrit had at least one crown with him when he travelled to Worms. The poet, though he makes no mention of a crown, does not weary of emphasizing the very great elegance of Sîvrit and his group of warriors on their journey. There is no doubt that medieval kings were in the habit of taking crowns with them not only on their numerous itineraries but even when they went to

⁹ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums im Lichte der Krönung*, Weimar, 1937, p. 33.

¹⁰ Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen*, p. 388.

war; the story is told of Charles the Bald that in a campaign against the Normans he lost three crowns to the enemy — though he is reported to have recovered them (with several gems missing) a few days later.

It has been noted that the coronation ceremonies for Prünhilt actually began when she was seen wearing a crown at her marriage banquet. Klewitz believes, though he does not claim to have proved the point, that it was customary in Germany for a royal couple to wear their crowns at the wedding ceremony which usually preceded the inaugural coronation of the new queen (p. 63, footnote). It has further been noted that the end of the coronation ceremonies was marked by a coronation banquet, the official nature of which was made quite clear by the fact that each of the queens was escorted to her place by a bishop. Both Schramm and Klewitz in their studies of German coronations and festival coronations point out that no coronation of any kind was complete without the concluding banquet, and hence in this particular too, the poet was faithful to tradition.

The second occasion in the *Nibelungenlied* on which a crown is worn in Worms is during the visit of Sîvrit, Kriemhilt, and Sigemunt to the Burgundian kings many years later. Here only a festival coronation is involved. On the morning of the day following the arrival of the guests, the kings and queens go "under krône/in das münster wît (812,-3)." After hearing mass they return "mit vil manigen êren (813,2)" to the palace where later they are seen going to the table (813, 2-3). Again the festival coronation concludes with a banquet. Both Schramm and Klewitz emphasize the fact that the function of the festival coronation was to make manifest the king as the ruler of the people, and Klewitz points out that this function could be fulfilled only if the festival coronation took place in circumstances which permitted the participation of more people than were included in the usual entourage of the king. Klewitz observes further that the climax of a festival coronation was not the placing of the crown on the king's head, but the procession of the crowned king which took place before the eyes of the people (p. 67 and p. 71). The poet of the *Nibelungenlied* was obviously aware of these facts. On the occasion of the festival coronation pure and simple he describes the procession to the cathedral and tells with what pomp the rulers make their way back to the palace, but the events inside the cathedral he dismisses in a subordinate clause: "Dô si gehôrten messe (813,1)." For both coronations large numbers of people have come to Worms, and crowds press to see their share of the public celebrations.

It has already been observed that at the time of the coronation of Prünhilt and Kriemhilt in Worms, Sîvrit had not yet been crowned king in his own country. The first use of the word *krône* in the *Nibelungenlied* is when Sîvrit refuses to be crowned because his parents are still living (43,2). His refusal is interpreted by Nelly Dürrenmatt

(p. 152) as "hövescheit," but such an interpretation is not only unsupported by the text, but is in poor accord with the facts of medieval history. Until about 1200 in western Europe the coronation of an heir during the lifetime of a reigning monarch was frequently a vital political issue and a subject of intense diplomatic activity on the part of both state and church. At a time when succession to the throne was hereditary to a limited degree only and was contingent on the election of one among possibly a number of candidates having certain qualifications, a king often attempted while at the height of his power to force or forestall the election by means of the coronation of one of his sons. This was done especially in cases where the hereditary heir seemed unlikely to win the support of church or nobility or where he lacked the vigor necessary to assert his claim successfully. It is therefore unlikely that Sîvrit's reluctance to wear the crown has anything to do with "hövescheit"; rather it can be assumed to be the culminating piece of evidence in the poet's elaborate demonstration of Sîvrit's personal superiority. A direct heir, designated furthermore by the nobility as successor to the throne (42,2-3), and possessing the inward attributes of royalty to such a degree that he with ease outstripped all competitors in everything he chose to undertake, had no need to wear the outward sign of royal authority. This theory cannot be proved conclusively, but it is at least supported by historical reality. The suggestion that he was motivated by "hövescheit" suffers moreover from the serious disadvantage of making Sîvrit suddenly appear less "hövesch" when, after his marriage to Kriemhilt, he finally does agree to wear the crown in his parents' presence.

The reason for his willingness to accept the crown on his return to Santen is made clear while Sîvrit is still in Worms, discussing with the Burgundian kings the question of Kriemhilt's inheritance. Sîvrit suggests that Kriemhilt can renounce her claim to a share of the Burgundian possessions since, if he lives to see her wearing the crown in his own country, "si muoz werden rîcher/dann' iemen lebender sî (695,-3)." It is his obligation to secure for Kriemhilt the powerful position she deserves, and to do this he must consent to the coronation which for himself alone was superfluous. From Sigemunt's point of view, on the other hand, the coronation in Santen of so celebrated a princess is a politically advantageous move, since it will give added importance to his kingdom (704,1-3).

Altogether the crown is mentioned no less than eight times in reference to the occasion on which, having returned to Niderlant with his bride, Sîvrit is publicly invested with the crown by his father. The poet does not, however, give a precise account of the actual coronation in Santen. There are two immediately obvious reasons for this. Such an account, so soon after the coronation in Worms, would have been rep-

etitious. Furthermore the subject of the *Nibelungenlied* is not the history of Niderlant nor even the story of Sîvrit, but rather the fall of the Burgundian kings with their seat at Worms. Beyond these considerations, however, it is noteworthy that Santen, in spite of its possession of a cathedral and its relative prominence in the Middle Ages, does not seem to have been the scene of an actual coronation, while at Worms, on the other hand, several inaugural coronations and numerous festival coronations are known to have taken place. Klewitz (p. 95) lists no less than twelve festival coronations in Worms in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, while as early as 895 the Emperor Arnulf had his son Zwentibold crowned king of Lorraine in the cathedral at Worms in the presence of the three powerful archbishops of Cologne, Mainz, and Trier. The occasion was the first coronation of a ruler lower in rank than the emperor at which members of the clergy officiated.¹¹ In 1156 Worms was again the scene of a coronation when Beatrix, the second wife of Frederick I, was crowned there by the archbishop of Trier. The fact that Isabella of England was crowned in Worms in 1235 is here irrelevant, except in so far as it indicates that Worms continued to be thought of as an appropriate coronation setting.

With the exception of the use of the word *krône* twice (1675,2; 1678,4) in connection with Ruedeger's daughter and her proposed marriage to Giselher, all the remaining occurrences of the word apply to Kriemhilt. After the death of Sîvrit, Sigemunt assures Kriemhilt that if she returns to Santen with him his land and his crown shall be subject to her (1075,3) and she shall wear the crown in the presence of all his kinsmen (1086,2). Kriemhilt refuses, and the theme is quickly forgotten, since Santen has no further part to play in the history of the Burgundians. Thirteen years later Kriemhilt is again offered a crown. After having ascertained her worthiness to wear the crown in his country (1149,2), Etzel has sent Ruedeger to the Rhine to win Kriemhilt as his queen. Passing through Bechelâren on his way, Ruedeger tells his wife of his mission, and Gotelint rejoices to think that Kriemhilt will wear their crown and console them for the loss of Helche (1170,3-4). Arriving in Worms, Ruedeger makes to the Burgundian kings the formal offer of Helche's crown for their sister (1199, 3-4). The brothers favor the proposal, but Hagen objects. As the climax of a series of arguments against the marriage to Etzel, Hagen warns,

und sol diu edele Kriemhilt Helchen krône tragen,
si getuot uns leide, swie si gefüeget daz.

In possession of the power of which the crown is the symbol, Kriemhilt will be certain of her revenge. In his private negotiations with Kriemhilt, Ruedeger reminds her of the very great power of King Etzel and assures her that if she will deign to wear the crown at Etzel's side she

¹¹ Schramm, "Die Krönung in Deutschland," p. 190.

will have suzerainty over twelve other crowns (1235,2) and will be given the lands of thirty princes. Finally Kriemhilt is crowned queen in Etzel's land (1374,4), but beyond noting the munificence which marked the event, the author gives no account of the coronation ceremonies.

The crown is mentioned for the last time in the *Nibelungenlied* by Kriemhilt herself. Having seen Hagen and Volkêr sitting on a bench below her window, Kriemhilt has assembled four hundred of Etzel's men to avenge her wrongs. The men are ready to meet Hagen when the queen orders them to wait a while because she intends to go to her enemies wearing the crown (1770, 3-4). She will confront Hagen not only with her person but also with the symbol of her sovereign power. This is not the first time that Kriemhilt herself has made mention of the crown. In the course of the quarrel of the queens in which Beyschlag¹² sees the ultimate cause of the fall of the Burgundians, Kriemhilt rejects Prünhilt's claim to homage and proposes to prove by the splendor of her appearance at court that she is not merely the equal of Prünhilt but indeed her superior. She adds (829, 2-3):

ich wil selbe wesen tiuwerre danne iemen habe bekant
deheine küneginne diu krône ie her getruoc.

There now follows a detailed description of the magnificence of Kriemhilt and her women as they prepare for their public vindication, but no mention is made of the crown. Kriemhilt is still the member of a society so ruled by law and custom that crowns were no longer worn at a monarch's whim. Years later, forced into unusual circumstances, she resorts to unusual measures, and reverting to the manners of less ordered times she places the crown on her own head to show her enemy that she commands the means to subdue him. But the symbol cannot replace the substance. With the death of Sîvrit, whose intrinsic greatness was such that he could forego the extrinsic evidence of it (43,2), and with the loss of Sîvrit's hoard, Kriemhilt's power has failed at the source. She can, it is true, destroy her enemy, but in so doing she finds only destruction for herself.

Looking back it will be seen that in a majority of instances the word *krône* has been applied in the *Nibelungenlied* to queens rather than kings, but to queens in their specific capacity of queen consort. The poet has expressed little interest in the fact that Prünhilt was a queen in her own right before ever having heard of Gunther. Her importance for the *Nibelungenlied* lies not in her person but in her position as Gunther's queen, a position which gives her sovereignty over the king's land, his castles, and his men (619, 3-4). Kriemhilt, the carefully guarded princess, becomes a ruling queen by reason of her marriage to Sîvrit, and it has already been observed that Sîvrit himself places great emphasis on the power she is to wield, a power which the poet mentions again on

¹² Siegfried Beyschlag, "Das Nibelungenlied in gegenwärtiger Sicht," *Wirkendes Wort*, April/Mai 1953, p. 198.

the occasion of Sigelint's death (717, 2-3):

dô hete'n gewalt mit alle der edelen Uoten kint,
 der sô rîchen vrouwen ob landen wol gezam.

As Etzel's consort Kriemhilt is raised once more to a position of similar authority, when as crowned queen she rules over (1385, 2-3)

alle des küniges mâge unt alle sîne man,
 daz nie diu vrouwe Helche so gewaldeclîch gebôt.

Queens such as the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* saw them were typical of the earlier centuries of German history. It is well known that in the early period of the Holy Roman Empire a number of distinguished women played a politically influential part as queen consorts, and it is a fact, ironical though this may seem, that the rise of courtly lady worship coincided with a sharp decline in the political importance of women. In *Die Frau als Herrscherin im hohen Mittelalter* Thilo Vogelsang explains the power exercised by queen consorts in the period of the Saxon and Franconian emperors and shows how it dwindled to the point of insignificance in the Hohenstaufen period. Social pre-eminence in a sphere in which aesthetic considerations prevailed had replaced active intervention in affairs of state.¹³

The literary reflection of the change indicated here can be seen in a comparison suggested by de Boor. In the course of his discussion of the women of the *Nibelungenlied*, in which, incidentally he is concerned with their behavior as women rather than as queens, de Boor makes the point that when Sîvrit returns with his bride to his own country where he becomes an exemplary ruler, the same thing has happened apparently as in *Érec* (p. 161). Having made this remark, de Boor does not pursue the parallel any further, nor does he explain his use of the word apparent in drawing the parallel. Actually the return of *Érec* as described by Hartmann differs in many respects from Sîvrit's return to Niderlant with Kriemhilt. Of interest here is only the word *krône*, which occurs twice in the concluding portion of *Érec* referred to by de Boor. The first occurrence is when Hartmann reports that *Érec* received the crown (10064-5) worn by his late father. The occasion is marked by elaborate festivities, but there is not a hint of anything resembling a coronation. Above all there is no mention of a crown for *Ênîte*, and even though originally *Érec's* father had wished to confer the authority in his kingdom on her as well as on his son (2916-2923), there is no suggestion that *Ênîte* actually possesses any ruling power. For the courtly poet it is enough that her sufferings are at an end, that joy and honor await her, with correct treatment from her reformed husband,

wan er nâch êren lebte
 und so daz im got gebte

¹³ Thilo Vogelsang, *Die Frau als Herrscherin im hohen Mittelalter*, Göttingen, 1954, p. 86 and also p. 61.

mit väterlichem lône,
 nâch der werlt krône,
 im und sînem wîbe,
 mit dem êwegen libe. (10124-29)

This second occurrence of *krône* introduces an element completely foreign to the *Nibelungenlied*.

The poet of the *Nibelungenlied* has used the word *krône* in only two ways: primarily to designate the actual crown worn by kings and queens in the display of their royal power, and secondarily to symbolize that power in the expression *krône tragen* in the sense of ruling or exercising royal authority. Nowhere in the *Nibelungenlied* does the word occur in a connotation which is not political. Hartmann's *der werlt krône*, on the other hand, seems to be a figure of speech for the glory of this world in contrast with the eternal life on which the courtly poet sets his hope. It is beyond the scope of the present study to examine in detail the use of the word *krône* in the courtly epics; a few examples will serve by antithesis to show still more clearly the self-imposed limitations of the poet of the *Nibelungenlied*. In the epic which has been entitled *Diu Crône*, Heinrich von dem Türlin, in a strikingly metaphorical use of the word compares his work to a crown set all around with precious stones, where strange pictures can be seen. In *Parzival* the word *krône* is often merely part of a biographical note to indicate the royal extraction of some of the numerous persons mentioned in the work, but beyond this Wolfram delights in using *krône* as a sort of metaphorical superlative. To quote only a few instances, *scham is der sele krône* (319.10), there gleams from the distance *aller ander bürge ein krône* (350.20), Gawan is counted by *frou Bêne zir hōhsten freuden krône* (692.5), while Parzival himself is addressed as *du krône menschen heiles* (781.14).¹⁴

The absence of *krône* in the *Nibelungenlied* in any connotation other than political becomes even more remarkable when compared with the prevalence of the word in the figurative language of the Middle Ages outside the sphere of the courtly epic. In tracing the history of the crown in medieval Europe Schramm points out the difficulties created by the frequent metaphorical use of *corona* in the Bible and its effect on medieval art. He mentions as an example "the crown of life," which resulted in the portrayal of saints carrying crowns in their hands.¹⁵ To be reminded of other expressions, such as "a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband," a "crown of rejoicing," or "a crown of righteousness," one need only glance at any Biblical concordance. The language of the Bible left its traces in medieval coronation orders. As

¹⁴ The examples from *Parzival* were found with the help of Alfred Senn and Winfred Lehmann, *Word-Index to Wolfram's Parzival*, University of Wisconsin, 1938.

¹⁵ Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen*, p. 377-378.

early as the ninth century such metaphors as a crown of spiritual jewels, or the crown of justice were used in coronation services, while God was besought to crown the ruler with glory and honor.¹⁶ It is quite impossible to assume that the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* was unaware of these and similar metaphorical uses of *krône*, and it is scarcely necessary to note that he has himself made skilful use of figurative language. It is possible to assume only that when he talks about the crown he is interested solely in its political and historical aspects. In such a matter, moreover, it cannot reasonably be claimed that the poet was limited by what he found in his sources. The subject of the crown was certainly one which allowed sufficient scope for innovation. The actual use he chose to make of the word seems to substantiate the opinion of Beyschlag when he says, "daß der Dichter diejenige Seite der aristokratisch-ritterlichen Welt seiner Zeit, die der höfische Roman ausschließt, in seine Vorzeitfabel einbezieht: das Leben der Könige und Landherren als Herrscher und Herrschervasallen, deren oberstes Gesetz des Handelns die harten und unerbittlichen Notwendigkeiten herrscherlichen Denkens sind." Beyschlag, however, having drawn this sharp distinction between *Nibelungenlied* and courtly novel, concludes by placing the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* side by side with Wolfram as his great counterpart and as an exponent with him of the courtly theme *wie man zer werlde solde leben* (p. 199). The foregoing findings on the poet's treatment of the crown seem to hint that he was possibly concerned neither with this nor with any other courtly theme. A series of similar investigations would, however, be needed before definite proof of such a contention could be offered.

¹⁶ Paul Krull, *Die Salbung und Krönung der deutschen Königinnen und Kaiserinnen im Mittelalter*, Halle, 1911, p. 15-17.

