

The Hero and His Companion: The Concept of Heroic Friendship

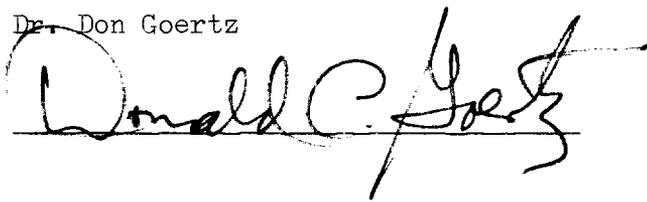
An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald C. Goertz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the name.

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The reading for a paper on the Hero and his Companion was - if not too expansive - certainly an entertaining and easy task. Presenting this rather nebulous notion (Heroic Friendship) in a cohesive and viable manner is, however, entirely different. The idea of Hero-Companion(s) has so many aspects that could be considered: the Hero-Companion relationship as it has progressed through the periods of literature, the relationship as indicative of contemporary ideas of friendship, and the relationship as an expression of homosexual love; to name a few. Concerning the last, Rictor Nortor has presented an interesting work dealing with the tradition of homosexual literature which in turn touches upon the two former aspects. His work is not wholly concerned with the Hero-Companion, rather the expression of homosexual love itself. Certainly this is a part of some Hero-Companion relationships, but it is not totally so. Anyway, I hope - with certain obvious limitations - to consider all three notions mentioned above, as they are somewhat inter-related. In addition, I shall deal only with the "epic" or "romance" (in some cases) hero and his companion. These are the heroes most directly involved with the folk/mythic traditions of the literatures they represent, which in turn have more bearing (I think) upon the basic social ideas the Hero and Companion represent.

"Heroic Friendship", that relationship between the Hero and his Companion, is a literary idea which seems to have been inspired, appropriately enough, the Heroic Age (comprising different periods for different peoples). It is an idea that existed among peoples whose national epics - if such existed - have not survived to this day. In fact, this idea was quite an institution (an institution that occurs in almost every Western culture as well as several non Indo-European cultures). George Vernadsky, for example, quotes Lucian to describe this type of friendship among various tribes of pre-Kievan Russia. Of the Scythians he quotes:

"When we see a brave man, capable of great achievement, we all make after him, and we think fit to behave in forming friendships as you do in seeking brides. . . . And when a man has singled out and is at last a friend, there ensues formal compact and the most solemn that we will not only live with one another but die, if need be, for each other; and we do just that. For once we have cut our fingers, let the blood drip into a cup, dipped our sword-points into it, and then, both at once, have set our lips to it and drunk, there is nothing thereafter that can dissolve the bond between us."<sup>1</sup>

Vernadsky also writes of "sworn brothers" as a custom common among the warriors of the Alans and Mongols "in search of glorious adventures."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say "sacred friendship between two youthful heroes is a favourite theme in the epos of the Alans as well as in that of the Persians, the Turks and the Mongols. We find it also in Russian byliny and fairy tales."<sup>3</sup> (This brings to mind two tangents -- in the Lay of Igor's Campaign and among the early Russian city-states through the rise of Muscovy, the prince/tsar always had about him a special band of companions as a bodyguard, etc., called "druzhina," which is derived from "dryg" or "friend." And who has not heard of "blood brothers" among the American Indians?) Incidentally, all these references point to the notion of "personal allegiance" that Hector Chadwick considers one of the attributes of the Heroic Age. I hope to come back to this later. In what may imply an even broader distribution of this type of friendship, Vernadsky (quoting Lucian) tells of the manner by which the Scythians swore their sacred friendship (in a different context): allegiance - or friendship - was sworn by the swearer placing his right foot upon a bull's hide on which sits the man to whom they swear fealty. Bulls are exceptionally important in the mythology of the Alans and Scythians as well as the Hittites and Teutons; further, the bull was a sacred animal in Mithraism

(a religion very popular among the Roman Legionaries).<sup>4</sup>

An interesting form of friendship - which could be considered an off-shoot of the Heroic - was documented by Robert Brain among the Bangwa of Africa, where "best friends are known as 'twins.'"<sup>5</sup> Among the Bangwa this idea of "twinship" exists from childhood through old age, remaining throughout an important part of the social structure:

"Youth who become friends exchange confidences, discuss their secret plans, hunt together, and plan their endless amorous adventures. The Bangwa speak of ideal friendship as one of reciprocity backed by moral, rather than supernatural and legal, sanctions. He is my friend 'because he is beautiful,' because he is good. Although there is in fact a good deal of ceremonial courtesy and gift exchange, it is seen as a relationship of disinterested affection. Friends spend long hours in each other's company, holding hands, walking together in the market. For old men, friendships are particularly valued: the most bitter complaint of one old Bangwa man was that he had grown too old to have a friend left to gossip with."<sup>6</sup>

This is incredibly reminiscent of a number of characters in the Iliad -- the last part brings old Phoinix to mind in particular.

The basic aspect of Heroic Friendship (essentially, it is Heroic Friendship) as a development of the Heroic Age, is the concept of personal allegiance. (While it violates the chronological order of the heroes I'd planned to consider, this is a perfect point to bring in Homer) Hector Munro Chadwick in his work The Heroic Age speaks of personal allegiance as an integral definition of "the Heroic Age" which, for the Greeks, he coincides with the Mycenaean Age and the period of the Trojan War.<sup>7</sup> The characters of the Iliad, then, all the assorted heroes, embody this concept. And, while Achilleus and Patroklos are the most famous pair of friends in the epic, the other heroes, too, maintain this relationship. This allegiance is expressed most clearly in the sorties made by both Patroklos and Achilleus when each exhorts the troops on

behalf of his friend. (Incidentally, though no literature of epic proportions survives from the early Gauls, it may be assumed that the idea of Heroic Friendship existed among them. Chadwick cites that the principle of personal allegiance was very highly developed among the Gauls<sup>8</sup> and that their concepts of religion and immortality parallels closely those in the Heroic Ages of the Greeks and Teutons.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, the presence of an "Achilleus" and "Patroklos" seems quite probable. One more example: Chadwick also tells us that personal allegiance is very prominent in the Serbian epic cycles of the battle of Kossovo, exemplified by the relationships of squires to lords and lords to kings.<sup>10</sup> This is quite similar to the relationships in the Iliad on the one hand and the Medieval romances on the other.) Continuing with the notion of personal allegiance as it figures in Heroic Friendship, Chadwick proposes the idea that the institution of a "comitatus" was more highly developed in the Teutonic Heroic Age than in the Greek due simply to the greater number of princes/nobles among the Greeks.<sup>11</sup> (note the number of Penelope's suitors on Ithaca where the population was probably never very great -- this is also the example Chadwick uses). The idea of personal allegiance itself seems to have arisen from the fact that kingships in the Heroic Ages seem to have been based upon military prestige rather than on nationalities or tribes, with few exceptions. In the Iliad the only heroes of the "first rank" (as Chadwick puts it) with national kingdoms are Achilleus and Ajaz son of Oileus. Ideomeneus of Crete is a lesser hero, Odysseus is not called a king, and Agamemnon and Menelaos seem to rule over cities regardless of tribal affiliations or their location.

There are other factors involved in the concept of Heroic Friendship

besides personal allegiance, not the least of which is being heroic itself - though not necessarily "epically" so. Herakles and Iolaos (who is certainly not an epic hero) became such paragons of Heroic Friendship - and here the presence of homosexual love enters - that numerous cults arose dedicated to the two,<sup>12</sup> including the Sacred Band of Thebes. (Farnell presents some interesting notions on the diffusion of this cult through Sicily and Sardinia). There is also the friendship between Theseus and Perithoos, which Rictor Norton sees as having homosexual connotations<sup>13</sup> (by the way, referring back to the Sacred Band of Thebes, Norton writes that "the patron saints of the monastery of Gembloux were the entire Sacred Band of Thebes."<sup>14</sup>) It is interesting to note that Norton sees the concept of "comitatus" as a growth of the all-male hunting parties of prehistoric societies which in turn generated homosexual love and which he and Lionel Tiger, author of Men in Groups, consider to have preceded heterosexual love (as opposed to heterosexual sex).<sup>15</sup> He cites interesting examples in support of this that seem logical, but then he also claims Herakles' labours "were meant as testimonies" of his love with Eurystheus.<sup>16</sup>

Having discussed briefly some of the background behind Heroic Friendship, I will now attempt to describe some examples of "Heroic Friends." I shall by no means do justice to all such friends - such as Theseus and Perithoos, or the proverbial Damon and Pythias - let alone to those I mention, but the basic concept will, I hope, be conveyed.

The first pair of Heroic Friends to consider - and perhaps the first pair in literature - are Gilgamesh and Enkidu. As a testimony of the concept of Heroic Friendship, these two are outstanding. To begin with, the friendship is a fated one in that Enkidu must die. This is a trait present in nearly all examples of Heroic Friendship until the romances of the Middle Ages, but by then the relationship between heroes had undergone

certain alterations (Rictor Norton's previously mentioned book interprets this part of Heroic Friendship - indeed the whole relationship - as part of what he refers to as the "Hylas Ritual." Agreed, traits and/or events he mentions do occur pretty much throughout, but his interpretations of them often appear quite convoluted; they are interesting, but I find it hard to accept most of them at face value). Anyway, Gilgamesh is the overly proud king-priest of Uruk while Enkidu is a giant-like figure only half man. Enkidu's reputation precedes him to Uruk from which Gilgamesh sends forth a prostitute, more or less to tame the creature. By the process of "association" with the prostitute Enkidu becomes a man, whereupon she persuades him to journey to Uruk. It is interesting that each quails at the mention of the other's name--they are fated to meet; at first, Enkidu to humble Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh to destroy Enkidu (The idea of one friend as a sort of moral restraint upon the other is quite common. It was essentially for this reason that Patroklos accompanies Achilleus to Troy). Following the struggle that ensues upon their first encounter, Gilgamesh and Enkidu become devoted friends.

Together, Gilgamesh and Enkidu undertake several adventures, killing Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. Ishtar, as the goddess of Love, seems intent upon separating the two friends, finally calling down a curse upon the slayer of the Bull of Heaven (it is Enkidu's sword which does the deed). Enkidu replies to this by throwing the Bull's right thigh in her face and crying "I would tear you just like this/If I could catch you!"<sup>17</sup> Since it was Ishtar who had the Bull sent to earth (in response to Gilgamesh's refusal to her) this rebuke by Enkidu is doubly insulting. For this, Enkidu is doomed--Gilgamesh is spared as he is part god. The wound Enkidu suffered in the battle with Humbaba worsens and he dies, introducing the most touching lines of the epic, and among the most touching in all literature:

"He looked at Gilgamesh, and said:  
 You will be left alone, unable to understand  
 In a world where nothing lives anymore  
 As you thought it did.  
 Nothing like yourself, everything like dead  
 Clay before the river makes the plants  
 Burst out along its beads, dead and. . .  
 He became bitter in his tone again:  
 Because of her. She made me see  
 Things as a man, and a man sees death in things.  
 That is what it is to be a man. You'll know  
 When you have lost the strength to see  
 The way you once did. You'll be alone and wander  
 Looking for that life that's gone or some  
 Eternal life you have to find.  
 He drew closer to his friend's face.  
 My pain is that my eyes and ears  
 No longer see and hear the same  
 As yours do. Your eyes have changed.  
 You are crying. You never cried before.  
 It's not like you.  
 Why am I to die,  
 You to wander on alone?  
 Is that the way it is with friends?  
 Gilgamesh sat hushed as his friend's eyes stilled.  
 In his silence he reached out  
 To touch the friend whom he had lost.

Gilgamesh wept bitterly for his friend.  
 He felt himself now singled out for loss  
 Apart from everyone else. The word Enkidu  
 Roamed through every thought  
 Like a hungry animal through empty lairs  
 In search of food. The only nourishment  
 He knew was grief, endless in its hidden source  
 Yet never ending hunger.  
 All that is left to one who grieves  
 Is convalescence. No change of heart or spiritual  
 Conversion, for the heart has changed  
 And the soul has been converted  
 To a thing that sees  
 How much it costs to lose a friend it loved.  
 It has grown past conversion to a world  
 Few enter without tasting loss  
 In which one spends a long time waiting  
 For something to move one to proceed.  
 It is that inner atmosphere that has  
 An unfamiliar gravity or none at all  
 Where words are flung out in the air but stay  
 Motionless without an answer,  
 Hovering about one's lips  
 Or arguing back to haunt  
 The memory with what one failed to say,

Until one learns acceptance of the silence  
 Amidst the new debris  
 Or turns again to grief  
 As the only source of privacy,  
 Alone with someone loved.  
 It could go on for years and years,  
 And has, for centuries,  
 For being human holds a special grief  
 Of privacy within the universe  
 That yearns and waits to be retouched  
 By someone who can take away  
 The memory of death."<sup>18</sup>

Such is the grief and devotion of Gilgamesh that he undertakes the great quest: finding a way to restore Enkidu to life.

"The bored know nothing of this agony  
 Waiting for diversion they have never lost.  
 Death had taken the direction he had gained.  
 He was no more a king  
 But just a man who now had lost his way  
 Yet had a greater passion to withdraw  
 Into a deeper isolation. Mad,  
 Perhaps insane, he tried  
 To bring Enkidu back to life  
 To end his bitterness,  
 His fear of death.  
 His life became a quest  
 To find the secret of eternal life  
 Which he might carry back to give his friend."<sup>19</sup>

Gilgamesh therefore passes over the "waters of the dead," to Utnapishtim, in his search. Upon briefly speaking of his grief, Gilgamesh is told by Utnapishtim what could be considered the definition of Friendship:

"Friendship is vowing toward immortality  
 And does not know the passing away of beauty  
 (Though take care!)  
 Because it aims for the spirit.  
 Many years ago through loss I learned  
 That love is wrung from our inmost heart  
 Until only the loved one is and we are not."<sup>20</sup>

Prompted by his wife, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh the means whereby he might restore Enkidu to life. Gilgamesh acquires the needed plant and

returns across the waters of the dead but Fate, as always, is inexorable -  
if not cruel:

"Urshanabi guided the ecstatic man away  
To the other shore, and when they parted  
Gilgamesh was alone again, but not  
With the loneliness or the memory of death.  
He stopped to drink and rest beside a pool  
And soon undressed and let himself slip in  
The water quietly until he was refreshed,  
Leaving the plant unguarded on the ground.  
A serpent had smelled its sweet fragrance and saw  
Its chance to come from the water, and devoured  
The plant, shedding its skin as slough.  
When Gilgamesh rose from the pool,  
His naked body glistening and refreshed,  
The plant was gone; the discarded skin  
Of a serpent was all he saw. He sat  
Down on the ground, and wept."<sup>21</sup>

With but a little imagination, one can see in the friendship of Achilles and Patroklos a parallel to that of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Like Enkidu - though under different circumstances - Patroklos is sent as something of a restraint upon Achilles (which, when one considers the Greek ideal of friendship, fits the fact that Patroklos was the elder of the two). Of the friendships among the heroes in the Iliad, that of Patroklos and Achilles is - for obvious reasons - the most developed. (It is helpful here to consider also the relationship of Alexander and Hepaistion which Mary Renault so vividly recreated in her books, and in which we see something of Alexander's emulation of Achilles) The story of these two Heroic Friends is well known and need not be gone into here beyond a few statements about their relationship.

It is periodically argued whether or not the friendship between Achilles and Patroklos entered into the realm of a sexual relationship and, depending upon one's stance, the passages of Achilles' lamentations for Patroklos are often cited. The presence of any sexually based - or

expressed - affection irrelevant in my opinion given what is generally known of the mores of the Greeks, although the "evidence" seems to argue a little more for than against. This is something, however, that is not unique with respect to other examples of Heroic Friendship. Such ambiguity could be raised about virtually all of them if one so chose to pursue the matter and - after a fashion - this is what makes the friendship of Achilleus and Patroklos important (beyond its influence upon Plato and hence such people as Montaigne and Bacon--which I hope to go into later). One of the essential features of Heroic Friendship is the idea of personal allegiance which has already been frequently mentioned. With Heroic Friendship as opposed to merely a trait of the "Heroic Age," however, this concept is intensified to such a pitch/depth of loyalty as to resemble a marriage of sorts (cf. the Scythians above):

"In both hands he caught up the grimy dust, and poured it over his head and face, and fouled his handsome countenance, and the black ashes were scattered over his immortal tunic. And he himself, mightily in his might, in the dust lay at length, and took and tore at his hair with his hands, and defiled it.

. . .

On the other side Antilochus mourned with him, letting the tears fall, and held the hands of Achilleus as he grieved in his proud heart, fearing Achilleus might cut his throat with the iron."<sup>22</sup>

"Then sighing heavily Achilleus of the swift feet answered her: 'My mother, all these things the Olympians brought to accomplishment. But what pleasure is this to me, since my dear companion has perished, Patroklos, whom I loved beyond all other companions, as well as my own life. I have lost him. . .'"<sup>23</sup>

". . . Meanwhile the Achaians mourned all night in lamentation over Patroklos. Peleus' son led the thronging chant of their lamentation, and laid his manslaughtering hands over the chest of his dear friend with outbursts of incessant grief. As some great bearded lion when some man, a deer hunter, has stolen his cubs away from him out of the close wood; the lion comes back too late, and is anguished and turns into many valleys quartering after the man's trail on the chance of finding him, and taken with bitter anger, . . ."<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, at one point, Achilleus' mourning for Patroklos is likened to that

of a wife for her husband. All Heroic Friendships are marked by this intense love that supercedes even the love the hero has for his wife (if one exists). In fact, with Herakles, as wife, however hotly he pursued her, always took a distant back seat to his heroic companions (but then, Herakles' heroic relationships are more often considered homosexual than Achilles', e.g. Herakles and Iolaos, mentioned above). And, again, there is the more or less historic example of Alexander and Hephaestion.

On to the Middle Ages. Of the Heroic Friendships in Medieval literature, Roland and Oliver usually spring to mind. The Song of Roland, however, was a work with which I was singularly unimpressed. Furthermore, I feel Roland and Oliver are rather minor as examples of Heroic Friendship: within the epic itself the characters seem to be secondary to the theme of Christian versus Moslem (common to much of Medieval literature). A certain sense of personal loyalty does come through in the battle in which both Roland and Oliver are killed; but Medieval heroes fit a basic stereotype, and there is a much better example of Heroic Friendship for all the heroes, Roland and Oliver, the knights of the Nibelung tale, and even the knights of Arthur: Tariel and Avt'handil, the heroes of The Knight in the Panther Skin, the Medieval epic of Georgia. The Knight in the Panther Skin is not only more entertaining than Song of Roland (and more affected), it presents a feature rather unique to the era--the Friends are of different faiths.

The poem of the Knight is full of Medieval conventions such as chaste, courtly love and quests, fantastic battles, and, of course, chivalry. (It is more a romance than an epic, but as either one it is a work of literature greatly neglected.) Our two knights are quite larger than life (one wonders how Launcelot would have fared against them before he lost his own chastity) which fits with the tradition of epic heroes

and they are among the few Friends whose relationship does not end in tragedy (this really makes it a romance).

The poem begins when King Rostevan, his champion the knight Avt'handil, and their followers - while out on a hunt - meet a mysterious, mournful-looking man clad in a panther skin (Tariel--hence the title of the work). Rostevan sends servants to inquire of Tariel his name and story, but the knight slays them without a word. This happens several times, Rostevan waxing wroth all the while, till Tariel leaves and loses the band of hunters pursuing him. Rostevan falls into a fit of melancholy so Avt'handil, fascinated by the mysterious knight, slips off (against the wishes of his king--which presages the transfer of a greater loyalty by Avt'handil to Tariel). After a very long search, Avt'handil has found the lair of Tariel, for he is living in a cave he cleared of evil djinns with a servant girl (the maid of Tariel's love). The maid finally prevails upon Tariel to tell his story to Avt'handil, the upshot of which is his love has been stolen from him (there are political events as well, but they are not overly important at this point). So great is Tariel's grief that he becomes mad and dons the skin of a panther rather than wear his "knightly armour." There is a certain amount of ambiguity here; madness seems to have been a big deal in Medieval literature (sort of the chivalrous thing to do when mourning for one's love) and Tariel may have purposefully taken up madness - or at least assumed it. Avt'handil, who has been separated from his own love during his search for Tariel, identifies with the story personally in addition to being greatly moved by the tragedy of this beautiful knight himself (both of Rustaveli's knights are veritable paragons of beauty, as well as their ladies). Avt'handil immediately offers his (almost sacred) friendship and assistance in finding Tariel's betrothed (the maid had earlier mentioned Tariel's need for such, for the sake of his sanity).

Later, Avt'handil sums up this friendship when he leaves the court of Rostevan to begin his quest for Tariel's lady:

". . . 'Who has confidence in a rash man? He for my sake sacrifices himself to be burned, he who must not be burned. I have appointed the time of my return; I have promised him to sacrifice myself for him Tariel . I swear it by my sun whom I contemplate as a sun!

'A friend should spare himself no trouble for his friend's sake, he should give heart for heart, love as a road and a bridge. Then, again the grief of his beloved should be a great grief to a lover. Lo! without him my joy is nought to me and myself I hold of no account.'"25

Avt'handil's own betrothed, Thinatin, realises the importance of this bond. She replies to Avt'handil:

"'Thou dost well not to break the oath thou didst swear; it is necessary to fulfill strong love for a friend, to seek for his cure, to know the unknown.'"26

Avt'handil's oath of friendship takes precedence even over his fealty to King Rostevan. The king does not look favourably on his knight's quest, so Avt'handil's departure is rather secretive and he leaves a message for Rostevan to be found after he's left in which he says

"'I know that in the end thou wilt not blame my resolve. A wise man cannot abandon his beloved friend. I venture to remind thee of the teaching of a certain discourse made by Plato: "Falsehood and two-facedness injure the body and then the soul.'"27

Later in the same letter, Avt'handil writes:

"'. . . I cannot be false, I cannot do a cowardly deed; he would shame me when we meet face to face in that eternity whereto we both shall come. Mindfulness of a friend ne'er doeth us harm. I despise the man who is shameless, false, and treacherous. I cannot be false; I cannot do it for a mighty king. What is worse than a hesitant, tardy-going man!'"28

Eventually, Avt'handil finds Tariel's lady-love, and the two knights

plot her rescue. It involves a great battle against supernatural forces, but, of course, the two win the day (almost single-handedly). In the ultimate of happy endings, Avt'handil and Tairel (by now quite sane) marry their respective beautiful maidens and come into their own kingdoms. Mindful, however, of the great of honour in Heroic Friendship, Tairel makes known there are limits even now when, near the end of the romance, he tells Avt'handil:

"I greatly hate too much fear, respect and ceremony in a friend, I hate unbroken sternness, gloominess; majesty; if one be a hearty friend let him tend towards me; if not, I for myself, he for himself, separation is much better."<sup>29</sup>

(This, of course, does not occur with these two friends)

This strong bond of friendship between Tairel and Avt'handil seems much less developed in most of the epics and romances of Western Europe, but the bond still exists. The reason for this could be the increasing presence of Christian ideas ("faith" figures very largely in many Medieval romances, such as the tales of Arthur) or the simple change in literary tastes. Whatever the cause, Heroic Friendship from roughly the Middle Ages on becomes increasingly an ideal of learned philosophy. In such works as the Medieval Nibelunglied, le Morte d'Arthur and the Serbian heroic "epic songs" the ideal of personal honour supercedes the honour of friendship. The Round Table - particularly as depicted by T.H. White in The Once and Future King (in which the philosophy of pacifism and other abstract ideas are the main theme) - show this trend admirably. In fact, in Launcelto, Guinevere, and Arthur we have a prime example of the decline of Heroic Friendship wherein romantic love is dominant (as it is to a much lesser extent in the

tales of the Niebelung's ring, where Fate and revenge seem supreme. This revenge could be taken as vengeance for betrayed trust/loyalty/friendship, but this is still carried out within the setting of "romantic" love). The Arthurian knights as a whole do possess a sort of mass Heroic Friendship (more of a fraternal type than Heroic, however), and within this there are varying degrees: there is the clannish-ness of the Orkneys, Gawain, Agravaine, Gareth, Gaheris, and Mordred; the utter aloofness of Galahad; and the romantic predilections of Tristram and Launcelot. There does exist the friendships of Launcelot with several other knights as well as Arthur (I refer here essentially to White's tetralogy, being more familiar with it) such as the youthful Gaheris, which recalls briefly Patroklos and Achilleus. It is significant also that Launcelot (in White, at any rate) suffers much torment over what seems to him a betrayal of his friendship with Arthur.

Arthur and his knights, however, present a rather unique problem to considerations of Heroic Friendship. Many of the characters can be linked directly or indirectly with figures of Celtic mythology and yet much of their "development" has very obvious Christian connotations. There is also the tale of the Sangreal and its influence upon everyone. And one must not forget the possible political influence upon the growth of the Arthurian mythos (it has been proposed that Geoffrey of Monmouth was largely inspired - perhaps externally - to attempt a reconciliation or legitimacy to Norman - and hence Anglo-Saxon - rule over the very independent-minded Celts/Britons of Wales). The Nibelung cycle poses much the same problem only it is more obviously mythologically based. The tale of the Nibelung hoard itself underwent much growth (more so than the Arthurian cycle) with the different characters having varying

personalities in different texts - Hagen is a notable example of this. (In the Arthurian tales, all of the characters are essentially consistent even when the tale is "foreign" to England, such as those of France or the Mediterranean) Hagen's inconsistent personality may rise from his half-elven/dwarvish lineage--it certainly has a direct bearing on his actions in Wagner's opera. In the older romances and mythic stories, Hagen's character - although he is still guilty of complicity in Siegfried's murder - has a greater sense of honour which is displayed in the subsequent series of retributions, and which Wagner omits entirely.

It would seem upon examination of chivalric character, that the knight's sense of honour is derived from the principles of Heroic Friendship, of which Roland and Oliver can be viewed as transitional figures. Certainly the concept of personal allegiance is very much in evidence: Siegfried goes to the court of the Burgundians, Launcelot, Palomides, and the Orkneys (though here we should only include Gawaine, Gareth, and Gaheris) travel to Camelot. The growth of modern states at this time no doubt influenced the lessening of this bond to personal allegiance to a sovereign rather than fellow heroes. In the legends of the Amelungs and "Dietrich and Hildebrand," the sovereign is much more a heroic companion than sovereign (while Arthur and Charlemagne are much more sovereigns, though still of heroic stature) and could also be considered transitional. Returning briefly to Roland and Oliver, they most assuredly represent Heroic Friendship - as seen in battle, part of which makes them rather flat characters - but their loyalty to each other is subordinate to their fealty to Charlemagne. This particular factor is one of the main reasons I prefer The Knight in the Panther Skin; while disobeying one's sovereign as Avt'handil does can

imply a lack of constancy, the fact that it is done for a Friend (and the risk of the consequences would certainly have been great) makes the devotion to that Friend seem so much greater and more personal than the image created by Roland and Oliver.

There is a definite reason for the omittance of Eastern literature both in this paper and elsewhere when dealing with Heroic Friendship. While we have seen above that the Central Asian tribes and those farther east by inference had periods relating to the Heroic Age and traditions similar - if not equivalent - to the concept of Heroic Friendship, little epic literature exists to be examined, particularly by this writer. What literature that has come from, say the Mongols, is largely oral literature of epic characteristics but not necessarily "Epic." There are, of course, the epics of India and the Tibeto-Mongolian Gessar of Ling but the tradition of Heroic Friendship seems much less developed in these works. This, no doubt, is due in a large part to basic "Eastern philosophy." There are examples of friendships in these works - Rama and his stepbrother in the Ramayana, and in Gessar of Ling, Gessar (who is sent to earth from heaven) is accompanied by a fellow deity throughout his stay among men. All of these works, however, reflect the concept of obliteration of the individual so important in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, and this must necessarily limit the development of Heroic Friendship in which the individual is of almost tantamount importance. Perhaps the closest example to Occidental tradition occurs in the Bhagavad-Gita in which Krishna acts as the charioteer of the heroic Arjuna (similar to some of the pairs of comrades in the Iliad); even the limitation of this situation to Krishna's "educating" of Arjuna brings to mind the "elder-youth" relationship of Patroklos and

Achilleus or the philosophy of Plato (and hence the whole Greek tradition of such friendships).

Heroic Friendship as depicted by Homer and "analysed" by Plato eventually became the topic of a great deal of philosophical consideration (as briefly mentioned above) beginning - roughly - during the High Renaissance-Enlightenment. Two persons that come immediately to mind are Michel de Montaigne and Sir Francis Bacon, both of the last half of the Sixteenth Century (Bacon also extends into the first decades of the Seventeenth), and I shall limit my own considerations to these two. To be sure, the definition of Friendship extolled by these great men is not exactly Heroic, but they (for Montaigne and Bacon are not quite in full agreement) are largely inspired by the Heroic version and thus merit some mention.

Montaigne's view on the subject of Friendship is strikingly reminiscent of Plato and the Greeks - even to the point of veiled misogyny. In his essay under this title ("On Friendship") he states:

"What is more, in sexual love there is but a frantic desire for that which flies from us [shades of Martial!]. . . . As soon as it enters into the terms of friendship, that is to say into a conformity of wills, it flages and vanishes. Enjoyment destroys it, as having only a fleshly end and being subject to satiety. [again: shades of Martial!] Friendship, on the other hand, is enjoyed in proportion as it is desired; it is bred, nourished, and increased only by enjoyment, as being spiritual, and the soul becoming refined by practice.

. . . Besides, to tell the truth, women are ordinarily not capable of responding to this communion and fellowship, the nurse of this sacred bond; neither does their soul appear firm enough to support the strain of so hard and durable a knot. And, truly, if that were not so, if such a free and voluntary familiarity could be established, where not only the souls might have their complete enjoyment, but the bodies also shared in the alliance, in which the entire man was engaged; it is certain that the friendship would be fuller and more perfect. But the sex has never yet, by any example, been able to attain to it, and, by common agreement of the ancient schools, is shut out from it."<sup>30</sup>

Montaignes certainly parallels Heroic Friendship in its sexism, but it is difficult to tell if it is for the same reason; while women rarely hold heroic status in epics, Teutonic literature definitely prevents us from making the exclusion universal. No one can deny Brunhild is "firm of soul" - nor Kriemhild, for that matter. Montaigne does borrow quite obviously from the Greeks and he makes mention of Patroklos and Achilleus themselves as well as Aristotle. Honour is as important, apparently, to Montaigne as it was to the Heroic Friends, but he does allow himself flights of emotion somewhat difficult to imagine among his predecessors (I am not aware, for instance, of communal wives and children).

Bacon, perhaps by virtue of his "stiff-upper-lip" nationality, is much more calm about these things - and decidedly less misogynistic. Again, we are told of the detriments of passion (which, unlike Montaigne, Bacon does not specify as sexual): "A principal fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge of the fulness and swellings of the heart, which passions of all kinds do cause and induce."<sup>31</sup> Further, Bacon is more poetic: "For a crowd is not company; and faces are but a gallery of pictures; and talk but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love."<sup>32</sup>

If not in letter, then in sentiment Bacon approaches the Heroic more than Montaigne (especially the Friendship depicted in Knight in the Panther Skin):

"But one thing is most admirable . . . which is, that this communicating of man's self to his friend works two contrary effects; for it redoubleth joys, and cutteth griefs in halves. For there is no man that imparteth joys to his friend, but he joyeth the more: and no man imparteth his griefs to his friend, but he grieveth the less."<sup>33</sup>

Of course, Montaigne is not far off:

"For that perfect friendship of which I speak is indivisible: each one gives himself so wholly to his friend, that there remains to him nothing to divide with another; on the contrary he grieves that he is not double, triple, or fourfold, and that he has not several souls and several wills, to confer them all on the object of his love."<sup>34</sup>

I have purposely left Plato out of this discussion in spite of his great influence on Montaigne and Bacon and the importance in their own right of his dialogues on Friendship/Love. This is because Plato can be discussed succinctly but not briefly; that is, if one is to do him justice. Essentially, Plato views Friendship as expressed in the Symposium and Phaedrus (and inspired, no doubt, by Patroklos and Achilleus) are of a bond whereby Honour, Virtue, and Piety (after a fashion) are instilled and cultivated in the friends (predominantly the younger member - cf. the Homeric heroes - but it is really a mutual influence). It is a bond of love-inspired education that is by no means passionless but largely rational. While Rictor Norton makes the citation to support a sexual viewpoint, the following quote will serve just as well to point out the "non-sexual" aspect Plato considered most important:

"Sidney [Sir Philip Sidney in Defense of Poesy], incidentally, is correct that Plato in the Phaedrus 'authorized' the physical aspects of boy-love. This suggests that we should think of boy-love in three aspects rather than the usual two: spiritual, to be praised; physical, to be condemned; and physical and spiritual, to be condoned."<sup>35</sup>

There may be some confusion here between Norton's "boy-love" and my "Heroic Friendship." Certainly, Plato did not intend such affection to cease upon the "boy's" assumption of manhood. The bond Plato speaks of is one virtually of a life-time, to begin in one's youth (a term much more accurate than Norton's, which has implications certainly not "condoned" by the Greeks). What exists in Plato is basically an analysis of the Friendship of Patroklos and Achilleus (and vice versa).

Despite Plato's overall opinion of poets, both Homer and Plato are presenting an epitome of a noble relationship. Naturally, not everyone is a hero, and heroes being "larger than life" so must their relationships be; but then, so is the ideal of Everyman (which, I suppose, is what makes them ideals). I have been attempting in this paper to present an over-view of Friendship between Heroes - Heroic Friendship (obviously, I cannot fully consider every example in every epic or romance of epic scope) - with this same purpose in mind. Many of our social mores are an extension of our mythical heritage, which finds its most widespread expression in "the epic." (or so it seems to me) As an institution, Heroic Friendship need not be between heroes; Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee of Lord of the Rings fame are most un-heroic heroes yet they represent one of the finest and most touching examples of Heroic Friendship I've ever come across (which is what makes this fantasy one of my favourite books). Heroes are virtually nonexistent today - in literature and in life - but this need not preclude the existence of Heroic Friendship. Even among heroes what qualifies as Heroic Friendship is the quality of the friendship not just the stature of the friends. Achilles and Odysseus could not be considered exemplary of Heroic Friendship though both are undoubtedly heroes and could be considered friends of a sort. The quality of the friendship determines the stature of the friends more than the reverse.

". . . then it will appear that it was a sparing speech of the ancients to say, 'that a friend is another himself;' for that (because) a friend is far more than himself."<sup>36</sup> This closing statement of Bacon's essay seems particularly pertinent here, for it sums up very well the calibre of Heroic Friendship as it existed in the works mentioned above. It is more than ample as a closing for this paper, but I

should like to bring it to a full circle (something of a worm Orobouros) and end with the oldest English epic (assuming my discussion to have begun with the oldest epic period): Beowulf.

Beowulf fits the pattern of archetypal hero rather well and the poem the pattern of epic even better. Beowulf is, for the most part, a solitary hero and companionship plays a minor role in his life - until old age and the great worm arrive. In his final battle, Beowulf sees for himself and depicts for us the full impact of Heroic Friendship. The worm is too great a task for Beowulf alone; it requires the presence and assistance of his thane Wiglaf. Only together do they succeed in destroying the monster. But, once again, Heroic Friendship ends in separation - Beowulf dies and Wiglaf, almost the spectre of the concept of Heroic Friendship itself, remains:

" . . . Not by the sword  
 Could he quell the monster or lay him low.  
 And Wiglaf is sitting, Weohstan's son,  
 Bent over Beowulf, living by dead.  
 Death watch he keeps in sorrow of spirit  
 Over the bodies of friend and foe."<sup>37</sup>

## NOTATIONS

1. George Vernadsky, The Origins of Russia (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 14.
2. Ibid. pp. 13-4.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. p. 15.
5. Robert Brain, "Somebody Else Should be Your Own Best Friend", Psychology Today, October 1977. p. 84.
6. Ibid.
7. Hector Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age (Cambridge University Press, 1926), pp. 183-6.
8. Ibid. p. 428.
9. Ibid. p. 429.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. pp. 363-4.
12. Lewis Richard Farnell, Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 139.
13. Rictor Norton, The Homosexual Literary Tradition: an Interpretation (Revisionist Press, 1974) p. 295.
14. Ibid. p. 139.
15. Ibid. pp. 58-60.
16. Ibid. p. 3.
17. Herbert Mason, trans. Gilgamesh: a Verse Narrative (Houghton Mifflin, 1971) p. 37.
18. Ibid. pp. 41-6.
19. Ibid. p. 47.
20. Ibid. p. 66.
21. Ibid. pp. 79-80.
22. Richard Lattimore, trans., The Iliad (University of Chicago Press, 1951) Bk. 18, lines 23-34.
23. Ibid. Bk. 18, lines 78-82.
24. Ibid. Bk. 18, lines 314-25.
25. Shota Rustaveli, The Man in the Panther Skin, trans. Marjory Scot Wardrop (literatura da Khelovneba, 1966) quatrains 684-5.
26. Ibid. quatrain 688.
27. Ibid. quatrain 770.
28. Ibid. quatrain 778-9.
29. Ibid. quatrain 1464.
30. E.J. Trechman, trans., The Essays of Montaigne (Oxford University Press 1927), Bk.I, p. 186.
31. Mary A. Scott, ed., The Essays of Francis Bacon (Charles Scribner's, 1908) pp. 118-9.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid. p.123.
34. Trechman, op. cit. pp. 191-2.
35. Norton, op. cit. p. 153.
36. Scott, op. cit. p. 128.
37. Charles W. Kennedy, trans., Beowulf (Oxford University Press, 1940) p. 93.

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