THE TECHNIQUE OF OBJECT-PERSONIFICATION IN THE DREAM OF THE ROOD AND A COMPARISON WITH THE OLD ENGLISH RIDDLES

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In the longer version of the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, which occupies ff.104v/106r of the Vercelli Book, the poet tells of a vision of the cross which appeared to him one night (1-27), relays a speech delivered to him by the cross which includes an account of Christ's crucifixion (28-121) and describes the reorientation of his life which this vision has worked (122-56).[1] Though the controlling consciousness throughout the poem is technically that of the visionary, it would be anachronistic to attempt to explain the entire vision, including the cross's speech, in terms of his peculiar psychology. The cross is dramatically and psychologically independent, though its speech constitutes, in part, an explication of the image it presents initially to the visionary. Throughout its speech the cross speaks from a physical point of view largely consistent with its identity as the cross of Calvary and as an inert piece of wood; but it is not a disinterested eye-witness, for it reveals in the course of its narrative a view of itself, of human beings and its relationship with them and a set of human senses, emotions and capacities, all of which belie its actual nature as an inanimate object.

So much is a natural consequence of the poet's adoption of the formal device of prosopopoeia to which Margaret Schlauch drew attention over thirty-five years ago.[2] It is to be expected that the cross's speech should reflect its paradoxical nature as a humanized object. But the implications of prosopopoeia for the interpretation of the cross's narrative and the impressive assurance with which the device is handled have not been fully recognized. The aim of this essay is to examine the means by which the cross's peculiar character is portrayed, and to consider the account of the crucifixion and other episodes in the light of its special perspective. This line of approach will lead on to consideration of comparable features of poetic procedure in the Old English *Riddles* which, taken as a group, represent a more elaborate exploitation of prosopopoeia (the *Dream* excepted) than any other English work of the period.

The quality of the cross's manifestation and its impact on the visionary are alike enigmatic. The latter's initial perception is of a bright, bejewelled, golden image raised in the sky and beheld by angels, men and all creation. Despite considerable emphasis on the image's visual qualities, the visionary responds to it in various ways not immediately explicable on the basis of its physical appearance as described. Emotional responses are represented by his fear (21 *Forht*) and sorrow (20 *sorgum*, 25 *hreowcearig*) after the cross

begins to bleed (19b-20a). A moral emanation of some nature is suggested by the visionary's awareness of himself as *synnum fah,/ forwunded mid wommum* (13b-14a) before the cross in its radiant manifestation. Epithets he applies to it (4, 13 *syllic[re]*, 27 *selesta*), expressions like *wuldres treow* (14), *wealdes treow* (17)[3] and *sigebeam* (13) and the assertion: *Ne wæs ðær huru fracodes gealga* (10b) all appear to represent intuitive judgements in response to aspects of the image not describable in graphic terms. More remarkable than these is the visionary's statement: *Hwæðre ic þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte / earmra ærgewin, þæt hit ærest ongan / swætan on þa swiðran healfe* (18-20a). Possibly this simply represents the visionary's recognition, triggered by the bleeding, that this is the cross on which Christ died; but if taken more literally, it may represent an intuitive grasp of some unspecified visual quality he sees through or beyond the gold which is revealed to him when the cross begins to bleed. This latter interpretation is more in keeping with the general emphasis in this part of the poem on the visionary's intuitive, unreasoned responses to symbolic aspects of the cross's appearance. His perception of the struggle as "former" (19 *ærgewin*) in particular suggests his sense of the gold as the final stage in a kind of metamorphosis.[4]

The following lines (21b-3) suggest a fresh development, with both manifestations of the cross alternating in this temporal dimension. The cross later claims that its wounds suffered at the crucifixion are still visible (46b-7) which would imply that both manifestations are available to the visionary throughout the cross's speech. These strangely visible qualities of struggle, time and change find reflection later in the cross's own account of its transformation.

The poet endows the cross with both natural and supernatural characteristics in its address. Whilst granting it speech, mind, vision, hearing and (to a limited extent) emotion, he does not allow it any *independent* action or feeling. Such claims as the cross makes for capacities of this kind are always linked with external events which provide a justification for them.[5] The effect of this treatment is remarkable. A fusion of what may be termed its literal and poetic roles, each to a large extent in rational conflict with the other, is achieved within a unified dramatic portrayal. The reader, whilst remaining aware of strict limitations imposed on the potential role of the cross by the poet's adherence to its status as an inanimate object, is forced by his art to accept a nature in it which, though far from its actual nature as an object, emerges easily from it with little sense of strain or falsification.

The techniques used to achieve this are various. Firstly, the cross's various claims to the ability to bend, break or fall are uttered only when (and, indeed, whenever) it is affected by external physical forces, i.e. when the earth trembles (35-8), when embraced by Christ (42-3), when raised up bearing Him (44-5) and when it is nailed (46-7). When finally it bows down willingly (59-60), this is in response to the hands of the *secgum* who come for Christ's body. It says much for the poet's skill that the external forces at work on the cross and their potential results (or actual results in 42-3) in terms of its movement are varied in such a way that the relationship

between external cause and effect is not overpoweringly obvious. The cross's inclination to *bugan oððe berstan* is presented as a response to its perception (36 *geseah*) of the shaking of the earth, not as an inevitable, physical result of it. The counteracting influence of *Dryhtnes word* (35) reinforces the image of mental processes at work in the cross. Similarly, the trembling of the cross when embraced is automatically accepted by the reader as an emotional response. In 44-5, awareness that the cross is actually raised by men (prompted by 44a *Rod ic wæs aræred*) is diffused by the contiguous presentation of the incident as a positive action of the cross: *Ahof ic ricne Cyning, / heofona Hlaford* (44b-5a). In 46-7, emphasis on the severity of the cross's wounds in conjunction with its statement that it dared not harm the inflicters compels respect for the cross's steadfast obedience to its lord even in such extreme circumstances, thus diverting attention from the factor of external physical disturbance. And finally, our impression of the willed nature of its deliverance of Christ's body to His followers (59-60) is fortified by a detailed description of its state of mind at this point (*Sare . . . mid [sorgum] gedrefed, eaðmod elne mycle*), with which its movement is automatically linked as motive to action. Indeed, an opportunity is never lost for portraying the cross as active, albeit in obedience to Christ or men: the way in which its raising up is presented, by a skilful manipulation of sentence-structure, in such a way that it is felt to act, has been mentioned above. Similarly, in 31 the cross is ordered (*heton*) to raise up (*hebban*) those regarded by its enemies as criminals, which implies a potential for refusal. Even when the cross must be static according to natural laws and Biblical narrative, its steadfastness is emphasized, as in 38 *Hwæðre ic fæste stod* and 43 *Ac ic sceolde fæste standan*. As a result, the impression is that the cross's immovability is willed and an expression of a retainer's obedience to its *Dryhten* (35). It is possibly significant that these utterances are attached only to the first two episodes wherein the cross is physically disturbed: having established an impression of its volition in this connection, too frequent repetition of the fact that it "stood firm" subsequently would elicit the logical response that, according to natural law and gospel narrative, the cross could not do otherwise. The device is used sparingly so that it does not rebound. It is also effectively varied later, in the passage where the cross remains behind, seemingly willingly, after the departure of the mourners (70-73).

The cross is able to see and hear (it hears creation's lament *[55-6]* and the *sorhleoð* of Christ's mourners): so much must be granted to a personified object. But its sentience is limited; nowhere does it lay claim, for example, to have felt physical pain. How, then, does the poet create so powerful an impression of physical suffering that critics have often remarked on the effective transfer of Christ's suffering to the cross? Certainly the cross describes in detail the violence to which it is subject: its first felling in the forest (29-30), fashioning as a cross (31) and transportation to the *beorg* where it is made fast (32-3); then the nailing (46-7) and its final felling and burial after the deposition (73-5). In the first series of episodes, covering its early history (29-33) outrage is conveyed simply by the rapid piling up of violent event on event, the reader's sense of physical anguish resulting, in the

usual way, by emotional inference. That the first event recalled by the cross is of great violence is important: simply by the conjunction of the first personal pronoun (29) with the verb *wæs aheawen* the reader is shocked into identification with the speaker, and so into acceptance of a personality in it; sympathy with the pain it must have felt follows naturally and inevitably. Then immediately a swift sequence of verbs denoting abduction (30 *astyred*), seizing (30 *Genaman*), mutilation (31 *geworhton*), carrying (32 *Bæron*) and fastening (33 *gefæstnodon*) compounds this response by promoting a lingering image of the cross as an enslaved prisoner-of-war. The undercurrent of realism which flows here beneath the developing personality of the cross is available to the reader but is not in destructive opposition to its poetic image as a sentient being.

The cross's recollection of the nailing reinforces the impression of pain: *on me syndon þa dolg gesiene, / opene inwid-hlemmas* (46b-7a), but, as usual, there is no violation of literal truth: the wounds are still visible and "open" (wood does not heal) and their second quality (*inwid-* "malicious") refers rather to the manner of their inflicting than to the result. Both elements, however, conspire to impress on the reader the cross's physical anguish: "open, malicious" wounds could not be other than painful. Again, the appropriate emotional response is inescapable.

The cross's reference to its bloodied state (48) is explicitly linked with the piercing of Christ's side (49 *begoten of þæs guman sidan, siððan he hæfde his gast onsended*). But later, a quite different image is established: *Genamon hie þær ælmihtigne God, / ahofon hine of ðam hefian wite. Forleton me þa hilderincas / standan steame bedrifenne: eall ic wæs mid strælum forwundod* (60b-62a). Here, the juxtaposition of the tortured Christ, the wounded, bloodied cross and the *strælum* "arrows" (probably the nails) conveys a powerful image of the cross as Christ's comrade in arms, wounded and bloodied on its own account.

The theme of the sorrowing cross is introduced in 58 *Sare ic wæs mid [sorgum] gedrefed* and developed in 70-71a *Hwæðere we ðær [h]reotende gode hwile / stodon on staðole*. While sorrow is an internal emotion, *[h]reotende*, if construed as "weeping", is an observable, physical reaction. The notion of the weeping cross is possibly anticipated in 62 *steame bedrifenne*: for *steame* "moisture" can denote either blood or water, and both, according to John 19.34, flowed from Christ's side.[6]

Some general remarks are now possible concerning the cross's veracity. It misrepresents its nature as a material object chiefly in that it claims inner motivation towards action or stillness and the capacity for feeling. When, for example, it says that it dare not fall or bow down contrary to the word of its lord, it lays claim to mind, volition, obedience and hence to a human relationship, but remains peculiarly true to its own material substance; movement, albeit of a strictly circumscribed kind, is open to it here because it is vertical and because external forces are at work upon it which might well make it fall;[7] the poet never cheats by separating any of these external events from the cross's claims to willed movement, actual or potential. Similarly, the cross draws attention to violence

towards it, to its bloodied state and to its wounds, but does not claim to feel pain; however, a sense of its pain is impressed on the reader by the manner of its description.

This simultaneous control of literal and poetic meanings in the speech of the cross finds a close and obvious parallel in the riddle genre.[8] The large and varied vernacular collection in the Exeter Book affords a suitable frame of reference. Those riddles to which the solution is a weapon, tool or other manufactured object used by men generally provide the closest parallels with the *Dream*; in these, the use of certain conventions (e.g. the power of speech in the subject and the servant-master relationship with its owner or user) enable the author not only to disguise the identity of his subject, but also to construct an enigmatic narrative or monologue with its own kind of internal consistency which incorporates the history and day-to-day life of the subject's invented persona. The aim of the riddle is to mislead but not to deceive, and the most successful examples of the genre are not necessarily those most difficult to solve, but rather those in which this narrative or monologue reflects a consistent and dramatically vivid persona, and is varied and interesting in its own right, whilst remaining true (given the accepted conventions) to the making, use and substance of the subject. Full appreciation of a riddle is thus possible only on a second reading or hearing, after the solution is known, for only then do both these qualities - the fidelity of the invented narrative to its base in reality and its dramatic coherence and imaginative variety independent of the solution - become clear.

The narrative of the personified cross is constructed according to similar principles. But whereas the *Riddles* challenge the reader to pierce the surface-meaning to discover the underlying base-object, in the *Dream* it is the significance of the object which is veiled rather than its actual identity. The cross is fully described by the visionary; but it clearly means more to him than a mere description of its appearance can convey, and the function of the cross's narrative is to make this meaning clear, not to conceal its identity. The naming of the cross as cross at a fairly late stage in its narrative (44 *Rod*) does not represent a "solution" to earlier clues to its identity, but rather a particular stage in the object's history which is reflected in one of the two images it presents to the visionary, and which is important for an understanding of its total significance.

Certain techniques whereby inanimate objects are endowed with volition, emotion and capacity for action are to be found in both *Dream* and *Riddles*, and these are listed and discussed below. It should be stressed that these parallels represent similarities of method only; neither the language used nor the images evoked are at all similar in most cases. Furthermore, the number of examples of these methods afforded by the *Riddles* is usually small, and are almost confined to riddles which have weapons, tools and other functional objects as their solutions; 20 "Sword", 4 "Flail" and 93 "Inkwell" exemplify these categories. The presentation follows the order of themes identified above in the *Dream* as closely as possible. The essential technique common to both texts is first defined, followed by an indication of the *Dream* context. References to the

Riddles are by number, solution and line. Comments are added where appropriate.

I Movement (actual or potential) as a result of external physical force presented as a response by the subject to action towards it (*Dream* 42-3a *Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte; ne dorste ic hwæðre bugan to eorðan,/ feallan to foldan sceatum*): 87 "Bellows" 6-7a *[Þegn] bleowe on eage; hio borcade, / wancode willum* "The thane blew in its eye; it barked and willingly moved up and down"; 54 "Churn" 6b *wagedan buta* "they both shook"; (cf. also 65 "Onion" 5 *Monnan ic ne bite nympþe he me bite* "I do not bite a man unless he bite me").[9] Whereas the *Riddle* subjects move as part of their intended function, in the cross this capacity is a feature of vitality created by the poet's exploitation of its position.

II Movement as a result of external physical force presented as the subject's willed carrying, raising or delivering of an object or being attached to it (*Dream* 44b-5a *Ahof ic ricne Cyning, / heofona Hlaford*; 59b . . . *hnag ic hwæðre þam secgum to handa*, . . .): 20 "Sword" 6b-8a *Þonne ic sinc wege / þurh hlutterne dæg, hondweorc smiþa, / gold ofer geardas* "Then through the bright day I bear treasure through the dwellings, gold, the handiwork of smiths"; (cf. also 58 "Draw-well" 11b-14a). The capacity of the *Riddle* object to carry its ornamentation is little more than a natural extension of its personification, whereas in the *Dream* the opportunity provided by the raising and lowering of the cross is used more positively.

III Stillness or rigidity in an inanimate object presented as "standing fast" through moral restraint (*Dream* 38b . . . *hwæðre ic fæste stod*; 43b *ic sceolde fæste standan*; 70-71a *Hwæðere we ðær [h]reotende gode hwile / stodon on staðole*): no examples in which the moral element is emphasized are to be found in the *Riddles*, but some degree of volition is implied in 60 "Reed" 2b-3a . . . *minum gewunade / frumstaþole fæst* "I remained fast in my native abode" and 88 "Horn" 21-2 . . . *ac ic sceal broþorleas bordes on ende / staþol weardian, stondan fæste* ". . . but, brotherless, I must hold my place at the end of the table, stand fast". In the *Dream*, the way in which the natural stillness of the cross is exploited to establish its relationship with Christ and its role in His service is particularly striking.

IV The details of an object's manufacture or adaptation to human use presented as an accumulation of violent and warlike actions against it (*Dream* 29-33a . . . *ic wæs aheawen* . . . *astyred* . . . etc.): 53 "Battering Ram" 4b-8a . . . *oþþæt he frod dagum / on oþrum wearð aglachaðe / deope gedolgod, dumb in bendum, / wriþen ofer wunda, wonnum hyrstum / foran gefrætwed* ". . . until, old in days, it was changed, deeply wounded in its miserable state, dumb in bonds, bound over its wounds, adorned in front with dark trappings"; 93 "Inkwell" 17-24a *Siþþan mec isern innanweardne / brun bennade; blod ut ne*

com, / heolfor of hreþre, þeah mec heard bite / stiðecg style. No ic þa stunde bemearn, / ne for wunde weop, ne wrecan meahte / on wigan feore wonnsceaft mine, / ac ic aglæca ealle þolige, / þæt [. .]e bord biton "Later the brown iron wounded me within; no blood came out, gore from my breast, though the hard, strong-edged steel bit me. I did not lament that time, nor did I weep at the wound, nor might I avenge my misery upon the life of the warrior, but, wretch that I am, I endure all (those weapons) that bit the shield".

V The theme of an inanimate object's unhealable wounds (*Dream* 46b-7a *on me syndon þa dolg gesiene / opene inwid-hlemmas*): 5 "Shield" 10b-14 *Næfre læcecynn / on folcstede findan meahte,/ þara þe mid wyrtum wunde gehælde, / ac me ecga dolg eacen weorðað / þurh deaðslege dagum ond nihtum* "Never might I find on the battlefield the kind of physician who might heal my wounds with herbs; but the wounds from swords increase on me because of the deadly stroke night and day".[10]

The *Riddles* provide no analogues for the themes of an object's movement in response to visual perception (*Dream* 35-7), an object's potential movement in a direction unintended by those who physically disturb it (*Dream* 44-7), a bloodied object (*Dream* 48,62) or a weeping object (*Dream* 70); but *Riddle* 93 "Inkwell" 17-24a (quoted above under IV), in which bleeding and weeping are explicitly denied to the subject, provides an interesting contrast: in the *Riddle* the poet has exploited the dry, inhuman aspects of his subject to create a paradoxical image of a warrior who, though strong in self-discipline, is physically powerless against the aggressor and whose very durability (or inability to die) involves protracted suffering and dishonour; whereas in the *Dream*, the poet, by exploiting the proximity of Christ, has managed to endow the cross poetically with visible manifestations of human emotion and injury. The latter poem reflects the more adventurous technique.

Most of the passages cited from the *Riddles* bear little verbal resemblance to the *Dream* extracts. III is an exception, but even here there is no evidence of direct influence in either direction. It is clear, however, that in general the poets of *Dream* and *Riddles* followed similar procedures. For example, in the *Riddles*, the investment of animism in a material object was often the method used to veil its identity. Sometimes the resulting characterization was of an animal (as in 87 "Bellows" and 65 "Onion" under I above) but more often the greater imaginative scope provided by a human persona was preferred, as in the *Dream*. In some cases this provided an opportunity to exploit such themes as the extraction of the subject from a natural habitat, its carving, cutting or other shaping to its manufactured form and its new, enforced role in the service of man; these are often presented enigmatically by images of binding or abduction, mutilation or wounding and enslavement or control respectively, as, for example, in 53 "Battering Ram" and 93 "Inkwell" (under IV above). Only in the latter riddle are these ideas employed in the service of a fuller characterization as they are in the *Dream*. On the other hand, the *Dream* poet exercises a firm control over the extent of the cross's characterization. For example, the idea of an

object's unhealable wounds (under V above) is not over-emphasized: it would be unfortunate if the cross as an insentient object were seen to complain too much of wounds shared and actually suffered by its sentient lord. In contrast, the uprooting and subsequent violence suffered by the cross is given considerable emphasis: as Christ is not dramatically present during these incidents, the cross may do double duty as both retainer and symbolic representative of its lord who suffers comparable violence and degradation elsewhere. This level of organization, which transcends anything found in the *Riddles*, was required of the *Dream* poet by his choice of subject. None of the *Riddles* attempts a consecutive narrative of the same complexity, much less a well-known one; most range more or less widely over the various functions and typical circumstances of the subject, especially those mentioned above in which are related the subject's transformation from natural object to artefact. The *Dream* poet, however, was dealing, not simply with a particular object with a certain function, but also with a known narrative in which the object is variously involved with particular human characters and groups. Despite the fairly loose treatment of the gospel accounts of the crucifixion, he was not as free to select those aspects of his subject which were best suited to personification. He was faced with the problem of adapting a known narrative in such a way that the theological significance of the central event might appear prominent and unmistakable, while retaining its essential features in a recognizable form.

In the light of the cross's assumption, through the poet's art, of a set of human capacities and emotions foreign to its actual, inanimate nature, how should the reader expect the cross to describe an event like the crucifixion in which human figures act independently? Its description of this event and associated episodes reveals that it is no mere observer, but an involved participant. In the following analysis, some fragmentation of the textual evidence will be advantageous: aspects of the cross's narrative which reflect a particular viewpoint will first be assembled, and their interpretation subsequently modified in the light of other aspects.

To begin with, just as the reader is kept aware of the firm roots of the cross's poetic personality in its known history and in the natural world, similarly, though the cross speaks of Christ and the crucifixion from an apparently human standpoint, its fundamental relationship to Christ as object to person is not obscured. Thus Christ unambiguously "mounts" (34 *gestigan*, 40 *gestah*) the cross (an absurd notion unless the cross is understood to be a material object); cross and Christ are not presented as in some other, equivocal relationship (for example, as making a joint stand against a common foe) which might imply that both are human. Other reminders of this relationship are the cross's reference to the nails (46) and its description of the deposition (59-61a). In addition, the cross occasionally refers to its shape and function (40 *gealgan*, 56 *rode*), thus reminding the reader of its own non-human appearance. By these means, the poet ensures that the visual image of the cross as cross is maintained, along with an awareness of the unfolding gospel narrative. An important corollary of this is that, as an object,

the cross may be expected to speak of the crucifixion as a human narrator would not. As in certain *Riddles*, the reader is invited to associate imaginatively vision and mind with a material object in a world of men, rather than to accept a fully-realized human personality in the cross.

Nevertheless, its persona is of human type, and its environment is peopled with humans of whom it speaks as if it, too, were human, and identifiably so: it classifies its assailants *holtes on ende* (29) as *feondas* "enemies", not as gallows-makers. A second group is distinguished by the terms *secgum* (59), *hilderinca(s)* (61, 72) or *beornas* (66) and a third by *Dryhtnes þegnas* (75) or *freondas* (76). It is easy to identify the likely bases of these groups in traditional accounts of the cross's history, but the cross's own identifications are cruder and largely military. Its relationship with Christ, whom it designates as *Dryhten* (35, 75), *geong hæleð* (39), *beorn* (42), *guman* (49), *æðelinge* (58) or *mæran þeodne* (69) (amongst other terms) fits naturally into this system. Thus in the perceived world of its persona, the cross regards itself as a member of a comitatus and identifies groups and individuals according to the system this role would normally imply in OE battle-verse; and the "heroic" Christ is a natural and almost inevitable figure in the battleground which dominates the cross's horizon.[11]

It is, then, appropriate to view the cross's own story and its description of the crucifixion as an account of its lord's last battle in terms of this relationship and this world, at least in the first instance. Its description of events is characterized by a perspective and language proper to the praising of a dead hero who died gloriously. No other retainer is in a better position to commemorate his lord in this way, for the cross, by its own poetic testimony, played its part in this battle alongside its lord and, as we have seen, suffered on its own account.[12]

Their relationship and shared perspectives are clearly indicated. On His first appearance, Christ is immediately recognized by the cross as its *Dryhten* (35). A recognized set of attitudes shared by Christ and cross is suggested by the phrases *efstan elne mycle* (34, of Christ) and *eaðmod elne mycle* (60, of the cross) and the *strang ond stiðmod* Christ (40) recalls the cross's *ic fæste stod* (38, varied in 43). Thus they are united, in the cross's view, by heroic attitudes in common. The cross indicates that its rigidity is in willed obedience to its lord (35b *ofer Dryhtnes word*) and seems to imply that they are comrades-in-arms against a common foe (37b-8a *Ealle ic mihte / feondas gefyllan*, as Christ hastens to mount it). The fact that the cross considers itself mocked with Christ (48) shows that it perceives in the *feondas* equal malevolence towards itself and its lord. In the light of this, the cross's emphasis on its own physical condition (46-7a, 48b-9a etc.) is scarcely surprising: it is no more in a position to convey a first-hand account of its lord's anguish than is, say, Wiglaf in *Beowulf*. The obeisance it owes its lord is hinted by the latter's perceived embrace (42 *ymbclypte*) in conjunction with the cross's inclination to *bugan to eorðan* (42) or *feallan to foldan sceatum* (43). Other indications of the relationship - for example, the cross's impulse to protect its

lord by crushing its enemies (by implication shared by Christ) - have been mentioned above (p. 3). Its lord is killed (49b *he hæfde his gast onsended*, 53 *Wealdendes hræw*, 56 *Cyninges fyll*, 72 *Hræw colode*) and is mourned and interred by his followers as befits a hero (65-8) while the cross sustains severe war-wounds (62 *mid strælum forwundod*). A further suggestion of the cross's assumption of kinship with the people who surround it is found in 61b-2a *Forleton me þa hilderincas / standan steame bedrifenne*: there is perhaps an implication here of Christ's followers' neglect of the cross in favour of Christ himself. The cross's overriding concern throughout is for its lord as, humbly (60 *eaðmod*) it delivers his corpse to his followers and continues to mourn him (70) after other thanes have departed, exhausted in their grief (69 *meðe*).

The cross maintains its usual logical consistency in this description of the crucifixion. For example, the variation between 46 *næglum* "nails" and 62 *strælum* "arrows" (if these refer to the same objects) might suggest inconsistency - a mixture of objective accuracy and the military perspective which is so much in evidence in the cross's narrative. But both kinds of identification are acceptable from the cross: as a cross in shape and substance, it is liable to have nails driven through it; but its warrior-spirit leads to their equation with arrows. Disparate objects are thus conflated. Similarly, the cross's interpretation of the crucifixion as an alliance between itself and its lord against human enemies does not conflict with the visual image of Christ in physical contact with it: Christ (or its lord) must be attached to the cross in order to do battle because, as a cross, no other position in relation to it would be appropriate. On the other hand, the manner of the contact is viewed as an embrace (42) as a logical consequence of the cross's identification of its lord and master in Christ. The fact that this latter action is not associated by the cross with the subsequent nailing (treated of separately in 46-7) demonstrates its peculiar tendency to make distinctions between connected events which would constitute misrepresentation in a human narrator.

Turning again to the Exeter Book *Riddles*, we find that those aspects of the cross's description of its environment and relationships which have been identified so far find reflection there.[13] These are as follows:

VI Builders or makers of the subject recognized as enemies to its original, natural state (*Dream* 30, 33, 38 *feondas*): 26 "Book" 1 *Mec feonda sum feore besnyþede*, "An enemy deprived me of life"; 73 "Spear" 1-4 *Ic on wonge aweox . . . oþþæt me onhwyrfdon / gearum frodne, þa me grome wurdon, / of þære gecynde þe ic ær cwic beheold*, "I grew up on the plain . . . until, old in years, those who were hostile to me changed me from the nature I preserved before when living"; 93 "Inkwell" 22 *wigan* "warrior" (quoted in context above under IV). Noteworthy here is the extension, in the *Dream*, of this recognition into the cross's account of the crucifixion; the enemies to its natural state become the adversaries faced by both cross and Christ.

VII Mutual recognition, implied by the subject, between it and men or other objects, of a role in the same military force (see above, pp. 9-10): 14 "Horn" 4-5a . . . *hwilum ic to hilde hleoþre bonne / wilgehleþan*, ". . . sometimes by my voice I summon good comrades to battle"; the narrator implies the same recognition in 53 "Battering Ram" 8b-11a *Nu he fæcnum weg / þurh his heafdes mægen hildegieste / oþrum rymeð*. "Now he opens up a way with the might of his head for another cunning warrior". These *Riddle* objects are weapons or war-gear and their personification as soldiers follows naturally from this. The *Dream* poet's imposition of this role on the cross is logically connected with the extension noted under VI above.

VIII The subject's recognition of a man as lord (*Dream* 35 *Dryhten* etc.): 4 "Flail" 4 *hlaford*; 17 "Ballista" 5 *freo*; 20 "Sword" 2, 24 *frean*, 4 *waldend*, 9 *Cyning*, 23 *healdende*, 26 *þeodne* (cf. also 21 "Plough", 23 "Bow" etc.). Note, however, that the cross knows its lord intuitively, without previous acquaintance.

IX The subject's recognition of, and obedience to, its master's wishes (*Dream* 35-6a *Þær ic þa ne dorste ofer Dryhtnes word / bugan oððe berstan*): 4 "Flail" 5-7a *Oft mec slæpwerigne secg oðþe meowle / gretan eode; ic him gromheortum / wintercealde oncweþe*. "Often has a man or woman come to greet me whilst I am weary with sleep; winter-cold, I answer them who are angry at heart"; 58 "Draw-well" 13b-14a *hyreð swa þeana / þeodne sinum*. "Nonetheless it obeys its lord". Here the parallel is perhaps deceptive: *Dream* 35 *ofer Dryhtnes word* may well suggest the kind of intuitive recognition exemplified under VIII above rather than the speech-convention used in the *Riddles*.

X An object's obeisance to its lord expressed by bowing (*bugan*) (*Dream* 42-3 *bugan to eorðan, / feallan to foldan sceatum*): 73 "Spear" 6-7 . . . *gedydon þæt ic sceolde wiþ gesceape minum / on bonan willan bugan hwilum*. " . . . contrived that, contrary to my nature, I sometimes had to bow to the will of a slayer".

XI An object's misinterpretation (in human terms) of actions towards and around it (*Dream* 42 *me se beorn ymbclypte;*): 14 "Horn" 3b *Hwilum weras cyssað* "Sometimes men kiss me"; similarly, 63 "Beaker" 4-5 *Hwilum mec on cofan cysseð muþe / tillic esne;*[14] 23 "Bow" 8-14, in which men drink (i.e. are pierced by) the venom (arrows) spat out (shot) by the bow.

Like the first series of parallels, these vary in the degree of similarity they illustrate between the two texts, though the essential forms of poetic procedure are comparable in each case. In VI the method of operation is clearly identical. X provides an illuminating contrast as well as a parallel; in the *Riddle*, *bugan* is probably expressive literally of the levelling of the spear against an enemy (or, possibly, of its bending when thrust against an enemy) and, in terms of its invented persona, of its enforced submission to its

wielder, the *bonan*, whom it apparently associates closely with the men who originally uprooted it and shaped it, and whom the spear later recognizes as its lord (8 *mines frean*). The cross, on the other hand, may bow literally only by accident, but dramatically the impulse to do so is a product of regard for its lord. The cross does not adopt the *feondas* as its masters in the same way that the spear accepts service under the *bonan*, but recognizes as lord only the Creator of its substance, not the human creators of its present form.[15] In short, for the cross, unlike the spear, a change of shape does not entail new allegiances; the cross-makers remain *feondas* throughout the crucifixion. The importance of this assumed relationship between cross and Christ is obvious at the level of symbolic meaning, and helps to explain both the cross's ready identification of its lord when first encountered and its recognition of his wishes (see VIII and IX above). In this respect, the cross resembles the subjects of such *Riddles* as Nos. 1, 2 and 3, which are natural phenomena, not material objects.

Under XI are assembled examples from the *Riddles* of the kind of odd perspective on the external world which results when an object is given a descriptive role. Christ's perceived embrace of the cross is analogous with the *Riddle* extracts, and accords well with His active role in the crucifixion. But the general presentation of Christ as active and uncoerced cannot be justified simply in terms of the cross's personification. A more secure artistic basis for this central image lies in aspects of the cross's speech not yet considered, which reflect an advanced degree of understanding acquired after the event. For the cross's story is a blend of contemporary and retrospective perceptions and interpretations. Only now, exhumed and glorified (75b-7) can it understand that the apparent defeat was really a victory. Given this new knowledge, it is to be expected that it should not present the hero as passive and reluctant; for it is not with such qualities that heroic victories are won. In this connection should be mentioned the unusual emphasis given to images of rest and weariness beside those of death in the description of Christ's death. Though such images are common enough in Old English poetry (particularly in descriptions of death in battle), they are never as prominent as here (63 *limwerigne*, 64 *he hine ðær hwile reste, / meðe æfter ðam miclan gewinne*, 69 *reste he ðær* etc.).[16] But whereas in most other contexts these images serve to recall the heroic struggle which ended in death, in the *Dream* they have the added function of underlining the equivocal nature of this death in particular.

This more advanced view of Christ as a heroic lord who dies in battle but is not defeated represents a transitional perspective. It merges with a new one which reflects the cross's latest transformation and level of enlightenment at the time of its speech to the visionary. The cross's early history ends at line 77 with its Invention and adornment by *Dryhtnes þegnas* (75), but the remainder of its speech makes it clear that it has undergone a fundamental change, as evidenced, for example, by its use of the term *beacen* "symbol" for itself (83, 118). There is a greater sense of maturity and authority as the cross, abandoning its previous, military perspective, stands back from its earlier existence and makes a quite

fresh series of identifications and interpretations. The men who fashioned it as a cross are no longer *feondas* but *bealu-wara* (79) "evil men". Previously, it now claims, it was made to be *wita heardost,/leodum laðost* (87-8) "the harshest of punishments, most hateful to men"; no longer the unwilling slave of its captors, made to bear criminals, it acknowledges its earlier role, in retrospect, as an instrument of torture, in contrast with its present status as the key to eternal life (88-9). Now, rather than expressing outrage at its abduction from its companions at the edge of the wood, it regards itself as honoured, chosen above all trees, as Mary was chosen above all women (90-94), and recognizes the purpose of its lord's suffering as redemptive (98-100).

But the cross's latest point of view is also represented in the body of its story. Its perception of the true nature of its lord is indicated by its consistent employment of two types of word for him: some, listed above, can be taken to refer to a worldly lord;[17] to these may be added 35, 75 *Dryhtnes*, 44 *ricne Cyning*, 56 *Cyninges*; others unambiguously denote the Christian God (33 *Frea mancynnes*, 39 *God ælmihtig*, 45 *heofona Hlaford*, 51 *weruda God*, 53 *Wealdendes*, 56 *Crist*, 60 *ælmihtigne God*, 64 *heofenes Dryhten*, 67 *sigora Wealdend*). The function of this variation seems to be to encompass both the cross's present state of knowledge and its previous, limited, heroic viewpoint. Similarly, the cross illuminates its story with the light of present understanding by commentary (39 *Ongyrede hine þa geong hæleð, [þæt wæs God ælmihtig]*, 41b . . . *þa he wolde mancynn lysan*) which forges a link between past and present worlds.[18] It is as if the cross, no longer a member of a *comitatus* and knowing now the true nature of its lord, were reinterpreting an earlier set of experiences, perceptions, identifications and relationships in rather the same way that a riddle might be reread after its solving. This aspect of its narrative also elucidates the visionary's intuitive perception of time and change in the cross on its first appearance, when it constituted a kind of visual puzzle.[19] The themes of old and new simultaneously perceived, of past suffering and present glory and of the temporal and the eternal are all expressed both visually in the cross and in its narrative.

In a recent article which argues that the *Dream* poet "drew . . . upon the heroic convention of the personification of weapons for his portrayal of the cross of Christ",[20] Michael Cherniss says:

> I do not wish to suggest that the poet who composed *The Dream of the Rood* was directly influenced by the Old English riddles, or that his poem and the riddles shared a particular literary influence in the form of a common source. Quite apart from the possibility of direct relationships, what is important is that these poems share certain elements which appear to have been common in Old English heroic tradition. The riddles portray those aspects of their subjects that would have been most readily apparent to their poets and audiences, and by employing the heroic diction and the convention of personification they reveal fully certain tendencies inherent in the portrayal of the same subjects in

> narrative contexts. The tendencies which they reveal reappear in *The Dream of the Rood*, not, I suggest, because the poet necessarily knew the riddles, but because his habits of thought and expression had been shaped by the same poetic tradition as that which shaped the habits of the riddle poets.[21]

This is a more guarded statement than that of A.S. Cook, who identified the vernacular OE riddle as providing "the apparent genesis of the artistic procedure" in the speech of the cross.[22] But despite Cherniss's justifiable caution, it is clear that the *Dream* and the *Riddles* have a good deal more in common than the limited degree of object-personification which informs the treatment of weapons in heroic tradition. In both texts, a thorough exploration of the poetic possibilities of personification is well under way which has scarcely begun in such passages as *Beowulf* 1522b-8, which records the failure of the sword Hrunting, and which represents a level of elaboration somewhat higher than is usual in OE heroic verse generally:

> Ða se gist onfand,
> þæt se beadoleoma bitan nolde,
> aldre sceþðan, ac seo ecg geswac
> ðeodne æt þearfe; ðolode ær fela
> hondgemota, helm oft gescær,
> fæges fyrdhrægl; ða wæs forma sið
> deorum madme, þæt his dom alæg.
>
> (Then the stranger discovered that the light of battle would not bite, harm life, but the edge failed the prince in his need; it had endured many battles previously, had often cleft the helmet, the corslet of the doomed; that was the first time that the valued treasure's reputation failed.)

If the poetic technique of both *Dream* and *Riddles* poets was shaped solely by the level of object-personification exemplified here, it must be allowed that their use of the technique represents a considerable advance along remarkably similar lines.

On the question of possible connections between *Dream* and *Riddles*, Cherniss is surely right to reject direct textual influence in either direction. But these poems may be products of the same age. The dating of the *Dream* depends largely on the relationship between the two surviving texts. The longer version considered here is preserved in the late tenth-century Vercelli Book in the late West Saxon dialect (with a sprinkling of forms proper to Anglian dialects which may be interpreted as features of an OE poetic language).[23] The shorter version, consisting of extracts (in terms of the Vercelli version) from the speech of the cross, is inscribed in runes on the Ruthwell Cross, Dumfriesshire, in an early Northumbrian dialect. The date of this monument is probably late seventh or early eighth century, and its text "has all the appearance of reference to or quotation from some familiar text".[24] Even

if it is accepted that the Ruthwell text is an extract from a longer version, it is of course impossible to be certain whether or not the Vercelli version is a faithful rendering of this longer version; but theme and treatment alike suggest composition in the Northumbria of the Ruthwell Cross.[25] The age of the riddle in Anglo-Saxon culture extended from the seventh to the eighth century;[26] Latin cross-riddles by Tatwine and Hwætberht survive from this period, and parallels between that of Tatwine and the *Dream* have been identified recently.[27] But neither these poems nor the various collections of Anglo-Latin riddles which are products of the same general period are to be compared with the *Dream* in respect of its ambitious development of the device of prosopopoeia; the vernacular *Riddles*, taken as a group, provide the closest parallels for this. The evidence assembled in the present study suggests either that the composition of the *Dream* provided a stimulus towards the development of a more sophisticated form in the riddle genre, or (more probably) that the *Dream* poet was familiar with the conventions of vernacular riddles, and that he made good use of them to convey the significance of a complex event of supreme importance to his Christian audience.[28]

NOTES

1 Citations are to the Old English texts as printed in *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. Michael Swanton (Manchester, 1970); *The Exeter Book*, ed. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, A.S.P.R., III (London and New York, 1936), for the *Riddles*; and *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Fr. Klaeber 3rd ed. (Boston, 1950).

2 "*The Dream of the Rood* as Prosopopoeia", *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York, 1940), pp.23-34.

3 Verse 17b *wealdes treow* is metrically defective and editors have often emended *wealdes* ("of power" or "of the forest") to *wealdendes* ("of the Lord"); see Swanton, *Dream*, p.107 for a defence of the MS form.

4 The event or events to which *earmra ærgewin* refers is in doubt; the phrase may denote Christ's, or others', crucifixion; see Swanton, *Dream*, pp.108-9 for these and other possible interpretations.

5 See also below, pp. 4-5.

6 See also Swanton, *Dream*, p.109, note on 20 *swætan*.

7 J.A. Burrow, in "An Approach to *The Dream of the Rood*", *Neophilologus*, XLIII (1959), 123-33, sees the cross's various expressions of its capacity to crush its enemies or to refuse to carry Christ as "more than simply a natural extension of the animism implicit in prosopopoeia. They refer properly to Christ. It was Christ who could have struck down his enemies," etc. The power claimed by the cross would normally suggest Christ's own to a Christian audience, but in this context the cross's claims do not seem to me to suggest "a kind of 'dream condensation' between Christ and the cross", as Burrow expresses it. Cross and Christ, though in all senses close, are physically differentiated (cf. 48 *unc butu ætgædere*), and the cross is subject to *Dryhtnes word* (35) which provides the authority for its rigidity here; the context implies that, had Christ wished to destroy his enemies, the cross *qua* cross in His service would have been the agent of destruction. See Robert B. Burlin, "The Ruthwell Cross, *The Dream of the Rood* and the Vita Contemplativa", *SP*, LXV (1968), 23-43, esp. 28-9.

8 See Swanton, *Dream*, p.67.

9 Cf. Aldhelm's riddle XLVI *Urtica*, 1-3: *Torqueo torquentes, sed nullum torqueo sponte / Lædere nec quemquam volo, ni prius ipse reatum / Contrahat et viridem studeat decerpere caulem*; Aldhelm's riddles are here cited from James H. Pitman, ed., *The Riddles of Aldhelm* (1925; rep. Hamden, Connecticut, 1970).

10 For the shield as a much-wounded soldier, cf. Aldhelm's riddle LXXXVII *Clipeus*, 5-6: *Quis tantos casus aut quis tam plurima leti / Suscipit in bello crudelis vulnera miles*?

11 The assumption made by Michael D. Cherniss, "The Cross as Christ's Weapon: the Influence of Heroic Literary Tradition on *The Dream of the Rood*", *ASE*, II (1973), 241-52, that the conception of Christ as warrior was a determinant of the poem's form (242, 249) is persuasive in view of the obviously didactic function of the work as a whole. The only problem is how this conception is to be reconciled with the cross's persona. It cannot be lightly assumed that the poet bypassed the

filtering consciousness of the cross and communicated directly with the reader. On this problem, see further, p.12 below. A measure of the uncertainty of critics in the face of the warrior-Christ is provided by the notion, stated in Robert E. Diamond, "Heroic Diction in *The Dream of the Rood*", *Studies in Honor of John Wilcox*, ed. A.D. Wallace and W.O. Ross (Detroit, 1958), pp.3-7 and echoed in John V. Fleming, "*The Dream of the Rood* and Anglo-Saxon Monasticism", *Traditio*, XXII (1966), 43-72, that the poet in his treatment of Christ was somehow at the mercy of fixed habits of heroic portrayal which here surfaced uncontrollably. Such an opinion of the poet's command over his material consorts oddly with the very high degree of structural organization which most critics now perceive in the poem as a whole.

12 The idea that the cross regards itself as the slayer of Christ is now widely accepted; see e.g. Fleming, 45; Burlin, 30; Swanton, *Dream*, note to line 66. The question is bound up with the reading *guman* in 146, where context indicates a plural "of men" (with late-West Saxon *-an* for normal OE genitive plural *-ena*) rather than a singular; Swanton, *Dream*, note to 146, suggests a generic singular, "of man" (i.e. mankind) though this meaning of *guma* is unattested elsewhere. If 66 *banan* is genitive singular, it can only refer to the cross; if plural, it must be taken as a reference to the *feondas*. The problem is difficult, but there are probably more objections to the former than to the latter interpretation. The cross does not elsewhere identify itself in the role of slayer until 87-8a *Iu ic wæs geworden wita heardost*, by which time it is speaking of itself from a different standpoint (see below, pp. 12-13); and even there, it emphasizes its enforced, medial role as instrument rather than agent. In the earlier part of the poem, the cross plays an active part in support of its lord. When, for example, it raises Christ up, it is not to kill Him but in order that battle may be joined. As an object, the cross, though "able" to fall, cannot itself crucify; the nails, over which it has no control, are the instruments of Christ's death, not the cross. Only after line 78 does the *Dream* poet abandon this kind of logic, when the cross stands back from its previous existence and reinterprets its role there in a spirit of detachment.

13 See above, p.5, for preliminary remarks on the general nature of the parallels between *Dream* and *Riddles* identified in the present study.

14 Cf. Aldhelm's riddle LXXX *Calix Vitreus*, 7-8: *Sed mentes muto, dum labris oscula trado / Dulcia compressis impendens basia buccis . . .*

15 See Cherniss, 249: "Given his formulation of Christ as heroic warrior, the poet of *The Dream of the Rood*, I believe, would have found it easy, indeed logical, to conceive of the cross - the only inanimate object which faces Christ's enemies with him - as the 'weapon' of heroic literary tradition". Cherniss adduces no evidence from the text that particularly suggests the idea of the cross as a weapon, and references to the resemblance in shape, the adornment of both swords and crosses with similar materials and the significance of both as symbols of kingship do not provide sufficient grounds for the identification. The parallels furnished by the *Riddles*, moreover, as in the theme of an object's natural origin and subsequent transformation by men for their use, are not confined to weapon riddles (cf. 26 "Book", 93 "Inkwell" etc.); and there are numerous functions and experiences of the cross, realized or potential, which could not be attributed to any weapon, particularly its various functions of raising and delivering (31, 44, 59) and its ability to be mounted (34, 40).

16 These images are especially striking in *Beowulf* 962-4, 1585-6 and 2901-02. In particular, compound adjectives with *-werig* as the second element (*Dream* 63 *limwerigne*) are often used to establish them (*Beowulf* 2125 *deaðwerigne* 962 *fylwerigne*, 1586 *guðwerigne*); see Swanton, *Dream*, p.73, footnote 1;

Burrow, "An Approach", 260. *limwerigne* is distinct from these *Beowulf* compounds, however, in that the weariness is associated directly with the body.

17 See above, p.9.

18 See also Burrow, 262: "The two sets of terms [i.e. for Christ] express the contrast between *humana natura* and *deitas patris*, the contrast which is summed up in line 39".

19 See above, pp.1-2.

20 Cherniss, 251-2.

21 Cherniss, 249.

22 Albert S. Cook, ed., *The Dream of the Rood* (Oxford, 1905), p.L.

23 Swanton, *Dream*, pp.6-7.

24 Swanton, *Dream*, p.41.

25 Swanton, *Dream*, pp.42-58.

26 Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, pp.lxvi-vii.

27 See W.F. Bolton, "Tatwine's *De Cruce Christi* and *The Dream of the Rood*", *Archiv*, CC (1964), 344-6.

28 This article has benefited considerably from criticisms of an earlier version made by my colleagues Dr Joyce M. Hill and Mr R.L. Thomson. They should not, however, be held responsible for the views it contains.