

Gautier de Châtillon's *Alexandreis* as an historical epic

In Alan of Lille and Gautier of Châtillon Lille can claim for her sons two of the foremost poets of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance, and Gautier himself was proud to proclaim in his *Contra Iudaeos*: « *Ego ... Tornacensis dioeceseos oppido, quod Insula dicitur, oriundus* »¹. His *Alexandreis*² is one of the most popular poems of the later Middle Ages and arguably the finest Medieval Latin epic. Its influence was profound³. There are striking echoes in twelfth and thirteenth century poets such as Albert of Stade, the author of the adventures of Duke Ernest of Swabia, Henry of Settimello, William the Breton and Nicholas de Braye. It was translated into Middle Dutch (the *Alexanders Geesten* of Jakob van Maerlant); Spanish (the *Libro de Alexandre*); Middle High German (the *Alexander* of Ulrich von Eschenbach); Icelandic (the prose version of Brand Jónsson) as well as Czech. Despite the Renaissance bias towards the masterpieces of antiquity, the epic maintained its popularity in four early prints: Rouen (c. 1487), Strasbourg (1513), Ingolstadt (1541) and Lyons (1558).

1 — Migne P.L. CCIX, col. 424 C.

2 — Recent work on the *Alexandreis* includes M.L. Colker, *Galleri de Castellione Alexandreis* (Padua, 1978); H. Roussel and F. Suard, *Alain de Lille, Gautier de Châtillon, Jakemart Giélee, et leur temps* (Lille, 1979). The volume includes J. Hellegouarc'h's « Gautier de Châtillon, poète épique dans l'*Alexandride* » dans Y. Lefevre's « Gautier de Châtillon, poète complet »; D.M. Kratz, *Mocking Epic, « Waltharius », « Alexandreis » and the Problem of Christian Heroism* (Madrid, 1980); J. Hellegouarc'h, « Une épopée latine au XII^e siècle. L'*Alexandride* de Gautier de Châtillon », in *L'épopée gréco-latine et ses prolongements européens*, éd. R. Chevallier (Paris, 1981); R.T. Pritchard, *Walter of Châtillon, The Alexandreis, translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Toronto, 1986); H. Harich, *Alexander Epicus: Studien zur Alexandreis Walters von Châtillon* (Craz, 1987); O. Zwiernlein, *Der prägende Einfluss des antiken Epos auf die Alexandreis des Walter von Châtillon* (Stuttgart, 1987).

3 — Cf. Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 5ff.

Gautier's achievement was to forsake the Alexander Romance, the principal source of so many Medieval accounts of Alexander, in favour of the prose historical-romance of the early Roman imperialist Quintus Curtius Rufus⁴. This, the only full-length history of Alexander in Classical Latin, was based mainly on Cleitarchus' account of Alexander written in Alexandria c. 310 B.C. and by far the most popular at Rome in the late Republic and early Empire. As an historian, Cleitarchus was prone to exaggerate Alexander's vices and sacrifice historical accuracy for rhetorical effect⁵, and Curtius, not surprisingly, shows similar tendencies. He is fond of moral judgements, and his sensational style is characterized by the exotic, crowd and panic scenes, hesitations and deliberations, contrasts and ironic reversals, character-sketches, copious speeches of the *suasoria* and *controversia* type, and the dominant role of fickle Fortune.

Gautier's portrait was bound to be influenced by his Roman model. In his assessment of Alexander⁶, Curtius had listed as his strengths: his incredible mental energy, exemplary courage, great generosity, clemency towards the vanquished, utter disregard for death, an extraordinary lust for fame and glory, powers of discernment and ingenuity, and control over immoderate urges. Such are Alexander's strengths in the *Alexandreis* too. Early on in his poem (l. 63-202), Gautier cleverly introduces a speech by Aristotle advising his young pupil on the delicate art of statecraft and commending the traditional Stoic virtues of kingship: *fortitudo, virtus, iustitia, temperantia, clementia, largitas*. The whole section is a somewhat free re-working of material from the immensely popular pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* translated into Latin from the Arabic *Kitab sirr al-asrar*.

The lean and pale philosopher urges Alexander to select his advisers with care, despising ambitious upstarts and not excluding those of low birth. Wealth should be discounted as a qualification, for real wealth is the possession of a virtuous character. He should be an upright judge, untainted by prejudice and bribery. He must convict the guilty in a civilized way, postpone punishment until anger is passed, and forget punishment once meted out. He must be merciful to the humble and approachable to the suppliant. He is to foster the closest links with his troops. His conduct should be exemplary at all times — before battle in reconnaissance, in the heat of the battle itself, and in the pursuit of the enemy. He is to be always visible to his men,

4 — Recent work on Curtius includes J.E. Atkinson, *A Commentary On Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4* (Amsterdam, 1980); N.C.L. Hammond, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1983); J. Yardley and W. Heckel, *Quintus Curtius Rufus, The History of Alexander* (Harmondsworth, 1984).

5 — Cf. Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* 10. 1. 74: *Cleitarchi probatur ingenium, fides infamatur*.

6 — 10. 5. 26-36.

encouraging them by every means at his disposal. He should share the booty with them to revive those wounded in body and spirit. If the expected booty is not forthcoming, he should promise wealth and discharge his promises punctually. «*Non murus, non arma ducem tutantur avarum*» (1. 163). Finally, Alexander must avoid luxury, drunkenness and lechery, for such vices dull the senses and ill-become world rulers. To follow Aristotle's advice assures eternal glory: «*si sic/Vixeris, extendes eternum in secula nomen*» (1. 182/183). It is against this standard that Gautier sets out to judge Alexander in the rest of the poem.

The Alexander of the *Alexandreis* is a relentless pursuer of *fama* and *gloria*. When he sees Achilles' grave in the Troiad (1. 471ff) and recalls how that warrior's praises were immortalised by Homer, his only fear as world-conqueror is that like fame will not attend his buried shade. When he collapses after swimming in the Cydnus, he is racked by the fear that he will die an exile, naked and without glory (2. 206/207). In his speech of encouragement before Issus (2. 486ff), he is content with glory alone and relinquishes the booty to his men. When Parmenion urges him to accept a ransom for Darius' mother and daughters (4. 115ff), and later (4. 330ff) suggests a night attack on the unsuspecting enemy, Alexander rejects the advice, for it would tarnish his glory. As he restlessly pushes on to conquer new lands (9. 553ff), he proclaims that longevity holds no attraction for him. Success for him is glory, and even death itself is acceptable, provided he dies on the world's stage.

Such *gloria* is the meed of *virtus*, and Gautier, at the very beginning of the poem, vividly portrays the boy Alexander yearning to reach manhood and display his prowess. Already in his mind he anticipates the mighty struggle with Darius. When elected king at Corinth, his whole face glows (1. 233), and, as his boat approaches enemy land, he symbolically wounds Asia with a missile (1. 386ff). Neither human nor natural obstacles can withstand Alexander's *virtus*. In the attack on Gaza (3. 345ff), though twice wounded in the knee and shoulder, he still forces his way through the enemy ranks. He braves the difficult overland route to the shrine of Zeus Ammon (3. 373ff) and unflinchingly crosses the mighty Euphrates and Tigris. Nothing can thwart his pursuit of Darius, and when the east is vanquished, his restless energy demands to invade the western seas, conquer Gaul, cross the Alps and subdue Rome (7. 372ff). Even his men urge him to spare himself, Craterus, on their behalf, pleading that he should avoid ignoble wars where life is risked for paltry rewards (9. 511ff). Gautier vividly characterizes the glory-seeking king as *prodigus aure/Vitalis* (3. 367/368); *discriminis immemor omnis* (3. 436); *Diluvium mundi* (5. 185); *tormentum flebile mundi* (6. 93); *fatalis malleus orbis* (8. 338) and *cruentus/Fatorum gladius* (8. 492/493).

Alexander's powers of leadership are well brought out. He protects the Greek homeland prior to invading Asia and ensures adequate supplies for the invasion itself (1. 352ff). He raises the army's morale on arrival in Asia with a sumptuous banquet (1. 394/395) and by recalling his encounter with the Jewish high-priest (1. 499ff). When Darius' threats are reported, Alexander brilliantly turns the tables on his foe by his optimistic interpretation of the ball and reins that the Persian king has sent him (2. 36ff). His speed of action enables him to traverse 500 stades in one day to outstrip Darius (2. 92ff). Aware that he alone inspires confidence in his men, he is quick to display himself once cured by his doctor Philip (2. 249ff).

In battle, too, he is Aristotle's ideal commander. At Issus (2. 424ff) he rides out in full view of all *gladioque tremendus et hasta* (437); he gives orders, strengthens the waverers, inspires courage, promises rewards, and directs the whole course of the battle. He is first both to charge the enemy and to pursue them in flight. The booty he divides equally with his men. Before Arbela, when an eclipse of the moon threatens mutiny, he turns to his favourite seer Aristander for a favourable interpretation (3. 493ff). He takes care to send out Menidas to reconnoitre the enemy's position (4. 278/279), and his ability to sleep so soundly on the eve of battle is an inspiration to all (4. 457ff). In the battle itself (4. 522ff) he rouses his men, directs them to avoid the scythed chariots and the hooks planted in the ground, and stresses the vast booty to be won. His own bravery is beyond reproach.

His leadership qualities are further attested by his army reforms after leaving Babylon (6. 33ff), ensuring that each soldier knew his role and was suitably rewarded for his valour. Subsequent attacks on native strongholds were carefully planned. Against the well-defended stronghold of the Uxii (6. 66f) Alexander consulted native settlers to find a secret road to the city, and picked men were dispatched under Tauron. Timber was hastily cut to provide hurdles and mantlets, and Alexander himself led the assault. Later, aware that wealth and luxury had undermined the army's resolve and morale, Alexander, as a prelude to the invasion of Bactra, burnt first his own possessions and then those of his men (8. 52ff). When he reached the Hydaspes and saw Porus on the opposite bank, he ordered Attalus, who most closely resembled himself, to stand in full view of the enemy, wearing his own royal robes. This allowed Alexander to cross the river downstream and, aided by a mist, to come upon Porus unawares (9. 62ff). Nowhere was the king's personal example more telling than in the assault on the city of the Sudracae (9. 341ff). When his men hesitated, Alexander himself mounted the city wall, and with a flying leap landed in the midst of the enemy. As they attacked, his shield was pierced, his helmet dented, and he lost much blood from an arrow

wound in his side. But his hasty action inspired Peucestes, Timaeus, Leonnatus and Aristonous to rush to their king's defence inside the enemy walls, and redoubled his army's resolve to effect an entrance.

A noteworthy feature is Alexander's *clementia*. He spared Athens after Aeschines urged a policy of conciliation (1. 276ff), and his forbearance won over many Cilician cities (1. 447ff). At Issus he did his best to spare the cultured Egyptian seer Zoroas when the latter sought death at Alexander's hand (3. 173ff). After the battle, he took pity on Darius' family, regarding the Persian king's mother as his own, his queen as a sister, and his seven year old child as an adopted son (3. 236ff). He spared Mazaeus, the governor of Babylon, after he surrendered the city (5. 441ff). When the Uxii begged Darius' mother to intercede with Alexander on their behalf, Alexander not only spared their commander Medates but restored their city and freedom to the towns' people (6. 135ff). Even Nabarzanes, Darius' assassin, was spared through the entreaties of the eunuch Bagoas (8. 6/7). When Porus, the Indian prince, finally submitted after his heroic resistance, Alexander nursed him back to strength, recognized him as a friend, and extended his former territory (9. 319ff).

There is praise, too, for Alexander's *liberalitas*. His celebrated visit to Jerusalem is marked by lavish gifts to the citizens (1. 551ff).

There are gifts for Darius' ambassadors even though they bring a haughty message (2. 43). For Darius' wife who dies in captivity Alexander sheds tears and builds a magnificent tomb with traditional rites and sacrifices (4. 11ff). When he meets three thousand Macedonians horribly mutilated by their Persian captors, Alexander, greatly moved by their plight, promises whatever they ask. When the majority prefer to remain in Asia, he provides them with land, money, flocks and grain (6. 293ff). Alexander's treatment of Darius is particularly magnanimous. He is horrified to learn that the Persian king has been thrust into chains by his own subjects (7. 106ff), and when he looks upon Darius' mutilated body, he weeps and eulogizes his former opponent (7. 347ff). Darius is laid to rest in his ancestral tomb, and above it the Jew Apelles erects a pyramid of brilliant white marble, richly adorned and inscribed (7. 378ff). No less generosity is shown to Alexander's loyal troops. They are richly rewarded after the victories of Issus and Arbela, after the capture of the great cities of the Persian empire, and after the death of Darius himself. On the very eve of his death in Babylon, Alexander warmly recalls their achievements. These were the men who had braved the intense cold and heat and all manner of hardship. These were the men who had thrice conquered Darius and Porus (10. 299ff).

Gautier also commends Alexander's *iustitia*. In the eulogy after Alexander's arrival in Babylon for the first time (6. 1ff), he stresses

how mildly he administers justice to the nations, and in the second half of the poem Alexander relentlessly hounds Bessus for Darius' murder and hands him over to the dead king's brother Oxatreus for punishment (8. 335ff).

Among Alexander's weaknesses Curtius had listed: his seeking equality with the gods and claiming divine honours; his giving credence to oracles that recommended such conduct; his assuming oriental dress and customs; his irascibility and drunkenness; and his abandoning his policy of sexual restraint. These weaknesses, which Curtius attributes to his fortune, mark the progressive deterioration of Alexander's character. Gautier, although he follows Curtius in censuring Alexander, is a much milder critic, and incidents damaging to the hero's reputation are omitted. Thus no mention is made of the dragging of Betis, governor of Gaza, around the city walls, or of the sacking of Persepolis at the whim of the drunken courtesan Thais. No detailed account is given of the deaths of Clitus, Hermolaus and Callisthenes, nor of Alexander's adoption of Persian customs and his soldiers' displeasure.

Rather, the criticism is often veiled. An unjust death strikes Sisenos down *non ignorante tyranno* (2. 267); Parmenion for all his loyal service to Alexander has for his reward that which the poet prefers to pass over in silence (3. 57ff); likewise Clitus for all his bravery at Arbela (5. 78ff); even the Macedonians feel that Philotas is standing trial *iniquo/Iudice* (8. 176ff); and the violent end of Clitus, Hermolaus and Callisthenes testifies that friendships is more explicit. Had Alexander continued to show the virtue he displayed towards Darius' family, he would have been beyond reproach. But he allowed luxury, sensual pleasure and his own good fortune to corrupt his nature. He became an enemy to his own friends, turned to murder and disdained the law. In his arrogance, he even claimed to be the son of Jupiter (3. 241ff). For Gautier Babylon marked the turning-point. Its wealth and life of ease undermined Alexander's virtue and firmness, and the thirty-four days spent there left an indelible stain on his character (6. 16ff).

Sometimes the criticism comes from foreigners. As Alexander prepares to cross the Tanais (Iaxartes) to invade Scythia, the Scythians send twenty mounted envoys to dissuade him. They denounce his insatiable greed. Having subdued the great world powers, he now wishes to contend with forests, rocks, wild beasts and snow. Ever hungry, he reaches out for new lands to conquer (8. 374ff). Their criticism is echoed by Gautier himself in the final book (10. 191ff), where Alexander, now in Babylon, plans even more conquests, and, though a world-conqueror, is still unsatisfied.

It was, however, Alexander's assumption of divine honours that outraged Gautier most. If only he had been content with mortal honours and had shown more humility! Instead, he arrogantly claimed on his death-bed that Jupiter had summoned him to share the rule of gods and men. Perhaps the Giants were once more about to assail heaven, now that Jupiter was decrepit (10. 404ff)! Such a grotesque idea echoes criticism found earlier in the poem. When they visited Jerusalem, Alexander's men were surprised that in his homage to the Jewish high-priest he showed to a mere man *decus unum quod sibi pridem/Iusserat impendi* (1. 548/549); in the third book he bids men believe *se genitum Iove* (3. 254) and is *parem superum* (3. 346); on the eve of Arbela, his bed is said to support *secundum Iovem* (4. 392/393); Philotas, speaking in his own defence, accuses him of openly boasting that Jupiter Ammon was his father (8. 276ff); in the ninth book he is *deorum/Emulus in terris* (9. 3/4), and Indian princes submit *Muneribus placare deum* (9. 39).

Such behaviour, acceptable as it was for an Asiatic king, clearly contravened Macedonian tradition and smacked of *hubris*. Yet, at the same time, Gautier is quick to stress that Alexander was a deeply religious king. He offered sacrifice at Achilles' tomb (1. 476/477); he promptly discharged the vows pledged for his recovery after his ill-fated swim in the Cydnus (2. 254/255); he spared the Tyrians who sought protection in their city's temples (3. 302); he offered Ammon lavish figs when he visited the Siwa oracle (3. 404); and in the assembly of the nations that swore allegiance to him in Babylon he publically acknowledged his debt to the gods (10. 283ff).

In following Curtius (and the poem attests Gautier's remarkable skill in reproducing Curtius' exact wording within the strictures of the hexameter line), Gautier clearly selected his material to suit his purpose. His aim was not to compose a history but an imaginative, poetical picture of Alexander as man, king and general. There are, therefore, no references to contemporary events in Greece or to the events that followed Alexander's death. Campaigns, too, are given less prominence. In India, only that against Porus and the capture of the stronghold of the Sudracae are treated in any detail. Incidents likely to prove tedious or to interrupt the poem's flow are omitted — the struggles in Bactra and Sogdiana, the capture of Susa, the subjection of Satibarzanes, satrap of the Arii, or the murder of Spitamenes by his wife. Episodes are abridged, such as the siege of Tyre, Philotas' conspiracy and trial, and Alexander's visit to the Siwa oracle. Military details, too, are compressed, with Gautier treating the battles of Issus and Arbela in Virgilian style and dismissing the Granicus with but a curt reference. Nothing is said of the arrangements made by Alexander to rule the conquered areas, and, compared with Cur-

tius, Gautier has few geographical descriptions.

But Curtius was not Gautier's sole source. Indeed there had to be others, since there were several lacunae in the Curtius text, and of the ten books the first two were already lost in the archetype of all the surviving manuscripts. Justin⁷ supplied the details for Alexander's enlistment of both young men and veterans for his army (1. 249ff); the comparative strength of the Macedonian and Persian armies (1. 246, 256, 357); the note of admiration that Alexander resolved to conquer the world with so few men (1. 264ff); the sedition of Athens (1. 268ff); Alexander's abandoning the less gifted soldiers to protect the homeland (1. 352ff); his marking the landing in Asia with a missile (1. 388ff); his dividing his possessions among his acquaintances (1. 440ff); his commanding his men not to lay waste Asia (1. 445ff); Darius' consolation that his last words would be understood by the Macedonian soldier who found him, and the Persian king's honourable burial (7. 235ff); and the countries that sent envoys to Alexander at Babylon (10. 224ff).

The *Epitome* of Julius Valerius⁸ was another source. Three times (1. 47; 2. 335; 3. 167) Gautier refers to the myth that Alexander was the son of Nectanebus. From the Alexander Romance, too, comes the lament that Greece was subject to Persia (1. 30ff); the means adopted to attack Thebes, and parts of Cleades' intercession; the region where Alexander landed in Asia (1. 378, 447); the details of Darius' arrogant letter and gifts to Alexander (2. 18ff); and Rome's submission to Alexander, with its consul Aemilius offering a golden crown as proof of friendship (10. 322ff).

Isidore⁹ supplied the description of Asia (7. 428/429), and probably the reference to Darius as the descendant of Arsamus (6. 443). A Latin version of Josephus' *Antiquities* was used for Alexander's visit to Jerusalem (1. 502ff). The portents attending Alexander's birth (10. 342ff) seem to combine several sources. Justin provides the two eagles fighting, Orosius the hail of real stones, the Romance the snake born of a hen, and Isidore the speaking lamb¹⁰.

Following the tradition of ancient historiography, Gautier makes deft use of dramatic tension and contrast between the leading personalities to glorify Alexander. Darius' portrayal throughout is reminiscent of Lucan's Pompey: *stat magni nominis umbra*¹¹. Paralysed by sloth and luxury, despite his vast resources, he has forgotten how to

7 — Cf. Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 11ff.

8 — *Ibid.*, 12ff.

9 — *Ibid.*, 13.

10 — *Ibid.*, 14.

11 — *Bell. Civ.*, 1. 135.

fight (2. 3ff). He scorns his young opponent and patronizingly urges him to return to his mother's bosom and play boys' games (2. 22ff). Outwardly, he is unchallengeable. Like Herodotus' Xerxes, he can review his troops from dawn to dusk (2. 51ff); in his costly apparel, he is accompanied to war by his bodyguard and kindred, and claims the protection of the most powerful gods (2. 102ff). Yet Darius lacks backbone. Gentle and tractable by nature, he is a mere puppet in the hands of his courtiers. He thus rejects Timodes' sound advice to seek the open plains, fearing the disgrace if he should flee and betray his people (2. 268ff). Addressing his army before Issus (2. 327ff), he completely misjudges Alexander, regarding him as but a hot-headed rebellious slave. His recall of the mighty Cyrus and his Giant ancestors carries no weight. The subsequent shock of battle leaves him bewildered, unsure whether to flee or fight on. When finally thrown from his chariot by Perdikkas' javelin, he takes to flight without a second thought and causes panic in his ranks (3. 189ff). He feels sincere grief when he first hears of his wife's death (4. 24ff), but suspects Alexander's relationship with her. Then, convinced of the truth, he nobly praises Alexander's conduct. He would yield his throne to him if fate so decrees, and sends envoys to offer Alexander a settlement. At Arbela he again fails to give efficient leadership, and, once the tide turns, he loses heart and flees (5. 283ff). Yet, anxious for his men's lives if he destroys the bridge over the Lycus, he nobly prefers honour to expediency (5. 321ff). He cannot rouse a despondent army. After Arbela, his speech to his followers (5. 386ff) is *plena pavoris et exspes*, and later at Ecbatana he overemphasizes his own losses and exile status (6. 312ff). No match for the ruthless and conning Bessus and Nabarzanes, he meekly submits and remains a pathetic figure all alone in his tent (6. 384ff). When the conspirators pretend to return to the fold (6. 470ff), the credulous king turns a deaf ear to Patron's warning, preferring to be deceived than to condemn his own men. His end, however, is nobly portrayed. In his soliloquy (7. 17ff), he laments his imminent death when he has striven to rule uprightly. He has the courage to stand up to the conspirators finally, but it is at the cost of his life. His dying words (7. 255ff) acknowledge Alexander's *pietas* and generously wish him world dominion. Darius' passive role thus effectively heightens Alexander's dynamism and explains his success.

Porus is more heroic and a worthier opponent. When he first appears at the Hydaspes (9. 56ff) it is as a majestic prince, a towering figure on a huge and frightful elephant. His spirit matches his size. A gallant warrior, defiant to the end, he kills Taxiles' brother for daring to urge surrender. Then, when there is no alternative, he graciously submits to Alexander who acknowledges his nobility.

As in Curtius, so in Gautier the moral tone is unmistakable. The

glory of even the greatest kings is but transitory, and Cyrus' defeat by Tamaris, a woman, should deter the mightiest rulers from rejoicing too much in their prosperity (2. 535ff). The Macedonians are rebuked at Issus for their greed, violence and debauchery as they fight for booty (3. 219ff). At Persepolis they butcher even a friend if he possesses a more valuable item of booty. they fight for costly furniture, barter or sell their share, and wantonly destroy what they cannot carry themselves (6. 173ff). Euticion's speech urging the three thousand mutilated Macedonian captives not to return to Europe includes the traditional denunciation of women: *Pectore femineo vernalis certior aura est, / Mollior est adamas* (6. 254/255). When Darius' soul is released from his body at death, Gautier muses on men's neglect of the soul and the hereafter in their devotion to avarice, carnal desire, gluttony, drunkenness and simony (7. 303ff). How different the noble Scythians are! They live a blissful life, detesting all gain and ambition, content with Nature's bounteous gifts. At peace with man and gods, they know not Alexander's hunger and greed. For them self-sufficiency has brought true happiness (8. 409ff). It is men's greed that has made the gems of India precious, for in themselves they are worthless (9. 33/34). As Gautier reflects on Alexander's premature demise, he deplores men's lack of preparedness for their end (10. 433ff). They brave the ocean waves at great risk to life and soul in search of wealth, glory and honour, only to find that the paths of glory lead but to the grave. Alexander found the whole world insufficient, but had to be satisfied in the end with a five foot marble tomb. Such a moralizing tone well reflects the Graeco-Roman view of historiography as a practical guide for human behaviour.

As in Lucan's historical epic, *Fortuna* and *Fatum* are assigned a major role by Gautier too. The idea of a superhuman power directing the course of events had fascinated Hellenistic historians. Polybius had seen in Tyche a factor to explain the rise of Rome, and both Cleitarchus and Curtius stress Fortune's profound influence on human affairs. Gautier's *Fortuna* is an incalculable and capricious power, harsh and gentle by turns (1. 493ff). Like the best of ancient generals, Alexander possesses *felicitas* and is Fortune's darling. When he falls ill after the ill-fated swim in the Cydnus, he soon recovers through Fortune's favour (2. 183ff). Confidence in Fortune's past favours inspires Alexander both at Issu (2. 454ff) and Arbela (4. 549ff).

But Fortune does not always smile even upon Alexander. As he invades Persia, he learns from bitter experience her fickle nature, so often is the attacked and forced to retreat (6. 150ff). The fall of Philotas, commander of the Companions, shows how easily she can ruin a man's reputation (8. 323ff). The Scythian envoys urge Alexander to grasp her firmly by the wings (8. 448ff), and proud Porus, too,

attests how perishable are her gifts (9. 300ff). Alexander in his arrogance is sometimes tempted to think that Fortune views him differently. When he leaps into the midst of the enemy inside the city of the Sudracae, Fortune makes him land on his feet with his back to a laurel tree (9. 374ff). But Alexander is no different. He loses her favour in Babylon, and poison carries him away. Closely linked with *Fortuna*, and almost interchangeable at times, is *Fatum* which implies rigidity. the deserter's attack on Alexander at Gaza fails *quia fatorum stat inevitabilis ordo* (3. 350ff). Fate impels Darius to reject Patron's generous offer of protection against Bessus and Nabarzanes (6. 511ff). It is Fate that wills the reluctant sun to usher in Alexander's last day (10. 367ff).

For Gautier, the churchman and Christian, such a supernatural power also indirectly points to God's providential guidance of world events as Lord of History. At times, Alexander is viewed as God's instrument to further the divine purpose. He himself recounts (1. 499ff) the vision he had of the Jewish high-priest. This servant of God was to give him confidence and direction for the future: *Egredere, o Macedo fortissime, finibus inquit / A patriis, omnemque tibi pessum dabo gentem*. Three times in the *Alexandreis* Gautier stresses that Daniel's prophecy is fulfilled in Alexander. At Arbela Alexander is heaven's avenger, the he-goat from the North bringing destruction on the Medes and Persians (5. 6ff). At Babylon Alexander is the predestined overthrower of Asia, the goat foretold by Holy Scripture to crush the horns of the twin kingdom (6. 3ff). And on Darius' tomb Apelles inscribes the words: *Hic situs est typicus aries, duo cornua cuius / Fregit Alexander totius malleus orbis* (7. 422/523). Significant, too, is the description of Alexander (9. 263) as *Ira Dei*. All conquerors must gratefully acknowledge the Greatest Conqueror of all, for: *vires, sceptrum, diadema, triumphos, / Divitas dare quo potuit, auferre valebit* (2. 545/546). It was overweening pride that cost Leviathan heaven and cast him down to the depths of hell (10. 79ff).

The frequent Biblical allusions attest God's involvement in history, Pride is always punished. Darius' ancestors, the Giants of Genesis, vainly sought to seize heaven (2. 350ff and 500ff). And even as proud Belshazzar feasted, his doom was sealed by the writing on the wall (2. 525/526). For Gautier God's ultimate purpose is realized in Christ, and history moves towards him. Thus, incongruously, the Jew Apelles carves Biblical scenes on the tomb of Darius' wife (4. 176ff). He traces the creation, the formation of man, his expulsion from Paradise, the corruption of the human race and the consequent flood. The Patriarchs and Kings are depicted, but pride of place belongs to the Prophets, as heralds of Christ.

References to the Gospel embroider the work. After Alexander's coronation at Corinth (1. 203ff), Gautier adds: *Hanc euangelico propulsans idola verbo/Paulus ad terni convertit pascua veris*. In the description of Asia (1. 396ff) attention is drawn to Jerusalem *ubi Virginis edita partu/Vita obiit; nec stare Deo moriente renatus/Sustinuit sed contremuit perterritus orbis*¹². When Parmenion is sent to save Tarsus from the enemy (2. 142ff), the poet notes that it was Paul's birth-place: *Hic, ut Scripta ferunt, illustri claruit ortu, / Per quem precipue cecis errore subacto / Gentibus emersit radius fideique lucerna*. An interesting instance of Gautier's interpretation of Curtius in a Christian light is the resurgence of Tyre burnt to the ground for resisting Alexander (3. 330ff). Curtius had ascribed its restored prosperity to long peace under the protection of Rome. For Gautier it was the true faith and heavenly peace that restored the city *sub ipso/Christorum Christo* (3. 336ff). And Leviathan, aware of the prophesied coming of one to plunder the halls of hell, urges Alexander's destruction in case he is the plunderer ordained by fate:

Est tamen in fatis, quod abominor, affore tempus
Quo novus in terris quadam partus novitate
Nescio quis nascetur homo, qui carceris huius
Ferrea subversis confringet claustra columnis,
Vasaque diripiens et fortia fortior arma,
Nostra triumphali populabitur atria ligno. (10. 134-139)

Gautier's portrayal of Alexander is generally sympathetic to the end, for his death is not of heaven but of hell. He has, it is true, sought equality with heaven, but it is Nature that engineers his downfall by marshallingst against him the powers of hell. The idea came from Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* Book 8, where Rumour spreads abroad the news of the making of the New Man by Nature. Allecto then summons the Vices and their retinues and urges them to make war on the New Man. Alan was himself indebted to Prudentius and, especially, to Claudian's *In Rufinum*, where Allecto, angry at the growth of Virtue on earth, summons the Vices to devise a worthy crime. Whereupon Megaera promises to conduct the arch-villain Rufinus into the imperial palace to embark on a career of deceit and disruption.

In Gautier Nature descends in alarm to the domain of the deadly sins and urges Leviathan to repay her past kindness to him by overthrowing Alexander. Leviathan readily agrees and secures the support of Treachery. She has both a powerful poison, that only a horse's hoof can contain, and a willing agent in the disgraced Antipater recently

summoned to Babylon by Alexander. Treachery herself undertakes to give Antipater his instructions. And so, at banquet Alexander, surrounded by foreign envoys anxious to win his favour, drinks the poison and is stricken with paralysis. Barely conscious, he is placed on a couch in view of all to bid farewell to his loyal troops. When asked who is to succeed him, he declares that it should be the best and worthiest man, and for his final act hands Perdicas his gold ring.

As an historian, Curtius had introduced into his work topical themes such as autocracy and liberty calculated to appeal to his first-century readers. Similarly, Gautier uses French colouring to broaden his poem's appeal. At key points in the *Alexandreis*, the beginning, middle and end, the poet's powerful patron William of the White Hands is recalled (1. 11ff; 5. 520; 10. 461ff), and, likewise, the proud history of Sens and Reims, both closely linked with William's career. Gautier explains that Alexander was as far from Babylon as St Denis is from Paris (5. 400) when Mazaeus, the governor, surrendered the city to him. The plight of Philotas tortured for treason by Alexander reminds the poet of Louis VI's execution of Count Burchard on the rack for the murder of Count Charles of Flanders in 1127 (8. 168ff). Darius' vile murder recalls the recent murder of two archbishops: Thomas à Becket of Canterbury in his cathedral in 1170 and Robert of Cambrai near Valenciennes in 1174 (7. 328ff). France will always remember Patron's generous offer of protection to Darius (6. 507ff), and will consider the Persian king Pompey's equal in nobility (7. 343ff). Among the countries carved, each with its characteristic quality, on Darius' tomb by Apelles, France is distinguished for her soldiery (7. 410), and patriotic pride elicits a note of wonder from Gautier that even Gaul offered homage to Alexander in Babylon. The growing sense of nationalism in late twelfth-century France, culminating in the achievements of Philip II, «Augustus» (1180-1223), is clearly foreshadowed in Gautier's patriotic prayer (5. 510ff) for a French king, with Alexander's energy and vision, to provide spiritual leadership in a crusade. Aware of the moslem Almohades' success in north Africa and Spain, and of Saladin's victories in the east, Gautier longs for the day when, under a French king, Parthia, Carthage and Spain, along with all nations, would sing of Jesus and come for baptism to the archbishop of Reims.

But it was as a poet, not an historian, that Gautier wished to be remembered. In its mythological trappings and rhetorical flourishes, the *Alexandreis* echoes the major classical epic poets, and Otto Zwierlein has convincingly shown how creatively and unmechanically Gautier used his predecessors. Virgilian reminiscences include: the role of Rumour (2. 1ff); the *ecphrasis* related to the arms of Darius (2. 496ff), the tomb of Darius' wife (4. 180ff) and Darius' own (7. 392ff);

the *aristeiai* of the battle-scenes; the reaction of the aged Mecha when both his sons are killed before his eyes (5. 94ff), recalling Priam's fate in *Aeneid* 2; the *adynaton* *Ante feret stellas tellus...* (8. 471ff), recalling *Eclogues* 1. 59-63; the heroism and tragic death of Nicanor and Simachus (9. 77ff) clearly modelled on the fate of Nisus and Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9; the hesitation shown by the doctor Critobulus in treating Alexander's wound (9. 456ff), recalling that of Iapyx in *Aeneid* 12; and the vices at the entrance to hell (10. 31ff), which recall Virgil's underworld in *Aeneid* 6.

Sometimes in a battle-scene Gautier will cleverly combine elements from more than one predecessor. For example, at Arbela Nicanor's duel with Remnon (5. 145ff) recalls Virgil (Aeneas in *Aeneid* 12 and Turnus in *Aeneid* 9), Lucan (Scaeva in *Bellum Civile* 6) and Statius (Tydeus in *Thebaid* 8). Likewise, Gautier's giant Geon (5. 38ff) combines elements from Virgil (Cyas and Pharos), Ovid (Cacus), Statius (Chromis), and Prudentius (Discordia).

But it was Lucan's historical epic that influenced Gautier most of all. Time and again we are reminded of the young Silver Age poet in Gautier's diction, authorial comments, speeches, digressions, scientific lore, gruesome battle-scenes, apostrophes, *sententiae*, the prominent role of *Fortuna* and *Fatum*, and the close parallel between Gautier's Alexander and Darius and Lucan's Caesar and Pompey. Eberhardus' view of the *Alexandreis* in his *Laborintus* (637/638) is thus mots apt: *Lucet Alexander Lucani Luce; meretur/laudes descriptus historialis honor.*

In his prose prologue Gautier had been uncertain whether to publish or not, so fearful was he of adverse comment. He begs his readers to take into account the lofty theme unattempted by the ancients and the limited time at his disposal. His fears were unfounded, for his brilliant achievement was soon acclaimed. Like other twelfth-century authors, Gautier was fascinated by the tale of Alexander, and Curtius' prose biography had appealed to him morally and rhetorically. When he says at the end of the poem (10. 457): *Iam satis est lusum, iam lusum incidere prestat*, his intention has not been to poke fun at Alexander¹³. The *Iusus* is simply the levity of Classical literature compared with theology. But, given Gautier's foundness in his other poems for satirizing the contemporary corruption of wealth, power and privilege, it is not difficult to view his epic as essentially a satirical attack on human greatness when based on self-glory, pride and a never satisfied greed for domination. Alexander belonged to the pre-Christian age, and his tragic destiny was a stark warning to those in Gautier's day who sought to advance themselves by like means. The

13 — For a contrasting view, cf. Kratz, *op. cit.*

theme, it is true, was an old one in Latin literature—Cicero, Livy, Seneca, Lucan and Juvenal¹⁴ had all denounced Alexander—but Gautier has nicely balanced the criticism against the heroic achievement by the standard of Alexander's own day to give a convincing portrait of the restless Macedonian king. His obvious delight in his romantic subject, his excellent Latinity, and his undoubted mastery of epic convention all combined to produce a truly memorable poem.

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14 — Cf. Cicero *Ad Att.* 13. 28. 2-3; Livy 9. 17-19; Seneca, *Bm.* 1. 13. 1. 2. 16. 1; *Ep.* 91. 17. 94. 62; Lucan 10. 20ff; Juvenal 10. 168ff.