

Waltharius and Ruodlieb

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HEROIC VIRTUE IN CHRISTIAN REVISION

WALTHARIUS vv. 846-77

The sixth was Batavid, whom Hagen's sister brought
Into the world; but when he saw the boy step forward,
His uncle tried to change his mind with shouts and pleas:
"Where are you rushing to?" he called out. "Look at Death,
How it is grinning! Stop! The Fates are drawing out 850
Your final threads. Your mind deceives you, darling nephew!
Desist! You are in fact no match for Walter's strength."
And still the luckless boy, advancing, spurned all this,
For in his veins he burned and longed to capture fame.
And Hagen mournfully drew long sighs from his breast 855
And poured out these complaints from deep within his heart:
"O whirlpool of the world, voracious lust of having!
Abyss of avarice, the root of every evil!
O dreadful one, if you would gulp down only gold
And other riches, letting men escape unharmed! 860
You kindle men, inspiring them with evil power;
And now for no one is his own enough. Behold!
For profit's sake undaunted they risk shameful death;
The more they have, the more the thirst for having burns.
They take another's goods by force now, now by theft; 865
And what provokes more sighs again and summons tears,
They thrust god-given souls into Erebus' furnace.
I am not able to recall my darling nephew;
For he is prodded on by you, O savage greed,
And blindly rushes on to taste repulsive death, 870
And for cheap praise he would descend among the shades.
What message for your mother, ah, my dear lost nephew?
Dear boy, who'll love your newly wedded bride, whom you,
Bereft of hope, gave not the pleasure of a child?
What is this rage of yours? Whence has this madness
come?" 875
He spoke, and sprinkled welling tears upon his lap,
And sobbing choked out a prolonged "Farewell, fair boy."

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WALTHARIUS vv. 1215-1224

"In vain my right hand would have conquered many foes, 1215
If in the end dishonor and not praise is mine.
To seek a noble death by wounds is better than,
My wealth lost, to survive, a lonely wanderer.
But I, who formerly was facing greater dangers,
Must not despair so of our chances for salvation. 1220
You, take the reins of Lion carrying the gold
And walking quickly go into the grove nearby.
But I prefer to make my stand here on the hillside,
Both greeting those who come and waiting for the outcome."

WALTHARIUS vv. 1396-1404

And with such business done, the fights are broken off.
His wound and grave exhaustion prompted each to lay
His weapons down. Who might have left that place unscathed,
Where two great-hearted heroes, equal in both strength
And passion, stood among the lightning-bolts of battle? 1400
The fight is ended; marks of honor branded each.
King Gunther's foot was lying there, and Walter's hand
Was lying there, and also Hagen's twitching eye.
Thus, thus the men have shared the treasure of the Avars!

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RUODLIEB III. 1-14

"I know that your king is so wise that he did not
Command this; but your foolish pride has prompted it.
Now you shall see what sort of honor you obtain
From this. You made the matter worse because you wished
To glorify yourself. You thoroughly deserve 4-5
To be suspended from a tree branch by your calves."
They all shout why he is so slow in doing this.
The leader answers, "Our king did not order us
To kill those who surrendered or were taken captive,
But, if we could, to rescue prisoners along
With loot; and we have rightly done both things. For who 10
Wants greater honor than to overcome the victor?
Fight like a lion; when avenging, be a lamb.
You gain no honor by avenging grievous losses.
The greatest kind of vengeance is to spare your wrath.

RUODLIEB V. 418-445

"Dear friend, I let you go, but most unwillingly;
For you were always ready at my every bidding. 420
For this I am extremely grateful, my beloved.
Nobody hates you; you are dear to all my people.
Now tell me truly, most beloved of all men,
Do you prefer rewards of money or of wisdom?"
He pondered then what he might properly reply.
"I do not wish," he said, "what custom ranks with honor; 425
For wealth, when it is known, has many ambushers,
While poverty turns many wretches into thieves.
It fosters hatred in both friends and relatives
And makes a brother break the bonds of loyalty;
But it is better to lack wealth than lack good sense. 430
Whoever is content to thrive in holy wisdom,
That man will always have enough of gold and silver;
He gains his wish since he is rich in inner weapons.
But I remember often seeing many fools
Who, after they had squandered all their wealth through
folly, 435
Were living then in need and shameful degradation—
And it was clear that wealth had hurt, not helped, those
men.
And therefore you can easily give me advice,
Providing that I not reject but follow it,
As valuable as if someone gave me ten pounds. 440
No one will steal it from me, hate me or become
My foe for it; no thief will kill me in some alley.
Great wealth is fitting in the chamber of a king.
A poor man has enough if he has strength and skill.
I have no wish for money, but I thirst for wisdom." 445