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Dennis M. Kratz

Quid Waltharius Ruodliebque cum Christo?

I. Introduction

No Classical poet exerted greater influence on Christian Latin literature than Vergil; nor was any Classical genre more imitated than the epic. Yet, while the *Aeneid* and its Classical successors inspired the production of many Christian heroic narratives, the authors of these works were compelled to face the inherent conflict between the pagan concept of heroism and the standards of Christian ethics. In this essay, I will discuss two Medieval epic poems, the *Waltharius* and the *Ruodlieb*, in terms of their response to this conflict, and the ways in which their authors have adapted a non-Christian literary tradition to the expression of Christian values.¹

II. *O saeva cupido: the Christian Theme of the Waltharius*

The *Waltharius* was composed around the middle of the ninth century by a German monk, probably the same Gerald whose 22-verse dedication precedes the narrative in several manuscripts.² In 1456 hexameters, which fall into three main parts roughly equal in length, it tells the following tale.

Part 1: As the army of Attila sweeps through Europe, three kings ransom their kingdoms with tribute and hostages. The hostages are Walter of Aquitaine, his betrothed Hiltgunt, and the warrior Hagen (sent in place of the young prince Gunther). In time, all three hostages rise to positions of prominence in Attila's court, especially Walter, the greatest of Attila's

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to Professors Carl C. Schlam and Gordon B. Ford, Jr., for their valuable suggestions to me during the preparation of this essay.

² For a survey of *Waltharius* criticism, see Otto Schumann, »Waltharius-Literatur seit 1926«, *AfdA* 65 (1951-52), pp. 13-41; Wolfram von den Steinen, »Der Waltharius und sein Dichter«, *ZfdA* 84 (1952), pp. 1-47.

soldiers and now the commander of his army. Then Hagen escapes after learning that Gunther has become king and abrogated his father's treaty with the Huns. Later, Walter and Hiltgunt also flee. Walter's successful plan of escape involves inviting the Huns to a banquet, and fleeing during the night while they are deep in drunken sleep. The plan includes in addition the theft of two large boxes crammed with treasure.

Part 2: Walter and Hiltgunt eventually pass through Gunther's territory. Hagen is delighted that his friend has escaped, but Gunther thinks only of capturing the treasure which the fugitives are carrying. Despite Hagen's objections, Gunther gathers eleven warriors (including Hagen, who, however, refuses to join the actual assault against Walter) and sets out. Walter takes his stand in a mountain pass whose narrowness allows the men to approach only one at a time. In a series of individual combats, he kills each warrior who dares to attack him, until only Gunther and Hagen remain.

Part 3: Hagen now joins the battle in order to avenge his nephew, one of Gunther's vassals killed by Walter. He and Gunther attack Walter. In the ensuing fight, each man is grievously wounded. Walter cuts off Gunther's leg, then attacks Hagen; but his sword shatters on Hagen's helmet. When the frustrated Walter throws away the useless hilt, Hagen cuts off his outstretched right hand. With his left hand, Walter grabs a short sword and puts out Hagen's right eye as well as six of his teeth. The men now lay down their weapons, drink wine, enjoy some rather cruel jokes at their wounds, and depart. The poet mentions that Walter will reach home, marry Hiltgunt, and rule happily in Aquitaine for thirty years.

That the *Waltharius* is conceived as part of the continuum of the Latin epic tradition is undeniable. In language, form, and content it harks back to two Classical epics, Vergil's *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid* of Statius. The author was strongly influenced also by a fourth century allegorical epic, Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, which recounts a series of battles in which Christian Virtues conquer personified Sins.

The poet's style reflects his desire to create a work within the bounds of the Latin epic genre. The simile, for example, is an important part of the traditional epic style. Eight similes, ranging in length from a few words (585, 899) to seven lines (1337-1343), appear in the *Waltharius*. The similes are representative of the poet's use of earlier works. Each has an identifiable Classical model, but none is taken verbatim from its source.

For example, the poem's longest simile compares Walter to a cornered bear (1337-1343):³

³ Quotations from the *Waltharius* are from *MGH, PLAC*, Vol. 6, Part 1 ed. K. Strecker (Weimar, 1951), pp. 1-83; for Gerald's Prologue, see K. Strecker, ed., *Waltharius* (Berlin, 1947). The English translations are my own.

Haud aliter, Numidus quam dum venabitur ursus
 Et canibus circumdatus astat et artubus horret
 Et caput occultans submurmurat ac propiantes
 Amplexans Umbros miserum mutire coartat,
 – Tum rabidi circumlatrant hinc inde Molossi
 Comminus ac dirae metuunt accedere belvae –,
 Taliter in nonam conflictus fluxerat horam.

(As when a Numidian bear is being hunted and, surrounded by dogs, makes a stand and threatens with its claws and, hiding its head, growls and, grabbing the approaching dogs, compels them to howl wretchedly – then the angry Molossian hounds bark at it from every side, and yet they are afraid to attack the fierce beast: thus the battle raged into the ninth hour.)

The apparent source for this simile is Vergil's extended comparison of Mezentius, not to a bear, but to a boar (*Aeneid* X.707–715). In each description, the wild animal is being chased by dogs:

Et canibus circumdatus . . . ^{... ursus}
 (Waltharius 1337–1338)
 . . . ille canum morsu de montibus altis
 Actus . . . (*Aeneid* X. 707–708).

But no dog dares venture too near:

Comminus ac dirae metuunt accedere belvae. (Waltharius 1342)
 Nec cuiquam irasci propiusque accedere virtus. (*Aeneid* X. 713).

In choosing this simile, the *Waltharius* poet seems also to have had two passages from the *Thebaid* in mind. In Statius' epic, a woman in a Bacchic frenzy sees a vision of two bulls fighting to the death, a vision which she interprets as an omen of the impending battle between Eteocles and Polynices (*Thebaid* IV.396–400). Both brothers do eventually perish in a battle which Statius describes with a simile that makes use of the animal imagery of the woman's vision (*Thebaid* XI.530–535). The same pattern occurs in the *Waltharius*; for there too the animal image of the simile serves to fulfill the symbolic language of a prophecy. That prophecy is a dream in which Hagen sees a bear rip out his eye and some teeth after having bitten off Gunther's leg (617–627). Thus we see the poet borrowing his image and language primarily from Vergil, but reflecting the *Thebaid* in the narrative function of the particular image.

Similes and Prophecy are but two of the epic conventions imitated in the *Waltharius*. Others include the Banquet and the Battle. In the battle descriptions, the poet includes such traditional motifs as *aristeiai* and a Catalogue. He draws his language now from Vergil, now from Statius, now subtly interweaves allusions to both Classical poets. He is careful, moreover, to incorporate into his scenes the various topoi out of which Classical epic battles are largely composed.⁴

Whereas the battle descriptions reveal a broad based approach to imitation, the banquet scene in the *Waltharius* has a specific exemplar, the banquet given by Dido in honor of Aeneas (*Aeneid* I.637–756). The ninth century version includes both verbal echoes and the inclusion of particular motifs, such as the description of a goblet on which are sculpted the heroic deeds of the host's ancestors (*Waltharius* 308–309, *Aeneid* I.640–642). At one point, Walter proposes a toast whose ironic use of *laetanter* ... *laetificetis* (305 ... 307) recalls the similar irony of the *laetum diem* ... *laetitiae* (*Aeneid* I.731 ... 735) of Dido's toast. The wine brings no joy certainly to Attila, who the next morning will bitterly lament not only Walter's departure but also his own hangover.

Granted, then the *Waltharius* represents a careful and skilled recreation of the Classical epic genre. On this issue, there is no longer serious disagreement. But there remains a more important issue, concerning which no general agreement is to be found. To what extent, if at all, was the poet able to take pagan German legend, and the Classical epic tradition, and transform his material into a work which is Christian in spirit? Answers to this question have varied. Some (Brinkmann, Schumann, von den Steinen) find the poem to be essentially, even totally Christian. Others have labelled its Christian elements inconsequential (Grimm), or defined the ethos of the *Waltharius* as hardly Christian at all (Jones).⁵

⁴ For a discussion of these topoi, consult Pierre-Jean Miniconi, *Index des thèmes »guerriers« de la poésie épique latine* (Paris, 1951); for the *Waltharius* poet's use of Vergilian reminiscences, Hans Wagner, »Ekkehard und Vergil«, *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums und des Mittelalters*, Reihe D, 9 (Heidelberg, 1939); on the general question of the poet's use of Classical models, an important work is Karl Stackmann, »Antike Elemente im Waltharius«, *Euphonia* 45 (1950), pp. 231–248.

⁵ Hennig Brinkmann, »Ekkehards Waltharius als Kunstwerk«, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Bildung* 43 (1928), pp. 625–636; Schumann, »Zum Waltharius«, *ZfdA* 83 (1951), pp. 12–40; von den Steinen, *op. cit.*; Jacob Grimm and Andreas Schmeller, *Lateinische Gedichte des X. und XI. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1838), pp. 57–64; George F. Jones, »The Ethos of the Waltharius«, *Middle Ages, Reformation,*

Diverse as these judgments have been, they have shared the common assumption that the key to the meaning of the poem is the issue of whether or not its central figure, Walter, can be regarded as a Christian hero. The question has been argued largely in terms of whether Walter's behavior reflects Christian values.⁶ However, this very emphasis on Walter, I believe, has obscured the poem's actual thematic design, of which Walter's portrait is but one part in a carefully integrated whole.

I suggest that the *Waltharius* is indeed a Christian epic, with an unmistakably Christian theme; but that this Christian theme is not exemplified in a positive way by Walter – or, for that matter, by any single character in the narrative. The *Waltharius* is an epic which has no hero; for the poet has taken the traditional function of epic, the celebration of heroic excellence, and inverted it to emphasize instead the *vitia* which prevent Walter, Hagen, and Gunther from being Christian heroes. Specifically, it is the condemnation of *avaritia*, not the characterization of Walter, which underlies the poem's thematic design.

A study of the epic's three main characters should help illustrate the nature of the poet's narrative technique and the influence of Christian sources on that technique. The Bible and the *Psychomachia* are especially important to a proper understanding of the symbolic meaning of the *Waltharius*.

The behavior of King Gunther is, by any measure, unheroic. He is a coward. His performance in the final battle is so unimpressive (1415: *Martis opus tepide atque enerviter egit*) that afterwards there is no question in Walter's mind, as he distributes the wine, which combatant should drink last. Gunther is also described as stupid (1228, 1304, 1332),

Volkskunde: Festschrift for John G. Kunstmann (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1959), pp. 1–20.

⁶ Cf. the contradictory opinions of von den Steinen, *op. cit.*, p. 20: »Walther ist durchaus ein idealer Held und soll es sein: aber nicht einem klassischen Helden wie Aeneas nachgeprägt und auch nicht vom Schnitt germanischer Sagenkönige, sondern eine Gestalt, wie sie erst seit Karl dem Großen geträumt werden konnte, bei aller Schwertgewalt christlichuntadlig und wiederum bei aller Gewissenhaftigkeit unbefangen von den kirchlichen Formen gelöst«, and Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 6: »There is evidence that Christianity is only skin-deep in the *Waltharius*. Walther asks divine forgiveness for boasting (561), yet he continues to boast thereafter without further apology . . . Even though Walther crosses himself (225) and invokes and thanks God, he shows no Christian mercy to his defenseless and imploring victims . . . In other words, Christianity is not strong enough to interfere with literary tradition or secular custom.«

greedy (cf. 470-472, 640-643), and arrogant (468, 720). The epithet *superbus* seems to cling to him. In two instances, the poet depicts Gunther in language which echoes the personification of *Superbia* in the *Psychomachia*. When he sees Walter's footprints in the dust, Gunther rejoices (513-515):

Ast ubi Guntharius vestigia pulvere vidit,
Cornipedem rapidum saevis calcaribus urget,
Exultansque animis frustra sic fatur ad auras.

(But when Gunther saw the tracks in the dust, he goads his swift horse with cruel spurs, and rejoicing in vain, thus speaks.)

This passage recalls Prudentius' description of *Superbia* just before she is defeated (*Psychomachia* 253-256)⁷:

Talia vociferans rapidum calcaribus urget
Cornipedem laxisque volat temeraria frenis
Hostem humilem cupiens impulsu umbonis equini
Sternere deiectampue supercalcare ruinam.

Thus exclaiming she spurs on her swift charger,
and flies wildly along with loose rein, eager to upset
her lowly enemy with the shock of her horse-hide
shield and trample on her fallen body.)⁸

But above all else, Gunther is an avaricious man; and we must remember that it is precisely his obsessive desire for the treasure which Walter is carrying which precipitates the assault that leads to so much death and destruction.

This negative portrait of Gunther is balanced somewhat by the poet's description of Hagen. A noble man plagued by dual loyalties, he opposes the greed-motivated enterprise against his friend. For a while he even withdraws from the scene of the fighting. Hagen is drawn into the final assault on Walter only to avenge the death of his nephew Batavrid, one of the warriors sent to his doom by the greedy Gunther. When Hagen sees Batavrid advancing toward Walter, he delivers an impassioned address (857-872):

O vortex mundi, fames insatiatus habendi,
Gurges avaritiae, cunctorum fibra malorum!

⁷ Latin quotations and English translations for Prudentius are taken from H. J. Thomson, ed., *Prudentius* I (Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

⁸ See also *Waltharius* 530-531 and *Psychomachia* 203-205.

O utinam solum gluttires dira metallum
 Divitiasque alias, homines impune remittens!
 Sed tu nunc homines perverso numine perflans
 Incendis nullique suum iam sufficit. ecce
 Non trepidant mortem pro lucro incurrere turpem.
 Quanto plus retinent, tanto sitis ardet habendi.
 Externis modo vi modo furtive potiunter
 Et, quod plus renovat gemitus lacrimasque ciebit,
 Caeligenas animas Erebi fornace retrudunt.
 Ecce ego dilectum nequeo revocare nepotem,
 Instimulatus enim de te est, o saeva cupido.
 En caecus mortem properat gustare nefandam.
 Et vili pro laude cupit descendere ad umbras.
 Heu, mihi care nepos, quid matri, perditae, mandas?

(O whirlpool of the world, insatiable hunger for having, abyss of avarice, source of all evils! Dire one, if only you devoured only metal, leaving men alone. But now, inspiring men with your perverse power, you set them on fire, and his own is not enough for anyone. Behold! They are not afraid to incur a shameful death for wealth. The more they own, the more the thirst for having burnst their throats. They get others' goods now by force, now by theft, and [a fact which provokes greater sighs and tears] they thrust heaven-born souls into the pit of Hell. Behold! I cannot call back my beloved nephew, for he is goaded on by you, cruel greed. Yes, blind he hurries to taste infamous death and, for vile praise, he desires to descend to the shades below. Alas, my dear nephew, what message, lost one, do you send to your mother?)

It is significant that the poet has chosen the moment of this decisive battle – the result of which will impel a revenge-seeking Hagen to attack and wound Walter – to interrupt the narrative and have Hagen condemn *avaritia* at such length. Hagen's words emphasize the centrality of the *avaritia* theme; for they can be applied not only to his nephew, but also to Walter's original greed in stealing the treasure, and to Gunther's insane lust to seize it.

Yet the subject of the harangue is at first a surprise, since the poet states clearly that Batavid was seeking not gold but glory (854: *Arsit enim venis laudem captare cupiscens*). But at the end of his speech Hagen makes the connection by implying that the desire for praise is in fact a kind of greed (868–871).

This connection later proves relevant to Hagen himself. When he agrees to join Gunther in attacking Walter, he gives Walter the following justification for his decision (1275-1279):

Haec res est, pactum qua irritasti prior alnum,
 Iccircoque gazam cupio pro foedere nullam.
 Sitne tibi soli virtus, volo discere in armis,
 Deque tuis manibus caedem perquiro nepotis.
 En aut oppeto sive aliquid memorabile faxo.

(This is how [by killing Bataavid] you first broke our pact of friendship. Therefore I desire no payment in return for a truce. I wish to learn in battle whether you have courage; and from your hands I seek vengeance for the death of my nephew. Yes, either I will die or I will perform some memorable deed.)

Hagen states clearly that he is motivated by a desire for revenge. However, although he disclaims any wish for treasure, nonetheless when he expresses a concern about glory (1279: *aliquid memorabile faxo*), he involves himself with the taint of *avaritia* as a result of his own earlier equation of the desire for glory with that sin.

Finally, Walter. Is he intended as a portrait of an idealized Christian hero? I think not, even though he does exhibit many noble qualities. He is, to be sure, a brave, even awesome, warrior. In other respects, he is a good man by Christian standards. During the many days, and nights, of the flight from Attila, Walter refrains from sexual intercourse with Hiltgunt, and for his continence earns the poet's praise (426-427). When he utters an arrogant boast just prior to the first attack by a vassal of Gunther, he interrupts himself and begs God's forgiveness for what he has been saying (559-565).

Moreover, in the interval of time between his conquest of the ten warriors sent against him by Gunther and the climactic confrontation with Hagen and the king himself, strong feelings of compassion and remorse well up in Walter. Searching out the trunks of the four soldiers whom he has decapitated, Walter joins their severed heads to their bodies. He contemplates his victory with remorse rather than joy and, falling to the ground, prays for the salvation of his enemies and himself (1150-1167).

This passage has been cited in efforts to prove that Walter is a new kind of hero, one who reflects Christian rather than pagan values. But it must be admitted that Walter's compassion, like his rather macabre acts of

kindness, comes too late. The men are, after all, dead. Nor do these feelings keep Walter from immediately reentering the fray in order – in his own words – that his right hand may not have slain many enemies in vain, that he may avoid dishonor, and that he may hold on to his possessions (1214–1218).

His avarice prevents Walter from being a model of Christian virtue. When he explains his escape plan to Hiltgunt, he instructs her first to get armor, then to fill two boxes with treasure. Only then does he think of such travel necessities as shoes and fish hooks. The poet calls our attention to the stolen treasure when Walter and Hiltgunt set out on their journey (326–330). Indeed, once he has stolen the treasure, it defines for Walter his view of right action. He fights to keep it and to avoid the shame of losing it. When one defeated adversary begs for mercy, Walter first taunts then kills him (750–753). He kills another man to prevent him from boasting that he cut off two locks from his hair (976–981); and tells another to report to his friends in the Underworld his failure to avenge Walter's murder of them (1056–1058). In the heat of battle Walter's mercy and compassion melt away; and the values which remain bear little resemblance to an idealized Christian ethic.

Yet the poet has managed to create a Christian poem. In the epic's final scene, he employs direct moralizing combined with purposeful allusions to the Bible and the *Psychomachia* to draw together the disparate threads of the preceding narrative and underline his basic theme. The Christian references are used to cast a mocking light on the heroic motifs.

This final portion of the epic contains two episodes. In the first occurs the disfigurement of the three warriors; in the second, they desist from the feud and refresh themselves. The wounds which they suffer have symbolic meaning. What, after all, motivated Hagen at last to join the assault against Walter? Revenge. How appropriate, therefore, his wounds – the loss of his right eye and six teeth – appear to be when we call to mind (as the poem's intended audience of monks surely would have done) the Biblical injunction »an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth« (Exodus 21:22–25).

The poet himself intrudes into the narrative to make his own moral position explicit, immediately after having described the wounds suffered by each man. The passage reads (1401–1404):

Postquam finis adest, insignia quemque notabant:
 Illic Guntharii regis pes, palma iacebat
 Waltharii nec non tremulus Haganonis ocellus.
 Sic sic armillas partiti sunt Avarenses!

(After the end of the battle has come, distinctive marks
 branded each man; there was lying King Gunther's foot,
 Walter's hand, and Hagen's twitching eye. Thus, thus
 they divided the treasure of the Huns!)

It is worth noting that in this list of injuries the poet fails to mention Hagen's missing teeth. Moreover, although Walter had hacked off Gunther's whole leg with the knee up to the thigh (1369: *crus cum poplite adusque femur*), the poet in the same catalogue mentions only the amputated foot. These apparent errors are most unusual lapses on the part of a craftsman who, as Brinkmann first showed, prides himself on attention to accuracy in even minor details. But they are not lapses. The omission and the change serve to turn the list into another unmistakable scriptural reference (Mark 9:42-48):

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.⁹

The Biblical allusion made by the list of wounds in the *Waltharius* suggests that they are meant to be viewed as punishments suffered by the three men for yielding to temptation. Walter and Gunther have yielded directly to avarice; Hagen, indirectly, by yielding to his desire for vengeance.¹⁰

The particular case of Walter's wound recalls a corresponding passage in Matthew which refers to the cutting off of one's *right hand* (Matthew 5:30):

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

⁹ For other statements of this theme, see also Matthew 18:7-9 and Deuteronomy 19:21.

¹⁰ In the light of the preceding discussion, we can now recognize that the expression *armillas Avarenses* (1404) is surely intended as a pun on *avaritia*.

When we remember Walter's earlier avowed faith in his right hand to protect his possessions, the loss of that hand seems immediately appropriate. But the poet intends an even more precise connection between Walter's wound and punishment for his greed. To understand fully the link between the Biblical allusion and the poem's basic theme, we must turn to the *Psychomachia*, and to Prudentius' description of the dire fiend *Avaritia* (*Psychomachia* 459-463):

[*Avaritia*] iuvat infercire crumini
 turpe lucrum et gravidos furtis distendere fiscos,
 quos laeva celante tegit laterisque sinistri
 velat opermento; velox nam dextra rapinas
 abradit spoliisque unguis exercet aenos.

(*Avarice* delights to stuff her filthy gain in
 money-bags, and to cram full of her theft purses,
 which she hides with her left hand; for her swift
 right hand is scraping up spoils with fingernails
 hard as brass.)

It is with her right hand that *Avaritia* is pictured as grabbing plunder; hence, it is proper, indeed inevitable, that Walter lose the grasping right hand as punishment for the *avaritia* that led him to stuff treasure chests full of *armillae Avarenses*.

One final correlation of this concluding scene with the *Psychomachia* emphasizes the Christian message of the *Waltharius*. In Prudentius' epic, after *Avaritia* has been killed, victorious *Operatio* announces that now is the time for the Virtues to rest and refresh themselves (*Psychomachia* 606-608):

Solvite procinctum, iusti, et discedite ab armis!
 causa mali tanti iacet interfecta; lucrandi
 ingluvie pereunte licet requiescere sanctis.

(Doff your armour, ye upright, and lay your weapons
 aside. The cause of all our ill lies slain. Now that
 the lust of gain is dead, the pure may rest.)

This episode (*Psychomachia* 603-663) provides the model for the drinking which ends the *Waltharius*; for *avaritia* has been, if not conquered, at least justly rewarded.

Puzzlement has been expressed concerning the ending of the *Waltharius*.¹¹ Why does Hagen fail to kill Walter after amputating his right

¹¹ See von den Steinen, *op. cit.*, p. 19; Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 18, speaks of the »trick ending« of the poem.

hand? Why do the warriors so quickly give up the fighting? Why is there no further mention of the treasure for which they were so recently fighting with such bitterness? All these seeming inconsistencies are dissolved, however, once we accept that the *Waltharius* poet's intention is not the realistic portrayal of action or human psychology – not, at least, according to twentieth century assumptions of realism – but rather the narrative exemplification of his theme. That theme is the condemnation of avarice; and in this context the conclusion of the poem is neither puzzling nor inconsistent.

The *Waltharius*, then, while utilizing the trappings of epic, turns the genre to a new purpose. It resolves the problem of welding Christian content to Classical form by attacking the values of at first glance heroic figures and rendering them, in essence, ridiculous. In this sense, we might even venture to call the *Waltharius* a mock epic. But we should not forget that sin is the source of the humor, and the ridicule of sin is subordinate to the poem's serious Christian spirit.

III. *The Ruodlieb and Christian Heroism*

The *Ruodlieb*¹² takes a radically different approach to the creation of a poem which is at once Christian in spirit and yet a part of the Latin epic tradition. This Latin narrative was composed in southern Germany in the mid-eleventh century, some two hundred years after the *Waltharius*.

The manuscript is incomplete, but the 2300 verses which have survived clearly recount the adventures of a young knight who leaves home to better his fortunes. He first distinguishes himself – as hunter, warrior, and diplomat – at the court of a foreign king, whose rewards to the hero include both gnomonic counsels and a generous supply of treasure. A letter from his mother, who reports that all his enemies have been eliminated, prompts Ruodlieb to leave the court and return home. The journey homeward includes episodes demonstrating the wisdom of several of the king's counsels, particularly one admonishing against red-headed men. Later, the hero stops at the castle of a widow, and there arranges the marriage of her daughter with his nephew. At home, Ruodlieb gains great honors; and a dream which appears to his mother foretells more successes. The next scene describes Ruodlieb's conquest of a dwarf, who promises to reveal to the hero the location of a great treasure. The narrative breaks off abruptly at this point.

¹² I have treated the *Ruodlieb* by itself in »Ruodlieb: Christian Epic Hero«, *Classical Folia* 27, Number 2 (1973), pp. 252–266.

Unlike the *Waltharius*, the *Ruodlieb* is not widely accepted as a part of the Latin epic tradition. It has been variously labelled as the first courtly romance (Wilmotte), the earliest courtly novel (Zeydel), the first realistic novel (Gamer), and a romantic epic (Raby). Others have associated it wholly or in part with Greek romances (Burdach) or the entertainments of mime-players (Winterfeld). It has even been called a totally individualistic work divorced from any literary tradition (Manitius).¹³

Three critical essays published since 1962 have addressed the nagging question of the relationship of the *Ruodlieb* to the epic genre.¹⁴ Braun emphatically denies that the poem has any relationship at all to Classical epic. Brunhölzl, on the other hand, argues for the *Aeneid* as the *Ruodlieb's* model, and concludes that the poem is an attempt, clumsy and utterly unsuccessful, at a Vergilian epic. Brunhölzl's harsh judgment concerning the failure of the *Ruodlieb* needs to be understood in the context of his own bias, that any deviation in language or form from Vergil is a flaw. If the *Ruodlieb* poet does not imitate his Classical model precisely, it is a confession of incompetence, since he certainly would have imitated more closely had he been able.

The fallaciousness of this viewpoint need not detain us here, especially since it has already been attacked eloquently by Gamer and more recently by Dronke.¹⁵ In his essay, Dronke argues that the *Ruodlieb*

¹³ Maurice Wilmotte, »Le Ruodlieb, notre premier roman courtois«, *Romania* 44 (1915-1917), pp. 373-406; Edwin Zeydel, *Ruodlieb: The Earliest Courtly Novel* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1959); Helena Gamer, »The *Ruodlieb* and Tradition«, *ARV: Journal of Scandinavian Folklore* 11 (1955), pp. 65-103; F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry* I (Oxford, 1957²), pp. 395-399; Konrad Burdach, *Vorspiel, Gesammelte Schriften zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes* I (Halle, 1925), pp. 153-157; Paul von Winterfeld and Hermann Reich, *Deutsche Dichter des lateinischen Mittelalters* (Munich, 1922), pp. 491-502; Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* II (Munich, 1923), pp. 547-555.

¹⁴ Werner Braun, *Studien zum Ruodlieb* (Berlin, 1962); Franz Brunhölzl, »Zum Ruodlieb«, *DVj* 39 (1965), no. 4, pp. 506-522; Peter Dronke, »*Ruodlieb: The Emergence of Romance*«, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 33-65.

¹⁵ Gamer, *op. cit.*, p. 68 (speaking generally): »Two equally fallacious tendencies have been widespread, first, an inclination to size up the stature of a mediaeval writer by determining the faithfulness with which he renders Classical themes, motifs, and stories; second, to judge the author's language and style by the standards of Classical Latin. Both tendencies emanate from the assumption that the mediaeval Latin works are decadent products of a long and honorable ancient lineage, and thus pass over the vital questions of the growth of a language and a literature and the originality of an author. These lines of thought overlook the

should be regarded as an experiment in poetic narrative, and emphasizes approaching the poem on its own terms rather than in terms of sources or analogues. He pays particular attention to the poet's ability to achieve characterization through dialogue and to his use of realistic detail to enhance the meaning of specific scenes. Dronke's illuminating study is a major contribution to our understanding of the poet's artistry, but it is deficient in its consideration of the problem of genre. Dronke refers to the *Ruodlieb* at one point as the first Medieval verse romance. Elsewhere, he labels it an epic romance, but qualifies this assertion by saying, like Braun, that in themes and conception it owes almost nothing to ancient epic.

All these earlier discussions of the genre and literary heritage of the *Ruodlieb* seem to me to miss the mark. My suggestion is to reassert the poem's epic character, but in a revised sense; for an examination of the text reveals the *Ruodlieb* poet to have made far more use of the conventions of Classical epic than has previously been suspected. The *Ruodlieb* is intended as an imitation and a rival of the *Aeneid*. In this sense of the term, it is an epic poem.

The poet's choice of Latin hexameters to narrate the adventures of a central heroic figure is the first indication of his epic intent. At the very beginning of the work, several allusions to the *Aeneid* announce that intent. The first strokes of the portrait of Ruodlieb bear unmistakable resemblances to Vergil's Aeneas. The opening line of each poem introduces its hero simply as *vir*. Ruodlieb, like Aeneas, is an exile from his native land who, suffering many hardships, travels through foreign lands (I.15-17)¹⁶:

Nusquam secure se sperans vivere posse,
Rebus dispositis cunctis matrique subactis,
Tandem de patria pergens petit extera regna.

fact that borrowed matter may be used, on the one hand, accurately and at the same time badly, and, on the other, quite freely, and with a high degree of poetic perfection – as indeed a Shakespeare and a Dante employed traditional materials.« Dronke, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64 (rebutting Brunhölzl directly): »Brunhölzl's suggestion that this poet would have liked to imitate classical diction but could not, quite simply, no foundation in the text. To speak as he does of this poet's »unlateinische Ausdrucksweise« is to set up arbitrarily a particular norm of Latin as if this were valid for every age and every artistic purpose.«

¹⁶ Quotations from the *Ruodlieb* are taken from Gordon B. Ford, Jr., *The Ruodlieb: Linguistic Introduction, Latin Text, and Glossary* (Leiden, 1966). English translations are from Ford, *The Ruodlieb: The First Medieval Epic of Chivalry from eleventh century Germany* (Leiden, 1965).

(Realizing that he could live nowhere securely, with his affairs put in order and entrusted to his mother, at last leaving his homeland, he seeks foreign lands.)

The phrase *petit extera regna* calls to mind Vergil's expression, applied to Aeneas, *extera quaerere regna* (*Aeneid* IV.350). Later in the *Ruodlieb*, the hero is described as having endured many labors (V.235: *sustinuisse labores*), an echo of Vergil's description of Aeneas as a man compelled to undergo labors (*Aeneid* I.10: *adire labores*). Moreover, Ruodlieb, like Aeneas, is prone to tears. The first reference to this characteristic is made in connection with the hero's departure from home (I.49):

Perfusa lacrimis facie dabat oscula cunctis.

(His face moistened with tears, he kissed everybody.)

This line contains an adaptation of Vergil's *lacrimis . . . perfusa genas* (*Aeneid* XII.64-65). One final Vergilian reference occurs in a description of Ruodlieb's mother immediately after the departure of her son (I.56-59):

Detersis lacrimis qui tunc lotis faciebus
 Consolaturi dominam subeunt cito cuncti,
 Quae simulando spem premit altum corde dolorem.
 Consolatur eos, male dum se cernit habere.

(After all of them had wiped off their tears and washed their faces, they went quickly to console their mistress. Feigning hope, she suppressed her sorrow deep in her heart and consoled them when she saw that they were suffering.)

Simulando spem reworks Vergil's phrase *spem vultu simulat* (*Aeneid* I.209), while *premit altum corde dolorem* is an exact borrowing from the same line in the *Aeneid*. When we consider the real paucity in the *Ruodlieb* of identifiable references to Classical literature, this complex of allusions is all the more arresting.

One method, then, by which the poet attempts to link his narrative with the *Aeneid* and hence Latin epic is the comparison of Ruodlieb with Aeneas. In addition, he has incorporated into his narrative specific themes found in the *Aeneid*. The Hunt is one such theme. In the *Ruodlieb* we find one hunting episode (I.27-48), and two other episodes in which the hero displays his skill as a fisherman (II.1-26; X.1-49).

In the second fishing scene, there occurs an epic Catalogue – of fish (X.38–48). Prophecy, another standard feature of Vergilian epic, appears in the dream of Ruodlieb's mother (XVII.88–128). The poet is also fond of Ekphrasis; and one extended description (of an embossed goblet) occurs as part of a Banquet (VII.1–25), still another stock epic scene.

The description of the goblet (VII.12–16) provides an insight into the poet's relation to his Classical model. The stimulus for this description is undoubtedly the goblet which appears in Dido's banquet (*Aeneid* I.640–642). However, in the *Ruodlieb* the embossing does not, as it does in the *Waltharius*, repeat Vergil's motif of the deeds of ancestors. Rather, on the bowl there are the Christian motifs of the four rivers of paradise and the right hand of God. The filling of a Classical convention with a Christian content is analogous to the poet's use of the epic genre for the expression of a basically Christian tale.

The *Ruodlieb*, then, makes use of many elements of the epic genre. Of the important conventions, only the Battle and its apparatus are missing from the poem – an omission which is in fact an integral part of the poem's overall thematic structure. The poem was not created in a literary vacuum, nor is it the isolated phenomenon that has been proposed. The author may indeed have been influenced by a variety of literary and folk traditions. But in giving form to his story, he chose to imitate the Latin epic. Whatever affinities this intriguing work may have with other genres, or however unique it may seem, it has an identifiable literary model in the *Aeneid*.

I have dwelt on the issue of the genre of the *Ruodlieb*, because the poet's artistry can be properly appreciated only with reference to the tradition of the Latin epic, and its limitations as a vehicle for the expression of Christian values; for the poet's intention is to take the Latin epic form and fill it with Christian content. The *Ruodlieb* is essentially different from the *Aeneid*, not because its author was incapable of more precise imitation, but because he was trying to create, within the epic framework, a poem different in spirit. Though the innovations which the *Ruodlieb* poet introduced into the epic genre are many, I will restrict my remarks to what I consider his boldest and most significant departure from his Classical model: his attempt to forge, in the person of Ruodlieb, a new Christian exemplar of epic heroism.

The narrative itself is the record of Ruodlieb's growth toward Chris-

tian heroic excellence. It begins with the following description of the young knight (I.1-10):

Quidam prosapia vir progenitus generosa
 Moribus ingenitam decorabat nobilitatem,
 Qui dominos plures habuisse datur locupletes,
 Saepius ad libitum quibus is famulans et honorum
 Nil deservisse potuit, putat ut meruisse.
 Quicquid et illorum sibi quis commisit herorum
 Aut ulciscendum causaeque suae peragendum
 Non prolongabat, quam strennuiter peragebat.
 Saepius in mortem se pro dominis dat eisdem
 Seu bello seu venatu seu quolibet actu.

(A certain man, born of a noble family, adorned his inherited nobility with his character. He is said to have had many wealthy lords. Although he served them often according to their wishes, he was unable to obtain any of the honors which he thought that he deserved. He did not put off whatever any of these lords entrusted to him – whether it was to avenge them or to transact their business – but he accomplished it as energetically as possible. Often he risked his life for these same lords in war and in hunting and in every type of action.)

Several aspects of this passage deserve attention. First, the hero is pictured as already having attained excellence as a hunter and a soldier. Second, he has been unfortunate in serving unworthy lords who have cheated him of his rightful *honores*. Finally, he cannot yet be called a truly Christian hero because of his willingness to serve his lords as an avenger (I.7: *ulciscendum*), in contrast to the teaching of Christ with regard to vengeance (Matthew 5:38-42).

Ruodlieb's travels take him to a foreign court, whose lord – called the Rex Maior – is both just and generous. The hero first impresses the Rex Maior with his skill as a hunter and fisherman. Then the poet shifts the narrative emphasis to a war which has erupted between Ruodlieb's new lord and a neighboring ruler. Now the opportunity beckons to display the hero's aforementioned prowess as a soldier in an epic battle. However, even though Ruodlieb is in fact the commander of the army which defeats the invaders, no battle is described. The poet's interest lies elsewhere. We learn only of the war's outcome, through the brief report of a messenger. On the other hand, the peace negotiations which

follow the war, and Ruodlieb's effective performance as a diplomat, are treated in detail.

In the role of diplomat, Ruodlieb strongly condemns the foolish pride (III.2: *stulta superbia*) and desire for self-glorification which motivated the leader of the defeated force. That man, he declares, deserves to be hanged from a tree by the calves of his legs. Now the soldiers all shout their agreement, asking why indeed Ruodlieb hesitates to do just this. But Ruodlieb has changed his opinion concerning retribution. Citing the orders of the Rex Maior, he now contends that there is no honor in vengeance. Ruodlieb instead proposes a new concept of revenge, to spare one's wrath (III.7-14):

Princeps respondit: »rex noster non ita iussit,
 Aut se dedentem vel captum perdere quemquam,
 Sed, si possemus, captivos erueremus
 Cum praeda pariter, quae fecimus ambo decenter.
 Vincere victorem, maiorem vult quis honorem?
 Sis leo pugnando par ulciscendo sed agno!
 Non honor est vobis, ulcisci damna doloris.
 Magnum vindictae genus est, si parcitis irae.«

(The commander answered: »Our king did not order us to destroy anyone who either surrendered or was captured but, if we could, to rescue the prisoners together with the booty. Both of these things we have done properly. Who wishes greater honor than to vanquish a victor? Be a lion in battle but like a lamb when taking vengeance! It is not honorable to you to avenge grievous losses. The best kind of vengeance is when you spare your wrath.«)

The reference to the lamb which Ruodlieb employs (III.12: *par ulciscendo sed agno*) underscores the Christian basis of the teaching, the lamb being of course a common figura for Christ. The repetition of the gerundive form of *ulcisci* recalls I.7 and the hero's ethos, as it were, at the beginning of the narrative.

The Rex Maior is the source not just for Ruodlieb's disavowal of vengeance. He is in fact a general model of proper Christian behavior. In sharp contrast to Ruodlieb's former lords, the Rex Maior is a fair and compassionate man whose behavior reflects *virtus*, *sophia*, *pietas*, and *clementia*. The king demonstrates these noble qualities most clearly in his treatment of his vanquished enemies, with whom he deals in a spirit of forgiveness. He expresses his philosophy in this manner (V.42):

Nam mala malo bono quam reddere vincere pravo.

(I prefer to return good for evil, rather than to conquer with injustice.)

When the defeated king, known as the Rex Minor, praises the Rex Maior for his noble behavior, the summation of the lesser king's praise is that the Rex Maior, through his possession of the qualities *virtus*, *sophia*, *pietas*, and *clementia* (IV.137-147), is the earthly representative of Christ (IV.154: *columen nostri tu solus es in vice Christi*).

The encomium of the Rex Minor represents just one way in which the poet establishes the Rex Maior as the model of an excellence which is specifically Christian. Ruodlieb, we recall, when citing the Rex Maior's injunction against vengeance, used the Christian image of the lamb. Elsewhere, the Rex Maior praises Ruodlieb's ability as a peacemaker by saying that the young knight rendered him, whenever he became angry, »gentle as a lamb« (V.407: *irascentem me mitem reddit ut agnum*). The poet ties together these Christian images in the speech Ruodlieb delivers when he is about to leave the Rex Maior's court (V.303-307):

Quod tibi servivi, mihi quam bene retribuisti.
 Huc postquam veni, pie rex, tibi meque subegi,
 Pascha fuit tecum mihi semper cottidianum,
 Semper habens multum vel honorum sive bonorum
 A te non solum sed ab unoquoque tuorum.

(How well you have rewarded me for serving you! After I came here, gracious king, and made myself your subject, every day with you has always been Easter to me. I have always had many honors and good things not only from you but from every one of your people.)

The Easter reference (V.305: *Pascha*) restates the Rex Maior's role as man *in vice Christi*. Ruodlieb's words also indicate, it should be noted, his belief that his original quest has been successful. He left home, we recall, because he had not received fitting *honores*. He now reveals his conviction that he has in fact been amply honored.

Ruodlieb, as we have seen, learns *clementia* from the Rex Maior. The king is also the source of *sophia* for the young knight. When Ruodlieb announces his desire to return home to his mother, the king offers him a choice between two final rewards for his service. The two possibilities are wealth and wisdom. In a long speech (V.425-445), Ruodlieb replies that pious wisdom (V.431: *pia . . . sophia*), which gives a man inner

strength, is what he desires. This choice leads to Ruodlieb's receiving both wisdom and wealth. The wealth is in the form of a generous supply of gold and jewels hidden in loaves of bread which the king instructs him not to break open until he reaches home. The wisdom takes the form of a series of twelve maxims to guide Ruodlieb in his future life (V.449-526).¹⁷

Now the time has come for Ruodlieb to depart. The Rex Maior dismisses the hero with these words (V.532-533):

Rex ait: »ito domum cunctorum plenus honorum
Atque vide matrem totamque tuam pariter rem.«

(The king said: »Go home, full of every honor, and see both your mother and all your possessions.«)

This statement, of course, articulates the actual success which Ruodlieb earlier believed that he had attained. He is now in fact *plenus honorum*.

Ruodlieb begins his journey home. One of the king's maxims had warned him against associating with any red-headed man (V.451-456):

Non tibi sit rufus umquam specialis amicus!
Si fit is iratus, non est fidei memoratus;
Nam vehemens dira sibi stat durabilis ira.
Tam bonus haut fuerit, aliqua fraus quin in eo sit,
Quam vitare nequis, quin ex hac commaculeris;
Nam tangendo picem vix expurgaris ad unguem.

(Never let a redheaded man be a special friend of yours!
If he becomes angry, he will not be mindful of loyalty,
for violent, dreadful, and enduring is his wrath. He
will not be so good that there will be no deceit in him,
by which you cannot help being defiled. For if you
touch pitch, you can scarcely be cleansed to the nail.)

Unfortunately, almost immediately after he leaves the court of the Rex Maior, Ruodlieb is joined by a red-headed man whose rash actions, and their disastrous consequences, form a major sub-plot of the epic. The red-headed man precipitates his own woe when he seeks lodging for the

¹⁷ These pieces of advice may originally have been intended by the poet as a framework for the rest of his narrative. The episode which follows does illustrate the correctness of the first three counsels. However, although other counsels are relevant to the story as it unfolds, the poet seems to abandon this framework and lets the narrative proceed in a different fashion. Concerning the folk origin of such a counsel framework, see Friedrich Seiler, *Ruodlieb* (Halle, 1882), pp. 45-74.

night in the home of an old man with a young wife. This act is contrary to another maxim offered Ruodlieb by the Rex Maior (V.461-467), one which the hero wisely follows. At the moment the red-headed man inquires about such lodgings, the poet describes him as »vain and very arrogant« (VII.117: *vanus nimiumque superbus*). The husband, it turns out, is not only old but also exceedingly ugly. His face is so bristly with hair that the only feature visible on it is a long nose full of veins. The wife is not only young but also promiscuous. Seduction follows, and the lovers, when discovered by the husband, murder him. The two are brought to trial; and, although the portion of the text relating the red-head's fate is missing, we can assume that his *superbia* is severely punished.

As the Rex Maior's function in the poem is to serve as a positive model for Ruodlieb, so the red-head is a negative model. His role is not unlike that of Gunther in the *Waltharius*; for each man represents the *superbia* which the Christian hero must subdue in himself.

Meanwhile, Ruodlieb continues on his journey. When at last he reaches home, he discovers the treasure secreted by the Rex Maior in the loaves of bread which were parting gifts. Ruodlieb, whose *pietas* has been emphasized throughout the poem (cf. I.69-71; III.27-30), immediately gives thanks to God (XIII.56). Then, falling to his knees, he pours forth a long prayer. (XIII.64-77):

Miles humi dat se terram premit oreque saepe,
 Ceu se pro regis pedibus domini daret eius.
 Tunc nimium plorans faciem lacrimando tingens
 Orabat: »domine, num par tibi quis valet esse,
 Qui clemens illum miserum dignaris homullum
 Sic locupletare vel honoribus amplificare,
 Eius nec vitis reminiscere quod patereris?
 Nunc mihi des, domine, quo non moriar, precor, ante
 Quam rursus videam, quem pauper egensque petebam,
 Qui mandante te clementer suscipiens me
 Fecit tantarum consortem deliciarum
 Et miserum denos secum retinendo per annos
 Amplificavit me, quo quod posthac sat honeste
 Vivere fidenter, haec si tracto sapienter.«

(The knight cast himself to the ground and again and again pressed the earth with his lips as if he were throwing himself before the feet of the King, his Lord. Then weeping a lot and wetting his face with tears, he prayed: »O Lord, who can be equal to You, who

mercifully deign thus to enrich and to increase with honors a poor little man such as I, but not to remember that You have suffered on account of my sins? Now, O Lord, I pray, grant to me that I will not die before I see again the king to whom I came poor and needy and who received me kindly at Your request and made me a participant in such great delights. Keeping me, a poor man, with him for ten years, he enriched me so that now I can live very honorably and confidently if I manage these things wisely.«)

This prayer, itself a reflection of Ruodlieb's *pietas*, continues the epic's other major themes of *clementia* (XIII.68: *clemens*), *sophia* (XIII.77: *haec si tracto sapienter*), and *honores* as the reward for excellence (XIII.69: *locupletare vel honoribus amplificare*).

In the episodes which follow, the poet emphasizes the hero's relationship with his mother and her role in helping him gain his greatest honors. In so doing, the poet returns to the perspective from which he began his tale. At the beginning of the epic, he had focused on the mother's intense grief at her son's departure. Now she sees her grief turned to joy. Moreover, Ruodlieb's respectful treatment of her provides another example of his excellence. We should remember that, happy though he was at the court of the Rex Maior, the hero rushed home when she summoned him. Later, remembering another of the Rex Maior's gnomic counsels (V.485-497), Ruodlieb defers to his mother's wishes by seeking a bride. The woman, unfortunately, proves less than desirable, for she is in the midst of a clandestine affair with a cleric. There is no marriage; nevertheless, Ruodlieb's reward for his filial devotion in this and other instances is God's favor (XVI.32-34).

God's favor is soon to be translated into further *honores*. And it is Ruodlieb's mother who is instrumental in his gaining them (XVII.85-88). God reveals the imminence of these honors to her when in a dream she sees Ruodlieb kill two boars and a herd of sows which are threatening her. Next she beholds her son sitting in a linden tree, where a white dove flies to him and places a crown on his head.¹⁸ The mother interprets this vision as a portent of successes to come to her son in the future and says to him (XVII.123):

¹⁸ For the relation of this dream to other literature, consult Paul Schach, »Some Parallels to the Tree Dream in Ruodlieb«, *Monatshefte für deutschen Unterricht* 46 (1954), pp. 353-364; consult also Gamer, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-101 for other possible sources of the dream motif.

Nunc scio, maiores nactus eris quod honores.

(Now I know that you will obtain greater honors.)

The following scene, the last of the epic, is intended, I believe, to illustrate the correctness of the mother's interpretation of her dream. For when the poem breaks off suddenly, Ruodlieb has just captured a dwarf whom he spares in return for being told the whereabouts of a large treasure.¹⁹

Thus the poem ends. The picture of Ruodlieb is completed, and its clarity seems to refute those critics who would judge the poet incapable of organizing his subject matter into a coherent, meaningful whole. Ruodlieb is a Christian hero, a man of peace. He embodies the four qualities of *virtus*, *pietas*, *clementia*, and *sophia*. Two of these qualities, *clementia* and *sophia*, he acquires through his relationship with the Rex Maior. From the king, God's representative on earth, he first receives the *honores* of which he had previously been unjustly deprived in his homeland. At the conclusion of the epic, he has returned home, where, because of his own noble actions (and those of his mother), he is now granted even greater honors by God himself.

It can be seen that this portrait of a heroic life, based on Christian values, contrasts sharply with the pattern of heroic behavior found in the *Aeneid*. The poet's determination to stress forgiveness and peace-making as central to the definition of heroism led him to omit from his narrative the battle scenes traditionally associated with epic. In turn, the emphasis on *clementia* and peace introduce a vital new dimension into the concept of the epic hero. The poet of the *Ruodlieb* did not invent a new literary genre any more than the *Waltharius* poet did. His achievement was in creating a new kind of epic poem.

IV. Summation

The authors of the *Waltharius* and the *Ruodlieb* were both striving to extend the capabilities of Latin epic by exploring ways of making it a suitable vehicle for the expression of Christian values. The *Waltharius*

¹⁹ There have been many guesses, none of which is convincing, as to why the poet did not complete the *Ruodlieb*. The most attractive hypothesis is that by Ford, who proposes (*Ruodlieb: The First Medieval Epic*, pp. 4-5) that »the poet intentionally ended his work at this point and desired to leave Ruodlieb's future crowning and marriage to the reader's imagination«.

is a mock epic, whose basic Christian theme, the condemnation of *avaritia*, is inextricably bound up with a denial of Classical standards of heroic action. The key to the poet's mocking attack on Walter, Hagen, and Gunther is our recognition of the symbolic meaning – based on allusions to the Bible and the *Psychomachia* – of the narrative's final episode, particularly the wounds suffered by each man. The *Ruodlieb*, on the other hand, attempts to provide a new definition of heroism – emphasizing the Christian virtues of *pietas*, *clementia*, and *sophia* – in the person of Ruodlieb. The epic is the account of Ruodlieb's growth toward Christian excellence. The turning point for him is his association with the Rex Maior, from whom he learns wisdom and the renunciation of vengeance, and from whom he first receives worldly rewards (*honores*) for his excellence.

Despite their different approaches to the creation of Christian epic, the two poets seem to share much the same moral and esthetic outlook. Each seeks to be innovative within a context of established literary tradition. Each condemns the destructive power of *superbia* and of vengeance as a response to injury. Each, in adapting the epic genre to his Christian purpose, focuses attention specifically on the incompatibility of the Classical heroic code with his own Christian values. In articulating their responses to this conflict, the two poets produced works which must be ranked among the high points of Christian Latin narrative. They also created two of the most striking figures in the history of Latin epic: Walter of Aquitaine, personified warning against avarice; and Ruodlieb, Christian alternative to Aeneas.