



*the opening lines of The Wanderer,
as they appear in the Exeter Book.*

SIX OLD ENGLISH POEMS

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[The word **NOTE** in the text indicates a particular crux of translation or meaning, which is discussed further. Click on **NOTE** to be taken to the relevant discussion, and then on **RETURN** to come back to the translation.]

INTRODUCTION

The six poems featured in this anthology represent some of the highest achievements of Old English poetry, and in them are expressed many of the major concerns that haunted the Anglo-Saxon imagination in the time before the Norman Conquest in 1066. The poems speak movingly of the inexorable passage of time, and the frailty and transience of all earthly things – against which religious faith may seem to be the only refuge and consolation. They explore the human pain of separation and exile, and the personal ache of absence and longing. Against an emotional landscape of deprivation and yearning, the quest for a secure and lasting identity, whether human or divine, is repeatedly evoked. And the physical settings described in the poetry mirror these themes. The land is harsh and desolate, human habitation ruined or abandoned, the sea full of storm. Everywhere, against brief moments of flickering light or warmth, there is darkness, and night, and the biting cold of winter. The analogy recorded by the Venerable Bede captures this world tellingly:

[our life on earth] is like sitting at a feast...in the winter-time. The fire burns and the hall is warmed, and outside it rains and snows and storms. A sparrow comes and flies swiftly through the house; it comes through one door and goes out another. For the time it is inside, it is not touched by the winter storm; but that time is like the blinking of an eye and the most minute of moments. The sparrow soon passes from winter to winter again. So is our life revealed for a brief space, but what went before and what follows after, we do not know.

Underscoring such a perception of transience and fragility, the form of the poems translated here is often that of a monologue, spoken by an unidentified voice that is estranged from company and human society. The tone that is heard seems always vulnerable, at best resigned to the elemental forces that besiege it, at worst close to mental and emotional collapse. Its accents sound with all the stubbornness and all the passion of elegy. Indeed, if there is a single word that crystallises the world depicted in these poems, it is the word 'loss'.

What now survives of Old English poetry is contained in four major sources, the *Junius manuscript*, the *Exeter Book*, the *Vercelli Book*, and the *Nowell Codex*; and the manuscripts as a whole present a number of

challenges for any interpreter. The actual physical condition of certain pages can be damaged, sometimes severely. The alphabet used, which is known as ‘insular minuscule’, contains certain letters (notably *f*, *r*, and *s*, or *þ* and *w*) that are easily confused, not simply by later transcribers but also by Anglo-Saxon scribes themselves. To economise on parchment, the poems are written out as continuous prose, without clear line-endings. An absence of punctuation sometimes makes it difficult to identify where exactly some monologues begin and where they end, with a substantial impact upon the identity of the voice speaking. Then again, whatever voice is heard can sometimes change its tone abruptly and radically: from clear-eyed realism in one passage to sudden, pious homily in the next, from a sense of probing individuality in one line to loose platitude in the next. Both textually and interpretatively, Old English poetry presents any translator with very substantial challenges.

Underpinning all of these problematic features, however, there is a single aspect that is coherent, compelling and fundamental. This is a poetry, above all, that is grounded in *sound*, in the direct immediacy of human voices speaking, in a language that (a thousand years later) the Dorset poet William Barnes was evocatively to describe as ‘shapen of the breath-sounds of speakers, for the ear of hearers, and not from speech-tokens in books.’ Although none of the poems rhyme, they are energised by a relatively extended alliterative line, derived from Germanic prosody, where two or three stressed letter sounds are repeated and thereby linked. And so, to take a few examples at random from this anthology, *stormas* alliterates with *stanclifu* and also *stearn* in the same line; *frod* links with *fyrdrinc* and also with *francan*, again in the same line; *wraetlic* with *wealstan* and also *wyrde*. Vowels as well as consonants can alliterate, and there is considerable flexibility in the number of words alliterating, as well as in the number of stresses in each line. But whereas in much modern poetry alliteration can sometimes seem rather decorative, an ornamental addition to generate special acoustic effects, in Old English poetry it is structural, a crucial underpinning by which a tradition of oral recitation is sustained. Words are to be *heard* – their plosives and fricatives, their pitch and tone, their pulse and rhythm – in all their muscular, tactile force.

Translating this sound-world into contemporary English raises several issues, not least the relationship between sound and sense, and the imaginative weight that is given to each. Few translators, understandably, attempt to reproduce the *exact* alliterative sound of the original (three Old English words in a line that begin with ‘p’, say, translated into three modern words beginning with ‘p’ also); but several try to maintain the

same *number* of alliterative words in any line, and others will, more generally, foreground the sound of any line before its meaning. Something of the tensions between sound and sense can be well illustrated by the following four versions of the opening lines of the poem *The Wanderer*. My brief commentary in note-form follows each. Plus signs (+++) indicate what are clearly commendable features; question marks (???) those features that raise some doubts about their overall effectiveness; minus signs (---) those features that demonstrably do not work and need reconsidering. The original lines read:

Oft him anhaga are gebideð
metudes miltse þeah he modcearig
geond lagulade longe sceolde
hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ
wadan wræclastas. Wyrð bið ful aræd!

Swa cwæð eardstapa, earfeþa gemyndig,
wraþa wælsleahta, winemæga hryre:

Version 1

Who liveth alone longeth for mercy,
Maker’s mercy. Though he must traverse
tracts of sea, sick at heart,
– trouble with oars ice-cold waters,
the ways of exile – Wierd is set fast.

Thus spoke a ‘grasshopper’, old griefs in his mind,
cold slaughters, the death of dear kinsmen:

+++ *some bare and effective phrasing*: ‘sick at heart’, ‘ice-cold waters’, ‘old griefs in his mind’, ‘cold slaughters’; *some telling alliteration, especially when unobtrusively voiced*, e.g. ‘sea, sick’, ‘the death of dear kinsmen’.

??? *alliteration sometimes leads to forced and inappropriate connotations* (e.g. ‘traverse / tracts’), *which are too elevated and Latinate in derivation*; *the old third-person form in ‘liveth’ and ‘longeth’ seems too consciously archaic*.

xxx *the choice of 'Weird', even with altered spelling, conveys little meaning to a reader, and even less to a listener; modern readers will find 'grasshopper' unintelligible, even when placed within inverted commas/quotation marks, to signal a specialised meaning.*

Version 2

Always the one alone longs for mercy,
the Maker's mildness, though, troubled in mind,
across the ocean-ways he has long been forced
to stir with his hands the frost-cold sea,
and walk in exile's paths. *Wyrð* is fully fixed!

Thus spoke the Wanderer, mindful of troubles,
of cruel slaughters and the fall of dear kinsmen:

+++ *some spare and telling phrasing: 'longs for mercy', 'troubled in mind', 'frost-cold sea', 'cruel slaughters'; a strong and effective translation of 'eardstapa' [literally earth-stepper] into 'the Wanderer';*

??? *alliterative effects are rather variable: 'mercy...Maker's mildness'; 'fully fixed'; the force of 'wyrð' is signalled by italicisation, but its meaning is rather unclear to both eye and ear without further explanation.*

xxx *the first four words 'Always the one alone' need rephrasing: positioning of adverb, meaning of the one; both the denotative and connotative meaning of 'stir with his hands' seem inappropriate.*

Version 3

Often the solitary dweller awaits favor for himself, the mercy of the Lord, although he, anxious in spirit, has long been obliged to stir with his hands (i.e. row?) the ice-cold (lit. frost-cold) sea over the path of the waters, to travel the paths of exile. Fate is utterly inexorable (lit. resolute).

So spoke the wanderer, mindful of hardships, of cruel slaughters, of the death of beloved kinsmen:

+++ *some effective phrasing, in terms of both meaning and rhythm: 'anxious in spirit', 'the ice-cold...sea', 'the path of the waters', 'mindful of hardships'; the prose has rhythmic shape, and advances with a sense of purpose and direction.*

??? *the explanations in parentheses help to clarify meaning, but also interrupt the flow of reading; the repetition of 'path' reinforces the sea/exile conjunction, but seems to lack verbal energy.*

xxx *'awaits favor for himself' is loose, pompous, and unduly Latinate; 'has long been obliged to stir with his hands' is dreadful 'translationese', with inappropriate connotation (obliged), and clumsy periphrasis.*

Version 4

'Oft the lonely one
experiences compassion,
the Creator's kindness;
though he with sorrowing mind,
o'er the watery way,
must long
agitate with his hands
the rime-cold sea,
go in exile tracks;
his fate is full decreed.'
So said a wanderer,
of his hardships mindful,
of hostile slaughters,
his dear friends' fall.

+++ *some evocative phrasing: 'with sorrowing mind', 'the rime-cold sea', 'hostile slaughters'; a convincing sound-world is often evoked through alliteration: 'fate/full', 'hardships/hostile', 'friends'/fall'.*

INTRODUCTION

???

visual presentation of the text as a sequence of half-lines enhances a sense of verbal concentration, but also makes for some disjointedness, e.g. 'must long' as a single line; some inversions of natural word order (e.g. 'of his hardships mindful') are rather forced.

xxx

some diction is artificial or overly 'poetical' in effect: 'oft', 'the watery way', 'agitate with his hands'; the rhythm of the first two lines is unnecessarily ponderous and awkward.

As these notes indicate, none of the versions above is without merit, yet it is a merit that is not infrequently vitiated by verbal contrivance. My own translation of these lines reads:

The man who is alone often longs for mercy,
the mercy of his God, while with a heavy heart,
he churns his oars, and rows and rows
across the vastness of the ice-cold sea,
the road of exile. Fate is set fast.

A wanderer said this, hard griefs in his mind,
the slaughter of battle, the death of those close.

What is achieved here, I hope, is a marrying of sound and sense, rhythmic pulse and alliterative effects enhancing meaning, rather than eroding it.

These are, of course, only seven lines from the more than six hundred translated in this collection. But with each line, I have tried to capture a rhythmic energy, an urgency of sound, expressed in a contemporary English that is both intelligible and vigorous. Wherever the lines do not yet work, I hope the failure will seem rather less complete than in earlier versions. Wherever they succeed, though, I hope they will help to bridge a gap of over a thousand years, and bring this remarkable body of poetry to life once again.

Tim Chilcott
June 2012

CHRONOLOGY

The authors of all six poems in this translation are unknown, as are the monk scribes who first wrote out the texts in manuscript form. The chronology of composition, similarly, is highly speculative, with few certainties about dating.

8th century likely period of composition of *The Ruin*, which is probably based upon the ruins of Aquae Sulis, or modern-day Bath.

late 10th century *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Ruin* are transcribed into *The Exeter Book*, a miscellany of texts on both Christian and secular themes. A number of the texts, however, may have been composed considerably earlier. At roughly the same time, *The Dream of the Cross* is written out in *The Vercelli Book*, a collection of religious texts, some of which may also have been composed much earlier.

10/11 August 991 the battle of Maldon is fought, though there is considerable debate about when the poem itself was actually written. Some scholars argue for a dating close to the events it depicts (i.e. very late 10th or very early 11th centuries), others for a later dating in the 11th century.

1050 the newly installed Bishop of Exeter, Leofric, is recorded as having given to the then-impooverished monastery a 'mycel englisc boc be gehwilcum þingum on leodwisan geworht' ('a large English book of poetic works about all kinds of things'). This is widely assumed to be *The Exeter Book* as it survives today.

CHRONOLOGY

- 12th – 16th centuries a long period of almost entire obscurity, with few knowing of the existence of Anglo-Saxon literature, and still fewer able to read it, owing to the rapid changes in the English language after the Norman Conquest.
- circa* 1724 transcription made of *The Battle of Maldon* by either John Elphinstone, or David Casley, and published in 1726 by Thomas Hearne.
- 1731 the only known manuscript of *The Battle of Maldon* is destroyed in a fire at Ashburnham House, along with a number of other works in the library established by the Cotton family.
- 1822 having been lost since the 11th century, the Vercelli Book is discovered by Friedrich Blume in the Italian cathedral library whose name it bears. It could possibly have been taken there by a pilgrim heading for Rome.
- 1842 *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are first translated into ‘modern’ English by Benjamin Thorpe, a pioneering Anglo-Saxon scholar.
- 1911 publication of Ezra Pound’s celebrated version of *The Seafarer*, which mimics the alliterative style of the original.
- 1930s having been lost, the original transcription of *The Battle of Maldon* [see *circa* 1724 above] is discovered in the Bodleian Library.

THE WANDERER

Oft him anhaga are gebideð
metudes miltse þeah he modcearig
geond lagulade longe sceolde
hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ
wadan wræclastas. Wyrð bið ful aræd!

Swa cwæð eardstapa, earfeþa gemyndig,
wraþa wælsleahta, winemæga hryre:

10 ‘Oft ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce
mine ceare cwīpan. Nis nu cwicra nan
þe ic him modsefan minne durre
sweotule asecgan. Ic to soþe wat
þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þeaw,
þæt he his ferðlocan fæste binde,
healde his hordcofan, hycge swa he wille.
Ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan,
ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman.
Forðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
in hyra breostcofan bindað fæste;
20 swa ic modsefan minne sceolde,
oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
freomægum feor feterum sælan,
siþþan geara iu goldwine minne
hrusan heolstre biwrah, ond ic hean þonan
wod wintercearig ofer wraþema gebind,
sohte seledreorig sinces bryttan,
hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
þone þe in meoduhealle mine wisse,
oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
wenian mid wynnum. Wat se þe cunnað
30 hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan,
þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena.
Warað hine wræclast, nales wunden gold,
ferðloca freorig, nalæs foldan blæd.
Gemon he selescegas ond sincþege,
hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
wenede to wiste. Wyn eal gedreas!
Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes

THE WANDERER

The man who is alone often longs for mercy, **NOTE**
the mercy of his God, while with a heavy heart,
he churns his oars, and rows and rows
across the vastness of the ice-cold sea,
the road of exile. Fate is set fast.

A wanderer said this, hard griefs in his mind,
the slaughter of battle, the death of those close.

‘Often alone in the hour before daybreak, **NOTE**
I cry out in pain. There is no one now living
to whom I dare fully reveal
my heart’s deepest thoughts. I know very well
that the noble mark of a man
is keeping his feelings close to himself,
guarding his thoughts, think what he may.
A weary mind cannot fight Fate.
A troubled spirit cannot give help.
Those eager for glory often bury their sorrow
deep in their hearts, and lock it in there.
So have I also – often wretched and sorrowful,
cut off from country, far from my family –
had to chain up inside my innermost thoughts,
since that day long ago, when I buried my lord **NOTE**
in the darkness of earth. I went away wretched,
winter-worn, over the ice of the waves,
seeking some house – whether far or close by –
of a generous lord, in whose meadhall
I’d find someone to show me affection, **NOTE**
who’d want to give comfort to a man without friends,
and treat him with kindness. Whoever has borne it
knows how cruel a companion sorrow can be
to the man who has few loving friends.
The path of exile claims this frozen spirit,
not patterned gold or the wealth of the world.
He remembers retainers, the giving of treasure,
how when he was young, his lord would treat him
to feasting. That joy has now died.

leofes larcwidum longe forþolian:
 40 ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
 earmne anhogan oft gebindað.
 þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
 clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge
 honda ond heaford, swa he hwilum ær
 in geardagum giefstolas breac.

Donne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma,
 gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
 bapian brimfluglas, brædan feþra,
 hreosan hrim ond snaw hagle gemenged.
 50 þonne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
 sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwad
 þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð
 greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
 secga gesledan. Swimmað oft on weg.
 Fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
 cuðra cwidegiedda. Cearo bið geniwad
 þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe
 ofer waþema gebind werigne sefan.

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
 for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce,
 60 þonne ic eorla life eal geondþence,
 hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,
 modge maguþegnas. Swa þes middangeard
 ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleð;
 forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer, ær he age
 wintra dæl in woruldrice. Wita sceal geþyldig,
 ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hrædwyrde,
 ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig,
 ne to forht ne to fægen, ne to feohgifre
 ne næfre gielpes to georn, ær he geare cunne.
 70 Beorn sceal gebidan, þonne he beot spriceð
 oþþæt collenferð cunne gearwe
 hwider hreþra gehygd hweorfan wille.
 Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
 swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
 winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,
 hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.
 Worlað þa winsalo, waldend licgað
 dreame bidrorene, duguþ eal gecrong,

Whoever is forced to lose for a long time
 the counsels of his beloved lord, knows this:
 when sleep and sorrow work together
 and come to bind the poor man, quite alone,
 he dreams that he clasps and kisses his lord,
 and lays his hands and his head on his knees,
 getting gifts from the throne, **NOTE** as he did long ago.

Then the friendless man wakes up again,
 and sees before him barren waves,
 sea-birds bathing, preening their feathers,
 frost and snow falling, mingled with hail.
 The wounds in his heart are heavier still,
 mourning his lord. Grief comes again
 as memories of kinsmen sweep through his mind.
 He greets them with joy, feasting his eyes on
 his own companions. They melt away.
 The ghosts of sailors bring him little enough
 of human speech. Sadness returns
 to the man who sends his weary spirit
 only too often over the billowing waves.

And so, I cannot see why in the world
 my spirit should not darken
 when I think about the life of us all:
 how suddenly those brave young warriors
 have left the stage. **NOTE** So it is this world
 fails day after day, and falls to ruin.
 A man cannot grow wise until he's seen his share
 of winters in the world. A wise man must be patient,
 not too hot of heart, nor too quick with words,
 not too weak a warrior, nor too rash and wild,
 not too fearful, nor too hopeful, nor too greedy,
 nor too quick to boast, before he knows for certain.
 A man should wait before he makes a boast,
 until he has no doubt in his brave heart
 which way his mind's intent will lead.
 The wise man knows how dreadful it will be
 when all of this world's wealth lies wasted,
 as now, in different places on this earth,
 walls stand, blasted by the wind,
 hung with hoar-frost, buildings shaken by storm.
 The wine-halls crumble. Heart-broken lords
 lie dead, their proud troops

- 80 wlonc bi wealle. Sume wig fornóm,
 ferede in forðwege, sumne fugel oþbær
 ofer heanne holm, sumne se hara wulf
 deaðe gedælde, sumne dreorighleor
 in eorðscraefe eorl gehydde.
- Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend
 oþþæt burgwara breahtra lease
 eald enta geweorc idlu stodon.
 Se þonne þisne wealsteal wise geþohte
 ond þis deorce lif deope geondþenceð,
 90 frod in ferðe, feor oft gemon
 wælsleathe worn onþas word acwið:
 Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom
 maþþumgyfa?
 Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
 Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
 Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
 genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære.
- Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe
 weal wundrum heah, wýrmlicum fah.
 Eorlas fornoman asca þryþe,
 100 wæpen wælgifru, wýrd seo mære,
 ond þas stanhleoþu stormas cynssað,
 hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð,
 wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,
 nipeð nihtscua, norþan onsendeð
 hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.
 Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice,
 onwendeð wýrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
 Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
 her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,
 110 eal þis eoþan gesteal idel weorþeð!
- Swa cwæð snottor on mode, gesæt him sundor æt rune.
 Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ, ne sceal næfre his torn
 to rycene
 beorn of his breostum acyþan, nemþe he ær þa bote cunne,
 eorl mid elne gefremman. Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
 frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung
 stondeð.

- fallen by the wall. War took off some,
 and sent them on their way. One, a bird bore off
 across deep seas. One, a grey wolf
 shared with death. One, sad-faced,
 buried his lord inside an earthen cave.
- So man's Creator destroyed these dwellings,
 until all human sound was silenced,
 and the ancient work of giants stood desolate.
 Whoever gazes wisely on these walls,
 and ponders deeply on this life so dark,
 will in his wisdom think back often
 on the slaughter, and say these words:
 'Where are the horse and its rider now? Where the giver of gold?
 Where are the seats at the feast? Where the hall's revelry?
 Oh, that cup that gleamed! Oh, that brave warrior!
 Oh, the glory of princes! How time vanishes,
 dark beneath the helmet of night, as though it never had been.
- Where loved companions once stood, there now stands
 a towering wall, all mottled like a snake. **NOTE**
 A torrent of spears, greedy for slaughter,
 took off the fighters, a glorious Fate.
 Storms crash against these cliffs of stone,
 and falling snow now chains the earth
 as winter howls. Then darkness falls;
 night's shadow deepens and sends down from the north
 its stinging hail to harrow men.
 All is hardship in the realm of earth.
 Fate's course changes the whole world under heaven.
 Here, wealth is soon gone, friends are soon gone,
 man is soon gone, kinship soon gone.
 All this earth's framework will lie desolate.'
- So the wise man spoke his mind, as he sat apart in thought.
 Good is he who keeps his faith. A warrior must never speak
 too quickly of his heart's grief until he knows its remedy,
 and how he can achieve it bravely. Happy the man who seeks forgiveness,
 the Heavenly Father's solace, our fortress and our strength.

THE SEAFARER

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
 siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
 earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
 bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
 gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,
 atol yþa gewealc, þær mec oft bigeat
 nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,
 þonne he be clifum cnossað. Calde geþrunge
 wæron mine fet, forste gebunden
 10 caldum clommum, þær þa ceare seofedun
 hat ymb heortan; hungor innan slat
 merewerges mod. þæt se mon ne wat
 þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
 hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
 winter wunade wræccan lastum,
 winemægum bidroren,
 bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.
 þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ
 iscaldne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song
 20 dyde ic me to gomene, ganotes hleoþor
 ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor weras,
 mæw singende fore medodrince.
 Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð,
 isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal,
 urigfeþra; nænig hlromæga
 feasceaftig ferð frefran meahte.

Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
 gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,
 wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft
 30 in brimlade bidan sceolde.
 Naþ nihtscua, norþan sniwede.
 hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
 corna caldast. Forþon cnyssað nu
 heortan gepohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
 sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige;

THE SEAFARER

This tale I tell is mine, and it is true. It tells
 of journeying, how often I endured
 the harshest times, day after day in toil,
 and how I suffered sharpest sorrow in my heart,
 and found so many homes of sadness in my ship.
 The waves surged wildly, as I took
 the anxious night-watch, standing at the prow
 as we pitched close to the cliffs. My feet were frozen
 with the cold, chain-clamped by the clasp
 of frost. So much fierce anguish
 burned hot about my heart, a hunger from within
 tore at my mind, weary of the sea. But men who live
 a prosperous life on land cannot begin to understand
 how wretchedly I spent whole winters,
 an exile, alone, cut off from kinsmen,
 on the ice-cold sea...
 Icicles hung down on me midst flying showers of hail.
 I could hear nothing but the roaring sea,
 the freezing waves. At times, the wild swan's song,
 the gannet's cry, would gladden me –
 the curlew's call instead of laughing men,
 the screeching gulls instead of drinking mead.
 Storms smashed against the rocky cliffs, answered
 by icy-feathered terns and dewy-feathered eagles
 screaming back. No kinsman could
 give comfort to such a helpless soul.

The man who's led a joyous life in cities,
 flushed proud with wine, the risks of travel far away,
 will never know the things, in my weariness,
 that I have had to go through on the ocean's paths.
 Night's shadows deepened; snow fell from the north.
 Frost bound fast the ground; hail fell on the earth,
 like coldest grain. But thoughts come now
 pounding in my heart: of fighting once again
 the salt waves surging and the towering sea.
 The yearnings of my heart keep urging me

monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan.

- 40 Ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geogube to þæs hwæt,
ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten
to þæs hold,
þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe,
to hwon hine Dryhten gedon wille.
Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege,
ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht,
ne ymbe owiht elles, nefne ymb yða gewealc;
ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað.

- 50 Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð:
ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
on flodwegas feor gewitan.
Swylce geac monað geomran reorde;
singeð sumeres weard, sorge beodeð
bitter in breosthord. þæt se beorn ne wat,
sefteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.

- 60 Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflode,
ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig; gielleð anfloga,
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu.

- 70 Forþon me hatran sind
Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif
læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.
Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce
ær his tiddege to tweon weorþeð;
adl oþþe ylde oþþe ecghete
fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.
Forþon biþ eorla gehwam æftercweþendra
lof lifgendra lastworda betst,
þæt he gewyrce, ær he on weg scyle,

to set out on a journey, to seek the country
of a foreign people, far across the sea.

No man on earth can be so self-assured,
so thoroughly equipped, **NOTE** so daring in youth,
so brave in his deeds, so dear to his lord,
that he feels no fear, as he sets sail,
about what his God will do to him.
Not for him the sound of harps, or giving of rings,
or pleasure in women, or worldly glory –
not any thing at all but that heaving of the sea.
The man who fights against the waves is always yearning.

Groves burst with blossom, cities grow fair,
fields become lovely, the world appears new.
All of this spurs on the man whose mind and soul
want to keep on travelling, who longs
to steer a course far, far across the sea.
The cuckoo, harbinger of summertime,
calls him in its mournful voice, and bitterly foretells
some sorrow for the soul. Prosperous men
can't know what hardship is endured by those
who tread the paths of exile, to the ends of the earth.

But now my soul breaks from my body's breast.
It flows out to the waters,
above the whale's wide home. It soars and soars
to all the corners of the earth, comes back to me
eager and unsatisfied. A lone bird screams,
urging my willing heart on to the whale-roads,
on to the waves of the sea.

And so it is the joys
of the Lord give greater warmth than this death in life,
this fleeting time on earth. I have no faith
the riches of this world will last for ever.
Always, without fail, one of three things
will threaten men before their final hour:
sickness, or old age, or violence by the sword **NOTE**
will tear out the life of those who're doomed to die.
And so for every man, it is the praise of the living,
of those who speak afterwards, that is the best epitaph.
Today he must work before he has to go,

fremum on foldan wið feonda niþ,
 deorum dædum deofle togeanes,
 þæt hine ælda bearn æfter hergen,
 ond his lof siþþan lifge mid englum
 awa to ealdre, ecan lifes blæd,
 dream mid dugeþum.

80

Dagas sind gewitene,
 ealle onmedlan eorþan rices;
 næron nu cyningas ne caseras
 ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,
 þonne hi mæst mid him mærp̃a gefremedon
 ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.
 Gedroren is þeos duguð eal, dreamas sind gewitene;
 wuniað þa wacran ond þæs woruld healdap̃,
 brucað þurh bisgo. Blæd is gehnæged,
 eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,
 swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.
 Yldo him on fareð, onsyn blacað,
 gomelfeax gnornað, wat his iuwine,
 æþelinga bearn eorþan forgiefene.
 Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma, þonne him þæt
 feorg losað,
 ne swete forswelgan ne sar gefelan,
 ne hond onhreran ne mid hyge þencan.
 þeah þe græf wille golde stregan
 broþor his begorenum, byrgan be deadum
 maþmum mislicum, þæt hine mid wille,
 ne mæg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful
 gold to geoce for godes eg-san,
 þonne he hit ær hydeð þenden he her leofað.

90

100

Micel biþ se Meotudes eg-sa, forþon hi seo molde
 oncyrræð;
 se gestapelade stiþe grundas,
 eorþan sceatas ond uprodor.
 Dol biþ se þe him his Dryhten ne ondrædeþ: cymeð
 him se deað unþinged.
 Eadig bið se þe eaþmod leofaþ; cymeð him se ar
 of heofonum.
 Meotod him þæt mod gestapelað, forþon he in his
 meahte gelyfeð.
 Stieran mon sceal strongum mode, ond þæt on
 stapelum healden,

be brave in the world against the devil's enmity,
 do daring deeds against the fiend,
 so that men's children will praise him afterwards,
 and his fame endure amid the angels
 for ever and for ever, the glory of eternal life
 among the heavenly host.

The days are gone
 when kingdoms of the earth were glorious.
 There are no kings, no Caesars now,
 no givers of gold, as once there were.
 The greatest used to do most glorious deeds,
 and used to live in lordly majesty.
 That chivalry is gone, the revels now are ended.
 Weaklings survive, in their hands the world,
 and hold it with their sweat. Glory is fled,
 the earth's nobility grows dry and old,
 as all men do throughout this middle-world.
 Old age creeps up on him, his face grows pale.
 Grey-haired, he mourns. He knows that former friends,
 the sons of princes, have been buried in the earth.
 And then his body fails as life now slips away.
 Sweetness he cannot taste, and he can feel no pain.
 He cannot lift his hand, cannot think now with his mind.
 A man may bury his brother with the dead
 and strew upon his grave the things of gold
 and treasures of all kinds. And yet there is no point.
 He may hoard his gold while yet he is alive,
 but no soul now weighed down with sin
 can use the gold before the wrath of God.

Great is the power of God; through him, the whole world turns **NOTE**
 He made the firm foundations,
 the broad face of the earth, the heavens high above.
 Foolish the man who does not fear his God: death will find him unprepared.
 Blessed the man who lives a humble life: he will find mercy in Heaven.
 God gave that spirit to him, since he trusts in all His power.
 A man must steer his passions, and keep them in their place.

110 ond gewis werum, wisum clæne.
 Scyle monna gehwylc mid gemete healden
 wiþ leofne ond wið laþne [? ? ?] bealo.
 þeah þe he hine wille fyres fulne
 oþþe on bæle forbærnedne
 his geworhtne wine, Wyrð biþ swiþre,
 Meotud meahtigra, þonne ænges monnes gehygd.
 Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
 ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen;
 ond we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten
 120 in þa ecan eadignesse,
 þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes,
 hyht in heofonum. þæs sy þam Halgan þonc
 þæt he usic geweorþade, wuldres Ealdor
 ece Dryhten, in ealle tid. Amen.

He must keep faith with men, his wisdom must be pure.
 He must be even-handed
 with his foes, as well as friends. **NOTE**
 He may not wish to see his cherished friend
 engulfed in foulest flames, or burning
 on a pyre. But Fate is stronger,
 God is mightier, than the thought of any man.
 Let us think where we might find a home,
 and then think how to reach it.
 All of us should work to go inside
 that everlasting blessedness
 that is a life belonging to the love of God,
 the bliss of heaven. Thanks be to God
 who loved us so, the Prince of Glory,
 Eternal Lord until the end of time. Amen.

THE WIFE'S LAMENT

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,
minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,
hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox,
niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.
A ic wite wonn minra wræsipa.

10 ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
hwær min leodfruma londes wære.
ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,
wineleas wræcca, for minre weapbearfe.
Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan
þurh dyrne geþoht, þæt hy todælden unc,
þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice
lifdon laðlicost, ond mec longade.

20 Het mec hlaford min herheard niman,
ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede,
holdra freonda. Forþon is min hyge geomor,
ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde,
heardsæligne, hygegeomorne,
mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne.
Bliþe gebæro ful oft wit beotedan
þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana
owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
is nu swa hit no wære
freondscipe uncer. Sceal ic feor ge neah
mines felaleofan fæhðu dreogan.

30 Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,
under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.
Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad,
sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,
bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne,
wic wynna leas. Ful oft mec her wraþe begeat
fromsiþ frean. Frynd sind on eorþan,
leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,
þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge

THE WIFE'S LAMENT

I tell this story, full of grief,
about myself, about my fate. I tell
what hardships I have borne as I grew up –
new ones and old – but never worse than now.
Exile has brought me unremitting pain.

First, my husband left, abandoning his people
for the tumbling waves. At every dawn, I grieved
where in the world my lord might be.
I set out on my journey like a refugee,
friendless, seeking protection in my grievous need.
But my husband's kinsmen had laid secret plans
and schemed our separation, to keep us
as far apart as could be in the world,
and make us wretched. My heart yearned for him.

My lord had ordered me to make my home within this place, **NOTE**
though in this country I had few dear,
loyal friends; and so I mourned.
And then I found that my matched man
was one ill-starred, and filled with grief,
concealing what he felt, with murder in his thoughts.
Smiling at each other, we'd often vowed
that only death could make us part,
and nothing else. All that has changed.
It is as if our love **NOTE**
has never been. And near or far,
I must endure my dearest husband's hate.

They've made me live within a forest grove,
beneath an oak-tree, in an earthen cave.
The cave is old; and all I do is yearn.
The dales are dark, with hills high up above.
Sharp hedge surrounds it, overgrown with briars.
It is a joyless place. Here I am often gripped
by my lord's going. There are dear friends
and lovers lying in their beds,
while I at daybreak walk alone

under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
 þær ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg,
 þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsipa,
 earfoða fela; forþon ic æfre ne mæg
 40 þære modceare minre gerestan,
 ne ealles þæs longapes þe mec on þissum life begeat.

A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
 heard heortan gepoht, swylce habban sceal
 bliþe gebæro, eac þon breostceare,
 sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong
 eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
 feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð
 under stanhlife storme behrimed,
 wine werigmod, wætre befloweren
 50 on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
 micle modceare; he gemon to oft
 wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
 of langope leofes abidan.

beneath the oak-tree, round this earthen cave.
 Here I must sit the whole of summer long;
 here I must mourn my exile's misery,
 my many troubles. For never can I
 set at rest the grieving of my heart,
 nor all the longing that has seized my life.

That young man **NOTE** should be serious of mind,
 steadfast in the thinking of his heart; he should look
 cheerful, even though his heart may ache
 with many, many griefs. He must depend upon himself
 for all his worldly joy. And let this friend be exiled
 to a distant land, where he may sit
 beneath stone cliffs, frozen by the storms,
 weary in his mind, in some desolate place
 surrounded by the sea. My friend will suffer
 great grief. Only too often will he recall
 a happier place. Oh what a cost
 to bear this longing for one so loved.

THE RUIN

Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon;
 burgstede burston, broснаð enta geweorc.
 Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,
 Hrungeat berofen, hrim on lime,
 scarede scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene,
 ældo undereotone. Eorðgrap hafað
 waldend wyrhtan, forweorone, geleorene,
 heardgripe hrusan, oþ hund cnea
 weþeoda gewitan. Oft þæs wag gebad
 10 ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum,
 ofstonden under sternum; steap geap gedreas.
 Wonað giet se ...num geheapen,
 fel on grimme gegrunden
 scan heo... ...g orþonc ærsceaft
 ...g lamrindum beag

 Mod mo... ...yne swiftne gebrægd
 hwætred in hringas, hygerof gebond
 20 weallwalan wirum wundrum togædre.
 Beorht wæron burgræced, burnsele monige
 heah horngestreon, heresweg micel,
 meodoheall monig dreama full,
 oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe.

 Crungon walo wide, cwoman woldagas,
 swylt eall fornom secgrofra wera;
 wurdon hyra wigsteal, westen stapolas,
 brosnade burgsteall. Betend crungon
 hergas to hrusan. Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,
 30 ond þæs teaforgeapa tigelum sceaðeð
 hrostbeages hrof. Hryre wong gecrong
 gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig glædmod ond
 gold beorht gleoma gefrætwed,
 wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;
 seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
 on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
 on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices.
 Stanhofu stoda, stream hate wearp

THE RUIN

How wonderful this wall of stone, smashed down by fate.
 Battlements broken, the work of giants decayed.
 Roofs have collapsed, towers tumbled down,
 barred gates have broken, frost in the mortar.
 Ceilings have split apart, torn down and ruined,
 undermined by age. Earth's grip grasps them –
 those mighty builders, dead and perished now –
 the fierce grip of the grave, a hundred generations
 passed away. This wall, grey with lichen,
 stained with red, saw many kingdoms rise and fall,
 surviving wind and storm. Its high arch has collapsed,
 and yet this wall of stone still stands, hacked at by weapons,
 by files grim-ground ...
 ... the old skilled work still shines ...
 ... sunk to crusts of loam ...

Mood quickened mind; and masons, skilled in
 round-building, **NOTE** bound the wall's base
 wonderfully together with braces of iron.
 Bright were the buildings, bath-houses all over,
 high gables on houses, trumpets blaring away, **NOTE**
 so many mead-halls full of merriment –
 till the might of fate changed all of it utterly.

Plague-stricken days killed everywhere,
 and death took away the flower of the people.
 The bulwarks were broken, becoming waste places.
 The city decayed, and those to rebuild it
 lay dead in the earth. So these halls are empty,
 and the red-curved roof has shed the tiles
 from the ceiling vault. Decay has brought it down,
 broken it to rubble. Once, many a warrior,
 high of heart, gold-bright, gleaming in splendour,
 proud and wine-flushed, shining in armour,
 gazed at treasure, at silver, at precious gems,
 at riches and wealth and jewels of great worth,
 in that radiant city whose kingdom was wide.
 Stone courtyards once stood there, hot streams gushed forth

[40] widan wylme; weal eall befeng
 beorhtan bosme, þær þa baþu wæron,
 hat on hreþre; þæt wæs hyðelic.
 Leton þonne geotan...
 ofer harne stan hate streamas
 un... ...þæt hringmere hate
 þær þa baþu wæron.
 þonne is
 ...re; þæt is cynelic þing,
 huse Burg

wide sprays of water, enclosed by a wall
 round their heart. There, the baths were,
 hot in the middle, as was fitting ...
 Hot streams ran over the clear grey stone
 and into the round pool ...
 ... where the hot bath was ...
 ... there is ...
 ... that is a noble thing ...
 ... house ... city ...

THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

Hwæt! Ic swefna cyst secgan wylle,
Hwæt me gemætte to midre nihte,
syðþan reordberend reste wunedon.
þuhte me þæt ic gesawe syllicre treow
on lyft lædan, leohte bewunden,
beama beorhtost. Eall þæt beacen wæs
begoten mid golde. Gimmas stondon
fægere æt foldan sceatum, swylce þær fife wæron
uppe on þam eaxlegespanne. Beheoldon þær engel
10 dryhtnes ealle,
fægere þurh forðgesceaft. Ne wæs ðær huru fracodes gealga,
ac hine þær beheoldon halige gastas,
men ofer moldan, ond eall þeos mære gesceaft.

Syllic wæs se sigebeam, ond ic synnum fah,
forwunded mid wommum. Geseah ic wuldres treow,
wædum geweorðode, wynnum scinan,
gegyred mid golde; gimmas hæfdon
bewrigene weorðlice wealdendes treow.
Hwæðre ic þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte
20 earmra ærgewin, þæt hit ærest ongan
swætan on þa swiðran healfe. Eall ic wæs mid sorgum
gedrefed,
forht ic wæs for þære fæggran gesyhðe. Geseah ic þæt fuse
beacen wendan wædum ond bleom; hwilum hit wæs mid
wætan bestemed,
beswyled mid swates gange, hwilum mid since gegyrwed.
Hwæðre ic þær licgende lange hwile
beheold hreowcearig hælendes treow,
oððæt ic gehyrde þæt hit hleoðrode.
Ongan þa word specan wudu selesta:

þæt wæs geara iu, (ic þæt gyta geman),
30 þæt ic wæs aheawen holtas on ende,
astyred of stefne minum. Genaman me ðær strange feondas,
geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me heora wergas
hebban.
Bæron me ðær beornas on eaxlum, oððæt hie me on beorg
asetton,

THE DREAM OF THE CROSS

Listen! Let me tell you the most marvellous dream
that came to me in the middle of the night,
while people, far and wide, were fast asleep.
I thought I saw a wondrous tree
uplifted in the air, laden with light,
the wood so radiantly bright. All of that beacon
was covered in gold. Five precious jewels
were studded on the cross-beam; **NOTE** and gems gleamed out
around it on the earth. **NOTE** God's angels all watched over it,
made beautiful in his plan. **NOTE** This was no criminal's cross,
and holy spirits gazed at it there,
with men throughout the world of this glorious creation.

Wondrous, that tree of triumph – yet I was stained with sin,
wounded with wickedness. I saw the radiant tree,
dressed in such splendour, shining in such joy,
adorned with gold and gems that covered
all so splendidly the Lord's own tree.
But through the gold I still could see
those wretched age-old strifes as, on its right side,
it began to bleed. Racked with sorrow,
I was frightened at the sight. I saw that deathly beacon
change its covering and colour, sometimes clothed in jewels,
and sometimes soaked in moisture, drenched by cursing blood.
So I lay there for a long, long while,
gazing in sorrow at the Saviour's tree,
until I heard it utter sounds.
The very best of trees began to speak:

'All of it was long ago, and yet I still remember it.
At the forest's edge, they cut me down,
and ripped me from my roots. Strong enemies seized me,
made me a spectacle, made me lift up high their criminals.

gefþæstnodon me þær feondas genoge. Geseah ic þa frean
 mancynnes
 efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on gestigan.
 þær ic þa ne dorste ofer dryhtnes word
 bugan oððe berstan, þa ic bifian geseah
 eorðan sceatas. Elle ic mihte
 feondas gefyllan, hwæðre ic fæste stod.
 40 On gyrede hine þa geong hæleð, (þæt wæs god ælmihtig),
 strang ond stiðmod. Gestah he on gealgan heanne,
 modig on manigra gesyhðe, þa he wolde mancyn lysan.
 Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte. Ne dorste ic hwæðre
 bugan to eorðan,
 feallan to foldan sceatum, ac ic sceolde fæste standan.
 Rod wæs ic aræred. Ahof ic ricne cyning,
 Heofona hlaford, hyldan me ne dorste.
 þurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan næglum. On me syndon þa
 dolg gesiene,
 opene inwidhlemmas. Ne dorste ic hira nænigum sceoððan.
 Bysmeredon hie unc butu ætgædere. Eall ic wæs mid blode
 bestemed,
 50 begoten of þæs guman sidan, siððan he hæfde his gast
 onsended.

 Feala ic on þam beorge gebiden hæbbe
 wraðra wyrda. Geseah ic weruda god
 þearle þenian. þystro hæfdon
 bewrigen mid wolcnum wealdendes hræw,
 scirne scirman, sceadu forðeode,
 wann under wolcnum. Weop eal gesceaft,
 cwiðdon cyninges fuse feorran cwoman
 to þam ædelinge. Ic þæt eall beheold.
 Sare ic wæs mid sorgum gefrefed, hnag ic hwæðre þam
 secgum to handa,
 60 eaðmod elne mycle. Genamon hie þær ælmihtigne god,
 ahofon hine of ðam hefian wite. Forleton me þa hilderincas
 standan steame bedrifenne; eall ic wæs mid strælum
 forwundod.
 Aledon hie ðær limwerigne, gestondon him æt his lices
 heafdum,
 beheoldon hie ðær heofenes dryhten, ond he hine ðær hwile
 reste,
 meðe æfter ðam mician gewinne. Ongunnon him þa moldern
 wyrcan
 beornas on bana gesyhðe; curfon hie ðæt of beorhtan stane,

On their shoulders, men carried me, till I was set up on a hill
 and held there fast by many enemies. I saw the Lord of all mankind
 run forward bravely to climb on me.
 I dared not go against the word of God
 and bend or break, not even though I saw the earth
 begin to tremble. I could have struck down
 every enemy, but I stood fast.
 The young man – who was almighty God – took off his clothes.
 Strong and resolute, he got up on the gallows
 bravely, beheld by many, to free mankind.
 I trembled as he held me tight, and yet I did not dare fall down.
 I was raised up as a cross, carrying a mighty King,
 the lord of heaven. I dared not bend.
 They drove dark nails in me; the scars can still be seen,
 clear wounds of malice. And yet I did not dare retaliate.
 They mocked us both together; I was all drenched in blood,
 which poured out from his side, when he had given up his life.

Up on that hillside, I had to live through
 such cruel, foul deeds. I saw the Lord of Hosts
 stretched out on the rack. Darkness had
 shrouded his kingly corpse with clouds.
 Shadows swallowed the shining light,
 dark under the heavens. All creatures wept,
 mourning the death of their king, Christ on the cross.
 But then friends came from afar
 to the prince. I saw it all.
 I was so pierced with pain; yet humble and eager,
 I bowed to their hands. They took almighty God
 and lifted him from off his torture. They left me
 standing wet and wounded badly by the sharpness of the spears.
 They laid him down, limb-weary, and stood there by his head,
 gazing at the lord of heaven. He rested there a while,

gesetton hie ðæron sigora wealdend. Ongunnon him þa
 sorhleod galan
 earme on þa æfentide, þa hie woldon eft siðian,
 meðe fram þam mæran þeodne. Reste he ðær mæte weorode
 70 Hwæðere we ðær gretende gode hwile
 stondon on staðole, syððan stefn up gewat
 hilderinca. Hræw colode,
 fæger feorgbold. þa us man fyllan ongan
 ealle to eorðan. þæt wæs egeslic wyrd!
 Bedealf us man on deoþan seape. Hwæðre me þær dryhtnes
 þegnas, freondas gefrunon,
 ond gyredon me golde ond seolfre.

Nu ðu miht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa,
 þæt ic bealuwara weorc gebiden hæbbe,
 80 sarra sorga. Is nu sæl cumen
 þæt me weorðiað wide ond side
 menn ofer moldan, ond eall þeos mære gesceaft,
 gebiddaþ him to þyssum beacne. On me bearn godes
 þrowode hwile. Forþan ic þrymfæst nu
 hlifige under heofenum, ond ic hælan mæg
 æghwylcne anra, þara þe him bið egesa to me.
 Iu ic wæs geworden wita heardost,
 leodum laðost, æþan ic him lifes weg
 rihtne gerymda, reordberendum.
 90 Hwæt, þa geweorðode wuldres ealdor
 ofer holmwudu, heofonrices weard!
 Swylce swa he his modor eac, Marian sylfe,
 ælmihtig god for ealle menn
 geweorðode ofer eall wifa cynn.
 Nu ic þe hate, hæleð min se leofa,
 þæt ðu þas gesyhðe secge mannum,
 onwreoh wordum þæt hit is wuldres beam,
 se ðe ælmihtig god on þrowode
 for mancynnes manegum synnum
 100 ond Adomes ealdgewyrhtum.
 Deað he þær byrigde, hwæðere eft dryhten aras
 Mid his mician mihte mannum to helpe.
 He ða on heofenas astag. Hider eft fundað
 on þysne middangeard mancynn secan
 on domdæge dryhten sylfa,
 ælmihtig god, ond his englas mid,
 þæt he þonne wile deman, se ah domes geweald,
 anra gehwylcum swa he him ærur her
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exhausted from his struggle. Then they began to build a tomb,
 carving it from brightest stone, within his killers' sight.
 They placed the mighty Lord inside, and began to sing in sorrow,
 sad in the dying light. Then they went away in wretchedness
 from their glorious prince. As he lay, few stayed with him.
 We crosses were a long time weeping there,
 standing in our places, after our warrior's voice
 fell still. The corpse – that lovely body –
 grew all cold. Then men began
 to cut us down. That was an awful fate!
 They threw us in a deep, deep pit. But servants
 of the Lord, his friends, found us all there,
 and dressed me in silver and in gold.

And so, dear friend, you have heard me tell
 how I have suffered such awful pain
 from the deeds of evil men. The time has come
 when I am now honoured far and wide.
 Throughout this wondrous creation, men on earth
 now pray to this sign. On me, God's son
 once suffered, and so now I am worshipped,
 high under heaven. I have the power to heal
 all those who will revere my name.
 In days gone by, I was the cruellest punishment,
 loathed by all people, until I opened up
 for them the righteous way to live.
 Listen! I now am honoured by the prince of glory,
 Heaven's guardian, before all other trees –
 just as almighty God
 honours his mother, Mary herself,
 before all other women in the world.
 Now, dear friend, I command you
 to speak this vision to the world,
 describe in words this is the wondrous tree
 on which almighty God was tortured so,
 for mankind's many sins,
 and the deeds of Adam long ago.
 He tasted death, yet in his mighty power,
 he rose again to help mankind.
 Then he ascended into heaven. He will come down
 to middle-earth again, and seek mankind

110 on þysson lænum life gearnaþ.
 Ne mæg þær ænig unforht wasan
 for þam worde þe se wealdend cwyð.
 Frined he for þære mænige hwær se man sie,
 se ðe for dryhtnes naman deaðes wolde
 biteres onbyrgan, swa he ær on ðam beame dyde.
 Ac hie þonne forhtiað, ond fea þencaþ
 hwæt hie to Criste cweðen onginnen.
 Ne þearf ðær þonne ænig anforht wasan
 þe him ær in breostum bereð beacna selest,
 120 ac ðurh ða rode sceal rice gesecan
 of eorðwege æghwylc sawl,
 seo þe mid wealdende wunian þenceð.’

Gebæd ic me þa to þan beame bliðe mode,
 elne mycle, þær ic ana wæs
 mæte werede. Wæs modsefa
 afysed on forðwege, feaka ealre gebad
 langunghwila. Is me nu lifes hyht
 þæt ic þone sigbeam secan mote
 ana oftor þonne ealle men,
 well weorþian. Me is willa to ðam
 130 mycel on mode, ond min mundbyrd is
 geriht to þære rode. Nah ic ricra feala
 freonda on foldan, ac hie forð heonon
 gewiton of worulde dreamum, sohton him wuldres cyning,
 lifiaþ nu on heofenum mid heahfædere,
 wuniaþ on wuldre, ond ic wene me
 daga gehwylce hwænne me dryhtnes rod,
 þe ic her on eorðan ær sceawode,
 on þysson lænan life gefetige
 ond me þonne gebringe þær is blis mycel,
 140 dream on heofonum, þær is dryhtnes folc
 eseted to symle, þær is singal blis,
 ond me þonne asette þær ic syþþan mot
 wunian on wuldre, well mid þam halgum
 dreames brucan. Si me dryhten freond,
 se ðe her on eorþan ær þrowode

on Judgment Day – the Lord himself,
 almighty God, and all his angels.
 He who has the power to judge will then judge
 each and every one, and what they have
 deserved as they lived this fleeting life.
 No-one will be fearless of
 what the Lord will say.
 He will ask the crowd if anyone
 will dare, in the Lord’s name, to taste
 the bitterness of death, as he did on the cross.
 Then, they will be afraid, and few will know
 what they might say to Christ in answer.
 But no-one there need be afraid
 if they bear this best of beacons in their hearts.
 Every spirit on its earthly journey
 who wants to be with God
 comes to that kingdom through the cross.’

I prayed then to the cross with joyous heart,
 all eagerly. I was there alone,
 with little company. I was keen
 to start my journey. Too many days
 have I spent longing. My life’s hope now
 is to seek that tree of triumph,
 more frequently than any other man,
 and worship it. My heart is set on doing that
 far more than anything. I will be protected
 by the cross. I have not had
 many close friends on this earth; and they’ve now gone
 from this world’s joys to find the King of Glory.
 They’re now in Heaven with God the Father,
 in everlasting splendour. And every day I yearn
 for that time when the cross of God,
 which I once gazed at here on earth,
 will fetch me from this fleeting life,
 and take me where there is great joy
 and happiness in heaven, where God’s people
 are seated at the feast in everlasting bliss.
 He will set me in a place where, afterwards,
 I’ll live in glory, with lasting bliss
 among the saints. May the Lord be my friend,
 who here on earth once suffered

on þam gealgtreowe for guman synnum.
 He us onlȳsde ond us lif forgeaf,
 leofonlicne ham. Hiht wæs geniwad
 mid bledum ond mid blisse þam þe þær brine þolodan.
 150 Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þam siðfate,
 mihtig ond spedig, þa he mid manigeo com,
 gasta weorode, on godes rice,
 anwealda ælmihtig, englum to blisse
 ond eallum ðam halgum þam þe on heofonum ær
 wunedon on wuldre, þa heora wealdend cwom,
 ælmihtig god, þær his eðel wæs.

for the sins of men upon that gallows-tree.
 He set us free, and gave us life,
 a heavenly home. With glory and with bliss,
 hope was renewed for those who faced the flames.
 Triumphant was the Son upon that quest,
 mighty and swift. And when he brought
 a host of souls into the kingdom of God,
 the Almighty Ruler, the angels and all the saints
 who already lived in glory, rejoiced.
 Their Lord had come,
 the King of Heaven, to where his true home was.

THE BATTLE OF MALDON

...brocen wurde.

Het þa hyssa hwæne hors forlætan,
feor afysan, and forð gangan,
hicgan to handum and to hige godum.
þa þæt Offan mæg ærest onfunde,
þæt se eorl nolde yrhðo geþolian,
he let him þa of handon leofne fleogan
hafoc wið þæs holtas, and to þære hilde stop;
10 be þam man mihte oncnawan þæt se cniht nolde
wacian æt þam wige þa he to wæpnum feng.
Eac him wolde Eadric his ealdre gelæstan,
freat to gefeohte, ongan þa forð beran
gar to guþe. He hæfde god geþanc
þa hwile þe he mid handum healdan mihte
bord and bradswurd; beot he gelæste
þa he ætforan his frean feohtan sceolde.

ða þær Byrhtnoð ongan beornas trymian,
rad and rædde, rincum tæhte
20 hu hi sceoldon standan and þone stede healdan,
and bæd þæt hyra randas rihte heoldon
fæste mid folman, and ne forhtedon na.
þa he hæfde þæt folc fægere getrymmed,
he lihte þa mid leodon þær him leofost wæs,
þær he his heorðwerod holdost wiste.

þa stod on stæðe, stiðlice clypode
wicinga ar, wordum mælde,
se on beot abead brimlipendra
æraende to þam eorle, þær he on ofre stod:

30 'Me sendon to þe sæmen snelle,
heton ðe secgan þæt þu most sendan raðe
beagas wið gebeorge; and eow betere is
þæt ge þisne garræs mid gafole forgyldon,
þon we swa hearde hilde dælon.
Ne þurfe we us spillan, gif ge spedaþ to þam;
we willað wið þam golde grið fæstnian.
Gyf þu þat gerædest, þe her ricost eart,

THE BATTLE OF MALDON

...would be broken.

Then he ordered each warrior to let his horse go,
drive it far off, and then march on forward,
thinking of hands that were strong, and hearts that were brave.
When Offa's kinsman realised that
the earl would not brook any weakness of spirit,
he loosed from his wrist his much loved hawk
back into the forest, and stepped up for battle.
And everyone knew that this was a youth
who wouldn't weaken in war, when he took up his weapons.
Eadric also wanted to serve his master,
his lord in the fight. Forward he carried
his spear into battle. His spirit was soaring
while he could hold in his hands
a shield and a broad sword. He made good his boast
when in front of his lord, he came up to fight.

Then Bryhtnoth began to arrange his men.
He rode all around, taught each man his task,
where he should stand, and how hold position,
said how they should grasp their round-shields aright,
firm in their hands, without any fear.
When all of his army was properly stationed,
he got off his horse among those who were dearest,
the troops of his house, whom he knew wholly loyal.

Then there on the shore, stridently calling,
stood a Viking messenger, whose menacing voice
spoke the sea-farers' message to the earl on the bank.

'To you, brave seamen have sent me
and told me to tell you that you should send quickly
wealth for your safety. Better for you
that you buy off this spear-rush by paying us tribute
than we share in so bitter a fight.
No need to slaughter each other if you will agree.
For your gold, we will give you a truce.
If you will decide – the chief of you here –

40 þæt þu þine leoda lysan wille,
 syllan sæmannum on hyra sylfra dom
 feoh wið freode, and niman frið æt us,
 we willaþ mid þam sceattum us to scype gangan,
 on flot feran, and eow friþes healdan.’

 Byrhtnoð maþelode, bord hafenode,
 wand wacne æsc, wordum mælde,
 yrre and anræd ageaf him andsware:

 ‘Gehyrst þu, sælida, hwæt þis folc segeð?
 Hi willað eow to gafole garas syllan,
 ættrynne ord and ealde swurd,
 þa heregeatu þe eow æt hilde ne deah.
 Brimmanna boda, abeod eft ongean,
 50 sege þinum leodum miccle laþre spell,
 þæt her stynt unforcuð eorl mid his werode,
 þe wile gealgean eþel þysne,
 æþelredes eard, ealdres mines,
 folc and foldan. Feallan sceolon
 hæþene æt hilde. To heanlic me þinceð
 þæt ge mid urum sceattum to scype gangon
 unbefohtene, nu ge þus feor hider
 on urne eard in becomon.
 Ne sceole ge swa softe sinc gegangan;
 60 us sceal ord and ecg ær geseman,
 grim guðplega, ær we gofol syllon.’

 Het þa bord beran, beornas gangan,
 þæt hi on þam easteðe ealle stodon.
 Ne mihte þær for wætere werod to þam oðrum;
 þær com flowende flod æfter ebban,
 lucon lagustreamas. To lang hit him þuhte,
 hwænne hi togædere garas beron.
 Hi þær Pantan stream mid prasse bestodon,
 Eastseaxena ord and se æschere.
 70 Ne mihte hyra ænig oþrum derian,
 buton hwa þurh flanes flyht fyl gename.
 Se flod ut gewat; þa flotan stodon gearowe,
 wicinga fela, wiges georne.
 Het þa hæleða hleo healdan þa bricge
 wigan wigheardne, se wæs haten Wulfstan,
 caþne mid his cynne, þæt wæs Ceolan sunu,

 that you’re willing to pay your people’s ransom
 and give to the Vikings what they think right,
 treasure for truce, accepting our peace,
 then we will take the gold, head back to our ships
 and sail out to sea, with you as our friends.’

 Byrhtnoth spoke, raising his shield,
 shaking his slim spear of ash, shaping his words.
 Stiff with anger, he gave this answer:

 ‘D’you hear, seaman, what these folk say?
 For tribute they’re ready to send you their spears
 with poisonous points, and ancient swords –
 war-gear that won’t be of use in a fight.
 So go, Viking envoy, back where you came from,
 and report to your people a much harsher message:
 here stands undaunted an earl with his men,
 who are pledged to fight in defence of their land,
 Aethelred’s country, the lord of my
 people and land. In battle, you heathens
 must fall! It would be too shameful
 if, with our silver, you boarded your ships
 without any fight, now that you’ve come
 such a long way into our land.
 Our silver is not so softly won.
 Sword and spear must first decide those terms,
 a brutal battle, before we pay you tribute.’

 He ordered them to take their shields, and to move forward
 till all his soldiers stood along the river-bank.
 Yet for the water, one side couldn’t reach the other.
 After the ebb, a flood-tide flowed in fast.
 Loop currents locked together. Too long, it seemed
 to all of them, till they might throw spears across.
 And so they stood by Panta’s stream in proud array,
 East-Saxon battle-ranks and the warriors from the ships.
 Neither could do any harm to the other
 save those who were killed by the flight of an arrow.
 Then the tide turned. The seamen stood ready,
 so many Vikings, eager to fight.
 Then Byrhtnoth the lord told a war-hardened warrior
 to defend the bridge. He was called Wulfstan,
 brave like his brothers, Ceola’s son.

þe þær baldlicost on þa bricge stop.
 80 þær stodon mid Wulfstane wigan unforhte,
 ælfere and Maccus, modige twegen,
 þa noldon æt þam forða fleam gewyrcan,
 ac hi fæstlice wið ða fynd weredon,
 þa hwile þe hi wæpna wealdan moston.
 þa hi þæt ongeaton and georne gesawon
 þæt hi þær bricgweardas bitere fundon,
 ongunnon lytegian þa laðe gystas,
 bædon þæt hi upgang agan moston,
 ofer þone ford faran, feþan lædan.
 90 ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode
 alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode.
 Ongan ceallian þa ofer cald wæter
 Byrhtelmes bearn (beornas gehlyston):

'Nu eow is gerymed, gað ricene to us,
 guman to guþe; god ana wat
 hwa þære wælstowe wealdan mote.'

Wodon þa wælwulfas (for wætere ne murnon),
 wicinga werod, west ofer Pantan,
 ofer scir wæter scyldas wegon,
 lidmen to lande linde bæron.
 100 þær ongean gramum gearowe stodon
 Byrhtnoð mid beornum; he mid bordum het
 wyrcan þone wihagan, and þæt werod healdan
 fæste wið feondum. þa wæs feohte neh,
 tir æt getohte. Wæs seo tid cumen
 þæt þær fæge men feallan sceoldon.

þær wearð hream ahafen, hremmas wundon,
 earn æses georn; wæs on eorþan cyrm.
 Hi leton þa of folman feolhearde speru,
 gegrundene garas fleogan;
 110 bogan wæron bysige, bord ord onfeng.
 Biter wæs se beaduræs, beornas feollon
 on gehwæðere hand, hyssas lagon.
 Wund wearð Wulfmær, wælræste geceas,
 Byrhtnoðes mæg; he mid billum wearð,
 his swuster sunu, swiðe forheawen.
 þær wearð wicingum wiperlean agyfen.

With his spear, he struck down the very first man
 who brazenly started across the bridge.
 There stood with Wulfstan fearless warriors,
 Aelfhere and Maccus, two men of spirit,
 who would not take flight at the ford,
 but fiercely hold out against every foe
 as long as they could wield their weapons.
 When the hated strangers clearly saw
 and realised how fierce were
 the guards of the bridge, they began to use guile,
 and urged they be offered some way across,
 to bring their foot-troops over the ford.
 Then the earl, in his arrogance, **NOTE** gave up
 far too much land to those loathsome people.
 The Vikings listened as Brighthelm's son
 called out to them across the cold water:

'The way is cleared. You men, come over quickly
 to us, and to war. God alone knows
 who'll win control of this slaughter-site.'

The death-wolves waded across, heedless of water.
 West over the Pant, the Vikings came,
 bearing their shields across the bright water,
 shields of linden brought on to dry land.
 Against their fierceness, Bryhtnoth stood ready
 with his men. He ordered them to make
 a wall of war with shields; they must all stand
 fast against their foes. The fight now neared,
 glory in battle. The time had now come
 when those who were doomed would die.

A howling cry rose up. Ravens circled,
 eagles eager for food, and on the earth, an uproar.
 Hands released their file-hard spears,
 sharp pointed shafts flew forth.
 Bows were busy, shields were pierced,
 the battle was bitter. On both sides,
 brave men fell, boys lay still.
 Wulfmaer was wounded – a kinsman of Byrhtnoth,
 his sister's son – and chose his sleep in death,
 brutally cut down by the sword.
 But then to the Vikings, requital was given.

- Gehyrde ic þæt Eadweard anne sloge
 swiðe mid his swurde, swenges ne wyrnde,
 þæt him æt fotum feoll fæge cempa;
 120 þæs him his ðeoden þanc gesæde,
 þam burþene, þa he byre hæfde.
- Swa stemnetton stiðhicgende
 hysas æt hilde, hogodon georne
 hwa þær mid orde ærost mihte
 on fægean men feorh gewinnan,
 wigan mid wæpnum; wæl feol on eorðan.
 Stodon stædefæste; stihte hi Byrhtnoð,
 bæd þæt hyssa gehwylc hogode to wige
 þe on Denon wolde dom gefeohtan.
- 130 Wod þa wiges heard, wæpen up ahof,
 bord to gebeorge, and wið þæs beornes stop.
 Eode swa anræd eorl to þam ceorle,
 ægþer hyra oðrum yfeles hogode.
 Sende ða se særinc suþerne gar,
 þæt gewundod wearð wigena hlaford;
 he sceaf þa mid ðam scylde, þæt se sceaft tobærst,
 and þæt spere sprengde, þæt hit sprang ongean.
 Gegremod wearð se guðrinc; he mid gare stang
 wlancne wicing, þe him þa wunde forgeaf.
- 140 Frod wæs se fyrdrinc; he let his francan wadan
 þurh ðæs hysses hals, hand wisode
 þæt he on þam færsceaðan feorh geræhte.
 ða he oþerne ofstlice sceat,
 þæt seo byrne tobærst; he wæs on breostum wund
 þurh ða hringlocan, him æt heortan stod
 ætterne ord. Se eorl wæs þe bliþra,
 hloh þa, modi man, sæde metode þanc
 ðæs dægweorces þe him drihten forgeaf.
- 150 Forlet þa drenga sum daroð of handa,
 fleogan of folman, þæt se to forð gewat
 þurh ðone æþelan æþelredes þegen.
 Him be healfe stod hyse unweaxen,
 cniht on gecampe, se full calice
 bræd of þam beorne blodigne gar,
 Wulfstanes bearn, Wulfmær se geonga,
 forlet forheardne faran eft ongean;
 ord in gewod, þæt se on eorþan læg
 þe his þeoden ær þearle geræhte.

Edward, I heard, struck one man
 so hard with his sword, kept nothing back,
 that the doomed soldier fell right at his feet.
 For this, Byrhtnoth, when there was chance to,
 gave his thanks to his nobleman. **NOTE**

So they stood fast, those stout-hearted
 soldiers in battle. They vied to see
 which of them might first with his spear
 take the life of some doomed man,
 some warrior with weapons. The wounded fell to earth;
 others stood steadfast. Bryhtnoth stirred them,
 and told every man there to focus on fighting,
 who wished to win glory over the Danes.

He then strode out boldly, sword raised on high
 with shield in defence, seeking some soldier.
 The earl bravely advanced on a churl.
 In both of their hearts was harm to the other.
 The seaman hurled a southern spear **NOTE**
 which wounded Bryhtnoth, the warriors' lord.
 He thrust with his shield, till the shaft broke,
 shaking the spear, till it sprang out.
 Stung into anger, he stabbed with his spear
 the proud Viking who gave him the wound.
 Wise in war-skills, he drove his lance straight through
 the warrior's throat, steering his thrust
 to reach right to the life-breath of the ravager.
 Then swiftly, he struck at another,
 bursting his breastplate, wounding his chest
 through the chain-mail. The deadly spear
 stuck in his heart. The earl was much happier,
 bravely laughed loudly, and gave thanks to God
 for the day's work that the Lord had given.

Then one of the Vikings loosed a spear from his hand.
 It winged its way from his wrist, and flew only too truly
 into brave Bryhtnoth, Aethelred's noble.
 There stood by his side a very young soldier,
 a mere boy in battle, young Wulfmaer,
 Wulfstan's son. In a flash he pulled out
 the bloody spear from Bryhtnoth's body,
 and sent the hard tip hurtling back.
 The point sank home, and on the ground lay
 the man who had grievously wounded the earl.

160 Eode þa gesyrwed secg to þam eorle;
 he wolde þæs beornes beagas gefecgan,
 reaf and hringas and gerenod swurd.
 þa Byrhtnoð bræd bill of sceðe,
 brad and bruneccg, and on þa byrnan sloh.
 To raþe hine gelette lidmanna sum,
 þa he þæs eorles earm amyrd.
 Feoll þa to foldan fealohilte swurd;
 ne mihte he gehealdan heardne mece,
 wæpnes wealdan. þa gyt þæt word gecwæð
 har hilderinc, hyssas bylde,
 170 bæd gangan forð gode geferan;
 ne mihte þa on fotum leng fæste gestandan.
 He to heofenum wlat:

‘Gepancie þe, ðeoda waldend,
 ealra þæra wynna þe ic on worulde gebad.
 Nu ic ah, milde metod, mæste þearfe
 þæt þu minum gaste godes geunne,
 þæt min sawul to ðe siðian mote
 on þin geweald, þeoden engla,
 mid friþe ferian. Ic eom frymði to þe
 180 þæt hi helsceaðan hynan ne moton.’

ða hine heowon hæðene scealcas
 and begen þa beornas þe him big stodon,
 ælfnoð and Wulmær begen lagon,
 ða onemn hyra frean feorh gesealdon.

Hi bugon þa fram beaduwe þe þær beon noldon.
 þær wearð Oddan bearn ærest on fleame,
 Godric fram guþe, and þone godan forlet
 þe him mænigne oft mear gesealde;
 he gehleop þone eoh þe ahte his hlaford,
 190 on þam gerædum þe hit riht ne wæs,
 and his broðru mid him begen ærndon,
 Godwine and Godwig, guþe ne gymdon,
 ac wendon fram þam wige and þone wudu sohton,
 flugon on þæt fæsten and hyra feore burgon,
 and manna ma þonne hit ænig mæð wære,
 gyf hi þa geearnunga ealle gemundon
 þe he him to duguþe gedon hæfde.

Then an armed Viking went to the earl,
 wanting to plunder all of his wealth,
 his armour, and rings, and richly worked sword.
 Bryhtnoth drew out his sword from its sheath,
 broad, bright-bladed, and struck at his breast.
 But one of the Vikings cut the blow short
 and shattered his arm, and its swing.
 The gold-hilted sword fell to the ground.
 He had no more strength to hold the blade up
 or wield his weapon. Yet these words still
 the grey-haired warrior said, to hearten his men.
 He bade them advance, his good companions,
 though on his feet he could no longer stand.
 He looked up to the heavens...

‘I thank you, Lord of the world,
 for every joy I’ve known upon this earth.
 But now, merciful Maker, I most have need
 that you should grant a favour to my ghost,
 so that my soul may speed to you
 and to your kingdom, King of angels,
 and pass in peace. My prayer is this:
 that the fiends of hell do it no harm.’

Then they hewed him down, those heathen men,
 and both the warriors standing by his side,
 Wulfmaer and Aelfnoth. Stretched out on the field,
 they gave their lives together, with their lord.

Then all the cowards **NOTE** fled from the battlefield.
 The son of Odda was the first to flee.
 Godric, whom Bryhtnoth had often given horses to,
 turned from the battle and abandoned him.
 He leapt on the horse that his lord had owned,
 on to that harness not rightfully his;
 and his brothers with him both ran off,
 Godwine and Godwig. With no guts for fighting,
 they wheeled away from the war, and sought the woods.
 They ran to that refuge, and both saved their lives.
 More men went with them than was in any way fit
 had they remembered the kindnesses
 Bryhtnoth had shown them and blessed them with.

200 Swa him Offa on dæg ær asæde
 on þam meþelstede, þa he gemot hæfde,
 þæt þær modiglice manega spræcon
 þe eft æt þearfe þolian noldon.

þa wearð afeallen þæs folces ealdor,
 æþelredes eorl; ealle gesawon
 heorðgeneatas þæt hyra heorra læg.
 þa ðær wendon forð wlance þegenas,
 unearge men efston georne;
 hi woldon þa ealle oðer twega,
 lif forlætan oððe leofne gewrecan.
 210 Swa hi bylde forð bearn ælfrices,
 wiga wintrum geong, wordum mælde,
 ælfwine þa cwæð, he on ellen spræc:

‘Gemunan þa mæla þe we oft æt meodo spræcon,
 þonne we on bence beot ahofon,
 hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewinn;
 nu mæg cunnian hwa cene sy.
 Ic wylle mine æþelo eallum gecyþan,
 þæt ic wæs on Myrcon miccles cynnes;
 wæs min ealda fæder Ealhelm haten,
 wis ealdorman, woruldgesælig.
 220 Ne sceolon me on þære þeode þegenas ætwitan
 þæt ic of ðisse fyrde feran wille,
 eard gesecan, nu min ealdor ligeð
 forheawen æt hilde. Me is þæt hearma mæst;
 he wæs ægðer min mæg and min hlaford.’

þa he forð eode, fæhðe gemunde,
 þæt he mid orde anne geræhte
 flotan on þam folce, þæt se on foldan læg
 forwegen mid his wæpne. Ongan þa winas manian,
 frynd and geferan, þæt hi forð eodon.
 230 Offa gemælde, æscholt asceoc:

‘Hwæt þu, ælfwine, hafast ealle gemanode
 þegenas to þearfe, nu ure þeoden lið,
 eorl on eorðan. Us is eallum þearf
 þæt ure æghwylc oþerne bylde
 wigan to wige, þa hwile þe he wæpen mæge

Earlier that day, having called a meeting
 in the council chamber, Offa had warned him
 that many there making brave speeches
 would not hold out in the hour of need.

So Aethelred’s Earl, the prince of his people,
 had fallen. All those who had shared his hearth
 could see for themselves that their lord lay dead.
 Yet proudly the thanes then pressed forward;
 undaunted, they hastened on eagerly,
 all of them wanting one of two things:
 either to die there, or avenge their dear lord.
 Then Aelfwine, who was Aelfric’s son,
 A warrior young in years, urged them all forward,
 his words ringing out in valiant speech:

‘Remember the times when we talked over mead
 there on the benches, when all of we heroes
 boasted how bravely we would fight in a battle.
 Now we’ll discover who is indeed brave.
 I want my ancestry known to you all.
 Among Mercian men, I’m from a great family.
 My grandfather was Ealhelm,
 a nobleman. He was wise, and did well in the world.
 Let none of my people try to reproach me
 with wanting to leave this army behind
 and hurry back home, now that my leader lies
 cut down in battle. This is the greatest of griefs.
 He was my kinsman. He was my lord.’

Then he went forward, recalling his hatred,
 piercing a pirate’s body with his spear.
 The man keeled over and fell to the ground,
 killed by the weapon. He began then to rally
 his friends and companions to go into battle.
 Offa spoke up, shaking his ash-spear:

‘Aelfwine, you’ve encouraged us all
 when most we had need. Our lord now lies dead,
 our earl on the earth. All of us now must
 spur on each other, urging all warriors
 into the fight, for as long as they can grasp hold

habban and healdan, heardne mece,
gar and godswurd. Us Godric hæfð,
earh Oddan bearn, ealle beswicene.
240 Wende þæs formoni man, þa he on meare rad,
on wlanca þam wigge, þæt wære hit ure hlaforð;
forþan wearð her on felda folc totwæmed,
scyldburch tobrocen. Abreoðe his angin,
þæt he her swa manigne man aflymde!

Leofsunu gemælde and his linde ahof,
bord to gebeorge; he þam beorne oncwæð:

250 Ic þæt gehate, þæt ic heonon nelle
fleon fotes trym, ac wille furðor gan,
wrecan on gewinne minne winedrihten.
Ne þurfon me embe Sturmere stedefæste hælað
wordum ætwitan, nu min wine gecranc,
þæt ic hlaforðleas ham siðie,
wende fram wige, ac me sceal wæpen niman,
ord and iren.'

He ful yrre wod,
feahstlice, fleam he forhogode.
Dunnere þa cwæð, daroð acwehte,
unorne ceorl, ofer eall clypode,
bæd þæt beorna gehwylc Byrhtnoð wræce:

'Ne mæg na wandian se þe wrecan þenceð
freat on folce, ne for feore murnan.'

260 þa hi forð eodon, feores hi ne rohton;
ongunnon þa hiredmen heardlice feohtan,
grame garberend, and god bædon
þæt hi moston gewrecan hyra winedrihten
and on hyra feondum fyl gewyrcean.
Him se gysel ongan geornlice fylstan;
he wæs on Norðhymbron heardes cynnes,
Ecglafes bearn, him wæs æscferð nama.
He ne wandode na æt þam wigplegan,
270 ac he fýsde forð flān genehe;
hwilon he on bord sceat, hwilon beorn tæsde,
æfre embe stunde he sealde sume wunde,
þa hwile ðe he wæpna wealdan moste.
þa gyt on orde stod Eadweard se langa,
gearo and geornful, gylpwordum spræc

of their weapons – hard blade,
and spear and sharp sword. Odda's son,
Godric the coward, has betrayed us all.
When he rode off on Bryhtnoth's huge horse,
too many men thought that it was our leader;
and so in the field, our folk became split,
the shield-wall was shattered. May he be damned
he made so many soldiers turn back and flee.'

Then Leofsunu spoke, his linden shield raised
for his safety, and said to Offa:

'I promise you this. I shall not retreat an inch
from this spot. I shall go forward
and in battle avenge my friend and my lord.
Now that my friend has fallen, the brave men
of Sturmer can never accuse me
of leaving the battle, and going home lordless.
A weapon will take me, whether a spear-point
or the edge of a sword.'

Incensed, he strode forward,
fought with great fierceness, spurning escape.
Shaking his spear, Dunnere then spoke.
This simple peasant called out to everyone,
told every soldier to avenge Byrhtnoth's death:

'Whoever intends to avenge our lord on the Vikings
must not hesitate, nor fear for his life.'

So they moved forward, heedless of death.
Fiercely grasping their spears, the followers
began to fight bravely, praying to God
that they might now avenge their dear lord,
and wreak destruction on his enemies.
A hostage helped them with all his might.
His name was Aschferth, Ecglaf's son,
from a brave family in Northumbria.
He did not flinch at the fire of the fight
but shot forth his arrows again and again,
sometimes hitting a shield, sometimes piercing a man.
As long as he had a bow in his hands,
wound after wound he inflicted on them.
Out in the front stood Edward the Tall,
ready and eager, boasting that he

þæt he nolde fleogan fotmæl landes,
 ofer bæc bugan, þa his betera leg.
 He bræc þone bordweall and wið þa beornas feaht,
 oðþæt he his sincgyfan on þam sæmannum
 wurðlice wrec, ær he on wæle læge.
 280 Swa dyde æþeric, æþele gefera,
 fus and forðgeorn, feaht eornoste.
 Sibyrhtes broðor and swiðe mænig oþer
 clufon cellod bord, cene hi weredon;
 bærst bordes lærig, and seo byrne sang
 gryreleoda sum. þa æt guðe sloh
 Offa þone sælidan, þæt he on eorðan feoll,
 and ðær Gaddes mæg grund gesohte.
 Raðe wearð æt hilde Offa forheawen;
 he hæfde ðeah geforþod þæt he his frean gehet,
 290 swa he beotode ær wið his beahgifan
 þæt hi sceoldon begen on burh ridan,
 hale to hame, oððe on here crincgan,
 on wælstowe wundum sweltan;
 he læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende.

ða wearð borda gebræc. Brimmen wodon,
 guðe gegremode; gar oft þurhwod
 fæges feorhhus. Forð þa eode Wistan,
 þurstanes sunu, wið þas secgas feaht;
 he wæs on geþrange hyra þreora bana,
 300 ær him Wigelines bearn on þam wæle læge.
 þær wæs stið gemot; stodon fæste
 wigan on gewinne, wigend cruncon,
 wundum werige. Wæl feol on eorþan.
 Oswald and Eadwold ealle hwile,
 begen þa gebroþru, beornas trymedon,
 hyra winemagas wordon bædon
 þæt hi þær æt ðearfe þolian sceoldon,
 unwaclice wæpna neotan.
 Byrhtwold mæpelode bord hafenode
 310 (se wæs eald geneat), æsc acwehte;
 he ful baldlice beornas lærde:

‘Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
 mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað.

would not give up so much as a footstep
 or move back at all, now that his lord lay dead.
 He smashed through the shield-wall, and fought with the men
 till he'd wreaked revenge for Byrhtnoth,
 his gold-giving lord, and he lay lifeless himself.
 The same with Aetheric, a stalwart companion;
 he too fought fiercely, urging them forward.
 Sibyrht's brother, and many another,
 split hollowed-out **NOTE** shields, and bravely defended.
 The shield rims burst and the chain-mail sang out
 a terrible song. At the height of the turmoil, Offa
 struck at a seaman, who fell dead at his feet.
 But Offa was quickly brought down in battle,
 and the kinsman of Gadd also fell to the earth.
 He had though fulfilled what he'd promised his lord,
 and had kept his word to his generous prince:
 that either they both should ride back to town
 and safely go home, or die in the battle,
 bleeding from wounds on the killing-fields.
 Nobly, he lay there, close to his lord.

Then shields were shattered; the Vikings surged forward,
 rage-burning for battle. Their spears kept on piercing
 the men's fated bodies. Wistan advanced,
 Thurstan's son, and fought with the seamen.
 He killed three of them in the thickening throng
 before he himself lay dead on the ground.
 The fighting was savage, yet the soldiers
 stood fast. Strong men collapsed,
 dragged down by their wounds. The dead dropped to the earth.
 All the while, Eadwold and Oswald,
 both of them brothers, exhorted the men,
 their cousins and kinsmen, and told them
 to use fiercely all of their weapons.
 They must all bear the stress to the best of their strength.
 Raising his shield, Bryhtwold then spoke.
 An old companion, he brandished his ash-spear
 and with great courage commanded the warriors:

‘Your minds must be firmer, your hearts even bolder,
 Your courage the greater, as our strength falls away.

Her lið ure ealdor eall forheawen,
 god on greote. A mæg gnornian
 se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan wendan þenceð.
 Ic eom frod feores; fram ic ne wille,
 ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,
 be swa leofan men, licgan þence.’

320 Swa hi æþelgares bearn ealle bylde,
 Godric to guþe. Oft he gar forlet,
 wælspere windan on þa wicingas,
 swa he on þam folce fyrrest eode,
 heow and hynde, oðþæt he on hilde gecranc.
 Næs þæt na se Godric þe ða guðe forbeah

Here lies our leader, all cut to shreds,
 a hero in the dust. Let any man who thinks
 to leave the fight lament for ever more.
 I have lived long. I will not go from here
 but mean to stay together with my lord,
 and lay me down beside the man I loved.’

Godric, too, the son of Aethelgar,
 spurred them on to fight, sending spears
 like darts of death throughout the Viking ranks.
 He led the army from the front
 and hacked and cut men down until at last he fell himself.
 This was not the Godric who had once run away...

NOTES

THE WANDERER

are gebideð / longs for mercy

there is considerable debate about the meaning and resonance of the verb *gebideð*, and whether *metudes miltse* ('the mercy of his God') is a present condition already experienced, or a future state desired but not yet achieved. Translating *gebideð* as 'experiences' certainly helps to draw the opening and closing lines of the poem together by the reference to God's grace and mercy. But it also reduces the dramatic thrust of the piece: if the speaker has indeed found such mercy, why the emotional turmoil of much of the poem? In terms of poetic logic, *gebideð* seems more persuasively rendered as 'hopes for', 'yearns for', 'waits for', which is the sense preferred here. [RETURN](#)

uhtna gehwylce / in the hour before daybreak

uht has sometimes been translated as 'dawn', though it is more accurately rendered as the 'hour *before* dawn', emotionally speaking, the darkest time of the night. [RETURN](#)

goldwine minne / my lord

literally, *goldwine* means 'gold-friend', and can be variously translated as 'king', 'prince', 'lord', depending on the context. [RETURN](#)

mine wisse / to show me affection

the original manuscript reads *mine wisse*, which is metrically defective. The phrase has been variously translated as 'who knew of my people', 'who knew my [dear lord]', 'who my *** might know', 'who showed me affection'. In the light of the words that immediately follow, 'showed me affection' seems a reasonable choice. [RETURN](#)

NOTES

giefstolas breac / getting gifts from the throne

the literal meaning of the Old English is 'enjoyed gift-thrones', which seems more persuasively interpreted as 'gifts *from* the throne', rather than 'gifts *of* the throne'. [RETURN](#)

flet ofgeafon / have left the stage

literally, *flet* means 'floor', i.e. the floor of the mead-hall that is a symbol of both physical and emotional security for the wanderer. It has seemed reasonable to translate the Old English into a phrase that has both literal and metaphoric meaning: to *leave the stage*. [RETURN](#)

wyrmlicum fah / all mottled like a snake

wyrmlicum fah is a phrase that has led to considerable debate. Literally, *wyrm* means a snake or serpent or worm or dragon; *licum* means '-like'; and *fah* 'variegated'. The phrase is often interpreted to mean that the crumbling walls are decorated by a frieze depicting dragons or snakes, or (rather less convincingly) worms. In a note on this line, however, Clifford Truesdell [see Further Reading and Links] offers a plausible alternative: that 'long-abandoned, lichen-covered stone walls... often resemble the camouflage of wood snakes' – which leads him to translate the phrase as 'snake-like mottled'. With a different rhythmic emphasis, I follow this attractive suggestion. [RETURN](#)

THE SEAFARER

ne his gifena þæs god / nor so thoroughly equipped

the Old English literally means, 'nor so generous in his gifts', with a nice ambiguity about whether the gifts are things given, things received, or commendable personal attributes (as in a person 'of great gifts'). In the context, I find Michael Alexander's suggestion [see Further Reading and Notes], 'so thoroughly equipped', persuasive; and it has been adopted here. [RETURN](#)

oþþe ecghete / violence by the sword

literally, *ecghete* means 'sword-enmity' or 'sword-hatred' – not, of course, hatred *of* the sword, but hatred demonstrated by its use. [RETURN](#)

seo molde oncyrræð / the whole world turns

the verb *oncierran* has given rise to several different interpretations ('the earth shall *turn aside*', 'the world *stands still*', 'this earth *turns*'), of which the most persuasive is the notion that the power of God energises the entire universe: hence here, 'the whole world turns'. [RETURN](#)

wiþ leofne ond wið laþne / with his foes, as well as friends

the impact of the statement is considerably enhanced if the order of the two nouns (*leofne*, friends; *laþne*, enemies) is reversed. [RETURN](#)

THE WIFE'S LAMENT

min herheard niman / within this place

the phrase *min herheard niman* constitutes a major crux in the poem. The scribe had originally written *min her heard niman*, but most editors override this word division and translate the phrase as 'take up abode in a *herh*', where *herh* may be a grove, or pagan shrine, or sanctuary – or (since the entire sense is conjectural) a more generalised 'in this place', or simply 'here'. Since the preceding lines have spoken of wandering and dislocation, I have preferred to evoke, in the first instance, that vaguer sense of place, rather than the more specific 'grove' or 'shrine' or 'sanctuary'. But of course, subsequently, the woman describes the place in considerable detail:

...a forest grove,
beneath an oak-tree, in an earthen cave.
...The dales are dark, with hills high up above.
Sharp hedge surrounds it, overgrown with briars. [RETURN](#)

freondscipe uncer / our love

the term *freondscipe* seems to embrace a considerable range of meaning, from mere 'friendliness' to extremes of 'passion'. I have chosen the word that seems to fall most naturally from the woman's mouth. [RETURN](#)

A scyle geong mon / That young man

the phrase *a scyle geong mon* introduces a difficult passage, because it is not clear whether the woman's address is to a particular young man (and, if so, whether to the husband who has deserted and betrayed her), or to young men in general, or to both. Imaginatively, the lines seem to me most convincingly interpreted as a kind of curse against the treatment she

has endured from her actual husband, whom she nonetheless continues to remember as a 'friend', though there may be a conscious irony in her use of that word. Such psychological swings between past and present, friendship and hatred, community and isolation, ring with an enduring truth. [RETURN](#)

THE RUIN

hwætred in hringas / skilled in round-building

literally, *hwætred in hringas* means 'bold or determined' in 'rings', a term that can be applied to any object that has, or that depicts, circular properties. And so, *hringban* is a ring-shaped piece of bone; *hringgewindla* a sphere; *hringmæl*, a sword with ring-like patterns; *hringwyll*, a circular well. Here, the sense is of stone-masons skilled in building complicated round structures, as opposed to simpler square or rectangular ones. [RETURN](#)

heresweg micel / trumpets blaring away

the root word *here* has strong military connotations (for example, *herenið*, warfare; *herenuma*, prisoner; *heresped*, success in war). Rather than translating *heresweg* as a generalised 'sound', or 'noise', or 'clamour', as earlier versions have done, it seems appropriate to foreground the military sound that is suggested: hence 'trumpets blaring away'. [RETURN](#)

THE DREAM OF THE CROSS

eaxlegespanne / on the cross-beam

the word *eaxlegespanne* does not occur anywhere else in Old English literature. It could refer to the actual centre-piece of the cross, where horizontal and vertical pieces of wood intersect, or to the entire vertical cross-beam along which Christ's arms were stretched. I find the latter reading marginally more convincing. [RETURN](#)

folden sceatum / around it on the earth

folden sceatum (literally, ‘corner/angle/edge of the earth’) has been interpreted in two different ways: either that the jewels cast their light to the far corners of the world, or that they made the ground around the cross gleam with light. I find the latter interpretation more persuasive, and have therefore translated the phrase as ‘around it on the earth’. [RETURN](#)

fægere þurh forðgesceaft / made beautiful in his plan

As Glenn [see Further Reading] points out, *forðgesceaft* is an ambiguous word, which can mean both ‘creation’ and also ‘future destiny’. My translation, ‘*made* beautiful in his *plan*’, tries to capture something of both meanings. [RETURN](#)

THE BATTLE OF MALDON

for his ofermode / in his arrogance

ofermode is almost certainly the most discussed word in the entire poem. Its root sense is *ofer* (over, very) and *mod* (heart, mind, spirit, ‘mood’, temper). Literally, *ofermode* means ‘high spirits’ or ‘overconfidence’, and is usually translated as ‘pride’. At the very least, the poem seems to present Byrhtnoth’s action as rash and incautious, and very probably (as rendered here) arrogant. [RETURN](#)

burþene / nobleman

literally, *burþene* means a ‘chamber-thane’, or a man of some rank who attended a king or person of royalty. The more modern word ‘chamberlain’ is derived from it. Here, the term ‘nobleman’ seems best to evoke Edward’s position and status. [RETURN](#)

suþerne gar / a southern spear

in other words, a spear made in the south (either English or French). [RETURN](#)

þe þær beon nolden / all the cowards

literally, the Old English means ‘those who did not want to be there’, an over-courteous periphrasis, it may seem, for the cowards who fled after Byrhtnoth’s death. The force of the betrayal is, I think, better conveyed by the direct accusation ‘all the cowards’ than by such muted indirectness. [RETURN](#)

celled / hollowed out

the exact meaning of *celled* is unknown, and the word has been variously translated as ‘round’, ‘hollow’, ‘embossed’, ‘whitened’, ‘shield-shaped’. ‘Hollowed out’ has seemed a reasonable epithet. [RETURN](#)

FURTHER READING AND LINKS

The current [2012] literature presenting and exploring Old English poetry is very substantial indeed, in both book and on-line form. Of necessity, the following bibliography focuses upon those works that are of particular significance for the translator from Old English.

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