

Exeter

Trilogy:

The Seafarer

The Ruin

The Wanderer

Translated by Crisman Cooley



Publishing Company

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Preface

This book is not for the academic—she has no use for the work of an autodidact. Having spent years earning them, she must cite credentials. This book is not for the poet—he can turn to recent compendia by rivals Heaney and Liuzza knowing he gets fine contemporary renderings of these three old poems (and many others) by known poets. Having spent years earning a name in poetry, he is not about to help someone else get one. (Unless they pay for an MFA in poetry to said poet's employer...)

This book is for you—the student who hates poetry, but who is taking a required course and faced with the task of learning something about one of the poems in this book. You are the one I can help.

How?

First, by giving you permission to steal from me. Every idea and every word I translate here you can use yourself without crediting me. I not only do not care, I urge you to engage in this theft.

Second, I will show you how to turn this nasty assignment into a fine battle axe. For example, take the first line-and-a-half of the Seafarer:

*Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan...*

This is the poem's shibboleth—the test of a good translation. Ezra Pound says:

*May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
Journey's jargon, ...*

Two minor nits. First “reckon” is an imperfect substitute for *wrecan*—two different words (though possibly related) with two different meanings, the first about counting or recounting, the second forcibly making, doing or expressing. Second, Pound's translation of these lines doesn't make sense.

Why would the poet say “I for my own self”? Isn't everyone's self their own? If it's not his self, whose self would it be? It's not a problem of meter (as when Polonius says, “This above all: to thine own self be true...”) It's a problem with placement of the caesura. It's not “for my own self”, it's... “for my self song's truth...” But—what is that? The phrase “self song's truth reckon” is impenetrable gobbledy goo. Does it mean that the song won't be true unless it is recounted? Or does he mean he's reckoning the song for himself, not for you and me?

Adding to the muddle, Pound has the poet explain with the clarifying phrase “journey's jargon.”

Huh?

“Oh, don’t worry about what my self song’s truth is or what it means to reckon it, it’s all just, you know, journey’s jargon.”

So there you are. In the first line-point-five, you’ve already got Ezra Pound on the run with your battle axe.

Other translations of “The Seafarer” have the poet essentially saying: “I can tell my own story all by myself!”, lending a kind of gee-whiz tone to the poem—which detracts somewhat from the elegaic tone.

On the other hand, s’pose you got to use Mary Jo Salter’s translation:

I can sing my own true story

Of journeys through this world, ...

Totally comprehensible. No gee-whiz about it. And she guides you right on through so by the end you can actually know what the poet was talking about. (No mean feat with *Seafarer*, which at times reads like a pass-around poem...) Only...where is the divided line? Where is the alliteration? Where is the giver of gold? Or two beats per half line? I.e., where is the *sound of poetry*?

Oh, that’s right. This is a *contemporary* translation. We can just pretend we’re talking at the breakfast table. And there’s the rub, I think. The poem totally loses its intensity with casual clarity.

Somehow, we need clarity *and* intensity. Meaning *and* poetry. Sense *and* sound.

So this is what I propose for you: after bleeding and cleaving the translation, you go on to propose *your solution*. No need to strain yourself actually making your own translation.

You can if you want. It took me fifteen years from the time this poem lodged its first image in my brain to its completion. I’m slow. You may be faster.

The image that got me, if you’re interested, was of the Seafarer’s hair and beard hung with ice. And this image reminded me of extreme weather I experienced growing up near the Continental Divide in the Rockies. That image of the Seafarer conquered me. And the tone of the poem expressed a form of suffering that I believed I had experienced myself in those mountains—which led me to move to the sea. Through this poem, I thought I might also “wreak true song.”

If you don’t have years to spend on this, you just need to turn in a paper, I can help. Your teacher will never have heard of me. You can say that what I’ve done is your work without her ever suspecting. The poem is by anonymous and you could pretty much say the translation is too. All you have to do is step up and say, “I’m anonymous!” And the translation is yours.

If you are caught and accused of plagiarism, refer your prof to this introduction. Bolster your confession with the T.S. Eliot quote that great poets (and desperate undergraduates) steal. (That isn't exactly what he said...¹)

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And don't blame me if your professor comes after my translation with a meat cleaver. No translation is bullet-proof. Like Smaug, I have my weaknesses. Bard's arrow can find me too. Use this translation at your own risk—and only if you have courage to defend it.

So, as I was saying. Flay the translation your teacher gives you, then step in with "your" rendering:

*Only I myself may wreak true song
of my sea journeys*

Here's what you've done. First, you've illuminated "*Mæg ic be me sylfum.*" You've shown it is not for nothing—it is the poet claiming authority for his own experience. "Only I can tell this story, because I lived it myself."

Why "wreak"? Isn't that only used with "vengeance", "havoc" and other acts of violence? You can answer casually: " 'Wreak' was the most powerful verb at hand meaning 'express'—and it happens to be the verb supplied by the poem. Is it such a bad thing to reintroduce an original meaning for a powerful old word?"

Finally, what about Ezra's "jargon" and Mary Jo's "story"? These are both translations of this word "*secgan.*" Here's a cool fact: the poet suggests two things by this word. According to Bosworth Toller,² *secg* means "sea" (as well as man, sword, sedge, etc.); and *secgan* is the verb meaning "to say." So *secgan* does double work: "sea-saying."

These three poems in this book serve up numerous similar examples of double meanings. They are among the "untranslatables." There is no modern word meaning both "sea" and "say." (Well, if there is, I don't know it. *Bay? Carp? Lie to?* I give up.) So you have to choose. Because I've already said "song" and "journey," I'm satisfied with tipping the reader off that we're talking about the sea.

So there you are: almost 1000 words about the first one-and-a-half lines. It can be done. So, good luck. And don't take this stuff too seriously. There will be a party after. Girls. (And boys.) Give yourself completely to this work now and later you can celebrate with a clear conscience.

¹ <http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw11.html>

² <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/027302>

Note on the Translations

There are gaps in some Exeter texts where the original manuscripts are missing words due to age. Most translations simply leave out these missing words. I've chosen to *guess* what they are and supply these guesses in my translation. This occurs in *The Seafarer*, lines 112-114 and in *The Ruin*, lines 12, 16-19, 21 and 44-49.

Your teacher is certain to try to attack you here—or at least question you. Defend yourself by saying you merely wanted to tell a complete story, then ask forgiveness for your shameless impudence. If she is not won over, you have grounds to dismiss her from the inner circle of your heart.

Apology to Ezra Pound

Just kidding, Ez. You're in my dead poets mastermind. If it weren't for you, I never would have tried translating *The Seafarer*—or any other poem. God's truth. Your book *ABC of Reading* has been my Bible and I hope I have done it a tiny bit of justice. Your knowledge of poetic history and languages people have used to express it is superhuman. Your audacity emboldened me to try. Consider this book my Final Exam, Sir.

Do I pass?

The Seafarer

[Anglo-Saxon, Anonymous]

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
earfoðhwile oft þrowade,

bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,

5

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

15

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 wera,
mæw singende fore medodrince.
Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð,
isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal,

25

urigfeþra; nænig hleomæga
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.
Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,
hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
corna caldast. Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
35

sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige --
monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
elpeodigra eard gesece --
Forþon nis þæs modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,
40

ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geogupe 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
45

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.
Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð:
50

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

55

bitter in breosthord. Þæt se beorn ne wat,
sefteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþer locan,
min modsefa mid mereflode,

60

ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
eorþan sceatas— cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig; gielleð anfloga
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu. Forþon me hatran sind

65

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:

70

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,

75

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,

80

dream mid dugeþum. Dagas sind gewitene,

ealle onmedlan eorþan rices;

nearon nu cyningas ne caseras

ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,

þonne hi mæst mid him mærfþa gefremedon

85

ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.

Gedroren is þeos duguð eal, dreamas sind gewitene;

wuniað þa wacran ond þæs woruld healdap,

brucað þurh bisgo. Blæd is gehnæged,

eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,

90

swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.

Yldo him on fareþ, onsyn blacað,

gomelfeax gnornað, wat his iuwine,

æpelinga bearn eorþan forgiefene.

Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma þonne him þæt feorg losað

95

ne swete forswelgan ne sar gefelan

ne hond onhreran ne mid hyge þencan.

Þeah þe græf wille golde stregan

broþor his geborenum, byrgan be deadum

maþmum mislicum, þæt hine mid wille,

100

ne mæg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful

gold to geoce for Godes egsan

þonne he hit ær hydeð þenden he her leofað.

Micel biþ se Meotudes egsa, forþon hi seo molde oncyrrað;

se gestapelade stiþe grundas,

105

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 seo ar of heofonum.

Meotod him þæt mod gestaþelað, forþon he in his meahte gelyfeð.

Stieran mon sceal strongum mode, ond þæt on stapelum healdan,

110

ond gewis werum, wisum clæne.

Scyle monna gehwylc mid gemete healdan

wiþ leofne ond wið laþne ...bealo.

þeah þe he hine wille ...fyres fulne

oþþe on bæle ...forbærnedne

115

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.

The Seafarer

[Translated by Crisman Cooley]

Only I myself may wreak true song
of my sea journeys, how I endured
difficult days, oft suffered
bitter breast-care, but abided,

5

knowing in the keel many cares,
wave-tossed in terror, there oft seized
at narrow nightwatch to keep my ship
from crashing on cliff rocks. Chill bound
my sea-wet feet, frost fastened them

10

cold and numb, while distress wailed
hot in my heart and hunger gnawed
my sea-weary soul. A man knows not,
passing pleasant life on land,
how care-wretched I run the ice cold sea,

15

where winter carries an outcast,
destitute, deprived of kith and kinsmen,
hair icicle-hung, head pelted by hail.

I heard nothing but icy spray
and roar of the sea. Swan song

20

made me joyful; gannets gride
and curlews cry did for men's laughter
and mew song for mead drink.

Where storms beat stone cliffs, a tern's cry echoed,
frost-feathered; oft an eagle screamed,

25

wings dripping wet. No friend heard
these desolate souls who might give comfort.
Few men know, who delight in life,
prosper at port, bale besot
in wealth and wine, how limb weary
30

I bide on the brine.
Night falls and snow from the north;
rime binds the land, hail falls to earth,
her coldest seed. Now there knocks
one thought at heart: that I to rising streams
35

of salt waves must go alone.
All seasons waken my wanderlust,
forth to fare far hence, so I
among strangers seek home.

No man is so happy on the whole earth
40
nor good in his gifts, nor brave in youth
nor daring in deed, nor loyal to his lord,
but seafaring causes him sorrow,
though he does merely what our Lord will.
Not hearing a harp, not wearing a ring,
45

not winning a wife, not worldly hope,
nor whit else for him but heaving waves;
his longing is founded on water ways.
Limb-borne blossoms adorning the town,
fair growing fields, the world's hastening
50

all admonish death-ready souls
to turn their thoughts toward travel

on distant floodways.

The cuckoo murmurs mournfully;
summer's ward sings, boding sorrow,

55

a bitter breast-board. That man doesn't know
who lives in ease, why some strive
for exile on the widest grave.

Now my spirit bursts the lock on its cage
and my mind, amid sea-flood,

60

over whales' realm wanders wide
ends of earth, returning to me
eager and greedy—the lone-flyer's cry
whets to the whale way a heart unresistant
to swells of sea. Dearer to me are

65

dreams of our Lord than this dead life
lived on land. I don't believe
wealth of earth ekes a man standing.

One of three things end his
fear of death and doubt of worth:

70

disease, old age, or the sword edge
tear life from limb and doom him to die.

So an earl always wants eulogy,
praise of his life in proud epitaph.

That's why he works before passing away

75

to win on earth, spiting foes,
bold in deed, devil defying,
so when he's old and in hereafter
his glory is sung, and he lives among angels

always to the ages, life's cup everlasting,

80

rejoiced among men. Days are departed,

all honor gone of earthly riches;

no kings come, no caesars,

no gold givers as of old

stand among men, win wars

85

or live as lords in majesty.

That host has all fallen, those joys passed away.

The weak have won and this world holds

a promise of pain. Glory is gone,

earth withers, grows old and sere,

90

as men do too throughout middle earth.

Age bids him farewell, pales his face,

hoars his hair, as old friends,

warriors nobly born, go in the ground.

Flesh fails him, he loses life-force:

95

he cannot taste sweet, nor feel but numb,

nor move his hand, nor think sound thought.

Though his tomb be gold-strewn,

and his born brother fill a raised mound

with precious gifts, his end is the same.

100

Nor may a soul full of sin

appease with gold the terror of God,

though he hide a trove when he is alive.

Mighty be the Creator's power, whirling from dust

firm foundations, fixing on them

105

quarters of Earth and heaven's height.

Dull is he who dreads God not: death will surprise him.

Blessed are the humble; heaven's glory comes to them.

A mind the Lord strengthens may trust its might.

Faith steers a man, gives him balance,

110

and draws his soul toward wisdom.

Each man should keep in good measure

friend and enemy, blessing and bale.

No one of his will goes to foul flames,

or prays on a pyre to be burned.

115

Thought is a false friend. Fate is stronger
and the Lord greater than any man's mind.

Take a true bearing of where home lies

and then think how to come there at last,

so all a man's toil might finally arrive

120

in prolonged blessedness,

life without end: in God's love,

find joy in heaven. Thank the Holy Spirit

that we are worthy of our Father's glory,

our eternal Lord for all time.

The Ruin

[Anglo-Saxon, Anonymous]

Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon;
burgstede burston, broснаð enta geweorc.
Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,
hrungeat berofen, hrim on lime,

5

scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene,
ældo undereotone. Eorðgrap hafað
waldend wyrhtan forweorone, geleorene,
heardgripe hrusan, oþ hund cnea
werþeoda gewitan. Oft þæs wag gebad

10

ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum,
ofstonden under stormum; steap geap gedreas.
Wonað giet se ...num geheapen,

fel on

grimme gegrunden

15

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.

25

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 sceadeð
hrostbeages hrof. Hryre wong gecrong
gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig
glædmōd ond goldbeorht gleoma gefrætweð,
wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;
35

seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices.
Stanhofu stōdan, stream hate wearp
widan wylme; weal eall befeng
40

beorhtan bosme, þær þa baþu wæron,
hat on hreþre. þæt wæs hyðelic.
Leton þonne geotan
ofer harne stan hate streamas
un...

45
...þæt hringmere hate
þær þa baþu wæron.
þonne is
...re; þæt is cynelic þing,
huse burg....

The Ruin

[Translated by Crisman Cooley]

Wondrous is this stonewall— fate broken,
burg burst, giant rockwork in ruin.
Roofs are fallen, towers toppled,
rungs bereft; frost hung limbs

5

of storm shelters lie cracked, gashed,
age undermined. Earth grasp clutches
mighty builders, their toil totters;
hard ground grips a hundred generations
a nation renowned. Oft bore this wall

10

scarlet stains on gray one kingdom after another,
standing under storms, towering, till it collapsed.
Stonework stays fast in heaps,
by fell men unmoved, yet time
grimly grinds rock to dust,

15

and water worn stones shine.
Skill shows in early work
under fallen rock, eartrind yields
makers' mind— swift braids,
strong in rings, noble bound

20

wires, well-anchored, wind walls together.
Buildings were bright, bathhouses many;
under high horn gables gathered great hosts,
many at meadhall were mirthful—
but that changed by sudden fate.

25

Death waled wide, oncoming plague days
swept away all that sword host.
Their castle became a waste land,
a dead city. Tenders ceased,
shrines fell to earth. Now these courts dreary,
30
and this tiber gape of fallen tile
lays bare roofbeams. Where ruins plunge, plains
a broken barrow, there had been many warriors,
gold bearing and glad-minded, in splendid array,
wine-wassailed and proud, war regalia gleaming,
35
gazing on gold, on silver, on studded jewelry,
on land, on cattle, on precious gemstones,
on this shining city and broad realm.
Where stone houses stood, a stream spilled hotly
boiling from below; the wall all enclosed
40
bright at its bosom and there baths beheld,
hot at heart. That was lavish.
They let pour in winter weather
over gray stone streams of hot water...
When they returned home rime-hung
45
from ringed sea it was hot
there in the baths. ...
... That was a kingly thing
to have a house in so great a city...

The Wanderer

[Anglo-Saxon, Anonymous]

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig
geond lagulade longe sceolde

hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,

5

wadan wræclastas. Wyrð bið ful aræd!
Swa cwæð eardstapa, earfeþa gemyndig,
wraþra wælsleahta, winemæga hryre:

"Oft ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce
mine ceare cwīpan. Nis nu cwicra nan

10

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.

15

Ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan,
ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman.

Forðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
in hyra breostcofan bindað fæste;

swa ic modsefan minne sceolde,

20

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,

25

sohte sele dreorig sinces bryttan,
hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
þone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
weman 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 selessecgas ond sincþege,
35

hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
wenede to wiste. Wyn eal gedreas!
Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes
leofes larcwidum longe forþolian,
ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
40

earmne anhogan oft gebindað.
þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge
honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
in geardagum giefstolas breac.
45

ðonne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma,
gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
baþian brimfuglas, brædan feþra,
hreasan hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged.
þonne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
50

sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwad,
þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð;

greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
secga geseldan. Swimmað eft on weg!
Fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð

55

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 lif eal geondþence,
hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,
modge maguþegnas. Swa þes middangeard
ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ,
forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer, ær he age

65

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 spricedð,
oþþæt collenferð cunne gearwe
hwider hreþra gehygd hweorfan wille.
Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,

75

swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,
hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.
Woriað þa winsalo, waldend licgað

dreame bidrorene, duguþ eal gecrong,

80

wlonc bi wealle. Sume wig fornom,
ferede in forðwege, sumne fugel oþbær
ofer heanne holm, sumne se hara wulf
deaðe gedælde, sumne dreorighleor
in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde.

85

Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend
oþþæt burgwara breahntma 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
wælsleahta worn, ond þas word acwið:
"Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom mapþumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!

95

Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære.
Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe
weal wundrum heah, wrymlicum fah.
wæpen wælgifru, wyrd seo mære,

100

ond þas stanhleoþu stormas cnyssað,
hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð,
wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,
nipeð nihtscua, norþan onsendeð
hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.

105

Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice,
onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,
eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð!"

110

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.

The Wanderer

[Translated by Crisman Cooley]

Oft the lone man longs for mercy,
the creator's kindness, for he goes soul-weary
beyond waterways and long must
scull by hand the ice cold sea

5

past exile-tracks. Fate has so decreed!
The wanderer begins, mind troubled by
wrathful battle-slaughter, fallen friends and kinsmen:

"Often alone before dawn

I speak low my cares. No one is alive anymore

10

to whom my mind I dare
speak openly. I know too well
that a noble serves the code of lords—
he locks his spirit, fastens and binds
his heart treasure, think what he will.

15

His weary words cannot forestall his fate;
his sorry soul cannot help frame him.
Therefore the just, often mournful,
in their breast-coffer bind moods fast.

So myself must I—

20

though sick at heart, deprived of property,
far from family—fetter my soul
since the year my lord was laid
under dark earth, and I, debased, blown
by grief's mad winter gale over the watery band,

25

sought a dreary hall and treasure bestower

where, near or far, I might find
in the meadhall some small remembrance,
and, though friendless, this comfort might
lure me to mirth. He knows who ventures

30

how cruel sorrow feels to a wayfarer
that has lost his beloved liege.

Exile awaits him, not a gold winding,
a door frozen shut, not bounty's horn.

He remembers hallmen and treasure-gifts,

35

for in his youth, his goldgiver
accustomed him to feasting. All pleasures perish!

Thenceforth he knows whose dear lord's
beloved lessons are too long forsaken
that sorrow and sleep lash together

40

the wretched lone-dweller, binding him up.
He dreams in his mind that he his sovereign
embraces and kisses, and lays on a knee
head and hand, as he did before
in days gone by at gift giving.

45

Awakening after, the homeless man
sees before him fallow waves,
bathing seabirds preening their feathers,
frost and snowfall, mingled with hail.

Then both make a heavier heart wound,

50

bitter after sweet. Sorrows are renewed
when friends resurface, hovering beyond;
he greets them gladly, seeing them beyond;

then the messengers swim off on a wave!

Floating seafarers bring there but few

55

known songs. Care is renewed

in one who goes often enough

over the watery band with a weary heart.

I cannot think for the world

why my soul does not darken

60

when my noble life I remember—

how suddenly they abandoned the hall

who were proud warriors. So this middle-earth

day by day drosses and falls.

No man is worthy of wisdom ere he

65

winters awhile in this world. Long he suffers,

not fast to fury, nor word hurried,

nor bending in battle, nor wanting sense,

nor fearful, nor fey, nor covetous,

nor rash for renown, ere he ken yare.

70

A baron abides when some threat speaks,

until fierce-minded and ready knows

whither his heart-thought will fly.

Yet shall brave men behold how ghastly it is

when all worldly wealth stands wasting,

75

so palpable now throughout middle earth

where wind-shaken walls still standing

and rime-hung houses fall to ruin.

Wine halls totter, rulers lie dead,

joys depart, good warriors are gone

80

once proud by the wall. War wasted some,
ferried them forth, some gulls carried in gobbets
over the deep sea, some the grey wolf
dealt unto death; and one, dreary-faced,
hid his lord in a grave.

85

This earthyard was devastated by the old shaper,
until burghers' revelry ceased,
and ancient work of giants stood empty.

By this wall then a wise one thought
and, this dark life pondering deeply,

90

the skillful sage remembering a past
worn by war slaughter, spoke these words:

'Where is the horse? Where is the warrior? Where is the giver of gold?

Where are the feast seats? Where are joys of the hall?

Oh bright cup! Oh shining armor!

95

Oh glory of princes! How time of renown
darkens under nightfall as if it never existed!'

Now stands in stead of beloved men

a wall, wondrously high, red-stained with serpents.

Corpse-starved weapons fate this nightmare,

100

storm-surge beats stone cliffs,

sky hurls ruin to bind earth

in winter terror; when darkness comes

in night shades, the north sends on

savage hail, malice of men.

105

All is violence in earth realm;

fate unwinds creation, world under heaven.

Here wealth wastes away, friends waste away,

man wastes away, warriors waste away—

this earthly foundation loses all worth!”

110

So said the wise-minded, sitting asunder, in runes.

Till truth is held in trust, he shall never hasten to show

that his warrior’s heart is torn, unless he knows it serves

to frame noble fortitude. Well is he who seeks solace

from our father in heaven, where all steadfastness stands.

