



The  
Complete  
Old English  
Poems

*Translated by*  
Craig Williamson

*With an introduction by*  
Tom Shippey



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OLD ENGLISH  
POEMS

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*Wilt þu, fus hæle, fremdne monnan,  
wisne woðboran wordum gretan,  
fricgan felageongne ymb forðgesceaft,  
biddan þe gesecge sidra gesceafta  
craeftas cyndelice cwichrerende,  
þa þe dogra gebwam þurh dom godes  
bringe wundra fela wera cneorissum?*

*Are you willing to trade talk with a stranger,  
Give a seer or singer, poet or prophet,  
A greeting, a welcome with wise words,  
Question the far-traveler about creation,  
Its natural power, its bodying forth  
Into everyday wonder through God's grace,  
Its life-quickenning capacity and clout,  
Its marvelous moving among men?*

—from *The Order of the World*





DEDICATION POEM

WEAVING WISDOM

Are you willing to trade talk with a stranger,  
Unwrap riddles, mix words with the wise,  
Wonder how and why each element  
Of creation quickens from cell to star,  
Each song shapes from Beowulf to blessing,  
Each primrose or prayer begins to bloom?

Each day through *dom*—through judgment,  
Through honor or ordinance, majesty or meaning,  
Some mystery offers itself up for unraveling  
To those who can thread thoughts and hear  
The shuttle singing, click and clack,  
Across the web, across the centuries.

And you, wanderer of landscape or light,  
Can you read runes, sift evidence,  
Draw conclusions or a straight line,  
Craft arguments in prose or a pot in clay,  
Chart the universe, charm the moment  
With child's play?

Here's an Anglo-Saxon proverb:

A wise man or woman never wearies  
Of asking questions about creation,  
Never tires of digging up ideas and artifacts,  
Never says, "No," to the dirt of history  
Or the mind mucking back through memory,  
Rooting about for tribal glory or plain truth.

So that by repeating, rehearsing, revising,  
We take the cunning wonder of the world

And weave it into a nest of numbers,  
A house of hypotheses, a web of words.

The Anglo-Saxon poet says, *Leorna ðas lare*—  
Learn this lore. So scholars wrote riddles,  
Teasing the wits of would-be solvers,  
Celebrating the mystery of moon and mailcoat,  
Warhorn and harrow, piss and plow,  
Weathercock, wine-cup, web and loom.

And across the bridge of language that lifts  
Over the river of years, here is my riddle:  
What shapes us all from morning to meandering,  
From ancient galaxies to ribonucleic acid,  
From certainty to serendipity, dawn to doom,  
From quarks to quasars, from proofs to passions,  
From kisses to calibrations, love to longevity,  
From warriors to websongs, high art to half-lives,  
From the flowers of heaven to the fields of Einstein?

Let each student who loves a mystery,  
Either as a shaman or as a detective,  
Inquire after the wonders of creation,  
The order of the world, inscribe in her book  
Or his understanding the *searorun*,  
The secret skill or inwrought power,  
Of each elemental thing, each nascent thought,  
Each truth-song inscribed in number or narrative.

Be bold to question, quick to doubt,  
Eager to imagine, proud of precision,  
Humble at the end of a proof or poem.  
Give thanks that some part of this grand,  
Unabating, intimate mystery remains  
Unknown, whether you want to call it  
A unified field, a world-wide web,  
Or a shuttle singing through the loom of time.

—Craig Williamson

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# INTRODUCTION

*Tom Shippey*

## SONG AND POETRY

About fourteen hundred years ago, mourners buried a man in what archaeologists have now labeled “Grave 32” in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snape, in Suffolk, England. He was laid out carefully and respectfully, in pagan fashion, with a spear by his right side and a round shield covering the left side of his torso. Underneath the shield, though, the mourners placed what may have been the dead man’s most precious possession: his harp. (Technically speaking, it is a lyre, but Anglo-Saxons would have called it a *hearpe*.) Made of maplewood, with a soundboard of thin oak, and with attachments, including a wrist-strap which would allow it to be played two-handed, it is an unusually fine instrument even compared with the similar harps recovered elsewhere, one of them from the lavishly furnished royal burial at Sutton Hoo a few miles away. The report of the archaeologist Graeme Lawson notes that it was left “cradled in the crook of the [dead man’s] left arm, almost as though in preparation for performance,” and adds that such graves provide us with “direct archaeological links” to the world in which Old English poetry was composed and preserved (215, 223). The “warrior-poet” of Grave 32 was surely a *scop*, one of those who (see *The Fortunes of Men*, ll. 74–77) “sits with his harp at his lord’s feet, / Takes his treasure, a reward of rings, / Plucks with his harp-nail, sweeps over strings, / Shapes song: hall-thanes long for his melody.”

What we now know as poetry, then, began as song, though the tunes and the music have been lost beyond recall. Performers nowadays try to reimagine it, though one may wonder whether any one person can now recreate a whole

art form developed long ago by many minds and marked by delighted virtuosity. The Anglo-Saxons' word for "harp-nail," or plectrum, was *sceacol*, and the poet of *The Fortunes of Men* calls it, in very literal translation, "the shackle, which leaps, the sweet-sounding nail." It is "the harp's sweet songs, the poet's music" that provoke Grendel to envious fury in *Beowulf*, and there are "sound and music mixed" when Hrothgar's poet plays the "joy-wood" and sings the story of Finnsburg to the Danish court and its guests (see ll. 89–90, 1060–1161). At a much lower social level, the story of Cædmon told by the eighth-century historian Bede (see the headnote to *Cædmon's Hymn*) indicates that it was normal at an Anglo-Saxon drinking-party for a harp to be passed around so that everyone could sing. Cædmon is unusual in that he cannot sing (or play?) and has to hide his embarrassment in the cowshed, from which the angel rescues him by the gift of inspiration. Of course, Bede's story may not be true, but it cannot have seemed implausible either to the first readership of Bede's own version, written in Latin, or to the readership of the translation into Old English made more than a century and a half later. For the pagan and pre-literate Anglo-Saxons of the early Anglo-Saxon period, poetry delivered as song was at once the main channel of their own traditions, their highest intellectual art form, and their most valued entertainment. When the messenger who announces Beowulf's death says that their lord has "laid down laughter" (l. 3022), he is thinking of *gamen ond gleodream*, "game and glee-dream," or as we would say, "merriment and joy in music."

The very high cultural value placed on their native skill by Anglo-Saxons must account for the preservation of Old English poetry in relatively large quantities, rather more than 31,000 lines of it all told, enough to fill the six thick volumes of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (and the post-ASPR discovered poems included in the section, "Additional Poems," in this collection). This body of literature is a striking anomaly on the early medieval European scene. Anglo-Saxons were still writing poems in the traditional style, with fairly strict adherence to the old rules of meter and use of traditional "kennings" (see pp. 17–18) almost up to 14 October 1066, when the last Anglo-Saxon king, Harold, died on the battlefield of Hastings: the latest datable poem we have is the one preserved in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* on the death of his predecessor, King Edward, nine months before. How long they had been doing this is a much harder question. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, or *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, was finished by 731, and his story of Cædmon is set many years earlier, so that *Cædmon's Hymn* is often taken to be the earliest Old English poem. But it has been pointed out by Kevin Kiernan (1990) that Bede gives only a Latin version of the *Hymn*,

the Old English poetic versions (in both Northumbrian and West Saxon) being added much later, so that they could have been composed on the basis of the Latin at that later date—though it is an odd coincidence, as Fulk and Cain remark (142, 255), that the Latin falls so neatly into Old English poetic form.

Other contenders for “earliest surviving poem” are carved rather than written (Old English used the same verb, *writan*, for both), and use the old runic alphabet rather than the Latin alphabet brought in by Christian missionaries. The poem, *The Dream of the Rood*, survives in long and probably expanded form in the Vercelli Book—an Anglo-Saxon manuscript found against all probability in the cathedral library of Vercelli in northern Italy, perhaps left there by a pilgrim—but some twenty lines of a version of the same poem are carved in stone, in fragmentary form, in runic letters and in a very different far-northern dialect, on the stone obelisk now known as the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire in southern Scotland. Everything about the Ruthwell Cross is enigmatic, but it could be three hundred years older than the Vercelli Book. There are five lines of Old English poetry, also in runic script, on the Franks Casket, a whalebone box discovered in France, and an early date is suggested by the fact that the engraver not only carved his runes clockwise around the box edges, but did them in mirror-writing along the bottom, as if the left-to-right convention was unknown to him (Fulk and Cain, 45–47).

Our written records of Old English poetry, then, last more than three hundred years, from 1065 back to at least the early 700s. But there can be no doubt that the verse form was old even in Cædmon’s time. We possess a considerable amount of Old Norse poetry, in a language related to Old English but recorded centuries later, much of it produced by professional “skalds” in language and meter comprehensible only to the initiated. Some Old Norse poems, however, are written in the meter they called *fornyrðislag*, “old-word-meter,” and this is effectively identical to Old English, in meter and often in turns of phrase. Poems have also survived in Old Saxon and Old High German, again with similar meter and phrasing, all of which indicates that the various Germanic peoples at one time, before any records survive, and when their languages were much more similar to each other than they later became, had a shared tradition of poetry. Christopher Tolkien has even pointed out that some names surviving in Old Norse must have originated as Gothic, the stories attached to them going back to the wars of the Goths and Huns in far eastern Europe before the fall of the Western Roman Empire, and also remembered by Old English poets (xxiii–xxv). But the reason poetry is preserved much earlier and

in much greater quantity in Old English than in its cousin languages must be—apart from a certain dogged conservatism in the English psyche—England’s early conversion to Christianity, with the associated import of writing skills.

## THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE WRITTEN WORD

The Anglo-Saxons, after initial hesitations and some backslidings, accepted Christianity and the literacy which came with the new religion with enthusiasm. Nothing exemplifies the scale of what they then achieved more than the career of the Venerable Bede. He was born in poverty and obscurity somewhere in Northumberland, remote from the intellectual centers and libraries of the Mediterranean world. When he was a young teen in 686, his first monastery at Wearmouth was all but wiped out by plague, so that the boy had to learn to sing antiphonally with his abbot Ceolfrid, there being no choir-monk left to join the service (Bede, 15–16). But by the end of his life he was the most learned man in Europe, author of a shelf of Bible commentaries and the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the greatest historical work of the post-Roman period. All were written in impeccable Latin—though at the very end of his life, on his deathbed, he came out with five carefully crafted and enigmatic lines of Old English poetry, *Bede’s Death Song* (for which see p. 1051).

In his *History* Bede tells a story to explain the new hope which the pagan Anglo-Saxons saw in Christianity. As the new religion was being debated, a thane of King Edwin said that the life of man was like a sparrow which flies into the king’s hall, from the darkness outside into the light and the warmth, and then flies out again. If the new religion offered knowledge of what was outside the little circle of light and life, the thane said, we should follow it. One of Edwin’s pagan priests agreed with him, rejecting his old faith, ritually destroying his own idols and setting fire to his own temple. The story suggests that the main draw of Christianity was its message of hope and certainty, of a world other than the brief, lit circle surrounded by darkness that was the pagan image of life.

Another element may have been relief from fear: the northern pagan religion, English or Norse, relied on propitiation of its gods by sacrifice, and there is archaeological evidence for ritual killings in early England, some of it gruesome, like a grave excavated in Yorkshire. There the mourners had laid a younger woman out carefully in a closed coffin with her jewelry and expensive grave-goods, including a bronze cauldron. But then they threw an older

woman in the grave, threw a rock on top of her to hold her down, fracturing her pelvis, and buried her alive. She was still trying to push herself up on her knees and elbows as she died (Fleming, 139–40, 347–48). Many besides King Edwin’s priest-counselor must have been glad to be released from this kind of ritual behavior: one might note that the *Beowulf*-poet seems to have heard of sacrificial rites, though he presents them as a desperate emergency measure by the Danes and expresses strong disapproval (ll. 175–88).

As for books, before the conversion century was over, rich Anglo-Saxon churchmen like Benedict Biscop (d. 690) were arriving in Rome like twentieth-century Texas oilmen in Paris, anxious to build up their collections. The libraries of York and Jarrow, while modest by Italian standards, soon became a source of pride (Lapidge), and Anglo-Saxon scholarship began to be respected far afield. Fifty years after Bede’s death, the York deacon Alcuin, or Alhwine, was “headhunted” by Charlemagne to produce, among other tasks, an authoritative text of the Bible (Garrison, Nelson, and Tweddle). One of the most praiseworthy features of this first era of Anglo-Saxon Christianity was the believers’ immediate determination to spread the Gospel to what they recognized as their kin in the still pagan lands across the North Sea. St. Willibrord (d. 739) became the Apostle of the Frisians. St. Boniface, whose birth name was Wynfrith, is known as the Apostle of Germany; he was martyred in 754 at Dokkum in the Netherlands (Talbot). Anglo-Saxon and Irish missionaries were probably the more successful for not always being associated with the Frankish church, seen with some justice as an arm of Frankish imperialism.

The Anglo-Saxon church nevertheless had its own special qualities, one of which was perhaps a certain lack of interest in humility. It did produce “fundamentalists” like Bede, who says nothing about his own birth, but the Anglo-Saxon monasteries that were soon founded—sometimes double foundations for men and women, sometimes ruled by royal-family abbesses like Cædmon’s Hild at Whitby—were aristocratic places, rich and status-conscious (see Wormald). This fact may well explain the survival of Old English poetry, and the kind of poetry that survived. Until late on, the church had an effective monopoly on writing, but aristocratic churchmen did not lose interest in their own traditions, including heroic legends of the past. Some thought they took too much interest in the stories of what must have been pagan heroes. Alcuin wrote angrily to one “Speratus” (an unidentified Mercian bishop; see Bullough) that he had heard a harper was being allowed to sing stories of Ingeld at mealtimes (a character who appears in *Beowulf*; see ll. 2022–66), instead of a lector reading the word of God; but this only tells us what was actually happening (Garmonsway and Simpson, 242). An evident

compromise was to put Christian story into the kind of poetic form Anglo-Saxons were used to, and that is what we often have. Bede tells us that Cædmon, himself illiterate, had the Bible read to him at the command of Abbess Hild so he could turn it into poetry, and we have long poems paraphrasing Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel, and the apocryphal book of Judith, though they are not now thought to be by Cædmon. A man called Cynewulf, probably a Mercian monk, added a runic “signature” to four poems, including the female saints’ lives of *Elene* and *Juliana*. The long poem *Andreas*, which translates another apocryphal story of St. Andrew’s conversion of the cannibal Mermedonians, would have made inspiring listening for trainee missionaries, and we have two poems on the life of St. Guthlac, who (like St. Juliana) knew how to deal with demons. A considerable “wisdom literature” also survives in poetry, of which more is said below. Possibly its existence contributed to the remarkably confident and ambitious project (traditionally and still not impossibly ascribed to King Alfred himself) not only of translating, with many changes and additions, Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, the most respected philosophical work in Latin surviving from classical antiquity; but also of rendering even its most challenging passages into Old English verse. As the most recent edition notes, the first poem in this sequence, which was free composition outlining a history of conquest and rebellion rather than translation of stages in an argument, “shows what the versifier was capable of when not constrained by the prose” (Griffith, 2009, 134).

One might add, “or when motivated by legends of the heroic past,” for another interest of Anglo-Saxon aristocrats was their own history. It is surely no coincidence that the three most famous literary works produced by Anglo-Saxons are all in their different ways historical: Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in Latin, mentioned several times already and completed by the year 731; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in Old English prose with poetic insertions, first compiled at King Alfred’s instigation in the 890s but kept up at Peterborough monastery till 1154; and the poem *Beowulf*, whose date is not known, but which gives a surprisingly detailed account of events in south Scandinavia in the early sixth century, a little of which can be confirmed. Portions of two other heroic poems survived up to modern times: *The Fight at Finnsburg*, which duplicates part of a story told in *Beowulf*, and *Waldere*, an epic about events in the fifth century, which was evidently discarded by some hard-line librarian who however used a few scrap pages to reinforce the cover of a book now in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Some abbots at least must have given permission for the considerable expenditure of time and

vellum needed to write and copy these poems, and we are now grateful for their open-mindedness.

### ORALITY, PRE-LITERACY, AND THE “RIDDLIC” MODE

There is no doubt that much of the surviving poetry, and perhaps all of it, was composed and set down by literate poets. Many written sources, usually in Latin, have been identified and are mentioned in the headnotes to individual poems, or groups of poems like *The Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter* and *The Meters of Boethius*. At the same time, the poems themselves often mention oral performance and hint at oral composition, which must once have been the only method of composing poetry before the missionaries from Rome and Ireland taught the Anglo-Saxons to read and write. In *Beowulf*, for instance (though this may be deliberate anachronism), the verb *writan* means “to cut”: King Hrothgar looks at the hilt of the giant’s sword which Beowulf has retrieved from Grendel’s mere, “On which was engraved [*writen*] in images and runes / The origin of strife, the first feud” (ll. 1686–87). One may wonder whether the delight which Solomon and Saturn both express about books—“Books are bound with glory . . . Books bring a reward to the righteous” (*Solomon and Saturn II*, ll. 72, 82)—is the product of a time when literacy was still intimately connected with the promise of salvation and had not dwindled down to being an administrative tool. To these wise men, even the individual letters of the Pater Noster prayer are magically powerful—as perhaps were once the pre-Christian runes listed and described in *The Rune Poem* and used non-literally by the poet Cynewulf, four times, to sign his own name. One may sum up by saying that Old English poems were produced by literate poets, who nevertheless were living in a largely if decreasingly pre-literate world.

It is vital to realize, however, that pre-literate is not the same as illiterate. In the modern world, illiteracy carries a stigma. In a pre-literate world the wisest of men, and of women, may well be illiterate, with no sense of inferiority attached. Indeed, a corollary of pre-literacy may well be that pre-literates have skills which the modern literate world has lost, and which even early literates still possessed and valued: notably, the ability to speak carefully, and listen hard. This shows up, one might suggest, in a complex attitude toward truth—how it is told and heard, perceived and understood, in all its complexity and ambiguity. For this Craig Williamson has invented the useful neologism

“riddlic,” a term with a wider meaning than “riddling” (1982, 25 ff.). Its “riddlic” quality is one of the most pervasive and distinctive features of Old English poetry in general, as discussed extensively below, though in our literate world it has often not been appreciated.

One may add that another distinctive feature of Old English poetry is the prominence it gives to female speakers and female characters. Three of the long poems surviving have heroines rather than heroes, *Elene*, *Juliana*, and *Judith*. The unhappy or unfortunate women—Hildeburh, Wealhtheow, and Freawaru—have important, even pivotal roles in *Beowulf*. In the epic fragment *Waldere*, an important speech is assigned to the woman Hildegyth. And female characters—Eve, Sarah, Hagar—speak up prominently in the poems *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*. In addition, we have two “dramatic monologues” in the Exeter Book by female speakers, their gender confirmed not only by the content of what they say but by the feminine endings on adjectives the speakers apply to themselves. These two poems also illustrate the power and potential for complexity of riddlic speech; as well as the theme of evanescence, an issue of special importance, one might think, for the pre-literate world.

The two poems are perhaps the most perplexing in the entire Old English corpus, and interpretations of them have varied even more wildly than usual, as the headnotes to them indicate: it is probable that we will never understand in detail the stories that they refer to. Nevertheless, there are some things one can say about their mode of speech and their underlying themes. The first of them (all poem titles are modern) is now called *The Wife’s Lament*. This appears to be an autobiographical lament by a woman, and what she is lamenting seems to be a separation forced on her and her partner by hostile relatives. The physical scenario, however, is so strange that some have thought that we must be in the presence of an allegory, perhaps of the body’s lament for the soul. For surely even a divorced Anglo-Saxon wife would not be “forced to live in a cold earth-cave, / Under an oak tree” (ll. 32–33)? Meanwhile, the core of the lament is the speaker’s memory of happy times. She declares, “Something now seems as if it never was— / Our friendship together” (ll. 29–30). Note that “friendship” is a much stronger word in Old English (*freondscipe*) than in modern English, where it excludes romantic love. And in the poem even “our” is stronger than the word we use, for where modern English distinguishes only singular and plural, Old English had a special set of personal pronouns for the “dual” number, used only of two people, here *uncer* rather than *ure*. So *freondscipe uncer* means the “friendship (love) of just us two, the two of us together,” even “together against the world.”



Nevertheless, what makes the thought especially bitter for the speaker are the words, “as if it never was.” Saying something is “as if it never was” does not mean, of course, that it never existed. It did exist. It still exists with painful clarity in the memory. But memory is purely subjective. There is no evidence for the memory in the real world at all. But which world is more real, the internal one or the external one? It is that contrast which creates special grief, special pain for the speaker as she hangs on to the love which now seems to be totally denied by the cold and unfeeling world around her.

The second lament spoken by a woman in the Exeter Book is the poem *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and this adds yet another twist to the theme of impalpability, the contrast of subjective/objective, the concern with what is there/not there. In this poem, the speaker laments that her lover, Wulf, has been taken from her and cries out at the end of the poem:

It's easy to rip an unsewn stitch  
Or tear the thread of an untold tale—  
The song of us two together. (ll. 21–23)

Once again she uses the dual pronoun *uncer*, and once again what she laments is an abstraction, “The song of us two together.” Nevertheless, and this goes a stage beyond what we heard from the speaker in *The Wife's Lament*, what this unhappy woman says is, logically speaking, *not true*. If it has never been “sewn,” there can be no “stitch” there to rip! If the tale is “untold,” there can be no “thread” to unravel. The “love” of *The Wife's Lament* did exist, even if now it is “as if it never was”: when the “wife” of that poem says, “The web of our wedding is unwoven,” she means that she and her lover *were* married, though now they have been separated. By contrast, the second woman is saying there never *was* any “stitch,” any “thread,” and so no “[told] tale,” no “song of us two together.” Nevertheless, we may well guess what that second speaker means. What she is saying is that she is desperately regretful for something that never existed, that has been prevented from existing—but is terribly and paradoxically powerful in her mind, in her imagination. To feel the force of what she says—and this is how “riddlic” speech often works—you have to be aware of both the surface literal non-meaning and the underlying emotional meaning: the point is the agonizing contrast, just as the point of a riddle is the contrast between misleading surface and hidden solution.

One may reflect that in a pre-literate world, where there is not even the concept of an authenticating document, subjective memories are especially

important, though their fragility is also well understood. One may go on to say that the whole theme of the subjective versus the objective appears powerfully again and again in the Old English corpus. Or, to put it into more appropriate “riddlic” language, the theme of what is that isn’t: which is the way the issue is put in the poem *Solomon and Saturn II*.

This may be the most complex but neglected dialogue in Old English poetry; it is rarely translated or discussed. Possibly it has been out of favor as being, in some views, not “Anglo-Saxon” enough. The two disputants have names from Jewish and classical tradition, and some of their often-bewildering information exchanges come from a lost world of apocryphal knowledge. Yet the genre of the poem, a wisdom contest, may well have been traditional in the Old Northern world. It is paralleled, for instance, by exchanges in Old Norse, such as *The Riddles of Gestumblindi* or the Eddic poems, *Vafþruthnismál* and *Grimnismál*. Yet one should note that *Solomon and Saturn II* is not exactly a *riddle* contest. To use Williamson’s useful neologism once more, it is “riddlic” rather than “riddling.” The two contestants do not behave quite like Tolkien’s Gollum and Bilbo, asking each other defined riddles to which there must be a definite single answer. Sometimes they test each other’s knowledge, rather than their riddle-solving skill. Sometimes they pose existential questions to which there can be no single satisfactory answer. Sometimes they answer question with question, and increasingly they enter into a dialogue on the unstated but recurrent theme of justice: why may two twins have entirely different fates, why must some be saved and some be damned? Yet there is an element of the riddle there. Gollum’s gruesome riddle, “This thing all things devours . . .,” echoes Saturn’s question in lines 130–37, “What creature walks the world . . . feasts on ground-walkers, / Sky-floaters, sea-swimmers everywhere.” Bilbo’s fortuitous answer is “Time!” Solomon’s is “Old age,” but in both cases either answer would do.

More indirectly, Solomon at one point (ll. 213–14) asks, “Are you wise enough to say / What things were and what things were not?” Saturn replies, as often, with a question, not an answer, but the answer is in the question: “Why does [the sun] cast shadows?” (l. 218). For something which is both a visible presence and a visible absence is, of course, shadow. (Tolkien did not forget this question either, or the sinister nature of shadow-shapes elsewhere in Old English). But the question of items which are at once there and not-there is widespread in the Old English corpus.

One item in this limited set, besides “shadows,” must, for instance, be “ruins.” A ruin is certainly there, physically. It may weigh many tons, like the ruined Roman stone buildings and stone walls which the Anglo-Saxons

encountered for the first time on their arrival in what was once Britannia. They seem to have made a great impression on the newcomers. To the poet of *Maxims II*, they were “the cunning work of giants” (l. 2). In *The Wanderer*, the speaker moralizes on “the old works of giants” (l. 91), and the same phrase comes up in the poem now called *The Ruin*, which, from its mention of “stone buildings and hot springs” (l. 39), is thought to be a meditation on the Roman ruins (now restored) at Bath. The point about a ruin, though, is that while it exists physically, *by its very existence* it testifies to the *nonexistence* of something else: whatever it is a ruin *of*. It is there, in the present. It proves that something else, in the past, is no longer there. Ruins, then, are a central image in *The Wanderer*, another of the Exeter Book’s “dramatic monologues,” this time spoken by a male persona (or possibly several of them, “wanderer,” “wise man,” or “man wise in mind”). There the ruins act as a physical proof of evanescence (see ll. 78–108). And the thought they generate, directly parallel to that of the “wife” in *The Wife’s Lament*, is “How the time has slipped / Down under the night-helmet *as if it never was*” (ll. 101–2).

But it may be there in memory. And memories are also in a sense there/not there. They may be immensely powerful, stirring thoughts too deep for tears, as they do for the two female speakers discussed above. But they are also utterly subjective. No two people remember the same thing the same way. Nor can the grief they bring ever be fully felt or fully communicated. And “the wanderer” adds a further twist to the “as if it never was” situation, just as the woman of *Wulf and Eadwacer* did. For the pain of memory may be especially great if the memories come to us in dreams, which can be blocked out by no effort of self-control. That is what happens to “the wanderer,” who in his dream remembers the happy time when he had a lord, a place, a home. Then he wakes up to the bitter landscape of later reality, where even the seabirds seem to mock him, for they are at home in the freezing sea as he is not. Rightly does he say, if with Anglo-Saxon understatement, “Then the wounds of the heart are heavier” (l. 53). *Nessun maggior dolore*, wrote Dante, “There is no greater sorrow than to remember, in misery, the happy time” (*Inferno* V, ll. 121–23). But the Anglo-Saxon poet dramatized the thought centuries before him.

Shadows, ruins, memories, dreams, “our friendship,” and “The song of us two together.” To the list of things that are and are not, or are now as if they had never been, one could well add the human counterparts of stone ruins: last survivors. They exist, and like the ruins, they bear testimony to what has vanished, through their memory. This does not have to be mute testimony, for last survivors can at least talk. But in Anglo-Saxon culture even that consolation is

doubtful, for “A noble man / Must seal up his heart’s thoughts” (*The Wanderer*, ll. 13–14). Of all the virtues, stoicism was perhaps the one most prized by Anglo-Saxons (as by many of their cultural descendants). There is a last survivor in *Beowulf* (ll. 2230–67) who makes a speech over the treasure he is hiding, or depositing—curiously, he leaves it “open” for the dragon to find. But his speech is a soliloquy, with no one to hear it. Beowulf too is very nearly a last survivor, though he has one person left to speak to, his relative (nephew?) Wiglaf. His last four-line speech, however, and typically, conceals grief by flat statement. Does talking soothe “the wounds of the heart”? Possibly poetry does.

### POLYMORPHS OF TRUTH

Another way to bring out the pervasive “riddlic” quality of Old English poetry is to borrow a rhetorical trope from Kurt Vonnegut. His novel *Cat’s Cradle* (1963) rests on the science-fictional idea of “Ice-Nine,” a form of water which acts like a seed crystal to turn everything it contacts into ice. Just as Vonnegut plays with the idea of different “polymorphs” of water, so one may “riddlically” play with the idea of different forms of truth, as they appear again and again in the Old English corpus.

In this imaginary scenario, “Truth-One” in Old English would be *sod*, or “sooth”—a word derived, though it does not look like it, from the verb “to be.” “Sooth” is things as they are, and one of the jobs of a “soothsayer” is to tell it the way it is. The Old English metrical psalms are full of such truths. In *Psalms 134*, for example, the poet says:

[God] alone made the world’s glorious wonders.  
 He created heaven for the understanding of man.  
 He first made the earth after the waters.  
 He made the great lights for the children of men.  
 He made the bright sun to rule the day  
 And the moon and stars to rule the night.  
 He slew the Egyptians and their firstborn children  
 And led the Israelites unharmed out of Egypt  
 With a mighty hand and powerful arm.  
 He parted the great Red Sea in an instant  
 And led the Israelites right through the middle. (ll. 9–19)

This is a biblical truth that does not seem open to debate (though there are certainly debatable truths elsewhere in the psalms, and the literal truth of

this is certainly debatable). Here we see both a cosmological and a historical truth combined in a description of God's ongoing creation in the world, what is called elsewhere *forðgesceaft*. And heavenly Wisdom in the Old English translation of the Boethian meters often speaks such undeniable truths, for example, telling Boethius that "if you want to gaze on the radiant truth, / You must renounce and relinquish all idle joys, / Imperfect goods and pointless pleasures" in favor of a gift that will make Boethius "eternally glad" (Poem 5, ll. 20–25).

Riddles, on the other hand, do not offer an unquestioned truth. They depend on a kind of doubling, "Truth-Two." Every statement in a riddle must be both eventually true (or it is not a fair riddle) and potentially misleading (or it is not a good and testing riddle). We cannot tell before solving a riddle which clues are meant to be literal, which metaphoric. As Williamson notes: "Each riddle creature takes on the disguise of another: the bagpipe is a bird that sings through its foot; the rake scruffs like a dog along walls; the butter churn is engaged in a bawdy bit of bouncing to produce its baby butter, and the bookworm is a plundering beast that wolfs down a tribal heritage" (2011, 163–64). Some of the most sophisticated riddles use this metaphoric/literal ambiguity to point to a double solution, one plain and the other bawdy. So the riddler says:

I heard of something rising in a corner,  
Swelling and standing up, lifting its cover.  
The proud-hearted bride grabbed at that boneless  
Wonder with her hands; the prince's daughter  
Covered that swelling thing with a swirl of cloth. (Riddle 43)

Here the corner, the bride, and her hands turn out to be literal truths, but the rising "something" (*nathwæt*, literally, "I know not what"), the "boneless wonder," has a doubled metaphoric meaning, both bread dough and phallus. The thing that covers this swelling creature, *brægl* in Old English, can be either a cloth or a dress. The ambiguity of riddles makes them delightful to solve, but it also challenges the reader to see below the surface meaning of words and concepts in order to reconceive the world in its many hidden connections. Williamson describes the process:

The riddlers taunt and cajole, they admit and deny, they peddle false hopes and paradoxes, they lead the reader down dark roads with glints of light. And in the end they never confess except to flatter, "Say what I mean." What they mean is that reality exists and is at the

same time a mosaic of man's perception. What they mean is that man's measure of the world is in words, that perceptual categories are built on verbal foundations, and that by withholding the key to the categorical house (the entitling solution), the riddlers may force the riddle-solver to restructure his own perceptual blocks in order to gain entry to a metaphorical truth. In short the solver must imagine himself a door and open in. (1977, 25)

Nevertheless, with a good riddle there ought at least to be a single correct solution (even if, as is sometimes the case with the Old English riddles, no one is sure what it is). This is not always the case with other forms of "riddlic" language.

Old English maxims offer another sort of truth that mediates between the two truths above, the unassailable truth and the riddle-truth, which we may call "Truth-Three" in the polymorphic system. The poet of *Maxims II* says, for example, "A king shall rule a kingdom" and "Wind is the swiftest creature in air," but also admits that "Truth is the trickiest" (ll. 1, 3, 10). Some editors emend OE *swicolost*, "trickiest," to *switolost* or *swutolost*, "clearest," in order to sustain the fiction of "Truth-One," things as they are, but the *Maxims II* poet constantly indulges in using the verbs *byð* (is, is always, will be) and *sceal* (shall be, should be, must be, ought to be, is typically), verbs notoriously difficult to translate. With respect to kingly behavior, for example, Williamson argues that "beneath the apparently straightforward gnomic half-line, the poem points to a wide variety of possible kingly behaviors," noting that "what is slides into what should be or might be [and] the possibility of 'might not' lurks beneath the surface [so that] the ideal is haunted by the shadow of real-world kingly faults and failures" (2011, 179–80). He also contends that sometimes beneath a series of apparently unrelated truthful maxims, there is an implicit riddle. So the poet of *Maxims II* says: "The dragon shall dwell in a barrow, / Old and treasure-proud. The fish must spawn / Its kin in water. The king must give out / Rings in the hall" (ll. 26–29). But what does the dragon or the fish have to do with the king? "Perhaps a generous king is like the fish spawning peace in the hall, while the greedy king is like a dragon, hoarding his treasure (as Heremod does in *Beowulf*) so that he has no loyal thanes and spawns only strife" (Williamson, 2011, 180).

On the other hand, some maxims scattered throughout the Old English poems appear to articulate a plain truth, which is not only expressed in the maxim but which also has maximum force. These maxims remain (in a sense) true, even when mere facts appear to deny them. Near the start of

*Beowulf*, for example, the poet rounds off a gnomic, and rather practical, statement about buying loyalty in advance with the words: “A warrior thrives / Through glorious deeds and generous gifts” (ll. 26–27). The established pattern of treachery and ingratitude in Anglo-Saxon history, and in everyone else’s history, proves the statement factually untrue. Nevertheless, it *ought* to be true, and the ideal or desirable rule is not invalidated by mere exceptions. Even more pointedly, Byrhtwold, the old retainer in *The Battle of Maldon*, says as he prepares to die with his lord on a lost battlefield, “Ever may a man mourn / Who thinks to flee . . .” (ll. 319–20). What he says is not factually true: one can easily imagine someone running away from a lost battle, and congratulating himself on his own good sense later on every time he thought of it! But once again we know what Byrhtwold means. He means no one *ought* to feel like that, has any right to feel like that. What he says is not *sod*-true, it is super-true, a cultural imperative. Maxims often express cultural imperatives even in the face of a history or a reality which denies them.

Another form of truth, “Truth-Four,” might be proverbs. Many Old English proverbs survive and are often fairly clear, such as *A Proverb from Winfred’s Time*, which says: “The sluggard delays striving for glory / Never dreams of daring victories, / Or successful ventures. He dies alone.” Other proverbs, especially those in prose, remain thoroughly enigmatic. They must have been accepted as true, but we do not have the key to their coding. Often it can be guessed: “He who wishes to run down the hart must not care about his horse” (Durham Proverb 41; Arngart, 294) means something like “You can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs.” Both ancient and modern proverbs have (one may well suppose, though it has to be a guess) the same meta-meaning: you cannot achieve your goal without paying the price for it. Other Anglo-Saxon sayings remain incomprehensible to this day: “The fuller the cup, the fairer you must bear it” (Durham Proverb 42; Arngart, 295). All the words are easy enough, but the truth behind them . . . ? And it is by no means the most challenging proverb to survive.

On another front, modern philosophers of language take particular interest in “speech-acts,” such as “performatives”—when you utter a performative you are in fact doing the deed you name. One significant example still recognized in our society is to say, “I bet you . . .” Probably someone who refused to pay up on a bet made orally would get away with it in our courts, for we all know that something is not legal till you have a written contract, an invoice, a receipt, and so on. Nevertheless, the words, “I bet you . . .,” especially if made before witnesses and ratified with a handshake, would be accepted as binding

in honor by many people. In a pre-literate society such deals have even more backing, and there is one particular kind of public statement which has special importance. This is the promise or, in Old English, the *beot*. This word is often translated as “boast” (Anglo-Saxons did not have the same inhibitions about immodesty that we do), but it derives from the verb *behatan*, “to promise,” and that is what the speaker of a *beot* is doing. He may back it up by stating previous achievements, but the main point of a *beot* is to promise an undertaking—typically, to stand by one’s lord in battle, to conquer or die. The status of a promise is, however, intrinsically uncertain, in abeyance. One cannot tell whether it is true or not till it is fulfilled, or of course, not fulfilled. So the moment when a promise is made/was made, “then,” is inevitably linked to a “now,” when the promise comes due.

So Wiglaf says to the warriors hanging back from the dragon, “Now the day has come / When the Lord needs the might of warriors” (*Beowulf*, ll. 2645–46), the woman Hildegyth calls to her lover Waldere, “The time has come when you must choose” (*Waldere*, l. 12), and even the author of the apparently un-heroic poem on *The Seasons for Fasting* (pure information, one might have thought) adds urgency to his regulations with the words, “The time has come! / We know in this hour that we need to pray” (ll. 134–35). The whole promise-complex animates the speeches of the retainers in the second half of *Maldon*. Leofsunu calls out, “I promise not to flee one foot” (l. 246), the poet says of Eadweard the Tall, “He vowed he’d never flee” (l. 276), Ælfwine says, “Now we’ll see who’s worthy of his vow” (l. 214), the poet notes of Offa, lying dead by his lord, “he had kept both his courage and his vow” (l. 293). The negative side gets just as much weight. Leofsunu imagines it when he says that the warriors back home “will have no reason to reproach me” (l. 249), and we are reminded that Offa had said, correctly, back in the “then” which is irreversibly connected to “now,” “That many who spoke boldly there in the hall / Would never make good on the field of battle” (ll. 199–200). And in *Beowulf*, Wiglaf says, “I remember well” the time when promises were made (l. 2631), and closes his speech of threat and reproach to the defaulters with a line that verges on maxim, “Death is better for you than a life of shame” (l. 2890).

Promises, then, are betwixt-and-between on the truth scale. They ought to be “performatives,” but may not turn out so. Charms, meanwhile, of which we have a dozen in this collection, aim to alter facts by words, so functioning even more strongly as “performatives.” When a healer tells her tale of how “the mighty women stole strength,” the tale is true only in some non-physical sphere, but when she says, “*Get out, little spear, if you are in here,*” that is surely



meant to be true, and to work, in a severely practical way (Metrical Charm 12, second stanza and refrain). One might call promises “Truth-Five,” and charms “Truth-Six.” And let us not forget allegory, riddle-become-story, as “Truth-Seven”: for Anglo-Saxon poets readily saw the point of the Phoenix rising from the flames as ascending from its earthly nest to immortal life, or the whale in *Physiologus II* seducing the careless sailors to camp out on its back and drown when it submerged, as images of the saved and the damned. But it is perhaps time to abandon Vonnegut’s idea of numbering polymorphs: for one of the characteristic errors of the literate mind confronting the pre-literate is to try, as our education has conditioned us to, to fix boundaries, make distinctions, reduce reality to bullet points.

In fact, if one looks at poems such as *Maxims I* (in its three different sections), or *Maxims II*, one cannot help noticing—it is what makes the poems bewildering—the way they slide in and out of levels of obliqueness. What could be plainer (or more useless) than “Frost shall freeze” (*Maxims IB*, l. 1)? What more culturally imperative (if questionable) than “The lasting memory / Of an honorable man is always best” (ll. 12–13)? The end of *Maxims IC* moves from history, “Enmity has ruled the earth since Cain’s / Crime against his brother Abel,” to what seems like a stern corollary, “for the man without courage, without spirit, / The least of treasures: no glory for the knave” (ll. 67–68, 79–80). But is that a fact, just the way things are in a world of strife? Or a recommendation, the way things should be? Do we need to make the distinction? Rightly, then, does the poet of *Maxims II* comment, “Truth is the trickiest” (l. 10). Sometimes (it is another thought repeated in several poems) one has to feel the truth to know it. *Maxims II* also declares, “Woe is wondrously clinging” (l. 13), and perhaps only someone who has been told, deep in grief, “Cheer up, don’t take it so hard,” can appreciate the truth of that.

Shifting and sliding, then, whether from riddling to riddlic, or up and down the “truth-scale” from one kind of statement to another, are part of the skill set of the Anglo-Saxon poet. Nothing said here can quite do justice to the “leaping shackle” of Old English poetic virtuosity, which shows at its most extreme in poems like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Deor*, each of which is built upon the “speech” of a narrator. For many years what drew attention to these poems was their personal quality, which they share with the “women’s songs,” *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and which is indeed strong and moving. Then slowly it was recognized that unlike Victorian “dramatic monologues” (to which they had been unconsciously assimilated by Victorian readers), these “men’s songs” were impersonal too. *The Wanderer* uses the words *I*, *me*, and *my*, nine times in its first thirty lines, three times near the middle (ll.

10–29, 63–65), but then never again. The poem is studded with imaginary speakers, who may or may not be the “wanderer” himself: the “wise man,” the “wise warrior,” “the wise man who ponders,” the “man wise in mind.” *The Seafarer* follows a similar pattern, but with a markedly more Christian conclusion. *Deor* goes the other way, from the far-distant to the immediately personal, starting with a sequence of “fates worse than death” drawn from old legend—Weland’s torture, Beaduhild’s rape-pregnancy, monstrous love, long exile, impotent despair—generalizing first that that is the way things often go (as said at much greater length in the poem *The Fortunes of Men*), but then applying it personally, to the harper “Deor” himself. All the “fates worse than death” found some cure or consolation, and for those fully aware of old legends, there may even have been a consolation hidden from the imagined speaker Deor: the fate of Heorrenda of the Heodenings, the harper who displaced him in the poem, was not a lucky one.

One thing all three poems are certainly saying is that true wisdom comes only from experience, from the heart, not the head: no one without such experience has a right to declare truth. A surprising number of other poems likewise center on the image of the ancient sage, the wise man, the old father, who may also be a wanderer, a seafarer, an exile, one hardened, like the sad women remembering former joys, by bitter experience. It seems to be almost compulsory for an Anglo-Saxon poet to claim moral authority created by age and grief, as Cynewulf does, presenting himself as “World-weary, sick at heart” (*Fates of the Apostles*, l. 1) or “old and ready / To follow the final road” (*Elene*, ll. 1233–34). Is this true autobiography, or required stance? One cannot tell. The poets claim the role of “soothsayers,” those who state ultimate truth about reality, but they move easily between riddle-truth, proverb-truth, maxim-truth, charm-truth, felt-truth, and learned-truth, as well perhaps as states which modern people do not readily recognize.

One must add that it is also highly characteristic that modern editors—conditioned by the need to mark off speeches and speakers by literal devices and print-conventions like quotation marks—are bothered by being unable to know who exactly is speaking or when a perspective has shifted. These are matters easier to convey orally than in print. Detecting and responding to such shifts: what that demands is, above all, hard listening.

## FORGOTTEN SKILLS

The need for hard listening is made greater by what seems to be a major goal of the Anglo-Saxon poet: to convey maximum change of meaning with mini-

num change of sound. The simplest way of doing this is to oppose contrastively two words of different meaning but similar sound, as in the Old English proverb, “Works speak louder than naked words” (Ælfric’s *Treatise*, ll. 1257–58; Crawford, 74). We say “actions speak louder than words,” but the “works/words” opposition packs more punch.

In this area, Old English had more than one advantage over modern English. The force of the dual pronoun in some circumstances has already been noted in *The Wife’s Lament*. By contrast, the existence of a subjunctive mood allowed for nuance, especially in conversations. The first words of Unferth in his challenge to Beowulf are, given literally, word-for-word and in the same word order as the Old English, “Art thou the Beowulf, he who with Breca contended?” Only Unferth does not exactly say “contended.” He uses the verb *winnan*, which was declined like *swimman* or *springan*, both of which have survived into modern English as “swim/swam/swum,” or “spring/sprang/sprung.” Its past tense in Old English was *wann*. But Unferth does not say *wann*, which would have been the third person past singular indicative. He says *wunne*, third person past singular subjunctive. The use of the subjunctive indicates something like hypothesis, doubt, not direct information—something other than “Truth-One.” One might get the sense of it by translating the passage as something like, “Are you the Beowulf, who is said to have competed, or anyway, so we hear, with Breca?” But the punch of the insult, for insult it is—hearers would inevitably notice both the word said, *wunne*, and the word *not* said, *wann*—is diminished by being spelled out. It’s hard for any translator to reproduce this! Our language no longer has that capacity.

Words as simple as “this” and “that” ought to be easier, for they have not changed much—though in Old English *ðæt* was only the neuter form of “the,” not necessarily directly opposed to “this.” But “this” and “that,” like “here” and “there,” or “then” and “now,” are “deictics,” a deictic word being one whose meaning depends on its relation to the speaker. This means their referents shift. One way we still use “this” is to indicate closeness to the speaker, perhaps to invite a listener to share that closeness—“I met this girl the other day, I saw this bike in the window, etc.”—and Anglo-Saxon poets used it the same way. The “wanderer” is inviting a kind of agreement when he says, “I can’t think why in this uneasy world,” and again “all this world’s wealth,” “this ruin of a life” (ll. 63, 79, 93). Not everyone may agree that “this world” is a ruin, or even uneasy, but “this” is inviting us to share the speaker’s point of view. The “seafarer” does something similar, summing up a whole set of observations as “All this,” and inviting his hearers to share a generalization.

But, as said above, the referents of deictic words can shift. The poem *Deor* says seven times, “That passed over—so can this.” The first six times, the referent of “That” is a time of trouble, described in the stanza that precedes the repeated line. Each of those six times also, we do not know what “this” is—only the speaker knows that. But the seventh time, although the words are exactly the same, the meaning of “that” is different, even opposite. For between the sixth and seventh repetition, the speaker has told us what “this” is: it is his own desperate situation, which unlike all the others has not passed over. As for “that,” it no longer identifies a time of trouble, but the speaker’s own previous time of prosperity. It is that time of prosperity which has passed, and the poem says, in effect, “it helps to endure one’s own troubles if you reflect on other peoples’ troubles which they got over.” One has to add that while it is easy enough to say things like that, it takes guts to say them when one is deep in a trouble that shows no sign of passing! And once again, spelling the whole thing out takes away the punch which the Old English poem supplies with marvelous, and once more subtle, economy.

Another set of words still in the language consists of what we now call the modal verbs—that particular set of auxiliary verbs which takes its place at the start of a complex verb phrase: in modern English, “can/could, may/might, will/would, shall/should,” and “must,” which last is tenseless. Modal verbs are odd in that while the first four pairs all have present/past forms, the past tense is often used not to indicate past time but something further off, less likely. We all know that if someone says, “I might do it,” it is less likely than “I may do it.” In the transit from Old to modern English, these verbs have all also changed places in a kind of square-dance which repeatedly confuses translators. In Old English *sceal*, pronounced “shall,” means “must.” *Moste*, a past-tense form, means “might” in the sense of “had permission to.” *Mæg*, pronounced “may,” means “can, am physically able to,” and *cann* . . . but the grammatical point need not be drawn out. The poetic point, which concerns us here, is that Anglo-Saxon poets seem to have been hypersensitive to the meanings of such words—and to some other verbs of similar meaning which the language has lost—and loved to contrast them. The *Beowulf* poet (if it was him: Tolkien thought the passage was an interpolation) makes a violent opposition, first between “Woe” and “Well,” but then between *sceal* and *mot*, the opposition neatly captured by Williamson’s translation:

Woe to those who in terrible affliction  
*Must* offer their souls to the flame’s embrace;

Well to those who on death's day  
*Can* seek their Lord's protecting power. (ll. 184–87)

The modal contrast, at least, is similar to the one that occurs when Beowulf responds to Unferth's accusation that he lost his swimming contest with Breca in the stormy sea, by saying that they stayed together, but for different reasons: he *could not* outswim me, I *would not* abandon him. It is always worth noting the way such verbs are used: often they are placed, for emphasis, at the end of a line, with a contrastive modal a few lines away. All of which, once again, offers challenge to a translator, insight to readers as once to listeners.

One may sum up by saying, “still waters run deep,” or to use an Old English proverb, “still waters break the bank” (*Dist. of Cato* 62; Cox, 13). The Old English proverb is literally true, as hydraulic engineers know: running water in an aqueduct exerts less pressure and needs thinner walls than static water. But both Old and modern English forms of the proverb mean the same thing metaphorically: very minor ripples on a plain surface may indicate strong pressures and deep passions beneath. But one may well ask at this point what bearing such shifts from “riddling” to “riddlic,” or from “proverbial” to “maximal,” or from one imagined speaker to another, have on what is after all the bulk of the poetry surviving, which consists of narrative, not rumination? And the answer is, the influence is pervasive. It colors the narratives, even the Bible translations (five major ones, *Genesis A* and *B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Judith*), the saints' lives (five again, *Andreas*, *Guthlac A* and *B*, *Elene*, *Juliana*), and the heroic poems (*Beowulf*, and the fragments of *Maldon*, *Finnsburg*, and *Waldere*). It especially affects the way characters talk.

## CAREFUL CONVERSATIONS

A good example of how to use a proverb in a difficult conversational situation occurs at *Beowulf*, lines 1832–35. Beowulf is saying farewell to the Danish king Hrothgar, having dealt with the monster Grendel and Grendel's mother for him, but for no apparent reason brings up the issue of Hrothgar's son Hrethric. “If your son Hrethric, / Heir apparent, wants to visit the Geatish court, / He'll find many friends there.” But why should Hrethric want to make such a visit? Beowulf caps his suggestion with a proverb, “Foreign lands / Are best sought by sons who stay strong!” The remark is so enigmatic that its point has rarely been noted, but it seems very likely (given other events at the Danish court) that Beowulf is delivering a veiled warning: your son, heir apparent

though he may be, is not safe. Get him out of here! But you cannot talk like that to kings. And so the proverb. One advantage of proverbs is that, in a way, the speaker does not say them (as noted by Deskis, they can be used to veil truth rather than declare it openly). They are what everyone says, and everyone accepts. If the listener knows how to apply them, well and good; if not, the speaker takes no responsibility. Hrothgar responds to Beowulf, significantly, by a veiled prophecy (all of which in the end comes true) of future problems for Beowulf and his people as well. At this point, one may well think, Beowulf and Hrothgar would each do well to listen to the hidden warning the other has given, but each perceives only the other's danger. The astute Anglo-Saxon listener could perceive both at once, and also the characters' matching non-perceptions.

In a similar though even more complex way, one may well wonder what the queen Wealhtheow is saying in her long speech to Hrothgar, her husband, earlier in the same poem (ll. 1172–85). It took fifty years of scholarship before anyone began to understand it, and many scholars would not believe it once they did—one of them insisted that the ironically unexpected situation revealed was just too difficult for Anglo-Saxon warriors to take in, men “not chosen mainly for intellectual qualities” (Sisam, 1965, 9). The remark is characteristic of the disdain often felt by modern literates for ancient pre-literates. How did Sisam know what qualities were prized by old heroes? Maybe men who could not take a hint did not last long in an Anglo-Saxon war band. Talking tactfully round a subject could be a survival skill, as could recognizing the intention when someone else was doing it.

Many people would now agree that the queen's speech is in fact a pivotal one. It changes the note of the poem from triumphal to ominous, for what the queen is saying is that she sees threats to her son Hrethric from both Beowulf (whom Hrothgar has just adopted: this threat turns out to be nugatory) and also from her nephew Hrothulf (who in legend appears to be a threat indeed). But the queen then makes a second speech, in lines 1216–29, in which she gives Beowulf a splendid gold neck-ring—we have just been told there is an unhappy fate upon it—and asks his help and protection for her sons, who, we should just have realized, will need it. She concludes, seemingly looking round the great hall of Heorot (on which there is also an ill fate):

“Here warriors hold true to each other in the hall,  
Loyal to the lord, devoted to duty,

Gracious in heart, their minds on mead.  
Downing their drink, they do as I ask.”

What kind of truth-statement is that? It is presented as flatly true, “Truth-One.” But if we pick up the hints, and indeed the plain statements just made, the air is full of foreboding, which the queen clearly senses. That perceptive critic, the late Ted Irving, saw it as a prayer (1968, 144): and it is true that this is what Wealhtheow desperately wants to be true and to come true. But a prayer ought to be addressed to someone. Is it a charm? In a charm, one says the thing that one wants to happen, in the hope that the words will make it happen. But surely Wealhtheow cannot realistically expect her words in this situation to have magic power. All one can say is that it is certainly a very human response to anxiety to deny one’s fears, but catching the tone of this statement would tax the powers of any actress.

Wealhtheow’s earlier speech, meanwhile—the one which changes the tone of the whole poem—contains no performatives, but is dominated by what modern philosophers of language have come to call “implicatures,” a major component of the new discipline known as “pragmatic linguistics.” All that one needs to know about pragmatics in this instance is that it is the skill of listening to what people don’t say (like the *wann* hiding behind *wunne* as mentioned above). Anglo-Saxon poets seem to have known that their audiences did not need to be taught it. A remarkably powerful “unsaid” occurs in the poem *Genesis B*. Satan, thrown down from heaven, chained in hell, and in a rage of jealousy against the human beings he fears have been created to supplant him, cries out that if he had his hands free, “For a cold winter’s hour, I could lead my troop—” Then his speech breaks off, resuming, “But these iron chains constrain my freedom” (ll. 395–96). The clash of subjective will and objective realization is rather like the scene of waking from dream in *The Wanderer*, but no one has ever had any difficulty in understanding the anacoluthon, in hearing what Satan did not manage to say: “I could lead my troop to utterly destroy those wretched human interlopers!”

Wealhtheow’s “unsaid” is harder to detect, but not so terribly hard—if one remembers, as said above, (a) that her husband has offered to adopt Beowulf a few hundred lines before (though no one apparently took any notice), (b) that she has sons of her own, Hrethric and Hrothmund, (c) that Anglo-Saxon monarchies did not recognize primogeniture, and (d) that her nephew Hrothulf, her son’s first cousin, is acting as co-regent to her husband. Her fourteen-line speech (1172–85) begins with four lines of entirely proper and

predictable recommendation for generosity (Beowulf has just got rid of Grendel for them). The fifth line brings up the matter of adoption, and the next three surely contain a veiled rebuke: give treasures away (unspoken, to strangers like Beowulf), but *leave the kingdom itself* to your kinsmen (unspoken, *not* to strangers like Beowulf). And then we have six lines about Hrothulf, who has done and said nothing to motivate them. One has to ask, what is the connection? And the answer has to be, fear: he is another competitor for her sons. The great unsaid, meanwhile—she is talking to a very old man, who just happens to be a king—lurks in “while you may . . . when you go . . . if he outlives you.” The word “die” is never used, but Wealhtheow is creeping up to it. The last time she skirts round the idea, “when you die,” she even uses the indicative mood rather than (as she did the first two times) a modal verb in the subjunctive! That may be as bold as it is safe to get when talking to old kings.

The force of Anglo-Saxon “rules for conversation,” at once more cautious and more assertive, has its effect even on poems which we know are direct translations. Though one can never be 100 percent sure what kind of text an Anglo-Saxon poet had in front of him, in several cases we have Latin texts which correspond so closely to Old English poems that the poet must have been using something very like them. One can nevertheless see what appear to be deliberate changes, motivated by a strong sense of what is/is not right and proper to say.

One such example is a conversation from the poem *Andreas*, based on a Latin text which must have been closely similar to the one now known as the *Codex Casanatensis* (for a translation of which, see Calder and Allen, 14–34). This is a missionary story, very suitable, one might think, for the Anglo-Saxon missionary milieu of St. Willibrord or St. Boniface. The poem tells how Andreas—that is to say, St. Andrew—was sent to the city of the cannibal Mermedonians to rescue his colleague St. Matthew, and how he converted the heathen by a display of courage and then of power. In order to get to the city, though, he has to hitch a ride on a boat, and what Andreas does not know is that the skipper of the boat is in fact his Lord Jesus, in disguise. The conversation between Andreas and his disguised Lord is accordingly a complex and teasing one, for Andreas is at once asking a favor (which puts him in an inferior position), very conscious of his mission (which puts him in a morally superior position), but not aware of whom he is talking to (which puts him in a false position). Latin and Anglo-Saxon views of how this should be presented are markedly different. Summarizing the difference, in the Old English poem both characters remain on their



dignity. Both seem conscious of the requirements of what we have learned to call “face.”

A fourteen-speech interchange in the Latin version is accordingly cut down to eleven in Old English (see ll. 267–358). One vital alteration is this. In both versions, Andreas has no money: he and his companions are hitchhikers. In the Latin, he conceals this fact *until they are on the boat*. When he does come out with it, the skipper says, very reasonably, “Why did you board then?” Andreas is then in a thoroughly humiliating position—like going into a restaurant, taking a table, and suddenly realizing you can’t afford the prices and will have to slink out again: avoiding customers’ fear of this is why restaurants (except the most prestigious) put their prices on the menu outside. In order to persuade the skipper to take him, Andreas accordingly has to explain his apostolic mission. The Anglo-Saxon poet clearly did not like this image of his hero on the defensive. In his version the saint says clearly, “I have no wealth” (l. 282), “I have no precious treasure” (l. 312), and he does so *before* they all “boarded the ship” (l. 357). The skipper still questions him, with a hint of surprise:

“How, dearest friend, has it come about  
That you intended without any treasure  
To secure a ship to cross the sea  
With its deep currents and high mountains,  
The cold cliffs of ocean waves?  
Have you no precious bread or pure water  
To nourish your body and sustain your spirit?  
Hard is the lot of the poor man who must wander  
Over the dangerous waves of the ocean road.” (ll. 319–27)

But the situation is defused, first, by the careful assertion of friendship, and more significantly—as tricky situations in this culture often are—by the skipper reverting to quasi-proverbial mode (which one might call, by analogy with “riddlic,” the “proverbious mode”). The last two lines are a general statement which everyone can agree with (compare, for instance, *The Seafarer*, ll. 55–57), so in a sense the speaker has not said them: he is just repeating what people say. The issue of how Andreas should apply this general statement to his own situation is left to him, with the implied question—“what in the world did you think you were doing?”—left in the realm of “implicature.”

Andreas still replies to the implied reproof with stiff dignity, quite unlike his counterpart in the Latin text:

“It is not proper for a prosperous man  
 To whom God has given such worldly wealth  
 To speak proudly to a poor man who owns nothing.” (ll. 330–32)

One notes that he too is moving in the direction of the maxim, stating a rule of propriety. In this complex negotiation, one may conclude, both speakers, human and divine, have to show at once their own self-respect, not to be offended by impertinent questions or assumptions of superiority, and their understanding of the other speaker’s limits. In a heavily armed heroic culture, one may well conclude, even monks and missionaries needed to learn how to tread the borderline between aggression and weakness, how to think ahead in a conversation, and when to shift “proverbially” in and out of impersonal modes.

Other conversations within the corpus could be analyzed similarly, and again with comparison to their originals, even originals of such particular authority as the Bible. A good example is the story of Abraham, his wife Sarah and concubine Hagar, and their two children, the half-brothers Ishmael and Isaac, told episodically in Genesis, chapters 16 to 21. The poet of *Genesis A* follows the story closely, for the most part, keeping the narrative order of the different subplots of Abraham’s life as they are told in the Bible. But the Hagar/Sarah story has some especially sensitive moments. Both Abraham and Sarah laugh at God’s promise (Genesis 17:16) that Sarah will bear him a son in advanced old age. Abraham’s laughter is retained, but Sarah’s sarcastic inner laughter (18:12) has been muted into indirect narration (ll. 2408–16), and her later lie (18:15) has been cut out entirely. Also sensitive, one might think, is the whole issue of Sarah offering her Egyptian slave Hagar to Abraham as a sexual substitute for herself. The Anglo-Saxon poet seems, however, relatively untroubled by this, reproducing her two speeches at 16:2 and 16:5 in lines 2254–62 and 2275–84. But Sarah’s later demand that Abraham should send away Hagar and her son gets more careful handling. (One might note that the habit of Anglo-Saxon kings of practicing “serial monogamy” gave rise to repeated trouble between stepmothers and half-brothers, like, for instance, the flight of Alfred’s nephew Æthelwold to the Vikings in 899, or the murder of Edward King and Martyr at Corfe Castle in 978.)

Whatever anxiety was riding the poet of *Genesis A*, he makes Sarah speak to Abraham much more carefully, in the speech at lines 2816–25, than she does in the Bible at Genesis 21:10. In the latter she even uses an imperative: “Cast out this bondwoman and her son.” *Wealhtheow* had used imperatives too, but to begin with only to urge King Hrothgar to do what he was ready and eager to do already, the vital one—the one with an implied but unstated “don’t” in it (see above)—embedded in formal politenesses. In *Genesis A* the imperative has vanished altogether, replaced by a much more tactful and submissive approach:

“Forgive me, my dear lord and husband,  
Giver of rings, keeper of the household treasure,  
For what I must ask. I beg you to order Hagar . . .” (ll. 2816–18)

She follows it up not with a flat declaration, “the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir,” but with a rather careful explanation (as if one were needed) of the disadvantages of contending heirs. One interesting addition is the last line of the speech (2825), “When your life departs at last from your body.” Sarah does not say that in the Bible, but the Anglo-Saxon poet picked up the implication, and has Sarah voice it in words quite similar to *Wealhtheow*’s final and most outspoken allusion.

### THE FORCE OF THE TOKEN

Later and more orthodox Anglo-Saxons like the homilist *Ælfric* of *Cerne* were unhappy about what adaptations were being made to sacred texts. In the case of *Genesis A*, probably *Exodus*, and quite certainly *Genesis B*, he might well have censored his bolder predecessors: which only goes to show how powerfully Anglo-Saxon ideas of tact and propriety could override even sacred authority. One must however move on from the details of “riddlic” or “polymorphic” language, “deictics” and “modalities,” “implicatures” and evasions, to the broader question of structure. Can anything be said—remembering that most of the surviving narrative poems are retellings of an established story—about the way Anglo-Saxons liked to construct narrative, and what kind of narrative drew their attention?

The question needs to be asked. The poem *Exodus* in particular (based, of course, on the Bible narrative of Exodus, chs. 12–14) has long puzzled even its admirers. Like other Old English poems, it takes every opportunity of

converting what is in fact flight into a display of heroic courage. At the start of *Andreas*, the twelve apostles were pictured as thanes defending their lord, like Offa or the heroes of *Maldon*:

These were great men, well-known warriors,  
 Brave and bold leaders of the people,  
 When hands and shields guarded the helmets  
 On the full plain of battle, that fateful field. (ll. 8–11)

Scholars have commented uneasily that of course this is an allegory of the warfare of the spirit. It is generally conceded that the author of *Exodus* was well aware of the familiar allegory by which the Children of Israel, leaving captivity across the Red Sea and into the Promised Land, represent all Christian souls passing from bondage to Satan through the waters of baptism to salvation. This may justify the poet's description of the Israelites as people of the sea, contrasted with the earth-bound Egyptians. But seeing "the sons of Reuben [as] / A horde of sea-raiders hungry for victory" (ll. 351–52; and in the original the word is *sæ-wicingas*, "sea-Vikings")? The enthusiasm with which the poet dismisses from the Israelite battle-line all those too young or too old for "the grim game of war" (l. 253) also does not seem to match an allegory of universal salvation. But there is one particular narrative issue which deserves close attention. The poet seems to have broken a basic rule of narrative by *missing out his big scene* (Cecil B. de Mille did not make the same mistake in the 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments*). Williamson declares in his headnote that he believes "the essential (dis)order of the poem . . . was altogether intended." What then was the intention?

The crux comes between lines 290 and 295. The Israelites are waiting on the shore of the Red Sea when the "war-crier" (l. 267) calls them to attention: the "shepherd of the people" (who must be Moses; l. 271) will address them. He tells them not to fear in a speech which runs to line 293. And then he speaks again, in a speech beginning just two lines later, to say a miracle *has happened*:

"I have struck the waters and separated the sea  
 With this vital rod, this green branch,  
 This vibrant token of times to come." (ll. 297–99)

The natural thing to do, surely, was to describe the miracle happening as it happened. Indeed one might well think that the story was better told the Bible's way, in Exodus 14:10–22. There the fleeing Israelites, seeing the Egyp-

tian pursuit, cry out against Moses in despair, saying they should have remained in slavery, verses 10–12 (the Anglo-Saxon poet will have none of that!). Moses tells them, “Fear not” (vv. 13–14; extended into lines 275–93 of the poem). The Lord tells Moses what to do (vv. 15–18), and the angel of the Lord shields the Israelites temporarily (vv. 15–20; not in the poem). Then Moses stretches out his hand, and the Lord parts the waters of the Red Sea (vv. 21–22; in the poem, told only in flashback, ll. 295 ff.). Why change the satisfactory and very-much-authorized order of the Bible?

The answer may lie in the word “token.” It has already been pointed out that in the warlike culture of Anglo-Saxon England, the *beot*, the promise, remained, so to speak, in limbo, till the moment came when it was or was not fulfilled, which one might well call the moment of *ðearf*, or necessity: for thane to endure (*ðolian*) in the *ðearf* of his lord or *ðeoden* was a set of alliterative connections on which several Anglo-Saxon poets rang changes. The “then” of the promise is inevitably connected with the “now” of its redemption. But there is another moment which is connected, and that is the retrospective moment when all has been made clear, when the promise emerges from its ambiguous state, and even onlookers can *see the result*. One might call this the moment of *soð* or “sooth.” And the sign of that moment, one could say, is the *tacen* or “token.” In the poem *Judith*, the heroine pulls the head of the Assyrian general Holofernes out of a bag, as she also does in the Apocryphal book of Judith, which is the poem’s source, but only the Anglo-Saxon author flags the head as the “victory-token” (l. 196).

In the same way Beowulf’s fight with Grendel is definitely over when Beowulf shows the monster’s arm—it is the first moment we realize that the hero has actually pulled it off—as “a plain sign” (*tacen sweotol*) to be nailed up “Under the eaves of Heorot’s roof” (ll. 831, 833). Later on in the poem, King Hrothgar meditates with the hilt of the giant’s sword in his hand, for it too is a token, a visible sign—or even more convincingly, a tactile memory, subjective made objective—of God’s power over the monster race drowned in the flood. Andreas makes his promise to God, undergoes his *ðearf* by torment in the cannibals’ prison, is released and vindicated by the flood which comes to drown the Mermedonian city, but the story is not over until the moment of *soð*—at line 1596, when a cannibal admits, as he does not in the Latin text, “Now in our terror we can see the truth.” But the clearest example of the sequence, promise—trial—revelation, as presented by Anglo-Saxons is the story of the Cross. In *The Dream of the Rood*, the Cross itself describes its own time of torment, but then says, “The time is come,” the truth has been revealed. This adds a special significance to the story of the Cross’s literal unearthing in

*Elene*, for the Cross itself is the greatest of all victory-tokens, “A token of glory, a symbol of victory” (*Elene*, l. 89).

More could be said about this Anglo-Saxon complex of emotions, and perhaps of ideology. One could say it rests on an attitude to time: past-looking-forward (then) moving to present (now) to perfect (has happened, future-looking-back). Decision is sometimes marked even by a pluperfect: the *Beowulf*-poet declares firmly, “The leader of the Geats *had* made good his boast” (l. 827), the *Judith*-poet that his heroine “*had* gathered glory” (l. 149). The modern proverb says, “It’s not over till the fat lady sings” (how obscure will this be in a thousand years?), but the Anglo-Saxon might say, “it’s not over till you can look back and see a token.” One could also say that the whole complex rests on a sense of the uncertainty of words and promises and memories and prophecies, all of them subjective: they need to be translated into a thing, something you can hold and look at, like an arm, a head, a cross. Or something undeniable, like the flood that drowns Andreas’s tormentors, or the flood that drowned the giants—or in the case of *Exodus*, the flood-in-reverse, the parting of the waters.

Going back to the narrative hiatus in that poem, what it tells us is that the poet and, one may assume, his audience were not as interested in the drama of events, what was actually happening, as in the moment of revelation, or confirmation, when one, in Ted Irving’s term, “comes at last, as the old Quakers used to say, upon a knowing” (1968, 105). Not our way of looking at things, but a characteristic way. One born, perhaps, from the grained-in uncertainty of life in a heroic age not yet over as the poets were writing. One, furthermore, which perhaps helped to determine the scenes from the Christian myth which Anglo-Saxon poets chose to focus on and repeatedly retell.

## UNIVERSAL HISTORY, PERSONAL CHOICE

Despite the assurance given by Christian faith, a sense of the unknown and the inscrutable runs through the poetry, in poems like *The Gifts of Men* and *The Fortunes of Men*, in the dialogue between Solomon and Saturn on the mystery of why one twin thrives and another does not (*Solomon and Saturn II*, ll. 254–86), in Cynewulf’s image of life as “a hard and harrowing voyage, / Sailing our ships across cold waters” (*Christ II*, ll. 488–89). The poetry also expresses a consistent sense of “the order of the world” (to name another poem), in its selection of Christian themes and answers. It is markedly different from the favored themes of modern preaching—little in it of grace, mercy,

forgiveness, penitence, or humility, all concepts for which Old English had slowly to develop a vocabulary—but expressed with power and sincerity. It is worth seeing the universe as Bede and his successors saw it.

One religious concern which recurs again and again is the origin of sin. This was firmly rooted in the Fall of the Angels, which led directly to the Fall of Man, and we have accounts of both most notably in *Genesis B*, a poem translated from Old Saxon and surely brought back from the Anglo-Saxon missions. The combined story is told also in *Genesis A*, in *Guthlac B*, lines 149–77, in the verses recovered from Vercelli Homily XXI (here at the very end of the section of “Additional Poems” not printed in *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*). But another thought also recurs. *Beowulf* locates the origins of the race of monsters, the enemies of God, in the race of Cain, and at the end of *Maxims IC*, the poet says ruefully that ever since then, humanity has lived in a state of war:

Enmity has ruled the earth since Cain’s  
 Crime against his brother Abel.  
 That was no one-day feud! Wickedness thrust  
 Its way into the world from that first blood.  
 Cain’s killing was mankind’s primal murder.  
 Afterwards feud flourished, and endless hatred  
 Plagued people, so the inhabitants of earth  
 Invented hard spears and tempered swords,  
 Endured the savage clash and claw of weapons. (ll. 67–75)

With another strange shift, he goes on directly from this to say in effect, “and that is what we must be ready for”—acquiescing? Recommending?

The shield should be ready, the spear on its haft,  
 The blade on the sword, the arrow on its shaft,  
 Courage in a warrior’s heart, a helmet on the brave. (ll. 76–78)

As remarked above, the last two lines of the poem move to a stern corollary:

But for the man without courage, without spirit,  
 The least of treasures: no glory for the knave. (ll. 79–80)

As often, the tone of this is hard to catch. Christian regret moves to ferocity expressed determinedly as a maxim, super-true, not to be denied.

The tone of *Genesis B* has also bothered scholars, for there are several departures from the way one might expect the story to be treated. Whatever one thinks of his motives, it cannot be denied that the subordinate devil whom Satan sends from Hell to tempt Adam and Eve shows loyalty (can that be praiseworthy loyalty?) to his satanic lord, and returns to him, shackled though he is “in black hell in a clutch of fire” (l. 842). There are a string of differences from the biblical account of the Fall (see the list in the headnote to the poem). The poet even seems (but how are we to take the tone of his remark?) to express surprise at God’s (dare one say?) negligence in allowing the Fall to take place:

It’s a great wonder that eternal God,  
 The Prince of peace, would endure such enmity,  
 And suffer his servants to be led astray  
 By that subtle demon who seduced Eve,  
 Marking mankind for endless suffering. (ll. 655–69)

One’s doubts are not entirely cleared up by the poet’s resort to *maxim* (a *maxim* found in similar words in Old Norse, suggesting that it was widespread in the northern world), “Woe to the one / Who doesn’t hear or heed this lesson, / Who still has a chance to make a choice” (ll. 703–5). What this says is that Adam and Eve were warned, and if you won’t take a warning . . . you should have listened harder.

At the other end of universal history lies Doomsday, another favored theme, expressed in the two poems on *Judgment Day*, in *Christ III*, again in the verses in Vercelli Homily XXI, and in another verse rescued from homilies on *The Judgment of the Damned*. Associated with the theme of fear are the grim poems on the fate, not of the soul, but of the body, delivered over to corruption and in both *Soul and Body* poems reproached bitterly by the soul from leading it astray (the longer Exeter version balances this with a passage of praise for the virtuous body by its soul). The same theme is picked up in *Azarias* and in *Guthlac B*, and recurs in the post-Conquest poems from Worcester Cathedral Library, in *The Soul’s Address to the Body (From the Worcester Fragments)*, and in *The Grave*. By contrast, the joy of Paradise, and the beauty of Creation itself, are described in *The Phoenix* and in passages from *Daniel*, *Azarias*, and *Guthlac A*, as well as in the song of Creation sung in King Hrothgar’s hall of Heorot (*Beowulf*, ll. 89–98), and in *Cædmon’s Hymn*.

It is undeniable, though, that the image of life collectively presented is a dark one, in which humanity is under continual siege from the devils, as it



was from the monster-races of the pre-Christian mythology. In every one of the five saints' lives surviving in the poetic corpus, the saint confronts and overcomes diabolic assault. Andreas has to cope not only with the cannibals, but with the "prince of hell" and his subordinates, who come to taunt and threaten him in his prison. The same is true of Juliana, and in *Elene* the repentant sinner Judas also faces down a demon enraged by his recovery of the True Cross. St. Guthlac takes an even more proactive line with the devils who haunt the wastelands of the Fens, moving into their territory to take it over, unmoved by the vision of hell that they show him. Nor are the devils like, for instance, C. S. Lewis's Screwtape and Wormwood, subtle tempters who put thoughts into the mind and slowly lead vulnerable souls down the primrose path to Hell. The nearest they come to this is when, in *Guthlac A*, they try to shake the saint's confidence by showing him the bad behavior of young men in monasteries (to which the saint replies, in effect, "Boys will be boys," an echo, perhaps, of some long-forgotten dispute about monastic governance). But for the most part the devils work by fear, and are vanquished by superior courage, confidence, and above all, power.

At bottom, one may conclude, the main appeal of the new religion was the assurance—and see what was said above about the force of the pluperfect—that victory over Satan and his minions *had already been won*. And the sign of that, the physical "token" demanded, was the Cross itself. In the Vercelli version of *The Dream of the Rood* the Cross is a "radiant sign," a victory-beam," a "tree of victory." In *Elene*, Cynewulf calls it "a radiant sign, / A token of glory, a symbol of victory" (ll. 88–89), and it is the sign which brings Emperor Constantine victory in battle. The word used for "sign" is in both poems and more than once, *beacen*, which means more than "beacon" ("sign, token, portent"). It is striking that there is another long runic inscription, on another cross not far away from the Ruthwell Cross, where as noted above, lines from *The Dream of the Rood* are carved in runes, in a dialect older and more northern than that of the Vercelli poem. This second runic inscription is on the Bewcastle Cross, which stands within the walls of the old Roman fort on Bewcastle Waste, overlooking the Debatable Land between England and Scotland, site of many battles. Its inscription has been declared unreadable (though one would like to see what computer enhancement would do), but its first words are perfectly clear: they read, in runes: **Dis sigebecn . . .**, "this sign of victory." What forgotten battle the inscription commemorates we do not know, but the inscription proves that calling the Cross a "victory-token" was felt to have more than symbolic meaning.

As for the moment of victory, that is described in the poem *The Descent into Hell* and again in *Christ and Satan*. The moment on which the world

turns comes when the two Marys go to wrap the dead Christ's body. They expect to find him on a cold bed, "the old earth-grave," so often described in the "Soul and Body" theme. But they are wrong—as wrong as the Assyrians in *Judith* who expected to find their general Holofernes resting from his debauching of Judith. The Marys discover an unexpected and miraculous truth:

They thought that [Christ] would have to remain alone  
On Easter eve. They surely had other ideas  
When they turned back from the tomb! (ll. 17–19)

This surprising truth which reshapes both history and eschatology is articulated in a typically understated way reserved for transitions of great moment in Old English poetry. King Hrothgar in *Beowulf* also has a strong sense of "fate's twists and turns" (l. 1772), but in his case it is from prosperity to woe. For the two Marys, the moment is what J. R. R. Tolkien called "eucatastrophe," the moment when everything turns from bad to good (1966, 85–87). The great reward of it, furthermore, is not just the Resurrection but the Descent into Hell itself, when Christ invades the realm of Satan and releases his prisoners, who have lived their lives since the Fall without a chance of salvation. (The thought that such souls could be released must have had special power for recent converts who remembered their pagan ancestors with affection: early missionaries record this as a concern.) Fall, Harrowing, and Doomsday: these are the three critical elements of the Christian story as we read it in Old English, clearly set out in *Christ and Satan*.

In this schema the vital thing is *to choose one's side*: winners or losers. But in "this ruin of a life," as the "wanderer" calls it, the sides may not be so clear. That, at least, was the thought which Bede expressed on his death bed, in the poem we now call *Bede's Death Song*:

Before he departs on that inescapable journey  
Down death's road, no man is so wise  
That he knows his own end, so clever or unconstrained  
That he need not contemplate the coming judgment,  
Consider what good or evil resides in his soul,  
What rich reward or bounty of un blessings  
Will be offered in eternity when his time runs out.

The poem, a mere five lines in the original, has been hailed as showing through its complex syntax what Anglo-Saxons could do after a lifetime of

studying Latin, but this view could not be more false. The saying is characteristic of Anglo-Saxon thought, and Old English poetry, on multiple levels. If not proverbial, it is “proverbious.” It is a speech act as well, but once more what kind of speech act has not been clear to everyone. It has been taken as a promise, a reassurance. In fact, it is a threat. It has the characteristic Anglo-Saxon understatement: when Bede says “no man is so wise,” he means, by implication, “many men are not wise enough.” The force of it in the original is multiplied by the stealthy repetition of the same verb at the end of first and last lines: but one is in the indicative, the other in the subjunctive. Fail to note the difference at your peril! For the threat lies also in the contrast of the two times, the “now,” “Before [you] depart,” while you are alive *and can choose*, and the “then” when “[your] time runs out”—when it will be too late to choose. Bede’s last words were grave, ominous, a touch sardonic, and above all, as has confused so many, they were “riddlic.”

#### THE END AND THE AFTERMATH

Anglo-Saxon England went down to defeat on 14 October 1066, when Duke William overcame King Harold. Soon all Anglo-Saxon bishops had been replaced by Normans, except Wulfstan of Worcester, too popular and too saintly to be removed: he never made the slightest effort to learn French, and since Duke William had no success at learning Old English, the two could only communicate through Latin translators. Anglo-Saxon royalty and gentry had likewise been muzzled, like Edgar Ætheling; executed, like St. Waltheof; or dispossessed, like almost everyone. Incoming bishops and abbots with no knowledge of Old English saw no point in composing or even preserving poems in what soon became, almost everywhere, the peasant language. The last Old English poem in strict meter is, fittingly, the poem from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* on the death of Edward (the Confessor), which must have been written in 1065 or 1066. Holdouts nevertheless remained, as we can see from the poems in the section, “The Minor Poems,” in this collection from Wulfstan’s Worcester, and the poem on Durham. Nor may that have been the end of the tradition, for almost three centuries later poems again began to be recorded in an alliterative meter, which, while different from Old English—for by then the language had changed to Middle English—nevertheless retain much of the rules, the traditional language, and even the spirit of pre-Conquest poetry. Even that resurgence, however, was to last not quite into the era of modern English.

One has to concede, though, that poetry in Old English had a long run. The question of which is the oldest of our surviving poems has been discussed

above, but whichever it was, a late seventh-century date is not improbable. The poem *Widsith*, a compendium of heroic names and legends, many of them now forgotten, has also been declared recently and persuasively to be another poem of the seventh century (Neidorf). Meanwhile, poems like *Maldon* and those from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* must be later than the events they commemorate, which, as said just above, takes us all the way to 1066. Although scholars have become increasingly cautious, or timid, in their opinions—one may note that the editor of *Genesis A* offers a full 250-year span of possibility for that poem, 650–900 (see the headnote to the poem)—there is a case for saying that this poetic tradition held its devotees for four centuries before violent suppression: a good claim on anyone’s attention.

There is one final thought, signaled in these sections by the riddle which Craig Williamson has prefixed to each section, a riddle in which the manuscript, or the poems in the manuscript, speak for themselves—as objects do in many riddles, and in other poems too, including *The Dream of the Rood*, where the rood itself speaks; *The Husband’s Message*, where what speaks is a runic inscription; and even the Franks Casket, which describes itself riddlically and runically, and for once also adds its own answer, “whale’s bone.”

The final thought is this. The poems we have are also, in their way, almost all “last survivors”: only three of them, apart from the *Chronicle* poems and the poems ascribed to Cædmon and Bede, and found in many manuscripts, duplicate each other. Some of the poems are, furthermore, fragments, including the *Maldon* and *Finnburg* poems and *Judith*. As for the corpus itself, it now is a ruin. Certainly it exists. But its existence is at least a reminder of what no longer exists, a whole tradition of which we can hear only, here and there, murmurs and echoes. The poems are in many ways like the buried lyre unearthed in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snape, like the treasures dug up at Sutton Hoo and restored, like the stone walls of Bath remembered and celebrated in the poem, *The Ruin*. The poems exist, often in fragmentary form, and like the old ruins, they bear testimony to all that they remember, even if it has vanished. Nor is their testimony mute, for last survivors can at least talk and pass their tales on. The “book-moth” riddle laments the fact that the songs of the tribe, once transferred from the *wordbord*, the word-hoard of the mind, of memory, to the written vellum page, are susceptible to the ravenous appetite of the devouring worm. The word *wyrm* in Old English also means “dragon,” like the one that destroys Beowulf in the end. But both the riddle and the poem *Beowulf* reaffirm that the wisdom of old, the stories of heroes, the marauding of monsters, the complicated forms of speaking and listening, the types of truth, can live on as they are both written down and retold. The

worm may devour the manuscript page, but we remember the song-bright wisdom and reshape it into a riddle of that *stal-giest* or “thief-guest,” the ravenous worm. The dragon of the world, that inexorable, devouring movement of time itself, may destroy us all, but it cannot touch the tales that we deem worth saving, worth remembering.

Many modern students, scholars, and poets have found inspiration, insight, even comfort in individual poems. Strange and challenging as they are, they are still capable of speaking to us over the centuries. The entire corpus, however, over 31,000 lines, has never before been translated in a collected edition by a single scholar and poet, as it has here. It deserves to be read in its entirety, for the poems illuminate each other, create a priceless example of cultural diversity which at the same time retains haunting familiarity. Craig Williamson’s offering here has become both the true echo of the old songs, and a new poetic reshaping of them for a modern world. In them the dead “warrior-poet” of Grave 32 can be heard again, like his lovingly buried and now painstakingly reconstructed harp.



## NOTE ON THE TEXTS, TITLES, AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POEMS

This book contains modern alliterative, strong-stress poetic translations of all of the Old English (OE) poems in the six volumes of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (ASPR)*, edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (1931–1953), plus additional OE poems identified or discovered after the publication of *ASPR*. The entire corpus of OE poetry, a little over 31,000 lines, has never before been translated into modern poetry. The most comprehensive translations heretofore have typically been in prose and have included somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 lines. When I had finished translating the OE poems included in my previous editions of *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs* and *Beowulf and Other Old English Poems*, I began to realize that no selective anthology of OE translations, my own included, could hope to accurately represent the whole corpus, and so I set out to remedy this situation by translating all of the poems. This was perhaps an act of what the Anglo-Saxon poets might have called *ofermod*, or “overweening ambition,” but I felt it was an important task that needed doing. I hope the results here will strike scholars, students, and general readers interested in the period and its poetry as a worthy endeavor.

The book is organized into sections that correspond to the individual books of *ASPR* (*The Junius Manuscript*, *The Vercelli Book*, *The Exeter Book*, *Beowulf and Judith*, *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, and *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*) plus a number of additional poems and poetic fragments not included in *ASPR*, which were identified as OE poetry later. After the introductory materials, each section of the book corresponds to a volume of *ASPR*, with a final section devoted to the additional non-*ASPR* poems. In each section I have given a brief introduction to the manuscript or

volume in question and have taken the poetic license of offering a modern riddle, written in the style of the OE Exeter Book riddles, to celebrate it.

The order of poems in the book is exactly that of *ASPR*, except for the additional uncollected poems at the end, which are arranged alphabetically by title. The individual poem titles, which are almost never in the original manuscripts, have occasionally been changed in various ways by editors and scholars over the years since *ASPR*. The titles here sometimes reflect these editorial changes or my own reading of the poems, but I have been careful to keep some element of the *ASPR* title in place or to indicate it in the headnote to the poem.

The demarcation of the poems (where one poem ends and another begins) has also been the subject of occasional debate among editors and scholars. My demarcations are meant to take into consideration scholarship since *ASPR*, and I have tried to indicate in the individual headnotes where this change has been argued and what the alternate demarcations are in the old and new readings. Where there is a significant loss of text either because of damage to the manuscript or a break in the sense of the narrative or meaning, this is indicated by three asterisks. Where I have added a brief passage to bridge the gap indicated by a loss in the manuscript, this added text is enclosed in brackets. The line spaces between sections of the various poems are not in the manuscript; these spaces are provided to demarcate sections of the poems for the modern reader.

In making these translations, I began with the *ASPR* texts and then consulted more recent editions. I have not followed a single edited text but have made use of multiple texts and the long history of scholarly commentary on the poems. My translations are based on these combined readings; in any case, they are not literal translations, either word for word or line for line, but an attempt to bring the meaning and majesty of the originals into modern poetry, trying, as St. Jerome suggested, to capture the grace and glory of the originals by translating sense for sense. For more on my method of translation, see the introductory essay, “On Translating Old English Poetry.”

In the course of my work I have consulted not only the various editions of the Old English texts but also occasional prose translations of the poems, including most notably the following (in approximate chronological order): *The Exeter Book* by Israel Gollancz and W. S. Mackie, *The Poems of Cynewulf* and *The Caedmon Poems* by Charles W. Kennedy, *Genesis A* by Laurence Mason, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* by R. K. Gordon, *Beowulf: A New Prose Translation* by E. Talbot Donaldson, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* by T. A. Shippey, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* by S. A. J. Bradley, *Old and Middle English c. 890–c. 1400* by Elaine Treharne, *The Old English Boethius* by Malcolm God-



den and Susan Irvine, *The Beowulf Manuscript* by R. D. Fulk, *Old Testament Narratives* and *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* by Daniel Anlezark, *Old English Shorter Poems: Religious and Didactic* by Christopher A. Jones, *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf* and *Old English Shorter Poems: Wisdom and Lyric* by Robert E. Bjork, *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints* by Mary Clayton, and *Old English Psalms* by Patrick O'Neill. Other prose translations are noted in the headnotes to the individual poems.

The headnote to each poem provides a brief introduction to some of the critical issues that have been raised about the poem, often citing recent editors of the poem whose work has been helpful to me in making the translations. In composing the headnotes, and indeed in assembling this entire work, I have made use of several important surveys of OE literature, both old and new, including (but not limited to) the following: *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* by Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder (the sections on Old English poetry are by Greenfield), *A History of Old English Literature* by Michael Alexander, *A History of Old English Literature* by R. D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain, and *Old English Literature: A Short Introduction* by Daniel Donoghue. The Fulk and Cain book was an especially valuable resource and guide; without it I could not have undertaken this work.

In a book of this scope, it is finally impossible to mention all of the editors, lexicographers, scholars, and translators who have shed light on these texts over the years, but I want to acknowledge and thank them for their many insights into these magnificent poems. I could not have accomplished these poetic translations without them. A number of scholars, having read my translations in earlier books, have encouraged me to keep steadily at work on this larger project. Their kind words have been the best of incentives to keep me committed to this task.



## ABBREVIATIONS

- ASPR*      *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–53.
- Klaeber 4*      Fulk, R. D., Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds. 2008. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 4th ed. Foreword by Helen Damico. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; based on 3rd ed. by Klaeber, Boston: D. C. Heath, 1950.
- MS              Manuscript
- OE              Old English



# ON TRANSLATING OLD ENGLISH POETRY

## INTRODUCTION

When poets are asked to describe the act of writing or translating poetry, they often turn to metaphor to unravel or explain a process that remains in part mysterious. If writing poetry is like dancing solo with the world, translating poetry is like dancing with a partner you get to know over time. My partner usually comes from a different homeland with a different personal or cultural way of perceiving and performing in the world. Our rhythms, our dances, our expectations are different. We do, however, share a sense of rhythm, and we both utilize bone, muscle, sinew. We do different dances on similar legs. We have brains that process music, rhythm, movement. This is true for any translation dance—it's a shared movement between worlds.

My dance with the Old English poet is special in that his or her language is part of my linguistic inheritance. The poet says *ban* where I say "bone" and *hus* where I say "house," but the meanings remain largely the same (even if the Anglo-Saxon house is quite different from my own). On the other hand, when the poet says *dom*, drawing upon a complex linguistic and cultural storehouse, he or she means something like "judgment, reputation, honor, glory," which is a far cry from the meaning of "doom" that I have inherited, meaning "fate, destruction, death," which first arises in the fourteenth century. So we speak a different but related language. Some of our words mean the same thing; the great majority do not. My partner's language is vastly more inflected than my own, though we share similar inflections that have survived the centuries. We come from different worlds but we are both human, and what we share makes the act of translation possible, even if finally

what we recognize is a strange but human otherness together. We are both poets who love the written word. We dream up worlds with these words which reflect the worlds we inhabit. We cherish human connection (though we connect in different ways) and lament the loss of loved ones (though our lamenting rituals are different). We dance together what we might call a dance of difference. My Old English poetic partner may be a court composer or a Christian monk. His or her natural mode of dancing out rhythms is alliterative strong stress, where mine is metrical feet and rhyme. In order to make this dance work, we must share ideas and languages—or at least I must do this since I'm the living partner doing the translator's choreography, but sometimes it seems, in the middle of a line, when we are sitting poetically together with warriors at the meadhall table, that my partner is communicating movements, inviting meanings, teasing me and my world with differences in language and culture or tongue-in-cheek ambiguity. We communicate together across the long space of time and shape the dance.

When the dance is done, I can analyze the movement and the steps, as I've done below, but something of this dance remains a mystery. This is as it should be. We can use critical language to understand the language of poetry, but this has its limitations. There is always an unconscious element to the process that remains hidden like some mysterious force in some unknown place. Sometimes after a hard night's work on my own lines or lines in *Beowulf*, the right words, both beautiful and true, just pop into mind without prompting. This is what makes writing and translating poetry both a transcendent experience and a true delight.

## OLD ENGLISH POETIC METER

Old English poetry is built on an alliterative, strong-stress pattern. Each line normally contains four strongly stressed syllables, for example:

1	2	3	4
Ic swiftne	geseah	on swaþe	feran
I a swift (thing)	saw	on the road	travel

The words that are stressed depend on their nature and function in the sentence (verbs, for example, are more important than adverbs) and in their placement (the first word in a poem or section is often important). The initial consonants of accented syllables normally alliterate only with themselves (*b* alliterates with *b*, *m* with *m*, *sp* with *sp*, etc.); any vowel can alliterate with any other vowel (*a*

alliterates with *a, e, i*, etc.). The third stress in the line always alliterates with the first or second stress or both. The fourth stress in a line never alliterates (or almost never alliterates), but it can sometimes alliterate with a stressed syllable in the preceding or following line. Thus the possible alliterative patterns in a particular line are stresses 1 and 3; 2 and 3; and 1, 2, and 3.

Each line is also divided into two half-lines, each with a syntactic integrity, and is separated by a relatively strong caesura or pause, and the half-lines fall into a number of possible patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. Each half-line normally has two stressed syllables and a somewhat flexible number of unstressed syllables. Sometimes there also occurs a secondary stress, midway in weight between a stressed and an unstressed syllable. The basic half-line patterns, with illustrations in modern English, are as follows:

' x ' x	Type A	grim and greedy
x ' x '	Type B	his mighty band
x ' ' x	Type C	the ship waited
' ' ' x	Type D <sup>1</sup>	high horn-gabled
' ' x `	Type D <sup>2</sup>	bold, battle-famed
' ` x '	Type E	wind-waters roll

In this scheme, the sign ' represents a stressed syllable or lift; *x* represents an unstressed syllable or drop; and ` represents a secondary stress or half-lift. Some but not all of the drops can be expanded into more unstressed syllables, and there are several subtype variations for each of the major types. Occasionally there are longer lines called hypermetric lines, which have three stressed syllables in each half-line instead of two; they seem to follow the pattern types above but add an extra foot (translators vary on whether or not to try to imitate these). There is only rarely rhyme in Old English poetry. This is a somewhat simplified summary of Old English meter; those readers interested in a more detailed explanation should consult the Old English grammars or handbooks on style such as those by Baker (2007) and Mitchell and Robinson (2007).

What was common to the literate Anglo-Saxon, the controlled strong-stress line, often proves strange to modern readers of poetry who are used to the iambic rhythms of later poetic traditions or the free verse of many modern writers. Occasional modern poets hearken back to the ancient Old English rhythms—for example, Pound in the *Cantos*, Auden in *The Age of Anxiety*, and Tolkien in his poems and songs (see Jones for examples of modern poets

using Old English methods). Mainly the strong-stress rhythms remain a medievalist's delight.

Translators deal with Old English meter in different ways. Some attempt to keep to the strict Old English meter and dredge up archaic words to meet the alliterative demands. Some scuttle strong stress for the more comfortable iambic pentameter or free verse or resort to syllabic verse. Some struggle to make compromises. My own compromise represents a cross between the traditional Old English strong-stress meter and a looser form, sometimes approaching a style used by Ælfric in what is called rhythmical prose. It retains the four-stress line in a loosely alliterative pattern. It builds in substantial cross-line alliteration—especially to bind to the rest of the poem an occasional non-alliterative line. It plays with the possibility of assonance and adds the close repetition of words and morphemes. It occasionally uses rhyme or off-rhyme to bind the lines where alliteration seems impossible.

Take, for example, the Bookworm riddle (Riddle 45), which I quote here in Old English, in a straightforward translation (with some indication of the ambiguities in the original), and in my own poetic rendering:

Moððe word frat—me þæt þuhte  
 wrætlicu wyrd þa ic þæt wundor gefrægn,  
 þæt se wurm forswealg wera gied sumes,  
 þeof in þystro, þrymfæstne cwide  
 ond þæs strangan staþol. Stælgist ne wæs  
 wihte þy gleawra þe he þam wordum swealg.

A moth ate (devoured, consumed, gobbled) words (speech, sentence, story)—to me that seemed  
 A strange event (weird fate, odd happening, pun on “strange saying”),  
 when I heard of that wonder (miracle, horror),  
 That a worm (bug, snake, dragon) should swallow (mentally imbibe, consume, absorb) the songs of a certain one of men,  
 A thief in darkness (mental darkness, ignorance), his glory-fast sayings  
 (pun on “cud or munchings”),  
 And their place (intellectual foundation) of strength. That thief-guest  
 Was no wiser for having swallowed (mentally imbibed) words.

A moth ate songs—wolfed words!  
 That seemed a weird dish—that a worm  
 Should swallow, dumb thief in the dark,



The songs of a man, his chants of glory,  
 Their place of strength. That thief-guest  
 Was no wiser for having swallowed words.

My poetic translation is written in strong-stress meter with four stresses to each line. It contains two primary alliterative stresses each in lines 1, 2, 3, and 6. The stresses of line 4 are linked by the assonance of “man” and “chants” and “songs” and “glory”; of line 5 by the assonance of “strength” and “guest” (or “place” and “strength,” depending on the individual pronunciation). Lines 2 and 3 are also linked by the cross-line alliteration in “dish” and “dumb”; lines 4 and 5 by the alliteration in “guest” and “glory” and “songs” and “strength.” All six lines have some form of *s* stress; three lines have a double *w* stress. The sinuous *s* pattern produces some of the ominous overtones of the *wyrm* complex (worm–snake–dragon) in Old English. Verbal repetitions include “songs” (1 and 4), “words” (1 and 6), “swallow”/“swallowed” (2 and 6), and the double “that” of line 2 and triple “of” of lines 4–5. There is also the imperfect rhyme of “weird” and “word(s)” which reproduces that of the original *word* and *wyrd*, even though the meanings are significantly different.

All of these devices help to tighten the translation and in some sense compensate for the loosening that takes place with the loss of primary alliteration in lines 4–5. The translation is occasionally iambic, as in “A moth ate songs,” or “Their place of strength,” which sounds more modern (though this Type B half-line pattern of x ‘ x ‘ is one of the five basic Old English types). But this momentary pattern is almost always followed by the shock of dense stress, as in “wolfed words,” and “thief-guest.” This clash of accented syllables of a primary or secondary sort is typical of half-line types C, D, and E above, and it may also occur when one half-line ends with a stress, and another begins with a stress. I hope my translation technique produces a rhythm that rolls back and forth between an ancient and modern mode. It is a rhythm that is influenced by Hopkins’s sprung rhythm, which is characterized by the primary importance of accentual stress combined with heavy alliteration and assonance, and which was itself probably based in part on his reading of Old English (see Vendler, 9 ff., and Plotkin, 18–19, 149 ff.). This is the method I have used in translating all of the Old English poems that follow, from the smallest riddles to the 3,182 lines of *Beowulf*. Of course, the longer poems have more of a tendency to shift styles, sometimes moving from a looser conversational or prosaic tone to quite dense and compact poetry in a short space of time, and I have tried to capture these tonal shifts in the translations.

Catching the complex meanings and ambiguities of the original Old English poems is often difficult, and sometimes a translator must repeat a phrase with variation to include different semantic possibilities in the original or pick up in one phrase or line what was lost in a previous one. Occasionally it takes two lines to capture the meaning of one especially complex line, and this is why the line numbers in the translations will not always agree exactly with the line numbers in the original texts. Riddle 45, “Bookworm,” is a typical example of a poem containing ambiguities that cause difficulties for a translator. Building into any translation what Fred C. Robinson calls the “artful ambiguities” of this riddle proves a challenging task (1975, 355 ff.; I am indebted to Robinson for much of the discussion of this riddle). The word-gobbling *wyrm* that steals man’s songs from their vellum foundation may mean “bug, worm, snake, reptile, or dragon” in Old English. The dragon that destroys Beowulf is a *wyrm*, but so is the larva that spins silk. Building the bug into a dragon and bringing him down is part of the mock-epic game of the riddle, but most of this is lost in the innocuous “worm” of modern English. (For more on the parodic devices in the riddle, see Stewart, 1975, 227 ff.). Taking the ravenous possibilities of *fret*, a word that implies unnatural gobbling, I try to recapture the dragon’s ferocity with the phrase, “wolfed words,” which repeats with variation the initial “ate songs.” Thus in order to capture some of the original ambiguity, I’ve had to use the Old English poetic device of repetition (verb + object) with variation (word choice). Whenever I have to add something to catch a bit of lost meaning in the original, I try to do this in an Old English way, thus imitating the poet’s method of composition.

Robinson points out a number of possible puns in the riddle. *Wyrd* is a word whose meaning ranges from “terrible fate” (epic dragons) to “what’s happening” (mocking the bug). In the riddlic context, it is also a pun on *gewyrd*, “speech.” The ambiguous tone is echoed by *cwide*, “songs, sayings,” a pun on *cwidu*, “what is munched” (*cwidu* or its other forms, *cwudu* and *cudu*, can mean “cud” in Old English). The grotesque irony of this is perhaps conveyed in the “weird dish,” since for moderns not only a hard fate but also hot lasagna may be “dished out.” Finally, modern English “weird” derives from the Old English *wyrd* and has gone from meaning “fact, fate, destiny, Providence” to “strange, uncanny.” The addition of “dumb” is also an attempt to catch the bovine level of *cwidu* as well as the unspeaking idiocy of the worm. The word *þystro* means either physical or mental “darkness”; *swealg*, “swallow physically” or “imbibe mentally.” These ambiguities are kept in modern English (e.g., “That book left me in the dark.” “Don’t swallow that old line.”).

These are just some of the semantic problems any translator must deal with, even in the short space of a six-line riddle. The difficulties in a long, complex poem like *Beowulf* are only compounded (see below for examples).

Some readers may object to the trade of a wolf for a *wyrm* or the intrusion of a dish. And yet, a translator must attempt to reproduce not only primary meanings, but also ambiguities, textures, and tones. St. Jerome says that often “word for word” translation must give way to “sense for sense” translation and notes that “it is difficult, when following the text of another language, not to overstep the mark in places, and hard to keep in the translation the grace of something well said in the original” (29). A safe translation is often one that does an injustice to the complexity and spirit of the original. My goal in translating these poems has been to recreate faithfully the Old English and to shape modern English poems as beautiful, startling, and compelling as the originals—to bring across the bridge of time something of that original grace.

## ON TRANSLATING TRANSLATIONS

The difficulty of translating poetry from Old English into Modern English is compounded in some cases because the OE poems are themselves translations from earlier Latin texts. The two most important instances of this are *The Meters of Boethius* and *The Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter*. *The Meters of Boethius* is a collection of OE poetic translations of Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (The Consolation of Philosophy). The original Latin text contains sections of both prose and poetry. The OE translation exists in two major manuscripts. The first of these translates all of the Latin prose sections and most of the Latin poetry sections into OE prose; the second, which probably derives from the first or from an earlier OE prose translation like it, translates the Latin prose and poetry into OE prose and poetry, respectively (see the introduction to the OE texts by Godden and Irvine for a discussion of the relationship between the manuscripts). In trying to discern what the OE poet-translator means in his poems, the modern translator must occasionally consult the source texts, in this case both Latin and OE prose, to elucidate difficult passages or capture elusive tones, while at the same time recognizing and respecting the differences between the various texts and translations.

One can see this complicated intertextual process at work, for example, in the opening lines of the first poem in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The lines give voice to the suffering lament of Boethius from his prison cell. In the Latin text he cries out, “Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi, / flebilis, heu,

maestos cogor inire modos. / Ecce mihi lacerae dictant scribenda Camenae / et ueris elegi fletibu ora rigant” (Godden and Irvine, II, 258), which Greene translates: “I who once wrote songs with keen delight am now by sorrow driven to take up melancholy measures [and] wounded Muses tell me what I must write, and elegiac verses bathe my face with real tears” (3). The OE prose version of these opening lines reads: “Ða lioð þe ic wrecca geo lustbærlice song, ic sceal nu heofiende singan and mid [swiðe] ungeradum wordum gesettan þeah ic geo hwilum gecoplice funde; ac ic nu wepende and gisciende [oft] geradra worda misfo,” which Godden and Irvine translate: “The songs which I, an exile, formerly sung with joy, I must now sing in tears, and set them with very discordant words, though I composed fitting ones at times before; but I must now, weeping and sobbing, often fail to find fitting words” (text, I, 244; translation, II, 5). The OE poetic version of the passage is as follows:

Hwæt, ic lioða fela lustlice geo  
 sanc on sælum; nu seal siofigende,  
 woþe gewæged, wrecca giomor  
 singan sarcwidas. (Godden and Irvine, I, 386)

This can be translated (with alternative readings in parentheses) as follows:

Behold (listen, well, lo)! I, many songs (stories, poems) have long ago  
 (formerly, once, earlier) joyfully (pleasantly, gladly, willingly,  
 delightedly)  
 Sung (chanted, recited, spoken) in joy (happiness, pleasure; on an  
 occasion; in a time or season); but now I must, sighing (lamenting,  
 crying),  
 Afflicted (troubled, anguished, frustrated) by weeping (crying, lamenting,  
 shrieking), a sad (troubled, miserable, dejected, suffering) wretch  
 (exile, outcast, fugitive),  
 Sing (chant, recite, speak) sorrow (suffering, pain, grief, wound)-words  
 (speech, saying, discourse, opinion, judgment).

My modern poetic version of the opening lines of the lament is as follows:

Listen! Once I embraced life, singing  
 Songs of joy. Now my tunes are twisted—  
 My mournful melodies are winding woe.  
 Weary with weeping, I cannot conceive

How my fate has turned or celebrate my life  
 With the sustaining songs I used to sing.  
 Sometimes my talking is tongue-tied,  
 My once-wise words, wrenched and wried.

All the versions of the opening Boethian lines share an elegiac tone and contrast the speaker's former joy of composing songs with his present difficulty of doing so because of his tearful suffering. The Latin speaker's Muses are wounded but still able to urge him on in writing "melancholy measures" and "elegiac verses." The speaker's plaintive cry might have struck a resonant chord with a translator familiar with the OE elegies, such as *The Wanderer* and *The Wife's Lament*. The OE prose translation of the Latin verse highlights the contrast between the fitting words of the speaker's former times and the discordant words of his present existence. It eliminates the wounded Muses and thus emphasizes the loneliness and isolation of the speaker. It also removes from the source the tears *bathing* the speaker, which may have offered some hope of cleansing or healing to come. The "real tears" in the OE prose stand in contrast to the apparent unreality of the speaker's present fate and call into question the accuracy of his perceptions of himself and his world. The carefully constructed rhetoric of the prose argument represents at least an attempt at reasoned self-control, even if the effort seems only partly to be working.

In the OE poetic translation or reformulation from the OE prose, the excruciating sense of loss, the anguish of exile, the pain of imprisonment, the woe of uncontrollable weeping, and the paradox of having to sing through suffering take center stage. The sense of exile is highlighted, and the suffering seems more deeply experienced. The quality of the speaker's poetic singing (helped certainly by the poet's skill) gives rise to a kind of melancholy beauty which has at least the implicit hope of a poetic amelioration of the speaker's troubles. The speaker's opening plea to an imagined audience, *Hwæt* or "Listen," though formulaic, gives vent to an exile's plaintive cry for a sympathetic audience, a camaraderie of listeners. His recollection of joyful songs in the past is both a cherished memory and a painful reminder of his loss makes his present condition all the harder to bear. He must, however, shape some song or poem, however painful, in order to articulate his sorrow and have a chance at understanding and overcoming his misfortune. Like the speaker of *The Wanderer*, his bind is that he must use his mind to cure his mind, and he will need the help of some greater power, in this case Philosophy, to help bring about understanding and consolation. In the Old English version of the *Consolation*, the dialogue between Philosophy and

Boethius is transformed into one between Wisdom and the mind of Boethius to help facilitate this process.

The OE poetic opening demands a somewhat extended translation in order to do justice to its complexity and tone. In my modern rendering, I have tried to make compelling the suffering voice by drawing upon the elegiac tradition of other Old English poems. The speaker remembers his once embraced life, which now seems isolated. His former songs of joy have turned into “twisted tunes” and “mournful melodies” that are “winding woe.” The combination of “mournful” and “winding” hints of funereal despair. The poet cannot understand how his fate has turned or twisted. His old songs can no longer sustain him; his “once-wise words” are “wrenched and wried” (twisted, warped). Nothing is straightforward anymore—not his memory, not his misery, not his poetry. Like the speaker of *The Wanderer*, he cannot conceive how or why his once celebrated world has turned into one of sorrow and suffering, misery and unmeaning. He has somehow lost the world’s favor and his own clear thinking and celebrant singing. He is like a man losing his mind. His memory wanders; his talking is “tongue-tied.” He will have to find a new way with words to unravel his ruin, and (as becomes clear later), he will need the forms of Philosophy with its rational arguments and reasonable words to do this.

Similar intertextual complexities appear in *The Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter*. These psalms are poetic translations of the last one hundred Latin psalms from a now-lost Latin psalter, probably an early Roman psalter. The OE poems often follow the Latin text but sometimes diverge from it for a variety of reasons, including variant readings from other texts or glosses, the translator’s misreading of the Latin, his decision to ignore difficult portions of the text, and his flights of poetic fancy to facilitate the alliteration or embellish the meaning of the Latin original. Most critics agree that this OE translator was at best a mediocre poet, often trying to produce a word-for-word translation, sometimes misreading the source or skipping over it when it proved difficult or trying to explain it in obscure ways. This often yields difficult or even slightly baffling passages such as the extended description of the wicked man in Psalm 108 who loves cursing. The Latin passage, taken here from the Vulgate Bible with bracketed alternate readings from both the Paris Psalter (PP) and from the Vespasian Psalter (VP), which is “the best surviving version of the Roman psalter in England” (Toswell, 1994, 395, n. 6), is given below along with the Douay-Rheims translation. This is followed by the OE poetic lines with possible variant translations in parentheses and my own poetic translation of the lines.

Et dilexit maledictionem, et veniet ei, et noluit benedictionem, et elongabitur [PP & VP: prolongabitur] ab eo. Et induit maledictionem [PP & VP: maledictione] sicut vestimentum [PP & VP: vestimento], et intravit sicut aqua in interiora eius et sicut oleum in ossibus eius. Fiat ei sicut vestimentum quo [VP: quod] operitur [PP & VP: operietur] et sicut zona qua semper praecingitur [PP: precingitur]. (The Vulgate Bible, 452; The Vespasian Psalter, 108; The Paris Psalter, folio 132a, online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8451636f/f273.image>)

And he loved cursing, and it shall come unto him, and he would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him. And he put on cursing like a garment, and it went in like water into his entrails and like oil in his bones. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him and like a girdle with which he is girded continually. (*The Vulgate Bible*, 453)

He wolde wergðu wyrcean georne,  
and hine seo ylce on eft gesette;  
nolde he bletsunge biddan ne tilian,  
forðon hio him wæs afyrred of ferhðcofan.  
He hine gegyrede mid grame wyrğðu,  
swa he hine wædum wræstum geteode,  
and sio his innað ywde swylce  
wan wætere gelic and wynele,  
se þe banes byrst beteð and hæleð.  
Wese he hrægle gelic þe her hraðe ealdað,  
and gyrdelse, ðe hine man gelome gyrt. (*ASPR* VI, 93)

He would (wanted to, desired to, was used to) eagerly (earnestly, zealously, gladly, completely) perform (do, make, produce, strive for) a curse (condemnation, evil, wickedness),  
And afterwards (thereupon, likewise, moreover), this would settle into (set upon, be appointed to, made for) him.  
And he would not ask for (beg for, pray for) or strive after (aspire to, endeavor to obtain, cultivate, cherish) blessing (benediction, favor, sanction);  
Therefore it was removed (withdrawn, estranged, expelled) from his spirit-chamber (mind-enclosure, soul-stronghold, breast, body).  
He clothed (dressed, attired, adorned) himself with a grim (angry, fierce, cruel, savage) curse (condemnation, evil, wickedness)

So that he firmly (ably, strongly, delicately) put it (drew it, tugged it, induced it) on like excellent (delicate, firm, strong) clothing (apparel, garment, robe),  
 And it likewise (in such manner, thereupon, moreover) revealed (showed, displayed, disclosed) his insides (innards, entrails, stomach, heart)  
 Like dark (dusky, dim, shadowy, lurid) water and joy-oil (gladdening oil, exultation-oil)  
 That repairs (cures, restores, remedies) and heals (saves, cures, restores) the bursting (damage, injury, harm) of bone.  
 May he be like a garment (clothing, robe, vestment) that here (in this place, at this point) deteriorates (grows old, wears out, perishes) quickly (immediately, promptly, readily),  
 And like a girdle (belt, band, sash) that is frequently (often, constantly, completely, fully) wrapped around (girdled about, surrounding) him.

He loved cursing—so curses came upon him.  
 He loathed blessings—they were banished from him,  
 Withdrawn from his breast, his heart's hoard.  
 He clothed himself with savage curses  
 As if they were like the finest clothes.  
 They soaked grimly into his skin and flesh  
 Like dark water and gathered in his gut,  
 Opening his innards, slowly seeping  
 Into bone and sinew like an oily joy,  
 A pulpy healing for his bursting bones.  
 May he always be clothed in the rags of malice  
 And grow old suddenly, tattered and torn.  
 May his curses be like a tight belt  
 Wrapped around him both day and night.

Both the Latin and OE versions of this passage emphasize the wickedness of the man who loves cursing so much that he metaphorically puts on a garment of curses that soaks into his own skin, oiling his innards, threatening his bones. By cursing others, he becomes a living curse himself. He exists without blessing at the edge of doom, which the narrator self-righteously wishes for him. The OE poet tries to translate this subtle passage with only mixed results. Diamond points out that the OE poet “translates *maledictionem* accurately [as] *wergōdu* [curse] and translates *dilexit* rather freely [as] *he wolde . . . wyrcean*” [he would make]” (1963, 38; much of the following discussion is



indebted to Diamond). In both Latin and OE versions, the curser eschews any blessing and so is left vulnerably unblessed. The OE poet adds the detail of the blessing being withdrawn (or estranged) from the wicked man's breast or body, using the kenning *ferhðcofan*, "spirit-chamber," to emphasize the importance of prizing and protecting the human soul. In the Latin text, the curses that the man puts on like a garment slide like water into his entrails and oil into his bones, presumably with deleterious effects. The OE poet emphasizes the potential danger here by calling the garment of curses *grame*, "grim," and the waters *wan*, "darkly pale." This would seem to set up the oily curser for a destructive ending. In the Latin passage the garb of curses enters the subject's body (*intravit*), whereas in the OE translation, it seems merely to show or reveal (*ywde*) his innards, though Diamond suggests that OE *ywde* (manuscript *ydwe*) might be a mistake for *eode*, which might translate Latin *intravit* (1963, 39). The Vespasian Psalter glosses Latin *intravit* with OE *ineode* (108), which would support this conjecture. Toller argues that the form here should be *ipan*, "to lay waste" (597; for the various proposed emendations of the manuscript reading, see Krapp's notes to verse 108.18.3 in *ASPR*, vol. 5, p. 221, and also O'Neill's note to verse 18 in *Old English Psalms*, 687).

Now the deeper translation difficulties begin. The OE poet launches into a small expansion as he ameliorates the internally oily garment of curses by calling the oil *wynele*, "joy-oil," and claiming that this nasty potion that derives from a habit of cursing suddenly takes on the miraculous and redemptive power of healing, restoring the curser's *banes byrst*, "bursting of bones." Diamond rightly notes that "the choice of this word [*wynele*], which means *gladdening oil*, seems to contradict the sense of the psalm, in which oil in the bone is pointed to as a bad thing," and he goes on to surmise that once the poet "had fixed upon *wynele* to translate *oleum*—a choice that seems to have been dictated almost entirely by the necessity of somehow making *ele* alliterate with *watere*—the poet was carried away and elaborated on the implications of *wyn* in a totally mistaken way, but the whole passage is so cloudy and confused that it is perhaps best to give it up" (1963, 39).

The passage ends in both Latin and OE versions with a curse leveled at the evil curser, which seems unintentionally ironic since the wages of cursing have just been drastically determined, at least in the Latin. Again the habit of cursing is likened to a garment that is now wished upon the curser himself. The garment will tighten menacingly around him like an overtight belt. He will not escape its grip. In the Latin version, this is obviously the same garment that seeps into the curser's bones, destroying him. In the Old English version, this becomes a threadbare garment that grows old and disintegrates

over time, presumably as does the wearer or curser. This might be a mistaken reading of Latin *operitur*, “covers,” as *peritur*, “perishes, wears out,” which the OE poet translates as *ealdað*, “grows old, deteriorates” (see the suggestion in the *Dictionary of Old English* under *ealdan*), or it might be a deliberate misreading in order to emphasize that as the cursing becomes habitual, it causes the slow destruction of the curser. Both the curser and the curses, or the “rags of malice,” as I have poetically put it, become tattered and worn, slowly disintegrating over time. As it stands in the OE passage, the garment of curses works in two ways. One seeps into the curser’s innards with what should be destructive consequences; the other turns threadbare and disintegrates over time. The danger here is both within and without. Because the OE reading of the garment metaphor makes a certain amount of sense, I have built both possible meanings into my own translation.

Diamond suggests at some point that we may have to give up on the most difficult passages in a garbled translation. Unfortunately, a modern poet who is translating the OE poem doesn’t have the luxury of giving up in difficult places. In my translation I have tried to highlight certain grim paradoxes in the poem. The man who loves cursing brings curses on himself (an irony which is clearer in the Vulgate and also in the Hebrew original). The man who rejects a blessing finds his own blessing banished far from his *ferhðcofan*, “spirit-chamber,” which I translate poetically as “heart’s hold,” a formulaic term I use elsewhere in the psalms to indicate both a secure place for the heart or soul in its purest state in this life and also that final security in the hold of heaven which is only possible through God’s blessing. The wicked man who clothes himself in savage curses in my translation finds this covering soaking into his skin, opening his innards, gathering in his gut, and seeping slowly into both bone and sinew. This is obviously an ominous oil—this habit of cursing could doom him. When the moment of truth arrives, I try to make sense of the appropriate devastation in the Latin source and the misadventure of the sudden OE redemptive healing. Unlike the OE translator, who often ignores the Latin passages he cannot make sense of, I am forced to give it a go. My resolution is to accept the OE poet’s surprise ending of the “joy-oil,” but to undermine it by flipping the phrase into “oily joy,” and then to describe the unexpected and unnatural bone restoration as “pulpy healing,” thus calling into question whether such a healing can honestly be brought about. My resolution gives a nod to both Latin text and OE translation. It leaves open the possibility that the OE poet was not merely caught in the trap of his own alliterative demands, but that he wanted somehow (even if magically) to save

the subject, knowing at some level of his own heart's hold that this was impossible. If the speaker is not actually making up the curses but repeating the curses that his enemies heap upon him (see below), he may be trying to ameliorate the curses aimed at him. Finally, in my translation, the curser has his burst bones only partially healed into a pulpy restoration. Without ceasing to wear the clothes of cursing, without reclaiming the banished blessing, he cannot hope for more.

The situation here is made even more complex because the narrative structure of the psalm and the stance of the speaker are much debated, no matter what the language version. The litany of curses may be the speaker's own malediction against his enemies; if so, he himself falls into the evil cursing mode of his foes. Alternatively, these curses may be the speaker's recollection of, or imagined rendering of, those his enemies have hurled at him (or might hurl at him); if so, he seems to delight too much in giving voice to their wicked words, becoming a curser himself in this act of recalling or rendering their curses. In either case, the curser seems to take on the worst aspects of those who curse him and ends up cursing himself.

The deepest meanings of any poem are often locked in the unconscious elements of the language, in the tones and suggestions, the ambiguities and ambivalences. In a translation, some of these hidden elements are buried in the sources themselves and sometimes have to be recovered like lost treasures in a hidden trove. What the OE translator was thinking when he turned the dangerous oil of the curses into a bone-saver, we'll never know (and perhaps he was uncertain of this himself), but somehow the solution lies locked in the combined treasure of translation and source text. In the art of translation, the poet necessarily claims certain prerogatives as he or she moves from one text to another, from one language and culture to another. These poetic moves need to be grounded in the original language and text, but they also need to fly a little as they take wing in the new language. My hope is that the image of the "pulpy healing" catches something of the failed shift in meaning from the Latin to the OE wording and adds a little something to the double treasure-house of words.

This act of translating the OE metrical psalms is further complicated because they are translations of a Latin text that is a translation of a Hebrew text (with perhaps a Septuagint Greek text in between). An analysis of this movement across four bridges connecting five languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Old English, modern English) remains beyond the scope of this work, but it certainly beckons anyone who loves the psalms and knows all of the languages involved.

## OLD ENGLISH POETICS AND STYLE

Old English poetry is different from Modern English poetry in a multitude of ways beyond the metrical differences. It is important in any translation to understand the larger modes of composition and then try to build them into the translations themselves. Those modes included in the discussion here are vocabulary (including compounds and kennings), patterns of repetition (including formulas, variation, apposition, parallelism, parataxis, and envelope or ring structure), and the tonal or rhetorical devices of humor, irony, and litotes.

### *Vocabulary*

One aspect of Old English vocabulary evident in the poems is the large number of words for certain common or important concepts such as man, warrior, sword, horse, battle, sea, ship, Lord, soul, glory, etc. A seafaring people, for example, will have a greater variety of words for the sea than a landlocked people. The poems also have a specialized vocabulary with an increased number of poetic or even archaic words, creating a larger *wordhord*, “word-hoard,” for the poet to work with. *Beowulf*, for example, includes unique words such as *bolster*, “cushion,” *cenðu*, “boldness,” and *hæf*, “sea,” and compounds like *ærfæder*, “fore-father,” *muð-bona*, “mouth-destroyer,” and *wis-hycgende*, “wise-thinking.” Mitchell and Robinson note that *Beowulf* has seven hundred unique words not found elsewhere in Old English (1998, 25). Tinkler observes that *The Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter* contain 207 unique words (13). Griffith lists a number of words found only in OE poetry, not in the prose (1991, 183–85). The variety of words enables the poet to make fine distinctions of meaning and meet the alliterative requirements of the poetic lines. It also makes the poetry seem different from everyday prose. It creates a special world by combining the everyday and the unusual—just as *Beowulf* brings us into a world of history and myth, meadhall drinking and monsters marauding, and *Genesis* ushers us into a biblical world of promises and imperfections, salvation and scheming, lost faith and the fall. The Old English *wordhord*, “word-hoard,” makes the poetic worlds both realistic and rare.

### *Compounds*

The Anglo-Saxons loved to shape new meanings out of old words by creating compounds such as *beag-gifa*, “ring-giver” (lord, king), *heofon-flod*, “sky-

flood” (rainstorm), *ead-stapa*, “land-stepper” (wanderer), and *breþer-bealo*, “heart-bale” (distress). The latest editors of *Beowulf* count 903 distinct compounds, of which 518 are unique to the poem, observing that “on average there is a compound in every other line” (*Klaeber 4*, cxii). Orchard’s list of battle compounds in *Beowulf* from *beado-grima*, “war-mask,” to *wig-sped*, “war-success,” runs to two pages (2003, 70–72). Each compound is a miniature yoking of perceptual worlds. Orchard argues that “in producing such compounds . . . the *Beowulf*-poet is effectively offering a number of snap-shots or perspectives both simultaneously and in sequence, and allowing the audience the chance to savour (or not) the multiplicity of meanings offered” (2003, 73). I have tried to keep these compounds in most cases, even when they might seem strange to a modern ear. Such strangeness is part of the act of reading poetry from another language and culture and appreciating the otherness of that perception and poetic vision.

### *Kennings*

A kenning is a special compound that calls a noun something it is not, then modifies it with a contextual clue. Examples of kennings include *ban-bus*, “bone-house” (body), *hilde-leoma*, “battle-light” (sword), *hwæl-weg*, “whale-road” (sea), and *hilde-nædre*, “battle-snake” (arrow). Kennings can also be constructed with a genitive modifier such as *rodore’s candel*, “heaven’s candle” (sun), and *homera laf*, “the leaving of hammers” (sword). In each case, the kenning is like a compressed metaphor. For example, in *ban-bus*, the unnamed thing (body) is compared to another quite different named thing (house), but modified with a contextual clue (a bone-house). Each of these kennings implies a hidden metaphoric analogy:

bone	timber
_____	_____
body	house

This, in turn, sets up four possible kennings: (1) a body is a bone-house; (2) a house is a timbered body; (3) a bone is a body-timber; and (4) a timber is a house-bone. This begins to make each kenning look like a new slant upon the world—a way of crossing categories to re-perceive reality. Each kenning is like a miniature riddle which invites the reader to solve the word (or creature or concept) in disguise and to consider reshaping our perceptual lenses to see the world with poetic eyes (for more on kennings and riddles, see Williamson,

1982, 29 ff., and Stewart, 1979, 115 ff.). A related Old English device calls something by one of its typical aspects, then modifies it, such as *weg-flota*, “wave-floater” (ship), and *beag-gifa*, “ring-giver” (lord, king). Such constructions are sometimes called half-kennings or *kend heiti* (see Brodeur, 251).

### *Variation (Parallelism, Parataxis)*

The basic construction pattern of Old English verse is built on the syntactic repetition of phrases with semantic variation. A phrase which is repeated exactly constitutes a formula such as the common opening of riddles,  *Ic wiht geseah*, “I saw a creature,” or the common closing,  *Saga hwæt ic hatte*, “Say what I am called.” The formulaic ending might be varied to  *Frige hwæt ic hatte*, “Discover what I’m called.” In *Beowulf*, there are formulas such as  *Hroðgar mapelode, helm Scyldinga*, “Hrothgar spoke, protector of the Scyldings,” which is repeated three times. There are variations on this such as  *Beowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*, “Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow” (nine examples). Such formulaic renderings are common in Old English poetry. They may have first been formulated in an earlier oral tradition and incorporated into the literature, or they may have been simply literary formulas. Other shorter, half-line formulaic examples include  *goldwine gumena*, “gold-friend of men,”  *mearum ond meðum*, “with horses and treasures,” and  *sigor-eadig secg*, “victory-blessed man.” Orchard lists some forty pages of such formulas in *Beowulf* (2003, 274 ff.).

The use of repetition with variation can help to define or subtly nuance a description via epithets, such as the poet’s description of Grendel as “a hell-fiend / A grim hall-guest called Grendel, / Moor-stalker, wasteland walker” (101b–03). It can also describe an action by stages or degrees, as in the description of Grendel’s eating of Hondscio:

He seized the first sleeper, slit his body,  
Bit open his bone-house, drinking his blood,  
Swallowing flesh, feasting on hands and feet,  
Eating greedily the unliving one. (739–42)

In passages like these, the lines or half-lines move forward, repeating the syntactical pattern of a noun or verb phrase while employing in each case semantic variation. When this occurs without any clear indication of coordination or subordination, it is called parataxis. It produces a pattern of rolling phrases with variations of meaning. The phrases often repeat grammatical patterns,

creating formal appositions (see Robinson, 1985, for more on this). In the Old English lines for the translation above, the verbs are more directly parallel (“seized,” “slit,” “bit,” “drank,” “swallowed,” etc.), but in the translation I have varied this a bit by shifting from past tense verbs to participles. This is a useful translator’s trick to keep the repetition from becoming overbearing to a modern reader.

The pattern of syntactic repetition with variation can be useful in situations where a single translation of a half-line fails to capture the original ambiguity, no matter what the word-choice in Modern English. For example, in the opening line of *The Wanderer*, the *an-haga* or “lonely one” (literally “hedged-in one”) is said to *are gebided*, which is ambiguous. The verb *gebided* can mean “waits for, expects, experiences,” and the object *ar* can mean “honor, glory, grace, mercy.” So then, does the wanderer experience, or merely wait for, mercy? Is it honor he wants, or grace? I try to capture some of this ambiguity through the device of repetition with variation by translating, “Waits for mercy, longs for grace.” Similarly, in the last half-line of *Beowulf*, the poet says of Beowulf that he was *lofgeornost*, which means something like “eager for praise (fame, glory).” There is great debate about whether the hero at the end of the poem is being praised for his proper pursuit of honor or judged for his pride in wanting to fight the dragon alone and his greediness for the dragon’s gold. The most recent editors of the poem argue that “the reference is either to glory earned by deeds of valor . . . or to the king’s liberality toward his men . . . or both” (*Klaeber 4*, 271). I’ve tried to keep some of the ambiguity of this concluding half-line by expanding it into a repetition with variation: “Most desiring of praise, most deserving of fame.”

The patterned repetition of half-lines can occur with an abrupt caesura between them so as to highlight a stark sense of change or reversal, which is called *edwenden*. In *Klaeber 4*, the editors note that this sense of reversal is common in the poem: “Joy alternates with sadness, good fortune with ill, in what seems like an endless process of reversal” (cx). So, for example, when Beowulf asks King Hrothgar if he’s had a pleasant night’s sleep after he’s cleared the hall of Grendel, Hrothgar responds with great anxiety and sadness because Grendel’s mother has entered the hall, killing Æscere. In my translation Hrothgar cries out: “Don’t talk of dreams. My life’s a nightmare!” (1322). Sometimes this sense of sharp contrast is carried by the phrase *oð ðæt*, “until,” which indicates a sudden sense of danger or unexpected outcome, such as when the poet says that the thanes in Heorot who are celebrating the newly built hall were “Surrounded by joy until a certain creature / Began to commit crimes” (100–101b), indicating the looming presence of Grendel.

### *Envelope/Ring*

Sometimes the poetic phrases, as they repeat and vary, return to the phrase or motif with which they began. This pattern of circling back by means of repetition and variation is called an envelope or ring pattern. A well-known example comes from *The Battle of Maldon* (25–28):

<i>Ƣa stod on stæde, stiðlice clypode</i>	A B
Then stood on the shore, fiercely called out	
<i>wicinga ar, wordum mælde,</i>	C B
the messenger of the Vikings, spoke with words,	
<i>se on beot abead brimliþendra</i>	B C
who announced in a vow (boast) of the sea-sailors	
<i>ærænde to þam eorle þær he on ofre stod.</i>	B A
a message to the earl where he stood on the shore.	

Lines 25a and 28b repeat the theme of the messenger’s location on the shore and enclose or envelop the passage. Lines 25b, 26b, 27a, and 28a all deal with the calling out of the Viking message or vow. Lines 26a and 27b deal with the reference to the messenger’s relation to the Viking troops. So the passage opens with ABC, repeats the B pattern twice, and returns home with CBA—a nice tight envelope (for more on this, see Bartlett, 9 ff.).

### *Humor: Irony, Understatement, Litotes, Bawdy*

Old English humor often takes the form of subtle irony, understatement, and litotes (a negative ironic understatement such as saying, “He’s not a good singer” when one means “He’s a terrible singer”). This is what Frank calls the “incomparable wryness” of the poetry (2006, 59 ff.). *Klaeber 4* notes a number of instances of grim humor and litotes in *Beowulf* (cx–cxi). When Beowulf tells of fighting the sea-monsters in his swimming match with Breca, he says he served them with his sword so that they had “little pleasure” (meaning he killed them and they had no pleasure!), and they slept late the next morning, “lulled by [his] sword” (564). When Wiglaf says to the cowardly Geats who fled from the dragon’s barrow that their lord had too few defenders, he is indicating by means of litotes that Beowulf had no defenders whatsoever except him. When the poet says of the Danes’ great woe from Grendel’s nightly visits, “that was no small sorrow they endured” (830), he uses litotes to emphasize their endless agony.



In the description of Grendel's coming to Heorot for his nightly savagery, there are two related litotes jokes:

That wasn't the first time he sought  
 Hrothgar's home, but he never found  
 In his grim days before or after  
 Such bad luck, such hard hall-thanes. (716–19)

The first joke is told at the hall-thanes' expense: that wasn't the first time Grendel came there—because he comes every night! The second is told at Grendel's expense: he never found such hard luck before or after—because following his battle-meeting with Beowulf there will be no “after.” Beowulf jokes before he goes to meet Grendel that if he loses the battle, Hrothgar won't have to worry about feeding him at the meadhall table or burying his body since Grendel will have gobbled him up. This instance of Beowulf's joking about his death is a traditional sign of a Germanic hero's bravery. A great hero often indulges in dark humor on his deathbed. When Beowulf is dying, he tells Wiglaf that he would give his armor to his son if only he had one. Of course, this irony also reveals a terrible truth: without a Beowulfian heir to the throne, the Geats are in grave danger, as the Swedes and Frisians will descend upon them.

Another kind of humor occurs in the Old English double-entendre riddles when a sexual, bodily element or action is compared wittily with some tool or natural element. The woman-warrior in the bread-dough/penis riddle (Riddle 43) sees something *nathwat*, (*ne+wat+hwet*, “I know not what”) “rising in the corner / Swelling and standing up” (1–2). She knows perfectly well what it is and goes over to grab at that “boneless wonder” (3b–4a) before she covers it up in mock modesty with a cloth (or a bit of her clothes!). The humor in the butter churn riddle (Riddle 52) mocks the actively engaging male servant who works away at the process of “churning” and is only “sometimes useful,” serving well but usually tiring “sooner than she” (7–9). In the sword riddle (Riddle 18), the creature says that his kind of sword, the battle-sword (unlike the implied sexual sword), brings neither bedroom joy nor more children to his lord's wife. At war he has to “stroke in brideless play / Without the hope of child-treasure” (23–24). It may seem odd that Anglo-Saxon humor finds its outlet often in sexual-bed and death-bed jokes, but these are charged moments in any human life, and as Freud argues, humor is often an outlet for submerged desire or fear.

## PROBLEM PASSAGES AND POETIC LICENSE

In any translation there are always words or passages which seem to defy translation. Often these are common words which have a wide range of meanings in the language or are idiomatic to the language, or they are passages which communicate hidden or ambiguous meanings or an emotional force in the original is difficult to translate. Sometimes these passages demand a degree of poetic license to express their forceful meanings. In this section I want to examine three such passages, the opening lines of *Beowulf*, the *Eala* repetition from *The Wanderer*, and the enigmatic ending of *Wulf and Eadwacer*. In each case I give the passage first in Old English, then in a relatively straightforward translation (with some indication of the ambiguities in the original), and finally in my own poetic rendering.

The opening lines of *Beowulf* look deceptively simple, but they set the tone for the rest of the poem and in some ways encapsulate some of its central themes:

Hwæt! We Gar-Dena in geardagum  
þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,  
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Behold (listen, well, lo)! We, about the Spear-Danes in the old days (days of yore, bygone days),  
Have heard (learned from asking about) the glory (power, might, majesty, splendor) of the people's kings (kings of a wide territory or domain),  
How the nobles (princes, chiefs, heroes, men) accomplished (performed, made, brought about) glory (strength, courage, valor, dedication).

Listen! We have heard of the Spear-Danes' glory,  
Their storied power, their primal strength—  
The kings and princes whose craft was courage.

The opening word *Hwæt* is often taken as a call to attention, though it is probably unstressed (on Old English interjections, see Hiltunen, 91 ff.). It is translated variously as “Listen,” “So,” “Indeed,” “Lo,” “What,” “Behold,” “Well,” “Ah,” and “How.” None of these works perfectly well, but “Listen!” seems to me the best alternative in terms of its attention-calling quality and meaning, even though it lacks the sharp sound of “Hwæt” and seems a little like a

teacher calling a class to order. I could alliterate “So” or perhaps “Say” with “Spear,” but this seems a weak, informal opening. Or I could keep “Listen” and alliterate “glory” with the second syllable of “bygone,” but this seems unnecessarily archaic. Reluctantly giving up the alliteration in the opening line, I make up for it in the second line by linking “storied” and “strength” with “Spear” in line 1 and by the partial rhyme of “glory” with “storied,” which also picks up the sense of tales heard in days gone by. I also strengthen the second line with a double alliteration which was present in the first line of the original. The use of “primal” picks up the sense of the past. In the third line there is a stress on “princes,” which makes for an alliterative linkage with “power” and “primal” in line 2. For the primary alliteration in line 3, I’ve chosen the unusual “craft” to go with “courage” because it picks up the subtle sense of “accomplishing” or “making” in *gefrunon*. I’ve kept and even strengthened the technique of apposition with variation in each of the lines. I’ve tried to communicate the sense of difference between the listening or reading audience and the old story that is being retold in the poem (for more on this theme, see Robinson, 1985, 27–28).

Another difficult passage to translate is the *Eala* cry in *The Wanderer* (94 ff. in the Old English and 100 ff. in my translation) where the speaker laments the loss of his lord and hall:

Eala beorht bune! Eala byrn-wiga!  
 Eala þeodnes þrymm! Hu seo þrag gewat,  
 genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære!

Alas the bright (shining, brilliant, beautiful, magnificent) cup (beaker, drinking vessel)! Alas the mailed warrior (fighter with a corselet)!  
 Alas the glory (power, might, majesty, splendor) of the prince (lord)!  
 How the time (period of time, age, season) has gone (departed, gone out, passed away),  
 Grown dark (gloomy) under the night-helmet (cover of night, of darkness) as if it were not (had never been)!

Gone is the bright cup. Gone is the mailed warrior.  
 Gone is the glory of the prince. How the time has slipped  
 Down under the night-helmet as if it never was.

*Eala* is a heartfelt cry imbued with longing and a sense of deep and unrecoverable loss. It is usually translated as “Ah,” “Oh,” or “Alas,” none of which

seems adequate to catch the power of the soulful lament, and all of which seem archaic and sentimental to a modern ear. One solution might be to say prosaically “I mourn for” or “I lament the loss of” and then list each of these precious and symbolically laden objects, but I’ve chosen to use the word “gone” to carry the sense of loss and to repeat it in the manner of *Eala* in the original so that it becomes increasingly a ritualized cry. The *g* of “gone” and “glory” provides the alliteration in the first two lines, and the *n* of “never” and “night-helmet” in the last line. The passage from “glory” to “gone” helps to strengthen the sense of loss. I keep the compound “night-helmet,” as in the Old English, not only to emphasize the loss of a protecting element but also to pick up the associations of a helmet like the Sutton Hoo helmet, which was once grandly decorated but now has lost most of its bright exterior. The slight enjambment of “slipped / Down” hurries the sense of loss along and makes it seem inevitable.

Finally, there is the mysterious and enigmatic ending of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which reads like a miniature riddle. In fact, the entire poem was once thought a riddle but is now generally accepted as a woman’s lament, though it’s never quite clear who either Wulf or Eadwacer is, and the dramatic situation is endlessly debated. The narrator, who is lamenting the loss of her husband or lover or son, cries out, “Wulf, my Wulf,” mourning his infrequent visits, which may be a litotes for his never visiting. The poem concludes with this enigmatic passage:

Þæt mon eape toslited þætte næfre gesomnad was,  
uncer giedd geador.

One may easily (readily, lightly) tear apart (sever, rend, wound, break open, destroy) what (that which) was never united (joined, assembled, collected, gathered together),

The song (poem, saying, word, speech, proverb, riddle, tale) of us two together (united).

It’s easy to rip an unsewn stitch  
Or tear the thread of an untold tale—  
The song of us two together.

This ending is both enormously powerful and endlessly mysterious. Questions abound. What is this enigmatic thing that is easily torn and never really together? Is it the speaker’s unfulfilled or impossible dream of Wulf’s

return? Or her long-held but unrealistic romance of reunion with an exiled lover? Why is the storied relationship, their song (or riddle) together, so easily ripped apart? Translators of these last lines must often strain to capture their enigmatic power and meaning in imaginative ways, as I have done here with the image of the unsewn stitch, which draws upon the Anglo-Saxon concept of the woman as *fridoweþba*, “peace-weaver”—the woman who is married not for love but for an impossible peace-weaving between strife-bound families or warring tribes (as is often the case in *Beowulf*). The word “stitch” makes concrete the final image. Its primary meaning here is “the thread that sews two pieces of fabric together,” as the woman and Wulf may have been metaphorically united or “stitched.” But the stitch also carries hidden connotations of “a sharp pain” (“a stitch in the side”), which catches some of the emotional pain of the narrator’s lament. Incidentally, both of these meanings of “stitch” ultimately derive from Old English *stice*, “sting, prick, pain in the side.” The word “thread” also has a double meaning which links the image of sewing with that of the story or song (as in the “thread of a plot”). I’ve expanded the line and a half in Old English to three lines in the translation. I’ve used the *s* alliteration in the first line, which links up with the “song” of the last line. The *t* alliteration links the last two lines. The use of “un” in “unsewn” and “untold” helps to stitch the lines together in an ironic way. It is important also in that it picks up the sense of difference or undoing in the poem’s refrain, *Ungelic is us*, “It’s different for us.” The assonant progression from “un” (“unsewn”) to “un” (“untold”) to “us” binds together ironically the two lovers in an undoing way. What they finally share is an unending separation.

## CONCLUSION

The act of translation is a mediation, a human dance between two minds, two languages, two literary traditions, two cultures. The Anglo-Saxons, themselves members of a multilingual community, recognized the complexity of translation. Anglo-Saxon churchmen often translated texts from Latin into Old English (of course to them it wasn’t old; it was just *Englisc*). King Alfred describes the act of translation metaphorically in the preface to his translation of St. Augustine’s *Soliloquies*:

So I gathered staves and posts and tie-beams for each of the tools I should work with, and building-timbers and beams for each of the structures I should make—as much beautiful wood as I could carry.

Each time I shouldered the wood home, I wanted the forest, but it was more than I could carry. In each beam I saw something I needed at home. So I urge those who have knowledge and good wagons to go to the woods where I cut my beams and fetch their own beautiful branches so they can weave lovely walls and shape splendid buildings and bright towns and live there joyfully summer and winter as I have not yet been able to do. (Carnicelli, 47; translation mine)

A good translator must be both ambitious and humble. He needs to carry home as much of the beautiful old wood as possible, but the whole forest is always beyond his reach. In my translations I've tried to gather up beams and timbers, posts and staves, from the grand originals and then bring them home to fashion a new building both true to the original form and beautiful in its own right. If this effort succeeds, I hope it will inspire new readers of these poems to think about learning Old English in an effort to return to the originals, where the real source of power and grandeur resides.

# THE JUNIUS MANUSCRIPT







## INTRODUCTION

I am an ark bearing sacred stories,  
Biblical tales and liturgical lore,  
Sailing across the traces of time.  
I bear in my hold a hoard of heroes,  
Saints and sinners—Adam and Eve,  
Cain and Abel, Noah and his family,  
Abraham and Isaac, Daniel and a demon.  
I gather glory and unravel evil;  
I lift up the legends of faith and feud,  
Promise and perdition, covenant and crime.  
I celebrate scenes in the holy story,  
From Genesis to judgment, beginning to end.  
Once men thought I was Cædmon's creation;  
Now they know my songs are separate,  
But held together by the script of salvation,  
The arc of redemption, the hope of heaven.  
Once I was owned by a friend of Milton,  
Copied and recreated in old Amsterdam.  
Now I sleep soundly in my Oxford bed,  
Where you can wake my unbabbled tongue  
With a watchful eye and an ancient ear.  
Make an exodus to see my drawings,  
Decipher my stories, and say who I am.

The Junius Manuscript, Bodleian Library MS Junius 11, is one of the four great codices of Old English poetry, along with the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the *Beowulf* manuscript. It is a large folio volume containing four poems. The first three, now known as *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Daniel*, are based on the Old Testament, while the fourth, *Christ and Satan*, is based on Christological material. The first three poems are written in a single hand; the fourth in three different hands. At the end of *Christ and Satan*, the words, *Finit Liber II: Amen*, occur, which appear to indicate that the first three poems may have been considered Book I, but this is impossible to know since the end of the third poem, *Daniel*, is missing. Lucas notes that “the compilation of the manuscript evidently began about the year 1000, the date given to the handwriting of the major part of it . . . [and] *Christ and Satan* was added in the first quarter of the eleventh century” (1). There is great debate about whether the addition of the final poem was made with an eye to completing a sequence extending from the Creation to the Redemption and Last Judgment.

Of the four major Old English codices, this is the only one with extensive illustrations. Numerous spaces for line drawings have been left in the first three poems, but the forty-eight completed drawings have been done only for *Genesis*. Lucas argues that most of the illustrations date from the early eleventh century, though some date from the second half of the twelfth. He points out that “the principal illustrations, which are ink-drawings (one painted in part, p. 11) by two artists, the second using coloured inks, belong to the ‘Winchester School’ and were formerly thought to have been executed at Canterbury [but] new evidence has now come to light on the basis of which the manuscript may be assigned with some confidence to Malmesbury” (2). Some of the drawings have captions, some of them in meter (these captions are included in the “Additional Poems” section).

The manuscript was probably in the monastery library at Malmesbury until the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII in 1539. After that there is no record of it for many years. Lucas explains that “some time before 1651 it was acquired by James Ussher (1581–1656), archbishop of Armagh, who early in the century was collecting books for the library of Trinity College, Dublin . . . and Ussher gave it to his friend [Franciscus] Junius, possibly as a parting gift in 1651” (5). Junius was a Dutch scholar who came to England in 1621 and stayed for thirty years. In 1655 he published an edition of the manuscript in Amsterdam which now bears his name, describing it as a poetic treatment of *Genesis* and other portions of the scriptures by the Anglo-Saxon monk and poet Cædmon.

This attribution of the poems was based on Bede's story of Cædmon's being inspired by a dreamlike, holy voice to sing a song of creation which became *Cædmon's Hymn*. The abess of the abbey where he worked and a number of learned men urged him to develop his talent by studying religious subjects and turning them into poetry. As Bede tells it:

All of them agreed that Cædmon's gift had been given him by our Lord. And they explained to him a passage of scriptural history or doctrine and asked him to render it into verse if he could. He promised to do this, and returned next morning with excellent verses as they had ordered him. The abess was delighted that God had given such grace to the man, and advised him to abandon secular life and adopt the monastic state. And when she had admitted him into the Community as a brother, she ordered him to be instructed in the events of sacred history. So Cædmon stored up in his memory all that he learned, and like one of the clean animals chewing the cud, turned it into such melodious verse that his delightful renderings turned his instructors into auditors. He sang of the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and the whole story of Genesis. He sang of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the entry into the Promised Land, and many other events of scriptural history. He sang of the Lord's Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of the Apostles. He also made poems on the terrors of the Last Judgement, the horrible pains of Hell, and the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven. In addition to these, he composed several others on the blessings and judgements of God, by which he sought to turn his hearers from delight in wickedness and to inspire them to love and do good. (249–50)

The linguistic and historical evidence now makes it clear to most scholars that the poems in the Junius Manuscript cannot have been written by Cædmon or even by a single author, but Krapp surmises that "it requires no stretching of probability to assume that the example and incentive of Cædmon's own verse accounts in large measure for the existence of these poems, and in consequence, of this manuscript" (1931, 1).

Debate continues about the possible unity of the manuscript in terms of some Anglo-Saxon scribe's or compiler's vision. J. R. Hall argues that "the unitive bibliographic features of Junius 11 invite consideration of the volume as a special collection of scriptural poems which, like the later Middle English

plays constituting a biblical cycle, were compiled and organized by an editor or editors according to a definite plan” (2002a, 21). He summarizes the variety of unified readings of the manuscript, noting that most of the previous proposals for unity focused on the Paschal liturgy as a guiding principle (see 22 ff. for a summary of these readings). He argues that the liturgical connections do not explain enough of the biblical and Christological materials in the Junius Manuscript and points to an idea proposed by Craig that the poems follow the pattern of the later medieval Corpus Christi plays from Creation to Judgment, noting Lee’s briefly mentioned idea that the poems “‘set forth the overall biblical structure’ of the story of redemption” (23; the inset citation is from Lee, 20). Hall points out that this pattern is present in Bede’s description of Cædmon’s poetry and in other sources such as Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus* and Wulfstan’s *Sermo 6*. He presents a detailed argument for this pattern and argues that the poems in the Junius Manuscript can be read as “an epic of redemption” (24). In a later article rebutting various critics of his position, he postulates a timetable for the composition of the Junius Manuscript:

Suppose that an editor wanted to assemble a book of salvation history, from Creation to the Last Judgment, and had managed to collect only Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel. He would have the three poems copied but could not complete the project until he found an appropriate New Testament poem. Some time later (two months? Two years?), he read Christ and Satan, saw that the poem would serve his purpose, and arranged to have scribes copy it into the last quire of the manuscript, allowing spaces for illustrations like those in the Old Testament part of the volume. Using folios the Old Testament scribe had prepared and adding new ones of their own, the scribes copied the poem. Its contents now complete, the manuscript was bound. In this hypothetical reconstruction, Christ and Satan specifically was not in the mind of the editor when he planned the volume, but a New Testament poem was part of his design. In a literal sense Christ and Satan was an afterthought, but in another sense it was a forethought—the final piece needed to complete Junius 11, the manuscript as a whole comprising “The Old English Epic of Redemption.” (2002b, 67)

Hall’s argument here seems both imaginative and compelling, though the question of the unity of the Junius Manuscript and its principles of compila-

tion must probably remain open. It may be that Anglo-Saxon notions of unity were more flexible or open-ended than our own. The balance between ordered connection and apparently arbitrary inclusion of poems in the Exeter Book is a case in point. The juxtaposition of order and arbitrariness can also be seen in individual poems such as the gnomic poems or maxims or even in the principles of connection and disconnection in the Exeter Book riddles.

## GENESIS (A AND B)

The OE poetic *Genesis (A and B)* covers material in the first book of the Bible from the Creation to Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) and also draws upon exegetical materials about the angelic rebellion in heaven. It focuses on certain events—the Creation, the rebellion of Lucifer, the casting out of the rebellious angels from heaven to hell, the creation of an earthly paradise and of Adam and Eve, their temptation and fall, Cain's murder of Abel, the succeeding generations beginning with Seth, Noah's flood, the story of Lot, and the extended account of Abraham's life which takes up nearly half of the poem. Many details in the biblical Genesis are omitted, such as the extensive genealogical lists, while others are added, such as the fall of Lucifer and the detailed exploration of the temptation of Adam and Eve—where, as Anlezark notes, “the poem often explains motivation where this is not found in the biblical original” (2011, ix). Some of the added or expanded events, such as the war in heaven and the battle of the kings, are places where “the martial diction of the native verse form is given free rein” (Fulk and Cain, 113). For more on biblical additions and omissions, see Doane, 1978, 62–70; 1991, 93–107; and Remley, 1996, 94–167.

Some of the themes of the poem noted by the critics include the balance between creation and destruction in the poem (the promise of paradise and the threat of the flood), man's inherent need to praise God, the contrast between obedience and rebellion, the figurative connections between Old and New Testament concerns (for example, the sacrifice of Isaac reflecting the murder of Abel and the crucifixion and redemption of Christ), the importance of property and kinship ties in creating stability, the difficulty of dis-

covering the truth in a world of appearances and disguises, and the relative innocence and guilt of Adam and Eve (see Fulk and Cain, 206–23, for a summary). On this last point, Eve’s *wacran hige*, which has often been translated as “weaker mind,” is now much debated. Chance argues for translating OE *wac* as “‘more yielding’ or ‘more pliant’ or ‘more wanting in courage, or mental or moral strength’ as in manly strength” (1986, 74), and Robinson argues for a translation of “soft, pliant, yielding,” in line with Old High German and Old Saxon forms (1994, 124–27).

The relation of the two parts of the poem, now known as *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*, is complex. Lines 235–851 in the Old English (225–942 in my translation) have different linguistic features and poetic styles, including a large number of long lines in *Genesis B* (which accounts for the greater number of lines in my translation). In 1875, Sievers pointed out the differences between the two portions of *Genesis* and surmised that the central passage (now called *Genesis B*) was translated from an unknown Old Saxon source that was later discovered in 1894 in a Vatican manuscript. The Old Saxon poem is included in Doane’s edition of *Genesis B* in *The Saxon Genesis*. Doane argues that the translation, or more properly “transformation,” of *Genesis B* and its insertion into the existing poem, *Genesis A*, probably took place in the late ninth or early tenth century (1991, 47 ff.). The composition date for *Genesis A* cannot be precisely determined, but Doane argues for sometime between 650 and 900 (1978, 36). Parts of *Genesis A* seem to have been revised at the point of the insertion of *Genesis B* (see Doane, 1978, 35–36, and 1991, 48). Doane (citing Evans) notes that *Genesis B* “is not a translation or paraphrase [of *The Saxon Genesis*] but an explanatory renarrativization, a *haggadah*,” explaining that “the first substantial episode we have, the Fall of the angels . . . has no direct biblical counterpart (though it goes back ultimately to certain biblical verses (Genesis 6.2–4, Isaiah 14.12–15, Apocalypse 12.9, etc.), but was, of course, a well-established traditional topos indispensable in Christian preaching and commentary” (1991, 93). Many details of *Genesis B* draw upon biblical passages but expand them or differ from them in significant ways. For example, Doane notes the following differences with respect to the Fall:

In Genesis B the Prohibition against eating of the Tree of Knowledge is given to both Adam and Eve, not Adam alone; the unbiblical Fall of Satan, providing the efficient and formal causes of sin, filled with dramatic speeches, is placed between the Creation of Man and the Fall of Man; Adam and Eve are tempted not by Satan or a snake, but

by Satan's messenger who enters a snake's body; the tempter approaches Adam first, and failing, tempts Eve; Eve is tempted by being told that the command not to eat has been rescinded; Eve's tempter appears to her as an "angel of light"; when she eats, Eve has an "angelic" vision; all this action is revealed in or accompanied by elaborate psychologically motivated speeches; Adam reproaches Eve and then acknowledges his guilt; Adam and Eve repent before they are reproached by God who does not appear to Adam and Eve after their sin. (1991, 94)

Fulk and Cain point out that "unlike his nameless counterpart in *Genesis A*, Satan is individualized in *Genesis B* by his heroic speeches to his fallen comrades, speeches that are Miltonic in their stoic commitment to resistance and vengeance," noting further that "the sentiments and diction may be explained as heroic conventions, but it remains remarkable that the poet, like Milton, chose to narrate these events from Satan's point of view, placing God in the inscrutable distance" (113–14). Doane points out that the end of *Genesis B* has a tone "reminiscent of the ending of *Paradise Lost*, with its tentative quietness and a sense of an ending that is a new beginning" (1991, 302). Milton wrote about Anglo-Saxon matters in his *History of Britain* and was a friend of Junius, so he may well have known about the Old English poem, yet most authorities acknowledge that the "Old English influence on Milton's epic remains impossible to prove" (Fulk and Cain, 228). It is remarkable that Milton's verse in *Paradise Lost* is heavily alliterative; and often because of the presence of a weak foot in the poetic line, it can be scanned as both iambic pentameter and as a loose form of strong-stress, alliterative verse. This is clear, for example, in the opening lines, scanned below in both ways. In the first example, the weak foot in each line appears in italics; in the second, the stressed syllables that alliterate are underlined:

Scanned as iambic pentameter

Of *mán's* first *disobédience*, *and* the *frúit*  
*Of thát* forbídden *trée* whose *mórtal* *táste*  
 Brought *déath* *intó* the *wórl*d and *áll* our *wóe*

Scanned as OE-style strong-stress verse

Of mán's first disobédience, and the frúit  
 Of that forbídden trée whose mórtal táste  
 Brought déath into the wórld and áll our wóe



My own experience as a translator leads me to believe that there is some connection in terms of form, characterization, and narrative thread between the two poems.

There are a number of gaps in the poetic text of *Genesis*, either because of missing manuscript pages or inexplicable omissions in the narrative. Where these gaps are short and simple, I have sometimes filled them in with brackets by drawing upon the Vulgate Bible. Where longer passages are lost, I have tried in a similar fashion to give a poetic indication in brackets of who is speaking or what the situation is when the narrative or dialogue takes up after a lacuna.

## Genesis A

It is right to praise the Lord of heaven  
 With wise words and loving hearts.  
 He is almighty, infinite, eternal, abiding—  
 Source and Shaper, Guardian of glory,  
 King of all exalted creatures, Lord of hosts. 5  
 He exists before beginning, beyond ending.  
 Righteous and steadfast, he will rule forever  
 The embracing expanse of high heaven,  
 Its length and breadth, its range and reach,  
 First established for the children of glory, 10  
 The guardian angels, the hallowed host,  
 Who held a bounty of brightness and bliss  
 Through the emanating might of their bold Maker.  
 The triumphant angels raised glad-hearted hymns,  
 Loving their Lord, living in his light. 15  
 Their being was bliss. Their glory was great.  
 They knew no sin, conceived no crime—  
 Their hearts and minds were wholly with God.  
 They praised and revealed only righteousness  
 In their home in heaven, manifesting truth— 20  
 Until some unwise angels fell into error,  
 Seduced by pride and perversity into rebellion  
 Against God by their arrogant leader.  
 They lost the Lord's love and their own good,  
 Turning from friends to fiends, from bliss to bale. 25  
 That band of traitors shamelessly boasted  
 That they intended to section off and share

God's glorious mansion, ration its rooms,  
 Brashly apportion its brightness and beauty.  
 That idea undid them. Their thoughts were thieves, 30  
 Their words were wounds. The unruly rebel  
 Who conceived that crime thirsted for power,  
 Weaving a web of pride and presumption,  
 Urging his unholy band to embrace envy  
 And seize their freedom from the holy tyrant 35  
 Who ruled the realm. He wanted a home  
 With his own bright, breathtaking throne  
 In the northern regions of heaven's kingdom.  
 Then God responded with righteous wrath  
 Against those angels he had gracefully created 40  
 In beauty and bliss. He shaped a space  
 For that proud traitor, a place of torment,  
 A renegades' realm, a howling hell—  
 Deep, enduring, dark, despairing—  
 Filled with flames, blood-red and biting, 45  
 Saturated with bitter, singeing smoke,  
 And the chilling clutch of intense cold.  
 Then over that eternal prison of pain,  
 He set an endless, brooding horror,  
 A monstrous terror, harsh and howling, 50  
 Those angels brashly rebelled against God;  
 Those devils reaped the reward of the damned.  
 The ravaging demons desired a kingdom—  
 They imagined it easy, underestimating God,  
 Who stifled their hopes of sharing his power 55  
 By raising his hand against their arrogance.  
 He defeated his enemy, crushing their courage,  
 Punishing their pride, abolishing their bliss.  
 In his sovereign strength, he ordered them out  
 Of their home in heaven—his wrath, their ruin. 60  
 So our Creator thrust out the throng  
 Of unthriving angels, twisted traitors,  
 Who traveled endlessly an exile-road,  
 Lamenting their loss, keening for their crime.  
 Their boasting was blistered, their pride punctured, 65

Their dreams debunked, their beauty destroyed.  
 Those malevolent demons lived in misery,  
 Drinking down sorrow, feasting on woe.  
 They had gone from angels to outcasts,  
 Laughing little at the horrors of hell. 70  
 They dwelled in darkness, defiled, defamed,  
 Caught in the clutch of deathless terror—  
 Suffering exile for their strife against God.  
 Then fellowship was once again restored  
 In heaven where peace and promise prevailed, 75  
 And the Lord of hosts was loved by his thanes,  
 That faithful band of unfallen angels,  
 Gathered in glory, bound in bliss.

All enmity was outlawed, all strife sequestered, 80  
 All dissent delivered to an everlasting doom,  
 When the rebel host was expelled from the light  
 And love of God. After the fiends' fall,  
 There were empty thrones throughout heaven,  
 Seats of grandeur and glory, waiting for other  
 Inhabitants to occupy since the fallen angels 85  
 Who betrayed their trust were disbanded, disowned—  
 Discovering their demon-selves in hell's dungeon.  
 Then our Lord meditated in his infinite mind  
 How he might resettle the lost lands  
 Of the overthrown angels, bring a better host 90  
 Than those boasters and brazen unbuilders  
 To the now empty thrones. So God ordained  
 In his endless imagination and sustaining strength  
 That he would shape a brave new world  
 Under heaven's roof for creatures to come, 95  
 An expanse of air and earth, sea and sky,  
 A realm called paradise for a race of people  
 Who would take the place of the fallen angels,  
 Who rebelled against glory and were gathered up  
 And expelled into darkness, hurled in the abyss, 100  
 Where nothing existed in that unshaped space,  
 That untouched time. The void was desolate,

Dark and deep, empty and idle,  
 Fruitless and fallow, unmade, unmoving.  
 Resolute and righteous, God began to gaze 105  
 Into the empty clutch of unfolding creation,  
 Powering possibilities according to his plan.  
 That cheerless abyss of never-ending night  
 Was next to nothing till the mighty one made  
 A wondrous world from the dark wasteland 110  
 With his shaping word. The King of glory  
 First created heaven and earth, laying out the land,  
 Lifting up the sky. He was the boldest of builders,  
 Surest of shapers, Maker unmatched.  
 But the verdant sweep could not be seen— 115  
 The plains of earth were not green with grass,  
 The seas were not yet shimmering blue—  
 And blackness shrouded the curve of creation.  
 Then the bright spirit of heaven's Keeper,  
 Our Shaper and Sustainer, arose endowing 120  
 Life over the deep, out of the abyss.  
 The bold Lord of angels, Bestower of life,  
 Commanded brightness born in the void,  
 And the light shone forth as God had said,  
 So his will was realized, his purpose fulfilled. 125  
 Then the Lord triumphant, our radiant Ruler,  
 Divided light from darkness over the waves,  
 Separating the space into radiance and shadow.  
 He called each force of creation forth  
 With his wondrous word, giving each its name. 130  
 The light he called "Day," beautiful and bright,  
 And the Lord was pleased with his first day's work.  
 His light created and constrained the shadow,  
 Sometimes defining or deepening the shade,  
 Sometimes dispelling it, driving it into darkness. 135

When time transpired and the spirit of making  
 Moved over the material of middle-earth,  
 The Lord made evening and in its wake,  
 A sweeping darkness he named "Night,"  
 Shaping and separating Day from Night, 140

So that ever after they should come and go,  
 Always one hard on the heels of the other.  
 After the first night came the second day,  
 When the Lord of life made the heavens,  
 Fashioned the firmament separate in the sky 145  
 From the great waters covering the earth.  
 He lifted a part of the broad sea  
 Into the vast expanse of sky, raising a roof  
 Over middle-earth with his shaping word.  
 Then the glorious morning of the third day 150  
 Arrived on earth, a shimmering brightness  
 Over an endless flood. There was no dry land  
 Till the Lord of angels commanded the waters  
 To keep confined to bed and stream,  
 Running in river-roads from land to sea. 155  
 The endless oceans gathered and held,  
 Created and constrained by the word of God.  
 The sea was separated from the dry land.  
 So the Shepherd of life gazed at the ground,  
 Wide and dry, and named it "Earth." 160  
 He bound the waves, brought them to the shore,  
 Making the strand, the sea's landed edge.

\* \* \*

It did not seem right to the Ruler of heaven  
 That Adam should remain alone in paradise,  
 Sole keeper and caretaker of his new creation, 165  
 So the Lord almighty, high King of heaven,  
 Source and Shaper of light and life,  
 Created a helpmate in the form of a woman,  
 A beautiful wife for his beloved Adam.  
 He drew her substance from Adam's rib 170  
 While the man was safe in the arms of sleep.  
 He felt no pain, no rip of rib,  
 No broken limb or bloody wound.  
 The Lord of angels drew the burgeoning bone  
 From his unwounded body and wrought a woman, 175  
 Breathing into her flourishing form  
 The breath of life, her immortal soul.  
 Their spirits quickened—they were like angels,

Adam and Eve, bride and groom,  
 Born immediately into bright youth, 180  
 Entering Eden through their Maker's might.  
 They knew no evil, felt no enmity,  
 Suffered no sin. Their minds were meant  
 To follow faithfully God's commands.  
 Their hearts burned pure with the Lord's love. 185  
 The happy-hearted King of the world's creatures  
 Then blessed the first man and woman,  
 Mother and father of mankind, saying:  
 "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth with offspring.  
 Gather your children in the green garden, 190  
 Your sons and daughters. Cherish your family.  
 You shall have dominion over all the earth  
 And the salt-seas. Enjoy the land's harvest,  
 The sweet song of birds, the fish of the ocean,  
 The cattle in the fields, the beasts in the wild, 195  
 Whatever walks on the land or swims in the sea,  
 Flies in the air or burrows in the ground—  
 Every living mystery is made for you."  
 Then our Lord saw the wonder of his works,  
 The fruit of his labors, the quickening of creation. 200  
 Paradise was a glorious guest-house filled  
 With the shape and spirit of God's intentions,  
 Glorious bodies with a natural grace.  
 Water rose from deep well-springs  
 To saturate the land, sustaining life. 205  
 Rain-clouds did not yet roam the skies,  
 Sweeping storms across fields and plains,  
 But the earth was still alive with crops,  
 Vital with verdant shoots and leaves,  
 Bright blooms muscling toward full fruit. 210  
 Four great rivers ran out of paradise,  
 Separated and sustained by the Lord's power,  
 Fed by the well-springs at the heart of Eden,  
 Where a radiant fountain ascended in the air.  
 One ancient river is named Phison—it flows 215  
 Around the land of Havilah with bright waters,  
 Where men find gold and gemstones,

As the books tell us. The second river,  
 Named Gihon, runs around Ethiopia,  
 That broad realm. The third great river 220  
 Is called the Tigris—it runs swiftly,  
 Full-flowing around the Assyrian nation,  
 As does the fourth great river there,  
 Which many men now name the Euphrates.

\* \* \*

## Genesis B

[Then God firmly warned Adam and Eve:] 225  
 “Enjoy the fruits of every other tree  
 Except this one—leave this fruit alone.  
 Its taste is doom. Obey this command  
 And you will need nothing else in paradise—  
 All your worldly wants will be fulfilled.” 230  
 Then they bowed their heads to heaven’s King  
 And held his words carefully in their hearts,  
 Thanking him for both his care and counsel,  
 His truth and teaching. Then creation’s King,  
 The resolute Ruler, let them live 235  
 In that perfect land and rose, returning  
 Homeward into heaven. His handiwork remained,  
 A miracle of his making, two together  
 On that sacred ground. They knew no care,  
 Felt no loss, made no moan, suffered no sorrow, 240  
 Never understood what grief might be gathered  
 If they ceased to obey the word of God.  
 Their undaunted desire was to fulfill forever  
 The Lord’s loving will. They were dear to him  
 As long as they carefully kept his commandments, 245  
 Trusting in his teaching, living by his laws.

The Lord had shaped through his hand-strength  
 And spirit-power ten orders of angels,  
 All of whom he trusted to serve him well  
 And work his will. He gave them the gifts 250  
 Of intelligence and insight, an embodied glory.

One angel he made so mighty in his mind  
 That he was created to be second-in-command  
 Of that illustrious company after his Ruler  
 In heaven's realm. This angel was brilliant— 255  
 His life and limbs were enthralled with light.  
 He was a blazing beauty, a dazzling delight  
 To all around him, like one of the stars.  
 He should have celebrated God's gifts,  
 Cherishing his brightness, his gown of glory, 260  
 His power and place in the angelic host—  
 Then he might have been sub-ruler of heaven,  
 A prince of power in the sweep of creation.  
 But he began to meditate on his own beauty,  
 His majesty and might, and to stir up strife 265  
 Against the real Ruler of heaven's kingdom,  
 Who created all life from his holy throne.  
 He was dear to our Lord, but couldn't easily hide  
 His hatred and hostility, his envy and ill will.  
 He sought to find words to express his enmity, 270  
 Trying to discover his own devious voice.  
 He began to boast that he would never obey  
 A ruling master, never stoop to serving God.  
 He began to celebrate his own special light,  
 Blessing his beauty, bearing his luster 275  
 Like creation's delight. He had his own servants,  
 Angelic soldiers, a faithful following  
 Of brazen fighters, who seemed to him greater  
 Than the troops of the Lord. The angel of insolence  
 Brooded on power. Before heaven's throng 280  
 He wanted his own throne. He embraced envy  
 And his own exaltation. He thought he could build  
 A stronger seat of power to the north and west,  
 A higher throne in heaven. His radiance was a rush.  
 He determined never to be God's disciple, 285  
 His servile minion, and said to his troops:  
 "Why should I slave for a lord and master?  
 There's no need to serve this holy tyrant.  
 I can muster up miracles with my own hands.  
 I have plenty of power to build a throne. 290



This fealty is false—this service, revolting.  
 I can gather enough grace to be a god  
 And command an army of warrior-angels,  
 Fierce troops who will not fail me in battle.  
 They have boldly chosen me as their champion. 295  
 I can shape a strategy and slay my enemy.  
 My company is devoted—they will never desert.  
 Their hearts are loyal—their faith holds true.  
 I can attack my master and rule this realm.  
 Why should I serve and flatter this god? 300  
 There's no good for me in this groveling.  
 Why should I bow and scrape before him?  
 Why should I act the role of the inferior?  
 I won't obey this arrogant lord any longer."

When the Ruler of everything heard this ranting 305  
 And saw his angel puffed up with pride,  
 Foolishly reviling his Leader and Lord,  
 He decided to reward this rebel for his strife.  
 He would pay his commander for his brash conceit  
 With defeat and darkness, punishment and pain, 310  
 A grim gift of torment. So each one suffers  
 Who embraces evil, strives against God,  
 The Guardian of glory. Then the Ruler of heaven  
 In his infinite power and eternal wisdom  
 Raised up his hands in righteous anger 315  
 And threw down the throng of revolting angels  
 Who rebelled with the traitor, trusting his lies.  
 They envied heaven and ended in hell,  
 Forfeiting God's favor in their fierce pride.  
 Their false commander committed a crime 320  
 So foul he was hurled into hell's abyss,  
 Where he soon discovered endless agony.  
 That proud angel turned perverse devil—  
 In his sin he slew his own best self.  
 He was bound forever with a horde of demons 325  
 In a pit of pain. They were harsh companions.  
 The rebel angels were expelled from heaven—  
 The fierce ones suffered an endless fall

For three long days and nights, ending at last  
 In hell's abyss where God transformed 330  
 The devious traitors into tortured devils,  
 Their holy radiance into flaming flesh.  
 They refused to revere his words and works,  
 So he turned their triumph into dark defeat,  
 An agony of existence under the earth. 335  
 They balked in heaven and were blistered in hell,  
 Where they spend each restless night in flames,  
 An ever-ready, relentless fire. At dawn, cold comes,  
 An eastern wind of almost ice. They're caught  
 Between the twin torments of frost and fire, 340  
 The stabbing heat, the piercing cold.  
 Hell holds them both in bitter balance.  
 Their world was turned upside down  
 When God transformed their precious paradise  
 Into a noxious nightmare, a world of woe. 345  
 The faithful angels kept their place  
 In the heights of heaven, a holy kingdom—  
 They held God's favor. The other angels  
 Fell from grace, now fiends of fury  
 In the house of flames. For their strife they suffer 350  
 Singe and smoke, ice and fire, unending torment,  
 Because they denied their duty to their Lord.  
 They dreamed of rebellion and raised a ruckus.  
 They desired a kingdom and deserved damnation,  
 Betrayed by a giddy delight in their leader's pride. 355  
 They warmed to power and fell into fire,  
 A candling darkness, a lightless flame.  
 A terrible truth dawned on them too late—  
 They traded God's glory for hell's grim fate.

Then the proud and presumptuous prince of darkness, 360  
 Who was once the most radiant angel of light,  
 Brightest in heaven, beloved by his Master,  
 Who cherished him till his arrogant rebellion  
 Led to God's righteous wrath and the fiend's fall,  
 Gathered his troops. The Creator had cast him 365  
 Like a living corpse down on a death-bed

Of terror and torment, calling him Satan  
 And securing his charge as commander of hell,  
 That black abyss of unending agony,  
 Where he would suffer and never again contend 370  
 With almighty God. Then Satan spoke,  
 Choking on sorrow, sick at his charge  
 Of ruling over hell. He had once held  
 A high place in heaven, an angel of brightness,  
 Until he was seduced by his own inflamed, 375  
 Overbearing pride. He refused to respect  
 His Creator's commandments because his heart  
 Harbored envy and ambition, hatred and guile.  
 Finally he found his voice and spoke:  
 "Now we're constrained in this endless abyss, 380  
 Unable to fly freely as we once did  
 In ethereal heaven. God granted us bliss  
 But restrained our longing, robbing us blind  
 Of our rightful rule, stealing our thunder,  
 Casting us down in this scorching pit, 385  
 And creating a paradise from our lost place  
 In heaven for mankind to prosper and thrive.  
 My bitterest bone to pick with God  
 Is that Adam, who was shaped out of earth,  
 Will sit on my throne, surviving in bliss, 390  
 While we suffer torment, exile and agony,  
 In the flaming hollows of unholy hell.  
 If only I could use these devilish hands  
 To break my bonds and escape the flames  
 For a cold winter's hour, I could lead my troop— 395  
 But these iron chains constrain my freedom,  
 Bite at my body, menace my mind.  
 I'm a realmless ruler, a heavenless hellion.  
 The ravenous fire rages above and below.  
 I've never seen such a hostile landscape. 400  
 These flames are unchecked, unlike my arms  
 Which are bound in chains. My strength is shackled.  
 The hell-gates are locked and so are my limbs.  
 I am bolted in iron forged in the fire.  
 That grim God holds me bound by the neck. 405

Now I can see that he was a spy—  
 He monitored my mind, perceived my purpose,  
 Figuring before that I would surely fall  
 And would eagerly bring evil to Adam  
 If my bonds were broken, my hands freed. 410  
 Now truly we suffer the torments of hell—  
 Both fierce flames and the black abyss.  
 God has swept us into a fiery haze  
 Of blazing bodies and blind unseeing.  
 What sin can he charge us with in heaven? 415  
 What harm did we ever accomplish there?  
 What weapons wield, what wounds inflict?  
 Why are we banished from brightness and bliss?  
 Where is our due process in this punishment?  
 Can we not claim recompense for this wrong, 420  
 Vengeance for this violation? An eye for an eye,  
 A tooth for a tooth? Let's undo God's plan.  
 We know he has marked out middle-earth,  
 Where he has made mankind in his own image.  
 He hopes to resettle our place in heaven 425  
 With these pure souls. This is our chance  
 To spoil his plan, avenging ourselves  
 On his precious Adam and all of his heirs.  
 In that new world we'll frustrate his will.  
 Now I no longer aspire to the holy light 430  
 Or hope for heaven where the Lord intends  
 To enjoy eternity with his host of angels.  
 We'll never succeed in weakening God's will,  
 So let's just subvert it with the children of men.  
 Let's teach them untruths, seduce them to sin, 435  
 Lead them to lie. Let's worm our way  
 Into this world and undo God's work.  
 In his wrath he will inflict terrible vengeance  
 Upon mankind, pitch them from paradise,  
 As he heaved us from heaven. Together in hell 440  
 We'll all be in exile, angels and men.  
 We'll make them our slaves, put them in chains,  
 Torture and torment them. Those human sinners  
 Will share our pain, and God will regret  
 That he ever made man. It's a devious plan 445

And a devil's delight. Let's begin the campaign!  
 If I ever gave any of you precious treasures,  
 Gems or gold, when we held our thrones  
 In the realm of heaven, then now is the time  
 To repay my gifts if you desire to do it 450  
 And can summon the strength to flee this dungeon,  
 Break through the gates, wing your way upward  
 On your feathery cloaks, and soar through the skies  
 To the new world where Adam and Eve  
 Have been created in the kingdom of middle-earth, 455  
 Richly rewarded with the pleasures of paradise  
 While we remain painfully homeless in hell.  
 They are precious to the Lord. We are only outcasts.  
 They have stolen our birthright of heavenly bliss.  
 This thievery endlessly eats at my heart— 460  
 They will own our place in heaven forever.  
 If someone could seduce them to sin against God,  
 Renouncing their promise, rejecting his law,  
 Then they will become loathsome to the Lord.  
 If they break his commandment, he will turn cruel, 465  
 Fueled by their unfaith in his wrath and rage.  
 Then they will trade paradise for this torturous place  
 Of punishing pain. Think about this,  
 My exiled thanes. How can we betray them?  
 I can sleep in my shackles with a grim satisfaction 470  
 If I know that the Lord's bliss is lost to them.  
 Whoever seduces Adam and Eve will thrive  
 In this fallen throng, reaping whatever reward  
 Is possible to find in this haven of fire.  
 That angel will serve as my second-in-command, 475  
 Sit next to me here on this throne in hell,  
 If he can come back reporting that all's not well  
 In heaven and earth, that these two humans  
 Have rejected God's law, perverted his purpose  
 In their words and works and were seduced into sin, 480  
 Desiring in their deeds some forbidden fruit.”

\* \* \*

Then one of the demons, an enemy of God,  
 Broke out his battle-gear, eager for the assault,  
 Proudly embracing that evil purpose.

He put on his head a helmet of invisibility 485  
 With secret clasps to conceal himself.  
 He carried within him a hoard of words,  
 Devious and dark, unprincipled and perverse.  
 He wound his way upward on unbright wings,  
 Stealing secretly through the gates of hell. 490  
 His mind was menacing, his spirit strong.  
 He beat back the blazing hell-flames  
 On both sides of his body with fiendish skill.  
 He intended to approach Adam and Eve,  
 Concealing his purpose—to coax and seduce them 495  
 Into breaking their Father's commandment,  
 Engaging in sin, afflicted with guilt,  
 Suffering shame, hateful to God.  
 Then he flew onward with fiendish cunning  
 Until he found the newly created kingdom 500  
 And discovered Adam, God's handiwork,  
 Skillfully shaped, together with Eve,  
 His beloved wife, the most beautiful woman.  
 They served God's will, fulfilling his purpose  
 As his designated disciples doing good works. 505  
 Two trees stood nearby, filled with fruit.  
 God had planted them there in paradise  
 With his own hands so that man might choose  
 Between good and evil, weal and woe.  
 Those trees offered fruits that were not alike! 510  
 One tree was beautiful, abounding in bliss,  
 Sacred and sweet—that was the tree of life.  
 Whoever tasted the fruit of that tree  
 Would live forever in the fullness of glory,  
 In that eternal paradise with the favor of God. 515  
 Age would not wither him or illness undo him.  
 He would wake each morning, his hope assured  
 Of fulfilling God's promise and attaining a home  
 With the angelic hosts in heaven on high.  
 The other tree, dangerous and dark, 520  
 Offered undoing—that was the tree of death.  
 Its treacherous fruit was bitter and blasted—  
 Its taste was lethal. Whoever ate that fruit

Would know both good and evil,  
 Their ways in this world, their home in the heart, 525  
 Their eternal ends, their certain divergence  
 Into bliss and bale. That one is doomed  
 To live in labor, suffer in sorrow,  
 Withered by age, defeated by death.  
 He might enjoy his life a little while 530  
 Until he descends into flaming darkness  
 To enter the service of the savage fiends,  
 Where he will live forever in peril and pain.  
 The devil's disciple, Satan's surrogate,  
 Knew all this and exulted in his heart. 535  
 He meant to tempt that happy couple  
 Into breaking God's clear commandment.  
 He was the evil enemy of God and man.  
 Then the devious fiend muscled his way  
 Into the skin of a venomous serpent, 540  
 Took the shape of a snake, slithering treachery,  
 Twisting his body about the tree of death  
 With cold cunning. He plucked the fruit  
 And wormed his way back to God's handiwork,  
 Where he smiled slyly, saying to Adam: 545  
 "My dear Adam, do you live in longing  
 For anything from God? He sent me here  
 To discover your needs, fulfill your dreams,  
 Offer you anything your heart desires.  
 Not long ago I sat by his side, basking in bliss. 550  
 He made clear my mission to minister to you  
 And teach you the truth of this divine tree.  
 He commands you to taste this fair fruit  
 That he knows you crave. Its gifts are legion:  
 Your strength will surge, your mind magnify, 555  
 Your spirit exult, your body grow beautiful.  
 You will taste the truth and discover the wonders  
 Revealed to you. You will want no wealth  
 When you have gained the grace and glory  
 This fruit contains. You have worked God's will, 560  
 Accomplished his ends. You are perfect and precious  
 To your loving Lord. I have heard him speak

Of your way of life, proudly praising  
 Your words and works. Now he wants you to hear  
 His messenger's commands and carry them out 565  
 In this lovely country. This earth is endless,  
 Vital and green under God's heaven.  
 The Lord himself hesitates to travel  
 Such a long, hard road down from heaven,  
 So he sent me here as his faithful servant 570  
 To speak with you now about his mission,  
 Teaching you the truth of this enabling tree  
 By my wise words and cunning thought.  
 Carry out his command. Take this fruit!  
 Bite it! Taste it! Your mind will expand, 575  
 Your heart enlarge, your form grow fair.  
 This is God's gift from his home in heaven."  
 Adam answered the serpent where he stood,  
 Exercising faithfully his own free will,  
 Alive to the effect of his making a choice: 580  
 "When I listened to the solemn voice of the Lord,  
 He gave me this land with commandments to keep  
 And offered me Eve as my beauty-bright wife.  
 He warned me not to be betrayed or bedeviled,  
 Risking ruin for this dangerous fruit, 585  
 Saying that whoever chooses evil in his heart  
 Will inhabit hell, a dark house of pain.  
 It's difficult to know what your purpose is.  
 Are you an angelic messenger from heaven  
 Or some devious liar with a hellish plan? 590  
 Your so-called mission doesn't make much sense.  
 Your tongue is twisted, your words are bewildering.  
 I remember what our Lord and Savior said  
 When I saw him last: he ordered me plainly  
 To honor his word and keep his commands. 595  
 You don't look much like an angel from heaven,  
 Nor do you offer any token of God's favor,  
 So I'm sorry to say I can't swallow your scheme.  
 You should go away. I trust the power and truth  
 Of the Master who made me with his own hands, 600  
 Created me from clay, who raised up this woman



Out of my rib. He is able to bestow his favors  
From highest heaven without sending a subordinate.”

Then the angry demon turned to Eve,  
Beautifully formed, threatening harm to her 605  
And all the children of earth to come,  
Saying, “I know that God will be enraged  
With both of you for being so stubborn,  
When I fly home to heaven on the long road  
And tell him you’ve rejected the righteous command 610  
That he offered from the east. He will rise up in rage,  
Forced to follow his own messenger here  
Into Eden. I can’t predict what God will do,  
But I know he will become a menace to you  
Unless you accept this offer, a willing woman, 615  
Obey these words and reach for a remedy,  
Following his command without hesitation,  
Escaping the pain of his punishing wrath.  
If you listen to me, I’ll show you the way.  
Eat this fruit, taste its sweetness, 620  
Savor its power to open your eyes,  
So that you can see beyond yourself,  
Beyond this world to the throne of God  
And curry favor with your own Creator.  
You will also be able to lord it over Adam, 625  
Control his desire, determine his will,  
If that’s what you want and he trusts your words.  
Just tell your husband you have in your heart  
Fulfilled God’s purpose. He’ll believe in you  
And give up his stubborn opposition and strife. 630  
We can counsel him together, coax him carefully  
To renounce his resistance, lest you should both  
Prove loathsome to your Lord. Lean to the law,  
O brightest and best of women—listen to me.  
If you perform God’s purpose, I will come to your aid 635  
In concealing Adam’s insults, his rebellious replies,  
His arrogant, wounding words to God’s servant.  
He thinks me malicious, calls me a liar,  
Believes I have some secret, malevolent scheme,

And says unashamedly that I am no angel. 640  
 But I have served a long life in heaven  
 With my angelic thanes, loyal to the Lord.  
 I know them well. I'm not just some devil."  
 So the enemy of God urged Eve on,  
 The deceitful serpent, coaxing her toward evil 645  
 With his tempting lies until his devious words  
 Grew hot in her heart, surging up in her mind.  
 She began to surrender. Her will was weaker,  
 Her nature more yielding, her promises more pliant  
 Under God's shaping plan, so she was swept along 650  
 By the devil's desires, his pernicious plot.  
 She took from the fiend the fatal fruit  
 From the tree of death against God's word.  
 No worse deed was ever conceived.  
 It's a great wonder that eternal God, 655  
 The Prince of peace, would endure such enmity,  
 And suffer his servants to be led astray  
 By that subtle demon who seduced Eve,  
 Marking mankind for endless suffering.  
 Then Eve ate the fruit, swallowing sin, 660  
 Tasting death, against the will  
 And word of the Lord. Through the gift  
 Of that fiend, God's foe, who beguiled her  
 With winsome words, betrayed her with lies,  
 Eve's eyes were empowered. She seemed to see 665  
 The brightness and beauty of heaven and earth,  
 The power and glory of God's creation,  
 Not through her own human eyes and mind,  
 But through the demon's grafted gaze  
 And his blazing vision, a devious dream. 670  
 Then the fiend we have forsworn spoke—  
 His counsel was cunning, his word-gift no good:  
 "Darling Eve, now that you've drunk this nectar,  
 Tasting the fruit, trusting my words,  
 You can see for yourself that your form is fairer, 675  
 Your beauty brighter, your goodness more gracious.  
 Now the light before and within you

Beams from your body, blazes from your eyes.  
 The world rejoices in your waking radiance.  
 Use this for a purpose—tell Adam your tale. 680  
 Explain how you acquired such subtle vision  
 After hearing and heeding my wise counsel.  
 Offer him this promise: if he yearns for the light  
 That he sees in your eyes and will obey me now,  
 Then I will hold him blameless for his blasphemies, 685  
 Even though he deserves no redeeming pardon  
 For his hateful words. I will also offer him  
 A small portion of what I gave to you,  
 The gift of God's vision, the eyes of light."  
 So now the children of Eve know sin 690  
 When they fall as all of mankind must,  
 Though they may find through their suffering  
 And amending their ways their Maker's mercy  
 And be restored to their Lord again.  
 So Eve came to Adam, carrying dark fruit 695  
 And the demon's words—breathtaking, beautiful—  
 The fairest woman in this new world,  
 Because she was shaped by the hand of God,  
 Even though she was seduced and snared  
 By the devil's deceit into a web of sin. 700  
 So both were unblessed, losing God's favor,  
 Forfeiting heaven for many seasons.  
 We mourn this loss. Woe to the one  
 Who doesn't hear or heed this lesson,  
 Who still has a chance to make a choice. 705  
 Eve carried a sumptuous secret in her hands  
 And a tempting truth hidden in her heart—  
 The delicious fruit of the tree of death,  
 Which God had forbidden his children to eat.  
 That unblessed apple was the source and sign 710  
 Of more sin to come. God set the terms:  
 His servants did not have to suffer death—  
 They could rise to the richness of heaven's hold  
 If they refused the bait of that bitter fruit.  
 God's enemy seduced Adam and Eve 715

And all of mankind. The woman's mind  
 Was more malleable to him, her heart  
 More hospitable to his concealed cunning.  
 She was led to believe that the deceitful devil  
 Was a divine messenger sent from God. 720  
 His tongue seemed truthful, his words wise,  
 His sign spectacular. She sidled up  
 To her lord and master, saying to Adam:  
 "Adam, my lord, this fruit is so sweet—  
 It's a taste of bliss and a pleasure to eat. 725  
 It will warm your heart and open your eyes  
 To the world's brightness. God's beautiful angel  
 Is everything he claims. By his radiant robes  
 I can see that he's our Maker's messenger,  
 Keeping his counsel, bearing us delicious, 730  
 Invisible truths from the King of heaven.  
 He's better a friend than an adamant foe.  
 If you have spoken to him harshly today,  
 He will forgive you for your heart's bitter hatred,  
 If we promise to serve him and work his will. 735  
 What will we gain by quarreling with an angel?  
 It bedevils our chances for peace in paradise.  
 He can plead our case with almighty God.  
 With my unveiled eyes, I can see the Lord  
 Who shaped this world, surrounded by splendor, 740  
 Gathered in glory in the south-east of heaven,  
 Encircled by angels in feathered cloaks.  
 Who could offer such an insightful vision,  
 If not God? Who could offer such harmonies  
 To my human hearing? The Shaper's songs 745  
 And the angels' wings are expanding my sight.  
 This is no scheme. My mind is a miracle—  
 Since I ate the apple, my eyes are enlightened.  
 Here, take this fruit I hold in my hands.  
 I offer it openly. Share my vision. 750  
 Taste this greatness. I believe it's brought  
 From the hand of God by his own command  
 Through this mighty messenger. His words are wise.

He tells nothing but the truth. Take a bite!  
 Nothing else on earth is equal to this. 755  
 As the angel says, it's a gift from God."

Eve incessantly urged Adam all day long  
 With words thick and fast to taste the fruit.  
 This lure was aimed at expanding love  
 Or sharing blame. That bite would turn bitter 760  
 As they betrayed their Lord. The evil angel  
 Encouraged them both to seize the moment  
 And sate their desires with a taste of sweetness,  
 The drink of death. To ease his envy,  
 He meant to draw mankind into mortal error, 765  
 To lead both Adam and Eve astray,  
 Snared in sin and bound for slaughter.  
 That twisted trickster, that hideous hell-hound,  
 Knew that they would discover God's wrath  
 And destroy their deed to a home in heaven. 770  
 That fiend offered Eve his subtle lies,  
 Bending her back to his own way of being.  
 He delighted in deceiving the loveliest of women  
 Into forfeiting God's favor. Seduced to sin,  
 She sold her will and spoke his words, 775  
 Betraying her heart and God's handiwork.  
 His beautiful bride urged Adam on  
 To share the fruit, till his spirit softened,  
 And trusting her undaunted loyalty and love,  
 He took the fruit. He ate the apple 780  
 And lost himself. She little knew  
 That mankind would suffer sin endlessly  
 After taking a taste of that bitter fruit.  
 She thought she would gain God's favor  
 In obeying his messenger's winsome words. 785  
 She talked her way into Adam's trust,  
 Until her husband followed his heart  
 And wound his will to her own desires.  
 His act was an invitation out of Eden.  
 What he took from Eve was death and damnation, 790

A savage sleep and a demon-dream,  
 The devil's deceit and a home in hell,  
 Though in name and nature, it seemed just fruit.  
 That apple was endless agony and exile,  
 Suffering on earth and torment in hell. 795  
 With a shared bite of that unholy fruit,  
 They marked themselves and all mankind  
 With bitter death. They murdered the future.  
 The cruel messenger cavorted around them,  
 Skipping in sin, exulting in evil, 800  
 Offering thanks to his lord, Satan, saying:  
 "Now I have fully worked your will,  
 Fulfilling your desire since the day we fell.  
 At last I've led Adam and Eve astray.  
 They've broken their bond, forsaken their Lord, 805  
 Abandoned his word, his trust and teaching,  
 Trading bliss for bale, rejoicing for wrath.  
 Now they will find a hard path to heaven  
 And a broad road to hell. Your envy is ended,  
 Your heart's pain has perished. Ignominy is over. 810  
 You don't have to grieve that your given place  
 In heaven is handed over to usurping mankind,  
 While you lie locked in hell's hot torment  
 With a host of fiends who followed you down,  
 Enthralled with your pride. God flew into a rage 815  
 When we refused to bow down before him  
 And beg for his blessing. But it was not our want  
 To render him homage. We counted the cost  
 And found it too great. Better freedom in hell  
 Than servitude in heaven. God drove us down 820  
 In his unchecked anger, his fiendish fury,  
 Hurling bold angels into the fiery abyss,  
 The blaze and burn of mind and bone,  
 So he could restore the thrones of heaven,  
 Handing our place to that muddle of mankind. 825  
 We've marred his grace and emptied his thrones  
 By misleading man. It's a devil's delight!  
 We've caused God double trouble—  
 The children of men have lost their hope

Of heaven, sinners bound for hell-fire, 830  
 Bypassing bliss—and we've perverted God's purpose,  
 Making the Lord lament his precious loss.  
 Our Maker will mourn that he ever made man.  
 Whatever we suffer is salved in Adam,  
 Eased with Eve, as they will know pain, 835  
 Passion, and perdition instead of paradise.  
 The damnation of man has healed our hearts  
 Since we have taken vengeance with victory  
 In our endless conflict with our cruel Creator.  
 We've endured enough. Now I'm headed home 840  
 To greet you, my lord, the great Satan,  
 Shackled in black hell in a clutch of fire."  
 The meanest of messengers, that fierce fiend,  
 Once more flew down to the doors of hell  
 To be greeted by flames where his master lay, 845  
 Chafing at his bonds, chained to the blaze.  
 Then Adam and Eve began grieving.  
 They sorrowed and spoke sharp words of woe,  
 Discovering the fear that came with the fruit,  
 The darkness of mind that death portended. 850  
 They dreaded the righteous wrath of God,  
 Realizing that they had defied his command.  
 The woman wailed, lamenting her loss,  
 Reproaching herself, repenting her choice,  
 When she saw the radiance dim and disappear, 855  
 The once bright sign from the false angel,  
 The faithless demon who led them on  
 With his devious counsel into dark calamity,  
 Sin and shame, humiliation and hell.  
 Sorrow smoked and seethed in their hearts. 860  
 Sometimes the married pair prayed together,  
 Calling on their Creator to punish them properly  
 For breaking his command. Suddenly they saw  
 The blunt truth that their bodies were bare.  
 They needed no house and knew no toil 865  
 In that precious land. They could have lived well,  
 If only they had learned to obey God's command.  
 Bound for misery, they heaped blame

On one another. Adam spoke up:  
 “O Eve, you have by your egregious sin 870  
 Marked us forever bound for death.  
 Can you see our destiny, the dark abyss,  
 The fierce flames of ruinous hell?  
 Can you hear it raging? Heaven’s kingdom  
 Is unlike that unholy fire. Here is the best land 875  
 We might have held, rejoicing forever  
 In this radiant land, God’s gift to us,  
 If you had not listened to that inveterate liar  
 Who tempted us to turn against our Lord,  
 Following that monster instead of our Master. 880  
 Now we sorrow in sin and fear our fate  
 Because God warned us to guard religiously  
 Against betrayal, a breach of trust,  
 And the resulting torment, a terrible loss.  
 Now hunger and thirst gnaw at my heart. 885  
 Care and discomfort have entered Eden.  
 How will we survive when the savage wind  
 Blows from west or east, south or north?  
 Storm-clouds will come, hail from heaven—  
 Frost will follow us, snow stalk us, 890  
 An evil cold come creeping over us.  
 Sometimes the savage sun will blast  
 Our frail bodies, scorching our skin  
 As we walk naked, exposed to the elements.  
 We’ve no free food, no sweet sustenance, 895  
 No shield from the storm, no safe shelter  
 From God’s righteous wrath, his punishing rage.  
 How can we survive? Now I sorely regret  
 Requesting God to make me a helpmate,  
 Raising you up out of my own rib bone, 900  
 For you have led me astray into hateful sin,  
 My heart’s shame, and my Lord’s loathing.  
 I regret that I ever laid eyes on you.”

Then Eve replied, the loveliest of women,  
 Fairest of wives—still the handiwork of God, 905  
 Even though ruined by the devious devil—  
 Lamenting her loss of the Lord’s trust:



“You are right to reproach me with hard words,  
 My lord and husband, yet the gall in your mind  
 Cannot be greater than the grief in my heart.” 910  
 Then Adam was downcast and answered Eve:  
 “If I knew God’s will, perceived his punishment,  
 You would see no hesitation in my heart,  
 No doubt in my mind. If God commanded me  
 To endure the ocean, sail blindly away 915  
 On the dangerous waves, I would never flinch,  
 But rush to a ship, risk sinking down  
 To the sea-bottom and entering the abyss  
 To accomplish his will. Now grace is gone,  
 Bliss is abandoned. I have lost my precious 920  
 Service to the Lord. There’s no joy in paradise.  
 We can’t stand here naked forever,  
 Baring our bodies for anyone to see.  
 We failed God. Let’s head for the forest,  
 Seeking a hideout in the wild wood.” 925  
 So the two sad sinners turned away  
 From their happy home, walking in woe  
 Into the green forest where they sat in sorrow,  
 Apart from paradise, awaiting their punishment,  
 Afraid of the pain that promised to come 930  
 Because they had broken their Lord’s command,  
 Losing the gifts bestowed by God.  
 Then Adam and Eve were sorely ashamed  
 Of their bare bodies, covering themselves  
 With torn ferns and fallen leaves. 935  
 They owned nothing to wear in shame—  
 They had no clothes. They bowed down together,  
 Prostrated in prayer, begging each morning  
 That God might come, that their almighty Father  
 Would not forget them, but finding them in the wild, 940  
 Would show them how to survive in the world,  
 Living in the light after their loss of paradise.

### Genesis A (continued)

Then almighty God, the glorious Prince,  
 Came into paradise in the middle of the day

For a leisurely stroll. Our Lord and Savior, 945  
 Our merciful Father, walked into Eden,  
 Wanting to check on his beloved children.  
 He knew they had eaten the forbidden fruit—  
 Their glory was gone, their innocence undone.  
 They scurried away, deprived of their dignity, 950  
 To hide in the tree-shadows, torn and tormented  
 By their shameful act, shaking with fear.  
 They huddled in the gloom, hearing God’s voice.  
 The Lord of heaven summoned his servant,  
 Keeper of each of the creatures in paradise. 955  
 God called to Adam, his abject son,  
 Who came naked to greet him, saying:  
 “Here I am, Life-lord, hiding in the wild,  
 For I have no clothes to cover the shame  
 Of my bare body so I’m dressed in leaves. 960  
 My thoughts are dark—my conscience torments me.  
 I’m scathed by sin and dreading doom,  
 Standing here stark naked before my Lord.”  
 God immediately answered Adam:  
 “Tell me, my son, why do you seek 965  
 These shadows in shame, this hopeless hideout?  
 I left you and Eve unembarrassed in Eden,  
 Your beautiful spirits bright with grace.  
 Why do you cover your body with leaves,  
 Inviting misery into your innocent mind 970  
 Unless you have tasted the forbidden fruit,  
 Eating the apple I forbade you to touch?”  
 Then Adam answered his guardian Lord:  
 “This beautiful woman, this beloved bride,  
 Offered me the fruit, hand to mouth, 975  
 Which I accepted in trust, betraying your word.  
 Now I am marked within and without  
 By a sense of sin. My world is woe.”  
 Then almighty God questioned Eve:  
 “Tell me, my daughter, having touched the tree 980  
 And tasted its fruit, what have you learned  
 From this sinful way of seeing the world  
 And being ashamed of yourself in Eden?

What did it profit you to be free in paradise  
 Only to grasp the apple, taste bitter fruit, 985  
 Devouring death in spite of my warning,  
 My counsel and command? Can you grasp  
 Its meaning, its unmaking? Does it twist your being  
 From blessing to bale, from bliss to bane?  
 Why did you offer Adam the apple to eat?" 990  
 Then Eve, the loveliest of women, was ashamed  
 As she listened to her lord and answered back:  
 "The serpent tricked me, that gaudy devil,  
 That devious snake, stalking me always  
 With his twisted tongue and tempting words 995  
 To grab that fruit, taste its sweetness,  
 Gobble it up, swallowing sin,  
 Until I snatched it like a shameless thief  
 Against your will and wolfed it down.  
 I admit I ate the apple. It was not right." 1000  
 Then our Savior, the almighty Lord,  
 Said to the snake, the guilty serpent:  
 "Now you shall wander the face of the earth,  
 Crawling through creation on your bare belly,  
 Footless, speechless, heartless, and hated 1005  
 By all of mankind. You shall eat dirt  
 All the days of your life for this loathsome deed.  
 The woman will despise you for dishing out discord  
 And tread on your unholy head with her heel.  
 You will lie in wait to wound her foot 1010  
 With your vile, venomous forked tongue.  
 The feud between you two will last forever,  
 Marking and murdering your children's children.  
 Your seeds will never be safe from strife  
 As long as the earth exists. Now you know, 1015  
 Evil enemy of man, what your life will be like."

In his righteous wrath, God spoke to Eve:  
 "Depart from Eden. Turn your back on bliss.  
 You shall now serve this man, be under his rule,  
 In awe of his authority, in fear of his force. 1020  
 You will suffer for your sin, atone for your evil,

Experience death, bear sons and daughters  
 In pain and sorrow in this world of woe.”  
 Then the eternal Lord spoke again to Adam—  
 The Source of light had a dark message: 1025  
 “Seek another homeland outside of Eden,  
 A house of unhappiness on sorrow’s road,  
 As a naked outcast, wandering in exile,  
 Deprived of all the pleasures of paradise.  
 Your soul and body are bound to be separated, 1030  
 For the wages of sin are suffering and death.  
 You shall live by your labor, tilling the land,  
 Eating what you grow in the good earth,  
 Earning your bread by the sweat of your brow  
 Until that dreaded disease called death, 1035  
 That inescapable illness you ate in the apple,  
 Worms its dark way through your decadent body,  
 Clutching your heart in a grim death-hold.”  
 Listen, as we hear how endless affliction  
 And mortal misery became the lot of mankind. 1040  
 The Guardian of glory, our Lord and Creator,  
 Dressed the couple in clothes, covering their bodies,  
 Concealing their shame—then commanded them  
 To depart from paradise to discover a life  
 Constrained by need. At the Lord’s authority, 1045  
 An angel followed with a sword of fire,  
 Closing the gates of their joy-filled home,  
 Their place in paradise of peace and pleasure.  
 No man or woman who is guilty of sin  
 Can pass through those gates. God’s guardian angel 1050  
 Patrols that pathway, protecting paradise,  
 A powerful warden who stands before  
 The doors of glory, the life of bliss.  
 Yet almighty God never intended  
 To withdraw all favor from Adam and Eve, 1055  
 Withholding the care and comfort of creation,  
 Even though they had rebelled against him.  
 Instead he left the heavenly roof  
 Studded with holy stars and the day-sun’s

Sustaining light, the bright sky-candle. 1060  
 He ordered the earth and sea to produce  
 Meat and fruit to sustain the couple  
 In their worldly needs. After their sin  
 They lived in a land less abounding than Eden,  
 A country of care, a world of woe. 1065  
 They regretted their sin, reliving their shame.  
 Then at God's command they produced children,  
 Cain and Abel, two noble sons.  
 Books tell us how those willing brothers  
 Toiled each day, tilling and herding, 1070  
 Amassing a wealth of grain and goods.  
 The firstborn, Cain, farmed the land.  
 The second, Abel, helped his father herd  
 The family flocks. At harvest time,  
 They both brought offerings to the Lord. 1075  
 Abel offered the best beast he had,  
 While Cain gave the worst grain to God.  
 The Prince of angels, the King of creation,  
 Looked down kindly on Abel's sacrifice  
 But wouldn't consider the chaff of Cain. 1080  
 Anger and envy entered Cain's heart.  
 He thought he had been insulted by God.  
 He hated his brother. His rage rose up,  
 His hand struck down, killing his kin,  
 The innocent Abel. That was unwise. 1085  
 Then middle-earth swallowed the bitter gore  
 Of brotherly blood. After that death-stroke  
 More evil arose, a progeny of crime.  
 From that branch grew abominable fruit  
 On tenacious vines twisting the hearts 1090  
 Of the children of men. Feuds flourished,  
 Murders multiplied, grief grew wild.  
 Mankind may well lament this history  
 Of willful sin and wicked slaying.  
 Ruin was forever rampant on earth 1095  
 After Eve injured all of mankind  
 With her evil sin after Adam was awakened

By the quickening breath from the Shaper's mouth,  
And they tasted that baleful, forbidden fruit.

Then the Lord of glory approached Cain, 1100  
Asking where on earth his brother Abel  
Might be found. The worthless murder-maker,  
Sin-shaper, devised this devious reply:  
"Am I my brother Abel's keeper?  
How can I know his comings and goings? 1105  
How can I keep track of my kinsman's journey?"  
Then the Prince of angels, the righteous Ruler,  
Almighty God, spoke again to Abel:  
"Why did you strike down your own kin  
With a heart of rage and hands of wrath, 1110  
Bury your brother in a slaughter-bed?  
You have savagely killed my faithful servant,  
And his blood cries out in anguish to me.  
For this murderous deed you shall suffer  
Pain and punishment, exile and agony, 1115  
Endlessly cursed without recourse.  
The earth will not offer you fruit or grain,  
Bountiful gifts to sustain your needs,  
Because you have bloodied her growing-ground  
With violent hands. For this cold killing 1120  
You must leave the country, flee from your family,  
Wander in exile without kith or kin,  
Deprived of grace, abhorrent to everyone."  
Then Cain answered his Creator and Judge:  
"I expect no pity, no mercy from my Maker. 1125  
I have forfeited your favor, compassion, and care.  
Now my feet must wander a woeful road.  
I can expect only enmity from everyone  
Who will endlessly hate me and remind me  
With cruel hostility of my own crime. 1130  
I murdered my brother, shedding his blood  
On the innocent earth. Now banish me  
From both my family and my fair homeland.  
This feud is fixed. A killer will come  
To murder me also. Cursed by my crime, 1135

My unholy sin, I will pass out of sight.”  
 The Lord of virtue and victory responded:  
 “There’s no easy exit for your endless suffering,  
 No early death for a brother-destroyer.  
 You’ll be a marked man, not easily murdered. 1140  
 If anyone slays you, he will soon find  
 Sevenfold vengeance upon his head.”  
 Then the glorious Creator set a peace-sign,  
 A mark of immunity, on that killer Cain,  
 Lest some other assassin should ease his pain, 1145  
 Steal his suffering, unwind his woe.  
 The Lord ordered that unholy brother  
 To depart from his mother, his kith and kin.  
 Then Cain walked away from the sight of God,  
 Condemned to wander an exile’s road, 1150  
 An outcast and outlaw without friends and family.  
 He went east to live far from his father,  
 Where a beautiful woman bore heirs for him.  
 His firstborn son was named Enoch.  
 The family built a great stronghold, 1155  
 The first fortified city of sword-wielding men.  
 Then the generations after Enoch arose—  
 His firstborn son was named Jarad.  
 This was the beginning of the race of Cain.  
 After Jarad, Mahalalel was keeper 1160  
 Of his father’s inheritance until he died.  
 Then his son Methuselah kept control,  
 Sharing the family treasure with his kin,  
 Son after son, until old and wise  
 In accumulated years, he passed away. 1165  
 His son Lamech became the new lord,  
 Took the family hoard and household goods.  
 His two wives, Adah and Zillah,  
 Bore him heirs in his homeland.  
 One of Lamech’s sons was called Jabal, 1170  
 Who first awoke the sounds of the harp  
 With his cunning hands, making melody.  
 Another son of Lamech called Tubal-Cain  
 Was a master-smith, the first of his kind

To shape farm implements of iron and brass, 1175  
 Endlessly useful to the children of men.  
 His craft was cunning, his skill unsurpassed.  
 Lamech once told his two wives,  
 Adah and Zillah, a miserable story  
 Of family murder, confessing his crime: 1180  
 “I murdered a man, an ancient relative,  
 By killing Cain. He was my kin,  
 The son of Adam, father of Enoch,  
 Slayer of Abel. I stained my hands  
 And my brooding heart with this bloody crime. 1185  
 I watered the ground with his red gore.  
 I know I will suffer God’s sevenfold vengeance  
 For this kin-killing when I pass on.”

A righteous son was born to Adam  
 In Abel’s stead—his name was Seth. 1190  
 He was prosperous and blessed, a true comfort  
 To his father and mother, Adam and Eve.  
 His father, the first of men, said prayerfully:  
 “The God of victories, the Lord of life,  
 Has offered me another beloved son 1195  
 To replace the boy that Cain killed.  
 Now my mind is free from mourning,  
 The sore grief in my heart is gone.  
 I give God thanks for this precious gift.”  
 So Adam’s line was brought to life again 1200  
 When he had lived one hundred thirty years.  
 Writings tell us that he increased his family  
 With sons and daughters for eight hundred years  
 And lived to be nine hundred thirty,  
 When his spirit parted from this earthly life. 1205  
 Then his son Seth succeeded Adam.  
 He ruled his father’s realm and took a wife.  
 He was one hundred five when he first began  
 To produce heirs. His eldest son,  
 Enosh, was the first of the children of men 1210  
 To call on the hallowed name of God  
 Since Adam walked on the green grass



Of paradise, endowed with a living soul.  
 Seth prospered, begetting sons and daughters  
 For eight hundred seven years until he died. 1215  
 After the earth had swallowed up the body  
 Of the seed-bearing Seth, Enosh held the inheritance.  
 He was dear to the Lord and lived ninety years  
 Before he began to bear children with his wife  
 Through bed-play, that is married intercourse. 1220  
 To him Kenan was born, heir of the realm.  
 After that he lived eight hundred fifteen years,  
 Begetting many sons and daughters before he died  
 At the ripe old age of nine hundred five.  
 He was a wise and ancient patriarch. 1225  
 After Enosh, Kenan was lord and guardian  
 Of the country, living seventy years  
 Before his son Mahalalel was born,  
 Followed by children for eight hundred forty years.  
 Then he left the world at nine hundred ten, 1230  
 When his time was finished under the heavens.

After Kenan, Mahalalel held the inheritance.  
 He lived sixty-five years before beginning  
 To bear children with his beloved wife.  
 She first gave him a son named Jared. 1235  
 Mahalalel lived long, enjoying many blessings,  
 Both earthly treasures and the joys of men.  
 He lived eight hundred ninety-five years  
 Before departing, leaving the land,  
 Its rule and riches to his son Jared. 1240  
 Jared was generous, giving gold to his people.  
 He was righteous and noble, respected and loved  
 By his kith and kin. He lived a life  
 Of one hundred sixty-five years  
 Before his wife gave him a gift of joy— 1245  
 Enoch, his noble first-born son.  
 Then he fathered many more children  
 Over the span of some eight hundred years,  
 Proud descendants of a great tribe.  
 He lived nine hundred sixty-five years 1250

Till he passed on power to his eldest son.  
 Enoch was a wise and worthy leader,  
 A righteous ruler, shepherd of his kin.  
 He prospered and fathered many sons  
 For three hundred years. God was gracious to him. 1255  
 Enoch left life in no ordinary way.  
 He died no death as mortals do  
 When God reclaims their worldly wealth  
 And leaves their lifeless bodies bound  
 For a graveyard bed. The Lord of angels 1260  
 Transported Enoch alive from earth  
 In the same form that his spirit received  
 Before he was brought forth into the world  
 By his mother, his soul robed in flesh.  
 He left the land's rule to his first-born son 1265  
 When he ascended from the earth, a mighty miracle,  
 After three hundred sixty-five years of life.  
 His son Methuselah received the inheritance,  
 Living the longest of any of these patriarchs,  
 Enjoying worldly pleasures, siring children 1270  
 Before he died at nine hundred seventy.  
 After Methuselah, his son Lamech ruled.  
 He lived one hundred two years  
 Before beginning to bear children.  
 The people's leader was wise and worthy, 1275  
 Beloved by all. He ruled the realm well.  
 He lived five hundred ninety-five more years  
 Before leaving the inheritance to Noah,  
 His first-born son, who ruled afterwards.

That leader waited some five hundred years 1280  
 Before his wife bore him three fine sons—  
 Shem, Ham, and Japheth, as books tell us.  
 The people of middle-earth began to multiply  
 As so many sons and daughters were born.  
 They multiplied widely across middle-earth. 1285  
 The descendants of Seth were dear to God,  
 Blessed with prosperity, respected by their Ruler,  
 Fair and faithful, righteous and good—

Until the children of God began to seek  
 Brazen brides from the cursed race of Cain, 1290  
 Defying his holy will and word.  
 The sons of men took shameful wives,  
 Beautiful but unblessed, stunning but sinful.  
 Then the Ruler of heaven spoke to people  
 In his righteous wrath, saying these words: 1295  
 “The race of Cain is not forgotten—  
 The crime of Cain is not forgiven.  
 They were not guilt-free when they left my spirit,  
 And now this nation enrages me.  
 The sons of Seth renew this feud 1300  
 By marrying women from among my foes.  
 The beauty of these brides, these unbelievers,  
 And the devious wiles of the fierce fiend  
 Have wormed their way into these men,  
 The people who were once at peace with me.” 1305  
 After one hundred twenty years in the world,  
 The race of Cain found no repentance  
 But rather became renegades, outlaws forever,  
 Conspiring with giants, malevolent monsters.  
 Then the world’s Creator, the Wielder of power, 1310  
 Was determined to punish his sinful foes,  
 Men and monsters, vicious and vile,  
 Bloated with evil, drunk with destruction,  
 Hideous and hateful to their righteous Lord.  
 The Victory-lord saw all the earth’s evils, 1315  
 The world’s wickedness, the shameless sins,  
 And decided to destroy those faithless people  
 With a grim vengeance. He repented creating  
 The race of men when he made Adam,  
 Stirring his soul to life with his own breath, 1320  
 And decided because of man’s savagery and sin  
 To lay waste to the world, blasting each body,  
 Withdrawing every breath. Dark days  
 Were approaching the fallen children of men.  
 Yet Noah was blessed, loved by the Savior, 1325  
 A virtuous man, righteous and merciful,  
 The son of Lamech in the line of Seth.

God knew that he held holy thoughts  
 In his mind, bold courage in his heart—  
 He was steadfast and true. So God told Noah 1330  
 Of the coming vengeance on the sons of men.  
 He saw that the earth was alive with evil,  
 Its wide plains polluted with sin,  
 Its rivers an endless road of unrighteousness.  
 All life was abomination, so the Lord said: 1335  
 “The day of vengeance is drawing near.  
 I mean to destroy with a mighty flood  
 All life everywhere shaped and sustained  
 By nature and nurture—men and women,  
 Birds of the air, beasts of the land, 1340  
 Fields and groves. You will have sanctuary  
 With your sons and family in a saving-ship,  
 An ark of mercy against the storm-winds  
 To protect the faithful when the dark waters,  
 The death-floods, come to destroy mankind, 1345  
 Those bent in sin. Begin now to build  
 A mighty ship, a sea-floater, a wave-walking  
 Ocean-home with rooms for all creatures  
 To rest in, a holding haven, safe and secure  
 For each of earth’s species, each natural kind, 1350  
 A shelter against the rage and wrath to come.  
 Build separate stalls, tiers and floors,  
 A broad deck. Be sure to make it  
 Fifty measures wide, thirty high, three hundred long.  
 Build the joints strong to survive the storm. 1355  
 Take into the ark, that floating fortress,  
 The offspring of every species, fish and fowl,  
 Beast and bird, seed and shoot, flower and fruit.  
 Build a roomy boat—the bigger, the better.”  
 Noah obeyed his Creator’s commands, 1360  
 Telling his family the flood was coming,  
 A dark calamity, a dire punishment  
 For sinful people, but no one believed him.  
 Still he persisted in his brave boat-building,  
 Heeding his Lord’s holy plan and purpose. 1365  
 After many years of constructing the ark,

Noah was rewarded by the Lord's return,  
 True to his promise. God saw the ship  
 Rising high in the yard, a house for the waves,  
 Ready to launch and ride out the flood, 1370  
 Caulked with earth-lime of a special kind—  
 Like the firmest faith, hardening in squalls,  
 Repulsing rough water, tightening against tempests—  
 Steadfast in the face of savage storms.

Then our Lord and Savior said to Noah: 1375  
 "Most beloved of men, I give you this pledge—  
 That you and your family shall load the ark  
 With every kind of creature, the seed and progeny  
 Of every plant and animal. The world will survive  
 In the belly of the boat you've cunningly built. 1380  
 You and your heirs—three sons, four wives—  
 Must ride the waves in the abundant ark.  
 Take into the ship seven of each species  
 That are food for men, and two of the others.  
 Take also fruits, grains, seeds, and shoots, 1385  
 The promise of plenty in days to come,  
 Enough to sustain all living creatures  
 Aboard the sea-wood. After the ravaging flood,  
 I will return the earth to its green goodness,  
 Its beauty and bloom, its sustaining fullness. 1390  
 Now gather your creatures and enter the ark.  
 You and your family still hold my favor  
 And will ride the waves to a renewed world.  
 In seven days a slaughter-rain will fall  
 On the face of the earth. Everyone will die 1395  
 Who is not in the ark. For forty days and nights,  
 The world will be battered by a rage of rain,  
 As I pummel the earth with wind and wave,  
 Wreaking my vengeance with dark storm-clouds.  
 The flood will destroy the world's wealth 1400  
 Along with its owners. All sins and sinners  
 Will be swept away. Only those inside the ark  
 Will be saved when the savage storm beats down  
 And buries the earth in an endless sea.

This is the covenant I promise to keep.” 1405  
 Then Noah loaded the ark with every kind  
 Of earthly creature as the Savior commanded—  
 Men and women, plants and animals,  
 Birds and beasts—everything God needed  
 To restore the earth, reclaim creation, 1410  
 After the deadly flood. With his deft hands  
 The Guardian of life, Protector of people,  
 Sealed the door of that floating sea-house  
 With a tight blessing against the tempest.  
 The son of Lamech was six hundred years old 1415  
 When he made his way up the gangplank  
 And climbed aboard with his cherished family,  
 A wise patriarch with his youthful sons,  
 The seeds of creation, the promise of progeny  
 After the flood. On the dry decks 1420  
 Of their floatable world, they waited for water.  
 Then the Lord lashed the land with rainstorms,  
 Opened the well-springs of the earth to flow,  
 Ordered the oceans to rise and rage,  
 Commanded the waters to cover creation. 1425  
 The rivers ran over, the seas surged on the strand,  
 No living thing outside the ark was spared.  
 The Water-wielder was wrathful and righteous—  
 He covered and hid the children of middle-earth  
 Who were feuding with him in a blanket of waves, 1430  
 A shroud of dark water. The storm-dread  
 Brought doom for forty days and nights.  
 The savage storm squeezed the life  
 Out of the bone-house of every creature,  
 Leaving dead flesh, a clutch of corpses. 1435  
 The flood covered land and lovers,  
 Men and mountains, trees and travelers.  
 There was nowhere for the wicked to flee.  
 The ark floated on the rising flood,  
 Holding Noah’s family and the keep of creatures, 1440  
 Those blessed by the Lord when he loaded the ship  
 And closed with his hands the doors of the hold.  
 Then the sea was like a ring of bright water

From end to end, horizon to horizon,  
 As the ark sailed on under the skies 1445  
 With its precious cargo, the promise of creation.  
 God guarded the ship so the seething tempest  
 Could not touch them, the wild water waste them.  
 The Lord was their pilot through the savage storm.  
 The fierce flood was fifteen measures deep 1450  
 Over the dark mountains—a mighty miracle,  
 A strange wonder. Finally there was no one left  
 For the seas to swallow, for death to drink.  
 No one could mourn the greatest of miseries  
 But the air itself when the flood had covered 1455  
 All the once living creatures of middle-earth,  
 Except those onboard, shielded by the Savior,  
 When the stern-hearted King of creation  
 Lifted up the obedient flood.

God the Maker was mindful of his seafarer, 1460  
 The son of Lamech, his faithful family,  
 And the creatures he carried—seed and stock,  
 Bird and beast, fish and fruit—all the life  
 That the Lord of light had locked in the ship.  
 God led Noah over the swelling waves, 1465  
 Across the wide lands with his guiding word.  
 The ocean ebbed, the flood subsided,  
 The dark waters diminished, the drowning ceased.  
 God revoked the rain and stilled the seas.  
 The ship had sailed for one hundred fifty 1470  
 Days and nights beneath the heavens,  
 Certain in the strength of its nailed sides,  
 Till the tempest passed and the tide turned.  
 Then Noah's ark, the best of boats,  
 Greatest of sea-houses, heaved up on land, 1475  
 High on Ararat in the mountains of Armenia,  
 Where Lamech's son, that saintly sailor,  
 Awaited his orders from the almighty Creator,  
 Some sign that he should leave the great ship  
 And find rest for his people, relief from the peril 1480  
 Of the dark flood that had devastated the world.

The ocean receded, the waves retreated.  
 Then the seafarers with their wives and families  
 Longed for a time when they could leave the ark,  
 Step out across the nailed deck-planks, 1485  
 And carry their belongings onto dry land—  
 They were too long confined in the crowded ship.  
 Then the heroic helmsman tested whether  
 The flood had finally left the land.  
 Many days after the mountain slopes 1490  
 Had held and harbored the ark's wealth  
 Of people and progeny, seeds and scions,  
 The renewing richness of the earth's life,  
 The son of Lamech let loose a black raven,  
 Flying from the sea-house across the flood. 1495  
 He believed that if the bird found no land,  
 He would return to the wave-wood across the seas,  
 But the bird was fiendish and played him false  
 By floating on a corpse, an unfair flesh-boat.  
 That dark-feathered bird had found its home! 1500  
 Seven days later, Noah tried a gray dove  
 To see if the sea would yield green earth.  
 The dove searched everywhere for dry land  
 But failed to find a place to perch—  
 No leaf-land, grass-hillock, or tree-slope. 1505  
 Her feet could not light on any good ground.  
 The land from hill to hollow, sea to sand,  
 Was covered with water. That weary bird  
 Flew back to the ark that evening  
 Across the dark, gloomy sea, settling 1510  
 Tired and hungry in Noah's holy hands.  
 After another week, the same brave dove  
 Was sent out again from the stranded ark.  
 She flew, rejoicing in the sky's freedom,  
 And found a resting place for her weary wings 1515  
 And tiny, tired feet—a perfect perch  
 In the branch and beauty of a lofty tree.  
 She sat in peace, enjoying the bough,  
 Then plucked a precious gift of green,



Shook her feathers, and flew home again 1520  
 With her promising present to Noah's ark,  
 Placing an olive branch, a green twig,  
 In her captain's hands. That hardy sea-lord  
 Sensed in the sprig that comfort had come,  
 A welcome respite from sailing the sea-road. 1525  
 After waiting a third week, the blessed man  
 Once again sent out the free-flying dove.  
 She discovered dry land with a green wood,  
 Resolving never to return to the ark,  
 That uneasy refuge of pitch and plank, 1530  
 Now that there was no need for ship-survival.

Then our Savior, the Guardian of heaven,  
 Spoke to Noah in a holy voice:  
 "Here is your homeland once again readied,  
 A rest from your relentless sea-journey, 1535  
 A bed of bright joy, the delight of dry land.  
 Now the earth awakens. Go in peace and prosper  
 With the world's offspring that I saved from the waves  
 When the ocean engulfed this third homeland."  
 So Noah disembarked at the orders of the Lord, 1540  
 Walked down the planks and stood on the strand,  
 Leading the survivors of the savage flood,  
 The righteous remnant of the days of rage.  
 The wise patriarch set up a sacrifice  
 To his Lord and Savior, offering a portion 1545  
 Of the life-gifts given to him by God  
 When he boarded the ark. The Lord was pleased  
 With Noah and his family, accepting the offering,  
 Especially since the faithful son of Lamech  
 Had lived by his laws and accomplished his will 1550  
 By his words and works ever since he was young.  
 He deserved God's favor, his bright blessing.  
 The Lord of glory spoke again to Noah:  
 "Be fruitful and multiply in the shelter and safety  
 Of this wondrous world. Fill the earth with life. 1555  
 Bring out the birds and beasts, the seeds and shoots.

Let the land bloom, the birds begin singing,  
 The animals feed and flourish. The earth is alive—  
 The time of the tempest is finished. In your hands  
 I place the power of your forefathers' world, 1560  
 The verdant groves, the enlivening air,  
 The fruits and flowers, the fish and fowl.  
 Never sit down to feast with blood.  
 A man who murders with a bitter spear-point  
 Slays the spirit within himself. 1565  
 He will not rejoice when he comes to judgment,  
 For my retribution will be fair but fierce.  
 If a man prospers by killing his brother,  
 What should he expect but righteous wrath  
 Before his Lord. Mercy cannot be measured out 1570  
 To the unmerciful. Killers will be dealt destruction.  
 Man was first made in the image of God—  
 His soul shaped with a divine breath.  
 Only those who keep the likeness of the Lord,  
 The kindred of angels, and the love of God, 1575  
 Will be safe from sin and survive the storm.  
 Flourish and increase, enjoy the earth,  
 Make the renewed world a welcome place  
 For each and every kind of my living creatures.  
 Fill the land with your sons and daughters— 1580  
 Build for yourselves a homeland for the heart.  
 Hear now my covenant in this rekindled creation:  
 I will never again bring the deluge down  
 To destroy the world with avenging waves.  
 You can see a sign of my promise of protection 1585  
 In the rich rainbow that brightens the clouds  
 And blazons my bond. I will keep this covenant  
 With mankind as long as the world remains.”  
 Then the wise son of Lamech, the guardian  
 Of God's wealth in that glorious ark, 1590  
 Disembarked with his three worthy sons,  
 Shem and Ham, and also Japheth,  
 Their wives and children, a precious progeny  
 Saved from the storms of wind and wave  
 By their steadfast Savior. Nations sprang up 1595

From this new beginning, this sacred seed,  
And the earth was filled with the children of men.

Once again Noah began with his kinsmen  
To build a house and establish a homestead.  
He toiled on the land, tilling the earth, 1600  
Sowing many seeds, planting a vineyard,  
Laboring each day so that the lush earth  
Might bring forth its verdant blessings  
Of sprig and shoot, bud and bloom.  
Then it happened that Noah got drunk 1605  
After a family feast and staggered into bed.  
Sated and wine-weary, he slipped from his robe,  
Starkly revealing his limb-naked body.  
He barely knew what mischief he'd made  
When his dizzy mind was swimming with wine, 1610  
Crying out to his heart in that holy house.  
He slept in such an unconscious stupor  
That he lost his modest covering of clothes  
And exposed his genitals, that ancient shame  
Of men and women from the days of Eden, 1615  
When the Lord of glory expelled our parents,  
Our father and mother, with a sword of fire,  
Locking the gates of paradise behind them.  
Then Noah's son Ham came into the bedroom  
Where his father was sleeping bare naked 1620  
And would not respect him, but ridiculed him,  
Laughing and joking, telling his brothers later  
How his father slept so shamefully in the hall.  
Shem and Japheth crept in, covering their eyes,  
And respectfully covered up their father's body. 1625  
To them it was anathema to laugh at their lord.  
Then Noah awoke from his drunken sleep  
And discovered that Ham had degraded him,  
Holding no love for his lord in his need.  
That was a bitter pill for the noble patriarch, 1630  
And he set a curse on his son, saying that Ham  
Would always be a miserable man, an outcast,  
Bound to serve the rest of his kinsmen

Everywhere on earth. That oath has been  
 A bane to Ham and his race forever. 1635  
 Then Noah and his noble sons, free men,  
 Ruled the realm and enjoyed their lives  
 For three hundred fifty years after the flood  
 Until the son of Lamech sailed on from life.  
 Noah's sons prospered, sharing property 1640  
 And bearing children. Japheth had a joyous  
 Hearth-ward of sons and daughters.  
 He was a good man, a kind comfort,  
 Supporting and sustaining his large family  
 With his wealth until his heart's treasure, 1645  
 His yearning spirit, departed this life,  
 Taking the long road to his Lord's judgment.  
 Then Gomer, Japheth's good son,  
 Shared his father's property with kith and kin,  
 Friends and family. His descendants flourished 1650  
 And filled the earth with no small numbers.  
 Likewise sons were born to his brother Ham.  
 The eldest were called Cush and Canaan,  
 Fine first-born sons in a long line.  
 Cush ruled the realm after Ham died, 1655  
 Dispensing the wealth among the family  
 In his father's place. He gave out laws  
 Until the rest of his days ran out.  
 The noble father of Nimrod traded  
 Earthly goods for heavenly glory, 1660  
 Seeking a peaceful place with the Lord.  
 Afterward the first son of the heirs of Cush  
 Ruled the realm and achieved renown.  
 Scriptures say that he was the mightiest man  
 In those ancient days, a powerful prince 1665  
 Of the kingdom of Babylon, the first to rule  
 That wide realm, extend its borders,  
 Establish its glory, fix its fame.  
 At that time all the men and women on earth  
 Spoke a common language, a single tongue. 1670  
 Likewise the people of Ham held power.

From Ham's stock many descendants sprang—  
His tribe was large, his people powerful.

Shem too had many fine, free-born sons  
And beautiful daughters before he met his rest. 1675  
The people in his long and abundant line  
Were steadfast and good. From his son Eber  
Sprang countless tribes that we now call  
The Hebrews. The proud people went east,  
Traveling with all their worldly wealth, 1680  
Their cattle and goods—a dauntless race.  
They sought a broader, less crowded land,  
Migrating in great numbers till they came  
To the broad plains and bright fields of Shinar,  
Whose high hills and verdant valleys 1685  
Might shelter and sustain them for many years.  
The earth was ample and rewarded their toil  
With abundant offerings, so the people prospered.  
There the multitudes cried out for craftsmen  
To create a great city with a tall tower 1690  
Reaching as high as heaven, a true token  
Of their own eminence in the land of Shinar,  
A place where powerful patriarchs would thrive,  
Before the tribes were scattered once more  
In their restless search for a richer land. 1695  
They chose to build in those beautiful fields  
Because mighty leaders, wise in years,  
Had lived there happily for a long time,  
But the proud builders began bickering  
About everything from craft to construction. 1700  
They were greedy for glory and wanted a hall  
To celebrate their skill and fix their fame.  
They raised ladders and built a city,  
Tall towers and stairways of stone,  
A height beyond measure, but the holy Lord, 1705  
Who needed no sign of human glory,  
In his gathering wrath gazed down upon  
That overreaching tower, that ascending sin,

And gave those proud earth-dwellers an odd gift  
 To thwart their plans—unintelligible tongues. 1710  
 Each tribe spoke a different language;  
 No one understood what his neighbor said.  
 Their craft was confounded, their master-plan  
 Unmade, their communication chaos.  
 The tower of Babel was an unholy monument 1715  
 To man's fierce pride, an unfinished folly.  
 The tribes left the city, endlessly divided  
 Not by a sword but by unshared speech—  
 One man's wisdom was another's blather.  
 Each was alien to the other, after almighty God 1720  
 Erased their understanding, The tribes scattered  
 In all four directions, searching for land.  
 Behind them rose a sign of undoing,  
 The half-built, abandoned tower of Shinar.  
 Then the tribe of Shem increased on earth 1725  
 And under heaven. One of his descendants,  
 Thoughtful and wise, dutiful and virtuous,  
 Had two noble sons born in Babylon,  
 Powerful princes, brave of heart,  
 Sage of spirit, Abraham and Haran. 1730  
 The Lord of angels was friend and elder  
 To both of those men who were bold leaders.  
 Haran bore a son whose name was Lot.  
 Abraham and Lot were noble lords  
 Who ruled the realm, its rightful inheritors. 1735  
 They were always held in high regard  
 By the children of men and the hosts of heaven.

Now the time finally arrived when Abraham  
 Married a beautiful, noble woman  
 And brought her home. Her name was Sarah, 1740  
 As the scriptures say. They prospered in peace  
 For many years, but she yielded no children,  
 No sons or heirs, as fate would have it.  
 Then Abraham's father set forth with his family  
 And goods out of the land of the Chaldeans, 1745  
 Seeking the land of Canaan. Abraham and Lot

Went on this journey, two loyal descendants  
 Chosen by God. These noble kinsmen,  
 Sons of patriarchs, then settled in Haran  
 Along with their wives, where Abraham's father, 1750  
 A worthy man, found his final rest  
 When he reached the age of two hundred five.  
 Then the Guardian of heaven, almighty God,  
 The eternal Lord, spoke to Abraham:  
 "Leave the land of Haran and your father's house— 1755  
 Set forth at once with your worldly wealth,  
 Goods for your offspring. Travel as I tell you,  
 Dearest of men, and I will lead you  
 To a lush country, a green homeland,  
 A sweet and sustaining countryside, 1760  
 Where you will thrive in my care and protection.  
 If an evil enemy should ever confront you,  
 I will curse and confound him with hostility  
 And lay agony and affliction upon his heart.  
 If you find a friend and neighbor who honors you, 1765  
 I will favor him and his family, offering them  
 My blessings and benefits. Through you, Abraham,  
 All earth-dwellers dear to my purpose  
 Shall find hope and happiness, a rich blessing.  
 Your sons and daughters will spread endlessly 1770  
 Under the sun, a splendid and prodigious race,  
 Until they inhabit many portions of the earth."  
 Then the great and gracious leader Abraham,  
 Generous and just, valued and virtuous,  
 Gathered his goods, his gold and silver, 1775  
 And left the land of Haran, leading his herds,  
 Wielding his wealth, heading for Canaan,  
 As God had commanded with his holy words.  
 Beloved of God, he came with his bride,  
 His wife and helpmate, his bed-companion, 1780  
 Along with Lot, his brother's son,  
 And his wife and family to claim his inheritance  
 When he was almost seventy-five years old.  
 God commanded Abraham to search the borderlands  
 Until he came to a place called Shechem in Canaan, 1785

Where he prospered. Then the Lord of angels,  
 The Leader of men, our God and Guardian,  
 Revealed himself to Abraham, saying:  
 “This is your homeland, bright and lush,  
 With fertile fields and green groves, 1790  
 Rich grain and ripe fruit, the promise of plenty.  
 Here you will have both blessing and bounty,  
 And your generations shall increase and thrive.  
 You and your heirs shall rule this realm.”  
 Then noble Abraham, the servant of God, 1795  
 Built an altar and offered his sacrifice  
 To the Lord of life, the Protector of souls.  
 Then Abraham traveled still farther east  
 To set his eyes on the best of lands.  
 Remembering the promise that his beloved Lord, 1800  
 The Guardian of heaven, the King of victories,  
 Had made to him through his holy word,  
 He began to seek for the best possible place  
 To build a home, till his family and followers  
 With their proud possessions, their worldly goods, 1805  
 Came at last to a rich place called Bethel.  
 The glad-hearted leader, the joyous lord,  
 Arrived from the east with his brother’s son,  
 Their beloved families, and a host of people,  
 Carrying their possessions over the high hills 1810  
 To this storied land with bright plains  
 And blooming groves, fair and fertile,  
 To shepherd their flocks, till their fields,  
 And flourish in faith under the eyes of God.

Then Abraham built another altar, 1815  
 Calling out to God with clear words,  
 Offering a sacrifice to the Lord of life,  
 The one who measures out all rewards,  
 Who gave him unsparingly the glorious gift  
 Of green growth on the earth again. 1820  
 Then the wise leader settled down  
 In his happy home with his wife Sarah—  
 Until a terrible calamity fell upon Canaan,



A fierce hunger, a lethal famine  
 That brought death to every household. 1825  
 Abraham was chosen and counseled by God  
 To seek refuge, sustenance, and safety,  
 In the land of Egypt. That faithful servant  
 Obeyed the Almighty and fled from woe.  
 That hunger-wolf was too greedy, too grim. 1830  
 When Abraham gazed at the high walls  
 And gabled halls of the Egyptian cities,  
 Brightly adorned, then the good husband  
 Began to instruct his bride, saying to Sarah:  
 “When the proud Egyptians at first behold 1835  
 Your elven beauty with their astonished eyes,  
 Some bold lord with a lustful heart  
 May rashly desire you and draw his sword  
 To unmake my marriage and take my life.  
 So, beloved Sarah, you must always say 1840  
 That you are my sister when strangers ask  
 How we are related and where we come from.  
 We will be siblings together on a strange trek  
 From a foreign land. Conceal the truth  
 And save my life if the Lord of peace 1845  
 Is willing in his wisdom to shield and sustain us,  
 Lending us longer life as he did before,  
 When we so often traded one land for another,  
 Leading our people on the long exile-road.  
 The Almighty ordained this journey for us, 1850  
 So that we might seek aid and advantage,  
 Food and favor, from the prosperous Egyptians.”  
 So Abraham, the daring and dauntless leader,  
 Traveled into Egypt with his kith and kin,  
 His worldly goods, and his faith in God. 1855  
 The Egyptians were alien to the noble outsider—  
 He knew no one in that strange land.  
 Powerful men gazed upon Sarah’s beauty,  
 Her royal bearing, her splendid grace.  
 They knew no one fairer than this fine woman 1860  
 And praised her to the prince, their liege-lord,  
 Who immediately ordered the foreign beauty

Brought to his hall so he could hold her there  
 In his own gaze, regarding her loveliness.  
 The treasure-giver, wealth-guardian, 1865  
 Also honored Abraham with many possessions.  
 But God was angry with this worldly prince,  
 The proud pharaoh, king of Egypt,  
 For his unseemly love of his servant Sarah,  
 For he desired the woman with wanton lust. 1870  
 So God sent down a terror to afflict Egypt  
 And all his household, a plague of pain.  
 Those powerful men paid dearly for their pleasure.  
 Pharaoh knew the source of his suffering,  
 The reason for God's unbridled wrath— 1875  
 Sarah's loveliness and his own longing.  
 Pharaoh ordered Abraham brought before him,  
 One holy terror in front of the other.  
 He gave Abraham back his beautiful bride,  
 Ordering him to seek friends elsewhere. 1880  
 He ordered his servants to escort Abraham  
 Honorably out of Egypt, uninjured, unimpaired,  
 So he could find peace in some other place.  
 Then Abraham took his worldly possessions  
 And went with his family and followers 1885  
 Away from Egypt and back to Bethel,  
 Their previous home. Brave heroes guarded  
 Both brides and rings, the treasures of the tribe.  
 Together they led their flocks and families,  
 Wives and wealth, to a propitious place 1890  
 Where they built homes and shaped a city,  
 Settling down, restructuring their lives.  
 They raised an altar near Abraham's old one,  
 Which was built when the patriarch first came  
 To that wondrous place in the unknown west. 1895  
 There the faithful leader who enjoyed God's favor  
 Lifted up the name of the Lord once more,  
 Sending his sacrifice in the embrace of flames  
 To the Leader of angels, the Lord of light,  
 The eternal Shaper and Sustainer of life, 1900

Thanking him once again for his gifts,  
And for leading them home to a thriving land.

Abraham and Lot lived in bliss and bounty.  
They shared their happiness in that new homeland  
Until the plains and pastures could not sustain them, 1905  
With crops crowding and people expanding,  
And they had to seek more spacious lands.  
Then the leaders often had to endure  
Conflicts and quarrels, feuds among herdsmen,  
Constant wrangling and severe strife. 1910  
So mindful of commitments and family honor,  
Abraham spoke plainly and fairly to Lot:  
“I am your father’s beloved brother;  
You are my brother’s beloved son.  
Kin should not quarrel or a family, feud. 1915  
God will not suffer such wounding strife.  
We are bound together forever by blood—  
Nothing should link us but enduring love.  
Now my noble nephew, consider this:  
Our borders are pressed by proud nations, 1920  
Canaanites and Pherizites, who crowd us together  
And cramp our space, provoking conflict.  
Their bold warriors and guarded lands  
Leave less and less room for us to expand.  
Let’s settle our differences and set out again 1925  
To seek new territories, traveling with God  
Guiding us on the road, leading us to new realms.  
I give you good counsel, son of Haran,  
A truth-speech to travel by. Think about it.  
Ask your heart which road to follow 1930  
With your family and herds. The choice is yours.”  
Then Lot left to seek the land near the Jordan  
With its green pastures and bright streams,  
Rich fields, harvest grains, ripe fruits,  
Succulent and sustaining as an earthly paradise, 1935  
Before our saving God, because of man’s sins,  
Gave Sodom and Gomorrah to the dark flames.

So Lot, son of Haran, settled in Sodom,  
 Bringing from Bethel his precious possessions,  
 Household goods and rings of twisted gold, 1940  
 Living many years with his family by the Jordan.  
 The land was good, and the crops were bountiful,  
 But the people of Sodom were ripe with sin,  
 Perverse in their pleasures, depraved in their deeds.  
 They had grown hateful to their own Creator 1945  
 And brought about their own grim undoing.  
 Lot would never adopt the shocking and shameful  
 Customs of that country—he abhorred evil  
 And shunned sin. He lived a stranger  
 In that loathsome land, pure of mind, 1950  
 Patient of spirit, following God’s counsel  
 With his whole heart, as if unaware  
 Of the degraded delights of that wicked nation.  
 Abraham stayed in the country of Canaan,  
 Where the mighty Maker protected him. 1955  
 The Guardian of angels, Lord of mankind,  
 Gave him full favor, worldly wealth,  
 His heart’s happiness, love and joy.  
 So generations later, we tell this story,  
 As children baptized in the bright waters 1960  
 Of our steadfast faith, honoring his name.  
 Wise and holy, he served God gladly  
 While he lived on earth and under heaven.  
 Never shall a man be defenseless today,  
 Or lack the Lord’s powerful protection, 1965  
 Or have any reason to fear his wrath,  
 If only he will steadfastly serve his Creator  
 In words and deeds, promise and purpose,  
 Spirit and speech, until death calls.  
 A man must be mindful of his Lord’s counsel— 1970  
 His heart must heed his holy commands.

Then I heard that King Chedorlaomer,  
 Lord of the Elamites, a bold leader  
 And brave captain, gathered a great army  
 And went to war. Amraphel of Shinar 1975

Supported his stance with a mighty host.  
 Four peoples' kings with their battle-companies  
 Marched south against Sodom and Gomorrah.  
 The homeland of the men of Jordan was overrun  
 With unwavering warriors, ferocious foes. 1980  
 Many pale maidens and beautiful brides  
 Had to go trembling into alien arms,  
 And evil embraces, for the brides' defenders  
 Had fallen in the fields, sick with war-wounds.  
 Then in righteous wrath and battle-rage 1985  
 Came five southern kings who fervently wished  
 To guard Sodom against its grim invaders.  
 For twelve hard years the southern peoples  
 Had paid tribute to their northern enemies  
 Till they could no longer stomach their shame— 1990  
 The price of peace was too high. They revolted  
 Against the Elamites, refusing to fill  
 Their fattened hoard any longer with gold.  
 Both hosts advanced with their savage hordes,  
 Eager for battle, bent on slaughter. 1995  
 Swords clashed, corselets sang, spears bit,  
 Bodies fell. Death-arrows filled the air.  
 The dark raven floated above the destruction,  
 Searching for carrion, screeching for blood,  
 A feast of flesh. Helmets crashed, 2000  
 Heads were bashed, both north and south—  
 There was no discrimination in death's dominion.  
 Battle-snakes hissed their venomous songs,  
 War-lances howled for the unbound heart,  
 Ring-adorned blades cut through the shouts 2005  
 To sever the spirit from a man's bone-house.  
 It was easy to separate precious war-booty  
 From wounded flesh for any living warrior  
 Who was not yet sated with sword-slash  
 Or any scavenger seeking to strip the dead. 2010  
 The northern men finally defeated their foes,  
 Trapped them in terror and tore them apart—  
 They were too fierce for the soldiers of Sodom.  
 The southern gold-givers lost their lives

And the precious treasure of their unprotected wives. 2015  
 Some managed to flee—most were slain.  
 Beloved battle-friends went down to death.  
 The sons of princes followed in their wake.  
 The leader of the Elamites held the battle-victory;  
 He ruled the field. His warriors seized the gold 2020  
 And sacked the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah,  
 Robbing households of wealth and wives.  
 Women were ripped from their sheltering homes—  
 Wives, widows, maidens. They led the losers,  
 Abraham's people, his kith and kin, 2025  
 From the city of Sodom, a pack of prisoners.  
 But all was not lost! Let's not forget  
 The rest of the story, reveal the fierce fate  
 Of the war-wolves who led Lot away,  
 Bragging of battle-prowess and cold courage, 2030  
 Boasting of victory as they boldly hauled off  
 Both wives and wealth, the spoils of war.  
 A survivor who fled the sword-slashing at Sodom  
 Sought out Abraham, the Hebrew leader,  
 And related to him Lot's fate, Sodom's defeat, 2035  
 Their loss of power and precious possessions.  
 Abraham grieved that his close kin,  
 His brother's son, should suffer slavery.  
 He mourned Lot's fate and mentioned it  
 To his comrades, Aner, Mamre, and Eshcol, 2040  
 Asking for their aid in his time of need.  
 He wanted these warriors to devise a plan  
 To free his beloved nephew with his bride,  
 Both bound in thrall to cruel conquerors.  
 The three brothers, known for their battle-skill, 2045  
 Promised Abraham in solemn counsel  
 To slay his enemies in righteous wrath  
 Or fall dying on the field of slaughter.  
 They healed Abraham's heart with their hard words.  
 Then the holy man ordered his hearth-retainers 2050  
 To take up their weapons. Three hundred eighteen  
 Bold spear-wielders, loyal to their lord,  
 Lifted their linden shields and left for battle.

Abraham and the three unwavering warriors,  
 Faithful to their lord, led the way to rescue Lot 2055  
 From his slavery and suffering, comrades carrying  
 Both faith and fury, righteousness and wrath.  
 When these battle-wolves were near the war-camp,  
 Abraham, heir of Terah, sagest of spear-bearers,  
 Counseled his captains on the coming battle, 2060  
 Suggesting that they set up a siege in two flanks,  
 Engage the enemy from divided directions,  
 Thrusting in a powerful pincer movement,  
 A double assault of swords and spears,  
 A savage battle-thrust with grim sword-play. 2065  
 He had carefully devised a cunning plan.  
 Abraham predicted success in the spear-rush,  
 A bold battle-victory through God's great power.  
 The soldiers advanced under the night-shadow—  
 As we have heard in the scripted story— 2070  
 Spears striking, shields clashing, corselets ringing.  
 The air was alive with the ache of arrows,  
 The suffering of swords. The boldest blade-wielders,  
 The bravest bowmen, followed their weapons  
 On the savage field to the slaughter-bed. 2075  
 Enemy soldiers drank death where before in battle  
 They had pillaged bodies like savage scavengers,  
 Riding their rage, roaring with laughter.  
 Abraham and his comrades quashed that army  
 Of northern wolves. He offered no ransom 2080  
 Of worldly goods or wrought gold  
 For his noble nephew, except of course  
 A treasure of blood, a gift of blades.  
 The Lord and Creator was Abraham's ally—  
 He smote the unholy host of heathens. 2085  
 The four enemy armies flew in terror,  
 Fleeing sword-slash, spear-thrust, arrow-bite—  
 The anger of Abraham, the ire of God.  
 They were pursued by an unrelenting power,  
 A host of Abraham's hearth-retainers, 2090  
 The fiercely faithful servants of the Lord.  
 Death claimed many enemy lives,

A clutch of corpses, a carrion feast.  
 On the slaughter-field lay those loathsome fiends  
 Who had looted Sodom and Gomorrah and slain 2095  
 The warriors of Lot, stealing their wives,  
 Their worldly wealth, their pride and power.  
 Now they found grief in place of gold,  
 Death in place of the battle-delight  
 Of bearing off women. Lot's uncle offered 2100  
 No trade or treasure, no residue of life's  
 Earlier pleasures or earthly joys.  
 Their gifts were grim, their lives lost.  
 The lords and leaders of the army of Elam  
 Who fled from death headed for Damascus. 2105  
 Abraham gave them a grim good-bye.  
 Lot was freed, the treasures retaken,  
 The women returned to their rightful homes  
 In the fond embrace of their own families.  
 Back on the battlefield, savage birds 2110  
 Swooped down on the bloodied bodies,  
 Screeching delight in their carrion joy,  
 Tearing at eyes, arms, sinews, tendons,  
 Calling their comrades to the battle-feast.  
 Abraham carried back the southern treasures, 2115  
 The brides and maidens. No man on middle-earth  
 Has ever achieved such great success  
 With such a small army against all odds.

The battle-news promptly spread south  
 To the nation of Sodom, proclaiming the rout 2120  
 Of those fierce foes. The lord of that nation,  
 Deprived of his forces, bereft of friends,  
 Came looking for Abraham. He brought along  
 The famous Melchizedek, treasure-keeper,  
 High priest of the people, a powerful bishop, 2125  
 Bearing bright gifts and God's blessing  
 To mighty Abraham, the victory-lord, saying:  
 "Abraham, you are honored among heroes  
 In the eyes of God, who gave you the glorious  
 Gift of ash-spears and gleaming swords 2130



To slash through your savage enemies,  
 Carve a bloody swath through your fierce foes,  
 A road of wrath, a hard path of pain.  
 That company was waiting in a cruel camp  
 To descend upon you, dealing out death 2135  
 In grim combat, but God himself  
 And your great army expelled that evil,  
 Banned that bane, put the faithless to flight.  
 Through his might you managed a great victory,  
 As God was your shield over superior numbers. 2140  
 You conquered an army through your covenant  
 With the Lord of heaven, Guardian of men.”  
 Then Melchisedech gladly granted Abraham  
 A gift of blessing by his own hand,  
 And Abraham gave God’s faithful bishop 2145  
 One-tenth of the booty the army collected.  
 Then the great war-king of Sodom spoke,  
 Deprived of his people, desperate for favor:  
 “Abraham, now that you have vanquished your foe,  
 Return to me the handmaidens you have rescued 2150  
 From bale and bondage, terror and torment.  
 Keep all the treasures of twisted gold,  
 The worldly wealth, the precious herds.  
 Let me lead home the women and children,  
 Wives and widows, who have suffered enough. 2155  
 Let’s give the wretched the gift of freedom,  
 Those heirs who have escaped death’s dark net,  
 Surviving now on the borderlands of woe.”  
 Then Abraham, honored in virtue and valor,  
 Exalted in victory, answered the bishop, 2160  
 Speaking plainly before the assembled people:  
 “Noble ruler, prince of men, I promise  
 Before the holy Lord of heaven and earth,  
 To take no bright treasure, no worldly wealth,  
 No gold coins or engraved artifacts, 2165  
 No sword or silver I have rescued in combat  
 From enemy archers, brazen bowmen—  
 Lest you and your people should later say  
 That I have grown rich on the spoils of Sodom.

You can carry home all the battle-booty I've won 2170  
 Except the shares of these noble leaders,  
 Aner and Mamre, and also Eshcol.  
 I cannot renege on my promise to them—  
 They deserve their reward for hard combat  
 And sustaining great injury on the battlefield. 2175  
 They fought fiercely for your care and comfort.  
 Go home with your treasure of gifts and gold,  
 Wives and maidens, your worldly wealth.  
 You are finally done with your dread of the northmen,  
 Who now lie lost on the fiercest of fields, 2180  
 A sumptuous feast for carrion crows,  
 The ravenous eagle with a blood-smeared beak,  
 The voracious birds who feed on flesh.”  
 Then the keeper went home with the battle-gifts  
 That gracious Abraham, mindful of favors, 2185  
 Had freely given him. Then the High-king of heaven  
 Appeared again to the Hebrew leader,  
 Bringing comfort to his heart, solace to his soul,  
 With his holy words, saying to the prince:  
 “Your rewards are now great. Keep courage, 2190  
 Revere wisdom, and respect my will.  
 The steadfast spirit should never slacken,  
 The strong faith falter. Heed my counsel  
 And have no fear of any fierce enemies.  
 With my own hands I will shield and sustain you 2195  
 Through all the days of your enduring life.”

Afterwards, Abraham, wise in years,  
 A worthy man, answered his Lord:  
 “Almighty God, Guardian of souls,  
 What can you give me, a man without heirs, 2200  
 A father without sons, a prince without progeny?  
 I need no wealth, no treasure to take home,  
 No hoard to hold or pass on as inheritance.  
 My blood relatives will divide my wealth.  
 My heart is a cold cache of sorrow— 2205  
 For this agony I know no comfort or counsel.  
 My steward rejoices in the rewards to come

When he and his heirs will inherit my wealth  
 In trust for the tribe. My wife's womb  
 Has always been empty. At night I dream 2210  
 Of a succession of sons. At daybreak I wake  
 To the slow ache of a fatherless dawn."  
 Then almighty God answered Abraham:  
 "Your steward shall never inherit your goods,  
 Your family wealth. Your own proud son 2215  
 Will inherit and thrive when your flesh fails  
 And lies in the ground. Behold the sky,  
 The heavenly canopy that holds a treasure  
 Of countless star-stones, ethereal gems  
 That scatter their light over fields and plains, 2220  
 The curve of the earth, the spread of the sea.  
 How many stars inhabit the heavens?  
 As many as the multitude you and Sarah shall bear,  
 Your children's children, your dear descendants,  
 A great tribe passing down through time. 2225  
 I promise you progeny. Lift up your spirits,  
 Chafe no more in your childless sorrow.  
 I will send you a son in Sarah's womb  
 Who will grow into greatness, gathering grace,  
 To be a wielder of wealth, warden of the tribe, 2230  
 When you are long gone. Do not lament  
 What is not lost. Remember our history,  
 This sacred story. I am the Lord your God,  
 The guardian and guide who many years ago  
 Led you out of the Chaldean land 2235  
 With a small band of faithful followers,  
 Your dear and devoted kith and kin,  
 And gave you the gift of this wide homeland.  
 Now I give you my covenant, prince of the Hebrews,  
 So that countless kingdoms across the earth 2240  
 Shall be settled in time by your prolific descendants.  
 They will inhabit the earth as far as the Euphrates,  
 From the borders of Egypt, where the Nile divides  
 Two kingdoms, to the Mediterranean coast.  
 Your sons will possess and rule these realms, 2245  
 Keeping contained these several kingdoms,

Just as the rivers and surrounding sea  
 Contain the homeland of countless tribes,  
 Their broad fields and high, stone cities.”  
 But Sarah sorrowed that she had borne no son 2250  
 As Abraham’s heir and the people’s solace  
 Through their dear love and fellowship in bed.  
 So she spoke to her husband with a troubled heart:  
 “The Lord of heaven has left me childless,  
 Without hope of bearing a son and heir 2255  
 And increasing your tribe here under heaven.  
 I’ve lost my hope for a boy in the house.  
 My old heart mourns to offer this counsel:  
 Take this Egyptian servant, a beautiful maiden,  
 And command her now to climb into your bed 2260  
 To see if the Lord will lift up his ban  
 On your sons through this other woman’s womb.”  
 Then Abraham submitted to Sarah’s counsel  
 And invited the servant to his bridal bed,  
 Where in the night’s play she became pregnant. 2265  
 As her belly swelled with Abraham’s son,  
 Her heart grew proud, her spirit arrogant,  
 And she scorned servitude, mocking her mistress,  
 Embracing indolence, causing family strife.  
 She knew she was bearing Abraham’s only son 2270  
 And was determined to be ruled by no one.  
 Now I’ve heard this story many times,  
 That Sarah brought her husband an anguished heart,  
 Speaking these words of bitter complaint:  
 “My lord, you have not done right by me 2275  
 In giving the handmaiden Hagar such power  
 Through the bed-play that even I counseled  
 To bear you a son, my beloved husband,  
 While I must be both faithful and unfertile.  
 She mocks me maliciously day and night 2280  
 With her words and deeds. She delights in my sorrow.  
 But she shall have her own bitter atonement  
 If I am allowed to rule her rightfully.  
 Let almighty God be the judge of this strife.”  
 Then the wise-minded man answered Sarah: 2285

“You will never be without honor in our house  
 As long as we live. Deal with your servant,  
 As your heart desires. She’s yours to rule.”

Then Sarah’s heart grew hard and cruel,  
 Merciless toward her proud handmaiden. 2290  
 She threw off envy and embraced anger,  
 Wielding words like bitter arrows.  
 So Hagar fled from Sarah’s fierce threats  
 And her shameful slavery. She had no desire  
 To endure Sarah’s wrath and retribution 2295  
 For her proud ways. She went into the wilderness  
 To hide from hatred. Then a servant of glory,  
 An angel of the Lord, found her suffering,  
 Wrapt in sorrow, and eagerly asked her:  
 “Where are you heading, my unhappy Hagar? 2300  
 Are you not still owned as Sarah’s servant?”  
 Hagar immediately answered the angel:  
 “Mired in the misery of my own making,  
 I fled from woe, from the dangerous threat  
 Of Sarah’s wrath, her savage spite. 2305  
 My agony is endless, my fate is fierce—  
 In this feral wilderness, I wait for wolves  
 To tear my flesh and gnaw my bones—  
 Or some savage hunger to unbless my belly,  
 Drawing the grief from my aching heart.” 2310  
 Then the angel answered the unhappy Hagar:  
 “Cease your suffering, your choking sorrow,  
 Your unwise desire to leave your lord.  
 Let your heart be humble, return home,  
 Earn the honor of your rightful mistress 2315  
 And the faith and favor of your beloved lord.  
 Soon you shall bear the son of Abraham  
 Into this world. Hear my true words:  
 You shall name this boy Ishmael, a man  
 Among men. He shall be a wild warrior, 2320  
 Strife-seeker, battle-brawler, corpse-maker,  
 A demon to his foes. He shall set his hand  
 To sword and shield to slake his thirst

For combat against enemies and kinsmen.  
 Many will struggle against his strong arms. 2325  
 From this patriarch's seed countless nations  
 Shall arise, people numberless as the stars.  
 Return home to your master, humble yourself  
 Before your lord. Declare your devotion  
 To those you must serve. Embrace your owners 2330  
 And your hidden destiny. Heal your heart."  
 Hagar returned home as the angel ordered,  
 The holy messenger with his wise words,  
 And bowed down humbly before her lord.  
 So Ishmael was born at last to Abraham, 2335  
 Even though he was eighty-six years old.  
 The son grew strong and flourished there,  
 As the angel of peace had promised Hagar.  
 Sometime later, after thirteen years,  
 The eternal Lord said to Abraham: 2340  
 "My blessed and beloved one, keep our covenant  
 As I have commanded. Be true to my teaching,  
 Eager to obey me, ready to work my will,  
 And I will fulfill my long-standing promise  
 To ease your pain because you have suffered, 2345  
 Gladden your heart, and sanctify your household.  
 Set the true sign of victory on each male  
 If you want me to be Lord and loyal friend  
 To you and all of your worthy descendants.  
 I will be shepherd and guardian of your people 2350  
 If you obey my laws and keep my commandments.  
 Each male child born into the tribe of men  
 Shall be circumcised after seven nights,  
 Marked with a victory-sign on the eighth day,  
 A token of my favor and our shared bond, 2355  
 Or be driven from the face of the earth  
 And my abiding protection, an exile and outlaw  
 Without wealth, without faith.  
 Do as I ask and I will keep our covenant—  
 The chosen must be marked with this sacred sign. 2360  
 Now, beloved Abraham, your wife Sarah  
 Shall bear you a son with my sure blessing,

Whom men shall name Isaac. Have no shame  
 For this late-born son, for I will bestow on him  
 Godly gifts, wealth and a winning way, 2365  
 Family and friends, divine favor,  
 Peace and prosperity, love and learning.  
 From that patriarch a progeny will spring—  
 Lords and leaders of a powerful people,  
 Warriors and princes, leaders and kings, 2370  
 Wielders of a nation renowned in the world.”

Then wise Abraham fell down laughing  
 With his face on the ground. The droll idea  
 That gray-haired Sarah could conceive a son  
 At the age of a hundred was wholly ridiculous. 2375  
 The Lord’s words were wildly absurd—  
 He could hardly keep his scoffing to himself.  
 Then old Abraham, who kept count of the years,  
 Worldly-wise, answered back to God:  
 “May Ishmael, my son with the servant Hagar, 2380  
 Live according to all your commandments,  
 Offer you thanks, carry out your will  
 With a resolute mind and a steadfast heart,  
 By his words and deeds both day and night.”  
 Then the almighty Lord answered Abraham: 2385  
 “Though old in years and worn with winters,  
 Sarah shall bear you a son in this world,  
 And your seed shall spread endlessly over earth,  
 Fulfilling my promise of a great progeny.  
 I will bless Ishmael, your first-born son, 2390  
 As you have requested, so his race will multiply  
 All over the land—I grant you this gift.  
 But I will bless even more your son Isaac,  
 Who is coming into this world as a great wonder,  
 With an abundance of joy, a surety of salvation. 2395  
 I will love him through the length of his days  
 And fulfill in him my heartfelt promise,  
 Keeping my covenant with him forever.”  
 Abraham followed his Lord’s command,  
 Ordering his son to bear the sacred sign 2400

Of peace and protection, a holy circumcision—  
 And also the men of his extended household.  
 Wise in spirit and committed to the covenant  
 With almighty God, he also received  
 The glorious sign. His Creator and King 2405  
 Increased his wealth with worldly goods  
 Since he had obeyed his every command.

\* \* \*

Then Sarah laughed at the Lord of hosts,  
 Not at all happily. After many long years,  
 She had laid down all dreams of a son. 2410  
 She scoffed at God and set aside his prophecy.  
 She couldn't conceive of such a miracle  
 Or keep faith in God's promise of fertility.  
 When the Lord of heaven heard the news  
 That the wife of Abraham was laughing 2415  
 Helplessly, hopelessly, in her bedchamber,  
 He reaffirmed his sacred pledge, saying:  
 "Sarah will not take the truth in what I've said  
 Or believe in this nascent miracle in the making—  
 Even so I will keep my steadfast word, 2420  
 The promise of pregnancy and a male heir.  
 Listen now to the truth of the Lord:  
 In this same season on my next journey,  
 A son shall be born to you and your bride.  
 When I return again to this hearth and home, 2425  
 A multitude of promises will be fulfilled,  
 The pledge of progeny, the gift of countless  
 Generations to come. And you Abraham  
 Will see that fulfillment with your own eyes."

Then after this counsel, they quickly departed, 2430  
 Lot's kinsman and his family, the holy ones  
 Eager to be gone. They traveled until  
 They could gaze upon Sodom, the city of sin,  
 With its shimmering towers and treasure-halls,  
 Palaces of pleasure wreathed in red gold. 2435  
 Then the righteous Ruler of high heaven  
 Spoke to Abraham in no uncertain terms:



“I hear the proud bawling and brawling  
 Of unrighteous men who are snared in sin,  
 The deafening din of roaring drunkards, 2440  
 The shameful speech of evil people,  
 Their brazen boasts, their wicked words,  
 Their envious whispers behind these walls.  
 The faults of the faith-breakers are numberless;  
 The torments of these traitors shall be endless. 2445  
 I will find out these countless covenant-wreckers,  
 Man of the Hebrews, and see if their sins  
 Are so darkly perverse in such devious ways—  
 From the habit of their minds to the way of their words,  
 From the drag of their deeds to the clutch of their crimes— 2450  
 That they shall be punished with the endless pain  
 Of brimstone and dark flames, grim and greedy,  
 Feeding in fury on that pagan people.”

\* \* \*

Within the walls of Sodom, men and women  
 Were ripe for reaping suffering and sorrow. 2455  
 Proud of their wealth, they insulted God,  
 Paying the Lord back with evil for good,  
 Until the Guardian of souls, the Source and Sustainer  
 Of light and life, could tolerate their offenses  
 No longer, so he offered them the gift 2460  
 Of unleashed anger. Stern and steadfast,  
 God sent two mighty angelic messengers  
 Who arrived at the gates of Sodom in the evening,  
 Where they found the son of Haran sitting.  
 They seemed like young travelers to the sage. 2465  
 Then the Lord’s servant Lot greeted them,  
 Mindful of etiquette with the ethereal strangers,  
 Offering them safety and shelter for the night.  
 The messengers of God gave him an answer:  
 “We thank you for your courtesy and kindness, 2470  
 Your faith and favor, but we must remain here  
 Until the Lord lifts up the morning sun.”  
 Then Lot bowed down before the strangers,  
 Offering them food and rest in his own house,  
 Refreshment and refuge from the open night, 2475

A welcome gift of hearth and home.  
 The angels thanked him for his kind favor  
 And followed the Hebrew leader home  
 To enjoy a feast and friendly hospitality,  
 Trading talk until the light faded 2480  
 At evening's end. Then night unfolded,  
 Clothing the sea with encroaching shadows,  
 Blanketing the broad land with darkness,  
 Gathering in its endless arms all earthly glory.  
 Then the sinful inhabitants of the city of Sodom, 2485  
 Young and old, who were unloved by God,  
 Surrounded Lot's house in a great force,  
 Demanding to see the unwelcome strangers,  
 Aliens from abroad. They ordered Lot  
 To lead his visitors out of his home 2490  
 And offer them up to the waiting crowd,  
 Shamelessly shouting in rough words  
 That they wanted to have sex with the strangers,  
 The uninvited guests. They knew no decency.  
 Then Lot, son of Haran, servant of the Lord, 2495  
 Rose up to meet the ungracious multitude.  
 He was shrewd of mind, crafty of counsel,  
 As he spoke to the hostile horde, saying:  
 "Inside my house are two pure maidens,  
 My own dear daughters, neither of whom 2500  
 Has ever known the passion of bed-play  
 With a man. Hear now my counsel:  
 Cease this hostility, forsake this sin.  
 Leave these holy houseguests alone.  
 I will offer up my own beloved daughters, 2505  
 Before I will give up these godly guests.  
 Take these maidens before you shamefully commit  
 A sin against creation and the sons of men.  
 I will staunchly protect these men if I must  
 And defend them all before God." 2510  
 Then the shameless crowd answered back:  
 "By rights you should leave our land.  
 You came here an exile, empty-handed,  
 Without friends and needing them. It's odd that you

Should assume unquestioned authority over us. 2515  
 Is it your privilege to be our teacher?  
 Our leader? The prince of our people?”  
 Then as the story goes, the heathen hordes  
 Laid hands on Lot, driven by hostility,  
 But his holy guests in their righteous wrath 2520  
 Helped him then, drawing him back  
 From the clutches of those cruel men,  
 Then sealed the eyesight of all the attackers.  
 Those brazen heathens, the sinners of Sodom,  
 Were struck blind. They could not see 2525  
 To take one step, let alone storm the house  
 In a savage assault against the strangers.  
 The now grim guests, the messengers of God,  
 Those spirits embodied a holy energy,  
 Braved the mob and backed them down. 2530  
 The day belonged to the angelic defenders—  
 They punished the people who assailed Lot.  
 Then the angels of power, the ministers of peace,  
 Spoke gently and reverently to their beloved host:  
 “Lot, leave this city with your kith and kin. 2535  
 If you have a cherished son, a dear daughter,  
 A fond friend, take them all immediately away  
 From this den of iniquity, this city of sin.  
 Flee from Sodom and save your lives,  
 Lest you perish with these faith-breakers, 2540  
 For the Lord has commanded us without constraint  
 To shatter the city of Sodom and Gomorrah,  
 Destroy its inhabitants, demolish its homes,  
 Drag every living being into dark fire,  
 Slaughter this nation without remorse, 2545  
 Raze this evil land which imagines itself  
 Beyond God’s wrath. The hour draws near.  
 Set out on the road to save your life.  
 The Lord has granted his faithful followers  
 The gift of mercy. Now make haste.” 2550

\* \* \*

[Then Lot warned his wife and daughters,  
 Who listened to him and prepared to flee—

But his sons-in-law laughed at Lot  
 And mocked him for being a fearful fool.  
 So the angelic strangers set Lot on the road 2555  
 Away from the city with his wife and daughters,  
 Telling them not to tarry or look back  
 At the conflagration lest they also be consumed.  
 Lot thanked the angels for leading them out,  
 But he feared for his family on this long journey,] 2560  
 So he stopped and said quickly to the strangers:  
 “We cannot travel far on foot with these women  
 In search of shelter. I ask you to grant me  
 The favor and friendship of close kin  
 And a pledge of protection in this terrible time. 2565  
 The high city of Zoar is not far away.  
 There we can find respite and repose,  
 Safety and security. If you will shield that town  
 From the blazing wrath of righteous flames,  
 We can seek shelter there and save our lives.” 2570  
 Then the righteous answered in friendship:  
 “We will give you the gift that you have requested  
 And save you from torment in that nearby city.  
 Go with your family and find a good shelter.  
 We must bring down the rage and wrath of God 2575  
 On these sinners who break the Lord’s laws,  
 But we will protect you and keep you in peace  
 After you have secured your family in Zoar.”  
 So the kinsmen of Abraham set out for shelter.  
 Their leader Lot did not spare the pace 2580  
 For the women until they came to Zoar.  
 When the sun rose—the peace-candle for some,  
 The death-sign for others—I’ve heard that the Lord,  
 The Guardian of glory, sent down a gift  
 Of brimstone and black flame in righteous wrath, 2585  
 His vengeance upon those vile-hearted sinners  
 Who had scorned his laws and mocked his teaching  
 For so long. His reward was hard retribution.  
 Torment and terror seized the unholy heathens—  
 Devastation and death came raining down. 2590  
 God’s flame seized everything green—

Groves, gardens, fields, fruit, grass, grain—  
 Everything growing, everything springing,  
 From sprout to seedling, tendril to tree.  
 The only thing harvested afterwards was ashes. 2595  
 The curse and conflagration devoured everything  
 In Sodom and Gomorrah. Nothing survived.  
 When Lot's wife heard the howling flames,  
 The crackling sound of the blazing rain,  
 And the shrieking of sinners inside the city, 2600  
 She turned back to gaze on the fiery destruction  
 Against God's command—and the scriptures say  
 She was suddenly turned into a pillar of salt  
 And stands there still outside the city  
 Where the vengeance of God's holy wrath 2605  
 Seized her along with all of the sinners  
 Because she ignored the advice of the angels.  
 Stiff as stone, bitter as salt, she stands alone  
 On the plains of Sodom awaiting doom  
 On that dark day when the world winds down, 2610  
 And she wakes up and walks home to judgment.  
 The God of glory made that miracle,  
 The wondrous riddle of the wife of salt.  
 Then Abraham went out alone at dawn  
 To the place where he had spoken with God 2615  
 And saw the slaughter-grim smoke of death,  
 Rising and reeking across the land.  
 Those burnt bodies had once been proud people  
 Feasting, carousing, drinking, swearing,  
 Mired in sin. They traded untruth 2620  
 For flaming terror, unholy desires  
 For unexpected death. In their wicked greed  
 They forgot the one who protected them all,  
 Providing prosperity, dealing out wealth,  
 So the Lord of angels sent them a message 2625  
 In hot waves of fire. They heard that warning  
 For at least a moment before they died.  
 But God was gracious and merciful to Abraham,  
 And recalling the covenant, saved his kinsman  
 From the cruel flames, sparing Lot's life, 2630

While the people of Sodom and Gomorrah perished.  
 Then fearing the Lord, the famous leader  
 Left the city with his two dear daughters,  
 Seeking a home far from the flames,  
 The blaze of wrath, the stench of slaughter. 2635  
 They traveled till they came to a cliffside cave  
 Where they settled in. Lot lived there,  
 Keeping the covenant for many days,  
 A pious man precious to the Lord.

\* \* \*

[Then the elder daughter said to the younger: 2640  
 “There is no man left alive to lie with us  
 Except our father. Let’s get him drunk  
 And delivered to bed so we can bear children.”]  
 The eldest went first to her father’s bed  
 As he lay wine-drunk and easily deceived. 2645  
 The old man never knew he sinned in his sleep,  
 Delighting in love-play with his own daughters.  
 He was caught unknowing, his heart constrained,  
 His mind befuddled, his memory dim.  
 The young maidens both became pregnant, 2650  
 Two sisters bearing the sons of their father,  
 Each the brother and cousin of the other.  
 The son of the elder sister was Moab,  
 And the scriptures say the son of the younger  
 Was named Ben-ammi. From each of these princes 2655  
 A progeny sprang up, two noble nations—  
 One made up of the famed Moabites,  
 And the other, the illustrious Ammonites.

Then the brother of Haran set out with his bride,  
 Leading his possessions and household people 2660  
 To the land of Abimelech. Abraham told everyone  
 That Sarah was his sister—thus saving his life—  
 For he had few family or friends, kith or kin,  
 In that foreign land. Then the king sent his officers  
 To bring back the beautiful woman to him. 2665  
 This was the second time that the wife of Abraham  
 Was ordered into the arms of another man,

Receiving the unwelcome advances of a stranger,  
 But our Lord and Savior assisted Abraham  
 As he had often done. God descended at night 2670  
 To the bed where the brazen ruler lay,  
 Drunk on wine. The Lord of truth  
 Threatened the king, menacing the man  
 In a dangerous dream-voice, saying to him:  
 “You have shamelessly seized the bride of Abraham. 2675  
 For that despicable deed, death shall rise up  
 And rip out the soul from inside your breast.”  
 Then the desperate dreamer, the sharer of sins,  
 Gorged with food, weary with wine,  
 Said to the Lord in his heavy-hearted sleep: 2680  
 “Lord of angels, would you ever allow  
 Such a virtuous ruler to lose his life,  
 A man who faithfully follows your laws,  
 Keeps your counsel, and looks now for mercy?  
 This woman told me she was Abraham’s sister 2685  
 In her own words, unprompted, unpressured.  
 I have not yet savored a sin, committed a crime,  
 Or engaged in evil with this supposed sister.”  
 Then the Lord of truth, the righteous Creator,  
 Eternal, almighty, answered the king 2690  
 At the edge of wrath, deep in the dream:  
 “Give Abraham back his wife, his beautiful bride,  
 His heart’s treasure, if you desire to live  
 Any longer in this world as protector of your people.  
 Abraham is blessed, worthy and wise. 2695  
 He beholds the God of radiance and wrath—  
 He speaks to the Lord of light and life.  
 If you refuse to return this warrior’s wife,  
 You will perish with all your earthly possessions  
 And suddenly, savagely, drop down dead. 2700  
 About this terror, there can be no question.  
 If my virtuous servant intercedes for you,  
 He can relay your message, pass on your prayer,  
 And if he asks for my mercy not menace,  
 I will let you survive to live out your days 2705  
 In peace and prosperity, satisfaction and joy.”

Then the worldly watcher, protector of his people,  
 Was torn from sleep, shaking with terror.  
 King Abimelech called in his wise counselors,  
 Conveying the ominous dream-words of God. 2710  
 He related the warning—they feared retribution,  
 Hovering in terror from the hand of God.  
 Then Abimelech ordered Abraham brought  
 Before the council and spoke to that sage:  
 “Leader of the Hebrews, honored guest, 2715  
 Tell me what I have done to displease you  
 And your family since you came to my kingdom?  
 What is this plot you’ve contrived against me?  
 What is this dream-snare you set for my soul?  
 Why have you brought your foreign family, 2720  
 Your alien ideas into our homeland,  
 Polluting us all with seduction and sin?  
 You told me that Sarah was your sister,  
 Related by blood. Your tongue is twisted,  
 Your words are false. Your so-called sister 2725  
 Was a snare for sin. We offered you honor,  
 Gave you a place among our people,  
 Friendship and favor, hearth and home.  
 Now you give us not thanks but threats  
 And remain ungrateful for all our favors.” 2730

Then Abraham answered King Abimelech:  
 “I have not done this out of hatred or hostility,  
 Terror or treachery, or wishing you woe.  
 I did it for protection, prince of this people, 2735  
 Fearing battle-play and sword-strife, far from kin,  
 After the holy one led me from my father’s house.  
 Without friends, my wife and I were forced  
 To seek shelter with strangers in a foreign land.  
 I have lived with the threat that some fierce foe  
 Might menace or murder me to seize my wife. 2740  
 So I’ve always said that Sarah was my sister,  
 Wherever we’ve wandered on the exile’s road  
 Or settled down in some alien nation.  
 I lied to save my life and protect my wife,



Not knowing whether you loved the Lord 2745  
 As a faithful follower and lived by his laws.  
 I carefully concealed from you and your counselors  
 The truth that Sarah is the bride of my bed.”  
 Then Abimelech understood Abraham’s words,  
 Accepted his honesty, and began to reward him 2750  
 With worldly wealth, an abundance of treasure,  
 Returning Sarah to her husband’s arms.  
 He gave Abraham both silver and servants,  
 Sizable herds and gleaming gold.  
 Then the people’s protector said to Abraham: 2755  
 “Live with us here in this noble land—  
 Be our faithful friend and close companion.  
 We’ll receive you with honor, reward you with riches.  
 I must have you here, noble Abraham.  
 Put down your roots in this adopted homeland.” 2760  
 Then the great treasure-giver said to Sarah:  
 “Your lord and husband should not complain,  
 Revile or reproach you for sharing this house  
 Or walking these halls, my elf-bright beauty.  
 I have paid a debt for my unwitting error 2765  
 With precious silver. Promise me this:  
 Do not leave this land or dare to depend  
 On the kindness of strangers. Settle down here.”  
 Abraham took Abimelech’s advice to heart,  
 Accepting the king’s counsel, friendship, favor, 2770  
 And his promise of peace. He was loved by God,  
 Defended by his Guardian, the Lord of angels,  
 Under the wings of heaven wherever he went.  
 Still the Lord remained angry at Abimelech  
 For the crime he’d committed against Abraham 2775  
 And his wife Sarah when he sinfully separated  
 That bold leader from his lovely bride.  
 Abimelech paid a heavy debt for his deed,  
 For he found that no woman in his wide kingdom  
 Could conceive a child or increase the heirs 2780  
 Of her lord and husband by means of love-play,  
 Whether she was free-born or a bound servant.  
 The Lord kept them all infertile until Abraham

Began to pray for forgiveness for Abimelech.  
 The Guardian of angels granted his prayer, 2785  
 Restoring fertility to the women of that world,  
 Who could then conceive. The almighty Lord,  
 Ruler of heaven, finally lifted his feud  
 With Abimelech as Abraham had entreated,  
 Offering him mercy and the promise of favor, 2790  
 Increasing the prosperity and progeny of his people.  
 Then the almighty Lord, who holds in his hand  
 The gift of life, set out to see Sarah  
 And fulfill his promise to both husband and wife.  
 A son was born to them, bearing the name 2795  
 That the Lord of angels had given to him  
 Even before his mother was pregnant.  
 The Lord named the noble son Isaac.  
 With his own hand Abraham firmly set  
 God's radiant sign on his beloved son 2800  
 About a week after his dear mother Sarah  
 Offered this gift to the world of mankind.

Abraham was one hundred years old  
 When Sarah bore him a strapping son.  
 He had waited years since the holy Lord 2805  
 Had created their covenant, pledging his word  
 To fulfill the promise of that day's joy.  
 The boy Isaac grew strong and sturdy,  
 Noble in nature, wise like his father.  
 Soon Sarah, the noble woman, began to notice 2810  
 Ishmael playing with his father Abraham  
 As they sat making mirth at a meal together,  
 A joyful family at their festive dinner,  
 Drinking and singing, regaling one other.  
 Then Sarah spoke as a wife to her husband: 2815  
 "Forgive me, my dear lord and husband,  
 Giver of rings, keeper of the household treasure,  
 For what I must ask. I beg you to order Hagar  
 To depart from this house, taking Ishmael along.  
 We can no longer live under one roof 2820  
 If I have my way. Two mothers in this house

Is one too many. Two sons cannot share  
 A single inheritance. There are too many heirs  
 Who will have their own families to sustain  
 When your life departs at last from your body.” 2825  
 Then Abraham’s vexed heart grew heavy  
 At having to exile his own dear son,  
 But God was ready to rescue Ishmael  
 From a family feud and comfort Abraham,  
 For he saw that his spirit was sorely troubled. 2830  
 So the King of angels said gently to him:  
 “Leave your grief and this song of sorrow—  
 Unlock your heartache and listen to Sarah.  
 Let her have her way. Tell Ishmael and Hagar  
 To hasten from home and leave this land. 2835  
 I will give power to Ishmael over many people  
 And a wealth of sons that spring from his seed.  
 His life will be ample, his joys abundant.  
 This is my boon and bond. You have my word.”  
 Then Abraham obeyed the Lord, driving away 2840  
 The sad-hearted Hagar and his beloved son  
 From his power and protection, his hearth and home.

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[Then one day Abimelech said to Abraham:]  
 “It is clear to me that the Lord and Creator,  
 The Ruler of heaven, shields and sustains you, 2845  
 Since he always grants you glory in battle,  
 Strength of spirit, and hardiness of heart,  
 Divine gifts that are greater than treasure,  
 So that you thrive in both words and works,  
 In whatever you do with friend or foe. 2850  
 The Lord and Ruler releases his power  
 Through your trusted hands in all your endeavors.  
 Everyone on earth understands this truth.  
 Grant me a gift, my gracious Hebrew lord,  
 A promise and pledge that you will remain 2855  
 My faithful friend for the comfort and care  
 I offered you here when you arrived exhausted  
 From your endless wandering on the exile-road.  
 We welcomed you here in our noble nation

With open arms, along with your family. 2860  
 Return this kindness with your faith and favor,  
 And I give you my promise—I will grant you  
 Great gifts of land, a world of wealth,  
 A place to put down roots and know the pleasure  
 Of surety and shelter. Be always honorable 2865  
 And merciful to my people—let the Lord of life,  
 Our almighty Father who holds the future  
 In his hallowed hands, who decrees fortune  
 In his thought and word, be willing to grant you  
 Great riches to give to your shield-warriors. 2870  
 Mark out your boundaries, put down your roots—  
 Make this country your beloved homeland.”  
 Then Abraham promised noble Abimelech  
 That he would accept his offer and settle there.

Then Abraham, blessed son of Terah, 2875  
 Prince of the Hebrews, lived a long time,  
 Lonely in the land of Philistine strangers.  
 The Lord of angels led him to a home  
 In a place called Beer-sheba. The holy one  
 Built a high hall and a great walled city, 2880  
 Planted a green grove, erected an altar,  
 A place of sacrificial stones and sacred joy,  
 Where he paid homage to his Lord and Ruler,  
 Who had lifted him up and given him life,  
 Blessing him on earth and under heaven. 2885  
 Then the almighty Lord made a trial of Abraham,  
 Testing his strength of spirit, his firmness of faith,  
 Speaking these hard, resolute words:  
 “Abraham, take Isaac, your beloved boy—  
 Make tracks for the wild and wait for my word. 2890  
 There you will offer up your loving son  
 As a sacrifice to me. Climb up the hill,  
 The high circle under the horizon,  
 With unfaltering feet, prepare the pyre—  
 Slay your son quickly with a killing sword, 2895  
 Then burn his body in a darkling flame,  
 An obedient offering to your righteous Ruler.”

Clutching his heart, Abraham carried on,  
 Hastening to the hill. He did not delay  
 Or question the command. The word of God, 2900  
 The Lord of angels, was awesome to him.  
 He loved the Lord and was dear to him,  
 So he did not resist the Savior's command.  
 He was willing to sacrifice his precious son.  
 That night he spent in a sleepless bed, 2905  
 Dreaming of the darling, innocent boy,  
 Who would follow his father up the hill,  
 But he rose and girded himself with a sword  
 To sever the life of his beloved son,  
 As the Lord commanded. Time threatened 2910  
 To undo their love and prove his faith.  
 A silent fear settled in Abraham's heart.  
 Worn with age, weary with obedience,  
 The gray-haired guardian, giver of gold,  
 Harnessed his donkeys, picked up his precious, 2915  
 Living treasure, his innocent son—  
 Ungrown, unguarded, unsuspecting, untainted—  
 And two young servants to ease the load  
 On the road of agony. They wound their way  
 Through the wilderness and up the high hill, 2920  
 As the almighty Father showed them the way,  
 Until the sun's dawning on the third day  
 Over the wondrously bright, deep water.  
 There Abraham saw the high killing-hill  
 Where his son should die as God had commanded. 2925  
 He stopped and spoke to his faithful servants:  
 "You two young men must stay in this place  
 While Isaac and I set out for the sacrifice.  
 We will return again once we have offered  
 A precious life to the King of spirits." 2930  
 Then father and son strode up the hill.  
 The father bore both fire and sword;  
 The son, the wood. Then young Isaac,  
 Barely beyond boyhood, began to ask Abraham  
 About the altar and his unknown offering: 2935  
 "My lord and father, we have fire and wood,

But where is the blessed and bright life  
 We were meant to bring as a burnt offering  
 To our merciful Maker, our gracious Lord?"  
 Then Abraham resolved in his reluctant heart 2940  
 To obediently honor his Creator's command.  
 Sadly he turned to his son and said:  
 "The King of glory, the Guardian of life,  
 Will provide a sacrifice as he sees fit."  
 With unfaltering purpose and unshakeable faith, 2945  
 He stifled his sorrow, climbing the hill,  
 Leading his heir as the Lord had commanded,  
 His faithful Creator, true to his covenant,  
 Till he stood at the top, ready to carry out 2950  
 This harrowing sacrifice of his precious son.  
 He sadly bound the boy's hands and feet,  
 Picked up the sticks for the funeral pyre,  
 Placed them down neatly with dead branches,  
 Setting his son securely on the wood, 2955  
 An innocent boy on a nascent flame.  
 Then Abraham looked Isaac in the eye,  
 Lifted his blade, intending to kill  
 The life he adored, seeking to slay  
 His beautiful boy with his own dark hands 2960  
 And dreadful arms, feeding the fire  
 With the blood and sinew of his own dear son.  
 In that moment of truth, between misery and mayhem,  
 A messenger of God, an angel of glory,  
 Appeared to Abraham, calling out to him 2965  
 In a quickening voice like quiet thunder,  
 Speaking to the faithful father, saying:  
 "Beloved Abraham, slay not your son.  
 Bear the beloved boy back in haste  
 From the hungry flame before it grows ravenous 2970  
 And devours him there. The God of glory  
 Has spared Isaac. He will rise in the morning  
 To greet his father, meet his mother,  
 And go on with the wonder of living his life.  
 God will reward your steadfast faith 2975  
 In the face of such sorrow, such sacrifice,

With great gifts, the winnings of victory,  
 The promise of peace, an endless prosperity,  
 A progeny of faith for the world to follow,  
 Because God's favor was dearer to you 2980  
 Than the precious life of your innocent son."  
 The pyre was blazing with waves of flame,  
 But the Lord of life had lifted up the heart  
 Of holy Abraham, kinsman of Lot,  
 When he gave up the sacrifice of his son 2985  
 In favor of the joy of a living boy,  
 The Hebrew heir, a promised inheritance.  
 Then the blessed Abraham, Haran's brother,  
 Glanced over his shoulder in time to see  
 A ram cruelly caught in vicious thorns, 2990  
 Beyond thriving, and he bore the beast,  
 An easier sacrifice than his own son,  
 To the funeral pyre and placed him there,  
 Drawing his sword to destroy the animal  
 And offer his blood-sacrifice in the smoke 2995  
 Rising to God, singing his praise  
 For protecting them both, the blessed boy  
 And the blade-wielding father willing  
 To destroy his own destiny and his heart's joy  
 For the sake of his Lord who loved them both. 3000  
 So father and son finished the sacrifice,  
 Thanking the Lord for all of the gifts  
 He had generously given them, early and late.

## EXODUS

**E***xodus* is a difficult and demanding poem. It ranges in style from baffling to brilliant. Earl notes the poem's problematic structure, saying: "There seem to be numerous lacunae; questions of interpolation are frequent; the narrative is often jumbled; and the biblical parallel which supposedly underlies the whole conception of the poem is often tenuous and at times willfully distorted" (137). There are also numerous *hapax legomena* (words unrecorded elsewhere), textual problems, rapidly shifting metaphors, and complex allusions which make the poem difficult. Greenfield says that "this is in many ways the most difficult of the Caedmonian poems, and perhaps of all Old English poems" (Greenfield and Calder, 212).

The poem combines elements of Christian typology and allegory with heroic and seafaring themes. It is based on portions of the biblical Exodus (mainly 12.19–30 and 13.17–14.31), though it also draws on Genesis and other books, as well as patristic exegesis and church liturgy (see Irving, 1953, 12 ff.; Lucas, 51 ff.; and Earl for more on the sources). The poem concentrates on the escape of Moses and the Israelites across the Red Sea with the help of God's miracle of parting the waves, but it incorporates other narrative elements such as Noah's flood and the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, each a providential escape of a related sort. In allegorical terms, the exodus from Egypt and the founding of Israel foreshadow Christ's act of redemption, which ushers in the messianic age. The movement through the waters of the Red Sea can be read as an image of baptism (see Remley, 1996, 168 ff.). The use of nautical imagery here partly derives from OE sea poetry, but it also refers to what Greenfield calls "the standard Christian interpretation of the sea voyage, a representation of man's journey as an exile to his spiritual home



in heaven” (Greenfield and Calder, 214). This theme can also be found in *The Seafarer* and the concluding lines of *Christ II: The Ascension*, for example. The separation of those saved from those destroyed at the end of the poem is described in language characteristic of the Last Judgment elsewhere in OE poetry such as *Christ III: Judgment*. Moses himself is a prefigural image of Christ, and the magical pillar of power here is sometimes referred to as a *beam*, as is the cross in other OE poems like *The Dream of the Rood*. Fulk and Cain call the poem “a loose paraphrase that takes the journey of the Israelites as a *typos* of Christians’ passage to the promised land through Christ’s sacrifice” (114). The poem also contains elements of heroic poetry, such as the description of the impending battle between warring peoples, the use of the beasts of battle, and the sudden narrative switches in and out of the confrontation. The language of battle is so strong, in fact, that it sometimes seems that the Egyptians and Israelites actually engage one another, when in fact it is God who confronts and slays the Egyptian army by slashing them with a wave of water.

The poem moves back and forth in biblical and historical time from past to present, and the narrative jumps have sometimes befuddled the critics, some of whom have rearranged portions of the poem. The purpose of this movement may be to offer the reader a lesson by means of examples or to communicate a sense of time that is beyond human ken. Irving argues that “the central theme of the poem is the march of the children of Israel under God’s guidance to the Promised Land,” which involves two complementary ideas: “first the need for (and difficulty of) obeying God; and second, the reward which comes to those who trust and obey him” (1953, 29). Lucas says that “the theme of ‘Exodus’ is Salvation by Faith and Obedience: in the exodus God saves his people—providing they are faithful and obedient” (31). J. R. R. Tolkien argues that the poem is “an account of the preservation of the chosen people and the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham; and it is an allegory of the soul, or of the Church of militant souls, marching under the hand of God, pursued by the powers of darkness, until it attains to the promised land of Heaven” (1981, 33).

There are two breaks in the poem. The first occurs after line 148 below (OE line 141 in the Lucas edition) and is the result of a lost leaf in the manuscript. The lost lines probably described “the relationship worked out between the Israelites and a former Pharaoh . . . by Joseph . . . to allow the Israelites to settle the land of Goshen [but] this agreement was broken by the Pharaoh of the exodus” (Lucas, 97). The second break occurs after line 463 below (OE line 446 in the Lucas edition) and is the result of an excised leaf in the manuscript.

Lucas notes that “the subject matter of the lost portion, corresponding to Ex[odus] 14.23–6, presumably dealt with the completion of the crossing, the pursuit into the path through the sea by the Egyptians, and Moses’s action to bring about the return of the waters over the path through the sea” (131). In each case I have provided a brief set of transition lines to make the narrative structure somewhat clearer.

Because of the complexity of this poem, its deliberate ambiguities and allusions, its concealed figurations and fulfillments, and its textual and narrative difficulties, I have sometimes expanded the lines briefly and conservatively to lend greater clarity to the occasional obscurities. I have tried to do this while respecting the essential (dis)order of the poem, which I believe was altogether intended. Just as the Israelites moved from apparent chaos and destruction at the edge of the sea to a finally perceived providential order after their passage, the reader here may also be invited to pass from initial perplexity to an understanding of order as he or she comes to a greater sense of the divinely inspired vision and history in the poem. It is this revelation of providential power and purpose that constitutes the heart of the poem.

## Exodus

Listen! We have heard the stories and learned  
 The laws of Moses. Everyone on middle-earth  
 Knows his judgments, his promises to men,  
 Passed on from one generation to the next,  
 Offering to every exile a heart’s homeland, 5  
 A reward in heaven after earthly perils,  
 A rest for the righteous at journey’s end.  
 This is the truth—hear it if you will.  
 The Lord of hosts, the King of truth,  
 Honored and exalted Moses in the wilderness, 10  
 Strengthening his spirit to make miracles.  
 The bold commander, loved by the Lord,  
 Was crafty and courageous. He humbled the land  
 Of Pharaoh and the proud forces of God’s foe  
 With a righteous hand and a chastening rod, 15  
 Afflicting his army. God gave him a gift—  
 Victory and the survival of kith and kin,  
 Life and land for the children of Israel,  
 Hearth and home for the sons of Abraham.

That was the first time God spoke to his servant, 20  
 Unmasking mysteries, revealing to Moses  
 In a moment of wonder how he made the world  
 From the curve of earth to the expanse of sky,  
 How he founded that glorious and faithful nation,  
 And offered his hero his hidden name, 25  
 Which not even the wisest patriarch had known.  
 He strengthened the hand and heart of Moses  
 Against Pharaoh's people in their time of trials,  
 When he visited the land and people with plagues  
 And drenched the enemy army with death. 30  
 A dark lament was heard in the halls.  
 As the gold-keepers fell, two treasures were lost—  
 The gift and the giver. The hall-joys were drained—  
 The last, lonely song was a cry of suffering,  
 Of peril and pain. In the middle of the night 35  
 God cruelly struck down the Egyptian oppressors,  
 The many first-born sons. Death stalked the land—  
 Terror and torment piled up corpses—  
 Killing was king of that ravaged realm.  
 Awe and anguish were everywhere abroad. 40  
 The mouths of the mockers were suddenly silenced;  
 The hands of the heathens clutched at their hearts.  
 The land grew dark with dead bodies.  
 The evil enemies, the fierce fiend  
 And his hell-hordes, were robbed of their lives. 45  
 God's hand destroyed their golden idols,  
 Their heathen shrines. The devil's delight  
 Was turned into dust. The Egyptians suffered  
 Terrible famines. That was a famous day  
 When the people of Moses embarked on their exodus. 50  
 The Egyptians endured their own captivity,  
 Bound in hell because they intended—  
 If God had allowed it—to keep the kinsmen  
 Of Moses enslaved, barred from undertaking  
 Their long-awaited journey to the promised land. 55  
 The people were ready. Their brave leader,  
 A bold commander, led them on.  
 They wandered in exile a wilderness of roads,

Unknown borderlands, and narrow escapes  
 From hostile peoples, in a covering cloud. 60  
 Moses led his people through many perils.

Two nights after they had barely escaped  
 From their Egyptian enemies, the opponents of God,  
 Their lord and leader ordered an encampment  
 Of people and provisions, a pilgrim-army, 65  
 Near the city of Etham. The next day  
 They turned north, driven by danger,  
 Avoiding the searing southlands of Ethiopia,  
 Where brown sun-dwellers lived scorched lives  
 In the blazing heat of the burnt hills. 70  
 God shielded his hosts from the heavenly fire  
 With a canopy of clouds, a holy veil,  
 Like a tabernacle tent in an arc of air.  
 This sun-shield moved, protecting the multitude  
 In a delicate embrace of earth and sky. 75  
 The sheltering cloud shielded the people  
 From the sweltering sun and enemy eyes.  
 It sailed the high seas of the hallowed air  
 As God had rigged it and fitted it out  
 With invisible canvas and unseen ropes. 80  
 It moved mastless, oarless, soundless,  
 Concealing the Lord's loyal hosts.  
 The multitude was amazed—no one knew  
 How to solve the riddle of the rudderless ship  
 Sailing along, veiled in the vaulted air. 85  
 Their next encampment was a welcome comfort  
 To the holy company. The traveling host,  
 Yearning at last for their evening rest,  
 Recognized in the glorious, radiant sails,  
 A signal from God to set up their camp. 90  
 As they lifted their eyes in the lofting air,  
 They saw a bright miracle in the night-sky,  
 A pillar of clouds and a pillar of fire,  
 Ascending with the energy of the Holy Spirit,  
 Leading the people of the almighty Lord 95  
 Through the wilderness by day and night.

Then I heard, as the ancient stories say,  
 That the rested travelers lifted their trumpets  
 Early in the morning in a bold-waking call,  
 Proclaiming their promise, heralding glory. 100  
 The army arose, a company of courage,  
 Eager to march as Moses commanded them,  
 Shouting their valor, these soldiers of God.  
 They gazed at their guide, the pillar of clouds,  
 That blessed beam, that veil of victory, 105  
 That pointed the way to survival and salvation,  
 As they followed the sail through the ocean of air  
 With strength in their steps and hope in their hearts.

Each evening a heavenly beam rose up,  
 A flaming beacon, waxing radiantly 110  
 In the wake of the sun. The pillar of fire  
 Proclaimed God's power in the night-sky,  
 Its bright rays gleaming over the archers,  
 A token of the Lord. The light glistened  
 On the soldiers' shields—shadows disappeared, 115  
 Melting in the glare. Nothing was concealed.  
 The candle of heaven, a night-guardian,  
 Watched over the hosts in the wilderness,  
 Protecting them from the gray heath-terror  
 Sweeping down like a desert storm 120  
 In a wave of horror. The pillar of fire  
 Unfurled blazing curls, locks of light,  
 Bright strands threatening the host  
 With singe and scorch of skin and bone  
 If the bold troops did not listen to Moses. 125  
 The shield-warriors followed a blazing banner  
 With the lion of Judah leading them on  
 To the land's end where waves lapped the sand,  
 A sea-barrier before the brave army.  
 The company pitched camp; weary ones recovered 130  
 From their hard journey. Stewards served food  
 To the hungry host, restoring their strength,  
 Sustaining their spirits. When the trumpets blared,  
 The soldiers and sailors spread out their tents

Along the strand. This was the shield-warriors' 135  
 Fourth camp, a resting place by the Red Sea.  
 Then terrifying news came to the camp  
 Of Egyptian pursuit, the peril of an inland evil.  
 Slaughter-fear stalked them, death-dread  
 Shivered their bones. The exiles awaited 140  
 Their cruel trackers and the clash of swords  
 From that enemy who had left them homeless,  
 Offered them boundless pain and punishment,  
 Endless oppression in a world of woe.

The fierce Egyptians who followed Moses 145  
 Forgot the pledge of an earlier pharaoh  
 [Who had given their leader and all the Israelites  
 The right to settle in the land of Goshen.

\* \* \*

Then Joseph] became treasure-keeper of the Egyptians  
 And greatly prospered, but the people soon forgot 150  
 Their precious promise and carried out crimes  
 Against the Israelites. Hatred made a home  
 In the Egyptian hearts—hostility ruled their heads.  
 They wanted to repay the generosity of Joseph  
 With a vicious reward, offering evil for good, 155  
 Treachery for truth. After their own survival  
 From plague and famine, generations plotted  
 To exterminate the Israelites. So the people of Moses  
 Might have paid in blood for that ancient enmity  
 And that day's dark work, if almighty God 160  
 Had allowed the Egyptians their savage slaughter.  
 Then the mood of the Israelites grew desperate;  
 Their hearts lost hope as they saw Pharaoh's army  
 Surging from the south, sweeping over the land  
 With shields gleaming, battle-swords swinging, 165  
 Boar-spears thrusting, trumpets ringing,  
 Banners waving, the cavalry-storm coming.  
 Dark death-birds circled the strand,  
 Carrion crows hungry for corpses,  
 Screeching like hellions for a bloody meal. 170  
 Wild wolves sang a hideous evening-song,

Frantic for a feast of flesh and bone.  
 The beasts of battle held no pity  
 For any people, Egyptians or Israelites.  
 They howled for carnage, sang for slaughter. 175  
 Those bloodlust guardians of the border lands,  
 Wilderness-wanderers, bayed through the night,  
 Spooking the souls of the men of Moses,  
 Who hunkered down in despair and doom.  
 Sometimes the proud Egyptian soldiers 180  
 Urged their horses on the warrior's road,  
 Marking the miles behind the banner  
 Of their fierce war-lord. Saddled in arrogance,  
 The Egyptian king, commander of the company,  
 Brooded on battle, ensconced in his helmet, 185  
 Rattling his mail-coat, shaking his sword,  
 Ordering his soldiers to secure the battle-line.  
 Silent on the strand, the exiled Israelites  
 Watched the advance of that land-army  
 With hateful eyes and troubled hearts. 190  
 Surrounding the king were vicious sword-wolves,  
 Fierce and fearless, loyal to their lord—  
 They hungered for battle, thirsted for blood.  
 The king had hand-picked a privileged host,  
 Two thousand warriors from noble families, 195  
 Each of them leading a pack of men,  
 Every soldier who could possibly be summoned.  
 All the kings of that country, the people's princes,  
 Were gathered together in that grim force.  
 The war-trumpet sang, signaling the host 200  
 Where heroes and horses should march and maintain  
 The king's command, carrying their war-gear.  
 So the dark force, marching by thousands,  
 Savage death-dealers, stalked the Israelites,  
 Eager to greet them with grim-bladed hands. 205  
 They meant to attack the exiles at dawn,  
 Bearing a gift of rage and revenge  
 For their lost brothers, the first-born sons.  
 The people of Moses began to mourn  
 For the fate they feared. A cry was raised, 210

A lament that haunted every heart,  
 A hymn of terror, a dirge of woe.  
 Courage fled, words withered, panic prevailed.  
 Men were stymied in their clanking mail-coats.  
 Soldiers swam in a sea of their own fear 215  
 Like frantic fish in an encroaching net.  
 The Egyptian army was wrathful and resolute,  
 An unrelenting enemy—until the mighty angel  
 Who guarded the Israelites stepped forward,  
 Separating the soldiers so that neither side 220  
 Could see the other to carry out the attack.  
 Then fate was unfixed, destruction undone.  
 The exiles enjoyed a night-long respite,  
 Though they were hemmed in on both sides  
 By powerful forces, the army on one side, 225  
 The sea on the other, with no way out.  
 They had given up hope of their rightful homeland,  
 A lost inheritance. They sat on the strand,  
 Clothed in sorrow, weighted in woe,  
 Grimly projecting their last day's doom. 230  
 They waited for the superior Egyptian soldiers  
 To swoop down in a killing company—  
 Until Moses commanded his troops readied  
 With a sharp blast of his brass trumpets,  
 Summoning his soldiers to lift their spirits, 235  
 Their spears and swords, change into chain-mail,  
 Keep courage, and muster a mighty host.  
 Then the people heard the battle-horn's cry  
 And hurried from their tents to take up arms.  
 The twelve tribes made up twelve battalions 240  
 Of brave-hearted men, fierce foot-soldiers  
 To fight in the battle. Their strength was stirred.  
 Each battalion had fifty bold companies  
 Of shield-bearing, sword-wielding men,  
 The noblest known. Each company consisted 245  
 Of a thousand thanes. It was no small threat.  
 The leaders did not welcome the young or weak  
 Into the ranks. The young who could not lift a fist  
 Behind the shield-wall against the enemy,



Or keep the heart's courage in a corselet, 250  
 Or who had never received an unwelcome wound  
 Over the shield-rim, the spear's savage play  
 In the grim game of war, did not fight;  
 Nor could the old, gray-haired comrades  
 Enter the fray though they displayed courage— 255  
 There was no youth left in their years.  
 They mustered only men of strength  
 In muscle and mind, spirit and sinew,  
 Who could readily grasp both spear-shaft  
 And battle-plan, and endure an attack, 260  
 So the army consisted of courageous men  
 Keen for battle. The standard was raised,  
 The brightest of beams, the pillar of clouds,  
 Close to the sea where the Israelites waited.  
 The light broke over the shield-wall, 265  
 Ascending in air to the roof of heaven.

Then the war-herald, a bold battle-crier,  
 Leapt up before the host, hefting his shield,  
 Summoning the soldiers, charging the commanders  
 To quiet the crowd so the multitude might hear 270  
 A brave lord's speech. The shepherd of the people,  
 Leader of the twelve tribes, wanted to address  
 The assembled army, the chosen people,  
 With a holy voice, saying these wise words:  
 "Fear not, though Pharaoh should marshal an army 275  
 Of fierce sword-warriors to fight on this shore.  
 Almighty God will grant you the victory  
 Through my holy hand, offering the Egyptians  
 An astonishing reward for their wicked works—  
 They will no longer live to scourge us 280  
 With torment and terror, making our lives  
 A mesh of misery, a web of woe.  
 There's no need to fear dead warriors,  
 Doomed bodies—their day is done.  
 God's counsel has been lifted from your hearts. 285  
 Remember the covenant and keep it always.  
 Worship your God, pray for his grace,

His promise and protection, shield and salvation,  
 His gift of victory in a time of triumph.  
 He is the God of Abraham, the Lord of creation, 290  
 Our eternal Maker of unmeasured might.  
 He holds our army in his guardian hands.”  
 Again the lord and leader of the living host  
 Lifted his voice, speaking boldly to his people:  
 “Behold, my beloved and faithful followers, 295  
 This miracle of God’s making before your eyes—  
 I have struck the waters and separated the sea  
 With this vital rod, this green branch,  
 This vibrant token of times to come.  
 The wave walls are rising into ramparts 300  
 On either side of a deep, dry road,  
 A silvery street for a saved people  
 To pass through, protected by the Lord.  
 No one has ever walked this way before,  
 Crossing these impassable seabed streets 305  
 Down under water since the dawn of the world.  
 God’s south wind has swept back the waves,  
 Splitting the sea, revealing the road,  
 A pathway of sand to save our people.  
 You can see the truth—in our time of need 310  
 God has granted us mercy in this miracle,  
 As in days of old. Speed is our best battle-plan.  
 Let’s hurry across, escape the enemy’s embrace,  
 Now that our Lord and Ruler has raised up  
 These walls of water, red sea-shields, 315  
 From seabed to sky-roof, to protect and preserve us,  
 Shaping a wondrous road through the waves.”  
 After hearing these words, the host arose.  
 The soldiers and the chosen ones of God  
 Raised up their shields and standards on the shore. 320  
 The sea-walls held firm, steady and secure,  
 For the space of a day, as the Israelites passed by.  
 That company held God’s covenant in their hearts,  
 His promise of protection, never scorning the counsel  
 Of their lord and leader, the holy man Moses. 325  
 As the talking ended and the time approached,

The bold blending of song grew stronger,  
 Swelling against the weighty wave-walls.  
 The fourth tribe went first, leading the people  
 Between walls of water. The seabed road 330  
 Was a vibrant green, a holy hue,  
 The promise of paradise. A soldier of Judah  
 Took the lead on that untraveled road  
 Ahead of his kinsmen. God granted him glory,  
 A great reward for that day's work, 335  
 A righteous victory and assured sovereignty  
 Over many kingdoms and a host of kin.

As the noblest of people walked through water,  
 They raised a banner high over their shields  
 With a sacred sign, the gold lion of Judah, 340  
 The bravest of beasts. The loyal warriors  
 Would never suffer insult or injury  
 As long as their lord and leader lived  
 And they could lift swords, thrust spears  
 Bravely in conflict with any bold nation. 345  
 The soldiers of Judah would always respond  
 To the call of battle with hard hand-play,  
 Sword-swipe, spear-stab, shield-thrust,  
 Blood-wound, body-woe, the cruel crush  
 Of hard helmets, carnage and corpses. 350  
 Behind that army were the sons of Reuben,  
 A horde of sea-raiders hungry for victory,  
 Bearing their shields over salty marshlands.  
 Reuben, son of Jacob, had committed a sin—  
 He unwisely slept with his father's concubine— 355  
 So he lost his sovereignty and marched behind  
 His better brother who had taken his place  
 As the first-born son with natural rights  
 To rule the nation. Reuben's inheritance  
 Was rescinded—still he was no coward. 360  
 Next in line came the sons of Simeon,  
 The third tribe, boldly waving banners,  
 Flashing spears bent on blood,  
 Wet with dew. The dawn-light came

As the sun lifted over bright water, 365  
 Announcing the morning like a beacon of God.  
 The host moved on, one mail-clad tribe  
 After another, led by their mighty leader,  
 Following behind the pillar of clouds.  
 Each knew its lineage as Moses had traced it 370  
 Back in time to the great father Abraham,  
 The ancient leader, prince of his people,  
 Wisest of rulers, rewarded by God  
 With the land-right and richness of kin  
 In tribes to come. That proud patriarch 375  
 Begat many fine men—a nation of Israelites,  
 The chosen race, righteous in God’s eyes,  
 According to scripture and the ancient sages  
 Who know the origin of the twelve tribes  
 And study the lineage and stories of the people. 380

Noah, for example, sailed over the flood  
 With his three sons, the deepest drowning  
 Ever on earth. He kept God’s covenant  
 In his head and heart, steering the world’s  
 Greatest treasure-house over the tumult of waves 385  
 Into that seafaring sanctuary; he had counted  
 And collected, two by two, a tally of creatures,  
 All earthly kinds from the endless stock,  
 Saving a mother and father for each species,  
 A blessed beginning for the new world. 390  
 Noah also carried every kind of seed  
 For the plants that people enjoyed on earth.  
 Wise men who know the lineage say  
 That Abraham, whose name was given by God,  
 Was the ninth in the line of fatherly succession 395  
 Of descendants after Noah. He was granted  
 Wide sovereignty over tribes and nations,  
 Yet he lived in exile. Later he led his beloved  
 People into the highlands of Mount Zion  
 Where they witnessed a wonder, a mighty miracle, 400  
 And established a covenant with the Lord of creation.  
 That was the place where the son of David,

Wise King Solomon, constructed the Temple,  
 The holiest house of worship ever built  
 For the children of men. That was also the place 405  
 Where Abraham led his innocent son Isaac  
 To be sacrificed, as we read in the scripture.  
 The life-slayer lit the funeral pyre—  
 It was not a happy moment for the man.  
 He meant to yield his young son to the flames 410  
 As a price for victory and a test of his trust  
 In God's judgment. He set down his son,  
 His long-awaited heir, as a holy sacrifice.  
 The beloved Isaac was his comfort and consolation,  
 The hope of his heart, the end of his lineage, 415  
 The legacy to his people. The distressed father  
 Felt like a death-dealer, savaging his own son—  
 But the blessed boy was not doomed to die.  
 Abraham bore witness as he lifted his sword,  
 An ancient blade rasping from its sheath, 420  
 To sever the life of his innocent son.  
 He did not hold the precious life of the boy  
 Dearer than his loyalty to his heavenly Lord.  
 Then the man who meant to slay his son,  
 Bloody his boy with the blade's edge, 425  
 If God were willing, rose up with reddened eyes—  
 But God in his glory did not desire or demand  
 This holy sacrifice of a human life.  
 He caught Abraham's arm with his hands  
 Before he could deliver the deadly blow. 430  
 Then a glorious voice, restraining Abraham  
 And restoring his spirit, spoke these words:  
 "Abraham, do not slay your innocent son  
 With a merciless sword. The truth is clear—  
 Your faith is firm, you've kept the covenant, 435  
 Passed the test, fulfilled your promise.  
 Know that you shall be shielded and protected  
 All the days of your life. This is my pledge.  
 How could a son of man need more?  
 The word of God cannot be confined 440  
 By heaven and earth in all its glory—

It is wider than the world, deeper than the sea,  
 Higher than the sky, vaster than air,  
 Subtler than any unseen breath,  
 More substantial than mountains of stone. 445  
 It is before beginning, beyond the end.  
 The Lord of angels, Ruler of fate,  
 King of all creatures, Prince of providence,  
 Offers you this oath on his own life:  
 No man will ever be able to know the number 450  
 Of your children's children, no matter how wise.  
 Your tribe will bear untold numbers,  
 An unending lineage of shield-bearing warriors,  
 The boldest of kin. What clever man  
 Could count such numbers? Only one 455  
 Wise enough to tally the stones on earth,  
 The stars in the sky, the sand on the shore  
 Or under the waves. Your sacred tribe  
 Of freeborn sons shall thrive in Canaan,  
 Even to the ends of Egypt, between the waters. 460  
 You will sire the noblest of all nations,  
 The chosen and cherished children of God."

\* \* \*

[When the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea,  
 The Egyptians remained in hot pursuit,  
 But the hand of God which held back the waves, 465  
 Let loose the flood on that fierce army,  
 Sparing no one as the wave-walls came down.]  
 The people panicked, the savage sea  
 Swept the enemy away; the Egyptians found  
 A deep meaning in that meeting. Walls of water 470  
 Crashed and collapsed, splattered with blood.  
 The sea screamed like a carrion bird,  
 The ocean was full of wounds and weapons,  
 The stink of corpses rose in the air.  
 A few tried to flee, fearing their doom, 475  
 Backtracking at the edge of the waves.  
 Havoc made a home in their breaking hearts—  
 Chaos and catastrophe menaced their spirits.  
 The spineless warriors wished to go home—

The great boasters had become deserters, 480  
 Cowards with nothing to crow about.  
 The raging storm-wrath was a dark demon—  
 Doomsday came early for those Egyptians,  
 As the Lord cut them off from sea to shore  
 With a stroke of water. He removed the road 485  
 He had made for the Israelites. No one there  
 Could walk home through the ocean's outrage.  
 Their only escape was a road to oblivion.  
 The waves rose up along with the wailing—  
 Darkness and despair hovered in the air. 490  
 Bodies were wasted in the wilderness of waves.  
 The Lord's flood filled with Egyptian blood.  
 The wall of waves came crashing down,  
 Lashing sea and sky with death and destruction.  
 Terror seized the troops, proud kings perished— 495  
 The dying cries were silenced by water.  
 Their fate was fixed—choices floated away.  
 Shields could be seen, unarmed and gleaming.  
 Warriors felt like fish in a net of death.  
 The sand had waited for the surging waves, 500  
 When the icy sea, separated from itself,  
 Would seal up and seek its seabed again,  
 Dragging the Egyptian army endlessly down  
 Like a grim spirit smiting its enemies.  
 The sky-blue air was blended with blood. 505  
 The waves had menaced the exiles' march,  
 The seafarers' journey, with death and destruction—  
 Until the Lord lashed out through the hand of Moses,  
 And the flood swept down, surging, seething,  
 Raging, ravaging, clutching at corpses. 510  
 The air grew angry—water assailed the land.  
 The wave-ramparts crumbled, the sea-walls crashed,  
 When almighty God, the Guardian of creation,  
 Lifted his holy hand against the Egyptians,  
 Keeping his covenant with the exiled Israelites, 515  
 Protecting his people as he had always promised,  
 Sending the lethal sea-gates down.  
 The arrogant Egyptians could not hinder his hand

Or escape his doom, the sea's fierce fury—  
 He destroyed them all in shrieking horror. 520  
 The seas slid up, the bodies slid down;  
 Dread fears rose, death-dreams plunged;  
 Fresh wounds wept, bloody tears tumbled  
 Into the ocean's embrace. The Lord of the flood  
 Ravaged the ramparts with an ancient sword 525  
 Of storm-wind and wave-walls. Troops perished.  
 Hordes of the sinful headed toward the bottom,  
 Where they lost their souls in endless sleep.  
 The evil enemy, white with fear,  
 Kissed the dark waters and clutched at nothing 530  
 Except themselves. Together they traveled  
 Into unbreathing terror, unearthly burial.  
 Pharaoh found as he dropped down  
 Into the abyss that the Lord of waves  
 Was mightier than any Egyptian power. 535  
 With righteous wrath, God meant to crush  
 Pharaoh's pride in the awful embrace  
 Of wind and wave. The Lord's reward  
 To every Egyptian for that day's work  
 Was doom in the deep, an unfathomed fate. 540  
 No one could come home to bleakly tell  
 A survivor's story to the waiting wives—  
 How the sea swallowed up both troops  
 And tale-tellers, bards and bold warriors.  
 Each hearth had a hoard-guardian gone; 545  
 Each wife, a husband in the sea's embrace.  
 The ultimate Power drained the cup  
 Of Egyptian boasts down to the dregs.  
 They were left empty in their battle with God.

Then noble Moses, a man of great virtue, 550  
 Spoke wise words of enduring wisdom  
 To the Israelites on the Red Sea shore.  
 His counsel and vision transcended time.  
 Even now nations know of that day's work,  
 Discovering in scripture the Lord's laws 555  
 Ordained for the exiles during their journey,



If the body's guardian, the human mind,  
 Ruler of the bone-house, our own intellect,  
 Can unlock the mysteries of holy scripture  
 With the keys of the spirit. Then God's treasure 560  
 Of wise words and careful counsel  
 Will come forth, and the faithful will find  
 Fellowship with the Lord and the Maker's mercy.  
 He will grant us more, as the scholars tell us—  
 The richer joys of a reward in heaven. 565  
 It's true that our present worldly pleasures  
 Are transient. Time unravels them all.  
 Desire and delight fade, touched and twisted  
 By inevitable sorrow—an exile's inheritance.  
 We wander the world pursued by woe, 570  
 Our homeless hearts mired in misery.  
 We dread the dungeon, the endless pit  
 Of unredeemed hell where demons rule,  
 Fire scorches and scourges, serpents strike  
 Tormented souls with their venomous tongues. 575  
 On earth we are plagued by relentless terrors,  
 The timeless thieves of old age and early death.  
 We struggle in life with sin and senility.  
 The day of reckoning, the hour of doom,  
 Draws near, a moment of might and glory, 580  
 When all our deeds will be judged by God,  
 And he will lead the steadfast, righteous souls  
 From their exile on earth to a homeland in heaven,  
 The light and life of the Lord's blessing,  
 Where everyone in that company of joy 585  
 Will sing hymns, glorious hosannas,  
 To the King of hosts for all eternity.  
 Moses rose to speak, the mildest of men,  
 The wisest of counselors. His people awaited  
 His precious words in awed silence, 590  
 Perceiving the miracle of the Lord's might,  
 The power of the prophet, and the sense of salvation  
 In the wise wonder of his healing words.  
 So Moses spoke to the chosen people:  
 "Mighty is this multitude, powerful its leader, 595

The Lord of heaven, our shield and support,  
 Who guides our journey. He has given us the hand  
 Of governance over the land and people of Canaan,  
 Their cities and treasures, their spacious kingdom.  
 The Lord of angels will fulfill his promise, 600  
 Carry out his covenant from your fathers' days,  
 That if you respect his laws, revere his learning,  
 His holy precepts, henceforth you will subdue  
 All your enemies and occupy this kingdom  
 Between the two seas and rule the high halls 605  
 Of feasting and fellowship from this day forward.  
 Your might will be unmatched, your glory great.”  
 At these wise words the host rejoiced,  
 The troops were jubilant. The trumpets of victory  
 Sang a beautiful song of bright victory, 610  
 And the banners were raised. All of the Israelites  
 Were home free on the shore. The heavenly pillar,  
 The beam of glory, had guided them forward  
 Under God's gaze, protecting the host.  
 The warriors exulted, the people were ecstatic— 615  
 They'd escaped alive from their enemies' power,  
 Risking their lives under the sea's ramparts  
 Raised from the deep. When the wave-walls went up,  
 The waters ran blood as they walked through the sea  
 With their war-gear on. After barely escaping 620  
 The Egyptian army, the men raised a battle-song,  
 Praising their protector in a loud voice.  
 The women answered back with their own songs,  
 Lifting up a host of hymns to the Lord,  
 Celebrating the glory of his mighty miracle. 625  
 Then it was easy to find the African woman,  
 The Ethiopian beauty, adorned with gold,  
 The wife of Moses, standing on the shore.  
 Then the sea-remnant began to share out  
 The treasure of arm-bands and neck-rings, 630  
 The Egyptian booty, washed up on the shore,  
 A people's plunder, the gift of the waves.  
 Their bondage was broken, their reward revealed.  
 They divided up the treasures, gold and silver,

Robes and rings, swords and shields, 635  
Clothes and corselets, in turn by tribe.  
This was the wealth that Joseph had amassed  
That the Egyptians took. Those treasure-keepers,  
From king to soldier, pharaoh to follower,  
Now slept in the sea, an untold host. 640

## DANIEL

This poem is based on the biblical book of Daniel, chapters 1–5, and may also owe debts to Jerome’s *In Daniele* and Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate* (Lerer, 128–29). There are a substantial number of parallel lines in this poem and a portion of *Azarias: The Suffering and Songs of the Three Youths* in the Exeter Book. The correlation is greatest between lines 286–370 of the translation here and lines 1–80 of the *Azarias* translation, and it shows what Remley calls a “progressive divergence” (2002, 87). The relation between the two poems is much debated. In his edition Farrell argues that the two poems may show the influence of a common tradition or that *Daniel* may have been the source of *Azarias* (40 ff.).

*Daniel* has sometimes been considered a flawed poem because of a number of problems: (1) The first dream is not described in detail, as it is in the Bible (see below); (2) the salvation of the three youths from the flaming furnace is told twice; (3) the song of supplication by Azarias (Azariah) to God appears to be recounted after the youths’ deliverance; and (4) the poem ends abruptly in the middle of Daniel’s explication of the angelic writing on the wall (for more on the problems, see Greenfield and Calder, 216 ff.; Farrell, 29 ff.). These “problems,” however, may derive from the poet’s overall sense of purpose, which differs from that of his sources. Solo notes that certain punctuation changes and a reading of *þa* as “when” instead of “then” indicate that the poet is repeating passages for a poetic purpose (347 ff.). He argues that the twice-told passage of the three youths tormented in the furnace serves, much like the twice-told tale in *Beowulf* of the hero’s battle with Grendel, to present the action from different perspectives in order to “contrast the viewpoints, the visions of carnal and spiritual men” (363–64). Portnoy points out that

“the image of the dew in *Daniel* is in fact a central and well-integrated component of an elaborate ring structure,” noting that this narrative device, which the poem has in common with *Exodus*, “goes some way towards challenging the prevailing criticism of the poem’s organization and pace” (195). Farrell argues that the poet concentrates less on the prophetic dreams than on the “narrative portions, especially those dealing with Daniel and the Three Children in their struggles against Nabuchodonosor and his line” (30), noting that the second dream is represented in detail “because it is of immediate importance as part of the struggle between Nabuchodonosor and Daniel” (31). He also points out that the opening and closing of the story are shaped to emphasize a balance between the fall of the Jews and the fall of the Babylonians (31). Citing Caie (1978), Greenfield argues that the main theme of the poem is not so much dream-reading as “a warning against pride in times of prosperity” (Greenfield and Calder, 218) and that the structural problem posed by the song “is obviated if one sees it . . . as communal rather than personal, a prayer for the salvation of the Jews as a nation” (217).

The details of the first dream as recounted in the Bible are not revealed in the poem, but they might well have been known by medieval readers. In the biblical account of the king’s dream (Daniel 2:31 ff.), a figure or idol appears with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. The figure is destroyed by a succession of blows from a powerful stone applied layer by layer from the weak feet upward toward the strong head. The head of gold is likened to the king, and the other parts to the succeeding kingdoms which will all eventually be destroyed. The construction of the golden idol in the poem results from the king’s pride; in the Bible it may also result from the king’s unconscious desire to remake the dream so that the entire body of the dream-figure is made from the more resilient gold. In this sense the king denies the meaning of the dream and defies God’s warning.

Lerer argues that a central issue in the poem is the relationship between oral and written articulation and transmission of sacred traditions, saying:

Human language as practiced by the Babylonians reveals itself to be replete with instabilities. It offers narratives of unsure dreams, and in the exercise of power, gives voice only to lies, boasts, and misapprehensions. The word of God, however, comes not spoken but written. As a people of the book, the Israelites possess a literacy that grants them access to spiritual truth. The images of understanding that the narrator shapes through Daniel coalesce, at its conclusion, into a statement of linguistic as well as moral life. (144)

Thus the word of God, though open to divinely inspired interpretation by the likes of Daniel, is scripted and cannot be changed, as Daniel clearly tells the king.

After line 172a there is a loss of a sheet between two folios which may have contained materials from the biblical Daniel 3:2–6 (Farrell, 3, 57). I have supplied some brief lines of transition in the translation.

## Daniel

I have heard that the Hebrews lived in Jerusalem,  
 Blessed with power, dwelling in prosperity,  
 Sharing out wealth from their great gold-ward.  
 They ruled the realm as was only right  
 Since God gave a mighty army to Moses, 5  
 Who led the hosts out of Egypt with a miracle.  
 They were a daring and proud-spirited people.  
 As long as they governed the land and cities  
 With skill, their power and prosperity were great.  
 As long as they kept their father's covenant, 10  
 The ancient pact between God and Abraham,  
 The Guardian of heaven, greatest of rulers,  
 Remained their protector, their shield and sustainer.  
 The Lord of creation offered the company  
 Strength and courage so that their soldiers 15  
 Could boldly advance under bright helmets  
 To vanquish enemy armies opposed to him,  
 Scourging the faithless—until in their feasts,  
 Pride and passion, drunkenness and deceit,  
 Wormed their devilish way into their hearts, 20  
 Undermining their faith, cracking their covenant.  
 They left their learning, relinquished the law,  
 Ignoring the might and measure of the Lord.  
 A man should never separate his soul  
 From God's love or set it on some lesser good. 25  
 Then I saw that the proud people of Israel  
 Were straying into sin, committing crimes.  
 Those unrighteous acts were an affliction to God.  
 Often the Keeper of the heavenly kingdom  
 Sent to Israel holy souls, inspired prophets, 30

To counsel and command, teach and foretell,  
 Offering the gift of wisdom in their words.  
 For a time people believed in their teaching,  
 Till their earthly desires dragged them down,  
 And they traded in truth for devious delight 35  
 And the Lord's wisdom for the devil's deceit.  
 Then the Lord grew fierce and grim-hearted  
 To those whom he had given wealth and power.  
 Those once favored had left the faith;  
 Those once dearest to the Lord were lost. 40  
 He had revealed to them the road of attack,  
 Brought these strangers to the place of Salem,  
 Where the fine, fortified city stood,  
 Securely protected by strong walls.  
 Then a savage army of Chaldean sorcerers, 45  
 Mighty magicians, approached the city,  
 Bent on slaughter, hungry for blood.  
 Nebuchadnezzar, the bold Prince of Babylon,  
 Had hatched a plot with a deadly purpose  
 In his bent, brooding, and malicious mind. 50  
 That savage leader sorely wanted  
 To expel, enslave, or kill the inhabitants  
 Of Israel by an endless onslaught of troops.  
 From the south and north he assembled his men,  
 Fierce soldiers, the grimmest of guests. 55  
 The cruel conquerors marched westward  
 With their heathen kings. All of the homeland  
 Guardians of Israel enjoyed life and love  
 Only as long as the Lord allowed.  
 I've heard it said that the menacing nation 60  
 Of ancient enemies, Israel's fierce foes,  
 Ransacked the city. Those evil unbelievers  
 Trashed the holy temple of Solomon,  
 Plundered its treasures of silver and gold,  
 Pilfered great riches from the glorious ruins, 65  
 Destroyed or delivered up every city-stronghold,  
 The people's sanctuaries, their battle shelters.  
 They brought home a booty of gold and men,  
 The treasure-keepers' joy and their kith and kin.

They bore the people of Israel off to Babylon 70  
 Over eastern roads and enslaved them all,  
 A heathen's hoard. Nebuchadnezzar knew  
 No charity. He subjugated the survivors,  
 The children of Israel who were sold as slaves,  
 And sent his counselors and soldiers west 75  
 To rule their realm, a wasted homeland.  
 So the Hebrews were a people displaced,  
 Their lives a wilderness of suffering and sorrow.  
 Then Nebuchadnezzar ordered his officers  
 To seek out the smartest of the young Hebrews, 80  
 Those who were most learned in the laws.  
 He wanted the wise ones to hone their skills  
 And increase their knowledge so that in debate  
 He could show off his strength, offer insights,  
 And proclaim himself the master of all minds. 85  
 He never thought to thank God for his gifts.  
 The officers found three young men,  
 Wise ones from a noble stock,  
 Skilled in scriptures, learned in the law.  
 One was Hananiah, the second Azariah, 90  
 The third Mishael—all chosen by the Lord.  
 They came courageous and keen-witted  
 Before the proud, pomp-loving king  
 In the Chaldean court. The Hebrew men  
 Were required to perform before the prince, 95  
 Parade their wisdom, reveal their learning,  
 Unlock their mind-hoards. The battle-king of Babylon  
 Ordered his serving officers upon their lives  
 To provide the young men with food and clothing,  
 Sustenance and shelter, for the rest of their days. 100

The guardian of Babylon was infamous on earth,  
 Arrogant and angry, a torment and terror  
 To the children of men. He lived by no law.  
 One night in a deep sleep, the royal tyrant  
 Was visited by a powerful and prophetic dream 105  
 That haunted his heart and tortured his mind.  
 He saw how the world was to be transformed,



Wondrously shaped in a new creation  
 Unlike anything before, containing a pattern  
 Of the rise and fall of nations and kingdoms, 110  
 So that every empire would one day crumble,  
 And all earthly delights would turn into dust.  
 Then the wolf-hearted lord of Babylon awoke  
 From his wine-drunk sleep. His mind seemed bent  
 By the dark dream he could barely recall. 115  
 He summoned together his shrewdest sorcerers  
 And demanded to know what his dream might mean.  
 He was twisted in terror over this strange vision  
 And couldn't find the right words to describe  
 Its beginning or end. The devil-wise sorcerers, 120  
 Who could not decipher a wordless dream,  
 Answered uneasily the tormented dreamer:  
 "Lord Nebuchadnezzar, how can we know  
 What's concealed in your mind, hidden in your heart,  
 What dreams disclose or the fates decree, 125  
 If you can't even bring to light its beginning?"  
 Then the wolfish king spit out an answer:  
 "You are not as wise as I once thought,  
 When you claimed to comprehend my destiny  
 And what great fortune would be my lot. 130  
 You often offer keen wisdom in the court,  
 Proud of your knowledge before the people,  
 But now you fail to decipher my dream.  
 Your knowledge is a nightmare! Your fate will be  
 Death's doom unless I come to know 135  
 What this dream portends that disturbs my mind."  
 Those court magicians could give no counsel  
 To the troubled king because the capacity  
 To know Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious dream  
 Or unravel its riddle was withheld from them— 140  
 Until the prophet Daniel, a powerful dream-reader,  
 Beloved servant of God, came to the court,  
 Bearing both wisdom and righteousness  
 Before the king's throne and the Creator's judgment.  
 He was the leader of those who had lost 145  
 Their homes and heartland, ruler of the remnant

Who lived in misery, wrapped in woe—  
 The ones now slaves of the savage heathens.  
 God granted Daniel grace through the secret  
 Thoughts of a holy spirit, so that an angel 150  
 Revealed to him every aspect of the king's dream.  
 When the day dawned, Daniel came to the court  
 To describe the dream to his worldly lord,  
 Wisely explaining the destiny of nations,  
 The rise and fall of all earthly empires, 155  
 So that the headstrong king could comprehend  
 The beginning and end of his anxious dream.  
 Thus Daniel garnered great honor and renown  
 Among the scholars and sages of that city  
 Because he had explained the king's dream, 160  
 Which had been both communicated and concealed,  
 Hidden in his heart and haunting his mind,  
 A sure sign of his sins and his wicked ways.  
 Yet Daniel could not bring the king to believe  
 In the power of the Lord, for he began to build 165  
 A golden idol in the plains of Dura,  
 Which were part of the country often called  
 The mighty Babylon. Against God's wishes,  
 The heathen king raised up a human image,  
 Gilded and godlike. He was shrewd without sense, 170  
 Cunning without capacity. He wanted wisdom  
 And knew no righteousness.

\* \* \*

[Then the king called the leaders of the land  
 Together to worship the glittering god.]  
 The heathens came at the call of the trumpet 175  
 And bowed down on their knees before the idol,  
 Worshipping an image. They knew no better  
 Than to follow the false faith of their lord,  
 An angry tyrant who was snared in sin,  
 Proud of his power, haughty in his heart. 180  
 They were as perverse as their unenlightened prince.  
 For their sins they were headed for a grim reward.  
 When the trumpets called everyone to come  
 To worship the idol, there were three in the city

Who refused to bow down to the brazen image— 185  
 These were the youths of Israel, the sons of Abraham  
 By their long lineage, keepers of the covenant,  
 True to the everlasting and almighty Lord.  
 These noble youths made known to everyone  
 That they would not worship a god of gold, 190  
 But only the King of heaven, the Shepherd of souls,  
 Who granted them grace. The courageous ones  
 Boldly made clear to the heathen king  
 That he could never compel them to worship an idol  
 That he had built and burnished as an unholy god. 195  
 The king's servants reported to their lord:  
 "The three wise scholars now in the city,  
 Who are incidentally your captives, refuse to obey,  
 To bow down humbly before our bright god.  
 They will not follow our faith and worship 200  
 The god you constructed in gold for yourself."  
 Then the swollen-hearted ruler of Babylon  
 Became enraged, fuming and furious.  
 In an outburst of temper, he told the three youths  
 They must humbly worship his glorious idol 205  
 Or suffer the pain of torture and torment,  
 The surging flame, the savage fire.  
 He commanded the Hebrew men to bow down,  
 To implore that evil idol for protection,  
 To pray to the gold he had shaped as a god, 210  
 But the young men refused his corrupt request.  
 They kept their courage and followed their faith.  
 They were determined to fulfil God's law  
 And not mock or scorn the Lord of hosts,  
 No matter how much misery it might cause them. 215  
 They would not worship a heathen idol  
 Or give credence to the prince's pagan god,  
 Even though he threatened them with cruel death.

Then the ruthless king, wrathful and resolute,  
 Flew into a fury, ordering a great furnace, 220  
 A fiery oven, to destroy the wise youths  
 For opposing his powers. When the furnace burned

As hot as could be, a blazing oven  
 To scorch the flesh and heat up the heart,  
 The king of Babylon, merciless and murderous, 225  
 Ordered everyone assembled and the youths bound  
 And cast into the flames. Then an angel appeared  
 To offer God's aid. Though the king's thanes  
 Had savagely thrust them into that fierce furnace,  
 The Lord shielded them, saving their lives, 230  
 When he sent down a holy spirit from heaven,  
 An angel who entered the oven, untouched by flame,  
 And enfolded the youths in a loving embrace,  
 Turning back terror and torment, burn and blaze.  
 That fire could not mar their manly beauty, 235  
 Singe their faces, scorch their flesh.  
 God was their guardian—his power preserved them.  
 The savage king was contorted with rage.  
 He ordered his servants to feed the fire  
 With more wood till it was monstrously large. 240  
 The furnace was groaning, the iron oven gleaming.  
 The wolfish king wanted the oven walls  
 To surround and cook, sizzle and sear,  
 The beloved youths who were determined to remain  
 Firm in their faith, steadfast in the law— 245  
 But the fierce flames leapt up abruptly  
 Beyond the furnace from the holy ones to the heathens,  
 Blazing and blackening more unexpected bodies  
 Than anyone thought fitting! Inside the oven  
 The youths survived—their spirits exulted. 250  
 Outside the oven, people in a frenzy  
 Were consumed by flames as their king looked on.  
 That was not the outcome anyone imagined—  
 The fire was determined to hurt the heathens.  
 The good Hebrew youths were all glad-hearted. 255  
 They sang praise-songs to God as well as they could  
 Inside the oven. He had preserved their lives.  
 They sang in the arms of their guardian angel,  
 Who had kept them alive in his cool embrace  
 And turned back the flame upon the tormenters, 260

So the faithful survived. That savage fire  
 Was no hotter to them than the light of the sun.  
 The tongues of flame did not touch their hearts  
 As they trusted in God. The fire fell on the heathens,  
 Who were already aflame with evil and hatred. 265  
 The threat was thrown back at the threateners.  
 The king's servants too soon discovered  
 The flames devouring their faces and flesh.  
 That grim fire did not help the good looks  
 Of those who no longer rejoiced in their work! 270  
 Then the hard-hearted, headstrong king,  
 When he came to his senses, saw a great wonder,  
 A holy miracle in the middle of the flames—  
 Three righteous men moving about in the oven,  
 Untouched, unscathed, unbroken, unblazed— 275  
 Whole in the heat, their hearts joyful—  
 And something else surrounding them there,  
 A glorious angel of almighty God,  
 Protecting them all in his arms' embrace.  
 No harm was done, no death delivered— 280  
 Except of course to their own tormentors.  
 Inside the oven it was only as warm  
 As sunlight on a summer day at dawn  
 When the cool dew is carried off by the breeze.  
 It was God himself who saved and sustained them 285  
 Then holy Azariah spoke his mind,  
 Praising the Lord in prayer and song,  
 Out of the heat of the surrounding flames,  
 Faithful and faultless, staunchly determined  
 To perform good deeds, saying these words: 290  
 "Listen, Lord of all creatures, Maker of all things.  
 Your matchless strength can save mankind.  
 Your name is glorious, bright and beautiful,  
 Renowned among nations. Day by day,  
 Your judgments are proved timely and true, 295  
 Righteous and triumphant, as you yourself are.  
 Glorious Father, your will in this world  
 Is just and generous. Grant us your grace,

Shaper of souls. Protect and preserve us  
 Now in our need from affliction and oppression, 300  
 Suffering and slavery. Our Lord and Judge,  
 We beg for mercy, bound by a ring of fire.  
 We have earned this woe in our worldly lives;  
 Our forefathers also were steeped in evil,  
 Immoral city-dwellers stained with sin, 305  
 Swollen with pride. They committed crimes,  
 Breaking the laws, abhorring the holy life.  
 Now we wander through the wide world,  
 Unprotected, displaced, unfaithful, ungraced,  
 Sometimes ignored, sometimes despised, 310  
 Sometimes enslaved in terrible torment  
 By heathen rulers or cruel kings.  
 We are the hated exiles of earth,  
 Driven by dire need into tyranny and bondage,  
 Where we struggle and suffer. Almighty God, 315  
 We offer thanks for days of hard discipline,  
 Our penance for pride. Do not forsake us Father,  
 But grant us your mercy, Savior of men.  
 Keep those holy covenants, those sacred promises  
 You established with Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph. 320  
 Lord almighty, you promised through prophecy  
 In distant days that you would deliver us,  
 Increase our progeny, bringing forth  
 A great multitude of famous tribes,  
 A people countless as the circling stars, 325  
 Numerous as the grains of sand on the shore,  
 Or the waves rolling endlessly in the ocean,  
 The boundless salt-seas—a people proliferating  
 Through the twists and turns of expectant time.  
 We are the survivors who suffer, dear Lord— 330  
 We pray that you will keep your old promise  
 To make clear your power and glory,  
 So that now the Chaldeans and other peoples  
 Who live as heathens under the heavens  
 Will know that you alone are the Lord Eternal, 335  
 Giver of victories, God of hosts,

Sovereign and shield, sustainer of truth,  
Righteous Ruler of everything on earth.”

So the holy man praised his Maker’s mercy,  
His power and purpose. Then down from the sky 340  
An angel descended, a beautiful being  
Robed in radiance. He brought comfort,  
The Lord’s compassion, a lifeline from God.  
Bearing heaven’s brightness, the holy angel  
Cast out the fire, swept back the flame 345  
With protecting power so that no one was harmed—  
Their bodies were unburned, their hearts untouched.  
The angry angel seized the blaze, flinging fire  
Back at their enemies for their wicked ways.  
When the angel arrived in the glorified air, 350  
The fire in the cruel furnace cooled down.  
It felt like a summer shower in the noon heat,  
A relief of wind and wet, a delight of raindrops.  
The flame was quenched by the Creator’s power,  
A gift of the clouds, a cooling hope for the holy men, 355  
When three youths—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—  
Walked with the angel through the fiery furnace,  
Four who fought the fire, surviving the flame.  
The bold-hearted men emerged intact,  
Praising God, offering prayers to the Prince, 360  
Urging the children of Israel and all earthly creatures  
To bless the everlasting Lord, the Ruler of all realms.  
The three bold survivors, wise in mind,  
Said to their Creator with a single voice:  
“Gracious Father, let the full beauty 365  
Of the world’s crafts, each created wonder,  
The heavens and angels, the bright clear waters,  
Each of your beings in its own degree,  
Everything above in its glory and grandeur,  
Praise your power and worship you. 370  
Let the sun and moon, the stars in heaven,  
The planets parading in the night sky,  
The waters of earth and air, the dew and rain,

Praise and glorify you. Let all souls sing,  
 Exalting the name of almighty God. 375  
 Let burning fire and bright summer,  
 Night and day, land and sea,  
 Light and darkness, heat and cold,  
 Frost and dew, rain and river,  
 Spring-snap and winter-wonder, 380  
 Cloud-drift and snow-drift,  
 All weathers, all seasons, glorify God.  
 Let all creatures in the curve of creation  
 Extol your blessings, eternal Lord—  
 Lightning-flash and thunder-clap, 385  
 Earth-hills and summer-spills,  
 Salt-waves and spring-surges,  
 The deep thrum of whales singing,  
 The high drift of birds winging,  
 Water-flow and wind-blow, 390  
 Cattle in the field, beasts in the wild.  
 Let the children of men celebrate your love,  
 Bring you the best of their hearts' hymns.  
 Let the people of Israel, your faithful servants,  
 Praise you, proclaiming your glory revealed 395  
 In the wealth of the world, in bright nature's  
 Bountiful being, in each creature's song.  
 Your hands hold each heart's virtue,  
 Each mind's making, each soul's yearning.  
 We three children of God speak out 400  
 With a singular voice rising from the flames—  
 Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael together.  
 We glorify God in the sanctity of our hearts.  
 We bless you forever, Lord of all nations,  
 Almighty Father, true Son of the Creator, 405  
 Savior of souls, Healer of hearts,  
 Holy Spirit, and all-knowing God.  
 We celebrate your vision in our way of seeing,  
 Your powerful truth in our best way of being.  
 You reign supreme in the realm of heaven, 410  
 Higher than the sun-road over the world-roof.  
 You are the Poet making, the Creator shaping,



The Holy Word weaving itself in the world  
 Moment by moment from beginning to end—  
 All light, all life, the soul of our seeking, 415  
 The way of our walking in every bright land.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar, Lord of the nation,  
 Prince of the people, spoke to his advisers:  
 “Many of you here watched this wonder,  
 A great miracle, as we thrust three men 420  
 Into the fiery furnace, sentencing them to death  
 By the torch and terror of a burning oven.  
 Now I see four figures here not three—  
 I can’t believe my eyes are deceived.”

Then a wise counselor answered the king: 425  
 “This is a wonder—there’s no trick to truth.  
 Their strange fate should show you your duty.  
 Some power has made them part of its purpose,  
 Granting grace to these three blessed youths.  
 They sing praise-songs from the flames 430  
 To the one God, almighty and everlasting,  
 Exalting his glory in each of his names,  
 Celebrating his victory. Prince of the Chaldeans,  
 Learn from this lesson—free them from the furnace.

It’s not wise to leave such favored men in flames; 435  
 This vengeance is dangerous—it could backfire!”

Then the king commanded the three young men  
 Freed from the flames and brought before him.  
 The restraining ropes that had locked their limbs,  
 Binding their bones, had been burned away. 440

Their countenances were cool, their bodies uncooked,  
 Their clothes unscorched, their beauty unblemished.

They walked calmly out of the waves of fire  
 In the arms of the angel and the hands of God.  
 Then the angel ascended to the vault of heaven, 445

A loyal servant of the everlasting Lord,  
 Celebrating the mighty miracle he had made  
 To exalt and honor those worthy men.

The youths praised God before the pagans,  
 Eagerly explaining his power and purpose, 450

His storied truth spinning out in time,  
 His many wonders at work in the world.  
 Then the people believed that this great protector  
 Who had saved the youths from the burning furnace,  
 Delivering them from the deadly flames, 455  
 Was a wonderful wielder of great power—  
 So the once proud and imperious king  
 Of brazen Babylon proclaimed to his people  
 That this was surely the one true God,  
 And that anyone who denied it would meet death. 460  
 Then the king released his ancient enemies,  
 Returning the remnant of God's chosen people  
 To the Lord's keeping, for they had found favor,  
 Gathering glory in the heat of Babylon,  
 Obeying their God and escaping the fire. 465  
 Their keen counsel was called upon everywhere  
 After the Lord of hosts had shielded them from harm.  
 I heard that when the king saw that wonder,  
 He understood the true miracle of their escape.  
 The servants of the Lord had braved that burning, 470  
 Walked through waves of blazing death  
 To escape their doom. How was this done?  
 The Lord had given them a powerful charm—  
 Immunity against evil, protection against peril.  
 He had untwisted the king's terror, unraveled his rage. 475  
 Then Nebuchadnezzar called an assembly,  
 Summoning his people to hear how God's power  
 Had been revealed, his might made manifest,  
 In the flame-walking exploits and the great escape  
 Of these miraculous men. He said to his people: 480  
 "Consider the wisdom and power of this miracle,  
 The wonder of God. We have surely seen  
 How he saved the lives of the three youths  
 From certain death in the leaping flames  
 Of the terrible furnace, as they lifted up his name 485  
 In prayer and praise. Now we know  
 That he is the one God, the almighty Judge,  
 The eternal Lord, who grants victory,  
 A true triumph to those who serve him

And spread his story. He reveals himself 490  
 To faithful followers who choose his protection.  
 It is clear that Daniel grasped my dream,  
 Declaring to me its secret significance  
 When it had baffled the best of minds  
 Among my counselors because God sent 495  
 A greater spirit to increase his wisdom  
 And skillfully unwind this wondrous riddle.”  
 So the Chaldean leader, Lord of Babylon,  
 Mentor to many, spoke these wise words  
 When he had seen God’s sign, a great miracle. 500  
 But the prince was stubborn and ruled by pride,  
 The sin that had made a home in his heart.  
 His spirit was insolent, swollen with conceit,  
 More than was fitting for even the best of men,  
 Until almighty God cast him down with force, 505  
 As he often does with such arrogant souls  
 Who are desperate to scheme their way to the top.

Now another dream came to deeply disturb  
 The sleep of noble king Nebuchadnezzar.  
 He thought he saw a strangely beautiful tree, 510  
 Strong and steadfast, anchored in earth,  
 Root-firm and heavy with bright fruit.  
 It was not like any ordinary tree of the forest  
 For it towered in the sky amidst the stars,  
 Its boughs reaching out over land and sea 515  
 Like embracing arms to shelter and sustain  
 All the wild creatures living in the wood,  
 To contain and provide food for them all,  
 The richest fruits for the birds and beasts,  
 A bounty of blessings, a nourishing gift. 520  
 Then the dreamer saw an angel descend  
 From his heavenly homeland in a dazzling light,  
 Calling out boldly, commanding the tree  
 To be cut down, causing the birds and beasts  
 To flee for their lives at the imminent fall. 525  
 He also ordered the fruit to be stripped,  
 The branches ripped off—the only life left,

A rooted stump waiting for the reviving  
 Grace of God to renew its green shoots.  
 He ordered the great tree to be bound 530  
 With iron bonds, shackles and chains,  
 So that it might know in its once proud mind  
 That a greater power than itself existed,  
 Prevailing over even the strongest of trees.  
 Then the dream ended and the king awoke, 535  
 Trembling with terror at the dreadful nightmare,  
 A troubling gift from almighty God.  
 The king directed his wise counselors  
 To explain the dream, even though he doubted  
 That any of them could unlock its mystery— 540  
 This was a test to see what they would say.  
 Then the king commanded Daniel to come,  
 The Lord's servant, the messenger of God.  
 A spirit from heaven had strengthened Daniel's mind  
 And opened his understanding to secret meanings. 545  
 The king could see this deep capacity in him,  
 Expecting him again to decipher his dream.  
 So the proud-hearted prince talked of the terror  
 Of the dream-tree, demanding to know from Daniel  
 What the vision signified, what the mystery meant. 550  
 He needed to know the truth of that tree  
 And its fateful fall in the shattering dream.  
 At first Daniel fell silent at the king's commandment,  
 Even though he understood the dream-riddle  
 Of the rise and fall of the tree. The truth was hard— 555  
 That this powerful prince was guilty before God.  
 The wise prophet, learned in the law,  
 Wise in words, paused for awhile,  
 Then offered this answer to the Chaldean king:  
 "Ruler of men, what you have seen in the dream 560  
 Is no small wonder: the mysterious angel,  
 His holy words, his heartless wrath,  
 His hard command that the tree should be stripped  
 Of its beautiful boughs, its sustaining fruit,  
 And suddenly toppled where it once stood fast, 565  
 Giving up its glory of branch and bloom,

Reduced to a root-stump, a poor groundling  
 Of the forest floor, a leaf-lost mystery,  
 A seat for small creatures in the dark wood,  
 Alone and unnoticed, as the angel said, 570  
 Unable to send up new shoots,  
 To grow gracefully again for seven seasons.  
 Like this great tree, your fortune will fall,  
 Your glory will be grounded, your rule undone.  
 Just as the tree grew glorious under heaven, 575  
 You have grown into a prince's power,  
 The guardian of realms without any rival.  
 No one can resist you except almighty God.  
 He will cut you down, topple your throne,  
 Send you into exile, friendless and alone, 580  
 Make you a mindless beast of the woods.  
 You will be reduced from a great king  
 To an unthinking creature living in the thickets  
 Of the forest, following the tracks of deer.  
 Your only food will be found under hoof, 585  
 The grasses of the moors, the weeds of the wild.  
 Your only bed will be a wandering unrest,  
 A waking sleep. Rainstorms will rouse you,  
 Harry and harass you like a dumb beast,  
 Until after seven years you discover the truth— 590  
 That there is only one all-powerful Lord of men,  
 Who dwells in heaven and not in Babylon!  
 All is not hopeless, however. The dream discloses  
 That like the root-stump, after seven seasons  
 You will branch and bloom, flower and fruit, 595  
 Regain your power and place in the world.  
 Your worldly kingdom will remain unharmed  
 By the envy of your enemies until you return.  
 Consider my counsel, take heed in your heart:  
 Give alms to the poor, protect the wretched, 600  
 Temper might with mercy, bow down before God,  
 Atoned for your sins before the day arrives  
 When the Lord will thrust you from your throne,  
 Steal your sovereignty, and rob you of reason.  
 Often God relents if men feel remorse 605

And repent, making heartfelt reparations  
 Before he suddenly releases his wrath  
 Like a savage storm, cutting them down  
 With a righteous fury.” Daniel hoped  
 That this wise truth and hard counsel 610  
 Would be heard by the stubborn king  
 With a sober mind and an accepting spirit,  
 But the ruler’s pride made that impossible,  
 And the powerful lord paid dearly for this.

The king of the Chaldeans continued to boast 615  
 Of his power and prosperity as he ruled the city  
 Of Babylon with its beautiful tall towers,  
 Stretching out over the plains of Shinar.  
 He exulted in having built marvels for men  
 And thought himself a maker of miracles. 620  
 So he celebrated his own craft and capacity,  
 His mental subtlety and sovereignty over men,  
 But these talents were truly gifts from God  
 To be used honestly and humbly in his service  
 By a lord and leader while he ruled his people. 625  
 Sometimes the King of the Chaldeans would say:  
 “You are the city of glory I built and blessed  
 With my mind and might. Your tall towers  
 Sing praise-songs to my powerful presence.  
 You are my radiance and resting place, 630  
 A homeland I will always rule and possess.  
 Everything here resounds with my name.”  
 Because of that boasting, that perilous pride,  
 The lord of men was seized by a strange spirit,  
 A stroke of madness. His reason unraveled, 635  
 And he fled to the wild, plucked from power,  
 Exiled from God, alone and unthinking.  
 He traveled a melancholy road of suffering,  
 The hardest ever walked by a man in this world.  
 His trials were endless, his torments boundless, 640  
 His well of sorrow was endlessly deep.  
 For seven years Nebuchadnezzar suffered  
 God’s righteous anger, a terrible torment,

Wandering the wilderness, a brute beast,  
 Until he looked up one day through the clouds 645  
 Drifting by like a dream and felt the return  
 Of his right mind, remembering that the Lord God  
 Was High King of heaven and earth,  
 The everlasting Spirit, shielding and sustaining  
 The children of men. Then his lunacy left him, 650  
 And he found himself both human and humble,  
 His heart unsavaged by the claws of pride.  
 His soul rejoiced in remembering God,  
 His greater Lord, and he left the torment  
 Of the wild wood for the towns of men. 655  
 He dragged himself home like a poor beggar,  
 Unclothed, unkempt, beyond boasting,  
 Eager at last for God's blessing,  
 Humbler than he had been as the ruler of men.  
 His kingdom was still secure after seven years, 660  
 Intact and thriving after the thrusting out  
 Of its intractable king. Brazen Babylon  
 Awaited the rescue of its once raging ruler  
 And the return of a wiser, kinder king.  
 When the Chaldean leader was restored to power, 665  
 He believed firmly in the Lord and praised him  
 Instead of himself. He was moved by mercy  
 Instead of wrath toward the children of men,  
 Becoming a conscientious and caring king.  
 He understood that ultimately God deals out 670  
 Weal or woe, bliss or bale, as he sees fit.  
 He did not merely read the wise words  
 Of the prophets but began to preach abroad,  
 Proclaiming the unstinting might of the Lord,  
 Recounting the story of his sudden madness, 675  
 His wandering the woods like a wild beast,  
 Devoid of reason, until he discovered  
 As he looked toward heaven, a new understanding  
 Of the everlasting Lord. His dream was fulfilled,  
 His destiny delivered, his mystery made plain. 680  
 His pain was endured, his penance effected,  
 His judgment established as Daniel predicted—

That the king should find a fierce punishment  
 For his unbridled pride. So he earnestly preached  
 God's true story and the Maker's might 685  
 Before the children of men. Afterwards  
 Daniel also taught God's learning and law  
 For a long time to people in Babylon.  
 After Nebuchadnezzar, the wilderness-wanderer,  
 Companion of beasts, returned from exile, 690  
 Delivered from brute hardship and pain,  
 He returned to rule the Babylonian empire  
 As king of the Chaldeans, prince of the people,  
 Protector of wealth, guardian of the security  
 And welfare of the citizens, shield and sustainer, 695  
 A great governor. No man could match his might  
 Until God determined his doom. Death destroyed him.  
 Afterwards his descendants prospered in that city,  
 Enjoying a wealth of braided gold, a great treasure.

Then a third generation of descendants arose 700  
 Among the Chaldeans. Bold Belshazzar  
 Ruled the kingdom and its bright cities  
 Until his heart too was puffed up with pride.  
 His arrogance and insolence destroyed the kingdom,  
 And God granted power to the Medes and Persians, 705  
 Letting the glory of Babylon wither away.  
 He knew that the elders who ruled the realm  
 Were bound in wickedness, snared in sin.  
 Then the lord of the Medes began to contemplate  
 A bold plan of action never attempted before— 710  
 To conquer Babylon, the city of princes,  
 Gift-givers and warriors, who guarded their gold  
 And untold wealth behind sheltering walls.  
 Babylon had been the greatest of cities,  
 Steeped in glory until Belshazzar's boasting 715  
 Provoked God. The people guzzled wine  
 Within their halls, never fearing any foe,  
 Even though cruel enemies encroached on them,  
 Decked out in war-gear, determined to sack the city.  
 No one believed that Babylon could be destroyed. 720



The king of the Chaldeans sat blithely feasting  
 With family and friends on his last day.  
 The proud lord was mead-drunk, malicious,  
 A king in his cups. He commanded all  
 The Israelites' gold, their holy treasures, 725  
 And sacrificial vessels—which the Chaldean soldiers  
 Had once seized when they sacked Jerusalem,  
 Riding in rage to the trumpet's terror,  
 Destroying the city and the glory of the Jews  
 With their savage swords—to be brought to the hall. 730  
 Those brash, boasting soldiers had laid hands  
 On the holy objects in the temple of Solomon,  
 Plundering those treasures like war-booty.  
 Then Belshazzar bragged that his armies offered  
 Greater power and protection than the so-called 735  
 Everlasting lord of the Israelites. This angered God.  
 Suddenly there came into the hall a holy sign  
 That the Chaldean lord was an outright liar.  
 The hand of an angel appeared in the air,  
 Writing secret runes, mysterious words 740  
 In blood-red letters. The king's heart was harrowed,  
 His spirit shaken by that scripting terror.  
 He saw in the angel's writing on the wall  
 The promise of punishment for the people of Shinar.  
 Many men gathered to discuss and debate 745  
 What the hand of the holy spirit had written  
 As a grim warning, a ghastly prediction.  
 No scribe or scholar could read or decipher  
 The angel's writing until the wise and righteous  
 Servant of the Lord, truth-seeker, dream-reader, 750  
 The man called Daniel, was brought to the hall.  
 His heart was filled with the Holy Spirit,  
 His understanding enlarged by the grace of God.  
 He was offered great gifts to read those letters,  
 Unravel the riddle of that mysterious writing. 755  
 The messenger of God, the mouthpiece of heaven,  
 Skilled in scripture, in both lore and law,  
 Answered the Chaldeans in the wisest way:  
 "I will never read holy runes for riches

Or solve secret writings for silver and gold. 760  
 God's divine judgments are not for sale.  
 The meaning of the mystery is beyond your ken.  
 Your scripted fate cannot be changed.  
 What you don't understand is your own arrogance  
 When you raise holy vessels in your heathen hands 765  
 And drink to your devils out of the sacred cups  
 That the Israelites used according to the law  
 At the ark of God until they were dishonored  
 By thieving hands and drunken minds,  
 Betrayed by pride and the lust for power. 770  
 What you drink now is the dregs of death,  
 The gift of God in his righteous wrath.  
 Your lord and leader, the previous prince,  
 Would never have tarnished the gold vessels  
 Of God in drunken revelry and boastful rage. 775  
 He never valued his own power over people  
 Or possessions even though his craft and courage  
 Had captured them both. That great protector  
 Often addressed his army with truthful words  
 After the Lord of heaven had revealed to him 780  
 In a mighty miracle that one power prevailed  
 Over all others, the Shaper of creation,  
 Sustainer of life, Guardian of glory,  
 Weaver of the world. Now you deny the existence  
 Of the living Lord, the eternal God, 785  
 Who rules in majesty over all your devils!"

## CHRIST AND SATAN

This poem portrays three separate but related instances of conflict between Christ and Satan. The first (lines 1–386 in this translation) centers upon the mourning of Satan and the fallen angels in hell after their rebellion against God and their banishment from heaven. Their lament over the loss of a heavenly homeland and their present suffering are similar in tone to comparable passages in the OE elegies like *The Wanderer* and in OE *Genesis (A and B)*. The second section (lines 387–699) focuses upon Christ’s harrowing of hell and his subsequent Resurrection and Ascension, followed by a description of the Last Judgment in which the glory of the saved and the torment of the damned are made clear in almost visceral terms. This section shares themes and treatments with the *Judgment Day* poems and *Christ III: Judgment*. The final section of the poem (lines 700–792) circles back to Satan’s temptation of Christ in the wilderness, which draws upon Matthew 4:1–11.

Whether these three sections are separate poems, related sections of a loosely constructed single poem, or organic parts of a unified poem remains the subject of some debate. Fulk and Cain, for example, argue that the poem “lacks a unified narrative trajectory, instead patching together three different strands of canonical and apocryphal passages . . . linked by homiletic passages urging preparations in this life for judgment in the next” (117–18). Clubb argues that the poet’s initial intention was “to compose a narrative poem on the events in the history of Christ after his crucifixion,” but that in the process he began to focus on the imaginative possibilities of adding dialogue to both the central and surrounding sections, and in the end, “[he] did not succeed in

remodeling his extraneous material so that it joined neatly to the episode of the Descent” (liv–lv).

Others have argued for a more unified theme and purpose in the poem. Huppé, for example, says that “the Temptation is climactic, not historically, but tropologically (morally), and thus it serves admirably as the climax of the three symbolic events that reveal God’s might and define man’s duty” (1959, 231). Finnegan posits that “the structure bodies forth the dual theme of the revelation of Christ to man, and man’s moral obligation with respect thereto” (36). Isaacs argues that “the central organizing structural principle is not to be found in the arrangement of episodes in the narrative, nor in the formal system of contrasts between the title figures, nor in the dramatic progression of thematic material . . . but in the pattern of the speeches by the seven separate voices, distinct from his own, which the narrator uses” (127–28). Sleeth thinks that the “poet of Part I was concerned to show that the consequence of Satan’s *cupiditas* was his abasement and that the poet of Part II was concerned to show that the consequence of Christ’s *caritas* was his exaltation . . . [while] another look at Part III, where Christ and Satan come into direct conflict with each other, shows the conspicuous presence there of *cupiditas* (as the sin to which Christ is tempted), rejection of *cupiditas*, and abasement” (14). My own view is that the poem represents in triptych form the conflict between Christ and Satan within the framework of God’s providential purpose from the shape of creation to the salvation of mankind. Christ conquers Satan in heaven during the rebellion of the apostate angels. After his banishment from heaven, Satan’s only refuge from endless suffering is his delight in dragging the rebellious and condemned humans into hell. Christ’s second conquering of Satan is his harrowing of hell, releasing those good but suffering souls who have lived before his coming, and subsequently his elevation of the saved and condemnation of the damned on Judgment Day. Why, then, does the poem conclude with the earthly temptation of Christ in the wilderness? Possibly to remind the reader that Christ too was subject to the human forms of temptation that Satan offers, but that he resisted these—just as the reader should also resist them in order to join the ranks of those who will be judged worthy of salvation and raised to a homeland in heaven.

No single source has been found for this poem. It seems to draw upon the Gospels (especially Matthew), the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, Latin and vernacular homiletic tradition, and various commentaries by the church fathers. For more on the possible sources, see Finnegan, 37–55, and Sleeth, 50–67.

There are several places in the poem where an apparent break in the narrative thread indicates a probable loss of material from an earlier draft. After

line 699 in this translation, there may have been a surer transition between the second and third sections of the poem. I have supplied two lines to make the transition clearer. After line 713, there is another break that results in the loss of the end of Christ's response to the first temptation (I have supplied two lines to clarify this) and also the whole of the second temptation. Lines 716–19 seem out of place to some editors who move them back into the preceding second section of the poem, but I have amended them slightly to show that Christ may be pointing out to Satan that unlike the fallen angels, the faithful followers among mankind will find a blissful home in heaven.

## Christ and Satan

God's strength is no secret to anyone—  
 It was never concealed from the inhabitants of earth  
 When he first created the land and its regions.  
 His power is present from beginning to end.  
 He first made sun and moon, sand and soil, 5  
 Rock and river, the riddle of water  
 In sea and storm, cloud and rain.  
 His power encompasses and embraces everything  
 From the ocean's depth to the land's breadth.  
 God shapes and sustains all things 10  
 Great and small from this day's moment  
 To the stretch of forever. He himself,  
 The Son of God, holds in his infinite gaze  
 Everything that is, from oceans to eternity,  
 From the smallest seed to the celestial sphere. 15  
 He counts the clouds and reckons the raindrops.  
 The great Creator through his glorious spirit  
 Made the wondrous world in only six days,  
 Both heaven and earth, and the high seas.  
 Who could measure the shape of creation 20  
 Or the meaning of the miracle except God.  
 He first established the order of the world  
 From heavenly host to human community,  
 From noble Adam to that angelic leader  
 Who rebelled against him and came to grief. 25  
 Satan's thanes considered themselves  
 Rulers of heaven in their unholy pride,

Lords of glory—they were grimly mistaken.  
 They lost heaven and discovered hell,  
 An unhappy home, exiled from God. 30  
 In that pit of misery, they endured pain  
 And endless woe in the flames' embrace.  
 They lost the ethereal light of heaven  
 And found the blistering fires of hell.  
 Greedy and rapacious, they endured raw torment, 35  
 Gorging on terror till the end of time.  
 Only God knows how he gathered the guilty  
 And thrust them down in the endless abyss.  
 There the old, fallen angel wails bitterly,  
 Separated from God, with a wretched voice: 40  
 "Where is the glory of angels gone?  
 Where is our bright majesty and meaning?  
 Where is our rightful homeland in heaven?  
 This cave is cruel, this house is dark,  
 The floor is seething with fiery venom, 45  
 The walls are alive with shackles of flame.  
 For no short time we must endure this agony,  
 This mind's misery, this world's woe.  
 Our day's delight is a night of the damned—  
 We are blind to heaven, hurled from its thrones. 50  
 Once we knew love, the Lord's blessing,  
 Bliss in the presence of our noble Prince,  
 Hearing beautiful hymns in our innocent hearts.  
 Now we are lost to the love of God,  
 His goodness and grace. Unfallen angels 55  
 Are still surrounding the Lord's throne,  
 Praising him there with words and works,  
 Basking in bliss while we are bound in flames,  
 Looking at nothing but our loathsome selves.  
 Here I'm an unholy hero, an outlaw in chains. 60  
 My pride has plunged me into a bitter haven—  
 I can never regain my home in heaven."  
 Then the hideous demons, shackled in sin,  
 Shrieking in torment, answered their lord:  
 "You liar! You told us not to serve the Savior. 65  
 You said you controlled both heaven and earth,

Claiming to be the Creator himself.  
 Now you're just a criminal in hell,  
 An unholy outlaw in a prison of pain.  
 We thought you were God, believed in your glory, 70  
 Altered our faith, and followed you here.  
 Your act is outrageous, your face revolting,  
 Your heroism a farce. We're banned from bliss  
 Because of your lies. You even claimed  
 That the Lord of mankind was your own son. 75  
 It's outrageous all the evil you've done  
 To reap this reward of exile and terror."  
 So the angels in agony, outlaws and exiles,  
 Railed against Satan, their unruly lord,  
 With embittered words. Christ had expelled them, 80  
 Banished them from bliss. They had lost the light  
 Through envious pride, a pernicious sin,  
 And were plunged rebelling into a fierce prison,  
 Where hell's grim welcome was a house of grief.  
 Dark and deformed, the once radiant angels, 85  
 Separated from God, demented and doomed,  
 Wandered that wasteland in a plague of pain,  
 Each of them his own affliction, his own bane.

The lord of demons, the first of fiends,  
 Spoke a second time, acutely aware 90  
 Of his torment and terror. His face aflame,  
 His mouth shot sparks as he spit out  
 A blaze of words in black lament.  
 His dark voice offered no demon joy:  
 "Once I was a holy angel in heaven, 95  
 Loved by the Lord and also this multitude,  
 But my heart's desire was to hurl glory  
 Down from its throne, displace the radiant  
 Son of God so that I could rule the cities  
 With this band that I have brought home to hell. 100  
 His promise was plain—the reward for rebellion  
 Was banishment and pain in this underground  
 Hell-hole, an endless abyss of agony  
 That we can call home. Where is the hearth?

Where is the hall-joy? Where are the angels, 105  
 The heavenly hymns, the love of the Lord?  
 Here is no glory, only the grimmest fate.  
 Here is no light, only black fire  
 To feast on the body, singe the soul.  
 I am a fallen angel guilty before God. 110  
 Serpents and dragons guard these gates,  
 Venomous worms. There's no way out.  
 In the fiery shade there's no place to hide.  
 The only sound is the hissing of snakes.  
 The shackles of pain are binding our bones. 115  
 The hell-fiends are fierce, dismal and dark.  
 No sun shines here, no candle of heaven,  
 Not even a night-sliver moon. It's all hell-haze.  
 We wander a wasteland of endless shadow.  
 Once I was the radiant ruler of heaven 120  
 Before I was unfairly hurled in the abyss,  
 Awaiting judgment. Now this pit is my palace,  
 A foul home for these raging fiends.  
 Yet sometimes we fly off, evil winging  
 In the unearthly air, this pride of pain, 125  
 Searching for another hell-hall. Mighty God  
 Will not grant us mercy, respite or relief,  
 Some untamed realm to rightfully rule  
 As he did before. The Son of God  
 Governs heaven's glory and hell's torment, 130  
 So I must wander an exile's far road  
 Away from his endless gaze and grasp,  
 Separated from joy, deprived of bliss,  
 Estranged from angels, since I so boldly declared  
 Myself lord of heaven, ruler of that realm. 135  
 That power play did not work out well."

As the wretched spirit, dragging his doom,  
 Spoke to his demon-host with little delight,  
 Venomous flames enveloped hell.  
 He spit out his words like bitter sparks: 140  
 "I am so huge and hideous, it's hard to hide.  
 My wounds are the signs of sin and shame,



Visible to everyone in this vile hall.  
 How both heat and cold contend in this cave!  
 I can hear fallen hellions wailing in woe 145  
 In our underground abyss. Naked ones struggle  
 With snakes and serpents biting their bodies.  
 The hell-hall is awash with venomous worms.  
 The pain pulses in through every pore.  
 I will never know the joy of a happier home, 150  
 Whether prince's palace or humble house.  
 I will never regard the radiant beauty  
 Of holy creation. That heavenly glory  
 Is a grim reminder of the light I've lost.  
 The singing of angels is an agony for me, 155  
 And the children surrounding the Son with song.  
 I want to strike out, but the only souls  
 I'm allowed to torment are the ones God disowns—  
 These captives I bring home to the bitter abyss.  
 Once we were gleaming with bright esteem, 160  
 Bearing honor in heaven and the love of the Lord,  
 Alive in the arms of his eager embrace  
 And the lift and fall of our hearts' rejoicing.  
 That grace is gone. This grim hell remains.  
 I am shamed with sin, doomed by my deeds, 165  
 Wounded with wickedness, aching with evil.  
 Now I can no longer lift my angelic wings  
 Or countenance to Christ, but bear on my back  
 The tongues of torment, the fetters of flame,  
 Singeing my skin, blazing my bones. 170  
 This hellfire has unhallowed my hopes and dreams."  
 The shepherd of sin, the keeper of crime,  
 That unmade monster, had more to say.  
 His misery was hot in his venomous mouth:  
 "Gone is the glory of almighty God, 175  
 Gone is the honor of the angelic host,  
 Gone is the presence of the loving Lord,  
 Gone is the innocence of all on earth.  
 Gone is the beauty and brightness of day,  
 Gone is the rest and revival of night, 180  
 Gone is our gateway to heaven's homeland,

Gone is the joyful embrace of God.  
 Nothing is now what it once was.  
 I am exiled from heaven, cut off from joy.  
 I cannot raise my arms or eyes to God. 185  
 I cannot hear the trumpet of welcome  
 Because I tried to drive the Son of God  
 From his rightful throne. What I wanted  
 Was to rule that realm, be the gift-giver  
 Of my own godlike glory, my own bad bliss. 190  
 This turned out worse than I ever expected!  
 I am blind to the radiance of my old host,  
 Deaf to the symphony that surrounds the Lord,  
 Expelled from the light that lifts the spirit  
 Into this unloved, loathsome, unholy home. 195  
 How did I land in this endless abyss?  
 How did I find myself snared in sin?  
 How was I cast off from the company of angels?  
 How was I unmade from my original self?  
 Where has my goodness and glory gone? 200  
 Where is my place in God's holy purpose?  
 I've learned a hard lesson: Whoever refuses  
 To listen to the Lord, the King of heaven,  
 Will discover the darkness of love's loss  
 And be dispossessed of eternal delight. 205  
 I have found pain and punishment in this prison,  
 Hard torment because of my wicked ways,  
 My malicious words, my malevolent works.  
 I thought that to thrive, I needed to force  
 My lord from his throne. I lost my home. 210  
 Now I must wander a wasteland of woe,  
 Enduring the agony of an exile's road."  
 Then God's ravenous foe passed into hell  
 With his rapacious thanes, grim and greedy.

So every man on middle-earth should be mindful, 215  
 Every woman in the world be equally prudent,  
 Not to provoke the powerful Son of God,  
 That radiant Prince, to righteous anger.  
 Let us learn from the lesson of Satan's fall

And the dark despair of his monstrous minions, 220  
 Expelled from heaven for their rebellious pride.  
 Let us take as our delight the humble host  
 Of exultant angels singing praise-songs to God,  
 Surrounded by bliss in the Lord's embrace.  
 He made his power and purpose known 225  
 When he banished forever those satanic angels  
 From their home in heaven to a prison of pain.  
 Remember that he is the radiant Lord  
 Of all beings. No one exists outside  
 God's grasp. We should reach for that radiance, 230  
 Aspire to achieve a homeland in heaven  
 With the King of kings, who is called Christ.  
 Let us bear in our hearts happiness and love,  
 Let us bear in our minds truth and wisdom.  
 Let us lead our lives in the Lord's law, 235  
 Carry ourselves with the spirit of compassion,  
 Tending to the helpless, hoping in turn  
 For the Maker's mercy as we bow before  
 His judgment throne. A man must live  
 In this earthly realm with his mind on God, 240  
 So his soul will shine when he seeks his home  
 With the angels in heaven, that precious land  
 Blooming with beauty, fragrant with fruit,  
 Radiant with bliss throughout the cities.  
 That world is woven with Christ's compassion, 245  
 The weft of creation. Let us return to our home  
 Where saints and angels stand by the throne  
 Of the living Lord, the Son and Savior,  
 Where each bright being praises the Prince,  
 Each blessed soul is a spiritual celebration 250  
 Of words and works to the glory of God,  
 So the light of grace may gather and shine,  
 An exultation of bliss through all eternity.

I've heard that the fiends finally admitted  
 That their pain and punishment were hard to bear. 255  
 They had given up glory in their great pride.  
 Plagued with exile, they said in spite:

“It’s clear that we sinned against God in heaven.  
 Now we must suffer strife, waging war  
 Against the powerful Prince of unfallen angels. 260  
 We lived in the light as long as we were willing  
 To obey the Lord, raising celestial hymns  
 To his perfect glory like thousands of thanes  
 Surrounding his throne in fearful fealty.  
 We heard hosannas, the sound of trumpets, 265  
 The symphony of the blessed in unbound delight.  
 The radiant Word arose, the Author of angels,  
 And all the saints bowed to the Victory-king.  
 The eternal Lord with his beloved Son  
 Rose up before us, blessing the host, 270  
 While we bowed below. God himself presided,  
 Ruling with his Son, showing mercy to those  
 Whom he met at the gates, who believed in his mission,  
 And were faithful followers in their lives on earth.”  
 [Then Satan said:] “It irked the angels 275  
 That this Prince was stern, righteous and resolute,  
 So I confronted them all, speaking these words,  
 Artlessly assuming a reasonable rage:  
 ‘I can offer you considerable craft and counsel,  
 The gift of persuasion if you trust my power. 280  
 Let’s renounce this lord, relinquish his rule,  
 Find faith in ourselves, create our own company,  
 Rejoice in the richness of our own ideas,  
 Find radiance in our unfettered imagination.  
 Let’s rise up and rebel against this unbending tyrant, 285  
 And stuff his brash boasts down his dying throat.’  
 So we brashly decided to drive the Lord  
 From his precious home, his noble stronghold,  
 And ended up exiles inhabiting the abyss.  
 He keeps that heavenly kingdom for himself. 290  
 He alone is the King, the eternal Lord,  
 Creator of all who became angry with us.  
 Now this host of once glorious angels  
 Must grovel in hell, a grim reward  
 For our proud rebellion. Some fly upward, 295  
 Dark flames in the air, searching eagerly

For the souls of sinners who desperately hunt  
 For heaven's door. These we bring down  
 To the gates of hell for a grim greeting,  
 A hard welcome home to the wicked, 300  
 But we cannot touch the blessed souls  
 Of the good and faithful who are dear to God.  
 Some of us are mustered to roam middle-earth—  
 Stirring up strife, fostering feud.  
 Sick in this hell, I suffer eternally 305  
 For the war I waged. I have traveled far  
 From faith to fury, brightness to bale.  
 I feed on malice and taste the bitter bile  
 Of my own unbecoming. My world is woe.  
 Will God ever welcome us home in heaven, 310  
 Give us a piece of that glorious kingdom,  
 Some land to possess, as he did before?"  
 So God's fallen angels, now his fierce foes,  
 Lamented their loss. Christ blasted those demons  
 From bliss for their blasphemies in his righteous wrath. 315  
 So people who hold goodness in their hearts  
 Should guard against sin, malevolence of mind,  
 Wickedness of works. Remember the power  
 And purpose of the Lord and build a green path  
 To a heavenly paradise where virtue is verdant. 320  
 The Son will embrace us with eternal light  
 If we trusted in him while we were here on earth.  
 He will never leave us but offer us life  
 On high with the angels in that heavenly city.  
 The Lord will lead us to a holy stronghold, 325  
 A radiant refuge with bright walls.  
 The blessed souls, freed from sorrows,  
 Will shine in that city, circling God's throne.  
 Let us proclaim this to everyone on earth!  
 We should always be mindful of God's mysteries, 330  
 Live our lives so we can unlock the secrets  
 Of his spiritual treasures, understand and accomplish  
 His purpose. Then a thousand angels will greet us  
 At the gates of heaven to welcome us home  
 If we deserve this through our lives on earth. 335

Those who are blessed in the eyes of God  
 Warp no words, work no wickedness,  
 Savor no sin. So the Lord has said:  
 “The righteous shall shine, robed in radiance  
 Like the everlasting sun in their Father’s kingdom.” 340  
 The blessed will be borne homeward to heaven  
 In the shielding embrace and exaltation of angels,  
 Forever and ever in the arms of the Lord.  
 Unfortunately, the fiend, old Satan himself,  
 Ignored this advice, resolving to rebel 345  
 Against our Father. He carried no comfort  
 As he plunged into hell where the floors were flaming,  
 Where fiends tore wailing through the halls  
 With venomous tongues and slashing claws,  
 Where all the wicked ones were fiercely burned, 350  
 Their spirits blasted by the black winds of woe.  
 Their once-proud prince was bound in prison—  
 He felt the heat. His faithless followers,  
 His dreadful thanes, were locked in loss.  
 This was the demons’ house of dread. 355  
 They were deaf forever to the angelic hymns  
 In God’s heaven, their innocent joy  
 Eternally lost. They embraced sin  
 And discovered hatred in the arms of the abyss.  
 They live in loathing, exiled from joy, 360  
 Singing no song except lamentation  
 Over the hideous sound of gnashing teeth:  
 “We have no hope except ice and fire,  
 No purpose but pain, no friends but fiends,  
 No gentle touch except that of serpents, 365  
 The spite of adders, the rancor of dragons.”  
 All anyone can hear for miles around  
 Is shrieking sorrow. They turn in torment,  
 Exiled from glory, lost in flame,  
 They remember and regret their ravenous dream 370  
 Of stealing the throne in the Savior’s kingdom.  
 Their proud rebellion proved a fool’s errand  
 Because the Son sent them downward to doom.  
 No sage is so wise, no counselor so knowing,

Save God himself, that he can comprehend 375  
 How the Lord's light shines over his blessed host,  
 Radiant in the realm of blessed heaven.  
 There angels exult in an epiphany of joy,  
 Saints sing an endless hallelujah of hymns,  
 The blessed arise bearing beautiful blooms, 380  
 The flowers of faith and fragrant herbs,  
 The words of God. He embraces them all  
 And leads them to light where they live forever  
 In the city of God, the heart's homeland,  
 Followers of the Savior, bathing in bliss. 385  
 That perfect reward is worth pursuing.

That fallen angel I've mentioned before  
 Was once called Lucifer or Light-bearer  
 When he lived in the Lord's kingdom.  
 Then he discovered a dark arrogance, 390  
 Pure pride, and stirred up strife,  
 Waging war against God in heaven.  
 That angel of evil, now known as Satan,  
 Thought he could have his own godly throne.  
 He lusted to be the sole lord of light 395  
 But regretted that sorely when he slipped and fell  
 Into deep disgrace, the humiliation of hell,  
 Sent into shame beyond rescue  
 By the righteous wrath of the Son and Savior.  
 The fallen angels were never allowed 400  
 To gaze on God's face, Christ's countenance,  
 Except when the Judge came to harrow hell,  
 Shattering the doors with a terrible din,  
 Blasting the grim gates. That brought bliss  
 To the mortals there when beyond the flames 405  
 They saw the Redeemer's radiant face—  
 Its beauty seemed better than Satan's hideous  
 Grimace and growl. All of the hell-demons  
 Twisted in terror in their heat-swept home.  
 Cowering in fear, they wailed these words: 410  
 "This attack is unfair since the Prince of angels  
 Comes like a warrior with the soldiers of God.

He leads with a light more radiant and ravishing  
 Than any we've seen outside of heaven,  
 Our old home. He has an army of angels 415  
 To deliver our doom. He may untwist torment,  
 Unwind wrath, unmake misery  
 For many good souls, saints and patriarchs,  
 But not for us. He will sustain our suffering  
 While saving souls, feed our flames 420  
 While freeing the blessed. We'll feel forever  
 A hideous shame from his righteous wrath."  
 Then the Lord and Creator entered into hell,  
 Seeking to save the faithful from the fire,  
 The good ones who had gone before, 425  
 In his might and mercy leading thousands  
 Of mortals to a better, brighter homeland.  
 Suddenly the sound of angels exulting  
 Shattered the dawn—Christ had conquered  
 The fierce king of hell, the fallen fiend. 430  
 His might was manifest, his power plain.  
 He opened the way for the blessed souls,  
 Lifting up those parents exiled from paradise,  
 Adam and his kin. But Eve could not look  
 Directly at heaven until she confessed, saying: 435  
 "I once angered you, eternal Lord,  
 When Adam and I, through the serpent's spite,  
 Ate the apple, tasting the forbidden fruit  
 As we should not have done. We drank doom.  
 Satan seduced us, that hideous demon 440  
 Who is now forever bound in flames.  
 He promised that paradise would always be ours  
 To rule as we wished, full of the fruit  
 Of our deepest desires. We trusted his guile,  
 His twisted truth, and took the bright fruit 445  
 From that holy tree, tasting not freedom  
 But sin and death, enduring exile,  
 And reaping the torment and terror of this place  
 Which is no paradise. That drink was bitter  
 To the last dregs. We lived in the sulfurous, 450  
 Hot pit of hell for thousands of years,



An almost-eternity, scourged with flame.  
 Now I beg you, Keeper of the kingdom,  
 Leader of this glorious host from heaven,  
 This band of angels, unfallen, unconquered, 455  
 That I may be permitted to rise up from here  
 With Adam, our family, our precious descendants.  
 Three days ago a follower of the Savior,  
 A turncoat and traitor, was thrust into hell.  
 Now he's bound in flames, lost in misery, 460  
 Because of his arrogance and God's anger.  
 He told us the truth—that the Lord himself,  
 The King of glory, would descend into hell  
 To bring us light and lead our kin,  
 The inhabitants of agony, to a happier home. 465  
 Then we lifted our heads, leaning on our arms,  
 Knowing that in spite of our endless torment,  
 Our unbounded terror, the Lord was coming  
 To heal our hearts and carry us home.”  
 Then Eve reached out her rueful hands 470  
 To the King of heaven, praying for mercy  
 Through Mother Mary, her own descendant,  
 Beseeching the Son and Savior of mankind:  
 “Lord, you were born through my own daughter,  
 Generations down, to deliver mankind. 475  
 Now this miracle is made manifest to all—  
 That you are the Lord, the Son of God,  
 And God himself, almighty, eternal,  
 Shaper and Sustainer of all creation.  
 Have mercy on me and carry me home.” 480

Then the eternal Lord gathered them up  
 And let them ascend. He had fixed Satan  
 And the rebellious angels forever in hell,  
 Where the miserable fiends, forcibly humbled,  
 Found their peril in that profound darkness. 485  
 They traded heaven's light for hell's gloom,  
 A blissful paradise for a prison of pain,  
 Where they're stuck forever without recourse.  
 In his righteous anger, God gave them a reward

Of exile from grace and endless agony, 490  
 A home of horror in the blazing abyss,  
 Forever stalked by the shadow of death.  
 There was bliss unbounded when the great host  
 Arrived in their homeland, the fortress of the faithful,  
 Led into heaven by the Lord of mankind. 495  
 The holy prophets, the kin of Abraham,  
 Lifted up the Lord, exalting Christ,  
 Who had conquered death, harrowed hell,  
 Put the fiend to flight. Prophets had foretold this.  
 When he blasted the doors of hell before dawn, 500  
 The sky cracked like heavenly thunder—  
 Christ was coming. The hinges of hell  
 And the demons' bones grew fearfully weak  
 In the hard radiance of the Lord's light.  
 Then the first-born Son of God sat with them, 505  
 Addressed the gathering with true words, saying:  
 "Wise spirits, by my might I made you—  
 First Adam and then this noble woman, Eve.  
 Through God's will, they begot forty children,  
 So that multitudes were born to inhabit this land, 510  
 Though the plan for a home in paradise was undone.  
 That terrible hell-fiend sought them out,  
 Seducing them subtly, snaring them in sin  
 Through his wicked guile. That angel was guilty  
 Of a terrible crime. In paradise I had planted 515  
 A perfect tree with branching boughs,  
 Full of bright but forbidden fruit,  
 The apples the two of you ate, as the devil urged.  
 Their taste was sweet as death's ashes,  
 And you were both banned from paradise, 520  
 Eventually enduring the fiery abyss,  
 Because you ignored the Savior's word,  
 And listened to Satan, who poisoned your thoughts.  
 I lamented that my handiwork had to endure  
 The bondage of work, the pain of birth, 525  
 The sin and separation, the agony of hell.  
 Neither human power nor angelic strength,

Neither sage's wisdom nor hero's courage,  
 Could save you then—only God the Savior,  
 Who had set the law and laid down the punishment 530  
 Before the sin, before the fall, and who came afterwards  
 To the human world from his heavenly home  
 Through the doors of delivery, a woman's womb,  
 A maiden unmatched, a virgin of virtue.  
 On earth I endured insult and injury, 535  
 Affliction and agony. Kings and counselors  
 Conspired against me, plotting my death.  
 My time was fulfilled—I had lived among you  
 Thirty-three years before my suffering started,  
 My painful passion. Always I remembered 540  
 The multitudes here, their torture and torment,  
 Their lament and longing for a Savior to come  
 To lead them from hell to their proper homeland,  
 Where they could delight in holy bliss  
 Not hideous fire, in the Lord's embrace 545  
 Not the devil's clutch. At home in heaven  
 You will know the Lord's generosity of joy,  
 The gift of bliss, a thousand-fold delight,  
 A radiant reward. I interceded for you  
 On the tree of torment, that blessed beam, 550  
 The gallows of glory where men mocked me,  
 Scourged me, struck me with a spear.  
 God in a body, I bore that pain,  
 Rising in glory to my homeland in heaven,  
 Returning to the arms of the holy Lord." 555

So the Guardian of glory, Lord of mankind,  
 Spoke these words early in the morning  
 On which the Lord God arose from the dead.  
 No stone was so strong, even wrapped with iron,  
 That it could resist God's might. The Lord of angels 560  
 Emerged from the sepulcher, ordering his angels  
 To summon the eleven worthy disciples,  
 And say to Simon Peter that he would once again  
 Be permitted to gaze upon God in Galilee,

Eternal and steadfast, as he had done before. 565  
 I've heard that the disciples departed for Galilee,  
 Inspired by the spirit and the news of the Lord.  
 There they recognized the holy Son of God,  
 Seeing the spot where the Lord stood.  
 The faithful followers ran to the place 570  
 Where the eternal one was and bowed humbly  
 At the feet of the Savior, thanking their Master  
 For this last reunion with the Shaper of angels,  
 The Sustainer of men. Then Simon Peter spoke:  
 "Is that you, Lord, clothed in glory, 575  
 Our radiant Redeemer? We saw you that time,  
 Bound by heathens, mocked and reviled,  
 With a crown of thorns on your innocent head.  
 Those unholy tormentors will regret that torture  
 When they come before you at the end of their days." 580  
 But some of the disciples doubted in their hearts  
 That this was their beloved. One called Didymus  
 Had to place his hand on the Savior's side  
 To feel the wound where God shed his blood,  
 The tears of baptism for all of mankind. 585  
 The Lord's passion was a precious act of love.  
 Christ climbed on the cross, the gallows of God,  
 Bleeding salvation for his beloved children.  
 All of mankind on middle-earth should thank  
 Our suffering Savior and eternal Lord 590  
 With words and works for breaking our chains,  
 Unshackling us from sin, harrowing hell,  
 And leading us blissfully homeward to heaven,  
 Where we will dwell forever in the land of delight,  
 Where God's glory, the Redeemer's radiance, 595  
 Will be revealed to the righteous as their just reward.

Then the eternal Lord was attended by his followers  
 For forty days and revealed to mankind  
 Before his holy spirit ascended into heaven  
 To the divine music of celestial clouds, 600  
 Lifted up by the hand of God,

While thousands of angels hymned him home.  
 Then Christ the Savior solemnly declared  
 That ten days later he would appear again  
 To the twelve apostles, his dear disciples, 605  
 To strengthen them with the gift of his spirit.  
 The living Lord, Redeemer of mankind,  
 Had restored to life many faithful souls.  
 Judas was not one of them—he had knowingly  
 Betrayed his blessed Lord, sent him to sacrifice, 610  
 Sold him for silver. He discovered his bad bargain  
 When the devil paid him back for his sin in hell,  
 The price of his soul, hell's dark reward.  
 Now the Son sits at the Father's right hand,  
 Offering the heart's healing, the soul's salvation, 615  
 The measure of mercy, to the children of earth.  
 We know that he is Maker and Ruler,  
 Shaper and Sustainer of all creatures.  
 The holiest angel sits in heaven,  
 Abides with his saints, prophets and patriarchs. 620  
 The Son of glory sits on his throne,  
 Surrounded by sky. He hearkens us home  
 Through his healing mercy, his steadfast love,  
 Drawing us upward to live in the light,  
 The revealed radiance of our holy Redeemer, 625  
 Where he holds his court and dwells in delight.  
 Let's always remember to eagerly obey  
 Our Lord and Savior, to please Christ.  
 That is a finer treasure, a deeper delight,  
 Than any we can find in this earthly life. 630

Now the glorious Prince, almighty God,  
 Will come to us all on Judgment Day.  
 He will order archangels to blow the trumpets  
 Above the cities, towns, and villages,  
 Over all the earth. The dead will arise 635  
 Out of the dust of their opening graves,  
 Revived in the end by the Redeemer's might.  
 That will surely be the longest of days,

The loudest of tumults, when the ruling Savior  
 Comes through the clouds to divide the hosts 640  
 Into fair and foul, blessed and baleful,  
 Saved and sent down. At his right hand  
 The righteous and just, the true and trusted,  
 Will ascend in bliss to the holy city  
 To rest forever in the presence of God. 645  
 He will welcome them home to heaven, saying:  
 “You are welcome guests. Enter my kingdom,  
 Lifted in love to the light of glory,  
 Resting forever in eternal bliss.”  
 At the Lord’s left hand, sinners will tremble, 650  
 Threatened by doom when the Son of God  
 Comes to judge them. They may dare to dream  
 With false hopes in their faithless hearts  
 That they will ascend to the city of angels  
 As the faithful did, but the light will dawn 655  
 A little too late, and the Lord will declare:  
 “You are banned from bliss. Descend with the damned  
 Into a prison of pain, an unholy hell-home,  
 A place of punishment. I know you not.”  
 Then the cursed demons will slink out of hell, 660  
 Summon and snatch them, thrust them by thousands  
 Into the gulf of guilt, the chasm of pain,  
 The abyss of agony. They can never return  
 From the prison of peril. Shackled in sin,  
 Bound in shame, they will endlessly endure 665  
 A chilling reception, a ravenous welcome,  
 The devil’s delight of torment and torture,  
 The scorn and scourging of whipping words  
 And taunting flames. The black hounds of hell  
 Will accuse them of feuds, plots and intrigues, 670  
 Proud boasts and pernicious deeds,  
 Of ignoring their noble Lord in their hearts,  
 Where their hopes should have found a home.  
 So let us strive to serve our Savior,  
 Obey his commands, bearing in mind 675  
 The heart’s hunger for Christ’s healing,

The soul's quest for God's grace,  
 Our whole life's longing to finally rest  
 With the heaven-bright Savior, the Son of God.  
 The gates of heaven are adorned with gold, 680  
 Decked with gems, treasured tokens  
 Of the Lord's generosity, his precious joy.  
 The walls of heaven are alive with angels  
 And blessed souls, living in the light,  
 Gathering glory, radiant with rapture. 685  
 The halls of heaven are full of martyrs  
 Whose lives and works honor God  
 And who sing out their holy praises to him:  
 "You are the Prince of heaven, Protector of men,  
 Origin of angels and all of creation, 690  
 Righteous Judge, Ruler and Redeemer.  
 Now you have led the offspring of earth,  
 The children of men, your faithful family,  
 Here to our blessed home in heaven."  
 The Lord's thanes gather round his throne, 695  
 Praising his majesty and mercy, power and purpose.  
 He climbed on the cross to suffer his passion,  
 Enduring death so that we might live.  
 That gallows grace is no small gift.

[Now we recall how Christ was tempted 700  
 To sin by Satan in the world's wilderness]  
 Where he first fasted for forty days  
 In the fullness of purity, the sustenance of mercy.  
 Then that wretched angel wrought by God,  
 Who rebelled against his own Creator 705  
 And was cast down from heaven for his crime,  
 Decided to tempt Christ, the King of creation,  
 Hauling flat stones to the holy one,  
 Taunting the Savior, saying maliciously:  
 "Lord, if you're hungry, transform these stones 710  
 Into loaves of bread, if you wield such power."  
 Then the Lord responded to the snares of Satan:  
 "Do you not know, demon, that it is written

[That man shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word from the mouth of God.] 715

\* \* \*

For the Lord of victory, Light of the living,  
Will reward the righteous with a home in heaven  
Along with those angels, trusted and true,  
Who will share an endless, unfallen joy.”

\* \* \*

Then Satan, that insolent, hideous creature, 720  
Seized Christ in his scornful clutch,

Lifting the Healer on his sinful shoulders,  
Bearing him up to a high mountain  
In malicious rage, where he tried his best  
To tempt the Savior with devious words: 725

“Lord, look now upon the inhabitants of earth.  
I offer you power over all these people,  
The chance to rule this worldly realm.

Reign over all of heaven and earth  
If you are truly the king of creation, 730  
The lord of angels, the guardian of men,  
As you seem to believe from your previous words.”

Then the eternal Lord answered the devil:  
“Go back to your hell-hole, unholy Satan—  
You cursed God and earned the abyss. 735

What waits for you there is torment and terror,  
Not blessing and bliss. I command you now,  
Prince of darkness, by the power of light,  
That you offer no hope to any of the inhabitants

In the hallways of hell, bear home no tales 740  
Of how you tempted the true Lord of heaven—  
Only the horror story of how you failed

And were thrown down by your righteous Ruler,  
Maker of mankind, King of creation.  
Go back to hell—turn tail and run! 745

Your prison is endless by any measure,  
A terrible hell-hole, a grim grave-house.  
Mark out its length with your demon hands.  
Try finding its floor, computing its depth,



Measuring its width, the length of its fire, 750  
 The angle of its air. How many feet down  
 Is the end of the abyss? How deep is its darkness?  
 How far does that grim grave-house extend?  
 Finally you will know how great God is,  
 How foolish your sins, how pitiful your power, 755  
 How unwise your rebellion. Go home to hell  
 With your calculating grasp, your unkind clutch.  
 Take a couple of hours for this endless task.  
 See if you learn anything from the eternal abyss.”  
 Then misery moved up behind Satan, 760  
 Vengeance crept up to seize the vile demon.  
 The evil one fled like a fury into hell.  
 He fell down darkly into a pit of pain.  
 Sometimes he tried to measure the agony,  
 The torment and terror, with his fierce fist. 765  
 Sometimes he tried to grasp the fury  
 Of the dark flames with his fallen mind,  
 But he could never fathom the depths of fire.  
 Sometimes he saw his friends, now fiends,  
 Lying in hell. Sometimes he heard 770  
 The wretched lament of lost souls,  
 Exiled from the Lord. They shrieked in pain  
 When they saw Satan. The rebels from heaven  
 Now suffered in hell a dreaded doom.  
 When the evil demon found the floor, 775  
 Satan sensed that the gates of hell  
 Were a hundred thousand miles away  
 And understood how Christ the Lord  
 In his craft and power had commanded him  
 To measure his own endless agony. 780  
 As the fiend glared with his abominable eyes  
 Across the abyss at the endless horror,  
 The unholy host began to wail  
 As terror seized and twisted their hearts.  
 They hated Satan and reviled his judgment, 785  
 Railing at their lost leader, their fallen lord:  
 “You led us out of heaven into living hell,

Dreaming of evil, denying the good.  
Now you exist in this unholy agony,  
Living in pain, loathsome to us,  
Suffering forever, as well you should,  
For you have never wished for any good!”

790

This is the end of Book II. Amen.

# THE VERCELLI BOOK





## INTRODUCTION

I am the silent voice singing in a house of books  
Far from my original home. Who made me,  
And who carried me, a dear clutch of words,  
On the way to Rome, no one knows.  
I contain and celebrate the song of the rood,  
The voice and vision of Christ's cross  
In a dreamer's mind, homilies on virtue and vice,  
The bliss of heaven, the bale of hell,  
The story of a saint who struggles with a demon,  
The discovery of the cross by Constantine's mother,  
The fates of the apostles, many of them martyred,  
And the soul's address to its moldering body  
In their sober reunion on the day of doom.  
Who knows what secrets I may reveal  
Across the bridge of untraveled time?  
Let your mind wander and say what I mean.

**T**he Vercelli Book is a codex housed in the cathedral library of Vercelli in northern Italy. It is a plain manuscript containing 135 folios “written in a bold, firm hand, apparently by a single Anglo-Saxon scribe at some time during the middle of the second half of the tenth century” (Zacher and Orchard, 4). The manuscript is better preserved than any of the other major Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. There are some missing folios and some damage from a reagent, probably applied to enhance the readability of

the script but which has instead obscured it in places. The book contains the six poems translated here and also some twenty-three pieces of homiletic prose on a variety of religious subjects. The movement between the homiletic prose and poetic texts is as follows (Krapp, 1932a, xvii–xx):

Homiletic prose

*Andreas: Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*

*The Fates of the Apostles*

Homiletic prose

*Soul and Body I*

*Homiletic Fragment I: On Human Deceit*

*The Dream of the Rood*

Homiletic prose

*Elene: Helena's Discovery of the True Cross*

The prose life of St. Guthlac

With respect to the so-called homilies, Fulk and Cain explain that “most are sermons, though two are homilies proper . . . two are largely hagiographical . . . and two are chiefly close translations of scenes in the life of Christ from the Gospels of John and Pseudo-Matthew, with no real exposition” (75), and they go on to note a number of formal and thematic connections between the homiletic prose and the poetic texts.

How and when the Vercelli Book came to reside in the Italian library remains a subject of some debate, as does the purpose of the particular compilation of texts. Zacher and Orchard summarize this as follows:

The fact that the book left Anglo-Saxon England certainly seems to have aided its survival, as well as fuelling speculation as to how the book might have reached its current home. Since Vercelli was throughout the early Middle Ages a major staging-post on the pilgrim route to Rome, the simplest explanation seems to be that the book was left behind (either as a gift or as a relic) by some presumably wealthy Anglo-Saxon en route to or from Rome, although other views persist. The original purpose of the compiler (if the single scribe can be so called) has again escaped scholarly consensus, with sharply differing views on the extent to which the collection as a whole can be viewed as having been planned, and on its purpose as a book for public performance or private devotion. (4)

Even though the Vercelli Book resides in a library far from most other OE texts, it is not in form and substance a thing apart. Zacher and Orchard note a number of connections between the texts in the Vercelli Book and other Old English texts. For example, there are two runically signed Cynewulfian poems in the Vercelli Book and two in the Exeter Book, a *Body and Soul* poem in each of the same two collections, and parallels between *Andreas* and *Beowulf* and between *The Dream of the Rood* and other OE religious texts ranging from the riddles to the Ruthwell Cross (4–5; see Orchard, 2009, for the various Rood cross-references). Finally, even though the Vercelli Book admittedly is “a manuscript that crosses and has crossed a number of temporal, generic, and literary boundaries” (Zacher and Orchard, 5), it does seem to be a more consciously compiled and ordered collection than the Exeter Book.

## ANDREAS: ANDREW IN THE COUNTRY OF THE CANNIBALS

This is one of five vernacular saints' lives or legends in OE verse. The others are *Elene: Helena's Discovery of the True Cross* in the Vercelli Book (see below) and *Guthlac A*, *Guthlac B*, and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book. Brooks notes that "the legend of the adventures of Andrew and Matthew in the land of the [Mermedonians] appears to have been from early times one of the most popular of all the apocryphal stories concerning the Apostles [and] it is preserved in numerous Oriental versions and also in Greek, Latin, and Old English prose recensions" (xv). Clayton points out that "of the Latin versions extant, none is the direct source of *Andreas*, but the Old English text most closely resembles the Greek along with some details most closely paralleled in a Latin version known as the *Casanatensis*" (xvi–xvii; for a translation of the *Casanatensis*, see Calder and Allen, 14–34). For many years, scholars assumed that the *Andreas* poet made use of *Beowulf* because of certain shared characteristics, but Fulk and Cain note that "this consensus lapsed with the growing recognition that Old English verse is formulaic, and verbal parallels may result from a common oral tradition rather than from a direct literary influence" (102). The relation between the two poems continues to be debated, but what is clear is that the *Andreas* poet has colored the story with the diction and tropes of OE heroic poetry. The poem begins, for example, with the traditional *Hwæt!* (Listen!) and refers to the audience's having heard stories of the legendary apostles, just as *Beowulf* begins with *Hwæt!* and a reference to its audience having heard the stories of the "Spear-Danes' glory." When God approaches Andrew, commanding him to journey to the land of the cannibals to save his brother Matthew, Andrew answers in



what Greenfield calls “a tissue of Anglo-Saxon formulas and kennings appropriate to the themes of exile and sea-voyaging, replete with variation” (Greenfield and Calder, 160). Clayton also points out that “Andrew’s disciples express their undying loyalty to him in terms that would be appropriate for a poem of secular heroism but in this context conveys the sense of their being soldiers of Christ, *militēs Christi*, with Andrew as their leader against the forces of the devil represented by the Mermedonians” (xviii).

Often there is a poetic expansion of the prose legend. After the dead prison guards have been discovered by the Mermedonians, the Latin prose version of *Casanatensis* says simply: “Now the murderers went to the prison so they could bring out a man to carry off for their food, but after they found the gate open and seven guards dead, they dashed off quickly to their leaders” (Calder and Allen, 27). The Anglo-Saxon poet expands this in heroic style, referring to the *wærlēasra werod* (throng of the faithless) that came with their weapons to *þam fæstenne* (to the fortress) to find at the door “of the prison death-house . . . not a welcome hand / But broken locks and bloodied bodies / The freedom of their foes and a collection of corpses” (lines 1096 ff.). Here the unholy heathens sound like the horde of Viking warriors in *The Battle of Maldon*, and the scene of carnage sounds like the aftermath of a Grendelish visit to the Danish hall or the result of the reawakened feud in Finnsburg. Boenig sums up the conjunction of Germanic poetic techniques in the Christian poetry:

The heroic language is, of course, part of the given of Old English poetry. Other poems about saints or religious matters in the Old English corpus show the same tendency to invest the spiritual with the military, to dress up the saint in the armor of the hero. The Guthlac poems and *The Dream of the Rood* are particularly adept at this. There is certainly scriptural warrant for it as well: St. Paul’s famous passage about taking on the armor of Christ (Ephesians 6:10–17) made the transfer easy. (xxxiv)

So Andrew is portrayed as a soldier-saint who battles against the devil and the heathen cannibals but who also obeys the will of God even when it means suffering to the point of near death. In this combination of bold warrior and suffering servant, he follows in, and reaffirms, the pattern set by Christ.

I have filled in several of the short manuscript breaks in the poem with details from the prose versions of Andrew’s life; these occur within brackets in the translation.

## Andreas: Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals

Listen! We have heard the heroic stories  
 Of the twelve glorious disciples of the Lord  
 Who served under heaven in days of old.  
 Their faith and courage on the battlefield  
 Did not falter or fail after they separated 5  
 And were dispersed abroad as the Lord commanded,  
 The high King of heaven who shaped their lives.  
 These were great men, well-known warriors,  
 Brave and bold leaders of the people,  
 When hands and shields defended the helmets 10  
 On the full plain of battle, that fateful field.  
 One great warrior of God was Matthew,  
 Who was the first among the Jews to write  
 With inspired skill the wondrous words  
 Of the Gospel in a country across the oceans 15  
 Where no foreigner could feel at home.  
 God cast Matthew's lot on a fierce island  
 Where strangers were often savagely attacked.  
 That wilderness was inhabited by cruel cutthroats,  
 Encompassed by evil and devilish deceit. 20  
 The people in that place, the tribes of terror,  
 Hungered for unholy food. They ate no bread,  
 Drank no water, but wolfed down human  
 Flesh and blood, the corpses of men,  
 An abominable feast. This was their custom: 25  
 They slaughtered strangers who came from afar,  
 Engorged themselves on their unwelcome guests.  
 Each foreigner found himself invited to the table,  
 And the inhabitants ate as many as they were able.  
 These heartless savages were not good hosts— 30  
 They satisfied their hunger in hideous ways.  
 First the fierce people would go for the eyes,  
 Gouging out the beautiful jewels of the head,  
 Stifling sight with their sharp spear-points.  
 Afterwards sorcerers with a sinister magic 35  
 Would make these monstrous and murderous men

A maddening drink that would poison their minds  
 And ravage their hearts so that when they were left  
 Without living guests to devour for dinner,  
 They would give up their humanity, gobbling grass 40  
 In the fields like cows, fattened for the feast.

Then Matthew came to that infamous city  
 Of Mermedonia that was bursting to the brim  
 With devilish men and hungry degenerates  
 Who gathered together with screams and shouts 45  
 To greet the stranger—those demon devourers  
 Had heard about the mission of the holy man.  
 They were not slow to attack with spears and shields—  
 They were armed to the teeth and hungry for blood!  
 They bound the saint's hands with fiendish cunning, 50  
 Savages themselves bound straight for hell,  
 And scooped out his eyeballs with a sharp blade,  
 An unsympathetic sword, lifting the orbs  
 That enabled him to see. The small suns  
 Of his head were eclipsed by evil. 55  
 Yet in his heart, the holy one praised God,  
 Composed even after he was forced to swallow  
 A cup of bitter poison, a venomous drink.  
 He raised hymns of praise to his guardian Lord  
 With holy words and sacred speech, 60  
 A fervent prayer from his evil prison  
 To the Prince of glory, his God in heaven.  
 He held Christ fast in his faithful heart.  
 Weary and weeping with tears of torment,  
 He reached out to the Lord in his hour of need, 65  
 The glorious one who shields and sustains us,  
 Speaking these words to his bountiful God:  
 "Look down, Lord, on your holy servant  
 Who sees no more. I am ensnared in evil,  
 Wound in a web of alien appetites. 70  
 I have always obeyed your will in this world,  
 Made my heart your home. Now I am captured  
 By demons and dressed for slaughter like a beast.  
 Only you can see into the hearts of men,

No matter how hidden. If I must die here 75  
 According to your will by sword-slash  
 Or spear-thrust, I am ready to suffer.  
 Your will is my way, Lord of all warriors,  
 Leader of angels. Lift up my hope—  
 Lend me your light, Lord, to sustain my sight. 80  
 Let me not be a beggar with wounds for eyes,  
 Wandering aimlessly the evil cities  
 Of these baleful, blood-hungry heathens,  
 Savaged and scorned. Creator and Keeper  
 Of this fallen world, on you I fix my faith, 85  
 The might of my mind, the love of my heart.  
 Father of angels, bright bearer of bliss,  
 You are the bestower of the breath of life.  
 Guardian of middle-earth, I pray to you now,  
 Set me free from this savagery. Protect me 90  
 From the scourge of suffering, the direst of deaths  
 At the hands of these vile and vicious men,  
 My Ruler and Redeemer, my righteous Judge.”  
 After these words, a holy sign from heaven  
 Came into the prison like a radiant sun, 95  
 A token of God’s glory, making manifest  
 To Matthew that his anguished prayer was answered.  
 God’s glorious voice was heard from the heavens,  
 A holy eloquence. He offered his servant  
 Healing and comfort in his prison of pain, 100  
 Saying in a clear and sublime voice:  
 “I hear you Matthew—have here my gift,  
 Of peace under heaven. Fear no evil  
 In mind or spirit. I will break your bonds,  
 Those sinful snares, and rescue you 105  
 With those who dwell in terrible torment.  
 By my holy power, I will open the gates  
 Of paradise to you, that place of radiance,  
 The happiest of homes, the greatest of glories,  
 An abode in heaven where you will abide. 110  
 Endure the cruel torture of these men.  
 You will not have to suffer this savagery for long—  
 These treacherous men will not torment you

With their cunning craft for untold days.  
 Soon I will send Andrew to sustain you, 115  
 Your shield and solace in this heathen city.  
 He will save you from this nation's terror,  
 This alien evil, this devouring hatred.  
 Andrew will arrive in twenty-seven nights,  
 And you will be freed from the vile unfaith 120  
 Of these murdering Mermedonians. You will then pass  
 From suffering to salvation, from grim torture  
 To the glories of heaven, from the heart's humiliation  
 To the comfort and keeping of the victorious Lord."  
 Then the Creator of angels, eternal Protector 125  
 Of all creatures, left Matthew unafraid,  
 Endowed with hope, and departed into heaven.  
 God is our Guardian, our rightful King,  
 The steadfast Ruler of every realm.

Then Matthew renewed hope in his heart. 130  
 The night-shroud lifted, the light dawned,  
 The fierce warriors gathered in a frenzy,  
 An evil throng thrusting their spears,  
 Rattling their swords behind their shields,  
 Their hearts blood-mad under their mail-coats. 135  
 They wanted to separate the living from the dead  
 In that dark prison and discover which of the breathing  
 Was ready for breakfast—a treat, a terror.  
 They would rob a life for a feast of flesh,  
 Take down the living for a taste of limbs. 140  
 In mad hunger, they had inscribed death-letters,  
 Doom-dates written down for each of the men,  
 When they would serve as meat on the menu.  
 Cruel and cold-hearted, they began to rage,  
 Clamoring loudly for the coming dishes, 145  
 The freshest meat, the sweetest blood.  
 Those heathens had no respect for the right way  
 Of living or the might and mercy of the Lord.  
 They came skulking out of the devil's darkness,  
 Shrouded like the devil in a cloak of sin. 150  
 They trusted in terror, kept faith with fiends.

They found the wise warrior, the holy hero,  
 Imprisoned in darkness, longing for the life  
 That the Lord of angels, the King and Creator,  
 Had promised him. There were three days left 155  
 Of his allotted time, according to the ravenous  
 Reckoning of the savage slaughter-wolves.  
 The day was drawing near when they meant  
 To break his bones, rip his sinews,  
 Unhinge his joints, separate his soul 160  
 From his body, share out his blood  
 And fine flesh, the delicious corpse-meat,  
 To men young and old. Everyone was eager  
 For a morning treat. No one worried  
 About the soul's journey to judgment after death, 165  
 Whether endless agony or eternal joy.  
 They often held a murderous dinner party  
 After thirty days to deliver death  
 And feast on flesh, driven by hunger  
 And the desire to tear bodies open 170  
 With their greedy teeth and grim jaws,  
 Stained with blood. They needed flesh-fodder.  
 Then the mighty Maker of all middle-earth  
 Was mindful of how Matthew remained in misery  
 Among those alien peoples, punished for nothing, 175  
 Bound by limb-locks. He was a dear disciple,  
 Showing his love among the Hebrews and Israelites,  
 But firmly opposing the occult arts,  
 The strange spells of the heathenish Jews.  
 Then the voice of heaven was suddenly heard 180  
 By the apostle Andrew who dwelled in Achaia,  
 Teaching people the true way of life.  
 Our God almighty, the Glory-king,  
 The Lord of hosts and Maker of men,  
 Opened his heart's hoard, his mind's treasury, 185  
 To the bold believer, offering these words:  
 "Go forth to the country where cannibals rule  
 And consume the flesh of their own kind.  
 Their custom is cruel, a savage practice—  
 They feast on strangers, foreigners who suffer 190

This terrible fate. The murderers in Mermedonia  
 Bring terror to travelers, agony to aliens,  
 Death to those who drift unknowingly  
 Into this harrowing corpse-hungry kingdom.  
 Your brother Matthew is shackled in that city, 195  
 Where he will be slaughtered in three days  
 So that the unholy heathens can feast on his flesh.  
 The tip of the spear will send forth his soul,  
 His body becoming the sweet taste of flesh,  
 Unless you manage to get there first!" 200  
 Then Andrew immediately answered the summons:  
 "My Lord and God, Guardian of glory,  
 Shaper of creation, how can I cross the sea  
 As quickly as you command? It's surely easier  
 Said than done! An angel might travel 205  
 With a touch of speed or a twist of time,  
 Who knows the craft and curve of space,  
 The height of heaven, the breadth of seas,  
 But I cannot. These evil aliens  
 Do not sound like good friends to foreigners— 210  
 Their minds are malevolent, their culture is cruel.  
 The sea-roads are rough, the cold waters unknown.  
 This does not sound like a safe journey."  
 Then the eternal Lord answered his servant:  
 "Alas, Andrew! that you should be slow 215  
 To set out, that cruel seas or savages  
 Should shake your faith or give you cold feet.  
 In my omnipotence I could bring you the city  
 With all its inhabitants, its evil and affliction,  
 If I wanted to. With a Maker's might 220  
 I could even lift up that infamous city  
 And set it down here. Trust is a covenant  
 The faithful should keep. Be ready to follow  
 Your Ruler's command. The hour of departure  
 Draws near. There can be no delay. 225  
 You must risk your life for the love of your Lord,  
 Bear your body to this unwholesome land,  
 Bring it to the clutch of these demon devourers,  
 Where war will be waged, faith will be tested

Against torment, terror, and dark dread. 230  
 The heathens will harass you, but I will be near.  
 Tomorrow at dawn you must board a ship  
 And sail over the cold ocean-road to cruelty,  
 Bearing my blessing as you journey beyond  
 The known limits of the wide world.” 235  
 Then the holy Shaper and Sustainer of men,  
 The origin of angels and all of creation,  
 Went home to heaven, a place of paradise  
 Where righteous souls redeemed of sin  
 Return to their heart’s hold, a richness, 240  
 A radiance, an endless rejoicing beyond  
 The body’s ruin, an eternal reward.

So God sent Andrew on a dangerous errand,  
 Entrusting his warrior with a difficult task.  
 His heart did not falter, his spirit hesitate. 245  
 He left the city, his mind on Matthew’s  
 Peril in prison. He kept up his courage,  
 Holding steadfastly to his holy purpose  
 With a firm faith. He would fight for God.  
 He headed for the harbor over the sand-hills, 250  
 Marching with his men down to the strand.  
 As the sun rose slowly over the horizon,  
 The ocean resounded, and the waves pounded  
 The shore. The brave-hearted hero rejoiced  
 To discover a broad-bellied ship ready to sail. 255  
 Just then the sun, the brightest of beacons,  
 The candle of heaven, the radiance of morning,  
 Lifted its glory, the day’s first light,  
 Over the sea’s horizon, shimmering on the waves.  
 Then Andrew saw standing on the strange ship 260  
 Three splendid seafaring thanes,  
 Brave-hearted men eager to set sail.  
 Its mighty captain was secretly God himself  
 With a crew of two angels, robed not in radiance  
 But in sailors’ garb, tossing in their ships, 265  
 Ready for the cold embrace of the sea-road.  
 Andrew greeted them, standing on the shore,



Eager to embark on his journey, saying:  
 “Bold seafarers, where have you come from,  
 Mighty warriors in a wondrous craft? 270  
 What power has driven you over the wild waves,  
 Bearing your boat securely to our shore?”  
 Then almighty God answered Andrew  
 With such a humble human voice  
 That he could not fathom who was speaking: 275  
 “We have sailed the sea-road from Mermedonia,  
 Riding surge and swell in this high-necked ship,  
 Our sea-stallion driven by wind and wave.”  
 Andrew answered the strange sea-captain:  
 “I humbly beg for your help to carry us 280  
 Across the whale-road on your high-prowed ship  
 To Mermedonia, though I have no wealth,  
 No worldly goods, no gold rings or gems  
 To pay for our passage. Only God can give you  
 His rich reward for your kindness and caring 285  
 If you consent to our poor request to carry us  
 Across the sea.” Then the Creator of angels,  
 God of all earthly princes and peoples,  
 Answered Andrew, speaking from the deck  
 Of the ready wave-walker, saying: 290  
 “No foreigner can flourish, no heart remain whole,  
 No body last long in that wretched land.  
 That is no good home for the weary traveler.  
 Men who make their way to Mermedonia  
 Often find devouring death in that evil city. 295  
 Why do you want to cross the wide seas  
 To toss your lives to the wolfish ones there?”  
 Then Andrew answered the captain again:  
 “Our hearts are driven by hope and longing  
 To arrive boldly at that infamous city, 300  
 If you will kindly carry us there,  
 Sailing us seaward toward those cruel killers.”  
 The Lord of angels, the Savior of men,  
 Spoke again to Andrew from the ship’s prow:  
 “We will gladly and graciously bear you 305  
 Across the sea, the great fishes’ bath,

To the dangerous land you long to visit,  
 The dark hideout of hideous desires,  
 If you will pay the price these sailors demand.”  
 Then Andrew replied, a friendless man 310  
 Without money on a desperate mission:  
 “I have no precious treasure, no plated gold,  
 No worldly wealth, no claim of land,  
 No rings or riches, gems or jewels,  
 To satisfy the fair cost of this journey.” 315  
 Then God answered Andrew from the gangway  
 Where the sovereign captain, the Savior stood.  
 He spoke over the gather of sea and sand:  
 “How, dearest friend, has it come about  
 That you intended without any treasure 320  
 To secure a ship to cross the sea  
 With its deep currents and mountainous heights,  
 The cold cliffs of ocean waves?  
 Have you no precious bread or pure water  
 To nourish your body and sustain your spirit? 325  
 Hard is the lot of the poor man who must wander  
 Over the dangerous waves of the ocean road.”  
 Then Andrew unlocked his word-hoard,  
 Offering his heart’s wisdom to the ship’s captain:  
 “It is not proper for a prosperous man 330  
 To whom God has given such worldly wealth  
 To speak proudly to a poor man who owns nothing.  
 It would be better to act humbly and offer help  
 To a stranded stranger as Christ commanded.  
 We are his followers, his chosen warriors. 335  
 He is our Ruler by right, our Creator and King,  
 Who made us all and gives us meaning,  
 Shapes each moment and sustains all life.  
 He sent forth his apostles across the earth  
 To seek out souls, saying to us: 340  
 ‘Go forth to the end of every country—  
 Walk every road, sail every sea,  
 Preaching my holy message to the multitudes,  
 Spreading the faith. I will sustain you  
 And keep you safe. Go without worry, 345

Without wealth, without silver or gold.  
 I will give you both bounty and blessing,  
 Each day's deserving—my gift of grace.  
 Now you can judge our journey for yourself  
 And tell us whether you will offer us aid." 350  
 Then the eternal Lord answered Andrew:  
 "If you are truly the servants of the Lord,  
 Who raised up heaven and shaped middle-earth,  
 And if you live in his love and obey his law,  
 Then I will take you sailing across sea-streams 355  
 In the spirit of generosity with which you ask."  
 So the bold-minded warriors boarded the ship,  
 Sailing with joyous hearts over the wide waves.

Later when the sea started to swell and surge,  
 Andrew prayed to the glorious Lord 360  
 For his blessing and favor on the sailors, saying:  
 "May the Lord who guards us grant you mercy,  
 Honor on earth and glory in heaven,  
 Be as generous with his joy to you on this journey  
 As you have been to me, a seafaring stranger." 365  
 Then the holy one sat, the saint by the sea-captain,  
 One noble spirit next to the other. No one  
 Has ever seen a simple ship so lavishly decked out  
 With such a noble treasure—Lord, angels,  
 Thanes, and heroes—a gather of glory. 370  
 Then the Lord and Captain of that wondrous craft,  
 Eternal and almighty, ordered his angels  
 To bring food and comfort to the poorly provided,  
 Seafaring soldiers so they might sustain themselves  
 And endure their lot on the stormy road. 375  
 Then the sea was troubled, the ocean roared.  
 The great whale muscled his way through the waves,  
 The gray gull circled, greedy for dinner.  
 The air darkened as the sky-candle dimmed,  
 The winds whipped up, the waves crashed down, 380  
 The sea-currents clashed, the ropes crackled,  
 The sails were soaked. The waves attacked  
 Like wild warriors—the sailors knew dark dread

On that dangerous and deserted sea-road.  
 No one knew the outcome of that battle, 385  
 But few could fathom reaching the shore alive.  
 They feared their harbor would be the sea's floor  
 And could hardly conceive of their sea-captain's power—  
 But even above the raging sea-storms,  
 Andrew held firm, faithful to his Lord. 390  
 He also gave thanks to the steadfast sea-captain  
 For both food and fortune, saying to him:  
 "May the righteous Lord, Author of light and life,  
 Ruler of heavenly hosts, reward you for this food  
 With bounty and bliss, the bread of heaven, 395  
 And bless you for the gifts you have given to us,  
 Hope for our hearts and a home on the waves.  
 Now my men are dismayed—the sea's in high rage.  
 Something is amiss in the watery abyss.  
 Brave warriors dread the death-dealing waves." 400  
 Then the Captain and Creator answered Andrew:  
 "Let me steer this wave-tossed ship to the shore,  
 Where your men can rest secure from the storm  
 And await our return from battling the seas."  
 Then Andrew's men rose up as one, 405  
 Refusing this offer, standing steadfastly  
 Beside their leader. They would not seek land,  
 The safety of shore, with their commander at sea.  
 The courageous warriors began to complain:  
 "Where shall we turn in an unknown land 410  
 Without our dear lord, our hearts made heavy,  
 Our souls weighed down with the drag of shame?  
 We would be deserters, despised everywhere  
 When councils of men meet to discuss  
 Which warriors have served their lords at war 415  
 And which have left them alone on the field  
 To suffer the slash and slaughter of battle."  
 Then the powerful Captain, King and Creator,  
 True to his promise, said to Andrew:  
 "If you are the servant of the Lord of heaven, 420  
 The Maker of middle-earth in all his majesty,  
 As you claim to be, comfort your men.

Make clear God's mysteries as he told them,  
 Teaching the speech-bearing people on earth.  
 It's a grueling journey over the gleaming ocean 425  
 To that distant land you so strenuously seek.  
 The sea is disturbed and churns up its bed,  
 But God can carry you safely across,  
 Shielding and sustaining the lives of your sailors."  
 So Andrew reassured his faithful followers, 430  
 Those glorious men, with these good words:  
 "When you set out to sea on this dangerous mission,  
 You promised to risk your lives in that land  
 Of dreaded savages who devoured their kind,  
 To suffer death for our dear Lord who commands us, 435  
 Giving up the ghost in the cruelest of kingdoms,  
 That alien land. I know that the Lord,  
 The Creator of men and of heavenly hosts,  
 Shields and protects us from the menacing waves.  
 The sea will calm down—our Captain and Creator 440  
 Will prevail over peril, sustain us through the storm.  
 This has happened before, when we were all riding  
 Through rough waters, a terror of tides,  
 When the ocean was in agony, whipped by winds.  
 The waves seemed to screech, one to another, 445  
 Offering our sailors a terrible death-song.  
 Remember how the water battered the boat,  
 Washing grimly over the gunwale, drenching the decks,  
 Flowing heavily into the hold. That was dead weight.  
 Remember how we saw the Almighty sitting there 450  
 In the middle of the boat, a brightness in the storm.  
 Every man cried out for mercy from his Maker,  
 For safety from the storm. Then the Lord of creation,  
 Shaper and Sustainer of angels and men,  
 Rose up and rebuked the storm, silenced the winds, 455  
 Stilled the seas, calming the chaos.  
 Our hearts rejoiced when we saw wave and wind  
 Grow fearful before God. He tamed those terrors  
 And he will tame these. I tell you each truly  
 That your Creator will never forsake a man 460  
 Whose faith is firm and whose courage holds fast."

So the saintly warrior wove these wise words  
 For his followers, wanting them to know comfort.  
 He heartened his thanes, reassuring seafarers,  
 Till sleep settled on them as they lay by the mast. 465  
 The sea-surge was stilled, the waves retreated,  
 The ocean gave up its attack—its wild fury  
 Became a buoyant embrace, lifting up life.  
 The sailors were saved, the terror was tamed,  
 The saint survived. His spirit rejoiced. 470

Then the wise traveler started speaking,  
 Opening his word-hoard to the captain, saying:  
 “I’ve never met a mightier or more worthy seaman,  
 So skilled in the way of both waves and words.  
 Your craft is subtle, your speech profound. 475  
 I have one small request, though again I offer  
 Little in the way of wealth, rings or riches,  
 Beautiful treasures adorned with beaten gold.  
 I would be your good friend and follower,  
 Learn from your wise ways, if you would consent 480  
 To be my teacher and counsel poor wayfarers  
 Traveling alone in this storm-tossed world.  
 For this generous gift, you could win God’s grace,  
 An abundance of joy in the heavenly kingdom.  
 First I want to find out how you steer the ship 485  
 Since the King of glory, the Creator of men,  
 Has granted you the gift of guiding this wave-floater,  
 This surging sea-stallion, over the endless  
 Ocean road. I have made sixteen trips  
 In various ships, my ice-cold hands on the oars, 490  
 Stirring the sea-road through frost and fury,  
 Without ever seeing a sea captain so savvy,  
 A steersman so sure upon the prow.  
 Your craft and courage seem boundless.  
 You are prince and power over all ocean peril. 495  
 When the sea surges and the waves roll,  
 You make the ship glide and soar like a bird  
 On its outstretched wings, its spreading sails.  
 I have never seen such skill in a captain—

You are a man unmatched in my experience. 500  
 This strange ship glides along unshaken,  
 As if it were standing still on the shore,  
 Where wind and waves cannot trouble it,  
 And savage storms cannot lash its sails,  
 Untimber its mast, or unmake its prow— 505  
 Yet it rushes along, swift under sail.  
 You seem young in years, without many winters,  
 Yet old in wisdom, a protector of men,  
 A shield to warriors, a shelter to travelers.  
 Your heart seems noble, your mind all-knowing— 510  
 You see the meaning of every man's words."  
 Then the eternal Captain answered Andrew:  
 "It often happens on a stormy sea-road,  
 As the winds rage and the waves rush,  
 That we must ride our sea-stallions boldly 515  
 Across the furious ocean with a fearful crew.  
 Sometimes it's hard for us on the high seas,  
 Even though we survive the worst of storms,  
 Pulling ourselves through peril on the flood—  
 But the storm cannot strike down any ship 520  
 Or hinder any warrior against God's will.  
 Our Lord, the Creator holds power over life—  
 He binds the waves and fetters the wind.  
 The force that rules heaven reaches out over men;  
 The Craftsman who created the world controls fate. 525  
 The Shaper who wound the world with light  
 Weaves the destiny of both man and main.  
 The one who made heaven as a home for angels  
 Controls the tides, who built the hall of glory  
 For the blessed with his own hands holds back 530  
 The tempest in time. Let this truth be known now—  
 That you are the Lord's thane, the Savior's servant,  
 Because the sea recognized in your gracious being  
 That your heart is home to the Holy Spirit,  
 Your faith is firm, and you know God's grace. 535  
 So the sea held back its warring waves,  
 Stilled its waters, tamed its storms,  
 When it understood that the eternal Lord,

Who made the majesty of heaven with his might,  
 Was shielding these unprotected sailors with his power 540  
 And keeping you close in his kind embrace.”  
 Then the bold-hearted warrior began to pray  
 With his holy voice to the Ruler of glory:  
 “Bless you, my beloved Lord and Creator,  
 Shaper of the world, Savior of mankind. 545  
 Your glory is known both far and near;  
 Your name is holy, your might and mercy  
 Are manifest to all. No one alive on earth  
 Can say for sure how your grace is given,  
 Prince of all peoples, Comforter of souls, 550  
 But it’s clear that you’ve blessed this sea-captain  
 With untold gifts in his youth. His ways are wise  
 As are his words. I’ve never met a man  
 With a better mind or more discerning thought.  
 His wisdom belies his brief life in years.” 555  
 Then Alpha and Omega, the Glory of kings,  
 The Beginning and End, spoke from the ship:  
 “Tell me, wise thane, as a disciple and servant,  
 How it is that the Jewish people lacked piety,  
 Rejecting and reviling the Son of God. 560  
 They could not see the source of their lives,  
 Even though he revealed himself through miracles  
 And wondrous works? Those sinners could not recognize  
 That child who was born to defend and deliver,  
 Console and comfort, all of mankind. 565  
 His wisdom was clear in his words and works.  
 Was this not revealed to those unbelievers?”  
 Then Andrew answered the curious captain:  
 “Dearest of men, how is it possible  
 That you of all people have never heard 570  
 Of the Savior’s power, how the Ruler’s Son  
 Revealed himself, his grace and glory,  
 Throughout the world? He gave speech to the dumb,  
 Hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind.  
 He gladdened the spirits of the leprous and lame, 575  
 Those who were limb-locked, sinew-twisted,  
 Sick and tormented. He healed the suffering



While here on earth and woke the dead  
 With a holy word. This man of glory  
 Manifested his power by means of miracles, 580  
 Consecrating wine from water to everyone's delight.  
 Likewise from two fish and five loaves,  
 He fed the multitudes, five thousand strong.  
 They had come from far, weary and woeful  
 From their long journey, to enjoy their feast 585  
 With pleasant food in the open fields.  
 Now, my dear friend, you can hear how the Healer,  
 The Guardian of glory, has offered us his love  
 Through all of his holy words and works.  
 His teaching has brought us untold joy. 590  
 He has invited us home to the gates of heaven  
 And the exultation of angels, where we may live  
 In his fond embrace forever, even after death,  
 Alive in the dwelling place of the Lord."

Once again the Guardian of wind and wave, 595  
 The God on board unlocked his word-hoard.  
 The bold-hearted captain asked Andrew questions:  
 "Can you tell me, since I need to know the truth,  
 Whether the Lord openly performed miracles  
 Everywhere for people's comfort and consolation, 600  
 Even where bishops, scholars, and elders sat  
 Studying sacred texts or deliberating in councils?  
 It seems to me that they plotted treachery  
 Out of malice or misjudgment, envy or error.  
 They were deaf to the Lord's deliverance, 605  
 Hearing instead the teachings of the devil,  
 That treacherous traitor, that devious foe.  
 False fate misled those foolish men.  
 The devil's deceit has left them floundering,  
 Wandering amiss, doomed to the death-road. 610  
 Now the cursed must live with the cursed.  
 They will find little comfort in the flaming embrace  
 Of the devil's clutch in that cruel hell-hall  
 Where demons dwell, savaging men's souls."  
 Then Andrew offered the captain his answer: 615

“I’ll tell you truly—our Lord and Captain  
 Made miracle after miracle before the multitudes,  
 Before princes and people in plain sight.  
 He also secretly offered small wonders  
 Day and night to those who suffered distress, 620  
 As he went about working goodness and peace.”  
 The Protector of princes asked Andrew again:  
 “Can you tell me, bold-hearted hero,  
 Wise wayfarer, insightful traveler,  
 What the Lord richly revealed to you 625  
 In your private conversations with the Ruler of the heavens?  
 Can you put his miracles into plain words?”  
 Then Andrew answered his questioner again:  
 “Beloved sea-lord, mightiest of captains,  
 Why do you ask me these curious questions 630  
 When you know through your wisdom every truth?”  
 Then the Ruler of the world, the Guardian of waves,  
 Answered his hero, his holy warrior:  
 “I ask you these questions here on the whale-road  
 Not to rebuke or reproach you but to rejoice 635  
 Because my mind blooms in delight  
 With your wise words, your noble thoughts.  
 I’m not alone in this. Everyone who recalls  
 How the Son of God acted here on earth  
 Carries comfort in his heart. His spirit is hopeful, 640  
 Forever seeking its heavenly home,  
 The abode of angels, sailing away  
 To its heart’s haven with the loving Lord.”  
 Andrew immediately responded to the captain:  
 “I see in your answer understanding and wisdom, 645  
 Honesty and insight, a discerning truth—  
 A mindfulness alive and blooming endlessly  
 With knowing bliss. So I will tell you  
 The beginning and end since I was there,  
 Hearing him speak so often among us, 650  
 His devoted disciples and faithful followers.  
 Crowds often assembled to hear Christ’s counsel.  
 Multitudes gathered to listen to his teaching.  
 Then the Lord of lords, the Bearer of bliss,

Would bring his holy message to a house 655  
 Where many had come to hear him preach—  
 Wise elders and prudent counselors.  
 People rejoiced wherever he appeared,  
 Their hearts lifted by the Guardian of cities.  
 Once it happened that the triumphant Judge 660  
 Traveled with a small group of dedicated disciples,  
 Warriors of God. Only eleven were invited—  
 He was the twelfth. At last we came  
 To the great city where God's temple was built,  
 A high and wide-gabled hall of the Lord. 665  
 It was breathtaking in its beauty, artfully adorned.  
 The high priest of the temple was full of malice  
 And began to mock and torment our Lord.  
 He unlocked his vile word-ward, unleashing  
 His venomous speech. He knew in his heart 670  
 That we faithfully followed the path of the Lord,  
 The one righteous Ruler, but he raised his voice  
 In cruel calumny against him, saying:  
 'Look, you are pitiful wretches, lost on the road,  
 Traveling in torment, trusting a foreign 675  
 Itinerant preacher whose unholy power  
 Is leading you astray. This man is a criminal,  
 A thief of the faithful, a poser and pauper,  
 Whom you proclaim a prince and the son of God.  
 We know where this ungodly imposter came from. 680  
 This "Lord" has an all-too-human lineage:  
 His mother is Mary, his father is Joseph,  
 His brothers are Simon and James. It's clear  
 That this so-called son of God has worldly kin.  
 This holy man has a human family—he's one of us!' 685  
 Many power-hungry leaders of this land  
 Said as much—they wanted to conceal  
 The righteous truth of the living Lord.  
 Their evil lies persisted—their wicked ways  
 Came back to haunt them in a dreadful doom. 690  
 Then the Lord of mankind left that meeting-place  
 With his devoted disciples, his faithful thanes.  
 He sought a secret place in the wilderness,

Where he revealed to men with a radiant strength  
 The might and meaning of his holy miracles. 695  
 Then they knew that he was the righteous King,  
 Ruler of the universe, Guardian of glory,  
 The one eternal God of all creatures.

Then the Lord went to the temple a second time,  
 Where he stood and listened to the unholy rabble 700  
 Babbling about this and that in the great building.  
 Those sinners could not see his true nature  
 Or take in his teaching, even though he gave them  
 Evidence of his miracles, the truest of tokens.

He saw in the temple beautiful images of angels 705  
 Artfully sculpted on the gray walls of stone  
 And said to those gathered in God's house:  
 'These are images of the highest order of angels  
 In the heavenly city. These beings are called  
 Cherubim and Seraphim. They stand before God 710  
 In his infinite glory, singing praise-songs  
 To the power and majesty of heaven's King.  
 These images, crafted by an inspired hand,  
 Are tokens of the beauty of the blessed beings.'

Then the Lord of hosts, the eternal Son, 715  
 The heavenly Spirit, spoke again:  
 'Now I will make my message and meaning  
 Manifest to you, doubters and disbelievers,  
 By creating a miracle in God's holy house,  
 Commanding this stone image to come down 720  
 From the walls to the ground to speak God's truth,  
 Telling you my parentage, revealing my true lineage,  
 So that men on earth may find a firmer faith.'

Then the stone image of the highest angel 725  
 Could not deny the Savior's command  
 But leapt down to life, a wonder from the wall,  
 A speaking stone, a rock of revelation.  
 The angel began to breathe and speak  
 Before the gathered elders in resounding tones  
 With intelligence, understanding, and subtle wit, 730  
 Preaching to the priests, teaching the teachers,

Winding a web of wonder about the doubters,  
 Binding their unbelief, speaking these words:  
 ‘You are faithless, joyless, miserable men,  
 Either ignorant or deceived in the throes of sin, 735  
 Trapped in the snares of your own dark thoughts.  
 Your minds are confused. You call God’s Son  
 A mere mortal—the one who created  
 Heaven and earth, land and sea,  
 Ocean and air, with his own hands. 740  
 He is the almighty God of the patriarchs,  
 Who bestowed his favor on Abraham and Isaac,  
 And also on Jacob. He gave them wealth,  
 Prosperity and honor, a place in his heart.  
 He revealed to Abraham his lordly lineage— 745  
 That from his seed should descend in time  
 The God of glory. That prophetic promise  
 Now stands before you, finally fulfilled.  
 Can you not see the God of victory now  
 Or know his power and presence from this sign? 750  
 How often do you listen to a speaking stone?  
 How often do you see the miracle of a man  
 Who is also the Lord? Open your eyes  
 And tell me if you can, what this mystery means.’  
 While the stone angel spoke, the men were silent, 755  
 But the sinful elders, who were deaf to the truth,  
 Said this was no miracle but some dark sorcery,  
 Some evil illusion or odious enchantment—  
 Said the riddle of the talking rock was unreal.  
 Then doubt came slithering into the hearers’ hearts, 760  
 Poisoning their minds, destroying their hopes,  
 So that the wicked worm that devours joy,  
 Left them hot with hatred, hungry with unhappiness,  
 Their spirits envenomed with mortal sin.  
 Those skeptics scoffed while their souls burned 765  
 With each blasphemy. They reviled the Lord  
 And revealed themselves. They mocked and scorned  
 The Son of God and moved toward doom.  
 Then the Lord commanded the sacred stone,  
 The wonder of speaking, the riddle of rock, 770

Into the streets to wander the wide ways  
 Over green fields and broad plains  
 To preach God's news to the Canaanites,  
 And through the power of the greatest King  
 To command Abraham and his two sons 775  
 To rise up from their tombs, lift their limbs  
 From the grave, receive their separated souls,  
 Rejoice in their restored and youthful spirits,  
 And walk the wide world once again,  
 Alive from ancient days to make manifest 780  
 To the multitudes the great power of the God  
 That they had worshipped, his miracles and might.  
 So the strangest of angels, the rock of God,  
 Traveled far and wide, a radiance on the road,  
 As the Ruler had commanded, till it finally came 785  
 To the land of Mamre where the beloved bodies  
 Of the ancient patriarchs were secretly buried.  
 Then the angel of God ordered Abraham,  
 Isaac, and Jacob to rise up from the dust,  
 Waking their bones from an earth-bound sleep, 790  
 To gather their spirits at God's command,  
 To travel the land and talk to men and women,  
 Telling each of them who shaped the world  
 From the slate-blue sky to the succulent green earth,  
 Warning them not to delay in following the faith, 795  
 Fulfilling the commands, and working the will  
 Of the King of heaven, the Gatherer of glory.  
 So the three wise patriarchs, witnesses of wonder,  
 Walking miracles, went throughout the land  
 To testify to the true might and miracles of God, 800  
 As they had been resurrected from the grave,  
 The moldering earth-house, home of the dead,  
 And given new life to preach God's glory.  
 When people heard the words of the once-dead  
 Patriarchs' preaching, they were seized with terror. 805  
 This truth was more than many men could tolerate.  
 So the Shepherd of heaven called them home,  
 Not to ground or grave but to heaven's glory,  
 Where he promised them peace and eternal joy.

Now, my dear young sea-captain, you've heard 810  
 Through the Lord's words and wondrous works  
 The might and meaning of his great miracles,  
 How he revealed himself to multitudes of men  
 And how many were blind in heart and mind  
 To his truth and teaching. I know more stories 815  
 Of the Son's holy and heroic deeds  
 Than you can begin to comprehend on this ship  
 For all your subtle craft and worldly wisdom."  
 All day long Andrew praised the holy one  
 To the ship-captain till sleep crept over him, 820  
 And he lay down, dreaming of his dear Guardian,  
 As the craft sailed silently over the whale-road  
 With a holy warrior sleeping beside his Lord.

Then the generous Lord, the Giver of life,  
 Commanded his angels to transport Andrew 825  
 Above the surging sea, to carry with kindness  
 His sea-weary sailors in their arms' embrace,  
 Safe and secure in their Father's keeping.  
 On waves of wind they came at last  
 To the city which Andrew had earlier seen 830  
 Revealed by God. Then the angels departed,  
 Holy messengers, for their homeland in heaven,  
 Leaving the saint in a peaceful sleep,  
 Resting on the road under the sheltering sky,  
 In night-long dream near the city wall, 835  
 Near his evil enemies who dozed in hunger,  
 Those devouring devils—till at long-last  
 God lifted the candle of dawn, the day-sun,  
 To wake the world. Darkness disappeared,  
 Shadows slipped away, clouds drifted off, 840  
 Leaving the land in a fresh, clean light.  
 The torch of heaven touched each rooftop,  
 A warm wake-up for the homes of men.  
 Then God's adamant warrior awoke,  
 Looking at the landscape by the city gates, 845  
 Where gray stone cliffs hovered like beasts  
 Looming darkly over human buildings

With their artful towers and colored tiles,  
 Their wind-swept walls. The wise warrior  
 Recognized at once that he had arrived 850  
 In Mermedonia, where the Father of mankind  
 Had called him before to his terrible task.  
 He saw his faithful followers asleep  
 On the hard ground and began to wake  
 His bold-hearted thanes, speaking these words: 855  
 “This is a true wonder worth telling—  
 Yesterday on the tide, a powerful Prince  
 Lifted us above the sea-surgings waves,  
 Raising our ship like a bird on the wind.  
 The captain of that boat was Christ himself, 860  
 The Ruler and Redeemer, the Glory of kings.  
 I recognized his holy words, his sacred speech,  
 Even though he disguised his divinity,  
 His holy power, in a sailor’s seafaring form.”  
 Then his young followers responded in kind, 865  
 Revealing their own spiritual mystery, saying:  
 “Andrew, we also want to tell you a wonder,  
 A riddle for you to unravel in your wisdom.  
 Sleep fell upon us, weary sailors at sea,  
 When over the surging waves, eagles arrived 870  
 In a gather of glory, an exultation of wings.  
 They lifted our souls as we slept and swept them up  
 In the joyous air, singing praise-songs,  
 Striding on the wind, the ethereal sea,  
 Surrounding our souls with majestic hymns, 875  
 Triumphant tones, holy harmonies,  
 Like an endlessly sweet symphony of seraphim.  
 We saw the Prince surrounded by angels,  
 A throng of thousands praising God,  
 The Lord of lords, with their celebrant songs, 880  
 While our souls rejoiced in the reverberant air.  
 We saw many martyrs and patriarchs there,  
 A zealous company rapt in glory,  
 Singing their hearts out to their triumphant Lord.  
 There was also David, a blessed champion, 885  
 King of the Israelites, son of Jesse,



A powerful ruler in the presence of Christ.  
 We saw all of you standing with God's Son,  
 Endowed with virtue, radiant with grace,  
 Twelve triumphant heroes together, 890  
 Surrounded by exalted, shining archangels,  
 Serving and sustaining the holy apostles.  
 There the blessed ones will drink delight  
 In the harmony of heaven, the heart's homeland,  
 Where peace is palpable, the soul is sustained, 895  
 And sorrow and strife are ever unripe.  
 Some will find joy in that holy haven;  
 Others will find torment and terror abounding  
 In a hall of flames, when banished from bliss,  
 They travel on life's last unending road." 900  
 Then the saint's heart was gladdened in his breast  
 When he heard that God would grant the apostles  
 Esteem and honor, the gift of grace.  
 So the wise protector of the bold-hearted  
 Warrior-band spoke these words: 905  
 "My Lord and God, the Glory of kings,  
 I see now you were never far from me,  
 Steering our ship over the ocean waves,  
 Though I was blind then to your bright divinity.  
 Prince of angels, Sustainer of spirits, 910  
 Radiant King, be merciful to me in Mermedonia.  
 I spoke so eagerly on our seafaring voyage—  
 Now I know who carried me across  
 The surging sea, holding the heft of wood  
 And the hope of heart in his holy hands, 915  
 Ruler and Redeemer, comfort and consolation  
 Of the human race. Yours is the promise,  
 The power and prophecy that will ever prevail,  
 Granted to everyone who comes to you."  
 In that charged moment, Christ the Creator 920  
 Of all living things was revealed to Andrew  
 As a blessed youth, beautiful and bright,  
 The Lord of heaven, speaking these words:  
 "Hail to you, Andrew, my beloved apostle,  
 With your faithful followers, your blessed band. 925

I will be your shield and safety, power and protection,  
 So that these darkly devouring, sinful savages,  
 Cannot in their unholy cruelty harm your soul.”  
 The wise warrior fell to the ground  
 In the face of such glory, praying to his Prince, 930  
 Supplicating Christ, saying to his Lord:  
 “Ruler and Redeemer, Savior of souls,  
 How could I not see with my sinful eyes  
 Your true nature, riding the waves  
 On the seafaring wood. Now I can see 935  
 Your goodness revealed, my Guardian and Guide.  
 Why did I speak when I should have kept silent?”  
 Then almighty God answered Andrew:  
 “You have sinned less in speaking so boldly  
 On shipboard than in Achaia when you staunchly 940  
 Declared the distance to Mermedonia impossible  
 To sail in three days and nights in any craft  
 After I commanded you to come here  
 Over the trial and tumult of wind and wave.  
 Now you know that the craft of Christ 945  
 Transcends time and that I can move  
 Any man any place as it pleases me  
 In my perfect power, my boundless grace.  
 Now rise up quickly at my command,  
 Blessed warrior, for God will grant you 950  
 A precious portion of power and wisdom  
 To work his will in this terrible trial.  
 Go down into the city to seek your brother,  
 Who is held in prison by wicked warriors,  
 The fiercest fiends. Matthew has been bound 955  
 By mesh and manacle, wounded by iron,  
 Bloodied by knives. Know now your task—  
 Free your beloved brother from the animosity  
 Of evil foes and free the other strangers,  
 Foreigners held for trial and torture, 960  
 None looking forward to their morning meal.  
 Matthew shall soon find relief from his torment  
 And receive his reward when he comes into heaven,  
 As I have promised him in his dark prison.

Now you must go into your enemies' grasp, 965  
 Their cruel clutch, and struggle with sinners.  
 Your body shall be wounded by sword-strokes;  
 Your blood shall run like gushing streams,  
 But your evil tormenters will not be able  
 To divide you with death even as they beat 970  
 Your broken body, punish you with pain,  
 Treat you with scorn. Endure this agony—  
 Do not let the heartless cruelty of heathens,  
 The slash of swords, or the sting of spears  
 Cause you to deny or desert your God. 975  
 Embrace your judgment, your everlasting honor,  
 Your grace and glory. Let your mind mull over  
 How many unblessed men mocked and reviled me,  
 Bound me in pain, scoffed at my suffering,  
 Scourged my body, cursed my coming. 980  
 Those sinners offered me the gift of sarcasm,  
 The ache and agony of sharp wounds and words.  
 They could not touch the truth with their dark wit.  
 When in the sight of the Jews, I was raised  
 On the rood, stretched out on the wood, 985  
 That tree of torture, the cross of Christ.  
 One of those cruel warriors wounded me,  
 Stuck a spear in my side so my blood flowed,  
 Bright gore onto the ground. My body has met  
 With endless misery, torture, and torment 990  
 In my earthly life. In this I've provided  
 A model for you of the suffering and stamina,  
 Agony and endurance, you will find for yourself  
 In this foreign land. Here in this city of sin,  
 You will turn many from terror to truth, 995  
 From ferocity to faith, from darkness to light,  
 From heathen habits to heavenly hopes,  
 Even though they have committed terrible crimes.  
 All this you will do nobly in my name,  
 And out of your suffering shall come great glory.” 1000  
 Then the Holy One, the King of all kings,  
 Went home to heaven in his humility,  
 The purest of places, a hallowed home,

A haven for the heart where grace abounds,  
And bliss awaits the faithful who can find it. 1005

Then the bold warrior patiently bore his lot  
With wisdom and courage. Mighty and mindful,  
He would not forget his Lord's commandment  
Or flee from the fight. He was eager and unrelenting  
In service to his Savior as he entered the city, 1010  
Slipping down the street with a concealed step  
So that the sinners could not see his crafty coming.  
The Lord had lifted him out of their gaze,  
Covering him in a cloak of invisibility and silence.  
The noble warrior pressed on toward the prison. 1015  
That soldier of Christ saw there a cruel band  
Of unholy heathens, seven altogether,  
Standing guard outside the prison door.  
Death took them without warning, a fierce fate,  
Leaving their blood-stained bodies on a hard bed 1020  
Of street-stones, locked in endless sleep.  
They died without honor, without knowing,  
Without seeing the force in the hand of God.  
The saint gave thanks to his merciful Father,  
Prayed to his Lord, the King of glory, 1025  
Praising his goodness, his promise and power.  
The prison door burst open at the visitor's touch—  
He was hand in hand with the Holy Spirit.  
The bold one strode in, oblivious to the strife  
That might be lurking, lusting for his life. 1030  
The savages were sleeping, sated with swords,  
In an endless unwaking, drunk with blood.  
Those sinners had stained that death-house red.  
Then Andrew saw his brave brother Matthew,  
An innocent alone in that evil chamber, 1035  
Praying in a dark corner of his prison cell,  
Praising his Lord, the Prince of angels.  
The sad-eyed saint suddenly saw his brother,  
And his hope was renewed under the heavens.  
One saint greeted the other, thanking God 1040  
That they had come together at last unharmed

Under the protection of the Lord. They rejoiced,  
 Two saints under the sun, their hearts as one.  
 Their faith was renewed, their joy restored.  
 Each felt the bliss of the other's embrace, 1045  
 And both were cherished in the heart of Christ.  
 The saints were surrounded by a radiant light,  
 And their rapturous spirits surged with joy.  
 Then Andrew greeted his God-fearing brother,  
 Telling him of the battles won and those to come: 1050  
 "These people are all eager to [flee this prison

\* \* \*

And now that I have unblinded all of your eyes,  
 Healed these prisoners, fulfilling my fate,  
 Accomplished this] act, let's all go home."  
 After these words, the glorious disciples, 1055  
 Heroes under heaven, boldest of brothers,  
 Bent down to pray to the Son of God.  
 Then the holy Andrew prayed to the Lord  
 For strength and courage in the trials to come  
 Before his body fell to the savage fiends. 1060  
 Then he let loose the limb-locks, the biting shackles  
 Of many prisoners, some two hundred forty  
 Who fled from that death-fortress to the Lord's  
 Peace and protection. He also released  
 Forty-nine women, freed from fear. 1065  
 Everyone fled—not a soul was left behind,  
 Bound in chains. No one wanted to linger  
 In that house of sorrow to share its doom.  
 Then Matthew left, leading the company  
 Of liberated prisoners and devoted disciples, 1070  
 As he'd been commanded by the holy one.  
 They were all wrapped in a wondrous cloud,  
 A secret shelter to protect the travelers  
 Against the onslaught of heathen arrows,  
 The sharp death-stings of those evil savages. 1075  
 The comrades in courage, friends in faith,  
 Conferred in a council before they parted.  
 Each confirmed to the other his hope of heaven,  
 Warding off with words the torments of hell.

So the brave-hearted warriors, the soldiers of God, 1080  
 Worshipped together their Creator and King,  
 Offering him praise with their holy voices,  
 Accepting their lot from the almighty Wielder  
 Of everything created and everything to come,  
 Whose glory among men will never end. 1085

Then Andrew returned glad-hearted to the city,  
 Where he heard that a heathen host was gathered,  
 Aliens and outcasts, fiendish foes.  
 Along the road he came to a pillar of brass  
 And sat down beside it. He held in his heart 1090  
 A pure love and an uplifting awareness of angels.  
 He waited serenely inside the city walls  
 To see what battle-glory God might give.  
 The unholy heathens gathered in throngs,  
 A crowd of cruelty, a crush of terror. 1095  
 The evil leaders came with their devouring disciples,  
 Armed to the teeth. Those crafty cannibals  
 Came to the prison expecting breakfast,  
 An unholy meal of human flesh,  
 The bone and sinew of a savage feast. 1100  
 What the spear-warriors found then at the door  
 Of the prison death-house was not a welcome hand  
 But broken locks and bloodied bodies,  
 The freedom of their foes and a collection of corpses.  
 They returned to the city-center, grim and ungorge, 1105  
 Bearing bad news to a menace of war-men.  
 They reported that no foreigners had been found  
 Alive and bound, those aliens with strange speech,  
 But that the guards lay lifeless on the cold ground,  
 Soaked with blood, slashed in the flesh, 1110  
 Their bone-houses empty, their spirits stolen.  
 Grim death was those jailers' dark doom.  
 Sadly, their morning meal was missing.  
 Then the heathen leaders began to tremble  
 At an unseen terror which eclipsed their own, 1115  
 As two livid guests sat down at their table—  
 Fear and hunger, unholy devourers,

Harbingers of death. The people pondered  
 Their dire fate. What could they do?  
 The meal was missing, the guards were gutted. 1120  
 Could they feed off the flesh of their own dead?  
 Inside of an hour the council of cannibals  
 Decided to devour their kith and kin,  
 And the mob descended on the prison steps  
 To lift their loved ones from the slaughter-bed. 1125  
 Soon the hungry heathens needed more bodies,  
 So all the citizens were quickly summoned.  
 Spear-proud warriors came to the council,  
 Riding their horses, the fiercest fighters.  
 The sorcerers cast lots to see which men 1130  
 Might be summoned to the table, not to talk  
 But to serve as the next treat—edible flesh.  
 The first lot fell to a great leader,  
 An adviser of earls, a chief in the army.  
 The brave-hearted man was bound in chains 1135  
 And began to shout in a warrior's wail  
 That he would sacrifice his own small son  
 As a delicacy for devourers to save his life.  
 The savages accepted his lifesaving offer,  
 Looked forward to tasting that tender treat. 1140  
 The heathens were hungry, so gold was no good  
 To bargain for a life. A forkful of flesh  
 Was much better than the hard taste of treasure.  
 Many were greedy to gorge on that youth,  
 For hunger was now lord of that land. 1145  
 The story spread quickly throughout the city  
 That soldiers were looking for the sacrificial boy  
 To fill their bellies and sustain their strength—  
 They would each receive a share of his body.  
 The heathen guardians of the unholy temple 1150  
 Gathered a mob to bring the child in.  
 Then the boy began to lament before the crowd,  
 Cut off entirely from his family and friends.  
 He sang for mercy but was only seen  
 As articulate meat. The gobblers offered 1155  
 No human understanding, no holy respect

For life and limb, for spirit or soul.  
 The heathens heard him cry out for compassion,  
 But all they wanted was his heart on a platter.  
 These monsters knew nothing of mercy— 1160  
 They trusted the sword's edge, the knife's knowing.  
 The council of cannibals had made its decision—  
 All the savages wanted was a slice of life.  
 They called for a hard-tempered sword,  
 A bold blade tested in the storm of battle. 1165  
 This seemed to Andrew an outrageous act  
 Of appalling evil, impossible to endure,  
 That an innocent boy should be bound and slaughtered.  
 The heathens' hostility and infectious hatred  
 Were hard to bear. The hot-hearted hordes 1170  
 Trembled with hunger, eager and motivated,  
 Bent on murder. They lusted for meat.  
 They wanted to bash in the boy's brain-house  
 And reach for his heart with sharp spears,  
 But holy God protected him from heaven, 1175  
 Melting their murderous knives and swords  
 Like warm wax, so his monstrous kinsmen  
 Could not kill him with their baleful blades.  
 Then the boy was freed from his dark fear  
 Of being unfleshed, carved to the bone. 1180  
 Give thanks to God, the Lord of lords,  
 Who offers judgment and generosity to all  
 Who wisely seek his aid. He answers the innocent  
 And holds out hope to the faithful who can find it.

Then lamentation and mourning were heard in the land. 1185  
 Heralds announced a great hunger. Men went meatless,  
 And famine stalked the savages. Grim desolation  
 Hunkered down in the high-gabled meadhalls.  
 All wealth was wasted, all sinful celebration  
 Lost to despair, all food was foul. 1190  
 No one could savor the taste of emptiness.  
 Clever men held council, their cunning uncrafted.  
 They took no pleasure in the land of their birth.  
 One warrior would often say to another:



“Whoever has wisdom, let him not hide it now— 1195  
 Calamity broods like a merciless monster  
 Over this luckless and unloved land.”  
 Then a devil appeared before those people,  
 Dusky and unbeautiful as a dark dread.  
 He was evil incarnate. Even among cannibals 1200  
 He was the great devourer—he hungered for souls.  
 Then the lord of hell, the crafter of crimes  
 Who fell from heaven, crippled in spirit,  
 Twisted in purpose, perverse in heart,  
 Began to denounce the saintly man 1205  
 With subtle guile, saying these words:  
 “I hear there’s a man who thinks he’s a hero  
 Who has come into this land uninvited,  
 An alien called Andrew. This so-called lord  
 Harmed you severely when he let loose 1210  
 Countless criminals from your guarded prison,  
 Undermining justice and destroying your dinner.  
 Now is the hour of vengeance upon him.  
 Let sword-slash and spear-point,  
 The hard edge of iron, cleave his bone-house, 1215  
 Separate his soul from his bloody body,  
 Liberating his spirit and leaving his corpse  
 To hungry warriors. You deserve this feast.  
 Go boldly to crush this foreigner in battle.”  
 Then Andrew immediately answered the devil: 1220  
 “How rashly and shamelessly you incite these people,  
 Goading them into an unwise conflict.  
 You urge them toward danger, knowing their doom,  
 Since you have suffered torture and torment,  
 The hot flames of hell. Your hatred and hostility 1225  
 Toward almighty God caused you to rebel  
 With that devilish host, those fallen angels,  
 Who gave up grace and a homeland in heaven.  
 Now you are nothing but an unholy weapon,  
 The edge of evil, the sword of undoing. 1230  
 There is no mercy in your gift of misery.  
 The King of kings thrust you into darkness,  
 Chained you in hell, where you are now known

As Satan by those who love the Lord of lords  
 And follow faithfully his righteous law.” 1235  
 Still the perverse prince of hell urged the people  
 With fiendish guile to fight, saying:  
 “Now you listen to the outcast and alien  
 Who has unrightly cut loose your criminals  
 And destroyed your dinner. Kill this outlaw, 1240  
 This foul fiend who calls himself Andrew  
 And accuses me with his artful words.”  
 Then a signal was sent to the citizens of the city.  
 Warriors thrust forward, the crowd cried out,  
 Eager for killing with their swords and spears, 1245  
 Advancing toward the gates behind their shields.  
 Then the Lord of hosts spoke to Andrew.  
 God gave his warrior words of strength:  
 “Now is the time for wisdom and courage.  
 Do not stay concealed but reveal your spirit, 1250  
 Strengthen your heart, steady your soul,  
 So these unholy heathens may clearly see  
 My strength in your stand, my purpose in your power.  
 They cannot kill you without my consent,  
 Call death upon you against my will, 1255  
 Or consume your flesh in unholy fashion.  
 They can slash but not slaughter, cut but not kill.  
 I will always be with you, standing at your side.”  
 After these words, a great throng arrived,  
 Swollen with rage. Their leaders unleashed them 1260  
 To find the foreigner and bring him back  
 With his hands bound, his head lowered.  
 Once the warriors could see him with their own eyes,  
 They wanted to kill him without considering  
 The consequences. Their dark craving was for carving. 1265  
 They ordered him taken and bound tight,  
 Then dragged his body over the slaughter-plains,  
 Across mountain gorges, along cliff-roads,  
 Here and there amid the ancient ruins,  
 The old work of giants, and inside the cities. 1270  
 The saint’s body was sorely wounded,  
 Soaked with blood. His bone-house was broken.

His blood rushed out in waves of hot gore,  
 But Andrew kept courage. His faith was firm,  
 His mind unmoving, his soul free from sin, 1275  
 Even as he suffered sword-slash and knife-stroke,  
 The punishing pain of each cruel cut,  
 Drawn out in time in endless torment.  
 The saintly man, bright as the sun,  
 Was savagely scourged all day long 1280  
 As the sun went gliding across the sky,  
 Gleaming in heaven, finally sliding  
 Down into darkness. Then the unholy heathens  
 Led their hated enemy, Andrew, to prison.  
 He was protected by the love and courage of Christ, 1285  
 Who can never be conquered, never defeated,  
 And his faith remained firm, his soul radiant,  
 In the protection of his Prince, in the light of the Lord.

Then the brave saint was bound in darkness,  
 His heart heavy, his mind devoted to prayer, 1290  
 His faith firm, his courage unwavering.  
 The night seemed endless. Snow lashed the earth  
 With winter storms. Winds whipped the land  
 With sleet and hail, freezing blizzards.  
 Bitter cold attacked the earth, locked the land 1295  
 With ice-chains. Frost and mist,  
 Gray winter warriors, stalked the earth.  
 Icicles hung like wicked water-spears.  
 Rivers shivered and froze like rock.  
 Ice formed a bridge over the water. 1300  
 Darkness and cold ruled the land,  
 But the innocent man kept courage in prison,  
 His mind steadfast, his heart secure  
 In the goodness and glory of his beloved Lord.  
 He spent the long winter-cold night 1305  
 In great affliction but without any fear,  
 Knowing that he had always given praise to God  
 With holy words and works. He prayed humbly  
 Until the gem of heaven, the radiant sun,  
 Announced the dawn. He basked in the Lord's light. 1310

Then a grim mob descended on the dark dungeon,  
 Slaughter-hungry and shouting for meat.  
 They ordered Andrew, the noble man,  
 The faithful hero, into the hands of his foes.  
 He was scourged and flayed—his wounds wept. 1315  
 His body had no relief from this blood-torture,  
 This mindless terror. Then the weary hero's  
 Breast heaved and he began to speak  
 As a circle of tears welled up in his eyes:  
 "Dear Lord, Giver of all life's gifts, 1320  
 Look down on my suffering. You see the woes  
 Of every warrior, the grief of every person.  
 I trust in your power, your might and mercy,  
 My Source and Savior, and I know you will never  
 Forsake me here to the hands of these heathens 1325  
 So long as I never stray far from your teachings,  
 Your laws and lore. You are my protector,  
 The source of hope for all of your people.  
 Save me now from this foul fiend,  
 The first sinner, the outlaw of angels, 1330  
 The outcast of heaven. Don't let this terrible bane  
 Of mankind mock and torture your faithful servant."  
 Then the hideous demon, the savage spirit,  
 The devil from hell, damned to eternal torment,  
 Appeared to the mob, urging them on: 1335  
 "Smash this sinful man in the mouth—  
 He talks too much and twists words into lies."  
 So they tortured him until the sun went down  
 Behind the high cliffs and steep crags,  
 Then dragged him back into the dark prison, 1340  
 Where the faithful man had to endure terrible filth.  
 Then the master of misery, a hideous monster,  
 Stalked into the saint's cell with seven dreads,  
 Terrible demons. He meant to torment the saint  
 With his devilish tongue and sneering words: 1345  
 "What did you expect when you arrogantly sailed  
 Into the arms of your enemies. Tell me, Andrew,  
 Where has your glory gone? Your power and protection?  
 You scorned our ancient idols, mocking our faith.

Do you claim this kingdom now for yourself, 1350  
 As your vile mentor did, the man called Christ  
 Who was puffed up with pride? He was killed by Herod,  
 The king of the Jews, when he climbed the cross.  
 Your savior was only a ghost on the gallows,  
 A corpse in an earth-cave, a ghoulish underground. 1355  
 Now I will bring my baneful warriors  
 To torture your body and tear you down.  
 They will offer you a cup of humiliation to drink.”  
 Then the satanic leader said to his warriors:  
 “Let the edge of the arrow, the point of the spear, 1360  
 Be poisoned with venom. Let their tongues snake  
 Close to this alien’s arrogant heart.  
 Let him pay for his boasting with a bitter blade  
 In his unholy belly. Let the blood flow.”  
 Then the savage foes rushed on the saint, 1365  
 Eager to catch him in a clutch of spears  
 And gather him up in a deadly embrace—  
 But God was his guardian, his steadfast Savior,  
 Who protected Andrew with his awesome power.  
 When the blood-hungry savages saw Christ’s cross 1370  
 On Andrew’s countenance, the glorious sign,  
 They fell back afraid, turned and took flight.  
 Then the ancient fiend, the prisoner of hell,  
 Began to mourn and lament his loss.  
 The unholy demon sang a howling song: 1375  
 “Why have you failed me, my unfaithful warriors?  
 Where was your courage? Your killing stroke?  
 Your righteous anger? This outlaw lives,  
 Leaving me locked in anger and agony.”  
 Then one of the loathsome evil spirits, 1380  
 An outcast from heaven, answered his lord:  
 “We can’t kill him with cunning or craft,  
 Sword-swipe or spear-thrust, iron or evil.  
 Why don’t you have a go, almighty leader— 1385  
 Let’s see how you fare in a fierce battle.  
 Unleash your frenzy on his steadfast faith  
 If you’re not afraid of the Lord’s lonely warrior.  
 If you want some advice, best of banes,

Before you rush madly back into battle, 1390  
 Craft your words, work out your arguments.  
 We should mock his misery, unravel his arrogance—  
 Maybe our unholy insults will undo him.  
 We need sharp, subtle words to pierce his defenses.  
 Fighting a fierce saint is no easy struggle!” 1395

Then the demon who lived in a clutch of pain,  
 A walking torment, cried out loudly:  
 “All right, Andrew, my scheming sorcerer,  
 How long have you practiced these evil arts?  
 How many men have you misled into misery? 1400  
 How many women have you enticed into woe?  
 Your deception is done, your preaching is worthless.  
 There are no more multitudes in this mean prison.  
 Your only followers will be torment and terror,  
 And these will hound you to the gates of hell. 1405  
 We will rip your flesh and serve up your heart.  
 Your only comfort will be death’s last drink,  
 The end of agony. My warriors are waiting  
 To embrace you in battle with sword-clutch  
 And blade-kiss. We will crush the life 1410  
 Out of your body and destroy your spirit—  
 To say nothing of your bones, sinews, and blood.  
 Who is so mighty in this world that he is able  
 To free you from the shackles of my fierce strength?”  
 Then Andrew answered back immediately: 1415  
 “Listen! The almighty Lord, the only Savior  
 Of men on earth, can easily free me.  
 He’s the one who wrapped you in chains of fire,  
 Tied you twisting in eternal torment,  
 After he threw you from your homeland in heaven 1420  
 For doubting and despising his holy word.  
 That was the beginning of evil and exile—  
 Your life as an outcast that will never end.  
 Your misery will increase moment by moment,  
 Your torment deepen day by day.” 1425  
 Then the fierce fiend suddenly turned and fled,  
 That grim stalker guilty of a feud with God.

In the half-light of dawn, a horde of heathens  
 Sought the holy saint, dragging him before them  
 A third time. They wanted to weaken 1430  
 The warrior's heart, carve up his courage,  
 But under God's watch this could not be.  
 They stirred up hatred, rousing their wrath.  
 The saint was bound, beaten, and scourged,  
 Cunningly cut, though just short of killing, 1435  
 Pierced with pain while the daylight lasted.  
 Weary with wounds, heavy of heart,  
 The holy and harrowed warrior cried out  
 Weeping to God, steadfast in his faith:  
 "I have never endured under heaven's vault 1440  
 A harder lot in life at my Lord's command,  
 As I follow my faith, proclaiming God's law.  
 My limbs are unlocked, my sinews separated,  
 My bone-house broken, my body bloody—  
 My wounds are weeping, oozing red gore. 1445  
 O Lord Victorious, Ruler and Redeemer,  
 How heavy was your heart, severe your suffering,  
 On that endless day among the Jews,  
 When you climbed the cross, Lord of creation,  
 The living God, and said to your Father 1450  
 From the high gallows, the killing tree:  
 'Father of angels, Ruler of heaven,  
 Beloved Creator of light and life,  
 Tell me why have you forsaken me?'  
 For three days I have suffered savage torment. 1455  
 Now I pray in this passion: Grant me the gift  
 Of giving up my spirit into your holy hands.  
 Let me come home to the celebration of souls  
 And sit at the table for the feast of the faithful.  
 You promised by the power of your holy word, 1460  
 When you encouraged twelve dedicated disciples  
 To travel the battle-road of suffering and strife,  
 That the hostility and hatred of angry enemies  
 Would not harm us. You pledged that our precious  
 Bodies would be unbloodied, our bones unbroken, 1465  
 Our sinews unslit, our flesh unstripped—

No lock of hair would be lost from our heads,  
 No corpses left cruelly lying on the road,  
 If only we followed your law, fulfilled your teaching.  
 Now my sinews are severed, my blood is shed, 1470  
 My locks are scattered across the land, dead in the dust.  
 Dying looks dearer now than clutching to life.”  
 Then a voice spoke to Andrew out of the blue—  
 The King of glory spoke these resonant words:  
 “Do not weep over your wretched plight, 1475  
 My dearest friend. Do not mourn this misery.  
 Be steadfast and strong, endure this evil.  
 I stand by your side, sustaining your strength,  
 Shielding your soul in my protecting power.  
 I created the world—I cradle and control it. 1480  
 The virtuous will find victory, the evil no end  
 Of peril and pain. The multitudes will declare  
 This truth on Doomsday, that all of creation,  
 Heaven and earth, will collapse and perish  
 Before one word I have uttered is undone. 1485  
 Look behind you and see the trail of torment,  
 Where your body has been dragged, your bones broken,  
 Your blood spilled. These savage heathens  
 Have done enough, the bitterest of blows,  
 The worst of woes. My shield will sustain you. 1490  
 They cannot touch you again with their spears.”  
 Then the holy warrior, the beloved soldier,  
 Looked back at the long track of his tears,  
 As his God and Glory-king had commanded,  
 And saw beautiful, bright groves, blooming 1495  
 With flowers everywhere his blood had fallen.  
 His gore had transformed the dead land  
 Into God’s green grandeur, a garden of light.  
 Then the protector of warriors spoke these words:  
 “All glory to you, God, all praise to your power, 1500  
 Ruler of nations, Redeemer and King.  
 You have not forsaken me in my suffering  
 Or left me to perish, an outcast alone.”  
 So the holy hero continued to praise God  
 Until the radiant sun slid down under the sea. 1505



Then for the fourth time the savage leaders,  
 Those fierce foes, led Andrew to prison.  
 They wanted to warp his will, pervert his purpose,  
 Crush his courage in the demon-dark night,  
 But the Lord of heaven, the Glory of men, 1510  
 The Giver of light, the greatest of teachers,  
 Came into the prison to comfort his servant.  
 The Creator of life boldly commanded  
 His broken body to be whole, saying:  
 “You shall no longer suffer the pain and torment 1515  
 That these heathen warriors would wield over you.”  
 So Andrew rose up heart-strong and healed,  
 Freed from his torment and thanking his Lord.  
 His body was not blemished or his clothes torn,  
 His bone-house broken or his locks shorn— 1520  
 And all his wounds weeping blood were gone.  
 Through God’s grace and power, he was whole,  
 Sound in body, sustained in his soul.

Listen! I’ve been singing the story of a saint,  
 Weaving words of praise in poetry for his works, 1525  
 Though his courage and wisdom are beyond my ken.  
 This saint’s life is worthy of great study,  
 And it needs a more powerful poet than I  
 To shape his song of suffering and glory  
 And say how he kept courage in the face of evil. 1530  
 Still I must weave his life into words.  
 It is traditional to tell how the holy warrior  
 Met with misery in that ancient city,  
 Often turning woe into wonder.  
 We have learned that he saw by a weathered wall 1535  
 Some ancient pillars, the old work of giants,  
 Firmly fixed, steadfast in stone.  
 The bold-minded warrior, wise beyond words,  
 Held counsel with the column, bravely saying:  
 “Listen, O marble, to the order of the Lord, 1540  
 Who commands all creatures on heaven and earth.  
 Everything trembles before the face of God  
 When he descends with his heavenly host,

Seeking out all of mankind on middle-earth.  
 Let a powerful river run out of this pillar, 1545  
 A mighty stream flowing from its base,  
 Since God commands you to punish this people,  
 Unholy heathens, fiends without faith,  
 With a ravaging flood. His wrath is righteous.  
 You are dearer than silver, greater than gold. 1550  
 On a stone like you, God wrote his mysteries,  
 His sacred laws, a treasure-house of words,  
 The ten commandments that he gave to Moses.  
 Afterwards Joshua and Tobias, those righteous men,  
 Protected and preserved them. They feared God 1555  
 And revered his gift, a wonder of words.  
 So you can see that the King of creation,  
 The Lord of angels, honored your kin  
 More than the race of gems with his written laws.  
 Now he requires you to reveal his power, 1560  
 Showing that you can comprehend his command.”  
 Then the stone suddenly split—it wasted no time  
 In obeying God—and a great river ran out  
 Surging over the land. By dawn it had grown  
 Into a mighty flood. After the heathens had finished 1565  
 Their daylong feasting, they had a bitter drink,  
 For they finally woke up to a deadly threat  
 As the salt-sea stalked that savage city,  
 The unleashed waves ravaging the land.  
 Fear rode on the flood. People panicked— 1570  
 That deluge spelled doom. Death exulted.  
 The ancient sea tucked in the young  
 Beneath a watery blanket. There was no waking  
 From that long sleep. That mead was too strong—  
 Its honey had some sting. Everyone drank death. 1575  
 The sea-strength grew—that wave-warrior  
 Assaulted the earth. Old shield-bearers wept—  
 Their weapons were useless against the ocean.  
 The unholy heathens wanted desperately to flee  
 From the savage flood, striving to survive, 1580  
 Climbing the hills and cowering in caves,  
 But a holy angel held them back,

Blanketing the city with a battle-flame,  
 A blade of fire, a searing death-slash.  
 Those twin warriors of flame and flood 1585  
 Imprisoned the people. There was no escape.  
 The water welled up, the fire descended—  
 Men mourned, women wailed, people perished.  
 Every cry in that city was a death-dirge.  
 Wind blew waves of fire over every wall, 1590  
 And the water rose up from floor to ceiling.  
 Lamentation was heard throughout the land.  
 Out of the chaos rose a lonely voice,  
 The mournful sound of a suffering wretch,  
 Lamenting to the lost crowd, saying: 1595  
 “Now in our terror we can see the truth—  
 That we unjustly shackled this poor stranger,  
 Tormenting the sinless with scorn and scourge,  
 Torturing the guiltless with blood-hungry blades.  
 Now some hideous hatred, some fierce fate, 1600  
 Has descended here to punish us with pain,  
 Treat us to terror, dealing out death.  
 I believe it would be better to free this prisoner  
 And beg God’s holy warrior for help.  
 Let’s release him. Maybe he can release us 1605  
 From this harrowing torment of unending wave,  
 Wind, and fire. Maybe he can rise above revenge  
 To banish the flames and bring us peace  
 In place of punishment. We must look to him  
 For any hope and protection, any end to sorrow.” 1610  
 Then the bearing and behavior of the people  
 Was known to Andrew immediately in his heart—  
 That the mighty heathen warriors were humbled.  
 Still the sea flowed in and the water rose  
 Up to their bellies, up to their breasts, 1615  
 Up to their shoulders, up to their necks.  
 Then the sacred warrior, the soldier of God,  
 Commanded the rivers to run down,  
 The streams to be still, the angry ocean  
 To return to its bed, the fires to cool, 1620  
 The sea-storms to cease, the sword to sheathe,

The waves to draw back from the broken walls.  
 The wise one walked out of his prison,  
 Unbound, undefeated, dear to his God.  
 The waves parted and a road was readied, 1625  
 A street through the sea-stream. The land was dry  
 Wherever the holy saint set down his foot.  
 The people rejoiced, the waves recoiled—  
 Help had arrived after all their agony.  
 Andrew invited the tempestuous sea 1630  
 To be still. He opened an abyss in the earth  
 With unwavering power to drain the waves.  
 The water rushed down and sinners sank,  
 The worst of the heathens, the cruelest of criminals.  
 Fourteen of the fiercest fiends slid straight 1635  
 Down into hell to the demons' delight.  
 Many of the survivors were sorely afraid.  
 They expected grim torment and righteous terror,  
 The savagery and slaughter of men and women,  
 The cruelest of miseries beyond human ken, 1640  
 When they saw their kin, stained by sin,  
 Marked by murder, plunge into the abyss.  
 Then all together they declared as one:  
 "Now we can see that the King of all creatures,  
 The Ruler of the world, both heaven and earth, 1645  
 Sent this holy herald as a gift to our people,  
 And we threw him in prison, blind to God's truth.  
 The all-powerful Lord has prevailed over us.  
 Now we should eagerly obey the commands  
 Of his faithful servant, his chosen champion." 1650

Then Andrew began to gladden the hearts  
 Of the waiting warriors with these words:  
 "Fear not in this dark hour your own destruction,  
 Even though those sinners are headed toward hell,  
 For the radiance of glory will reveal the truth 1655  
 To those who realize and repent their crimes  
 And live mindfully in the Lord's light."  
 Then Andrew prayed to the Son of God  
 To save those young men who lost their lives

In the bitter embrace of the fierce flood, 1660  
 So that their eternal souls, stained with sin,  
 Devoid of goodness, denied grace,  
 Deprived of glory, should not be gathered  
 In the grasp of demons in the hold of hell.  
 When the saint's message made its way 1665  
 From Andrew's heart to the mind of God,  
 The Lord of hosts heard the holy prayer  
 Of the humble hero and commanded the dead  
 To rise up alive from their watery graves.  
 Then I heard that a holy miracle occurred— 1670  
 Many young men rose from the dead,  
 Restored in body, refreshed in spirit,  
 Even though they had lost their lives before  
 In the sudden attack of the savage flood.  
 They received baptism and a promise of peace, 1675  
 A covenant with God, a pledge of protection—  
 His grace and glory in a place beyond torment.  
 Then the spirited hero, the mighty saint,  
 The King's craftsman, commanded them all  
 To build a church, raise up God's temple 1680  
 On that sacred spot, where each had been raised  
 From the dead at the source of the flood, to partake  
 Of the sacrament of baptism through God's power.  
 Then a festive host of men and women  
 Began to gather throughout the city. 1685  
 They promised to forgo their heathen faith,  
 Their ancient gods, their false idols—  
 To follow the Lord's will, accept his laws,  
 And live in the promise of his eternal love.  
 They embraced this faith and boldly approached 1690  
 God's holy messenger for a bath of baptism.  
 The sacrament was established and embraced by all  
 Who promised to serve God and follow his faith.  
 The church was consecrated in the eyes of God.  
 The Lord's commandments were the law of the land. 1695  
 Then Saint Andrew chose a man named Plato,  
 Who was bold in spirit, wise in words,  
 To serve as bishop in that glorious city

And consecrated him in his apostolic office  
 For the people's need. He charged the faithful 1700  
 To follow God's teachings and seek salvation.  
 Then Andrew admitted that his spirit was eager  
 To leave that city of worldly wealth,  
 Of gold and gift-giving, of silver and song-sharing,  
 Of the joys of the great high-gabled halls. 1705  
 He said he would seek a swift sea-slider,  
 A sure wave-walker down by the shore.  
 It was hard for the multitude to hear this news,  
 That God's champion intended to return home.  
 Then the God of glory, the Lord of hosts, 1710  
 Appeared to Andrew on his homeward journey,  
 Urging him to return with these words:  
 "[Why leave so quickly your beloved people  
 When you have just saved their souls from sin,  
 Healed their hearts, and brought them grace?] 1715  
 They lament their loss, the love of their leader,  
 And go about grieving, men and women together.  
 They suffer great sadness and bring me their woe.  
 Do not suddenly forsake this young flock  
 In their nascent joy but set my name securely 1720  
 In the home of their hearts. Stay in the city,  
 Protector of warriors, preserver of people,  
 Sharing their joy in the wine-halls of men  
 For seven days' duration. After that wait,  
 You can set sail for home with my blessing." 1725  
 So Andrew returned to Mermedonia once more,  
 Bold-hearted, brave-spirited, eager to obey God.  
 This time he had no fear of fierce foes,  
 The fiendish race who once devoured their dead.  
 Christian wisdom flourished there in words and works 1730  
 After the people had set their eyes on Andrew,  
 Heaven's holy thane, and their hearts on the Lord.  
 Andrew instructed each of them in the faith,  
 Counseling and confirming them in Christ's  
 Love and law, strengthening their spirits, 1735  
 Guiding the multitudes to the heavenly halls,

The heart's homeland where the Father, Son,  
 And comforting Spirit reign forever  
 In the singular radiance of the true Trinity.  
 Saint Andrew attacked the heathen temples, 1740  
 Destroyed the idols, erased all evil and error.  
 Satan suffered deep agony in his heart  
 To see his followers turn from hell's temples  
 To the happiness of heaven, from terror to truth,  
 From peril to peace and a place of joy 1745  
 Where demons and hell-fiends cannot come.  
 Then the seven days passed as God had commanded,  
 And Andrew ended his preaching in the city,  
 His teaching of the people, and he took his leave.  
 He readied his ship to return to Achaia, 1750  
 Where he would await a brave warrior's death,  
 The sure separation of his soul from his body.  
 His grim loss of life was no laughing matter  
 To his savage slayer who was sent on a journey  
 To the jaws of hell where he suffered the terror 1755  
 Of greedy flames, friendless and alone,  
 An outcast without any comfort or consolation.  
 Then I heard that a host of people led Andrew,  
 Their beloved leader, to the ship's prow  
 With sad spirits at the saint's leaving. 1760  
 Their hearts surged up with hot tears  
 As tender sorrow touched their souls,  
 And they turned to weeping. Men brought  
 Their beloved mentor, the brave warrior,  
 The best of men, to his ship on the strand, 1765  
 Watched him sail over the sea's road  
 And slip silently beyond the sea's horizon.  
 Then they worshipped the God of glory,  
 Praising his power in one voice, saying,  
 "There is only one God, our holy Father, 1770  
 The Lord and Creator of all living things,  
 Almighty, everlasting. His right and rule,  
 His promise and power, are glorious and blessed  
 All over middle-earth. His holy splendor

Makes bright each quickened creature,  
Each shining saint, each shimmering angel.  
We bask in his living light and realize glory  
In his holy radiance for ever and ever.  
He is the Lord of lords, the King of kings.”



## THE FATES OF THE APOSTLES

This poem was once thought to be an epilogue to *Andreas*, but is now taken to be a separate poem. It combines elements of elegiac sadness and heroic diction, along with the tone and treatment of Christian martyrologies. The poet opens with a heroic *Hwæt!* (Listen!), then introduces a travel-weary, heart-sad speaker like those in some of the elegies, before he goes on to briefly summarize the fates of the twelve apostles (substituting Paul for Matthias), finally concluding with a set of runic clues to indicate his identity and an appeal to sympathetic readers for their prayers and support. Donoghue notes the contrast between the heroic saints and the poetic speaker: “By bravely and willingly accepting martyrdom, the apostles gained salvation, but the narrator implies he is an ordinary sinner who must appeal for help from friends when he has to go on the lonely journey of death” (62). Greenfield similarly highlights the poem’s central contrast and connection: “Through his opening lines and double epilogue, [the poet] establishes an analogical relationship between the apostles and himself, between their preaching and his art, at the same time creating an ironic distance between their past heroic deaths and heavenly rewards, and his fearful lone journey” (Greenfield and Calder, 166).

This poem is one of four that contains the signature of Cynewulf or Cynwulf embedded in runes; the other three are *Elene: Helena’s Discovery of the True Cross* in the Vercelli Book (see below) and *Christ II: The Ascension* and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book. The names and meanings of the Cynewulfian runes here and elsewhere are much debated, as is the identity of Cynewulf himself. We know almost nothing about the name or its exact significance in these poems. Frese argues that the poet finally “through the elaborate human

exercise of art in each of these four runic signatures, reached, with faith and good works, toward an existence beyond the temporal human sentence [which is] literally and figuratively, the only salvation for a poet to whom words are deeds” (334). For more on Cynewulf and the runic signatures, see Brooks (123 ff.) and the articles by Elliott (1953b), Diamond (1959), and Frese in Bjork (2001); see also Niles, 2006, 285 ff., and Bjork (2013), vii ff. My reading here follows that of Elliott in most, but not all, respects. Each runic name in OE is given in the text in parenthesis with the letter value in bold; the name translated is part of the text itself. For example, “Wealth (**Feoh**)” means that the F rune, called *Feoh*, means *wealth*.

### The Fates of the Apostles

Listen! World-weary, sick at heart,  
 I shaped this song, gathered these stories  
 From far and wide about the twelve apostles,  
 Noble heroes who showed great courage  
 And attained glory in the eyes of God. 5  
 These faithful champions were chosen by the Lord;  
 They were respected and renowned, beloved in life.  
 The power and glory of the Prince’s servants  
 Were known to all men across middle-earth.  
 Theirs was no small fame. The sacred band 10  
 Was guided by lots and God’s hand  
 To the places where they could glorify God’s law,  
 Making it manifest to a multitude of people.

Some of these brave and notable men  
 Lost their lives in the city of Rome 15  
 Through the terrible treachery of Nero—  
 These were the apostles, Peter and Paul.  
 Apostleship is honored throughout the world.

Andrew also risked his life before the cruel  
 Ægias in Achaia. He refused to bow 20  
 To any earthly king or temper his faith  
 To any powerful tyrant. God’s champion  
 Chose eternal life, the unworldly, timeless  
 Light of the Lord, when the battle-bold warrior

Entered the fray, embracing his fate 25  
 As God willed it, and climbed on the cross.

Listen! We have also heard from holy men,  
 Learned in the scriptures, about John's lineage—  
 Because of his kin he was dearest to Christ  
 Among mortal men, once the King of glory, 30  
 The Creator of angels, the Father of mankind,  
 Descended from heaven through the doors of delivery,  
 Entering our world through a virgin's womb.  
 John taught the words of Jesus in Ephesus,  
 Where he also sought through the doors of death 35  
 The rapture of life, the radiance of heaven.

Nor was John's brother James slow to serve  
 In the face of death. Among the Jews,  
 James was forced by the unholy Herod  
 To brave the unsheathed sword's bite 40  
 And leave life, his soul sheared from his body.

Philip preached among the peoples of Asia  
 Where he also sought eternal life  
 By climbing the gallows-tree, the cross  
 Where he was hung by a hostile mob 45  
 In Hierapolis. The cruel ones crucified him.

Far and wide it's no great secret  
 That bold Bartholomew, a valiant servant  
 Who endured strife, served in India.  
 The heathen Astrages, blind in his heart, 50  
 Ordered his head severed at Albanapolis  
 Because he would not bow down to idols  
 Or worship false images as they demanded.  
 He lost his head and gained great glory.  
 The joy of heaven seemed far more precious 55  
 To him than false gods and worldly goods.

Likewise Thomas traveled to parts of India,  
 Where hearts were healed and minds enlightened

Through his trusted teaching of the holy word.  
 This bold-hearted man of exalted spirit 60  
 And astonishing skill, through the Lord's power,  
 Boldly raised the king's brother from the dead  
 Before the multitudes. The young man  
 Whose name was Gad was battle-brave.  
 Later Thomas yielded his life to the people 65  
 In a cruel conflict when a heathen sword  
 Slashed through his body, freeing his soul  
 To seek out the light of heaven as his reward  
 For virtue and victory as the saint went down.

Listen! We have heard from the holy books 70  
 That truth was revealed, God's great glory,  
 To the Ethiopians through Matthew's teaching.  
 As the day dawned, the radiant sun  
 Awakened a belief in the Lord's light,  
 Illuminating the minds of the multitudes. 75  
 Through the Son's love, the land was cleansed.  
 Unfortunately, Irtacus, the bloodthirsty king,  
 Ordered Matthew killed with savage weapons.

We have heard that James suffered death in Jerusalem  
 Before the priests. The steadfast man 80  
 Fell to the ground, battered to death  
 By a cruel cudgel—he fell prey to hatred.  
 That human malice was no misery to him:  
 He was blessed and happy at his life's end,  
 His soul's liberation. His rich reward 85  
 Was eternal life with the King of glory.

Two warriors were not slow to the battle-strife,  
 The game of swords, the play of shields.  
 Simeon and Thaddeus, God's steadfast soldiers,  
 Served keenly in the Persian conflict 90  
 Until life's last day descended on both.  
 Those noble men suffered pain and slaughter  
 From the hatred of spears, the hostility of swords,  
 And left vain life to seek a truer victory,

The reward of glory instead of battle-gifts— 95  
 The joy of heaven, the generous grace of God.  
 Their living was separated from the body's being  
 In this world, and they gave up earthly wealth  
 For the holy joy of a heavenly home.

So these twelve holy heroes met their end, 100  
 Glory-thanes who served their eternal Lord,  
 Their heavenly Father, whose power is imperishable.

Now I pray that the person who has read this poem  
 And finds these words spiritually sustaining  
 Should humbly pray to this holy host 105  
 To grant me aid, shield me from sin,  
 Support me in my faith, and send me mercy.  
 I will need kind friends, caring and compassionate,  
 When I must travel the long, last road  
 Into that unknown and wondrous land, 110  
 Leaving my body behind, a bag of dust,  
 An armful of earth, a feast for worms.  
 Let the person who loves such sacred stories,  
 Who can read runes and understand riddles,  
 Solve this puzzle and say my name: 115  
 Wealth (**Feoh**) shall stand briefly at the end  
 For earls to enjoy on earth, but a fool and his gold  
 Are soon separated on a man's death-day.  
 Worldly joy (**Wynn**) shall soon pass away;  
 The body's animal strength (**Ur**) will decay, 120  
 Flesh disappear just as water (**Lagu**) glides away.  
 Torch (**Cen**) may burn and bow (**Yr**) may slay,  
 But the need (**Nyd**) of night, the dying day,  
 Will stop the string and quench the blaze.  
 All worldly powers are held in the hand 125  
 Of heaven's King. Now you can see  
 Who sings this song, writes this riddle,  
 Recites this story. Say who I am.

If you love this poem and are mindful of its meaning,  
 Please pray for my comfort and consolation, 130

My sustenance and solace. I have to leave home now,  
Let my soul fly free from the bone-house  
As I travel somewhere wondrous out of this world  
To another country, the heart's homeland.  
That sacred place is unknown to everyone 135  
Except those who possess a godlike soul.  
We should all eagerly seek our Lord,  
Pray to the power that shields and sustains us,  
Send our poems and prayers to the King of creation,  
So that we might find favor and finally enter 140  
The kingdom of heaven, the place of peace,  
Where the King of angels offers to each  
The richest reward, a gather of glory,  
The radiance of heaven, both now and forever,  
Eternally ours, eternally renewing, 145  
An endless energy shaping creation.

Finit.

## SOUL AND BODY I

This is one of two *Soul and Body* poems in Old English; the other, shorter version, which contains only the lament of the damned soul, occurs in the Exeter Book. The common portions of the poems are alike in most ways, though there are subtle differences in usage and spelling (see Moffat's 1990 edition for comparative versions). Fulk and Cain note that "the soul's address to the body and the horrors of the rotting corpse are standard homiletic themes . . . [and] though the Exeter version lacks the less colorful speech of the saved soul, the two versions must stem from a common written tradition" (138). The soul and body are separated at death so that each suffers a different fate: the damned soul laments the sins of its body, which has now become a decomposed bone-house, food for worms. On Judgment Day, the soul and body are reunited to be judged and suffer together. The saved soul here is reunited with its virtuous body to await judgment and presumably to go united again to heaven with the righteous. Shippey points out that "the poet addresses himself firmly to [each of] the wise, *modsnotra gehwam* . . . convinced that good and evil are total opposites, without intermediate states, being on the whole more stimulated by the side of evil and danger," adding that the poet "believes in the value of realising this total opposition *before* decisions are taken, and even more firmly in the uselessness of realisation and repentance afterwards" (36). Fragments of another poem, *The Soul's Address to the Body*, are also found in the Worcester Fragments (see the "Additional Poems" section). Similar themes are found in *The Grave*, *Judgment Day I*, *Judgment Day II*, and *Christ III: Judgment*.

## Soul and Body I

Truly every man needs to see and understand  
 The state of his soul, the fate of its journey,  
 How dark it will be when grim death comes  
 To separate those kinsmen, body and soul,  
 Who were so long together, joined as one. 5  
 Long afterwards the soul shall receive  
 God's just reward, either grief or glory,  
 Torment or true bliss, depending on what  
 The body has earned for it, the world-walker,  
 Dust-dweller, in their days on earth. 10  
 The soul shall come every seventh night  
 For three hundred years, moaning in misery,  
 Seeking the body, that carrion coat  
 It wore before, that unthriving flesh,  
 Unless almighty God, the Lord of hosts, 15  
 Determines the world's doom sooner than that.  
 Then the soul shall speak, discourse with dust,  
 Crying out its cares in the coldest words:  
 "You cruel, bloody clod, what have you done?  
 Why did you torment me, filth of flesh, 20  
 Wasting world-rot, food for worms,  
 Effigy of earth? You gave little thought  
 To the state of your soul and how it might suffer  
 After leaving your clutch, lifted from flesh,  
 Or how long you might molder and spoil. 25  
 Are you blaming me, you wicked wretch?  
 Little did you think that lusting for pleasure  
 Might be craving for terror, that gorging on life  
 Might leave you lifeless, a banquet for worms.  
 God in his goodness gave you a spirit. 30  
 The Lord in his great power and glory  
 Sent you by an angel from his home in heaven  
 The gift of a soul from his own hand.  
 Then he redeemed you with his holy blood,  
 His sacred suffering, his blessed sacrifice. 35  
 Yet you bound me with hard hunger



And cruel thirst. You tied me to torments  
 In hell's dark home, made me a slave.  
 I lived inside you, encompassed by flesh,  
 Trapped in my torment, your sinful desires, 40  
 Your lusty pleasures. I couldn't escape.  
 Your evil pressed upon me so strongly  
 That it sometimes seemed that I might have to wait  
 Thirty thousand years till the day you died.  
 So I waited in misery for our moment of parting— 45  
 But the end of this waiting is not so good!  
 You were puffed up with pride, gorging on food,  
 Drunk with wine, feasting on pleasure  
 Like some wild beast, while I felt a thirst  
 For the body of God, a soulful drink. 50  
 You never considered in your long life here  
 While I had to live with you in the wretched world,  
 That you were conceived in lust, born in flesh,  
 Bound by sin, yet steadied and strengthened  
 By the gift of a soul sent by God. 55  
 You never guarded me against hell's torments  
 Because of the lusts of your sinful heart.  
 Now you will suffer shame for my undoing,  
 Guilt for my grieving, on that great day,  
 When the only-begotten Son gathers up mankind. 60  
 Now you are no more loved as a faithful companion,  
 No more important to anyone alive,  
 Mother or father, kith or kin,  
 Than the darkest of birds, the black raven,  
 The carrion crow—not since I left you, 65  
 Sent on a journey by the same holy hand  
 That brought me down to the flesh-house before.  
 Now comes the day of God's hard reckoning.  
 You can't buy any easy way out of the journey  
 Toward final judgment—not with crimson jewels, 70  
 Not with silly trinkets, with silver or gold,  
 Not with worldly goods, with your bridal ring,  
 Or your palace of pleasure. Now you must abide  
 In the earth's embrace. What remains, my body,

Will be stripped to the bone, its sinews shredded, 75  
 Its ligaments ripped away, while I, your soul,  
 Must seek you out, unwilling yet undaunted,  
 Revile you with words as you reviled me with deeds.  
 You are deaf and dumb to the living world,  
 But not to me. Your pleasures are past. 80  
 Still I must visit you at night with my need,  
 Driven by sorrow, afflicted by sin,  
 Only to flee at cockcrow, when holy men  
 Sing praise-songs to the living God.  
 I must leave for the lands appointed to me 85  
 By your dark deeds, a home for the homeless,  
 A house of shame. Mold-worms and maggots  
 Will feed on your flesh, chew up your sinews,  
 Dark greedy creatures, gluttons munching you,  
 Moment by moment, back to the bone. 90  
 The extravagances you offered, the possessions you paraded  
 Here on earth before people, finally mean nothing.  
 Better for you than the accumulated wealth of the world—  
 Unless you'd given your riches to God as a gift—  
 Would be to have been conceived from the beginning 95  
 As a bird in the air, a fish in the flood,  
 Or an animal on the earth, grazing along,  
 A dumb ox in the field without wit,  
 Or the fiercest animal wandering in the wild,  
 If God had willed it, or even the worst of worms, 100  
 Than ever to have been born a man to take baptism.  
 You will have to answer for both of us  
 On that day of reckoning when all the wounds  
 Wrought by men in this world are revealed,  
 The sores of sin, the marks of misery. 105  
 Then the Lord himself, the Shaper of heaven,  
 Will hear the past deeds of each person  
 And ask the recompense for Christ's wounds.  
 What will you say to God on Doomsday?  
 You will have to pay for each sin separately, 110  
 With each small joint in your hand or limb—  
 A severe judgment from a stern judge.

But what are we going to do together?  
 In the end we will endure the multitude of miseries,  
 The gathering of griefs, you allotted for us earlier.” 115

Then the soul will revile the flesh-hold,  
 Condemn the body, the cold corpse,  
 As it hastens away to the depths of hell,  
 Tormented by sinful deeds, and not to the holy  
 Delights of heaven. The dust will lie still— 120  
 It cannot respond, offer the sad soul  
 Some argument or answer, some ease for the spirit,  
 Some support or peace. A corpse cannot speak.  
 Its head is split open, its hands torn apart,  
 Dismembered in the dust. Its jaw is gaping, 125  
 Its palate cracked, its throat ripped out,  
 Its sinews sucked away, its neck gnawed apart,  
 Its gums shredded into a handful of dust.  
 Savage worms now ravage its ribs  
 Drink down the corpse, thirsty for blood. 130  
 Its tongue is ripped into ten pieces,  
 A delightful feast for the little devourers,  
 So it cannot speak to the soul, trade talk  
 With the wretched spirit. The name of the worm  
 Is Ravenous Greedy-Mouth, whose hard jaws 135  
 Are sharp as needles. It is the first visitor  
 To desire the grave, crunching through ground.  
 It rips up the tongue, bores through the teeth,  
 Eats down through the eyes into the head,  
 Inviting the other gobblers to a great feast, 140  
 When the wretched body has cooled down  
 That once wore clothes against the cold.  
 Then it becomes the feast for worms,  
 Cold carrion, a banquet for maggots.  
 Wise men should remember this. 145

It's more hopeful when the holy and blessed soul  
 Comes back to the body, encompassed in joy.  
 Its mission and message bring hope to the heart.

This soul seeks willingly the body it bore,  
 The flesh-robe it wore for a long lifetime. 150  
 Then gathering souls speak as one to the body  
 With wise words, truthful and triumphant,  
 Greeting the good one with sincere welcome:  
 “Dearest friend, beloved companion,  
 Even though worms are attacking you, 155  
 Greedy ones eager for a feast of flesh,  
 I have come back from my Father’s kingdom,  
 Wrapped in blessing, robed in grace,  
 Clothed in joy. Alas, my lord, if only  
 I could lead you away to see the angels 160  
 And the splendor of heaven, as you appointed for me  
 Through your good deeds. You fasted here,  
 Filling me up with the body of God,  
 Quenching my thirst with the soul’s drink.  
 You lived in poverty, offering me an abundance 165  
 Of spiritual pleasures and soulful treasures.  
 You need not feel shame for the holy gifts  
 You gave me on earth on that great day  
 When the sinful and righteous are divided.  
 Nor should you need to mourn at the meeting 170  
 Of men and angels over all you’ve given.  
 Here you were humble, bowing before men,  
 Raising me up to eternal bliss.  
 I mourn for you here, dearest of men,  
 For a body turned into a banquet for worms, 175  
 But God’s will was always that your share  
 Should be this hateful home, this loathsome grave.  
 But I tell you this truly: Do not be troubled  
 By this earthly torment—we will be united again  
 Gathered together for God’s judgment 180  
 On Doomsday. Then we shall enjoy together,  
 A precious pair, the honor and grace  
 You appointed for us while we were living,  
 And we will be exalted as one in heaven.  
 We have no need for care at God’s coming, 185  
 No reason to flee or fear his judgment,  
 No grief for guilt, no sorrow for sin.

Then in God's presence we will speak as one,  
Recounting all the good deeds we have done,  
And celebrate the rewards we have won together.  
I know that you were great in worldly endeavors

190

\* \* \*

## HOMILETIC FRAGMENT I: ON HUMAN DECEIT

Randle points out that although this fragmentary poem has often been neglected by scholars, “it sits squarely within the homiletic context of the Vercelli Book as a whole,” and notes that “its theme, namely, the deceitfulness of men in the present age, is a relatively commonplace homiletic motif” (185). Both Isaacs and Pulsiano (1987) note that the central metaphor of the poem is that of the bees that produce both sweet honey for the tongue and an unexpected sting in the flesh. The theme of double-dealing and betrayal is a common one in OE poetry, from *Beowulf* to *The Battle of Maldon*. The theme is also evident in *Charm for a Swarm of Bees*, where the charmer exhorts the earth he is throwing to take power over not only the bees but “over grudges, over malice, over evil rites, / Over even the mighty, slanderous tongue of man.” The beginning of the homily is lost because of a missing folio between this and the previous poem.

### Homiletic Fragment I: On Human Deceit

\* \* \*

So many sorrows of different sorts,  
A myriad of woes, steal furtively  
Into the halls of men, subverting their joy.  
One man insults or abuses another  
With secret slander or malicious words,  
Blames a good man behind his back  
While speaking fairly before his face.

His heart holds deceit like a dark treasure—  
 He gathers guilt with his gift of guile.  
 In that moment the Lord of hosts 10  
 Will be the witness of that wicked deed.  
 Therefore the prophet has said, “Lord of hosts,  
 Do not give me up to suffer with the sinful  
 Or lead me to live with smooth-tongued liars  
 Doomed to destruction. Their hearts hold 15  
 Bitter thoughts and devious desires.  
 What they promise with their lips, they pervert  
 With their lying words and evil intentions.”  
 Misery lurks in the malicious mind,  
 The sinful heart, though a man’s words 20  
 May seem faithful and fair, true and trustworthy.  
 Goodness and guile are strange travelers together,  
 Like delight and danger, pain and pleasure—  
 Just as bees bear both the sweetest honey  
 And the sharpest sting, a treat for the mouth 25  
 And a torment for the flesh, a tiny spear  
 Holding poison, hiding in the tail,  
 To wound their prey when they have a chance.  
 These bees are just like dishonest people  
 Who promise honey with their sweet tongues 30  
 And deliver pain when they betray their friends  
 With their cunning deceit and the devil’s art.  
 So now middle-earth is corrupted with crime,  
 Undone by evil—so it wanes and waxes.  
 Our old enemy watches day and night, 35  
 Deceives and disturbs, confounds and torments,  
 Mixes compassion with cruelty, mercy with malice,  
 Trust with torment, piety with persecution,  
 Expectation with enmity. No one loves  
 His neighbor in his heart as our Holy Lord 40  
 Commanded except the rare sinless soul.  
 Most men unwisely choose worldly hopes  
 Because they know nothing of the spirit.  
 Their craft is cunning, their gift is guile.  
 Let’s put our trust in a better truth, 45

Set our souls' hopes on spiritual goods,  
Now that we have a remedy in God's grace,  
His redemptive mercy, so that we may rise  
In the radiant light of our loving Lord  
To a homeland in heaven in the embrace of angels,  
Our comfort and consolation, when almighty God  
Discerns our faith and determines our doom.



## THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

**T**he *Dream of the Rood* is the first dream vision poem in a vernacular language in western Europe. It transforms Christ into an unconventional, self-sacrificing warrior and endows the cross with human consciousness and feeling. As both stand-in for Christ and witness to the crucifixion, the cross suffers and laments to the dreamer, while Christ remains stoically silent. As persecutor, the cross represents the human torturers. The poem translates the distance between God and man into the nearness and shared suffering of Christ and cross and mediates the gap between nature and humankind. It shows us the power of the resurrection: the greatest warrior can embrace death and then rise up to slay it. A tree in the forest can be cut down and carried into consciousness as it moves from slayer to celebrant, from gallows to glory. Portions of the poem are found carved in runes on a stone cross in Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, and two lines are also found on a reliquary of the True Cross in Brussels (see “Minor Poems” in this collection).

At the heart of the poem is the device of endowing an inanimate object with consciousness and feeling and enabling the object to speak. This tradition is partly derived from the classical tradition of prosopopoeia, “discourse by inanimate objects,” and partly from the medieval riddling tradition (see Schlauch, 23 ff., and Donoghue, 75 ff.). There are several medieval Latin cross riddles and some (with solution debated) in Old English in the Exeter Book. *The Dream of the Rood* makes use of both of the basic Old English riddle types: the third-person descriptive riddle (“I saw a creature”) and the first-person persona riddle (“I am a creature”). It challenges us to say both who the cross is and what its identity and history mean. The dreamer begins by

describing the cross as a wondrous creature whose nature shifts back and forth in the dream—sometimes drenched with blood, sometimes dressed in gold. When the cross begins to speak, it recounts its history from its homeland in the woods to its transformation into a gallows at the hands of man. With these riddlic devices, the poet creates a rood that shifts shapes, recounts its history, and participates in the wonder of human perception and the enigmatic miracle of the crucifixion and resurrection. At lines 86b–87, I have restored the sense of missing lines on the discovery of the cross.

### The Dream of the Rood

Listen! I will speak of the best of dreams,  
 The sweetest vision that crossed my sleep  
 In the middle of the night when speech-bearers  
 Lay in silent rest. I seemed to see  
 A wondrous tree lifting up in the air, 5  
 Wound with light, the brightest of beams.  
 That radiant sign was wrapped in gold;  
 Gems stood gleaming at its feet,  
 Five stones shining from its shoulder-beam.  
 A host of angels beheld its beauty, 10  
 Fair through the ordained, ongoing creation.  
 That was not an outlaw's gallows, a criminal's cross.  
 Holy spirits, angels, men on earth—all creation  
 Stood watching that wondrous tree.  
 The victory-beam was beautiful, bright 15  
 And shining—but I was stained with sin.  
 I saw the tree of glory sheathed in gems,  
 Clothed in gold—jewels gleaming  
 On the Lord's tree; yet through that gold  
 I could see the ancient agony of the wretched— 20  
 The suffering and struggle—since it first began  
 To sweat blood from its right side.  
 I was seized with sorrow, tormented by the sight  
 Of that beautiful cross. I saw that creature  
 Changing its shape, its form and colors— 25  
 Sometimes it was stained with sweat,  
 Drenched with blood, sometimes finely  
 Dressed with gold. Lying there a long time,

Sadly gazing at the Savior's tree,  
I heard the best of woods begin to speak: 30

“Many years ago—I still remember the day—  
I was cut down at the edge of the forest,  
Severed from my trunk, removed from my roots.  
Strong enemies seized me, shaped me into a spectacle,  
Ordered me to lift their outlaws, crucify their criminals. 35  
Men bore me on their shoulders, set me on a hill,  
Fastened their foes on me, enough of enemies.  
Then I saw the Lord of mankind hasten to me,  
Eager to climb up. I dared not bow down  
Against God's word. I saw the earth tremble— 40  
I might have slaughtered his foes, yet I stood fast.  
The warrior, our young Savior, stripped himself  
Before the battle with a keen heart and firm purpose,  
Climbed up on the cross, the tree of shame,  
Bold in the eyes of many, to redeem mankind. 45  
I trembled when the Hero embraced me  
But dared not bow down to earth—I had to stand fast.  
A rood was I raised—I raised the mighty King,  
Lord of the heavens. I dared not bend down.  
Men drove their dark nails into me, piercing my skin— 50  
You can still see my open malice-wounds—  
But I dared not injure any of those enemies.  
Men mocked us both—I was drenched with blood  
From the side of the Man after he sent forth his spirit.  
I endured much hostile fortune on that hill. 55  
I saw the Lord of hosts stretch out his arms  
In terrible suffering. Night-shadows slid down,  
Covering in darkness the corpse of the Lord,  
Which was bathed in radiance. The dark deepened  
Under the clouds. All creation wept, 60  
Lamenting the Lord's death: Christ was on the cross.  
Yet eager ones came, believers from afar,  
To be with the Lord. I beheld it all.  
I was seized with sorrow, humbling myself  
To men's hands, bowing down with bold courage. 65  
They lifted up almighty God, raising his body

From its burden of woe. Those brave warriors  
 Left me alone, covered with streams of blood—  
 I was wounded with arrows, pierced with pain.  
 They laid down the limb-weary Lord of heaven, 70  
 Gathering near his head, guarding his body.  
 He rested there awhile, weary after his struggle.  
 Men made him an earth-house, shaping a sepulcher  
 In the sight of the slayer, carved of bright stone.  
 Inside they laid the Lord of victories and started to sing 75  
 A long lament, a sorrow-song at evening,  
 As they began to depart, drained by the death  
 Of their glorious Prince. He rested in the tomb  
 With few friends, but we stood by weeping,  
 Unquiet crosses, when the cries of men 80  
 Had drifted off. The corpse grew cold,  
 The soul's fair house. Then men came along,  
 Cut us down to earth, carried us off.  
 That was a terrible fate. They buried us  
 Deep in a pit in the ground, a grave for crosses, 85  
 But servants of the Lord [learned of my tomb;  
 Friends hauled me out, offered me healing,]  
 Sheathed me in gems, in silver and gold.

Now you have heard, my dear dreamer,  
 How I have endured such sorrow and strife 90  
 From wicked men. The time is come  
 For all men on earth and throughout creation  
 To honor me and offer prayers to the sign of the cross.  
 The Son of God suffered on me for awhile—  
 Now I rise up high in heaven, a tower of glory, 95  
 And I can heal any man who holds me in awe.  
 Long ago I became hateful to man, hardest of woes,  
 A terrible torturer. Then I was transformed.  
 Now I offer the true way of life to speech-bearers,  
 A road for the righteous. The Lord of glory, 100  
 The Guardian of heaven, has honored me  
 Above all trees, just as he also honored  
 His mother Mary above all women.  
 Now I command you, my dear friend,

To reveal this dream to other men, 105  
 Disclose to them that the tree of glory  
 Was Christ's cross where he suffered sorely  
 For the sins of man and the old deeds of Adam.  
 He tasted death, a bitter drink, yet rose again  
 In his strength and power to save mankind. 110  
 He ascended into heaven. Our almighty God  
 Will return to middle-earth on Judgment Day  
 With all of his angels to judge each man  
 In his wisdom and power according to how  
 Each man has lived his life on earth, 115  
 Spent the precious loan of his days.  
 No man can flee from the fear of God  
 Or the weight of his words. He will ask  
 Before the multitudes where the man is  
 Who would taste bitter death in his name, 120  
 Just as he did on the cross, the true tree.  
 Then they will fear and think a little  
 How they might answer Christ on that day.  
 No man needs to fear who wears on his breast  
 And bears in his heart the best of signs. 125  
 Each soul that longs to live with the Lord  
 Must make a journey from earth to heaven,  
 Seeking God's reward through the rood."

Then I prayed to the cross with an eager heart  
 And a zealous spirit where I was left alone 130  
 In such small company. My spirit was lifted,  
 Urged and inspired, to travel that long road.  
 I endured an endless time of longing.  
 Now my life's great hope is to see again  
 Christ's cross, that tree of victory, 135  
 And honor it more keenly than other men.  
 The cross is my hope and my protection.  
 I have few powerful friends left on earth—  
 They have passed on from the joys of the world,  
 Seeking the greater glory of God, 140  
 Longing to live with their Heavenly Father.  
 I live each day, longing for the time

When the Lord's cross that I saw before  
In a wondrous dream will come back again  
To carry me away from this loan of life 145  
To the joys of heaven, to an everlasting bliss,  
To the Lord's table where the company of Christ  
Feasts together forever and ever, where I can dwell  
In glory with the holy saints, sustained in joy.  
I pray for God to be my friend, the Savior 150  
Who suffered sorely on the gallows-tree  
For the sins of men, who rose and redeemed us  
With life everlasting and a heavenly home.  
Hope was renewed with grace and glory  
For those who before had suffered burning flames. 155  
The Son and Savior was mighty and victorious  
In his harrowing of hell when the Lord Almighty  
Came back home to the kingdom of heaven,  
Leading a band of spirits to the saints and angels,  
To their homeland in heaven where they dwell in bliss. 160

## ELENE: HELENA'S DISCOVERY OF THE TRUE CROSS

**E***lene: Helena's Discovery of the True Cross* is the longest of the OE poetic saints' lives, which include *Andreas* in the Vercelli Book and *Guthlac A*, *Guthlac B*, and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book. It is also one of four poems with a Cynewulfian runic signature, including *The Fates of the Apostles* in the Vercelli Book and *Christ II: The Ascension* and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book. *Elene* is a poetic treatment of the discovery of the true cross of Christ by St. Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine. Fulk and Cain note that the poem "is a translation of some recension of the *acta* of Cyriac (or Quiriac), bishop of Jerusalem . . . a version of the *Inventio sanctae crucis* [Finding of the Holy Cross]" (98, 247). Gradon says that "this legend is probably of eastern origin and combines the story of the finding of the True Cross by St Helena, a legend springing from the discovery of the Holy Sepulchre in 326, with the story of the hostility and ultimate conversion of a Jew called Judas" (15), noting further that "the development of the Helena legend can be clearly traced in patristic writings of the fourth and fifth centuries, while the history of Judas appears in the writings of the eastern fathers after about the middle of the fifth century" (15). Bjork points out that the poet "reshapes his Mediterranean source and adds striking and memorable scenes to make the poem both decidedly Anglo-Saxon and clearly his" (2013, xvii).

The poem contains a number of narrative episodes, including Constantine's auspicious vision of the cross before his victory over the Huns and Germanic troops, his conversion to Christianity, his mother Helena's quest to find the true cross in Jerusalem, her questioning of the Jewish elders and tormenting Judas to reveal its location, the discovery of Christ's cross along with the other two crosses from Calvary, the miracle of a dead man revived by the

true cross, and the conversion of Judas and Satan's subsequent lament over the loss of a follower. It also includes the building of a church on the place of discovery, the renaming of Judas as Cyriacus, who is made Bishop of Jerusalem, and the miraculous discovery of the nails from the cross, which are refashioned into a bit for the bridle of Constantine's horse (thus fulfilling a prophecy in Zecharias 14:20). The poem concludes with an epilogue in which the poet laments his former sinful ways and solicits prayers for forgiveness in his old age, and then closes with a vision of the bliss and bale handed out to the saved and damned on Judgment Day.

The presentation of gender and the presence of anti-Semitism in this poem have been the subjects of much recent debate (see Fulk and Cain, 99; M. Nelson, 191 ff.; Klein, 53 ff.; and the articles in chapter 5 of Bjork, 2001). Helena is sometimes seen in psychological or naturalistic terms as a hard-hearted warrior of Christ, determined to discover the cross concealed by the Jewish peoples at all costs, including the grim torture of Judas. Others see Helena as a more passive agent of Constantine, or in more abstract, typological terms, as a representative of the new faith, who stands in contrast to the Jews in the poem, who are representative of the old wisdom. The play between the personal and the typological may be part of the deliberate and often delicate balance in the poem that sometimes subsumes the actor into the larger allegory of providential purposes, and sometimes invites us to question the troubling ease with which this is done by those characters who may be prone to mystification or misreading in order to reaffirm an order or achieve an end.

There is much debate about the runes at the end of the poem (indicated by bold capital letters in the translation), which spell out the name of the supposed poet Cynewulf. The reading of the runes here follows the suggestions of Elliott (1953a). Little is known about the identity of Cynewulf, although there is much critical speculation on this account (see the headnote to *The Fates of the Apostles* above). Each runic name in OE is given in the text in parenthesis with the letter value in bold; the name translated is part of the text itself. For example, "bow (**Yr**)," means that the Y rune, called *Ț*; means *bow*.

The OE form of the saint's name is Elene, the traditional title of the poem. This is variously translated into modern English as Elene, Helena, and Helen. Along with Gradon (118), I have translated the name as Helena, following my practice elsewhere of using the most recognizable form of the name for an English-reading audience. The accent falls on the initial syllable of the name.



## Elene: Helena's Discovery of the True Cross

Two hundred thirty-three winter-cold years  
 After almighty God, the glory of kings,  
 Had come into the world in flesh and blood,  
 Spirit and sinew, breath and bone,  
 As the living Christ, the Light of the righteous— 5  
 It was the sixth year in the reign of Constantine,  
 After that holy hero and battle-lord  
 Had become the leader of the Roman kingdom.  
 The great shield-warrior and people's protector  
 Was an honorable man, bold and beneficent, 10  
 Generous and just. God granted him glory,  
 Increased his power, made him a great prince,  
 An emperor on earth, a triumphant king.  
 He was a conqueror to some, a consolation to others,  
 A scourge to his enemies, a shield to his friends. 15  
 Battle was brought to him, terror and tumult,  
 The hard clash and confrontation of troops,  
 When the Huns and Hrethgoths gathered their forces,  
 And the fierce Franks and Hugas began to threaten  
 The peace of his people. They wanted war. 20  
 Their spears were shining, their mail-coats gleaming  
 With woven iron. They raised their voices,  
 Swords and shields, and their bold battle-flag.  
 This collection of clans had a plain purpose,  
 To kill Constantine and conquer his lands 25  
 As they came forward in their fierce strength.  
 The ravenous wolf sang his savage song,  
 An unholy howl—his hunger was no secret.  
 The wild eagle soared on dew-damp wings,  
 Screeching a death-chant, following the foes. 30  
 Over the boundaries swept the greatest of armies  
 That the king of the Huns could muster for battle  
 Among his neighbors—battle-hungry, blood-thirsty,  
 Eager for combat. The relentless ones rolled on.  
 The keenest of warriors advanced in waves 35  
 Of ordered legions till they approached the edge  
 Of the city-fortress, fierce foot soldiers

Eager to fight an enemy in a foreign land.  
 The cruel spear-men set up a camp  
 At the Danube's edge with a great clamor. 40  
 They meant to ransack the Roman empire,  
 Massacre the people, and carry home plunder.  
 The Roman citizens discovered terror  
 In the onslaught of Huns. Savage arrows  
 Began to fly, flesh-bite and death-sting, 45  
 Lethal battle-snakes darting through the air.  
 The emperor ordered his troops to attack.  
 The resolute Roman army entered the assault,  
 Battle-hard, ready for the conflict.  
 Their numbers were smaller than those 50  
 Of the Huns, but their spirits were stronger.  
 Swords clashed with shields, steel with wood,  
 Blade on bone, singing a shrill war-song.  
 The black raven shrieked, eager for blood.  
 The army moved out, marching for its life. 55  
 The trumpets blared a bright battle-call,  
 Heralds of doom. Horses pawed the ground.  
 Steadfast warriors headed for the strife.  
 The Roman king was touched by terror  
 When he saw the horde of Huns and Hrethgoths 60  
 Gathered there by the river, a fierce force,  
 A company of cutthroats, ready for war.  
 His heart was heavy, his spirit sad—  
 His valiant army was too small for victory.  
 His troops made camp, close companions 65  
 Preparing for the next day's desperate battle.  
 The army of warriors surrounded their prince,  
 Preparing for the night's uneasy sleep.  
 Later, as the emperor slipped into dream,  
 An extraordinary vision entered his mind. 70  
 A strange man of supernatural beauty  
 Appeared in the dream, revealing himself  
 With heavenly radiance—a creature brighter,  
 More beautiful than anyone under the sun.  
 Suddenly the emperor sat up startled, 75  
 His head protected by his hard boar-helmet.

The mighty messenger, a heavenly herald,  
 Called out as the veil of night vanished,  
 And the mind's darkness drifted away:  
 "Constantine! The King of the company of angels, 80  
 The Ruler of fate, Decider of destiny,  
 The Lord of hosts, brings you a promise  
 Of power and protection, triumph over terror.  
 Fear not, though alien armies may attack you,  
 Savages come at you with swords and spears, 85  
 For God is your shield, your strength in battle.  
 Raise up your eyes to your Ruler in heaven  
 Where you will find a radiant sign,  
 A token of glory, a symbol of victory."  
 The emperor was suddenly alert at the angel's 90  
 Bold bidding and laid open his heart,  
 Lifting his eyes as the peace-weaver proposed.  
 He saw there the glory-tree, the radiant rood,  
 The cross of Christ, beautifully adorned  
 With gems and jewels, gleaming with gold. 95  
 The wonder-tree was inscribed with these words:  
 "With this sign you will slay the perilous hordes,  
 Beat back the blood-thirsty barbarians,  
 Overcome the evil enemy on the battlefield."  
 Then the radiance faded, folded into night 100  
 As the bright angel ascended into heaven,  
 Returning home to the host of the pure.  
 The king was enthralled by the holy vision—  
 That cross was his hope against the hordes.

Then Constantine, the ruler and ring-giver, 105  
 Protector of peoples, pride of princes,  
 Commanded a symbol made in the likeness  
 Of Christ's cross, the radiant rood,  
 Just as he had seen revealed in the heavens.  
 In the light of dawn, he roused his warriors 110  
 And raised the standard of the tree of God,  
 The cross of victory, to bear in the battle-storm  
 Against the heathen hordes, the bold barbarians.  
 Trumpets blared, tempers flared,

The dark raven dreamed of devouring 115  
 Combat-corpses on the battlefield.  
 The dewy-feathered eagle prepared to plunder  
 Flesh and sinew, arm and eye—a bloody feast.  
 The savage wolf came to stalk his prey,  
 Howling his hideous, unmerciful song. 120  
 Battle-terror touched each warrior's heart.  
 Swords slashed, shields clashed, arrows shrieked  
 From bowstring to breastbone, fierce battle-adders  
 With a dangerous bite. Death rained from above.  
 The barbarian hordes could not be stopped, 125  
 Driven by fury and a fierce love of battle.  
 The brutal army savagely attacked,  
 Breaking the shield-wall, slashing with swords.  
 Then the bold banner was raised, the sign of the rood.  
 The war-chant shifted to a song of victory— 130  
 The cross of Christ was on the battlefield.  
 Gold helmets gleamed, bright spears shimmered,  
 Bones were shivered, barbarian blood flowed.  
 The unholy heathens dropped like flies.  
 Huns and Hrethgoths fled from the field. 135  
 The enemy attackers were desperate to escape  
 As the war-horns trumpeted a Roman triumph,  
 And Constantine raised up the sign of the cross.  
 The harried aggressors were scattered everywhere.  
 Battle-swords slew some, arrows others— 140  
 Barbarians barely escaped with their lives.  
 They kept no courage. The company was decimated.  
 Some fled to the cliffs, hiding in caves,  
 Some nursed deadly wounds by the Danube.  
 Some went swimming in the deepest water, 145  
 Carried downstream by death's cold current.  
 The Roman armies exulted in the chase,  
 Relentlessly hunting the heathens down  
 From dawn to dusk. Ash-spears and arrows  
 Bit like battle-snakes. The enemies' shields 150  
 Were suddenly shattered, their bones broken,  
 Their lives lost. Not many Huns went home.  
 The sign of Christ's victory was clear to all—

The almighty King had granted Constantine  
 Triumph over terror, victory over the vicious 155  
 Barbarian hordes through the holy rood,  
 The tree of glory, the cross of Christ.  
 With the battle won, the king of the Romans,  
 Returned home, made worthy by war.  
 His army exulted over their hard victory, 160  
 Enjoying the spoils they had seized in battle.  
 So the people's protector sailed home with thanes,  
 Joyful soldiers shaking their war-shields  
 And singing victory-songs back to the cities.  
 Then the shield-commander, their lord and king, 165  
 Summoned his wisest counselors together,  
 Those who had studied the sacred texts  
 And stored their meanings in memory's hold,  
 To ask if any of them, young or old,  
 Could answer the question he put them: 170  
 "What god was this whose symbol saved us  
 From certain slaughter, whose cross kept us  
 All alive, whose tree held back terror,  
 Whose radiant rood has given us glory?"  
 No one knew anything about that victory-sign 175  
 Or could venture a guess about its meaning.  
 Then the wisest of men said that the cross  
 Was a sacred symbol of the King of heaven.  
 When the few battle-warriors who had been baptized  
 Heard this truth, their hearts rejoiced. 180  
 Their spirits soared that they might offer the emperor  
 The gift of the Gospel, its grace and glory,  
 Explaining how the Son of God, the Shielder of souls,  
 The King of kings, the Trinity triumphant,  
 Was born to a pure maiden in Bethlehem— 185  
 How he was tried and tormented on a gallows tree,  
 Crucified on a cross like a common criminal  
 Before crowds that mocked him in his misery—  
 How he died and delivered the children of men  
 And their suffering souls from Satan's snare 190  
 By his harrowing hell—how he granted them grace  
 Through the sign of the cross, the same radiant symbol

Revealed to Constantine in his divine dream,  
 A victory-sign against the heathen hordes—  
 How Christ rose from the dead on the third day 195  
 And ascended into heaven, his heart's home,  
 To live forever with his Father in eternal light.  
 So the faithful instructed the victorious emperor  
 In the spiritual mysteries they had all been taught  
 By the holy Sylvester. Then King Constantine 200  
 Was converted and baptized a faithful follower  
 Of Christ and kept his belief for all his days,  
 Ruling according to the will of God.

Then the battle-hard King Constantine,  
 Bestower of treasures, experienced joy— 205  
 A bright blessing had entered his heart.  
 His hope was in heaven, his comfort in Christ.  
 He lived in God's love, making known his law  
 Through the gift of the Spirit day and night.  
 The war-famous king and gold-giving lord 210  
 Of all the people and princes who served him  
 Honored and praised his God and Guardian.  
 Then King Constantine, shield of the Romans,  
 Bold in battle, sure-handed with a spear,  
 Learned from the scriptures with the help of scholars 215  
 How the Lord of heaven had been cruelly hung  
 On the gallows-tree, wracked on the rood,  
 Through human deceit and inhuman hate—  
 How Satan himself, that ancient enemy,  
 Had seduced the Jews to condemn Christ, 220  
 Torment and torture him, nail him to the cross,  
 Wantonly kill the Lord of creation.  
 For this heinous crime, they would all suffer  
 Endless banishment, eternal damnation.  
 From that day on, the story of Christ 225  
 And the sign of the Cross, the sacred rood,  
 Resided in Constantine's heart, sustaining  
 His spirit, so that he ordered his mother Helena  
 To journey abroad with a band of soldiers  
 To the land of the Jews to seek out the cross, 230

The tree of glory, the gallows of God,  
 And see if the holy cross might be hidden  
 In an unmarked grave in unhallowed ground.  
 Helena was not reluctant to make the journey  
 To look for Christ's cross or follow the command 235  
 Of her gracious ruler, her glorious son.  
 In a company of mailed warriors, the brave woman  
 Set out eagerly on her longed-for journey.  
 The Roman hosts hastened to the shore  
 Where the sea-steeds, the wave-walkers, 240  
 Were tethered and ready, straining at their ropes.  
 Helena's holy mission was known to many—  
 Multitudes lined the Mediterranean shore.  
 The troops advanced along the strand.  
 They loaded the ships with spears and shields, 245  
 Swords and mail-coats, men and women,  
 And the necessary provisions for the long road.  
 Then the tall ships sailed through wild waves,  
 Braving the grim ocean's battle-blows.  
 The waves rose up, the sea resounded. 250  
 I've never heard, before or after, of a braver woman  
 Leading a fairer force over the ocean road.  
 Anyone who watched would certainly have seen  
 A wonder on the wave—a wooden horse  
 With one foot, a tall back, and bright wings, 255  
 Racing over a fathomless sea-road.  
 Bold warriors sailed with high spirits,  
 And the queen took pleasure in their company.  
 They joyfully sailed the ring-prowed ships  
 To a safe harbor in the land of the Greeks, 260  
 Anchoring the ancient vessels there,  
 Lashed to the strand. The sea-steeds awaited  
 The outcome of the quest when the battle-queen  
 And her mailed warriors might come boldly back  
 Along eastern roads for the return voyage. 265  
 In the morning sun everyone could clearly see  
 Chain-mail gleaming, sharp blades glistening,  
 Boar-helmets shining, the best of battle-gear.  
 The spear-warriors set out from the ships,

Surrounding their treasured, triumphant queen. 270  
 The soldiers of the emperor, companies of the king,  
 Marched in glory through the land of Greece,  
 Resolute in their purpose to redeem the rood.  
 The proud warriors carried a precious gem,  
 A jewel of a queen in a strange battle-setting, 275  
 The gift of their lord. The blessed Helena,  
 Bold of heart, steadfast in spirit, firm in faith,  
 Never forgot her son's wish, her lord's command,  
 That she should seek the land of the Jews  
 Across peaceful plains and dangerous battlefields 280  
 With her stalwart soldiers. So in a short time  
 These best of battle-thanes reached Jerusalem,  
 A company of warriors with a noble queen.

Then Helena commanded the wisest of Jewish  
 Leaders in the city to come to a council 285  
 To explain the Lord's mysteries in the ancient laws.  
 So a great gathering of scholars arrived  
 From near and far, three thousand strong,  
 Men who would expound on the law of Moses.  
 Then the noble queen welcomed the sages 290  
 And said to the host of Hebrew men:  
 "I have learned through the words of the prophets,  
 Their secret writings in the sacred books,  
 That long ago you were honored and esteemed  
 By the King of glory, dear to the Lord, 295  
 Praising his words and performing his works—  
 But sadly then you spurned his wisdom,  
 Reviling the Redeemer, who in his grace and glory  
 Might have saved you from hell's curse,  
 The torture and torment of unending flame, 300  
 If you had recognized his power and purpose,  
 Instead of accusing him of hateful crimes,  
 Abusing and nailing him cruelly to the cross.  
 You spit in the face of the Savior and Son,  
 Who could wash your eyes clean of blindness 305  
 With the sacred spittle and heal your hearts,  
 Saving you from the darkness of devils



And their fiery filth. You condemned to die  
 The Lord himself who created life  
 And conquered death—who raised up the patriarchs 310  
 From their moldering graves, their grim fates.  
 In your blindness you traded light for darkness,  
 Truth for lies, mercy for malice.  
 You played deadly games with perjury,  
 So now you are sentenced to Satan's realm, 315  
 Where no one will hear your unholy words  
 Or care to comfort your everlasting pain.  
 You condemned the life-giving power  
 Of the eternal Light. Now dwell in darkness  
 For all of your days. You live in delusion 320  
 And will die in desperation. Go quickly now  
 And consult among those who comprehend  
 The old laws and learning for some wisdom  
 So that your sages can answer my questions.”  
 Then the wise ones went away sad-hearted, 325  
 Haunted by anxiety, frustration, and fear.  
 They searched the wisest sayings in their scriptures  
 On good and evil, so they could easily answer  
 The queen's questions and satisfy her demands.  
 They gathered a throng of a thousand sages 330  
 Who knew the ancient laws and lore.  
 This council crowded around the queen's throne,  
 Where the emperor's kinswoman, the magnificent  
 Battle-queen, was clad in gold. Helena spoke  
 To the assembled hosts, a company of men: 335  
 “Listen, you scholars, to the divine mystery,  
 The sacred wisdom of the ancient texts.  
 You have heard the holy words of the prophets  
 Promising that the Lord of life would be born  
 Unto you in the form of a child, a mighty Ruler, 340  
 Of whom great Moses, guardian of the Israelites,  
 Sang in his praise-song, saying these words:  
 ‘To you shall be born one day in secret,  
 A child of wonder, a boy of blessing,  
 A prince of power, whose pregnant mother 345  
 Will be a pure maid untouched by a man's embrace.’

So also King David, the wise prophet,  
 Father of Solomon, lord of warriors,  
 Singer of songs, said these words:  
 ‘I have seen in splendor the God of creation, 350  
 The Lord of victories, the Ruler of hosts.  
 He has been my guardian, my glorious shepherd—  
 He stands in radiance at my right hand.  
 My earthly gaze shall remain on God  
 Till the end of days.’ Likewise Isaiah 355  
 Gave you his words, inspired by God—  
 The prophet who profoundly understood the spirit  
 And could see beyond his own eyes said:  
 ‘I have raised a son and many children,  
 Granting them each sustenance and solace, 360  
 Peace and prosperity, but all of my rebellious  
 Offspring have reviled me, denied and despised me.  
 They have neither faith nor foresight, and follow  
 Neither God’s will nor the wisdom of prophets.  
 Unlike the wearied oxen, those beasts of burden, 365  
 Goaded and whipped, who recognize the lord  
 Who gives them fodder and find him a friend,  
 The people of Israel have derided my prophecies,  
 Laughed at my learning, mocked the meaning  
 Of my wondrous visions, my deepest dreams, 370  
 Even though I have worked many miracles  
 For the children of men during all my days.’

Now we have heard through the sacred scriptures  
 That God gave you an unblemished glory,  
 An abundance of grace, prosperity and power, 375  
 Telling Moses how you were to follow the law  
 And obey the commandments of the King of heaven—  
 But soon that became irritating to you,  
 So you began to grumble and complain,  
 Denying your duty, rebelling outrageously 380  
 Against your Ruler, rejecting the Creator,  
 Your own Maker, the Lord of lords.  
 You traded holiness for heresy, truth for lies.  
 Now go quickly to your scholars and counselors,

Those wise ones who know best your law and lore, 385  
 The ancient mysteries and meanings of scriptures.  
 From their deep understanding, let them answer me.”  
 Then the proud-hearted, sad-spirited multitude  
 Went away as the queen had commanded.  
 Afterwards they found five hundred wise men 390  
 Who understood the scriptures, summoning these  
 Scholars and sages to the royal palace.  
 The queen saw them standing there and said:  
 “You are foolish men of little faith,  
 Miserable outcasts, exiles from the Lord, 395  
 Denying the scriptures, despising the teachings  
 Of your ancient fathers, never more than now,  
 When you cast off the cure for your own blindness,  
 Rejecting righteousness, denying the truth—  
 That the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, 400  
 The only-begotten King, the Lord of lords.  
 You studied the sayings of the ancient prophets,  
 Knew the law, yet still you could not see  
 The truth revealed with your blind eyes.”  
 The sinners replied with a single voice: 405  
 “We learned in the past from the ark of God  
 The Hebrew laws which our fathers left us,  
 And we cannot comprehend why a proud queen  
 Should be so angry with us. We are not aware  
 Of breaking any holy law or of any crime 410  
 We’ve committed against you or your people.”  
 Helena answered the unthinking hosts,  
 Her words ringing out over the crowd:  
 “Go quickly again to discover more perceptive men  
 Who can read the scripture with spiritual eyes, 415  
 Make meaning of the mysteries hidden within,  
 So that they can skillfully answer my questions.”  
 Then the unwise, sad-minded ones left the council,  
 As the mighty queen commanded, a woman well known  
 For her strength in the cities. Dejected and downcast, 420  
 They struggled to discover what terrible sin  
 They might have committed against the emperor.  
 Then one spoke up who was wise in mind,

Skilled in speech, whose name was Judas:  
 “I know well the wonder that the queen wants— 425  
 The tree of victory on which the Savior suffered,  
 The sinless Lord of life, the guiltless Son of God,  
 Whom our fathers hung in their deep hatred  
 On that grim gallows, that high tree.  
 That was a brutal plan, a savage deed. 430  
 We must not become informers about that murder  
 Or reveal the rood’s grave, its hiding place,  
 Lest our ancient scriptures be overturned,  
 And the wisdom of our fathers be forsaken.  
 If people learn of this, then our place and power, 435  
 Our revered religion, and the lineage of Israel  
 Will be in jeopardy as the Jews will all be judged.  
 As my famous grandfather, the prophet Zachaeus,  
 Once said to my father, whose name was Simon,  
 And my father repeated to me on his death bed: 440  
 ‘If in your lifetime, you hear men asking  
 About the holy tree, the gallows of God,  
 And raising questions about the cross of victory  
 On which the Lord died, the Guardian of heaven,  
 The Child of peace, the people’s Champion, 445  
 Then speak forth directly my dear son  
 Before you die. After that dark moment,  
 The people of the Hebrews will lose their power  
 To govern and rule in age after age.  
 But the power and glory of those who believe, 450  
 Who praise and honor the crucified King,  
 Will live on earth forever and ever.’

I boldly answered my failing father,  
 A scholar who knew the laws and scriptures:  
 ‘How did it come about that our wise ancestors 455  
 With hateful hearts and evil purpose  
 Laid murderous hands on that holy man  
 To scourge and torment him, torture and crucify him,  
 If they knew then that he was the Son of God,  
 The living Christ, the Savior of souls?’ 460  
 Then my wise father replied to my question:

'Think about God's impenetrable power,  
 His wondrous wisdom, his might and mystery,  
 And the unknowable name of the righteous Redeemer,  
 The Son and Savior. His mind cannot be measured, 465  
 His purpose understood, his glory grasped  
 By any earthly being. We were blind to the truth.  
 I resisted the pernicious plotting of our people,  
 Refused to take part in their sinful scheming,  
 Their unconscionable crime. I kept clear 470  
 Of that savage sin which would shame my soul.  
 I opposed that injustice, abhorred that iniquity,  
 When the assembly of elders conspired together,  
 Planning how they might crucify the Son of God,  
 The Shield of mankind, the Lord of angels, 475  
 The Protector of people and all of mankind.  
 Our unholy leaders, those unwise schemers,  
 Were sinful and stupid: they thought they could kill  
 The living Lord. They could not deal out death  
 To the divine Creator, torture him into turning 480  
 Away from his task, tear him from life,  
 Though after a while on the hallowed cross,  
 He sent his spirit forth, giving up the ghost  
 On the gallows-tree. Then God's victorious Son,  
 The Lord of heaven, the Glory of all glories, 485  
 Was carried from the cross and kept in a cave,  
 A holy sepulcher, a tomb of darkness,  
 For three days—after which he rose from the dead,  
 The Light of all light, the Prince of angels,  
 The Lord of victory, Protector of men, 490  
 Revealing himself in radiant splendor  
 To his holy servants, his devoted disciples.  
 Later your brother came into the bright  
 Life of the Lord, being bathed in the holy  
 Baptismal waters. He found his Savior 495  
 And followed the faith. For his love of the Lord,  
 Stephen was stoned. He did not return  
 Evil for evil but prayed for his enemies,  
 The patient one interceding for all of them,  
 Asking that the Almighty, the King of glory, 500

Might visit mercy instead of vengeance  
 On those who maliciously murdered a man  
 Who was entirely innocent, sinless in his soul,  
 After the teaching and practice of Saul,  
 Who condemned so many of Christ's followers 505  
 To an unfair trial, an unjust execution.  
 Yet God showed mercy afterwards to Saul,  
 Who became Saint Paul after his conversion.  
 He brought comfort and consolation to many.  
 The Lord of life, the God of creation, 510  
 Redeemed that recreant and named him anew.  
 There has never been a truer teacher of the law  
 Among all men and women brought forth  
 Under the curve and canopy of God's heaven,  
 Though he earlier caused your brother Stephen 515  
 To be brutally stoned to death on the mountain.  
 Now you see, my son, how we can find God's mercy,  
 His loving compassion, even though we commit  
 Crimes against him, wounding him with our sins,  
 If we repent our evil deeds, make amends, 520  
 And cease sinning. Realizing all of this,  
 My own dear father and I afterwards believed  
 That the Lord of life, the God of glories  
 Had suffered cruel torment on the cross  
 And died for mankind's great need. 525  
 In this way the Ruler of heaven redeemed us.  
 So I urge you, dear son, through this secret truth,  
 This divine mystery, never to mock  
 The Son of God, revile your Redeemer,  
 Or deny his divine power and purpose 530  
 In this fallen world. Always have faith  
 And ask for mercy. Then you will earn  
 The richest reward granted by God,  
 Eternal life and a home in heaven.'  
 My father Simon taught me this truth 535  
 When I was a boy. He had studied and suffered,  
 Learning from books and growing wise with grief.  
 Now that I have opened my heart to your hearing,  
 You should certainly know what is best to reveal

To that great queen about the rood and Redeemer." 540  
 Then the wisest of those listening to Judas said:  
 "We have never heard anyone among our people  
 Speak openly about these secret mysteries.  
 You've studied the learning and know the lore;  
 You've lived with your father's and his father's words. 545  
 Say what you believe to be true when the queen  
 Questions you before the council of wise ones.  
 You will need great knowledge and understanding,  
 A politic awareness of the nature of power,  
 A worldly wisdom, a spiritual shrewdness, 550  
 When you offer your answers to the noble queen,  
 Who will gather us all in a conclave before her."

Then words flew as men hotly debated.  
 Some believed this, others believed that.  
 They deliberated and discussed all these ideas, 555  
 Ruminating on them over and over again.  
 Then the emperor's messengers arrived, announcing:  
 "The queen commands you to come to court  
 To report the results of your council's findings.  
 Your knowledge and wisdom are sorely needed." 560  
 The sad-hearted, sober-minded elders were prepared  
 When the summons came from the queen's palace.  
 They arrived in court to offer the craft and power  
 Of their great learning. Then the queen began  
 To address the sages, hold forth with the Hebrews. 565  
 She questioned the soul-weary, wise men  
 About the ancient scriptures, how their prophets,  
 Holy in spirit, shrewd in mind, canny in vision,  
 Sang their secret stories of the Son of God,  
 And how he suffered for the sins of mankind 570  
 For the sake of our souls. The Hebrew hearts  
 Were harder than stone. They refused to reveal  
 Any secret mystery to be found in the scriptures  
 Or offer any answer about the Son of God.  
 They claimed to know nothing of this matter. 575  
 Then Queen Helena, herself hard with anger,  
 Spoke to the gathering of great minds:

“Let me speak plainly and promise you here  
 That upon my life I will not lie to you:  
 If you continue to dissemble and deceive us, 580  
 Weaving such a web of wicked lies,  
 You will find a fierce fire here on this hill,  
 Blazing your bodies, flaming your flesh,  
 Blackening your bones, consuming your corpses.  
 The reward for deceit will be a slow death. 585  
 You may not affirm our reading of the scriptures  
 Or reveal the hidden prophecies of the Son,  
 Which you have hidden so long in a veil of shame,  
 But you will never be able to conceal this mystery,  
 This sacred and profound wonder, from the world.” 590  
 Then under the death-threat, the wise ones relented—  
 They had no desire to dispute with fire.  
 They admitted that Judas knew the secret meanings  
 Of the scriptures and handed him to the queen, saying:  
 “Here is one among us who can reveal the truth, 595  
 Who knows the secret mysteries of law and lore,  
 Who can unravel the riddle from beginning to end  
 And answer all your compelling questions.  
 He is noble in lineage, discriminating in speech,  
 The son of a prophet, skilled in discourse. 600  
 He was born with the gift of second sight;  
 He has in his heart wise answers.  
 He is a truth-seeker, an unraveler of mysteries.  
 He can give you the gift of sacred wisdom  
 That your heart so deeply and earnestly desires.” 605  
 Then Helena sent each of the Hebrews home  
 Except for Judas, whom she kept as hostage.  
 She commanded him to tell her the truth  
 About the cross of Christ, which had been hidden  
 For so long in a secret grave, saying to him: 610  
 “We have now come to a crossroad—  
 One way leads to life, one way to death.  
 Make a choice to fix your fate.”  
 Judas could not escape his anguish  
 Or set aside his sorrow. His fate was fixed— 615  
 He was caught by the queen. So he said:



“How can a man who wanders a wasteland,  
 Wearied by the world, oppressed by hunger,  
 Famished for food, who suddenly sees  
 Two choices before him, bread and a rock— 620  
 One hard, one soft—pick up the stone  
 Instead of the loaf, rejecting something  
 That would relieve his hunger, sustain his life,  
 And walk like a wraith on down the road?”

Then the blessed Helena answered him honestly, 625  
 Saying to him plainly before the people:  
 “If you want to have a blissful home in heaven  
 With the radiant angels, a victorious reward,  
 And a long life on earth, tell me the truth now:  
 Where does the cross of Christ, the King of heaven, 630  
 Rest secretly, that sacred rood under the soil,  
 The gallows-tree you have shamefully hidden  
 From mankind because of your murderous evil?”  
 Judas had a tortured heart, a troubled mind—  
 Between two threats he was in a deadly bind. 635  
 He had little hope of entering heaven  
 Or expectation of any longer earthly life  
 If he could not find the cross. He said to Helena:  
 “Noble queen, how can I find something hidden  
 So carefully from mankind for so many years, 640  
 Two hundred or more by some measures.  
 Many good and wise men have come and gone  
 Since then, and I came into life much later.  
 How can I find mention in my heart’s hold  
 Of the treasure you seek?” Then Helena replied: 645  
 “How is it then that in this learned land,  
 You can remember every single event  
 That occurred in the time of the Trojan War?  
 This is infinitely older than Christ’s crucifixion.  
 If you can still tell that ancient story 650  
 In such detail—the nature of the struggle,  
 The outcome of the war, the exact number  
 Of spear-wielding warriors who went down  
 To death behind the wooden shield-wall—

You must have recorded the burial place 655  
 Of the radiant rood, the tree of glory,  
 In your secret writings long ago,  
 So that someone knows where it rests now  
 Beneath some rocky slope in a tomb  
 Of earth and stones, and how many years 660  
 Have passed since it was stealthily placed there.”  
 Judas replied, his mind bound in misery:  
 “My lady, we remember well that war  
 And have written about it in our records,  
 Keeping track of the combat between nations, 665  
 But the story of the Savior and the glory-tree  
 We’ve never heard from any man’s mouth  
 Except as it has been told here by you.”  
 Then the noble queen answered Judas again:  
 “You deny the truth that you know about 670  
 The tree of life, and yet a little while ago  
 You were talking to your comrades about the cross,  
 And now your words are warped as you lie  
 About the victory-tree, the Redeemer’s rood.”  
 Judas responded, saying that he spoke 675  
 Out of doubt and disquiet, trepidation and terror,  
 Fearing some harsh retribution for his answer.  
 Then the emperor’s kinswoman spoke these words:  
 “Listen! We have long heard that it is revealed  
 In scripture that the spiritual Son of God, 680  
 The child of the King, was crucified on Calvary,  
 Hung like a criminal on that gallows-tree.  
 Tell me the truth: where in the scriptures does it say  
 That Christ was killed? Where is the high hill  
 Where God and the glory-tree stood and suffered? 685  
 You must reveal the rood now or be executed  
 For your sins. I must find that hanging cross,  
 So I can cleanse it according to Christ’s will,  
 Purify it from its fierce fate, its death-dealing role,  
 Redeem it as a source of comfort and consolation 690  
 To all of mankind so that almighty God,  
 The Healer of souls, the Sustainer of multitudes,  
 May fulfill my purpose and my solemn promise.”

Then Judas, steadfast and stubborn, said:  
 "I don't know where this Calvary is, 695  
 Where Christ was crucified and the cross buried."  
 Then Helena replied in an angry passion:  
 "I swear by the Savior, the Son of God,  
 The crucified Christ, that you will die  
 An unholy death by hunger in front of your kinsmen 700  
 Unless you cease lying and reveal the truth."  
 Then she commanded him to be securely bound,  
 Quickly carried away by a band of men,  
 And thrust into a deep pit, a dry well,  
 Where he would endure hunger and isolation, 705  
 Wrapped in chains for seven nights,  
 Bound in that grim underground prison.  
 On the seventh day, desperate and starving,  
 His body weary, his spirit wasted,  
 He began to mourn and cry out for mercy: 710  
 "Please, I beg you by the God of heaven  
 To free me from this terrible well of pain  
 And the fierce hounds of hunger that gnaw  
 At my poor belly. I promise I'll tell you  
 Where the holy gallows-tree of God is hidden, 715  
 Gladly reveal the resting place of the glory-rod.  
 I can't conceal the truth any longer  
 About the location of the tree of life.  
 I tried to hide it in my misplaced folly,  
 But down in the darkness I've seen the light." 720

When the ruling queen heard this cry  
 And took in the truth of her prisoner's pleading,  
 She commanded him raised from the well of suffering,  
 The narrow cell of his gathering grief.  
 Then Judas was mercifully lifted into the light 725  
 At the queen's command, and he led her to the hill  
 Where the Lord and Guardian of heaven was hanged,  
 The Son of God, on the gallows-tree.  
 Judas was weary and weakened by hunger  
 And couldn't remember where the cross was buried 730  
 In its battle-bed, its slaughter-rest, by the enemy's cunning;

But with a new courage and conviction,  
 He raised up these words in a Hebrew prayer:  
 “My Lord and Savior, Guardian of glory,  
 Who created the world from the wide plains 735  
 To the surging seas, who measured out  
 With holy hands the boundary of both  
 Earth and sky, who rules heaven’s realm  
 With its host of angels, riding high in the radiant air  
 In a perfect place, where those wrapped in flesh 740  
 Can never rise from their earthly paths—  
 You shaped these celestial beings and set them forth  
 To serve your ministry and perform your purpose.  
 Six ranks exist in perpetual bliss, each bathing  
 Six bright wings in the blessed light. 745  
 Four are always in flight, serving the Lord  
 Both day and night, singing glorious hymns  
 To the everlasting Judge, praising with passion  
 And perfect clear voices, the King of heaven.  
 These chosen angels are the Cherubim who chant: 750  
 ‘Holy is the holy God of archangels,  
 The Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth  
 Reveal his rich glory, his sublime power,  
 The radiant wonder of his making might.’  
 Among the other angels in heaven, 755  
 The two most exalted are called the Seraphim.  
 They protect the sacred garden of paradise  
 And its tree of life with a flaming sword,  
 A damascened blade whose cutting edge  
 Blazes and shimmers with a radiant light 760  
 Of variegated hues, the colors of creation.  
 That sword is terrible in the grip of God.  
 Lord, you wielded that slashing flame,  
 That radiant wonder, to cast out the company  
 Of rebellious angels, order-unravelers, 765  
 Heaven-wreckers, sin-serpents, thanes of Satan.  
 That cursed company of rabble-rousers,  
 Never-again-angels, fell down into darkness,  
 Into the flames of hell to endure forever  
 Torment and pain, torture and anguish, 770

Eternal bondage. Now they live in the clutch  
 Of the demon's claws, the dragon's embrace.  
 That insurgent angel renounced your sovereignty,  
 Rebelled against your righteous law.  
 For that he must suffer eternal exile 775  
 For his foul sins, his tortuous rebellion,  
 A source of misery and miserable himself,  
 Outlaw in envy, outcast in shame,  
 Bound forever in a prison of pain,  
 Unable in deceit to unweave your words. 780  
 Lord of angels, Ruler of heaven and earth,  
 Is it not your will that one should reign  
 Who was born a child to his mother Mary,  
 A pure maiden, to be Prince of the angels,  
 Who rode on the rood, crucified on the cross? 785  
 And if he were not your own true Son,  
 Unstained by sin, how could he then  
 Have woven such wonders, making miracles  
 In this worldly life? And how could you lift  
 Him up from the dead in waking glory 790  
 Before the multitudes of men and women,  
 If he were not your child by that radiant maiden?  
 Reveal now the rood, the victory-sign,  
 The blessed cross, the beacon of God.  
 Just as you heard the holy prayers 795  
 Of Moses and revealed the buried bones  
 Of Joseph hidden under the hill-stones,  
 Now I beg you Lord, Joy of hosts,  
 If it seems according to your eternal will  
 Through the light of creation, to hear my prayer 800  
 And reveal to me the rood's resting place,  
 That treasure-house long hidden from men.  
 Author of life, let some sacred smoke  
 Curl up from its grave, rise up from the ground,  
 Drift into the sky, a delightful wonder. 805  
 Then I shall find faith, believe more firmly  
 In the crucified Christ and know him to be  
 The Savior of souls, the eternal and almighty  
 King of Israel, who will command the glorious

Homeland of heaven, ruling in radiance 810  
 Forever and ever in a world without end.”

Then from that spot steam rose up  
 Like smoke-wisps swirling into the sky,  
 And the heart of Judas was filled with joy.  
 Blessed and wise, he clapped both his hands 815  
 Up toward heaven, firm in his faith.  
 Unblinded, unbound, he prayed to God:

“Now I have discovered in my obstinate mind  
 That you are the Son, the Savior of middle-earth.

My eternal thanks to you, O Lord, 820  
 God of hosts, enthroned in glory,

For giving me this simple gift of grace  
 And revealing to such a stubborn sinner

And mournful man this hidden mystery,  
 The role of the rood in the working of Providence. 825

I also entreat you, Son and Savior,  
 Giver of all good gifts to mankind,

Now that I know you are the Lord Incarnate  
 And see revealed your radiant grace—

To forgive me for my former sins in this world 830  
 And forget my transgressions, for I have committed

More than a few. Let the heavy weight  
 Of my guilt be lifted and grant me leave,

Almighty God, to dwell forever  
 In that shining city with saints and angels, 835

Where my brother Stephen is honored in glory—  
 For his steadfast faith he was stoned to death.

His reward is endless bliss in heaven,  
 While here on earth he is celebrated in stories,

In sermons and scripture, a holy martyr 840  
 Held dear in our memory, undefeated by death.”

Then Judas rejoiced. The resolute man  
 Began to dig in the earth for the rood

Until not twenty feet away he discovered  
 Hidden under a hill, deep in a dark pit, 845

A secret chamber with three crosses  
 Buried by a band of unbelieving Jews

In days long gone. They incited anger,  
 Stirred up hatred against God's Son,  
 As they surely never would have done 850  
 If they hadn't listened to the lies of Satan,  
 That devious demon, the shaper of sin.  
 Then his spirit soared and his heart gladdened  
 When he saw the tree of glory in the ground.  
 He grabbed hold of the gallows with his hands, 855  
 Lifting the cross from its earthly tomb  
 With the help of the crowd. Foot-travelers  
 Filed into the city with a firm purpose—  
 To boldly bring the three crosses to the queen,  
 Who rejoiced in her heart for the holy rood. 860  
 She asked which of the three unburied trees  
 The Son of God, the Healer and Hope-bearer,  
 Had hung upon in his hardest hour, saying:  
 "Listen! We have heard it said in the holy books  
 That two thieves suffered with Christ the Lord 865  
 On their separate crosses. The sky grew dark  
 In that deadly hour. Now who can tell me  
 Which of these three is the gallows-tree  
 On which the Lord of angels, the Guardian of glory,  
 Suffered and died? Which one is Christ's cross?" 870  
 Judas grew quiet. He had no way of knowing  
 Which tree was the true cross, the victory-wood,  
 The rood on which the Son of God was raised.  
 So he commanded the crosses to be set there,  
 Three tall killing-trees in the great city center, 875  
 Where the crowds might wait for the wonder  
 Of the Lord's revealing the one rood  
 On which he rode. The counselors and comrades  
 Who waited by the crosses began to sing,  
 Musing over one miracle, expecting another, 880  
 Lifting up their voices around the rood  
 Until the ninth hour, the sacred time  
 Of Christ's crying out on the cross and dying.

Then a crowd of people came seeking a miracle,  
 Carrying to the crosses a dead body on a bier, 885

A bone-house deprived of its sacred soul.  
 Judas ordered them to lay the body down  
 Near the crosses while he meditated deeply.  
 He raised up boldly in his arms' embrace  
 The first two crosses over the broken body, 890  
 The lifeless corpse. Its limbs stayed cold—  
 No living breath arose in that body.  
 Then Judas lifted the third cross in joy,  
 The Redeemer's rood, the tree of victory,  
 And the body rose up, intact and inspired 895  
 By the breath of life, its own lost soul.  
 Its limbs were alive, its eyes opened,  
 Its heart quickened by the power of the cross.  
 People raised their voices in praise of the Lord,  
 Honoring the Father and exalting the Son, 900  
 Lifting up their voices in a rapture of song:  
 "Glory be to God, who breathes life into being,  
 Shaping, sustaining all living creatures  
 Who celebrate the Creator without end."  
 All of mankind remember these miracles— 905  
 From sight or story, song or scripture.  
 Everyone should recognize the holy riddle  
 Of the rood, the miracle of Christ crucified,  
 And all of the wonders which the Lord of the world,  
 The Creator of life, accomplished on earth 910  
 For the saving of souls and salvation of mankind.

Then the liar leapt up, the devious devil  
 From the bowels of hell, hovering in air,  
 A monster minded to deceive mankind.  
 He began to mock God's miracle, saying: 915  
 "What's going on? Who is this man  
 Who is stealing my stuff, stirring up strife,  
 Thieving my thanes, my faithful followers,  
 Reviving that old unrewarding feud?  
 My powers are bound, my heart is broken 920  
 By this endless persecution. This is not fair.  
 Who is this stranger who embraces the cross?  
 I counted on him coming to my homeland in hell



With demons for company. He was stained with sin.  
 Now he steals what is rightfully mine 925  
 By calling on Christ, my ancient enemy.  
 That so-called Savior, Jesus of Nazareth,  
 Was a misguided boy born in Bethlehem  
 Of human flesh. He has mocked me, defiled me,  
 Made my existence an endless misery. 930  
 He has robbed me of riches, wasted my wealth,  
 Stolen my precious stash of souls.  
 He's unrestrained. It's unfair. It's obscene.  
 His kingdom spreads like a pernicious plague  
 While mine is compromised all over creation. 935  
 I have no reason to revere this cross,  
 To praise its power. The Savior of souls  
 Has locked me in hell with a miserable host,  
 Flaming mad demons, all eager to escape.  
 My heart's delight was once with a Judas— 940  
 He brought me hope with his secret betrayal.  
 Now I'm betrayed by another Judas—  
 My heart humiliated, my treasures stolen.  
 I'm fleeced and friendless. Never mind though—  
 I'll consult with my devious comrades in hell 945  
 And come back with wicked plots and powers.  
 I'll seduce a king to set against your king.  
 He'll abandon the faith, follow my ways,  
 Persecute your people, deliver you into darkness,  
 So you will suffer and denounce your Savior. 950  
 Your crucified Christ will be king of nothing!"  
 Then the wise-minded Judas, a bold battler,  
 Prepared his response, for the Holy Spirit  
 Had entered his heart, inspiring his answer.  
 His mind was aflame with Christ's love 955  
 And a warrior's wisdom as he shrewdly said:  
 "Sin-shaper, God-mocker, Christ-killer,  
 There's no need to stir up strife, renew the feud,  
 Deceiving people, delighting in their doubt,  
 Persecuting them with pain. The mighty King, 960  
 Who raised the dead with his holy word,  
 Will thrust you down into the pit of hell,

A place of torment, an endless abyss  
 Of evil outcasts, twisted with sin.  
 May you at last recognize your real loss, 965  
 The Lord's love, a treasure you've wasted,  
 Pitched in the trash of your own perdition.  
 What have you gained? A lake of flame,  
 A bath of fire, a boundless torment.  
 For you and yours there is no hope, 970  
 No healing, no heaven. Delight in damnation  
 If you can. You are cut off from Christ's  
 Mercy and will know misery without end."  
 Helena heard this combat between friend and fiend,  
 Sanctified and sinner, blessed and damned. 975  
 Her heart rejoiced to hear the sin-spreading  
 Lord of hell overwhelmed by this bold believer,  
 And she wondered at the man's newfound wisdom,  
 His spiritual strength, and his firm faith.  
 How had he gone from ignorance to insight, 980  
 From falsehood to truth in so little time?  
 She thanked God, the King of glory,  
 For the two gifts through the Savior and Son:  
 She had seen the victory-tree and the glorious gift  
 Of heavenly grace in the heart of Judas. 985

Then that great morning-news was announced  
 Throughout the nation, alarming many men  
 Who wanted to keep the Lord's law hidden.  
 People proclaimed in every town and city,  
 As far as the endless seas surrounding the land, 990  
 That the long-buried cross of Christ had been found,  
 The most sacred symbol of victory ever raised  
 Under the realm of heaven, the holy rood.  
 This was the greatest of griefs to the Jews,  
 The hardest of fates to the fierce unbelievers, 995  
 Because they could not unravel that revelation,  
 Undo that act for all the will in the world,  
 But it was a boon and blessing to all Christians.  
 Then the queen commanded messengers sent  
 Across the sea to Rome to announce to the emperor, 1000

That bold warrior and wise leader, the great news—  
 That the rood had been recovered by the grace of God,  
 The cross which had been concealed for so long  
 To the endless distress of all devout Christians.  
 When he heard this news, the king rejoiced, 1005  
 His heart gladdened, his spirit soared.  
 Multitudes came from afar, robed in riches,  
 Gathered in gold, to hear those tidings.  
 The king and his company found comfort and joy  
 In the messenger's welcome words from abroad 1010  
 That the queen had been so successful in sailing  
 Across the swan-road to discover the rood.  
 The emperor commanded the queen and her troops  
 To ready themselves for the return voyage.  
 No one hesitated when they heard that news. 1015  
 Constantine then sent soldiers and envoys  
 Carrying messages to his victorious mother,  
 Hoping that they would survive the wave-tumult  
 And arrive safely at the holy city.  
 He directed his mother to build a church, 1020  
 A temple of God, on Calvary hill  
 For the sake of Christ and the comfort of men,  
 Where the rood had been raised, a tree of glory,  
 A beam beyond any other found on earth.  
 So the queen followed her Son's commands 1025  
 When her beloved kin carried his message  
 Out of the west and across the wave-road.  
 Helena commanded her servants to seek  
 Skilled stone-masons to build on that holy hill  
 The house of God, the greatest of churches, 1030  
 As the Lord himself, the Guardian of souls,  
 Had counseled her quietly from high heaven.  
 Then she ordered the cross artfully adorned  
 With gold and gems, the brightest stones,  
 And placed in a silver casket with precious clasps. 1035  
 In that treasure-house, the tree of life,  
 The victory-beam, has rested ever since,  
 Perfect, protected, inviolable, unassailable.  
 It stands ready to support us in our suffering,

To sustain us through every trial and tribulation, 1040  
 To remind us of Christ's redeeming role  
 In offering us aid, the gift of grace.  
 Then after some time, Judas the discoverer  
 Was bathed in baptism, cleansed of sin,  
 Converted to Christ. The Holy Spirit 1045  
 Made a home in his heart as he fully repented.  
 He chose a home in heaven over heresy in hell,  
 The love of the Lord over the idolatry of demons.  
 His God and Judge granted him mercy.

Judas was baptized, who before was blind, 1050  
 And gladly brought into the living light.  
 His heart was lifted, his spirit inspired  
 To a better life and the hope of heaven.  
 Fate had ordained that he should find  
 The fullness of faith and be loved by the Lord, 1055  
 Cherished by Christ. This became clear  
 When Queen Helena commanded Eusebius,  
 Bishop of Rome, both learned and wise,  
 To be brought to the holy city of Jerusalem  
 For consultation and counsel, and to ordain Judas 1060  
 To the priesthood to serve the people there.  
 Eventually Eusebius confirmed him as bishop  
 Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit  
 And gave him a new name, Cyriacus.  
 So he was known as "the Savior's law" 1065  
 Throughout the city. For his many virtues  
 He came to hold a place in the house of God.  
 But Helena was still concerned about something—  
 She wondered what happened to the cruel nails  
 That pierced Christ's hands and feet on the cross, 1070  
 As the Son of God hung on the tree of glory.  
 The queen of Christians began to inquire  
 Of Cyriacus whether he might unravel this riddle  
 Through the power of the spirit, saying to him:  
 "Noble Cyriacus, protector of the people, 1075  
 You rightly revealed to us the hiding place  
 Of Christ's cross, that glorious gallows-tree

On which the Healer of souls, the Son of God,  
 Was brutally hanged by heathen hands.  
 My restless mind keeps reminding me of the nails. 1080  
 I want you to find them wherever they're buried,  
 Discover them deep in the dark earth,  
 Concealed in the soil from human eyes.  
 My mind will not cease its endless mourning  
 Until the almighty Father, Lord of hosts, 1085  
 Savior of mankind, the Holy One on high,  
 Consents to reveal those terrible nails.  
 Now my best of heralds and dearest disciple,  
 Lift up your holy prayer in all humility  
 To the bright radiance, the King of heaven, 1090  
 Beseeching the Glory of hosts to hear us  
 And reveal that terrible treasure under earth,  
 Those grim-gripping nails in an old grave,  
 A secret too long concealed from Christians.”  
 Then the holy bishop, his heart inspired, 1095  
 His spirit strengthened, went forth eagerly  
 With a great company praising God  
 To seek the treasure that the queen requested.  
 When he came to Calvary, he bowed his head  
 And opened his heart—he held no secrets. 1100  
 The holy seeker called humbly to God,  
 The Guardian of angels, asking for aid  
 In finding the nails in their unknown grave.  
 Then God the Father and the comforting Spirit  
 Revealed a sign in the form of fire 1105  
 Rising up from the earth where the noblest of nails  
 Lay buried below through a cunning act.  
 The flame shot up, brighter than the sun,  
 A great revelation from the holy Gift-giver.  
 The people there saw a mighty miracle 1110  
 When out of the darkness, like stars or gemstones,  
 The nails near the bottom of the pit, their prison,  
 Began to gleam with a heavenly radiance.  
 The people rejoiced, praising God,  
 Exulting in the bright act of revelation, 1115  
 Even though in earlier days they had embraced

Ignorance and evil, seduced by the devil's deceit  
 To turn away from the tree and the truth of Christ.  
 With a single voice they cried out, saying:  
 "At last we see for ourselves the victory-sign, 1120  
 The wonder of God, though we once were blind  
 To the truth and denied the faith with our lies.  
 Now the divine light is revealed, the truth told,  
 The miracle made known. For this great gift  
 We sing in praise: Glory to God in heaven." 1125  
 Then the holy bishop whose once-hard heart  
 Had turned to Christ, whose spirit was inspired  
 By the Son of God, was gladdened again.  
 Trembling with awe, he carried the nails  
 To the noble queen. Cyriacus had certainly 1130  
 Fulfilled her wish to unearth that wonder.  
 Then all at once there was the sound of weeping  
 As a flood of tears fell on her cheeks,  
 Not from pain or grief but from pure passion  
 And her love of Christ. Her joy flowed freely 1135  
 From the orbs of her eyes, falling down  
 On a bright web of filigree wire, a pendant  
 Worn by the weeping queen. Beaming with joy,  
 Radiant with faith, she knelt down over the nails,  
 A gift from God and a solace for her sorrow. 1140  
 She thanked the almighty Lord of victories  
 For the truth revealed on that tree of glory,  
 The promise proclaimed by the ancient prophets,  
 The redemption radiating through the reach of creation,  
 The comfort and consolation of the living Lord. 1145  
 She was filled with the gift of God's grace,  
 The wonder of divine wisdom, the generous joy  
 Of the Holy Spirit. The tree had transformed  
 Her great heart. She knew that the Son of God,  
 Who rode the rood and revealed the truth, 1150  
 Would be her protector, her shield and salvation.

Then Helena eagerly began to seek in her soul,  
 Through an understanding of spiritual mysteries,

A pathway to glory and the God of hosts.  
 Our heavenly Father, the almighty King, 1155  
 Supported and sustained her wish in this world.  
 The promise of the prophets sung from the beginning  
 Was now fulfilled. The faithful queen of the people  
 Gathered her thoughts through the grace of the Spirit,  
 Wondering in what way the nails might serve 1160  
 Some holy purpose in this world through Christ's will  
 For the benefit of mankind. She summoned a man  
 Known for his wisdom to come for a consultation  
 And asked his advice. He replied to the queen:  
 "It is fitting for you in your faith to remember 1165  
 The words of the Lord and keep his commandment  
 Since the mighty Savior of mankind has given you  
 Spiritual victory and the power of wisdom.  
 Bear the noblest of nails to the worthiest king  
 In this world to be used as a bit for his bridle. 1170  
 When he rides forth in battle, the bit will be famous  
 Over all the earth, and the king will conquer  
 Every enemy he meets with his bold-hearted men,  
 His sword-wielding warriors. Wherever armies clash  
 In fierce combat, bitter foes on the battlefield, 1175  
 He shall have victory in strife, safety for his soldiers,  
 And the power of peace-keeping after the war,  
 When he bears this symbol, the noble nailed-bridle,  
 On his bright horse through the arc of arrows,  
 The thrust of spears, the slash of swords, 1180  
 In the storm of war. These victory-nails  
 Will be known as invincible to all enemies—  
 So the prophet Zechariah, wise of mind,  
 Inspired in spirit, once spoke these words:  
 'It will come to pass that the famous king's horse 1185  
 Will be known by the multitudes in the midst of battle  
 By its bit and bridle-rings. That sign shall be called  
 Holy to God, and the fortunate king  
 Carried high on that horse shall know victory  
 In battle and find great fame in this world.'" 1190  
 Then Helena quickly commanded this to be done,

The nailed bit and bridle to be made  
 For the prince and ring-giver, her son the king,  
 And sent this gift over the sea-road home to him.

Then she commanded the best of the Jews 1195  
 To come together in the city of Jerusalem  
 For a conference at court. The queen began  
 To mentor the wise men, counseling them all  
 That they should love the Lord, refrain from sin,  
 Keep the peace, cherish the bonds between them, 1200  
 And obey the Christian counsels of Bishop Cyriacus,  
 Who understood the scriptures and the Lord's law.  
 So the bishopric of Jerusalem was well established,  
 And people came to Cyriacus from far and near  
 To ease their suffering—the lame and limb-sick, 1205  
 The feeble and fumbling, the weak and wounded,  
 The blood-stained and blind, the leprous and mind-bent,  
 The miserable and heart-heavy. The bishop's care  
 And his healing hands always fashioned a cure.  
 When Helena was ready to leave, she rewarded him 1210  
 With precious gifts before she sailed home  
 And commanded the faithful who loved the Lord,  
 Women and men, to honor in their hearts and minds  
 That glorious day on which God's holy rood  
 Was richly revealed, the greatest of trees 1215  
 Ever rooted in earth, growing up boldly  
 Under its leaves. Spring was almost over—  
 It was only six days till the onset of summer  
 In the month of May, the warmth of the year.  
 For all those who remember the festival day 1220  
 On which we celebrate the glory of the cross  
 And Christ the Lord who stretched out his arms  
 Over all the world on that killing rood,  
 May the doors of hell be closed and locked,  
 And the gates of heaven unclasped forever, 1225  
 So that the kingdom of angels is opened to us,  
 And we are welcomed into the heart's homeland  
 And given our due along with Mary



In a land where we will abide forever  
 In eternal bliss with Christ the Lord. 1230

Finit.

Now that I have told this sacred story  
 About the rood, I am old and ready  
 To follow the final road. My flesh is frail,  
 My body failing. I have woven these words 1235  
 Out of study and thought, winnowing them long  
 Into the night-watch. I too was blind  
 To the full truth about Christ's cross  
 Till my mind was filled with the Lord's light,  
 Revealing the depths of divine understanding. 1240  
 My words and works were stained with sin,  
 And I was bound in misery, wound in woe,  
 Before God granted this feeble old man,  
 Whose mind was missing its careful clarity  
 Of younger days, a sacred gift, a share of grace. 1245  
 He opened my heart and soul to the truth,  
 Easing my body and enlightening my mind,  
 Unlocking the ancient art of poetry,  
 Which I have practiced with great joy.  
 In earlier days, I only remembered 1250  
 God's cross as through a glass darkly.  
 I couldn't see the sacred meanings buried  
 Like divine secrets beneath the words.  
 Until I was taught by the tree of glory  
 And my vision cleared by the Holy Spirit, 1255  
 The truth was hidden like unrevealed runes.  
 Then man seemed like a sputtering flame (Cen),  
 A guttering fire bound to die down,  
 Blown by cares and sorrows even when blessed  
 By heartfelt gifts in his glorious hall, 1260  
 As his memory unraveled, his world unwound.  
 Once he could hold his bow (Yr), as a bold warrior  
 Has need (Nyd) to do while riding his horse (Eoh),  
 Adorned with gold—but now he mourns in mind

For the miles left behind by man and mount. 1265  
 His joy (**W**ynn) is fleeting, his pleasure passing  
 With the march of years. His youth is gone—  
 His battle-armor gathers dust instead of glory.  
 His manly strength (**U**r) withers in the world,  
 Shriveled by time—it dribbles away day by day 1270  
 Like the slow, indiscernible drip of water (**L**agu)  
 Or the inexorable ebbing of tides in time.  
 No worldly wealth (**F**eah) ever remains for long.  
 It moves from treasure to trash, from delight to dust,  
 As time passes. It disappears like the wind— 1275  
 Substantial in the storm, rushing and raging,  
 Only to die down, suppressed and silent.  
 So everything we hold dear in this earthly realm  
 Will be destroyed. The Doomsday fire  
 Will engulf those who cherished only good 1280  
 In this worldly life, when God comes in judgment  
 With his host of angels. Each man and woman  
 Will hear from the Lord's lips the final truth,  
 An undeniable accounting of words and works.  
 Each will pay a high price for shameless sins, 1285  
 Discover doom for evil deeds and wicked thoughts.  
 On Doomsday the Lord will divide the multitudes—  
 Every man, woman, and child who has ever lived—  
 Into three parts before they enter the judgment flames.  
 The righteous truth-seekers, his faithful followers, 1290  
 Those blessed by God and worthy of glory,  
 Will be placed highest in the holy fire,  
 Where they will endure the purifying flame  
 With small suffering as it pleases the Lord.  
 In the searing middle, the sinful but sorry, 1295  
 Wicked but woeful, miserable and melancholy,  
 Will be chastened with heat and smothering smoke.  
 At the bottom of the fire in the ravaging flame  
 Will be placed the evil plotters, the crafty deceivers,  
 The cursed liars, the wicked destroyers, 1300  
 An unrighteous rabble, an unholy host.  
 They will dwell in the grip of bone-blazing fire,  
 Soul-searing heat, headed for the devil's clutch

In the endless abyss. They will never enter  
 The mind of God, the memory of the Lord, 1305  
 But be cast finally from the fierce flames  
 Into the fiery abyss of bitter hell.  
 For the other two parts, it will be quite different—  
 They shall see the God of victories,  
 The Lord of hosts, and the exalted angels. 1310  
 They will rise up in glory, separated from sin,  
 Wholly purified of all evil and iniquity,  
 As gold is refined in the fire, purged of impurity.  
 They will know peace and eternal well-being,  
 The Lord's blessing, and the gift of grace. 1315  
 The Guardian of angels shall be kind to those  
 Who despised wickedness and avoided sin,  
 Calling out to Christ, Son of the Creator,  
 With their joyful words. They will shine like angels,  
 Surrounded by the eternal radiance of the Redeemer, 1320  
 And enjoy their inheritance with the King of glory,  
 Their home in heaven forevermore.

Amen.



THE EXETER  
BOOK





## INTRODUCTION

I am a sheaf of songs scribbled on the cow's skin  
By once-wing darting from horn to hide,  
Old as a millennium in a holy house in Exeter.  
I hold in my arms Advent and Ascension,  
A monk on a hillside, a panther and whale,  
A Christlike bird, a soul and body,  
A plethora of riddles—prayer and plow,  
Bagpipe and Bible, moon and sun,  
Iceberg and bellows, a bawdy onion,  
Fish and river, sword and shield,  
Cock and hen, bow and bookworm.  
Sometimes a wife cries out in me—  
Her husband responds with a gift of runes.  
Sometimes I celebrate beautiful towns,  
Sometimes I cry at the edge of ruins.  
Once I was wounded by sharp knives,  
Stained by beer or a glob of glue,  
Used as a hot-plate and a filing cabinet  
For precious gold leaves. I last longer  
Than any author. Say who I am  
Who sings mouthless to the minds of men.

**T**he Exeter Book is a manuscript collection of poems in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral in Exeter, England. Muir notes that “the combined codicological and literary evidence

indicates that the anthology was designed and copied out *circa* 965–75, making it perhaps the oldest surviving book of vernacular poetry from Anglo-Saxon England” (1). The first known owner of the book was Bishop Leofric, who died in 1072. Before his death, Leofric drew up a list of items he intended to donate to the cathedral, including *i mycel englisc boc be gehwilcum þingum on leodwisan geworht*, “a great English book about various matters crafted in poetry,” which most scholars take to be the Exeter Book. The manuscript contains 130 folios. The first seven folios constitute introductory materials added at a later date from another manuscript. The Exeter Book proper occupies folios 8–130. There are missing gatherings between *Guthlac B* and *Azarias: The Suffering and Songs of the Three Youths*, and between Riddles 67 and 68 (my numbering) and possibly at the end of the manuscript after the last riddle. There are also missing folios in a number of places.

The manuscript is moderately damaged in a variety of ways. As Muir points out, this damage may be related to its very survival in later times when Old English manuscripts were considered of little value:

The condition of the manuscript suggests that it has survived only because it could be put to practical use in the scriptorium: it was used as a cutting board (as the slashes on its front leaves show); a messy pot (perhaps of glue) was placed on its exposed first folio on at least one occasion; a fiery brand was placed on its exposed back with apparent indifference; and the sheets of gold leaf were often stored between its folios, leaving a sparkling residue of gold on many of its leaves. (2)

The manuscript has, like one of the creatures in the Exeter Book riddles, shifted shapes and survived by means of its transformations.

Whether the Exeter Book is a consciously crafted anthology of related poems or an arbitrary miscellany of unrelated poems is a matter of continuing debate. N. F. Blake, for example, says that “the Exeter Book differs from the other three poetic codices in that it is a poetic miscellany in which there does not appear to have been a recognisable principle of selection” (1990, 2). Muir believes that the anthology is arranged in a meaningful manner, contending that the first eight poems are “related thematically in their concern with different models for Christian living” and arguing that there is “a strong thematic link in the series of poems from *Judgement Day I* to *Homiletic Fragment II*, all of which are concerned with aspects of the Easter liturgical season” (23).

There are elements of both order and arbitrariness to the collection. The book opens with a series of long religious poems, and these share certain



themes with some of the later, shorter poems such as *Vainglory* and *The Descent into Hell*, but not with the more secular poems such as the down-to-earth, and sometimes bawdy, riddles. The poems we now call elegies occur reasonably close together and share certain religious and philosophical themes with the opening poems—yet they are also quite different in their use of a developed narrative persona. The poems with refrains, *Deor* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, occur together. The riddles are not randomly placed throughout the book but collected in three sections, though two are substantial and one is mysteriously short. In the short section, Riddle 58, the reed-pen or rune-stave riddle, has probably been placed next to *The Husband's Message* because both poems mention runes or letters or may have been considered riddles. Some poems that seem thematically connected, such as *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*, are separated by other poems. Finally, it is not possible to see order everywhere in the Exeter compilation, just as it is not possible to view the collection as a random miscellany.

This juxtaposition of order and arbitrariness is often an element in the poems themselves. Gnomic poems or maxims, for example, are usually a catalogue of characteristics, traits, or ideals that sometimes follow a connected sequence of meaning and sometimes leap rather arbitrarily from one context to another. Howe calls this pattern a “strangeness of taxonomy,” whose apparent disjunctions force us to see beyond our ordinary categories of perception, and whose apparent absurdity “is also deeply disconcerting, for it challenges our fundamental ways of ordering experience” (10). The play between ordered perceptions and apparently arbitrary surprises is reminiscent of the formal play of the riddles, which are always teasing us with strange connections and disguises and challenging us to “Say who I am” or “Say what I mean.” The heart of the riddlic game lies in the metaphoric or metamorphic connection between apparently unlike things. A moon is described as a thief of light. A rake is a stiff-tailed dog. A penis is like an onion in a sexual stew. A vellum page was once a cow's hide. A drinking horn was a noble head-rider in an earlier life. Riddles are built on connections that appear arbitrary and incomprehensible, which means it takes time to solve them and make sense of their world.

The progression of poems in the Exeter Book may be like the progression of gnomic kernel statements in the *Maxims* or like the balance between ordered understanding and arbitrary surprise in the riddles. We can easily understand the relation between *Christ* and the *Guthlac* poems or *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. We might even argue that the mystery of Christ's life and death is like a divine riddle. It is harder to discern a connection between an Advent lyric and a bawdy riddle or between *Deor* and *Pharaoh*. It has been

difficult over time for scholars to decide whether poems like *Deor* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* are elegies, riddles, or some other genre. We must finally accept the fact that there is sometimes an ordered connection between individual Exeter Book poems and sometimes an unexpected leap from one poem to another or an arbitrary inclusion of an *apparently* unrelated poem. Some of the pleasure of poetry, whether medieval or modern, lies in the exploration of ambiguity and of the relation between order and disorder.

## CHRIST I: ADVENT LYRICS

The three *Christ* poems which open the Exeter Book were once taken to be a single poem but are now regarded as three separate but related poems similar to “the separate panels of a triptych” (Shippey, 158), each focusing on an important aspect of Christ’s life and mission and geared to the events of the liturgical year. The poems also emphasize mankind’s fallen nature and its need for the enlightenment and redemption made possible by Christ’s coming. Albert Cook (1909) was the first to recognize that the Advent lyrics are poetic elaborations of the antiphons or anthems used in the liturgy of the medieval church, known as the Greater Os and Monastic Os. Fulk and Cain explain that these are “the antiphons (responses) that were sung during the final days of Advent at the hour of Vespers before and after the Magnificat, the canticle of Mary,” noting that “each begins with a direct address, usually to Christ, such as *O Adonai* or *O Rex gentium*—hence the name ‘Os,’ each Old English equivalent beginning *Eala*” (123). As is typically the case, the OE poets have taken some creative freedom in their treatment of the biblical and liturgical sources. Burlin, in his edition, sees the composition of the lyrics as analogous to a musical symphony with repeated themes and variations and says that “the poem is a composite of many themes or motifs related to the Advent, its mysteries, its historical reality, its figures, and its theological significance” (49). Greenfield notes the following binding forces among the twelve lyrics: “Mary’s ‘progress’ . . . various architectural and light/darkness figures . . . such motifs as the coexistence of Father and son, man’s inability to understand God’s mysteries, man’s misery and need of grace, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the call to praise God”

(Greenfield and Calder, 188). For the sources and analogues of the lyrics, see Muir, 396 ff.

## ADVENT LYRIC I

The opening Advent lyric draws upon a biblical tradition of Christ as the cornerstone of the great building of creation and the foundation of faith. The opening of the poem is missing, but Campbell, in his edition, notes that “the decapitation . . . does not obscure the fact that the poet was working with an extended metaphor concerned with architecture, building, and creation” (11). He points to Kennedy’s earlier remarks that the poet “here extends the image of the building to symbolize not only the Christian Church, but the individual Christian as well, and sets forth the world’s need that the Craftsman come to repair this structure which now lies decayed under its roof” (Kennedy, 1943, 238). Clayton notes that “the idea of the stone rejected by the builders goes back to Psalm 117.22 (‘The stone which the builders rejected; the same is become the head of the corner’) and was applied to Christ in the new Testament” (365). The antiphon for this lyric, translated from the Latin, is as follows: “O King of the people and their hearts’ desire; O Cornerstone, who make both things one: come and save humanity whom you have fashioned from clay” (Muir, 43).

### Advent Lyric I

\* \* \*

to the king,

You are the wall-stone the workers rejected,  
 The rock of strength they once cast away.  
 Now you are the fitting and firm foundation,  
 Cornerstone of the great and glorious hall,  
 Unbroken flint securely joined,  
 So that those with eyes to see your glory  
 Throughout the cities may marvel forever  
 And know the miracle of your mighty work.  
 Lord of victory and truth triumphant,  
 Let everyone gaze on the beautiful form,  
 The breadth and binding, of your great work,  
 The brawn of standing wall against wall,

5

10

Strength and support, buttress and beauty.  
 But we live in a world of rubble and wreckage. 15  
 Now we need our Creator, our Craftsman and King,  
 To reshape the structure and restore the hall,  
 Rebuild the ruin and reclaim the rooms  
 Beneath the roof. He built the first man,  
 Created the body, the limbs of clay. 20  
 Now may the Lord of life rescue the weary,  
 Release the multitude from life's misery,  
 Free the wretched from torment and woe,  
 Redeem the ruin as he has so often done.

## ADVENT LYRIC II

This lyric deals with the theme of the Lord of light leading the living, who are imprisoned in the darkness of the post-lapsarian world, and also the dead patriarchs and prophets, who are locked in the darkness of hell, into the bright world of truth revealed by Christ's coming. Campbell points out that "instead of following the antiphon in putting stress on the dark imprisonment of our present state, the poet . . . shifts his focus to the bright future (*sunnan wenað*) [we yearn for the sun]" (14). There may be a subtle wordplay here in Old English, as we yearn not only for the sun (*sunne/sunnu*) but also for the Son (*sunu*) of God. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from the Latin, is as follows: "O Key of David and Sceptre of the House of Israel; you who open and no one closes; who close and no one opens: come and lead the captive sitting in darkness and the shadow of death from his prison-house" (Muir, 44).

### Advent Lyric II

O Lord and Ruler, our righteous King,  
 True teacher, custodian of the key  
 That unlocks life, guardian of heaven's gate—  
 You open to some the path to paradise;  
 To others you deny that welcome passage 5  
 If their works are unworthy. We speak these words  
 Out of deep need, entreating our Creator,  
 Who gracefully shaped us, body and soul,

Bone-house and breath-spirit, frame and form,  
 To watch over us. Never let us be lost, 10  
 Tied in torment, trapped in despair,  
 Bound in the prison of worldly care,  
 Sitting in sorrow. We long for the sun  
 When the Lord of life may reveal the light,  
 Strengthen our spirits, redeem us from ignorance, 15  
 Unlock our understanding, surround us with grace,  
 And make us worthy of the glorious gift  
 Offered to us when he allowed us into heaven,  
 After we had to turn into this troubled world,  
 Bereft by loss, deprived of our homeland. 20  
 So one would say who speaks the truth  
 That he rescued and redeemed the race of men  
 When it was perversely twisted. He chose a maiden  
 Free from sin, a spotless virgin, to be a mother  
 Untouched by man's embrace, conceiving in grace, 25  
 Pregnant and pure, bearing God's son.  
 That woman's worth is unmatched in the world.  
 This was an unknown happening in our history,  
 A wonder in our world, a glorified riddle,  
 Revealing to us the might and mystery of the Lord. 30  
 This gift of grace spread over the earth,  
 So that life's deepest secrets were soon revealed  
 By the Lord of life, the Giver of glory—  
 Old knowledge which had been buried before,  
 Proverbs and prophecies, songs and wise sayings, 35  
 Lasting doctrines and lore, lost in darkness,  
 Now brought to light, when the King came  
 To reveal the secret meaning of every word,  
 The untouched truth of the sacred story  
 Told by all those who deeply desire 40  
 To honor and praise the name of the Creator.

### ADVENT LYRIC III

This lyric celebrates the city of Jerusalem in several of its medieval allegorical forms. Campbell explains: "Besides the heavenly Jerusalem, which is appar-

ently the subject of the opening address, and the earthly Jerusalem of the Church and the body of human believers which is manifestly referred to in the closing lines, the central portion of the poem seems also to use the Virgin Mary as one of the significations of the term” (16–17). Christ is coming not only to his earthly homeland of Jerusalem but also to his physical home in the womb of the Virgin. Thus the city of Jerusalem and Mary herself are spotless and “without any sign of sin,” *næfre wommes tacn*. This theme ties the architectural images of the early Advent lyrics to the Marianic themes that follow. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from Latin, is as follows: “O Jerusalem, city of God most High: raise up your eyes to heaven and behold your Lord, who comes now to release you from your shackles” (Muir, 46).

### Advent Lyric III

O vision of peace, holy Jerusalem,  
 Highest of thrones, finest of cities,  
 Fortress of Christ, homeland of angels,  
 Where the souls of the righteous rest forever,  
 Gathered in glory, surrounded by bliss— 5  
 You are a city with no sign of sin,  
 No touch of torment, no glimpse of crime.  
 All evil is exiled beyond your borders.  
 You are a vision of peace, a place of hope,  
 Holiness and joy, as your name promises. 10  
 Look around you now at the wide world,  
 The roof of heaven, the catch of creation.  
 See how the King of heaven seeks for you,  
 Walks away from his high home, comes down  
 To his worldly cradle to be born a man. 15  
 You are the home where his heart wakes,  
 As the wise prophets predicted his coming,  
 Proclaiming this joyful promise, the birth of Christ,  
 Bearing comfort to you, the best and brightest  
 Of cities forever. Now the Christ-child is come 20  
 To ease the torment of Hebrew suffering,  
 Unmake your misery, unlock your chains,  
 Loosen your bonds, and bring you a blessing,  
 Knowing the hapless heart needs the gift of grace.

## ADVENT LYRIC IV

Here the narrative form of the Advent lyrics begins to move from prayer and petition, from lament and longing, to “direct address and dramatic dialogue” (Burlin, 92). The speakers in this lyric are a melding of medieval Christians and the children of Jerusalem who are contemporaries of Mary and Joseph. They question Mary about the miracle of her virginal pregnancy. Mary responds, explaining the wonder of how she “kept [her] virtue, pregnant and pure,” becoming the “exalted mother of the Son of God.” Kennedy notes that in Christ’s birth “the sin of Eve is done away, the curse revoked, the lowlier sex exalted [and] new hope is come for man and maid” (1943, 240). The antiphon for this lyric, translated from Latin, is as follows: “O Virgin of virgins, how shall this come about? For one like you has never been seen before, nor will there be a successor. O daughters of Jerusalem, why are you amazed by my situation? The mystery which you perceive is divine in nature” (Muir, 47).

## Advent Lyric IV

O joy of all women, expectant, unending,  
 Bountiful blessing beyond glory,  
 Fairest of maidens over all the earth  
 Encircled by waves—unveil that mystery,  
 Tell us how delight descended from heaven, 5  
 Bearing God’s gift in an untouched womb.  
 We can’t understand how this miracle was made.  
 No such story was told in the past,  
 Nor is any expected in the days to come.  
 Yours is a gift that sets you apart, 10  
 A grace unsurpassed—a promise, a privilege.  
 The favor and faith abiding in you,  
 Both truth and trust, were steadfast and strong,  
 Worthy of worship, since you alone among women  
 Bore the glory of heaven, its might and majesty, 15  
 In your blessed womb, and your maidenhood  
 Remained unbroken, your virtue unblemished.  
 Yet as the children of men must sow in sorrow,



Conceive in care, so shall they reap,  
 Bearing pain in passion, braving death in delivery. 20

Then the Blessed Virgin, victorious mother,  
 Holy Mary began to speak:  
 “What is this mystery that moves beyond knowing,  
 This unsolved riddle that leaves you lamenting?  
 Why should you sorrow, O sons and daughters, 25  
 Children of Jerusalem? You cannot conceive  
 How I kept my virtue, pregnant and pure,  
 Exalted mother of the Son of God.  
 This riddle remains a mystery to mankind,  
 But Christ revealed his truth embodied 30  
 In the dear kinswoman of David—  
 That the guilt of Eve is gathered back,  
 The sin absolved, the curse cast off,  
 And the humbler sex, gifted and glorified.  
 Hope is conceived that this endless blessing 35  
 Will be shared by men and women together,  
 Now and forever in the harmony of heaven  
 With the exaltation of angels, under the eyes  
 Of our Truth-father to whom all eternally turn.”

## ADVENT LYRIC V

This lyric begins with a praise song to the Lord of light and a plea for God to illuminate the world of sin and darkness by fulfilling the prophecy that the Word will be made flesh, and the heavenly radiance, which is greater than sunlight and the brightness of angels, will become a living light to transform this world. The poet then turns from the imagery of light to the miracle of the Virgin birth, in itself a wondrous act of radiant imbuing. Burlin notes that the poet here “has worked together his doctrinal matter and his imagery into a texture of great imaginative intricacy . . . [as] he alludes to a concept which Augustine tackled again and again in his sermons on the Nativity, the ‘twofold generation of Christ’: ‘Generation by the Father without a mother, and by the mother without a father: both miraculous’” (103). The antiphon for this lyric, translated from the Latin, is as follows: “O Morning Star, Splen-

dour of eternal Light and Sun of Justice: come and shine upon humanity sitting in darkness and the shadow of death” (Muir, 48).

### Advent Lyric V

O Radiance of dawn, brightest of angels,  
 Messenger of morning, righteous and rising,  
 Bright light of truth, splendor of sun,  
 Brilliant beyond stars, imbuing middle-earth  
 With the grace of growth in all seasons— 5  
 You are the illumination and enlightenment  
 Of all time and the world’s endless turning.  
 You are the God begotten of God,  
 Separate and Self, Son of the Father,  
 Gift and blessing of high heaven, 10  
 A child born who has always been  
 Before beginning, beyond ending.  
 But creation calls you. Your precious work,  
 Our fallen world, is in dire need.  
 Send us the heavenly brightness from on high, 15  
 The light of the Father, the light of the Son—  
 Radiate our darkness, redeem our lives.  
 We have suffered so long, shrouded in sin,  
 Covered by the haze of ignorance and unknowing,  
 Enduring death’s shadow, an unending night. 20  
 Now we hold the hope of salvation,  
 A belief brought to us by the Word of God,  
 Which was one with the Father from the beginning,  
 Co-eternal with the Creator. Now the living Word  
 Has become sinless flesh which the maiden bore, 25  
 Virgin and mother, as comfort and consolation  
 To the world-weary and heart-heavy:  
 God was among us, seen without sin.  
 These two together lived as one—  
 The Son of God and the son of man, 30  
 A mighty child in all his majesty,  
 Heaven in harmony with all of earth.  
 For this radiant riddle, this bright world-wonder,

We give great thanks to the Lord of victories,  
Who gave us his Son who was also himself.

35

## ADVENT LYRIC VI

This lyric begins with an etymological explanation of the meaning of “Emmanuel,” “God-with-us,” that Burlin calls “as much the reconciliation of the two Testaments as it is the union of God and man” (108), noting that “though the interpreting angel belongs to the New Testament, the words cited derive from the most famous of Old Testament prophecies, that of Isaiah 7:14: ‘Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel’” (108–9). With this beginning, the poet shifts to the prophets who proclaimed the coming of Christ, placing particular emphasis on Melchisedech, who “throughout the Middle ages was taken as a prototype of Christ” (Campbell, 20). The voices of the sufferers in the antiphon are normally taken to be contemporaries of the poet, but in the poem they are initially the “righteous dead in limbo awaiting the liberation of Christ’s visit to hell” (Campbell, 21). By the end of the poem, however, the voices include both those bound and suffering in hell and those bound in the earthly darkness of the poet’s world. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from Latin, is as follows: “O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, Expectation of the peoples of the earth and their Saviour: O Lord, our God, come to save us” (Muir, 49).

### Advent Lyric VI

O God of souls, you were wisely named  
Emmanuel, as the angel first said in Hebrew.  
That secret name was afterwards interpreted  
By its hidden meaning: “Now God himself  
Is with us, Guardian of the high heavens.”  
As the prophets foretold the King of kings,  
The pure Priest, so Melchisedech predicted,  
The Lord of lords, the light incarnate was coming.  
He was wise in spirit and saw through time  
To reveal the divine power of the eternal Ruler;  
He was a great law-giver and guide to learning,  
A teacher of proverbs and precepts, master of lore

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10

To those who longed for the coming of Christ.  
 So the prophets had promised that the Son of God  
 Would cleanse the earth and all its people 15  
 And descend strong in spirit to harrow hell,  
 Hasten as a Savior to the darkest depths  
 Where the righteous suffered, bound in torment  
 Until the Child of God should unchain them.  
 So the wretched prisoners spoke to him: 20  
 “Now come to us, High King of heaven,  
 Lord of light—bring us life’s salvation.  
 We are the world-weary slaves of torment,  
 Bound by care, burned by hot tears,  
 The bitter salt of each day’s suffering. 25  
 Here in our dire need, you are our only hope,  
 Our only remedy, our dream of release.  
 Seek us out here in darkness with our lives undone,  
 Our longing made misery. Keep in mind  
 This great multitude of mournful prisoners. 30  
 Have mercy upon us—don’t leave us behind—  
 Redeem us with your royal promise and power,  
 Christ our Savior, and don’t let the cursed one  
 Clutch our hearts, control our lives.  
 Leave us the gift of your gladness and grace, 35  
 Your eternal glory. Shield and save this host  
 You created with your own shaping hands  
 So long ago. We long to live forever with you,  
 Our Lord and Father, in the heavenly homeland.”

## ADVENT LYRIC VII

This lyric is constructed in dramatic dialogue form as Joseph and Mary debate her pregnancy, and Joseph voices his fear and anxiety about Mary’s possible adultery. This motif of the “doubting Joseph” has a biblical source in Matthew 1:18–21 and was a matter of religious speculation and commentary and a forerunner of the comic treatment in the Annunciation play in the later medieval mystery cycles. In Pseudo-Augustine’s “Sermon 195,” for example, Mary questions the angel Gabriel: “How can it happen that I shall become pregnant when my womb is chaste and my husband has not touched me?”

and Joseph ponders Mary's possible adultery: "Shall I speak up or stay silent? I really don't know what to do. Shall I report the adultery or keep quiet because of the shame?" (Calder and Allen, 75–76). In the OE poetic dialogue here, Campbell observes that "the poet not only accomplishes his exposition but reveals something of Mary's character, her love for Joseph, and her questioning, bewildered feeling at this moment in the face of his announcement" (22–23).

The speakers and speech boundaries of this lyric are not indicated in the manuscript and are thus much debated. I have followed the demarcations of Krapp and Dobbie (1936) and also of Campbell and Muir. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from Latin, is as follows: "O Joseph, why did you believe what before you feared? Why indeed? The One whom Gabriel announced would be coming, Christ, is begotten in her by the Holy Spirit" (Muir, 51).

## Advent Lyric VII

[Mary:]

"O my husband Joseph, son of Jacob,  
 Descendant of David, kinsman and king,  
 Do you mean to cast off our love,  
 Unravel our vows, untie our oaths?"

[Joseph:]

"I'm deeply grieved—our trust is torn. 5  
 Without warning, my honor has fled.  
 My reputation is spoiled, my dignity undone.  
 Because of you, I hear harsh words,  
 Insult and sorrow, accusation and scorn.  
 Everyone bears me the gift of abuse. 10  
 Care is my constant companion. I cannot  
 Escape my shame or flee from my tears.  
 Only God may heal my heart's deep sorrow,  
 Bring comfort to my wounds, my woe—  
 O Mary, my maiden, my young virgin." 15

[Mary:]

"Why are you mourning, wounded with sorrow,  
 Crying this lament? I've never found any fault  
 In you, any crime or cause for blame.

You've done nothing wrong, yet you suffer  
 This wretched state, twisting words as if  
 Your life were tormented by some strange sin." 20

[Joseph:]

"This wicked conception is the source of my shame.  
 This pregnancy has been nothing but trouble.  
 How can I battle slander, struggle with woe?  
 How can I answer my endless enemies? 25  
 Their hateful words are like daggers in my heart.  
 Everyone knows that I gladly received  
 From the temple of God a clean maiden,  
 Pure and unstained. Yet now this is undone,  
 Your virtue unmade in some unknown way. 30  
 It does me no good to speak or keep silent.  
 If I speak the truth, then the daughter of David  
 Must suffer the law—death by stoning.  
 If I keep silent, concealing the crime,  
 Then I am bound to bear the burden 35  
 Of whispered perjury and malicious scorn,  
 Loathed by everyone, accused by all."

Then the maiden unraveled the riddle,  
 Unwound the mystery, revealing the wonder:

[Mary:]

"By the Son of God, the Savior of souls, 40  
 I speak the truth when I say to you  
 That I have never known a man's embrace  
 Or accepted any loving arms on this earth—  
 But a visitor from heaven appeared to me  
 In my own home where I was pure and innocent. 45  
 The archangel Gabriel came to greet me,  
 Granted this privilege, saying that heaven's spirit  
 Would illuminate my body so that I should bear  
 Life's lasting glory, God's bright Son,  
 The power and prince illustrious, unending. 50  
 Now I am God's immaculate temple,  
 Free from sin. The spirit of comfort,

The heart's healer, has lived in me.  
 Cast off your cares, set down your sorrows,  
 Give thanks to the Lord's magnificent Son  
 That I have become the wonder of women,  
 Maiden and mother, virgin victorious,  
 And you, his father in the eyes of the world,  
 So that in him the prophecy is at last fulfilled."

55

## ADVENT LYRIC VIII

This lyric celebrates a divine riddle: How can Christ be born into a particular time and place and also exist co-eternal with God even before the Creation? Christ is one with the Father and born of the Father. Campbell says that "the idea of Christ's coexistence with the Father, or as it is sometimes called, the eternal generation of the Son, is an important one, of course, to hold in mind simultaneously with the vision of the nativity at Bethlehem, in order to prevent an erroneous and sentimental conception of the birth of Christ" (25). The poet tells us that no person, no matter how wise, can finally understand this mystery. He gives us here both a recounting of the Creation and also the birth of the Christ-child, whose appearance in time and beyond time takes on special significance in the reference to the opening of the golden gates, which are at once the gates of heaven and the doors of delivery of Mary's womb. The collected voices calling for liberation from the demonic wolf at the end of the poem are both the righteous dead awaiting Christ's harrowing of hell and also the living who are trapped in sin. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from Latin, is: "O King of Peace, you who were born before the ages: come forth through the golden gate, visit those you have redeemed, and summon them back to that place from which they rushed headlong through sin" (Muir, 53).

### Advent Lyric VIII

O true and peace-loving King of kings,  
 Almighty Christ, before creation,  
 Before the world's wonders were conceived,  
 One being with the Father, born of the Father,  
 A child begotten from his own craft and power,  
 His strength and skill. There is no one so wise,

5

No sage so skilled under earthly skies,  
 No riddle-unraveler who can solve for us  
 How heaven's guardian gathered himself  
 Into the spirit and flesh of his own Son. 10  
 What has been said or written about this?  
 What first came to pass was glorious creation,  
 When wise God separated under the skies  
 Darkness and light, declaring his purpose,  
 Saying, "Now and forever, let there be light, 15  
 A shimmering joy, a gleaming sun,  
 A candle in heaven, a generous gift  
 For all the generations about to be born."  
 Suddenly the light appeared as it was spoken,  
 A radiance in the air for the race of men, 20  
 Gleaming among the stars, circling in time,  
 In days and seasons, but not before God himself  
 Had ordained the Son, acknowledging Christ,  
 Dwelling with him, co-eternal, before beginning.  
 Lord, you are the mind that made, the spirit that shaped, 25  
 This grand and glorious wonder called creation  
 Along with your Father—both Holy Son  
 And God himself. No one is so wise of mind  
 Or skilled with words that he can say  
 Just how you were conceived in spirit 30  
 And born in flesh, or trace your true lineage.  
 Come now, holy Guardian of glory,  
 Maker of mankind, Lord of light,  
 Grant us your mercy—make this manifest.  
 We need to know your mother's kin 35  
 Since we cannot explain your father's line,  
 For that is beyond our human understanding.  
 Bless us and all this middle-earth in your coming,  
 Our dear Savior, our consoling Christ,  
 And command the sacred, golden gates, 40  
 The doors of delivery, locked for so long,  
 To open the way for you to descend  
 In this Advent journey to the humble earth.  
 We need your mercy now that the wolf,  
 The demon of darkness, the savage slayer, 45



Has scattered your flock, ravaged their spirits.  
 What you bought with blood, he seizes and steals.  
 He rages and rides rough-shod over souls,  
 Binds us with sin's subtle ropes, ties us in torment,  
 Drags us down into hell against our desires. 50  
 We desperately need help. We pray in our hearts  
 That you will end our exile, ease our woes,  
 So that the vicious slayer, the wolf of the world,  
 Will drag himself into hell, falling endlessly  
 Into the abyss, abject and undone. 55  
 And your glorious handiwork, Creator of men,  
 This wondrous world and its precious people  
 Will arise redeemed to their rightful home  
 With God in heaven, that glorious kingdom  
 From which we were seduced and ensnared 60  
 By that dark demon, that fierce hell-fiend,  
 Through our own sinful lust, our unrighteous desires.  
 That ravenous beast, that unholy spirit,  
 Stripped us of glory, robbed us of bliss,  
 Which we have lost forever unless you Lord 65  
 In your infinite mercy redeem us swiftly,  
 Save us from the pain of this endless perdition.  
 Deliver us from this evil, O Lord of all life—  
 Save us from the wolf who stalks our souls.

## ADVENT LYRIC IX

This is the lyric where finally the promise of the Advent is fulfilled. Garde points out that “the poet lovingly embroiders the traditional image of the Queen of Heaven, first in terms of meritorious obedience and then in fulfillment of prophecy,” noting that Mary “is celebrated among men and angels as the Lady of heaven, earth and hell, who willingly and courageously devoted her maidenhood to God in order to participate in the redemptive act” (84–85). Once again the image of the golden gates of paradise is juxtaposed with that of the doors of Mary’s womb. Burlin points out that “by this piece of typological linking, the ‘closed gate’ of Mary’s virginity becomes the means of opening the ‘golden gates of heaven’” (148). Near the end of the poem, we reach the climax of the Advent series as the poet and his collective audience

see the Christ-child at Mary's breast. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from the Latin, is as follows: "Lady of the universe, sprung from royal seed: Christ has now come forth from your womb like the groom from the bridal chamber; He lies in a manger who also rules the stars" (Muir, 55).

## Advent Lyric IX

O glorious maiden of middle-earth,  
 Purest of women, most precious queen,  
 How wisely and justly do all speech-bearers  
 Praise your name and bless your birthing  
 With joy in their hearts, delighting and saying 5  
 That you are the blessed bride of God,  
 Lord of the sky, Ruler of heaven.  
 The attendants of Christ, servants of God,  
 Proclaim and sing that with your virtue,  
 You are the Lady of the glorious hosts, 10  
 Hallowed in heaven by his primacy and power,  
 And Lady under heaven of all earthly hosts,  
 Even those dwelling in hell. Alone of all women,  
 You blessed the world with the boldest vision,  
 Sinless and strong, powerful and pure, 15  
 As you yearned to give your virginity to God.  
 No ring-adorned bride with such a clean longing,  
 Such a spotless soul, has ever brought  
 That bright gift to God in heaven's home.  
 So the great Commander, the Lord and Creator, 20  
 Ordered his angel, his high messenger,  
 To hasten from the host, fly down this way  
 To reveal to you in full praise and power  
 That you should conceive, pregnant and pure,  
 And bring forth in glory the Son of God 25  
 In a virgin birth as a mercy to mankind,  
 And afterwards keep your body unblemished,  
 Your virginity intact, your innocence untouched.

We have also heard that the prophet Isaiah,  
 A truth-sayer from the ancient days, 30

Said he was led from earth to an eternal home,  
 Where he could see the whole of heaven,  
 The shape of time, the lines of life.  
 Then the wise one looked far beyond all lands,  
 Contemplating creation, until he saw 35  
 A great gate, a glorious in-going,  
 A decorated door, adorned with treasure,  
 Secured and bound with mighty bands.  
 He was sure no man could move that gate  
 With its bars and bolts, its muscled bonds, 40  
 Unlock that iron throughout eternity,  
 Until the angel of God appeared to explain  
 The meaning and majesty of those mighty doors,  
 Opened his mouth and began to speak:  
 "I will tell you the truth as it is coming 45  
 And has come about, that God himself,  
 The almighty Father, will penetrate these pure,  
 Golden gates, these doors of delivery,  
 By the might of his spirit to visit the earth,  
 And after his coming through the locks of life, 50  
 The gates will be bound again for good  
 Until God the Savior unlocks them again."  
 Now the prophecy is fulfilled that the wise one saw  
 With his own eyes. You are the blessed walls  
 That the Lord walked through, the gates of his coming 55  
 And going, the doors of his own delivery.  
 So Christ the Almighty, Son and Savior,  
 Found in your virtue both heart and home,  
 A blessed body beginning in your womb.  
 Then Christ, the Lord of angels, came, 60  
 The Giver of life, to close the gates  
 With a secret key made to match  
 The spiritual doors like a holy limb-lock,  
 Leaving you pure, immaculate, intact.  
 Show us now the grace that Gabriel brought, 65  
 God's high messenger, and hear our prayer:  
 Reveal to us the comfort we crave,  
 The Redeemer we need, our souls' desire,

Our Savior, your Son. Then we will see with one  
 Heart's hope the blessed child at your breast. 70  
 Intercede for us now with earnest and enabling  
 Words of wisdom so that the Christ-child  
 Will not leave us alone in this valley of death  
 To be at the mercy of evil and error,  
 But deliver us home to heaven with our Father, 75  
 Where we may dwell forever in the arms of faith,  
 Free from endless suffering and sorrow,  
 Gathered in glory with the God of hosts.

### ADVENT LYRIC X

This lyric is a song of welcome to the newborn Christ and a celebration of the gift of grace that the Advent offers. Garde notes that it “reiterates the co-existence of the Saviour and the Father at the time of creation, including the Holy Spirit in anticipation of the Trinitarian doxology in [Advent Lyric] XI” (87). Burlin points out that the poet has “brought to a climax two themes which, from the beginning . . . he has held in contrapuntal harmony [wherein] the awesome power of the Deity is again set beside the weakness and perversity of the ‘spiritual exiles,’ and each motif is accorded a conclusive statement” (156). Here finally the Trinity presides over implicit judgment but also provides an escape from the torments of the world and hell by offering the gift of forgiveness and mercy. The antiphon for this lyric, translated from the Latin, is as follows: “O Lord of the heavens, you who are eternal with the Father and one with the Holy Spirit, hear your servants: come and save us now; do not delay” (Muir, 58).

#### Advent Lyric X

O Lord of heaven, our holy Savior,  
 You lived with your Father long ago  
 In that glorious home, before beginning,  
 Beyond ending, always and eternal.  
 No angel existed before creation— 5  
 No heavenly host yet guarded the glory  
 Of God's high kingdom, his sacred service,

When you first lived with the eternal Lord,  
 Ordaining the endless act of creation,  
 This wide world, these broad plains. 10  
 Abiding with you both was a sheltering breath,  
 A guardian ghost, the Holy Spirit.  
 We humbly pray to you, our Helper and Healer,  
 Our Savior and Salvation, Christ the Lord,  
 That you may hear our captive voices, 15  
 Enslaved by sin, and deliver us from evil.  
 We are outcasts exiled by our own desires,  
 Our own weak wills, our worldly longings.  
 We are bound by the hell-fiends who hate us,  
 Exiles themselves from their home in heaven. 20  
 We are wrapped up in their ropes of rage  
 And the torment of our own souls' suffering.  
 There is no power that can release these ropes,  
 No mercy to end this misery but yours,  
 Our eternal Lord. Yours is the hand 25  
 That breaks bonds and soothes the soul.  
 Offer us hope to end our suffering,  
 A balm to ease our blame, so that your coming  
 May be a comfort to the care-worn heart,  
 A consolation to the sin-locked spirit. 30  
 Unhasp our hope, unmake our misery,  
 Even though our little faith, our lust for sin,  
 Has fixed a feud against you, gracious Lord.  
 Have mercy upon your humble servants,  
 As we struggle with sin, enduring exile, 35  
 Wandering this wide world of earthly woe,  
 Stumbling and stammering, unable to walk  
 The righteous road, unable to weave together  
 The right words to save our sick souls.  
 Come to us now, King of mankind, 40  
 Maker of mercy, Creator of comfort.  
 Rescue us now, our righteous Lord.  
 Don't delay too long—our need is dire.  
 We yearn for the gift of divine grace,  
 The offer of redemption, salvation for our souls 45

Let us serve your purpose among all people  
 So that now and forever we may finally attain  
 The motive we were made for, to work your will.

## ADVENT LYRIC XI

This lyric begins with a praise-song to God, sung by both angels and humans as they celebrate the *heofoncund brynes*, “the heavenly Trinity,” and the revelation of this divinity in human form since the Lord *dugeþum cwome / heanum to broþre*, “came to mankind as a solace to the lowly.” Garde points out that “through the Advent of the Son, whose death and Resurrection removed the curse of death and bestowed the gift of eternal Life, man can now hope to return from his earthly exile to his heavenly home” (88). In the Sanctus at the end of the poem, the angels all begin the praise-song, but the human audience again joins in so that the poet “creates the impression that the hymn is coming from the mouths of both God’s mortal and immortal worshippers” (Campbell, 33). The liturgical source(s) for this lyric are debated (see Burlin, 162–64; Campbell, 99; and Clayton, 368–69). Muir (400) argues for a combination of the following antiphon and *Sanctus*, translated here from the Latin as follows: “Let us praise the Lord, whom the angels praise, whom the Cherubim and Seraphim proclaim, ‘Holy, holy, holy,’” and “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest” (Muir, 59–60).

### Advent Lyric XI

O heavenly Trinity, high and holy,  
 Full of honor, glory, and radiant grace,  
 Blessed and worshipped in this broad world,  
 Whom speech-bearers, poor earthly inhabitants,  
 Must rightly praise with all their might— 5  
 Now that God our Savior has revealed himself  
 To us according to both promise and prophecy  
 So that we might know him, we raise our voices  
 Humbly before you as do those bright angels,  
 The righteous and faithful race of Seraphim, 10  
 Crowned in glory, confirmed in honor,

Always adoring, eagerly exalting,  
 Their voices vibrating, radiating praise  
 With untiring power, both strong and sweet,  
 A majestic music both far and near. 15  
 They have a sublime service with the King.  
 Christ gave them the gift that they might gaze  
 With adoring eyes on his powerful presence,  
 His eternal grace, far and wide forever.  
 And with their bright wings wrapped round 20  
 In heavenly bliss, a feathery radiance,  
 They might also guard the grandeur of God,  
 His exalted aura, his infinite face.  
 The angels thrive about his throne,  
 Flying here and there, quick throngs of light, 25  
 Hoping to land near their beloved Lord  
 In that noble court of unending peace.  
 There they praise their beloved Prince,  
 Singing their songs in the radiant air,  
 Gathering and giving back great glory 30  
 To the Lord, the noble source of creation  
 The Author of everyone. So the angels sing:  
 "Holy art thou, Lord of archangels,  
 Holy in heaven, our victorious Prince,  
 Holy on earth among all peoples, 35  
 In all ages and seasons, Lord of all lords.  
 Your earthly dominion will endure forever,  
 Always eliciting the praise of the faithful.  
 You are the God of hosts, our shield and shelter,  
 Filling heaven and earth with your endless glory, 40  
 Your eternal blessing, your might made manifest.  
 Let Hosannas on high be yours in heaven,  
 And praise-songs by all the people on earth.  
 Blessed are you who have come among us  
 In the name of the Lord as a solace to the lowly, 45  
 Carrying comfort to the care-worn heart,  
 Bearing mercy to those bound in misery.  
 Let us offer you on high our eternal adoration  
 And everlasting honor without end."

## ADVENT LYRIC XII

The last of the Advent lyrics is a simple conclusion to the themes of the preceding lyrics. The mystery of Christ's coming as God and man is made manifest to the world, inspiring human hope and joy over the meaning of this miracle. Burlin calls this lyric a kind of coda, produced with "the utmost economy and hushed simplicity," and concludes: "The essential meaning of the earlier sections is epitomized: God was made man through the mystery of the Virgin Birth, but greater than this fact were the consequences of His Coming, that He brought help to all the human race and continues daily to mete out His mercy and forgiveness to errant mankind" (170). The antiphon for this lyric, translated from the Latin, is as follows: "O wonderful exchange: the Creator of the human race, assuming a living body, deigned to be born from a Virgin; and, becoming man without seed, bestowed on us His divinity" (Muir, 61).

## Advent Lyric XII

O what a wonder, what a transformation,  
 This miracle for mankind, that our mild Creator  
 Took a living body, received from a maiden,  
 An innocent virgin, undefiled flesh—  
 She was untouched by man, unsullied by sin. 5  
 The Lord of victory, the Christ-child came,  
 Not through a husband's eager embrace,  
 Nor through the seed of any mortal man.  
 That was a greater craft than any earth-dweller  
 Can understand. No man is so wise 10  
 That he can unravel this riddle, make clear  
 This mystery—how the high Lord of heaven  
 Brought help to mankind through his mother's womb.  
 And so our Savior, moving forth in time,  
 Bears grace and forgiveness as a gift to mankind 15  
 Each day, each season, each laboring life long,  
 For which gift we praise him in words and works,  
 Service and song. This is wise counsel  
 To any man who has a knowing mind  
 And a deep memory and who can comprehend 20  
 The meaning of this miracle: he must devoutly



Honor God, the Holy Savior himself,  
Loving his Lord who will return that love,  
Reward that faith, redeem that humble follower  
In a land he yearned for but never knew,  
That heavenly kingdom so far from home,  
In the endless joy of the always living,  
Where the blessed abide with their Holy Savior,  
Surrounded by bliss in a world without end.

25

Amen.

## CHRIST II: THE ASCENSION

This second part of the *Christ* triptych begins with a reference to the Advent and ends with a reference to the Last Judgment. It seems therefore to stitch together the other two gateway moments in Christ's life so that in terms of the liturgical calendar, as Frese argues, the Ascension is "at the exact midpoint between His first and His second coming" (330). Alexander notes that "Cynewulf's *Christ II* (or *Ascension*) lacks some of the lyricism of *I*, and some of the dramatic energy of *III*, but it is a consistently exalted work, integrated around the theological programme of its source, Gregory the Great's 29th Homily on the Gospels [which] Cynewulf supplements . . . from Bede's hymn *On the Lord's Ascension*" (210). The poem begins with what seems to be a trivial exegetical question: Why did the angels not attend Christ's birth, robed in white, when they were so arrayed at the Ascension? The answer, according to Gregory, is as follows: "When the Lord was born, divinity seemed humiliated; but when the Lord ascended, humanity was exalted . . . indeed, white garments are more in keeping with the exaltation than with humiliation" (Calder and Allen, 79).

Key sections of the poem include the disciples' lament as they watch their Lord ascend, the gifts of men passage at lines 244 ff. (see similar passages in *The Gifts of Men* and *The Fortunes of Men*), and the six great leaps of Christ that derive from Solomon's statement in Canticles 2:8: "Behold, He comes leaping upon the mountains and springing across the hills" (noted in Greenfield and Calder, 191). Calder and Allen point out that Gregory describes five of these leaps as follows: "He came from heaven into the womb; from the womb He came into the manger; from the manger He came onto the Cross;

from the Cross He came into the sepulchre; from the sepulchre He returned into heaven” (80). The poet adds the sixth leap, the harrowing of hell. The language of leaping is distinctive, startling, even finally playful, perhaps as a way of indicating that Christ’s coming into the world is a comic and cosmic mystery or a holy riddle, a theme repeated in *The Dream of the Rood*. Bjork notes that the poet “admonishes his audience to be ready for the last Judgment and concludes his rumination with an extended simile reminiscent of that found in *The Seafarer*, in which the life of mortals is likened to a sea voyage” (2013, xii).

This poem is one of four that contains the signature of Cynewulf or Cynwulf embedded in runes whose names also carry meaning in the poem; the others are *Fates of the Apostles*, and *Elene: Helena’s Discovery of the True Cross* in the Vercelli Book and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book (see later in this section). Each runic name in OE is given in the text in parenthesis with the letter value in bold; the name translated is part of the text itself. For example, “need (**Nyd**)” means that the N rune, called *Nyd*, means *need*. The names and meanings of the Cynewulfian runes here and elsewhere are much debated, as is the identity of Cynewulf himself. We know almost nothing about the name or its exact significance in these poems. For more on this, see the articles by Elliott (1953a), Diamond (1959), and Frese in *The Cynewulf Reader* (ed. Bjork, 2001); see also Niles (2006, 285 ff.) and Bjork (2013, vii ff.).

## Christ II: The Ascension

O wise and wonderful unraveler of mysteries,  
 Wrap your deep and discerning mind  
 Around this miracle, so you will know why—  
 When the Almighty was born a babe in Bethlehem,  
 Pure and spotless from a virgin’s womb, 5  
 In the sanctuary and shelter of his mother Mary,  
 The flower of maidens, the first of women,  
 That angels appeared, not dressed in white  
 Or clothed in radiance, as the Prince arrived.  
 The holy messengers, according to scriptures, 10  
 Sang to shepherds hosannas in the highest,  
 Announcing their joy, that the Son of God  
 Was born in middle-earth in Bethlehem.  
 Books however don’t say that in that glorious hour—

Angels were arrayed in robes of white, 15  
 As they were later when the Lord of light  
 Summoned in splendor his glorious followers,  
 His beloved band, to the city of Bethany.  
 The faithful disciples did not despise  
 Their leader's words but came without delay 20  
 To the holy city to meet their master,  
 Their supreme teacher and treasure-giver.  
 The gatherer of glory and bestower of grace  
 Made plain to them many signs and sayings,  
 Parables and prophecies, before he ascended, 25  
 The only begotten Son, one with the Father,  
 Forty days after he rose from the dead.  
 Thus he fulfilled the words of the prophets  
 Who spoke of his coming, sang of his glory  
 Throughout the world, predicting his power, 30  
 The gift of his sacrifice, the grace of his passion.  
 His disciples praised their Lord of life,  
 The Father of creation. They were loyal thanes,  
 Whom he richly rewarded in later days.  
 Then the Lord of angels, who offered mercy 35  
 And the gift of grace, hastened toward heaven  
 And his Father's embrace, speaking these words:  
 "Rejoice in spirit, hold joy in your hearts,  
 For I shall never leave you, but walk lovingly  
 Beside you, never forsaking you in your faith. 40  
 My presence will always empower you  
 With truth and virtue through my gift of grace.  
 You will never be without the goodness of God.  
 Go now through the wide world, traveling  
 Each winding road, preaching to people, 45  
 Proclaiming to all of mankind on middle-earth  
 Our radiant and redeeming faith, our blessed belief,  
 Baptizing all people under earthly skies  
 And turning them toward the truth of heaven.  
 Destroy their idols, abolish their enmity, 50  
 Sow the seeds of peace in men's minds,  
 And hope in their hearts with your forceful spirits.  
 Then know that I will abide with you always,

A sure comfort, and keep you in peace  
 With a steadfast strength wherever you preach.” 55

Then suddenly a bright harmony was heard,  
 A symphony of angels resounding in the air,  
 A host of hosannas reverberating in glory,  
 As Christ the King ascended into heaven,  
 Rising through the roof of the great temple, 60  
 While his faithful servants gazed at his going,  
 The watchers who waited in the hall below.  
 They followed his hallowed footsteps in the air,  
 Their hearts burning within their breasts,  
 Their spirits sad, their minds mourning, 65  
 Because they could no longer behold  
 Their beloved Lord here under heaven.  
 Then the race of angels raised a song,  
 Praising their Prince, the Lord of life,  
 Rejoicing in the wondrous light shining 70  
 Round their Savior’s head. They suddenly saw,  
 Clothed in white, two bright angels  
 Robed in radiance by the first-born son,  
 The greatest of kings, the glory of God.  
 They cried out from heaven with clear voices 75  
 In words of wonder to the people below:  
 “Men of Galilee, why do you stand waiting  
 In a circle? Do you not see the Son of God,  
 Your Lord and Savior, ascending into heaven,  
 The Prince of all peoples rising in radiance, 80  
 Returning home with a host of angels  
 To his Father’s throne where glory thrives?  
 Our blessed band will bear homeward  
 The noblest victory-child through the vaults of heaven  
 Into the shining city, the shelter of bliss. 85  
 The God you gaze upon, your strength and solace,  
 Shining in splendor, will one day return  
 With his throng of angels, his bright thanes.  
 The Prince will come to judge the deeds  
 Of every person in every nation on earth.” 90  
 Then the Guardian of glory, the archangels’ king,

The Protector of saints, was raised into heaven  
 Over men's rooftops, wrapped in clouds,  
 Ascending the skies with the bright seraphim.  
 Hope was renewed and joy was revived 95  
 In the cities of men at the Prince's coming.  
 The Lord of life, the bearer of bliss,  
 Sat in triumph at his Father's right hand.

Then the disciples, brave-hearted but sad-minded,  
 Journeyed to the holy city of Jerusalem, 100  
 From where they had seen with their own eyes  
 Their gracious giver ascending from earth.  
 There was a round of tears, the sound of weeping,  
 A circle of woe, where the deepest love,  
 The hottest hearts, were engulfed in grief. 105  
 The glorious thanes stayed in the bright city,  
 Waiting ten days for the Prince's promise,  
 As the Lord had commanded before he left,  
 Ascending into heaven, the sheltering sky.  
 Bright angels in white greeted the Lord, 110  
 The bearer of all bounty, the giver of all good.  
 The scripture says in its gift of words  
 That a throng of bright angels came  
 Through the clouds in that holy hour  
 To meet the blessed Lord of mankind. 115  
 A song of celebration reverberated in heaven,  
 Wrapping everyone in glory. His angelic orders  
 Arrived in that holy city to serve him,  
 Brightly clad, a beautiful host.  
 Then the welcome guests of heaven saw 120  
 The Prince of peoples, the Lord of life,  
 The source and sustainer of all that is,  
 Sitting on his throne in bright majesty,  
 The Ruler of middle-earth and high heaven.

\* \* \*

[Then the angels sang their celebrant hymns 125  
 Of glorious welcome to Christ their Lord,  
 As he ascended into heaven with the saints, saying:]  
 "Now the holy one has harrowed hell,

Taken back the devil's dark tribute,  
 The gorge of spirits unfairly swallowed 130  
 In days of strife. The demon-warriors,  
 Fiendish and fallen, are now humbled,  
 Tied up in their own torment, bound to suffer  
 Separation from God in the endless abyss.  
 Those satanic warriors could not succeed 135  
 With sword-slash or spear-thrust  
 When the King of glory, Protector of heaven,  
 Waged war with his singular strength,  
 His infinite power, against his ancient foes.  
 He freed from that fortress of fierce fiends 140  
 The righteous host that you see before you.  
 After this war-strife, the Prince of victory,  
 The Savior of souls, God's only Son,  
 Will ascend to take up that blessed throne  
 Where brighter spirits abide in grace. 145  
 Now that you clearly know who the Lord is,  
 Who lives in power and leads this band,  
 Go likewise into all lands, greeting your friends.  
 Rejoice in his harrowing and his redeeming power.  
 Open up, O gates of heaven! Unhasp your hold, 150  
 For the Lord of life, the King of creation,  
 Comes to the city with no small crowd,  
 A host he saved from the devil's clutch,  
 The good folk gathered from the fiend's fist.  
 He has made peace between angels and people, 155  
 A solemn bond, a sacred covenant,  
 Between God and men, an eternal promise:  
 Life's hope is redeemed, its light revived."

So now we have heard how the Savior-Son,  
 The child who offers us hope and healing, 160  
 Has carried the gift of salvation in his coming,  
 Defended and freed us here under heaven,  
 So that each one living here might choose:  
 Hell's humiliation or heaven's glory,  
 Satan's tragedy or Christ's redeeming story, 165  
 The dearest light of the Lord's love

Or the darkest night of the devil's hatred,  
 The dream of joy or the screams of suffering,  
 Endless antagonism and constant bickering  
 Or infinite joy, Christ's comfort and consolation, 170  
 Glory with the angels or gloom with the devils,  
 Eternal life or infernal doom, endless bliss or the abyss.  
 We must choose life or death while body and soul  
 Abide together in this limited life  
 Let us give thanks without end to God, 175  
 The blessed Trinity who abides in eternity.

It is only right that the race of men  
 Should be grateful for the countless gifts from God,  
 His infinite treasures early and late,  
 His manifold mysteries, his world-wonders. 180  
 He gives us food and fullness, sustenance and shelter,  
 A wealth of land and gentle weather,  
 The sheltering sky and heaven's helm,  
 Sun and moon, the glimmering stars  
 In the dark sky, heaven's candles 185  
 Brightening the night for all on earth.  
 Dew forms and raindrops fall, nourishing  
 All forms of life from fields to families,  
 Seedlings to succulence, sustaining us all.  
 Let's praise him most for our salvation 190  
 Who raised our hopes in his own Ascension  
 And took our misery in a trade for mercy.  
 The only begotten Son atoned for our sins,  
 Settling the greatest of feuds with our Father,  
 Weaving peace in place of wrath, 195  
 Offering love to avert God's law  
 Spoken so long ago to the sorrow of men  
 As we were expelled from our own innocence:  
 "I dreamed you from dust, created you from clay,  
 Shaped you from earth—and on earth are you exiled 200  
 Where you shall endure toil and torment,  
 Hunger and want, unbounded misery,  
 And untold suffering. Your death-song will be



Your enemies' elation and the devils' delight  
 As you return to earth, a feast for worms, 205  
 And afterwards find release in the fires of torment."

Listen! The Lord made it easier for us,  
 For all living people and their progeny,  
 When he took on the form of flesh and blood,  
 Embraced a body, lived with limbs 210  
 In a world of time, growing from child to man.  
 God's Son wanted to save us when he ascended  
 In that holy hour to the home of angels  
 To untie our torment and ease our woe.  
 Job in his story somehow knew this, 215  
 And singing as well as he could, praised God,  
 The Protector of people, the sustaining Savior,  
 And out of his love and devotion devised a name  
 For the Son of God, calling him a sacred bird  
 Beyond the Jews' conception, in the strength 220  
 Of his divine spirit. The flight of this bird  
 Was concealed from his enemies, a deep mystery.  
 No one could see it whose mind was hazy,  
 Whose heart was rigid. Many were blind  
 To the bird's flight and the bright tokens 225  
 That the Son of God had given them as signs.  
 The holy One himself had walked among them,  
 Offering his message and mercy to middle-earth.  
 So the glorious bird took flight with strength  
 In his great wings and mighty spirit, 230  
 Sometimes seeking his homeland in heaven,  
 Surrounded by angels and a radiant grace,  
 Sometimes diving back down to earth,  
 Seeking the ground through a spirited power.  
 Concerning this wonder, the prophet Job sang: 235  
 "He was borne aloft in the arms of angels  
 And the embrace of God, in the mastery and mystery  
 Of the Lord's high and holy grace,  
 A bird of the spirit in the splendor of heaven."  
 Those who were blind could not see the bird 240

Or fathom its flight. They denied the Ascension  
 And refused to see the Lord of life lifted up  
 In the form of a man returning home  
 To the heavenly hosts. This ghost and guest  
 In our human home, both breath and body, 245  
 The Son of God, ennobled us and gave us gifts,  
 The hope of a home in heaven, eternal with angels,  
 And also on earth, a manner of mind,  
 A sowing of skills, our earthly abilities.  
 To one he sends the gift of speech, 250  
 A fine memory and wise words  
 From mind to mouth, so he can sing  
 And tell stories with secret power  
 And deep insight. One plays the harp well  
 With his agile fingers in a hall of warriors, 255  
 Waking up music on the joyful wood.  
 One can comprehend his divine law;  
 Another, the constellations, stars on the sky-road.  
 One is skilled at writing down speech;  
 Another shoots arrows instead of words, 260  
 A shower of darts in the storm of war,  
 Articulating death over the shield wall.  
 One guides a ship over the salt-sea,  
 Stirring the waves with the ocean-wood.  
 One can climb up the towering tree; 265  
 One can shape weapons, both sword and spear.  
 One knows the roads that wind through the world.  
 Thus the Son of God hands out skills,  
 Gives each person gifts, a measure of mind,  
 But God grants no man unlimited wisdom, 270  
 Lest he be plagued with pride in his own power,  
 Puffed up with arrogance, in love with himself.

So almighty God, King of all creatures,  
 Lord of all life, honors earth's offspring  
 With great gifts and certain skills, 275  
 And also bestows a wealth of grace  
 On the blessed in heaven, a permanent peace,

The heart's home, for angels and mankind.  
 God honors his handiwork and celebrates  
 The shape of creation. The prophet once said 280  
 That sacred stones were raised on high,  
 Holy jewels, bright stars of heaven,  
 Both sun and moon. What are these precious gems  
 Shimmering in the sky but God himself?  
 He is the sacred light of the sun, 285  
 Steady and true, sustaining all life,  
 A radiance unending for angels and earth-dwellers.  
 The moon shines high over middle-earth,  
 A spiritual star, a reflecting spirit.  
 Likewise the church of God gathers 290  
 And gives forth light both righteous and true,  
 As scriptures say, since the Son of God,  
 King of all creatures clean and pure,  
 All souls innocent and unfettered, ascended  
 From earth. But the church faithful suffered 295  
 From unfit rulers, unjust leaders,  
 Heathen kings. And the evildoers,  
 Stained with sin, untaken with truth,  
 Unheeding the soul's deep need,  
 Blasted and burned the temple of God, 300  
 Both bodies and buildings, raising Cain,  
 Causing bloodshed, murder and mayhem.  
 But then the power of the Spirit prevailed,  
 And the servants of God, the Lord's thanes,  
 Found grace and glory after the Ascension 305  
 Of the eternal Lord, the everlasting Son.  
 King Solomon, son of David, ruler of nations,  
 Singer and shaper of sacred poems,  
 Maker of mysteries, sang these words:  
 "It shall be revealed that the Lord of angels, 310  
 The King of creation, almighty God,  
 Shall come leaping into life in middle-earth,  
 Bounding over mountains, springing over valleys,  
 Enveloping the hills with his glory, the dales  
 With his joy. His spirit shall skip endlessly 315

Everywhere. His leaping will be an act  
 Of love and truth, and he will redeem the life  
 Of all earth-dwellers with his abounding grace.”

The first leap came when he descended  
 Into a woman, slipping quietly 320  
 Into the Virgin’s womb, a sinless mother  
 Without stain, pregnant and pure,  
 To become a solace, a comfort and cure,  
 The hope of salvation to the human race.  
 The second leap came when he slid through 325  
 The doors of delivery, a baby born,  
 Wrapped in radiance and swaddling clothes,  
 The Glory of all glories, a mystery and miracle  
 For middle-earth in a manger in Bethlehem.  
 The third leap came when the King of heaven 330  
 Climbed up on the cross, riding the rood—  
 Father, Son, and Spirit saving mankind.  
 The fourth leap came when he climbed down  
 From the cross, moving from tree to tomb,  
 Lying down in the sepulcher, embraced by the earth. 335  
 The fifth leap came when he harrowed hell,  
 Humbling its inhabitants with fiery chains,  
 Leaving them locked in living torment,  
 Binding the foul fiends’ demon-king,  
 Their mad-mouthed Satanic spokesman, 340  
 That soul-grim spirit-ghost, roped in rage,  
 Secured in sin, tied in torment,  
 Fixed in flame, where he suffers still.  
 The sixth leap came when our holy Lord  
 Ascended from earth, skipping through the sky, 345  
 Hopping into heaven, eager and exultant  
 To return home again to his almighty Father—  
 His passion and power, a divine child’s play  
 Delighting everyone in that eternal city.  
 In that holy hour, a host of angels 350  
 Gathered to greet him, singing to the Savior  
 Songs of great gladness, hosannas in the highest.  
 They saw the Prince of all people, the glorious

Crown of creation, come back to the bright hall  
 Of his own beginning, his infinite being. 355  
 The Prince's play, his radiant revel,  
 His dance of holy and humane play,  
 Delighted all the inhabitants of heaven,  
 Sheathing and sustaining them in eternal light.  
 Thus here on earth God's eternal Son 360  
 Ascended by leaps and bounds over lofty hills,  
 Lifted by the might of mercy, the courage of creation,  
 Higher than mountains. Now we must also  
 Let our hearts leap in meditation and might  
 From peak to peak, power to power, 365  
 Virtue to virtue, striving for glory  
 In all of our everyday words and works  
 So that we too may ascend to the joy and bliss  
 Of heaven where a host of angels awaits us.  
 We should seek salvation with our hearts and minds, 370  
 Hoping in faith that the Son and Savior,  
 The Child and Healer, the living God,  
 Will ascend from earth with our bodily forms.  
 Therefore we should scorn sensual pleasures,  
 Idle delights, the wounds of appetite, 375  
 The lures of sin, seeking bliss in a better self.  
 Our heavenly Father will always help us.  
 He will send down his angels from on high  
 To shield us from the bitter arrows of our enemies,  
 The scathing slash and sting of our adversaries, 380  
 The savage fiends who would offer us injury  
 When the demon-archer, our dangerous foe,  
 Draws back his bow, lets fly his dart,  
 Sin's dark arrow, a deadly battle-snake.  
 So we must keep watch against the sudden shot, 385  
 The unexpected arrow, the subtle sin,  
 Lest bitter death should enter in  
 Beneath the bone-shirt, the shield of ribs,  
 To touch the heart with the devil's venom.  
 That is a grave wound, a ghastly slash, 390  
 A pale gift for the perishing soul.  
 Let's guard ourselves while we live on earth,

Rely on our Lord as our shield and sanctuary,  
 Pray to the Son and the blessed Spirit  
 To protect us from the snares of sin and deceit, 395  
 The hatred of our enemies, the hostility of our foes.  
 God gave us life—limbs, body, soul—  
 Bone-house and spirit-breath. He will shield us  
 Against all evil. All praise to the Lord,  
 His glory in heaven, his world without end. 400

No one on earth need fear the devil's arrows  
 Or the flying spear-shafts of fiends  
 If he has God as his strength and protection,  
 The Lord of hosts as his demon-shield.  
 The day of judgment, the day of doom, 405  
 Is not far away, when we shall receive  
 Our just reward for the deeds we've done  
 Over a long lifespan on middle-earth.  
 The scriptures tell us how God's holy treasure,  
 His glorious Son, leapt into a life 410  
 On middle-earth in the Virgin's womb.  
 Truly I fear for myself a dread doom  
 When the Lord of angels comes back again  
 Because I have not obeyed the Lord's laws,  
 Followed what the Savior wisely said. 415  
 I will surely see terror and torment,  
 The wages of sin, when I am brought  
 Before the Lord in that last assembly  
 To face my Father in final judgment.  
 Here runes wrap in a riddle my maker's meaning: 420  
 Mankind (Cynn) shall tremble in great terror  
 When the King of creation comes in judgment.  
 He will hear heaven's Ruler speak sternly  
 To those who forgot to listen to the words  
 Of the lord while they were living on earth, 425  
 When they might have found for their poverty (Yrmbu)  
 And need (Nyd) some ease in Christ's comfort.  
 Many men will wait in fear for their lack of faith  
 On that broad plain, wondering what punishment  
 They will reap as a reward, what doom for their deeds. 430

Then worldly joy (**W**ynn) shall lose its luster.  
 Fortitude (**U**r) will flee, one of life's joys  
 Lost long ago under earth's wide waters,  
 The great lake-flood (**L**agu) that swallowed up  
 All worldly wealth (**F**eah). Then on Judgment Day 435  
 Our gathering of goods, our treasures and trinkets,  
 Will go up in flames. The ravaging fire,  
 Swift and savage, sun-bright, blood-red,  
 Will run wild, rampaging across the world,  
 Sacking cities, crushing castles, heaving halls 440  
 Down into dust, leaving bright land burnt,  
 Turning broad plains into a blaze of perishing.  
 Fire is the greediest traveler, a ravenous guest.  
 It steals man's treasures, women's jewels,  
 Every good hoarded so ungenerously on earth. 445  
 Every proud piece so carefully guarded  
 Will go up in smoke, a scorch of gold.  
 Therefore I offer these words of advice  
 To those I hold dear: never lose sight  
 Of your soul's needs or let your spirit 450  
 Swell with pride while God gives you a place  
 To dwell in this world, while soul and body—  
 That ghostly being and its guest-house—  
 Travel together. Each person must ponder  
 The deeds he's done in past days 455  
 And remember how the Lord of might  
 Came bearing mercy to middle-earth,  
 A healing pity as the angel first promised.  
 When he returns, he will be stern and just,  
 Bearing a righteous wrath. The sky will shake, 460  
 The heavens heave, and all the great powers  
 Of the world will wail their imminent doom  
 As the radiant King rewards them all  
 For their sin-stained lives, their vile deeds.  
 Then the soul-weary ones shall suffer endlessly 465  
 In a ring of flames, a bath of fire,  
 When the mighty King comes in majesty  
 To sit in judgment upon the multitudes.  
 Then the heavens will trumpet terror,

People will mourn their sinful lives, 470  
 Their descending doom. Multitudes will weep  
 Before the Judge—those whose faith was unfirm,  
 Whose good works remain undone.  
 The sound of terror will fill the land,  
 The loudest cacophony heard on earth 475  
 Since the first creation. Then each desperate  
 Sinner shall search for a safe hideout,  
 Which he would willingly trade for all his goods  
 In that rush of triumph, that crush of terror,  
 When the Lord of hosts, the Prince of peoples, 480  
 Comes to judge us all, the loved and the loathed,  
 The dear and the despised, the faithful and the foolish,  
 His friends and his foes, with a righteous reward  
 For the lives they've led, the deeds they've done.  
 All people on middle-earth need to ponder 485  
 The state of their souls in this drift of days,  
 This barren season before that dread time.

Life is like a hard and harrowing voyage,  
 Sailing our ships across cold waters,  
 Riding our sea-steeds over the deep, 490  
 Alone on the ocean in seafaring wood.  
 The current is dangerous, the sea savage,  
 The waves driven by wind, as we struggle  
 In this turbulent world, this stormy life—  
 Till at last we sail over the roiling seas 495  
 Into a safe harbor, guided by God's grace,  
 His Spirit-Son, our help and haven,  
 Our safety and salvation, so that we may know  
 While riding the waves where to heel and hove  
 Our sea-steeds, moor our crafts, 500  
 Lock on land, and leave hard traveling.  
 Let us anchor hope in that harbor,  
 Leave transience for trust, where the Lord and Savior  
 Has opened a way, prepared a port,  
 A haven for us, ascending into heaven. 505



## CHRIST III: JUDGMENT

The third part of the *Christ* triptych describes the second coming of Christ on Judgment Day. It is a poem in which, as Kennedy notes, “the cosmic fury of the fires of Doomsday and the hope and terror with which the souls of men are brought to Judgment are superbly set forth” (1943, 242). Greenfield points to a number of religious sources for the poem—“an alphabetic hymn attributed to Bede, material from Gregory the Great, Augustine, Caesarius of Arles, and other Christian writers on the great theme of Judgment” (Greenfield and Calder, 193), though Muir believes that “the Bible is its principal source and inspiration” (418). Clayton adds that “the poet also seems to have been familiar with vernacular sermons” (xii). Garde traces the central religious issues raised in the poem: “Many aspects of salvation history are considered in this poem, including man’s original lapse into sin; the historical non-recognition of the Saviour; contemporary man’s desired relationship with God and his neighbour; the constraints of the Christian faith and the eschatological expectations appropriate to each soul” (192).

In narrative terms, *Christ III: Judgment* progresses from the clarion call to judgment through a description of Christ’s suffering on the cross, which parallels in some respects *The Dream of the Rood* in the Vercelli Book, and ends with the judgment of the damned and blessed and a description of the respective eternal homes of each—the fires of hell and the bliss of heaven. The narrative movement is often complex as it weaves back and forth in time, connecting Creation, Crucifixion, and Judgment Day with the narrator’s own present time. The poem is full of what Kuznets and Green call “numerous starts and stops and . . . seemingly illogical digressions as well as

an initially bewildering repetition of scenes and motifs” (227), and such sudden shifts in time and focus are characteristic of other OE poems such as *Beowulf*. Thomas Hill points out that “one way of defining this event is in terms of temporality: human, secular time ends as divine time begins” (239). The poetry of eschatology is everywhere interwoven with the narrator’s preacherly advice to his listeners or readers to take heed, while they may, of the prophecies and warnings in the poem and to commit themselves to virtuous Christian living while there is still time to save their souls.

### Christ III: Judgment

Suddenly at midnight, the crash and call  
 Of almighty God’s judgment on Doomsday  
 Shall rise up ringing and ripping  
 Throughout creation, a tear in time,  
 A terrible dread to mortal men— 5  
 Just as a daring and dangerous thief  
 Who prowls in the dark might rise up  
 And suddenly strike the careless sleeper,  
 Assaulting the unwary, attacking the unready.  
 So on Mount Zion a multitude of God’s faithful 10  
 Shall gather together, gleaming and glad,  
 Radiant in their reward, the gift of glory.  
 Then from the four corners of creation,  
 Bright angels shall begin to blow their trumpets,  
 Blaring and blasting loudly in unison, 15  
 So that the ground shall tremble underfoot,  
 And all of middle-earth shudder and quake.  
 The angels will issue their clarion call,  
 Trumpet their summons to the circling stars  
 From south and north, east and west, 20  
 Waking the dead all over creation,  
 Calling the children of men to their doom,  
 Their day of judgment, their fixed fate—  
 Telling all who have perished and lie moldering  
 In earth to rise up from the depths of sleep. 25  
 Then you may hear a multitude of mourners,  
 Dismal and undead, lamenting their deeds,  
 Their lifelong undoing, their works of woe.

Then a portent shall appear, the greatest ever—  
 Angels and demons, bright and dark, 30  
 Shall gather together, the buoyant and baleful,  
 And each of them shall be appointed homelands,  
 Unmatched dwellings of delight and dread.  
 Then suddenly to Mount Zion, out of the southeast  
 Shall come the blazing light of the Shaper's sun, 35  
 Brighter than any mind can imagine—the glittering  
 Son of God gliding through the vaults of heaven,  
 The glorious countenance of Christ the King  
 Glaring out of eastern skies, fresh to followers,  
 Fierce to foes—our savior and scourge, 40  
 Unlike to each, the righteous and wretched.  
 His countenance to the good shall be beautiful,  
 His spirit sweet and glad, his mind merciful,  
 Generous and loving to those who loved him  
 In this life. He will be a friend to the faithful. 45  
 The sound of his voice will be sweet to their ears.  
 He will save those who served him in words and works.  
 His countenance to the evil shall be terrifying,  
 His spirit unmerciful to those condemned for their crimes.  
 This should be a warning to any wise man 50  
 Who fears judgment and flees from sin,  
 If he does not fear when he comes to greet God,  
 When he sees the embodied Lord of creation  
 Moving toward judgment in his glorious might  
 With angels around him, circling and singing. 55  
 Creation shall cry out and before the Lord  
 Great raging fires will sweep over the earth.  
 Ravaging flames will resound and roar,  
 The sky will split, planets plummet,  
 The bright, steadfast stars plunge down. 60  
 The sun, whose bright radiance has sustained  
 The children of men since the dawn of time,  
 Will darken and brood, blood-red,  
 And the moon, whose softer, reflected radiance  
 Has brightened the night, shall descend, 65  
 And the stars shall be scattered by a deadly wind,  
 A Doomsday fire-storm that knows no end.

Then the Almighty, Creator of kings,  
 The Lord of glory, shall suddenly arrive  
 At the judgment meeting with his angel host 70  
 And all of his faithful servants, the holy souls,  
 When the Prince of power seeks out all people  
 To offer them unending delight or endless doom.  
 Then the heavenly blare of bright trumpets  
 Announcing peace or panic, shock or security, 75  
 Shall be heard over the wide plains of the world.  
 The winds shall rage and howl from seven sides,  
 Break and blow, rise up and waste  
 The storm-ravaged land, unshelter mankind,  
 Inspire with fear all earthy creatures. 80  
 Then an infinite, immeasurable crash shall come,  
 A bright sound that blinds the eye  
 And deafens the ear, a tumult of terror,  
 A sign of reckoning, dreadful to mankind.  
 Then people shall pass through the widening fire, 85  
 Blown up, beaten down in the blazing whorls,  
 The glut of flame. Fear not that Adam's seed  
 Will escape the heat of terror, the time of woe.  
 Men will gnash their teeth and twist their minds  
 Not for some small torture but for the grimmest 90  
 Of griefs, the unmaking of middle-earth,  
 As the conflagration of God blazes and consumes  
 The shape of creation—the fish in the seas,  
 The mountains of earth, the heavens with their stars—  
 All blasted, all wasted. Then misery and dread 95  
 Will stalk the land and middle-earth will mourn.

Then that greedy ghost, the fire-guest,  
 The ravening blaze, will blast buildings,  
 Harrowing homes, ravaging the land,  
 Sheathing the world in a savage flame. 100  
 City walls will shatter, mountains melt,  
 Cliffs will collapse—those rocky guardians  
 That have always separated land and sea,  
 Shielding the headlands from fierce floods

And the houses of men from whirling waves. 105  
 Then the death-fire shall seize and devour,  
 Like a raging warrior, an untamed terror,  
 All of earth's creatures, birds and beasts,  
 Fish and fowl, a dread clutch of kinds.  
 Where winding streams wandered the land, 110  
 Rivers will blaze in a bath of fire,  
 And fish will frantically swim in boiling  
 Unbreathable water, a scalding doom.  
 Ocean beasts will be burned alive,  
 Sinking hulks in a sizzling sea. 115  
 Water will burn like wax. Such wonders  
 Will baffle the minds of men on middle-earth  
 When the firestorm lays waste to the world,  
 And the blazing wind is a winding sheet.  
 Men will wail and moan with misery, 120  
 Penitent before that fiery pestilence,  
 Fearful of God's judgmental flame.  
 The dark fire will seethe and set down  
 On those damned by sin. Deep regret  
 Will come too late to stave off ruin. 125  
 The flames will gorge on gifts of gold,  
 The worthless clutch of kingly treasures.  
 There will be squeals of pain, screeches of woe,  
 Hearts howling, souls shrieking,  
 The embattled strife of those last moments 130  
 Of life beneath the rage and roar of heaven.  
 No person stained with sin will find peace  
 Or flee from the relentless judgment fire  
 That will search every creature's burrow,  
 Every living thing's hearth and home, 135  
 Seizing every once-abounding life form  
 Until all creation is cleansed of crime,  
 All sin singed away, all earth unstained.  
 Then mighty God, Lord of creation,  
 King of all angels, will come to the mountain, 140  
 Shining in glory over the great gathering,  
 His noble army of angels circling round,

Wrapped in light. Deep in their hearts  
 They will all tremble in fear of the Father  
 And the coming judgment of reward or wrath. 145  
 It's no wonder that worldly, impure people,  
 Snared in sin, should be stalked by dread,  
 When even the archangels in their bright glory,  
 Righteous and radiant, fear the fire  
 Of the Lord's judgment. The sense of dread 150  
 On that terrible day will shiver the souls  
 Of everyone on earth when the King calls them  
 To rise from the grave, unmoldered, undead,  
 To come to judgment, blessed or baleful,  
 In the grim silence that greets all speech-bearers. 155  
 Then Adam's sons from time's beginning  
 And Eve's daughters shall suddenly end  
 Their earthly rest, rise up from the ground,  
 The clutch of clay. At the coming of Christ,  
 Each human corpse shall be quickened. 160  
 Bones shall take on muscle and sinew,  
 Hearts shall be whole, limbs shall live.  
 Every man and woman shall be full-fleshed  
 And young again. Each soul shall be filled  
 With all the good and evil it accumulated 165  
 Earlier in its earthly life, its breadth of days.  
 Body and soul together shall reclaim  
 Their sum of memory, the extent of experience,  
 Their lifetime collection of words and works.  
 Each one's virtues and vices shall come to light 170  
 In the pure perception of the mind of God.  
 Then mankind shall be remade and renewed  
 Through the might of God. Multitudes shall arise  
 To receive judgment after the Lord of life  
 Loosens the death-bonds. The air shall burn, 175  
 The heavens blaze, the bright stars fall,  
 The planets plummet, the greedy fire  
 Plunder the land. Souls will go  
 To their eternal home. The acts of men  
 Shall be laid open, made manifest 180

Throughout middle-earth. The mind's thoughts,  
 The heart's secret desires, shall no longer  
 Be hidden away like guarded treasures.  
 Nothing will be concealed from the Creator  
 On that day of judgment, of doom or delight. 185  
 Everyone's earthly deeds will be known,  
 The sum of life's days, early and late.  
 Each one's measure will be carefully taken,  
 Each one's way of being will be weighed.  
 Everyone will test his soul's state 190  
 When he intends to bring before God  
 In hope and faith, his heart's radiant grace—  
 When the fires of judgment begin to burn  
 To separate the weak who are twisted by sin  
 From those who are strong, straight in spirit, 195  
 Pure in soul, and worthy of salvation.  
 Then will come the sound of the trumpet,  
 The sign of God, the raging flame,  
 The throngs of glory, and the threat of doom.  
 Christ's cross of suffering and salvation, 200  
 The holy rood, will rise as a sign  
 Of God's sovereignty to summon the people  
 Into his presence, all souls early and late,  
 Filled out with flesh, alive with limbs.  
 Then this untold clutch of creatures 205  
 Shall come before their Creator, a multitude  
 Of men and women, all made young again,  
 Made whole, made eternally alive  
 Before the judgment fire and the face of God.  
 They will each come, called by name, 210  
 Driven by delight or dragged by need,  
 Carrying their heart's hoard, their soul's treasure,  
 To the Son of God. Their righteous Father  
 Shall see how the soul of each has flourished,  
 Whether it emerges from its living days 215  
 Wounded or wondrous, marred or magnificent.  
 The bold and blessed will bring their Lord  
 Their beautiful aspect and reap a reward,

A bounty of blessings for their good works.  
 It would be good to please God in that grim hour. 220

Many people will be stained with sin,  
 Hounded by dread, grim with grief,  
 Trembling in spirit at the coming judgment.  
 The Lord's cross, the brightest of beacons,  
 Shall stand strong before the multitudes, 225  
 Offering grace—but not to them.

It will shine forth, streaming with blood,  
 Saturated with Christ's sweat and gore.  
 That bright beam will banish shadow  
 Over all creation—that radiant rood 230  
 Will unshade the world. Christ's cross

Will be a bliss to some, a bane to others,  
 The faithless who forgot to give thanks to God.  
 Christ willingly climbed that holy tree

To be hanged in shame to save the world, 235  
 Murdered for the crimes of mankind, buying  
 Salvation for the sinful with his sinless body.

That was no small price to pay for our reward.  
 For that gift of grace, a priceless sacrifice,  
 He will ask a simple fee, the soul's surety, 240  
 When the sky brightens not with the sun,

But the red blood of the cross, the holy rood.  
 Then the sinful shall look a little fearful,  
 Sick with sorrow as they realize their own  
 Dark deeds, their twisted souls. 245  
 His gift of glory shall be their bane.

If only they had seen the truth in time—  
 Now they will see only desolation and dread  
 In the wounds of Christ, those open sores

That might have saved them, the body-stabs 250  
 Offered by those who nailed our God,  
 His fair hands and feet, to the wood

And slashed his side, so that bright blood  
 And water flowed from his heart's hold.

In the eyes of creation, Christ was on the rood. 255  
 This will be made manifest to the children of men—



That the Son of God suffered for all sinners,  
 Lost his life to save the people he loved.  
 All of the faithless children of men  
 Will suddenly see in their false hearts 260  
 How cruelly they mocked and scorned him,  
 Spat in his eyes, taunted and tormented him—  
 How the hell-bound struck him, slapped his face,  
 Battered his body with their balled-up fists,  
 Blind in their hearts to his holy purpose. 265  
 Those foolish sinners fashioned a crown  
 Of thorns for his head, a twist of torment.  
 They saw then the agony of the living earth  
 And the tears of heaven as creation wept.  
 The dumb world mourned while sinners slept. 270  
 The silent creatures shared Christ's suffering  
 But had no hands to help when men seized  
 Their lord with wicked grasp and grim clutch.  
 The sun was squelched, shaded with misery.  
 In Jerusalem the wall-hangings in the holy temple 275  
 Were suddenly rent as the foundation shuddered.  
 The veil of the temple was torn in two,  
 Its radiant colors ripped as if by sword-slash.  
 The earth trembled, buildings quaked,  
 Walls crumbled, stones shattered— 280  
 Fear stalked the living. The sea grew angry  
 And savaged the shore. The storm-wind  
 Whipped waves over the lap of the land.  
 The stars glowered and lost their grace,  
 But in that hour heaven discovered 285  
 The radiant power who made it, raised it high,  
 And adorned it with gems, beautiful star-stones,  
 When it sent its herald, the nativity star,  
 To brighten the world as the Christ-child,  
 The King of creation, was born in Bethlehem. 290  
 On the cruel day of Christ's suffering,  
 Sinners saw another wonder as the ground split.  
 Graves opened up, gave forth their bodies,  
 Raised up the faithful with resurrected life.  
 Then fierce Hell, the avenger of sin, 295

Knew deep down the Creator had come  
 When its heart was opened, so the faithful host  
 Could pass through the fiery demon-doors  
 As their souls sought comfort from endless sorrow  
 In their dear Savior's harrowing of hell. 300  
 The seas made known the mighty Lord,  
 Who set the waves on their watery bed;  
 The surface firmed when the Son of God  
 Walked on water—it dared not drown its maker  
 Or swamp the Savior's feet in the flood. 305  
 The trees proclaimed the power of the Lord,  
 Who shaped them, root and bloom,  
 Branch and blossom, each exulting  
 In Christ's rood-riding on one of their own  
 When he endured misery for the sake of sinners 310  
 On that best of trees where God was tortured  
 And tasted bitter death to deliver mankind.  
 Then trees wept blood under their bark,  
 A gathering of sap, red with Christ's gore.  
 Speech-bearers cannot understand or explain 315  
 How the silent creatures were so sensible  
 To Christ's suffering, how they deemed his death.  
 Everything in creation wept for the Lord  
 From the edges of earth to the heights of heaven.  
 These things knew in their unconscious bones, 320  
 Their unthinking leaves, their silent stones,  
 That God was going, leaving his life-house.  
 The creatures on earth and heaven's high halls  
 Were gripped with fear, suffused with sorrow.  
 Blind-hearted men, ensnared in iniquity, 325  
 Harder than stone, could not then see  
 In Christ's suffering their salvation from sin,  
 Or know that their Maker might save them  
 From the torments of hell with his harrowing might,  
 Or remember that prophets had predicted the coming 330  
 Of the glorious Christ-child in their blessed visions.  
 They knew he would come through the gates of heaven,  
 The doors of delivery of the purest virgin,  
 The noblest woman. They said he would be

The most precious jewel, the salvation-stone 335  
 That would brighten the world, the best treasure,  
 Our radiance and refuge, our solace and shelter,  
 Our gift and grace, through the blessed Queen.

What is he thinking who will not bear in mind  
 The mild teachings of our merciful Lord 340  
 And all the suffering he bore for mankind  
 So that we might gain a homeland in heaven?  
 Woe to the ones who discover a hard judgment,  
 Damned by sin on that day of doom,  
 When they see the Lord's body marked with scars, 345  
 Terrible sores, and torturous wounds,  
 Signs of our Savior's passion. With desolate souls  
 And mournful minds, they will know in their hearts  
 The greatest of griefs, how Christ the King  
 In his gentle mercy bought with his body 350  
 Their salvation from sin so that finally they could be  
 Set free from evil and live a life of bliss.  
 They forgot to thank God for that gift,  
 So they will see in the Savior's signs,  
 His redeeming wounds, no hint of hope, 355  
 When they come before Christ on his royal throne,  
 Their radiant Creator who gives out rewards—  
 Bliss to some, bale to others, delight or doom  
 To each person according to his or her works.  
 Then the pure and virtuous people shall be gathered 360  
 At the right hand of God, the righteous Christ—  
 The faithful ones who followed his teachings,  
 Fulfilling his words and works with joyful hearts  
 In their days on earth. At the left hand of God  
 Shall be grimly gathered those who loved sin, 365  
 Cherished harm in their hearts, enjoyed evil.  
 Rewards for the unholy will be righteous and cruel.  
 Christ the king of victory shall call them  
 To the sinister side where, unmasked and exposed,  
 They shall whimper and groan, weep and wail, 370  
 Fearful in their unfaith, as foul as goats,  
 So gravely ungraced, despairing of mercy.

On Doomsday the Lord shall mete out rewards  
 According to each one's words and works.  
 Those saved by God shall be known by three signs. 375  
 This is the first—that they will shine brightly  
 With a glorious light over all the people  
 Of the great cities. Their days of faith  
 And their righteous deeds will illuminate their faces,  
 And their light will be greater than that of the sun. 380  
 This is the second—they will know God's glory,  
 Experience his grace within their hearts,  
 And suddenly see with their eyes of delight  
 That they are welcome to share the joys  
 Of the company of angels in their heavenly home. 385  
 This is the third sign—that the saved will see  
 The lost souls suffering punishments for their sins  
 In the lurid darkness, tormented by pain,  
 The ravening fire, the serpent's jaws,  
 The great worm's bitter fangs, the unfaithful souls 390  
 Suffering for sin in the ravenous flame.  
 Those who are saved will surely be relieved  
 When they discover what's in store for the damned.  
 Then they will know what mercy means  
 And thank God for the glory given to them. 395  
 The fate of the damned will heighten their delight  
 In being called to Christ, who has saved them  
 From cruel torment and offered them eternal glory.  
 Some souls on that day will be lifted into heaven;  
 Some will be locked in hell. Some will know joy; 400  
 Some will know nothing but the dread demon.  
 Some will bask in truth; some will burn in torment.  
 So good souls are rewarded for their love of God,  
 But the damned will see in their own darkness  
 A quite different joy, cruel and un-Christlike. 405  
 They will see sins enough, an abundance of evil,  
 Punishment and pain for their past lives.  
 Torment will hang heavy upon them,  
 Grief gather about them in three ways:  
 The first is this—all they will see is misery. 410  
 All they will feel are the fierce fires of hell,

All they will remember is a darkness of deeds,  
 All they will look forward to is a fathomless flame  
 And endless days of unremitting damnation.  
 The second is this—the shame and guilt 415  
 Of being undone by sin, for their reward is ruin,  
 Their promise is pain, their unfortune is endless.  
 God shall see in their faces a grotesque agony,  
 An outrage of unlove, a loathing of evil.  
 Everyone on earth and angels and devils 420  
 Will see their dark deeds finally revealed,  
 Their perverted power, their gruesome guilt.  
 Everyone will see through their transparent flesh  
 Their souls mired in sin. Their bodies will be clear  
 As glass through which eternity gazes at their shame. 425  
 They will never be blameless, never escape the flame.  
 The third way is this—they will always know  
 Grim sorrow and suffering, the pain of grief,  
 As they see those pure ones, who are promised salvation,  
 Rejoicing in their good deeds, which the wicked scorned, 430  
 Despising virtue, disdaining God, in their earthly days.  
 They will weep sorely for their evil works,  
 Their embrace of sin, as they behold their betters,  
 Bright with glory. They will be bound to misery—  
 The bliss of the faithful will be their bane. 435  
 In their lives they scorned pure, permanent joys  
 And loved the body's impure delights,  
 Drinking desire from a fleshly cup.  
 They will sink with shame, lurch with guilt,  
 Bent with the burden of sin, bearing the weight 440  
 Of their wicked works, their shame made manifest.  
 It would be better for them if they had been ashamed  
 Of their wicked deeds before even one man,  
 Confessing to God's messenger, acknowledging their guilt.  
 The confessor cannot see through flesh 445  
 To ascertain the secret truth of the soul  
 Or know the heart's deep cruelty or kindness,  
 Yet sins can be healed with honest confession.  
 No one, however, can hide the grim stain  
 Of unatoned sin on that harsh Judgment Day, 450

When multitudes will see each unconcealed crime.  
 If we could only see into our own souls  
 With eyes of the spirit, not of the body,  
 To recognize the signs of sin, the deep wounds,  
 The unclean thoughts, the wicked words, 455  
 The evil acts, the agony of guilt—  
 Then our passion for life with the Lord  
 Would pass beyond all human understanding.  
 We would earnestly strive for eternal life  
 With every skill and strength, breathless for bliss, 460  
 Determined to fulfill our better being  
 By cleansing our souls of the canker of sin,  
 Healing our heart's deepest wounds  
 During the brief loan of days in this life,  
 So that we might live unashamed in the eyes 465  
 Of our neighbors, ourselves, and our Lord,  
 And enjoy a blessed life without blame,  
 While body and soul are bound together,  
 Abiding on earth and under heaven.

Now we must look with the eyes of the mind 470  
 And the knowledge of the heart for secret sins  
 Hidden deep within. With those other eyes,  
 The gems of the head, we cannot fully fathom  
 The depths of thought, the ambiguity of intent,  
 The measure of memory, to see what good or evil 475  
 Resides there, so that when we arrive before God  
 At the grim hour, our being may be pleasing to him  
 When he blazes in glory from his bright throne  
 Over all the angels and the endless multitudes.  
 There he will begin to speak to the blessed, 480  
 Promise them peace, offer them solace  
 With his holy voice, bid them enter unharmed  
 The house of angels, the harmony of heaven,  
 And enjoy forever the sweetest symphony  
 In their new homeland. Then the high King, 485  
 The Lord of hosts, will say to them all:  
 "Come into the kingdom of heaven with your friends,  
 A radiant homeland joyfully prepared

Before the ages, made ready long ago  
 For the day when you would be with the blessed 490  
 In this land of life's riches and celestial delight.  
 You earned this reward when you succored the poor,  
 Offered mercy to those in misery, sustained the sick,  
 Granted comfort to the needy in my holy name  
 When they prayed for compassion. You gave shelter 495  
 To the lost and lonely, bread to the hungry,  
 Clothing to the naked. You gave healing and hope  
 With your heart's joy and your soul's deep affection  
 To the sick and suffering, bedridden with disease.  
 You strengthened their spirits and gave them courage. 500  
 What you did for them you did for me.  
 When you offered them love, you earned my blessing.  
 Enjoy your eternal reward among my beloved."  
 The Lord's words to the evil will be unlike  
 Those to the good. His mercy will be menace, 505  
 His delight, doom—no love on the sinister side.  
 The faithless will find no favor, no grace  
 But a grim unlife—their reward shall be  
 Only a righteous judgment for their unholy  
 Words and works. They must endure doom. 510  
 The Lord's compassion will be lost to the wicked,  
 His mercy missing to those mired in sin.  
 They will be charged and tried, championed  
 By no one, found guilty and grimly judged.  
 They will know both reckoning and wrath. 515  
 Sinners will be doomed for their wicked words,  
 Their waste of days, their squandering life.  
 Their balance sheet will be a bit short  
 When they're brought before God to settle accounts.  
 Then the almighty Lord shall speak to sinners, 520  
 As if addressing a single lost soul, saying:  
 "Listen! I made you with my own hands,  
 Gave you a living soul and limbs of clay,  
 A beautiful body and a bright mind,  
 A form and figure in the image of myself. 525  
 I set you above all creatures, gave you gifts,  
 Power and prosperity, intelligence and insight.

I offered you wisdom without woe,  
 Majesty without misery, grace without gloom,  
 But for my wealth of gifts you felt no gratitude. 530  
 I gave you land and a place in paradise  
 With its bright plenty of blooming hues,  
 But you failed to fulfill your own promise  
 And refused to heed my words of warning.  
 You listened instead to that treacherous demon, 535  
 The satanic slayer, murderer of mankind.  
 Now I pass over the pain of that old story—  
 How you embraced sin, debasing my gifts  
 At the subtle urging of the devious fiend.  
 I gave you joy out of my loving generosity, 540  
 Pleasure in paradise in modest measure,  
 But you wanted more, unchecked power  
 And the capacity and knowledge of your Creator.  
 To the devils' delight, you became a stranger  
 To paradise, an alien to your own best joy, 545  
 And you were cast out, away from bliss,  
 Away from the promised homeland of souls,  
 Deprived of the blessed company of your Creator.  
 You were driven into the dark world of woe  
 To suffer the wages of sin and endure 550  
 Pain and hardship, toil and trouble,  
 The curse of exile, and the dread of death,  
 Doomed in the end to endless damnation,  
 A bitter life in hell with no help from anyone.  
 Then I began to lament that my own handiwork, 555  
 The miracle of man, the wonder of the world,  
 Should pass so smoothly into the dark power  
 Of fierce fiends, that the children of men  
 Should suffer such torture and torment,  
 Live out eternity in a loveless home. 560  
 So I descended as a child into the womb  
 Of a beautiful maiden, a glorious mother,  
 Pure and pregnant, to be born in Bethlehem,  
 Alone a solace and savior to mankind.  
 There they swaddled me with their own hands, 565  
 Wrapped me in the plain clothes of the poor,



And laid me down in a dark cradle.  
 I suffered for the sins of the wretched world  
 And seemed a small thing to the children of men.  
 I lay on hard stone, a babe in a crib, 570  
 A manchild in the manger—for this I came  
 To rescue you from sin, the savagery of hell,  
 The flagrant fires of damnation, so you could shine  
 Among the saved, bright with the blessed,  
 In holy bliss instead of hellish flame. 575  
 For your salvation I suffered human pain.

It was not for pride that I endured adversity,  
 The shame and suffering of a fleshly body,  
 But because I wanted to be human like you,  
 To offer myself as a model for mankind— 580  
 Blessed, beautiful, released from sin.  
 For this love I bore brutal beatings,  
 Savage strokes to my head and face,  
 The spit of evil mouths on my fair cheeks.  
 Men gave me a drink of vinegar and gall, 585  
 A bitter quench for their own Creator,  
 The unsweet taste of human torment.  
 They offered me the wrath of fierce foes,  
 Scourging my body with stinging whips.  
 Hardened with hate, they held back nothing. 590  
 With a humble heart, I suffered their scorn,  
 Both misery and mockery, agony and abuse.  
 I endured both punishment and pain for you.  
 They wreathed a twisted crown of thorns  
 About my head and crushed it down cruelly. 595  
 Then I was hung on a high tree, nailed to the cross,  
 Riding the rood. A spear punctured my side,  
 Piercing my ribs, opening a hole  
 For the red gore to pour out onto the earth.  
 My blessed blood was a grim gift. 600  
 All this I did so that you could be delivered  
 From the devil's tyranny. I bore this suffering  
 So that you could finally be free from sin,  
 Secure in faith. I sent my living spirit forth

From my broken body. See now the life-wounds 605  
 Left on my palms, the holes of pain.  
 See now the piercings on my poor feet  
 Where they nailed me up on the innocent wood.  
 See now the wound in my side that wept blood.  
 How unequal was that reckoning between us! 610  
 I bore your pain so that you might have the promise  
 Of a homeland in heaven with all its blessings.  
 I dearly bought life for you with my death  
 So that you could live in the light without sin.  
 I gathered your grief so that you could find glory. 615  
 My harmless body was secluded in a sepulcher  
 So that you might shine with the angelic hosts.  
 Why did you reject that redemption I offered you  
 Out of love, bought with the pain of my body?  
 Were you a fool forgetting to be thankful? 620  
 For the bitter death I endured in martyrdom,  
 I ask now for nothing except the life  
 That you have wasted in worldly delights,  
 Trading your soul's promise for sin and shame,  
 Drinking deeply from the cup of desire, 625  
 Polluting your spirit, my sweet home within.  
 I shaped for you a sacred tabernacle,  
 A worldly home, a walking joy, a bright body  
 Rescued from demons, set free from sin.  
 Why have you spoiled and defiled this gift? 630  
 Why do you hang me on the cross of your hands?  
 This is more bitter than my fate on the wood.  
 Why do you crucify me on the rood of your sins  
 So willfully when I died willingly for you  
 To draw you from darkness to eternal delight, 635  
 From the flames of hell to a home in heaven?  
 I was poor in this world so that you might prosper  
 Eternally in the next. I was a beggar on earth  
 So that you might be blessed in my heavenly realm,  
 But for these gifts your heart knew no gratitude. 640  
 You saved no thanks for your Lord and Savior.  
 I commanded you to comfort and cherish my people,  
 To share the possessions I gave you with the poor.

You were greedy, not giving. You offered no welcome  
 To the needy at your door and denied them everything 645  
 In your heart and home. You gave no food to the hungry,  
 No clothes to the naked, no drink to the thirsty,  
 Though they were parched and prayed for water  
 In my name. You offered no help or healing,  
 No sustenance or shelter, no comfort or consolation. 650  
 You never had a kind word for a suffering soul.  
 In scorning the poor, you have scorned me,  
 So now you must endure exile from God  
 And endless torment in the devils' den."  
 Then the Lord of victories will pronounce his sentence, 655  
 Deliver his doom full of pain to the damned:  
 "The time of torment is at hand. Let the unholy,  
 Who turned willfully away from the angels,  
 Turn toward the demons who will devour their joy,  
 Despise their being, emblazon their bodies 660  
 With a slash of fire in the hell that was shaped  
 For Satan and his devils, rebels in their wrath,  
 Exiles in torment. Into that swarm of sin  
 And shame, you are destined to sink and suffer.  
 My gift to you now is the grim abyss— 665  
 Descend with your friends to the friendless flames."  
 The doomed will not be able to deny God's word.  
 The damned shall carry out the King's command.  
 Those who sinned will be ushered into  
 The demon's maw to feel the clutch 670  
 Of fire, the claw of dread. The undead  
 Will not rest, the endlessly evil, the unblessed.  
 Then the Lord of mercy shall be merciless—  
 The Savior of mankind turn slayer of men.  
 No one walking in this world will escape 675  
 God's judgment—no getaway for God's foe!

Then the Lord will swing his victory-sword  
 With his right hand hard against the unholy,  
 Sweeping sinners and demons alike into the abyss,  
 The evil embrace of darkening flames, 680  
 A fiery fate. They shall dwell forever

In that death-hall, a hell-house of pain,  
 Exiled from the mind and memory of God.  
 These sinners will be snared, twisting in torment,  
 Surrounded with flame. Their evil is ubiquitous, 685  
 Their agony unending. In hell the unvirtuous  
 Will meet their vengeance—an endless dying.  
 In that eternal fire there is no mercy,  
 In that never-ending night there is no hope.  
 Nothing can cleanse those unforgiven crimes, 690  
 Nothing purge the sins of those hellish citizens.  
 They are the forgotten, the unforgiven, the damned.  
 The devil's bottomless pit will feast upon them  
 In flaming delight. It will burn them daily  
 With an ancient fire, freeze them sometimes 695  
 With a terrible frost, twist them in torture,  
 Offer them jaws of the dragon, serpent-fangs,  
 The greedy mouth of the great worm.  
 There is no escape from that prison of pain—  
 That unholy ravening will be their doom. 700  
 Mindful of hell's torment, we declare this truth:  
 The man who has given up the guardian of his soul,  
 Who no longer listens to words of wisdom,  
 Who cares not whether his eternal soul  
 Is saved or damned, wretched or redeemed, 705  
 Whether it will know the joys of heaven  
 Or the harassments of hell—that man is lost.  
 In his heedless heart he feels no sin,  
 No shame—he has no dread of damnation.  
 He has no remorse for the ruin he's caused, 710  
 No regret that the Holy Spirit is lost to him  
 Because of his sins in this earthly life.  
 Finally the wicked must stand before God,  
 Stained with sin, shaking with dread,  
 Pale as death. Then shall the truth-breaker, 715  
 The traitor, the tortured, the unloved, the unworthy,  
 Be fulfilled with fire, steeped in flame,  
 Overwhelmed with fear before his Lord.  
 He will bear the signs of shame, the dark  
 Marks of guilt—the countenance of a criminal. 720

The children of men, now the children of sin,  
 Will weep and wail, shed terrible tears,  
 When time has run out—too late for change,  
 Too late for mercy, too late for saving the soul,  
 When their Lord and Judge, once generous, 725  
 Will no longer listen, even as they deplore  
 What they've done. Righteousness has no regrets.  
 Their sorrow will fall on the deaf ears of God.  
 The time to repent will have surely past.  
 That healing will be lost that would have sustained 730  
 The soul in this life and brought the heart health.  
 There will be no grief in the good, no gladness  
 Or well-being in the evil. Each one will receive  
 His own just reward in the sight of God.  
 A wise man should be watchful when body and soul 735  
 Are bound together while he lives on earth  
 In the Lord's light if he wants to secure salvation.  
 He should follow God's will, be faithful and attend  
 To the needs of his soul, celebrate its beauty,  
 Sustain its blessing, be prudent in words and works, 740  
 Examine the manner of his mind, the habit of his heart,  
 While he still wanders in this world of shadows,  
 This transitory time, so that in his coming and going,  
 His joy will not fade, his life will not lose  
 Its bloom and beauty, its being with God, 745  
 The reward for the righteous that the high King  
 Of creation has assigned to those who carefully  
 Nurture and sustain their sacred souls,  
 Whose hearts have heard and followed the Holy Word.  
 On Judgment Day, heaven and hell will be filled 750  
 With the children of men, each soul rewarded  
 With doom or delight, bane or blessing.  
 The abyss shall swallow the enemies of God,  
 The fiercest of flames punish the wicked,  
 The sons of sin, the daughters of iniquity. 755  
 In hell they will find no relief or redemption,  
 No escape from evil, no freedom from flames.  
 Their fate will be fixed, inscribed in fire.  
 Only a fool would forget this troubling truth,

Thrust it out of his mind, shove it willingly 760  
 Away from his soul since he should know  
 That God will bring vengeance on the unvirtuous,  
 Wasting the wicked, demolishing the wicked,  
 When life and death share out the souls.  
 The house of torment will be open to the evil, 765  
 Welcoming the wicked through the doors of the damned.  
 All the oath-breakers and sin-lovers  
 Will fill up the hell-house with their dark souls.  
 The Lord of judgment shall then set apart  
 The sinful from the saintly, the baleful from the blessed, 770  
 And the evil shall enter immediately into hell,  
 Enduring torture and tumult, savagery and suffering,  
 An unfolding punishment, an unending pain.  
 There will be thieves and criminals in endless throngs,  
 Liars, adulterers, unfaithful fornicators, 775  
 Perjurers, murderers, malefactors, felons—  
 God will deliver them to the clutch of fiends,  
 The delight of devils, the wrack of pain.  
 Wretched shall be those who chose sin in life  
 On that day, cut off from their Creator, 780  
 Denied the great mercy of their own Maker,  
 Doomed to death, to unlife underground  
 In the caves of corruption with the brood of unbeing,  
 The bars of fire, the prisons of flame.  
 There they will stretch out their limbs 785  
 Each dark morning to be bound and burned,  
 Singed and scourged in punishment for their sins.  
 Then the Holy Spirit, through the might of God,  
 The Creator's command, shall lock up the gates  
 Of unholy hell, the greatest of death-halls, 790  
 Filled with fiends and foes, misery and men.  
 That will be a house of unjoy for demons  
 And people, the pained and perishing undead.  
 No one may escape from those pitiless shackles,  
 Those chilling bonds, their hearts bound forever 795  
 By ice and fire. They broke God's law.  
 They were imbued with sin instead of scripture;  
 They read not, recked not, the Lord's word.

Now they must live in endless night,  
 Oppressed by pain, damned by their deeds, 800  
 Since they despised the glories of heaven.  
 Then the chosen shall come before Christ,  
 Bearing a treasure, a brightness beyond words,  
 A bliss beyond reckoning. Their days shall be filled  
 With endless delight, a living joy, 805  
 Cradled in the embrace of their loving Creator,  
 In the comfort and community of saints and angels,  
 In their homeland in heaven without end—  
 And there the sinless shall be clothed in light,  
 Shielded from sorrow, swathed in peace, 810  
 Gathered in glory, a radiant grace.  
 They will exist in the love of the Lord,  
 His shelter and security, his comfort and care,  
 And he will guard and preserve them all their days.  
 In heaven there shall be angels singing hymns, 815  
 The sweetness of saints, the presence of Christ,  
 The beauty of the Beloved, brighter than sunlight,  
 Love of dear ones, life without death,  
 The happiness of hosts, the heart-joy of men,  
 Youth without age, the splendor of the Son, 820  
 Health without sickness, rest without toil  
 For all of the righteous, a bright and glorious  
 Day without darkness, joy without sorrow,  
 Love without hate, friendship without feud,  
 Peace without envy from that time on— 825  
 No hunger or thirst, sleep or sickness,  
 Radiant sunlight or reflective moonbeams,  
 No scorching heat, no cold or care—  
 Only the comfort and community of the blessed,  
 Where the most beautiful of hosts shall live and thrive 830  
 In the arms of grace and the keep of heaven's King.

## GUTHLAC A

The two *Guthlac* poems in the Exeter Book were once thought to be part of the same poem, but most editors now agree that the poetic styles are sufficiently different to argue for the existence of two separate poets. Fulk and Cain point out that *Guthlac B* is similar to the signed poems of Cynewulf (*Christ II: The Ascension*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Elene: Helena's Discovery of the True Cross*, and *Juliana*), while *Guthlac A* is “metrically more like conservative (and therefore presumably earlier) compositions such as *Genesis A*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Beowulf*” (103–4). *Guthlac B* is clearly based on a chapter from Felix’s *Vita S. Guthlaci*, but whether *Guthlac A* also draws upon the *Vita* is still much debated. Roberts, in her edition, notes that although much of the poem follows loosely the details of the *Vita*, there were probably many sources for the poem (19–28). The opening lines of *Guthlac A* were once thought to be part of the end of the previous poem, *Christ III: Judgment*, or a separate poem or poems, but now most editors accept these lines as an appropriate prologue to the poem (see Krapp and Dobbie, 1936, xxx–xxxii; Muir, 435–36).

The following details of Guthlac’s life are reported by Roberts (1–12) and Bradley (248–49). He was born in 673 into a noble Mercian family and served as a soldier and commander for some nine years in the Mercian army. His biographer Felix reports that his reflection upon the deaths of ancient Mercian kings converted him into a soldier of Christ, and at the age of twenty-four he became a monk at Repton, where two years later he withdrew into the wilderness at Crowland in the Lincolnshire fens. He spent fifteen years in isolation, until he died on April 11, 714, and was buried there. One year later, because of his virtuous life and the fact that his body was found



incorrupt, he was confirmed a saint. A shrine was constructed in Crowland in his honor, around which an abbey developed dedicated to St. Bartholomew, who is said in various accounts of Guthlac's life to have saved him from the torment of demons. The Latin *Vita* was probably composed shortly after his death, and the poet of *Guthlac A* notes that his poem is composed within the living memory of the saint. Bradley points out that that "Guthlac did not die for the faith but he was, in a sense then popular, a martyr, for in the words of St. Jerome: 'It is not the shedding of blood alone that is counted as suffering witness, but the impeccable service of a faithful mind is also a daily martyrdom'" (249; for the St. Jerome quote, see Rhodes, 208).

In the opening lines of the poem, it is clear where the angel begins speaking, but there is debate about where the speech ends. I have followed Roberts, who admits that "as the poet expands on the great happiness the soul will have, he loses sight of the angel" (31). Other editors (Krapp and Dobbie, Muir, and Clayton) mark the end of the speech earlier, after line 15a (line 10a in the original).

## Guthlac A

That will be the dearest of delights  
 When the blessed soul sheds its body,  
 Finally forsaking all earthly pleasures,  
 As it encounters the fairest of angels  
 In an exultation of air, a lift of light. 5  
 That higher being, a heavenly brightness,  
 Will sing sweet welcome, one spirit to another,  
 Greeting the soul with God's good news:  
 "Now you can follow your deepest desire,  
 Your heart's yearning, homeward to heaven, 10  
 A timely traveler on the glory-road.  
 Let me lead you now on that pleasant path.  
 The way will be smooth, the light of heaven  
 Radiantly revealed, the place as promised,  
 Filled with joy. You are a timely traveler 15  
 To that holy home. In that perfect paradise,  
 You will never know suffering or sorrow,  
 Poverty or peril. There will be endless blessings,  
 Hymns of praise in the harmony of angels,  
 The rapture and rest of eternal souls 20

Rejoicing with the Lord. All who have obeyed his laws  
 And fulfilled his commands in their earthly lives  
 Will find their righteous reward in heaven,  
 Where the King of kings rules the cities.  
 The joy-halls there will never decay, 25  
 Never slide into darkness. The hosts in those halls  
 Will never know misery, never lack mercy.  
 They will never taste time or drink bitterness  
 From death's cup. They will live forever,  
 Enjoying God's favors. The steadfast souls 30  
 Who hold to the truth will find their way home  
 To heaven after they shed their mortal robes.  
 These are the disciples who practice and teach  
 Christ's holy commandments, the Lord's laws,  
 Proclaiming his promise, singing his praise. 35  
 The virtuous will vanquish the cursed spirits,  
 The devils of damnation, and rise victorious  
 To a holy repose, eternal rest in heaven."  
 Every human heart longs for the holy light;  
 Everyone's unique spirit strives for this, 40  
 A place in paradise where the cleansed soul  
 Can pass into the power and presence of God.  
 There are many degrees of holiness in the world  
 Considered saintly. We can join these ranks  
 By following God's holy commandments. 45  
 A wise man knows he cannot seek good times  
 In this life and hope that his soul will journey  
 Homeward into heaven. The world is troubled;  
 The love of Christ cools. The age of anxiety  
 Comes upon us—time is torment. 50  
 The promise of the prophets gathers to a head.  
 The world wanes, blooms wither,  
 Seedlings wilt, fruit falters—  
 Virtue vanishes. There is no abundance  
 Except of unease, no hope except of escape, 55  
 No belief except in dread. All creation shaped  
 In six days is hapless, heading toward its end.  
 Middle-earth is split. The Lord sees dwindling  
 The faithful few who keep his commandments.

Doom draws near. Wise ones know the Lord 60  
 Will meet with many but offer mercy to few.  
 Some hope to gain glory or attain status  
 In their order or rank by words without works.  
 Some hope for worldly wealth, not eternal joy.  
 They despise the souls of the holy saints 65  
 Whose good works serve God's purpose,  
 Whose hearts are longing for life in heaven,  
 Whose promise is not encrusted in prosperity;  
 Nor their holy grace, inlaid with gold.  
 They fear and follow God, keep his commandments, 70  
 Trade wealth for the soul's surety,  
 Acquire glory by giving alms, purchase a place  
 In holy paradise by aiding the meek,  
 Sustaining the poor, sheltering the wretched.  
 They serve God daily—he sees their deeds. 75  
 Some sacred souls willingly inhabit  
 The wilderness, house-keeping in dark caves,  
 Waiting for a heavenly home. The proud demon  
 Who envies life, who lost his own privileged  
 Place in heaven, harasses their hearts 80  
 With visions of terror or false splendor—  
 That savage demon is skilled at both.  
 With his cunning craft he persecutes hermits,  
 But angels stand watch, guarding God's own,  
 Shielding their virtue, sustaining their strength, 85  
 Preserving his saints, those sacred warriors  
 Who serve their heavenly King, whose souls  
 Will be saved. For their deep love of God,  
 They will be lifted above the multitudes,  
 Reaping a just and generous eternal reward. 90

Now we can tell the holy truth made known to us,  
 How Guthlac trained his heart and mind  
 To know and follow the will of God,  
 To renounce both wickedness and wealth,  
 Shun earthly nobility and set his hopes 95  
 On a home in heaven. He did this faithfully  
 Once God, who prepares the pathway of souls,

Had enlightened him, giving him angelic grace,  
 A wealth of truth, a treasure of trust,  
 So that he climbed up crags, gathered stone 100  
 And wood, built a simple mountain-house  
 Where he lived alone, offering all he owned,  
 The wealth he once spent on worldly pleasures,  
 To his beloved Lord. A guardian from heaven  
 Watched over him, strengthened his soul, 105  
 Empowered his spirit, endowed his will.  
 Now we have often heard that this holy man  
 Lived a passionate and perilous life  
 In the days of his youth until God sent an angel  
 Into his heart's hold to still his lust, 110  
 Quiet his cravings, and keep him free from sin.  
 His time was near—two guardians kept watch,  
 Each anathema to the other—a dread demon  
 And an angel of the Lord. Often they entered  
 The mind of Guthlac, offering ideas 115  
 In no way alike. One said all earthly life  
 Was unfirm and fleeting, and praised the perfect  
 Goodness and grace of heaven's eternal home,  
 Where holy men bathe in God's endless bliss,  
 Where the Lord rewards the righteous, 120  
 Who suffer the world and seek heaven.  
 The other urged him to seek a society  
 Of scoundrels and thieves, outlaws and exiles,  
 To prowl the night-lanes to plunder wealth  
 And care nothing for his victims' lives. 125  
 Demon and angel incited and urged him  
 Until the Lord of hosts ended that strife,  
 Gave virtue the victory, and flung the demon  
 Back into darkness, exalting the angel.  
 That comforting spirit who occupied the air 130  
 Stayed with Guthlac to shield and protect him,  
 Teach and train him, embracing him always  
 With the Lord's love and also showing him  
 The deep delight of each day on the mountain.  
 Often terror stalked the high hill, an alien anger, 135  
 An unholy hatred, the enmity of ancient foes,

The old fierce fiends, demons of the dark,  
 Who were cunning and crafty in their quiet scheming,  
 Subtle in their sinful beauty. They had hidden lairs  
 In that land, places to which evil was exiled 140  
 After the Lord drove the demons from heaven.  
 No one knew where they had holed up,  
 Grotesque bundles of malice in hills and mounds,  
 Until God made them manifest to Guthlac,  
 The holy builder who crafted a home— 145  
 Not because he cared for worldly wealth,  
 But because he wanted to defend the land  
 For his holy Lord and devote himself to it,  
 After Christ's champion had overcome  
 The unholy fiend. He was tested and tempted, 150  
 Even in the early days of those still living,  
 Those who now remember his saintly wisdom,  
 His heroic courage, when he settled down  
 In the secret and dangerous home alone,  
 Where he praised God, extolling his glory. 155  
 Often he proclaimed God's messages there  
 To those who loved and feared the Lord,  
 And he always revered the blessed martyrs,  
 When the blessed Spirit had revealed to him  
 Life's mortal truth, its hidden meanings, 160  
 Making plain the power and presence  
 That binds the world, that succors and sustains  
 Each living being. So Guthlac held faith,  
 Turned wisely aside from feasts and flesh,  
 The comforts of the hall, the gather and greeting 165  
 Of human company, the vain delights  
 Of carousing song, the sweetest sights  
 Of dawn and dusk, and the dross of ostentatious dress.  
 He feared and revered God too much in heart  
 And mind to want to gather worldly glory. 170

Guthlac was good. He hoped for heaven's  
 Healing in his heart, salvation for his soul.  
 His guardian angel was always nearby,  
 Protecting that rare warrior of the wasteland.

This blessed man was a model to many in Britain 175  
 When he climbed the mountain, armed only  
 With a spiritual sword. He sanctified that land  
 After planting Christ's cross in the ground  
 To consecrate the space with his Maker's mark.  
 The holy man outlived a host of perils 180  
 In a place that God's martyrs would later brave.  
 Guthlac's purpose we attribute to God,  
 Who gave him strength and prudence, craft  
 And courage, a might beyond that of other men.  
 When the demons shot their tiny spears, 185  
 Their devious darts, to assail his soul  
 With subtle doubts, they honed their points  
 To a fine hatred—they could not hold back.  
 But Guthlac had some heavenly help:  
 The angel shielded him, strengthening his courage 190  
 When they threatened him with fire and fury.  
 They surrounded his body, screaming in heat  
 That his flesh would be devoured by flames,  
 His body burned, his bone-house turned  
 To ash and grit on that once-holy hill, 195  
 Causing great suffering and sorrow to his kin  
 If he would not amend his arrogant ways,  
 Return home from his remote dwelling,  
 Reclaim his old habit of earthly delights,  
 Discharge his duties to kith and kin, 200  
 Keep faith in family, embrace the joyful life,  
 And forget this feud with his demon neighbors.  
 The fallen lord who led those dark demons  
 Uncoiled his words, but good Guthlac  
 Felt no dread that day—his soul was secure 205  
 In the guardianship of God. No unholy terror  
 Could touch him, so that host of devils,  
 Satan's servants, suffered agony and shame.  
 They writhed in wrath, twisted in torment,  
 Saying that besides God himself, Guthlac 210  
 Had caused them more misery than anyone  
 Since brashly entering their cherished wasteland,  
 Where they had once fled from heaven's harrowing

Feud with that ungracious, ungenerous god  
 To seek a respite from suffering, a relief from radiance, 215  
 A place of peace in exchange for paradise  
 In their hidden lairs in the gravelike ground.  
 That secret spot, that unholy hideout  
 Was far from any ancestral domain,  
 Barren and abandoned, dismal and desolate, 220  
 But it was not forgotten by God, who held  
 That remote place deep in his memory  
 And waited for the claim of a better keeper.  
 So his old enemies grew livid with the Lord—  
 Their suffering and shame became unbearable. 225  
 They had no home on earth, no place in the air  
 To rest their limbs or lay their heads.  
 Their time was frozen, their pain permanent,  
 Their exile endless. They lamented their loss  
 And wished for death, an end to endlessness. 230  
 They could not scathe Guthlac's spirit  
 Or sever his soul from his brave body  
 By battering his bone-house, but they could cast  
 Subtle snares with their lying minds,  
 Cause trouble and torment with their cunning ways. 235  
 They laid down laughter and sighed in sorrow  
 On that wide plain that was not paradise  
 When a better being with a saintly bearing  
 Overpowered them. They were doomed to depart,  
 To give up their homes in those green hills. 240  
 The fierce fiends threatened Guthlac,  
 Saying he would not thrive but experience  
 The throes of death if he hunkered down  
 In their hills because a far greater host of demons  
 Would soon come calling like grim guests, 245  
 Violent visitors who cared little for his life.  
 Guthlac threw their dark words back down  
 Their wicked throats—they had no need  
 To boast and brag about their devilish deeds  
 Against almighty God. The brave man said: 250  
 "You may promise pain and death to me,  
 But God will shield me from your hateful spite.

He protects my life and shapes your affliction.  
 This is the truth—I can hold this home alone,  
 Keep my promised place easily among you. 255  
 I am poor in company but powerful in spirit.  
 A might beyond man's reckoning or a demon's  
 Subtle grasp dwells within my soul,  
 A spiritual mystery sustaining me,  
 So I will build a peaceful home in these hills. 260  
 I will lift up my house and hymns with hands  
 And heart in harmony with heaven. A holy angel  
 Will be my architect. The Lord will craft  
 My words and works. In God's name  
 Be gone, damned and despicable demons, 265  
 To your desolate home. Here I will have peace  
 With the everlasting Lord. I will not entertain  
 Your evil ideas, your subtle temptations.  
 God's hand will guard me, his power preserve me.  
 This is my homeland. It's yours no longer." 270

Suddenly a clamor arose, a screeching chaos,  
 As a crowd of demons, outcasts and exiles,  
 Gathered around Guthlac, brashly boasting,  
 Throwing fierce words in his face, saying:  
 "We know the ways of worldly men. 275  
 We've often seen their power and prosperity—  
 They're proud of the prominent lives they lead.  
 But we've never met such an arrogant man  
 Anywhere on middle-earth. You are God's  
 Worthless wretch. You own nothing 280  
 Except your vainglory. You vow to steal  
 A home among us here in devils' land.  
 We will help you build a house of death.  
 No one will give you the gift of food,  
 No one will offer you sustenance or shelter, 285  
 No one will greet you with a morning smile  
 When you walk out your front door.  
 Hunger and thirst will be your friends,  
 Harrowing your steps like wild beasts.  
 Your righteous resolve is like the mad 290



Tenacity of a lunatic. Leave this land.  
 If you want to learn, listen to us.  
 We can be kind if you take our truths  
 To heart. We can be cruel if you remain  
 Deaf to demons. We will assault you 295  
 Without restraint, without weapons, swords or spears,  
 And bring your proud carcass down to darkness  
 Without laying a single hand on your precious body.  
 We will touch your heart with a stabbing terror,  
 Your proud soul with a piercing dread. 300  
 Your faith will be futile; your future, death.  
 We'll haul your house down with brutal horses  
 And a host of baleful men. They will bring rage  
 To greet you, ravage your home and heart,  
 Trample you, tear you apart, leaving only 305  
 Bloody tracks and the soul's endless horror.  
 This is your choice—safety or savagery.  
 Take off or take heed. Find friends  
 Instead of fiends if you care about your life.”  
 Guthlac was ready—he met that rage 310  
 With the courage and wisdom God had given him.  
 He did not flinch in fear at their dark words  
 But told the truth to those lying fiends,  
 Announcing the sorrow in store for them, saying:  
 “This is a wide wasteland full of hideouts 315  
 For exiles and outlaws living in misery.  
 You can summon many demons to stir up strife,  
 But for what purpose? I promise you, I will wield  
 No worldly weapon, no sword or spear,  
 With a hand of wrath. I will kill no creature, 320  
 Steal no space, leave no land  
 A bloody graveyard. I will please Christ  
 With a greater gift. I came in peace.  
 You offered me some unholy hideouts  
 With your devious speech. That will not suffice. 325  
 I do not fear or faint. My Lord holds sway  
 Over all men, all creatures, all spirits.  
 He provides my peace, my soul's resting place.  
 Nothing I love depends upon you.

I serve my Lord and Savior. His sweet angel 330  
 Carries comfort to me, not endless craving,  
 So I am always free of the demons of desire,  
 And my longing is only for my living Lord.  
 I have seldom known worldly strife or sorrow.  
 Now a spiritual shepherd tends to my needs, 335  
 Guards and guides me—my hope is with God.  
 I care nothing for wealth, power or pleasure.  
 Each day God gives me a hand with what I need.”  
 So Guthlac spoke, God’s glorious champion  
 Who stood secure against the host of demons, 340  
 Sustained by the wondrous strength of angels.  
 The fiends left the field, fled to their lairs  
 To rest and recover, reshape their strategy—  
 They planned no long respite to their rage.  
 Guthlac lived on the hill with humble courage— 345  
 He loved that home. He gave up earthly longings,  
 Ephemeral joys, but kept his compassion,  
 His mercy toward men, and prayed passionately  
 For the salvation of every soul when he bowed  
 His head down alone in the wilderness. 350  
 His heart was blessed by a heavenly spirit.  
 Often he wondered with the angel nearby,  
 Hovering in air, how he might least enjoy  
 The body’s pleasures, those worldly joys.  
 His faith never faltered or fled in the face 355  
 Of the dreaded demons. He never deferred  
 His early dawn-call to rise up for the Lord,  
 Never lay back in late morning sloth or slumber.  
 A holy warrior must battle for God,  
 Bear a righteous anger always against 360  
 The satanic slayer, the seeker of souls.  
 The demons found Guthlac firm in his faith  
 When those fierce-flying devils rose up  
 From their lairs, streaking through night-clouds,  
 To see if his love of his home in the hills 365  
 Had lessened at last. They hoped that his heart  
 Would be touched by a human longing,  
 By that strange affection that men call love,

So he would leave the hills and go home again.  
 But Guthlac never knew such yearning 370  
 After the angel greeted him with heaven's blessing  
 And gathered him affectionately into God's grace.  
 No human craving could undo his covenant  
 After the angel addressed him in the wilderness.  
 Often he spoke these sustaining words: 375  
 "Truly a man who follows the Holy Spirit  
 With his head and heart, whose words and works  
 Are inspired and strengthened by the force of faith,  
 Who hopes for heaven and the promise of peace,  
 Should follow the Lord's lore, the teachings 380  
 Of truth, and never let that ancient enemy,  
 The hellish demon, turn his soul from salvation,  
 His mind from his Maker's gift of grace.  
 A man like me must know obedience,  
 Give back to God a hallowed heart. 385  
 How shall my soul ever know salvation  
 Unless I learn to listen to the Lord?"

\* \* \*

["Leader of demons, mover of darkness,  
 Tempter and tormenter, father of hell,]  
 Sooner or later your power to persecute me 390  
 In the wilderness of this world will surely end.  
 My body cannot set aside death from the flow  
 Of this fleeting life. It will perish like the land  
 That I stand on here, ephemeral as earth.  
 You may break my bone-house, 395  
 Burn my body with a greedy fire,  
 That grim devourer, but you can never  
 Unwind my words, unmake my works,  
 Unpower my prayers, while my mind holds true.  
 With a cruel flame you can torch my body, 400  
 But you cannot touch my immortal soul.  
 Your savage assaults will only serve  
 To make it stronger as I eagerly await  
 My Lord's judgment, my Maker's mercy.  
 Death holds no grief for me—it's a gift. 405  
 Though my bones and blood return to dust,

My eternal soul shall seek heaven's homeland,  
 A place of bliss. My house in the hills  
 Is good enough for a man of God  
 Who serves through suffering his Lord's will. 410  
 A holy man should not covet worldly goods  
 Beyond what he needs to sustain his body."  
 Then the old foes' hatred fired up again.  
 The sad shrieking of those grim guests,  
 Those woeful demons, rose up in the air, 415  
 But the praise of Christ in Guthlac's heart  
 Protected him with a godly shield,  
 The strength that saves each virtuous soul  
 And lets life thrive against an evil throng.  
 Guthlac never gave heed to worldly goods; 420  
 He hoped for God's grace and heavenly glory.  
 In our age was there ever any greater hero,  
 For whose sake and in whose sight  
 Christ manifested many miracles on earth?

Guthlac was shielded from those slaughter-guests, 425  
 Who were keen to catch him in their greedy clutches.  
 God would not allow his soul to suffer pain  
 In its body-home, but let the terrible demons  
 Strike him with their hands while protecting his spirit.  
 The evil ones grabbed Guthlac, lifting him aloft, 430  
 Giving him the power to see beyond the eyes  
 Of mortal men the habits of immoral monks  
 In worldly monasteries. Many passed their time  
 In earthly pleasures, acquiring wealth,  
 Robes and riches, as proud young men will do 435  
 When they are not guided by a fear of God  
 Or the example of their elders. The fierce fiends  
 Found an end to their ranting and rejoicing  
 When they discovered they could no longer  
 Torture Guthlac's body or torment his mind. 440  
 They led him out of the air to the hill-home  
 That he dearly loved. The demons grieved  
 And mourned, lamenting that a son of man  
 Should suffer such torment and survive.

He had come through cruelty, dark thought 445  
 And dire threat, alone and apparently unattended,  
 For they could not see the angel in his heart.  
 He would stay safe unless those devils  
 Could derail his purpose with greater pain,  
 Making the poor man pay for their own misery. 450  
 But Guthlac set his heart's hope in heaven,  
 His soul's trust in the surety of God's grace.  
 He had escaped the evil of the fiends' embrace  
 And overcome their first test and torture.  
 So the holy warrior remained in his home 455  
 On the hill—his peace, his place, was with God.  
 In his heart he felt that the man most blessed  
 Was one the who shielded his soul against the fiend  
 So that the devil's hand might not harm him  
 When the Lord's law decreed its last judgment 460  
 At death's delivery in the final parting.  
 Yet the evil scoffers scorned the holy hero,  
 Hurling insults at him out of their own agony.  
 Their attempted torment could not twist the truth—  
 That God had given Guthlac great gifts, 465  
 Strength and courage, honor and grace,  
 So that he could conquer the devious demons.  
 Then the damned spirit spoke to Guthlac:  
 "We wouldn't have needed to harrow your heart,  
 If you had listened to your friends and loved ones 470  
 When you entered this area, poor and pitiful,  
 Searching for strife, declaring to demons  
 That the Holy Spirit would be your shield  
 Against affliction and agony, and that the sign of God  
 Would keep the hard hands of any man 475  
 From savagely striking your noble face."  
 Some of you reading or listening here  
 Know that many holy men indulge in sin,  
 Engage in evil. This is not agreeable to God.  
 You gorge yourselves at great feasts, 480  
 Always greedy for the body's banquets.  
 You feed your flesh, feasting and frolicking,  
 Praising God not in faith but in foolish smugness,

Proud and self-satisfied. You hide unholy secrets  
 In your hearts and pursue shameful deeds in the dark, 485  
 But nothing is hidden from God's immortal eye,  
 So keep watch on yourself! Now the story continues  
 With the demon leader, the cursed criminal, saying:  
 "We lifted you up, leading you away  
 From the land's delights, wanting you to see 490  
 The terrible truths that we had learned  
 In our secret spying, the false seeming  
 Of supposedly holy men. Even in your own  
 Pure perception, you can't deny their deceit,  
 Their private love of power and pleasure, 495  
 And this will be your agony and affliction."  
 Then God wanted to reward Guthlac for suffering  
 And embracing martyrdom, so he endowed his mind  
 With wisdom and fortitude. The faithful warrior  
 Made a stand against those ancient enemies, 500  
 Telling them again to their great distress  
 That in the name of the Lord, they should depart  
 And give up their lairs in that green land, saying:  
 "Demons, you are now defeated, crushed and routed.  
 Sin sits on your shoulders, guilt grabs at your legs. 505  
 You seek no compassion and deserve no mercy.  
 You will get no grace. God gave you power  
 For moments over me, but you misused that might,  
 Lifting me into the air, so that I could see unnaturally  
 Through buildings and bodies into men's hearts. 510  
 What I saw on high, however, was not only deceit  
 But the light of heaven. Then you reproached me  
 Because I once tolerated the loose rules  
 And wild ways of young churchmen.  
 You wanted to blacken all of their names, 515  
 Degrading and disgracing the worst of them,  
 And overlooking the best. You refused to show me  
 The saintly ones, humble and unashamed,  
 Who dwell without sin in their words and works.  
 Let me tell the truth to all of you liars: 520  
 God created young people in the spirit of joy.

They grow from bud to bloom, flower to fruit,  
 Rejoicing in the perfect pleasure of living.  
 A young man lacks the wisdom of maturity,  
 But he understands the energy of existence, 525  
 The joy of being. Time elders the young,  
 Teaches them patience, humility, a higher calling,  
 So that they can serve both God and man  
 In many noble ways on middle-earth.  
 Then they wisely put away vanity and vice, 530  
 Embrace virtue, letting their better spirits soar.  
 This is the haunting truth you always ignore  
 Because it holds no delight for demons.  
 You see the sins of the guilty but never  
 The virtues of the good. You feast on unfaith, 535  
 Sucking up shame. You are gluttons of guilt.  
 You rejoice in crime and reject all comfort.  
 You must wander endlessly in exile from God.  
 You are thieves and outcasts who will carry off  
 Nothing but judgment from the heavenly Father 540  
 Who sends me here, the only one who can settle  
 All disputes between us, our Lord and Judge,  
 Who measures out the length of every life.”  
 So the holy warrior spoke these words.  
 The man was a martyr, separated from sin, 545  
 But he had to endure his share of suffering,  
 Though the Lord held power over his torments.  
 It has seemed a marvel to men that God should let  
 Those wretched demons rack him with pain,  
 Afflict him with agony, yet it truly happened. 550  
 A still greater thing was how the Lord  
 Came into this world and poured out his blood  
 At the hands of men with hatred in their hearts.  
 He held dominion over life and death  
 When he humbly bowed down, climbing the cross, 555  
 Reaching through death to redeem mankind,  
 Enduring the malice of murdering men,  
 Those who persecuted him here on earth.  
 So we should sing praise-songs to the faithful,

Extolling their deeds to our Lord and Savior, 560  
 Praising him for the stories of such steadfast people  
 Whose lives reflect the wonder of his works.

The gift of grace was given to Guthlac,  
 A godly power and spiritual strength.

It's a great task to tell his courageous story 565  
 From beginning to end. His almighty Father  
 Sent him in the vanguard against his foes,  
 Those secret, satanic marauders of life.

His soul was severely tested and tormented,  
 Yet it proved true through every trial. 570

His bravery was assailed by evil enemies  
 But never bested. He never faltered.

It is well known throughout the world  
 That he kept his courage and his spirit thrived  
 Through the will of God. He never wavered. 575

He trusted his Guardian to protect his soul.  
 Yet there is more to tell of the trials he endured.  
 His holy heart withstood the clutch of fiends.

Evil spirits set upon him with sin and savagery—  
 They lusted for his life. But even the darkest 580  
 Demons cannot control death or doom,

So Guthlac's soul waited patiently in his body  
 Until God decreed a more peaceful passing.

The fiends grew furious when they saw that God  
 Would save Guthlac from their fierce afflictions, 585  
 As he can easily do with all blessed ones,

And would judge them harshly for their harrowing crimes,  
 So they hurried him down to the gates of hell,  
 Hoping to hound that holy communicant

Into unholy fear. They approached the dread doors, 590  
 Where after death's agony, the sinful and unsaved  
 Must seek entry to the underground abyss.

There they menaced the holy man with the threat  
 Of pain and possession, terror and torment,  
 And descent into darkness, as demons will do 595

When they desire to unmake a righteous man,  
 Seduce his soul with subtle doubts or secret sins.



They wove deceit into a wormlike weapon,  
 Telling Guthlac that his heart was unholy,  
 His mind impure, his place in hell secure. 600  
 He would live forever in a house of fire,  
 His skin and soul a scorch of pain.  
 The demons hoped to haul God's champion,  
 His chosen warrior, down into darkness,  
 But they had not reckoned on their own doom, 605  
 The judgment of God. Filled with frustration,  
 Hateful to Christ, they spoke fiercely to Guthlac:  
 "You are neither worthy nor wanted by God.  
 You have not been chosen as God's champion  
 Or servant. Your heart has not been proven 610  
 Holy according to your words and works.  
 Now you must follow us into the fiery abyss,  
 Dwell in a house in hell, not a home in heaven,  
 Lost from the light, for your flesh is too full  
 Of sin and shame, temptation and treachery. 615  
 Now we will reward you for your worldly evil  
 By tormenting your soul with endless agony."  
 Then blessed Guthlac answered back,  
 His spirit strengthened by the power of God:  
 "Torment me if you think that the Lord Christ, 620  
 Shaper and sustainer of the living light,  
 Will let you lead me to that loathsome flame.  
 That is under the control of the King of glory,  
 The Savior Christ. He is the one  
 Who easily defeated you, exiled you from heaven, 625  
 And bound you in chains. I am his humble  
 And obedient servant—I submit to his doom,  
 His righteous judgment, with my heart and soul.  
 He is my radiant Lord, my redeeming light.  
 I praise the Creator for the wonders he made 630  
 For the angels in heaven and the inhabitants of earth.  
 I will exalt my Father and exult with him  
 For all of the blessings he has bestowed on us.  
 I will sing his praise-songs both day and night  
 As demons can never do. Your tongues are tied 635  
 With unbreakable bonds of infinite light,

So you can never sever the silence of exile.  
 At death's door you will mourn your grim fate  
 With surging grief. You can lament in hell  
 But never praise or petition heaven's King." 640

Then courageous Guthlac continued speaking:  
 "In all my days I will honor my Judge,  
 Loving my Lord in my words and works."  
 So learning and faith go hand in hand  
 With honor and eloquence for any man 645  
 Who wants to fulfill God's will with his works.

Then Guthlac spoke again to the demons:  
 "You are all faith-breakers, trust-betrayers,  
 Exiles from heaven and your own heart's good.  
 You drink fire daily and feast on flame. 650  
 You were deceived by Satan, deprived of heaven,  
 Despoiled of joy, seduced by sin,  
 Harrowed by hopelessness, delivered to death.  
 Your blindness has no cure—you see nothing  
 Except the madness of sin without mercy. 655

You rebelled against God, renouncing creation  
 And your place in heaven. You lost perfect peace,  
 The heart's holy joy, in rejecting God.  
 For your pride and presumption, your fierce unfaith,  
 Your cruelty and crime, you were cast forth 660  
 From God's comfort and the kingdom of heaven  
 Into the endless and unholy flames of hell,  
 Where you must always endure darkness and death,  
 Weeping and woe, lamenting with the lost.  
 Your reward is never to know relief. 665

I have placed my faith in the Lord of creation,  
 The source of life, the savior of Men.  
 In his might and mercy, my Maker will be  
 My shield and sustainer. He will never forsake me  
 Because I have fought for him, body and soul, 670  
 In words and works, by means of the mystery  
 Of his wondrous power. I trust in the Trinity's  
 Radiant glory, in the true Creator,  
 Who holds in his hands heaven and earth.

He watches over me and will never allow 675  
 Dread demons to torment me without end.  
 On me your malice is meaningless and wasted,  
 Your purpose pointless, your hatred hopeless.  
 You will never drag me into despair and darkness,  
 Never seduce me in the snares of sin, 680  
 Never touch me with your terrible afflictions.  
 You are damned demons, marauders and murderers,  
 Exiles and outlaws, unblessed and undone.  
 My heart is filled with faith—my soul seeks salvation,  
 A better life in a homeland of eternal light 685  
 With the glory of the Father and the light of the Savior,  
 A redeeming radiance you shall never see.  
 Your perverse pride expelled you from heaven  
 When jealousy arose in your maddened minds.  
 You imagined yourselves as glorious as God. 690  
 Your envy was your evil undoing. Your rebellion  
 Reached as far as hell. Your boast was your bane.  
 You fought for heaven's glory—you found hell's grief.  
 For your claim, God cast you downward into darkness  
 Where you discovered despair and a righteous flame. 695  
 Those tongues of fire lashed out with a bitter venom.  
 You were angels no more but angry demons,  
 Afflicted with agony, pursued by pain,  
 Bereft of joy and the company of angels.  
 Now you have traded blessing for burning, 700  
 Exultation for agony, hope for shame.  
 There's no point in thinking you can drag me down  
 Into the devil's lair of doubt and despair.  
 You will never catch me with your cunning craft,  
 Your sinful snares. You can never steal my soul, 705  
 Seduce or snatch me from my holy purpose,  
 Carry me off to the flames of hell,  
 Where the demons of undelight must dwell forever  
 In perpetual darkness till the end of days,  
 For I will live in a community of comfort 710  
 In a sublime kingdom with a host of angels,  
 Where the true King resides forever,  
 The help and protection of all mankind.”

Then God sent a holy messenger from heaven,  
 Who arrived like a terror speaking dread words, 715  
 Demanding that the devils return the hero,  
 The guiltless Guthlac, with life and limb intact,  
 Unburned and unblemished, from the edge of the abyss,  
 That wretched place, so that his eternal soul,  
 Properly prepared, might depart in joy 720  
 On another road, the pathway to heaven,  
 In God's perfect peace and protection.  
 Then the pack of fiends was filled with fear—  
 Their courage cooled. The messenger of the Lord  
 Was radiant as the sun. The bright guardian 725  
 Shielded Guthlac in his power and protection.  
 He bound those demons in dire restraint  
 With mental bonds, a force of mind  
 Beyond their knowing, commanding them:  
 "Bring Guthlac home whole. Let there be 730  
 No bone-breaking, body-bruising, skin-scorching,  
 Bloody wounding, or any sign of suffering,  
 When you leave him safely in the hill-home  
 Where you vilely seized him. He shall rule  
 That small realm without your sinister resistance. 735  
 I am the judge sent by God to say this:  
 You will heal with your hands all his hurts,  
 Accept his constraints, obey his commands.  
 It's no great secret that I am God's servant,  
 One of the twelve whom the Lord loved 740  
 In his human form. He sent me from heaven  
 When he saw envious demons tormenting his disciple.  
 Guthlac is my brother—his suffering grieves me.  
 He is my friend forever. When he's home alone,  
 I will be by his side, shielding and sustaining him. 745  
 If fierce fiends come to visit him in his sanctuary,  
 They will come face to face with an angry apostle  
 Who channels God's wrath to protect his champion.  
 To Guthlac I will be the gentlest of visitors;  
 To you I will be the grimmest of houseguests. 750  
 Now I must be a witness for Guthlac before God,

Bringing back the testament of his words and works  
 To the Lord who knows him and delights in his deeds.”

Guthlac’s spirit was glad after Bartholomew declared  
 God’s message. The demons were determined 755  
 To be obedient to the saint’s sacred commands.  
 Then the Lord’s chosen champion set out  
 On the welcome road home to his hillside,  
 The spot of land he had left and longed for.  
 The chastised demons bore him back carefully, 760  
 Holding him without hurt in their hateful hands.  
 In their fear of God, they carried him gently  
 And kept him from falling, cushioning his ride.  
 The holy builder was brought home to the hill,  
 Triumphant over all the temptation and terror. 765  
 He was blessed by God’s creatures great and small,  
 In sight and sound, in grove and glade.  
 Beautiful birds welcomed him home  
 With their colorful songs, a torrent of tree-music.  
 He had offered them food on many occasions 770  
 When they had flown hungrily around his hand.  
 Wild beasts also turned out in welcome,  
 Glad to be with this gentle spirit  
 Who had turned his back on the world of men.  
 They shared the joy of life in the wood. 775  
 The ground sang a green song, the birds  
 A bright hymn, the earth a rich melody  
 Of birth and bloom, the cuckoo a spring-song.  
 Guthlac was blessed in his wild-wood home  
 With green-stalk and birdsong, protected by God. 780  
 The guardian from heaven had driven out demons.  
 What greater pleasure has ever been granted  
 To any man in the memory of middle-earth?  
 We are all witness to these holy wonders,  
 The miracles that happened to a man of our time. 785  
 No one can doubt or deride this sacred story  
 Of God’s way of strengthening and shielding the soul.  
 Let no man’s mind be so feeble or foolish

As to miss the joy, the majesty and meaning,  
 Of this true tale—God delights in it too. 790  
 So the almighty Lord, who loves all creatures  
 Alive under heaven in their embodied beauty  
 And the races of men throughout middle-earth,  
 Wants us to imbibe the wisdom of these sacred stories  
 So that his truth may be made known, a payment 795  
 For the promise he has offered, a return for his reward.  
 He clears a way for our souls through life.  
 This is not the least of God's gifts when love  
 Lights up the heart with a shining grace.  
 So the almighty Lord exalted Guthlac's 800  
 Days and deeds. The holy warrior  
 Was faithful and firm against the evil demons,  
 Strong in virtue, steadfast against sin.  
 He kept his promises and prayed to God,  
 Thankful that he had been given time to suffer 805  
 Until God could lift him to a better life.  
 Then Guthlac's soul was borne into heaven  
 In the embrace of angels who carried him lovingly,  
 Bringing him gently before the face of God.  
 The generous and eternal Judge gave Guthlac 810  
 His soul's sustenance, his heart's home,  
 The radiant place his Ruler had promised  
 Where he might know joy without suffering  
 And find a reward for faith in the boundless bliss  
 And shielding arms of his loving Lord, 815  
 The Son of God, the holy shepherd,  
 Who guards all glory and shares out grace.  
 So the souls of the righteous will ascend into heaven,  
 Those who keep faith, follow God's laws,  
 And fulfill his promise with words and works. 820  
 They are Christ's communicants, his chosen champions,  
 Who bear in their hearts both holy hope  
 And a pure purpose in serving their Savior.  
 They carry courage and wisdom on the long road  
 To stand against sin and the attacks of demons, 825  
 Both subtle and savage, the lusts of the heart,  
 The doubts of the mind, the delights of the body,

The pains and pleasures of an imperfect world.  
 They construct a house where the soul can survive  
 All earthly suffering and will spiritually thrive. 830  
 They build a community with brotherly love.  
 They chastise themselves for their unchaste thoughts.  
 They sustain their minds and souls with meditation.  
 They love fasting and forswear feasting.  
 They hold no hatred and seek no sin. 835  
 They keep their commitment to truth and justice.  
 They accomplish on earth what Christ has commanded.  
 They will not sorrow or suffer after death  
 When the Lord comes calling but will follow  
 Their generous Judge, their righteous Ruler, 840  
 Through the streets of glory in the city of Jerusalem,  
 Where they will gaze joyfully on the face of God,  
 That perfect peace, beautiful and blissful,  
 And abide forever in the land of the living.

## GUTHLAC B

**F**or a general introduction to the *Guthlac* poems, see the headnote to *Guthlac A*. While the sources of the previous poem are debated, the source for this one is clear—chapter 50 of Felix’s legend, *Vita S. Guthlaci* (see Calder and Allen, 108–12, for a translation). Fulk and Cain point out that *Guthlac B* “loosely renders one chapter (50) describing the saint’s sickness and death, and it is this dependence that lends the poem its eastern hagiographical flavor, given the similarity of Guthlac’s mode of eremitism as portrayed by Felix, to that of the Desert Fathers” (103). Some critics have argued that the poet of *Guthlac B* knew the *Guthlac A* poem and decided to fill in the rather brief death scene in the former poem, but Roberts, in her edition, notes that “it does not seem likely that *Guthlac A* provided much in the way of actual source-material for the *Guthlac B* poet” (42). Greenfield notes that “this second Guthlac poem is quite different from its predecessor, emphasizing time rather than place, ‘Holy Dying’ rather than ‘Holy Living,’ the Fall and Redemption rather than saintly apotheosis” (Greenfield and Calder, 177). Important themes in this poem include the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden, the entrance of death into this world, Guthlac’s solitude in the wilderness, his struggles with demons (much less extensive than in *Guthlac A*), his love of the natural world, his visitations with an angel, his sickness over Eastertide, his conversations with his servant and disciple, his death accompanied by the earth’s shuddering (as in the case of Christ’s death in *The Dream of the Rood*), and finally, his servant’s sailing over the waves to report his death to his beloved sister. This last portion of the poem has strong elegiac elements that recall passages from *The Wanderer*.



The end of the poem is cut short because of the loss of a least a folio, but some or much of the missing material is probably the beginning of the next poem. Some scholars believe that *Guthlac B* is one of the Cynewulfian poems because of certain similarities in style and theme and argue that a Cynewulfian signature may be part of the missing elements at the end of the poem (see Bjork, 2001, 5; 2013, xi and note 20).

## Guthlac B

It is widely known to endless generations  
 And celebrated among people everywhere  
 That the Lord of creation, the almighty King,  
 Shaped mankind out of purest earth.  
 That was the beginning of all our offspring, 5  
 The blessing and beauty of generations to come.  
 Our father Adam was born first  
 Through the grace of God in paradise,  
 Where for him nothing in the world was wanting:  
 There was no lack or loss, no absence in Eden, 10  
 No inexorable ruin to wealth or well-being,  
 No transience to time, no fade or fall  
 To flesh or flower, no declining joy,  
 No waning life, no decay or death.  
 Mankind might have lived in that new land 15  
 Forever flawless in endless bliss  
 As life and limb, body and soul,  
 Dwelled in peace in God's presence,  
 If only Adam and Eve had lived his law,  
 Heard and held his words in their hearts, 20  
 Not twisted his trust. But finally they tired  
 Of too much obedience, so the subtle serpent  
 Tempted Eve to pluck the forbidden fruit  
 From the tree of knowledge of good and evil  
 And taste the flesh that would unmake innocence. 25  
 Eve ate the apple. It was that simple.  
 She devoured knowing and discovered death,  
 Then gave her husband Adam an equal share  
 Of the bitter fruit through the devil's guile.  
 Adam ate. He lost his smile. 30

Satan lured them lusting out of Eden,  
 Lonely as angels banished from bliss.  
 Paradise was lost to all their progeny.  
 In sin and shame they were thrust out  
 Into an alien world of weeds and woe, 35  
 Toil and torment, longing and labor.  
 For the tooth of crime, they paid the cost,  
 The taste of death. It was a bad bargain.  
 Ever after, the world's progeny would pay  
 In anguish and atonement for inexorable sin, 40  
 The soul's severance, and guilt before God.  
 Death rushed in and the devil ruled  
 Over all mankind in middle-earth.  
 After the fall, no one of that renowned race  
 Was ever so wise or able to follow God's 45  
 Will or do his work to escape the evil  
 Of that bitter drink that the young bride  
 Eve gave to Adam. That rich treat  
 Ruined them both and led to torment  
 And the loss of home. Grim death 50  
 Ruled all earth's inhabitants, all living things.  
 Still, a great number of saintly souls  
 In various places in the wide world,  
 In various ages in our whole history,  
 Have wanted to work the will of God 55  
 To reap rewards and regain a place  
 In the homeland of heaven. Revered books  
 Tell us how Guthlac through God's grace  
 Became blessed among the English.  
 He chose for himself eternal power and protection. 60  
 He worked wonders, miracles for men.  
 His fame traveled far and wide  
 Throughout the cities and countryside in Britain.  
 People said that through God's power  
 Guthlac appeared, healing the sick, 65  
 Caring for the infirm, curing the afflicted.  
 He restored broken bodies and unhappy souls,  
 Those shackled in pain and sick at heart.  
 Many wretched people brought him their sorrow,

Their misery and anguish. He brought them hope, 70  
 Comfort and consolation, help and healing.  
 He was God's servant to the wounded world.  
 No one can know the number of miracles  
 That Guthlac did through the grace of God  
 In his concern for people and his love of the Lord. 75

Often a death-band of demons, separated from glory,  
 Came to the house on the hillside where the saintly  
 Servant of the Lord, the strong and steadfast  
 Guthlac lived. In that wild wasteland,  
 Bereft of beauty, stripped of joy, 80  
 Those evil demons bellowed and bawled,  
 Shouted and screeched, raising a hubbub,  
 A clamor of sounds, a cacophony of tongues.  
 The Lord's champion, his chosen servant,  
 Strongly withstood that unholy host. 85  
 Those fierce fiends never acknowledged  
 A time of retreat. They came in shrieks,  
 Warring and wailing. Sometimes the shape-shifters  
 Howled like beasts in unholy herds;  
 Sometimes they cringed back into human shapes 90  
 With cursing cries. Sometimes the faith-breakers,  
 Twisting in flame, slithered like serpents  
 Or muscled into dragons, breathing and blasting  
 Venomous fire. They never found Guthlac  
 An easy target. The bold warrior was wise 95  
 To their tricks and torments. He stood his ground,  
 Never yielding to their deadly disguises.  
 He remained a holy man in his hillside home.  
 Sometimes bird families driven by hunger  
 Flocked to his hand for a gentle feeding, 100  
 Warbling their thanks for a welcome feast.  
 Sometimes travelers came to his table  
 To find some hope for their ailing hearts.  
 Pilgrims often came to his home in the hills,  
 Anxiously seeking his healing solace. 105  
 No one left a meeting with Guthlac mired in sin  
 Or marked by misery. He restored them all,

Body and soul, untwisted their torment,  
 Unraveled their rage, undid their despair.  
 Guthlac was a healer through God's grace. 110  
 The Lord protected him and gave him power  
 And perfect joy as long as he lived.  
 After Guthlac had inhabited the wilderness  
 For fifteen years, his death drew near,  
 An end to his suffering and strife. The Holy Spirit 115  
 Was sent down to comfort that blessed preacher,  
 Whose soul was alight with the urge to journey  
 Homeward to heaven. Illness invaded him,  
 But he endured with courage, keen to greet God,  
 Who had promised him a radiant and rich reward, 120  
 The peace of paradise. Pain pressed his bone-house,  
 His frail breast-hoard, in the nightly gloom,  
 Harried his heart, enfeebled his mind.  
 The spirit of Guthlac was glad to go home.  
 The Father of angels would not let him linger 125  
 Any longer in this world, suffering but sinless,  
 For his warrior had pleased him every day  
 With his courage and wisdom in words and works.  
 So almighty God reached down his hand  
 In might and mercy to touch the spirit 130  
 Of his faithful servant who was strong of heart,  
 Staunch of purpose. Hope was renewed;  
 Joy was at home in his holy breast.  
 His body-hoard burned; the illness inflamed  
 His heart and mind. His limbs felt heavy, 135  
 Weighed down with pain. His muscles relaxed,  
 Opening his heart's hoard for his soul to soar.  
 His eyes opened wide—he saw the truth—  
 That God had come down, his glorious guest.  
 He strengthened his spirit against the fierce fiends, 140  
 Fearing nothing—not the agony of illness  
 Or the attack of demons, not the severing of death  
 Or the dread of doom. A praise-song to God  
 Reverberated in his heart; love of the Lord  
 Animated his spirit. His pain was undone. 145  
 Time faded but he felt no great care

That his body and soul, wedded in the world,  
 Should break their bond. The days hurried by;  
 The nights darkened down. The hour approached  
 When a man must face the cruel consequences 150  
 Of his ancestors' fall and his own failings,  
 The fate of death, and meet God's judgment,  
 The legacy of Adam and Eve in Eden  
 When they paid the price for the taste of sin.

In that hour of suffering, Guthlac's strength 155  
 Grew weary, but his spirit was steadfast.  
 A grim disease burned hot in his breast—  
 His heart swelled, his bone-house burned.  
 The bitter drink that Eve offered Adam  
 At the world's beginning was ready for Guthlac. 160  
 The fiend had first served that hateful potion  
 To innocent Eve in the Garden of Eden;  
 She gave the deadly drink to her dear husband.  
 After that cup of crime, all people and their progeny  
 Paid a steep price for that bitter brew, 165  
 That first sin. After the fall, no one  
 Of the race of men could ever escape  
 The drink of death from that cruel cup.  
 A wise man knows that this is what comes  
 From the sin-swallow, the taste of mortality— 170  
 Eventually life unlocks itself,  
 And the death-doors welcome each of us in.  
 No fleshly creature, whether man or woman,  
 Noble or humble, can escape the clutches  
 Of unwavering death. That fierce foe 175  
 Rushes after us, counting on illness, strife,  
 Or the twist of time to take us down.  
 The lonely stalker, the savage shade,  
 The relentless warrior, stole close to Guthlac.  
 The holy man lived with a young servant, 180  
 A caretaker who visited him each day.  
 He was kind and considerate and loved to sit  
 At Guthlac's side in God's temple, listening  
 To the preacher speak about his heavenly home.

Now he wanted to hear what the saint had to say 185  
 In his time of need. Sickness assaulted  
 His beloved master, harrowing his heart.  
 His mood was anxious, his grief was gathering.  
 The servant approached Guthlac, asking:  
 “My friend and master, beloved father, 190  
 Brother to all, caretaker of companions,  
 How is it that your body is so tormented,  
 Your spirit assailed? I have never seen you  
 So sorely pressed. Can you still converse,  
 Or have you lost the power of speech? 195  
 It seems to me that last night your life  
 Was in jeopardy. Today illness overcomes  
 Your frail flesh, attacking your body  
 With painful wounds. Your lot is suffering,  
 While mine is sorrow. Your terrible affliction 200  
 Inflames my heart. I cannot escape this anxiety  
 Unless you speak and comfort my care.  
 Can you tell me how this illness will end?”  
 Guthlac answered back slowly—his breath  
 Was short. A bitter bone-killer assailed him, 205  
 But he spoke bravely to his beloved servant:  
 “A terrible pain has taken hold of me  
 In the dark of night, burdening my body,  
 Unlocking my bone-house. Some illness  
 Creeps in, clutching at my heavy heart. 210  
 The house of my soul, this carcass to come,  
 This frail flesh, these coverings of clay,  
 Are bound for a bed of earth, a grave  
 Resting place. My hour draws near.  
 My foe is fearless and not slow to fight. 215  
 I can evade my enemy for seven nights,  
 But on the eighth, my soul must be severed  
 As the day dawns. Then all my time  
 In this world will be done. My grief will be gone,  
 And I will reap the reward of the righteous 220  
 At the knees of my Lord, a bright blessing  
 And the gift of grace, unending bliss  
 With the Lamb of God, my holy Savior.

Now my soul is yearning for its final journey.  
 You know death will soon sever life from limb. 225  
 My time of lingering here grows too long.”  
 Then there was much weeping and mourning.  
 The servant grew heart-sad when he heard  
 That his holy master would leave this life.  
 At that sudden message, that dreaded news, 230  
 His mind was darkened, his spirit distressed,  
 Because he saw his master’s soulful yearning  
 For his final journey. Grief seized his heart.  
 He suffered his passionate tears to fall  
 In waves. Fate could not forever keep 235  
 That precious treasure locked up in life,  
 The sacred soul of his dying master.

The saintly soul saw the grieving spirit  
 Of his faltering servant, so the good man,  
 Who was dear to God and a support to men, 240  
 Set about healing the young man’s heart.  
 He spoke with a gentle, sustaining joy,  
 Offering him comfort and consolation, saying:  
 “Put away your sadness, your mourning for me.  
 Though this illness eats away at me, 245  
 Burning my body, harrowing my heart,  
 I welcome the wisdom of my Master’s will  
 And feel no dread in this hour of death.  
 I fear no wasting flesh or demons’ welcome  
 At the gates of hell. Neither the first-born fiend 250  
 Nor the offspring of iniquity can justly accuse me  
 Of any sin or crime, any secrets of the soul,  
 Any fleshly shame. Those dark devils  
 Must abide forever in the house of flame,  
 The abyss of agony, in exile from the Lord. 255  
 In that hall of death, there is no mercy,  
 No light or love except for the eager embrace  
 Of endless fire. That is a joyless house.  
 Put away your sadness, my beloved son.  
 I am on my way to heaven’s homeland 260  
 And the just reward for my worldly works,

An unending joy with my eternal Lord.  
 There is no misery for me, beloved boy,  
 No bodily hardship or heart's heaviness,  
 As my soul is set free to seek my Father 265  
 And a place in heaven with my glorious King.  
 I have pleased the Lord each day with my deeds,  
 My words and works, my spiritual mysteries.  
 My reward will be rich, a flawless treasure.  
 My heart's desire is a home in heaven. 270  
 My soul strives to be set free from flesh  
 To find an unblemished life of bliss.  
 My days here hold no more pain and suffering.  
 My life falters, my body must fall.  
 I will leave my temporary, earthly home 275  
 To find my peace in paradise with God  
 Where my rich reward is untouched by time."  
 Then the holy warrior, the wise hero,  
 Gave up words. His weary spirit  
 Needed rest. The heavens circled round 280  
 Over the homes of men. Time turned,  
 A strange succession of darkening nights.  
 That day approached when the living Lord  
 In human flesh and embodied form  
 Had climbed the cross, eternal and almighty, 285  
 To conquer death and redeem mankind.  
 He wrought the resurrection of the body  
 When he rose from earth at Easter time  
 And harrowed hell, leading a saintly host  
 Homeward to heaven, gathered in glory. 290  
 So the blessed Guthlac in that auspicious hour,  
 Peaceful in spirit in spite of his pain,  
 Marshaled all the strength in his soul  
 To rise up and greet his loving servant  
 In spite of his exhaustion and hard affliction. 295  
 He centered his mind on life's holy meaning,  
 Meditating on mortality and God's mercy  
 And made an offering to please his Lord.  
 From his well of wisdom and sacred knowledge,  
 He praised God and began to preach 300



The Gospel truth through the saving grace  
 Of the Holy Spirit to his beloved servant.  
 He spoke of sweet revelations, victory-signs  
 Confirming the promise and power of the Lord,  
 The radiance of creation, the peace of paradise, 305  
 So that his servant heard these holy words  
 And bathed in their bliss in untold ways  
 Never before experienced in his earthly life.  
 These were God's miracles marvelously told,  
 An eternity opening up to his imagination, 310  
 A mystery made plain by this inspired teacher,  
 A truth beyond the mind or mouth of any man.  
 This spell seemed woven of angels' words  
 Like ethereal threads from the Lord's loom,  
 Like strands of light in an eternal web, 315  
 Beyond the craft or ken of mortal man.  
 It was a miracle that the heart of anyone  
 Could hold such wonder in a worldly garb,  
 That such power could find a place on earth,  
 Such wisdom wind its way into our world. 320  
 This was a deep way of knowing and being  
 Beyond human bounds that the Lord of angels,  
 The Savior of souls, had given to Guthlac.

Four days had passed since God's servant Guthlac  
 Had grown gravely ill, enduring his affliction 325  
 With great courage. He felt no sorrow,  
 No misery of mind, no heaviness of heart,  
 Over the separation of his soul from his body.  
 Death crept up like a furtive thief,  
 Silent and stealthy, cruel and resolute, 330  
 Seeking his soul-house, the broken body.  
 On the seventh day since the arrows of illness  
 Had pierced his body, harrowed his heart,  
 Unlocking that treasure-chest with cunning keys,  
 Guthlac's wise servant came again to visit 335  
 His master and mentor in that holy house.  
 He found his blessed and blameless lord,  
 Strong in spirit, frail in flesh, past hope,

Lying on his bed in God's temple,  
 About to leave this world, his body afflicted 340  
 With surging pain. It was the sixth hour  
 At midday, the last day for holy Guthlac.  
 His life in flesh had found its limit.  
 Assailed by illness, painfully pierced  
 By death's unseen arrows, he could hardly draw 345  
 Any breath or raise his voice to speak.  
 His beloved servant, sad at heart,  
 Mourning in mind, greeted his master  
 With a muted joy. He prayed that Guthlac,  
 The saintly preacher, through God's power 350  
 Might summon speech to reveal to him  
 How his faith fared in the face of death,  
 How confident he was in the world to come  
 As he lay there in the looming darkness.  
 Guthlac spoke to his young servant, 355  
 One beloved man to another. The bold warrior  
 Could hardly breathe, saying softly:  
 "My dear son, the awaited hour  
 Is not far away for my life's last breath.  
 It's not long now till I give you my last words. 360  
 Hold fast to the covenant we have kept,  
 The words of fellowship we've shared in this world."  
 The sad-eyed servant replied to his lord:  
 "I will never allow our love to languish,  
 Our friendship to falter or grow faint, 365  
 Even now in your hour of need."  
 Guthlac thanked his servant and said:  
 "Be ready for a journey when my life and limb,  
 Body and soul, are finally separated.  
 When death arrives, depart from this house. 370  
 Travel to my dear sister, telling her joyfully  
 That I have begun my soul's long journey  
 To my eternal home with God in heaven.  
 Tell her with these words that I denied myself  
 Her agreeable presence in this worldly place 375  
 Because I desired to see her again in paradise,  
 Two sibling souls together without sin

In everlasting bliss before the face of God.  
 Our love will be steadfast in that bright city,  
 And we will know happiness with a host of angels. 380  
 Tell her to give my bone-house back to the ground—  
 Let my corpse be covered with clay,  
 A soulless body in a house of sand.”  
 Then the servant’s mind was sorely troubled,  
 Afflicted and oppressed by his master’s words. 385  
 He sensed that his life-leaving was not far off,  
 So he urgently spoke these words to Guthlac:  
 “I beg you, master, most beloved of men,  
 By the power of God, the Guardian of souls,  
 Please shield my suffering, ease my agony. 390  
 I see through your vision that the end is near.  
 Sorrow surrounds me, pain presses my heart,  
 Misery sits on my mind. The night is an anguish.  
 Still I have never doubted you, my father and friend.  
 You have always been my teacher and comforter. 395  
 Always I heard in the evening hours  
 As heaven’s candle, the radiant sun,  
 Slid down into darkness in the western sky,  
 Some other bright being speaking with you.  
 Troubled, I heard the counsel of this creature, 400  
 The wise words of this strange messenger,  
 This unfamiliar friend who came to visit  
 At the edge of day, the brink of night.  
 I also heard by dawn-light the speech  
 Of some ghostly guest in this holy house. 405  
 I’m curious to know what or who  
 In God’s glorious creation is coming to visit  
 And where he comes from. Can you tell me?”

Then after a long and painful pause,  
 The blessed one spoke to his beloved servant, 410  
 Revealing his courage with each arduous breath:  
 “Listen, my friend, to this death-bed truth,  
 Which I’ve never told to anyone on earth,  
 Lest men and women should have marveled at it,  
 Doubted or denounced it, mocked it in stories. 415

I have lived my life in quiet solitude  
 So as not to compromise my soul through boasting  
 Or risk God's wrath through holy pride.  
 My glorious Lord, the Giver of life,  
 Since the second year of my living alone 420  
 Here in this hermitage, has sent me a visitor,  
 A holy spirit, a heavenly angel,  
 A mighty servant who has sought me out  
 Each morning and evening, lifting my pain,  
 Mending my mind. He reached through my breast 425  
 To my heart's hoard, leaving me the gift  
 Of great wisdom, shaping a sacred vision,  
 A way of seeing that cannot be told,  
 A manner of searching into each man's mind  
 And sensing the hidden secrets of his heart. 430  
 So I guarded this sacred gift in my soul,  
 Never telling anyone until today  
 About this angel's glorious visits  
 At dusk and dawn. Now you know  
 This divine truth, dearest of men. 435  
 Keep it in trust. For the faith and fellowship  
 We have shared together in the fullness of years,  
 I will never leave you alone in this world,  
 Even after my death, troubled and heartsick,  
 Wondering and weary, an exile from love. 440  
 Have faith—I will be your friend always  
 In the world that exists beyond time.  
 Now my soul is setting out for its heavenly home  
 From its house of flesh. Time is not listless—  
 It hastens ahead into the arms of eternity. 445  
 This earthly casket, a cradle of flesh,  
 Grows weary on its frame. My body heads home,  
 Grieving at the grave. My spirit rises,  
 Eager to seek its heavenly home.  
 Now I grow weary with my worldly struggles." 450  
 Then Guthlac sank back against the wall  
 Where he was sitting and bowed his head.  
 He kept courage and continued breathing

Though his harried heart labored hard.  
 From his mouth arose the sweetest scent 455  
 Like the honeyed smell of summer plants  
 Whose roots are in earth, but whose blooms  
 Waft a delightful fragrance across the fields.  
 So Guthlac's breath drifted throughout the day  
 Until evening. Then the noble radiance 460  
 Of the sky began sliding down in the west,  
 Seeking its rest on an evening couch.  
 The northern sky gathered in a gray veil,  
 Wrapping the world in a gloomy mist.  
 Night pressed down on the bright beauty 465  
 Of the land. Darkness reached out to doom,  
 But the night was suddenly shocked with light  
 As a holy radiance rose over cities  
 And the homes of men. Then Guthlac  
 Waited patiently for the soul's promise, 470  
 Holding courage in his heaving heart.  
 His breath was broken, afflicted by illness  
 And death's bitter arrows. A divine light  
 Hovered over holy Guthlac all night long,  
 Erasing shadows, chasing away gloom, 475  
 A bright candle from twilight till dawn,  
 When the warm sun rose up from the east.  
 Then the glorious hero also arose,  
 Refreshed and radiant, looking at his servant,  
 His dear and faithful disciple, saying: 480  
 "The time has come to keep your promise—  
 Carry my message to my beloved sister.  
 Tell her my soul hastens to its Maker,  
 Leaving behind this broken body.  
 My heart is bound for its home in heaven." 485  
 Then the humble man took the sacrament,  
 Refreshed his soul with the holy Eucharist,  
 The noble food that sustains the spirit,  
 Raised his hands in a rush of joy,  
 Unclosed his eyes, those lovely jewels, 490  
 Brightest of head-stones, gazed happily

On the grace of heaven, and sent forth his spirit,  
 Robed in the radiance of his holy works,  
 Into the generous joy of the everlasting Lord.

Then Guthlac's soul was brought to bliss 495  
 As angels bore him into heaven to know  
 The lasting joy of living with the Lord.  
 Below, his body grew cold and lifeless  
 Beneath the night-sky. But the brightest beam  
 Of heavenly light, a holy beacon, 500  
 Swirled around his earthly house,  
 Surging toward the sky like a tower of flame,  
 Reaching right up to the roof of heaven.  
 It dazzled the dark like a fistful of stars,  
 Blazing in the sky like a score of suns. 505  
 A host of angels sang heavenly hymns,  
 Songs of victory, while saints mixed melodies  
 And blissful harmonies in the halls of heaven.  
 The scent of brightness filled the air.  
 Light was blooming—a fragrant symphony 510  
 Of sound and sight beyond the power  
 Of any earthly poet to put into words.  
 God's mighty praise-songs were heard,  
 Measure after measure, in their endless majesty  
 And eternal meaning. Then the island trembled, 515  
 The ground quaked, the servant shuddered.  
 He feared for his life and forgot about courage.  
 Bereft, he boarded a boat, urging forward  
 That wooden wave-horse on the flowing road.  
 The messenger and sea-steed moved as one 520  
 Under the relentless sun, past shores and cities,  
 Driven by waves of sea and sorrow  
 Until the ship's broad-bellied bottom  
 Ground on gravel, scraped on the strand,  
 Stood on the shore of that far haven. 525  
 The servant disembarked with a heavy spirit,  
 Heart-weary because his beloved master  
 Had been left behind, deprived of life.  
 His bittersweet memory brought hot tears

That washed over his mournful mind in waves. 530  
 He had a care that could find no comfort,  
 For he was bound to bear the terrible news,  
 The sad but true tidings to Guthlac's sister,  
 A saintly maiden, a joyous virgin.  
 He made no secret of his deep suffering, 535  
 Singing a death-chant for his beloved friend.  
 From the heart's well, he lifted these words:  
 "Courage is best for one who endures  
 The loss of his lord and afterwards broods  
 With a melancholy mind on the shape of fate 540  
 And the severing of those unbreakable bonds  
 Of faith and friendship when the time comes,  
 Woven by fate. The wounded wanderer,  
 An exile from love, knows the taste of grief.  
 He remembers his lord, his treasure-giver, 545  
 Gone from the world, gathered up in the ground.  
 He must go from the grave, wrapped in woe,  
 On a joyless journey, lamenting the lost life.  
 I have no reason to rejoice at his death.  
 My beloved lord, a glorious leader 550  
 And your dear brother, the noblest man  
 Ever born in England between the shores  
 Of the surrounding seas, the joy of kinsmen,  
 Protector of the poor, shielder of the suffering,  
 Sustainer of friends, has gone home to glory 555  
 From this weary world through the judgment of God.  
 Now his earthly portion, the frame of flesh,  
 The broken bone-house, rests on a death-bed  
 In his house in the hills, and his heavenly portion,  
 The sacred soul, has been borne from his body, 560  
 Lifted to the infinite light of the living Lord.  
 My master Guthlac asked me to tell you  
 That there would always be a shared home  
 In heaven for brother and sister, a sacred trust,  
 A twosome in truth, an eternal joy 565  
 With a host of angels and holy saints,  
 A glorious reward for your blessed works  
 In this weary world. My victorious master

Said as he hastened homeward into heaven  
That you should cover his corpse, dearest maiden,  
Bury his body with a blanket of earth.  
Now that you know my mournful mission,  
I must wander forth, in exile from joy,  
My heart burdened by the memory of my lord.

570

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## AZARIAS: THE SUFFERING AND SONGS OF THE THREE YOUTHS

At least one folio is missing between the end of the previous poem and the beginning of this one. The fragment that exists here includes a description of the suffering and song of Azarias (Azariah) and that of the three youths, based on the Book of Daniel in the Vulgate Bible. Alternative titles suggested for this poem are *Azarias*, *The Canticles of the Three Youths* (Muir, 157), *The Songs of Azarias and the Three Children* (a possibility noted by Farrell, 37), and *The Three Youths* (Remley, 82). There are a substantial number of parallel lines in this poem and a portion of *Daniel* in the Junius Manuscript. The correlation between the two texts is high at first (in OE, lines 1–75 of *Azarias* and 279–366 of *Daniel*; in the translations, lines 1–80 and 286–370) and shows what Remley calls a “progressive divergence” (2002, 87) as the poems progress. Fulk and Cain explain that “there is no consensus about how to explain the connection between the two poems—which borrows from which, and whether this might not be a case of memorial rather than literate transmission,” but they note that “it is difficult to believe that *Azarias* 1–75 is not copied from some written recension of *Daniel*, since the correspondence is in many ways so precise” (116). Farrell points out in his edition that “*The Songs of Azarias and the Three Children* were important in liturgy on occasions of supplication and celebration from the earliest times” (39) and notes the significance of the expansion of the role of nature in the latter half of the poem. The poem opens with an implied dramatic situation: the lord of the Chaldeans has ordered Azariah and his friends to be burned for their stubborn faith, but an angel descends to protect them from the flames. The Old Testament story here takes on a pronounced Christian coloring at the end of the poem, when Christ is mentioned both as a shaper of the

natural world and as a protector of the fire-bound faithful. The missing lines at 29 ff., due to the cutting away of the top of the manuscript folio, have been supplied from the corresponding lines in *Daniel*.

## Azarias: The Suffering and Songs of the Three Youths

\* \* \*

Then holy Azariah spoke his mind,  
 Praising God in prayer and song,  
 Out of the heat of surrounding flames.  
 Wise in works and firmly determined  
 To perform good deeds, he spoke these words: 5  
 “Lord of all creatures, Maker of all things,  
 Your matchless strength can save mankind.  
 Your name is glorious, bright and beautiful,  
 Renowned in the nation. In every deed  
 Your judgment is proved powerful and true, 10  
 Your counsel propitious. Your will is our guide,  
 Shaper of souls, to worldly prosperity.  
 Protect and preserve us, Ruler of heaven.  
 Save us from affliction and oppression,  
 Suffering and torment. Almighty Father, 15  
 We beg for mercy, bound by a ring of fire.  
 We have earned this woe in our worldly lives;  
 Our forefathers also were steeped in evil,  
 Immoral city-dwellers stained with sin,  
 Swollen with pride. They committed crimes, 20  
 Breaking laws, abhorring the holy life.  
 Now we wander through the wide world,  
 Unprotected, ungraced, unfaithful, displaced—  
 Sometimes irrelevant, sometimes despised,  
 Sometimes enslaved in terrible torment, 25  
 Treated as possessions by heathen kings.  
 We are the hated exiles of earth.  
 You have driven us into tyranny and bondage  
 [Where we struggle and suffer. God of glory,  
 We offer thanks for days of hard discipline, 30  
 Our penance for pride. Do not forsake us Father,  
 But manifest your mercy, Creator of souls—

Keep those holy covenants, those sacred promises  
 You established] with Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph.  
 Shaper of spirits, you promised through prophecy 35  
 In distant days that you would deliver them,  
 Increase their progeny, bringing forth in birth  
 Expanded families in great sovereignty,  
 A people countless as the circling stars,  
 Numerous as the grains of sand on the shore, 40  
 Or the waves rolling endlessly in the ocean,  
 The boundless salt-seas—a people proliferating  
 Through the twists and turns of expectant time.  
 We are the survivors who suffer, Lord—  
 We pray that you keep your old promise 45  
 To make manifest your power and glory,  
 So that now the Chaldeans and other peoples  
 Will know that you alone are the Lord Eternal,  
 Victorious Shaper, God of glory,  
 Sovereign and shield, sustainer of truth, 50  
 Righteous Ruler of the world's creatures.”  
 So the holy man praised his Maker's mercy,  
 Speaking his mind. Then suddenly from the skies  
 A dazzling angel descended, a beautiful being  
 Robed in radiance. He carried comfort, 55  
 A saving grace, a lifeline from God.  
 Holy and heaven-bright, that powerful angel  
 Forced back the flame so the bitter blaze  
 In awe of the angel would not burn brightly  
 But protect those men who obeyed God's law. 60  
 He swept back the fire, scattered the flame,  
 So their bodies were unburned, their hearts untouched.  
 When the angel arrived in the glorified air,  
 The fire in the cruel furnace cooled down—  
 It felt like a summer shower in the noon heat, 65  
 A relief of wind and wet, a delight of raindrops.  
 The flame was quenched by the Creator's power,  
 A gift of grace for three suffering, saintly men  
 Who survived the fierce flames of the furnace  
 And emerged, praising God with all their might. 70  
 Then they commanded the children of men

And all things that thrive under the roof of heaven  
 In the whole of creation to bless the Lord.  
 The three bold survivors, wise in mind,  
 Said to their Creator with a single voice: 75  
 “Gracious Father, let the full glory  
 Of the world’s creatures and created wonders,  
 The heavens and angels, the bright clear waters,  
 The virtue and strength of all earthly things,  
 Praise your power and worship you. 80  
 Let the sun and moon radiate and reflect  
 Your brilliant glory, O righteous King,  
 Our living Lord, and lend to earth  
 Both fruit and grain, your fertile gifts.  
 You often send the morning rain 85  
 To fields and forests to freshen and feed  
 Root and stem, seed and sapling,  
 So that each green thing gathers life,  
 Leaps into being, grows leaf and bloom.  
 Your rain succors and sustains all life, 90  
 Finds and fashions a deep fertility,  
 Warms earth, enriches roots, sings up shoots.  
 God’s greatest glories are his gifts to men.  
 The wise man sees his holy helper,  
 His savior and sustainer, the God who gives us 95  
 Every good thing, who promises us all,  
 A plenty beyond fields, a harvest of hope,  
 If we desire and deserve our Maker’s mercy,  
 A generous judgment, when at his bold bidding,  
 The severed soul shall leave the bone-house, 100  
 Journey from the body on that long road home.  
 Almighty Lord, may all spirits praise you,  
 All earth’s energies, all natural forces  
 From burning blaze to cooling breeze,  
 From summer sun to winter storm, 105  
 From dawn to dusk. Let all creation exult  
 In the name of the Lord and his prolific power,  
 From spring to fall, sun to shadow,  
 Seed to shoot, song to silence.  
 Let’s celebrate each new day’s delight 110

In God's dominion, each bright bidding,  
 Each law of love. His power prevails.  
 Even the cold wind adores Christ the King.  
 Frost and snow, the bitter winter weather,  
 Bright lightning, the flash of fire— 115  
 All laud the Lord, his might and majesty,  
 His prevailing power. The earth itself  
 Praises God with produce, the green gift  
 That sustains our living and lets us thrive.  
 The tribes of men grow powerful and prolific 120  
 Because of the blessings provided to us  
 Throughout the ages by our beloved Lord.  
 We plow and plant and wait for nature's  
 Nurture through God's strength. We hope  
 For rich rain and heavy harvest fruit. 125  
 Let the full fields and groves of middle-earth  
 Praise the power of your generous creation.  
 Let the oceans and rivers exult and sing.  
 You carve the course of land-lane  
 And whale-road, the broad plains 130  
 And deep waters where beasts roam  
 And strange sea-creatures dive and swim—  
 All sustained by your making might.  
 They know their nature, their place appointed  
 By their holy Shaper, the Shepherd of light. 135  
 You are the ruler and well-spring of rivers,  
 The sovereign source of every stream.  
 You send the world clear water from cliff-side,  
 A glorious king's pure and powerful gift  
 To sustain his people. The sweet-singing 140  
 Birds of the air bless you, warbling hymns  
 To their heavenly king. The fish sing  
 Silent songs in the thick thrum of water  
 Only you can hear. The cattle low for their Lord.  
 The people bless you for their bounty and being. 145  
 Let the tribes of Israel glorify their God.  
 Let the priests and disciples, lords and servants,  
 Be humble before you, O holy Creator.  
 Now we three—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—

Praise your power, your mercy and might. 150  
 We bless you almighty Father in heaven,  
 The true Son, and the victorious Spirit,  
 For sending us here this guardian angel  
 To shield and protect us from fire and foe,  
 From the dark heat of our enemies' hatred, 155  
 With his sheltering wings, his sustaining embrace."

Then the heathen hordes exploded in fury,  
 Rushing madly toward the fiery furnace,  
 When God's foes saw that he would not suffer  
 His faithful young men to be burned to death. 160  
 Christ shielded them from the fierce flames.  
 Then the heathen messenger, trembling in terror,  
 Returned to the hall to report to his lord,  
 Announcing before the gathered nobles  
 His terrible truth: the holy ones were untouched 165  
 By the furnace-flames. Their faith was intact.  
 The lord and his nobles heard that grim news  
 As the fierce-minded messenger began to speak:  
 "I know that we bound the three young men  
 In a blaze of fire, an oven of agony— 170  
 But suddenly I saw not three but four,  
 As something strange came shimmering in the air.  
 No human counsel could carry any weight  
 In that moment of wonder. The youths held their place  
 On the hot hearth-stones, unhurt by the heat, 175  
 Untouched by the oven's fierce flames.  
 There was a radiant angel among them,  
 Brighter than fire, cooler than ice,  
 Impervious to the blaze in his robes of glory."  
 When the Chaldean prince swallowed those words, 180  
 The stubborn lord left his hall in a hurry  
 And went to the fire to see the wonder  
 With his own eyes. The arrogant lord  
 Stood before the pyre, commanding the youths  
 To come out of the flame. The saints emerged, 185  
 Telling the lord they were untouched, unscathed,  
 And that faith had saved them from the evil oven.

They walked through fire, wrapped in glory,  
And the flame could not find them, burn their bodies,  
Or ravage their robes. With their souls' protection 190  
And the Lord's love, they stood against sin,  
Triumphed against terror, exhausted evil.  
They were shielded by virtue and an angel's embrace,  
So that no heathen fire or unfaith could reach  
Into the sacred spaces of their holy hearts. 195

## THE PHOENIX

The OE *Phoenix* is based on a rich tradition of legendary tales about the wondrous bird that is able to restore its life in old age by suddenly combusting and then arising anew out of its own ashes. The first half of the poem is “a free and creative adaptation and development of Lactantius’s *Carmen de ave phoenice*, by a poet well-versed in Christian theology” (Muir, 468), while the latter half draws upon a number of sources, such as Ambrose’s *Hexameron*. N. F. Blake points out in his edition that the first 170 lines of the *Carmen* correspond to the first 380 lines of the OE poem, noting that “the English poet was by no means a slavish imitator and he adapted the original to suit his own ends” (1990, 25). Garde summarizes the complex allegorical meaning of the poem, noting that the phoenix “is presented as a specifically appointed, exemplary creature of God whose paradisaical sun-worship is reminiscent of post-Judgmental Christians glorifying Christ; whose essential nest-building function is peculiarly relevant to the endeavours of the aspiring Christian, and whose descent to earth, passage through death to new life, and return to its paradisaical homeland indicate those of Christ and by extension, the righteous Christian” (196).

There are other aspects to this highly developed allegory as well. Greenfield points out that “the bird’s departure from the earthly Paradise is, early in the ‘interpretive’ part, equated with the exile of Adam and Eve for eating the forbidden fruit” (Greenfield and Calder, 244). He also notes that the reference to Job later in the poem portrays the Old Testament figure as one “who, like the Phoenix, is certain in his faith, knowing he will rise again to enjoy happiness with the Lord” (244). N. F. Blake points to a possible connection between the tree of the phoenix and the tree of the knowledge of good and



evil in Eden, saying, “It is not too fanciful to think that it was upon this tree, the highest in the garden, that the phoenix perched” (1990, 84). The bird’s miraculous ability to die and be reborn through the cleansing and rejuvenating fire brings together a variety of Christian themes, from the fall of man to the resurrection of Christ, to the Judgment Fire and the redemption of the blessed. As in *Advent Lyric II*, the sun in this poem probably draws on a wordplay that associates the sun (OE *sunne/sunnu*) with the Son (OE *sunu*). The poem ends with a vision of the blessed in heaven in a macaronic passage with each opening half-line in Old English and each closing half-line in Latin (lines 680–88; see Cain for a study of macaronic verses in OE). Because of the complex demands of the poetic translation here, I have not attempted to indicate the OE and Latin half-lines in the macaronic section of the poem. For both text and a literal prose translation with the separate OE and Latin half-lines indicated, see Jones (18–63).

## The Phoenix

I have heard of the most glorious homeland  
 Far to the east, famous among men.  
 That region is not known by many rulers  
 Of middle-earth because God guards it  
 Closely in a far-off corner of creation, 5  
 Away from the eyes of all evil-doers.  
 The land is lovely, blessed with blooms  
 Of the sweetest scent, the pleasant perfumes  
 Of the rich earth. That land is unmatched,  
 Its Maker mighty, his power unparalleled. 10  
 There the doors of heaven are often open,  
 And the sound of angels and the sight of the blessed  
 Are a revelation and rapture, ringing with God’s grace.  
 He created that country with its broad plains,  
 Green woodlands, and sweeping space 15  
 Under beautiful skies. No blustering weather  
 Beats or batters that peaceful place—  
 No sleeting rain or freezing snow,  
 No frosty breath or scorching heat,  
 No blazing sun or battering hail. 20  
 Nothing harries or harms that land—  
 Its blooming beauty abides forever.

That high plateau is a perfect place.  
 There are no hills or hollows there,  
 No mountains, cliffs, mounds or crags, 25  
 As we have here—no deep dales,  
 No ridges, rock formations, or ravines,  
 No sudden steeps, no great gaps, no rough ground.  
 Flowers flourish on the smooth surfaces  
 Of that fair land, blossoms never fading. 30  
 Wise sages, word-smiths, say in their writings  
 That the flat land is twelve fathoms higher  
 Than any mountain looming brightly above us  
 Here at home beneath the stars of heaven.  
 That high paradise is a plain of victory, 35  
 A place of peace. Its groves are a vibrant,  
 Green gladness under the shimmering sun,  
 Summer and winter. Ripe fruit never falls,  
 Untouched by time in God's season.  
 Leaves will not fade or flowers lament 40  
 Their loss of sweet blush and beauty.  
 Flames will not waste that wondrous wood,  
 At least not until the world breathes  
 Its last breath in a blaze of glory.  
 Once when the great flood, fierce 45  
 And fathomless, raged across the earth,  
 Burying nearly all life beneath the water,  
 This plain resisted the rough waves,  
 Strong and secure, a fortress against the flood,  
 Through God's grace. So it will remain 50  
 Forever flowering until the Apocalypse arrives,  
 The grim fire devouring both breath and bloom,  
 And the Lord calls all creation to rise up  
 Out of their death-houses, the old tombs,  
 To come to judgment on the day of doom. 55  
 No hatred haunts that land, no evil or enmity,  
 No suffering or sorrow, old age or agony,  
 No need of sleep or cause for grief,  
 No feud or foe, mourning or misery,  
 Wound or woe, no clutch of pain 60  
 Or crimp of death, anguish or exile,

Want of wealth, sudden sickness,  
 Winter aches, drowning waves, icy chills.  
 No hail harrows the heart; no stormwind  
 Chills the soul. Yet sweet streams monthly 65  
 Spring from the soil, watering the wood  
 At God's command. These irrigate the earth  
 With cool water, bless and brace  
 Each blade and leaf, each stem and stalk,  
 Each branch and bloom. The beautiful trees 70  
 Never lose their green gowns, their gems  
 Of fruit and flower, their holy fragrance.  
 The fairest groves flourish there.  
 The woods know no breach of beauty.  
 The flowers mourn no loss of scent— 75  
 No dusky blooms descend to dust.  
 The gathering green never falls or fallows;  
 The world never knows spring's planting,  
 Autumn's reaping, winter's waste.  
 This fragrant paradise will persist through time 80  
 Until the Creator who crafted its glory  
 Decides to unmake its bright beauty  
 In the world's waning and the wake of doom.

In that loveliest of lands lives a wondrous bird,  
 Wing-strong, feather-bright, a lone-flier, 85  
 A beautiful creature called the phoenix.  
 Brave of heart, bold of purpose,  
 Perfect and unparalleled, he lives alone.  
 Death cannot harm him on that plain  
 Of paradise as long as the world remains. 90  
 Each day he gazes at God's bright candle,  
 The glorious sun traveling the sky-road,  
 Gathering his wings to ride the wind  
 To greet heaven's holy, gleaming gem.  
 He waits each dawn for the bright day-star 95  
 To rise like a sea-warrior up from the waves,  
 Out of the ocean, shining from the east,  
 God's radiant sign of the world's waking,  
 Renewing the covenant of life and light.

Before dawn the stars dim and descend 100  
 Into the night-dark waters of the west  
 Then the flight-proud bird waits and watches  
 Longingly over the ocean under the azure sky  
 Until that bright light of heaven rises up  
 From the edge of the sea on invisible wings, 105  
 Soaring imperceptibly into God's heaven.  
 That fairest bird, bound in beauty,  
 Gathered in grace in a timeless form,  
 Flies to the fountain-head, settles in the springs,  
 Bathes in the brook twelve times over, 110  
 Before the coming of heaven's candle,  
 That bright beacon that rides the air.  
 And twelve times over at every bathing,  
 The bird tastes the sacred spring water  
 Cold as the sea. After each refreshing bath, 115  
 Each surge and swallow, the proud bird  
 Swings up into a towering tree, soaring  
 On sun-bright wings. There he watches time,  
 Charting the changing hours as the sun glides  
 Through the eastern sky, God's bright beam 120  
 Over the surging sea. The arc-bright candle,  
 A sustaining star-fire, lights the land,  
 Radiates the world with grace and grandeur,  
 God's gift of life for all of middle-earth.  
 As soon as the sun rises high in the heavens 125  
 Over the salt-streams, the gleaming-gray bird  
 Soars from his tree-perch into the sparkling sky,  
 Wing-swift, flight-strong, warbling and singing  
 His song of greeting to the radiant sun.  
 The bird is so beautiful, the melody so buoyant, 130  
 The trills so heartfelt, the sound so thrilling—  
 Beyond the clarity and craft of any sound  
 Since the beginning of time, when the Creator  
 Shaped the world with an eternal singing—  
 That no one on middle-earth has heard such music. 135  
 The sound of his voice is sweeter and brighter,  
 More beautiful than the song-craft of any creature.  
 No trumpet or horn or harp's melody,

No strains of an organ or strings of a lyre,  
 Can match that sound—no human voice, 140  
 No chanted song, no swan's feathers—  
 None of the sounds the Lord has shaped  
 For man's joy in the sad-hearted world.  
 He sings his heart's hymns in living joy,  
 Till the sun dives down in the southern sky, 145  
 And the song is stilled. The songbird muses,  
 Lifts his head, muscles mind-strength  
 And body-wisdom into wide-spread wings,  
 Ruffling perfect pinions three times,  
 Feathers into flight, and heads home, hushed. 150  
 He marks each hour both day and night  
 On that high plateau, the plain of paradise.  
 It is ordained that the bird shall live in bliss  
 In his bath of beauty, guardian of the grove,  
 Warden of wings, tracker of sun, 155  
 In the stretch of time, till a thousand years  
 Have come and gone, and the gray bird's  
 Bone-house waxes with age and his spirit wanes.  
 Then in the fullness of time, the spread of hours,  
 The greatest of birds gives up the grove, 160  
 Lifts up in flight from the green earth,  
 Seeking a special homeland in the world,  
 Where no man dwells, no woman walks,  
 No child plays. In that secret place,  
 He rules his realm as the king of birds 165  
 For a single season, then wings westward  
 With his feathered friends, each seeking to serve  
 His glorious lord. Then the flying throng,  
 A troop of birds, arrives in Syria,  
 Where the pure phoenix drives them off, 170  
 So that he may settle in a shady grove,  
 Concealed from the eyes and minds of men.  
 In that secluded wood, he sits in a tall tree,  
 Its branches spread aloft, its blossoms bright,  
 Its roots fixed in earth under heaven's roof. 175  
 Men call this a phoenix tree, a name borrowed  
 From the bird. I've heard that the mighty Maker,

Lord of mankind, has granted to this tree  
 An unmatched gift—that of all the great trees  
 Whose branches reach out to embrace the air, 180  
 This one has the staunchest green, the brightest bloom.  
 The phoenix bird, like the phoenix tree,  
 Is under God's power, protected from evil.  
 No bitterness can blight him, no bale can break him.  
 He is shielded so long as the world stands. 185

When the wind rests in fair weather,  
 And heaven's holy gem brightens the sky—  
 When storms are stilled and seas are calmed,  
 Tempests are tranquil and clouds drift on,  
 Then the world's heart is hushed under heaven. 190  
 The bright sky-candle shines from the south,  
 Bringing warmth and light to middle-earth,  
 And the bird begins to build in the branches  
 A wondrous nest, a woven home.  
 The phoenix is driven by a deep desire, 195  
 A fervent need, to trade old age,  
 A heaviness of years, for fresh youth,  
 A bright birthing, a new beginning.  
 From far and near, he gleans and gathers  
 The sweetest stems, the richest roots, 200  
 A twist of twigs, some shoots and stuffing,  
 Fragrant herbs and the fairest flowers,  
 Spices and scents from every season,  
 Created by the Lord to sustain life,  
 Our Father's gift—both bloom and blessing. 205  
 This wild bird bears these treasures  
 In his beak and claw back to the tree  
 That bears his name, builds in its branches  
 In that quiet, secret, and secluded land,  
 A braided home where he lives alone, 210  
 His body surrounded by the warming sun,  
 His wings wound about by leafy green,  
 By supple stem, brightest blossom,  
 Sweetest scent, the best of earth's offerings.  
 He perches there in peace, prepared 215

For the living fire, longing for flight.  
 When the gem of heaven, the summer sun,  
 Shines high and hot over grove and glade,  
 Surveying the world, illuminating shadows,  
 Then fate is fulfilled as the bird's home 220  
 Is imbued with God's heavenly heat.  
 Each herb is an incipient oven, each flower  
 An expectant blaze. The nest is a nascent fire.  
 With a sudden, sweet scent and bright flash,  
 Both bird and nest burst into flame. 225  
 The funeral pyre blazes the bird's body,  
 Engulfing his heart, devouring his home.  
 The fierce yellow flame, savage as the sun,  
 Obliterates the phoenix, flesh and bone,  
 Melts off a multitude of years, gnaws 230  
 Limbs, sinews, feathers, skin into nothing.  
 Out of this fire of apparent unbeing,  
 The ashes gather into a miraculous ball,  
 A hope of feathers, a hint of song.  
 The noblest nest, the bold bird's home, 235  
 Is wholly burned, his bone-case broken,  
 His corpse turned cold. Out of the ashes  
 Comes an orb like an apple or an egg,  
 Out of which emerges a wondrous worm  
 Like a small creature cracking his shell. 240  
 He grows in the shade like a fine fledgling,  
 A proud eaglet. He gobbles and groans,  
 Plumes and preens, gathers to a greatness,  
 Bright-feathered, beautifully adorned.  
 His flesh is revived, his form refreshed, 245  
 Separated from sin, resurrected, reborn.  
 We too are like this bird. We bring home food,  
 Harvest grains and heavy fruits, the reaping gifts,  
 Before winter's chill or storm-wind's blast.  
 We store such food to sustain ourselves, 250  
 When snow and frost blanket the earth,  
 Icing it over like a crop of cold.  
 Our fruit and grain were once small seeds  
 Sown in the ground. Then the sustaining sun

Came beckoning life in spring's awakening, 255  
 Pulsing seed-skins, pulling sprouts, nurturing plants,  
 So that the fruit of the earth, the world's wealth,  
 Would be grown again from its own seeds.  
 So the old bird is born anew from his own flesh.  
 He eats no food, no grain or fruit, except the sweet 260  
 Honey-dew, a long night's nectar, a dawn-drink.  
 In this way the noble phoenix births himself,  
 Braces his new body, sustains his life,  
 And seeks again his old home under heaven.

When the bird boasts bright feathers again 265  
 Among the ashes of burnt herbs and plants,  
 And he can spread his renewed wings  
 To the wind's blessing, then young and graceful,  
 He gathers up his old body's bone-ash  
 And cinders that were once muscle and sinew, 270  
 Which the fierce blaze has turned to dust,  
 And begins with an artist's skill and craft  
 To assemble all the crumbled bones  
 And reshape the burnt flesh, the rich residue  
 Of the funeral pyre, wrapping it all up 275  
 With pleasant herbs, a fragrant bundle,  
 Something sweet from the death-spoils.  
 Then a deep desire begins to draw him home,  
 And he seizes his own relics in his talons,  
 Clutching a fistful of ash within his claws, 280  
 Winging homeward with his blasted bones  
 To his sun-bright land—his life redeemed,  
 His body renewed, his coat of feathers recast.  
 So he returns to his own bright beginning,  
 Just as God created him, perfect in that paradise. 285  
 Then that brave bird buries his own ashes,  
 His powdered bones on the high plateau  
 Of his old homeland. There the sun surges  
 Anew for him, sings his song of living heat,  
 When the star-stone, the brightest of sky-gems, 290  
 Rises up in radiance from the eastern sea.



The bird is blessed with multitudinous hues  
 In his feathered breast. His head is bright  
 Behind with blended green and pale purple.  
 His tail is dusky colored with hints of crimson, 295  
 Cunningly studded with bright spots.  
 His feathered wings are white beneath.  
 His neck is green; his bill gleams like glass.  
 His eye is stunning as a jeweled stone  
 Set by skilled smiths, encased in gold. 300  
 Around his neck is a ring of sun,  
 A circlet of feathers, a band of brilliance.  
 His belly is beautiful; his crest is bold.  
 His lithe legs and tawny feet are overgrown  
 With strong scales like a bright mail-coat. 305  
 This bird is unique but a little like a peacock,  
 As the books tell us, grown great,  
 Strong but not sluggish, no slow glider  
 Through the upper air but a speedy flier,  
 Elegant and artful, swift and bright 310  
 As streaking sunlight. The eternal Lord  
 Is the radiant Ruler who grants that bird bliss.  
 When the bird departs from his nesting ground  
 To seek his old dwelling, his bright-hued body  
 Is seen by multitudes of men and women 315  
 On middle-earth. People flock together  
 From north, south, east, and west  
 To see God's grace revealed in the radiance  
 Of that bright bird, as the true King of victories  
 Earlier endowed him with the noblest nature, 320  
 The fairest form, in that original creation.  
 He is the best and most beautiful of birds.  
 All men wonder at his shining grace,  
 And artists rush to catch his splendor  
 In storied words or shapes of stone— 325  
 Each trying to copy the phoenix in flight.  
 Then the race of birds returns from far and near,  
 A thriving throng. They warble praise-songs  
 To their noble lord, their glorious leader,

Once lost, now found, as they flock to him, 330  
 Surrounding him with a flying ring  
 Of joyful servants exulting in his return.  
 People watch and are moved beyond words  
 That the flock follows the phoenix so faithfully,  
 A wonder on the wing. The swarming birds 335  
 Celebrate the coming home of their beloved king,  
 Then lead their lord toward his ancient home,  
 That garden paradise on the high plateau,  
 Till their leader suddenly turns and swings away  
 From his feathered followers, soaring swiftly, 340  
 A solitary bird seeking his old homeland.

So the blessed bird survives his death-time,  
 Swinging back to his old beloved land.  
 Then the birds that followed the fair phoenix  
 Leave their lord, sad-hearted at their loss, 345  
 And fly homeward to their own native lands.  
 The ancient bird, now young again,  
 Settles into bath, branch, and sun.  
 Only God knows the gender of that bird,  
 Whether male or female. It's an unsolved riddle 350  
 How the bird breeds, reforms himself,  
 And is so richly reborn. The blessed bird  
 Enjoys himself in the green groves  
 And sparkling springs, thriving on the plateau,  
 Until another thousand years have passed, 355  
 And he rises again to greet death and be reborn,  
 Awakening from the ashes of the fierce fire.  
 Even when the phoenix expires, he has no fear  
 Of dreaded death or flaming dissolution,  
 For he knows well that after ashes, 360  
 He will rise again, reborn in his former glory  
 Beneath the shielding sky of heaven.  
 The phoenix is his own dear father,  
 His darling son, inheritor of his bones,  
 Those precious relics, that sacred dust 365  
 That seeds itself. God granted him this gift—  
 That he should become again what he once was

Before death, resurrect himself from the holy fire,  
 Bearing himself homeward again on bright wings.

So it is that the blessed wind their way 370  
 Through this earthly world's wretched exile,  
 Bold ones who brave the dark fires of death  
 To be reborn again in body and soul  
 And lifted up into everlasting life,  
 The rich reward for their good works, 375  
 A place in paradise, a homeland in heaven.  
 The bird is like those blessed servants of Christ,  
 The chosen ones who can change their forms  
 After earthly death, and through God's aid  
 Find themselves reborn, remade, returned home 380  
 Where the heart finds its own original joy.  
 We have heard that God made man and woman  
 Through his wondrous might and settled them  
 In a beautiful place that we call paradise.  
 There they lacked no joy, no generosity, 385  
 No daily grace, no season's sustenance.  
 They were at first willing to keep God's word,  
 But an old enemy of the Lord, out of deep envy,  
 Offered them forbidden fruit that they foolishly ate,  
 The taste of bitter knowledge from that tree, 390  
 So they lost life and were plucked from paradise,  
 Sorely seduced by Satan—and all for an apple.  
 After that misguided meal, their dessert  
 Was mournful misery, a sense of separation  
 From themselves and God. That was no gift 395  
 Of love to each other or their offspring.  
 They were painfully punished for the tooth of crime,  
 Enduring God's wrath and their own dark guilt.  
 Ever since that first sin, the sons of Adam  
 And the daughters of Eve have suffered, 400  
 Repeating the bitter pattern of original sin.  
 All men are mournful for that unmaking meal  
 When the serpent's envy drove us all  
 Out of Eden away from God's eternal bliss.  
 Satan deceived our parents in paradise, 405

So they were driven away to live in toil  
 In this valley of death, to build an earthly house  
 In place of Eden's home. The gates of paradise  
 Were closed to them and the plateau hidden  
 Through the devil's wiles until Christ came, 410  
 The King of glory, our only hope,  
 Who brought solace to those who were suffering,  
 Raising the wretched out of the abyss  
 When he opened heaven's doors after harrowing hell,  
 Returning the righteous to their home in heaven. 415

Scholars say, and sacred writings tell us,  
 That this holy story of redemption and return  
 Is like the flight of the phoenix, when the bird  
 Grows wise in spirit, old in years,  
 And leaves his homeland to seek shelter 420  
 In that restoring grove. The noble bird  
 Builds his nest of sticks and twigs,  
 Plants and flowers, herbs and spices,  
 Waiting for the wonder, the redeeming riddle,  
 Of the fierce flame that transforms time 425  
 And the bird's body, saving his vital spirit.  
 He longs for life, to be young again,  
 To defeat death, rise from the flames,  
 Fly back home again after his bath of fire,  
 And settle into the radiant peace of paradise, 430  
 That sun-bright land. Likewise our ancient parents  
 Left their lovely Eden, that earthly paradise,  
 A place of grace and glory, traveling  
 Into the arms of envy, the realm of exile,  
 Where evil enemies and unknown creatures, 435  
 Monsters and marauders made them suffer—  
 Harried and harassed, injured and oppressed them.  
 Yet many heeded and hewed to their Maker,  
 Served their holy Lord in many ways  
 With righteous words and virtuous deeds, 440  
 So their heavenly King held them in his heart.  
 The holy ones now gather around that tree,  
 Shielded from Satan and his serpentine guile,

His venomous sins, in their perilous hour.  
 God's warrior weaves his own nest of glory 445  
 With worthy deeds and alms to the poor,  
 Opposes all evil, fights against feud,  
 Avoids enmity, and invokes his Lord's aid.  
 He hastens forth in fear and awe of God,  
 Fleeing from vice and the powerful pull 450  
 Of the devil's dark deeds, unholy desires.  
 He holds his Lord's love and law in his heart,  
 Seeking through prayer a perfect peace,  
 Shunning sin, bowing humbly before God,  
 Dreading his judgment as a good man should, 455  
 Determined to offer the gift of good works.  
 The Lord is his shield through every season,  
 His righteous Judge and generous Redeemer.  
 So a man feathers his nest with faith  
 And good deeds. These are the firm fruits 460  
 And precious plants that the phoenix gathers  
 And weaves together from far and wide  
 Around the world and under God's heaven  
 To fashion his nest as a shield against evil,  
 And shape a shelter against the endless 465  
 Wickedness of the world, the heart's hatred.  
 So the warriors of God fulfill his will  
 Through mind and might. God grants them  
 Their just reward. He will weave for them  
 An eternal nest, a homeland for the heart, 470  
 Out of the herbs of their virtue and the precious plants  
 Of their good works because they have always loved  
 The Lord's holy lore, his sacred teachings,  
 And have chosen faith over worldly wealth.  
 The soul strives for eternal bliss in heaven, 475  
 Not a longer life in this fleeting realm.  
 So a man may earn a place in paradise,  
 A home in heaven with the high King,  
 During his worldly days until the end,  
 When death calls, that blood-hungry warrior, 480  
 Armed with the weapons of age and agony,  
 Feud and ferocity, fiendishness and fate.

Death will seize each life, bury each body  
 In the earth's embrace, separated from its soul,  
 Where it must molder in middle-earth, 485  
 Waiting for the Lord's call and the cleansing  
 Fire to sweep ravening across creation.  
 Men and women shall be led to that last meeting  
 When the Lord of hosts, the King of victories,  
 Calls his assembly to assign judgment. 490  
 When the Lord and Creator, Father of angels,  
 Savior of souls, issues his great clarion call,  
 And the sound of the trumpet is suddenly heard  
 Throughout the land, then shall each earthly body  
 Arise from the dust, from the cold clutch of clay, 495  
 To return resurrected to righteous judgment.  
 Dark death shall lose dominion over the blessed.  
 Those who are saved shall enter into eternal life  
 By the grace of God, as the wicked world  
 So rife with sin goes up in flames. 500  
 Everyone shall know dread on that grim day  
 When the fire wolfs down all worldly wealth,  
 Consumes crops, gulps down dappled gold  
 And the hand of greed, gathers each earthly  
 Good up in its terrible tongues of flame, 505  
 And feasts on flesh and other furnishings.  
 In the hour of revelation, the radiance of the phoenix  
 Shall be made manifest, a sign to mankind,  
 A harbinger of hope, a reminder of resurrection,  
 When God shall raise all buried bodies 510  
 From their tombs, their earthly beds,  
 Gathering their limbs, sinews, bones,  
 Woven together again with their separated souls,  
 Before Christ's knee. The Savior will shine  
 Like a radiant sun, the jewel of heaven, 515  
 On the holy ones from his high throne.  
 It will be well in that grim hour for those  
 Who can prove themselves pleasing to God.

Glad will be those resurrected in flesh,  
 Their reformed bodies cleansed of sin. 520

Each soul will return to its own bone-house  
 As the judgment flames burn high in the heavens.  
 That fire may be fierce to many men  
 Who come to judgment in mortal dread,  
 Both the just and the unjust. Sepulchers will open, 525  
 Bodies climb out, souls move back in  
 To their fleshly homes. Together again  
 On the final day, they will fear God's doom.  
 The ravening fire will ravage all sinners,  
 But the blessed will be encircled with virtue, 530  
 Shielded by their own earthly good works,  
 Which are like the noble herbs and pleasant plants  
 That the phoenix uses to feather his nest  
 So that it bursts into flames, kindled by sun,  
 And the bird after burning rises into new life. 535  
 So good men and women dressed in flesh,  
 Who follow the faith and work God's will,  
 Shall be young and fair, gloriously rejuvenated,  
 Yearning for the Lord's mercy at that last meeting.  
 Then righteous souls and steadfast spirits 540  
 Shall raise their holy voices in hymns of praise  
 To God's glory, strain upon swelling strain.  
 Then they will rise up, wrapped in the fragrance  
 Of God's fullness, the perfume of perfection,  
 The gift of their goodness, the wonder of their works. 545  
 Their souls shall be cleansed of all corruption,  
 Separated from sin by the purging flame.  
 Let no one imagine that this tale is untrue,  
 That this poem is a lie. It is a sacred story.  
 Listen to the wisdom of Job's songs. 550  
 Inspired by the spirit, blessed with insight,  
 Honored by the vision, he spoke these words:  
 "Deep in my heart I have no dread  
 Of dying in this nest, my last-breath bed,  
 To make my journey on death's long road, 555  
 Weary with years, covered with clay,  
 Dressed in dust, lamenting my deeds.  
 I hope through the gift of God's eternal grace  
 That I may be resurrected, renewed like the phoenix,

To live a new life in perfect pleasure 560  
 With my beloved Lord in the exultation of angels—  
 My only doom an endless delight.  
 The Lord's light never ends—his life  
 Sustains all living souls. He is the radiant Son.  
 Though my flesh shall feel the corruption of time, 565  
 My body become a feast for worms,  
 Yet the God of hosts will free my soul  
 In death's dark hour and wake me to glory.  
 This is my heart's hope—it never falters—  
 That I will enter a homeland in heaven 570  
 To abide in joy with the Lord of angels.”  
 So the wise seer sang this prophetic song  
 In ancient days about God's power and glory  
 And man's resurrection into eternal life,  
 So that we might understand the holy miracle 575  
 Of the bird's burning, the phoenix in flames,  
 His radiant rebirth. He gathers the fire's remnants,  
 Ashes and bones, sinews and cinders,  
 Carries them in his clutch to the house of the Lord,  
 Soaring skyward toward the transforming sun. 580  
 There he remains, restored, rejuvenated,  
 For many years where nothing can harm him.  
 Likewise, after death, through the Maker's might,  
 Souls shall travel together with their bodies  
 Heavenward, radiantly adorned, just like the bird, 585  
 Surrounded by sweetness, the herbs of grace,  
 Where that true and undimmed sun always shines,  
 And the Son of God, Savior and Ruler,  
 Reigns over the multitudes in eternal glory.

High over heaven's rooftops the Savior shines, 590  
 The radiant Redeemer, the Lord Christ.  
 The blessed souls with their restored bodies,  
 Beautifully adorned, will flock like birds  
 About the phoenix, their sun-bright Lord,  
 Exulting in bliss in their heavenly home. 595  
 There the fierce fiend, the demon of darkness,  
 Can no longer harm them, steal their hearts



With subtle guile. They will thrive in the light,  
 In the Lord's pure presence, just like the phoenix,  
 Bathed in bliss. The works of the blessed 600  
 Will shine forth forever in that perfect paradise,  
 Sun-bright before the glorious countenance  
 Of their almighty Creator, the ever-living Lord.  
 Their heads will be crowned in great splendor  
 With precious stones, a braid of gems, 605  
 A twist of light, a heavenly halo.  
 Their brows will brighten with holy bliss,  
 Gleaming with the radiant majesty of God.  
 They will live in the light of enduring joy,  
 Enjoying eternal youth in a world unwaning. 610  
 They will dwell forever in that heavenly home  
 In matchless beauty, adorned with grace,  
 Alive in the light of the Father of angels.  
 There they will live untouched by trouble,  
 Unmarred by misery, unharmed by strife. 615  
 No sin will unsettle them, no wickedness wound them,  
 No poverty plague them, no agony upset them,  
 No old age upend them, no hunger hurt them,  
 No thirst torment them. They will each exult  
 In the goodness and glory of everlasting God. 620  
 The blessed will sing out hymns of praise,  
 Hosannas to the Prince, and celebrate the power  
 Of heaven's King. Their perfect melodies  
 Will surround God's throne with the sweet sound  
 Of saints and angels, blessed and beloved, 625  
 As the host of heaven begins to sing:  
 "Our Lord and Savior, Shield and Protector,  
 All peace and power are in your keeping,  
 All gifts and goodness, all wisdom and wonder,  
 All shelter and sustenance, comfort and consolation. 630  
 The heavens resound with your eternal glory,  
 From the arc of angels to the curve of earth.  
 Protect and preserve us, almighty Father,  
 Our Creator and Ruler, our radiant King."  
 So the righteous will sing in that glorious city, 635  
 Sanctified in spirit, purged from sin,

Proclaiming God's majesty, praising his power.  
 His honor is eternal, without origin or end.  
 His blessing had no birth or beginning—  
 It always was, is, and will be, 640  
 Creation continuous, an everlasting gift.  
 Though he had a beginning in middle-earth,  
 As a child conceived in a virgin mother,  
 Born an innocent babe in Bethlehem,  
 Still his power remained complete in heaven. 645  
 He was bound to suffer in his human form  
 Slander and torture, suffering and pain,  
 The doom of death on the holy rood,  
 Christ's cross. Yet on the third day  
 After flesh-fall, his loss of life, 650  
 Through his Father's grace he revived and lived,  
 Resurrected and restored. So the fair phoenix,  
 That reborn bird, young in his new nest,  
 Is a token of Christ, the Son of God,  
 With his power of preserving life after death 655  
 As he rises reborn with life in his limbs,  
 A miracle of muscle, a wonder of wings,  
 Alive out of the ashes of his own death-fire.  
 So our benevolent Redeemer offered us aid,  
 Life without end, through his body's death 660  
 And God's grace, the greatest of gifts,  
 Just as the phoenix carries herbs and fruits,  
 A bounty of plants, a redeeming gift,  
 When he desires a new life beyond death.  
 So Christ eagerly climbs the cross, 665  
 Embracing his death, resurrecting himself,  
 Restoring his body, so that mankind may also  
 Have the chance to live reborn in heaven.  
 These are holy words, the wisdom of scripture,  
 The inspired writings of saints and sages 670  
 Whose hearts and minds were wholly on heaven,  
 An offering of fragrant words and works,  
 Celebrating their Creator, their radiant King.  
 Praise be to God in his everlasting glory,  
 In his power and perfection in the celestial city 675

Where he dwells forever surrounded in bliss.  
He is the righteous and radiant King,  
The majesty and might of all middle-earth  
And the heavenly host in the eternal realm.  
The Author of light has granted us here  
His righteous reward for our good deeds,  
The gift of grace, the deep delight  
Of being with him in the realm of bliss,  
The light and peace of that perfect place,  
The holy homeland where the heart's joy  
Endures in God's blessing, and the soul sings  
Timeless hymns to our triumphant Lord  
Among the exultation of angels. Alleluia!

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## JULIANA

*J*uliana is one of several saints' lives in OE verse. Woolf notes in her edition that "the martyrdom of Juliana took place during the Diocletian persecution, and was probably first set down in writing in the reign of Constantine, when the Church, at last unmolested, zealously sought out the names and histories of her martyrs" (1993, 11). The poem "is the earliest extant vernacular version of this saint's life" (Bjork, 2013, xv). It is probably based on a Latin prose life resembling the *Vita* printed later in the *Acta Sanctorum* of Bolland (Woolf, 1993, 11; Fulk and Cain, 100). Though the plot of the OE poem follows that of the prose *Vita*, there are significant differences in the characterizations and narrative foci. Fulk and Cain point out that the poet here "has increased the contrast between Juliana and her opponents by means of polarization . . . polishing her character and besmirching theirs," noting that "Heliseus is made particularly demonic and bestial in his deranged furor at her resistance" (100). Juliana is more worldly-wise in the *Vita* and even manipulates her antagonist with great skill. In the OE poem, she is an innocent martyr, however strong-minded, from beginning to end. Greenfield argues that "her *imitatio Christi* seems specifically reflected in at least two ways: (1) the punishments her father and suitor inflict on her have their parallels in Christ's Passion; for Africanus interrogates, beats, and hands Juliana over to Heliseus for judgment, while Heliseus has her scourged again and hung on a high cross for six hours; and (2) her besting of the devil in her prison cell resembles the Harrowing of Hell" (Greenfield and Calder, 169). Horner argues that "in a text like *Juliana*—a hagiographical and thus idealized portrait, likely read by female readers—the discourse of enclosure functions both on a physical, spatial level and a spiritual one: the woman is closed

and enclosed: she must maintain her body as an impenetrable fortress (a favorite metaphor in female saints' lives) against evil intrusions" (106).

There are two gaps because of folios missing in the manuscript that can be filled in from details in the prose *Vita*. After line 300 in my translation, the break contains a section in which Juliana forces the devil to admit that he is Belial and to confess his many crimes throughout history from leading Adam and Eve to fall and Cain to kill Abel, to Judas's betrayal of Christ (Woolf, 1993, 33). After line 566, there is a gap in which Juliana is tortured on a wheel of fire but endures the flame with the help of an angel who releases her. Her executioners are converted and later beheaded because of their conversion. Heliseus again orders her to be burnt alive, and she responds by praying once more for divine aid (Woolf, 1993, 47). After the gap, Juliana seems to be recounting to Heliseus some examples of holy men whose plight is like her own.

There is much debate about the runes at the end of the poem (indicated by bold capital letters in the translation), which spell out both individual words (which I have given both in OE and in translation in the text) and all together, the name of the supposed poet Cynewulf. The reading here follows the suggestions of Elliott (1953b). Little is known about the identity of Cynewulf, although there is much critical speculation on this account (see the headnote to *Christ II: The Ascension*).

## Juliana

Listen! We have heard bold heroes declare  
 Judgment on the reign of the ruthless Maximian,  
 A savage king who persecuted many people  
 Throughout middle-earth. That unholy heathen  
 Killed Christians, destroyed churches, 5  
 Spilled the blood of righteous believers,  
 Staining the grassy fields, the innocent earth.  
 His empire was endless, his power unchecked.  
 His perverse soldiers swept through cities,  
 Violent and depraved, wicked and deluded, 10  
 Exalting idols, embracing evil, sowing enmity,  
 Harrowing the holy. His troops hated God's law.  
 They wounded the wise, savaged the saints,  
 Burned the blessed, persecuted God's people,  
 His faithful warriors, with spear and fire. 15

One of his senators, a wealthy aristocrat,  
 Ruled fortified cities on the frontier,  
 Often inhabiting his homestead in Nicomedia,  
 Where he hoarded his treasure of heathen gold  
 And prayed in pagan temples to false idols. 20  
 He eagerly indulged his evil needs  
 And never once heeded the word of God.  
 His name was Heliseus—his power was a peril  
 To all mankind. In his devious heart  
 He began to desire a beautiful maiden, 25  
 A virtuous virgin named Juliana,  
 But she bore in her soul a saintly spirit,  
 A firm faith, and a love of God.  
 She vowed to remain pure and spotless,  
 Untouched, untainted, immaculate for Christ. 30  
 Then she was promised in an unwanted betrothal  
 To the rich Heliseus by her unthinking father,  
 Who was heedless of his own daughter's heart,  
 For the young virgin despised the idea  
 Of marriage to any man. Worldly wealth 35  
 Meant less to her than love of her Lord.  
 Her fear of God was greater than her want  
 Of wealth. She desired only spiritual treasure.  
 The rich aristocrat with his great power  
 Had his mind on marriage. His deep desire 40  
 Was for the young maiden to be made ready  
 To be a wife in his house, a bride in his bed.  
 Juliana rejected his offer, his jewels and gold,  
 His heathen hoard, and his greedy love,  
 Saying to him before a multitude of men: 45  
 "There's no need to indulge in endless torment  
 Of the heart. If you love the one true God  
 And are faithful to him, follow his laws,  
 Find shelter in his protection, raising songs  
 Of praise to his glory, I will grant you the gift 50  
 You so earnestly desire. On the other hand,  
 If you praise demons and promise your faith  
 To a false idol, an inferior pagan god,  
 Then this is the promise I hold in my heart—

You will never bring me home as a bride. 55  
 This is my vow, the word of a virgin—  
 No torture or pain, no suffering or sorrow,  
 No menacing threat will move me from this.”  
 The proud prince, corrupted by sin,  
 Inflamed with rage, heard the maiden’s words. 60  
 He was cold and cruel, blinded with anger,  
 Bent with wrath, an ungovernable passion.  
 The powerful man sent his speedy messengers  
 To fetch the girl’s father to bargain for his bride.  
 Those old sinners leaned their spears together, 65  
 Began to trade talk, heathens haggling,  
 A faithless father-in-law and scheming son-in-law,  
 Men making deals in a bridal market.  
 The heartless Heliseus, guardian of the realm,  
 Raised his weapon in righteous rage, 70  
 Speaking fiercely to the virgin’s father:  
 “Your daughter dishonors me, insults my affection,  
 Spurns my offer of wealth and marriage.  
 She blasphemes my gods before my people,  
 Assaults my integrity, angers my heart. 75  
 She insists that I worship some strange god  
 With offerings and praise, and lift this alien deity  
 Above all the other gods we’ve known and loved.  
 So I must turn unholy apostate before I have her.”  
 Then her father’s face grew darkly fierce. 80  
 He swore in anger, unlocked his heart’s hoard.  
 Seething with rage, he began speaking:  
 “I swear by the true gods, the guardians who hold  
 My faith and favor, and before you,  
 My glorious prince, wielder of wine-halls, 85  
 That if these words you tell me are true,  
 And Juliana is rejecting your generous offer,  
 Then I will not spare her or shelter her,  
 But give her up as an ungrateful girl,  
 A gift to you for desire or destruction. 90  
 Grant her life or death—your power is my pleasure.”  
 Then the father went back, searching for the maiden,  
 His spirit seething with a terrible fury.

He shocked her out of her cheerful mood,  
 Brought her to the edge of anguish, saying: 95  
 “You are the dearest daughter of my heart,  
 My only joy, the light of my eyes.  
 Juliana, you are being foolish in this faith,  
 Resisting your ruler and the wise judgment  
 Of revered counselors. Resistance is fruitless. 100  
 Give up your stubborn struggle and settle  
 For this generous offer from a powerful prince.  
 He is nobler, richer, and mightier than you.  
 He is a good friend who can help you succeed  
 In this difficult world. Don’t spurn his wealth, 105  
 His affection, his promise of lasting love.”

Then blessed Juliana, the gem of virtue—  
 Her heart true, her faith firm, her love fixed  
 On her only Lord—offered her answer:  
 “I cannot and will not marry this man 110  
 Unless he agrees to worship the Lord of hosts  
 More freely and firmly than he has done,  
 Adores him with offerings, following in faith  
 The one who created the light of the world,  
 Heaven and earth, the spread of the sea, 115  
 The length of the land. If Heliseus desires  
 To hold his unholy gods in his heart,  
 He will not have me in his heathen house.  
 He should seek another woman with his wealth.  
 I am bold believer, not a bride to be bought.” 120  
 Then her furious father spit out his answer.  
 He gave her no treasure in his gift of words:  
 “As long as I live, I make you this promise:  
 If you do not give up this folly of your alien faith,  
 If you continue to worship your strange gods, 125  
 Neglecting those who shelter and sustain this nation,  
 If you are bent on forsaking your father’s faith,  
 Then you shall forfeit your life, becoming food  
 For wild beasts who will tear at your throat.  
 If you refuse the handsome proposal of this prince 130  
 And treat his generosity like an unwanted gift,



You will trade majesty for misery, wealth for woe,  
 The dream of a desirable life for a deadly doom.”  
 Then blessed Juliana, wise and discerning,  
 Dear to the Lord, spoke to her father: 135  
 “I will be truthful to you as long as I live.  
 My faith is firm—my heart holds no fear.  
 I dread no doom, no punishment or pain,  
 No torture or terror, no unknown ordeal,  
 With which you threaten me, my reckless father. 140  
 I embrace no evil, endure no unholy marriage  
 With any man, no matter how powerful.  
 Your idolatry is unacceptable, your menace intolerable.  
 You cannot convert me from my love of Christ.”  
 Then her father grew furious and grim. 145  
 With a savage heart he ordered her scourged,  
 Tortured and tormented, telling her this:  
 “Recant these rash words. Refuse your faith.  
 This is dangerous folly to deny a prince  
 And denounce our ancient and noble gods.” 150  
 Then Juliana, undaunted by death-threats,  
 Strong in spirit, wise in mind, dear to God,  
 A blessed maiden, spoke boldly back:  
 “You will never persuade me to promise faith  
 Or tribute to deaf and dumb devil-shrines, 155  
 Soul-destroyers, ministers of hell’s torments,  
 Because I honor and worship the God of glory,  
 The one true Lord of heaven and earth.  
 I will put my trust in my true protector,  
 My Savior and shield against all hell-fiends.” 160  
 Then the maiden’s father Africanus in his fury  
 Handed her over to the fierce Heliseus.  
 At the first dawn-light, he ordered her hauled  
 Out of her home to the hall of judgment,  
 Where the court marveled at the maiden’s beauty. 165  
 Her bridegroom greeted her with honeyed words:  
 “Sweet sunshine, Juliana, your radiant face  
 Never fades, never shadows, never falls from grace.  
 There is bloom in your beauty, sanctity in your smile—  
 Be a bride at a wedding, not a heretic on trial! 170

Praise and propitiate our honorable gods;  
 Seek their protection, safekeeping, and care.  
 They can shield you now from terror and torture,  
 Grant you mercy instead of misery,  
 Offer you comfort instead of cruelty. 175  
 These perils are being prepared for you  
 If you do not propitiate our own true gods.”  
 The noble maiden answered immediately:  
 “I will never be driven by the dread of torment  
 Or the threat of torture to be your bride. 180  
 If you desire my fellowship, forsake your faith  
 In idols and demons. Recognize and revere  
 The God of glory, Creator of souls,  
 Lord of mankind, in whose shaping hands  
 The world is held, supported, and sustained.” 185  
 Then the proud prince before his people  
 Showed his savage mind. Fierce and furious,  
 Bound on vengeance, he ordered the sinless maiden  
 Stripped and stretched, mercilessly whipped,  
 While he laughed, mocking her, saying: 190  
 “The victory is won before the battle’s begun,  
 But I will spare your life even though you spoke  
 Such rash words and recklessly refused  
 To honor and worship our own true gods  
 If you sing a different tune. If not, your reward 195  
 Will be retribution, torment and terror.  
 Your unyielding soul shall suffer such pain  
 That your faith will falter. Be reconciled now  
 With the old gods. Give them precious gifts  
 Not rash blasphemies, sacrifices not unholy speech. 200  
 Offer praise-songs to secure a peace—  
 Let our strife sleep. Be my bride and bedmate.  
 If you persist in this foolish, rebellious faith,  
 Driven by the hatred of your idolatrous heart,  
 Then I must unleash my righteous anger, 205  
 Avenge these bitter insults and blasphemies  
 Against our true gods, and bring terror  
 To their fiercest foe—a defiant maiden  
 Who has angered them with ill-tempered abuse,

Mocked their mercies, slandered their sweetness, 210  
 Scorned their praise. These are the great gods  
 We've followed and worshipped forever in our world."  
 The fearless maiden responded in her faith:  
 "I do not fear your judgment, dread your doom,  
 Tremble at your torments, you foul sinner. 215  
 I place my heart in the hands of the Lord,  
 My hope in the God of highest heaven,  
 My Guardian and Guide, Savior and Sustainer.  
 He will be my shield against torment,  
 My protection against the cruel clutch 220  
 Of those dark demons whom you call gods.  
 They are vile and worthless, without virtue,  
 Without goodness, without mercy or meaning.  
 They are idols of emptiness, images of the void.  
 No one can find true faith there— 225  
 No peace or protection, comfort or consolation.  
 Who needs the friendship of unreal fiends?  
 They offer no balm or blessing, no sweet salvation.  
 I give my heart and soul to the Lord's love,  
 Christ's merciful keep. He rules all reigns, 230  
 Judges all earthly princes, powers all realms.  
 He is the triumphant Lord, the one true King."

It seemed hideous and shameful to Heliseus  
 That he could not change the maiden's mind,  
 For her faith was strong, her heart steadfast— 235  
 So he ordered her hung high on a gallows-tree  
 By her beautiful hair each day for six hours.  
 The sun-bright maiden suffered terrible torments.  
 She was struck and beaten with savage blows,  
 Then cruelly cast down and dragged into prison, 240  
 But she held firmly to the love of Christ.  
 In her meek spirit was a soul-warrior's strength.  
 Then the prison door, the hard work of hammers,  
 Was bolted and barred, confining the maiden  
 In a cruel place, but her heart was unbound— 245  
 Her faith was free. She praised her Savior,  
 The God of heaven, the King of glory.

In that dark dungeon, that cage of pain,  
 The Holy Spirit was her constant companion,  
 Her comfort and joy. Suddenly a demon 250  
 In the unholy dark, in the guise of an angel,  
 Burst into the cell. The enemy of man,  
 Authority of evil, seducer and slayer  
 Of innocent souls, exiled from God,  
 Began to speak gently to the holy saint: 255  
 “Why should you suffer, sweetest of maids,  
 Dearest of daughters, most precious of gems,  
 The prize of the Prince, our glorious Lord?  
 This terrible judge is not too generous!  
 He’s dreaming up tortures, promising pain, 260  
 Offering the gift of agony without end  
 If you do not please him. Be prudent.  
 Pledge your faith to the proper gods,  
 Propitiate the old ones. Be wise as a serpent—  
 Offer a sacrifice as soon as men come 265  
 To carry you back to the beam of pain,  
 The tree of torture, before you meet death  
 In an unheavenly spectacle. Submit and survive,  
 A maiden triumphant over the judge’s wrath.”  
 Then the virgin who feared no earthly judge, 270  
 Who dreaded no doom, whose heart was held  
 In the hands of Christ, asked the apparent angel  
 Who he was and where he came from.  
 The lying wretch responded to her:  
 “I am an angel of God, messenger of the Lord, 275  
 Minister of truth from heaven on high,  
 Sent here to save you. Great torments are coming  
 To gather you into the grim clutch of grief.  
 The Lord himself ordered me here  
 To urge you to recant and save yourself 280  
 While there is still time and a life left to save.”  
 Then the maiden was suddenly seized with dread,  
 Twisted with terror at these strange tidings  
 That the demon lord, the dark enemy of God,  
 Told her in untruth. The guileless Juliana 285  
 Strengthened her soul, calling out to God:

“Eternal, almighty Protector of men,  
 Father of angels, first and last,  
 I beg you now by the power of creation,  
 Gather me into your abiding grace, 290  
 Shelter me from the apparent unwisdom  
 Of this unknown angel. Merciful Father,  
 Show me who this air-hovering liar is  
 Who leads me away from your dear love.”  
 Then the voice of heaven came out of the clouds: 295  
 “Seize that savage fiend and hold him tight  
 Until he reveals his true purpose,  
 His origins and history from beginning to end.”  
 Then the maiden’s innocent soul rejoiced,  
 And she seized the demon as God had demanded. 300

\* \* \*

[Then the demon continued his unholy history:]  
 “I desired to deliver the King of kings  
 To cruel death. I caused the soldier  
 To stab the Lord, wounding the Savior  
 While the crowd looked on. Then blood and water 305  
 Flowed to the ground. I incited Herod  
 To call for John’s head when the holy man  
 Opposed his unlawful marriage. After that  
 I cunningly persuaded Simon to strive  
 Against the chosen disciples of Christ 310  
 And assail the faithful in deluded folly,  
 Calling them sorcerers. With a crafty trick,  
 I twisted the brain of Nero to order the slaying  
 Of Christ’s faithful servants, Peter and Paul.  
 Meanwhile Pilate had crucified the Lord, 315  
 Nailed him on the cross through my dark counsel.  
 Likewise I instigated Ægias to order  
 The saintly Andrew to be hung up high  
 On the gallows-tree to send his soul  
 To heaven’s glory. With my hellish brothers, 320  
 I have done dark deeds, committed crimes,  
 Shared out sins—such plots of pain  
 And unholy promise, they cannot be counted  
 Or fully known. My evil is almost endless.”

Then Juliana said through the holy grace 325  
 Of God's spirit to the evil demon:  
 "Fulfill your promise, reveal your mission,  
 Tell me who sent you here, enemy of mankind."  
 Then the demon, hard in the maiden's grip,  
 Began to dread—she offered no truce. 330  
 Escape was hopeless, and so he confessed:  
 "My father, the king of hell, foe of mankind,  
 Sent me here from my shackled space,  
 My own tight terror, to torment your mind.  
 He exults in evil even more than I do. 335  
 In his pride he sends out angelic perversions  
 To beguile the righteous, seduce the sinless,  
 Turn the steadfast from truth, twist their minds,  
 Tempt them away from salvation to sharing  
 Our endless terror in a house of misery, 340  
 A palace of pain. The master of dread  
 Is no gentle lord. If we return, empty of evil,  
 We dare not come into that devil's sight,  
 For he calls forth his dark ministers to find us,  
 Bind us in terror, imprison us in anguish, 345  
 Enslave us in that endless, savage flame.  
 If the hearts of the holy ones hold true,  
 Resisting temptation, rejecting iniquity,  
 Then we must suffer new torments,  
 Hell-blasts to our being, bale and woe. 350  
 This is my grim truth: my heart was harassed  
 Into seeking you out and harrowing your soul."

Then the holy maiden renewed her questions  
 Of that ancient sinner, the enemy of man:  
 "Tell me now, evil tempter, slayer of souls, 355  
 How you seduce the righteous into sin."  
 Then the devil, exile and outcast, responded:  
 "I will tell my story from beginning to end,  
 So you can see the truth. I've accomplished evil  
 Many times by wounding man severely 360  
 With terrible sins, snatching his soul,  
 Perverting his purpose. I desired to steal you

Away from salvation through subtle deceit,  
 So you would deny your God, renounce the Lord,  
 And bow to a lesser being, sacrificing yourself 365  
 To the shaper of sin, the maker of misery.  
 I seduce the righteous with my shifting shapes,  
 Offering dream and delusion to the innocent heart.  
 When I find a man strengthening his soul  
 By fixing his faith on the will of God, 370  
 I bring him a gift of unfettered desire,  
 The sensual lusts of eye and mind,  
 The sweetest sins, a feast of iniquity,  
 Every secret crime the heart can consider,  
 All the delusions of dark delight, 375  
 So that he becomes inflamed with sin,  
 Addicted to vice. Then he will burn boldly  
 With an evil purpose, turn away from prayer,  
 Follow my false promise on a trail of terror  
 That leads to his own torment, the terrible loss 380  
 Of his Lord's love, the unraveling of his faith.  
 I build out of the heart's hidden desires  
 A prison of habitual sin, perpetual pain.  
 If one is willing to follow my devious ways,  
 Then he shall trade in his virtue for vice, 385  
 And death shall be a dread for him  
 In his desert of unfaith and unlove.  
 But when I finally meet a holy warrior,  
 A champion of God who refuses to flee  
 From my force of evil, my arrows of sin, 390  
 A soldier and sage who seeks his protection  
 In a holy shield, the power of prayer,  
 And the might of a spiritual mail-coat—  
 One who will never forsake his faith  
 But gathers God's power on the battlefield— 395  
 Then I must flee, harried and humiliated,  
 To the clutch of fire, the embrace of flames,  
 Bemoaning my fate that I could not fight  
 Against a good man. He stole my pleasure,  
 So I must seek out a weaker warrior, 400  
 A base one less bold in the soul's battle,

One I can puff up with pride, seduce with sin.  
 Though he may believe his soul safely guarded  
 In a fortress of goodness and strong resolve,  
 I am ready and eager to examine his heart's 405  
 Hidden chambers, his closet skeletons,  
 The secrets of his soul. I delight in his sin.  
 I will breach the walls of his unclear conscience,  
 Disable his defenses, tear down his towers,  
 Send bitter truths into his unprotected heart, 410  
 Spears of beckoning sin, arrows of desire,  
 So a lustful passion seems better to him  
 Than prayer to the Lord or praising God.  
 That warrior will worship his own body.  
 He will live in iniquity under a dark mentor 415  
 And turn his good countenance away from Christ.  
 I will hone his habits, heel him to sin—  
 My teaching will lead him to a fiery torment.  
 He will fall from his fortress of apparent virtue  
 Into the abyss. I covet his sinful soul 420  
 More than his foolishly debauched body,  
 Which will return to earth, food for worms.  
 His wretched ruin will be my reward.”  
 Then Juliana spoke to the demon again:  
 “Tell me, unholy spirit, shape of misery, 425  
 Dealer of darkness, how you can craftily  
 Worm your way into the unsullied heart.  
 Long ago you rashly contended with Christ,  
 Waging war against your God in heaven.  
 For that you were given a house in hell, 430  
 A palace of anguish, a prison of pain,  
 In a pit dug under the earth for your pride.  
 Why haven't you learned your lesson  
 About battling the brave soldiers of the Lord,  
 Those holy warriors bound in faith, 435  
 Guarded and shielded by God's glory?”  
 Then that cursed creature, the fierce fiend,  
 An awesome monster, answered the maiden:  
 “First tell me how you became so bold,  
 So wise and daring, beyond all womankind, 440



That you could bind me with such firm bonds,  
 So that I am helpless in your mighty handgrip.  
 You have put your trust in the eternal Lord,  
 Maker of mankind, who dwells in glory,  
 Just as I have held my hope in my father, 445  
 The lord of hell, the king of crime.  
 When I am sent to seduce the righteous,  
 To turn their hearts away from the holy,  
 Their souls from salvation through evil deeds,  
 Sometimes I meet a saintly resistance. 450  
 Sometimes my dark purposes are denied  
 By a strange power, my will is wasted,  
 And I discover too late my own dire grief.  
 I have met such misery on this journey.  
 Now a rejected sinner, I suffer new shame, 455  
 So I beg you by the power of almighty God  
 And the unending grace of heavenly glory,  
 Through the mercy of Christ who climbed the cross,  
 The Savior who suffered on the gallows-tree,  
 That you should pity me, a miserable wretch, 460  
 Set me free so I will not perish,  
 Even though I have flown through the air  
 On this foolish journey, eager for evil,  
 For I never expected such a terrible time!"

Then the radiant maiden, the candle of glory, 465  
 The unquenched light, answered the fiend:  
 "Hell-ghost, grim spirit, you must confess  
 More of your evil acts and dark deeds,  
 Your monstrous makings, your wicked works,  
 Your dreams and delusions to harry and harm 470  
 The race of men before I mean to let you go."  
 The angry devil answered her back:  
 "Now I can hear, through your artful eloquence,  
 That cruelly constrained by your binding words,  
 I must obey your command, open my mind, 475  
 Tell you the truth of my endless evil,  
 Untwist the snare of my subtle craft,  
 Though I suffer torment in this trail of words.

Often I have stolen the true sight of men,  
 Blinding them wholly with evil ideas, 480  
 Mists of delusion, the murk of unmeaning,  
 The arrows of bitterness, anger and envy—  
 Lifting the light right out of their eyes.  
 I have set many traps to wound the unwary,  
 Shattering their feet with wicked snares. 485  
 I have lured them into the embrace of flames—  
 That was the last anyone saw of their tracks!  
 I have tortured some so their bodies burst,  
 The blood spewing forth in a deadly spurt—  
 They slipped out the door of their own veins. 490  
 Some I sent sailing on the savage seas,  
 Where the oceans rose, gulping them down.  
 Some I sent to the gallows-tree, the high cross,  
 Where they left life—crucified and cold.  
 Some I taught to gather old grudges, 495  
 Fixing on feud, drinking discord  
 From the killing cup. Drunk and debauched,  
 They seized their swords rashly in the wine-hall,  
 Slashing each other, slaying only themselves.  
 Their souls flew from the bone-house. 500  
 Some I found without God's token,  
 The cross of Christ, unblest and uncaring.  
 These I dispatched in different ways  
 With a killing craft and my own hard hands.  
 Even if I could spin out this savage story 505  
 For a summer-long day in time without torment,  
 I could never remember the full range of miseries  
 I've brought to mankind since the world was made,  
 The stars were raised, and earth established  
 For the first fair folk, Adam and Eve, 510  
 Whose lives I stole, whose hearts I turned,  
 Seducing them away from the Lord's love,  
 A perfect grace, a home in paradise.  
 They traded bliss for bitter knowledge,  
 Innocence and truth for the taste of sin. 515  
 That gift of shame was not short-lived—  
 It lasted forever for the children of men.

Why should I continue to narrate my crimes,  
 The sins I've spawned, the feuds I've fired,  
 My endless evil over eons to mankind? 520  
 None of my enemies has ever laid hands on me,  
 Binding me boldly as you've done here  
 With the craft and power of a pure maiden.  
 No patriarch or prophet, no sinless saint,  
 Has ever matched your innocent might. 525  
 Even though God himself, the King of hosts,  
 Had offered them wisdom, given them grace,  
 I could still worm my way into their hearts.  
 No one has ever been able to bind me,  
 Shackle my strength, fetter my fierceness, 530  
 Until now. You have unpowered me,  
 Unpacked the grim force given to me  
 By my malicious father, mankind's foe,  
 When he commanded me to come out  
 Of hell's dark haven to make sin sweet 535  
 To a saintly maiden. Now misery hounds me  
 At every twist and turn. Your righteous revenge  
 Will increase my shame. There will be no rejoicing  
 When I return to that unhappy hell-hall  
 And render accounts with a handful of nothing 540  
 To my unholy lord on his throne of doom."  
 Then the heathen senator, the gallows-minded man,  
 Ordered saintly Juliana taken from her cell  
 And brought before his judgment throne.  
 Inspired in her heart, exulting in spirit, 545  
 She dragged along the dreaded devil,  
 A bold maiden with a bound demon,  
 A holy saint with a handful of sin.  
 Twisting in agony, tortured in woe,  
 Lamenting his loss, he began to grieve: 550  
 "I beg you, lady Juliana, by God's grace,  
 Not to degrade me before all these men  
 More than you shamed me in the prison cell  
 When you conquered my crafty and cunning father,  
 The king of hell, the lord of sin, 555  
 In the place of peril. You rebuked us both

With a painful stroke. I've never met anyone  
 So resolute and resourceful, bold and blameless,  
 Strong and sinless, in this wide world.  
 You're wise in spirit and pure of heart." 560  
 Then the maiden released that soul-slayer  
 After his time of torment in the dark abyss.  
 The dread demon was a bearer of bad news,  
 Bound to tell the revolting truth  
 To a host of torturers, the tribe of hell. 565  
 That was not a good journey for him.

\* \* \*

[Then Juliana concluded her rebuke of Heliseus:  
 "These holy men from throughout history]  
 Have eagerly praised God, his words and works,  
 His trials and triumphs. He is the true Lord, 570  
 Ruler of heaven, Creator and Commander  
 Of every victory, every bliss and blessing,  
 The soul's joy beyond the touch of time."  
 Then an angel descended, adorned with light,  
 Scattered the fire that threatened to scorch 575  
 The innocent maiden, freed her from flame.  
 She remained untouched in the twisted blaze,  
 Safely shielded by the angel's power.  
 Then Heliseus suffered the greatest grief  
 To see the virgin unvanquished, his might unmade, 580  
 A hard reward for a rich man.  
 Stained with sin, he sought some way  
 With dark malice to murder the maiden.  
 The demon destroyer was not too slow  
 To suggest building a clay cauldron 585  
 With killing craft, surrounded by kindling,  
 A blaze of trees. Into that earthen prison,  
 They poured hot lead and lit the pyre.  
 That unholy bath boiled and bubbled.  
 The senator urged them with savage speed 590  
 To thrust the maiden into molten lead.  
 Suddenly the flame was scattered—hot lead burst out,  
 Exploding death at the fleeing bodies.  
 Mad horror was everywhere in the liquid fire.

Many men were burned beyond help— 595  
 Seventy-five heathens suffered and died.  
 Still the maiden stood in unscathed beauty.  
 The fire could not singe her hem or robe,  
 Her locks or limbs, her skin or bone.  
 She endured untouched in the swirl of flame, 600  
 Offering prayerful thanks to the Lord of lords.  
 Then the thwarted senator grew suddenly fierce,  
 Tearing his clothes and gnashing his teeth,  
 Raging like a madman, his mind inflamed.  
 He was beast-wild, blaspheming his gods 605  
 Who could not conquer this woman's will.  
 The maiden of glory was firm and fearless,  
 Mindful of the Lord's power and purpose.  
 Then the wicked senator shouted his orders,  
 Commanding his warriors to cut off her head, 610  
 Slaughter the maiden dear to Christ  
 With a quick sword-slice, sever her thought  
 From her holy heart. He had no idea  
 What her innocent death would deliver later.

Then the holy maiden's hope was renewed, 615  
 Her innocent heart gladdened at the grim news  
 That her suffering would cease and her soul  
 Would finally be set free. So the sinful senator  
 Ordered the sinless virgin dragged to the slaughter.  
 Suddenly a wretched hell-spirit appeared, 620  
 Wailing his woe, screeching his misery—  
 This was the fiend she had bound and scourged.  
 He shrieked out his evil incantations  
 To the crowd of hard men bent on crime:  
 "Give this maiden some bodily grief, 625  
 Push her into pain, scathe her with suffering.  
 She tortured me so that I turned traitor.  
 Give her the reward of a sword's edge.  
 She scorned our gods, mocking their might.  
 Squeeze her soul in a twist of terror. 630  
 Avenge her unfaith, unseal her head.  
 Make her pay for our ancient enmity,

You sin-sick men. Remember how I hurt,  
 Shackled in pain, enduring her evil.  
 Her demand for truth brought terror and woe.” 635  
 Then gentle Juliana, blessed and bright,  
 Looked hard the hell-sprite, man’s fierce foe,  
 Hearing his agony, his shrieking abuse,  
 Singing his harm-song as he arched in the air.  
 Headed for torment and a meeting in hell 640  
 With his dark lord, he began to lament:  
 “My name is misery, my life is woe.  
 My time is terror. This holy maiden  
 Has unmade me. She will shame me again.  
 There’s an uncanny evil in her invincible soul.” 645  
 Then the maiden was led to a border-land  
 Where cruel, hateful men intended to kill her.  
 There she began to preach to the people,  
 Urging them to flee from sin and seek salvation,  
 Praising God and promising the soul’s comfort. 650  
 On the glory-road, she taught them, saying:  
 “Remember the joy of being God’s warrior,  
 The majesty of heaven, the hope of saints,  
 Your home in glory with God’s angels.  
 The Lord is worthy of the highest praise 655  
 From a host of angels and the race of men.  
 His help is at hand for all of eternity  
 For those who both desire and deserve it.  
 As your teacher, I urge all of you now  
 To keep God’s laws and secure your homes 660  
 Against ill winds. Build strong heart-walls  
 To withstand the squalls and storms of sin.  
 Fix firm foundations on the living stone,  
 The rock of God. Use a mortar of love,  
 Good will, strong belief, true faith. 665  
 Follow the heart’s promise, the soul’s purpose.  
 Make your house mighty with holy mystery.  
 Then God will grant you grace when you need it  
 In the arms of agony, the throes of affliction.  
 Truly no one knows his own ending. 670  
 Keep a careful watch in this wicked world

Against the onslaught of enemies, the war-cries  
 Of both body-slayers and soul-seekers  
 Who would hold you back from the heavenly city.  
 Pray to the Son of God, the Lord of mankind, 675  
 The Prince of angels, for the gift of mercy.  
 May the love of the Lord, the comfort of Christ,  
 The peace of God, be with you forever.”  
 Then her soul was led from her body  
 With a swift sword-stroke. It soared to bliss. 680  
 Afterwards the sin-stained, wicked wretch,  
 Unholy Heliseus, fled in fear to his ship,  
 Turned tail from his own dark terror,  
 Setting sail with soldiers over the whale-road.  
 The sea raged and swallowed them all. 685  
 They dropped anchor in the cold abyss,  
 An unwelcome homeland without much heart.  
 Thirty-four warriors lost their lives  
 To the sea’s wrath, both servants and lord.  
 They lost hope and found hell—a bad trade. 690  
 The thanes of Heliseus found no good gifts  
 In that dark hell-hole, that demon-hall,  
 No twisted gold, no jeweled wine-cups,  
 No glory-songs or mugs of beer,  
 No reward of rings, no songs of joy. 695  
 The holy body of the saint, however,  
 Was borne to the grave in glorious praise  
 By a great multitude. Inside that city  
 People still celebrate the Saint Juliana,  
 Raising praise-songs to the Lord our God. 700

As the days draw down, my need is great  
 That the holy saint might offer me help  
 As each of my friends wanders far away  
 On death’s dark road and I am alone.  
 When those two companions, body and soul, 705  
 Sever their ties, close down their kinship,  
 Unmake their marriage, then the spirit shall leave  
 Its worldly bone-house far behind  
 And travel to some unknown judgment hall.

On Doomsday I must seek another home, 710  
 Based on the worth of my former works.  
 C, Y, and N, *Cyn* or mankind must sadly pass on.  
 Heaven's King may be wrathful when the sinful  
 Sheep, E, W, and U, *Ewu* wait trembling  
 For the judgment of God, a reward for their deeds. 715  
 All earthly goods will be L and F, *Lagu-Feob*,  
 Flood-bound wealth. The world will quake—  
 The last days will be drenched in sorrow.  
 I remember the sins I have committed in this world  
 And mourn these miseries with a torment of tears. 720  
 Sometimes I was too slow to feel shame,  
 Unwilling to admit guilt for my wicked works  
 While soul and body were bound together,  
 Traveling on life's transient road.  
 I need the saint to intercede for me 725  
 With the Son of God, the supreme King.  
 My heavy heart is its own fair warning.  
 I beg and pray that every living person  
 Who recites this poem will remember me  
 And pray to the Creator, my Lord and Protector, 730  
 Sustainer and Shield, Spirit of consolation,  
 Wielder of judgment, Father and Son,  
 The True Trinity, to grant me mercy  
 On that perilous day when all promises are paid,  
 All works rewarded, all deeds delivered up, 735  
 All souls divided, all ends determined.  
 Dear God of hosts, Judge of deeds,  
 Father of faith, eternal Lord,  
 Grant us mercy when we come before you,  
 Humble, yet hoping for generosity and grace 740  
 In your infinite eyes, and the welcome we want  
 To see in your sweet, forgiving face.

Amen.



## THE WANDERER

This is the first of several poems in the Exeter Book that are often characterized as elegies—dramatic monologues in which the speaker expresses some sense of separation and suffering and attempts to move from a *cri de cœur* to some form of consolation. Themes include the loss of loved ones, longing for earlier times, a recognition of life's transience, and the use of proverbial or religious wisdom to come to terms with misfortune. The wanderer who speaks in the poem struggles with a loss of kin and social connection. Mitchell and Robinson point out his vulnerability as a lordless exile in Anglo-Saxon society:

The wanderer who speaks the monologue is in the worst possible circumstances for an Anglo-Saxon warrior in the heroic age: he is a retainer who has lost his lord and comrades and who therefore finds himself with no place in society, no identity in a hostile world. He is a man *in extremis*, alone with his memories and naked to his enemies. This plight moves him to strenuous and painful reflection. (2007, 280)

*The Wanderer* is a poem of complex consciousness. Rosier notes that “it is intrinsically a mirror of a mind in its several states and faculties of memory and reverie, of reason and imagination, of perception and conception” (1964, 366). The narrator of the poem, the *anhaga* or “lonely dweller” (literally, “the hedged-in one”), has become, by means of contemplating his life, a man *snottor on mode*, “wise in mind.” He recounts for the reader this process of

turning his lament into consoling wisdom, but paradoxically, in the process, he seems to relive again his old life of suffering. The heart of his difficulty is that he must use his mind to cure his mind. The wanderer generalizes that “the wise man who ponders this ruin of a life” will remember his earlier hall-joys and cry out: “Where has the horse gone? Where is the rider? Where is the giver of gifts?” This *ubi sunt* (“where are they?”) motif is derived from a Latin tradition, and it expresses both a lament over loss and a recognition of transience. Life is on loan. Everything is fleeting—goods, friends, kith and kin—“all this earthly foundation.” Here philosophical speculation competes with apocalyptic images.

In the end the narrator reaffirms his faith, but some critics find his internalized lament more moving and believable than his philosophical wisdom. Pope, for example, believes that “the poet was a good deal less interested in the possible therapeutic virtue of his discourse than he was in the imaginative realization of loss and loneliness in this unstable world” (89). Perhaps the speaker has moved beyond his plaintive lament into a philosophical understanding of the unseen stability of the ways of Providence in this world. Perhaps the consolation is undercut by the power of the images of instability and suffering right up to the end of the poem.

## The Wanderer

Often the wanderer walks alone,  
 Waits for mercy, longs for grace,  
 Stirs the ice-cold sea with hands and oars—  
 Heart-sick, endures an exile’s road—  
 A hard traveler. His fate is fixed.

5

So said the wanderer, old earth-walker,  
 His mind choked with the memory of strife,  
 Fierce slaughter and the fall of kinsmen:

Often alone at the edge of dawn,  
 I must wake to the sound of my own sorrow,  
 The mute song of a muffled heart,  
 Sung to no listener, no lord alive.  
 I know the custom. A noble man  
 Must seal up his heart’s thoughts,

10

Drag the doors of his mind shut, 15  
Bind sorrow with silence and be still.

A weary mind cannot fight fate—  
A savage soul cannot find solace,  
Help or healing. Who wants fame,  
A home in the tribe's long memory, 20  
Must seal off sadness, bind up woe.

So often I've locked up my heart-sorrow  
In a breast-hoard, a cage of bone,  
Cut off from kinsmen after I covered  
My gold-lord in the dark hold of ground. 25  
I went winter-sad with the weight of years  
Over the winding waves, seeking some lord  
Who might heal my history, hold my heart,  
Welcome me home with gifts or grace.

A man without country, without kin, 30  
Knows how cruel it is to have sorrow  
As a sole companion. No one waits  
To welcome the wanderer except the road  
Of exile itself. His reward is night-cold,  
Not a lord's rich gift of twisted gold 35  
Or a warm hearth and a harvest of wealth.  
He remembers hall-thanes, shared treasures,  
His place at the table, his lord's trust.  
His dreams are done—they taste like dust.

A man knows who has lost his lord's counsel 40  
How sorrow and sleep can bind the mind.  
A man may wander his own headland,  
Discover his lord unburied, undead—  
He kisses and clutches his dream lord,  
Lays in his lord's lap his head and hands, 45  
As he once did in those generous days  
When he knew the joys of hall and throne.  
Then the wanderer wakes without friends,

Alone except for sea-birds bathing  
 In the dusky sea, spreading wide wings— 50  
 As snow falls, frost feathers the land,  
 And hard hail harrows the living.

Then the wounds of the heart are heavier,  
 Aching so long for his lost lord.  
 Sorrow is renewed with the memory of kinsmen 55  
 Wandering his mind, each guest a ghost  
 Who gathers and greets him with signs of joy,  
 Eagerly searching for old companions.  
 They all drift away—the unknown floaters  
 Bring no known sayings or songs to him. 60  
 Care is renewed for a man who must send  
 His brooding heart over the bond of waves.

So I can't think why in this uneasy world,  
 My mind shouldn't darken, sink into shadow,  
 When I think through the lives of men— 65  
 How warriors and retainers have suddenly slipped  
 From the hall-floor, brave ones gone.  
 So the days of middle-earth fail and fade.  
 No man's wise till he's walked through winters,  
 Suffered a world of unshared grief. 70  
 A wise man must be patient, not hot-hearted,  
 Not quick-tongued, not weak-willed at war,  
 Not reckless or unwitting, not eager to boast  
 Before he has thought things through.  
 A warrior must wait when he makes a vow 75  
 Until his mind is sure and his heart strong,  
 And he can read the road his traveling takes.

The wise warrior knows how ghostly it will be  
 When all this world's wealth is a wasteland,  
 As middle-earth is now in many places— 80  
 Wall fragments stand, blasted by winds,  
 Covered by frost—ruined hallways in snow.  
 Wine-halls decay, lords lie dead,  
 Deprived of joys—the proud troop

Has fallen by the wall. War took some 85  
 On a long death-road; a bird bore one  
 Over the deep sea; the gray wolf shared  
 One with death; a sad-faced earl  
 Hid one in an earth-hole, a bleak barrow.  
 So the Maker of men laid waste to the world, 90  
 Until the old works of giants stood idle  
 And empty of the hall-joys of men.

The wise man who ponders this ruin of a life—  
 The hall that crumbles into a broken wall,  
 The hall-guest now only memory's ghost— 95  
 Remembers slaughter and strife, crying out:  
 Where has the horse gone? Where is the rider?  
     Where is the giver of gifts?  
 Where is the seat of feasting? Where is the hall-joy?  
 Gone is the bright cup. Gone is the mailed warrior. 100  
 Gone is the glory of the prince. How the time has slipped  
 Down under the night-helmet as if it never was.  
 The only thing left is traces of the tribe,  
 A strange, high wall with serpentine shapes,  
 Worm-like strokes, what's left of runes. 105  
 The strength of spears has borne off earls,  
 Weapons greedy for slaughter. Some glorious fate!

Raging storms crash against stone-cliffs;  
 Swirling snow blankets and binds the earth.  
 Winter howls as the pale night-shadow darkens, 110  
 Sending rough hail-storms from the north,  
 Bringing savagery and strife to the children of men.  
 Hardship and suffering descend on the land;  
 The shape of fate is twisted under heaven.  
 Life is on loan: Here goods are fleeting, 115  
 Here friends are fleeting, here man is fleeting,  
 Here kith and kin are fleeting. Everything passes—  
 All this earthly foundation stands empty and idle.

So a man wise in mind spoke to himself as he sat:  
 Good is the man who holds trust, keeps faith, 120

Never speaks too quickly about the storm  
Of his pain or passion unless he knows  
How to perform a cure on his own heart.  
It is well for a man to seek mercy for himself  
From his Father in heaven where security stands,  
And where we can still find beyond perishing  
A permanent place, an eternal home.

## THE GIFTS OF MEN

This is another catalogue poem like *The Fortunes of Men* and the *Maxims* poems. Greenfield points out that the theme of gifts in this poem “emphasizes aristocratic talents analogous to those found in Old Norse Eddic poetry, rather than practical or spiritual ones, and the poem undoubtedly represents a fusion of Christian and Germanic concepts” (Greenfield and Calder, 263). Fulk and Cain note that “the greater part of the poem is a catalogue of human abilities and qualities, structured by the repetition of [OE] *sum*, ‘one’ . . . [and] the larger point is that God’s gifts are distributed widely rather than concentrated in a few individuals, and thus although one may lack wealth, strength, or some particular talent, there is always compensation of some sort” (174–75). The poet concludes that the Lord *wide tosawed . . . his dugupe*, “widely distributes his talents (gifts).”

### The Gifts of Men

There are many fresh gifts that grace the earth  
That soul-bearers see and understand  
In their hearts and minds, gifts granted  
By the God of hosts, as the mighty Measurer  
Deals out to mankind from his boundless source  
Some craft or skill, some special capacity,  
Some quality of character, some share of knowledge,  
Some art or understanding. Each earth-dweller  
Deserves some endowment, some boon or blessing.  
No one in the world is so troubled or tormented,

5

10

So witless or weak, so sad-hearted or sluggish,  
 So unblessed or unfortunate, that the Gift-giver,  
 The Bestower of worth, strips him of mind-skill,  
 Denying him wisdom in thought and speech,  
 Stealing his strength to do daily work, 15  
 Lest he despair of his words and deeds,  
 His own accomplishments, and the gift of grace.  
 No one is so abject in God's eyes.  
 Conversely, no one is so powerful or clever  
 In this world, so wise or wonderful among men, 20  
 So widely adored, so full of fame,  
 That the people's Protector, the Guardian of greatness,  
 Would give him the gift of all wise thoughts,  
 All worldly skills, all deepest understanding,  
 Lest he grow proud and pompous, full of favor, 25  
 Despising the poor, disdainful of the wretched.  
 The God who holds judgment offers his gifts  
 Of strength and skill, mastery and might,  
 Wisdom and understanding, fairly and diversely  
 Among all earth-dwellers in an even-handed way. 30  
 To one he gives the gift of worldly goods,  
 Great treasures; to another, supple strength  
 Or a sure-handed craft. One is poor  
 With few possessions, yet sharp in mind-skills.  
 One is magnificent, beautiful in bearing. 35  
 One is a storyteller, gifted in song.  
 One weaves words, an eloquent speaker;  
 One pursues wild beasts, an eager hunter.  
 One is prized by powerful rulers;  
 One is a warrior, a battle-crafty man, 40  
 When spears fly and shields clash.  
 One offers wise counsel in a meeting of men  
 Where laws are written. One is an architect,  
 A maker of buildings with a trained hand  
 And a sharp mind, translating thought to stone. 45  
 He frames the hall to weather the storm  
 Of wind and war-blast, to resist failure or fall.  
 One greets the harp with his hands,  
 Plays with craft and cunning the singing wood.



One is a swift runner, one a sure shooter, 50  
 One skilled in song, one fleet of foot.  
 One steers a ship over the fallow waves,  
 Plotting the way for the high-prowed boat  
 Over ocean roads, while strong sailors  
 Power the wave-walker with their oars. 55  
 One has swim-skills as he plows through water.  
 Another uses his hands to hammer gold  
 And set gems for his powerful lord,  
 Protector of men. One is a skilled smith  
 Who with hard hands and a cunning mind 60  
 Can forge a storm of weapons out of steel  
 When he makes for the battle-strife of men  
 Helmet and hip-sword, a death-dagger  
 For close killing, mail-coat and bright blade,  
 Shield boss or rim, welded for war, 65  
 Wound tightly against the spear's thrust.  
 One is pious, eager in alms-giving,  
 Virtuous and good. One serves ably  
 At the meadhall table. One is horse-smart,  
 Riding the road or at home in the stable. 70  
 One is patient, enduring what he must.  
 One knows the law, offering good counsel.  
 One is quick and cunning at dice;  
 Another is deep and clever at chess.  
 One is a wise wine-server or beer-keeper. 75  
 One is a builder who raises houses;  
 One is a war-lord who leads the host.  
 One is a counselor who knows the laws.  
 One is a thane who serves his lord bravely  
 In a time of need. One has patience, 80  
 A firm faith, and a steadfast spirit.  
 One is a fowler, skilled with the hawk.  
 One is bold on horseback, another agile  
 And full of tricks, a merry prankster  
 For the prince, a magician for the multitudes, 85  
 Light on his feet, lithe with his hands.  
 One is kind and gracious, a good comrade—  
 His mind and words are agreeable to men.

One carefully holds in his gentle heart  
 The soul's needs, gathers God's grace, 90  
 His Lord's love, instead of the world's wealth.  
 One is fierce in his struggle with the devil,  
 Ready to ride forth to combat crime  
 And battle sin. Another is skilled  
 At church offices and religious services— 95  
 He glorifies God, the Lord of life,  
 With his clear voice and songs of praise.  
 One is book-wise—he loves learning.  
 One cleverly connects hand and mind—  
 He writes deep secrets and dark sayings. 100  
 There is now no man on earth so mighty,  
 So strong or skilled, so ingenious or inventive,  
 That all God's gifts would ever be his alone,  
 Lest he be plagued with pride, his once pure heart  
 Defiled with sin, shot through with arrogance— 105  
 Thinking himself the epitome of beauty,  
 The wizard of intelligence, the king of glory,  
 The keeper of fame, the only doer of great deeds.  
 The Lord distributes endowments and gifts  
 In different ways to diverse peoples 110  
 To break man's boasting and puncture his pride.  
 One acquires virtues, another useful crafts;  
 One is beautiful, another battle-skilled.  
 One is mild-hearted, tender and compassionate,  
 Careful in conduct and moral-minded. 115  
 Another is true, loyal to his lord.  
 So the Creator distributes talents, spreads gifts,  
 Far and wide. His bounty is endless.  
 Let us then praise the Prince of glory  
 Who give us life, our heavenly Father, 120  
 Who reveals to men his merciful heart.

## PRECEPTS: A FATHER'S INSTRUCTION

*P*recepts is a poem of fatherly advice and instruction addressed to the speaker's son. Hansen says that "the father's aim is to construct a world of stable difference in which clear meaning and rational choice are possible" (48), and observes that "all of the father's injunctions either recommend behavior that is classified as proper, fitting, or right, or they warn against actions that are seen as dangerous, foolish, or wrong" (48–49). The father advises his son to avoid sin in both *worda ond dæda*, "words and deeds," and to find teachers in life who understand *spella ond lara*, "proverbs and precepts." The dividing of the sessions of instruction into ten days, each with its slightly varied opening, provides a pattern of repetition and ritualized learning that reinforces the lessons. Bjork surmises that this poem "may partially answer our question about how *Maxims I* and *Maxims II* and other proverbial lore were used by the Anglo-Saxons [since] a wise man or father figure could have passed on to others proverbs and maxims that were biblical in import . . . or more generally gnomonic" (2014, xvi).

### Precepts: A Father's Instruction

A wise father, full of insight,  
Seasoned with experience, skillful with words,  
Gave his noble son this good advice  
So that the boy might prosper in this world:  
"Do worthy deeds—they will bring you worth,  
God stands by you to support the good,  
And the fiend will only instigate evil.

Be keen and committed to the better choice.  
 Practice this bravely as long as you live.  
 Love your father and mother; hold your family 10  
 Dear in your heart, if they also love God.  
 Honor your elders with gentle words.  
 Think kindly of teachers, especially those  
 Who let virtue thrive in the life of the mind  
 And who always encourage you to do the good.” 15

Then he wisely said to his son a second time:  
 “Trust in this—commit no crime.  
 Commend no sin in kith or kin,  
 Lest God accuse you as an accessory to evil.  
 He will deal out punishment or praise, 20  
 Banishment or bliss. Be sure and steadfast.”

Then the wise father spoke for a third time,  
 Instructing his child from his heart’s meditations:  
 “Never associate with anyone worse.  
 Seek out a teacher wiser than yourself. 25  
 Listen to advisers who hold good counsel.  
 Take a prudent mentor without respect to rank,  
 A tutor who understands proverbs and precepts.”

A fourth time the father instructed the child  
 So near to his heart to remember this: 30  
 “Never deceive or betray a dear friend,  
 Yet always do what you know is right.  
 Keep to this rule and foster trust.”

A fifth time the father began again  
 To teach his child his heart’s thoughts: 35  
 “Guard against drunkenness and fool’s talk,  
 Sins of the heart, lies of the mouth,  
 Anger and envy, dark thoughts,  
 The desire for women, illicit love.  
 When you fall for a woman you don’t know, 40  
 Strange lust will lead to shame and loathing,  
 Arrogance and enmity against God.

Always be wise in what you say.  
 Be a watchman against your own desires;  
 Guard against your own incautious words.” 45

A sixth time the beloved man began again  
 To instruct his child with kindness and care:  
 “Keep a clear distinction between good and evil;  
 The mind must be sharp to discern the difference.  
 Know first the good, then choose the good; 50  
 Know evil and avoid it. Keep your perception clear,  
 Your will resolute, your choices righteous.  
 Foster and cherish what is good in your heart.”

A seventh time the old, experienced father  
 Said to his young, inexperienced son: 55  
 “A wise man seldom feels untempered joy;  
 He worries over every happy moment.  
 A fool never frets about the future,  
 Never mixes delight with distress,  
 Unless he clearly experiences adversity, 60  
 And his mirth is chased away by misery.  
 A prudent man watches his words,  
 Ponders his thoughts in his heart's hold,  
 Keeps calm and avoids unrestrained speech.”

An eighth time the old father began to speak, 65  
 To advise and admonish with gentle words:  
 “Learn such lore as is fit to be learned,  
 Showing your aptitude. Train yourself in wisdom.  
 Trust in the Lord and the memory of saints;  
 Keep your eye on the truth whenever you talk.” 70

A ninth time the sage approached his son,  
 A scholar and philosopher with much to say:  
 “There are not many left who love wisdom,  
 Who read and reflect upon the scriptures.  
 Their minds molder, their thoughts wither, 75  
 Their hearts hesitate, their discipline dries up.  
 They care nothing for the Lord's commands,

And many will pay with their souls' suffering—  
 But keep your mind on the ancient writings,  
 The sacred books, the texts of truth, 80  
 Which people now ignore everywhere.  
 Surely turning a blind eye or a deaf ear  
 To the Lord rarely leads to any good.”

A tenth time, full of anxious concern  
 And loving care, the father firmly 85  
 Began again to instruct his son:  
 “A wise man guards himself against sin  
 In his words and deeds, supports truth  
 For his soul's sake, his heart's health.  
 His gifts will grow, his talents increase, 90  
 His endowments expand through the hand of God.  
 Whoever throws off sin empowers his strength.  
 Always flee from the fierce grip of anger;  
 Speak no rash words from a raging heart.  
 A wise man guards his thoughts till he knows 95  
 How his words will be heard. One should be moderate,  
 Wise in mind, sensible in spirit, prudent in thought,  
 So he can gain his share of happiness in life.  
 Neither flatter nor blame; never be double-tongued  
 Or hypocritical in your heart. Avoid slander and sin. 100  
 Be slow to judge, merciful to many.  
 Show contempt to none. No one is worthless  
 In the eyes of God. Be gracious and kind,  
 Loving in spirit, loved by many.  
 Always remember your father's instruction. 105  
 Follow this wisdom and withstand sin.”

## THE SEAFARER

This poem is a dramatic monologue divided into two parts. In the first half, the seafarer comments on his experience at sea, contrasting it with the worldly joys that land inhabitants experience. His soul is stirred not by harp-songs or the sharing of mead in the hall but by the tumult of waves on the high seas and the testing of his strength and spirit. In the middle of the poem, the speaker shifts into a philosophical and religious mode, never mentioning the sea or land again as the poem turns into what I. L. Gordon calls “an act symbolic of the renunciation of worldly life generally and the ready acceptance of the struggles and sufferings involved in the quest for eternal bliss” (7). As the seafarer travels on his pilgrim road, he recognizes the transience of this life and the permanence of the next. Donoghue notes that “one of the essential lessons learned by the Seafarer is that the joys of heaven cannot be comprehended by earthly standards, which are *deade* [dead] and *lene* [transient] even in their most splendid manifestation” (51).

Kennedy points out that “the use of sea imagery in an allegorical contrast of earthly existence and the Christian vision of life after death is not without parallel in Old English poetry” (1943, 112). He points to a passage from Cynewulf’s *Christ II: The Ascension* (lines 488–505 in my translation above), which may have drawn its inspiration and imagery from Gregory’s homily on the Ascension. In that passage, the turmoil of life is compared to “a hard and harrowing voyage / Sailing our ships across cold waters,” and the salvation of Christ to a safe harbor, “a port, / A haven . . . ascending into heaven.”

Where the Old English wanderer is thrust into a life of exile, a long road of suffering, the seafarer deliberately chooses his lonely and difficult life. He rides his ship of sorrow, eschewing the joyful life on land because only in

suffering and contemplation can he discover the transience of this worldly life and the stability of the afterlife in heaven. As the poem moves from seafaring to sermonizing, it seems only appropriate that it should end with “Amen.”

## The Seafarer

I can sing this truth-song about myself—  
 Of harrowing times and hard traveling,  
 Of days of terrible toil. Often I endured  
 Bitter heartache on my ship of sorrow,  
 In my hall of care, on the heaving waves. 5  
 The narrow night-watch often held me,  
 Anxious and troubled at the ship’s prow,  
 As we sailed, tossing close to sea-cliffs.  
 My feet were pinched by cold, bound by frost.  
 Hunger and longing tortured and tore 10  
 My sea-weary mind. No man knows  
 Who lives on the land in comfort and joy  
 How I endured suffering and sorrow  
 On the ice-cold sea through endless winters  
 On the exile’s road, cut off from kin, 15  
 Surrounded by icicles. Hail flew in showers.  
 There I heard nothing but the roaring sea,  
 The ice-cold waves, the frozen surf.  
 Sometimes I listened to the swan’s song,  
 The curlew’s cry, the gannet’s call— 20  
 A seagull singing instead of men laughing,  
 A mew’s music instead of meadhall drinking.  
 Storms battered sea-cliffs—the tern answered,  
 Icy-feathered. Often the eagle screeched back—  
 Dew on its wings. No kinsman was close 25  
 To guard the heart, comfort the wretched spirit.  
 The man who lives a joyful life on land,  
 Secure in the city, proud and passionate  
 In the company of friends, drinking wine,  
 Can never fathom how I wandered weary, 30  
 Sad and suffering, on the long sea-road.  
 Night-shadows darkened, snow fell from the north,



Frost bound the land, hail fell on earth,  
The coldest of grains.

Still my heart is stirred  
To seek the sea-streams, the tumult of waves, 35  
By my wandering thoughts. The mind always urges  
The soul to set out, seeking some foreign soil,  
A land of strangers. No man is so proud,  
Or so endowed with gifts, so bold in his youth,  
Or so brave in his deeds, so safe and secure 40  
In his lord's grace, that he harbors no worries,  
No sorrows or cares, in his seafaring days,  
Over what his lord might ultimately offer him.  
He never dreams of the delight of the harp,  
Or receiving gold rings, or the joys of a woman, 45  
Or any other earthly pleasure. His dreams  
Are driven by the sea—the longing of his heart  
Lingers on the thrashing tumult of the waves.  
The groves burst into bloom, adorning the towns,  
Meadows grow beautiful—the world hastens on: 50  
All this urges the restless heart to travel,  
The eager mind of the sailor to seek the sea.  
The voice of the cuckoo, summer's harbinger,  
Sings of sorrow, bodes mourning,  
The heart's keen, sad song. A man of comfort, 55  
Proud and prosperous, never knows  
What seafarers endure on the exile-road.  
So my thoughts sail out of my unstill mind,  
My heart heaves from my breast-hoard,  
Seeking the sea—my spirit soars 60  
Over the whale's home, twists and turns  
Over the earth's surfaces, rolls and returns,  
Greedy and ravenous. The solitary flier screams,  
Rousing the quickened heart on the whale-road  
Over the stretch of sea.

For me the joys of the Lord 65  
Are keener than the dead life loaned to us on land.  
I can never believe that all this worldly wealth  
Will last forever. One of three things  
Always threatens a man with uncertainty

Before he travels on his final road— 70  
 Illness or old age or the sword's grim edge.  
 Therefore each man must earn the honor  
 And respect of the living, the praise of posterity,  
 Secure his reputation with speech-bearers  
 Before his death by striving to accomplish 75  
 Great deeds against fiends, against the devil.  
 Then the children of men will honor him,  
 And his glory will live forever with the angels,  
 An eternity of joy with the heavenly host.

The days of greatness are now gone, 80  
 The wealth and power of earthly kingdoms.  
 There are no kings or emperors left alive,  
 No gold-givers as there once were,  
 When the greatest warriors won glory.  
 The troops have perished, the joys passed on. 85  
 Weaker men remain and rule the world  
 In toil and turmoil. Glory is laid low.  
 Earthly nobility is aging, fading away,  
 As every man withers on middle-earth.  
 Old age sneaks up on him, his face pales— 90  
 The gray-haired man mourns, misses his friends,  
 The children of men who have left the earth.  
 When life leaves a man, he cannot taste joy  
 Or feel pain any longer in his flesh-house;  
 His hand cannot stir, his head cannot think. 95  
 He may strew his brother's grave with gold,  
 Enrich that body-barrow with great treasure,  
 But gold cannot travel on the spirit-road,  
 Cannot help the soul weighed down with sin,  
 Cannot hide that heaviness from God's wrath. 100

Great is the terrible power of God—  
 All earth turns aside before it.  
 God created the wide world, the broad plains,  
 The surfaces of land and sea, the high heavens.  
 Foolish is the man who does not fear God— 105  
 Death sneaks up on him like an unexpected guest.

Blessed is the man who lives humbly in the Lord—  
 Mercy comes down to greet him from the heavens.  
 God strengthens and supports that soul  
 Because the believer trusts in His power. 110  
 A man must keep control of a strong spirit,  
 A willful heart—keep it steady and constant,  
 Pure in its promises, holding to its vows.  
 Each man must be measured and moderate  
 In affection to friends and enmity to foes, 115  
 Even though one may often wish another  
 In the embracing fire of a funeral pyre—  
 Enemy or friend. Fate is stronger,  
 The Lord mightier, than any human desire.  
 Let us consider where our true home lies 120  
 And plan how we might come to that place.  
 Let us aspire to arrive in eternal bliss,  
 Where life is attained in the love of the Lord,  
 Where hope and joy reside in the heavens.  
 Thanks be to holy God, the Lord of glory, 125  
 Who honored us and made us worthy,  
 Our glorious Creator, eternal through all time.

Amen.

## VAINGLORY

**V***ainglory* is a poem of advice, a passing on of wisdom from a teacher to a pupil. It is part sermon, part homily, part religious reflection.

The poem includes both example and admonition, as well as a brief narrative of the rebellion in heaven by Satan and his minions, recounted so powerfully in the Old English poem *Genesis* and by Milton centuries later in *Paradise Lost*. The speaker of the poem draws upon a variety of modes—personal experience, contrasting exempla, and religious narrative—to pass on advice and wisdom to his student listener, as he says his own teacher has done with him. The speaker repeats the advice of a prophet at line 58, then gradually segues into a melding of his voice with that of the prophet. There is disagreement about where the prophet’s voice ends and the speaker’s voice begins again. Shippey wisely recognizes that the shift of voices is a complex one, noting that in these lines, “the voices of the poet and prophet are hardly to be distinguished” (129). The pupil learns from the teacher and becomes the teacher himself, passing on wisdom to yet another pupil. One voice flows naturally into the other. In that spirit, I have refrained from marking off the prophet’s speech with quotation marks; the reader should pass gradually from one voice to another. This passing of voice from the wise man to the student (or from the poet to the reader) is a crucial part of the learning process described in the poem.

### Vainglory

Listen! A wise man once told me long ago  
Of many wonders—a teacher and truth-sayer.

He unlocked his word-hoard, his wise lore,  
 His mind schooled in the sayings of prophets,  
 So I could listen and truly perceive, 5  
 By holy song and enchanted story,  
 God's own son, a welcome guest  
 In our human home, and also that other  
 Weaker one, mankind unshielded,  
 Different and distinct, separated by sin. 10  
 A man who reflects may easily see  
 How in this loaned life a wanton pride  
 May mar his mind, how savage drinking  
 Can destroy his spirit over many dark days.  
 Many loud speakers who love boasting, 15  
 Warriors trading insults with tall tales,  
 Inhabit our cities, feast at our tables,  
 Talking together, drinking in delight,  
 Sharpening strife in the family hall,  
 Making of home a haven of spears. 20  
 When wine drives the soul, excites the heart,  
 Then outcry and uproar arise in the company,  
 Shouting and screaming, clamor and crash.  
 But men's hearts and minds are made differently—  
 Not all are alike. One is arrogant, 25  
 Swollen with pride, pushy and violent.  
 Many men suffer vainglory like that—  
 Sometimes it swells unchecked into insolence,  
 Sometimes it shifts into anger or insult,  
 Filling the heart with fiendish arrows, 30  
 Cunning and deceit. Then a man begins  
 To lie and cheat, curse and cry out,  
 Belch and boast more than a better man might.  
 He thinks his behavior is honorable and good,  
 But he may see otherwise at his evil end. 35  
 He spins his web of dark intrigue,  
 Devious plots, dangerous lies—  
 He's a back-stabber, a wily devil.  
 He shoots forth his mind-barbs in showers,  
 While he shields himself from his stabbing sin. 40  
 He hates his betters out of envy and malice,

Lets arrows of spite shoot through the walls  
 Of the soul's fortress shaped by the Creator  
 To shield us from sin. He sits at the table,  
 Proud of his place, swollen with food, 45  
 Flush with wine. He draws his mind  
 Like a dangerous bow, shoots his words,  
 Feathered with anger, aimed with envy,  
 Poisoned by pride. Now you can recognize  
 His devious craft, his dangerous talk, 50  
 When you meet him conniving in the court.  
 Know from these signs he's the devil's child  
 Enveloped in flesh. He's proud and perverse,  
 Grounded in hell, empty of honor,  
 Deprived of God, the King of glory. 55  
 The prophet said, the word-ready man,  
 The ancient shaper, singing these words:  
 Whoever exalts himself in evil days,  
 Haughty in heart, proud in mind,  
 Swollen in spirit, shall be heeled and humbled 60  
 After his final journey on the corpse-road;  
 He shall dwell in hell, beset by serpents,  
 Twisted by torment in the woe of worms.  
 It was long ago in God's kingdom  
 That pride was born—arrogance arose 65  
 In the conflict of angels. They raised a raucous,  
 Hard war against heaven with seditious strife.  
 They renounced their King, embraced rebellion,  
 Plotted treason to steal the throne  
 Of their rightful God, the King of glory. 70  
 They planned to rule high heaven,  
 To secure their power and stifle joy.  
 The Father of creation, the world-shaper,  
 Withstood that strife, won that war—  
 That fight was too fierce for arrogant angels. 75  
 All this is different with another kind of man  
 Who lives humbly on earth, meek and mild,  
 At peace with people, dear to his friends,  
 Loving even his enemies who would offer harm.  
 He works to spread good will in this world; 80

He hopes to rise into heaven, the angels' home,  
Know the joy of saints, the music of his Maker,  
The gift of glory, the breath of bliss.  
It's different for those who dwell in evil,  
Settled in sin, comfortable in crime, 85  
Perishing in pride. Their rewards are not so rich,  
A grim gift from the God of glory.  
So know this from the prophet's story—  
That if you find one humble of heart,  
Meek of mind, sharing in spirit, 90  
You will see, linked and living with him,  
A loving guest, God's own Son,  
The desire of the world, the joy of mankind,  
If the wise prophet has not deceived us.  
Therefore we should always think of salvation, 95  
The gift of God, remembering at all times  
Our great Creator, the Lord of victories.

Amen.

## WIDSITH

**W***idsith*, whose name means “wide-wanderer,” is a poem about a “scop” or “singer-poet,” who serves King Eormanric of the Goths and travels about the world, visiting a wide variety of peoples, singing his songs and telling his stories in hopes of receiving a valuable reward. As he collects, composes, and passes on stories, he weaves together the strands of people and places in a vision of the larger world. As he travels both real roads and those dreamed up in the map of the mind, he becomes the embodiment of all such poets. Fulk and Cain note that the form of the poem is mainly a *thula*, or recited list of both legendary and historical peoples and their leaders, which seems to provide “an incomparable window on the rather large repertoire of legends that an Anglo-Saxon *scop* . . . might be expected to know” (218), but they also point out that the range of the list probably goes beyond the capacity of any Anglo-Saxon audience to fully comprehend, and that “some decidedly literate lists [were] surely incomprehensible to anyone but a monkish bookworm” (218). Bjork argues that “the poem may have functioned as a mnemonic device for remembering major themes and tribes and periods of history that should be incorporated into the present worldview” (2014, xii). For the spelling of the proper names in the poem, whose forms and identities are often debated, I am indebted to Mitchell and Robinson (1998, 196–203).

### Widsith

Widsith the wandering singer spoke,  
Unlocked his word-hoard, unpacked his memory.



He had traveled along many earth-roads,  
 Known many peoples among the races of men.  
 He was often rewarded with gems in the hall 5  
 For his fund of stories, his stash of memories.  
 His ancestors hailed from the tribe of Myrgings;  
 He first came out of the east from Angel  
 With Ealhild, a trusted and gracious peace-weaver,  
 To the home of Eormanric, the Gothic king, 10  
 That savage promise-breaker, betrayer of men.  
 Widsith was rich with his many recollections.  
 With his resonant voice, he began to speak:  
 “I have learned these lessons about the rulers of men:  
 Each prince should live properly, each lord honorably; 15  
 One lord after another should rule the land,  
 So the throne can thrive, the people prosper.  
 Hwala was best for awhile, Alexander mightiest  
 Among the races of men, prospering most 20  
 Of all the peoples I’ve heard talked about.  
 Ætla ruled the Huns, Eormanric the Goths,  
 Becca the Banings, Gifca the Burgundians.  
 Caesar ruled the Greeks, Cælic the Finns,  
 Hagena the Island-Rugians, Heoden the Glommas.  
 Witta ruled the Swabians, Wade the Hælsings, 25  
 Meaca the Myrgings, Mearchealf the Hundings.  
 Theodric ruled the Franks, Thyle the Rondings,  
 Breoca the Brondings, Billing the Wærnas.  
 Oswine ruled the Eowan, Gefwulf the Jutes,  
 Fin Folcwalding the race of the Frisians. 30  
 Sigehere ruled the Sea-Danes for a long time.  
 Hnæf ruled the Hocings, Helm the Wulfings,  
 Wald the Woingas, Wod the Thuringians,  
 Sæferth the Secgan, Ongendtheow the Swedes,  
 Scafthere the Ymbas, Scafa the Longobards, 35  
 Hun the Hætwere, and Holen the Wrosnas.  
 Hringweald was called king of the pirates.  
 Offa ruled Angel, Alewih the Danes—  
 He was the bravest and boldest of all these men.  
 Yet he was no greater hero than Offa, 40  
 Unsurpassed among men, who as a boy in battle,

A youth in arms, accomplished much,  
 Gained for himself the greatest of kingdoms,  
 As no one his age had ever done.  
 With his lone sword, he fixed the boundary 45  
 Firmly against the Myrgings at Fifeldor.  
 Afterwards the Angles and Swabians held it  
 As Offa had won it with a striking sword.  
 For a long time Hrothwulf and Hrothgar together,  
 Uncle and nephew, kept a careful peace, 50  
 When they had driven off the Viking tribes  
 And vanquished Ingeld's army of spears,  
 Slew at Heorot that host of Heathobards.

So I have traveled through many foreign lands  
 In this wide world, learning much 55  
 Of both good and evil. I served and suffered,  
 Separated from family, cut off from kin.  
 So I can chant and sing, telling my story,  
 Making clear in the meadhall before many men  
 How nobles were generous, magnanimous to me. 60  
 I was with the Huns and the glorious Ostrogoths,  
 The Swedes and Geats, and also the South-Danes,  
 The Wendlas, the Wærnas, and also the Vikings,  
 The Gefthas, the Wends, and also the Gefflegas.  
 I was with the Angles, the Swabians, and the Ænenas, 65  
 The Saxons, the Secgan, and also the Sweordweras,  
 The Hronas, the Danes, and also the Heathoreamas,  
 The Thuringians, the Throwendas, and also the Burgundians,  
 Where I received an arm-ring, a beautiful bracelet.  
 Guthhere gave me a bright, shining gem 70  
 In reward for my song—he was no hoarding king.  
 I was with the Franks, the Frisians, and also the Frumtings,  
 The Rugas, the Glommas, and also the Romans.  
 Likewise I was there in Italy with Ælfwine.  
 He had, as I've heard, a commendable hand. 75  
 He was generous and quick to pass out gifts  
 And win men's praise, offering rings  
 And arm-bands, the best of benefactors,

The son of Eadwine. Still I traveled.  
 I was with the Saracens and also the Serings, 80  
 The Greeks, the Finns, and also with Caesar,  
 Who held festive cities in his great power,  
 Riches and rings and other desirables;  
 He also held the kingdom of the Welsh.  
 I was with the Scots, the Picts, and the Scride-Finns, 85  
 The Lidwicings, the Leonas, and also the Longobards,  
 With heathens and brave men, also with the Hundings.  
 I was with both Israelites and Asyrians,  
 Hebrews and Jews, and also Egyptians.  
 I was with the Medes, the Persians, the Myrgings, 90  
 And the Mofdings, and against the Myrgings,  
 And with the Amothingas; with the East Thuringians,  
 The Eolas, the Iste, and also the Idumingas.  
 I was with Eormanric all this time:  
 The king of the Goths treated me well— 95  
 He was kind and generous. He gave me gifts,  
 This lord of the cities, prince of the peoples,  
 A beautiful neck-ring cunningly crafted  
 Out of six hundred pieces of pure gold,  
 Counted in shillings. I gave it to Eadgils, 100  
 My lord and protector when I came home,  
 A precious reward for my beloved prince  
 Since the lord of the Myrgings gave me land,  
 My father's estate, my family's home.  
 Then Ealhhild, the dear daughter of Eadwine, 105  
 Noble and majestic, queen of her people,  
 Gave me another precious gift.  
 Her praise was passed on to many places,  
 As it was my dear duty to tell in song  
 Of the best and most beautiful gift-giving 110  
 Queen under great heaven's realm.  
 She was gracious and gold-adorned.  
 When Scilling and I, harp and harper,  
 With a clear voice raised a victory-song  
 Before our lord—the sound and song 115  
 Made music together—then proud-hearted men,

Whose minds were sharp, whose skills were honed,  
 Said they had never heard a better song.  
 Afterwards I passed into the land of the Goths,  
 Always seeking the best of companions, 120  
 The firmest of friends, the retainers of Eormanric.  
 I sought Hethca, Beadeca, and also the Harlungs,  
 Emerca, Fridlal, and also Ostrogotha,  
 The good and wise father of Unwen.  
 I sought Secca, Becca, Seafola, and Theodric, 125  
 Heathoric, Sifeca, Hlithé, and Incgentheow,  
 Eadwine, Elsa, Ægelmund, and Hungar,  
 And the proud band of Withmyrgings.  
 I sought Wulfhere and Wyrmhære, where war  
 Rarely ceased when the army of Goths 130  
 Had to defend their ancient hereditary  
 Homeland with hard-biting swords  
 Against the people of Ætla by Vistula wood.  
 I sought Rædhere, Rondhere, Rumstan, and Gislhere,  
 Withergield, Frederick, Wudga, and Hama. 135  
 They were not the worst, though I named them last.  
 Often the whistling, screaming spear  
 Flew fast from those people at their enemies.  
 Wudga and Hama, wanderers and exiles,  
 Commanded there, held sway over both 140  
 Men and women with twisted gold.  
 So I have always found in my far wandering  
 That people hold dearest whoever is able  
 To rule the land as long as he lives,  
 Through God's granting him that power." 145

Thus minstrels, story-tellers, song-shapers,  
 Wander about the world as fortune demands,  
 Singing their needs, speaking their thanks.  
 Wherever they go, south or north,  
 They always find someone skilled in song, 150  
 Marvelous in measures, wise in words,  
 Generous in giving from his noble treasure-ward,  
 Who wants to raise up his glory before his warriors,

To do great deeds that exalt his honor,  
Till time takes its toll and everything transient,  
Both life and light, passes finally away.  
So he gains high praise and everlasting glory  
In his storied exploits under the heavens.

## THE FORTUNES OF MEN

Like *The Gifts of Men* and the two *Maxims* poems, this poem is a kind of catalogue poem. It begins with a storied family setting, where loving parents nurture and teach their son. But the boy must eventually “walk out of youth” into the adult world, where only God knows what his fate will be. The poet begins his list of possible fortunes with a catalogue of dire fates, then turns to a few more positive fortunes, emphasizing various human crafts, implying that the answer to an inhospitable world might be hard work and a traditional place in the social fabric. The poet concludes by saying that every man should give thanks to God for fixing his fate and measuring out mercy to mankind, but the presence of mercy in the catalogue is muted. Shippey says that the poem “presents us with a particularly teasing opposition of pain and providence, so detached as to be almost bland, and yet showing clearly that the poet is able to imagine the reality of suffering, even if he chooses not to comment on it” and concludes that “the impression finally left is not heartlessness, but a determination to look on the bright side of a dark situation; a second recognition of the fact that mourning does no good, whether to the poet or to the nameless mothers of doomed children [so] the poet’s wisdom is a blend of recognition and wilful optimism” (11).

### The Fortunes of Men

Often it happens through the glory of God  
That a man and woman bring into the world  
A child by birth, give him colorful clothes,  
Cuddle and coax him, teach and train him,

Till the time comes when his young limbs 5  
 Are strong, lithe, and fully grown.  
 His father and mother first carry him,  
 Then lead him, and finally walk beside him.  
 They feed and clothe him, but God alone knows  
 What the years will bring the growing boy. 10  
 One walks out of youth to a woeful end,  
 A misery to mankind. Out on the moor  
 A gray wolf will eat him and his mother mourn—  
 His fierce fate is beyond man's wielding.  
 Hunger haunts one, the sword slays one, 15  
 The storm drowns one, the spear guts one—  
 War is his stalker, battle his bane.  
 Blind-eye gropes with his hands through life,  
 Lame-foot crawls sinew-sick through pain,  
 Bird-man flies wingless from the tree, 20  
 Doing wind-tricks as he soars down.  
 On the ground he rots like dead fruit—  
 Root-sick, his bloom is done.  
 One shall walk on a far-winding road,  
 Bear his food and home on his back 25  
 Into foreign lands, leaving a damp track  
 On dangerous ground. He has few friends  
 To offer him greeting as they gather round.  
 A friendless man finds no welcome—  
 Men fear his long trail of misfortune. 30  
 One man rides the high gallows-tree,  
 Dangling in death till the raven swoops  
 Down on his bone-house, his bloody flesh,  
 Scoops out his eyeballs, pecks at his head,  
 Tears at his corpse. He can't keep at bay 35  
 That dark-coated bird, ward off the black flier  
 With his useless hands. His life has fled.  
 He feels nothing on the gallows-tree—  
 His face is pale, his fate is fixed.  
 He swings in death's shrouded mist— 40  
 Outlaw and alien, his name is cursed.  
 Another sleeps on a funeral pyre—  
 The fierce flame, the red fire

Will devour the doomed. He leaves life quickly.  
 The woman will wail who loses her son 45  
 To the flames' embrace, his last kiss.  
 Sometimes the sword's edge steals the life  
 Of an ale-drinker or a wine-weary man  
 At the mead-bench. His words are too quick.  
 Another drinks beer from the cup-bearer's hand, 50  
 Grows drunk as a mead-fool, forgets to check  
 His mouth with his mind, seeks suffering,  
 Finds fate, life's joyless end.  
 Men call him a mead-wild self-slayer,  
 Give him an unholy name in words. 55  
 One will be lucky with God's help,  
 Leave the wrack and ruin of youth,  
 The spilling of fortune, the heft of hardship,  
 Find days of joy and the treasure of gems,  
 Mead-cups and crafted gifts in old age, 60  
 The camaraderie of kin—all worth keeping.

So mighty God gives out destinies,  
 Deals out fortunes to all men on earth.  
 One finds wealth, another finds woe,  
 One finds gladness, another finds glory, 65  
 One shoots arrows, another throws dice,  
 One is crafty at the gaming table,  
 One chooses chess, another wise words.  
 One has skill as a great goldsmith—  
 He hardens rings, adorns kings, 70  
 Who reward his craft with gifts of land.  
 One shall gladden hearts in the hall,  
 Delight the drinkers, delivering joy.  
 One sits with his harp at his lord's feet,  
 Takes his treasure, a reward of rings, 75  
 Plucks with his harp-nail, sweeps over strings,  
 Shapes song: hall-thanes long for his melody.  
 One will tame the proud, fierce bird,  
 Hold hawk in hand, till that sword-swallow  
 Gentles down to the arm's delight— 80  
 He gives the bird food and foot-rings,



Until that savage slayer in its hooded grace  
Humbles himself to his trainer's hand.  
So God gives out varied fortunes,  
Fixes fates, shapes our endings,  
Creates our crafts, decides the destiny  
Of every man throughout middle-earth.  
So every man should give thanks to him  
For the mercy he measures out to mankind.

## MAXIMS I: EXETER MAXIMS (A, B, AND C)

The *Maxims* poems that follow may be part of a single poem or three separate but formally related poems. There is a similar aphoristic poem, *Maxims II: Cotton Maxims* (see under “The Minor Poems”), which has a less varied syntax but a more diverse list of truths (or should-be truths). The heart of these poems usually consists of a list of short, pithy statements about various creatures, human and non-human, and their appropriate, typical, or desired context, action, or condition. Each maxim is a mini-definition usually built on the verb *byð* (is, is always, will be) or *sceal* (shall be, should be, must be, ought to be, is typically). These simple verbs are notoriously difficult to translate, and often the shadow of “what isn’t” or “what might not be” lurks beneath the assertion of the maxim. The relation between one maxim and its neighbors is often vexed. Sometimes there seems to be a connection; often there remains a startling disjunction. Shippey notes that “the poems’ charm often derives from their unfamiliar blend of the bold and the canny, the physical and the abstract, the banal and the suggestive” (18). Hansen says that “although it sounds authoritative, the gnomic voice . . . is open to human experience and hence to conflicting perspectives, and it insists that in the poem as in life, its listener take part in a mutual performance through which meaning is made” (176). Bjork points out that a gnomic poem like this one “seems to function as the repository of the wisdom of the tribe as it relates to the natural world, the preoccupations of the social world, and the verities and lasting realities of the Christian world” (2014, xi).

## MAXIMS I (A)

*Maxims I (A)* shares characteristics with certain OE dialogue poems such as *Solomon and Saturn* (see under “The Minor Poems”), as it begins with the speaker’s invitation to question him with wise words and to trade truths. It then offers a praise song to God before proceeding with its catalogue of “byð” and “seal” maxims that sometimes morph into miniature stories such as that of the blind man, the young student, and the man of violence. God has created a profusion of peoples with different perceptions and ideas; therefore, truths need to be traded and tested in dialogue and discussion. “God is eternal, untouched by time” (15), but his truths are not always self-evident since he gives humanity “minds to make meanings, / Myriad thoughts, diverse perceptions, / A variety of views, a host of tongues” (20–22).

## Maxims I (A)

Question me with wise words, without hiding  
 Your deepest thoughts, without making your mind  
 A mystery. How can I reveal my own secrets,  
 My knowledge and understanding without knowing  
 Your heart’s thoughts, your mind’s movement. 5  
 Wise men should stir up ideas, mixing wisdom.

It is fitting first to praise God our Father.  
 In the beginning he gave us a great treasure,  
 The gift of life with its passing joys.  
 These are precious loans to be remembered, 10  
 To be repaid. God inhabits his glory-heaven;  
 Man makes his home here on earth,  
 Passing from the raw quickness of youth  
 To the slow quavering of old age.  
 God is eternal, untouched by time. 15  
 Events cannot change him, illness ail him,  
 Age trouble him. His spirit does not weather,  
 His heart never fails. He is as he was  
 And forever will be, our patient Prince.  
 He gives us minds to make meanings, 20  
 Myriad thoughts, diverse perceptions,  
 A variety of views, a host of tongues.

Earth's islands offer a wide welcome  
 To all kinds of creatures, all peoples, all races.  
 Almighty God established these lands 25  
 In trust to man: broad, fertile plains  
 For a profusion of peoples, customs and cultures.  
 Wise men should hold meetings, sharing counsel.  
 Different minds may travel down the same road.  
 Sages can settle strife and shape a peace, 30  
 Where evil men only argue and antagonize  
 One another. Good advice goes hand in hand  
 With wisdom and justice, truth and trust.  
 Two together make good companions,  
 Woman and man, husband and wife, 35  
 Offering care and comfort, bearing children.  
 On earth each tree must shed its leaves  
 As its branches mourn; each man must be ready  
 To walk alone down death's long road.  
 Only God knows where the plague goes 40  
 When it leaves our land. When death nestles  
 In one child's heart, God grants them another.  
 A new baby makes up for what death takes.  
 It's a balance between birth and bereavement.

A man who does not know his Lord is a fool. 45  
 He doesn't recognize death's little surprise.  
 The wise are righteous and safeguard their souls.  
 Heart-glad are those who thrive at home;  
 Heartbroken, those betrayed by their friends.  
 A man with no nest egg is bound to fail. 50  
 An innocent heart sings, full of gladness.  
 A blind man must endure without eyes,  
 Suffer the world without sight. He cannot see stars,  
 The reflective moon, the radiant sun.  
 When he mulls his fate over in his mind, 55  
 He sits in sorrow, drinks up distress,  
 Certain his sight may never return.  
 Loneliness is his constant companion.  
 The Lord gave him this gift of misery  
 And can claim it back, offering a cure, 60

Quickening the cold gems in his head,  
 Healing his sight if his heart is pure.  
 The sick man needs a doctor to tend him.  
 The young man needs a teacher to instruct  
 And inspire him so he can share knowledge 65  
 And cherish learning till he is sure of himself.  
 Let him be fed and clothed, treated with respect,  
 And never abused, so his character grows.  
 Give him a chance to learn his lessons  
 And prove himself so he knows his mind 70  
 And can prosper among people and prove worthy.  
 A strong mind may rule; a savage mind  
 Must be restrained. Often a storm rages,  
 Driving the sea into a fury—the wind whips up  
 The roiling waves. Then dark waters 75  
 Drive toward the shore, testing the land's strength.  
 The cliff-walls hold firm, enduring the wind.  
 It's the raging storm that provokes the waves;  
 The sea is calm on a windless night.  
 So people are peaceful when unprovoked, 80  
 When they settle disputes, lay feuds to rest,  
 Live securely in trust with kith and kin.

A king is eager for power. He longs for land,  
 Hates one who takes it, loves one who gives it.  
 Power rides with pride, rashness with courage, 85  
 Each of them eager to engage in battle.  
 An earl rides on his high horse, his men gallop  
 Together in a troop, his foot-soldiers stand fast.  
 A woman should sit at her table and sew—  
 Her art is embroidery. A wandering woman 90  
 Causes talk to spread; she will be slandered  
 And treated with contempt till she loses face.  
 A shameful man always slinks in the shadow;  
 A pure man rises up, striding in the light.  
 The head should always work the hand, 95  
 And the hand linger lovingly on the head.  
 A great treasure rests in its hiding place.  
 The gift-throne stands ready for sharing the hoard.

Men are eager, even greedy, for the king's gold—  
 The holder of the high-seat has enough.  
 We owe the giver a return for his gifts  
 If we hold true and do not betray his trust.

100

### MAXIMS I (B)

Unlike the preceding poem, this one begins without an invocation but with a quick succession of gnomic truths: *Forst sceal freosan, fyr wudu meltan*, “Frost shall freeze, fire melt (burn) wood.” It eventually leads from such compressed gnomes to the drawn-out story of the Frisian wife, who waits patiently for her sailor-husband to return home from his long sea journey. This is immediately followed by the counterexample of some less faithful wives who become curious about other lovers in their husbands' absence. Here the antithesis between the ideal and the reality is spelled out in narrative form. The poem then moves on to a catalogue of needs: the mouth needs food, the soldier a shield, the bride a bracelet, the student a book. It concludes with a rare mention of Woden, who made idols, in contrast to God, who made glory and gave us rules to live by, like the maxims in this poem.

#### Maxims I (B)

Frost shall freeze, fire melt wood,  
 Earth bear blossoms, ice form a bridge,  
 A crown of bright water, locking up  
 Earth's seeds and shoots. One shall unfasten  
 The bonds of frost, almighty God.  
 Winter will leave, fair weather return,  
 Summer hot with sun. The restless sea,  
 The deep road of the long dead,  
 Holds many secrets—its waters run deep.  
 Holly should burn on the funeral pyre.  
 A dead man's precious possessions  
 Are often divided. The lasting memory  
 Of an honorable man is always best.

5

10

A king shall buy a queen with wealth,  
 Pay the proper bride-price, land and money,

15

Cups and rings. Both must be liberal,  
 Generous with gifts. A man must be ready for war;  
 A woman should prosper among her people.  
 A man keeps courage, a woman her secrets.  
 She should gladly give out horses and treasures. 20  
 At the meadhall banquet, she should greet her lord,  
 The people's protector, with the first cup  
 Before his companions, keep good counsel,  
 Offering advice that is wise and useful to those  
 Who rule together the hearth and home. 25

A ship shall be nailed, its boards riveted.  
 A bright linden-shield shall be lashed with leather.  
 Dear is the welcome sailor to his Frisian wife,  
 When the ship is anchored and her husband is home.  
 She calls him in, washes his sea-stained shirt, 30  
 Offering him new clothes, old comforts,  
 And all the love he needs on land.  
 A wife must be faithful, not false to her husband;  
 If she's not true, tongues will wag.  
 Many wives are constant, many are curious 35  
 And seek other pleasures to soothe separation,  
 Loving some stranger when the ship is gone.  
 The sailor is long on the sea-voyage,  
 But one should always await the arms  
 Of a spouse, the welcoming home 40  
 Of a long-gone lover, and not worry over  
 What cannot be hurried. He will come home,  
 If he's not harmed at sea, leaving her sweet pleasure  
 Asleep forever in the ocean's clutch.  
 The rich merchant pays for a place to stay 45  
 For all of his men when he sails into port,  
 Secures food and drink, wood and water,  
 Begins to feast before he feels faint.  
 A man who seldom eats will grow sick—  
 You can hardly survive on sun and good weather. 50  
 If you want to thrive and keep sailing,  
 You need something to eat to stay alive.  
 Good food is for strength, a grave for hunger.

If you want to hide a sinister murder,  
Bury it like a secret underground. 55

The humble shall bow down, the bent fall down,  
The righteous flourish. A wise man chooses  
Good counsel—it's the most useful.  
A foolish man chooses evil—it's the most useless.  
Goodness prevails in the stretch of time— 60  
It's close to God. The mind shall be measured,  
The hand held in check. The eye shall have sight,  
The spirit wisdom, the heart understanding.  
The mind of man needs to reflect carefully  
So his thoughts may thrive. Every mouth needs food; 65  
Meals should be served at regular times.  
Gold is fitting for a good sword, a precious blade;  
Beautiful clothes and fine gems for a woman.  
Heroes need a poet, a shaper of songs,  
To spin out stories of great victories. 70  
Warriors must keep their courage in battle  
To defend the homeland against attack.  
The soldier needs a shield, the raider a spear,  
The bride a ring, the student a book,  
The holy man the Eucharist, the heathen his sins. 75  
Woden wrought idols; the Almighty, glory,  
Broad skies, the plains of heaven.  
He is our mighty Maker, King of truth,  
Savior of souls, our World-shaper  
Who gave us everything: rules to live by, 80  
A world to live in, what we need  
And long for, his blessing, his Being.  
In the end he will rule the human race—  
He is our Lord and our Creator.

### MAXIMS I (C)

*Maxims I (C)* begins with the example of the wise man who needs friends, followed by the unwise man who is an exile and the friend of wolves. Like the previous poems, it asserts the need for dialogue and counsel since “there are as



many thoughts and perceptions / As there are people on earth.” The contrast between friends who share ideas and support one another and outcasts who are friendless and hostile to everyone is exemplified in the legendary enmity and isolation of Cain, which leads eventually to a world in which feud flourishes and animosity plagues the peoples of earth. If there is any overarching theme to the three *Maxims* poems, it is that differing human perceptions may lead through shared dialogue to a deeper understanding and more lasting truth. Alternatively, isolation and arrogance lead to family feud and the blood of nations spilled on the battlefields of hostility and indifference.

### Maxims I (C)

A wise man gives careful counsel,  
 Offers good advice, guards his secrets,  
 Writes runes, shapes stories, sings songs,  
 Earns fame, finds an honor-path to glory,  
 Works diligently each day as he should. 5

A smart man never forgets a fine horse,  
 Trained and broken, tamed and true,  
 Ready and round-hooved. No man ever needs  
 Or easily acquires too much. A man wants  
 A good friend on every journey, a road-mate; 10  
 One often travels a long way around a town  
 Where he knows no friends, finds no comfort.  
 The friendless man has no companions  
 Except wild wolves, savage beasts.  
 Often that slaughter-hound slashes and rips 15  
 His bare leg or throat, shredding his flesh.  
 Dread the gray wolf—give the dead man a grave.  
 The wolf mourns no murder, laments only hunger,  
 Weeps not for the kill, wails no dirge for the dead.  
 He wants only a quick feast of blood and bone. 20  
 A wound wants a bandage, a hard man revenge,  
 The arrow a bow, but a man needs both.  
 The gift needs giving, the treasure trading,  
 Gold given away—one gift deserves another.  
 God gives each gift, takes each treasure away. 25  
 A great hall stands tall, grows old alone.  
 In the forest a fallen tree grows least;

Trees should spread out, extend their arms.  
 Faith should flourish in the innocent heart.  
 A faithless man, reckless and rash, 30  
 His mind poisoned with bitter untruth,  
 Finds no care or comfort in his Maker.

God created what was in the beginning  
 And commanded it to come forward  
 Even unto now. Wise words are best 35  
 For every man, the song for a singer,  
 Prudent thought and talk for a man.  
 There are as many thoughts and perceptions  
 As there are people on earth. Everyone  
 Has a mind of his own. He longs less 40  
 Who knows how to sing songs, pluck harpstrings  
 With his quick-moving hands: he holds  
 The gift of music which God has given him.  
 He who lives alone drinks misery;  
 Fate has found him not one friend. 45  
 He would be better off if he had a brother,  
 And both were sons of the same lord.  
 If they had to attack a boar or kill a bear,  
 An animal with sharp tusks or cruel claws,  
 Together they might bring down the beast. 50  
 Warriors should bear arms and travel together,  
 Sleep in a troop, never be separated  
 By battle or slander till death takes them,  
 Tears them apart. Two shall sit together  
 At the game board till their troubles slip away, 55  
 Their sorrows sleep, and they forget fate.

Idle hands are good for nothing  
 But throwing dice; they are seldom seen  
 On a broad ship unless it's under sail.  
 A man will be weary who rows against the wind. 60  
 A weak man is accused of losing courage,  
 Lacking strength; his oar lies dry at ship-side.  
 Cheating is corrupt, but cunning may be called for  
 As a stone on the board or a bracelet is taken.

Men may hurl hateful words at each other 65  
Before turning their backs—each should be ready.  
Enmity has ruled the earth since Cain's  
Crime against his brother Abel.  
That was no one-day feud! Wickedness thrust  
Its way into the world from that first blood. 70  
Cain's killing was mankind's primal murder.  
Afterwards feud flourished, and endless hatred  
Plagued people, so the inhabitants of earth  
Invented hard spears and tempered swords,  
Endured the savage clash and claw of weapons. 75  
The shield should be ready, the spear on its haft,  
The blade on the sword, the arrow on its shaft,  
Courage in a warrior's heart, a helmet on the brave.  
But for the man without courage, without spirit,  
The least of treasures: no glory for the knave. 80

## THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

**T**he *Order of the World*, called by early editors *The Wonders of Creation*, opens with an invitation to trade wise words with a *wodþora*, “a wise poet or seer,” about the nature of creation and its divinely fashioned wonders. The speaker calls this a *herespel*, a “praise-song or eulogy,” to celebrate both Creation and Creator. It is, as Hansen notes, a kind of creation theology reflecting the belief that the natural world embodies a shaping purpose and an infinite order under the aegis of God, where “the original act of creation is repeatedly defined as one that organizes and harmonizes a variety of elements for the benefit and delight of humankind; the work sings the praises of the workman, and by contrast the limitations of human knowledge are manifest” (82). Each and every worldly wonder signifies God’s purpose and glory; each is a “telling token” in this singer’s paean—both a revealing sign in nature and here signified by words, both real in the material world and reverberant in poetic meaning. Thus the poet’s *herespel* not only celebrates God’s glory; it also participates in it and reflects in its smaller shaping the larger design and purpose of Creation. Isaacs points out that this poem is also about the act of creation in the writing of poetry: “A poem describing the wonders of God’s Creation serves as a model for demonstrating the wonders of artistic creation and the Wonders which are the proper subject for artistic creation” (71).

### The Order of the World

Are you willing to trade talk with a stranger,  
Give a seer or singer, poet or prophet,

A greeting, a welcome with wise words,  
 Question the far-traveler about creation,  
 Its natural power, its bodying forth 5  
 Into everyday wonder through God's grace,  
 Its life-quickenning capacity and clout,  
 Its marvelous moving among men?  
 Each waking wonder is a telling token  
 To the man who understands the wide world, 10  
 Holds a map in his mind, comprehending  
 The shape of creation and contemplating the past,  
 Knowing that long ago warriors and poets  
 Could weave truth in proverbs and prophecies,  
 Their measure of melodies, the warp and weft of song— 15  
 So that through their repeating, rehearsing, revising,  
 Men might remember this web of mysteries,  
 God's gift of world-wonders, of life's rich riddles,  
 Of the deep-down shaping, sustaining spirit.  
 So let the deeply thinking man, seeker and seer, 20  
 Who reflects on the seminal secrets of creation,  
 Unlock his word-hoard, inscribe for the world's  
 Understanding, the art and craft of narration,  
 The treasure of a good story, the gift of signifying song.  
 A wise man never grows weary of watching 25  
 Wonders, of contemplating this grand creation,  
 Of acting wholly and wisely in the world.

Understand this lesson—learn this lore.  
 Let me tell you first of the Creator's power,  
 His everywhere abundance, his mind and might: 30  
 It is greater than yours no matter how quick  
 Your intelligence, how deep your understanding.  
 Your mind cannot grasp his infinite wisdom,  
 His grandeur, his glory. No earth-walker,  
 No dust-dweller, can wrap his mind around God's 35  
 Magnificent work any more than the Lord grants,  
 According to his plain purpose, his high decree.  
 We must always give thanks to the Prince of peoples,  
 Our eternal Lord, both now and forever,  
 Who grants us grace, a radiance of spirit, 40

So we may rise up to the heavenly realm  
 If we obey the commands of the King of heaven  
 And are not found wanting at last in our souls.

Hear this praise-song. In the beginning,  
 Almighty God the Father, Guardian of all gifts, 45  
 Created heaven and earth, the fathoms and floor  
 Of the wide seas, and all the world's creatures  
 Visible and variable. Through God's guidance,  
 They praise his everlasting purpose and power,  
 Raising their reverent songs to his high splendor. 50  
 Our great Creator wove the world as one,  
 Shaping all creatures with craft and purpose.  
 Everyone moved as the mover intended  
 In his majesty and meaning according to his laws.  
 So all things brighten and bear his glory. 55  
 All things ring round the world, praising him,  
 Following his artful, original word,  
 Dwelling in the places where he justly put them,  
 Following the course that the Lord commanded.  
 The seas keep their boundaries; the sun and stars, 60  
 Heaven's candles, hold their bright places,  
 Maintaining their course. The blessed Lord of life  
 Leads all of creation, directs all beings,  
 All doings, in his fathomless embrace.  
 All life is drawn into his heart's hold. 65  
 He is the gentlest of judges, who shaped this life.  
 Each morning the sun rises, bright and beautiful,  
 Over the misty hills, the dark horizon,  
 Walks out of the east over the waves,  
 Wondrously adorned at the day's dawn. 70  
 The brightest of flames, a lustrous light,  
 Shines on the living, the torch of God.  
 It is a source of splendor, magnificent to men  
 On earth who have been given the gift of sight  
 By the Creator and King. Then the glorious star 75  
 Sails off into the western sky like a wanderer  
 Until it dives down in the last touch of twilight

Into the deep waters of the western seas.  
 Night follows according to the Lord's natural laws.  
 The sun sails downward into darkness, 80  
 Shining somewhere on secret roads  
 Under earth's embrace, behind the world.  
 No man is so wise that he knows the way  
 This traveler takes, or where the bright blaze  
 Hides its light, brilliant as gold, 85  
 How it sails over the plains into the endless edge  
 Of darkness and beneath the surging seas,  
 Or what earth-dweller in an unknown land  
 Might still see the sun's splendor  
 Across the ocean while we sleep in darkness. 90

Thus the Lord with unfolding purpose  
 And unending knowledge shaped the world—  
 The day with the night, the deep with the high,  
 The wind with the water, the land with the sea,  
 The field with the flood, the fish with the waves. 95  
 These works do not weaken but weather well.  
 He keeps them strong, maintains the muscle  
 And sinew of each splendor, so that each remains  
 Steadfast, firmly in the grasp of God's hands.  
 His glorious power is the source of all standing. 100  
 Those who dwell in the Lord's keeping,  
 In God's household, are eternally blessed,  
 Surrounded by joy. They live with a beloved host,  
 Countless throngs of saints and angels,  
 In the company of the glorious King of heaven, 105  
 Gazing on his radiance with devoted eyes,  
 In full faith. They have enough of everything.  
 Who sees the light knows who made the eyes;  
 Who loves the Lord lacks nothing.  
 In heaven's hall there is faith and feasting, 110  
 Radiance and revelry, the music of angels,  
 And the eternal comfort of the King of glory.  
 So each person must resolve to serve God.  
 Let each of the children of earth forsake

All empty desires, all idle pleasures, 115  
All fleeting joys, all transient treasures,  
And aspire to that abounding heavenly bliss  
Among the blessed, where all sin is shed,  
All evil eradicated, all malice undone  
By God's mercy in that better kingdom. 120



## THE RHYMING POEM

This poem is among the most difficult to translate in the OE corpus. It has not only the traditional alliterative, strong-stress constraints in each line but also rhyming half-lines—all of which make the poem nearly impossible to reproduce in modern English. It was probably difficult to produce in the original as well, since many of the words which enable the scheme are rare or nonce words, and this unrecognizability has produced scribal corruption in a number of places. The translation here makes use of off- and slant-rhymes, sometimes in succeeding lines, to allow for more flexibility. Macrae-Gibson notes in his edition of the poem that in the “writing of alliterative verse with end-rhyme, the poet is simply . . . adopting a device already established as an occasional feature, used by Cynewulf to lend weight to passages of emotional intensity, and extending it to give intensity to a whole poem” (5). Klinck, in her edition, classifies this poem as an elegy like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, noting that it divides into two halves: “The poem contrasts the speaker’s former happy and prosperous state with his present bitterness, and links his decline to the corruption of the world generally . . . and like [those elegies] moves towards a homiletic close, admonishing us to seek the joy in heaven which will not fade” (40–41). Finally, the speaker must give up his *lichoma* or “corpse-house” and find a home in heaven.

### The Rhyming Poem

I was given life by the Lord of heaven,  
Who brightly and boldly unfurled the light.  
I was dressed in bliss, in blessed colors,

In blossoming hues, the truest shades.  
 My robes were a bouquet at the banquet— 5  
 Men gazed at my beauty, my blaze.  
 I went riding on rich horses striding  
 Across the plains, stretching, straining  
 Their muscles in whinnies and whistles,  
 Their heads brushing the boughs rushing by. 10  
 Then the world was quickened with thick growth,  
 Alive with shoots, seeds becoming  
 Blossoming fruits, grains growing on earth.  
 Guests came by, trying to mix and mingle,  
 Talking lightly, dressed in delightful clothes. 15  
 My ship came guided, gliding over the sea,  
 Sailing windward, never failing me.  
 In the high hall my rank was great,  
 My brave troops riding with a regal gait.  
 Each warrior wanted to see and celebrate 20  
 Some great treasure, a weight of gold and gems.  
 As I was proud, puffed up with power,  
 Prudent men praised me, raised my image;  
 Brave men protected me from bitter enemies.  
 So power and pleasure lifted up my spirit. 25  
 My thanes and retainers were always nearby.  
 I held and harvested the land, commanded men,  
 Sat on a high throne, thriving, contriving glory,  
 Growing vain, never failing old friends.  
 Everything was smooth sailing, a plain joy. 30  
 My history was like a shaper's story,  
 Chanted with charmed words. I held fate  
 At arm's length—no frailty, just strength.  
 That was a time of singing, of harp-strings,  
 Of magical words. No sound of treachery 35  
 Was heard. Peace delivered an end  
 To the river of tears. Servants hastened to serve,  
 The lyre was plucked, bright song rang  
 In the hall, melody swelled to the ceiling—  
 There was no feeling of fear, no stealing 40  
 Of fortune or faith, blessing or boon.  
 The bright hall reverberated with bliss;

Nothing diminished, courage increased,  
 Wealth never dwindled, song never ceased.  
 Wisdom flourished as well as faith; 45  
 Nothing fell into ruin. I gave out gold,  
 Turned treasure into everyone's pleasure,  
 Sold protection, bought trust, brought fame home,  
 Gathered land, leaned toward glory.  
 My robes were elegant, my kingdom magnificent. 50  
 Now my heart is troubled, my spirit trembles;  
 The times are twisted, danger persists.  
 A warrior loved by day flees by night,  
 His bold courage now cold in sudden flight.  
 Some secret curse comes shrithing 55  
 To the once blithe hall, sits on the soul  
 Where a treasure burns. Nothing turns it aside.  
 Some endless evil, some bottomless grief,  
 Steals in the mind like a cunning thief,  
 Razes all kind thought, all hope to thrive. 60  
 The weary one struggles, wants to walk away,  
 But the road goes nowhere—every sign says,  
 “Turn back” or “No Rest Here.”  
 Pain shows no pity—no respite but despair.  
 The will is weak, desire droops and curls, 65  
 No-faith follows, the heart heaves  
 Its last, its least—all harrows, all hollows.  
 Joy fades, lordships fall. Sin spreads  
 Its wide net, shame serves, pleasure pains.  
 Thus the world winds down. Hope drowns. 70  
 The battle-spear rends, sends man down,  
 The fletched arrow rips flesh, slaughter sings,  
 Thrift falters, debt stings,  
 Old age cuts courage, exile binds,  
 Finds no known friends, no known sayings. 75  
 Wealth fails, vows begin to bail,  
 Anger burrows in, wrath reigns.  
 The barrow holds the brave, the world  
 Turns cruel, cunning rules everywhere.  
 Commanding fate keeps demanding: 80  
 “Dig a hole for yourself, a grim grave;

You've earned it, your flesh cannot flee.”

I am fate's servant: Death's arrow

Flies toward my last day, its talon

Grasps my living, tears out a gasp,

85

Shatters my bone-house, my soul's home.

Then the body lies low, deceased,

Its cold-cut heart, a worm's feast—

Home alone down to the bone.

Fame is memory—what's left remains.

90

A wise man knows well what ails, what aids him.

The taste of sin is thin and bittersweet;

God's bread is whole and soul-sustaining.

Heaven is our haven, mercy our salvation.

Let's flee from evil, see God's blessing,

95

Sing like saints separated from sin,

Live in God's love, rejoice in his judgment,

Hasten home to him, our place of peace.

## PHYSIOLOGUS I: THE PANTHER

The Old English *Physiologus* is a poem that contains separate but related allegorical poems, beginning with *The Panther* and *The Whale*. A third poem, a fragment of one and one-half lines, is about a bird of some sort, possibly a partridge or phoenix. Some editors include the fragmentary poem, *Homiletic Fragment III*, as part of the bird poem (see below). Marckwardt and Rosier note that “the medieval Latin versions of the Greek *Physiologus* (or *Bestiary*, as it was sometimes later called) contained between twenty-six and forty-nine chapters, each devoted to a real or legendary creature together with its interpreted moral or theological significance” (236). Greenfield says that the poem treats the themes of salvation and damnation allegorically as it “describes the traits and actions of birds and animals—these do not necessarily bear any resemblance to natural history—and then didactically explicates their significance in terms of God, Christ, mankind, or the devil” (Greenfield and Calder, 241).

The panther here is associated with Christ, probably because of a mistranslation of the word for “lion” in a rare reference to the Lord in Hosea where the Septuagint has “panther” instead of “lion.” The Christlike beast, handsome and exotic, is friendly to all creatures except the serpent or dragon who represents his archenemy Satan in this particular allegory. The panther has a magical coat of many colors like that of Joseph, its “luminous hues” an indication of its compelling beauty. The panther eats its fill, then sleeps in a cave for three nights, increasing its power. This corresponds to the period of Christ’s entombment after the crucifixion, during which time he harrowed hell and left the Devil enchained. At the end of this period, the panther emerges from the cave and emits an alluring music and scent from its mouth, which symbolizes the

redemptive grace of the resurrection. The musical scent (or the perfumed melody) draws the faithful to him. The implicit connection between Christ and the panther is made explicit in the concluding half of the poem.

### Physiologus I: The Panther

There are many creatures on middle-earth  
 Whose nature and origin we cannot know,  
 Whose numbers we cannot easily count—  
 Birds and beasts on air and land  
 Who wander to the water at earth's edge, 5  
 Where the rolling waves, the roiling seas,  
 Surround the shores, embracing earth.  
 We've heard about one curious kind  
 Of wild creature, an exotic animal  
 Who inhabits the hills in distant lands, 10  
 Living in caves. It's called the panther—  
 As the wise sons of men say in writings  
 About this wild wanderer, this beautiful beast.  
 He's a friend to all except the serpent,  
 The devilish dragon, whom he hates and harrows, 15  
 Fighting that fierce fiend at every opportunity.  
 The panther has a coat of many colors.  
 Just as holy men say that Joseph's coat,  
 A delight of dyes, a catch of colors,  
 Was brighter, more beautiful and varied 20  
 Than any worn by the children of men—  
 So the panther's coat has luminous hues,  
 A rainbow range, a shimmering skin,  
 Each color brighter, more beautiful than the next—  
 The fairest of furs, the sleekest of skins. 25  
 This panther is unique, one of a kind—  
 Mild and meek, gentle and loving.  
 He will harm no creature except his foe,  
 His ancient enemy, the poisonous serpent,  
 The dangerous demon, whom I've mentioned before. 30  
 When the panther is full, pleased with his feast,  
 He seeks out his secret resting place,  
 His cave in the hills, where he sleeps soundly

For three nights, slumber-fast, storing strength.  
 Then on the third day when mind and muscle 35  
 Have grown great, there comes quickly  
 From the mighty beast's mouth, strange music,  
 A sonorous mewling, a miraculous song.  
 After that melody, a strange smell rises  
 And plays like perfume in that same place, 40  
 Sweeter and stronger than any scent,  
 Than the blooms and blossoms of any plant,  
 Any flower in the wood, any fairness on earth.  
 Then from all the cities and kingdoms,  
 From the houses and halls, multitudes of men 45  
 Take to the roads, throng the earth-ways,  
 Hasten along with all the animals to the hills—  
 A company of creatures to the scent and song.

Likewise the Lord God, our ruler and redeemer,  
 Our judge and joy, giver of all gifts, 50  
 Earthly and eternal, is gentle to all creatures  
 Except the serpent, the bitter enemy,  
 The devious dragon, the source of all poison,  
 Who is God's enemy, his fiendish foe,  
 Whom he bound hard in hell's torments, 55  
 Wrapped in chains of fire, blazing fetters,  
 Sheathed in misery. Then on the third day  
 The Lord rose from the grave, from a strange and secret  
 Sleep where he suffered death for us all,  
 The prince of angels, the giver of glory, 60  
 Who died for our sake. That was a sweet smell,  
 Beautiful as a song that blessed the world.  
 Righteous men came from all over creation  
 Seeking that scent. So Saint Paul said,  
 There are many good things on middle-earth 65  
 Granted by God, the giver of gifts,  
 Ruler of rewards, our Savior and Redeemer,  
 The only hope of all earth's creatures  
 Above and below. What draws us to God  
 Is the finest fragrance, the sweetest scent. 70

## PHYSIOLOGUS II: THE WHALE

In *The Whale*, the second part of the *Physiologus*, Marckwardt and Rosier point to a mistranslation from earlier versions of the poem, where the creature is called “Fastitocalon,” which is probably derived from an Irish-Latin form of the Greek word for “shield-turtle” (237). The name lost its meaning to the Anglo-Saxons and was used as a name for the satanic whale in this poem. The description of the whale seems more realistic than that of the panther, probably because the Anglo-Saxons knew something about whales. In this poem Satan is represented by the dangerous and deceptive whale, who floats like an island, drawing unwary sailors to his thick-skinned shore. The sailors, relieved to find a respite in the middle of the sea-strife, build a fire, share a feast, and lie down in trusting sleep. The whale then dives down with the men into the ocean’s depths to drown and devour them. The poet tells us that this is the way devils and demons lure unwitting men into evil ways, drawing them away from righteous people and tempting them to rely upon the judgment of the wicked. Once the Devil has them mired in sin, he bolts into hell, dragging them behind him, just like the whale.

### Physiologus II: The Whale

Now I will draw words from the well  
Of memory, shaping with song-craft  
The tale of a fish, the great whale  
Who’s discovered unwittingly, unwillingly,  
By seafarers and wave-travelers.  
He’s deadly and dangerous, cruel and savage,



To every man. He is life-grim.  
 The name of this ancient sea-floater  
 Is Fastitocalon. His form is like rough stone,  
 Like sea-weed floating near sand-banks, 10  
 Drifting up and down at the water's edge.  
 Sailors think him a lovely island,  
 When they see him, so they can safely fasten  
 Their high-prowed ships to that un-land  
 With anchor-ropes, moor their sea-steeds 15  
 At the dark edge of this dissembling strand.  
 Then the sea-weary men disembark  
 On the devious shore, leaving their ships  
 Bound fast to the rim, surrounded by sea.  
 The sailors make camp, expecting no evil, 20  
 Fearing no fight. They kindle a flame,  
 Build a fire on that floating island,  
 Mind-weary men thankful for a rest,  
 Glad for the gift of a safe harbor.  
 When the fiendish fish, cruel and crafty, 25  
 Senses that the seafarers are finally settled down  
 On his sandlike skin, enjoying the weather,  
 Then suddenly the demon dives down,  
 Rides the salt-roads into sea-depths,  
 Settles on the bottom where he drowns them all 30  
 In a dark death-hall, both ships and men.

This is also the way of demons and devils,  
 Who snare life's travelers through secret power  
 And devious plots. They seduce and ruin  
 The good will and works of men, 35  
 Tricking them into turning to their foes,  
 Depending on their enemies, finding cruel  
 Companionship in the comfort of fiends,  
 When they settle down in the Devil's home.  
 When he knows through his cruel craft 40  
 And perverse purpose that some people  
 From the race of men are in his power,  
 Bound by his chains—then the soul-slayer  
 Takes their lives through his savage skill,

The high and the humble, the proud and perishing, 45  
 Who do his dark will, mired in sin,  
 Here in this human land. Suddenly he bolts into hell,  
 Hiding under the dark helmet of night.  
 Deprived of good, he seeks the bottomless surge  
 Of terrible torment in the opaque gloom, 50  
 Just like the great whale who sinks ships,  
 Dragging sailors to the death-hall of doom.

The sea-charger, the proud whale  
 Has another strange trait. Out in the ocean,  
 When hunger harrows the awesome beast 55  
 And he's desperate for food, the sea's guardian  
 Opens his mouth, stretching his lips.  
 A beautiful scent rises up from inside him,  
 Which snares all kinds of smaller fish.  
 They dart on the waves to that sweet smell 60  
 Streaming out. They all crowd into that cave  
 Without thinking, wary of nothing,  
 Until the monster's maw is overflowing.  
 Then quickly he claps his grim jaws shut,  
 Snaring his battle-prey in his savage mouth. 65

So it is with each unwary man  
 Who wastes his days, his fleeting years,  
 His tenuous life—who loses his will  
 And is deceived by the sweet scent—  
 So that stained with sin, drunk with desire, 70  
 He is marked with guilt before God,  
 The King of Glory. The cursed one  
 Opens for him the gates of hell  
 At the end of life's great journey  
 And offers his dark gift to those 75  
 Who have falsely and foolishly followed  
 The joys of the flesh, delighting in the body  
 Against the wise guidance of the soul.  
 When the deceiver has dragged them down  
 Into that fierce prison with craft and cunning, 80  
 Into the ravening fire, that raging flame,

Then he attacks those who have listened to him in life  
 And taken his teachings eagerly to heart.  
 After the life-slaughter, he snaps shut  
 His grim jaws, the gates of hell. 85  
 No one inside can ever escape—  
 No exit, no return. Just like small fish,  
 Such seafarers cannot escape from the whale's maw.

Therefore we must always be wary of the whale's trap,  
 The Devil's trickery, any unholy deceit, 90  
 And put our trust in the Lord of lords,  
 Strive against all devils, whether fish or fiend,  
 With words and deeds, so that we can fix our eyes  
 On the King of Glory. Let us look to him  
 For peace and salvation in this fleeting life, 95  
 So that we may dwell in glory with the dear one,  
 Near and far, both now and forever.

## PHYSIOLOGUS III: PARTRIDGE OR PHOENIX?

This poem has traditionally been edited with the homiletic fragment that follows as a single poem, though there are obvious breaks in the manuscript and in the syntax and meaning. The combined poem has traditionally been identified as a partridge in the tripartite *Physiologus*, but Drout (2007) argues instead for a phoenix. In his edition of the Exeter Book, Muir argues that the homiletic fragment is a separate poem (see the headnote to that poem). As it stands, it is difficult to tell what sort of bird is meant here.

### Physiologus III: Partridge or Phoenix?

I heard of a strange story told  
About a wondrous, beautiful bird

\* \* \*

## HOMILETIC FRAGMENT III: GOD’S BRIGHT WELCOME

This is one of two homilies or homiletic fragments in the Exeter Book; there is a third in the Vercelli Book. Number III here comes before number II in the sequence because when the poems were first identified and titled, it was thought to be part of the preceding poem, *The Partridge*. Drout (2007) suggests that this is a long phoenix poem with missing portions. The latest editor of the Exeter Book argues for a missing folio conjugate between the poems which accounts for the textual loss and believes this segment to be another homiletic fragment (Muir, 9, 590). In this homiletic poem, the Lord entreats his listeners (or readers) to turn away from *hellfirena swearta*, “dark hell-sins” or “hellish crimes,” and follow him in order to become *beorhte gebroþor*, or “bright, radiant brethren.”

### Homiletic Fragment III: God’s Bright Welcome

\* \* \*

And the Lord of light spoke these words:

“Truly when you turn to me in trust,

Following me in faith, whole in your heart’s love,

And flee from the darkness of hell-sins,

Then I will turn kindly, mercifully to you,

5

With a sweet familial love, an old affection,

And welcome you home with open arms,

Offer you blessings beyond number,

Count you my comely and cherished children,

My bright brethren, my loving radiance.”

10

So let us yearn eagerly to please God,  
Hate sin, turn away from torment,  
Earn what's deep-down wanted  
By us, by God, his peace and protection,  
His kindness and comfort, his ushering in  
Each yearning heart as long as the day lights,  
The sun livens our breath and being.  
Then we shall dwell in the brightest of homes,  
The best of havens, the glory of God.

*Finis.*

## SOUL AND BODY II

This is one of two *Soul and Body* poems in Old English; the other, longer version, which contains not only the lament of the damned soul (as the Exeter version does here) but also the celebration of the saved or blessed soul, occurs in the Vercelli Book. Fragments of *The Soul's Address to the Body* are also found in the Worcester Fragments (see the "Additional Poems" section). The common portions of the poems are alike in most ways, though there are subtle differences in usage and spelling (see Moffat's 1990 edition for comparative versions). Fulk and Cain note that "the soul's address to the body and the horrors of the rotting corpse are standard homiletic themes . . . [and] though the Exeter version lacks the less colorful speech of the saved soul, the two versions must stem from a common written tradition" (138). The soul and body are separated at death so that each suffers a different fate: the soul laments the sins of the body while the body suffers mutely, a feast for worms. Anderson points out in his edition that "though the onslaught of the worms is luridly described, the corpse cannot feel its horrors, which will end when the greedy worms have divided and eaten it [while] the soul, on the other hand, will know its own agony forever" (48). Similar themes are found in *The Grave*, *Judgment Day I*, *Judgment Day II*, and *Christ III: Judgment*.

### Soul and Body II

Truly every man needs to see and understand  
The state of his soul, the fate of its journey,  
How dark it will be when grim death comes

To separate those kinsmen, body and soul,  
 Who were so long together, joined as one. 5  
 Long afterwards the soul shall receive  
 God's just reward, either grief or glory,  
 Torment or true bliss, depending on what  
 The body has earned for it, the world-walker,  
 Dust-dweller, in their days on earth. 10  
 The soul shall come every seventh night  
 For three hundred years, moaning in misery,  
 Seeking the body, that carrion coat  
 It wore before, that unthriving flesh,  
 Unless God determines the world's doom 15  
 Sooner than that, almighty Father, eternal Lord.  
 Then the soul shall speak, discourse with dust,  
 Crying out its cares with chilling words:  
 "You cruel, bloody clod, what have you done?  
 Why did you torment me, filth of flesh, 20  
 Wasting world-rot, food for worms,  
 Effigy of earth? You gave little thought  
 To the state of your soul and how it might suffer  
 After leaving your clutch, lifted from flesh,  
 Or how long you might molder and spoil. 25  
 Are you blaming me, you wicked wretch?  
 Worm-food, did you ever consider  
 How long this would last, the length of forever?  
 God in his goodness gave you a spirit—  
 The Lord in his great power and glory 30  
 Sent you by an angel from his home in heaven  
 The gift of a soul from his own hand;  
 Then he redeemed you with his holy blood,  
 His sacred suffering, his blessed sacrifice.  
 Yet you bound me with hard hunger 35  
 And cruel thirst; you tied me to torments  
 In hell's dark home, made me a slave.  
 Oh, I lived inside you, encompassed by flesh,  
 Trapped in my torment, your sinful desires,  
 Your lusty pleasures. I couldn't escape. 40  
 Your evil pressed upon me so strongly  
 That it sometimes seemed that I might have to wait



Thirty thousand years till the day you died.  
 So I waited in misery for our moment of parting—  
 Now the end of this waiting is not so good! 45  
 You were puffed up with pride, gorging on food,  
 Drunk with wine, feasting on pleasure  
 Like some wild beast, while I felt a thirst  
 For the body of God, a soulful drink.  
 If you had considered in your long life here 50  
 While I had to live with you in the wretched world,  
 That you were directed to flesh, drawn to lust,  
 Sated with sin, yet steadied and strengthened  
 By the gift of a soul sent from God,  
 Then you never would have tormented me 55  
 So severely with the desires of your hellish heart.  
 Now you will suffer disgrace with my shame,  
 Grief with my grieving, on that great day  
 When the only-begotten Son gathers up mankind.  
 Now you are no more loved as a faithful companion, 60  
 No more important to anyone alive,  
 Mother or father, kith or kin,  
 Than the darkest of birds, the black raven,  
 The carrion crow—not since I left you,  
 Sent on a journey by the same holy hand 65  
 That brought me down to the flesh-house before.  
 Now comes the day of his hard reckoning.  
 You can't buy any easy way out of the journey  
 Toward judgment—not with crimson jewels,  
 Not with silly trinkets, not with silver or gold, 70  
 Not with worldly goods. Now you must abide  
 In the earth's embrace. What remains, my body,  
 Will be stripped to the bone, its sinews shredded,  
 Its ligaments ripped away, while I, your soul,  
 Must seek you out, unwilling yet undaunted, 75  
 Revile you with words as you did me with deeds.  
 You are deaf and dumb to the living world,  
 But not to me. Your pleasures are past.  
 Still I must visit you at night with my need,  
 Driven by sorrow, afflicted by sin, 80  
 Only to flee at cockcrow, when holy men

Sing praise-songs to the living God.  
 I must leave for the lands appointed to me  
 By your dark deeds, a home for the homeless,  
 A house of shame. Mold-worms and maggots 85  
 Will feed on your flesh, chew up your sinews,  
 Dark greedy creatures, gluttons munching you  
 Moment by moment back to the bone.  
 The extravagances you offered, the vanities you paraded  
 Here on earth before people, finally mean nothing. 90  
 Better for you than the accumulated wealth of the world—  
 Unless you'd given your riches to God as a gift—  
 Would be to have been conceived from the beginning  
 As a bird in the air, a fish in the flood,  
 Or an animal on the earth, grazing along, 95  
 A dumb ox in the field without wit,  
 Or the wildest beast wandering the wasteland,  
 If God had willed it, or even the worst of worms,  
 Than ever to have been born a man to take baptism.  
 You will have to answer for both of us 100  
 On the dread day of reckoning when all the wounds  
 Wrought by men in this world are revealed,  
 The sores of sin, the marks of misery.  
 Then the Lord himself, the Shaper of heaven,  
 Will determine a judgment, a just reward. 105  
 What will you say to God on Doomsday?  
 You will have to pay for each sin separately,  
 With each small joint in your hand or limb—  
 A grim judgment from a stern judge.  
 But what are we going to do together 110  
 When God has conceived us as one again?  
 Then we will endure the multitude of miseries,  
 The gathering of griefs, you allotted for us earlier.”

Then the soul will revile the flesh-hold,  
 Condemn the body, the cold corpse, 115  
 As it hastens away to the depths of hell,  
 Tormented by sinful deeds, not to the holy  
 Delights of heaven. The dust will lie still—  
 It cannot respond, offer the sad soul

Some argument or answer, some ease for the spirit, 120  
 Some support or peace. A corpse cannot speak.  
 Its head is split open, its hands torn apart,  
 Its jaw is gaping, its palate cracked,  
 Its gums shredded, its throat ripped out,  
 Its sinews sucked away, its neck gnawed apart. 125  
 Savage worms now ravage its ribs,  
 Bloodthirsty ones gulping down gore.  
 Its tongue is ripped into ten pieces,  
 A delightful feast for the little devourers,  
 So it cannot speak to the soul, trade talk 130  
 With the wretched spirit. The name of the worm  
 Is Ravenous Greedy-Mouth, whose hard jaws  
 Are sharp as needles. He is the first visitor  
 To venture in the grave, crunching through ground.  
 He rips up the tongue, bores through the teeth, 135  
 Eats down through the eyes into the head,  
 Inviting the other gobblers to a great feast,  
 When the wretched body has cooled down  
 That once wore clothes against the cold.  
 Then it becomes the feast for worms, 140  
 Cold carrion, a banquet for maggots.  
 Wise men should remember this.

## DEOR

*D*eor is rare among Old English poems in that it is written in stanzas and includes a refrain. It has been interpreted in many ways—among them a dramatic monologue, a charm for good fortune, a begging poem, an elegy, and a poem of consolation (Muir, 597–98). It follows a series of homiletic or religious poems and precedes two elegies and the first group of riddles; it is a poem that bridges the homiletic and the enigmatic. Both the form of the poem and its murky historical details are much debated. *Deor* weaves stories out of Germanic history and legend and shapes a moral reflection from them. Each stanza details a particular story of misfortune and suffering, ending with a refrain intended to generalize sorrow to hold some hope for its passing away with time. The refrain, *Þæs ofereode; þisses swa mæg*, “That passed over—so can this,” appears to offer some hope for the surcease of the narrator’s suffering. The central paradox here is that while misfortunes may “pass over” in time, they remain in the mind of the singer in fragmented form. Ironically, the poem conveys a deep sense of loss even as it claims to ameliorate it.

The poem opens with the story of the legendary smith Weland, whose hamstrings are cut by King Nithhad in order to enslave him and force him to make beautiful objects for him. Weland seduces or rapes the king’s daughter Beadohild, leaving her pregnant, and kills the king’s sons. In the second stanza, Beadohild says that the death of her brothers was less painful to her than her own suffering, once she discovered that she was pregnant. In the third stanza, the story of Mæthhild and Geat is cryptically mentioned. There is much critical debate about this story, which has no known medieval origin. In the fourth stanza, *Deor* mentions a despotic ruler, Theodric, who

ruled the Mærings for thirty winters (years were often marked by winters in Anglo-Saxon England). In the fifth stanza, Deor mentions the tyrant Eormanric, a fourth-century king of the Goths. His “wolfish ways” lead to such suffering that his subjects hope that some foe might attack him and take over his kingdom.

After his cryptic catalogue of the misfortunes of legendary people in the first half of the poem, the narrator tells us that his name is Deor and that he once served as the *scop* or singer in the court of the Heodenings until he was unceremoniously displaced by another singer, Heorrenda. Heorrenda is mentioned in one of the sagas, but there is no record of a singer named Deor. His name may be a poetic fiction. *Deor* can mean “brave, bold” but also “grievous, ferocious.” As a noun it means “wild beast.” A similar word, *deore*, means “dear, precious, beloved,” and a wordplay seems possible here, as Deor moves from a beloved place in the Heodenings’ court to a life of loneliness and wild exile, “apart from joy.” Deor’s loss is finally twofold. He misses the life he once had as a prized singer in the court, but beyond that he can no longer remember the details of his old life or the stories he once sang. He can only recall these fragments. For all his hope in their passing over, they remain like barbs in the mind.

## Deor

Weland the smith made a trial of exile.  
 The strong-minded man suffered hardship  
 All winter long—his only companions  
 Were cold and sorrow. He longed to escape  
 The bonds of Nithhad who slit his hamstrings, 5  
 Tied him down with severed sinews,  
 Making a slave of this better man.  
*That passed over—so can this.*

To Beadohild the death of her brothers  
 Was not so sad as her own suffering 10  
 When the princess saw she was pregnant.  
 She tried not to think how it all happened.  
*That passed over—so can this.*

Many have heard of the cares of Mæthhild—  
 She and Geat shared a bottomless love. 15

Her sad passion deprived her of sleep.

*That passed over—so can this.*

Theodric ruled for thirty winters

The city of the Mærings—that's known to many.

*That passed over—so can this.*

20

We all know the wolfish ways of Eormanric—

That grim king ruled the land of the Goths.

Many a man sat bound in sorrow,

Twisted in the turns of expected woe,

Hoping a foe might free his kingdom.

*That passed over—so can this.*

25

A man sits alone in the clutch of sorrow,

Separated from joy, thinking to himself

That his share of suffering is endless.

The man knows that all through middle-earth,

Wise God goes, handing out fortunes,

Giving grace to many—power, prosperity,

Wisdom, wealth—but to some a share of woe.

30

Let me tell this story about myself:

I was singer and shaper for the Heodenings,

Dear to my lord. My name was Deor.

For many years I was harper in the hall,

Honored by the king, until Heorrenda now,

A song-skilled shaper, has taken my place,

Reaping the rewards, the titled lands,

That the guardian of men once gave me.

*That passed over—so can this.*

35

40

## WULF AND EADWACER

This poem was first thought to be a riddle because of the deliberate obscurity of its language and the enigma of its last lines. It has also been “identified as a charm, a complaint that a passage of verse has been misplaced, an account of romance among dogs (facetiously), and of an anthropomorphic pack of wolves” (Fulk and Cain, 191). Now most critics consider the poem a dramatic monologue spoken by a woman who is separated from her lover Wulf and unhappy in her marriage to Eadwacer. The poem is addressed to Wulf, but at one point the speaker also seems to cry out to another man, Eadwacer. Since *eadwacer*, however, means literally “guardian of wealth or fortune,” this might simply be an epithet for Wulf or even for God. There is also a child in the poem, the whelp of line 20. We don’t know whether the father of this child is Wulf or Eadwacer, or why Wulf may be bearing this child to the wood (or perhaps “wood” is a riddle for something like a cradle or even the grave). Maybe the woman is married to Eadwacer but in love with Wulf and wants to escape with him. Maybe she both longs for, and fears, the return of Wulf. It’s unclear whose embrace it is that is both lovely and loathsome to the woman. Another theory is that the speaker’s child is actually Wulf and that the poem is a mother’s lament for her lost or separated son. The half-line refrain, which is rare in Old English poetry, *ungelic(e) is us*, means literally, “It’s different (unlike) for us (between us).” But who is this “us”? Does the refrain mean that the speaker is different from Wulf or from Eadwacer? Or does it mean that she and Wulf are different from her own people or even from the rest of the cruel world? We’re never sure, but we feel keenly the woman’s sense of separation and suffering. Finally,

as Horner argues, her only resolution is to sing her sorrow “as her voice breaks through her enclosed solitude” (42).

## Wulf and Eadwacer

If he comes home here to my people, it will seem  
A strange gift. Will they take him into the tribe  
And let him thrive or think him a threat?  
It's different with us.

Wulf is on an island; I am on another. 5  
Fast is that island, surrounded by fens.  
There are bloodthirsty men on that island.  
If they find him, will they take him into the tribe  
And let him thrive or think him a threat?  
It's different with us. 10

I've endured my Wulf's wide wanderings  
While I sat weeping in rainy weather—  
When the bold warrior wrapped me in his arms—  
That was a joy to me and also a loathing.

Wulf, my Wulf, my old longings, 15  
My hopes and fears, have made me ill;  
Your seldom coming and my worried heart  
Have made me sick, not lack of food.  
Do you hear, Eadwacer, guardian of goods?  
Wulf will bear our sad whelp to the wood. 20

It's easy to rip an unsewn stitch  
Or tear the thread of an untold tale—  
The song of us two together.



## RIDDLES 1–57

There are over ninety OE lyric riddles in the Exeter Book, separated into three parts. The exact number varies from edition to edition, depending on how the breaks between the riddles are construed. A few are based on medieval Latin riddles, but most appear to be original. The use of riddles or of riddlic metaphors is an important rhetorical device in medieval dialogue poetry such as *Solomon and Saturn* and in early Germanic works like the Old Norse *Vafþrúðnismál* and the Icelandic *Heidreks Saga*. In formal poetic terms, there are two kinds of riddles in the Exeter Book. In third-person descriptive riddles, the human speaker describes a wondrous creature he has seen or heard about. These riddles often begin with a formula, “I saw (heard about) a creature,” or “The creature is,” and end with “Say what I mean.” First-person persona riddles, which use the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, give voice to the non-human creature and often begin with “I am (was) a creature” and end with “Say who I am.” The tension between these two different kinds of riddles raises a question about the implied relationship between perception and being, or hermeneutics (how we make meaning) and ontology (how we define being). How we perceive the world, how we make meaning with language, helps to shape who we are.

The riddles, however, also point to the limits of our ability to catch the real world by means of language. Barley, for example, argues that the riddle-game is “a complicated play on reality and appearance, linking the unlike, denying conventional similarities, and generally dissolving barriers between classes, to make us realize that the grid we impose upon the world is far from a perfect fit and not the only one available” (143–44). Tiffany points to the “inherently seductive quality of a riddle, which can be attributed in part to a

manner of speaking that simultaneously illuminates and obscures its object . . . [so that the creature] becomes human and then performs a verbal striptease in the dark, before our eyes, divesting itself of its human attributes” (79–80). Another kind of striptease takes place in those riddles which are characterized as bawdy double-entendre riddles. These appear to have two solutions, one for the prim and one for the saucy. The onion masquerade hides a penis, the butter churn a vagina. The sword tells us he’s the battlefield brawler, not that bedroom carouser. These riddles, which were once termed “obscene” and considered “folk riddles,” are now thought to be complex lyric explorations of human sexuality and of the way we use language to characterize it or play seductive games with it.

No solutions to the riddles are provided in the Exeter Book. For a brief discussion of solutions proposed by scholars for each riddle, see the “Appendix of Possible Riddle Solutions.” The occasional use of runes in the riddles is indicated by boldface letters in the translations; the meaning of these is explained in the appendix note for each riddle in which the runes occur.

## Riddles 1–57

### 1

What man is so mind-strong and spirit-shrewd  
 He can say who drives me in my fierce strength  
 On fate’s road when I rise with vengeance,  
 Ravage the land with a thundering voice,  
 Rip folk-homes, plunder the hall-wood: 5  
 Gray smoke rises over rooftops—on earth  
 The rattle and death-shriek of men. I shake  
 The forest, blooms and boles, rip trees,  
 Wander, roofed with water, a wide road,  
 Pressed by mighty powers. On my back I bear 10  
 The water that once wrapped earth-dwellers,  
 Flesh and spirit. Say who shrouds me  
 And what I am called who carry these burdens.  
 Sometimes I plunge through the press of waves  
 To men’s surprise, stalking the sea-warrior’s 15  
 Fathomed floor. The white waves whip,  
 Foam-flanks flaring, the ocean rips,  
 The whale’s lake roars, rages—

Savage waves beat on the shore, cast rock,  
 Sand, seaweed, water on the high cliffs 20  
 As I thrash with the wave-power on my back  
 And shake under blue, broad plains below.  
 I cannot flee from the helm of water  
 Till my lord lifts me to a higher road.  
 Say, wise man, who it is who draws me 25  
 From sea-clutch and cover as the deep  
 Stream stills and white waves sleep.  
 Sometimes my lord seizes and shoves me,  
 Muscles me under the broad breast of ground,  
 Packs my power in a dark, narrow prison, 30  
 Where the hard earth rides my back.  
 I cannot flee from the weight of torture,  
 Yet I shake the home-stones of men:  
 Horn-gabled meadhalls tremble,  
 Walls quake, perch over hall-thanes, 35  
 Ceilings, cities shake. The air is quiet  
 Above the land, the sea broods, silent  
 Till I break out, ride at my ruler's call—  
 My lord who laid bonds on me in the beginning,  
 Creation's chains, so I might not escape 40  
 His power unbowed—my guardian, my guide.  
 Sometimes I swoop down, whipping up waves,  
 Rousing white water, driving to shore  
 The flint-gray flood, its foam-flanks flaring  
 Against the cliff wall. Dark swells loom 45  
 In the deep—hills on hills of dark water,  
 Driven by the sea, surge to a meeting of cliffs  
 On the coast road. There is the keel's cry,  
 The sea-guest's moan. Sheer cliffs wait  
 Sea-charge, wave-clash, war of water, 50  
 As the high troop crowds the headland.  
 There the ship finds a fierce struggle  
 As the sea steals its craft and strength,  
 Bears quick cargo through bitter time,  
 The souls of men, while white terror 55  
 Rides the waves' back. Cruel and killing

On the savage road—who stills us?  
 Sometimes I rush through the clouds riding  
 My back, spill the black rain-jugs,  
 Rippling streams, crack clouds together 60  
 With a sharp shriek, scattering light-shards.  
 Sky-breakers surge over shattered men,  
 Dark thunder rolls with a battle-din,  
 And the black rain hums from a wet breast,  
 Waves from the war-cloud's womb. 65  
 The dark horsemen storm. There is fear  
 In the cities in the souls of men when dark,  
 Gliding specters raise light-sharp swords.  
 Only a dull fool fears no death-stroke;  
 He dies nonetheless if the true lord 70  
 Whistles an arrow from the whirlwind  
 Streaking rain through his heart. Few  
 Find life in the rain-shriek's dart.  
 I urge that battle, incite the clash  
 Of clouds as I rage through rider's tumult 75  
 Over sky-streams. Then I bow down  
 At my lord's command, bear my burden  
 Close to the land, a mighty slave.  
 Sometimes I storm beneath the land,  
 Sometimes rage in the cavern of waves, 80  
 Sometimes whip the waters from above,  
 Or climb quickening the clash of clouds.  
 Mighty and swift—say what I'm called  
 And who rouses and calms my fierce power.

## 2

Sometimes busy, bound by rings,  
 I must eagerly obey my servant,  
 Break my bed, clamor brightly  
 That my lord has given me a neck-ring.  
 Sleep-weary I wait for the grim-hearted 5  
 Greeting of a man or woman; I answer  
 Winter-cold. Sometimes a warm limb  
 Bursts the bound ring, pleasing my dull-

Witted servant and myself. I sing round  
The truth if I may in a ringing riddle. 10

## 3

I am the lone wood in the warp of battle,  
Wounded by iron, broken by blade,  
Weary of war. Often I see  
Battle-rush, rage, fierce fight flaring—  
I hold no hope for help to come 5  
Before I fall finally with warriors  
Or feel the flame. The hard hammer-leavings  
Strike me; the bright-edged, battle-sharp  
Handiwork of smiths bites in battle.  
Always I must await the harder encounter, 10  
For I could never find in the world any  
Of the race of healers who heal hard wounds  
With roots and herbs. So I suffer  
Sword-slash and death-wound day and night.

## 4

The culminant lord of victories, Christ,  
Created me for battle. Often I burn  
Countless living creatures on middle-earth,  
Treat them to terror though I touch them not,  
When my lord rouses me to wage war. 5  
Sometimes I lighten the minds of many,  
Sometimes I comfort those I fought fiercely  
Before. They feel this high blessing,  
As they felt that burning, when over the surge  
And sorrow, I again grace their going. 10

## 5

My gown is silent as I thread the seas,  
Haunt old buildings or tread the land.  
Sometimes my song-coat and the supple wind  
Cradle me high over the homes of men,  
And the power of clouds carries me 5  
Windward over cities. Then my bright silks

Start to sing, whistle, roar,  
 Resound and ring, while I  
 Sail on, untouched by earth and sea,  
 A spirit, ghost and guest, on wing. 10

## 6

I am a mimic with many tongues,  
 Warbling tunes, shifting tones,  
 Juggling the city with head-song.  
 Old night-singer, song-shaper,  
 Pleasure-poet—I keep a clear calling, 5  
 Wind melody for men. These sit  
 Bowed in quiet in the curve of song.  
 Say who I am who sing like a minstrel  
 Soft clamor of court and mime the world  
 In harlequin play, boding bright welcome. 10

## 7

I was an orphan before I was born.  
 Cast without breath by both parents  
 Into a world of brittle death, I found  
 The comfort of kin in a mother not mine.  
 She wrapped and robed my subtle skin, 5  
 Brooding warm in her guardian gown,  
 Cherished a changeling as if close kin  
 In a nest of strange siblings. This  
 Mother-care quickened my spirit, my natural  
 Fate to feed, fatten, and grow great, 10  
 Gorged on love. Baiting a fledgling  
 Brood, I cast off mother-kin, lifting  
 Windward wings for the wide road.

## 8

I was locked in a narrow nest,  
 My beak bound below the water  
 In a dark dive; the sea surged  
 Where my wings woke—my body quickened  
 From the clutch of wave and wandering wood. 5  
 Born black, streaked white, I rise

From the womb of waves on the wind's back,  
Sailing over seals' bath. Who am I?

## 9

My dress is silver, shimmering gray,  
Spun with a blaze of garnets. I craze  
Most men—rash fools I run on a road  
Of rage, and cage quiet determined men.  
Why they love me—lured from mind, 5  
Stripped of strength—remains a riddle.  
If they still praise my sinuous power  
When they raise high the dearest treasure,  
They will find through reckless habit  
Dark woe in the dregs of pleasure. 10

## 10

Foot-furrowing, I walk and wound—  
Living I ravage the raw land;  
Lifeless I bind lord and servant.  
Sometimes out of my belly I bring  
The rush of drink to the fierce-hearted 5  
War-man. Sometimes the arch-wild,  
Fierce-footed woman treads my back.  
Sometimes the dark-haired, drunken slave  
Lifts me up near the night fire  
With hot hands—turns, teases, 10  
Presses, thrusts, warm and wet,  
Down dark ways. Say what I am,  
Who living plunder the down land  
And after death serve man.

## 11

I saw six creatures scratch the ground,  
Their four lively sisters strutting round;  
The house of each, pale skin on shell,  
A fine, filament robe hung on a wall,  
Well-seen. Though each had been stripped 5  
Of a gossamer skin, none was nude  
Or raw with pain; but quickened, covered,

And brought to grass and grain by God—  
They pecked, strutted, and stripped sod.

## 12

Once I was a plain warrior's weapon—  
Now a stripling prince wraps my body  
With bright twists of silver and gold.  
Sometimes men kiss me or carry me to battle  
Where I call my lord's companions to wage war. 5  
Bright with jewels, I am borne by a horse  
Over hard plains, sometimes by the sea-stallion  
Over storm-waves. Sometimes a woman,  
Ring-adorned, fills my breast for the table—  
Later I lie stripped of sweet treasure, 10  
Hard and headless on the long boards.  
Clothed in gold, I may grace the wall  
Where men sit drinking, a soldier's gem.  
Wound with silver, I sometimes ride  
A warrior's horse, swallowing soldier's breath, 15  
Blasting battle-song. Sometimes I bring  
Bold men to wine; sometimes I sing caution  
Or rescue thieves' catch or scatter foes  
For my lord. Say what I am called.

## 13

I am a warrior with a white throat.  
My head and sides are tawny. Two ears  
Tower above my eyes. My back and cheeks  
Are furred. I bear battle-weapons.  
My gait is swift. I lope through green 5  
Grass on battle-toes. My song is sorrow  
If the slaughter-hound scents the narrow  
Hall where I lie hidden with a brood  
Of children, and we wait nestled in the curve  
Of love while death snuffs at the door. 10  
The dog drags doom—so quick with terror,  
I seize my children for a secret flight.  
If he bellies down, stalking in my chamber,



I cannot choose to fight—that is fools'  
 Counsel—I must tunnel a quick road 15  
 Through a steep hill, paw for the light,  
 Rush mothered babes through the burrow  
 Safely on secret streets out the hill-hole.  
 Brood-free I do not fear the hound's rush.  
 If the death-foe tracks the fierce mother 20  
 Through side streets, he will find  
 A narrow road through Grimsgate and a hard  
 Meeting on hilltop as I turn battle-tooth  
 And war-claw on the foe I once fled.

## 14

In battle I rage against wave and wind,  
 Strive against storm, dive down seeking  
 A strange homeland, shrouded by the sea.  
 In the grip of war, I am strong when still;  
 In battle-rush, rolled and ripped 5  
 In flight. Conspiring wind and wave  
 Would steal my treasure, strip my hold,  
 But I seize glory with a guardian tail  
 As the clutch of stones stands hard  
 Against my strength. Can you guess my name? 10

## 15

I guard a full flock of old treasures  
 In a belly bound by wires. Sometimes  
 I spit forth death-spears by day—  
 And slay more surely, the fatter my belly.  
 Sometimes I swallow battle-weapons, 5  
 Dark gleaming spears, arrows that ache  
 And snakelike points. My belly is great  
 In its death-bright hoard, dear to proud warriors  
 Who may remember what I thrust through my mouth.

## 16

A strange creature. I cannot speak,  
 Mix words with men, though I have a mouth

And a broad belly

\* \* \*

I sailed on a ship crowded with kin.

17

I saw the smooth-prancing **S R O**  
**H**, high-powered and head-bright,  
 Sail on the plain. The proud one  
 Held on its back a battle-power,  
**N O M**. On the nailed creature came 5  
 The **A G E W**. The wide road carried,  
 Fierce in its flowing, a bold **C O**  
**F O A H**. The journey of these was flash  
 And glint. Let the wise who catch  
 The drift of this riddle say what I mean. 10

18

I am a strange creature shaped for battle,  
 Coated in colors, dear to my lord.  
 Bright thread lurks and swings in my mail,  
 Cradles the death-gem, gift of a lord  
 Who grips and guides my body forward 5  
 Through the wide rush of war. In the clear  
 Court of day, I bear the glint of gold,  
 Bright song of smiths. Often I slay  
 Soul-bearers with thrust and slash.  
 Sometimes the hall-king decks me in silver 10  
 Or garnet praise, raises my power  
 Where men drink mead, reins my killing  
 Or cuts me loose, heart-keen, swing-tired,  
 Through the broad room of war. Sometimes I sing  
 Through the throat of a friend—the curse 15  
 Of weapons. No son will seek vengeance  
 On my slayer when battle-foes ring death.  
 My tribe will not count children of mine  
 Unless I lordless leave the guardian  
 Who gave me rings. My fate is strange: 20  
 If I follow my lord and wage war,

Sure thrust of a prince's pleasure,  
 Then I must stroke in brideless play  
 Without the hope of child-treasure.  
 I am bound by an ancient craft to lose 25  
 That joy—so in sheer celibacy I enjoy  
 The hoard of heroes. Wrapped with wire  
 Like a bright fool, I frustrate a woman,  
 Steal her joy, slake desire. She rants,  
 Rails, curses, claps hands, chants 30  
 Unholy incantations—bladed words  
 In a bloodless battle I cannot enjoy.

\* \* \*

19

Head down, nosing—I belly the ground.  
 Hard snuffle and grub, I bite and furrow—  
 Drawn by the dark enemy of forests,  
 Driven by a bent lord who hounds my trail,  
 Who lifts and lowers me, rams me down, 5  
 Pushes on plain, and sows seed.  
 I am a ground-skulker, born of wood,  
 Bound by wizards, brought on wheel.  
 My ways are weird: as I walk, one flank  
 Of my trail is gathering green; the other 10  
 Is bright black. Through my back and belly,  
 A sharp sword thrusts; through my head,  
 A dagger is stuck like a tooth: what I slash  
 Falls in a curve of slaughter to one side  
 If my driving lord slaves well. 15

20

Sixty rode horses down to the shore—  
 Eleven were prancers, proud and fine,  
 Four gleaming white. They champed  
 For the sea-charge, but the channel was deep,  
 The wave-clash cruel, the banks steep, 5  
 The current strong—so the spear-proud warriors,  
 Horses and earls, mounted a wagon

And under its beam rode the bright wain  
 Over sea-curve to land. No ox drew the wagon,  
 No strength of slaves, no road-horse hauling. 10  
 She was no sea-floater or ground-roller  
 With her weight. She did not drag water,  
 Fly down from the air, or double back,  
 But bore earls and white horses from steep  
 Shore to shore—mounts and their men 15  
 Over deep water and home safe again.

## 21

Agob is my name twisted about—  
 I'm a strange creature shaped for battle.  
 When I bend and the battle-sting snakes  
 Through my belly, I am primed to drive off  
 The death-stroke. When my lord and tormentor 5  
 Releases my limbs, I am long again,  
 As laced with slaughter, I spit out  
 The death-blend I swallowed before.  
 What whistles from my belly does not easily pass,  
 And the man who seizes this sudden cup 10  
 Pays with his life for the long, last drink.  
 Unwound I will not obey any man;  
 Bound tight, I serve. Say what I am.

## 22

I'm a strange creature with changing cries—  
 I can bark like a dog, bleat like a goat,  
 Honk like a goose, shriek like a hawk.  
 Sometimes I imitate the eagle's cry,  
 The gray warrior's "keee," sometimes the call 5  
 Of the kite, sometimes the scream of the gull,  
 While I sit singing, a saucy mimic.  
 My name is spelled with **G**, **Æ**, and **R**—  
 Also an **O**, an **H**, and an **I**—  
 Say what these six letters clearly spell. 10

## 23

I am a wonderful help to women,  
 The hope of something to come. I harm

No citizen except my slayer.  
 Rooted I stand on a high bed.  
 I am shaggy below. Sometimes the beautiful  
 Peasant's daughter, an eager-armed, 5  
 Proud woman grabs my body,  
 Rushes my red skin, holds me hard,  
 Claims my head. The curly-haired  
 Woman who catches me fast will feel 10  
 Our meeting. Her eye will be wet.

## 24

A life-thief stole my world-strength,  
 Ripped off flesh and left me skin,  
 Dipped me in water and drew me out,  
 Stretched me bare in the tight sun;  
 The hard blade, clean steel, cut, 5  
 Scraped—fingers folded, shaped me.  
 Now the bird's once wind-stiff joy  
 Darts often to the horn's dark rim,  
 Sucks wood-stain, steps back again—  
 With a quick scratch of power, tracks 10  
 Black on my body, points trails.  
 Shield-boards clothe me and stretched hide,  
 A skin laced with gold. The bright song  
 Of smiths glistens on me in filigree tones.  
 Now decorative gold and crimson dye, 15  
 A clasp of wire and a coat of glory,  
 Proclaim the world's protector far and wide—  
 Let no fool fault these treasured claims.  
 If the children of men make use of me,  
 They will be safer and surer of heaven, 20  
 Bolder in heart, more blessed in mind,  
 Wiser in soul: they will find friends,  
 Companions and kinsmen, more loyal and true,  
 Nobler and better, brought to a new faith—  
 So men shall know grace, honor, glory, 25  
 Fortune, and the kind clasp of friends.  
 Say who I am—glorious, useful to men,  
 Holy and helpful from beginning to end.

## 25

I am man's treasure, taken from the woods,  
 Cliff-sides, hill-slopes, valleys, downs;  
 By day wings bear me in the buzzing air,  
 Slip me under a sheltering roof—sweet craft.  
 Soon a man bears me to a tub. Bathed, 5  
 I am binder and scourge of men, bring down  
 The young, ravage the old, sap strength.  
 Soon he discovers who wrestles with me  
 My fierce body-rush—I roll fools  
 Flush on the ground. Robbed of strength, 10  
 Reckless of speech, a man knows no power  
 Over hands, feet, mind. Who am I who bind  
 Men on middle-earth, blinding with rage  
 And such savage blows that dazed  
 Fools know my dark power by daylight? 15

## 26

Part of the earth grows lovely and grim  
 With the hardest and fiercest of bitter-sharp  
 Treasures—felled, cut, carved,  
 Bleached, scrubbed, softened, shaped,  
 Twisted, rubbed, dried, adorned, 5  
 Bound, and borne off to the doorways of men.  
 This creature brings in hall-joy—sweet  
 Music clings to its curves, live song  
 Lingers in a body where before bloom-wood  
 Said nothing. After death it sings 10  
 A clarion joy. Wise listeners  
 Will know what this creature is called.

## 27

I saw a wonderful creature carrying  
 Light plunder between its horns.  
 Curved lamp of the air, cunningly formed,  
 It fetched home its booty from the day's raid  
 And plotted to build in its castle if it could 5  
 A night-chamber brightly adorned.

Then over the east wall came another creature  
 Well known to earth-dwellers. Wonderful as well,  
 It seized back its booty and sent the plunderer home  
 Like an unwilling wanderer. The wretch went west, 10  
 Moved morosely and murderously on.  
 Dust rose to the heavens, dew fell on earth—  
 Night moved on. Afterwards no one  
 In the world knew where the wanderer had gone.

## 28a

I am sun-struck, rapt with flame,  
 Flush with glory, and flirt with the wind.  
 I am clutched by storm, touched by fire,  
 Ripe for the road, bloom-wood or blaze.  
 My path through the hall is from hand to hand, 5  
 So friends raise me, proud men and women  
 Clutch and kiss me, praise my power  
 And bow before me. To many I bring  
 A ripe bliss, a rich blooming.

## 29

Middle-earth is made lovely in unmatched ways  
 Rich and rare. Across the hall  
 I saw a creature singing—nothing wilder  
 In the haunts of men. Her shape is strange.  
 Her beak hung down, her hands and feet 5  
 Slung up like a shouldered bird—she waits  
 Song-hungry in the hall of earls her hour  
 Of craft. She cannot feast or fly about,  
 Drink man's delight (she dreams of skill,  
 A task, her art), but begins to dance 10  
 On a road of hands—brash mute lies dumb,  
 Gathering glory while a beautiful haunting  
 Song sails through her strange foot—  
 A gift of sound. How her long dangling  
 Legs chant is a wonderful riddle. 15  
 Jeweled, naked, proud of rings—  
 She sings like a mighty sister,

Guardian of air, bearing bass brothers  
 Droned on her neck. Let the song-lifter,  
 Truth-shaper, name this creature.

20

## 30

Middle-earth is made lovely in unmatched ways  
 Rich and rare. I saw a strange creature  
 Riding the road, weird craft and power  
 From the workshops of men. She came sliding  
 Up on the shore, shrieking without sight,  
 Eyes, arms, shoulders, hands—  
 Sailed on one foot over smooth plains—  
 Treasure and haul. Her mouth in the middle  
 Of a hoard of ribs, she carries corn-  
 Gold, grain-treasure, wine-wealth.  
 The feast-floater brings in her belly food  
 For rich and poor. Let the wise who catch  
 The drift of this riddle say what I mean.

5

10

## 31

An awesome beauty angled the wave;  
 The deep-throated creature called to land,  
 Laughed loud-lingering, struck terror  
 Home to men. Her blades honed sharp,  
 She was slow to battle but battle-grim,  
 Savage wound-worker. The slaughterer  
 Struck ship-walls, carried a curse.  
 The cunning creature said of herself:  
 “My mother, who comes from the kind of women  
 Dearest and best, is my daughter grown  
 Great and pregnant; so is it known to men  
 On earth that she shall come and stand  
 Gracefully on the ground in every land.”

5

10

## 32

I saw close to the houses of men  
 A strange creature that feeds cattle.  
 By tooth-hoard and nose-haul



(A useful slave), it scruffs the ground,  
 Scratches at plants, dogs walls 5  
 Or drags fields for plunder—seeks  
 A crop-catch and carries it home.  
 Its prey is bent stalk and weak root;  
 Its gift is firm grain and full flower  
 On a glittering plain—growing, blooming. 10

## 33

The earth was my mother—I was raised  
 From her cold, wet womb. I know in my mind  
 I was not woven from hair or wool  
 By skilled hands. I have no winding  
 Weft or warp, no thread to sing 5  
 Its rushing song; no whirring shuttle  
 Slides through me, no weaver's sley  
 Strikes belly or back. No silkworms spin  
 With inborn skill their subtle gold  
 For my sides, yet warriors call me 10  
 A clever garment, a coat of joy.  
 If you are clever and quick with words,  
 Say what this strange coat is called.

## 34

A strange creature ran on a rippling road;  
 Its cut was wild, its body bowed,  
 Four feet under belly, eight on its back,  
 Two wings, twelve eyes, six heads, one track.  
 It cruised the waves decked out like a bird, 5  
 But was more—the shape of a horse, man,  
 Dog, bird, and the face of a woman—  
 Weird riddle-craft riding the drift of words—  
 Now sing the solutions to what you've heard.

## 35

I saw a creature with its belly behind  
 Huge and swollen, handled by a servant,  
 A hard, muscled man who struggled so

That the bulge in its belly burst through its eye:  
 Its passion—gorge and spill through death, 5  
 Then rise and fill with second breath  
 To sire a son and father self.

## 36

This strange creature, a stripling boy,  
 Sought sweet pleasure pumping joy.  
 His nourishing Bess gave him four  
 White fountains—murmur and roar—  
 To the boy's delight. A bystander said, 5  
 "Alive, that boy will break the downs;  
 Dead, he'll bind and wrap us round."

## 37

Writings reveal this creature's plain  
 Presence on middle-earth, marked by man  
 For many years. Its magic, shaping power  
 Passes knowing. It seeks the living  
 One by one, winds an exile's road, 5  
 Wanders homeless without blame, never there  
 Another night. It has no hands or feet  
 To touch the ground, no mouth to speak  
 With men or mind to know the books  
 Which claim it is the least of creatures 10  
 Shaped by nature. It has no soul, no life,  
 Yet it moves everywhere in the wide world.  
 It has no blood or bone, yet carries comfort  
 To the children of men on middle-earth.  
 It has never reached heaven and cannot reach 15  
 Hell—but must live long through the word  
 And will of the king of creation's glory.  
 It would take too long to tell its fate  
 Through the world's web: that would be  
 A wonder of speaking. Each man's way 20  
 Of catching the creature with words is true.  
 It has no limbs, yet it lives!  
 If you can solve a riddle quickly,  
 Say what this creature is called.

## 38

Old is the shaper, eternal the lord  
 Who rules this earth, the power of world-  
 Pillars, prince and king, the guardian  
 Of all, one real and reckoning God,  
 Who moves and holds heaven and earth 5  
 In his circling song. He shaped my power  
 In the earth's beginning, in the world's  
 Unwinding song set me always awakening,  
 Sleepless—suddenly bound to night,  
 My eyes close down. He powers middle-earth 10  
 With a mighty word—in his charge I wind  
 The world's embrace. The quick breath of spirit  
 Startles me—I am ghost-shy, yet always  
 Bolder than the wild boar bristling at bay.  
 No bearer of banners on this broad earth 15  
 Can surpass me except God alone,  
 Who holds and rules the high heaven.  
 My scent is stronger than incense or rose,  
 Blooming beauty of the flower distilled,  
 More delicate than the lily curled in a field 20  
 Of light—wisps, blossoms, man's delight.  
 I am sweeter than the musk of the fragrant nard,  
 Sharper than the stench of the black swamp.  
 I bind all turnings under heaven's roof,  
 Guide and sustain as God first wrought, 25  
 Hold shape and form, rule thick and thin.  
 I am higher than heaven—at the point-king's command,  
 I watch and wield his world-treasure,  
 The great shaper's riddle. I see and sense  
 All things under earth, the hell-caves 30  
 Of suffering souls. I am much older  
 Than the universe, than middle-earth might be,  
 Yet born a child from yesterday's womb,  
 Glorious to men. I am brighter than rings  
 And bracelets of gold with their delicate threads. 35

I am fouler than wood-rot or the reeking slime  
 Of seaweed washed on the shore. I am broader  
 Than earth, wider than the green, billowing plain.  
 A hand may seize, three fingers wrap round me.  
 I am harder and colder than the bitter frost, 40  
 The sword of morning that falls on the ground.  
 I am hotter than Vulcan's flickering fire,  
 Sweeter than bee-bread laced with honey,  
 Galled as wormwood gray in the forest.  
 I can gorge like an old giant—bloated, 45  
 Bellied—or live sustained without food.  
 I can fly higher than pernex, eagle, or hawk,  
 Outstrip the zephyr, swiftest of winds—  
 I am slower than swamp-frog, snail, rainworm,  
 Quicker than the skittering child of dung 50  
 We call beetle. I am heavier than gray stone  
 Or a clump of lead, lighter than the bug  
 That dry-foots the water, harder than flint  
 That strikes fire from steel, softer than down  
 That flutters in the wind, broader than the earth, 55  
 Wider than the green, billowing plain.  
 I weave round the world a glittering cloak,  
 A kind embrace. No creature catches  
 My pace and power—I am highest of unfathomed  
 Miracles wrought by God, who alone restrains 60  
 With eternal might my thundering power.  
 I am stronger and grander than the mighty whale,  
 Dark watcher, guardian of the ocean floor.  
 I am feebler than the handworm that the sons  
 Of men dig from the skin with shrewd skill. 65  
 My head is not wound with delicate curls  
 Of light hair—the lord has left my face,  
 Head, skin—bare. Now light curls, locks  
 Shine, hair blooms, shoulders down—hangs  
 Like a miracle. I am bigger and fatter 70  
 Than the mast-fed pig who gorges on beech-wood,  
 Grunts, roots, snuffles up joy, so that now  
 He

39

\* \* \*

This mother sustains the myriad creatures  
 Of middle-earth—the brightest, the best,  
 The darkest, the dearest—the children of men  
 May joyfully own or usefully rule  
 In this wide world. Without her children  
 We would not survive. How she mothers  
 And who she is remains a riddle. The wise  
 And worldly ought to know this creature's name.

5

40

Two feathered flappers came together,  
 Panting and pushing in the open air.  
 The bright-haired girl, flushed and proud,  
 Grew big in the belly if the work was good.  
 Now scholars may need these letters to know  
 What I'm talking about: two of **N**,  
 One bright **Æ**, two of **A**, and two of **H**.  
 The tumblers twist to the letters' key  
 As the treasure-door swings open,  
 So that solvers can see in the heart  
 Of the riddle, craft and play. Carousing men  
 May know the names of the low-down lovers!

5

10

41

A noble guest of great lineage dwells  
 In the house of man. Grim hunger  
 Cannot harm him, nor feverish thirst,  
 Nor age, nor illness. If the servant  
 Of the guest who rules, serves well  
 On the journey, they will find together  
 Bliss and well-being, a feast of fate.  
 If the slave will not as a brother be ruled  
 By a lord he should fear and follow,  
 Then both will suffer and sire a family  
 Of sorrows when, springing from the world,  
 They leave the bright bosom of one kinswoman,  
 Mother and sister, who nourished them.

5

10

Let the man who knows noble words  
 Say what the guest and servant are called. 15

## 42

A small miracle hangs near a man's thigh,  
 Full under folds. It is stiff, strong,  
 Bold, brassy, and pierced in front.  
 When a young lord lifts his tunic  
 Over his knees, he wants to greet 5  
 With the hard head of this hanging creature  
 The hole it has long come to fill.

## 43

I heard of something rising in a corner,  
 Swelling and standing up, lifting its cover.  
 The proud-hearted bride grabbed at that boneless  
 Wonder with her hands; the prince's daughter  
 Covered that swelling thing with a swirl of cloth. 5

## 44

A man sat down to feast with two wives,  
 Drank wine with two daughters, supped with two sons.  
 The daughters were sisters with their own two sons,  
 Each son a favored, first-born prince.  
 The father of each prince sat with his son, 5  
 Also the uncle and nephew of each.  
 In the room's reach was a family of five!

## 45

A moth ate songs—wolfed words!  
 That seemed a weird dish—that a worm  
 Should swallow, dumb thief in the dark,  
 The songs of a man, his chants of glory,  
 Their place of strength. That thief-guest 5  
 Was no wiser for having swallowed words.

## 46

This bright circle spoke to men,  
 The tongueless treasure without voice—  
 The ring wrought power in silence saying,

“Save me, Healer of souls!” Let those  
 Who read the red-gold’s silent song-craft 5  
 Catch the incantation, solve the song,  
 And give their souls to God as the ring said.

## 47

Bound in place, deaf and dumb,  
 Making a meal of gifts that come  
 From a man’s hand, she swallows daily  
 Sustaining treasures dearer than gold,  
 Brought by a servant, a dark thane, 5  
 Sought by kings, queens, princes—  
 For benefit and pleasure. What race  
 Of shapers makes such treasure for the dark,  
 Dumb lady to swallow is beyond my measure.

## 48

On earth this warrior is strangely born  
 Of two dumb creatures, drawn gleaming  
 Into the world, bright and useful to men.  
 The scourge of warriors, the gift of foes,  
 It is tended, kept, covered by women— 5  
 Strong and savage, it serves well,  
 A gentle slave to firm masters  
 Who mind its measure and feed it fairly  
 With a careful hand. To these it brings  
 Warm blessings; to those who let it run 10  
 Wild, it brings a grim reward.

## 49

I saw four weird fellows traveling  
 Together as one. This creature seemed swift,  
 Bolder than birds—left black tracks.  
 It flew through air and dove under waves.  
 The warrior who winds all four over gold- 5  
 Plated roads pushed restlessly on.

## 50

I saw two hard captives carried,  
 Prisoners bound together as one

Punishing creature, under the roof  
 Of a hall. Close to one captive worked  
 A Welshwoman—the strong dark slave 5  
 Wielded power over both in their bonds.

## 51

I saw a tree towering in the forest,  
 Bright with branches, a blooming wood,  
 Basking in joy. It was nurtured by water,  
 Nursed by soil, till strong in years,  
 Its fate snapped, turned savage. 5  
 It suffered slash, rip, wound—  
 Was stripped in misery, chained dumb,  
 Its body bound, its head wrapped  
 In dark trim. Now it muscles a road  
 With head-might for another grim warrior— 10  
 Together they plunder the hoard in a storm  
 Of battle. The first warrior swings  
 Through dense threat, head-strong,  
 While the second follows, fierce and swift.

## 52

The young man came over to the corner  
 Where he knew she stood. He stepped up,  
 Eager and agile, lifted his tunic  
 With hard hands, thrust through her girdle  
 Something stiff, worked on the standing 5  
 One his will. Both swayed and shook.  
 The young man hurried, was sometimes useful,  
 Served well, but always tired  
 Sooner than she, weary of the work.  
 Under her girdle began to grow 10  
 A hero's reward for laying on dough.

## 53

In the high hall of heroes where men  
 Sat drinking, I saw four splendors  
 Borne across the floor—a jeweled tree,  
 Fine grain of the forest, a share of silver,



Bright twisted gold, the shape and symbol 5  
 Of the rood that raised us like a ladder  
 To the high heavens before Christ stormed  
 The walls of hell. The wood's lineage  
 I sing before men—maple and oak,  
 Burnished holly, hard yew—together they serve 10  
 And share one name—wolfshead-tree,  
 The outlaw's perch. This creature welcomes  
 Its lord's weapon, hall-gift and treasure,  
 The gold-hilted sword. If you can with courage  
 Grasp this riddle, say what the wood is called. 15

## 54

I saw the shuttling wood wound a strange,  
 Struggling creature, slash it brightly  
 With battle-colors. A board struck  
 And small spears stuck into the creature  
 While the bound wood wound fast, 5  
 Cinching its woe. One of the creature's  
 Feet was fixed, the other furious—  
 Swinging high and swaying low.  
 A bright tree stood by, spun with light  
 Leaves. What was left by the spears was borne 10  
 To the hall floor where warriors sat drinking.

## 55

The wind carries small creatures  
 Over hill-slopes and headlands: dark-  
 Coated, black-bodied, bursting with song—  
 They chirm and clamor like a troop on wing,  
 Winding their way to wooded cliff-walls, 5  
 Sometimes to the halls of men—singing a name-song.

## 56

Mighty one-foot works in a field,  
 Moves not far, rides not much,  
 Sails not through the sun-bright air,  
 Heaves not up on the hauling ship,  
 The studded wood—yet it serves its lord. 5

It swings heavy tail, small head,  
 Long tongue, no tooth—pumping iron,  
 It pokes in a pit! It sucks no water,  
 Swallows no food—yet it jaws deep  
 Water into the air, catch and carry. 10  
 It boasts no spirit, life-gift of the Lord,  
 Yet it serves well. In the sweep of its name  
 Are three rune-staves, and Rad comes first.

## 57

I saw heart-strong, mind-sharp men  
 Gazing in a hall at a golden ring.  
 Who turned the ring prayed to God  
 For abiding peace, the hall-guests'  
 Grace. The bright circle of gold 5  
 Spoke the name of the Savior of good  
 Men to the gathering, proclaimed to the eye  
 And mind of man the most glorious token,  
 Spoke though dumb of the suffering king  
 To all who could see in its bodied wounds 10  
 The hard carving of Christ. An unfulfilled  
 Prayer has no power in heaven; the dark  
 Soul will not find the city of saints,  
 The throne of power, the camp of God.  
 Let the man who knows how the wounds 15  
 Of the strange ring spoke as it passed round  
 The hall—twisting, turning in the hands  
 Of proud men—explain the riddle.

## THE WIFE'S LAMENT

*The Wife's Lament* has been read as a riddle, an allegory of the Church's longing for Christ, a retainer's lament for his lost lord, a speaking sword, and even the cry of a lost soul speaking out from beyond the grave. Scholars today mostly agree that it is a poem of love and lament, spoken by a woman who has lost her husband, who is also her lord. Like other Old English elegies, this poem begins as a heartfelt cry, moves through a struggle for consolation, and ends as a generalized piece of gnomic wisdom. The speaker recalls that her husband has left her for unknown reasons. Some plotting involving kinsmen has taken place, and he has fled. She has discovered that he was feuding with unknown people or possibly against her and plotting murder. She desperately remembers their love, but this memory increases her sense of loss and pain. In the end she tries to generalize her suffering to include all people, especially her husband. The speaker, however, doesn't know why her husband has left, and because of this uncertainty, she doesn't know whether to pity him or to curse him. The generalizations at the end of the poem allow her to do both. If he is faultless and suffering, he joins her in grief and deserves pity and consolation. If he has been plotting against her or has simply left her out of lack of love, he deserves the curse she is uttering under her breath.

### The Wife's Lament

I tell this story from my grasp of sorrow—  
I tear this song from a clutch of grief.  
My stretch of misery from birth to bed rest

Has been unending, no more than now.  
My mind wanders—my heart hurts. 5

My husband, my lord, left hearth and home,  
Crossing the sea-road, the clash of waves.  
My heart heaved each dawn, not knowing  
Where in the world my lord had gone.

I followed, wandering a wretched road, 10  
Seeking some service, knowing my need  
For a sheltering home. I fled from woe.

His cruel kinsmen began to plot,  
Scheming in secret to split us apart.  
They forced us to live like exiles 15  
Wretched, distant lives. Now I lie with longing.

My lord commanded me to live here  
Where I have few friends, little love,  
And no sense of home. Now my heart mourns.

I had found the best man for me, 20  
My husband and companion, hiding his mind,  
Closing his heart, bound in torment,  
Brooding on murder beneath a gentle bearing.

How often we promised each other at night  
That nothing would part us except death. 25  
But fate is twisted—everything's turned.  
Our love is undone, our closeness uncoupled.  
The web of our wedding is unwoven.

Something now seems as if it never was—  
Our friendship together. Far and near, 30  
I must suffer the feud of my dear lord's brooding.

I was forced to live in a cold earth-cave,  
Under an oak tree in an unhappy wood.  
My earth-house is old. I lie with longing.

Here are steep hills and gloomy valleys, 35  
 Dark hideouts under twisted briars,  
 Bitter homes without joy. My lord's leaving  
 Seizes my mind, harrows my heart.

Somewhere friends share a lover's bed,  
 Couples clinging to their closeness at dawn, 40  
 While I sing each morning's sorrow  
 Outside my earth-cave, under my oak tree,  
 Where I spend the summer-long day,  
 Mourning my exile, the cares of my heart,  
 The wandering of my tormented mind. 45  
 My spirit cannot rest, my heart be healed,  
 My mind be free from this life's longing.

A young man must surely wake at dawn  
 With hard-edged sadness in his lonely heart.  
 He must brook misery beneath a gentle bearing 50  
 While he suffers his own stretch of sorrow,  
 Endless and undoing. May he look for joy  
 In an empty bed, exiled also in an alien land—  
 So that my friend sits under stone cliffs,  
 Pelted by storms, stranded by waves, 55  
 Chilled to the bone in his cruel hall.  
 In the comfort of cold, the embrace of anguish,  
 He may remember a kinder hearth and home.  
 Woe waits for the lover who lies longing.

## JUDGMENT DAY I

This is one of two *Judgment Day* poems; the other is in “The Minor Poems.” The theme is also found in *Christ III: Judgment* in the Exeter Book (see above) and in other religious poems and homilies (see, for example, *Verse in a Homily: The Judgment of the Damned* in “Additional Poems”). Donoghue notes that one of the major themes in OE religious poetry is “the immanence of the Last Judgment” (89), especially as the millennium drew near, and cites (92) the importance of Luke 21:25–28: “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; Men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of heaven shall be moved; And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.” Jones notes that this poem’s “picture of the Last Judgment is impressionistic, better suited to stirring pious fears than clarifying doctrine” (xxxii).

### Judgment Day I

It shall come to pass that the seas will rise  
And flood the earth, oceans everywhere  
Wrapping the world. Each and every  
Living thing will meet its ordained end.  
Whoever wants to, can contemplate

This hard truth in his heart and mind.  
 Our Lord has determined the judgment day,  
 When he will return in full radiance  
 To burn up the earth, lay blaze to the land.  
 That will be no trivial exchange of words 10  
 When the Lord arrives! A savage heat  
 Will seize the earth's surface, kindling creation,  
 Leaving behind only flames, embers, and ashes—  
 For this world is now ruled unrightly  
 By hard-hearted, cruel-minded men 15  
 Who hoard power and flaunt their pride,  
 Slander and scorn their unloved Lord—  
 Till those who should guard the soul against sin  
 Betray and entrap them, deceive and destroy them,  
 Leading them downward into a fiery darkness 20  
 With a crowd of friends and a company of fiends.  
 Fire will be their welcome, flame their ushering in,  
 Torment their unglad greeting in a land where no sun  
 Lights up the sky, no stars glimmer on that dark roof,  
 As the soul meets its jailers of truth and terror 25  
 Too late—those are not kind companions.  
 There struggles a hot crowd in a cramped space  
 Without a hint of cooling. This is no joyful home  
 But a house of horrors, no palace of pleasures  
 But the pit of hell, an unending abyss— 30  
 The bitter end of life's long journey  
 For a man who sows strife with his mouth  
 And harbors hatred in his heart. He forgets to remember  
 About the darkness of creation, the hold of hell,  
 How it descends endlessly, exists infinitely. 35  
 For those ushered in because of their sins,  
 Their suffering will never stop. Their pain is permanent.

Who then is so wise about the world's wonders  
 That he can reckon the height of heaven,  
 Express its exaltation, grasp its unending good, 40  
 As it stands ready to welcome those purified souls  
 Who have heard this hard but healing message,

Desiring God's glory and dreading the deeps.  
 The day is coming when we must bring forward  
 Our sins and transgressions in habit and thought— 45  
 That will be a hard meeting in a cruel court.  
 The heat will be cooled, the warmth of the earth—  
 Nothing will be left except the rage of water  
 And furious death in the home of fish.  
 Here will be seen neither blood nor bone, 50  
 But each of the children of men shall seek  
 With body and soul, a righteous reckoning,  
 A just reward for all the deeds we have done,  
 All we have wrought in our lives on earth.  
 There is no greater terror than this tolling 55  
 That will resound beyond all boundaries.  
 No stars will sparkle, earth's glories will fade,  
 Power and possessions will pass away.  
 Therefore I promise to retell this truth,  
 To teach all people to praise God's glory, 60  
 To keep the hope of heaven in their hearts,  
 To live in faith and win the Lord's love  
 Before that dread, majestic day,  
 When trumpets herald the hot flame,  
 The blare and blaze of terrible power. 65  
 Then all fame will fade, all earthly glory  
 Will be gone, when the great guardian of light  
 Drenches all earth with endless fire,  
 Blazing branch and bone, brood and blood.  
 The air will ignite, fire sweep the sky, 70  
 Bright and burning. Blood will be shed—  
 Men will know the high hand of power.  
 The flames will quicken, creation quake,  
 Heaven will resound with a ring of fire.

Then men and women will leave this world, 75  
 The misery of earth, this mass of woe,  
 To see with some trepidation their deeds  
 Enduring in eternity. That day will reveal  
 Whose life is clean, whose heart is pure:



A great reward will be ready for them. 80  
 Hope has always been abiding in heaven,  
 Since our loving Savior, the Lord of the world,  
 In accord with providence was nailed to the rood,  
 A sheer radiance on the darkest wood,  
 Tied and tortured to save mankind. 85  
 Christ keeps count of all good deeds.  
 He holds court and comprehends the heart.  
 The sinful soul finds itself nowhere near  
 The road to heaven, as it always despises  
 Holy instruction, slanders the sacred, 90  
 Scorns God's wisdom, mocking the truth.  
 That man does not see the mouth of terror  
 In each evil act till the teeth strike him.  
 Suddenly he discovers in desperation,  
 As mankind is divided, that he will at last 95  
 Stand at the left hand of God, forever lost,  
 Not at the right hand with the saved,  
 Set free from sin and all earthly wounds.  
 A man of the world sips sweet wine,  
 Tasting life's pleasures, wanton at the feast, 100  
 Carousing instead of contemplating his fate,  
 Lusting for this life, oblivious to the next.

Then the Lord of souls, the Prince of glory,  
 According to his holy promise and plan,  
 Will offer solace to those who reflect 105  
 On their sins, suffer remorse, and meditate  
 Carefully on Christ's meaning and mercy.  
 The Lord of life and Guardian of heaven  
 Will welcome home with great rewards  
 Those who have sorrowed for their worldly sins, 110  
 Suffered shame, and longed for mercy.  
 The one who wants to live with God  
 Should not be slow to learn this truth  
 Nor sluggish to set out on the soul's journey  
 If he wants to find that glorious homeland 115  
 That the eternal Lord of brightness and blessings,

The Prince of souls, prepares for us.  
 He is our Victory-lord who adorns that hall,  
 Who graces that dwelling. All will be welcome  
 Who are pure of heart, free from sin, 120  
 As the Wielder of heaven's grace has said,  
 The King of all kings. So everyone alive  
 Should listen to the Lord—at least those who think  
 Deeply and desire to rise to the heights of heaven.

It will come to pass, though the body is covered 125  
 With earth and clay, a deep blanket of dust,  
 That it shall rise up and receive life, quicken again,  
 Return to being, breathe above ground.  
 The children of earth, the offspring of Adam,  
 Will be summoned to judgment, called to court. 130  
 Then their souls and bodies, spirits and bone-houses,  
 Will be brought together in a miraculous meeting,  
 Ready to travel that long, last road.  
 Then the truth will be shown, judgment made known,  
 When we gather together on that greatest of days 135  
 Beneath the cross. Before God's rood  
 Everything will be revealed under the heavens,  
 Whether hot or cold, good or evil.  
 Each and every truth will at last be told—  
 Nothing will be lost, nothing left out, 140  
 As God listens, the greatest of kings,  
 To what we have done. His powerful voice  
 Will be louder and clearer, more penetrating to people,  
 Than any trumpet ever blown, any horn ever heard.  
 His words will be manifest throughout middle-earth. 145  
 Under his mighty message, the plains will tremble,  
 The earth reverberate, the continents quake.  
 Remember this lesson and repeat this truth.  
 I cannot alter this fate under heaven.  
 It shall come to pass for all people 150  
 That the final fire will hover over  
 The homes of men, blasting their bodies,  
 Blazing their beauty, flaming their form.

Beyond that burning, life will be set  
On a new foundation of eternal bliss.  
Only those who think this through now  
Will be there then. Only those who know  
God's truth will enter the glory of heaven.

## RESIGNATION A: THE PENITENT'S PRAYER

This poem and the next have traditionally been combined as a single poem with a variety of titles, such as *A Supplication*, *The Exile's Prayer*, *Contrition*, and *Resignation* (the title in *ASPR*). There is now debate about whether the poems are actually one. There is evidence of a lost manuscript leaf between them; in addition, the lexical and thematic shifts between the two parts lead the latest editor of the Exeter Book to regard the poems as separate but related and to entitle them *Contrition A and B* (Muir, 670). The subtitles used in this edition are meant to reflect the differences in tone and form in the poems. The subtitle for *Resignation A* is taken from Pulisano (1995). Fulk and Cain point out that both are “monologues on the theme of sin and righteousness,” but note that this first poem is “a penitential prayer in which a contrite sinner asks God’s forgiveness and mercy, pleading that the angels take him into God’s presence, and though he committed many sins, that the devil not be allowed to lead him on a *ladne sid*, ‘hated journey’” (136).

### Resignation A: The Penitent's Prayer

May the eternal and almighty God  
Hold and help me, rule and restrain me,  
Keep and comfort me. My glorious Lord,  
You first shaped heaven and earth,  
The world's wonders, magnificent and manifold,  
For the children of men. I commend to you,  
Almighty God, Guardian of wisdom,

Lord of light, my body and soul,  
 My limbs and thoughts, my words and works.  
 Show me a sign, Shepherd of the stars, 10  
 Marking the way for my soul to follow,  
 To see your will in the wonders of creation,  
 That I may prosper in serving you.  
 Nurture in me what is gracious and good,  
 My righteous King. Do not let the arch-thief 15  
 That evil enemy, that demon-wolf,  
 Come stalking me in the shadows,  
 Even though I've followed you more feebly,  
 Served you less surely than I should have done,  
 As my King of glory, my powerful Creator. 20  
 My ever-living Lord, forgive me my sins,  
 My heart's hostile thoughts, my dark deeds.  
 I remember the remedy, O glory of kings,  
 And hope to attain it if I am allowed.  
 Grant me some respite to know your will; 25  
 Give me both insight and understanding,  
 Both patience and purpose, to pass the trials  
 That you might send me, my righteous King.  
 You may see in my soul sinful thoughts  
 And mark in my deeds serious transgression, 30  
 Yet grant me forgiveness, sustain me with mercy,  
 My Lord and Judge, though I have committed  
 More faults, more cruelties, more bitter sins,  
 Than God in his wisdom would have permitted.  
 I need to know mercy, to find some favor 35  
 In my dwindling days, in my desperate hours,  
 To see and seek another way of life,  
 A way without sin, so that gracious God  
 May grant me new life, a gladness beyond,  
 Though I've made amends, purged my sins, 40  
 Cleansed my soul more slowly than I ought,  
 Kept the commandments less surely than I should.  
 You have given me something beyond measure.

\* \* \*

I set my hope, my trust in you,  
 With my anxious fears and terrible forebodings, 45

So that my soul may be securely fixed.  
 Lift up my heart, elevate my spirit,  
 O King of souls, to the great remedy  
 Promised and prepared. I hasten to you,  
 Father of mankind, away from the mundane, 50  
 Wretched world. I leave before long.  
 Let me depart, Lord of the beloved—  
 Welcome me home with embracing arms,  
 Ruler of destinies, Sustainer of my soul.  
 When too many men surround me with malice, 55  
 When too many friends become my foes,  
 I will come to the Lord for kindness and comfort,  
 Even though I have earned no honor,  
 Merited no mercy in my earlier days.  
 But let the angels descend to deliver me, 60  
 Bear me home to your holy presence,  
 Your judgment, measure and mercy, Lord.  
 Even though I have grievously sinned  
 Day after day, let no devil lead me,  
 Your own offspring, a limb of your body, 65  
 On that loathsome journey, that harmful road,  
 Lest those arrogant angels, proud of plotting,  
 Rejoice in their old rebellion, their original idea  
 That they were better than the eternal Christ.  
 They were sorely deluded and must always endure 70  
 Perpetual exile, creatures who are cursed.  
 Stand by me Lord and sustain my spirit;  
 Restrain and repel that storm of demons,  
 Those woeful once-angels attacking my soul.  
 Heal my heart and lift me into heaven, 75  
 My just Lord, my generous Judge.  
 My soul is even now stained with sins,  
 And I am sometimes afraid, though surely I know  
 You have given me many gifts, precious favors,  
 Honors on this earth. All thanks to you 80  
 For unmerited mercies, unearned blessings,  
 All kindness and comfort beyond my deserving.

## RESIGNATION B: THE EXILE'S LAMENT

See the preceding headnote for *Resignation A*. Unlike the former poem, this one has more of an elegiac tone than a prayerful one. The speaker here laments his painful life in exile and wonders what he has done to offend God. He hopes that his Lord might offer him a *bot* or “remedy,” but in the end he feels forced to endure a fate that he is helpless to change. Fulk and Cain note that the speaker of this poem tells of “God’s punishments for him, which he cannot understand . . . he complains of isolation, loneliness, and persecution—hardly the sentiments of *Resignation A*” (136). His desperate, muffled cry for help or hope at the end of the poem is reminiscent of the cries in some of the elegies. Bliss and Frantzen argue that this poem “is not in any way a religious poem: it is a psychological study of a state of mind” (397), noting further that “it is a dramatic monologue by the kind of man who never succeeds in any of his enterprises, and who blames everyone but himself for his failure” (297). The subtitle for *Resignation B* follows the suggestion of Bjork (2014).

### Resignation B: The Exile's Lament

\* \* \*

I will take courage, laugh and look forward,  
Hope and rejoice, dress for the journey,  
Make my soul ready for the last road,  
A pilgrim's promise to himself and his Lord,  
And suffer gladly in the sight of God,  
Now that my heart is bound, my soul secured.

The Lord surely assigns blame to me  
 For some sins I've committed unknowingly,  
 Some deeds I've done without understanding.  
 I have offended God, angered my Lord, 10  
 And have been cruelly chastised for my choices,  
 Punished for my pleasures in the world's eyes.  
 So now I endure an endless martyrdom.  
 I am not wise with words or shrewd in judgment—  
 I could never speak before a crowd. 15  
 Alone, I can sing out my heart's sorrow,  
 Since I have met misery, suffered poverty,  
 Bearing earth's hardships—thank God—  
 More misery and dread than others have known.  
 So the solitary wanderer enters into exile, 20  
 Driven far from his home, friendless,  
 Finding unfathomed sorrow, set apart  
 From his dear Lord. Deprived of joy,  
 He cannot live long. His Lord is angry with him.  
 He mourns his lost youth. He goes hungry 25  
 Even with handouts—his misery grows heavy.  
 He endures suffering, bitter reproach,  
 The word-wounds of men. His heart sorrows,  
 His mind is sick as he wakes each morning,  
 His soul suffers in the unhallowed dawn. 30  
 I speak this story about myself, weave this woe,  
 A tale of longing across the seas.  
 My mind does not know

\* \* \*

I can barely fathom how to buy a boat,  
 A wave-wanderer. I have little gold 35  
 And no friend to help me set sail  
 Across the ocean. Poverty plagues me,  
 Denies me my deepest desires. Trees  
 Wax tall, the wood may flourish,  
 Embrace its fate, find its destiny, 40  
 But I, bearing slander and censure,  
 Cold calumny of character, can never  
 Find anyone to love among mankind,  
 Anyone to cherish in my native land.



My Lord and Guardian, I am sick at heart. 45  
My rest and cure, my respite and remedy,  
Must come from you in another life.  
I cannot live, unhappy as I am,  
Without hardship and heartache in this life.  
When I kept peace with people around me 50  
With the kindness of kinship, surrounded by strangers,  
Their care was always a lovely reward  
Laced with anxiety, for I never knew  
When affection might end. What I sowed in love  
I reaped in misgiving. Still it seems best, 55  
When a man cannot finally transform his fate,  
To accept his lot and simply endure.

## THE DESCENT INTO HELL

This is a complex poem that has sometimes been underappreciated. Some critics have found it confusing or incoherent; others have praised its ambiguities and multiple meanings. Muir notes that the poem is “inextricably linked to the Easter liturgy in theme, tone and structure” (676). It combines heroic and religious language and themes to shape an Anglo-Saxon version of the Harrowing of Hell. Fulk and Cain explain that it begins with the two Marys visiting the tomb of Christ, then “shifts abruptly to the Harrowing—Christ’s rescue of the patriarchs and the righteous from hell, where they were obliged to remain until Christ’s sacrifice made it possible for humankind to enter heaven,” noting that “the Harrowing is presented in the heroic terms of battle, describing how Christ, *reðust ealra cyninga*, ‘harshes of all kings,’ destroyed the walls of hell without the aid of armed warriors” (118). The major portion of the poem consists of a speech welcoming Christ and imploring him for mercy. The identity of the speaker or speakers in the poem is much debated, but the most likely reading is that the speaker is John the Baptist, who first speaks at the tomb and later at the gates of hell. Citing Burlin, Shippey argues that “in his final appeal for mercy, then, John the Baptist, the *burgwarena ord* [leader of citizens], speaks more for us than for himself; behind the actual, once-and-for-all event of the Harrowing, the poet is describing also the future salvation of Christians, even ‘the operation of redemptive grace within the individual soul’” (Shippey, 42; Burlin, 72).

## The Descent into Hell

Before day-break, the noble women  
 Prepared to go. The assembled people  
 Knew the Lord's body was enclosed in earth,  
 Shut up in a sepulcher, a corpse in a cave.  
 The grieving women, sad and suffering, 5  
 Meant to lament their Lord's death.  
 His bed had grown cold, the old earth-grave.  
 His journey was both hard and harrowing,  
 But his band of men, exultant as angels,  
 Brave by his tomb, held hope in their hearts. 10  
 Mary in mourning came down at dawn,  
 Directing another noble-born woman  
 To walk with her. The sorrowful women  
 Hoped to find the victorious Son of God  
 In the grave-house, where the Jewish men 15  
 Had hidden him, secure in the sepulcher.  
 They thought that he would have to remain alone  
 On Easter eve. They surely had other ideas  
 When they turned back from the tomb!  
 A host of angels assembled just before dawn, 20  
 Surrounding the sepulcher, the Savior's stronghold.  
 The earth-door was open, the vault was vacant,  
 The Lord's body had received the breath of life.  
 The earth trembled, the ground quaked—  
 The inhabitants of hell laughed and rejoiced. 25  
 The young Lord awoke and rose up in majesty.  
 The mighty Warrior walked out of the earth,  
 Wise and victorious, gathered in glory.  
 Then a man named John came forward  
 To explain to all the inhabitants of hell 30  
 The great miracle of his kinsman's coming:  
 "When he had to send me on this hard journey,  
 Our Savior promised he would come for me,  
 Seeking me out after six long months,  
 Arriving as Prince of all peoples. The time is past— 35  
 The promise is kept. The Redeemer will return.

The Son of God will proclaim his victory.  
He comes to harrow hell and ungrieve the grave.”

Then the Lord of mankind, the Protector of heaven  
Hastened on his journey, the greatest of kings. 40  
He wanted to batter and lay waste  
To the walls of hell, unfasten that fortress  
And free the prisoners from that hateful place.  
In that battle-rush he needed no helmeted men,  
No warriors in mail-coats, no earthly armor— 45  
His great power was unlimited and adamant.  
At the gates of hell, the bolts were broken,  
The bars were lifted, the locks undone.  
The King rode in, the Lord of hosts,  
The Savior of mankind. The exiles pressed forward 50  
To see the glory of the victorious Son—  
Adam and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,  
Many bold men, Moses and David,  
Isaiah and Zachariah, proud patriarchs,  
A host of heroes, a gathering of prophets, 55  
A multitude of women, many maidens,  
Uncounted crowds, an endless troop.  
Then John saw the victorious Son of God  
Hastening toward hell in might and majesty.  
In a somber mood, he saw God’s momentum, 60  
A miracle on the way. The hell-gates were ablaze  
With a glorious light, the doors that were so long  
Locked and barred, engulfed in darkness.  
God’s servant was filled with gladness.  
The leader of those who had languished in hell, 65  
People and patriarchs, seized courage,  
Spoke boldly before that expectant crowd,  
Called out to his kinsman, weaving words  
Of joyous welcome to the victorious visitor:  
“We thank you Lord for seeking us out here, 70  
Bound in sorrow and suffering for so long.  
Although that fallen fiend, the traitorous devil,  
Enemy of all, ensnares many a brotherless exile,  
No one can be so tightly bound, so inexorably locked,

So cruelly constrained, that he cannot take courage, 75  
 Hold hope in his heart, if he trusts in God's grace  
 To ransom and redeem him from this pernicious prison.  
 So we all believe in your power, my Prince,  
 My beloved Lord. I've endured so much  
 Since your last visit when you brought me sword, 80  
 Mail-coat, helmet, and hard war-gear,  
 Which I've held ever since. Then you revealed  
 To me your promise of protection for my people.  
 O Gabriel, how wise and wondrous you are,  
 How shrewd and skillful, how gracious and gentle, 85  
 In the words you speak, in the deeds you do—  
 That you brought us the boy in Bethlehem.  
 We waited so long, sitting in sorrow,  
 Longing for peace, hoping for the heart's healing,  
 Yearning for the day when we might at last hear 90  
 The words of God from his own glorious mouth.  
 O Mary, how brave a king you bore  
 When you brought us the babe in Bethlehem.  
 We waited in torment, trembling in bondage  
 Behind hell's gates, the darkest of doorways. 95  
 Our savage slayer, that demon destroyer,  
 Rejoiced in his work, his devious deeds.  
 Our ancient enemies exulted endlessly  
 When they heard us mourning, gathered in grief,  
 Lamenting the fall of our entire race, 100  
 Until you bore us the Son and Savior—  
 Until, O Lord, you arrived on earth,  
 Incarnate among us, our only Redeemer,  
 Lord God of victory, the King of glory.

\* \* \*

You were God's gift and a child's grace. 105  
 Our hearts were rapacious—we betrayed ourselves,  
 Selling our souls, bearing the sins  
 Of our own hearts into the hands of the slayer,  
 Forced to beg for peace from our enemies.  
 O Jerusalem in Judea, O holy city, 110  
 You have remained steadfast in that sacred place.  
 Not everyone on earth who sings your praise

Is allowed to pass through your holy gates.  
 O Jordan in Judea, O holy river,  
 You have remained steadfast in that sacred place. 115  
 Not everyone on earth can enter your waters,  
 Yet the blessed can feel God's flowing grace.

Now I implore you, my Lord and Savior,  
 To grant us mercy, release us from torment.  
 You are Christ the Lord. Help us O Healer, 120  
 Creator of mankind. Out of your abiding love  
 You descended into your mother's womb  
 Not from your own need but from ours,  
 Victorious Lord, Ruler of nations,  
 Extending your mercy to all of mankind. 125  
 We are fallen and feel the need for grace.  
 You can encompass everything, grasp the wonder  
 Of the world, its homelands, its races of men,  
 Just as you can reckon the grains of sand  
 In the sea's bed and along the shore. 130  
 And so I implore you, Blessed Savior,  
 Best of kings, Lord of hosts,  
 By your childhood and by your wounding,  
 And by your resurrection, Joy of mankind,  
 And by your mother whose name is Mary, 135  
 Whom all here in hell extol and praise,  
 And by the angels who stand about you,  
 Whom you gathered in greatness at your right hand  
 When by your will you began to seek us out  
 To follow us here into wretched exile 140  
 Away from home at the farthest end  
 Of our harrowing and heartbreaking journey—  
 And by Jerusalem in Judea, the holy city,  
 That once again must await your return,  
 And by the Jordan in Judea, the holy river, 145  
 Where we bathed together in that sacred stream—  
 O Lord sprinkle its holy water, the blessing of baptism,  
 On all who inhabit this savage city  
 Behind the blasted gates of hell,

Just as you and I, Christ and John,  
Two kinsmen together in the waters of the Jordan,  
Inspired all of middle-earth in baptism,  
Bringing mercy and hope to the children of men,  
For which grace thanks be forever to God.

## ALMSGIVING

**A** *lmsgiving* begins with an exhortation to give alms in the spirit of charity to combat greed or cupidity and then moves on to an extended simile “drawn from Ecclesiasticus 3.33, comparing almsgiving’s effect upon the wounds of sin to water’s efficacy against fire” (Fulk and Cain, 136). By thus healing the soul, man grows in the image of God. Anderson says, “The righteous man, who *sawla lacnað*, ‘heals souls,’ by increasing the yield of Christian virtue through almsgiving, is the proper image of the just God who rescues men through baptism from the death sentence of their sinful human nature” (127).

### Almsgiving

It is good for a man who is generous and just  
To offer alms. An unselfish spirit  
Combats greed, the clutch of wealth,  
With the gift of gold. Alms-giving  
Is an act of honor in the eyes of the world 5  
And a sign of glory in the sight of God.  
Just as one quenches a fierce flame,  
A seething blaze, with the gift of water  
So the firestorm cannot destroy the cities,  
So with alms-giving one can soothe worldly wounds 10  
Inflicted by sin, saving souls through healing.



# PHARAOH

*P*haraoh draws upon a medieval dialogic tradition of question and answer that is also found in the two *Solomon and Saturn* poems. Anderson notes that the tradition is “used in ancient and medieval schools for such diverse purposes as instruction in literacy, philosophical disputation, dramatized or fictionalized argument modeled largely on the Socratic dialogues of Plato, catechisms in rhetoric and rudimentary theology, and (to judge from the number of riddlic questions and answers in medieval dialogue collections) entertainment” (129). The dialogue here is about the destruction of Pharaoh and his army as they try to pursue the Israelites across the Red Sea (Exodus 14).

## Pharaoh

“Tell me, if you can, how many men  
Were in Pharaoh’s army, its size and strength,  
The thrust and force of that hostile host,  
When the army of Egypt began to harass,  
Pursue and plague, the people of God.”

5

“I can’t say for sure, hand you a head-count,  
But I know there was a grim chase of chariots,  
Six hundred strong and armed with warriors—  
Fierce soldiers that the sudden waves of destruction  
Sent home to oblivion in a furious fate.”

10

## THE LORD'S PRAYER I

This is the shortest of three poetic versions of *The Lord's Prayer* in Old English (for the other two, see "The Minor Poems"). All three poems paraphrase and expand upon the Latin texts from which they are translated. Muir notes that this poem "emphasizes God's continual watching over his people when they humble themselves and request his help (he is called *helpend wera* [helper of men], an epithet without equivalent in the *Pater Noster*); it also mentions the continuing threat of evil in the world, which Christians must gird themselves against" (24).

### The Lord's Prayer I

Our Holy Father who dwells in heaven,  
Abiding in glory, abounding in bliss,  
May your name be hallowed by each of your works,  
The wonders of creation and the children of men.  
Surest of shapers, Savior of mankind, 5  
Let your kingdom come far and wide,  
Your will and wisdom be established, exalted  
Under heaven's roof and across the land.  
Holy Father, Helper of men,  
Give us this day a gift of grain, 10  
A blessing of bread, a glorious abundance.  
O steadfast Savior, do not let temptation  
Batter us down, but deliver us, Lord  
From every evil, both now and forever.

## HOMILETIC FRAGMENT II: TURN TOWARD THE LIGHT

This is one of two poetic homilies or homiletic fragments in the Exeter Book. There is no internal manuscript evidence of any significant loss in the homily, but some editors argue that the development seems seriously curtailed. There are also poetic homiletic fragments in the Vercelli Book (see both “The Vercelli Book” and “Additional Poems” in this collection), and there are homiletic passages in many other OE poems, such as the elegies and *Beowulf*. The speaker here offers religious wisdom and consolation to one in need of advice and comfort. Greenfield says that the implied listener in the poem is “gnomically adjured in the beginning to bind fast the thoughts of his heart, to guard his *bordlocan*, ‘treasure-chamber,’” noting that “the end of the poem refers to the Nativity, to the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the *bordfate*, ‘treasure chest’ of the Virgin” (Greenfield and Calder, 267).

### Homiletic Fragment II: Turn Toward the Light

Rejoice now in spirit, thrive in the solace  
Of the Savior, take comfort in Christ.  
Gather glory, guard your treasure-house,  
The secure space of your heart’s holdings.  
Bind up your thoughts. Be careful with vows.  
A true companion sometimes proves false;  
Promises can unravel so a friendship is undone.  
The world sometimes weathers rough storms,  
The tempests of untrust, and suffers doom.

There is one heart's haven: one firm faith, 10  
One living Lord, one sacred baptism,  
One eternal Father, the precious Prince  
Of all peoples, our Maker who has shaped  
Creation and country, firmament and fields,  
The wonders of the world, its joys and blessings. 15  
God's glories grew, though the not yet fully  
Wakened world slept in a blanket of expectation,  
In a shrouded grove, a shadow of unknowing,  
Imminent creation concealed in darkness—  
Until one powerful, mindful maiden 20  
Grew into her own God-given glory,  
In whose treasure-cup, the virginal vessel,  
It pleased the Holy Spirit to spring into life  
And breathe into being God's Son.  
Bright in her breast, warm in her womb, 25  
The inborn light began to shine.

## RIDDLES 28B AND 58

See the headnote to Riddles 1–57 for an introduction to the riddles and the “Appendix of Possible Riddle Solutions” for proposed solutions to these riddles. Riddle 28b is a variant of Riddle 28a earlier in the collection. Riddle 58 is thought by some editors to be part of *The Husband’s Message*, which follows it in the manuscript, since there appear to be resemblances between the speakers of the two poems (as each may be a message-bearing creature such as a rune-staff or reed-pen).

### Riddles 28b and 58

#### 28b

I am sun-struck, rapt with flame,  
Flush with glory, and flirt with the wind.  
I am clutched by storm, consumed by fire,  
Ripe for the road, bloom-wood or blaze.  
My path through the hall is from hand to hand  
As friends raise me, proud men and women  
Bow humbly before me, clutch and kiss me,  
Praise my power. To many I bring  
A ripe bliss, a rich blooming.

5

#### 58

Rooted near water, raised by the shore,  
I was earth-fast, bound in a bed,  
My native land. Few men walked

In this wilderness, watched as the wave  
Played round my body with its dark arms 5  
At dusk and dawn. I did not dream  
That someday I should speak, slip words  
Over benches, mouthless in the meadhall.  
That is a miracle to men who do not know  
This craft—how the point of a knife, 10  
A skilled right hand and a man's intent  
Tooling together should shape me so  
That boldly I bring you my message,  
Singing in silence so no man in the wider  
World may share our words and understand. 15

## THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

This poem and Riddle 58 are sometimes taken to be one poem since the speaker in each case may be a rune-staff bearing a message; most editors, however, treat them as separate poems. The solution to Riddle 58 is more likely to be a reed-pen. The speaker in *The Husband's Message* is an inanimate object, as in many riddles. The theme of lovers or spouses separated by feud is similar to that of *The Wife's Lament*, though formally this poem is less an elegy than an invitation. Klinck, in her edition, argues that the poem is more of a formal love letter “designed to evoke, not the feelings of the speaker, but those of the lord towards his lady: his fidelity, his confidence in the strength of the vows they made together, his urgent desire for her, all mediated by the messenger’s ceremonious deference” (58). The bold capital letters at the end of the poem are runes in the original; they stand for their runic names so that the *S*- and *R*-runes, *sigel-rad* or *segl-rad* (Niles, 2006, 239), probably refer to the “sun-road” or “sail-road”; the *EA* and *W* to *ear-wynn*, “sea-joy”; and *M* to *mon*, “man.” Together they appear to extend a heartfelt invitation to the woman or wife who receives the message to board a ship and set sail homeward toward her waiting husband or lover.

### The Husband's Message

Now I can speak secretly to you,  
Pass on my message, sing of my lineage,  
Tell you what kind of childhood I had,  
What kind of tree I was taken from,  
How I was shaped into silent song.

\* \* \*

Over the salt-seas I was forced to sail  
 At my lord's pleasure from foreign lands  
 On ship's plank or prow, visiting towns,  
 Seeking the loved one to read my runes.

\* \* \*

A stave of words, I am quietly yours. 10  
 I bear you the carved thoughts of my lord's love,  
 So you may know in your heart of his deep devotion.  
 I pledge and promise his love is true,  
 His trust holds, his faith is fixed.  
 My lord and shaper sends his greeting, 15  
 Begs you to recall in your rich array  
 The vows you shared when you held a home,  
 Trading talk, waking as one,  
 Walking the land, in the sweet trust of love.

A feud drove him away from his victory-proud 20  
 People, sent him sailing into exile.  
 Your loving lord sends you this message:  
 Go down to the cliff's edge, the sea-wall,  
 And listen for the spring-sad cuckoo's song  
 Wafting from the woods, plaintive, persistent. 25  
 When you hear that sweet, mournful melody,  
 Let no one hinder your heart. Go down to the sea,  
 Set sail south over the gull's ground.  
 Let the whale-road take you to where  
 Your lord lies, waiting, wanting, 30  
 Expectant in exile. His sole wish,  
 As he said to me, is to have you home  
 With God's grace so your love may thrive,  
 And both together can share the hall,  
 Giving out treasure, a reward of rings, 35  
 To warriors and thanes, a prince's pleasure.  
 He has a store of hammered gold,  
 A great estate, enough for all,  
 A place of power in a foreign land.

\* \* \*



Long ago he fled the feud, launched his ship, 40  
 Escaped into exile, bound by necessity,  
 To sail the whale-road into foreign lands.  
 Now he has vanquished woe, won over strangers,  
 Wrestled down fate. He can lack no joy,  
 Want no treasure, no fine horses, 45  
 No meadhall pleasures, no great possessions,  
 If he has you, a prince's daughter.  
 Let my runes remind you of your vows together:  
 I hear **S** and **R**, *Sigel-Rad*, the Sun-Road,  
 The sail's pathway; **EA** and **W**, *Ear-Wynn*, 50  
 The Sea-Joy; and **M** for *Mon*, Man—  
 All of them inviting you to set sail  
 Under the sun, across the sea to your lord,  
 Who has kept his oath of love alive  
 And cherishes the vows you voiced together. 55  
 Let my runes recall and reveal his love.

## THE RUIN

This poem contrasts the greatness of an ancient city, probably Bath, with its present state of ruin. The great halls have become tumbled-down walls, whose stones have survived longer than both citizens and rulers. Time and weather have unraveled this ancient glory, and the *entageweorc* or “work of giants” is moldering away. Amid the present ruin, the poet recalls the ingenuity of the architect, the beauty of the buildings, the revelry of the halls, and the splendor of the stone baths. Orchard points out that “it has been argued that the poem owes much to the Latin genre of the *encomium urbis* (‘praise poem for a city’), as well as to various Latin laments for fallen cities and abandoned buildings,” and notes other possible connections with the OE riddles and elegies (2008, 46–47). Mitchell and Robinson point out that “the Anglo-Saxons were very given to reflection on former civilizations and the people who built them, so much so that their language had a word for such meditation: *dustsceawung*, ‘contemplation of the dust’” (2007, 265). Appropriately enough, the poem itself, in its manuscript form, has suffered serious decay and destruction over time.

### The Ruin

Wondrous are these ancient wall-stones,  
Shattered by time, foundations shaken by fate,  
The old work of giants, crumbled, corrupted—  
Rooftops in ruin, towers tumbled down.  
Gate-locks lie broken, frost chokes the lime—  
Ceilings sapped with age, the high hall loftless.

The mortar is moldy, the master-builders are gone,  
 Buildings and brave men in the clutch of the grave.  
 A hundred generations have passed away,  
 Princes and peoples now forgotten. 10  
 The ruddy wall-stones are stained with gray,  
 Rocks that have outlived the reign of kings,  
 The crash of storms, the crush of time.  
 Still something remains as a fierce reminder—  
 Walls scored with weapons, grimly ground down, 15  
 The old work of smiths, skillfully wrought,  
 Shining and bright, now dull with dust,

\* \* \*

The mind of the builder crafted a clever idea,  
 To bind the walls in circular shapes  
 With strips of wire, with rods and rings. 20  
 The burg-halls were bright, the bath-houses beautiful,  
 The gabled roofs grand. The sounds of warriors,  
 Their steps and shouts, reverberated under roofs.  
 The meadhalls were full of wine and revelry—  
 Until fierce fate overturned everything. 25  
 Proud men were slaughtered, a plague attacked,  
 Grim death gathered up a whole host of people.  
 Their ramparts were ruined, their halls laid waste;  
 Their cities crumbled. Warriors were wounded,  
 Craftsmen killed. No builder was left alive. 30  
 The halls grieved and fell, arches angled down,  
 Tiles tumbled, red stone hit the ground,  
 Broken piles where once men sang  
 And played the lyre, clothed in splendor,  
 Adorned with gold, gladdened with wine, 35  
 Gazing on treasures, shining armor,  
 Silver and gemstones, precious jewels,  
 A bright city, a burgeoning kingdom.  
 There were stone buildings and hot springs  
 Bringing bath water in the walls' embrace— 40  
 That was convenient as the hot streams poured  
 Over the gray stones into a circular pool,  
 A pond in a building, a kingly thing.

\* \* \*

## RIDDLES 59–91

See the headnote to Riddles 1–57 for an introduction to the riddles and the “Appendix of Possible Riddle Solutions” for proposed solutions to each riddle. The occasional use of bold capital letters in the translations, which are the alphabetical equivalents of runes or runic names in the original text, is explained in the same appendix for each riddle in which the runes have occurred.

### Riddles 59–91

59

Sometimes a lady, comely and proud,  
Locks me up, boxes me tight—  
Sometimes draws me out on demand  
And hands me over to her pleasing prince,  
Who shoves his hard head in my hole, 5  
Slides up while I slip down—  
A tight squeeze. If the man who seizes me  
Presses with power, something shaggy  
Will fill me up, muscle me out—  
A precious jewel. Say what I mean. 10

60

I am the hard punch and pull of power,  
Bold thrusting out, keen coming in,  
Serving my lord. I burrow beneath

A belly, tunneling a tight road.  
 My lord hurries and heaves from behind 5  
 With a catch of cloth. Sometimes he drags me  
 Hot from the hole, sometimes shoves me  
 Down the snug road. The southern thruster  
 Urges me on. Say who I am.

## 61

Gleaming with joy, glad with gold,  
 I am carried to the hall where I serve  
 Bold heroes carousing together.  
 Sometimes in a chamber as I come full-  
 Bodied to a palate, a man may kiss me, 5  
 Press me boldly with his cupped hand,  
 Work his will, drink desire,  
 Mouth on mine, in a delicate spill

\* \* \*

So the light shows what I bear in my belly

\* \* \*

So the reckless man raises this treasure, 10  
 Drinks deep of my own dark pleasure.

## 62

I saw **W** and **I** smooth-prancing the plain,  
 Carrying **B** and **E**. A bold **H** and **A**  
 Was to both on that journey the lifter's joy  
 And a portion of power. The hard **D** and **E**  
 Rejoiced in the going; the **F** and **Æ** flew 5  
 Over the **EA** and **SP** of that strange troop.

## 63

A stalk of the living, I nothing said;  
 Dumb, stand waiting to join the dead.  
 I have risen before and will rise again,  
 Though plunderers carve and split my skin,  
 Bite through my bare body, shear my head, 5  
 Hold me hard in a slicing bed.  
 I do not bite a man unless he bites me,  
 But the number of men who bite is many.

## 64

I stretch beyond the bounds of middle-earth,  
 Shrink down smaller than a hand-worm,  
 Grow brighter than the moon, and run  
 Swifter than the sun. I cradle oceans,  
 Lakes, paths, green plains in my arms.  
 I dive down under hell's way and rise up  
 Over heaven's home, arced over angels.  
 I form-fill all earth and ancient worlds,  
 Fields and sea-streams. Say who I am.

5

## 65

In the hall of the High King, I heard  
 That a voiceless creature spoke charmed  
 Words, chanted praise, prayer-song

\* \* \*

Wise and wonderful it seemed to me

\* \* \*

It speaks without mouth, moves without feet

5

\* \* \*

Saying, "I am now teacher of men,  
 Preacher to many on middle-earth—  
 I will live as long as men walk the land."

It's wound with silver and plated gold.

I have seen it open where men sit  
 Drinking together. Now a wise man  
 Should know what this creature is called.

10

## 66

I saw a creature wandering the way:  
 She was devastating—beautifully adorned.  
 On the wave a miracle: water turned to bone.

## 67

She shapes for her listeners a haunting sound  
 Who sings through her sides. Her neck is round  
 And delicately shaped; on her shoulders draped,  
 Beautiful jewels. Her fate is strange

\* \* \*

68

\* \* \*

Who am I who stand so boldly by the road—  
High-towering, cheek-bright, useful to men?

69

Power and treasure for a prince to hold,  
Hard and steep-checked, wrapped in red  
Gold and garnet, ripped from a plain  
Of bright flowers, wrought—a remnant  
Of fire and file, bound in stark beauty  
With delicate wire, my grip makes  
Warriors weep, my sting threatens  
The hand that grasps gold. Studded  
With a ring, I ravage heir and heirloom

5

\* \* \*

To my lord and foes always lovely  
And deadly, altering face and form.

10

70

\* \* \*

Often I tugged at four sweet brothers,  
Pumped and plied for a day's full drink  
At each dangling hole—but the dark herdsman  
Pulled my pleasure as I grew older,  
And I was drawn to wider roads—moors,  
Fields—bound by beam and neck-ring  
To earth-trace and a gait of suffering,  
A haul of sorrow. I kept silence,  
Goaded by iron, side-sting—  
Moaned to no man, even as punishing  
Point and pace together tracked pain.

5

10

71

I grew in the ground, nourished by earth  
And cloud—until grim enemies came  
To take me, rip me living from the land,  
Strip my years—shear, split, shape me  
So that I ride homeless in a slayer's hand,

5

Bent to his will. A busy sting,  
 I serve my lord if strength and strife  
 On the field endure and his hold is good.  
 We gather glory together in the troop,  
 Striker and death-step, lord and dark lunge. 10

\* \* \*

My neck is slim, my sides are dun;  
 My head is bright when the battle-sun  
 Glints and my grim loving lord bears me  
 Bound for war. Bold soldiers know  
 That I break in like a brash marauder, 15  
 Burst the brain-house, plunder halls  
 Held whole before. From the bone-house  
 One breaks ready for the road home.  
 Now the warrior who feels the thrust  
 Of my meaning should say what I'm called. 20

72

I was a young maiden, a gray-haired woman,  
 And a singular warrior at the same time.  
 I flew with birds and swam in the sea,  
 Dove under waves, dead among fish,  
 And stood on the shore—locking in a living spirit. 5

73

I saw a swift one shoot out on the road:

**DNLH**

I saw a woman sitting alone.

74

Suckled by the sea, sheltered near shore,  
 Cradled in the cold catch of waves,  
 Footless and fixed—often I offered  
 To the sea-stream a stretch of mouth.  
 Now a man will strip my bonelike skin 5  
 From the sides of my body with a bright blade  
 And bolt my flesh, relish me raw:  
 A quick cuisine—crack to jaw.



75

Often on floodways, found with kin

\* \* \*

I took for my food

\* \* \*

and also him.

Never sat at home

\* \* \*

Killed in the sea with strange skill  
And savage power, covered by waves.

5

76

I am a prince's property and joy,  
 Sometimes his shoulder-companion,  
 Close comrade in arms, king's servant,  
 Lord's treasure. Sometimes my lady,  
 A bright-haired beauty, lays serving  
 Hands on my body, though she is noble  
 And the daughter of an earl. I bear  
 In my belly what blooms in the wood,  
 The bee's delight. Sometimes I ride  
 A proud horse in the rush of battle—  
 Harsh is my voice, hard is my tongue.  
 I bear the scop's meed when his song is done.  
 My gift is good, my way winning,  
 My color dark. Say what I'm called.

5

10

77

I am puff-breasted, proud-crested,  
 Swollen-necked. I strut on one foot.  
 I sport a fine head, high tail,  
 Eyes, ears, back, beak, two sides.  
 I ride a stiff nail, my perch above men.  
 I twist in torment when the forest-shaker  
 Whips and shoves; where I stand the storm-  
 Wind-waters roll, hail stones,  
 Sleet shrouds, frost slips freezing,  
 Snow drifts down. One-foot, hole-belly,

5

10

I mark the seasons with a twist of fate  
 I cannot change. My stake is grim.

## 78

When this creature comes, it gobbles ground,  
 Grubs earth, follows on its feet

\* \* \*

With no skin or flesh, it always

\* \* \*

## 79

My race is old, my seasons many,  
 My sorrows deep. I have dwelt in cities  
 Since the fire-guardian wrought with flame  
 My clean beginning in the world of men,  
 Purged my body with a circling fire. 5  
 Now a fierce earth-brother stands guard,  
 The first to shape my sorrow. I remember  
 Who ripped our race, hard from its homeland,  
 Stripped us from the ground. I cannot bind 10  
 Or blast him, yet I cause the clench of slavery  
 Round the world. Though my wounds are many  
 On middle-earth, my strength is great.  
 My craft and course, power and rich passage,  
 I must hide from men. Say who I am.

## 80

This mother of many well-known creatures  
 Is strangely born. Savage and fierce,  
 She roars and sings, courses and flows,  
 Follows the ground. A beautiful mover,  
 Prone to power—her clutch is deep. 5  
 No one knows how to catch her shape  
 And power in song or how to mark  
 The strength of her kin in myriad forms:  
 Her lineage sings the spawn of creation.  
 The high father broods over one flow, 10  
 Beginning and end, and so does his son,  
 Born of glory, and the heavenly spirit,

The ghost of God. His precious skill

\* \* \*

All kinds of creatures who lived on the earth,  
 When the garden was graced with beauty and joy. 15  
 Their mother is always mighty and pregnant,  
 Sustained in glory, teeming with power,  
 Plenty, a feast of being, a natural hoard  
 For rich and poor. Her power increases  
 Her manifest song. Her body is a burbling 20  
 Jewel of use, a celibate gem with a quick,  
 Cleansing power—beautiful, bountiful,  
 Noble and good. She is boldest, strongest,  
 Greediest, greatest of all earth-travelers  
 Spawned under the sky, of creatures seen 25  
 With the eyes of men. She is the weaver  
 Of world-children's might. A wise man  
 May know of many miracles—this one  
 Is harder than ground, smarter than men,  
 Older than counsel, more gracious than giving, 30  
 Dearer than gold. She washes the world  
 In beautiful tones, teems with children,  
 Soothes hard suffering, crushes crime.  
 She wraps the world in a coat of jewels  
 That amazes man. She is rock-cover, 35  
 Storm-song, ice-wall, earth's kiss.  
 She dies without feeling and is born again,  
 Mother and offspring. Her womb is split

\* \* \*

Open your word-hoard and make known to men  
 Who the great mother is with her mighty kin. 40

81

Shunning silence, my house is loud  
 While I am quiet: we are movement bound  
 By the Shaper's will. I am swifter,  
 Sometimes stronger—he is longer lasting,  
 Harder running. Sometimes I rest 5  
 While he rolls on. He is the house  
 That holds me living—alone I die.

## 82

A weird creature came to a meeting of men,  
 Hauled itself into the high commerce  
 Of the wise. It lurched with one eye,  
 Two feet, twelve hundred heads,  
 A back and belly—two hands, arms, 5  
 Shoulders—one neck, two sides.  
 Untwist your mind and say what I mean.

## 83

I saw a creature with a strange belly  
 Huge and swollen, handled by a servant,  
 Hard-muscled and hand-strong, a mighty man  
 Who seized the creature, gripped it so  
 That the tooth of heaven began to blow 5  
 Out through its eye. It struggled and sang,  
 Bellowed from below, puffed up and passed out;  
 Yet it always arched up on air again.

## 84

\* \* \*

We stood, tall hard twins, my brother  
 And I—pointed and perched on a homeland  
 Higher and nobler for our fierce adorning.  
 Often the forest, dear sheltering wood,  
 Was our night-cover, rain-shield for creatures 5  
 Shaped by God. Now grim usurpers  
 Must steal our homeland glory, hard young  
 Brothers who press in our place. Parted,  
 We suffer separate sorrows. In my belly  
 Is a black wonder—I stand on wood. 10  
 Untwinned I guard the table's end.  
 What hoard holds my lost brother in the wide  
 World I will never know. Once we rode  
 The high side of battle, hard warriors  
 Keeping courage together—neither rushed 15  
 To the fray alone. Now unwhole creatures  
 Tear at my belly. I cannot flee.

The man who follows my tracks of glory  
 For wealth and power, in a different light  
 May find what is wholly for his soul's delight. 20

85

I saw a creature with a strange belly  
 Bound in leather

\* \* \*

A servant held it hard from behind,  
 Sometimes shoved with great skill

\* \* \*

ate afterwards, 5  
 Thankful for food at such a time.

86

I saw a strange sight: a wolf held tight by a lamb—  
 The lamb lay down and seized the belly of the wolf.  
 While I stood and stared, I saw a great glory:  
 Two wolves standing and troubling a third.  
 They had four feet—they saw with seven eyes! 5

87

My head is struck by a forging hammer,  
 Sheared close by a shaping blade,  
 Honed smooth by a fierce file.  
 Sometimes I swallow my tempered foe,  
 When bound by rings, I heave from behind, 5  
 Thrust a long limb through a hard hole,  
 Catch hard the keeper of the heart's pleasure,  
 Twist with my tongue and turn back  
 The midnight guardian of my lord's treasure,  
 When the conquering warrior comes to hold 10  
 The gift of slaughter, the joy of gold.

88

Boast of brown snufflers, tree in the wood,  
 High hard life, plant and pleasure,  
 Earth-shoot, love letter, lady's delight—

Gold-skinned treasure of the high courts—  
 Ring-bound, the warrior's weapon and joy

5

\* \* \*

## 89

I was point and high pleasure for my lord

\* \* \*

Sometimes startled he broke for the wood,  
 Sometimes leapt with the years' lean grace  
 Over plunging streams, sometimes mounted  
 Steep cliff-trails home or sought hoof-proud  
 In hollows the horned shield of the troop,  
 Sometimes pawed at ice-grass locked like stone—  
 Sometimes the gray frost shook from his hair.  
 I rode my fierce lord's butting brain-chair  
 Till my younger brother stole helm and headland.  
 Cast homeless to the brown blade, seized  
 By burnished steel, gutted without gore—  
 I felt no blood-rush, wept no death-song,  
 Dreamed no dark vengeance. I endured  
 The sharp torments of shield-biters.  
 Now I swallow black wood and water,  
 Bear in my belly dark stain from above.  
 One-foot, I guard black treasure seized  
 By a plundering foe that once bore  
 The battle-companion of the wolf far:  
 The scavenger darts from my belly blackened  
 And steps toward the table, the stout board

5

10

15

20

\* \* \*

Sometimes a share of death when the day-candle  
 Slides down and no man's eyes see my work

\* \* \*

## 90

I am higher than heaven, brighter than sun,  
 Harder than steel, smoother than

\* \* \*

sharper than salt,  
 Dearer than light, lighter than wind.

91

I am noble, known to rest in the quiet  
Keeping of many men, humble and high born.  
The plunderers' joy, hauled far from friends,  
Rides richly on me, shines signifying power,  
Whether I proclaim the grandeur of halls,  
The wealth of cities, or the glory of God.  
Now wise men love most my strange way  
Of offering wisdom to many without voice.  
Though the children of earth eagerly seek  
To trace my trail, sometimes my tracks are dim.

5

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# BEOWULF AND JUDITH





## INTRODUCTION

I am the scorched hide that holds the stories  
Of monsters and men. Sages seek me out  
To decipher my strange body-tracks,  
Lift up my meaning, listen to my skin.  
In my gathers are tales of lost glory,  
Treasure and terror, wisdom and woe.  
Inside my meadhalls, men swear fealty  
And faith but sometimes settle feuds  
With murder and mayhem, swords and shields,  
Fury and battle-flame. Once I also was attacked  
By a fierce fire, a hungry blaze  
That devoured many of my brothers and sisters,  
And I barely escaped by flying out the window  
With a singed skin. Wounded, I survived  
To offer a wealth of words to the world—  
Saint-song, monster-marvel, life-letter,  
A Danish king, a cruel hall-demon,  
A bold-hearted hero, a pleading queen,  
A hoard of gold guarded by a dragon,  
A holy woman-warrior, a drunken Assyrian,  
A trove of stories in a harp-heavy tongue.  
Say who I am who offers this time-treasure,  
The word-gift of scops, sages, and scribes.

The poems in this section, *Beowulf* and *Judith*, which appear in *ASPR*, vol. IV, are found on folios 129r–198v of the Nowell Codex in the manuscript Cotton Vitellius A.xv, in the British Library in London. The codex also contains three OE prose texts: a portion of *The Passion of Saint Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, and *The Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle* (for a text and prose translation of the entire codex, see Fulk, 2010). This Cotton Vitellius manuscript also contains the apparently unrelated Southwick Codex on folios 1–90<sup>v</sup>, which *Klaeber 4* notes “contains the free translation of Augustine’s *Soliloquia* attributed to King Alfred, a rendering of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the prose dialogue of Solomon and Saturn, and a very brief fragment of a homily on St. Quintin” (xxv). The two codices were bound together in the early seventeenth century.

The manuscript has a long and somewhat obscure history. It was probably first held in the courts or monasteries, eventually coming into private hands at the closing of the monasteries under Henry VIII. It came into the hands of the seventeenth-century collector Sir Robert Cotton and was later donated to the British Museum. A fire in 1731 destroyed part of the collection, and the edges of the manuscript were burned before it could be saved by being tossed out a window (*Klaeber 4*, xxvi). The codex was in this damaged state when the Icelandic historian Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín commissioned a transcription to be made in 1787 and then made a second, somewhat flawed transcription himself from the first. Some of the damaged or lost letters in the manuscript have been supplied by the Thorkelín transcripts. The manuscript was rebound in 1845 to halt further loss from crumbling and decay. *Judith* follows *Beowulf* in the Nowell Codex, though there is some manuscript evidence that *Judith* may have initially been the opening poem (or pulled from another manuscript source) and *Beowulf* the closing poem in the collection (*Klaeber 4*, xxv–xxvi; Orchard, 1985, 1). The fire damage to *Judith* was less than that to *Beowulf*. The collector Franciscus Junius (1589–1677) made a copy of *Judith* sometime before 1651, which proved valuable in establishing portions of the text damaged by fire (Griffith, 1997, 8).

The Nowell Codex is written in two hands. The prose texts and *Beowulf* to the middle of line 1939 (1936 in this translation) are written in one hand, and the rest of *Beowulf* and *Judith* in another. Dobbie (1953, xiii) notes that we can be reasonably certain of the loss of about thirty-five folios in the Nowell Codex in three locations: (1) a substantial section at the beginning of *The Legend of Saint Christopher*; (2) another substantial portion at the beginning of *Judith* (part of *Judith* and possibly another poem); and (3) a small portion at the end of *Judith*.

Fulk notes that the linguistic features of the Nowell Codex suggest that they were copied from different sources and says: “Why these particular texts were collected in one book is not plain, but one influential explanation that has been offered is that the manuscript is devoted to narratives about monsters” (2010, x). Orchard notes that “it was Kenneth Sisam who first considered that the *Beowulf*-manuscript may have been compiled on the basis of an interest in monsters which is exhibited by at least four of the five texts it contains” (1985, 1). He develops this theme, arguing that “the heathen warriors and monster-slayers . . . have themselves become monsters in Christian eyes” (1985, 169). Orchard goes on to explain:

But if the old heroes were becoming slowly demonized, then new biblical and Christian heroes, like Judith and Christopher in the *Beowulf*-manuscript, were emerging to fight their own demons, and to be fêted in the traditional heroic diction and manner of the past. The Anglo-Saxon literary tradition is one in which Christian virtues and pagan heroic diction become gradually intertwined, and the past is constantly reassessed and reinterpreted in the light of the new learning. In such an atmosphere old heroes find new audiences, whether those heroes come from a Germanic past, like Beowulf (or, in Iceland, Grettir), or from a Classical tradition, like Hercules or Alexander, inherited alongside the new Latin learning. (1985, 170)

The collection in the Nowell Codex may contain stories of heroes and monsters or monstrous men in a variety of intersecting or cross-cultural traditions. J. R. R. Tolkien argued in his seminal essay in 1936 that the monsters in *Beowulf* must have some relevance to the human passions and feuds in the poem that destroy kinship ties and bring cultures down into the symbolic claws of the Grendelkin or the inexorable maw of the dragon of greed or the worm of time. Whether we see heroes like Beowulf finally as subject to such forces or not remains a much debated issue. But the poems and prose explorations in this codex seem to be gathered together to explore these important issues.

## BEOWULF

*Beowulf* has often been considered the earliest English epic, though it does not closely resemble classical epics often associated with the term. Tolkien preferred the term “heroic-elegiac poem,” emphasizing the movement toward an elegiac tone in the latter half of the poem (1936, 275). Perhaps the poem, like the Danish hall Heorot, moves from building to burning, from epic to elegy. The editors of *Klaeber 4* suggest calling it “a long heroic poem set in the antique past” (clxxxvii), which is an apt, broadly generic description. The poem not only moves back and forth between epic and elegy, between historical materials and mythic elements; it also contains different subgenres. Joseph Harris argues that “the *Beowulfian summa* includes genealogical verse, a creation hymn, elegies, a lament, a heroic lay, a praise poem, historical poems, a flyting, heroic boasts, gnomic verse, a sermon, and perhaps less formal oral genres” (236). John Hill notes that *Beowulf* is a “poem of arrivals and departures,” with a narrative structure full of “chiasitic structures, envelope patterns, ring patterns, interlace effects or ‘digressive’ jumps ahead and invited recollections of past kings and events, with both forward and backward shifts” (3–4). The temporal jumps often emphasize the connection between past history, present action, and predicted future events.

Readers often remember the poem primarily as a series of great battles between Beowulf and the monsters, but nearly half of the poem consists of speech acts of various sorts, from the scop’s celebrant story of Finnsburg in the Danish court to the messenger’s prediction of the great wars to come after Beowulf’s death. Orchard notes that more than 1,200 lines are given over to about forty speeches in the poem (2003, 203). In the middle of this move-

ment back and forth between speech acts and direct action, there occurs the singular act of Hrothgar's reading of the runes or images on the sword hilt brought back from Grendel's lair by Beowulf after his killing of Grendel's mother. Lerer argues that "the hilt stands as a figure for the poem itself" (337) and notes that it points forward in time from the audience of Danes listening to the king and scop in the poem to the audience of readers in Anglo-Saxon England. In the context of the Danish audience in the poem, it is a foreshadowing of a culture to come. In the context of an Anglo-Saxon readership, it is a looking back at the roots of their literate culture.

Of the many themes in the poem that have been identified and debated, one of the most important is the meaning of the monsters and their relation to the world of the humans. Tolkien argued in his seminal 1936 essay that the monsters were not just some fairy-tale element inappropriately brought to center stage in the poem, leaving the more important human and historical elements relegated to the margins. He read the monsters as part of the mythic meaning of the poem and, as such, representative of the darker human passions and threats in the worlds of Denmark and Geatland. In his reading, while Grendel is "primarily an ogre" and "approaches to a devil," he is also "an image of man estranged from God" (1936, 279–80). He is related to Cain and at the same time is a representation of savage Death, which comes uninvited and "gibbering" to the feast of life (260). The dragon is "a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life) and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life)" (259). For Tolkien, the monsters represent both human evil and the inevitable cruelty of time.

Subsequent critics have seen the relation between the monsters and humans in the poem in many different ways. Kaske, for example, draws upon both classical and Christian traditions to argue that the controlling theme in the poem is the heroic ideal of *sapientia et fortitudo*, "wisdom and courage" (423 ff.). In his view, Beowulf represents both wisdom and courage; Hrothgar represents wisdom without courage; and Hygelac represents courage without wisdom. Grendel represents a perversion of courage, "reckless savagery" or "violent brutality" (438). The dragon represents a perversion of wisdom, "the perversion of mind and will" (450). Hume argues that "the controlling theme of the poem . . . is *threats to social order* [including] troublemaking, revenge, and war—problems inescapably inherent in this kind of heroic society, yet profoundly inimical to its existence" (5). Each of these threats is represented by a monster, and Beowulf stands for humanity's best response to these threats. Grendel embodies both murderous envy and a savagery unbound by

social constraint. Grendel's mother embodies the more understandable motive of revenge built into the human, heroic code that governs feuding. She demands an eye for an eye, a life for a life. The irony is that "what makes vengeance so uncontrollable and tragic is the fact that it is directed by the same laudable forces which help create and ensure social order in a violent world—the desire to conserve and protect kin or allies" (7). The dragon represents the need of king and country for gold in the treasury and the necessity for raiding parties and wars to obtain it. Such wars "upset the balance of social order" and in the end bring devastation upon the lordless Geats (9).

Niles also takes up the theme of social order but goes beyond Hume in including the positive ways in which a community can be built and maintained (1983, 224 ff.) He argues that "the poem's controlling theme is *community*: its nature, its occasional breakdown, and the qualities that are necessary to maintain it," including such elements as feasting, gift-giving, the exchange of speeches, and the sharing of song (226). Grendel represents the loner, the "creature apart from human community" who cannot enjoy the pleasures of people and play, song and celebration, language and love, storytelling and social bonding (229). Grendel's mere is an anti-Heorot meant to "suggest what human beings could be like in the absence of the joys of the group, in the absence of all obligations except the ties of blood" (231). The elegiac passages toward the end of the poem show us "society breaking down in the face of physical disasters" (231). Ironically, Beowulf's funeral provides an opportunity for his retainers and subjects to mourn together in an attempt to reaffirm their love for their lord and their sense of shared values (234).

Tolkien and early scholars tended to group Grendel and his mother together as an undifferentiated monstrous force and to ignore the place of women in the poem, but with the rise of feminist criticism, scholars have examined this issue. Chance, for example, argues that if Grendel is a mock-retainer and the dragon a mock-king, then Grendel's mother must be a mock-mother and mock-queen, a woman who fights her own battles (1990, 248 ff.). In this respect, she is a perversion of the Anglo-Saxon ideal of the woman as *fridowebbe* or "peace-weaver." She battles heroes, pursues vengeance like a warrior, and places no stock in peace. She's not interested in wergild for the death of her son. What good is gold in a cavern of grief? She is both masculine and monstrous. Chance contrasts Grendel's mother with the women in the poem like Wealhtheow, Freawaru, and Hildeburh, who are married off to patch a peace between warring tribes. They are expected to produce children, pass the cup in the meadhall, mollify feuding men, and keep quiet. Usually



their efforts at peace-weaving are doomed from the beginning. They are gifts at their own weddings, pawns in an unwinnable endgame.

Another highly debated topic is the question of Beowulf's possible pride and greed in wanting to battle the dragon alone and in desiring the dragon's gold. In 1953, Tolkien raised this question in an article on *The Battle of Maldon* in which he accused the two heroes, Byrhtnoth and Beowulf, of being too rash or proud in their pursuit of glory, rushing into battle with Vikings or monsters when more pragmatic caution would have been in order (1953, 1 ff.). He argues that both heroes are guilty of *ofermod*, "excessive courage, overweening pride," which ends up destroying not only themselves but the warriors and cultures they are meant to protect and sustain. He charges the aging Beowulf with rashly charging into battle with the dragon with insufficient troops and says that the "element of pride, in the form of the desire for honour and glory, in life and after death, tends to grow, to become a chief motive, driving a man beyond the bleak heroic necessity to excess" (14).

Many critics have taken up this thread. Goldsmith, for example, argues that Beowulf "possesses that arrogant self-confidence which is the special trait of the supremely noble and courageous fighter," and that his "insistence on challenging the dragon alone destroys the Geats" (73). In the first half of the poem, she notes that Beowulf is given the opportunity to see the dark side of Heorot revealed—its hidden feuds and hostilities, its failure of kinship bonds and of peace-weaving marriages, its lack of courage. In his sermonic advice to Beowulf, Hrothgar warns him of these dangers. The second half of the poem shows Beowulf succumbing to the sins of pride and covetousness that Hrothgar warned him about earlier. Goldsmith says that "Hrothgar, whose own spiritual sloth had let envy and murder into Heorot, has seen his error, and so could beg Beowulf to guard himself against pride and covetousness, when the testing time should come" (83). Hrothgar's early advice provides both a warning and a foreshadowing of Beowulf's fate. Finally, Goldsmith argues that Beowulf is "a man fighting his personal devil . . . supremely brave, supremely heroic in suffering, and supremely wrong-headed" (83).

On the other hand, many critics have viewed Beowulf as an ideal hero in heroic or even religious terms. Malone (1948) argued early on, for example, that the Christian poet of *Beowulf* found much to admire in the Germanic heroic tradition of the poem and that "his hero in all he says and does shows himself high-minded, gentle, and virtuous, a man dedicated to the heroic life, and the poet presents this life in terms of service: Beowulf serves his lord, his people, and all mankind, and in so doing he does not shrink from hardship,

danger, and death itself” (in Nicholson, 140). Alexander, in a similar vein, calls Beowulf “a peaceable man who is cast in the role of a slayer of monsters and dragons [who] is (by the standards of Germanic heroes) exceptionally modest, gracious, generous, and magnanimous . . . an ideal rather than an actual historical figure” (79).

The great critical debates about the poem are bound to continue. Ultimately we must recognize that *Beowulf*, like any great work of literature, both invites and resists interpretation. This accounts for the great variety of critical readings of the poem, of which I have sketched only a small portion above. The wisest of editors and critics must finally agree to disagree about the poem, sometimes even in the same space, and it seems fitting to close this introduction with the voices of two great *Beowulf* scholars, Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, who in their edition of the poem arrive at different conclusions. Mitchell says:

For me *Beowulf* is a poetic exploration of life in this world, of the blind forces of nature and the dark passions of humans against “our little systems [which] have their day and cease to be.” This contest is seen in terms of the system within which the poet lived but of whose inevitable weaknesses he makes us aware through both the story and his own comments. But I believe that the poet meant us to admire, not to condemn, Beowulf and that the poem ends on a note of hope not of despair. Today, in this nuclear age, with man’s inhumanity to man daily more apparent on all levels and the powers of darkness in seeming ascendancy throughout the world, we may see *Beowulf* as a triumphant affirmation of the value of a good life: as the poet himself says *Brūc ealles well*, “Make good use of everything.” (Mitchell and Robinson, 1998, 37; quote from Tennyson’s “In Memoriam”)

Robinson draws a somewhat different conclusion:

According to the strictest clerical spokesmen of the day, there was no room in the Anglo-Saxon Christian world for pagan ancestors, but a nation needs a past and pride of ancestry. This is what the *Beowulf* poet gives to his people. Through deep thought and high art he finds a place in his countrymen’s collective memory where their ancestors can reside with dignity even as the Anglo-Saxons acknowledge that those ancestors were pagan and lost. It is this accomplishment of the poet that gives to his narration of warrior courage, exultant triumph,

and honour in defeat its tinge of sadness and conflicted nostalgia. It also gives the poem its unforgettable gravity and makes it more than an exuberant telling of mighty exploits in bygone days. (Mitchell and Robinson, 1998, 38)

Perhaps *Beowulf* is like a great literary riddle which each reader must solve for himself or herself. Perhaps the poem is an invitation from the hero to “Say who I am” and from the poet to “Say what I mean.”

## Beowulf

Listen! We have heard of the Spear-Danes' glory,  
 Their storied power, their primal strength—  
 The kings and princes whose craft was courage.  
 Often Scyld Scaefing denied dinner  
 To his arch-foes, wrecked meadhall benches, 5  
 Stealing joy so that all his enemies  
 Drank terror instead. Their cups were cold.  
 At first a foundling, he wrestled fate,  
 Made that misery his own slave  
 Till the whole world over the whale-road 10  
 Yielded power, lifting tribute,  
 Offering gold. That was a good king.  
 To him was born a boy of promise,  
 A young prince for court and country,  
 A gift from God, an heir and comfort, 15  
 For the Lord of life saw such suffering  
 So often inherited in a kingless hall,  
 Such great violence, such grim sin,  
 Such deep need, that he brought Beow,  
 Son of Scyld, to end the anguish 20  
 And establish honor—his name was known.  
 So should a young prince make a friend of power,  
 Learn the grace of giving in his father's house,  
 Gather courage and hearth-companions  
 Who will stand by him in savage battle 25  
 In later years. A warrior thrives  
 Through glorious deeds and generous gifts.  
 Great Scyld left life in God's keep.

His comrades bore his body down  
 To the sea's curl as he'd commanded, 30  
 The land-leader for many years.  
 The ring-necked ship stood ready,  
 Icy and eager to embrace the king.  
 They laid their tall treasure down  
 Next to the mast, the gift and the giver, 35  
 With gold and gems, swords and mail-shirts:  
 No ship ever sailed in such grave beauty.  
 On his breast lay a clutch of arms—  
 What men crafted and the sea claimed,  
 A tribe's treasure for the king's crossing, 40  
 His last gifts not less than the foundling's first,  
 When unknown parents put the baby boy  
 Into a plain boat like a poor beggar  
 And offered their gift, cold and friendless,  
 To the endless sea. Who came with nothing 45  
 Left with gold. Who sailed alone  
 Was mourned by many. His men set up  
 A bright banner to proclaim his coming,  
 Then let the long waves take their treasure—  
 No sound but the ship's sliding into water 50  
 And the heart's keening. No man knows,  
 Whether wise counselor or world-traveler,  
 Who received that gift of cargo and king.

Then the son of Scyld ruled wisely  
 After his father went from the world— 55  
 Beow grew up, a beloved king,  
 And also sired a warrior prince,  
 Healfdene the great, brave and battle-fierce,  
 Who ruled the Scyldings, siring sons,  
 Princes of power—Heorogar, Hrothgar, 60  
 And Halga the good—and a daughter Yrse,  
 Who stories say was Onela's queen,  
 Bed-gem of that battle-Swede.  
 Then Hrothgar won great battle-glory,  
 Found worth at war, till his young troops 65  
 Swelled with power and pride, obeyed orders,

Supported their king. Hrothgar's dream  
 Was a meadhall built for his mighty band,  
 The work of craftsmen, worth remembering,  
 Where a king could share with the sons of men 70  
 His gifts from God in his hall of glory—  
 Stories, treasures, everything except  
 The common land and the lives of men.  
 The word went out—the craftsmen came  
 From all over middle-earth to shape beams 75  
 And raise up the glorious people's hall.  
 They quickly finished this finest of buildings,  
 This show of strength, and King Hrothgar,  
 Whose fame had spread, named it Heorot  
 After the ancient Hart. The king kept promise, 80  
 Giving gold from the treasure-table,  
 A feast of rings. The raftered hall,  
 High, horn-gabled, was doomed to wait  
 For battle-flames, the fierce sword-hate  
 Of family feud, when oaths of in-laws 85  
 Might mean less than murderous rage.

Then the monster who lived in shadows,  
 The dark's demon, suffered pain  
 When he heard the harp's sweet songs,  
 The poet's music in the hall of joy. 90  
 The shaper sang the world's creation,  
 The origin of men, God's broad grandeur  
 In sun-bright fields and surrounding waters.  
 That greater Shaper set sun and moon  
 As land-lights and adorned all earth 95  
 With leaves and limbs, created each  
 Green gift, each living thing,  
 Each walking wonder of this bright world.  
 The listening warriors lived in the hall,  
 Surrounded by joy until a certain creature 100  
 Began to commit crimes. A hell-fiend,  
 A grim hall-guest called Grendel,  
 Moor-stalker, wasteland walker,  
 Demon of the fens, he dwelled in marshes,

In monstrous lairs, unhappy, unhoused, 105  
 After God the Creator had rightly condemned  
 The race of Cain, that murdering kin,  
 When the Lord of life took vengeance  
 On Abel's bane, that slaughtering son.  
 No one found joy in that long feud, 110  
 That banishment for family-killing.  
 Out of Cain's crime what woke was evil,  
 A brutal borning of orcs and elves,  
 Gibbering giants, the living dead,  
 Who fought God, finding a hard reward. 115  
 In black night came the hall-marauder  
 To see how the beer-drinkers soundly slept,  
 A feast of dreamers who'd forgotten sorrow—  
 They locked out misery, this mess of men.  
 Unwhole, unholy, the monster came, 120  
 Grim and greedy, ready, ravenous—  
 A stalking mouth, he quickly seized  
 Thirty thanes, hauled them home,  
 His precious plunder, his proud slaughter—  
 King of the lair, exulting in dinner. 125  
 A dark cry woke before dawn,  
 A wail of Danes long after dinner,  
 Grendel's bloodbath their breakfast greeting,  
 His war-craft the morning's misery.  
 The glorious king had cold joy, 130  
 Suffered for his thanes, drank sorrow,  
 When he saw the bloody tracks  
 Of the grim guest, the ravenous ghost.  
 That strife was too strong, that loathing too long—  
 He even invited himself back the next night 135  
 For more murders and no mourning!  
 He was bent on vengeance, savage in sin.  
 Then it was easy to find a hero who sought  
 A hall removed from the ravenous beast,  
 A separate bed, once the blood-feud was known, 140  
 The grim crime of the murderous hall-thane.  
 Only those who left the hall escaped the hate!  
 So Grendel ruled the greatest of halls,

Sabotaged the right, a monster unmatched  
 Against many men, till the meadhall 145  
 Stood empty, unguarded, an idle house—  
 Twelve winters long, the time of grief  
 That Hrothgar became king of nothing,  
 Ruler of agony, lord of woe.  
 Then the shaper's song to the sons of men 150  
 Was of blood-feud and baleful sorrow,  
 Grendel's stalking and Hrothgar's suffering:  
 His night-hatred was no secret—  
 His plan was to devour peace with the Danes.  
 He offered no payment for past crimes, 155  
 No gold for his gnawing. No hall-counselor  
 Hoped to see shame's wergild in that claw.  
 That hall-bane, fierce and relentless fighter,  
 That death-shadow, moved against men.  
 Out of the mist, up from the moors, 160  
 He ambushed and ate, drank and devoured  
 Both young and old, both able and feeble.  
 He shaped the fens into endless night.  
 No one knows where the hell-shades walk.  
 The enemy of men, that lone horror, 165  
 Brought endless shame home to the hall,  
 A bed of terror to bright Heorot,  
 A night-demon in the dark hall,  
 But he was barred from the king's throne,  
 Kept from the gift-seat and God's love, 170  
 Separated from grace. That was wrack and ruin  
 To Hrothgar, ravaging his brave heart.  
 Wise men in secret counsel considered  
 What brave men might best do  
 To turn back terror. They offered sacrifices 175  
 At heathen shrines, prayed that some soul-slayer,  
 Some demon might ease their dark distress.  
 Their hope was dire—they prayed to hell  
 Instead of heaven. They knew no God,  
 No Great Shaper, no Judge of Deeds. 180  
 They laid praise at the mouth of hell,  
 Sang no songs to the greatest Lord,

Asked no favors of the Glory-giver.  
 Woe to those who in terrible affliction  
 Must offer their souls to the flame's embrace; 185  
 Well to those who on death's day  
 Can seek their Lord's protecting power,  
 Wrapped in the welcome of his embrace.  
 So Hrothgar brooded, Healfdene's son,  
 On seething sorrow. The wise king 190  
 Could not stop that killing, ward off woe.  
 That strife was too strong, that feud too fierce—  
 That hall was home to the grimmest of night-woes.

Then the story spread so that Hygelac's thane,  
 The greatest of Geats, heard about Grendel 195  
 And his hateful crimes. Beowulf was a huge hero,  
 Strongest in battle, mightiest of men  
 Alive at the time. He ordered his ship built,  
 A great wave-walker, and said he would seek  
 Over the long sea, the swan's road, 200  
 That well-known king needing brave new men.  
 Beowulf was beloved at home, but counselors  
 Laid no claim to his staying—they urged him on,  
 Observed omens, figured the fates,  
 Called his quest good. He picked out the bravest 205  
 From the Geatish ranks. The group of fifteen  
 Gathered for glory, sought the wave-wood,  
 Followed their sea-skilled battle-lord  
 Down to the shore-mark, the edge of land.  
 The ship waited, a wave-floater, 210  
 Under the tall cliffs. Time passed.  
 Warriors prepared to climb the prow.  
 Sea-currents shifted against the sand.  
 Men bore bright war-gear  
 To the ship's belly, smith-crafted armor. 215  
 The ship shoved off, warriors willing—  
 The sea lifting the well-braced wood.  
 They went over water, driven by wind,  
 The foam-necked floater like a great bird,  
 Until the next day at the augured hour, 220



When the proud bird with a twisted prow  
 Swooped toward land, as seafarers saw  
 Bright sea-cliffs, high headlands,  
 The stony shores. Sea-warriors knew  
 The waves were crossed, the journey done. 225  
 The Battle-Geats climbed down,  
 Secured the boat, rattled their mail-coats,  
 Bright war-shirts, and thanked God  
 That they had found safety in the sea-crossing.

Then the cliff-guard, watchman for the Danes, 230  
 Whose duty it was to survey the sea,  
 Saw bright shields borne over the gangway,  
 The glint of war-gear ready for the road.  
 Curiosity burned: who were these men?  
 Hrothgar's lookout leapt to his horse, 235  
 Rode to the shore, brandished his spear,  
 Spoke to the strangers, offering a challenge:  
 "Who are you? What are you,  
 War-bright, mail-coated men,  
 Bringing your tall sails over the sea-streets? 240  
 Long have I held this high lookout,  
 Watching the waves for a threat to the Danes,  
 So no ship-army, no enemy threat,  
 Might sail up and sack us unawares.  
 No shield-warriors have marched more openly 245  
 Onto our shore than yours, nor did you count  
 On the consent of my kinsmen for safe passage.  
 Never have I seen a more splendid warrior,  
 A mightier man, than one who walks with you.  
 That's no mere retainer but a man of lineage, 250  
 No mere warrior but an armored lord—  
 Nothing belies such greatness. Now let me know  
 Your lineage before you ride quietly forward  
 Like spies on our land. Here's my plain thought:  
 Tell me quickly where you come from." 255  
 The greatest of Geats answered the coast-guard,  
 The leader of war-men unlocked his word-board:  
 "We will give you the gift of our lineage—

We are known as the nation of Geats,  
 Hearth-companions of King Hygelac. 260  
 My father was known at home and abroad—  
 Ecgtheow, a great lord and leader.  
 He lived long, endured many winters  
 Before he went walking on his last road,  
 An old man leaving hearth and home— 265  
 No wise man now living has forgotten him.  
 We come with true hearts and trusty swords  
 To greet your king, the people's protector.  
 Be courteous and give us good counsel.  
 We come on an errand, a warrior's mission 270  
 To the lord of the Danes. Let's all agree:  
 Nothing should be secret, nothing hidden.  
 The only thing hateful we've heard—you know:  
 Something of darkness walks among the Danes,  
 Some evil enmity, who knows what, 275  
 A secret scourge, a shade of slaughter—  
 An unknown malice moves among men,  
 A shaper of corpses in the shadow of night.  
 I am the healer who can help Hrothgar—  
 I bring a remedy for the sickening foe. 280  
 I offer counsel to the wise, good king,  
 A remedy for ravaging, an end to woe,  
 If he's to escape evil, reverse his fate—  
 If he's ever to trade his seething sorrow  
 For a cooler heart, or a hall's blessing 285  
 For the hot rage of a tormented house.”  
 The coast-guard spoke, high in his saddle,  
 A fearless follower: “A smart shield-warrior  
 Who thinks clearly with a keen mind  
 Should know the difference between words and deeds. 290  
 What I see is this—a brave troop bound  
 To aid and sustain the king of the Danes.  
 Go forth with your chain-mail and war-gear.  
 I will guide you and order my men  
 To guard your ship, tarred and ready, 295  
 Against all enemies, till it bears back home  
 Over the sea-streams its beloved warrior,

Carrying a hero with its curve-necked prow,  
 And the good Geats who survive unharmed,  
 Home whole, safe through this battle-storm.” 300  
 The men marched out, the ship stayed still,  
 A broad-bellied boat, rope-tethered  
 And anchor-bound. Bright boar-shapes  
 Gleamed over cheek-guards, high over helmets  
 Fire-hardened, variegated, inlaid with gold, 305  
 War-masks guarding the grim warriors.  
 The men moved as one, a fell formation,  
 Till they saw the hall, timbered, tessellated,  
 Adorned with gold, the most beautiful building  
 On middle-earth, the best-known hall 310  
 Under heaven where the mighty one dwelled,  
 Its gold light gleaming long on the land.  
 The battle-brave coast-guard pointed to Heorot,  
 The bright hall of men, showed them the way,  
 Then wheeled his horse, speaking to the Geats: 315  
 “I must go back to my post. May God the protector,  
 The father of men, keep you whole.  
 I return to the shore and my sea-watch  
 To sound the alarm against enemy invaders.”

The street was stone-paved, the road straight, 320  
 The walkway clear to the ranks of men.  
 Their war-coats gleamed with bright chain-mail,  
 Hard and hand-locked as they neared the hall—  
 The rings of their corselets singing to Heorot.  
 The sea-weary warriors set broad shields, 325  
 Their round body-guards, against the wall—  
 Brave men came boldly to bench-seats,  
 Battle-gear ringing; spears stood together  
 Like an ash-gray troop, the craft of smiths,  
 A sharpness of shafts. That mailed troop 330  
 Was an energy of armor, a worth of weapons.  
 Then Wulfgar the hall-guard asked the warriors,  
 Those grim house-guests about their ancestry:  
 “Where do you come from with decorated shields,  
 Gray-iron mail-coats, grim-masked helmets, 335

And a stand of battle-spears? I am Hrothgar's  
 Herald and hall-guard. I've never seen  
 Such bold faces on seafaring strangers.  
 I think pride brings you—not anger or exile—  
 With heart's courage to seek Hrothgar.” 340

The proud one answered, prince of the Geats,  
 Unlocked words, hard under his helmet:  
 “We are hall-thanes and hearth-companions  
 Of noble Hygelac. Beowulf is my name.  
 I would speak with the son of Healfdene, 345  
 Glorious Hrothgar, lord of the Danes,  
 If the king in his goodness would grant me leave.”

Wulfgar considered—his wisdom was known,  
 His courage, clear: “I will ask the king,  
 Lord of the Scyldings, giver of rings, 350  
 Glorious prince, what you request,  
 Regarding your journey, and as seems fit,  
 Bring back his reply, whatever it is.”

Then Wulfgar hurried to where Hrothgar sat,  
 Gray and grizzled, surrounded by thanes, 355  
 A brave messenger before the Danish lord,  
 Addressing his king as custom demanded.  
 Wulfgar spoke to his beloved leader:

“Here are travelers from a long crossing,  
 Seafarers, wave-warriors, men of the Geats— 360  
 The bold, battle-scarred thanes name  
 The greatest one Beowulf. They seek permission  
 From you Prince Hrothgar to trade words,  
 Mix wisdom. May you choose wisely  
 And give them counsel, a good hearing. 365  
 They are worthy in war-gear, esteemed in armor,  
 And the leader who brought them here is good,  
 Truly a war-gift, mighty among men.”

Hrothgar spoke, protector of Scyldings:  
 “Young Beowulf was a boy I knew well. 370  
 His famous father was called Ecgtheow.  
 Hygelac's father, King Hrethel of the Geats,  
 Made him a marriage-gift of his only daughter.

Now has his hard, strong son come here,  
 A mighty warrior to sustain old friends. 375  
 Seafarers said, who carried precious gifts,  
 Gold to the Geats, that his hand-grip  
 Held the strength of thirty men—  
 It was battle-tested. Holy God  
 In his great mercy has sent this savior 380  
 To the beleaguered Danes to give Grendel  
 The gift of his grip. That's my hope.  
 I will give him treasures for courage,  
 Gifts for tearing that terror from life.  
 Order them in to meet our kinsmen— 385  
 Bid them welcome to the Danish hold.”  
 Then Wulfgar went to the hall door,  
 Offered these words to the waiting warriors:  
 “My lord of victories, leader of the Danes,  
 Commands me to say he knows your lineage, 390  
 And you seafaring warriors are welcome,  
 You brave men, to our Danish lands.  
 Now you may enter in battle-armor,  
 Approach Hrothgar under war-grim helmets,  
 But let your shields and slaughter-shafts rest 395  
 By the wall, waiting the outcome of your words.”

Up rose the warrior, around him his men,  
 A splendor of thanes; some stayed behind  
 To guard their gear, as their chief commanded.  
 The troop rolled in under Heorot's roof, 400  
 Warriors behind their battle-commander.  
 He stood on the hearth, hard under helmet,  
 His corselet crafted by clever hands,  
 A ring-net sewn by skillful smiths.  
 Beowulf spoke, offered a greeting: 405  
 “Hail Hrothgar, may you always be well.  
 I am Hygelac's kinsman and thane.  
 I have done deeds, gathered youthful glories.  
 This story of Grendel has spread to the Geats—  
 Seafarers say this greatest of halls 410  
 Stands idle and useless, without warriors,

When the day's late light fades,  
 Hidden under heaven. Wise ones counseled  
 That I should come to King Hrothgar.  
 They knew my cunning and battle-craft— 415  
 They saw me come home from bloody combat,  
 Stained with slaying a family of fiends—  
 I challenged and crushed five fierce giants—  
 Slaying night-monsters riding the waves.  
 Their pain was my pleasure—they asked for trouble. 420  
 I avenged the Geats, grinding the grim ones.  
 Perhaps I might hold a private meeting  
 With your monster, give a gift to Grendel,  
 Settle his endless feud with the Danes.  
 I entreat you now, great Lord Hrothgar, 425  
 As I've come so far, to grant me this favor,  
 Protector of Scyldings, prince of the people—  
 Let me, alone with my band of hard warriors,  
 Purge Heorot, clean out this hall.  
 I have heard that the awe-striker, 430  
 That skulking atrocity, wields no weapons.  
 So, let's be fair. I'll scorn the sword,  
 Meet that monster's reckless abandon  
 With my fist. I'll fight tooth and nail  
 With no broad shield, no yellow wood, 435  
 Foe upon foe, talk terror with my hands.  
 Let the warrior whom Death decides to take  
 Trust in God's judgment, his fair doom.  
 I expect if Grendel rules the day  
 In this battle-hall, he'll ravage us all, 440  
 Devour the Danes, eat some Geats.  
 If death claims me, no need to cover  
 My missing head, my bloody body!  
 He'll haul home my bones and blood,  
 My savory shroud, devour without sorrow 445  
 My ravaged body, stain his lair.  
 There'll be no need to feed my gobbled form,  
 No need to mourn, no cause to grieve,  
 No body to bury—but send home to Hygelac,  
 If the battle takes me, the best of my war-clothes— 450

What's left of them—the chain-mail  
 Protecting my chest, Hrethel's heirloom,  
 The work of Weland. Let the fates fall."  
 Hrothgar spoke, Lord of the Scyldings:  
 "For our old favors to your father Ecgtheow, 455  
 You have come to fight, Beowulf my friend.  
 Your father slew Heatholaf with his hard hands,  
 Struck up a feud with the warlike Wylfings.  
 Then the Geats could no longer keep him—  
 They were harried hard by the fear of war, 460  
 So he sought the South-Danes' protection,  
 Sailing over the sea-surge, the rolling waves,  
 When I was a young king, ruler of the Danes,  
 Keeper of the treasure-hoard of heroes.  
 My older brother Heorogar, Healfdene's son, 465  
 Was newly dead, my own dear kin,  
 An unliving man—he was better than I.  
 Afterwards I settled your father's feud  
 With a wergild of treasures sent over waves,  
 Ended his troubles. He swore me oaths. 470  
 Now it's my shame and sorrow to say  
 To any man what evil the monster Grendel  
 Has wreaked in Heorot, his brooding hatred,  
 His sudden ferocities, his unbound feud,  
 His steady slaughter. My troop is depleted, 475  
 My war-band shrunk. Fate has swept them  
 Into the claw and clutch of Grendel's rage.  
 God may easily separate that mad ravager  
 From his foul deeds. Often my warriors,  
 Have boasted over beer, angry over ale-cups, 480  
 That they would wait to meet that terror,  
 Greet Grendel with their grim swords.  
 Then in the morning, the meadhall was stained  
 Bright with blood, shining with slaughter  
 When the day dawned, mead-benches broken 485  
 And drenched with gore. I had fewer followers  
 Since death carried my dear men off.  
 But now, Beowulf, sit down to feast,  
 Unlock your thoughts, share stories

Of great victories as your heart desires.” 490  
 Then benches were cleared in the meadhall  
 For the gathering Geats. The bold-hearted sat,  
 Proud in their strength. A thane served mead  
 Shimmering in ale-cups. The shaper sang,  
 His clear voice in Heorot. There was joy in the hall, 495  
 The camaraderie of warriors, a keep of carousing.  
 That was no small company of Geats and Danes.

Unferth spoke, Ecglaſ’s son, who sat at the feet  
 Of the Scylding king, unlocked battle-runes—  
 Devious thoughts and unfriendly words. 500  
 Beowulf’s undertaking was an ache to him,  
 For he hated to hear that any man’s deeds  
 Might hold more glory than his. He offered gall:  
 “Are you the great Beowulf who challenged Breca  
 In swollen pride, to swim the sea, 505  
 To risk your lives for a foolish boast?  
 No one could stop you, not friend or foe,  
 From your swimming match on the open sea,  
 Your death-diving in deep waters,  
 Your proud journey over ocean roads. 510  
 Your hands churned up the sea-streets,  
 Those winter-waves for seven nights,  
 But Breca was better, a winner over waves.  
 The smarter warrior overcame your strength,  
 Gathering glory. On the eighth morning, 515  
 The sea washed him up on the Heathoreams’ shore.  
 From there he sought his own homeland  
 Where he ruled the Brondings, beloved by all,  
 To sleep in his stronghold and deal out treasure.  
 He had strength in swimming and a wealth of rings. 520  
 That son of Beanstan fulfilled his boast,  
 Got the best of you. I think worse things  
 Await you even though you’ve endured  
 Grim battles before, if you dare to keep  
 The night-watch here to greet Grendel.” 525  
 Beowulf replied, the son of Ecgtheow,  
 Measured out meanings, mixed words:



“Well, Unferth my friend, you said a mouthful  
 About Breca’s bravery, on a belly full of beer.  
 I’ll tell you the truth—I had greater sea-strength, 530  
 More hard riding on the heave of waves  
 Than any man. We were just boasting boys  
 When we risked our lives in the roiling sea,  
 Two alone at the edge of youth.  
 We did what we said, made good our words. 535  
 We took our bare swords swimming,  
 Hard blades in hand, to ward off whales.  
 Breca failed to swim faster or farther  
 Beyond my strength in the surging sea,  
 And I stayed by him. We swam together, 540  
 Suffering the surge for five nights  
 Till the coldest of sea-storms, heaving water,  
 Tore us apart in the darkening waves,  
 And the battle-grim north-wind  
 Savaged our bond, split us apart. 545  
 The waves were rough. Sea-beasts roused.  
 There my body-mail of hand-locked rings  
 Protected my life—the battle-jacket,  
 Woven of iron and worked with gold,  
 Covered my chest. A savage sea-fiend, 550  
 Monster of the deep, dragged me down  
 To the sea-bed in his cruel grasp,  
 Till I touched him with my sharp sword,  
 A burial greeting, a gift for his chest.  
 Battle-rush took the sea-beast’s life 555  
 Through my hard hand. Time and again  
 The terrors attacked, monsters moved in.  
 The fierce ones found me, diving for dinner.  
 I served them well with my good sword—  
 It was fitting for fish. I don’t think 560  
 They enjoyed that feast at their sea-bed table.  
 Their dead mouths weren’t able to eat me.  
 The morning after, they slept late,  
 Lulled by my sword, dozing on sand,  
 Swept up by waves, so that never again 565  
 Could the monsters hinder seafarers’ sailing.

Light lifted from the east, God's bright beacon,  
 The sea calmed, the swells subsided,  
 So I could see headlands, wave-walls,  
 Windward shores. Fate often protects 570  
 The undoomed man if his courage holds.  
 I was offered nine sea-monsters  
 To slay with my sword. I've never heard  
 Of a harder battle in wind or water,  
 Nor of a man more pressed in the sea-rush; 575  
 Yet I survived the monsters' grasp,  
 Swam home alive, weary from the work.  
 The sea-streams bore me far from home  
 Into the arms of the Finns, the land of the Lapps.  
 I've never heard, Unferth, of your exploits, 580  
 Tracking terror, matching wits with monsters,  
 Slinging courage with a swinging sword—  
 I don't mean to boast—though I heard  
 You were a kin-killer, a bane to your brothers.  
 For that family ravage you'll rot in hell— 585  
 Your soul is damned though your wit is keen.  
 You want the truth? I'll tell you Unferth,  
 Son of Ecglaf, if your spirit had been strong,  
 Your mind on monsters instead of memories  
 Of killing kin, that awesome terror, 590  
 That savage Grendel might have slain fewer  
 Of Heorot's heroes, left the hall unhaunted.  
 He's found this feud a little one-sided—  
 He knows no need to fear your swords,  
 The battle-blades of the Victory-Scyldings. 595  
 He takes his toll in terror from the Danes—  
 Your life's the tribute he needs. The monster  
 Shows mercy to no one. He lusts and feasts,  
 Kills and carves up dinner with his claws,  
 Invites the Scyldings to an endless sleep. 600  
 The Geats will give him what the Danes have not—  
 Strength and courage, a sword's grim greeting.  
 Then men may wake unafraid, drink  
 Morning mead, saunter under the southern sun,  
 Their world clothed in light, find their fellowship 605

And forget fear.”

Then the treasure-giver,  
 Gray-haired, battle-famed, knew joy.  
 The Lord of Bright-Danes had heard Beowulf,  
 Counted his courage, his strength of spirit.  
 Then laughter lifted in the great hall— 610  
 Words were traded. Wealhtheow walked in,  
 Hrothgar’s queen, clothed in gold.  
 Careful of custom, mindful of manner,  
 She greeted each hall-thane in turn.  
 The noble woman served the first cup 615  
 To the Danish king, keeper of the land,  
 Beloved by his people, bade him rejoice  
 In the beer-feast. He enjoyed the banquet,  
 Raised up his cup, the victory-king.  
 Then the lady of the Helmings went through the hall, 620  
 Carrying the jeweled cup to young and old,  
 Generous of mead and her gracious mind,  
 Sharing her spirit, till the courteous queen,  
 Adorned with rings, brought Beowulf the cup,  
 Welcomed the Geat with wise words, 625  
 Thanking God for granting her wish  
 That some warrior might offer defense  
 Against the darkness and an end to woe.  
 The battle-fierce warrior took the cup  
 From Wealhtheow’s hand. Beowulf spoke, 630  
 Son of Ecgtheow, eager for battle:  
 “I knew when I boarded the boat with my men,  
 Sat down in the ship with my brave band,  
 And sailed the sea, that I would fulfill my oath  
 And the Danish hopes or discover death 635  
 In Grendel’s claws, his fierce grasp.  
 Here in Heorot I will stop this savagery,  
 Cleanse this hall or cancel my days.”  
 The queen cherished that plain boast,  
 Sitting with Hrothgar, adorned with gold. 640  
 The talk rose up, the hall-troops rejoicing  
 Over old victories. The son of Healfdene  
 Sought his night-rest in another hall.

He knew the monster was bending his mind,  
 Mulling since morning on attacking Heorot. 645  
 Dark shapes were gliding, shadows sliding  
 Under cloud-cover. The dark rim-walker,  
 Fierce ravager, was writhing toward Heorot.  
 The company rose—the leaders paid regards.  
 Old Hrothgar wished young Beowulf well, 650  
 Gave him control of the hall with these words:  
 “I’ve never entrusted my people’s hall  
 To anyone since I could lift hand and shield;  
 Now I yield its keep to you—  
 Control it. Guard this greatest of halls. 655  
 Remember glory, reveal your strength,  
 Watch out for that walking wrath,  
 Confound the wraith. Whatever you dream  
 Will be yours if you survive the onslaught.”

Then King Hrothgar, protector of Danes, 660  
 Left the hall with his close companions.  
 The war-king wanted to find Wealhtheow,  
 His bright queen in her bed-chamber.  
 The King of Glory, as men would learn,  
 Had set a hall-guard to greet Grendel, 665  
 A dangerous man on a special mission  
 To stand night-watch for the monstrous guest,  
 The great giant. The lord of the Geats  
 Trusted his strength and God’s grace.  
 He stripped off his chain-mail, unlaced iron, 670  
 Unlocked his helmet, lifted it from his head,  
 Gave his sword to a servant, his best iron blade.  
 Beowulf of the Geats spoke the quiet boast  
 Of a good man before getting into bed:  
 “I don’t claim any lesser strength, 675  
 Any poorer power, any weaker will,  
 Than Grendel, so I’ll give him this gift:  
 I won’t put him to sleep with my sword,  
 Steal his life with iron, though I might.  
 In spite of his strength, his violent fame, 680

His clawed hand can hold no sword  
 To hew my shield, to hack my life.  
 Let's fight as equals—I'll forego the sword,  
 If he dares to fight me without weapons,  
 And let wise God give out glory 685  
 Wherever he wants to the one who wins."  
 The battle-brave earl put his head on his pillow,  
 Lay back to rest with his seafaring thanes.  
 None of them expected to see home again,  
 Family or friends, kith or kin, 690  
 The light of day or their land of birth.  
 They knew night-slaughter had stricken the Danes,  
 A curse of killing in a hall of corpses—  
 But God gave them fortune's weaving,  
 The warp and weft of war-victory, 695  
 A gift to the Geats of craft and comfort  
 Through the savage strength of one warrior  
 To seize the shadow, catch the killer.  
 This is the truth of time's long telling—  
 A mighty God rules over all mankind. 700

Out of the darkness a shadow-walker  
 Came writhing, sliding toward sleepers  
 Unaware in the gabled hall—except for one  
 Who watched, waiting for the wraith.  
 Men know that God the Creator 705  
 Will not let a demon, a savage stalker,  
 Drag us into shadows. Beowulf waited  
 In waking anger, rage in reserve,  
 Aching for action. Grendel came gliding  
 Out of the moors, up from the marshes, 710  
 Bearing God's wrath. The monster meant  
 To stalk and kill a mouthful of mankind.  
 Under a shroud he slid to the door—  
 Under dark clouds he crept to the hall,  
 The house of giving, the home of feasting, 715  
 That wasn't the first time he sought  
 Hrothgar's home, but he never found

In his grim days before or after  
 Such bad luck, such hard hall-thanes.  
 The unholy warrior reached the door, 720  
 Separated from joy. The door burst open,  
 Its iron bonds snapped with a touch of hands—  
 A mindful of evil at the mouth of the hall.  
 The fiend stalked the floor, swollen with anger,  
 Fierce in his fury. Out of his lurid eyes, 725  
 Leapt like a flame, an unfair light.  
 He saw in the feast-hall a pile of men  
 Sleeping together. His heart exulted,  
 His mind bent—he meant before daybreak  
 To separate life from limb for each man— 730  
 An awesome terror up to old tricks.  
 He was driven to find a fulfilling feast—  
 His fate was one last feeding on mankind.  
 The mighty one watched how the other moved,  
 The kinsman of Hygelac saw his killing attack. 735  
 The monster never thought of holding back—  
 He seized the first sleeper, slit his body,  
 Bit open his bone-house, drinking his blood,  
 Swallowing flesh, feasting on hands and feet,  
 Eating greedily the unliving one. 740  
 One power moved unwarily up  
 To the body of the other, a warrior at rest,  
 Seized the strong-hearted thane with his hand,  
 Reached for a clutch of flesh with his claw—  
 But Beowulf was hatching his battle-plan, 745  
 Snatched up the creature's nailed hand,  
 Shook his claw in a monstrous greeting,  
 Grabbed his grasp. The cold keeper of sins  
 Had never met a harder handgrip  
 In all his dark marauding in middle-earth. 750  
 His wretched heart discovered fear—  
 He wanted to flee back home to the marshes,  
 But his hand was locked in a terrible fist.  
 His spirit spooked, his heart heaved for home,  
 A host of demons, a haven of fens— 755

But this time his only hold was in Beowulf's hand.  
 That was a new way of life for him.  
 Hygelac's thane remembered his boast  
 Earlier in the evening, stood up strong,  
 Held the fiend fast, fingers bursting, 760  
 One tried to bolt—the other crushed him back.  
 One wanted the fens—he got cold fingers.  
 That was a bitter journey the demon-walker  
 Made to Heorot. The hall resounded—  
 The building shook like a wild ale-party! 765  
 The proud Danes panicked, their hearts in shock,  
 With two fierce hall-guards feasting on rage.  
 The building roared with battle-shrieks  
 As both warriors were bent on slaughter.  
 It's a wonder the wine-hall withstood 770  
 The ravaging warriors, their fierce rage.  
 It was braced and bound, inside and out,  
 With iron bonds, hammered by smiths.  
 I heard it said that many mead-benches  
 Were ripped from the floor, splintered seats 775  
 Of inlaid gold, while the grim ones grappled.  
 No wise one of the Scyldings ever thought  
 That Heorot could be wrecked by any means,  
 That antler-boned hall, by crash or craft,  
 Unless fire should reach out ravenous 780  
 And swallow it whole. The sound of slaughter  
 Rose in the hall, a strange new song.  
 Fear seized the North-Danes who heard  
 For the first time there through the wall  
 A dirge of terror, mad music 785  
 Sung or screeched by the foe of God,  
 A song of no victory, a depth of wailing  
 From the clutch of hell. He was held fast  
 By the strongest man in living memory.  
 The protector of men had a plain purpose— 790  
 To keep in his clutch the uninvited killer  
 Whose useless days would serve no one.  
 Beowulf's retainers raised their swords,

Old heirlooms, to protect their prince,  
 To save the life of their mighty leader. 795  
 When they leapt into the fray, they little knew—  
 Hard-hearted warriors hacking at Grendel  
 From every side, seeking his soul—  
 That no iron on earth, not the sharpest sword,  
 Could harm that demon, cut through flesh, 800  
 For he had woven a spell against wounding,  
 A protection against weapons made by man,  
 A secret skin so nothing could touch him.  
 His life-parting was painful, unexpected;  
 That alien spirit, that savage shadow 805  
 Would travel far to the keep of fiends.  
 The demon discovered, who had always sought  
 To bring his murderous heart to mankind—  
 He was at war with God—that his body  
 Would not travel on that last road 810  
 Because the kinsman of Hygelac, bold Beowulf,  
 Held him by the hand. Each was anathema  
 To the life of the other. The awesome creature  
 Finally felt pain in a body-wound:  
 His shoulder-bone was seen, his sinews torn, 815  
 His tendons ripped, his bone-locks broken.  
 Battle-glory was given then to Beowulf.  
 Grendel fled, life-lost and spirit-sick,  
 Into the fens to his joyless home,  
 A clutchless wraith. He knew his days were done. 820  
 For the Danes, it was a dream come true  
 After the blood-rush. He had purged the hall—  
 The warrior who was battle-wise and heart-strong,  
 Cleaned out Heorot, Hrothgar's home,  
 Delivering it from darkness. He rejoiced in his night-work, 825  
 In the doom of his deeds—they were worth remembering.  
 The leader of the Geats had made good his boast  
 To the East-Danes, brought an end to evil,  
 An ease to suffering, a last look at grief.  
 That was no small sorrow they'd endured. 830  
 It was a plain sign when the battle-brave man  
 Nailed the monster's arm—shoulder to fist—



Under the eaves of Heorot's roof.  
A welcome-home was Grendel's claw.

The next morning many great warriors 835  
Gathered in the gift-hall, as I heard tell;  
Folk-leaders came from far and near,  
Traveled long roads to Hrothgar's home  
To marvel at the monster's tracks. His leave-taking,  
His life-going, brought sorrow to no one 840  
Who saw the footprints of the ungloried guest,  
How the weary one dragged himself off defeated  
To the lake of demons, fated, fleeing,  
Leaving his bloody life-tracks behind.  
The lake-water boiled with blood— 845  
The fiendish waters swirled with gore,  
The red roil of battle, the hot clutch of blood.  
Death-doomed, deprived of life-joy,  
He laid down his life in the murky fen,  
His heathen soul in his stronghold. Hell seized him. 850  
Hall-thanes tracked him to the foul mere,  
Then turned back joyfully, traveled home  
To Heorot, young and old on their horses,  
Speaking in high spirits about Beowulf,  
Praising his deeds, spreading his fame. 855  
Time and again they talked of his power,  
Saying that no one between the seas,  
Under the expanse of heaven, the sky's sweep,  
Was a bolder shield-bearer, a braver warrior  
More worthy of a kingdom to rule— 860  
But they didn't blame Hrothgar, unpraise him,  
Find fault with their dear lord and friend—  
He was a good king. Sometimes they spurred  
Their horses on, galloping on good roads,  
Sometimes held back their bridling bays 865  
While the king's song-shaper, story-teller,  
The one who remembered old songs,  
Who could weave old rhythms with new words,  
Chanted Beowulf's story, securing his glory,  
Weaving courage and wisdom in a weft of song. 870

He sang too of Sigemund, son of Wæls,  
 His wide travels and great glories,  
 Strange stories known and unknown,  
 His crimes and feuds craftily hidden  
 From the children of men, except Fitela, 875  
 His nephew and friend to whom he talked,  
 For they fought together, battled like brothers,  
 Blood-companions in countless battles,  
 Slaying a swath of giants with their swords.  
 No small glory sprang up for Sigemund 880  
 After his death-day. Hardened by battle,  
 He killed a dragon, destroyed the worm,  
 The old treasure-hoarder, guardian of gold.  
 Under the gray stones, into that cold cave,  
 The prince's son went without Fitela, 885  
 Alone in his courage, daring the dragon.  
 What fate offered, he took—shook his sword,  
 Stabbed the scaly worm to the wall,  
 Pinned the bright beast to the stone  
 With his edge of iron, its skin shining. 890  
 The dragon was dead, the serpent skewered.  
 The awesome striker, son of Wæls,  
 Sigemund had sought the ring-hoard alone.  
 He brought treasure to the boat's belly  
 Where he could rejoice over gems, fathom gold. 895  
 The old worm melted in its own heat.  
 He was the most hailed hero after Heremod—  
 Whose strength and daring, whose battle-courage  
 Was finally drained in a twisted war.  
 He was betrayed by giants into enemy hands— 900  
 His end was quick. His surging sorrows  
 Beat his spirit till he became a source of sadness,  
 A gathering of grief to his thanes and people.  
 Wise men mourned then their lost lord,  
 For they had hoped from the oldest days 905  
 That this stout-hearted warrior might prevail,  
 Offer an end to affliction, relief from ruin,  
 A remedy for evil. A king's son should prosper,  
 Take the role of his father, rule wisely his people,

Protect the land and its treasure-hoard, 910  
 Shaping a shelter-hall for the Scyldings.  
 Beowulf was dearer to all his people, a better  
 Friend than Heremod, who was seized by sin.  
 Sometimes they spurred their horses, racing  
 Down sandy roads. The morning sun 915  
 Also hastened across heaven. Warriors walked  
 Bold-hearted back to the high hall Heorot  
 To see the strange wonder. The king came  
 From the queen's bed, the guardian of gold,  
 Keeper of ring-wealth, fast in his fame, 920  
 With his company of men, and his queen too  
 With her wealth of women on the meadhall path.  
 Hrothgar spoke, stood on the porch steps,  
 Staring at the eaves under the roof,  
 Glistening with gold and Grendel's claw. 925  
 "Thank God for this saving sight!  
 I've endured evil, a bundle of grief  
 At Grendel's hand. May the Guardian of heaven  
 Keep working wonders. Not long ago  
 I never expected relief from my sorrow 930  
 When the greatest of halls stood stained  
 With bright blood, shining with slaughter,  
 A stretch of woe to all wise counselors  
 Who despaired of defending the people's place  
 Against demons, sprites, and dark shadows 935  
 Haunting Heorot, a nightwork of woe.  
 Now a great warrior has wrought relief,  
 And through God's hand, healed Heorot,  
 Found out evil and cunningly fixed it,  
 Where we failed with our unsound plans. 940  
 Your mother may say—whoever she was  
 Who bore such a son among mankind—  
 That God was gracious to her, kind in creating  
 A boy, a blessing. Now Beowulf, best of men,  
 I hold you humbly in my heart like a son, 945  
 And cherish your coming. Keep well this kinship.  
 No treasure I own cannot be yours.  
 Often I have given gifts to honor

Weaker warriors, a trust of treasure.  
 Now you have done such glorious deeds 950  
 That your fame will never falter.”  
 Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
 “With kind hearts and cold courage,  
 We have entered this struggle against the unknown,  
 Ungrasped power, and snapped its strength. 955  
 I wish you might have seen him yourself,  
 The feast-weary fiend, scales dragging,  
 Falling in the hall, dead-tired.  
 I wanted to catch him quick, hold him  
 Hard with a hand-grip, cradle him 960  
 In a death-bed, a slaughter-couch,  
 So he might find a savage sleep,  
 His ghost lifting from the body-bed;  
 He was bound to stay in my unyielding grip  
 Unless his flesh could flee. I wanted 965  
 Him dead, no bones about it—  
 But I couldn’t hold him, the restless enemy,  
 Against God’s will. He slipped my grasp.  
 To save his life he left his hand behind,  
 His arm and shoulder—a nice touch! 970  
 The token claw gave him cold comfort,  
 No hope of life, that loathed spoiler,  
 Tortured by sin; but pain grabbed him  
 In a hard grasp, a wailing wound,  
 A misery-grip. There he must wait, 975  
 Stained with crime, till bright God  
 Brings judgment for his dark deeds.”  
 After this, Unferth son of Ecglaf,  
 Boasted less of his battle-works,  
 His courage quiet, while all warriors 980  
 Gazed on the claw, the fiend’s fingers,  
 Nailed near the roof by Beowulf’s strength.  
 Each claw-nail, each hand-spur  
 In the heathen’s banged up death-grip,  
 Was stiff as steel. The old talk was dead— 985  
 Men claimed no hard thing could pierce him,  
 No ancient iron, no trusted blade,

Could cut his bloody battle-fist.  
 Then Heorot was ordered adorned by hands.  
 Men and women readied the wine-hall, 990  
 Decorated for guests. Gold-threaded tapestries  
 Draped the walls, bright weavings,  
 A web of wonder for the eyes of men.  
 The beautiful building had been blasted,  
 Its iron hinges shattered by terror's touch, 995  
 When the monster, stained by sin,  
 Outlawed from men, jerked into flight  
 To run for his life. Only the roof stood  
 Untouched, unharmed, unbloodied in the end.  
 Death offers no easy escape to anyone 1000  
 On the road from birth, no matter the need:  
 Earth-dwellers, world-walkers,  
 Soul-bearers, the sons of men—  
 Each of us seeks the place prepared  
 Where after feasting in the pleasure-hall, 1005  
 The flesh lies down in death's bed,  
 With a blanket of earth for a long unwaking.

That was the time for a victory-feast—  
 King Hrothgar, Healfdene's son,  
 Hailed the warriors in. I've never heard 1010  
 Of a greater group of kinsmen and thanes,  
 Gathered about their treasure-giver,  
 With such noble bearing. Glorious warriors  
 Feasted at mead-benches, drinking their fill,  
 With Hrothgar and Hrothulf, bold-minded men. 1015  
 The heart of Heorot was filled with friends—  
 That was before some of the Scyldings,  
 Betraying their brothers, took treachery in.  
 Then Hrothgar gave Beowulf a victory-banner,  
 Woven with gold, a helmet and mail-coat, 1020  
 Healfdene's jeweled sword, ancient to onlookers.  
 Beowulf drank mead with no need for shame  
 Before his bowmen with such rich gifts.  
 Not many have given four finer treasures  
 As a sign of friendship, gleaming with gold. 1025

The helmet's rim, a costly crown,  
 Was wrapped with wire, wound in wealth,  
 A guardian roof-ridge for a warrior's head,  
 So that no keen sword, no hammered leaving  
 Of a smith's sharp files, no battle-hardened blade, 1030  
 Could cut him down, pierce his protection,  
 When the shield-warrior met his fierce foe.  
 Then the gift-giver, protector of men,  
 Ordered eight horses onto the hall floor,  
 Bridled in gold. One of the saddles 1035  
 Was crafted with gems, cunningly wrought—  
 That was the battle-seat of the great king,  
 When glorious Hrothgar, Healfdene's son,  
 Sought sword-play. His war-mood never faltered—  
 His fame was tested and forged in battle 1040  
 Where men fought in a field of corpses.  
 The lord of the Danes, in the line of Ing,  
 Their ancient king, offered ownership  
 To Beowulf of both horses and weapons,  
 Urged him wisely to use them well. 1045  
 That gift-giver repaid his battle-rush  
 With horses and treasure so no truth-teller  
 Could find fault. He also gave seafarers sitting  
 On mead-benches who came with Beowulf  
 Heirloom treasures and ordered wergild 1050  
 Paid for the Geat that Grendel killed  
 In vicious sin—surely he might have slain  
 More men if wise God and a man's courage  
 Hadn't hindered his desire, forestalling fate.  
 God rules the race of men, both then and now, 1055  
 So understanding is always best, the soul's seeing.  
 Whoever lives long through days of feud and strife  
 Will come to endure both love and loathing,  
 Get an eyeful of both good and evil on this earth.

Then sound and music were mixed in the hall, 1060  
 Harp-songs before Hrothgar, battle-son of Healfdene;  
 The joy-wood was touched, a tale spun out,  
 As the king's shaper, the song-weaver,

Wove strands of story to men on mead-benches  
 Of days when Finn, surrounded by his sons, 1065  
 Slid into slaughter, a surprise attack,  
 And how Hnaef of the Half-Danes fought and fell  
 In that Frisian strife. His sister Hildeburh  
 Could not praise the faith of those Finnish giants.  
 Blameless she lost both brother and son 1070  
 In that shield-play—they fell to their fates,  
 Slain by spears. She was struck with grief.  
 Hoc's daughter mourned that shaft of fate  
 When morning came, and under the sky  
 She saw the slaughter of kith and kin, 1075  
 All those she loved most, her family joy—  
 Cold corpses. That fight seized  
 Finn's thanes, all but a remnant,  
 So the Frisian prince could not continue  
 To battle the Danes or Hengest their leader 1080  
 Who survived Hnæf—or even protect his own men.  
 So Finn and Hengest fixed a truce:  
 A hall-space would be cleared for the Danes,  
 Ruled jointly, so that mighty King Finn,  
 Son of Folcwalda, from its high seat 1085  
 Might share the gift-giving with rings to each,  
 And treasure to the two tribes, gold to Frisians  
 And Danes alike; he might honor the others  
 As well as his own, bring joy to both,  
 However hard in the shared beer-hall. 1090  
 Both sides pledged peace, secured a settlement.  
 They swore oaths. Finn promised without fail,  
 Without feigning, to honor all survivors  
 On both sides, as his counselors advised,  
 So that no warrior by words or works 1095  
 Should break the truce, destroy the treaty,  
 Undermine the peace. No one would mention  
 Out of malice that the princeless Danes  
 Had to follow Finn in the Frisian hall,  
 The slayer of Hnæf, their own ring-giver, 1100  
 Since fate forced this truce upon them.  
 If any Frisian warriors wanted to remember

The murderous feud or recall it with words,  
 Then the sword's edge should settle it.  
 Hnæf's funeral pyre was prepared 1105  
 And ancient gold hauled from the hoard.  
 The best of the Scylding battle-warriors  
 Was laid on the pyre. He was not alone.  
 In plain sight were plenty of mail-coats,  
 Bloody and stained, iron-hard helmets 1110  
 With boar-images bathed in gold and gore.  
 Retainers from both sides lay ravaged,  
 Warriors at rest with their gaping wounds,  
 The cringing dead in a pile of slaughter.  
 Then Hildeburh asked that her son be borne 1115  
 Beside her beloved brother, his uncle Hnæf,  
 On the funeral pyre. Their bones and flesh  
 Blazed and burned. She keened over corpses,  
 Grieving in song. The dead drifted up  
 In sound and smoke; the ravaging flame 1120  
 Raged over the barrow, reaching heaven.  
 Heads melted, wounds burst, blood sprang out,  
 Sizzling from sword-bites. The flame gobbled all,  
 Greediest of ghosts, war-heroes on both sides—  
 Their glory was gone, their strength sapped. 1125  
 Some of Finn's warriors went home without friends,  
 But Hengest and Finn lived in the hall unwillingly  
 With their own retainers, with their own memories  
 Of summer-slaughter through the savage winter.  
 Hengest dreamed of his homeland, unable to sail 1130  
 His ring-prowed ship over storm-wind roads,  
 Winter-waves locked in the bond of ice—  
 Until spring came to the halls of men  
 As it still does today, unlocking light,  
 A wonder of weather biding its time. 1135  
 Winter was gone, the earth was fair.  
 The exile was eager to seek his homeland,  
 Yet he dreamed more of revenge than return,  
 More of settling grief than sailing home—  
 If only he could fight Finn, answer with iron 1140  
 That unending feud. So he did not refuse



The world-wide custom of hard revenge  
 When Hunlafing laid in his lap that intimate edge,  
 That flashing sword known to the Frisians.  
 So Finn too felt the sword's touch, 1145  
 A cruel death in his own hall—  
 After Guthlaf and Oslaf, Hunlaf's kin,  
 Reminded Hengest of that grim slaughter  
 After the sea-voyage, in that guest-hall,  
 Fixed the blame for that family feud 1150  
 On the Frisians. The blood's revenge  
 Cannot be contained in a restless heart.  
 Then the hall was decorated red  
 With the blood of foes. Finn was dead,  
 His company killed, his queen taken 1155  
 Home to the Danes. The Scyldings  
 Took all the hall-treasures, heirlooms,  
 Tapestries and gems, home with Hildeburh,  
 Over the sea to her own people.  
 The shaper finished his song of victory, 1160  
 Of family feud. Joy rose up,  
 Bright bench-sounds; cup-bearers  
 Brought wine in beautiful jugs.  
 Then Wealhtheow walked in with her gold crown,  
 Sat down between two good men, 1165  
 Uncle and nephew, Hrothgar and Hrothulf,  
 Each true at the time, their trust unbroken.  
 Also Unferth was there, admired by many,  
 The king's mouthpiece. Men knew his heart  
 Held courage and cunning—he'd killed his kin 1170  
 Without mercy. Wealhtheow spoke:  
 "Take this cup, my noble king,  
 Giver of treasure, gold-friend of men.  
 Be kind in your words, generous to the Geats  
 With gifts and treasures from all the tribes. 1175  
 I've heard you would treat Beowulf like a son.  
 Heorot is purged, the ring-bright hall.  
 Use well your gifts and give rewards  
 While you may, but leave your kingdom  
 To kinsmen when you go, to folk and family. 1180

I know gracious Hrothulf will honor our sons,  
 Keep the kingdom for them if he outlives you,  
 Lord of the Scyldings. I hope he'll give them  
 Back the good that we've given him here,  
 The joy and honor he's had since childhood." 1185

Then she turned to the bench where her sons sat,  
 Hrethric and Hrothmund, with other brave boys,  
 Next to the good man, Beowulf the Geat.  
 Beowulf was brought the welcome cup  
 Of words and wine, feasting and friendship, 1190  
 And twisted gold, arm-bands and rings,  
 Chain-mail and the world's greatest  
 War-collar worn by any man on earth—  
 No finer treasure, no greater gift  
 Under heaven since Hama carried off 1195  
 The neck-ring of the Brosings to that bright city,  
 The beautiful jewel and its rich setting.  
 He wanted silver instead of strife, gold not gore.  
 He fled from the killing craft of Eormenric  
 And found in the feud his last reward. 1200  
 This collar was the one that Hygelac wore,  
 Grandson of Swerting, when he rallied his troops  
 Under his war-banner to protect his hoard  
 And bring back booty, the spoils of slaughter.  
 Fate took him for his pride in provoking 1205  
 A feud with the Frisians and the savage Franks.  
 He wore that neck-gem with precious stones  
 Over the bowl of the sea. His body fell  
 Beneath his shield, a king in the clutch  
 Of the dreaded Franks, his chain-mail, 1210  
 His neck-ring and life in their last embrace.  
 Then common warriors plundered the bodies,  
 Harvesting gain from the ground of slaughter,  
 Reaping treasure in the field of corpses.

The hall resounded. Then Wealththeow rose 1215  
 And spoke to the company: "Enjoy this collar,  
 My beloved Beowulf, this beautiful neck-ring,  
 My lucky young warrior, the mail-coat

And treasures, war-shirts for strength.  
 Be crafty, courageous—be proud and prosper— 1220  
 Be kind in counsel to my precious sons.  
 I'll reward you for that. You've earned the praise  
 Of generations across windy seas and cliff-walls.  
 May you thrive and enjoy these treasures.  
 Be gentle to my sons, bringer of joy— 1225  
 Here warriors hold true to each other in the hall,  
 Loyal to the lord, devoted to duty,  
 Gracious in heart, their minds on mead.  
 Downing their drink, they do as I ask.”  
 Wealhtheow went back to sit by her lord 1230  
 At this best of banquets. Warriors drank wine  
 Which tasted finer than the dark fate  
 Destined again to stalk the hall  
 At the end of evening when King Hrothgar  
 Retired to his rest in a separate room. 1235  
 Countless men cleared the benches,  
 Spread out their pillows and padded bedding,  
 Just as before. One beer-drinker,  
 Unsuspecting, sank into bedrest,  
 Doomed to die. Each sleeper set at his head 1240  
 His war-shield, bright battle-wood,  
 And above on the bench, his high-ridged helmet,  
 His ring-mail shirt woven with iron,  
 And his sharp-shafted war-wood.  
 Their custom was clear: be ready to strike 1245  
 In bed or in battle, at home or away,  
 Whenever their lord looked in dire need—

That was a loyal band, a trusted troop.  
 So they sank into sleep. One paid a high price  
 For his night's rest, a monstrous replay 1250  
 Of times when Grendel haunted the gold-hall,  
 Unleashing evil until his end,  
 Crushed in sin. Too soon it was clear  
 He had an avenger bent on killing—  
 Her hatred teeming at the loss of her son— 1255  
 Grendel's mother, a monster-woman,

Awesome, appalling, a walking dread,  
 Who lived in the lake's liquid terror,  
 In the cold currents after Cain killed  
 His only brother, the sword-slayer 1260  
 Of his father's son. So Cain was outlawed,  
 Marked for murder, fleeing from joy,  
 Wandering the wasteland. Then monsters woke  
 From that demon seed, ghosts and ghouls—  
 Grendel was one, a savage outcast, 1265  
 A fierce foe, who found in Heorot  
 A waking warrior, watchful, warlike,  
 Waiting for battle. Each reached out  
 With a savage grip. One was ready  
 With his yawning strength, a gift from God. 1270  
 He trusted the Lord, his Maker's mercy,  
 And his powerful grip. He finished the fiend,  
 Humbled the hall-guest, the hell-ghost.  
 Grendel fled, separated from joy,  
 Seeking his death-home, the bane of men. 1275  
 His greedy mother, grim as the gallows,  
 Rushed ravenous to avenge her son.  
 She came to Heorot where the Ring-Danes slept,  
 Handing twisted fate to trusting warriors.  
 Grendel's mother made her way in. 1280  
 Her terror was only less than Grendel's  
 By this much—as the terror of a woman-warrior  
 Might be less than a man's, the shock of a war-wife  
 As her hammer-forged blade stained with blood,  
 The red-sweat of battle, severs the ridge 1285  
 Of a man's boar-helmet and splits his head.  
 Suddenly in the hall, hard swords were drawn,  
 Shields grabbed with hands, too late for helmets,  
 Too late for corselets. She snatched a man!  
 She was in and out, quick on the take, 1290  
 In a rush to revenge and return home.  
 She fled to the fen. He was Hrothgar's man,  
 His favorite retainer between the seas,  
 A beloved shield-warrior. She savored him too,  
 A man ripped from bed, stripped of his sleep. 1295

She touched his heart, feeding on his fame.  
 Beowulf, the honored Geat, was gone.  
 After the great feast and the gift-giving,  
 He had been offered another lodging.  
 Cries rent the hall, an uproar in Heorot. 1300  
 She had seized her son's claw, his blood-crusty hand—  
 That was no slaking of sorrow but a bad exchange  
 With brutal payment of kith and kin on both sides.

Then the grizzled king, a once-great warrior,  
 Was fiercely troubled, torn by grief, 1305  
 When he heard his chief thane, his dearest friend,  
 Was dead. Beowulf was brought to the high hall  
 For vengeance and valor. In the dawn light  
 He and his seafarers came to the hall,  
 Where the wise king waited, wondering 1310  
 Whether God Almighty would ever grant  
 A better fortune, a chance at peace,  
 After he heard the wail, reliving old woe.  
 Beowulf the worthy warrior walked across  
 The bloody floor with his band of men. 1315  
 The hall-slats resounded, the boards shook.  
 He approached the wise king, asking  
 If he'd had a restful night with pleasant dreams.  
 Hrothgar responded, protector of the Scyldings:  
 "Don't talk of dreams. My life's a nightmare! 1320  
 Sorrow haunts this hall again, stalking the Danes.  
 Æschere is dead, Yrmenlaf's brother,  
 My rune-reader, wise counselor,  
 Shield-warrior, and shoulder-companion.  
 We guarded each other's back in battle 1325  
 When troops clashed, blade against boar-crest.  
 He was all an earl should be, from start to finish,  
 Always good. Now some unsteady spirit,  
 Some restless, ravenous hall-beast  
 Has been his slayer. Who knows 1330  
 Where the savage feeder has taken his body,  
 Feasting on flesh. She's avenged her son,  
 Finished the feud you started with your grip,

Hard hands on the monster who'd winnowed  
 My people too long. His life languished 1335  
 In your hands. Now another has come,  
 The second night-stalker, hall-wrecker,  
 Borne by feud, bent on vengeance,  
 And many may feel who grieve for their king,  
 Their generous gift-giver, and mourn his counselor, 1340  
 That her coming follows hard upon your killing—  
 It galls our hearts. She's stolen my right-hand man  
 Who supported your coming and sustained your dreams.  
 I've heard rumors, what land-dwellers  
 And hall-counselors say, that they've seen 1345  
 Two monsters on the moors, wasteland wanderers,  
 Ghastly spirits or grim beasts,  
 And one has a shape most like a woman,  
 While the other's like a man, a miserable wretch,  
 Outlawed in exile, except bigger than a man— 1350  
 That one they've called Grendel from distant days.  
 No one knows of his father, if some man-dark shape  
 Begot the fiend, the spore and sport  
 Of savage lust. The two roam a remote land,  
 A cruel country, wolf-slopes, wild headlands, 1355  
 Windswept roads, fen-paths in the marsh,  
 Where a mountain stream slithers under hills,  
 Not many miles from here where the mere  
 Hunkers down under trees, under frost-covered wood,  
 With roots snaking down in dark water. 1360  
 There you can see a stark wonder each night—  
 Fire walks on water, flame on the flood.  
 No wise man living can fathom its depths,  
 Sound its source. Though the heath-stepper,  
 A stag with strong horns, is harried by hounds 1365  
 To flee through that forest, he would rather die,  
 Lay his life on the shore, than plunge in that lake  
 To protect his head. That's no gentle place,  
 No shielding strand. Surging waves  
 Roust black, ravenous storms, 1370  
 Raising dark waters to the heavens,

When the wind howls, stirs up evil,  
 Marsh-mist, and the sky weeps.  
 You're the only help for this horror,  
 Our hope and protection. It's a dread land 1375  
 Beyond your knowing, a place of peril  
 Where you might find our evil enemy  
 Who stalks in sin. Seek her if you dare.  
 I will give you a reward for revenge,  
 Fair recompense for the feud, twisted gold 1380  
 From the treasure-hoard, if you return."  
 Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:  
 "Grieve not, wise warrior and good king.  
 It's better to avenge a friend than endure  
 Headlong mourning. Each man must discover 1385  
 His own death someday. A good man gathers  
 Glory before he's gone, a warrior's tribute.  
 Arise great guardian of the Danes' kingdom—  
 Let's go look at the tracks of Grendel's kin.  
 I promise you this: she can't hide 1390  
 In the earth's embrace, a deadly den,  
 In mountain-woods, or ocean caves,  
 Wherever she flees. Have patience,  
 Bide time, and bear sorrow as a man should."  
 Then the old Danish lord leapt up, 1395  
 Thanking God for that great speech.  
 Hrothgar's horse, his braided steed,  
 Was saddled and bridled. The wise prince rode  
 In stately splendor with a band of shield-warriors  
 Marching behind. The monster's tracks were plain 1400  
 On the forest paths; they followed her going  
 On the marked ground. Over the murky moor,  
 She carried the corpse of Hrothgar's thane,  
 The lifeless counselor, the best retainer  
 Who shared with Hrothgar home and hall. 1405  
 The noble prince rode over rocky slopes,  
 Steep stone-paths, narrow one-man roads,  
 Into the unknown moor-homes, marsh-lairs  
 Of water-monsters and sea-snakes.

He went with his counselors, crafty men, 1410  
 Scouted the land till they found some trees,  
 A stunted grove leaning over gray cliffs,  
 A joyless wood. Water was below,  
 Bloody and roiling, a turmoil of gore;  
 To the Danes it was terror and torment, 1415  
 A goad in the mind, a grief in the heart,  
 When they found Æschere's head  
 Sitting on the sea-cliff. The lake boiled with blood,  
 Surged with hot gore as the warriors looked on.  
 The war-horn sounded a surging battle-song; 1420  
 The foot-troops sat down, gazing in wonder.  
 They watched in the water strange worm-shapes,  
 Sea-serpents swimming, exploring the lake,  
 And water-monsters lying on the headland shores  
 Like beasts of the deep who wake in the morning 1425  
 And wander the sea-roads, sorrowing ships,  
 A wilding of worms. The fierce ones fled,  
 Thrashing with rage at the bright, sudden sound  
 Of the battle-horn. A bow-bearing Geat  
 Cut one of them off from his life with a shot— 1430  
 A stitch of iron in his monstrous heart.  
 He swam a little slower as death stroked by—  
 Shortly he was hard-pressed and hampered by spears,  
 By barbed boar-shafts, like a pig in the waves,  
 Riding the pikes, assailed by enemies, 1435  
 Hauled to the shore—that wave-walking worm,  
 Alien beast, wonder of the water.  
 Men gazed at that guest, that grim horror.  
 Then Beowulf put on his battle-clothes  
 Without fuss, without fear of losing his life. 1440  
 His chain-mail—hard, broad, hand-woven—  
 Would breach the sea—it knew how to keep  
 His bone-house whole so his fierce foe's  
 Hand-crush could not reach his heart,  
 Or the anger of enemies tear out his life. 1445  
 A shining helmet guarded his head—  
 It could slice dark water, strike the depths,



Lunge for the lake-floor. It was cunningly made,  
 Crafted by smiths, adorned with gold,  
 Encrusted with gems, with emblematic boars, 1450  
 So no sword or blade could bite through its iron.  
 Not the least of his strengths, his battle-aids,  
 Was what Unferth gave him in his time of need—  
 Hrunting was the name of that ancient sword,  
 That iron-edged blade and heirloom treasure— 1455  
 It was engraved with waves, serpentine swirls  
 Like deadly snakes, tempered with gore.  
 Never had it failed any warrior wielding it  
 Who greeted terror with his battle-hand  
 In a meeting of monsters in their unholy home. 1460  
 This was not the first time it carried courage.  
 Surely Unferth, Ecglaf's son, crafty and strong,  
 When he lent this sword to a better warrior,  
 Beowulf the Geat, was not thinking much  
 Of what he had said, boasting in the hall 1465  
 And drunk on wine, a cowardly slanderer.  
 Unferth was a taunter who took no risks.  
 He never wanted to walk under water.  
 He never thought to brave broiling waves.  
 He gave up glory for loathing at the lake, 1470  
 Unlike the other who carried courage to the edge.  
 Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:  
 "Remember great Hrothgar, son of Healfdene,  
 Wise king, gold-friend of men,  
 What we agreed, now that I'm ready to go: 1475  
 If I should leave life, discover death in this dive,  
 You would stand as my father, guardian and shield  
 Of my thanes and retainers, if slaughter takes me.  
 The gifts you've given me, gracious Hrothgar,  
 Rewards for the hall-strife, send on to Hygelac, 1480  
 So the lord of the Geats, son of Hrethel,  
 Will know from that gathering of gold and wealth  
 That I found here a good ring-giver  
 Whose favor I enjoyed. And let Unferth,  
 Known for sharp words, take home my sword, 1485

The hard-edged heirloom with its serpentine stain,  
 Its wave-patterned blade. With his sword Hrunting,  
 I will gather glory or die in death's clutch."

After these words, the man of the Geats,  
 Without waiting for an answer, dove down— 1490  
 The sea-surge welcomed the warrior,  
 Seized and swallowed the brave swimmer.  
 He drifted down, the daylight fading  
 As he touched lake-bottom. Soon that sea-creature  
 Who ruled the realm for a hundred years, 1495  
 Grim and greedy, ravenous for slaughter,  
 Saw that warrior winding through water,  
 Pushing down from the land-light above,  
 Seeking her strange home. She seized the intruder  
 With her fierce claws, but she broke no bones, 1500  
 Pierced no hide—the warrior was whole,  
 Protected by mail from the monster's hand,  
 Shielded by rings from those savage fingers.  
 No claw could cut that coat. When Beowulf came  
 To the murky floor, the sea-wolf seized him, 1505  
 Dragging him home to her desperate lair,  
 So despite his courage, he could not swing his sword,  
 Wield his weapon. He was battered by sea-beasts  
 Who tore at his mail-coat with terrible tusks,  
 Attacking the alien warrior. Then Beowulf saw 1510  
 He was in a hall-cavern which held back water;  
 The cave-roof held up the floor of the sea  
 So the warrior would not suffocate in the waves,  
 The fierce grip of the flood. He saw a fire-light,  
 Pale and blazing, both bleak and bright. 1515  
 Then the good man greeted the mere-woman,  
 Monstrous, mighty, outlaw of the deep.  
 He gave her a sword-gift, thrust and stroke,  
 Held nothing back from his sharp greeting,  
 So that ring-patterned blade was swinging 1520  
 Straight for her head, singing a war-song,  
 Greedy for battle. Then the cave-guest saw  
 That his lightning blade would not bite her body,

Slice through her life. The battle-edge failed  
 Where before it had split both helmet and head, 1525  
 Sailed through chain-mail, fixed a man's fate.  
 That was the heirloom's first failure.  
 Resolute and keen, the kinsman of Hygelac,  
 Seeking glory, cast off the sword  
 With the serpentine swirls and inlaid gems, 1530  
 Dropped the useless steel to the ground.  
 He trusted the strength of his fierce hand-grip,  
 As a man must do in his quest for fame  
 And lasting glory—he must risk his life.  
 The prince of the War-Geats feared no feud, 1535  
 Refused no strife. He seized the shoulder  
 Of Grendel's mother, swollen with fury,  
 Battle-hard with rage, threw that life-foe,  
 That grappling grim-wife to the ground.  
 She came back for more, gave him a gift 1540  
 Of harrowing hands, a clench of claws.  
 Then war-weary, the strongest of foot-warriors,  
 Hardest of heroes, stumbled and fell.  
 She sat on her hall-guest, gripping her knife,  
 Broad and bright-edged, lunging in his lap, 1545  
 Embracing revenge for the loss of her son.  
 His corselet clung, a woven war-web,  
 Guarding his heart against stab and sting,  
 Protecting his body against penetration.  
 Then the son of Ecgtheow might have perished, 1550  
 Ended his life there deep under ground,  
 If his hardened chain-mail, a web of rings  
 Had not held strong, and if holy God,  
 Guarding the right, had not shaped victory  
 For the greatest of Geats who rose up again. 1555  
 Then Beowulf saw a battle-rich blade,  
 Boding bright victory among some armor,  
 An old sword of giants, a warrior's glory,  
 Heavier than any man's hand-play,  
 Forged in fire, invincible and adorned. 1560  
 The Scyldings' hero seized the ringed hilt,  
 Lifted its length, heaving its heft.

Fierce in fighting, savage in strength,  
 Desperate for life, he struck the furious  
 Blade at her body—it bit through her neck, 1565  
 Broke the bone-rings, shattered her life.  
 The edge cut through her fated flesh.  
 She fell to the floor, the sword sweating blood,  
 And the warrior rejoiced in a good day's work.  
 The pale light flared like heaven's candle, 1570  
 An indoor sun brightening the cave.  
 He gazed round the chamber, circled the hall,  
 Raised up the old sword, hard by the hilt,  
 Hygelac's thane, angry and resolute.  
 This blade was useful, unlike Unferth's. 1575  
 Beowulf had a battle-gift for Grendel—  
 He wanted to repay his vengeance in the hall,  
 His devouring of Danes in their witless sleep  
 Night after night, sometimes a few,  
 One time fifteen, a monstrous gift— 1580  
 He'd dragged them away like delicious prey.  
 Beowulf repaid him with swift revenge  
 As he saw him lying, war-weary, lifeless,  
 Drained on his death-bed from hall-wounds  
 At Heorot. Suddenly his blade swung, 1585  
 Cutting the corpse. The body burst open  
 In a handful of gore from that hard stroke.  
 With a sword-slice to his dead body,  
 Beowulf severed Grendel's head.

Then wise men watching up on the shore, 1590  
 Gazing with Hrothgar at the churning waves,  
 Saw the roiling water stained with blood.  
 The grizzled elders talked together,  
 Counseled sagely that no one could come  
 Out of that lake a conquering hero, 1595  
 Proclaiming victory to their glorious king—  
 Surely the sea-wolf had slaughtered him.  
 Then came the ninth hour. The Scyldings forsook  
 Their headland watch—Hrothgar went home,  
 The gold-friend of men. The Geats sat still 1600

Like loyal strangers on the alien shore,  
 Stared at the water, sick at heart,  
 Hoping against hope to see their lord.  
 Meanwhile below, the great battle-sword  
 Began to melt like a bloody icicle 1605  
 From the sweat of battle, as the wonder after winter,  
 When the Father who rules all times and seasons  
 Unlocks the ice-bonds, the chains of frost—  
 He is the true Creator. The prince of the Geats  
 Took no treasures from that cavernous hall 1610  
 Except the head and the jeweled hilt.  
 The sword-blade had melted, burning away  
 Its damascened beauty. The blood was too hot,  
 The poison of the alien spirit too strong,  
 The gore of the cave-dread who died too great. 1615  
 The Geat came swimming who killed the monster,  
 Slaughtered the she-worm—he plunged up through water.  
 The currents were cleansed, the lake and its lair,  
 The liquid roads where the monster played,  
 Leaving her days of life-loan in the deep. 1620  
 Then the lord and protector of seamen swam,  
 Stroking toward shore, rejoicing in his haul,  
 The burden of the blade he was bringing home.  
 The Geats leapt to greet him, thanking God  
 That their hero was whole, safe and sound. 1625  
 Then was the mail-coat of the conqueror loosened,  
 The helmet of the hero untied. The lake drowsed,  
 The waves calmed, the water subsided,  
 Stained with blood. The men marched back,  
 Their spirits unburdened, their hearts rejoicing, 1630  
 Following the footpaths, the old known roads.  
 The thanes were bold and proud as kings.  
 They bore Grendel's head from the mere-cliffs,  
 A weight for the warriors—it took four to haul  
 Grendel's head to the gold-hall stuck on spears, 1635  
 A toil of trouble. Straightway they came,  
 A gathering of Geats, a strength of retainers,  
 Toward Hrothgar's hall, fourteen warriors,  
 Their great lord with them, who moved across fields,

A troop together, home to the meadhall. 1640  
 The prince of the Geats, bravest of battle,  
 Gathered in glory, surrounded by thanes,  
 Came to the hall to greet King Hrothgar.  
 They bore Grendel's head by the hair  
 To the hall floor where the Danes drank, 1645  
 Dragged that left-over flesh to the table,  
 A ball of terror to the men and the queen—  
 A dead gaze, a stark sight.

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:  
 "Now—son of Healfdene, Lord of the Scyldings, 1650  
 See what we've brought—a gift from the mere,  
 A token of glory to gaze upon.  
 I did not walk readily under water,  
 Battle calmly in the monster's cave,  
 Keep my life easily in that lake-lair. 1655  
 I'd have perished if not for the power of God.  
 That great sword Hrunting, gift of Unferth,  
 Was not much good, though famous enough,  
 But the Ruler of men, who often guides  
 A warrior alone, gave me eyes to see 1660  
 An heirloom on the wall, an old sword of giants,  
 So I found a better weapon to wield.  
 When the time was right, I slew those demons,  
 Monstrous house-mates. Then that battle-blade,  
 The serpentined sword, melted down to the hilt, 1665  
 As the blood spewed out, hottest of battle-sweats.  
 I brought back the hilt from the cave-hoard,  
 Paid the monsters in kind for their killing,  
 The slaughter of Scyldings, the death of Danes—  
 It was only right. I promise you this: 1670  
 Tonight you can rest without fear in Heorot,  
 Thanés all together, both young and old,  
 Prince of the Scyldings, lord of your people.  
 Death will not haunt you as it did of old."  
 Then the golden hilt, the old work of giants, 1675  
 Was given to the hand of the grizzled king.  
 It passed that day to the prince of the Danes

From the hoard of demons after their fall,  
 Created by craftsmen, shaped by smiths.  
 When that grim-hearted foe of God, 1680  
 And his monster-mother, guilty of murder,  
 Left this world, the beautiful hilt  
 Came to the best of earthly kings  
 Between the seas. Hrothgar spoke.  
 He gazed at the hilt, an heirloom treasure, 1685  
 On which was engraved in images and runes  
 The origin of strife, the first feud,  
 When the sea surged and the flood slew  
 The race of giants—they knew suffering,  
 Always alien to eternal God. 1690  
 He gave them the deep water's reward.  
 So rune-staves told this ancient story  
 On the gold hilt, once grip and guard  
 Of the greatest sword, the sharpest steel,  
 Naming its owner with serpentine shapes, 1695  
 Worm-like runes. Then wise Hrothgar spoke,  
 The son of Healfdene—the thanes listened.  
 "Now a man who knows truth, acts rightly,  
 And rules with justice, a protector of the land  
 And all its people, recalling the past, 1700  
 Will say that this is the best man ever born.  
 You have harvested glory, great Beowulf—  
 Your name is renowned to the ends of earth.  
 You keep courage tempered with wisdom,  
 The surest of strengths. Your fame spreads far. 1705  
 A king keeps his promise—I honor my vow.  
 You will be your people's pride and joy,  
 Comfort and keep, for a long time.  
 You're not like Heremod, the king before Scyld,  
 Who slew the sons of Ecgwela, nurturing slaughter, 1710  
 Not justice and joy. A plague to the Danes,  
 Quick to anger, he killed his mates,  
 His hearth-companions. He turned notorious,  
 Trading hall-mirth for murder, though God alone  
 Gave him power to rule, sustained his strength. 1715  
 The heart in his breast was bloodthirsty—

He gave no rings for honor and glory  
 To his people the Danes, serving only himself.  
 He lived without joy, an ache and affliction  
 To his own people. Learn from his story: 1720  
 Be manly and munificent—shape worth from wealth.  
 I give you this story from my treasure of years.  
 It's a wonder how God with his great heart  
 Deals out to mankind wisdom and land,  
 Nature and nobility, in his all-wielding power. 1725  
 Sometimes he lets a good man's mind dwell  
 In desire or delight, gives him hearth and home,  
 A kingdom to rule, prosperous and proud,  
 Subjects to govern, a stronghold to guard,  
 Till lost in unwisdom, driven by folly, 1730  
 He cannot imagine an end to joy.  
 He lives in fullness so the fool believes  
 That nothing can touch him, no turning of fate,  
 Neither sudden illness nor old age,  
 Neither sword-strife nor ancient sorrow. 1735  
 Neither heart's hatred nor dark dread  
 Can twist his comfort—the world is his will—  
 Until his pride puffs up, his arrogance increases,  
 So the soul's guardian sleeps, the watcher wanes.  
 His sleep is too sound, bound up by care, 1740  
 And the soul-slayer wakes with his treacherous bow.  
 The man's heart is shot with a bitter shaft,  
 His mind poisoned without protection,  
 The savage suggestion of a dark demon,  
 An insidious evil. He's without defense. 1745  
 He thinks he owns too little and rules too few.  
 His grim mind is bent toward treasure.  
 He hoards everything, gives nothing,  
 Honors no one but himself, forgets fate—  
 Forgets that his glory was given by God 1750  
 Who offers honor. Finally he falls.  
 His flesh-house crumbles—it was just a loan.  
 His end approaches. Another succeeds him,  
 A generous king who never hoards,



A ring-giver who rules without fear, 1755  
 Who hands out treasure without mourning,  
 Guard against the soul's Bowman, beloved  
 Beowulf, best of men. Avoid evil,  
 Seek eternal gain, pursue no unyielding pride,  
 Be great and giving. Power is fleeting. 1760  
 For a time you may have might and glory,  
 Yet soon illness or the edge of a sword  
 Will sap your strength, or the fire's clutch,  
 Or the flood's surge, or the sword's reach,  
 Or the spear's flight, or the horror of old age, 1765  
 Or the dimming of eyes, the coming of dark.  
 Then death will suddenly seize you, my warrior.  
 I've ruled the Ring-Danes for fifty years,  
 Kept them safe from swords and spears  
 Throughout middle-earth, ruling under heaven, 1770  
 Till I thought no enemy could touch me.  
 Well, fate's twists and turns have found me—  
 Sorrow turned out joy from my homeland  
 When that old foe invited himself in,  
 The dreaded Grendel with his unexpected gift 1775  
 Of sorrow to my spirit, suffering to my soul.  
 I thank God that I've come to see,  
 After such long strife, his bloody head,  
 His gaping gaze with my own eyes.  
 Come now to the seat of joyous feasting, 1780  
 War-worthy hero of the Geats—  
 We'll share many treasures before morning."  
 The Geat was heart-glad, accepted his seat  
 As the wise king suggested. The food was served  
 To the brave warriors sitting down to feast 1785  
 For a second night—just as before.  
 Night's dark helmet dimmed the hall;  
 The retainers rose, the gray-haired Scylding  
 Sought his bed. It pleased the Geat,  
 The glorious shield-warrior, that he could rest. 1790  
 A hall-thane came, attended to his needs  
 With awe and reverence, led the weary warrior

And sea-crosser who was far from his country  
 To a separate lodging and a well-deserved sleep,  
 As was the tired sea-traveler's due.

1795

Then the warrior with a great heart rested;  
 The hall towered over him, vaulted with gold.  
 The guest slept till the blithe-hearted, black raven  
 Sang in the sun, declaring the dawn,  
 Heaven's joy. The bright light hastened,  
 Shining over shadows. Warriors rose,  
 Eager to travel home to their people.  
 Bold-hearted Beowulf longed for his ship.  
 He ordered Hrunting, that precious blade,  
 Returned to Unferth, son of Ecglaf,  
 Said thanks for the loan, calling the sword  
 A good battle-friend, war-crafty.  
 He found no fault with that good weapon,  
 No blame with the blade: he was generous with praise.

1800

1805

The warriors in armor prepared to depart,  
 Eager for home. Dear to the Danes,  
 The Geatish prince approached the high seat  
 Of Hrothgar, greeted the great king.  
 Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:

1810

"Now we seafarers, guests from afar,  
 Ask leave to speak: we must return to Hygelac.  
 You treated us well, provided properly.

1815

If I can accomplish any more on earth  
 To earn your heart's love, your people's praise,  
 Than the battle-deeds I've already done,  
 Just send for Beowulf—I'll be back.

1820

If over the sea-roads, I hear that any neighbors  
 Or even hall-thanes, those hanging around,  
 Threaten to harm you, I'll bring you war-heroes,  
 A thousand thanes, to stifle that strife.

1825

I know that Hygelac, lord of the Geats,  
 Guardian of his people, though young as a ruler,  
 Would support my coming in words and works,  
 Declarations and deeds, so I can keep my promise,  
 Continue to help and honor the Danes

1830

With power and protection, and a forest of spears,  
 When you need good men. If your son Hrethric,  
 Heir apparent, wants to visit the Geatish court,  
 He'll find many friends there. Foreign lands  
 Are best sought by sons who stay strong!" 1835  
 Hrothgar spoke, answering his friend:  
 "A sage God sent these words to your spirit;  
 I've never heard a young warrior speak so wisely.  
 You are strong in might, sharp in mind,  
 Wise in words. If in fortune's twists, 1840  
 Your king Hygelac, son of Hrethel,  
 Should ever be slain by a grim war-spear,  
 A battle-sword, or some unknown sickness,  
 And your lord is gone, the Geatish prince  
 And people's protector, yet you remain alive, 1845  
 The Sea-Geats could not find a better man  
 To select as king to hold their land,  
 To guard their hoard and protect the kingdom,  
 Should you consider ruling the land of your kinsmen.  
 The longer I know you, the better I like you, 1850  
 My beloved Beowulf—your heart pleases me.  
 You have brought us together, Geats and Spear-Danes,  
 Built a common kinship, a bridge between nations,  
 A tying of tribes, so that strife may sleep,  
 And old hostilities may be put to rest. 1855  
 While I live and hold this kingdom together,  
 We will share treasures with your seafaring people,  
 Greet them with gold over the sea-bird's bath.  
 The ring-necked ships will carry this sharing  
 Of gifts as tokens of honor and friendship. 1860  
 I know our peoples will act honorably  
 In the old way toward friend and foe."  
 Then king Hrothgar, Healfdene's son,  
 Protector of thanes, gave twelve treasures  
 To Beowulf in the hall, bade him go safely home 1865  
 To his own people and come back again.  
 Then the king from a long Danish line,  
 Lord of the Scyldings, old and wise,  
 Kissed and embraced that best of thanes,

Holding his head while the tears ran down 1870  
 His grizzled face. He was of two minds,  
 But it seemed unlikely he would ever greet  
 This Geat again or keep his counsel.  
 So dear was Beowulf, his mood was keening—  
 He could not hold back the heart's surges, 1875  
 The waves of sorrow, the spirit's longing  
 Deep in his breast for this beloved man—  
 It burned in his blood. Then Beowulf left,  
 Glorious with gold, strode over the green,  
 Proud of his gifts. The wave-walking ship 1880  
 Waited for its owner, tethered on its anchor.  
 On that sea-journey, the gifts of Hrothgar  
 Were hailed by all. He was a blameless king  
 Until old age sapped his strength,  
 Stole his joy as it does with so many. 1885

Then young warriors walked to the shore,  
 Bearing mail-coats, ring-locked battle-shirts,  
 Woven steel. The coast-guard met them again.  
 He offered no taunts from the top of the cliff  
 But rode down to greet them, glorious guests— 1890  
 Said that their return would be richly welcomed  
 At home by the Geats when the men in bright armor  
 Disembarked from their boat. Then on the strand,  
 The sea-bellied ship was loaded with armor,  
 The ring-prowed craft with horses and treasure. 1895  
 The mast towered up over the gathering of gifts,  
 From Hrothgar's hoard. Beowulf gave the boat-guard  
 A sword wound with gold—he was always honored  
 Afterward in the meadhall for that heirloom gift.  
 The ship sailed out, plowing deep water, 1900  
 Leaving Danish lands. The mast was rigged  
 With a swath of sail, a great sea-cape,  
 Bound by ropes. The sea-wood groaned,  
 Timbers creaked; the wave-winds did not hinder  
 That sea-craft from its course. The foamy-necked floater 1905  
 Rode the swells, walked over waves—  
 The boat with the bound prow crossed deep water

Until seafarers could see the cliffs of the Geats.  
 The ship sprang forward, driven by wind,  
 Strode for the sand, stood up on the shore. 1910  
 The Geats' coast-guard who gazed at the sea,  
 Watching for warriors to welcome them home,  
 Hurried down to the shore, eager to greet them.  
 They moored the wide-bellied ship to the shore  
 With an anchor-rope, so the surging waves 1915  
 Would not bring wrack and ruin to the wood.  
 Beowulf ordered the prince's treasure—  
 Armor, trappings, gems, and gold—  
 Borne from the ship. Soon they saw Hygelac,  
 Son of Hrethel, their own gift-giver, 1920  
 Whose hall of thanes nestled near the sea-wall,  
 A beautiful building. The king sat proudly  
 On his high throne. His young queen Hygd,  
 Wise and well-taught, courteous and accomplished,  
 Hæreth's daughter, had dwelled in his hall 1925  
 Only a few years. She was generous to the Geats,  
 Not grasping of gifts or hoarding of hall-treasures.  
 She was not like Fremu, the queen of crime,  
 Who served up terror. No one except her lord  
 Dared look at her directly in the light of day. 1930  
 Whoever stared received the sword's edge—  
 Whoever gazed got seized and shackled—  
 Whoever looked had a shortened life.  
 After any arrest, the case was soon settled  
 By the stroke of a sword, the shadow of justice, 1935  
 The wail of slaughter, the blood of sorrow.  
 That was not a queen's proper custom—  
 A precious woman should be a peace-weaver,  
 Knitting trust not terror. She should not steal  
 A man's life with a trumped-up insult. 1940  
 Marriage to Offa put an end to that.  
 Men shared her story at the mead-benches,  
 Said she caused less harm, cursed fewer lives,  
 After she was offered, sheathed in gold,  
 To the young warrior, a prince to his people, 1945  
 When she sought Offa's hall with her father's blessing,

Followed his counsel across the waves,  
 Found a wedding in her husband's wielding.  
 There on the throne of Offa's hall,  
 Her fate turned—she enjoyed a better life. 1950  
 She was generous, glorious and good,  
 Useful to all, kind and loving  
 To her husband the king, the lord of warriors  
 And prince of men—the best, I believe,  
 Between the seas, of all mankind. 1955  
 Offa was honored far and wide  
 For his keen courage and generous giving.  
 He was sharp in battle, wise in ruling.  
 He held his homeland till Eomer was born,  
 Grandson of Garmund, kinsman of Hemming, 1960  
 Mighty in battle, a comfort to men.

Then the brave Beowulf with his band of warriors  
 Walked along the shore, strode across the sand.  
 The world-candle shone, the sun rising high  
 In the southern sky. The warriors went eagerly 1965  
 To the hall of Hygelac, protector of men,  
 Slayer of Ongentheow in the Swedish feud,  
 A young battle-king, generous with rings.  
 Hygelac heard of Beowulf's coming:  
 Men said there in his homestead near the sea 1970  
 That the guardian of warriors, his shield-companion,  
 Had come back alive to the Geatish court,  
 Safe from the strife and sport of battle.  
 The hall was prepared with a place for the men.  
 The battle-survivor and the proud king, 1975  
 Kinsmen together, traded talk,  
 Both formal greetings and shared stories.  
 Queen Hygd, Hæreth's daughter,  
 Moved with mead-cups through the hall,  
 Carrying kindness—she loved the people— 1980  
 Offering spirits to the outstretched hands  
 In the high hall. Hygelac was curious—  
 He began to question his brave companion,  
 Wondering what marvels the Sea-Geats had met:

“How was your journey, beloved Beowulf, 1985  
 As you swiftly resolved to ride the seas,  
 Stalking battle over salt water  
 In the hall of Heorot? Did you bring a remedy  
 For Hrothgar’s woe, his well-known grief?  
 My heart welled up with care and sorrow— 1990  
 My spirit quailed at your dangerous quest.  
 I urged you to leave that slaughter-fiend alone,  
 Let the Danes do battle with the monster Grendel,  
 Deal with the dread of their own demon.  
 I thank God you survived, came home sound.” 1995  
 Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:  
 “It’s no secret, my lord Hygelac,  
 What happened at that monster-meeting,  
 The clash and combat of two mighty creatures.  
 I grappled with that grim beast Grendel 2000  
 Who had long torn Heorot apart with terror,  
 Tormenting the Scyldings, devouring the Danes.  
 I avenged them all, finished that feud,  
 So that Grendel’s kin, any savage creatures  
 Who may stalk the earth to the end of time, 2005  
 Snared in sin, will have no reason  
 To boast of that battle, that clash at dawn.  
 I traveled to Heorot to greet Hrothgar  
 In his ring-hall to make known my mission.  
 When the son of Healfdene heard my purpose, 2010  
 He gave me a seat with his own sons.  
 The hall-troop was happy—I never saw more  
 Joyful mead-drinkers under one roof.  
 Sometimes Wealhtheow, the wondrous queen,  
 The peace-weaver of peoples, walked the hall, 2015  
 Cheering up warriors, offering the gift of rings  
 To young retainers before she sat down.  
 Sometimes Freawaru, Hrothgar’s daughter,  
 Carried an ale-cup or gold-rimmed horn  
 Around to retainers, offering a drink 2020  
 From the jeweled vessel, the communal cup.  
 Draped in gold, she is promised to Ingeld,  
 Son of Froda, prince of the Heathobards,

Enemies of the Danes. This peace-weaving plan  
 Is Hrothgar's hope to settle the feud 2025  
 And buy off strife with the gift of his daughter,  
 But princes perish and slaughter sneaks back  
 In the slayer's spear, even if the bride is good.  
 It may irk Ingeld, lord of the Heathobards,  
 And his proud thanes, when he enters the hall 2030  
 With his foreign bride, that her retinue of Danes,  
 Aliens and enemies, rejoices at the feast.  
 They'll see Scyldings bearing their ancestral heirlooms—  
 Bright treasures, battle-gear, sharp swords.  
 At one time their fathers wielded these weapons 2035  
 Until bitter sword-swing and shield-play  
 Led to death and the loss of heirloom treasures.  
 An old warrior will remember, while drinking beer  
 With a fierce heart, his ancestor's hilt-ring,  
 And the slaughter of Heathobards, his close kin, 2040  
 At the hands of the Danes. His heart is grim.  
 He unlocks sorrow, unpacks hatred,  
 Tests the resolve of a fierce young warrior,  
 Stirs up savage strife with these words:  
 'I wonder if you recognize your father's sword, 2045  
 That dear family blade he bore into battle  
 His last time in armor, when the Danes slew him,  
 Fierce Scyldings seized the battlefield,  
 And Withergyld lay dead among Heathobards.  
 Now some slayer's son sits in our hall, 2050  
 Drinking our mead, boasting of that battle,  
 His mouth full of murder, bearing your treasure,  
 The family honor which you rightly own.'  
 He rakes up the past with proud, bitter words,  
 Pricking his conscience over family killing, 2055  
 Till the time comes when the queen's retainer,  
 Who is wearing that sword of stolen honor,  
 Lies sleeping in death-rest, slain by the sword,  
 Drenched in blood for his father's deeds.  
 The avenger escapes—he knows his homeland. 2060  
 Then the oath will be broken, the promise of peace,  
 And Ingeld's love for his wife will be cooled



By seething sorrow. Some deceit bedevils  
 The tenuous trust between Heathobard and Dane.  
 Theirs is not a friendship or a marriage to last. 2065  
 Only the bond of bitterness will hold true.

But I was speaking of Grendel. You should know,  
 Great Hrothgar, my giver of treasures,  
 What became of the hard hand-fight of heroes.  
 After heaven's gem, the glorious sun, 2070  
 Had slipped past earth, the night-stalker came,  
 The savage spirit seeking Hrothgar's hall  
 And its heap of yet unscathed warriors.  
 Hondscio was fated to be the first hall-guard  
 Nearest the door, a monster's dinner. 2075  
 Grendel was mouth-slayer to that armored thane—  
 He swallowed the life of that dear man.  
 But the bone-biter, tooth-slayer, flesh-eater,  
 Had no intention of leaving the gold-hall  
 Empty-handed. He paid me a visit 2080  
 With his fierce hand-grip, a clutch of claws.  
 He had a pouch like a great glove to put me in—  
 It was made of devil's craft and dragon skin.  
 The demon beast exulting in dark deeds  
 Intended to stuff my flesh and innocence in, 2085  
 Pile me up with a pack of warriors in his pouch.  
 He found this impossible when I stood up.  
 I stopped his stuffing, filled with fury,  
 Driven by rage. It would take too long  
 To recount the battle, tell how I repaid 2090  
 The people's bane, the enemy of mankind.  
 There with my works I honored the Geats  
 And all of our people, my glorious prince.  
 He slipped away, enjoying his life  
 For a little while, but he left a gift, 2095  
 His right hand, a token of the terror  
 He found in Heorot that horrible night.  
 The miserable wretch left for his lair,  
 Sinking to the lake-bottom like a stone.  
 For that slaughter-rush, the king of the Scyldings 2100

Gave me plated gold, a good reward,  
 A trust of treasures, when morning came,  
 And we shared together both talk and table.  
 There was song and story, a hall rejoicing;  
 A wise old warrior unlocked his word-hoard, 2105  
 Sometimes singing with hands on harp-wood  
 Songs of truth and sorrow, sometimes shaping  
 Strange stories. The great-hearted king,  
 A battle-warrior bound in years, began to recall  
 The strength of his youth. His heart surged 2110  
 As his mind reached back over many winters.  
 We were happy in the hall, sharing pleasures  
 All day long till the dim night drew down.  
 Then the slaughter-ghost, the grief-slinger,  
 Grendel's mother came to the death-hall 2115  
 Where her son was slain, where the boy-beast  
 Discovered the battle-grip of the Geats.  
 That monstrous wife, that horrid hag,  
 Avenged her son, ate Æschere whole,  
 A wise counselor—his life departed. 2120  
 There was no body to burn on the pyre  
 When morning came, no death-bed fire  
 To ease his rest. She had borne his body  
 In her fiendish arms, her evil embrace,  
 Beneath the brackish mountain streams, 2125  
 Back home to her lair under a loathly lake.  
 That was for Hrothgar the greatest of griefs.  
 He implored me out of loyalty to you  
 And deep-hearted grief to do a warrior's work,  
 Risking life and limb in the tumult of waves, 2130  
 To finish the feud and find glory.  
 He promised the Geats a great reward.  
 I swam to the slaughter—that's widely known—  
 Discovered the cave-guard under deep waters.  
 We locked arms—the lake boiled with blood. 2135  
 In the grim hall of Grendel's mother,  
 I severed her head with a great sword.  
 I barely managed to escape with my life,  
 But fate was with me. The lord of the Danes

Gave me many rewards, magnificent treasures. 2140  
 So King Hrothgar kept proper customs,  
 Held nothing back in the way of riches.  
 The son of Healfdene opened his hoard,  
 Gave me treasures of my own choosing,  
 A generous meed for my fierce might. 2145  
 I offer them to you, my warrior-king;  
 I count on your kindness—I've few kinsmen left."  
 Then Beowulf ordered his rewards brought in—  
 A war-standard with a boar's head,  
 A battle-helmet with a beautiful, high crest, 2150  
 A gray iron mail-coat, a great battle-sword.  
 He also offered this gift of words:  
 "Hrothgar gave me this battle-gear—  
 The wise king counseled me to convey to you  
 Both treasure and story, to recall their history. 2155  
 He said that Heorogar, his elder brother  
 Who was king before Hrothgar, held this armor,  
 Treasured it so highly that he firmly refused  
 To give it up to his own son Heoroward,  
 Though he was loyal and loved. Use it well." 2160  
 I've heard there were four horses,  
 Swift and similar, apple-fallow,  
 Brought in next. Beowulf gave his gifts,  
 Steeds and goods, to his beloved king,  
 As a kinsman should do—not weave a web 2165  
 Of greed and malice, craft and cunning,  
 A gift of death to comrades and king.  
 Hygelac's nephew was loyal to him;  
 In hard battles each helped the other.  
 I've heard that he gave the neck-ring to Hygd, 2170  
 The gold-wrought treasure from Queen Wealhtheow.  
 He gave the king's daughter three fine horses,  
 Supple and saddle-bright. Hygd wore the necklace,  
 A gift of gold, gleaming on her breast.  
 Beowulf was brave in battle, honorable to all— 2175  
 His glory was woven of good deeds.  
 He killed no kinsmen, no hearth-companions  
 In feuds or drunken fits. His heart was fierce

But not savage—his strength was God’s gift,  
 The greatest of mankind. He was slow to start, 2180  
 So the Geats never thought him great as a boy,  
 Nor would the lord honor him with gifts  
 In the meadhall. He seemed unstrong,  
 No one knew how to take his measure.  
 But the Geats were wrong—his time came. 2185  
 Fate often turns, offers the unexpected—  
 He found fame and glory after an unsung youth.  
 Then the guardian of earls, Hygelac the king,  
 Ordered in the heirloom of Hrethel his father,  
 A glorious sword adorned with gold. 2190  
 No blade was more treasured among the Geats.  
 He laid the sword in Beowulf’s lap  
 And gave him also a grant of land,  
 Seven thousand hides’ worth, a hall and throne.  
 Each had inherited his land by birth, 2195  
 But the king’s was greater by royal right.

Time passed. In the strife-filled days  
 Of the Swedish wars when King Hygelac  
 Lay dead and the Geats lost many lives  
 In battle-clashes, when the savage Swedes, 2200  
 Those terrible warriors, hunted down Heardred,  
 Hygelac’s son, Hereric’s nephew,  
 And slew him bitterly behind the shield-guard,  
 Then the kingdom passed into Beowulf’s hands.  
 He ruled wisely for fifty winters, 2205  
 An old warrior, a respected king—  
 Until a dragon came in dark terror,  
 A savage worm who ruled the nights,  
 Who sat on treasure in a steep stone-barrow.  
 There was a hidden path under his cave, 2210  
 An entry-burrow unknown to men,  
 But a certain slave stole quietly in,  
 Crept up to the worm-hoard, seized a cup  
 Glazed with gold. It gained him nothing  
 But the dragon’s rage, the worm’s wrath. 2215  
 His shrewd stealing caught the serpent

Unaware, unready—but neighbors would know  
 His dread revenge, his swollen rage.  
 Not for himself did he disturb the dragon,  
 Not for his own gain. This desperate slave 2220  
 Robbed the dragon because he was homeless,  
 Outlawed from men, fleeing their feuds,  
 The judgment of their swords, guilty of sin.  
 When the unwelcome guest gazed at the hoard,  
 He saw bright terror, a sleeping dragon. 2225  
 He stole the cup, taking quick advantage  
 Of the worm's rest. The cave was filled,  
 The old earth-house, with twisted treasures,  
 Ancestral gold, ancient heirlooms,  
 Hidden by the last of a lost race, 2230  
 The sole survivor of a fallen tribe.  
 Death took them all in the embrace of time,  
 Except for one, the last guardian  
 Who mourned his people, remained waking  
 For a stretch of years, walked alone, 2235  
 Expecting to enjoy the hall-gifts  
 By himself in his last brief days.  
 A barrow stood ready, an old earth-hall,  
 On the high headland near the surging sea,  
 Secure because of its secret entrances. 2240  
 The ring-guardian bore the hoard to the barrow,  
 Placed the ancient gold and gems  
 Back in the ground, speaking these words:  
 "Hold now, earth, what heroes cannot,  
 The treasures of men, the gifts they took 2245  
 From your mines and quarries. Battle-death  
 Has drawn them down. Savage strife,  
 The terror of time, and endless evil  
 Have seized all my people who knew the hall-joys,  
 Claiming their lives. I've no one left 2250  
 To carry the sword or polish the cup—  
 The tribe is gone. The hard helmet,  
 Plated with gold, has lost its edge,  
 Stripped of its skin. The polishers sleep  
 Who could make it shine, the bright war-mask. 2255

The mail-coat that endured blade-bites  
 Over the crash of shields decays like its wearer.  
 The corselet cannot ride to war with its rings,  
 Cannot sing its battle-song. No longer the harp-joy,  
 The song of the wood, no longer the good hawk 2260  
 Swinging through the hall, no longer the swift horse  
 Striking the court-stones. Savage death  
 Has sent forth the races of men on a dread road.<sup>7</sup>  
 Sad in spirit, the survivor mourned,  
 Moved like a lone wraith down life's road, 2265  
 Keening day and night until death's hunger  
 Devoured his heart.

Then the night-demon,

The old dragon, discovered the hoard-joy  
 Unguarded, unprotected, a worm's want.  
 The serpent stole in, the furious flamer 2270  
 Who seeks barrows, the naked slayer  
 Who flies by night, sheathed in fire.  
 Earth-dwellers desperately dread this dragon,  
 Who guards heathen gold in earth for eons.  
 His unused gifts bring him no good. 2275  
 So the enemy of men, heirloom-crafty,  
 Guarded the hoard for three hundred winters,  
 Gold in the ground, until one angered him,  
 Enraging his heart. The thief carried  
 The cup to his lord, garnished with gold, 2280  
 Encrusted with gems. He asked his owner  
 For a peace-promise to heal their feud.  
 The hoard had been raided, its riches drained  
 By a precious cup. His lord relented,  
 Seeing the heirloom for the first time 2285  
 With longing eyes. The worm had awakened—  
 Strife was renewed. He sniffed along stones,  
 Sensing the man-spoor, his enemy's tracks.  
 The thief had crept too near the dragon—  
 Yet an undoomed man may survive exile 2290  
 And suffering with good fate and God's grace.  
 The hoard-guard sought eagerly along the ground  
 To greet the thief who had caught him napping,

Harmed his sleep. Fierce and flaming,  
 The savage worm searched near the barrow— 2295  
 No one skulked in that barren wasteland.  
 On the scent of battle, he was keen for killing.  
 Sometimes he crawled back in the barrow,  
 Searching for the cup. The dragon discovered  
 That a man had disturbed his beautiful treasure. 2300  
 He waited with hot patience until evening,  
 A barrow-guard swollen with fury.  
 He would trade death-fire for the drinking cup,  
 The taste of rage. The daylight dropped down  
 As the worm wanted—he would not wait long 2305  
 Near the cave-wall but would soar in the air  
 With savage fire. The onset was ominous  
 To Geats on the ground; the end would be agony  
 To their treasure-giver, their beloved lord.

Then the earth-guest began to vomit fire, 2310  
 Scorching bright halls. The blaze spread  
 Like a burning light, a terror to men.  
 The spitfire left nothing living,  
 Nothing quick among the dead. The worm's rage  
 Was alive in the dark, his cruel killing, 2315  
 His slaughter-flames, both near and far,  
 His feud of fire with the neighboring Geats.  
 Then he fled to his cave-hall—secret, secure—  
 Hiding at dawn. He had circled and slain,  
 Sheathing houses and men in a glaze of flame. 2320  
 He trusted his cave and his courage, his barrow  
 And battle-rage, but he was sorely deceived.  
 He holed up under stone. Then the terror was told  
 To Beowulf, the grim truth made known,  
 That the flames had feasted on his own hall, 2325  
 Devoured his home, the best of buildings,  
 The gift-throne of Geats. His heart burned  
 With rage and regret, the greatest of sorrows.  
 The wise king feared he'd offended God,  
 Maddened his Maker by breaking old laws. 2330  
 His heart was hot with some dark thought,

Some quiet despair—strange and unsettling.  
 The fire-worm had ravaged his ancient hall,  
 The heart of his people on the sea's headland.  
 For that crime, the war-king devised a wrack 2335  
 Of misery for him—he would waste the worm.  
 He ordered a battle-shield made of iron,  
 Knowing wood was worthless against dragon-flame.  
 The old king was coming to the end of his days,  
 His last loan of life, just as the worm 2340  
 Was fated to die, though he grasped at gold,  
 Held desperately to goods, as dragons will do.

The prince of rings proudly scorned  
 To meet the dragon with his full troops,  
 Disdaining aid. The king feared no conflict 2345  
 With a cave-dragon, thought no worm's courage,  
 Strength, or savvy worth worrying about,  
 Because he had survived battle-crash and fury,  
 Sustaining great victories in Hygelac's army  
 Many times after crushing Grendel's hand-grip 2350  
 And purging Heorot of his savage kin.  
 That was not the smallest of combats  
 When Hygelac was slain, lord of his people,  
 Greatest of Geats, son of Hrethel—  
 He died of sword-drinks, slain by blades 2355  
 Thirsty for blood, at the hands of the Frisians  
 In the battle-rush. Beowulf escaped the slaughter  
 Because of his swimming strength in the sea;  
 He carried in his arms the precious armor  
 Of thirty warriors while he rode the waves. 2360  
 The Frisians and Franks who bore war-shields  
 Had no need to boast of their battle with Beowulf—  
 Few came back from that grim meeting.  
 The son of Ecgtheow swam home to his people,  
 Sad and alone, a wanderer on the waves. 2365  
 There Queen Hygd offered him the kingdom,  
 Trust and treasures, gift-throne and gold.  
 She knew her young son could not sustain  
 The Geatish kingdom against its enemies



Or hold the throne now that Hygelac was dead. 2370  
 But the Queen and the counselors could not convince  
 Beowulf to take the kingdom from its rightful heir,  
 Heardred, son of Hygelac and Hygd—  
 He valued honor and friendship, not pride and power.  
 Beowulf served Heardred with wise counsel 2375  
 Until the boy grew into a good Geatish king.  
 Then Swedish outcasts came over the seas,  
 Eanmund and Eadgils, sons of Ohthere,  
 Seeking sanctuary in Heardred's court.  
 They had rebelled against their uncle, 2380  
 King Onela, greatest of sea-kings,  
 A glorious prince and giver of gold.  
 For Heardred that was a hard stroke—  
 His sheltering those sons cost him his life  
 When Onela brought his hard war-troops 2385  
 To battle the Geats, killing Heardred  
 For high treason with a righteous blade  
 And installing Beowulf to rule the Geats  
 And guard the throne. That was a good king.  
 But Beowulf remembered Heardred's killing: 2390  
 In later days he supported the outcast Eadgils,  
 Making a friend of the man in his misery.  
 He gave him the gift of warriors and weapons  
 To sail home to Sweden with an icy heart  
 To take his vengeance and kill the king. 2395

So Beowulf had survived each of his enemies,  
 His beastly battles, the family feuds,  
 The endless strife and slaughter of men,  
 Until the day he fought the dragon,  
 Until he waged war with the worm. 2400  
 Righteous with rage, the lord of the Geats  
 Sought the serpent with eleven of his warriors.  
 He knew of the dragon's feud and fury,  
 Its malice meant for the race of men.  
 The cup had come to the king from the hand 2405  
 Of the thief, the thirteenth man in their band,  
 The sorrow-bound slave who began the feud.

He led them down to the dragon's lair  
 Against his will—he walked to the earth-cave,  
 An old stone barrow near the sea-wall, 2410  
 Bulging with treasures, ornaments and rings.  
 The terror-guardian who held the hoard,  
 Ancient under earth, was bent on battle.  
 That gold was no man's cheap bargain.  
 The battle-hard king, gift-lord of Geats, 2415  
 Sat on the headland, saluting his thanes,  
 Wishing them luck. His spirit was sad,  
 His mind restless, his heart ripe for death.  
 An old man's fate was closing in,  
 When a grizzled king must seek his soul-hoard, 2420  
 Separate life from living, body from being.  
 He had not long to linger in flesh—  
 His soul was ready to leave the bone-hall.

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:  
 "In youth I endured battle-storm, war-clash, 2425  
 Many warriors' meetings—I remember them all.  
 I was only seven when King Hrethel of the Geats,  
 The guardian and giver of treasure took me in,  
 Received me gladly from my father's hand,  
 Fostered me with treasure and feast-hall joy, 2430  
 Mindful of caring for kith and kin.  
 I was no less loved than his own three sons,  
 Herebeald and Hæthcyn, and my dear Hygelac.  
 For Herebeald the eldest, heir to the throne,  
 A death-bed was savagely spread by Hæthcyn, 2435  
 Who killed his brother with his horn-tipped bow,  
 Shot him dead with an accidental arrow  
 That missed its mark, a bloody point,  
 Killing his own kin with a slip of the hand.  
 That feud could not be fixed with vengeance 2440  
 Or wergild, grim swordplay or life-gold.  
 That bloody deed baffled his father's heart—  
 One son unavenged, the other his slayer.  
 In the same way it's sad for an old man  
 To see his son riding the gallows, 2445

A boy on a bitter tree. He sings a song  
 Of sorrow, seeing his son hanging high,  
 A hungry raven's ravenous joy,  
 And he knows of no help for the hanged man,  
 Wise as he is. Each morning he remembers 2450  
 That his son is gone—he mourns the dawn.  
 He has no care for another heir in the hall,  
 No joy in the next son when his dear first one  
 Has discovered death. He sees his son's  
 Empty room, deserted hall, joyless bed, 2455  
 A home for the winds. The gallows-rider  
 Sleeps in his grave—no joy of the harp,  
 No song or storied life for him.  
 The old man mourns, slips into sorrow's bed,  
 Rests his grizzled head on a painful pillow, 2460  
 Thinks everything is empty, hall and homeland.  
 Likewise the guardian of Geats, King Hrethel,  
 Bore heart-sorrow for his own son Herebeald.  
 He could not find vengeance or settle the feud  
 With his younger son, his brother's life-slayer. 2465  
 He had no revenge, no remedy for murder.  
 He couldn't kill his own unloved son.  
 That sorrow was too great—he gave up his life,  
 Left the joys of men and chose God's light.  
 To his sons he rightly left hall and land, 2470  
 His kingdom a gift to his living kin.

Then there was grim savagery and strife  
 Between Swedes and Geats over the seas.  
 When Hrethel died, old feuds flared up.  
 The sons of Ongentheow, Onela and Ohthere, 2475  
 Were battle-hungry; they attacked at Hreosnabeorh,  
 Brought slaughter not friendship to the Geats.  
 We pursued the Swedes at great price  
 As Hæthcyn our king was killed in battle,  
 But the next morning his brother Hygelac 2480  
 And all of our warriors avenged that crime.  
 When Ongentheow attacked Eofor the Geat,  
 The boar-warrior answered back with his blade,

The revenge of kinship on a cold morning—  
 The Swede dropped down from the sword's swath, 2485  
 His war-helmet split. Eofor's hand withheld nothing  
 From the sword's fury, spared no strength  
 In the death-swing. He remembered that feud.  
 I've repaid Hygelac for his trust and treasure  
 With my bright blade, my loyal sword. 2490  
 I gave him my battle-strength for those gifts.  
 He granted me land, both hearth and home.  
 He never had reason to hire mercenaries,  
 To seek with gifts among Swedes, Danes,  
 Or East-Germanic tribes for a weaker warrior. 2495  
 I was always his leader on the front line,  
 Greeting his enemies, guarding his life.  
 While my sword and strength endure, I'll always  
 Protect my people in the crush of battle  
 As I did slaying Dæghrefn, champion of the Franks 2500  
 With my bare hands. He brought no booty home,  
 No bright neck-ring back from the battle,  
 But fell with his standard, a proud prince.  
 My blade was no slayer—I crushed and killed him  
 With my hard hand-grip, broke his bone-house, 2505  
 Shattered his heart. Now must sword-edge,  
 Hard hand and blade, again seek battle,  
 Bringing the gift of a fist to the dragon's hoard.”  
 The prince proclaimed his battle-boast,  
 His last promise to the Geatish people: 2510  
 “In my youth I have fought many battles,  
 Surviving by strength. In my old age  
 I will slay this serpent, seek out glory,  
 If the worm will come out of his earth-hall.”  
 Then he turned to his dear companions, 2515  
 Bold shield-warriors and helmet-wearers,  
 Spoke for the last time to his own troops:  
 “I would not bear my sword against the serpent,  
 Wield a weapon against the awesome worm,  
 But meet the dragon as I greeted Grendel, 2520  
 Alone with my arm-strength, my death-grip—  
 But who knows how to grab a dragon

Or fend off fire with his bare hands.  
 Here I expect bitter breath, spit-flame,  
 Deadly venom, so I must wear a mail-coat, 2525  
 Carry an iron shield. I will not back off  
 One foot from the barrow, but trust to the Lord  
 Of fates among men. I will forego boasting  
 And beat old battle-wing. Wait here at the barrow-door,  
 Protected by armor, to see which of us survives 2530  
 The slaughter-rush, weathers his wounds.  
 This is not your battle—I'm the only warrior  
 Who can test his strength, share this strife,  
 Do manly deeds against this death-dragon.  
 With courage I will kill the evil worm, 2535  
 Gather his gold and ancient heirlooms,  
 Take his life, or his hatred will haul me down—  
 That life-bane breaking your lord's bones."

Then he rose up, hard under helmet,  
 With battle-coat and shield, went to the worm 2540  
 Under the stone walls, in no way a coward.  
 There by the cave-wall, the man who had conquered  
 Many monsters, coming through battle-clashes  
 With his great heart and warlike will,  
 Saw a stone arch standing with bitter steam 2545  
 Bursting out of the barrow. What he saw  
 Was a stream of fire, a blaze of hatred  
 Like burning bile—he could not reach the heart  
 Of the hoard, unscathed by dragon-fire.  
 Then the king of the Geats, swollen with fury, 2550  
 Sounded a challenge with fierce words,  
 Daring the dragon—his war-cry resounding  
 Under gray stone. Hate was renewed—  
 The hoard-guard recognized in a man's cry  
 The voice of vengeance. That was no peace-promise. 2555  
 First came a fierce breath out of the cave—  
 The serpent's fire shot out from the stone,  
 A raging steam. The earth screeched.  
 The lord of the Geats, bold man in the barrow,  
 Swung his shield against that fiery terror, 2560

That alien awe. The coiled creature  
 Heaved its hot heart into the battle.  
 Beowulf brandished his sharp sword,  
 An ancient heirloom, an undull blade.  
 Each killer saw cold terror in the other. 2565  
 The strong-hearted man stood with his shield  
 And war-corselet while the serpent coiled  
 In flaming fury. The cave-snake  
 Came gliding, a fire-worm toward its fate.  
 The shield protected Beowulf's life 2570  
 For a short time, but less than he needed,  
 And he feared there for the first time  
 Since wielding weapons—uncertain, unsure  
 If fate would offer him a share of glory.  
 The lord of the Geats raised his hand, 2575  
 Slashed with his sword through scales and skin—  
 The blade bit bone, the edge broke,  
 The cut less keen than the king needed.  
 After that savage stroke, the serpent fumed.  
 The barrow-guard's heart was kindled for killing— 2580  
 He spit forth fire. The battle-flames flew—  
 Fire leapt in air. The gold-friend of the Geats  
 Could claim no victory. The bare blade failed.  
 That was no easy journey to give up ground,  
 To find a home in another place, no painless road 2585  
 For brave-hearted Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow.  
 So each man must travel when his days are spent,  
 Winding a long road beyond walking,  
 Learning the hard way that his life is lent.

Not long after, the fierce fighters, 2590  
 Awesome creatures, clashed again.  
 The hoard-guard took heart—his breast heaved,  
 His breath steaming. The guardian of Geats  
 Was sheathed in fire, engulfed in pain.  
 His noble companions did not keep courage— 2595  
 They crept from the cave, fled to the wood,  
 Deserting their prince, protecting their lives.  
 Only one stayed—his heart was true,

Surging with sorrow. Nothing can undermine  
 The claim of kinship in a moral man. 2600  
 Only Wiglaf stayed, son of Weohstan,  
 A worthy shield-warrior and beloved retainer,  
 A proud prince who came from the Swedes  
 From the Wægmunding tribe, Beowulf's clan.  
 He saw his lord sweltering under his helmet, 2605  
 Tormented by fire, and remembered the rights  
 And rich homestead given to his father by the Geats.  
 He could not hold back, but seized his shield,  
 The yellow linden-wood, unsheathed his sword,  
 An ancient heirloom, the death-gift of Eanmund, 2610  
 Son of Ohthere, when Wiglaf's father Weohstan  
 Was Eanmund's slayer with his deadly blade,  
 His bane in battle. The sword changed hands,  
 And Weohstan was a wanderer, exile and outcast—  
 He killed his kin. He took the spoils 2615  
 To Eanmund's uncle, the fierce Onela—  
 The burnished helmet, ring-bound corselet,  
 And ancient sword crafted by giants.  
 Onela gave the booty back to Weohstan  
 As gifts for vengeance. There was no feud 2620  
 For killing his nephew—he condoned that crime.  
 Weohstan passed the sword and corselet on to Wiglaf  
 So his son could do great deeds like his father.  
 They lived with the Geats; then Weohstan died.  
 This worm-strife was young Wiglaf's first battle 2625  
 Beside his lord. His heart did not melt—  
 He kept courage. The sword of his kin  
 Was undaunted, as the dragon would discover!

Wiglaf reflected, said the right words  
 To the Geats who'd fled, his heart sad: 2630  
 "I remember well when we all drank mead  
 In the beer-hall, promising Beowulf,  
 Our beloved lord, who gave us arm-rings,  
 That we would honor his gifts of armor,  
 Helmets and hard swords, if his need came. 2635  
 We were hand-chosen from his host of troops

To follow him into battle. He believed in us,  
 Thought us battle-worthy, bound to glory.  
 He gave me treasures, tokens of his trust.  
 He counted on us to be good spear-warriors, 2640  
 Bold helmet-bearers, the best of Geats,  
 Even though our lord intended as leader  
 To meet that creature alone with his courage  
 Because he's achieved such daring glory,  
 Such audacious fame. Now the day has come 2645  
 When our lord needs the might of warriors,  
 The strength of arms. Let's help our battle-hero  
 Through this heat, this grim terror.  
 God knows I would welcome the flame's embrace  
 To battle beside Beowulf in the fiery flesh. 2650  
 It seems dead wrong for retainers to flee,  
 Bearing shields back home before we feel  
 The fearful flame or strike down our foe,  
 Defending the life of the lord of the Geats.  
 It would not be fair with all his proud deeds 2655  
 For Beowulf to fall alone, undefended—  
 To endure terror and treachery together.  
 We should all enter this shared strife  
 With sword, helmet, corselet, war-clothes.”  
 Then he braved the fire, wading through smoke 2660  
 To support his lord, hailing his king:  
 “Brave and beloved Beowulf, battle well!  
 Remember your vow since the days of your youth:  
 You would never let your glory fade,  
 Your name go unremembered. Now, noble warrior, 2665  
 You must trust to your strength to save your life.  
 Keep up your courage—I am coming to help you.”

After these words the worm grew fierce,  
 An alien evil, blazing in rage—  
 The serpent came seeking his human foe, 2670  
 Sheathed in flame, a fiery bane—  
 He hated mankind. The flame surged out,  
 The shield burned down to its metal boss,



And the mail-coat did not serve well—  
 So the young warrior ducked down, 2675  
 Sought the protection of his kinsman's shield,  
 An iron shelter. Beowulf the battle-king,  
 Mindful of glory, striking with strength,  
 Drove his blade with a righteous rage,  
 Thrust his sword into the dragon's head, 2680  
 Stuck his skull. The ancient iron  
 Whose name was Nægling, broke at the bone—  
 An aging blade that failed in the fight.  
 The iron edge was not fated to save Beowulf  
 In this burning battle. I've heard his hand 2685  
 Was always too strong—it strained his sword.  
 That blood-tempered blade was not much help.  
 Then the scourge of mankind, the dread dragon,  
 Attacked for the third time, flaming in feud,  
 Blazing with bile. He seized Beowulf's 2690  
 Neck with his claws, struck with his fangs,  
 Death-biting bones. Beowulf's blood surged  
 From his open wounds like waves of gore.  
 Then, as I've heard, at the Geatish king's need,  
 Wiglaf showed strength and skill beside him, 2695  
 A keenness of courage natural to him.  
 He took no heed of the dragon's blazing head—  
 His hand burned when he helped his kinsman.  
 The mail-coated warrior struck lower down  
 In the dragon's belly, the demon's bulge, 2700  
 Shoved in his sword with its serpentine blade,  
 So the fire subsided. The dying king,  
 Conscious again, drew out his battle-knife,  
 Deadly and dangerous, that he kept on his corselet—  
 The guardian of Geats sliced open the worm's belly. 2705  
 Their courage and kinship destroyed the dragon—  
 Comrades together, noble warriors in need.  
 So men should share strife, keep camaraderie,  
 Honor their kin. That was bold Beowulf's  
 Last victory, the end of his life's work. 2710  
 Then the deep wound that the dragon made

With its fierce fangs began to swell and burn.  
 Beowulf found a bitter evil festering in his breast,  
 A poison licking at his heart. Then the prince sat  
 By the stone wall at the edge of the barrow. 2715  
 He gazed at the old work of giants,  
 Saw how the ancient earth-hall was held up  
 By pillars of stone. Then his peerless thane  
 With his own hands washed him with water—  
 Wiglaf tended his battle-weary lord, 2720  
 His blood-stained leader, lending him comfort.  
 Tenderly he took off his helmet.  
 Then a dying Beowulf began to speak  
 In spite of his wounds. He knew deep down  
 His life-days were done, his joys on loan. 2725  
 Death was drawing inexorably near:  
 “Now I would give my good battle-clothes,  
 Sword and armor, to my heir and son,  
 Flesh of my flesh, if only I had one.  
 I’ve ruled the Geats well for fifty winters. 2730  
 None of the neighboring people’s kings  
 Dared to greet me with battle-song,  
 Sword-shouts, or the slash of war.  
 None of them touched me with terror.  
 I’ve held my own, endured my fate, 2735  
 My allotted time, a treasure of years,  
 Sought no feuds, sworn no devious oaths.  
 Now sick with life-wounds, I celebrate this—  
 My times of joy, my treasure of memories.  
 The Ruler of men will not blame me 2740  
 For the murder of kinsmen, the misery of feud,  
 When life leaves my body. Go quickly,  
 Wiglaf my friend and battle-companion,  
 To seek the hoard under the gray stone,  
 Now that the dragon sleeps, the unwaking worm, 2745  
 Deprived of his treasure. I want to see  
 The ancient wealth, the gifts of gold,  
 The beautiful gems, skillfully wrought.  
 I want to see what the worm has guarded,  
 The gifts in the ground, so I can leave life, 2750

Knowing the treasures I've left behind  
To a land and nation I've long ruled."

I've heard that Wiglaf, son of Weohstan,  
Obeded his battle-wounded lord,  
Went into the barrow, wearing ring-mail, 2755  
Walked by a stone seat, saw gems and jewels,  
Gold on the ground, rich wall-hangings,  
In the dragon's den. In the night-flier's cave,  
Ancient cups stood, unused for eons,  
Without their polishers, bereft of gems. 2760  
Wiglaf saw hundreds of helmets  
Gnawed by rust, people's arm-rings  
From tribes gone by, once artfully adorned.  
Gifts in a barrow, gold in the ground,  
Will easily overcome or eventually outlast 2765  
Any man—no matter who hides it!  
Wiglaf also saw a strange gold standard,  
Hanging high in the hoard, a hand-work  
Delicately woven. Out of its unearthly web,  
A light shone so he could see the treasures 2770  
Of wall and floor. No sign of the worm,  
Of the serpent, could be seen. The keen blade  
Of two warriors had taken him. Then I've heard  
That Wiglaf alone plundered the hoard,  
The old work of giants, robbed the barrow 2775  
Of cups and plates, gems and jewels,  
And the old standard, brightest of banners.  
His old lord's blade with its stout iron edge  
Had already wounded the guardian of the hoard,  
The treasure-terror and flame-breather, 2780  
The dragon who blazed in the dead of night,  
Till his life was cooled by sword-cuts.  
Wiglaf hurried, eager to return  
With his glittering treasure, anxious to know  
Whether his brave lord would still be alive 2785  
Where he left him, his life-blood fading.  
He carried the treasure to his glorious king,  
His dear lord whose life was draining,

His body-wounds leaking blood.  
 Wiglaf once again wiped his lord's face, 2790  
 Sprinkling water on him till his words  
 And spirit revived from a deep source,  
 Welling up through his breast-hoard.  
 Beowulf spoke, wrapped in grief,  
 Gazing at the gold: "I thank God, 2795  
 The King of Glory, the Ruler of all,  
 For this ancient treasure, this trust of gold  
 I gaze on here, a gift to my people,  
 As I leave life, departing on death's road.  
 I have bought this hoard with my elder days 2800  
 To sustain our people. Lead them now—  
 I can't hold out. Command the brave Geats  
 To build a bright barrow after my funeral fire  
 On the high sea-cliff of Hronesness  
 As a reminder to my people, so that seafarers 2805  
 Will guide their ships by what they call  
 Beowulf's Barrow through dark waters."  
 He took off his collar, the gold neck-ring  
 And gave it to Wiglaf, the young spear-warrior—  
 Also his mail-coat, gold-plated helmet, 2810  
 And a gift of rings, telling him to use them well:  
 "You are the last remnant of our race,  
 Wiglaf of the Wægmondings. Fate has swept away  
 All of our kinsmen, earls and their courage,  
 Warriors and their sword-wielding strength. 2815  
 They have braved a way that I must follow."  
 These were the old warrior's last words,  
 A gift from his heart's hoard before he climbed  
 The funeral pyre to embrace the fierce flames.  
 Out of his breast the soul flew seeking 2820  
 A righteous doom, the judgment of the just.  
 Then young Wiglaf sorrowed to see him suffer  
 In his last moments, the man he loved most,  
 Who lay by his slayer, the evil earth-dragon,  
 In unwaking sleep. No longer could the coiled worm 2825  
 Guard the ring-hoard, rule his treasure.  
 The flame-forged, battle-notched sword,

Hammered by smiths, had stolen his life.  
 The bitter serpent, the wide-flying worm,  
 Stilled by his wounds, had fallen by the barrow, 2830  
 Tucked beside Beowulf and the ancient treasure.  
 He could no longer glide through the dead of night,  
 Alone in his arrogance, pleased with his blaze,  
 Proud of his treasure. He'd dropped down to earth  
 Through Beowulf's heart and hand-work. 2835  
 I've heard that hardly anyone on earth,  
 No matter how strong or daring of deeds,  
 Could disturb the ring-hoard with his hands  
 Or run through the worm's bitter, blazing breath,  
 If he found the barrow-guard awake and watching. 2840  
 Beowulf bought the hoard with his life.  
 Each of them traveled on a treasured road,  
 Awesome at the end of their loan-days.

It wasn't long before the ten battle-slackers,  
 Weak-willed traitors, left the woods. 2845  
 They dared not bring their spears to battle  
 When their liege-lord needed them most.  
 Now they bore their shields to the barrow,  
 Ashamed and late, their armor to where  
 Their old king lay. They looked at Wiglaf, 2850  
 A weary foot-soldier bent by his lord,  
 Washing him with water, trying to rouse him  
 Without success. The gesture was fruitless,  
 Though he wished dearly to wake his warlord,  
 Preserve his prince's life on this earth. 2855  
 He could not alter the flow of his fate,  
 The judgment of God, whose doom rules all deeds,  
 Both then and now, never alters, never ebbs.  
 Then young Wiglaf gave a grim response  
 To the cowardly Geats who'd lost their courage. 2860  
 Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, looked at the unloved ones,  
 Spoke these dark words, sad in his heart:  
 "A man who speaks the truth may well say  
 That your liege-lord who gave you gifts of trust  
 Like the war-gear you're wearing as you stand here, 2865

When he handed out gifts to hall-thanes  
 Drinking at mead-benches—helmets and mail-coats,  
 The finest of treasures far and near—  
 That lord threw away his war-trappings and trust,  
 For they proved useless when the battle broke out, 2870  
 And the great worm wanted to take his life.  
 The people's king had no need to boast  
 Of the good courage of such battle-companions.  
 Yet the Ruler of victories shaped the strife  
 So that Beowulf alone might slay the worm, 2875  
 Destroy the dragon, wield vengeance with a sword  
 In his time of need. I had little power to protect him  
 But was able to help beyond my means.  
 The deadly dragon grew steadily weaker  
 After I struck him with my sword. The fierce fire 2880  
 That flamed from his head died down.  
 No crowd of defenders came to the king's aid  
 In his darkest hour. Now your inheritance  
 Of ancient treasure and homeland joy,  
 The giving of swords, receiving of rings— 2885  
 Your future has fled with your lost courage.  
 You and your kin must lose your land rights  
 When neighboring nobles hear of your flight.  
 Your hall-joy is gone—your glory is buried.  
 Death is better for you than a life of shame.” 2890

Then Wiglaf commanded the battle-outcome  
 Proclaimed in the camp over the sea-cliffs  
 To the band of sad-hearted shield-warriors  
 Who'd waited the long morning to discover  
 If their dear lord was alive or dead. 2895  
 The messenger galloped off with harrowing news,  
 Held back nothing from the people's hearing:  
 “Now the joy-giver and hall-guardian,  
 The lord of the Geats, sleeps in his death-bed,  
 With a blanket of slaughter wrought by the worm, 2900  
 The ancient serpent who lies beside him,  
 The dragon struck down by his deadly dagger.  
 His sword could not slice through worm-scales.

Wiglaf son of Weohstan sits beside Beowulf,  
 The living warrior keeping his heart-weary 2905  
 Watch over the dead, keening for his lost lord,  
 Guarding them both—the loved and the loathed.  
 Now the Geats are in for a terrible time,  
 The sure threat of war from the Franks and Frisians,  
 When the neighboring nations hear the news 2910  
 Of Beowulf's death, the fall of the king.  
 The old strife between us is no great secret.  
 Our feud with them began when Hygelac  
 Sailed to their shores with a seafaring army,  
 Where the enemy assailed him, attacked quickly 2915  
 With a stronger force, made the man of the Geats  
 Bow down in his mail-coat, clutching the ground.  
 That king gave no more gifts in the hall,  
 Trust and treasure to his loyal retainers.  
 The King of the Franks was never our friend. 2920  
 And let's not expect any peace from the Swedes,  
 Any keeping of promises from old enemies.  
 Everyone knows how Ongentheow their king  
 Robbed Hæthcyn of his life near Hrefnawudu,  
 The son of Hrethel, when the Geats in their pride, 2925  
 Their battle-arrogance, attacked the Swedes.  
 Ohthere's father, Ongentheow the king,  
 Old but terrible, fiercely struck back,  
 Killing Hæthcyn, the sea-raiders' king,  
 Rescuing his wife whom the Geat had seized, 2930  
 The old queen bereft of her family gold,  
 Mother of Onela and Ohthere, her sons.  
 Ongentheow followed his deadly foes,  
 Who fled leaderless to the refuge of Hrefnawudu.  
 The Swedes laid siege to the war-weary Geats, 2935  
 The remnant of the sword-fight, threatening them  
 Throughout the night with savage vows,  
 Saying they intended to slice them with swords,  
 Greet them with slaughter when morning came,  
 Hang them on gallows for the ravens to eat, 2940  
 A breakfast for birds. Relief for the grieving  
 Came at dawn when the Geats gratefully heard

Hygelac's horn trumpeting that help was coming,  
 The sign of an army advancing on the road.  
 The Swedes and Geats left a trail of blood 2945  
 In that rush to slaughter. Everyone saw  
 The tracks of blood, stoking the feud.  
 Ongentheow the brave began to back off,  
 Weary with his kinsmen, to his own stronghold.  
 He had heard the horn sound a warrior's warning, 2950  
 Knew the power of the proud Geatish prince,  
 His strength and savvy in waging war.  
 He doubted his weary troops could resist  
 The new onslaught of savage sea-warriors  
 And worried for the safety of his wife and sons, 2955  
 So he pulled his war-troops back to a shelter,  
 An old king holing up behind an earth-wall.  
 The Geats gave pursuit, dogging the heels  
 Of the Swedes, overrunning the camp,  
 Raising the standard of Hygelac over the field. 2960  
 Then the grizzled Ongentheow was laid low  
 By the sword of Eofor, son of Wonred,  
 After being wounded by Wulf, Eofor's brother,  
 Who struck him first with his hard sword  
 So that blood-streams surged from his head, 2965  
 From under his hair. The old Swede was not afraid,  
 But paid Wulf back with a harder battle-blow,  
 When the king gave Wulf his sword's greeting.  
 Wulf, son of Wonred, daring destruction  
 Could not answer Ongentheow with a counter-blow 2970  
 Because the king had cut through his helmet,  
 Hacking his head. He was streaming with blood  
 And had to lie down. He fell on the earth.  
 He was not doomed to die but fated to recover  
 From the Swedish wound. When Wulf swooned, 2975  
 His brother Eofor, Hygelac's thane,  
 Lifted his broad sword, an old blade of giants,  
 Slashing the helmet of the giant Ongentheow  
 Across the shield-wall. The king fell,  
 Guardian of the Swedes, his life severed. 2980  
 Then many of the Geats gathered Wulf up



When fate turned the battle in their favor  
 With a slaughter of Swedes and a field of corpses.  
 Eofor then plundered Ongentheow's body,  
 Stripping the king of his war-corselet, 2985  
 Hard-hilted sword, and huge helmet.  
 He brought that war-gear back to Hygelac.  
 The Geatish king accepted his trust and treasure,  
 Promising him rich rewards among the warriors.  
 The lord of the Geats, the son of Hrethel, 2990  
 Gave Wulf and Eofor, when they came home,  
 Untold treasures for their battle-prowess—  
 A hundred thousand in land and rings,  
 In gifts and gold. No man on middle-earth 2995  
 Could fault the rewards that the brothers reaped  
 For their battle-deeds. And the king gave Eofor  
 His only daughter as a marriage-pledge,  
 A peace-weaver to grace his home.  
 That's the history of hatred and hostility,  
 Of savagery and feud, between Swedes and Geats, 3000  
 That will spur their shield-warriors to seek us out,  
 Once they learn that our lord is lifeless,  
 Who guarded our kingdom, land, and treasure  
 Against all enemies, keeping us safe  
 As a hero should, protecting his people. 3005  
 Now we must hasten to see our king,  
 Bring back the ruler who gave us rings,  
 Tokens of trust, carry our lord  
 To his resting place on the funeral pyre.  
 Let's not begrudge him gold, offer only 3010  
 Some small share to melt with the brave man,  
 For we have here a dragon's hoard,  
 An untold treasure, dearly bought,  
 Grimly paid for with our lord's life.  
 The fire shall devour this gold, these rings, 3015  
 A web of flame embrace the giver.  
 No man may wear these rings in remembrance—  
 No woman can wrap her neck in this collar,  
 These links of gold. Sad-hearted, the Geats  
 Must now wander new worlds, 3020

Stripped of inheritance in strange countries,  
 Now that their leader has laid down laughter.  
 Now our hands must wake to morning spears  
 And battle-beasts, not sweet harp music.  
 The dark raven shall sing its feasting song, 3025  
 Tell the ravenous eagle how men tasted  
 When he and the hungry wolf plundered corpses.”

So the messenger brought back dire news,  
 A hateful speech. He didn't hold back  
 About their past or future. Tearfully the troop 3030  
 Of cowards rose up, walked without hope  
 To Earnaness, the high headland,  
 Where they gazed in wonder on the strange sight.  
 They saw on the sand their lifeless lord,  
 A gift-giver lying in endless bed-rest. 3035  
 That was the last day of Beowulf their lord,  
 Battle-warrior, king of the Geats.  
 His death was awesome, uncanny.  
 What was stranger was the serpent with him,  
 The worm at his side, a loathsome mate. 3040  
 The grim fire-dragon was glazed by flame,  
 Coated in colors, fifty feet long.  
 Sometimes he'd soared in the joyful wind,  
 Sometimes dived down to his secret lair,  
 The last of his earth-caves where he met death. 3045  
 Beside him lay piles of cups and pitchers,  
 Swords and dishes, gnawed by rust,  
 As if blighted by a thousand years  
 In the earth's embrace. The ancient treasure,  
 Heritage of the hoard, was sheathed in a spell— 3050  
 So that no man might enter the ring-hall,  
 Touch the treasure through time,  
 Except through God's gift, the King of victories,  
 Who is man's protector. Only He could choose  
 The man who could open the hoard at last. 3055  
 It's clear that the one who unrightly hid  
 The glittering treasure, rings and riches,  
 Gold in the ground, got nothing from it.

The scaly hoard-guardian slew the warrior,  
 The rarest of heroes who avenged that feud. 3060  
 No one knows how or where or when  
 A glorious warrior will meet his end,  
 No longer dwell in the meadhall with his kin.  
 So it was with Beowulf when he sought strife  
 And the barrow-guard, not knowing 3065  
 He was lifting his sword on his last day.  
 The great princes who first buried the hoard  
 Laid on that treasure a timeless curse  
 That any man who dug it up before Doomsday  
 Would be guilty of sin, chained in hell, 3070  
 Tormented by demons at their heathen shrines,  
 Unless he saw more readily than before,  
 The grace of the owner's charmed gift—  
 Gazed at the giving instead of the gold.  
 Wiglaf spoke, son of Weohstan: 3075  
 "Often many must suffer for the will of one,  
 As we do now. Nothing we said  
 Could persuade our prince, defender of our kingdom,  
 Not to seek the dragon, the guardian of gold,  
 But to let him live, lie where he was, 3080  
 In his old barrow till the end of time.  
 He held to his high destiny with the dragon.  
 The hoard is here, grimly gained.  
 The fierce fate that drew our king here  
 Against our counsel was too strong. 3085  
 I've been in the barrow, seen the serpent's  
 Beautiful gems under the earth-wall,  
 When the way was opened uneasily to me.  
 I seized as much as a man could carry  
 Of that burden of gold in my hands and arms, 3090  
 Bore them beyond the cave to my king,  
 Who was still alive, conscious and alert.  
 He spoke out of sorrow, out of old age,  
 Asked me to greet you. The king commanded us  
 To build a high barrow in the place of his pyre, 3095  
 To honor our hero and his glorious deeds—  
 A grand monument like the man himself.

He was the most worthy of men in this world  
 As long as he lived in the wealth of hall-joy.  
 Let's go see the treasure again, the serpent's hoard 3100  
 Of gold and gems, jewels and heirlooms,  
 In the heart of the cave. I'll lead the way  
 So you can see the precious rings and stones,  
 Bright trappings and broad gold.  
 Let Beowulf's bier be quickly built, 3105  
 So when we come out, we can carry our king,  
 Our beloved prince to a place of peace  
 Where he can rest in the protection of the Lord."  
 Then the brave warrior, Weohstan's son,  
 Ordered warriors to announce the message 3110  
 That powerful men, leaders and land-owners,  
 Should bring firewood from far forests  
 For Beowulf's pyre. Wiglaf spoke:  
 "Now darkening flames must devour the prince  
 Of warriors who long withstood war-storm, 3115  
 Iron-rain, the sharp wind of arrows shot  
 Over shield-walls, driven by bow-strings,  
 When shaft served barb, death-feathers whistling."

Then Wiglaf, wise son of Weohstan,  
 Summoned seven warriors from the troop, 3120  
 Collected the best to enter the cave,  
 Under the earth-wall, the evil roof,  
 Following the torch-bearer to the treasure.  
 No lots needed to be drawn to loot the hoard—  
 They all rushed to plunder the treasure-cave 3125  
 When they saw it unguarded, unused,  
 Wasting away. No man mourned  
 The loss of that treasure. They plundered the hoard  
 And pushed the dragon over the sea-wall,  
 Plunging the worm to a watery grave, 3130  
 So the sea could embrace the body of the serpent,  
 The fiery dragon in the clutch of waves.  
 They loaded the twisted gold on their wagons,  
 Untold treasure of every kind,  
 And bore their king to Hronesness, 3135

The old battle-warrior. The Geats prepared  
 His funeral pyre, a splendid hoard  
 Hung with helmets, battle-shields,  
 Bright mail-coats, as Beowulf had asked.  
 In the middle they laid their battle-lord, 3140  
 Lamenting their leader, mourning the man.  
 There on the barrow they woke the flame,  
 The greatest of funeral fires, stoking the pyre.  
 The wood-smoke rose to the sound of wailing  
 In the curling fire. The blaze was fierce, 3145  
 Its fury twisted with the sound of keening.  
 The wind died down—the fire had ravaged  
 Beowulf's bone-house, hot at the heart.  
 Sad in spirit, they mourned their prince;  
 Likewise a lonely old woman of the Geats, 3150  
 With her hair bound up, wove a sad lament  
 For her fallen lord, sang often of old feuds  
 Bound to fester, a fearful strife,  
 The invasion of enemies, the slaughter of troops,  
 Slavery and shame. Heaven swallowed the smoke. 3155  
 Then the Geats built a barrow, broad and high,  
 On the sea-cliff to be seen by seafarers.  
 It took ten days to build that beacon,  
 A hero's monument. The pyre's remains,  
 The fire's offering of ashes and dust, 3160  
 They wrapped in walls for the great warrior,  
 As beautiful as craftsmen knew how to build.  
 In that best of barrows, the Geats buried  
 Rings and gems, ornaments and heirlooms,  
 All they had hauled from the worm's hoard. 3165  
 They returned to earth its ancient treasure,  
 The gifts of men now gold in the ground,  
 Where it still lies useless, unloved, unliving.

Then around Beowulf's barrow twelve  
 Battle-warriors rode, mourning their prince, 3170  
 Keening for the king, shaping their praise  
 For a precious man. They spoke of sorrow,  
 They sang of courage, of great words and deeds,

Weaving glory with a weft of power.  
When a lord's life lifts from its body-home, 3175  
It's only fitting to mourn and remember,  
To lament and praise. So the Geats recalled  
His great heart and lamented his fall,  
Keening and claiming that of all the kings,  
He was the kindest of men, most generous and just, 3180  
Most desiring of praise, most deserving of fame.

## JUDITH

The beginning of *Judith* is lost, though how much exactly is lost is the subject of some debate. The poem is based on the book of Judith in the Latin Vulgate Bible, where the story is longer and more complicated (with a number of minor characters) and where Judith plays the role of the potential seductress to win access to Holofernes. The poetic version here is focused on the climactic scene of Judith's righteous slaying of the Assyrian leader with God's aid and the subsequent rout of the heathen army by the Hebrew troops. Some editors believe that because the poem only deals with the end of the biblical story, a significant portion of the text has been lost, but Huppé, in his edition, argues that "the Old English poet characteristically dealt with biblical narratives selectively" (1970, 137). The emphasis on the central action heightens the drama and focuses on the role of the heroine as both a Germanic woman-warrior and a Christian soldier-saint. Fulk and Cain point out that "the poet polarizes the characters, drawing a sharp contrast between the licentious Holofernes and the virtuous Judith, who is cast as a kind of *miles Dei*, saint-like in her faith that God will deliver her people" (117). Chickering argues that the poem's "confident exuberance takes many forms . . . all of which stabilize and reinforce the poem's simple central themes of Judith's wisdom and faith, and God's mercy and grace towards His faithful" (42). Orchard notes that in the Vulgate, Judith is described as "a loyal 'widow' (*vidua*), and it is her chastity which is stressed . . . [while] in *Judith* itself, by contrast, her chastity or widowhood are scarcely mentioned, and instead we are invited to consider her beauty, courage, and wisdom" (1985, 9).

The poem treats the Old Testament story with a New Testament perspective. The Hebrew maiden Judith constantly refers to, and relies upon, a

Christian god. Griffith, in his edition, points out that “the Christianization of Judith allows the voices of the Christian narrator and the heroine to echo each other. . . . They seem to speak of the same God—both use the phrase, *swegles ealdor* [Lord of heaven] for him—and to possess the same knowledge, though his is merely historical, where hers shows a prescience that is divinely inspired” (1997, 75). The praise-song to God at the end of the poem seems to blend both narrator’s and heroine’s voices in their tribute to the creative power of the Lord who shapes the universe.

The poem also makes use of traditional battlefield elements and motifs from the heroic poems. Griffith notes the “bearing of banners, noise of shields, beasts of battle, an initial shower of arrows and spears, warriors’ rage, unsheathing of swords, ceaseless pursuit of the fleeing enemy, an interruption by the narrator in the first person, splitting of the shield-wall, and the small number of foes who return home alive” (1997, 63). Donoghue points out that “although their feasting takes place in a tent, Holofernes’ men become hall-retainers (*flet-sittende, benc-sittende*) [hall-sitters, bench-sitters], who wear coats of mail and other Germanic armor,” adding that “Holofernes is a gold-friend of men (*gold-wine gumena*), but these heroic terms drip with irony because the Assyrians are the antitypes of traditional heroes from legends like that of *Beowulf*” (40).

## Judith

\* \* \*

Judith distrusted all earthly goods,  
 But she never doubted God’s gift of grace,  
 The power and protection of her glorious Prince  
 To shield her from harm in this wide world,  
 Defend her against the greatest dread, 5  
 The deepest terror, when she needed help most.  
 The Lord of creation granted her aid,  
 The fullness of favor because of her strong,  
 Unyielding faith in her Heavenly Father,  
 The highest Judge, her Ruler and refuge. 10

I’ve heard that Holofernes ordered a feast,  
 Sent out invitations, as the story is told,  
 Summoning the elders, his noble retainers.  
 He ordered a banquet of food and wine,  
 Sweet delicacies and sumptuous delights. 15



The shield-warriors rushed to his hall in haste,  
 Local leaders eager to obey the proud prince.  
 That was four days after Judith arrived,  
 Elf-bright and beautiful as a young nymph,  
 But also deeply wise in the ways of her mind— 20  
 The war-woman came seeking the Assyrian lord.  
 In the hall of Holofernes, the grim guests arrived.  
 His imperious warriors occupied the benches,  
 Mail-coated men guzzling strong wine,  
 Grief-givers, guardians of evil, wielders of woe. 25  
 Deep bowls and vessels like bottomless cups  
 Were borne to the boards, served to the hall-guests,  
 The company of fierce fighters carousing together.  
 The bold shield-warriors drank it all down,  
 Doomed by their own debauchery, fated to fall. 30  
 Their leader was oblivious in his blind lust  
 To the twist of fate, his unexpected end.  
 Holofernes the gift-giver, gold-lord of men,  
 Poured out the wine, roared and shouted,  
 Laughed up a storm, stumbled about, 35  
 Bellowing like a bull, bawling and brawling,  
 So that far from the feast, people could hear  
 Their fearsome general mad with mead  
 In a beastly passion, drunk with pride,  
 Urging the revelers to rage on together, 40  
 Guzzling like soldiers before the battle-storm.  
 So the arrogant deceiver, the devious destroyer,  
 The bearer of spirits, benefactor of oblivion,  
 Drenched his retainers in wine and revelry,  
 Until they collapsed as a company, dead drunk, 45  
 Emptied of purpose, drained of resolve.  
 The lord commanded them all to be looked to,  
 Until night descended on the children of men.

Then gorged on sin, engulfed in lust,  
 The general ordered the blessed maiden Judith 50  
 Brought to his bed, wrapped in riches,  
 Adorned with rings. His soldiers obeyed,  
 Quick as lightning, striding to the guest-hall

To bring back the gift the prince desired,  
 The living jewel. They greeted and grabbed her, 55  
 Proud shield-warriors bearing the beautiful  
 But subtle-minded maiden to the opulent tent  
 And into the chamber of the heathen Holofernes  
 Where he rested at night, hateful to our Savior.  
 His bed was bordered by a veiling fly-net 60  
 Fashioned in gold with transparent filaments,  
 So the baleful leader, the dread lord,  
 Could spy on anyone who entered the room  
 While remaining invisible as an evil wraith,  
 Unless he ordered the intruder to approach, 65  
 Secretly, stealthily, for a private conversation.  
 When they brought in the wise woman Judith,  
 Telling their lord that the holy maiden,  
 The ring-adorned treasure, had been brought to bed  
 For his private pleasure, then the famous lord 70  
 Shuddered with joy, dreaming of debauchery—  
 He intended to ravish the virgin, savage her beauty,  
 Defile her with filth, defame her with sin.  
 He twisted this pernicious plot in his fiendish mind,  
 But the Guardian of glory, the Lord of hosts, 75  
 The heavenly Judge, denied this dark deed.  
 Then the vicious fiend, driven by lust,  
 Led by lechery, strode to the ravaging bed,  
 Where his worldly glory would ungather  
 And hurtle into oblivion that very night: 80  
 He would meet the end he had been heading for—  
 Not delight but death, not joy but judgment.  
 By now the great ruler was drained of desire;  
 In his drunken stupor, his savagery was spent.  
 He fell on the bed, his wisdom wasted, 85  
 His mind in exile, his desire undelivered.  
 His wine-drunk warriors and retainers departed,  
 Once they had brought their bold general,  
 Their lord of lechery, to his last bed.  
 The truth-breaking tyrant was alone, undone. 90

Then the Lord's grim and glorious handmaiden,  
 The Savior's servant, thought about how

She might murder the monster, ravage his heart  
 Before he woke up from his ravenous sleep.  
 The bold-hearted woman with the braided hair 95  
 Unsheathed her sword, a bright blade hardened  
 In battle-storms, raising it in her right hand.  
 The Lord's maiden warrior summoned her Shaper,  
 The Savior of all the inhabitants of earth,  
 The Defender of heaven, speaking these words: 100  
 "I beseech you, blessed Lord of creation,  
 Holy Spirit of comfort and consolation,  
 Savior and Son of the almighty God,  
 Glory and power of the great Trinity,  
 Grant me the gift of your unalloyed grace, 105  
 Your infinite mercy in my hour of need.  
 My heart is inflamed, my soul inflicted  
 With fierce sorrow. This is my moment,  
 O heavenly Lord, to escape from torment—  
 Let me triumph today through the one true faith, 110  
 So I can cut down this dark dealer of death,  
 This wielder of wickedness, this pernicious lord.  
 Grant me deliverance in this dangerous mission,  
 My stern, strong Lord, my giver of glory.  
 This is my hour of greatest need. I pray for grace, 115  
 The might of my sword, and the mercy of my Savior—  
 Give me vengeance for the vice that sleeps in this bed,  
 Loosen the grief that is burning my breast,  
 Harrowing my heart." Then God, the great Judge,  
 Gave her the gift of courage, strengthened her heart, 120  
 Just as he does with everyone on this earth  
 Who seeks him in wisdom and true faith,  
 Who asks him for aid, protection and power.

Then Judith's heart opened and hope returned.  
 The holy woman clutched that heathen warrior 125  
 Firmly by his hair, cunningly caught him,  
 Dragged him in disgrace with hard hands  
 Across the bed, seized the shameless one  
 With deep scorn, dropping the wretch down  
 Where she could manage him more easily. 130  
 The woven-haired woman, the braided beauty,

Slew the fierce fiend with her gleaming sword,  
 Staining the blade with his savage blood,  
 Hacked off his head half-way through the neck,  
 So he lay in a swoon, weary of wine and war-play, 135  
 Not quite drained of life. The bold woman-warrior  
 Struck the heathen hound a second time  
 So that his head leapt off, bounding on the floor.  
 His foul body lay lifeless, his corpse unquickenened.  
 His soul flew off under the cliffs into the abyss, 140  
 To be lashed in torment, lost in torture,  
 Surrounded by serpents, venomous worms,  
 Wracked by endless punishment and pain,  
 Engulfed in darkness, incarcerated in fire.  
 He had no hope in hell of returning home 145  
 From that hall of serpents but was bound to dwell  
 In unrelenting despair for an endless time  
 In the hopeless house of the homeless heart.

Judith had gathered glory, found fame,  
 In that battle-victory granted by God, 150  
 The Lord of heaven. Then the wise woman  
 Lifted the bloody head of the battle-warrior  
 Into the bag that her pale handmaiden  
 Had secretly brought to carry it home—  
 The sack they used before to bear food. 155  
 Then the fearless maidens, bold-hearted  
 War-women, bore home the gory battle-gift,  
 Escaping swiftly through the enemy lines,  
 Exulting as they left, till they could see clearly  
 The shimmering walls of the bright city, 160  
 Their own beautiful and blessed Bethulia.  
 The ring-adorned women-warriors  
 Picked up their pace, hastening home,  
 Until they came glad-hearted to the city gate.

The warriors were waiting there at the wall, 165  
 Holding watch faithfully inside the fortress,  
 As the cunning, courageous maiden had commanded  
 Before she set off so soberly on her quest.

The boldly beautiful, beloved warrior  
 Had proudly come back home to her people. 170  
 The wise woman ordered the guarded gate  
 Opened up then to offer her passage  
 Inside the great wall of the spacious city,  
 Speaking these words to the victorious people:  
 “Let me weave for you a story of wonder, 175  
 Spin out a web of words worth remembering—  
 A tale to give thanks for, to let the grieving  
 Soul forget its sorrow and find comfort.  
 Our God of glory is gracious to you.  
 The reward for your torment is now revealed— 180  
 A grim triumph over that terrible tyrant.”  
 The city-dwellers rejoiced when they heard the speech  
 Of the holy woman at the edge of the wall.  
 The army exulted, the hosts gathered at the gate,  
 Men and women together, a great multitude, 185  
 Raising their voices, praising God’s maiden,  
 Surging forward to see their leader  
 In throngs of thousands, both young and old.  
 Hearts were lifted in joy in that city of meadhalls  
 When people heard that Judith had returned victorious, 190  
 And with humble zeal, people welcomed her home.

Then the wise warrior, adorned with gold,  
 Ordered her handmaiden to unwrap the head  
 Of the savage hunter, the stalker of men,  
 Unbag the blood-stained brain-house, 195  
 To show the troops her victory-token,  
 The holy sign of her heady success.  
 Then the warrior-woman spoke to the host:  
 “Victorious lords, leaders of our people,  
 See here the head of that loathsome horror, 200  
 The heathen Holofernes. His evil thoughts  
 No longer thrive—his mind is blank,  
 His speech is dead. He murdered many  
 Of our best men—now he walks with the unliving.  
 He always sought to sow sorrow, plotting pain, 205  
 But God would not grant the wicked wretch

Any longer life to plague us with affliction,  
 So he has reaped his own mindless murder  
 With a sharp battle-blade and God's aid.  
 Now I command each citizen, each shield-bearer, 210  
 To prepare for combat. When the great Shaper,  
 The Lord of beginnings, creation's King,  
 Sends us the first gleam of sunlight from the east,  
 Bear your linden shields before your breasts  
 And bright mail-coats under shining helmets 215  
 Into the enemy lines, harrowing their hosts,  
 Felling their fated lords and leaders  
 With sword-flash and blade-bite, a bitter greeting.  
 Death's doom is allotted to the fierce foes,  
 The heathen hordes. Your destiny is battle-glory 220  
 As God himself, the Lord Almighty,  
 Has made manifest here in my hand."

Then the bold battle-ranks were quickly prepared.  
 Brave warriors and courageous comrades  
 Went forth with flags, great victory-banners, 225  
 Heroic soldiers marching from the holy city  
 Under hard helmets with a clatter and crash,  
 The din of shields at the crack of dawn.  
 The lean wolf rejoiced in the wood  
 Along with the dark raven, the carrion crow— 230  
 Both beasts knew that war would provide them  
 With a battle-feast of fallen flesh.  
 And the dark-feathered eagle flew in their wake  
 On dew-covered wings in pursuit of prey,  
 His hooked beak singing a savage war-song. 235  
 The warriors marched out, men seeking battle  
 Behind their boards, the curved protection  
 Of their linden shields—those who had suffered  
 Not so long ago the scorn of foreigners,  
 The hostility of heathens, the taunts of a tyrant. 240  
 The Hebrew people paid back the Assyrians  
 In bold courage and war-blades for their contempt,  
 A shower of death-spears and fierce fighting.  
 Out of their horned bows flew a slew of arrows,

Battle-snakes biting like angry adders. 245  
 The Hebrew heroes stormed the enemy ranks  
 With their death-spears. They hated the heathens  
 Who had invaded their homeland. The proud peoples  
 Indigenous to the land were the strongest of warriors.  
 Stout-hearted and stern-minded men, 250  
 Resolute and enraged against their enemy,  
 They roused the drunken Assyrians ungently,  
 Made them regret their mead-minded stupor.  
 With hard hands the Hebrews drew death-blades,  
 Shining swords from the sheaths at their sides, 255  
 Damascened with death's serpentine designs,  
 Their sharp edges keen to strike and slay  
 The Assyrian foes. Filled with anger  
 And grim hostility against the heathens,  
 They spared no one in the enemy ranks, 260  
 Left no man living among the invaders,  
 High or low, noble or nameless.

All morning long the Hebrews harried  
 The enemy until the Assyrian army heads  
 Recognized the wrath of the angry Israelites, 265  
 The righteous rage and deliberate danger  
 Of sudden sword-swing and death-stroke,  
 And carried word to the senior leaders,  
 Soldiers and standard-bearers, warning them all,  
 The mead-weary warriors, of the morning menace, 270  
 With wild tales of Hebrew sword-play  
 And terrible slaughter. Then I heard that the doomed  
 Warriors shook off sleep. Waking their weary hearts,  
 The fierce ones fled to the tyrant's tent.  
 They wanted to warn Holofernes of the wrath 275  
 Of the Hebrews before that terror took them.  
 They all imagined that their lecherous lord  
 Lay with Judith, the ravished maiden—  
 Two lusty warriors between the sheets.  
 Still no one dared to enter the sanctum 280  
 To wake the war-general or seek to know  
 How the night had passed between them both,

Their powerful prince and the pious woman,  
 Their hard-fisted lord and the handmaid of God.  
 The armed might of the Israelites approached. 285  
 They fought passionately and repaid promptly  
 The old grudges and grievances, scorn and slander,  
 With grim swords and gripping spears.  
 The haughty Assyrians on that fateful day  
 Were roundly humbled—their fame faded away. 290  
 The troops huddled round their lord's tent,  
 Their spirits broken, their fierce hearts spent.  
 They began to cough and gnash their teeth,  
 Wailing like grim, wounded animals,  
 Their war-pride turned into savage grief. 295  
 Their glory was gone, their reputation unraveled.  
 They wanted to wake their beloved prince,  
 But there was no point! One bold warrior  
 After a long wait decided to enter the tent—  
 The need was too great. Sprawled on the bed 300  
 He found his headless lord separated from life,  
 His gold-giver gone, his spirit missing,  
 Fear chilled his heart—he fell to the ground,  
 Ripping his hair, rending his robes,  
 His great body groveling, his mind frenzied, 305  
 Wailing these words to the warriors outside:  
 “This broken body is the sign of our doom—  
 Our glory is undone, our destruction at hand.  
 Our pride has perished, our terror turned upon us.  
 Here lies our headless lord hacked to death 310  
 In his lusty bed by some dreadful sword.”  
 The heavy-hearted warriors threw down their weapons  
 And fled from that bloody bed. The Hebrew forces  
 Followed the heathen host, hacking them to the ground,  
 Leaving a feast for voracious wolves and war-birds. 315  
 The survivors fled the shield-strength of their foes.  
 The Hebrews pursued them, favored by God,  
 Given the victory. Bold heroes began  
 To hack their way through the enemy's guard  
 With savage swords, splitting the shield-wall. 320  
 Spears were thrown, thrusting through wood,



Embracing bone. Hebrew hearts burned  
 With war-frenzy, an unbound fury.  
 That cruel contest had no Assyrian winners—  
 Most of their nobles dropped dead in the dust. 325  
 Not many went home with their heads.  
 Hebrew warriors came back through the carnage,  
 Returning home through the reeking corpses.  
 They took back their land from the unliving enemy,  
 Brought back bloody war-booty, shields and swords, 330  
 Burnished helmets, and beautiful treasures.  
 The guardians of the land had gathered glory,  
 Conquered the Assyrians with their battle-swords,  
 Put the tyrant's power and the occupation to rest.  
 What remained on the road was the wretched host 335  
 Of heathens, the most hated people alive.

The Hebrews with the braided hair began to celebrate  
 In their shining city of Bethulia—it lasted a month.  
 They carried their trophies—helmets and hip-swords,  
 Gray mail-coats, the war-gear of soldiers, 340  
 Battle vestments adorned with gold,  
 And treasures untold—home to their fair city.  
 They won this war-booty by bravery in the battlefield  
 Through the wise counsel and cunning of Judith,  
 The courageous maiden. Her just reward 345  
 Was the gory helmet of the headless Holofernes,  
 His mighty sword and broad mail-coat  
 Adorned with red gold, everything the arrogant  
 General owned, from riches to rings,  
 Trinkets to treasures, gemstones to gold. 350  
 All of this they gave to the wise woman,  
 The bright and beautiful warrior maiden.  
 Judith gave all the glory to God, the Lord of hosts,  
 Who had granted her victory, a warrior's worth  
 In this wide world, and also a place in heaven, 355  
 A righteous reward for one who held faith  
 In the almighty Lord. She longed for this gift  
 Throughout her life. At the end of her days  
 There was never a doubt about her reward

As a holy maiden in God's eternal home.  
We give him our thanks as his glory thrives—  
Our Maker's grace figures forth all creation,  
Shapes wind and sky, uplift and downdraft,  
Heaven and earth, furious seas and solid ground,  
All might and meaning, all measure and mercy,  
All earthly wonder, all heavenly bliss.

360

365

THE METRICAL  
PSALMS OF THE  
PARIS PSALTER  
AND THE METERS  
OF BOETHIUS





## INTRODUCTION

We are parchment songs lifted from Latin,  
Transformed in time to an English tongue.  
One of us sits tucked in a bed of prose;  
The other runs beside her sacred sister.  
One of us barely escaped a fierce blaze;  
The other sailed south to a foreign home.  
One of us arises from a trial in Rome  
And offers solace to a suffering prisoner.  
The other hearkens back to ancient Israel,  
Reshaping Hebrew hymns and prayers.  
One of us is full of lyric philosophy,  
Consolation and comfort, healing the heart.  
The other offers up songs of praise,  
Faith and wisdom, judgment and joy.  
One of us may have been written by a king  
Who saved a country and secured a language.  
The other was written by an unknown poet  
Who looked through Latin at the sacred songs,  
Some of them sung by the sire of Solomon.  
We were not sewn together in sheaves of skin  
But bound in a book by a modern editor.  
One of us lives in a London library;  
The other exists in a Paris bibliothèque.  
Say who we are who bring together songs  
Of suffering and solace, lore and learning,  
In praise of Providence, in honor of the Lord.

The fifth volume of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, published in 1932, combined the metrical psalms from the Paris Psalter manuscript, located in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Fonds Latin 8824) and the meters in the OE version of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (The Consolation of Philosophy) by Boethius, contained in a damaged manuscript in the British Library in London (MS Cotton Otho A.vi). For the damaged portions of the Boethius text, the editor drew upon a seventeenth-century transcription of the original made by Franciscus Junius and located in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (Junius 12). The OE poems of the Paris Psalter and Boethius were presumably combined in the edition in part because each is a translation (or an adaptation of a translation) of a Latin text, and each deals with religious or philosophical materials that were important to the life of the Anglo-Saxon church. *The Consolation of Philosophy* contains patristic ideas that often draw upon the writings of the church fathers. Psalters like the Paris Psalter were part of the learned and liturgical religious tradition at the heart of Christianized Anglo-Saxon England.

## THE METRICAL PSALMS OF THE PARIS PSALTER

**T**he Paris Psalter is an unusual shape, about 53.5 centimeters high and 18 centimeters wide. Some eleven folios and a picture of David playing the harp have been cut out of the manuscript (Krapp, 1932b, viii). The manuscript contains in facing columns a variety of religious materials, including the psalms in Latin and Old English, and a number of Latin liturgical texts—including biblical canticles, the litany of saints, and nine prayers (see Krapp, ix–x, for a full description of these). There are also some pen drawings in the manuscript in the spaces at the ends of the Latin psalms that take less space than the Old English versions (Krapp, x–xi; Colgrave, xiv–xv). At the end of the manuscript is an inscription that names the scribe as Wulfwinus Cada, about whom little is known, and the owner of the manuscript, John, duke of Berry (1340–1416), who was a collector of manuscripts and art (Krapp, xii–xiii). The date and origin of the manuscript are uncertain, but Krapp argues that “the very general metrical irregularity of the verse translation may be taken as indicating a relatively late time of origin, perhaps the latter ninth or early tenth century,” noting, however, that “metrical variations are just as easily explainable on personal as on chronological grounds” (xvii). O’Neill argues that “the cumulative evidence points to a date after 1030, perhaps ca. 1050” (2001, 21).

The Paris Psalter contains a Latin version of the psalms and OE translations of the psalms in facing columns. The Latin text is a “Roman Psalter corrected with Gallican and Hebrew variants” (S. Harris, 298). The first fifty psalms are translated into OE prose, attributed to Alfred (O’Neill, 2001, 73 ff.). The last one hundred psalms are translated into OE poetry by a later unknown poet. The Latin text of the psalms, however, is not the one used by

the Anglo-Saxon translator. The correspondence between the OE text and the fragments of psalms in the devotional materials in MS Junius 121 in the Bodleian Library indicates that both verses were based on the same Latin psalter, which is now lost (Krapp, xix–xx; Jones, 288–89). For the “Fragments of Poems,” see the “Minor Poems” section of this volume. An OE poetic version of Psalms 90–95 is also found in a Trinity College manuscript, “Eadwine’s Psalter,” and provides a number of alternate readings (Baker, 1984). The numbering of the psalms in OE is slightly different than that of most English Bibles translated from the Hebrew because of the ways in which the psalms are sometimes combined or divided (see Krapp, xiv).

After the OE metrical psalms were published in *ASPR* in 1932, they received little scholarly attention. No modern editions or translations were forthcoming until O’Neill’s 2016 edition of all of the Old English prose and metrical psalms in the psalter. Another edition by Jane Toswell and Mark Griffith is in progress with the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Press.

The metrical psalms have rarely been translated into modern English or included in anthologies probably because the quality of the OE poetic translations is mixed at best and hardly up to the standard of poems like *Beowulf* or *Genesis*. Toswell identifies a number of significant issues involved in the translations: “the status of the psalms as a sacred text; the potential for cultural shift from a Hebrew original, by way of several intermediate translations into an Anglo-Saxon context; the difficulty of analysing the translation as a process, and determining the characteristics of that process; and the question of the content of the psalter being transferred into a very restrictive poetic form” (2014, 320). Greenfield argues that the OE verses “are not very distinguished as poetry: meter and alliteration, however regular, are mechanical and uninspired, common adjectives and adverbs as well as unusual words are overworked as verse fillers, and the traditional poetic vocabulary finds little place therein” (Greenfield and Calder, 232). Diamond (1963) notes that the poet must have followed this dictum: “If he added any words in order to satisfy the requirements of meter and alliteration, they must add little or nothing to the sense of the original” (7), and the *Dictionary of Old English* notes numerous examples of fillers, mainly common adverbs, that probably have little or no significant meaning. Griffith argues similarly that the metrical psalms are “a pedestrian and unimaginative piece of poetic translation” (1991, 167). He contends that the translator knew much of the traditional Old English poetic vocabulary, but that “his decision to translate closely and to follow in many instances the conventional and prosaic translations of the psalter



gloss tradition, coupled with his apparent distaste for the heroic, inevitably led to restricted use of this vocabulary” (182). Toswell summarizes the translator’s work as follows:

The psalter poet was not, on the face of it, an adventurous soul. He produced a vernacular version of the Roman psalter as nearly as possible word by word to create a slavish equivalent to the sacred original. Where he ran into difficulties, he used a number of expedient measures to avoid error: simply omitting the difficult bits; accepting the difficult Latin word straight into his Old English text; or even making use of the other two versions (Gallican and Hebrew) of the Latin psalter, and translating from them. . . . Rarely, even, does the psalter poet give any hint of allegorical interpretation of the psalms. He is far more likely to expand the literal—and obvious—meaning of a verse than to add layers of interpretation to it. The metrical psalms are a workman-like translation of a text which, although it was used as an elementary reading book throughout the Middle Ages, and was sung by every Benedictine monk weekly, had many “hard places” [see Sisam and Sisam in Colgrave, 1958, 17]. The psalter poet was more successful at rendering these difficult passages than many of the Anglo-Saxon glossators and explicators of the psalms. (1994, 394)

To the extent that critics are correct in characterizing these OE psalms as mediocre poetry, a modern translator is faced with the choice of whether to make modern poetic translations that accurately reflect that original mediocrity or to assume that the originals were in some respects more interesting than we can see in the twenty-first century and to try to rediscover and recreate that quality of interest in a modern translation. Sometimes a translator simply has to take a strange delight in the OE translator’s odd misreadings or muddled additions, such as when he translates the Latin reference to panting with longing for God’s commandments in Psalm 118 into foaming at the mouth for them, or when in Psalm 108, he takes the Latin image of a wicked man’s wearing his cursing like a garment that seeps like oil into his bones, presumably with a deleterious effect, and adds that these oily curses function to heal his mysteriously broken bones (for more on this passage, see the section “On Translating Translations” in the essay “On Translating Old English Poetry” at the beginning of this book).

Another complex issue for a modern translator is what constitutes the “original text” for the OE translator who used a Latin psalter text (the exact

form of which is now lost) and may have referred occasionally to a Septuagint Greek or Hebrew text to which he had access. Toswell argues that the translator must have been influenced by a vernacular psalter-gloss tradition (1997; see Keefer, 1979, for lists of psalter glosses). Tinkler details a number of instances where patristic commentary on the psalms influenced the poet's vocabulary and syntax. A modern translator is often tempted to pick up shades of meaning from the Latin, or in some cases the Hebrew, to determine just what an odd OE word or phrase might have meant. Indeed, dictionary makers often refer to the Latin word as evidence for the OE meaning, though this assumes a reasonable understanding on the part of the OE translator of the original. The process of consulting "original texts" can become a complexity of cultural (mis)readings—as of course every translation is in part a faithful reading of the original and in part an unavoidable misreading in another language with its own different denotations and connotations. The form of the Paris Psalter itself, with side-by-side Latin and OE versions, invites us to consider the texts in relation to one another. As a modern translator dives down into the murky waters of one language and culture on top of another (on top of yet another, etc.), the subtle beauty and complexity of each referential or "reaching-down" translated text becomes more apparent. I have tried to capture some of this complex beauty in my own translations by occasionally bringing up from the textual depths of the sources a partly buried meaning or reference or in some cases a needed meaning missed by the OE translator. This means that if I have occasionally "misread" the OE translations, I have done so with an eye to previous readings and meanings that ebb and flow beneath the surface of the OE translation. As elsewhere in the book, I have translated not word for word but sense for sense, as St. Jerome advocated, allowing always that "it is difficult, when following the text of another language, not to overstep the mark in places, and hard to keep in the translation the grace of something well said in the original" (29). If I have occasionally translated gracefully things unwell said along with things well said in the original, I can only claim a poet's prerogative and beg the reader's indulgence. Part of the joy of translating these psalms resides in the poet-translator's taking his own place at the end of a long line of translators and poets as languages, meanings, and cultural implications continue to shift and flow. For more on the complexities of translating the psalms, see the section "On Translating Translations" in the essay "On Translating Old English Poetry" at the beginning of this book.

The form of a psalm is difficult to define. Some of the psalms are praise-songs; others are songs of thanksgiving or songs recounting holy history.

Some are statements of longing or supplication; others seem to switch modes or to defy them altogether (see Alter, xviii, on the flexible subgenres in the original Hebrew). The metrical psalms vary widely in length. The shortest is Psalm 116 (7 lines), which is a praise-song to God and an affirmation of faith. The longest is Psalm 118 (535 lines in OE and 522 in the translation), which contains twenty-two stanzas of eight verses each. In the Hebrew this long psalm is built on an elaborate alphabetic acrostic (all the verses in each stanza begin with the same letter, and the succession of letters from one stanza to the next follows that of the Hebrew alphabet) that cannot be reproduced in the translations and a complex set of terms for God's teaching or Torah or law, one of which occurs in each of its verses. The terms are variously translated into modern English in different Bibles as "word," "saying," "law," "statute," "decree," "ordinance," "judgment," "rule," "precept," "testimony," "witness," "commandment," "promise," "teaching," "learning," "truth," "righteousness," and "justification." The OE poet uses some of these verbal techniques but less rigorously than the Vulgate Latin or the original Hebrew, sometimes repeating a term like *bebod*, "command, decree," or *gewitnes*, "witness, testimony, revelation" (see O'Neill, 2016, 691, note to verse 2, for the latter meaning) in more than one verse in a stanza or using two terms in a single verse. This elaborate psalm has often been viewed as needlessly monotonous and pedantic, but it is now recognized as being somewhat skilled in the way it repeats the central terms in slightly shifting contexts in order to catch and communicate their complexity of meaning. The repetitions also have an important ritual effect, as each verse in one sense repeats and in another reshapes the central concerns of the psalm. This pattern of repetition with variation is a primary poetic device in both the Hebrew psalms and the OE metrical psalms.

In the translations below, I have not kept to the individual verse parameters or indicated these numerically as is normally done in editions of the Bible and of the various psalters. The demands of poetic translation require some flexibility in moving from line to line or verse to verse so that elements lost in one verse may be recovered in the next and the integrity of the whole psalm as a poem can be maintained. The psalms here are marked out in poetic line numbers as is the case with most other edited OE poems and their translations.

I am greatly indebted to Patrick O'Neill for sharing with me portions of his work-in-progress on his edition, *Old English Psalms*. His prose translations were a great aid to me in my task of translating the OE psalms into modern strong-stress alliterative poems. I have drawn upon aspects of his work in my translations.

## The Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter

51

\* \* \*

He feared nothing and felt no need  
 For help or protection but firmly trusted  
 In his abundant wealth and vain boasting—  
 But I am like a flourishing olive tree,  
 Trusting forever in the house of God 5  
 And in his mercy and steadfast support.  
 I acknowledge you, Lord, now and forever  
 In the world you've created, gathered in goodness,  
 Wise in the sight of the holy ones who find  
 Shelter in your strength, comfort in your keeping. 10

52

The fool asserted in his unwise heart  
 That there was no God. Such men are abominable,  
 Corrupted with cruelty, polluted with pride,  
 Made monstrous by their own evil desires. 5  
 Knowing no good, they achieve no good—  
 Not a single one of them. Then the holy Lord  
 Looked down from heaven on the children of men  
 To determine whether any of them at all  
 Discerned his power, divined his purpose,  
 And earnestly desired to seek God. 10  
 But everyone on earth was idle and empty,  
 Full of nothing but the same false vanity.  
 It was painfully clear that no one wanted  
 To work God's will—not a single one of them.  
 Can you not see, you dealers of iniquity, 15  
 That you devour my people, consume them greedily  
 Like gluttons gorging on the best bread?  
 Are you incapable of understanding?  
 They never call on the Creator in fear,  
 They never feel a sense of dread. 20  
 So the mighty Lord shrewdly scatters  
 The bones of those who please only themselves.  
 They despise God and will be despised.

Who out of Zion will offer the Israelites  
 Eternal salvation except God himself, 25  
 The holy Lord, when he kindly releases  
 His beloved people at last from bondage?  
 On that day Jacob shall be gathered in gladness,  
 And all of Israel shall begin to rejoice.

## 53

Save me, God, in your holy name.  
 Release me from my enemies, my fierce foes.  
 Deliver me now through your precious power.  
 Hear my prayer and heed my words.  
 Devious strangers have often assailed me, 5  
 Seeking my soul, powerful people  
 Who never held God or his goodness in their sights—  
 But God will help me. The eternal Lord  
 Will be my shield, my soul-sustainer.  
 My steadfast defender will never deceive me. 10  
 So remove the treacherous evil of my enemies  
 And cast them down in your righteous wrath,  
 Scattering them abroad like lost leaves.  
 Let me please you, Lord, with my glad offering,  
 And acknowledge your name, for I know it is good. 15  
 You have delivered me, Lord of life,  
 From trouble and torment, hardship and woe,  
 Keeping your watchful eye on my enemies.

## 54

Hear my prayer, holy Lord.  
 Do not despise the desperate pleading  
 Of one who is suffering, tormented by grief.  
 Watch over me, Lord, in my time of affliction.  
 Listen to my words, my fearful lament. 5  
 I am bitterly beset, assaulted by enemies,  
 The clamor of fiends, my treacherous foes.  
 Injustice approaches, descending on me.  
 The malice of my enemies is a heavy burden.  
 Deep in my heart is a troubled spirit. 10  
 The fear of death descends upon me.

Terror takes hold of me at every turn,  
 Finally enfolding me in fierce darkness.  
 Then I said to myself in the stillness of my mind,  
 “Who gave you wings to fly like a dove 15  
 Out of the shadows to a place of rest?”  
 So I will escape, winging into the wilderness—  
 For I have lived a long time in the desert—  
 Waiting for one who can carry me home,  
 A great hero who can find me a remedy 20  
 For timidity of mind and ferocity of heart.  
 I have seen the strife and brutality of cities,  
 The evil and injustice stalking the streets  
 Both day and night, a plague of peoples  
 Bound for perdition. Let God cast them down, 25  
 Divide their tongues, unravel their languages,  
 Leaving them dumb to the minds of strangers,  
 The meaning of sages. May the weight of hardship,  
 The cruelty of conflict, climb over their walls  
 And strike them down. May terror and treachery 30  
 Settle in their hearts. May hard misery,  
 Usury and injustice, be upon the land.  
 If my enemy curses me with devious lies,  
 I can bear the brunt of that scorn and slander  
 With quiet courage. Though my foes torment me 35  
 With malicious words, I can hide from their hatred—  
 But you were my friend, my comfort and counsel.  
 We kept close company, sharing sweet meals,  
 Walking together into God’s holy house,  
 Sharing our thoughts, always in agreement. 40  
 Let death now come unexpectedly to my enemies.  
 Let those who defile me descend into hell.  
 Let those who revile me vanish from the earth,  
 For cruelty and deceit dwell in their guesthouses—  
 Evil makes its home in their ghostly hearts. 45  
 I cried out to the Lord among the multitudes,  
 And my Savior heard me and heeded my plea.  
 Morning and evening and also at midday,  
 I declare my longing to my beloved Lord,  
 Knowing you will gladly hear my voice. 50

Lord, may you come to rescue my soul,  
 Deliver me from the evil intentions of my foes.  
 Save me now from their treacherous snares.  
 God will hear my prayer and humble my enemies.  
 He is the Lord who has always been 55  
 Before beginning, after ending, abiding forever.  
 But the faithless are fixed in their evil ways—  
 They will never fear or revere God.  
 They perjure themselves with false testimony.  
 They defy his covenant and are cut off in his anger, 60  
 For that promise was created close to his heart.  
 Their slippery tongues are smoother than oil,  
 Their words are venomous as battle-darts.  
 Set your trust in the Lord, who will always sustain you,  
 And never feed you insults or a feast of deceit. 65  
 He will never let the heart of the righteous  
 Become the home of a ravaging spirit.  
 Lord, you will lead the wicked down  
 Into the pit of destruction, of torment and terror.  
 Those bloodthirsty men filled with treachery 70  
 Will never find solace in their earthly endeavors  
 Or any deep pleasure in their wicked lives;  
 But I will trust myself to my beloved Lord.

## 55

Pity me, Lord, have mercy on me,  
 For every day treacherous people torment me  
 And trample me down from dawn to dusk.  
 Many enemies attack me, and my only hope  
 Rests with you, my Lord of glory. 5  
 I will praise God with my willing words  
 And trust that his favor will follow my plea.  
 I believe in God and will flee foreboding.  
 What fear should I have of mortal men?  
 For nothing men do can terrify me. 10  
 All day long they revile my words  
 And stir up strife with their evil designs.  
 They lurk nearby to dog my heels,  
 To hide their haunting, to steal my steps.

So, Lord, my soul expects this outcome— 15  
 That you will cast your all-seeing eye of vengeance  
 On these miserable men and deliver them doom.  
 Let your wrath and rage descend upon them.  
 Let me sing out my story to you, O Lord.  
 I have given you my life, my wealth of suffering, 20  
 My treasure of tears, as I've often promised.  
 My enemies will flee if I call out to you,  
 Pleading for you to become my protector,  
 For I know in my heart you are truly my God.  
 Let my psalm be both praise and prayer 25  
 To honor my Lord with a devotion of words.  
 I will acclaim my Lord all day long.  
 In your protecting arms, I fear no peril,  
 No menace of men. In me, O Lord,  
 Lives the obligation to fulfill my vow 30  
 To praise your protection, your steadfast aid,  
 For you have kept my feet from stumbling,  
 Saved my eyes from bitter tears,  
 And delivered my soul from the pains of death,  
 So I might please God in the light of the living. 35

## 56

Pity me, God, have mercy on me,  
 For you alone are my soul's trusted haven.  
 Let me sleep securely in the shadow of your wings,  
 Sheltered by your feathers till evil passes by.  
 I cry out to the supreme and sovereign God, 5  
 Who has treated me well. He sent to this world  
 From the high heavens a living gift,  
 A saving power, the Lord himself,  
 To rescue and redeem me, deliver me from misfortune.  
 He reproached those who would cast me down 10  
 And grind me fiercely under their heels.  
 Almighty God sent forth to us here  
 In his merciful forethought a promise and purpose  
 Together in trust. He rescued my soul  
 From the teeth of deceit, the arrows of iniquity, 15



The savagery of those who prey on the poor  
 And the unprotected like ravenous lions.  
 Their devious tongues are like slander-sharp swords.  
 In the claws of deception, in the depths of dream,  
 I was sorely troubled as I lay sleeping. 20  
 So rise up exalted in heaven, holy Lord—  
 Let your glory extend over all the earth.  
 My enemies have set treacherous snares  
 For my unguarded feet, subduing my soul.  
 They have dug me a pit with their hateful hands 25  
 And have fallen into their own deep iniquity.  
 I have seen them sliding into the abyss  
 With my own eyes. My heart is ready,  
 My soul prepared to sing psalms to God,  
 To serve him well with true words. 30  
 Let the joy of the psaltery, the strains of the harp,  
 Rise up in the morning, as I rise up  
 To praise you, Lord, among all the people.  
 I acknowledge you here, almighty, eternal,  
 And lift up my psalms to the listening world. 35  
 Your mercy is generous as the endless heavens,  
 Your truth is boundless beyond the clouds.  
 Your glory is exalted above the heavens,  
 Your splendor extends over all the earth.

## 57

If you speak the truth and seek justice,  
 Then fairly judge the children of men.  
 You held untruth and iniquity in your heart,  
 Shaping evil with your own hands,  
 So your punishment for that was a clutch of grief. 5  
 Men wander into wicked ways from the womb,  
 Twisting truth throughout their lives.  
 May anger greet them like a certain serpent,  
 A cunning worm that people call the asp.  
 This devious snake stops up its ears 10  
 So that it falls deaf to the healing charm  
 That wise men chant to protect themselves

Against its venom that poisons the heart.  
 But God is stronger than any serpent—  
 He can break the teeth of the evil snake. 15  
 He can loosen the power of any lion.  
 All the evil ones will surely perish  
 Like wax melting near a warm fire  
 Or vanish like water running down  
 Into deep ground, absorbed by earth. 20  
 The Lord bends his bow against these enemies,  
 Who may see the momentary flash of an arrow  
 But never again the radiance of the sun.  
 The Creator can destroy malice in a moment.  
 Before your fruit trees can burst into bloom, 25  
 Disease will plague their bright petals,  
 Shriveled their succulence, and shred their roots.  
 The sinful shall be swallowed up in God's wrath.  
 The righteous shall rejoice in the Lord's justice  
 When they see how the wicked will utterly perish. 30  
 They will wash their hands in the treacherous blood  
 Of unholy heathens, their fierce foes.  
 They will say in the silent spaces of the heart:  
 "This is the fruit of the wise and good ones  
 Who speak the truth and perform righteous works, 35  
 For God fully judges everyone on earth."

## 58

Deliver me, holy God, from the hostility of my enemies,  
 The oppression of my foes. Release me from the wicked  
 Who would rise up against me without your aid.  
 Deliver me from those who do evil against me.  
 Save me from those who embrace injustice 5  
 And from all the battle-hungry, bloodthirsty ones,  
 Those powerful people who are bent on deceit  
 And struggle against me, oppressing my soul,  
 Even though I have not embraced iniquity  
 Or committed crimes against my Lord. 10  
 Whenever I have sinned, I have repented afterwards  
 And firmly abstained from repeating such sins.

Rise up to meet me, righteous Lord,  
 And see for yourself all I have done.  
 You are the Lord of hosts, God of the Israelites, 15  
 Their shield and protector in their time of need.  
 See how swiftly you visit the children of men,  
 All of the peoples everywhere on earth.  
 I know you will never show much mercy  
 To those who are wicked and pursue evil. 20  
 Your enemies will trail home each evening,  
 Howling like dogs, suffering from hunger,  
 Haunting the city walls, prowling in pain.  
 When they mouth their sweetly deceitful words,  
 Their devious tongues are like sharp swords. 25  
 Who knows what they seek in their hidden hearts.  
 Humiliate them, Lord, and lead them to shame.  
 Let them vanish in your eyes as if they were nothing.  
 I entrust my strength to you, O Lord,  
 For you are my defender, my shield and deliverer. 30  
 Your mercy and compassion were a gift to me,  
 A sustaining support when I needed a friend.  
 Lord, reveal your goodness and grace to me  
 In the face of my enemies, my untold foes.  
 Do not put them to death lest they rashly forget 35  
 The laws you have made that mankind must follow.  
 Scatter them everywhere across the earth  
 By the power of your word. Destroy them all  
 For the sins of their lips, the malice of their mouths,  
 The hatred of their hearts. Let them suffer themselves, 40  
 Trapped in pride, bound in blame.  
 Let them be tormented by their own devious lies.  
 Let them be overwhelmed by their own anger  
 And wander alone with their hearts' hatred.  
 Then they will discover that God rules 45  
 The world of mankind and the borderlands of earth.  
 Each evening they will come home wildly  
 Prowling like dogs, roaming the city,  
 Feeding on hunger. As they search the haunts,  
 Scattering blindly, ravenous for food, 50

They will finally feast on a fistful of nothing.  
 Then they will raise up a howling lament.  
 But I will sing of your strength in my waking song  
 And celebrate your compassion in my morning prayers,  
 For you were always my shield and sustainer, 55  
 My guardian and guide in my days of distress.  
 You are my aid, my help and my hope  
 In my time of trial, my hour of need.  
 I will sing to you, Lord, both now and forever,  
 For you are my faith and also my fortress, 60  
 My eternal defender, my soul's delight,  
 My source of compassion, almighty God.

## 59

Lord, you have shattered us, scattered us abroad,  
 Driven us everywhere into wrack and ruin.  
 You afflicted us with anger, offering us all  
 The bitter brew of suffering—and only afterwards  
 The gift of compassion, the sweet wine of joy. 5  
 You troubled the earth and made it tremble.  
 We saw the land quiver, the mountains quake.  
 Now hear our prayer and heal earth's ruptures,  
 Bring back together all that's been breached.  
 You sent many signs, ominous warnings— 10  
 Even if afterwards you offered sweet wine—  
 That those who fear and revere your power  
 Should stand watch and protect themselves  
 Against the bows and arrows of your enemies,  
 For only your beloved ones would be saved. 15  
 Deliver me now with your right hand,  
 Lend me your strength to keep me safe.  
 Listen to me, Lord. Let me hear your voice  
 As you graciously say in your earthly sanctuary:  
 "I will rejoice in the division of Shechem and Convallem 20  
 That together prospered in powerful Metiboris.  
 Gilead is mine and shrewd Manasseh.  
 Ephraim is my stronghold, the strength of my head  
 Here in this land. Judah is acclaimed as my king.

Moab is the vessel of my hope and trust. 25  
 Into Edom I will stretch my fierce foot—  
 They will feel my shoe. All the foreigners  
 Of Allophilas will be under my thumb.”  
 Who will lead me into a dearer city  
 Surrounded by walls? Who will bring me into Edom? 30  
 But are you not the same God who drove us away?  
 Do not move your full force against us, Lord,  
 But bring us your backing in our hour of need,  
 For all earthly aid is idle and vain,  
 Worldly safety is a shelter of woe. 35  
 Surely our mighty and steadfast Lord  
 Will lend us his strength, a measure of his power,  
 Leaving our enemies useless and undone,  
 Reduced to nothing in utter shame.

## 60

Hasten to hear my prayer, holy God.  
 Grant me your favor with a generous spirit.  
 I am calling to you from the ends of the earth.  
 The cares of the world press down on my heart.  
 Help me now, Lord. Lift me up from distress 5  
 To that firm rock, your secure stronghold.  
 Your love has led me to steadfast hope,  
 A tower of strength against my enemies.  
 I will dwell now and forever in your tabernacle,  
 Safe in the shelter of your protecting wings, 10  
 For you have heard my prayer ascending to you  
 And brought each person a precious gift,  
 The inheritance of those who fear your name.  
 The time is coming of the rightful king,  
 When one day will flow peacefully into the next. 15  
 You will increase his days, year after year,  
 Supporting his strength, sustaining his joy,  
 Until the day when he is destined to journey  
 To your kingdom and stand safe in your sight,  
 To dwell in your presence forevermore. 20  
 Who shall seek the Lord's steadfast truth?

So I fervently sing in praise of your name,  
 Fulfilling my promise, keeping my vows  
 From day to day as is only fitting.

## 61

I will fervently subject my soul to God.  
 My surety and salvation depend on the Lord.  
 He is my God, my steadfast Savior—  
 In his unwavering protection, I shall not fear.  
 You sinners have savagely attacked others, 5  
 Bent on destruction, putting people to death  
 Without delay, as if you would knock down  
 A wall, toppling it from its firm foundation.  
 You brood on how to destroy my honor,  
 Darting here and there with your devious tongues, 10  
 Your malicious mouths, sucking up truth,  
 Spitting out slander. You offer a blessing  
 With warped words, concealing a curse  
 In your cruel hearts. But I have subjected  
 My soul to God, who governs my patience 15  
 With a guiding hand. He is my God,  
 My knowing Savior, my way to salvation.  
 I cannot flee from my steadfast Lord.  
 In God is my glory and all my joy—  
 He is my truth, my sacred trust. 20  
 Remember the Lord, you holy believers,  
 For he is your hope, your help and salvation.  
 Let your thoughts be pure, your hearts whole,  
 For God is your strength, your firm foundation.  
 Yet you children of men wander in darkness, 25  
 Embracing evil with your wicked ways.  
 You are liars and boasters who deceive yourselves,  
 Proud of your passions, violent and vain.  
 Do not put your trust in illicit wealth,  
 Riches or robberies, thriving by theft. 30  
 When you steal from people to become prosperous,  
 You beggar your soul and bedevil your heart.  
 Once I heard God speaking and understood  
 This truth that is only occasionally revealed—

The might of the Lord extends over middle-earth. 35  
 Power and glory, compassion and mercy,  
 Abide in God now and forever,  
 So he will judge each and every one of us  
 According to our individual merits  
 And the works we do each day of our lives. 40

## 62

O God, my God, I long to greet you  
 Each day at dawn. My soul thirsts,  
 My body hungers, for your trust and truth.  
 In the dry desert, in the wide wasteland,  
 On road and river, field and flood, 5  
 I earnestly hope I can gaze on your glory,  
 Appear before you among the holy ones.  
 Your mercy is mightier than this brief life,  
 So I will sing your praise with joyful lips,  
 Bless you, Lord, all my living days, 10  
 And purify my hands frequently with the faithful  
 In your holy name. My soul is filled  
 With the sweetest marrow, the richest fat.  
 Let my lips sing out the glory of God,  
 Let me gladly praise your name, O Lord. 15  
 I am mindful of you in my nightly rest  
 And my morning meditations. I bless you in bed  
 And rise to greet you with expectant joy  
 Each day at dawn. You have always been  
 My steadfast strength, my unfailing aid. 20  
 This is my heart's hope—that one day soon  
 I shall be gently nestled, safe in your feathers,  
 Under the protection of your shielding wings,  
 Because my soul rests truly in your trust.  
 Your right hand sustains me in my time of need, 25  
 For the sinful have often sought my soul,  
 Pursued me in vain to the ends of the earth  
 In the darkest of dwellings, those old earth-caves.  
 Since they have been given the taste of the sword,  
 They will soon serve as a gross feast for foxes. 30  
 A good king shall rejoice in the Lord,

Knowing pure bliss in his perfect power.  
 Those who swear by him will praise him,  
 And the malicious mouths of all who speak evil  
 Will be muzzled at last everywhere on earth. 35

## 63

Hear my prayer, holy Lord—  
 These trials and temptations often overwhelm me.  
 Shield my soul in my hour of need  
 Against the terror of my evil enemy.  
 You have often defended me against dread forces, 5  
 The devious plotters and wicked deceivers  
 Who pursue evil and injustice everywhere.  
 They hone their tongues like sharp swords  
 And bend their minds like menacing bows,  
 Determined to strike down the innocent ones. 10  
 They shoot their sharp arrows without warning,  
 Let loose their lies without shame or fear.  
 They arm themselves with angry words,  
 Saying, “Who can see us or know our purpose?”  
 They brood and plot the most terrible crimes, 15  
 Only to discover they are destroying themselves,  
 For the Lord turns their power into peril.  
 Many a man strides with an arrogant heart  
 Till the righteous Savior raises him up.  
 Their malicious barbs are like children’s darts, 20  
 Their slanderous tongues make small mischief,  
 Their wicked ways cannot continue.  
 All who see them are deeply troubled.  
 Everyone on earth ought to fear evil,  
 Revere the Lord, widely proclaim 25  
 And wisely understand, the wonder of his works.  
 The just rejoice in the righteousness of God.  
 They live in hope of relief and deliverance.  
 The pure of heart will also praise him.

## 64

It is fitting to raise a praise-song to the Lord.  
 Let his greatness and glory be celebrated in Zion,



Let him be worshipped with vows made in Jerusalem.  
 Holy Lord, hear my prayer, my supplication,  
 For each living body, all earthly flesh, 5  
 Is finally commanded to come home to you.  
 The words of the wicked have swept over us,  
 Putting us in peril, snaring us in sin.  
 Look on our misdeeds with mercy, Lord.  
 Blessed is the one generously chosen 10  
 And deeply cherished by our eternal God.  
 Afterwards he shall enter the dwelling places  
 Of the Lord. We will all arrive at the temple  
 With befitting gifts to replenish your house  
 With goodness and virtue. Steadfast and strong, 15  
 It will stand secure, a wonder forever.  
 Hear us now, our God and Savior.  
 You are the hope of the ends of the earth,  
 Of everyone at home and across the seas.  
 The mighty mountains are subject to you, 20  
 The fathomless oceans obey your rule.  
 You disturb the deep and drive the waves,  
 Whose roar and rage are hard to endure.  
 People abroad shall fear and revere you,  
 Nations stand in awe of your great wonders. 25  
 You rule the world, its princes and powers,  
 From the light of morning to the shade of evening.  
 You fill the earth with fruit and grain,  
 An abiding harvest for the human race,  
 A generous gift for endless generations. 30  
 God's rivers are filled with the sweetest water,  
 So earth-dwellers will be nourished and sustained,  
 As the living Lord provides for us all.  
 The running waters of rain and river  
 Bring forth produce, fruit and grain. 35  
 People flourish through procreation;  
 Mankind prospers, generations rejoice,  
 Sustained by water in the dew and rain.  
 Lord, when you bless the year's cycle,  
 The ring of seasons, with the gift of growth, 40  
 You offer us all your kind beneficence

As your fields are filled with rich grain,  
 Your groves are heavy with ripe fruit,  
 And your hills are covered with woolly sheep.  
 The fields will be ripe with flowing wheat, 45  
 The plains will be rich and rejoice with grain.  
 The living world will sing praise-songs to you  
 And thank you, Lord, for your abundant grace.

## 65

Let all earth-dwellers far and wide  
 Praise the eternal Lord with wise words,  
 Celebrate his name with psalms of joy,  
 Passing on praise of his grace and glory,  
 Declaring to God how his wondrous works, 5  
 His splendid creations, are spread over earth.  
 Yet Lord, in the face of your overwhelming power,  
 Your deceitful enemies still lie to you.  
 Let all the earth worship the Prince of glory,  
 Singing praise-songs to you, eternal Lord, 10  
 Affirming among the children of men  
 That your name is exalted over the human race.  
 Come now and see what marvelous works  
 The Lord has made. See how his judgments  
 On the children of men can instill terror. 15  
 He holds the power to transform waters  
 So that the deepest seas will dry up.  
 He can bind the force of mighty rivers  
 So you can walk across as if on dry land.  
 He rules mankind now and forever, 20  
 He watches over us with eternal eyes.  
 Those who anger him will not endure,  
 Those who provoke him will discover peril—  
 They will not be raised up and exalted in themselves.  
 Let earth-dwellers bless the eternal Lord, 25  
 Singing bold praise-songs to him  
 With jubilant voices and devoted hearts.  
 The Lord has breathed life into my soul.  
 He will not let my feet be savagely snared.  
 He has tested and tried us with a pure fire, 30

With wise discretion and true judgment,  
 As silver is tested and refined in the furnace.  
 Lord, you have led us into terrible traps,  
 The nets of our enemies. We are stalked by malice.  
 You have set dangerous men to dominate us. 35  
 They bear down upon us to break our spirits,  
 Yet Lord, you led us through fire and flood  
 At last to a cool, refreshing place.  
 I will humbly enter your holy house  
 To offer a sacrifice and repeat the vow 40  
 That my lips have wisely uttered before,  
 When trials and tribulations oppressed me,  
 That I would fulfill all my promises to you,  
 All the sacred oaths I have made on earth.  
 Let everyone come and listen to me, 45  
 If you earnestly fear and revere God,  
 And I will tell you truthfully now  
 How much the Lord has done for my soul.  
 Through his might, I call out with my mouth—  
 Through his power, I rejoice with my tongue. 50  
 If I have seen iniquity in my heart,  
 Do not reproach me for that, my Lord.  
 My Lord and Savior has listened to me  
 And heard the plea in my fervent prayer.  
 May the Lord be blessed for listening to me 55  
 And looking upon me with such compassion  
 That he never harbored unkindness in his heart  
 Or allowed himself to be estranged from me.

## 66

Mighty Lord, have mercy on us,  
 Bless us now in our hearts and minds.  
 Let the light of your countenance shine upon us,  
 And our hearts will be gladdened, our minds gentled  
 Through your perfect power, your great glory. 5  
 Then we will understand that here on earth  
 Through your saving grace, we may find a way  
 To practice our traditions among other peoples.  
 Let everyone acknowledge you, O Lord,

For you are a good and faithful God. 10  
 Let all the nations acknowledge you.  
 May peoples everywhere experience joy  
 When you judge them all with just deliberations  
 And direct the steps of all earth-dwellers.  
 O faithful Lord, let people acknowledge you, 15  
 Let nations acclaim you across the land,  
 For the earth offers everyone a fertile bounty.  
 Bless us, dear Lord, and bless us, O God—  
 Let the Lord God bestow a blessing on us.  
 May we all fear and revere the Lord 20  
 Everywhere even to the ends of the earth.

## 67

Let God arise. Let his enemies be overthrown.  
 Let those who despise him be destroyed.  
 Let those who hate him flee from his face.  
 His foes will vanish more swiftly than smoke,  
 Melt away like wax flowing by the fire, 5  
 So the wicked shall perish in the fierce flames.  
 The just will enjoy a never-ending feast,  
 Looking on the face of their eternal Lord,  
 Like a family together in joy and peace.  
 Sing frequent psalms to the one true God, 10  
 Sing heartfelt hymns and praise his name.  
 Follow the gentle and true path  
 Of the one who ascended above the sun,  
 The one who is known by the name of the Lord.  
 Take pleasure in his presence, and in his sight 15  
 Let those be troubled, deeply afflicted,  
 Who cruelly pass judgment on widows  
 Or are severe fathers to their stepchildren.  
 The Lord abides in his holy house,  
 A revered father, a righteous judge, 20  
 He makes his family of one mind  
 Live in perfect joy in a peaceful home.  
 He guides his people with great power,  
 So he rescues those who were once captives  
 And the angry ones dwelling in caves. 25

Then God goes forth for his good people  
 Into the deserts. In the sight of the Lord  
 The earth will shudder, the foundations shake,  
 The clouds crack, the skies rain down,  
 As the world wakes up in awe and wonder, 30  
 Discovering the fear of Israel's God.  
 The sky will willingly provide its rain,  
 And God will offer each individual  
 A separate inheritance. You will achieve this,  
 Almighty Lord, through your steadfast strength. 35  
 Your creatures will live and thrive in these joys—  
 You gave your gifts to those in need.  
 God offers wise words to those who preach  
 Good tidings, bestowing on them  
 A power of mind and strength of purpose. 40  
 He is a mighty King, the Lord of light.  
 Often the spoils of a house are divided.  
 If you sleep together among the clergy,  
 The wings of the dove will shine like silver,  
 And its back will gleam like sparkling gold. 45  
 When the heavenly King scatters them on earth,  
 They will then be whitened with snow in Zalmon.  
 The mountain of God bears fruit and grain  
 In a great abundance to sustain mankind.  
 Receive these gifts with proper respect 50  
 As you receive the mountain in all its grandeur,  
 For this is pleasing to the Lord, your God,  
 Who will abide on that land until the end.  
 The chariots of God number ten thousand,  
 And those who rejoice number thousands more. 55  
 The Lord is powerful in all his actions.  
 Rising up, he ascended on high.  
 He captured those who lived long in captivity  
 And was a great gift-giver to the children of men  
 All over middle-earth, but the unbelievers 60  
 Could not seize the land to settle there.  
 May the Lord our God be blessed each day,  
 May he grant us a safe and prosperous journey.  
 May the Lord, our Savior, shield and sustain us

At the hour of death on the day of dread. 65  
 The Lord will shatter the hairy heads  
 Of his scornful enemies who walk in sin.  
 For the Lord boldly said: "From Bashan,  
 I will turn suddenly to the depths of the sea,  
 Till your feet are broken and run fast with blood. 70  
 Your fiendish enemies have the tongues of dogs—  
 They see and track you wherever you turn."  
 The steps of my God are straight and true,  
 The King who abides in holy places.  
 There the wise elders came in haste, 75  
 Gathering in a group to sing praise-songs  
 Together with young people playing timbrels  
 And those plucking their tightly drawn strings.  
 In this assembly may Christ, the Lord God,  
 Boldly bless the children of Israel. 80  
 There were the young children of Benjamin  
 And the elders of Judah, leaders of the people,  
 And also the elders of Zabulun and Naphtali,  
 Fathers of the future as need would have it.  
 Command your power, almighty God, 85  
 Summon your strength, confirm with wisdom  
 Your work on the temple built long ago  
 And sanctified in Jerusalem, as great kings  
 Bear you beautiful gifts in this holy place,  
 Arriving from all four corners of the earth. 90  
 Rebuke the wild beasts of the woods  
 And the gathering of bulls among the people's cows  
 With your fierce words. Those tempted and tried  
 With a treasure of silver will not be turned back.  
 But scatter those people [who long for war]. 95

\* \* \*

68

Keep me safe and sound, O God,  
 For savage storms assail my soul,  
 And dark waters surge about my heart.  
 I am stuck in the mire with no sure footing,  
 Riding the sea-ridges, swallowed by salt-water, 5

Floundering in the powerful, tempestuous waves.  
 Wanting and weary, sad in spirit,  
 I have cried out continually, heavy at heart.  
 My throat is hoarse, dying for comfort.  
 My eyes grow dim, my sight is swamped, 10  
 Yet I readily hold onto my hope in God.  
 My enemies who hate me without any reason  
 Number far more than the hairs on my head.  
 They assail and attack me with hard hands.  
 They accuse me of crimes I did not commit, 15  
 And because of their perjury, their cunning lies,  
 I am constrained to return what I did not steal.  
 You know, God of glory, I am wanting in wisdom—  
 Never let my faults be hidden from you.  
 No one who awaits your arrival on earth 20  
 Should endure disgrace on my account.  
 You are the Lord of hosts. No one who seeks you,  
 O God of Israel, should meet with dishonor  
 Through me. I have borne censure and scorn  
 For your sake, Lord, suffering a loss of face. 25  
 Now I am alienated from my father's sons,  
 My mother's children, my brothers and sisters,  
 An unwelcome guest in my own home.  
 My zeal for your house has greatly consumed me,  
 And the reproaches of your enemies have fallen upon me. 30  
 When I set my soul to proper fasting,  
 They reviled me with all their slander and scorn.  
 When I traded all of my elegant clothes  
 For a plain sackcloth, they called me a spectacle.  
 Those who gathered apart at the gates 35  
 Were hostile to me; those who drank wine  
 Shouted at me scornfully with angry words.  
 But I will lift up my sweet prayer to you, O Lord.  
 May you hear my heartfelt pleading now  
 In the fullness of your mercy, your pure salvation. 40  
 Save me from the mire where I am stuck,  
 Pull me from my enemies, almighty Lord.  
 Lift me up from the dark, drowning waters  
 Of the sea where the tow pulls me down

Into the clutch of the deep. Save me, O Lord— 45  
 Don't let the ocean swallow me up,  
 Or the greedy mouth of the abyss devour me.  
 Listen to me, Lord, in your devoted sympathy,  
 For your gentle spirit is always inclined  
 To offer compassion to those in need. 50  
 Look on me now with your many mercies.  
 Do not turn your perfect face from your servant,  
 For now my foes draw near to attack me.  
 Listen to me now and answer my need,  
 Marshal your might and come to my aid. 55  
 Regard my soul, rescue and redeem it  
 From my evil enemies, [for you alone know  
 My many sins, my suffering and] shame.  
 In your sight are all my enemies who assail me,  
 Who offer me nothing but torment and terror 60  
 Without any regret for what they have done.  
 My heart has endured heavy reproach,  
 My spirit has suffered endless woe.  
 I had no friend to share my sorrow;  
 I sought a comforter but could not find one. 65  
 My enemies mixed my food with gall  
 And gave me vinegar to quench my thirst.  
 May their own tables be turned into traps  
 For a banquet of evil, a feast of shame.  
 Let them taste terror and drink dishonor. 70  
 Let their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,  
 Let their backs be bent so they cannot stand.  
 Pour on them all your indignation and anger.  
 Let your rage and wrath overwhelm their hearts.  
 May their houses be empty, their encampments barren; 75  
 May their world become an empty wasteland,  
 A forgotten homeland without inhabitants,  
 For they have persecuted those hard-pressed,  
 Anyone to whom you offered tribulation.  
 They have sharpened my pain, increased my woe. 80  
 Offer them the iniquity that they have earned  
 For the iniquity they committed, a reward of wrath.  
 Let none of them enter into your righteous works.



Let them be blotted out from the book of life  
 And never written down in the list of the righteous. 85  
 I am wretched and poor, but the eternal face  
 Of the Lord, my God, surely favors me,  
 Graciously healing me without delay.  
 So I fervently praise the name of the Lord  
 And will lead the way with a song of devotion. 90  
 This will surely please my beloved God  
 More than an offering of a young calf,  
 Even one sprouting horns on his head  
 Or sturdy hooves to range in the fields.  
 Let the poor and sorrowful see this and rejoice. 95  
 Seek out the Lord and your soul shall live,  
 For the Lord listens intently to those in need.  
 He will never forsake his faithful believers  
 Or hold back his care from those in thrall.  
 Let heaven and earth praise almighty God, 100  
 The vast oceans and the creatures in them,  
 For the Lord will always save Zion,  
 And cities will be rebuilt among Judah's tribe,  
 Where the servants of the Lord will come to dwell,  
 Laying proper claim to their promised inheritance, 105  
 Securing possession of their native land.  
 Then those who love the name of the Lord  
 Will abide in that land forever and ever.

## 69

Be a precious help to me, Lord God—  
 Look down on me now in my urgent need  
 And come to my aid without delay.  
 Let the vicious enemies who sought my soul  
 In spite and hatred be wholly confounded. 5  
 Let them be appalled and suffer shame.  
 Let all my antagonists who plotted evil  
 Be wretchedly reversed, turned from treachery.  
 Let their mockery and malice be made remorse.  
 Let those who always taunted me, saying, 10  
 "What a pity!" be snared in their own scorn.  
 Let those who always seek the Lord,

Who faithfully desire your salvation, saying,  
 “May your power endure forever, Lord,”  
 Find the sweet joy they so deserve. 15  
 I am poor and powerless, without worldly goods.  
 Look down upon me, almighty God.  
 Be my steadfast helper, my holy Redeemer.  
 Deliver me Lord. Do not delay!

## 70

I deeply believe in you, Lord God,  
 And my hope rests firmly in you. In faith  
 May I never be confused or confounded.  
 Deliver me through the power of your right hand.  
 Incline your ear with a gracious spirit, 5  
 Rescue me gladly and deliver me, Lord.  
 Let my guardian always be the Lord God.  
 Keep me safe in your sheltering strength.  
 You were always my shield and surety before;  
 Now free me from the hands of my sinful enemies 10  
 Who willfully refuse to carry out your commands  
 And fulfill your law. They are workers of iniquity.  
 You were always a comfort to me in my youth,  
 My wise and steadfast source of patience.  
 You sheltered me, God, right from the beginning 15  
 In my mother’s womb, and your grace sustained  
 My early days. Let me sing to you always.  
 Now I have become like a portent to people,  
 And you are my staunch aid in my hour of need.  
 May my soul be strong, my mouth empowered 20  
 To proclaim your glory all day long,  
 Singing praise-songs to you in all places.  
 Do not cast me off, Lord of glory,  
 When old age finally descends on me.  
 When my strength dissolves inside my breast, 25  
 And my mind falters, do not forsake me,  
 My living Lord, in those final days.  
 Often my enemies speak evil of me  
 And lie in wait to ambush my soul.  
 They scheme openly together, saying: 30

“Let’s wait and see—his God will forsake him,  
 Leaving him abandoned like a stray dog.  
 Then we can assault him, attack him utterly,  
 Savage him when there’s no one left to save him.”  
 Do not forsake me, almighty God, 35  
 But deliver me from evil, offer me aid.  
 Let all those who fervently revile me  
 Be confounded with doubt, consumed with shame.  
 Let those who set out snares for my soul  
 Trap themselves in their own twisted nets. 40  
 I will place my trust wholly in God  
 And rejoice in praising you a long time in this land.  
 My mouth shall proclaim your abundant power,  
 Reveal your deeds, your righteous works,  
 And declare all day long your eternal salvation. 45  
 I know nothing of markets or mercenary trade  
 Or how to manipulate competitors with lies,  
 But I will put my trust in the absolute worth  
 Of almighty God, always remembering  
 Your truth and justice, your power and glory. 50  
 Lord, you first taught me kindness and respect  
 From the time of my youth. Now I am old,  
 Worn with years, but I will sing your praise  
 And raise up your glory in the days I have left.  
 Do not abandon me, my living Lord, 55  
 Until I finish singing the resolute strength  
 Of your righteous arm, your forceful power,  
 To this generation and the company to come,  
 Reminding them all of your many wonders,  
 The renowned justice that you raised up 60  
 And set out in the high halls of heaven.  
 King of glory, eternal Lord, there is no one  
 Quite like you anywhere in creation.  
 You have shown me in trials and temptations  
 The fair testing of many famous men, 65  
 Often afflicting me with inscrutable evils,  
 Only to reverse your anger in the end  
 And release me from the depths of the earth,  
 This worldly abyss that we all live in.

You immediately multiplied your righteous actions 70  
 When you offered me aid, comfort and confirmation,  
 Strengthening my spirit so I could control my life.  
 So I acknowledge you again, my eternal Lord.  
 With my hand on my harp, I shall sing out psalms,  
 Making music on the sweet psaltery, 75  
 O God of Israel, holy and eternal.  
 My lips will rejoice, raising praise-songs to you,  
 My Lord of glory, my victory-king,  
 And my soul will also sing in rapture,  
 The soul that you yourself redeemed. 80  
 My tongue has acclaimed your truthful words  
 And glorified your works as is only fitting.  
 Let those who sought to snare my soul  
 Be brought down low and utterly confounded,  
 Discovering the dread of their own lost lives. 85

## 71

Grant your judgment to the king, O Lord;  
 Grant it also to the king's son,  
 So that he may observe and uphold the truth.  
 Judge your beloved people graciously;  
 Judge the poor, the unpowerful, the needy 5  
 With loving truth and discerning judgment.  
 Let the mountains receive your radiant peace,  
 Your gathering glory; let the hills receive  
 The true grace of your wondrous works,  
 A source of pleasure to all your people. 10  
 Let the Lord judge all people fairly and justly,  
 The poor and wretched in their fearful need,  
 And rescue their unfortunate, innocent children.  
 Let him unmask the deceiver, shame the slanderer—  
 Our Lord who lives with the sun and moon, 15  
 Who abides with them forever and ever.  
 He will descend on the earth like steady rain,  
 A gentle shower on field and fleece.  
 In his own days his peace will spring up,  
 His righteousness will flourish, his justice abound 20

Till the clear moon rises beyond our reckoning.  
 He will rule the generations between the seas  
 From running rivers to the ends of the earth,  
 A vast kingdom of all creation.  
 All the Ethiopians shall come before him, 25  
 And all his enemies shall lick the dust.  
 Those favored with fame will come from Tharsis;  
 Kings will come from the far islands,  
 Bearing offerings from Arabia and Saba.  
 Everyone on earth shall please the Lord 30  
 And honor him publicly with great gifts.  
 The kings of the world shall worship him;  
 People everywhere will pay him homage.  
 He will deliver the poor and wretched ones  
 From the wrath of rich men who oppress them. 35  
 He will rescue the needy who hold no hope  
 Of earthly aid and save their souls  
 From usury and iniquity. His name will be blazoned  
 Boldly before them. The Lord exists  
 For all his peoples—to him is given 40  
 The gold of Arabia, the gift of nobles.  
 Generations shall worship and bless the Lord  
 From sunrise to sunset all day long.  
 The glorious firmament will guard the earth,  
 Its radiant light raised over the mountains. 45  
 His fields will flourish with waves of grain  
 Flowing above Lebanon. The towns will brighten  
 With beautiful flowers and rich fruit.  
 A harvest of hay will adorn the land,  
 And grasses will cover the countryside. 50  
 Let his name be blessed by the children of men  
 Far and wide for all eternity.  
 Let his name be steadfast before the sun,  
 Let his throne be set before the moon.  
 In him everyone on earth is blessed, 55  
 And all peoples will boldly praise him.  
 Blessed is the Lord of the Israelites,  
 Their own God who works great wonders.

Blessed is his name, his sustaining spirit,  
 Now and forever. May the earth be refreshed, 60  
 Renewed by his power, restored by his grace.  
 God's grandeur abides. So be it. So be it.

## 72

How good is the eternal God to those Israelites  
 Who hold righteousness in their hearts and minds!  
 But my feet are slipping on solid ground  
 In following the ways of sinful people,  
 Emulating evildoers, wandering into wickedness. 5  
 The wretched who prosper seek no peace.  
 The powerful are eager to pursue sin—  
 They can't see death, the dark end of days.  
 There is no surety that they will endure suffering;  
 They do not struggle like others on earth, 10  
 Staggering home weary after a day's work.  
 They are never subject to the scourge of power.  
 Pride has seized them, squeezing their souls,  
 Revealing their unrighteousness. Evil oozes  
 From their thick skins like oil from fat. 15  
 They plot and scheme how to lubricate sin  
 In their high houses. They cook up deceit.  
 They set their devious mouths against heaven  
 And twist their sinuous tongues over earth.  
 (So my people shall return home here 20  
 Where the faithful will find a fullness of days.)  
 And they said, "How will God discover all of this?  
 How will this knowledge be known on high?"  
 The sinful have seized the goods of the earth  
 And the wealth of the world. Then I said to myself: 25  
 "Though my heart is always ruled and righteous,  
 And no one complains about my control,  
 And even though I have washed my hands  
 In innocent waters without any malice,  
 I have been scourged all day long for my sins, 30  
 Accepting the finger of blame each morning."  
 I might say to some, "Remember my foretelling—

Look to the lives of your children to come.”  
 With wisdom I have pondered, trying to perceive  
 How this difficult struggle might be resolved 35  
 Till I could enter the holy house of the Lord  
 And see more clearly these last events.  
 For their devious sins, you have struck them down,  
 Entrusting them to evil for their deep deceit.  
 For their worldly wickedness, you have cast them out. 40  
 For their greed and graft, you have rightfully given them  
 A grim reward when they thought they were saved,  
 Delivered from doom. Now they are destroyed,  
 Razed and ruined for all their injustice,  
 The darkly malicious deeds they have done. 45  
 They walk as if waking from a heavy sleep.  
 They flaunt their idols in the Lord’s city,  
 But you could reduce them to nothing in a flash,  
 Like disappearing images in the mind of God.  
 The thoughts of my heart are pure and clean, 50  
 But my heart falters and my feelings are numb.  
 Now I am brought down to nearly nothing,  
 Like a blind beast, dumb to his doom—  
 Yet I know in my soul I am always with you.  
 You have held me firmly by the right hand, 55  
 Leading me down this difficult road,  
 Guiding me with your will, receiving me in glory.  
 What can resist my hopes in heaven?  
 And what did I want from you here on earth?  
 My flesh is weary, my bone-house bent— 60  
 My heart is heavy, my spirit spent.  
 My soul’s desire is the Lord’s protection  
 And an eternal portion of heaven forever.  
 Those people shall perish and pass away  
 Who take no pleasure in you, O Lord, 65  
 Who set their hearts on other things.  
 You will destroy those who have forsaken you  
 And drag them to doom. They will know deserving.  
 My heart adheres to almighty God.  
 I set my hopes in the Lord God forever 70

And hold fast to him in my heart's homeland.  
 I will sing praise-songs to you, O Lord,  
 And to the daughters of Zion at their own doors.

## 73

Why would you want to drive us away  
 At last from you, O eternal God?  
 Why would you cast us off forever?  
 Is your anger so fierce at your own flocks,  
 Your terror so strong for your own sheep? 5  
 Remember the congregation you created, Lord,  
 The assembly you shaped back in the beginning.  
 You freed your people, the rod of your inheritance,  
 The stronghold of Zion, that glorious place  
 Where you came to dwell. Raise up your hands 10  
 Against your enemies and crush their arrogance.  
 Your fierce foes have inflicted heavy abuses  
 On your holy followers. The hostile ones hatch  
 In their malicious hearts evil schemes,  
 Those who live in the heart of your fortresses. 15  
 They boast and brag of their wicked ways  
 And set up their signs everywhere in your stronghold.  
 How could they know on their long journey  
 That they were destined to design those strange symbols,  
 The strange portents that they hewed from the wood? 20  
 Then they hacked down the doors of your holy house  
 With their sharp hatchets and double-edged axes,  
 Savagely striving to destroy everything  
 With their mighty adzes. The wicked ones  
 Boldly burned to the ground your splendid house, 25  
 Desecrating the earth, profaning the place  
 That is religiously assigned rightly to your name.  
 Then they said to themselves in their evil hearts,  
 "Let's gather together in a great assembly  
 With all of our kinsmen and utterly destroy 30  
 All the festive days of this Lord on earth.  
 We do not see any known signs here,  
 Any of our icons, or any of the old prophets  
 Who might offer us some truth, some understanding."



How long, O Lord, will you endure this abuse 35  
 From your malicious enemies? How long will you suffer  
 This merciless mockery as your old adversaries  
 Hatefully slander your name without end?  
 Why do you turn your face away from us,  
 Your glorious presence? Why do you hold back 40  
 Your powerful hand, the right hand of judgment,  
 And keep it tucked in, close to your heart?  
 Our God and King, our almighty Maker,  
 Before the world was brought into being,  
 Your shaping spirit established abundance, 45  
 Shelter and salvation, in the heart of creation.  
 In your divine strength you set up the seas,  
 Shattering the hard-headed skull of the dragon  
 Who haunted the deep, turning the monster  
 Into a feast for the sun-baked Ethiopians. 50  
 You split the springs, destroyed the streams,  
 And dried up the roaring rivers of Ethan.  
 You established the day and the dark night,  
 And the sun and moon to brighten the skies.  
 You shaped the seasons, spring and summer, 55  
 And set up all the boundaries of the earth.  
 Remember your shaping the children of men,  
 The wonder of creation you made for yourself.  
 Only hostile enemies would reproach the Lord,  
 Fools who would never recognize your name. 60  
 Remember the innocent—never deliver the souls  
 Of the guiltless to beasts, the wretched and poor  
 Who acknowledge you and confess their sins.  
 Do not forget them forever, eternal Lord.  
 See for yourself that your truth is proclaimed, 65  
 Your righteousness is known, your covenant kept.  
 Your testimony is fulfilled that the dark days  
 Would arrive on earth for those who pursue  
 Injustice and iniquity. Turn back the proud,  
 Not the humble and poor who fervently desire 70  
 To praise your name. Rise up, Lord God,  
 Plead your cause and render your judgment.  
 Remember how the faithless and foolish people

Heap scorn and shame on you all day long,  
 Remember the voices of the true and faithful 75  
 Who spend their days seeking you out.  
 Strike down the proud who persecute you,  
 The hostile ones who have always hated you.  
 Afterwards the faithful will ascend to you.

## 74

We acknowledge you, our eternal Lord;  
 All peoples acknowledge and praise you,  
 Calling out your name in their deepest need.  
 Let me sing the story of your wondrous works  
 With measured words, a testimony of truth. 5  
 Everything on earth is melting away.  
 Decades will dissolve, faces fade,  
 But I will fortify the pillars of earth,  
 Its firm foundation, now and forever.  
 I have said to the sinners not a few times: 10  
 “Put down your pride, leave off boasting,  
 Give up evil plots and wicked works.  
 Do not hurl your curses up at heaven,  
 Heaving your evil words against God.”  
 No one will come from the east or the west, 15  
 No one from the wide wilderness or the wasteland,  
 The moors or the mountains—for God is their judge.  
 Some he lifts up, some he lays down,  
 Some he accepts, some he discards.  
 The wine-cup in God’s hand is filled— 20  
 He picks it up and pours it out.  
 One shall receive only what he bestows.  
 The wicked will drink the eternal dregs  
 Which are never emptied, a bitter cup.  
 Yet I will hold fast to the world’s pleasures, 25  
 Rejoice and sing to the God of Jacob.  
 I will boldly break the battle-horns of the wicked,  
 But those of the righteous shall be raised up.

## 75

Long ago God was known among the Jews—  
 His name was renowned among the Israelites.

His homeland is truly preserved in peace—  
 He abides in Zion where he bends firmly  
 His horn-shaped bow and wields his sword 5  
 And shield in battle. Lord, your glory  
 Gathers in the hills, your wonders shine  
 From the eternal mountains, enlightening us.  
 The foolish who cherish reckless thoughts  
 And heedless desires in their angry hearts 10  
 Have slept a long sleep, untroubled, unknowing.  
 Those who sought wealth in worldly terms  
 Hold a fistful of nothing in their greedy hands,  
 For it's hard to grasp the goodness of God.  
 At your stern rebuke, O God of Jacob, 15  
 The bold riders who galloped out  
 To conquer the world have fallen asleep  
 On their gallant horses. They dream of dread.  
 Who can resist your righteous anger?  
 When you hurl a judgment from heaven to earth, 20  
 Then the world trembles, its inhabitants shake.  
 Then the Lord rises up in judgment  
 To save the meek and rescue the merciful.  
 The mind of man must acknowledge your power  
 And gladly contemplate all that remains. 25  
 So let me prepare a festival for you.  
 Let everyone keep a covenant with God  
 And worship him both faithfully and fervently,  
 For he is goodness unmatched, power unparalleled.  
 Let those who live anywhere around the earth 30  
 Bring gifts to him of goodness and purity,  
 Approaching his presence in awe and dread,  
 For he is the Lord who wields the lives  
 And summons the souls of everyone.  
 His terror abides for the kings of the earth. 35

## 76

I cried out with my voice to my beloved Lord,  
 Who heard me and heeded my plaintive prayer.  
 In my day of distress, I stretched out my arms,  
 Earnestly seeking my eternal Lord;  
 At night I lifted up my entreating hands, 5

Eager to enter into his presence.  
 I was never deceived on that difficult journey,  
 But I denied my soul its true relief.  
 Only when I firmly remembered God  
 Could I find at last my greatest hope. 10  
 I was sorely disturbed—my soul was despondent.  
 My eyes were weary with the long night-watch;  
 In my sleepless torment, I spoke few words.  
 Then I often thought about the days of old,  
 Having fully in mind the eternal years. 15  
 At night I began to commune with my heart,  
 But my soul wandered in a restless state.  
 Then I said to myself: “I know in truth  
 That the eternal God in his loving kindness  
 Would never want to cut us off, 20  
 Cast us out, or punish us without cause—  
 Never unfairly withhold his gracious favor  
 From the race of mankind forever in this world,  
 Never be unmindful of our deepest needs,  
 Never hoard his pity in a guarded heart, 25  
 Never keep from us his love and compassion  
 Or withdraw in anger his care for mankind.”  
 And meditating more, I said to myself:  
 “Now I have finally come to consider  
 The matter of the immutability of our holy Lord, 30  
 Mindful of the marvels he created at the beginning,  
 Recalling the words that shaped his handiworks.”  
 Then I began to meditate on his glorious works,  
 Remembering how I had humbled myself,  
 Conducting myself with proper restraint. 35  
 I thought about all of your glorious works  
 As if I were looking through your own eyes—  
 For in my working, I abide in your watching.  
 The God of hosts walks a holy pathway.  
 Who is a great god but our glorious God? 40  
 You are the only God who could make the world  
 And all of its wonders, the craft of creation.  
 Later you made known all your mighty works  
 To the people on earth. Also, O Lord,

You liberated the children of Israel from Egypt. 45  
 O God of glory, the waters were watching,  
 The waves saw you and withheld their power,  
 The ocean depths were assailed with fear.  
 Then the sea roared and the waves crashed,  
 The clouds shrieked as your arrow shot through. 50  
 Thunder and lightning rolled on the water  
 Like a wheel of fire, blasting the air,  
 Blazoning the waves with the hand of God.  
 The sea shook, the earth trembled—  
 You agitated the whole orb of the earth. 55  
 You ripped new roads across the deep,  
 Shaped new paths through shining waters.  
 No one can discover your sea-tracks there.  
 You led your people like a flock of sheep,  
 Bringing them home through the mighty hands 60  
 Of Moses and Aaron, all unharmed.

## 77

Pay heed, my people, to my enduring truth,  
 My immutable law. Incline your ears  
 To hear devoutly the words of my mouth.  
 First let me speak in stories and parables  
 About the things at the beginning of the world, 5  
 The things we knew according to our ancestors,  
 Who passed down their wisdom across the years.  
 They had no thought to hide their sins,  
 For each age admitted them openly to the next.  
 They praised their beloved Lord and his powers, 10  
 Acclaiming the marvels he made for mankind,  
 A multitude of wonders for many generations.  
 He set up a testimony, a covenant in Jacob,  
 A true witness and affirmation of faith,  
 And established a law for the Israelites, 15  
 Which he ordered our ancestors to make known,  
 Passing this down from father to son,  
 Parent to child, so that each generation  
 Might hold fast to hope, keep his commands,  
 And always bear in mind his wondrous works. 20

They should not imitate those unfaithful ancestors,  
 A perverse people, a depraved race,  
 Whose hearts were not anchored in trust and truth  
 But in rage and wrath. No one expected  
 God to care for their souls with any kindness. 25  
 The children of Ephraim first entered into battle,  
 Ready with bent bows and bitter arrows  
 To keep their covenant in the days of strife,  
 But their unsteady spirits would not hold true.  
 They refused to walk in the Lord's lawful ways, 30  
 Observe his commandments, or keep his covenant.  
 They would not worship as the Lord wished,  
 According to the law of all his creations.  
 The faithless forgot his good works  
 And his marvels witnessed by many generations. 35  
 In their own land of ancient Egypt,  
 In Campo-tanea (the field of Tanis),  
 He worked wonders in the sight of men.  
 He parted the seas, holding back the salt-waves,  
 So his beloved people could pass through. 40  
 A great cloud guided them by day  
 As the Lord had commanded, and by night  
 A pillar of fire was the blazing sign  
 That God watched over them, attending to their needs.  
 He struck stone in the unwatered wilderness 45  
 And let streams and rivers flow from the rock,  
 So people could drink in their deep rejoicing—  
 That surge of water was a sweet gift.  
 But they forgot their promise and pursued sin,  
 Provoking the wrath of their God and guardian 50  
 In that once dry desert. They tested him sorely  
 With their bent minds and their evil hearts  
 By demanding the food that they fiercely desired,  
 Saying severely about him: "If the Lord is so wise,  
 If his power is so perfect, why can't he prepare us 55  
 A great feasting table in this wide wilderness?  
 He struck the stone and made the streams run,  
 So we could drink and quench our thirst—  
 But where is the meal to feed our mouths,

Where is the bread to fatten our bellies?" 60  
 When the holy Lord heard those words,  
 Insolent, contemptuous, he hesitated a moment,  
 Then answered back with an angry fire,  
 A rush of burning anger against Jacob,  
 A righteous blaze against the Israelites, 65  
 Because they would not believe in God's words.  
 They disregarded his truth and despised his teaching.  
 He opened up the wide doors of heaven,  
 Revealing the dark clouds he commanded  
 And rained down manna to sustain mankind, 70  
 Bringing them all the bread of heaven,  
 The food of angels, a feast of faith,  
 An abundance of wheat to keep them whole.  
 And God woke the winds, stirred up the storms,  
 From Auster and Africus (fierce winds 75  
 From the south and southwest), so that out of the air  
 A feast of feathered flesh came down,  
 As great as the grains of sand on the shore,  
 As dark as dust—meat on the wing.  
 Many birds fell in the middle of their camp 80  
 In great profusion near the tents of men,  
 So they swallowed the food and were fully sated,  
 Gobbling down God's gifts from heaven.  
 They satisfied their hunger and slaked their desires.  
 Their Creator had given them what they craved, 85  
 Depriving them of nothing. They ate abundance,  
 Devouring flesh. With meat in their mouths,  
 The wrath of God descended upon them,  
 And many perished in the throes of sin.  
 That was surely no place of celebration, 90  
 For the noble leaders of Israel were lost.  
 After such grim warnings, they still sinned  
 And would not believe in God's great miracles.  
 Their days were consumed with idle deeds,  
 And their years wasted with worthless works. 95  
 After the slaying, many began to seek him,  
 Returning to their Lord by morning light.  
 They remembered that God was their great helper,

A friend in need, a trusted protector,  
 Their holy redeemer. But the praise of their mouths 100  
 Was a faithless flattery, a web of deceit  
 To escape destruction. Their tongues were twisted,  
 Their hearts bent, their lies loathsome.  
 They knew no loyalty—they felt no fear.  
 They were all unwilling to keep God's covenant, 105  
 But the Lord is merciful, compassionate and kind.  
 He forgave them all for their evil deeds,  
 And refused to banish them or bring them to ruin.  
 In his anger he turned away only evildoers,  
 Not wanting to unleash his wrath against all. 110  
 He remembered that they were only flesh and blood,  
 Formed from the dust by his own hands,  
 Quickened by his breath. Their lives were brief  
 As a passing breeze. Their words were wind.  
 Afterwards they incited him to anger in the wilderness 115  
 With their devious words and despicable deeds.  
 They gave him grief in the dry desert,  
 Inciting him again in that land without water.  
 Often they tested and tempted their Lord,  
 Provoking the holy God of Israel, 120  
 Oblivious of how his powerful hand  
 Had protected them all in a time of trouble  
 When he had oppressed all of the Egyptians  
 With awe and fear, signs and portents,  
 In Campo-tanea (on the field of Tanis). 125  
 These manifestations were known to men.  
 The Lord turned their rivers into blood,  
 And no one could drink that dark water.  
 And he sent them a harsh gift of dog-flies  
 To torment them, biting their flesh, 130  
 And hideous frogs to feast on them.  
 The two terrors annihilated them.  
 And he sent them caterpillars, cruel worms  
 To chew their crops, and also grim grasshoppers,  
 Locusts to level their once green land. 135  
 He sent them a rage of cold, hard hail  
 To rip their vineyards and ruin their plenty,



And a gift of hoarfrost to touch their trees,  
 Apple and mulberry, with freezing fingers.  
 And he gave their cattle to the killing hail 140  
 And all their goods to the greedy flames.  
 He unleashed all his anger upon them,  
 His righteous wrath, his terrible rage,  
 Through a menacing host of malevolent angels  
 And sent down an appalling pain upon them, 145  
 Not even sparing their souls from destruction.  
 Fierce death stalked and consumed their cattle.  
 There was no promise of favor or fortune  
 In the plague he sent. People perished.  
 He killed all the first-born children in Egypt, 150  
 The first fruits of the descendants of Ham.  
 Then he led his people like a flock of sheep  
 Through the alien wilderness on an unknown road.  
 God guided them along with high hopes.  
 Fear of the enemy did not follow them, 155  
 For the dark waves engulfed their foes.  
 Then he led them into a place of delight,  
 A holy sanctuary acquired by his hand,  
 And for their sakes, he deliberately drove out  
 Many powerful people from their houses 160  
 So the Israelites could occupy the deserted land.  
 They took control and divided it fairly  
 By casting lots. After the Israelites occupied the land  
 Of that mighty people, they mocked God,  
 Refusing to obey his commandments faithfully 165  
 And keep his covenant. They turned away,  
 Embracing evil with their bad behavior  
 Just as their forefathers had once done.  
 Their minds were muddled, their hearts hostile.  
 They were sunk deeply in their own depravity. 170  
 They provoked God's anger by exalting themselves  
 In their fierce pride, carving images,  
 Worshipping false idols in their unfaith.  
 When God heard that, he spurned them all,  
 And dread fell upon the Israelites. 175  
 God walked out of their wisdom-house

And abandoned Shiloh, his proper home,  
 Where he had lived so long among men,  
 And he delivered them again into captivity,  
 Passed over power to their enemies' hands. 180  
 He gave his chosen people to the sword's edge,  
 A blade of unbleeding, and scorned his inheritance.  
 He embraced the young with devouring flames—  
 No one lamented the death of the maidens.  
 He put their priests to the killing sword, 185  
 And their widows were mute and could not weep.  
 Then God's heart was suddenly stirred  
 Like that of a man startled out of a dream  
 Or a wine-drunk warrior roused from his stupor,  
 And he slew his enemies and put them to shame 190  
 With back-piercing wounds and dark diseases,  
 An endless reproach they could never escape.  
 Then he justly forsook the house of Joseph  
 And refused to choose the tribe of Ephraim,  
 But chose instead the tribe of Judah 195  
 So dear to him in the stronghold of Zion.  
 And he built his sanctuary, his holy house,  
 As singularly sacred as a unicorn on earth,  
 And commanded that it should exist forever.  
 Then he chose David, his dear servant, 200  
 And took him away from his flocks of sheep  
 To give him food. He accepted him readily.  
 Then David nourished the people of Jacob  
 And sustained the rest of Israel's inheritance,  
 Just as he had cared so kindly for his sheep. 205  
 So he will feed them without malice  
 And lead them forward without fault  
 In the power and protection of his own hands.

## 78

Alien peoples have entered into your inheritance,  
 Eternal Lord, defiling your temple,  
 Desecrating your house, making Jerusalem  
 A shabby storehouse in an empty orchard.  
 They have put to death all of your servants,

Offering their flesh to the carrion crows,  
 The bodies of your holy ones to the wild dogs  
 And beasts of the wood. These savage people  
 Spilled the blood of innocent children,  
 Like water tossed on the streets of Jerusalem. 10  
 The broken bodies lay prone on the roads—  
 There were no gravediggers to bury them.  
 We are now a reproach to everyone around us,  
 Neighbors and friends, the tribes of man.  
 How long will you hold us, God of glory, 15  
 In your jaws of wrath, your bite of anger?  
 Your flaming rage is searing your people.  
 Let loose your fury on the alien nations,  
 Who have never known or worshipped you,  
 Who have never called out your name in need. 20  
 They have often unfairly devoured Jacob  
 And ravaged his dwelling in days of old.  
 Almighty Ruler, do not recall too frequently  
 The ancient iniquities we often committed.  
 In our days of trial, in our deepest need, 25  
 May we find your mercy and receive your favor.  
 Help us, Almighty, deliver us from suffering,  
 Release us from torment, our living Lord.  
 Be mild with our sins, merciful with our misdeeds,  
 In our urgent need, for your name's sake, 30  
 Lest the heathen marauders should mock us, saying,  
 "Where in the world did your holy God go?"  
 They will taunt us often in the eyes of men.  
 Avenge the blood of your beloved servants,  
 So cruelly shed as you have clearly witnessed. 35  
 Let the sorrow of your servants, the lament of the lost,  
 The complaint of those who were kept in chains,  
 Come before you. Embrace in your almighty arms  
 The children of those doomed to death,  
 Those just now hearing their hard judgment. 40  
 Then render unto the grim-hearted ones  
 The ghastly reward they have so well earned,  
 A sevenfold gift of torment and terror  
 For their sinful souls, their hateful hearts.

Scorn those on earth who have scorned you. 45  
 We are your people and the sheep of your flock.  
 We will praise you forever and sing of your glory,  
 Extolling you in words till the end of time.

## 79

Listen to us Lord, consider our plea.  
 Hear our prayer, you who rightly rule  
 And lead the noble people of Israel,  
 Guiding Joseph away from his enemies,  
 Like a loving shepherd with his lost sheep. 5  
 You are enthroned above the Cherubim.  
 We beseech you, Lord—reveal yourself  
 Before Ephraim and Benjamin, and also Manasseh.  
 Stir up your strength and rescue us now,  
 Come down in glory and save us on earth. 10  
 Reveal your gentle face to us, Lord.  
 Restore us, God of hosts, and redeem us now.  
 Render us your mercy so we might be saved.  
 Hear us, O glorious God of hosts!  
 How long will you seethe and smolder, 15  
 Angry with the prayer of your own servant?  
 Will you teach and feed us with the bread of tears,  
 Bring us a cup of bitter sorrow,  
 A proper measure for all of mankind?  
 You set us in strife, a reproach to our neighbors, 20  
 A living insult, a byword for shame.  
 Now our enemies will wound us with sharp slander  
 And harass us constantly with hostile acts.  
 Turn us around, O God of hosts,  
 Show us your face, your kind countenance, 25  
 Your steadfast compassion, so we might be saved.  
 You brought out of Egypt an excellent vineyard,  
 Transplanting it here, reviving its strength  
 In an alien soil, clearing the ground,  
 Casting out all the indigenous peoples. 30  
 You prepared the way, planting the roots,  
 Establishing the stock, pruning the vines,  
 Guiding our journey, breaking new ground,

So the vineyard flourished and filled the land.  
 Its broad shadow covered the hills, 35  
 And its branches ascended the cedars of God.  
 You stretched out its arms over the rivers  
 And let them reach the salty sea-streams  
 Encircling the earth. Why did you break down its fence,  
 So that all who pass by can plunder the vineyard? 40  
 Wild boars from the woods root up the vines,  
 And fierce beasts wolf down the delicious fruit.  
 Lord of hosts, forceful and mild,  
 Turn your favorable countenance on us again.  
 Look down from the heavens, watch over the vineyard, 45  
 The generations of growth that you first planted  
 With the promise and power of your right hand,  
 When you set up the stock and the son of man,  
 Whose strength you confirmed, subject to you,  
 Right from the beginning, our glorious Ruler. 50  
 Fire devours it, a hand digs through it.  
 In the face of your terror all evil with tremble;  
 Before your power, the wicked will perish.  
 Lay your right hand, your righteous hand,  
 On the just man and the son of man, 55  
 Whose virtues you appointed and confirmed,  
 Endowed and strengthened, Lord of hosts.  
 Deliver us and we will never depart from you,  
 Quicken us now as we call out your name.  
 Turn us around, restore us, [Lord of hosts, 60  
 Show us your kind face and we will be saved.]

## 80

\* \* \*

“If you listen, Israel, intently to me—  
 If you listen, Israel, only to me—  
 No other god will be newly created  
 And worshipped among you, no alien god  
 Adored in Israel, for I am your God, 5  
 Who long ago led you out of Egypt.  
 Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.  
 Yet my people are reluctant to listen to my voice,

And Israel refuses to hear or heed me  
 With proper devotion. So I empowered them to live 10  
 With their headstrong spirits, their unhindered joys,  
 Carried along by their own counsels,  
 Drinking the delights of their own desires.  
 If only my people, the chosen of Israel,  
 Had listened to me, heeding my words, 15  
 Willing to walk faithfully in my ways,  
 Then I could have cut down all their enemies,  
 Destroying their persecutors, crushing their foes,  
 With the unmitigated power I held in my hands.”  
 The Lord’s enemies will lie to him, 20  
 Their tongues twisted with malicious deceit.  
 Their time of misery will endure forever,  
 Their days of dread stretch into doom.  
 He fed them all with the choicest food,  
 The fullest fruit, the fat of the land, 25  
 And after God struck and split the stone,  
 With wheat and honey that flowed from a rock,  
 And fed them till they were sated and sustained.

## 81

Mighty God stood among the gods,  
 Judging them severely, saying to them:  
 “How long will you make false judgments?  
 How long will you listen to the lies of sinners?  
 Render justice to the orphans and stepchildren, 5  
 The poor and unprotected, the wretched and wanting,  
 For these are truly the righteous ones.  
 Rescue the desperate, save the downtrodden  
 From the malevolent hands of evildoers.”  
 They had no knowledge or understanding; 10  
 The wicked have always wandered in darkness,  
 While the foundations of earth trembled and shook.  
 At first I said: “You are gods on high,  
 A proud progeny exalted over men,  
 But you will die like men, disappear like princes, 15  
 Just as the noblest of men drop dead.”

Lord, rise up and judge the inhabitants of earth,  
 For you are the inheritor and guardian of peoples.

## 82

Who is like you, eternal Lord?  
 Do not be silent or hold your peace,  
 For all your enemies have perished in disgrace.  
 Those who loathe you have lifted up their heads,  
 Scheming against you to do you harm. 5  
 They consult and conspire, plot and persecute,  
 Hoping to harm your holy ones here,  
 Openly urging treachery, saying:  
 "Come, let us cast these people out,  
 Scatter them all throughout the nations, 10  
 So that no one will ever again remember  
 How anyone invoked the name of Israel."  
 They all connived and conspired against you  
 With cunning plots in an evil alliance,  
 A gathering of tribes striking their tents, 15  
 Edomites and Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarites,  
 Gebal and Ammon, and also Amalek,  
 Along with the tribes dwelling in Tyre.  
 The Assyrians have also joined with them,  
 Conversing on the roads with the children of Lot. 20  
 Deal with them as you did with Midian and Sisera,  
 And also Jabin. The spring of Endor  
 And the surge of Kishon carried them off.  
 Those wretches became the dung of the earth.  
 Cast down all of their proud princes 25  
 As harshly as you did with Oreb and Zeeb,  
 Zebah and Zalmunna, and all of their elders.  
 They boasted they would seize God's sanctuary on earth.  
 Lord, drive them along like a helpless wheel,  
 Blow them away like straw in the wind. 30  
 Set them ablaze like a forest fire,  
 Like consuming flames on the mountain heath.  
 Hunt them down in your righteous wrath,  
 Punish them all and let them perish

In the savage tumult of their own terror. 35  
 Let their faces forever be filled with shame,  
 When they desperately struggle to seek your name.  
 Let them be tormented for a rage of days,  
 Confounded in their lives and put to shame  
 When they struggle in anguish to seek your name.  
 O Lord, you alone abide on high, 40  
 Above all earth-dwellers, eternal God.

## 83

How lovely are your houses, Lord of hosts,  
 How dear are your dwellings. Deep in my soul  
 I have always longed to live in them.  
 My heart and flesh eagerly yearn  
 For my dear living Lord. The smallest sparrow 5  
 Seeks a home, and the turtle-dove builds  
 A timely nest where she feeds her fledglings.  
 These are your altars, God of hosts.  
 You are my Lord, my beloved king.  
 Blessed are those who dwell in your houses, 10  
 Holy Lord, and who praise you forever and ever.  
 Blessed is the man who seeks only your aid,  
 Who holds you steadfastly in his heart's purpose  
 And sets for himself that same resolution  
 As he walks alone through the valley of tears, 15  
 Where grief oppresses him, sadness overwhelms him,  
 In this earthly existence you appointed for him.  
 He gave them a blessing who gave them the law,  
 So they walked the road from strength to strength.  
 The power and glory of the true God 20  
 Was manifested on Mount Zion. Holy Lord,  
 Hear my prayer, lend me your ear,  
 For you are the God of merciful listening—  
 You are the glorious God of Jacob.  
 Our Lord and protector, behold the face 25  
 Of your anointed one. It is better to worship  
 One day with you than spend a thousand days  
 In the clamoring company of other people.  
 It is better to enter the house of God



As a humble servant than dwell in a palace 30  
 With many sinners. The Lord loves best  
 Compassionate people who are righteous in purpose.  
 God will bestow on them both grace and glory,  
 For he will never withhold any good thing  
 From the innocent heart. Blessed are those 35  
 Who seek for themselves the power and protection,  
 The might and mercy, of the eternal God.

## 84

You have blessed the good land, gracious Lord,  
 And undone the cruel captivity of Jacob.  
 You have pardoned all your people for their sins,  
 Absolving them of their offenses. You withdrew your anger,  
 Sparing us your vengeance, relieving our fears. 5  
 Turn us around, O Lord and Savior,  
 Transform us, avert your anger from us,  
 Save us from the fury that stirs in your heart.  
 Do not carry forward with cruel intent  
 Your righteous wrath from generation to generation. 10  
 Turn us readily to you, Christ almighty—  
 Let all of your people rejoice in you.  
 Show us your mercy, O mighty Lord,  
 Offer us on earth an abundance of salvation.  
 Afterwards I will hear what the holy Lord 15  
 Wants me to hear in my deepest heart.  
 He fervently seeks peace for his people,  
 Particularly for those who search for him.  
 The Lord is close to those who come to him  
 With devout awe and reverent grace. 20  
 He offers them on earth a great glory.  
 The keenest virtues come to them—  
 Mighty justice and the spirit of mercy.  
 The love of peace embraces them—  
 A sense of family sustains them. 25  
 The richest truth rose up from the earth  
 While righteousness looked down from heaven.  
 The Lord will offer us grace and goodness,  
 And the earth will flourish and bear fruit.

Justice shall always walk before him, 30  
Laying down his steps along the way.

## 85

Incline your ear to me, holy Lord,  
For I am poor and powerless. Hear me, Lord,  
For I am anxious and in great need.  
Protect my spirit, preserve my soul,  
For I am holy. Save your servant, 5  
For I trust in you. Have mercy on me, Lord,  
For I have cried out fervently to you  
Throughout the day with great longing.  
Make the soul of your servant glad,  
For I have often lifted it up to you. 10  
You are kind and caring, my sovereign Lord,  
Your mercy overflows to those who call on you.  
Lend your ear, eternal Lord,  
To my inmost prayer. Attend to my pleas,  
As I call out to you again and again. 15  
When torment and suffering darken my days,  
And anxiety overwhelms me, I cry out to you,  
For you listen to me with a loving spirit.  
None of the gods anywhere on earth  
Are remotely like you, my eternal Lord— 20  
They could never make your unmatched works.  
You alone created the generations of man,  
All those who will worship you, Lord of glory.  
They earnestly call out your name in need,  
For you are the one almighty God, 25  
Who alone is able to work wonders.  
Lead me, Lord, in your chosen way,  
And I will follow, walking in your truth.  
My heart rejoices in awe and fear  
When I hear and revere your holy name. 30  
From now on I will acknowledge, O Lord,  
With the deep intent of my whole heart  
That you are the glorious one called God.  
May we worship your name now and forever.

Your mercy is a mighty gift to me. 35  
 You have saved my soul from the dark abyss,  
 The pit where all the hell-demons dwell.  
 The wicked unjustly rise up against me—  
 They often assail me, my beloved Lord.  
 Savage men have come seeking my soul— 40  
 They set no stock in the fear of God.  
 But you, my Lord, are a God of mercy,  
 Kind and compassionate in all your works,  
 Patient and forbearing, resolute and righteous.  
 Look down on me, Lord—grant me your grace. 45  
 Lend your strength to your young servant.  
 Save, O Lord, your handmaiden's son.  
 Show me a sign of your favor, Lord—  
 Make it manifest so that all my enemies  
 Who have hated me will see my advantage 50  
 And be truly confounded, stunned with shame.  
 For you have always been my steadfast help,  
 My sure consolation, my almighty Lord.

## 86

His foundations hold up the holy mountains,  
 For the Lord has always loved the gates of Zion  
 More than the great houses of Jacob.  
 Glorious things are said about you, O Jerusalem,  
 That you are the loveliest of the Lord's cities. 5  
 I remember also the splendors of Egypt—  
 Sometimes called Rahab, the sea-monster—  
 And the towers of Babylon, the two together.  
 Behold how the foreigners of Tyre  
 And Ethiopia, the sun-dwellers' land, 10  
 Came and took up residence there.  
 Mother Zion first spoke the word "man,"  
 And man became glorious within her,  
 And he established her as the most exalted one  
 Anywhere on earth. Our Lord and Judge 15  
 Declared this in the writings of those wise ones  
 Who were foretellers for all of the people

Who have lived in Zion throughout the ages.  
 So the happiness of all of us having a homeland  
 Abides forever in you alone, Lord. 20

## 87

You are my beloved savior, Lord.  
 I have called out to you secretly by day  
 And cried out to you longingly at night.  
 Let my prayer rise up to your listening ears,  
 My petition come before your watchful eyes, 5  
 For my soul is filled with sin and suffering,  
 And my life draws near the doors of hell.  
 Some people think in their merciless hearts  
 That I am numbered among those nearing the pit,  
 Perched on the edge of the dark abyss, 10  
 Destined to fall with the wicked souls.  
 I am just like those notorious men,  
 The fallen ones who consort with the dead,  
 Free but forgotten, lost in oblivion,  
 Cast cruelly into an open pit, 15  
 Driven out by the hand of God.  
 They laid me down in the dark realm  
 Where desolation and death's shadow reigned.  
 There you revealed your wrath to me,  
 Turning my pernicious pride against me. 20  
 You drove away all my closest friends.  
 They left me alone in a desperate place,  
 Trapped in a torment I cannot escape.  
 My eyes are weak, my sight grows dim  
 From my dire want. I cry out fervently 25  
 All day long to the God of glory,  
 Lifting up my hands to you, O Lord.  
 The dead work no miracles, it's true.  
 No doctor can revive them, raise them up  
 To acknowledge you, to confess to you. 30  
 No one understands your words or wonders  
 In the country of forgetfulness. In that lost land,  
 No one knows what secret sleeps  
 In the abandoned heart. Can your truth be seen

At the edge of oblivion, your glory in the grave? 35  
 Can they know your wonders in the shadow-land?  
 Can they discover justice in the realm of the dead?  
 I called out fervently to you, eternal Lord,  
 In my secret soul. May my sincere prayer  
 Enter into your presence every morning. 40  
 Why did you want to deny my prayer,  
 Faithful Lord, or turn away your face  
 From me in this life. I am poor and ragged.  
 I've been bound to labor since I was born.  
 I was cradled and crushed, lifted up and let down, 45  
 Celebrated and scorned, but never confounded.  
 Fear of your anger has often oppressed me.  
 My dread of you now harrows my heart.  
 It comes in strange surges like dark waters.  
 You have driven away my dearest friends 50  
 And harassed everyone I've ever known,  
 Tormenting those who are left alive.

## 88

Mighty God, I will sing of your mercy forever  
 To the race of men from generation to generation,  
 Declare with my mouth your steadfast faith,  
 Your righteous truth. For you have said to us  
 In well-known words that your gentle mind 5  
 And generous heart were established in heaven  
 Forever and ever for the children of men.  
 Your truth endures in your promising words:  
 "I have made a clear covenant for my chosen ones,  
 Showing how I wanted my testimony taken, 10  
 My witness worked out. I have sworn an oath  
 To my dearly beloved servant David  
 That I would establish for him and his descendants  
 A pleasing homeland with an untroubled throne  
 To sit upon and rule for succeeding generations." 15  
 The heavens profess your wonders, Lord,  
 Your splendid marvels that will always endure,  
 Just as the holy ones in the church acclaim  
 Your truth and righteousness, raising their voices,

Singing your praise-songs now and forever. 20  
 Lord of hosts, no one in the world  
 Under the dome of heaven can be compared to you,  
 And no one in the future among the children of God  
 Will ever be in the least like you.  
 You are the God of glory, the Lord of hosts, 25  
 Revered by all, feared by all,  
 In an assembly of the wise, a high meeting  
 Of the holy ones. You are held in awe,  
 Mighty and fearsome over the children of men,  
 All those who exist across this earth. 30  
 You are God of hosts, almighty Lord,  
 Unmatched by any earthly power or presence.  
 Your steadfast truth is always around us.  
 You rule the seas with their raging waves;  
 When the storm-winds blow, you still the waters. 35  
 You humble the proud with wounds and woe,  
 Subdue your enemies with a righteous zeal,  
 The force of your presence and the power of your arm.  
 You control the heavens and the wide world,  
 The curve of creation, the circuit of earth. 40  
 You created the northern land and the sea,  
 Making Tabor and Hermon in your name.  
 They also raise up your right arm in force.  
 Let the high powers of your holy right hand  
 Be exalted over people, all nations on earth. 45  
 Your throne is prepared with truth and judgment.  
 Mercy and righteousness precede your presence.  
 Blessed are those who can praise your name—  
 They shall walk and live in the light of your countenance.  
 They shall dwell each day in joy and justice. 50  
 For you, O Lord, are the glory in their greatness—  
 We are made worthy through your care and compassion.  
 The eternal Lord will receive and shelter us  
 Along with the holy one, Israel's king.  
 Then you will say openly to all your children: 55  
 "I will set myself up as a mighty help  
 To my cherished people whom I have chosen.  
 I have found a servant, my beloved David,

Whom I have anointed with holy oil  
 Consecrated here with my own hand. 60  
 I will support my servant with my steadfast arm  
 And make him mighty with unmatched power.  
 No treacherous enemy will ever harm him,  
 No fiendish enemy will bring him down.  
 No son of iniquity will injure him. 65  
 I will cut off his foes from his watchful eyes,  
 Scatter his attackers and put them to flight.  
 My truth and mercy taken together  
 Will greatly sustain him, and in my name  
 His vibrant horn will be raised in victory. 70  
 He will be a ruler exalted in power.  
 I will set his right hand to rule the rivers  
 And the deep sea-streams in his appointed land,  
 And he will call out to me, his trusted father:  
 ‘Be for me, O Lord, my shield and defender, 75  
 The pledge and promise of eternal salvation.’  
 I will make him a ruler as the first-born one  
 And set him over the kings of the earth,  
 Where he shall reign, the most exalted of all.  
 I intend to keep my compassion for him 80  
 Forever and to bestow great power on him,  
 To strengthen my faithful, deserving witness  
 As part of my promise, my gracious purpose.  
 I will build him a great seat, a worthy throne,  
 Distinguished forever like the days of heaven 85  
 On earth among men. But if my children  
 Will not obey my laws, keep my commandments,  
 And honor my judgments in all of their deeds—  
 If they shamefully profane my laws,  
 Disregard my demands, and revile my justice— 90  
 I will punish their iniquity with a rod of terror,  
 Scourge them for their sins with a whip of dread.  
 I will not justifiably remove my mercy  
 But bestow my truth, as I have sworn my oath  
 To keep my holy covenant with David 95  
 And not deceive him in my words or deeds,  
 So he and his descendants will dwell here forever.

His throne will be worthy and set in my sight  
 Like the sun and moon, eternal witnesses  
 Of truth and trust, emblazoning heaven.” 100  
 But Lord, you rejected your anointed one,  
 Spurned and abandoned him in righteous anger;  
 You delayed and suspended your servant’s covenant  
 And profaned his sanctuary here on earth.  
 You ruined his ramparts, wasted his walls, 105  
 Sacking his stronghold, turning his hall  
 Into unbridled terror. Those who passed by,  
 Wayfaring strangers, attacked and demolished him,  
 Leaving him stunned, his reputation in shreds.  
 Now he has become a disgrace to his neighbors 110  
 Who reproach and scorn him. He reigns in shame.  
 You have lifted up the arms of his enemies,  
 Bringing a gift of battle-bliss to his foes.  
 You have unstrung his bow, unsharpened his sword,  
 Undone his aid in the heat of conflict. 115  
 You have darkened his splendor, sullied his purity,  
 Cast down his throne miserably in the dirt.  
 You have darkened his days and shortened his nights,  
 Covering him with shame and bitter confusion.  
 How long, O Lord, will you manifest your anger, 120  
 Unleash your wrath in a flaming rage?  
 Remember, O Lord, my poor existence  
 In this transient world. Surely you have not made  
 The children of men for an idle purpose.  
 Where is the one who draws a breath 125  
 And is full of life who will not meet death?  
 And where is the one who can save his own soul  
 From the terrible shackles of hell’s hold?  
 Where is the ancient, powerful mercy  
 That you promised to David and all mankind, 130  
 The covenant you swore to keep in truth?  
 Remember the reproach that your servants suffer,  
 Their scorn and shame when foreign peoples  
 From alien lands fabricate lies about them.  
 All of your enemies, eternal Lord, 135  
 Will endlessly taunt and torment them



And carry their reproach to your anointed one.  
 May the eternal Lord be blessed forever.  
 So be it. So be it.

## 89

You are our shelter and sanctuary, Lord,  
 Our secure refuge from generation to generation.  
 Before all the great mountains were made  
 Or the circuit of the earth set in place—  
 Before the beginning, you are, God of glory. 5  
 Do not turn away your graciousness from man  
 Or remove humility from our human hearts.  
 For you yourself once clearly said,  
 “I shall transform the hearts and minds  
 Of the children of men.” In your eternal eyes 10  
 A thousand years are like yesterday’s passing,  
 Like the guards’ brief night-watch hour.  
 These passing years are next to nothing.  
 The morning fades away from its fullness  
 Like a withered plant. The next day 15  
 It blooms again, a beauty until evening  
 When it falls, fades, and dries into dust.  
 We are afflicted by your anger, razed by your wrath.  
 You have set our iniquities before your eyes.  
 You are the watcher who sees our sins, 20  
 Who created our world in the brilliant light  
 Of your bright countenance. But our days disappear,  
 Our world grows weary—everyone is weakened  
 By your righteous wrath. We fade and fall.  
 Our years go by like a web-walker, 25  
 A spider weaving its wisps of doom,  
 Eager to draw flies into its web.  
 The days of our years drift away,  
 A hastening sorrow, even a hundred of them.  
 If a strong man is lucky and lives to eighty, 30  
 His extra years will prove an affliction.  
 In old age we are overcome by weakness,  
 A mildness beyond caring, but in that bliss  
 We become fearful, diminished by dread.

Who can say how long that terror endures, 35  
 How long your mighty wrath holds sway?  
 No one can know or number your judgments.  
 Make known to us, Lord, your right hand,  
 The hand of power, the hand of judgment,  
 For we are the ones pure of heart 40  
 And keen of mind, wise with learning.  
 Turn back to us just a little, holy Lord.  
 Be openly entreated by your own servants.  
 In the morning we are graciously filled with your mercy,  
 So our minds rejoice, delighting in our days. 45  
 We rejoice in the days when you humbled our hearts,  
 For the years we witnessed all of those evils.  
 Look upon your servants with loving eyes  
 And upon your handiwork, the whole of creation.  
 Lead their children with a gracious spirit. 50  
 Let the brightness of the benevolent Lord be upon us,  
 The radiance of our great God shine over us,  
 Directing the work of our hands from above.

## 90

The glorious help of the highest one,  
 The guardian of heaven, abides with me  
 Always and forever. I said to the Lord:  
 “You are precious to me, my steadfast support,  
 My sure refuge, a good and fair God, 5  
 A trusted friend. I think often of you.”  
 The Lord has released me from evil snares,  
 From hostile hunters with their sharp tongues  
 And malicious words. Beneath his shoulders,  
 He shelters me and bears me up— 10  
 I trust in his wings. Let my truth protect me  
 Against my enemies. Fear not the night-terror!  
 There is no need to dread the arrow in flight  
 By the light of day, the spear-rush in darkness,  
 Or the noon-day devil, a notorious demon. 15  
 Though a thousand sinners fall down on your left,  
 And also ten thousand more on your right,  
 Not one will harm you. You will see with your eyes

And witness before you the reward of the wicked,  
 The punishment of sinners. Because you have made 20  
 Holy God your refuge, your highest hope,  
 No hideous evil can ever harass you,  
 No fierce affliction approach your house.  
 For God himself has ordered his angels  
 To keep you safe in their sheltering arms, 25  
 So that you might go in the chosen way.  
 They will bear you up with their bright hands  
 To keep you from striking a dangerous stone.  
 You shall step on the asp, tread on the basilisk,  
 Subdue the lion, and defeat the dragon. 30  
 Listen to the voice of the Lord, saying:  
 "For his trust in me, I will deliver him  
 And fiercely protect him, for he knew my name.  
 He called out to me, his kind Creator,  
 And I heard him at once. In my loving kindness, 35  
 I freed him from his torment and tribulation.  
 So I will save him and deliver him,  
 Glorify his name among the races of mankind,  
 And give him the gift of a long lifetime,  
 Revealing to him my grace and salvation." 40

## 91

It is good to acknowledge and praise God,  
 To sing out his name in devoted song,  
 For he is the noblest of the race of heroes,  
 To fervently proclaim his mercy in the morning,  
 For he has acted so graciously toward mankind, 5  
 And to declare his righteous truth at night.  
 Lord, I have plucked this ten-stringed instrument,  
 To sing with the psaltery or the sounds of the harp,  
 To give you pleasure, the gladness of song,  
 For you have loved me in all your wise works. 10  
 I rejoice in the holy deeds of your hands.  
 How great are your mighty works, O Lord.  
 Your thoughts are fathomless, vast and deep.  
 The careless man knows nothing of this,  
 And the foolish man has no understanding of it. 15

Sinners will spring up like blades of hay,  
 Bands of criminals sprouting evil  
 Everywhere on earth, only to wither  
 And perish forever, destined for doom.  
 You are the highest, the guardian of heaven, 20  
 Almighty God, always to eternity.  
 Your evil enemies shall be endlessly scattered.  
 They will all perish on the pathway of life.  
 Then my horn that looks like that of a unicorn  
 Will be raised up, and I will endure, 25  
 Entirely contented in my old age.  
 Your eyes have seen my malicious enemies,  
 Your ears have heard my slandering foes.  
 The righteous shall flourish and bloom like a palm,  
 Bright and beautiful in its flowers and foliage; 30  
 The just will rise up like the mountain of Lebanon  
 Springing from the earth, a glorious growth.  
 Plant yourself truly in the house of the Lord,  
 So you may flower and flourish in his holy dwelling.  
 There are still many people approaching old age 35  
 Who expect prosperity and speak patiently,  
 Saying the Lord has been righteous and true,  
 Holding within him not a hint of evil.

## 92

The Lord is clothed in strength and splendor.  
 He girds himself with power and glory.  
 The Lord reigns, our ruling Judge,  
 Robed in grandeur, wrapped in renown.  
 He has set forth and strengthened the circuit of earth, 5  
 So the ground holds firm, steady and secure.  
 Your throne is ready, O eternal God.  
 You live before the beginning of the world,  
 Without end, boundless and abiding.  
 The floods lift up their praise-songs to you— 10  
 The rolling rivers, the roaring seas.  
 The din of the wide waters will not be stilled.  
 The surging sea-waves thrust and roll,  
 As the ocean waters storm and shout.

Like the sea, our Lord is an awesome power 15  
 In the high heavens. Our Lord and Ruler,  
 Your testimony is true, your witness affirmed  
 By the wonder of your works. Everything holy  
 Befits your house, becomes your dwelling,  
 And abides forever through the length of days. 20

## 93

You are the God of vengeance, Lord.  
 You can deliver revenge or offer rescue,  
 Just as you choose, to any man.  
 Raise yourself up, O Judge of the earth,  
 Repay the proud with what they deserve 5  
 For acting cruelly in their arrogant lives.  
 How long shall sinners rule the world,  
 Or criminals boast of their brutal murders?  
 They tell brash stories of evil deeds,  
 Exult in iniquity, perpetuate injustice. 10  
 They have maliciously abused your people, Lord,  
 Afflicted and oppressed your earthly inheritance.  
 They have slain strangers and helpless widows,  
 Poor orphans and unprotected children,  
 Crowing that the Lord never sees their crimes, 15  
 That the God of Jacob pays them no mind,  
 As he goes where he pleases without concern,  
 Without comprehension. You senseless people,  
 Recognize this, understand it all.  
 Let silly fools know this serious truth: 20  
 Who shaped the ear, can he not hear?  
 Who formed the eye, can he not see?  
 Who teaches wisdom, does he not know?  
 Who elicits awe, can he not threaten?  
 And does his threat not serve some purpose? 25  
 God alone knows the thoughts of man,  
 The vain ideas and idle dreams  
 Of all earth-dwellers. Blessed is the one  
 You teach, O Lord, your truthful law,  
 Your ruled discipline, your lore and learning. 30  
 You will protect him, deliver him from darkness,

From the days of evil, till the perilous pit  
 Of unlit doom is dug for the wicked,  
 An endless abyss of pitch-black pain.  
 Our Lord will never cast off his people, 35  
 For he would never forsake his inheritance.  
 Who then remains to be converted,  
 So he will not turn back to embrace injustice?  
 Who will help me flee from this wicked world,  
 So I can contemplate wisdom among the just? 40  
 Who will rise up with me to do what is right,  
 Stand up for truth against iniquity,  
 Fight against those who do evil deeds?  
 If the Lord, our Judge, had not kindly helped me  
 In my times of need on life's long road, 45  
 My soul might have found a home in hell.  
 If I had said, "My foot has slipped,"  
 Then the Lord's mercy would have helped me,  
 Picked me up and saved my life.  
 When I wandered lost in sin and sorrow, 50  
 My mind weighed down with heavy grief,  
 Your consolations, Lord, eased my soul.  
 Evil and injustice cannot cleave to you.  
 You fix the bane of suffering, Lord.  
 The wicked would bind fast the righteous, 55  
 Plotting together to destroy their souls,  
 To spill the innocent blood of the just.  
 But the Lord is my ruler, my only refuge,  
 Secure and steadfast, firm and fixed.  
 My hope resides in the help of the Lord. 60  
 Almighty God will reward the wicked,  
 Repay them for all the evil they have done,  
 Scatter them abroad for all their iniquities,  
 Grant them what they dearly deserve,  
 The Lord almighty, our righteous judge. 65

Come, let us praise God together,  
 Please our Lord and Ruler, proclaiming  
 Allegiance to our Savior, seeking his presence,

So that we may humbly confess our sins  
 And sing psalms to him in great joy. 5  
 For the Lord is a mighty and magnificent God,  
 The exalted king over all other gods  
 Worshipped by mankind. He will never drive away  
 His own people in their time of need.  
 In his power are all the ends of the earth; 10  
 Likewise he holds up the lofty mountains.  
 He rules the seas and wields the waves  
 That he first created and set in place.  
 He formed the dry land with his own hands.  
 Come, let's bow down before our Maker, 15  
 Bend our knees in the sight of our Lord.  
 Let's weep before the one who made us,  
 For he is our Lord, our judge and leader,  
 And we are the loyal sheep of his pasture.  
 He shelters and sustains us and gives us food. 20  
 If you hear the gracious voice of the Lord,  
 You should never hide the thoughts of your mind  
 Or darkly harden the intent of your heart  
 Against God's will, as your ancestors did  
 On the day of provocation, of fierce unfaith 25  
 And bitter rebellion, that day in the desert:  
 "When the fathers of this nation tested me  
 So severely with their treachery and deceit,  
 They tried to prove me, though they knew the truth  
 And could see with their eyes my wondrous works. 30  
 Now I lived with these people for forty years,  
 Seeing that they erred in their rash hearts  
 And offended me, as I told them repeatedly.  
 They did not know my ways or understand  
 That I had made an oath in my righteous anger 35  
 As I wondered whether in their offending ways  
 They would ever enter into my rest."

## 95

Sing now new songs to the Lord—  
 Let all the earth sing to the eternal Lord.  
 Sing now to the Lord and bless his true name.

Proclaim his salvation from day to day  
 To people everywhere. Proclaim his glory 5  
 To victorious nations, make known to peoples  
 The wonder of his works, for he is the great God,  
 And everyone on earth should praise him.  
 He is the God above all other gods—  
 All earth-dwellers should dread him 10  
 The heathen gods are fierce demons  
 Who deal out death, but our God alone,  
 Our holy Lord, has shaped the heavens.  
 True praise, like true confession, Lord,  
 Only takes place in your gracious presence, 15  
 Where your holiness is both exalted and acknowledged.  
 Bring now to the Lord honor and splendor,  
 The two together with glory as the third.  
 Let people praise the Lord on high  
 From all their homelands. Let everyone on earth 20  
 Praise God's name in their deep need  
 And bring him offerings. Enter his courts  
 And worship him earnestly in his holy hall.  
 Before God's face, the earth shall tremble.  
 Declare now before all the present tribes 25  
 And also before the generations to come,  
 That from a tree issued a glorious ruler,  
 Our Lord himself. His law established  
 The earth's orbit, the world's turning.  
 He will render judgment, an honest justice. 30  
 And a righteous wrath to all the Gentiles.  
 Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad.  
 Let the rolling rivers and salty sea-streams  
 Sing out their joy. Let the fields and woods  
 And all the life inside them sing. 35  
 The forests have existed in days of gladness  
 In the presence of the one eternal Lord,  
 Who came in glory to judge the earth.  
 Know now he is coming with his endless reach  
 To judge earth's people in truth and justice. 40



## 96

The mighty Lord reigns in righteousness,  
 So the earth rejoices in great gladness  
 And the sea-islands share in the exquisite joy.

\* \* \*

## 97

[Let the rivers rejoice,] clapping their hands,  
 Let the mountains be glad for they know the signs  
 Of all that stands in the presence of God.  
 For the blessed one came to judge the world,  
 The expanse of earth with truth and justice, 5  
 Leading his chosen ones in the way of righteousness.

\* \* \*

## 98

The Lord reigns over fierce peoples,  
 Controls their anger, rules their rage.  
 He sits above the cherubim, and he alone  
 Is able to unsettle the inhabitants of earth.  
 The Lord is in Zion, the greatest of judges, 5  
 Glorious and exalted over all of mankind.  
 Lord, we acknowledge your eternal name—  
 It is great and awesome among mankind,  
 Holy and helpful to the children of men.  
 The honor of the king embraces justice. 10  
 You first set the standard for fair judgment  
 In the world's beginning, and you established  
 The great and guiding laws for Jacob.  
 Lift up your praise with courage and strength  
 For the holy Lord of the high heavens 15  
 And honor his footstool now and forever,  
 For it is sacred to the children of men.  
 Moses and Aaron, excellent brothers  
 And true priests, and also Samuel  
 Called out his name in their earnest need. 20  
 They fairly and fittingly invoked the Lord,  
 And he listened to them, heeding their pleas

According to his kindness, his gracious nature,  
 And answered them with words in a pillar of cloud.  
 They kept his covenant and carried out his commands, 25  
 Holding true to the testimony he entrusted to them.  
 Holy Lord, you heard their prayers  
 In the spirit of mercy and were gentle with them,  
 But you justly punished them, almighty God  
 For all their offenses, their willful iniquities. 30  
 Exalt our God, our Lord and Savior,  
 And worship him here on his holy mountain,  
 For all powers are his, all praise is due him.  
 Holy is the guardian of the heavenly kingdom.

## 99

Let all this earth, obey mighty God,  
 Praise the Lord with bold rejoicing,  
 And serve God with great gladness.  
 Enter fully into his presence with joy.  
 Know wisely that he is our God and Ruler, 5  
 Our Shaper who sustains us, and we are his.  
 We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.  
 He watches over us and keeps us fed.  
 Go through his gates and give thanks to God.  
 Acknowledge him, praise him, and worship him 10  
 Within his courtyards with hymns of joy.  
 Praise the name of the Lord for he is beloved,  
 Gentle and benevolent in times of torment.  
 Lord, your mercy abides, your gracious nature  
 Forever embraces the children of men. 15

## 100

I will sing out the mercy and judgment  
 Of the mighty Lord. I will understand the truth  
 Of the blameless way when you visit me.  
 I passed through the center of your holy house  
 With an innocent heart, setting no evil 5  
 Before my eyes. I abhorred the wicked,  
 The workers of iniquity who embraced sin.  
 The hostile heart is no pleasant companion,

The perverse spirit no fair friend.  
 I have turned away sinister, malicious men, 10  
 Not wanting to know their devious schemes  
 Or understand how they invite evil  
 Against their neighbors with slanderous tongues.  
 I have hounded them all with hostile strife.  
 Those who see the world with arrogant eyes 15  
 And insatiable hearts are hateful to me.  
 I would not share a meal with such men.  
 My eyes are firmly fixed on the faithful  
 Who sit by my side or walk along with me.  
 They serve me well with truth and trust. 20  
 The proud man who longs to say  
 Wicked things and incite malice  
 Will not be welcome in the heart of my house.  
 In the morning I will slay the bold intruders  
 Who embrace evil, committing iniquities. 25  
 I will usher the wicked out my door,  
 Expelling those sinners from the city of God.

## 101

Listen to my prayer, O glorious Lord,  
 Guardian of heaven, and let my cry  
 Reach up to you, Ruler of all peoples.  
 Never turn your face away from me,  
 My Prince of glory. If I am troubled, 5  
 Incline your ear to me, kind Lord,  
 Hear my plea, help your petitioner.  
 My days drift by, disappearing like smoke.  
 My brittle bones, my marrow-sticks,  
 Are drying up, or so it seems, 10  
 Like crackling twigs in the night-fire  
 Or something in the cook's frying pan.  
 Hear me, Lord. I am like the hay  
 That withers away after the mower's swath,  
 A cruel cut from the hands of man. 15  
 My heart is also worn and wasted—  
 I have forgotten to eat my sustaining bread.  
 My heart laments, heavy with grief—

My bones barely cleave to my meager flesh.  
 I am like the pelican adrift in the desert 20  
 Or the night-raven holed up in a cave.  
 I am the sparrow, a solitary bird,  
 Perched on the edge of its own grief.  
 All day long my enemies taunt me,  
 Praise me, then mock me. They are quick to carp, 25  
 Keen to renew their swearing against me.  
 I have eaten the dry bread of ashes  
 And drunk the bitter wine of tears  
 In the face of your anger and indignation.  
 You raised me up and cast me down, 30  
 Delivering me only to destroy me afterwards.  
 My days disappear like dark shadows—  
 I wither away like yesterday's grass.  
 You abide forever in eternity, Lord.  
 The memory of you will last as long 35  
 As the world exists. Rise up, mighty God,  
 Be merciful to Zion, for the time has come  
 To offer her aid. Your faithful servants  
 Are grateful to you for favoring the world,  
 For showing mercy to the stones and the land. 40  
 All earth-dwellers fear and revere your name;  
 Wise kings perceive and proclaim your glory.  
 The Lord has built and rebuilt Zion  
 With his own strength, his power made manifest.  
 The Lord has heard the cries of the needy 45  
 And does not scorn or shun their pleading.  
 These truths are wisely written down  
 And made known throughout the generations—  
 That God created mankind. Let them thank him  
 And praise him with devotion and gratitude. 50  
 The Lord looks down from his holy throne,  
 Gazing on earth from his heavenly heights.  
 He has heard the cries of the cruelly bound  
 And released the children of the brutally slain.  
 The true name of the Lord will be proclaimed 55  
 Gratefully in Zion by those he has freed,  
 All the children of the people in Jerusalem.

Their praise-songs will ring out a great rejoicing.  
 Then people will come from far nations  
 And gather faithfully to follow the Lord. 60  
 His might is manifest, his strength will endure.  
 He will always respond to those on life's journey.  
 I declare from my heart that my days of misery  
 Are surely few, so you may not be able  
 To call me out in the midst of my days, 65  
 Summon me at once in my short span,  
 For your years endure forever, Lord.  
 In the beginning you created heaven and earth,  
 This wondrous world with all its adornments.  
 These are the great and glorious works 70  
 Of your own hands. One day they will perish,  
 But you will endure. All earthly things  
 Will finally wear out like old garments,  
 And you will change them like a tattered cloak,  
 So they will be altered forever afterwards. 75  
 Only you will be what you always were—  
 Your years will show no fade or fall.  
 The children of your servants now serve you;  
 They have taken up their ancestors' dwellings.  
 Their descendants will take up their dwellings in turn, 80  
 And you will care for these endless generations  
 In an unbroken line forever and ever.

## 102

Bless the Lord gladly, O my soul.  
 Let everything within me, body and spirit,  
 Bless the name of the eternal Lord.  
 Bless the Lord surely, O my soul.  
 May you never desire to forget his favors, 5  
 All the good things he has done for you,  
 Offering you mercy for your sinful deeds,  
 Healing you of all your illness and infirmity,  
 Redeeming your dear life from destruction.  
 He has fairly fulfilled your desires with goodness. 10  
 He has made you triumphant, crowned with mercy,  
 And strengthened your spirit with true compassion—

So your life is renewed like that of an eagle  
 In molting, made keen and young again.  
 Lord, you maintain a meek disposition, 15  
 An abundance of power, and a fair sense  
 Of judgment and justice for all of those  
 Who suffer deep pain and affliction,  
 Insult and injury—the wretched and wronged.  
 The Lord made all his wise ways known 20  
 To the acclaimed Moses on many occasions,  
 And likewise his wishes to the people of Israel.  
 Eternal Lord, you are forceful and forbearing,  
 Patient and benevolent, as you've always been.  
 Your care and compassion are known to mankind. 25  
 Your righteous anger is never unbridled,  
 Your wrath is never unbounded rage.  
 You do not judge us simply on our acts,  
 Our deplorable deeds, our shameful sins,  
 Or requite us ever according to our iniquities— 30  
 For after shaping the splendor of heaven,  
 You made manifest your mercy, mighty Lord,  
 To those who loved you, who faithfully followed you.  
 As far as the eastern edge of heaven  
 Reaches out to the west, enveloping the earth, 35  
 Winding over the world, God has separated us  
 In this great scope from sin and transgression,  
 Iniquity and injustice, everywhere and always.  
 As a father forgives and loves his children,  
 So almighty God is gracious to us. 40  
 He loves those who love him—he knows our needs.  
 Always remember, almighty God,  
 We are shaped of soil, made of dust.  
 The days of man are like mown hay,  
 Like an ephemeral flower in every way. 45  
 His days are fleeting. His spirit fades,  
 His life draws down, and afterwards  
 Only the grave will embrace his body,  
 Envelop his flesh and bones forever.  
 No one will know any other dwelling, 50  
 Any other home for him except the ground.

But your mercy endures, almighty Lord,  
 Your steadfast love, your eternal wisdom,  
 Over all those here who fear and revere you.  
 Likewise the Lord's justice endures 55  
 And abides for the children of all those children  
 Who observe his commands and obey his laws,  
 Keeping his teachings carefully in mind,  
 Faithfully following his glorious words,  
 Working joyfully to accomplish his will. 60  
 The holy Lord has built his throne  
 In his heavenly home from where he rules  
 The kingdoms of earth. Let all the angels  
 Boldly bless their eternal Lord,  
 Their kind master. Let the angelic orders, 65  
 The Virtues and Powers who work his will  
 And fulfill his words, earnestly bless  
 Their gracious Lord. May the hosts of his children,  
 And the gathering of all his faithful servants  
 Who firmly intend to work his will 70  
 Bless the Lord. Let the whole of creation,  
 Every glorious wonder, every earthly splendor,  
 Bless our eternal Lord in his presence and place—  
 Let our awe for him abide forever.  
 May my soul rejoice and bless the Lord. 75

## 103

Bless the Lord gladly, O my soul.  
 You are my God, glorious and powerful,  
 And your deeds are mighty over the sons of men.  
 You are clothed in splendor, robed in radiance,  
 Wrapped in a garment of ethereal light. 5  
 You stretch out the heavens like a hide  
 That holds up the force of the waters on high.  
 God created the heavens, the expanse of air,  
 So that he who walks on the wings of wind  
 Might easily ascend. He makes his angels 10  
 Ministers of the air; his steadfast servants,  
 A radiant flame. He crafted creation,  
 Fixing its foundation, the pillars of earth.

It will endure forever—indestructible, abiding.  
 He made the seas like a cloak of water 15  
 Over the depths. He made the heights,  
 The hills and mountains, towering over  
 The seas of men. They will dread your rebuke  
 And flee in terror from your voice of thunder,  
 Trembling in awe at the power of God. 20  
 The mountains shall rise and the high plains  
 In the places you have established for them.  
 They cannot advance beyond their boundaries  
 Like powers seeking to possess other spaces.  
 Deep springs will often issue from the valleys, 25  
 Water rise and flow in the midst of mountains.  
 All the wild animals of earth will drink.  
 Asses will wait to quench their thirst,  
 While the birds of the air maintain their nests,  
 Crying out from the rocks above. 30  
 The hills will be filled with leaves and fruit,  
 An abundance of food in high places.  
 Seeds and shoots, buds and blooms,  
 Will all be crops replenished from above  
 By the falling rain, the fruit of creation. 35  
 You also give us fodder to feed our animals  
 And sustain their lives. You made us herbs  
 And sweet spices as an aid to mankind.  
 You raised from the land bread and wine  
 To enliven and cheer the hearts of people. 40  
 Your oil anoints and refreshes our faces,  
 Your bread strengthens the hearts of mankind.  
 You fill the boughs with beautiful leaves,  
 The branches that soon hang heavy with fruit.  
 The thriving cedars in the hills of Lebanon, 45  
 Grow from the seeds you skillfully planted.  
 They hold the sparrows that carefully guard  
 Their young nestlings, a living treasure.  
 The highest house is like a lookout,  
 The house of the heron, a leader on land. 50  
 Often harts haunt the hostile peaks  
 Among the rocks where rabbits flee.



God made the moon in a glorious time,  
 And the sun to move and mark the hours  
 From dawn to dusk. You made the darkness 55  
 And the dread of night when wild beasts  
 Wake in hunger and roam about.  
 Then lion cubs come crying for food,  
 Greedily seeking what God may give them.  
 When the sun rises, it beckons them to rest, 60  
 Draws them home to their hidden dens.  
 People begin their great labors at dawn;  
 Their hard day's work ends at evening.  
 Great were your works, almighty God,  
 Wonders you made in your infinite wisdom. 65  
 The earth is alive with your skill and shaping,  
 Your craft and creation. In the immense ocean  
 Are countless creatures, great and small,  
 Over which mighty ships glide swiftly.  
 You made the dark dragon of the deep, 70  
 Let it rule the waves far and wide  
 For its own great sport. Every living thing  
 Asks you, Lord, for food to eat.  
 As they gather together, may you bring the bounty  
 From your holy hands to offer them food. 75  
 If you ever turn away your face,  
 Then they will suffer a fierce fate,  
 And their lives will quickly be taken from them.  
 They will disintegrate into their own dust.  
 Lord, send forth your own sustaining spirit, 80  
 Renewing life, refreshing nature,  
 Restoring everything on the face of the earth.  
 Glory be far and wide to the Lord of hosts.  
 May the glory of the Lord continue forever.  
 May the Lord rejoice in his wondrous works. 85  
 He watches over the entire earth—  
 He makes it tremble in fear of him.  
 If he touches mountains, they will start to smoke.  
 I will sing his praise to the end of my days  
 And tell him the truth for the length of my life, 90  
 As long as I dwell in earthly joys.

Let my praise be a pleasure to God's heart,  
 For I shall dearly love my Lord forever.  
 But the wicked sinners who inhabit this earth  
 Will be brutally destroyed all too quickly, 95  
 So they will no longer dwell in this world.  
 Bless the Lord gladly, O my soul.

## 104

Praise the Lord and his eternal name,  
 Call out to him with a pleasing voice,  
 Tell his wondrous works among the Gentiles.  
 Sing sweetly and play on the harp to him,  
 Declare his wonders far and wide. 5  
 Praise the Lord's name in your earnest need.  
 The pure of heart passionately rejoice  
 In those who sincerely seek the Lord.  
 Seek the Lord and you will be able  
 To resist all injury, all insult and enmity. 10  
 Earnestly seek the presence of the Lord.  
 Remember the many wonders he created,  
 The marvelous works, the judgments of his mouth.  
 Listen! He has honored the offspring of Abraham,  
 Who was his servant, over all peoples, 15  
 And the children of Jacob, whom he chose long ago.  
 He is our Lord, accomplished in deeds,  
 Bounteous in all his abundant works.  
 His judgments are bold, righteous and recognized  
 Everywhere on earth. He was mindful forever 20  
 Of the covenant he made, his true testimony,  
 That his chosen people were meant to maintain  
 Their special privilege for a thousand generations,  
 So that whoever held that lineage would thrive.  
 He offered an oath to Abraham and Isaac 25  
 And decreed to Jacob that the people of Israel  
 Should keep the covenant and honor his testimony.  
 And then the Lord said to him these words:  
 "I shall give to your people the land of Canaan,  
 A true inheritance, a proper possession." 30  
 That glorious tribe was not great in number,

Barely a few until their children were born.  
 Generation after generation of people were created.  
 Then other nations oppressed them with fear—  
 But the Lord would never let them be harmed 35  
 By the might of men, and he rebuked kings  
 On their account, saying sternly:  
 “You shall not touch my anointed people,  
 Harm my chosen ones in any way,  
 Or place a curse upon my prophets.” 40  
 Then hunger and famine descended on the land,  
 And everywhere mankind was deprived of bread.  
 Then God sent a servant into their presence,  
 A young man who was skillful and shrewd,  
 Joseph, son of Jacob, whose brothers sold him 45  
 Into cruel slavery. He was held in bondage,  
 Bound in fetters until God delivered him,  
 Raising him up through the wisdom of his words,  
 So that a righteous king showed him clear favor,  
 Releasing him promptly and establishing him 50  
 As a great leader over all the people.  
 He set him up in his house as a steward  
 And gave him control of all his goods,  
 So that he might teach the young noblemen  
 And also the elders with his words of wisdom 55  
 The many things that he had learned himself.  
 So Israel entered into Egypt, and afterwards  
 Jacob lived again in the land of Canaan.  
 The Lord increased the number of his people,  
 Showed them favor and firmly strengthened them 60  
 Over their enemies. First he began  
 To turn the hearts of all the Egyptians  
 To treachery and malice, so they hated his people  
 And deceived his servants. Then God sent  
 To his beloved people the glorious Moses, 65  
 His own servant, and also Aaron,  
 Whom he had chosen, teaching them both  
 The true wisdom of words and works,  
 Of wonders and portents, which they then revealed  
 To the best and most virtuous kinsmen 70

Until they overcame the people of Canaan.  
 First God punished his enemies with darkness,  
 For they did not acknowledge or accept the warnings  
 Of his chosen servants, Moses and Aaron.  
 Likewise he turned their water into blood, 75  
 Brutish pools where fish perished.  
 He sent to their land noxious frogs,  
 A living insult in the finest homes,  
 Even in the king's own chambers.  
 He spoke and there swarmed gnats and flies— 80  
 Insect hordes attacked the borders.  
 He sent down hard rains, savage storms,  
 Burning hail, hot from the heavens.  
 That fire was God's fierce retribution  
 On the land of Egypt. Then their vineyards 85  
 And fig trees perished, barren and leafless.  
 They could never flower or produce fruit.  
 He spoke and the grasshoppers ravaged the land,  
 Along with the savagely gnawing beetles  
 In numbers beyond man's capacity to count. 90  
 They devoured all the fruits of the earth,  
 Chewing the plants right down to the ground.  
 Then God struck down all the first-born children  
 Begotten and born anywhere in Egypt,  
 And likewise the lords of their great lineage. 95  
 Then he honored his people with gold and silver,  
 Leading his beloved ones away from that land.  
 And no one was ill or ailing in his tribes,  
 Either young or old. The Egyptians were glad  
 To see the Israelites go, for a terrible fear 100  
 Had come upon them. God gave his people  
 A covering cloud to shield them from harm  
 And a pillar of fire to lead them on  
 Through each dark night. They asked for flesh  
 To feed themselves, and birds flew down, 105  
 Gannets and gulls from the great sea,  
 And he satisfied their hunger with manna from above,  
 The holy bread from the heights of heaven.  
 God split a rock and commanded streams

To flow from the stone, water from a spring— 110  
 Those waters did not wet their feet when later  
 They marched together into the river Jordan,  
 For the high and holy guardian of heaven  
 Remembered the words he had spoken to Abraham,  
 The covenant he had kept with his chosen one. 115  
 So he led his people, his beloved host,  
 To a land of rejoicing, a place of promise,  
 Where he gave them power over the foreign peoples,  
 And they took possession of their land and labors.  
 There they followed their faith, always observing 120  
 The sacred laws of their holy Lord,  
 His just words and fair judgments,  
 With eager trust, always and forever.

## 105

I acknowledge and praise the eternal Lord,  
 For I know he is a good and gracious God,  
 Who has revealed his compassion to all mankind.  
 The Lord is forever wise in this world.  
 Who can ever fully know or describe 5  
 The powers of the Lord or listen to his praise  
 From all the people and understand the wonder  
 Of hearing such exalted words in this world?  
 Blessed are those who bring together  
 True justice and righteous judgments 10  
 In their words and deeds at all times.  
 Remember us, Lord, in your heart and mind,  
 Recall your people each day in your thinking,  
 And search for us here with your salvation.  
 Look on us in a fair and fitting manner, 15  
 Include us always in the company of the chosen  
 As long as we live, so that we may rejoice  
 Everywhere with your people and praise your inheritance.  
 We have sinned in the past as our forefathers did,  
 Acting unjustly, committing iniquity. 20  
 Our ancestors did not truly understand  
 The wonders you worked in ancient Egypt—  
 Those were no small miracles, my Lord.

They did not remember your many mercies,  
 The wonders you performed among those people. 25  
 They mocked your miracles as they bore their shields  
 To the wide waters of the Red Sea,  
 Yet you saved them there, Lord of life,  
 And rescued them for your name's sake,  
 When you revealed the bounty of your great power. 30  
 You rebuked the sea and swept back the waves,  
 So the sea-road dried up and you delivered them,  
 Leading them between great walls of water  
 As if they were walking on a dry desert.  
 So the Life-lord saved them from the hostile hands 35  
 Of their hateful enemies, their fierce foes.  
 Then the flood savagely drowned the fiends  
 So that not even a single witness survived.  
 Afterwards they firmly believed in his words  
 And pleased him, singing praise-songs to him, 40  
 But soon they forgot his wondrous works  
 And failed to observe and obey his counsel.  
 In the desert they discovered greed and desire,  
 A wanton craving for passion and power,  
 And they hotly tested and tempted their God— 45  
 But he answered their request and brought them food,  
 Meals for their mouths in great abundance.  
 In the camps they began to bitterly mock  
 And provoke great Moses and also holy Aaron.  
 Then the earth opened up, swallowing Dathan 50  
 And also Abiram and their faithless followers.  
 And a fire was kindled in that wicked company,  
 Consuming all of those guilty sinners.  
 Then they made an icon, a golden calf  
 In Horeb and worshipped that heathen idol, 55  
 Turning their glory into the graven image  
 Of a calf that chews on a clump of hay.  
 They forgot the Lord who had boldly saved them  
 From the hostile hands and loathing hearts  
 Of their fierce enemies, and who worked wonders 60  
 In the land of Egypt and also Canaan,  
 Making stunning miracles at the Red Sea.

Then the Lord of glory would have destroyed them  
 When the might of Moses could not save them  
 With a great miracle. But Moses protected his people 65  
 From the hostile power of their hateful enemies  
 By averting God's anger so that he refrained  
 From driving all his people into destruction.  
 Still they persisted—they could not see the value  
 Of that precious land, the best there was, 70  
 Or believe in his words, but grumbled and groaned,  
 Complaining about their hard, cruel lives,  
 Refusing to listen to the Lord's words.  
 So he raised his hand, desiring immediately  
 To expel them all into the endless desert, 75  
 To scatter their seed and so drive away  
 Their beloved offspring into the vast wilderness.  
 Then they prayed to Baalpeor for aid and favor  
 And devoured sacrifices made to the dead,  
 Offerings to alien gods. That was not right. 80  
 They boldly, brazenly mocked their Lord  
 In full force in their unholy meetings—  
 All they accomplished was their own ruin.  
 Then Phinehas stopped that sacrificial feasting  
 When he destroyed the alien, evil idols. 85  
 For that he won salvation and obtained support  
 From each of the tribes in every generation.  
 But the people shamefully mocked God again  
 With scorn and insults at the waters of contradiction,  
 Where Moses was much troubled and afflicted, 90  
 As he often was for the sake of their sins.  
 His spirit was fierce. He was unable to teach them  
 With the words of his lips God's wise will.  
 They refused to destroy the hostile peoples,  
 As their Lord and judge had commanded them. 95  
 They mingled and intermarried with the sinful heathens,  
 Learning their lore, worshipping their idols,  
 Performing acts loathsome to the Lord.  
 That was a source of great shame and infamy,  
 No small stumbling block for them. 100  
 They began to sacrifice their sons and daughters

To the fiends and demons, offering innocent blood  
 To the god of Canaan whom they vilely chose.  
 Then the earth was defiled with evil deeds,  
 Stained with sin, polluted with blood. 105  
 The faithless forsook the great works of God,  
 So the eternal Lord grew angry with them  
 In his righteous wrath and despised his inheritance.  
 He judged them harshly and handed them over  
 To the powerful unbelievers in the heathen nations 110  
 Who had always dominated and persecuted them.  
 Those fiends were not known for their friendship.  
 Familiar enemies oppressed and abused them.  
 They suffered humiliation at their hostile hands.  
 Often the Lord of life had to deliver them. 115  
 Still they provoked him in their dark counsels  
 And were often debased in their own iniquities.  
 When he saw their suffering at the hands of their enemies,  
 He heard their passion and heeded their prayers.  
 He remembered his promise according to his mercy 120  
 And regretted their suffering, their pain and oppression.  
 He took pity on them, offering them compassion  
 In the sight of their captors who had persecuted them.  
 Save us now, holy Lord, and make us whole,  
 Redeem us, O God, Father of goodness. 125  
 Gather us up from the distant regions  
 Where we all endure misfortune and misery,  
 So we might confess and praise your name,  
 The most holy one here on earth,  
 And we might be praised and gather glory, 130  
 Greatly extolled over peoples everywhere.  
 Blessed be the God of the Israelites,  
 The sovereign Lord forever and ever,  
 And may all the people say with certainty,  
 "So be it, so be it," for all eternity. 135

## 106

I acknowledge and praise the eternal Lord,  
 For I know him to be a wise God,  
 Gracious and good. His mercy is forever.



Now I will say that this same God,  
 The guardian of life, has rescued and redeemed 5  
 A great many people from hostile hands  
 And gathered them together from far lands.  
 These desperate ones wandered in the wilderness  
 From the rising of the sun in the dawn's light  
 To its disappearing in the dusk of the western sky. 10  
 From the sea and the north, they twisted and turned,  
 Drifting through the desert, unable to discover  
 A familiar landmark, a known road  
 To a city where they might live and thrive.  
 They were harrowed by hunger, hounded by thirst, 15  
 A people in peril, their souls under siege.  
 They suffered endlessly, and in their trials,  
 They cried out to the Lord, and he rescued them  
 From their tribulations, delivering them from distress.  
 The Lord of life directed them to the right road 20  
 Where they could travel freely and finally come  
 To a habitable city, a place to call home.  
 So they acknowledge the mercy of the mighty Lord  
 And acclaim his miracles to the children of men,  
 For he satisfies fully the empty soul 25  
 And satiates the hunger of those who suffer,  
 Filling them all with nourishing good.  
 The Lord listens to those bound in darkness,  
 Those who are living in the shadow of death,  
 Fettered by the chains of iniquity and evil, 30  
 The malice of oppression, the misery of want.  
 For they mocked the Lord's wise words  
 And made them worthless with a cunning craft.  
 They treated the counsel of the highest King  
 With scorn and contempt. Their hearts were hopeless, 35  
 Their spirits weak, their lives wretched.  
 They could find not help anywhere on earth.  
 They cried out in torment to their lost Lord,  
 Who rescued them and saved them from suffering.  
 He delivered them from darkness and the shadow of death 40  
 And broke their bitter chains of captivity.  
 Let them acknowledge the mercy of the mighty Lord

And acclaim his miracles to the children of men.  
 He can easily shatter the iron bars  
 And the brass doors of any prison. 45  
 He will wisely lead his people away  
 From the path of evil, the road of ruin,  
 Where they wander in iniquity, bent with shame.  
 In their sinful stupor, they rejected all meat,  
 Refused all food, then found themselves 50  
 Famished and feeble, close to death,  
 Approaching the doors of their own undoing.  
 They cried out to God in their deep distress,  
 And he delivered them again from all their anguish,  
 A misery of their own making. He sent his wise words 55  
 Which healed them and made them whole again.  
 Finally they were rescued from their grim fate.  
 Let them offer praise to their eternal Lord  
 And thank him for being merciful to mankind.  
 His works are wondrous among the children of men. 60  
 They should offer him praise and prepare a sacrifice  
 And everywhere proclaim the wonder of his works.  
 Those who seek the sea in their sailing ships,  
 Conducting their business over the wide waters,  
 Understand God's glories, his hidden powers, 65  
 In the wonder of the waves, the secrets of the deep.  
 When the Lord speaks, storm-spirits raise up  
 Dangerous waves surging toward the skies.  
 The men in their ships rise up toward heaven,  
 Then crash down suddenly into the deep abyss, 70  
 Swollen with evil, wasted with dread.  
 They are deeply troubled, tossed about  
 On a reeling road like staggering drunks.  
 What wisdom they had is swallowed up  
 By some terrible evil in the depths of destruction. 75  
 Once again they cried out to God in torment,  
 And again he delivered them from dire straits.  
 He can still the storm-wind, calm the waves,  
 Soften a gale into a gentle breeze.  
 So the wind and waves grew calm again— 80  
 The forces of peace had stilled the sea.

Then the Lord led them into a safe haven.  
 He knew their longing and saved them from peril.  
 Let them praise the Lord for all of the mercy,  
 The care and compassion, he showed to mankind. 85  
 Glorious are his wonders over the children of men.  
 Let everyone praise him in the exalted church  
 Of the Christian community. Let them all sing  
 Praise-songs to God and his eternal well-being  
 In the seats of the righteous now and forever. 90  
 He has set running rivers down in the desert,  
 Streams of joy to delight wretched people  
 Oppressed by sorrow, obsessed with thirst.  
 He turned that fruitful land into a salt marsh  
 For the sinful deeds of those who dwelled there. 95  
 He turned a wasteland into a wide water,  
 And a dry desert into deep springs.  
 He established a homeland for those who hungered  
 And gave them a city where they might survive.  
 They planted vineyards, sowed seeds, 100  
 Cultivated crops, nurtured blooms,  
 Bringing home a harvest of fruit and grain.  
 And God blessed them all with great abundance,  
 Full fields, a multitude of children,  
 And herds of cattle, not one of them harmed. 105  
 Few in number, they were often afflicted,  
 Harassed by their enemies, tormented by the trials  
 Of evil and iniquity. Afterwards they were seized  
 By suffering and sorrow, cruel companions.  
 Sometime later they scorned sacred doctrine, 110  
 And their leaders were all sorely led astray.  
 Often they swore and blasphemed on the road,  
 And deceiving themselves, sometimes wandered away.  
 But God took pity on the wretched and needy  
 And rescued them from the peril of poverty, 115  
 Guiding them home like a shepherd with his sheep.  
 When the righteous see that, they will all rejoice,  
 Remembering God's promise that he will silence  
 All evil, the words and ways of the wicked,  
 Invoking only the truth of his mouth. 120

Who is so wise in his mind and knowing in his heart  
That he can fathom the mercy of the almighty Lord?

## 107

My heart is ready, O holy Lord,  
My heart is ready to sing out psalms,  
Ready to please and praise God.  
Rise up, my glory, so that I may rejoice  
And sing with my psalter, hymn with my harp, 5  
Offering you, Lord, my early morning music.  
I acknowledge you, Lord, and sing your praises  
Among all peoples with my pleasing words,  
Offering thanks to you among the nations.  
Let me sing out my psalms—I am grateful to you. 10  
Your mercy extends to the heights of heaven,  
Your righteousness reaches beyond the clouds,  
Your compassion extends over the children of men.  
You are gathered in glory, holy Lord,  
Exalted high above heaven and earth. 15  
May your chosen ones be cleanly delivered,  
Blameless and beloved. Keep me safe  
With your right hand, redeem me,  
Heal my heart and make me whole.  
Hear me now, my Lord and Savior, 20  
You who say to the holy ones on earth:  
“Now I will rejoice and divide the tribes,  
Their tents and tabernacles, those that now stand  
In such great splendor in Shechem and Metibor.  
Gilead is mine as well as Manasseh. 25  
Ephraim, his brother, is equally my stronghold,  
My protecting helmet here in this land.  
I proclaim Judah now as my king.  
The Moabites are likewise my trusted kinsmen.  
Into Edom I will stretch out my fierce foot— 30  
Let them feel my shoe. All the foreigners  
Will be subdued and subjugated to me.”  
Who will lead me into the firmly fortified  
City of life? Who will bring me into Edom?

You are the same God who cast us from glory 35  
 And drove us away when we were sinners.  
 May you never withdraw the strength of your hand,  
 The power of your will from our assembled army.  
 Grant us your help in our time of trouble,  
 For all earthly aid is idle and vain. 40  
 The almighty Lord, our trustworthy guardian  
 Will lend us his strength, a share of his power.  
 Then he will render our enemies helpless,  
 Leaving them useless, utterly undone.

## 108

I will not be silent in my praise of you, Lord,  
 My living God, though the malicious mouths  
 Of the wicked and sinful are always open,  
 Weaving deceitful words against me  
 With their hateful hearts and lying tongues. 5  
 My enemies have conspired boldly against me,  
 Attacking me endlessly without cause.  
 They have offered me harsh insults and slander,  
 Hateful deeds instead of love.  
 They were pernicious but I always prayed for them. 10  
 They offered me evil instead of goodness,  
 They offered me loathing in place of love.  
 Set a wicked master over one like this—  
 Let the devil stand at his right hand.  
 Let his antagonist always be his accuser. 15  
 Let him stand in judgment and be condemned.  
 Let him suffer the doom he surely deserves.  
 May his pernicious prayers be turned to sin.  
 May his dwelling place become a desert,  
 A wasteland where no living creature can be. 20  
 May his days be few, dark and dim.  
 May his office of authority be filled with enemies.  
 May his children be orphans, his wife a widow.  
 May all within his reach be wretched.  
 May all his children be scorned and scattered, 25  
 Outcasts and aliens expelled from home,

Living in longing for his protection and love—  
 When they beg for shelter, may he throw them out.  
 May a powerful money-lender seize his goods,  
 Dispensing them all to an evil enemy. 30  
 May foreign hands take hold of his wealth.  
 May no man ever take pity upon him  
 Or offer aid to his fatherless children.  
 May all his offspring fall into ruin,  
 Forever poor, forever wretched. 35  
 Let his name be annihilated in one generation.  
 Let the memory of him be next to nothing.  
 May the evil and iniquity of his forefathers  
 Be brought before the mind of God.  
 May the sins of his mother never be wiped out. 40  
 Let them stand against the Lord in their deeds.  
 Let the Lord blot out the memory of them  
 By his own decree forever from the earth.  
 There was no gentle purpose in that man's mind—  
 He was full of malice and without mercy. 45  
 He persecuted the poor with a heartless passion,  
 Plotting how he might cunningly destroy them.  
 He loved cursing—so curses came upon him.  
 He loathed blessings—they were banished from him,  
 Withdrawn from his breast, his heart's hoard. 50  
 He clothed himself with savage curses  
 As if they were like the finest clothes.  
 They soaked grimly into his skin and flesh  
 Like dark water and gathered in his gut,  
 Opening his innards, slowly seeping 55  
 Into bone and sinew like an oily joy,  
 A pulpy healing for his bursting bones.  
 May he always be clothed in the rags of malice  
 And grow old suddenly, tattered and torn.  
 May his curses be like a tight belt 60  
 Wrapped around him both day and night.  
 This is the work of those who despise me,  
 Those who savagely speak ill of me.  
 May the Lord shut himself off from the one

Who speaks wounding words to my soul. 65  
 And as for you, my Lord God,  
 I pray that you might grant me mercy  
 For the sake of your great and glorious name,  
 As you have shown a compassionate spirit  
 To many before me. Guardian of life, 70  
 Deliver me now for I am wretched  
 And in perilous need. My spirit is troubled,  
 My heart heavy. I am like a shadow  
 Vanishing at evening, like a grasshopper  
 Lifted up from the goodness of the land. 75  
 I can barely walk, my knees are weak  
 From constant fasting. My flesh soaks  
 In a fragrant oil and begins to turn,  
 Dangerously transformed. Now I have become  
 A walking reproach to all my neighbors. 80  
 When people see me, they shake their heads.  
 Help me, Lord God, and make me whole;  
 Save me, Christ, in your great mercy.  
 Let them know the reality of your right hand,  
 That you have done these things to redeem me. 85  
 Let them be cursed—but may you be blessed.  
 Let those who are roused up in rage against me  
 With sinful acts be confused and confounded,  
 While your faithful servant finds joy in you.  
 Let those who insulted and dishonored me 90  
 Be clothed in shame like a man without pants,  
 Exposed to the world. I will praise the Lord  
 With the words of my mouth in the midst of men.  
 He has stood at the right hand of the needy  
 To protect the poor and provide for them, 95  
 As he has stood by me, protecting me always  
 From the fierce foes who would persecute me.

109

\* \* \*

[He shall judge nations] and act severely;  
 He shall crush the heads of many men

Widely over earth. Those who walk on the way  
 Will stop and drink from the deep streams,  
 The surging torrents. They shall be stronger 5  
 And more spirited, doing great deeds.  
 Afterwards they will lift their heads up high.

## 110

I will acknowledge you, eternal Lord,  
 And praise you fully with my whole heart  
 Before the assembly of the righteous and the just.  
 Great are the works of the Lord our God.  
 Now, as always, I earnestly seek 5  
 To know God's wishes and accomplish his will.  
 His majesty and justice abide forever.  
 He has made a remembrance of his great wonders.  
 He is gentle and generous. Almighty God  
 Gives food to those who fear and revere him. 10  
 He will always be mindful of his witness in this world,  
 His promise and covenant which he perfectly fulfilled  
 With great miracles and glorious deeds,  
 Declaring to his people that he desires to give them  
 Through his own power the inheritance of the Gentiles 15  
 As their proper possession, their true heritage.  
 God's handiwork is revealed in the minds of the righteous  
 And the fairness of judgment that he desires to raise up.  
 His commandments are true, his precepts established,  
 His judgments fair, forever and ever. 20  
 There is no deception in the laws of the Lord;  
 This is confirmed in the honor and integrity  
 Of all his decrees. He has offered redemption  
 To his beloved people, commanding them all  
 To faithfully keep his covenant forever 25  
 And hold his holy name in awe.  
 The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom  
 For those who stand in awe of the Lord.  
 This awareness will lead to a wise understanding  
 For those who observe it and put it into practice. 30  
 The praise of the Lord shall abide in this world,  
 A lasting joy forever and ever.



## 111

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,  
 Whose reverence endures in his steadfast heart,  
 Who follows his commands with with a willing spirit.  
 He shall be joyful and prosperous on earth,  
 And his descendants shall be blessed for generations. 5  
 Glory and wealth shall thrive in his house;  
 His justice shall be known to everyone on earth  
 As long as it survives. A light was revealed  
 To his beloved people, his chosen ones,  
 Who had lived for a long time in darkness— 10  
 Yet in spite of this, their hearts held true.  
 The mighty Lord has a merciful spirit—  
 He is always trustworthy in a time of trouble.  
 A man deeply glad, good and kind,  
 Wise and worthy, establishes his authority 15  
 With true words and righteous judgment.  
 He shall be blessed and fortunate forever.  
 Whoever follows God's truth and laws,  
 Never fearing afterwards any evil tidings,  
 Shall remain in everlasting remembrance. 20  
 His heart is ready for hope in the Lord,  
 His spirit is strengthened by true teaching  
 So that no malicious enemy may harm him.  
 He will spurn the sinful, despise his foes.  
 He who gathers his goods and gives them away 25  
 To the wretched and needy will see his justice  
 Abide forever, endure till the end.  
 His horn shall be lifted up in glory,  
 A wonder in this world. Sinners shall see this  
 And grow angry, gnashing their teeth 30  
 In terrible pain, howling with rage,  
 Swollen up with an ephemeral fury—  
 But the desires of the wicked shall pass away.

## 112

Children, praise now the redeeming Lord,  
 Eagerly praise the name of the Lord.  
 Let his name be blessed now and forever.

From the first sight of the sun's rising  
 Till it travels toward the edge of the western sky, 5  
 Praise the name of the Lord with all of your acts.  
 The Lord is exalted above all nations,  
 The greatest glory of the race of mankind.  
 His grandeur extends beyond the heavens.  
 Who can compare to our holy Lord, 10  
 Our God who dwells gathered in glory  
 In his heavenly kingdom, who watches over  
 The poor and lowly, caring for the meek  
 Everywhere on earth? He can raise the wretched  
 Up from the dust, lift the downtrodden 15  
 Out of the dungheap, offering his aid  
 To one who has no safety or solace,  
 No comfort or care, and establish him  
 In a life of lordship, the prince of his people.  
 He can bring a barren woman home 20  
 And bless her, the mother of many children—  
 She will feast and rejoice over her sons.

## 113

When the tribe of Israel went out of Egypt,  
 The whole house of Jacob left a fierce foe,  
 Barbarians who spoke a foreign tongue.  
 When the tribe of Judah secured the blessing  
 Of the holy one, they wielded power, 5  
 Honor and authority, over the Israelites.  
 When the sea saw them, it suddenly fled.  
 The River Jordan retreated from them.  
 The mountains rejoiced, resting like rams,  
 And the lesser hills were like little lambs 10  
 At peace among the protecting sheep.  
 What was it, O sea, that forced you to flee?  
 What was it, O Jordan, that made you run backwards?  
 The mountains rejoiced, reclining like rams,  
 The hills were festive like fair lambs with sheep. 15  
 The earth shall tremble before the gaze  
 Of the eternal Lord. The earth shall quake  
 In awe and fear before Jacob's God.

He transforms stone into wide water,  
 The broad lakes rising across the land 20  
 And converts cliffs into surging springs  
 With his ruling hand. Not to us, O Lord,  
 Not to us, O Savior, but only to your name  
 Shall we attribute the abounding glory  
 That everywhere exists throughout the land 25  
 In your powerful mercy and steadfast truth,  
 Yoked together, lest foreigners should say,  
 “Where is their God? Is he anywhere now?”  
 Our God exists above with the angels  
 In heavenly bliss. In this earthly realm, 30  
 He does as he desires, he works his will.  
 The idols of the heathens are evil icons,  
 Silver and gold, unholy images  
 Wrought with craft by earthly hands.  
 They have mouths yet cannot cry 35  
 Or speak one word. They have eyes  
 Yet cannot see. They have ears  
 That cannot hear and open noses  
 That cannot breathe. They have hands  
 Yet cannot hold anything good. 40  
 They have feet yet cannot walk.  
 They have throats that cannot wail  
 Or lament their loss—no living breath  
 Rises up from within to quicken them.  
 They are like their makers who trust in them. 45  
 The houses of Israel first looked for the Lord,  
 Seeking his help and powerful protection  
 Against their enemies. The house of Aaron  
 Likewise believed in a beloved Lord,  
 Who was gracious to them, a great support, 50  
 Providing security in times of trouble.  
 To all those who fear and revere the Lord,  
 To all those who place their hopes in him,  
 The Lord will be a stalwart friend,  
 A steadfast protector, in their hour of need. 55  
 Be mindful of us, O mighty Lord,  
 And bestow your faithful blessing on us,

As you blessed all the children of Israel  
 And also blessed the house of Aaron.  
 You brought a blessing of abounding joy 60  
 To all those who feared and revered you,  
 The great and small throughout the earth.  
 May the mighty Lord be magnified  
 Over all of you and all your children.  
 May you all be blessed by almighty God, 65  
 Who made heaven and earth. He rules the heavens  
 And has given this earth to the children of men.  
 The dead shall never praise you, Lord,  
 Nor those who travel from here to hell,  
 But we, the living, shall fervently bless 70  
 Our beloved Lord now and forever.  
 We will never stop singing praise-songs to him.

## 114

I love you, Lord, for hearing my prayer,  
 For humbly lending your ear to my plea  
 When I called you silently with the still voice  
 Of my hidden heart through all of my days.  
 A terrible sorrow surrounded me, 5  
 Besieging me with the pangs of death,  
 And the fear of hell was clinging to me.  
 Pain and sorrow, trial and tribulation,  
 Often oppressed me. Then I earnestly called  
 On the name of the Lord in my desperate need: 10  
 Beloved God, free my soul, redeem my life,  
 Lead me to safety. The one thing I know,  
 Almighty Lord, is that our God is just.  
 Offer us mercy in your enduring power.  
 The Lord protects and preserves the little ones 15  
 With a knowing grace. When I was wretched,  
 Debased and despised, he delivered me.  
 Lord, bring my soul to its resting place,  
 Its proper home, your sheltering love.  
 You have treated me to your bounty and blessing 20  
 In this earthly life. You have saved my soul  
 And brought it back from dreaded death.

You have saved my eyes from bitter tears,  
 My feet from falling. Wherever I go  
 In the land of the living, I will please my Lord. 25

## 115

I have always believed so I speak but a little.  
 I am modest and meek, for I have been humbled.  
 When I started to seek for answers in my soul,  
 I said to myself that as far as I could see,  
 All men were false and full of deceit. 5  
 What good can I give back to the Lord  
 For all the good things he has done for me?  
 I have accepted on earth the chalice of salvation  
 And will earnestly invoke the name of the Lord.  
 Precious is the death of his holy ones 10  
 In the sight of the Lord, a bright beacon.  
 Listen, O Lord—I am your servant,  
 Your handmaiden's son born through you.  
 Lord, you have broken my cruel bonds;  
 Now let me bring you my sacrificial praise. 15  
 I will pay my promise to the holy Lord  
 And fulfill my vows at the proper times  
 In the precious courts around his house  
 Before the eyes of everyone there,  
 Rejoicing gladly in the midst of Jerusalem. 20

## 116

Let all people praise the eternal Lord  
 With wise words and heartfelt hymns.  
 Let them praise together the glorious one,  
 For his kindness and mercy extend over us.  
 His great compassion is clearly confirmed, 5  
 A boon and blessing to all mankind.  
 Likewise the Lord's steadfast truth  
 Abides with us always and forever.

## 117

I will acknowledge and praise the eternal Lord,  
 For I know him to be a wise God,

Gracious and good. His mercy is forever.  
 Let all of Israel affirm this now,  
 For he is a great and glorious God, 5  
 And his loving mercy abides forever.  
 Let the house of Aaron declare this too:  
 He is a great and glorious God,  
 And his loving mercy abides forever.  
 Let all honorable people who fear 10  
 And revere the Lord affirm this too,  
 For he is a great and glorious God,  
 And his loving mercy abides forever.  
 I called out to the Lord in my time of trouble;  
 In his endless expanse he heard my plea. 15  
 Since the Lord is my help, I fear no man.  
 Since the Lord is my help, I scorn my foes.  
 It is better to meditate earnestly on the Lord  
 Than to trust too easily the human heart.  
 It is better to hope earnestly in the Lord 20  
 Than to always trust a powerful prince.  
 When all the foreign peoples surrounded me,  
 I was saved by the formidable name of the Lord.  
 When many powerful ones surrounded me,  
 God's name protected me steadfastly against them. 25  
 When they surrounded me like stinging bees  
 With their hot buzzing or raged against me  
 In a fire-storm like dried-up thorns  
 Set to blazing in a thick flame,  
 Then the name of the Lord protected me. 30  
 I was tossed and tormented, thrown about,  
 But I found my help and did not fall down;  
 I found my help and support in the Lord,  
 Who accepted me and came to my aid,  
 As was only fitting in my hour of need. 35  
 My steadfast strength came in praising the Lord,  
 Who is ever my shelter and my salvation.  
 The clear sounds of joy can always be heard  
 In the sweet mouths of the truthful and just.  
 The Lord's right hand manifests his might, 40  
 And his right hand likewise raised me up

In my dire need. I shall not die now  
 From illness or affliction but live securely,  
 Affirming far and wide the works God.  
 He castigated me, who was guiltless himself 45  
 And exempt from shame, the almighty Lord,  
 But he would not deliver me to death forever.  
 Open up the doors of the just for me  
 So I may enter and acknowledge the Lord.  
 The righteous shall enter the gates of God. 50  
 I will acknowledge and praise you, eternal Lord,  
 For you heard my prayer in my heartfelt need  
 And are surely wise in the ways of salvation.  
 That same stone that the builders rejected  
 Has now become the greatest cornerstone. 55  
 The holy Lord in his endless wisdom  
 Appointed it as the wall's powerful support.  
 That is a wondrous work in our eyes  
 For he has decorated it with beautiful designs.  
 This is the day the wise Lord made for us 60  
 And for all the generations of mankind to come,  
 As a source of joy for the human race.  
 O Lord, my God, deliver me now—  
 Save us, Lord, and make us whole;  
 Deliver us now into great prosperity. 65  
 Blessed is the man over all other men  
 Who does good deeds in the name of the Lord.  
 We will bless you here in the house of God,  
 For the Lord our God has given us light,  
 Illuminating our days with love forever. 70  
 Let us establish this as a festival day,  
 A day of celebration just for ourselves,  
 And frequently observe it with great joy,  
 Approaching the splendid horns of the altar.  
 You are my Lord God, the eternal one. 75  
 I acknowledge you with all of my actions;  
 You are my Savior—I shall always praise you.  
 I will acknowledge you now, my eternal Lord,  
 For you heard my prayer in my heartfelt need  
 And are surely wise in the ways of salvation. 80

I shall always acknowledge the eternal Lord,  
 For he is a good and gracious God,  
 And I know that his mercy abides forever.

## 118

Blessed are the undefiled ones who walk  
 Lovingly on the way in the law of the Lord.  
 Blessed are those who bear witness  
 And wisely contemplate his revealed testimony,  
 Who seek for his help with their whole hearts. 5  
 Evildoers who commit crimes cannot walk  
 In the glorious way of almighty God.  
 Lord, you have ordered all earth-dwellers  
 To earnestly keep your holy commandments.  
 I wish that my ways would follow your will, 10  
 So I could be true to your every command.  
 I will surely never be shamed or confounded,  
 If I faithfully follow all your precepts.  
 I acknowledge and praise you, my eternal Lord,  
 And thank you with my heart's deep devotion, 15  
 As I honor your judgments and observe your decrees  
 In my words and works as long as I am able.  
 May I treasure your truth in my heart and mind,  
 So you do not leave me alone in this life.

How can a young man find his way 20  
 On the right road that is ready and waiting  
 Except by observing your wise words?  
 I will seek you fully with my whole heart;  
 Do not drive me away from your precepts.  
 I have hidden in my heart the gift of your words, 25  
 Lest I should sin against you, Lord.  
 You are blessed and beloved, my gracious Lord.  
 Teach me with love how to serve you well,  
 So I may clearly know and follow your truth.  
 With the words of my lips, I will always affirm 30  
 Your powerful laws, the judgments of your mouth.  
 I will also rejoice in walking on your path,  
 Where I understand your testimony, your true witness,



Just as I fully enjoy the greatest of treasures.  
 I will trust in your justice and never forget 35  
 Any of your words as long as I live.  
 I have always meditated upon your truth,  
 So I could abide by your wise words.

Reward your servant with good deeds.  
 I will fervently hold to your words of wisdom 40  
 And observe their meaning all the days of my life.  
 Open my eyes so I can fully observe  
 All of your laws, the wonders you have created.  
 I am a wretched inhabitant of this earth—  
 Do not conceal your precious precepts from me. 45  
 My soul longs fervently for the security  
 Of your righteous words, your truth at all times.  
 You rebuked the proud, upbraided the arrogant,  
 Whom you knew for certain to be firmly cursed  
 For refusing to follow your righteous commands. 50  
 Remove far from me treachery and shame,  
 Reproach and contempt; then I will be sure  
 To remove the arrogant by all means,  
 For I want to seek out your revealed testimony.  
 Powerful princes have gathered in their halls, 55  
 Proud lords sitting on their high thrones,  
 Speaking against me with hostile words,  
 But I have remained your faithful servant  
 Striving with courage to put into practice  
 Your true words as a wise man would— 60  
 For your truth is my trust, your witness my worth.  
 I have weighed it in my mind, affirmed it in my heart.  
 It is my steadfast support as I seek out the truth.

My soul clings to the dust, cleaves to the ground;  
 Quicken me now according to your words. 65  
 I have wisely declared all my ways to you  
 And you have heard me with a welcoming spirit.  
 Teach me while I'm living how best to know  
 And follow your truth for the longest time.  
 Witness for me the way of your truth, 70

So I may take part in your wondrous works.  
 My soul grew weary with a weight of sleep  
 When grief and anxiety dragged me down.  
 Let me grow strong again with your words.  
 Deliver me now from wicked ways 75  
 And in your law have mercy on me.  
 I have wisely chosen the way of truth,  
 The road of righteousness, never hindered  
 Or led astray from your lawful judgments,  
 Clinging firmly to you and applying myself 80  
 To observe your witness and affirm your testimony.  
 You will never need to put me to shame.  
 Now I run on the road of your wise words  
 And your fair justice. Almighty Lord,  
 Make my heart hold a generous spirit. 85

Set the law before me, eternal Lord,  
 So I may walk steadily in the ways of truth  
 And always be able to seek them out.  
 Offer me the gift of true understanding,  
 So I can search out and contemplate your law 90  
 And faithfully hold it in the fullness of my heart.  
 Lead me now on the narrow path  
 Of your commandments where I can learn and thrive  
 With each step I take as I've truly desired.  
 Incline my heart so I may wisely turn 95  
 To your holy revelation, your true testimony.  
 Never let cupidity devour my heart.  
 Turn away my eyes from idle thoughts  
 And worthless works, lest I should witness  
 Nothing but vanity. Lead me, Lord, 100  
 On your true path, your precious road.  
 Set this down for your dear servant,  
 So he may learn the power of your words  
 And fulfill your will in awe and reverence.  
 Save me from shame, deliver me from disgrace, 105  
 Which is always a source of dread and doubt;  
 For this I will surely be glad of your judgments.  
 Wise in my will, I have boldly desired

To carry out your commands, always expecting you  
 To quicken my steps on the path of justice. 110

Let your gentle spirit descend on me now,  
 Eternal Lord, the gift of your gracious  
 And glorious salvation, according to your word.  
 I shall answer those who offer me reproaches,  
 Cruel words, contempt and derision, 115

That I place my hope entirely in you,  
 In the power and protection of your holy words.  
 Do not remove the words from my mouth  
 When I am speaking with force and faith,  
 For I hold in my trust those truthful words 120  
 And depend on the power and practice of your judgments.

I shall always follow and fulfill your law;  
 Let me abide in it for all eternity.

I shall walk far and wide into endless places  
 Because I have always affirmed your testimony. 125

Let me proclaim your truth in the presence of kings,  
 Where they sit and scrutinize everyone with their eyes.  
 Let me tell them your revealed testimony is true,  
 Your witness is honorable and trustworthy to me,  
 And they will never know shame in observing it. 130

Let me earnestly consider the course of your commands  
 And follow them because I have always loved them.  
 I have lifted up my hands, loving your precepts,  
 Which I faithfully follow among the people,  
 Trusting in the truth of all your pronouncements, 135  
 For your words were always beneficial to me.

Remember now, Lord, your promising words  
 As you imparted hope to your faithful servant.  
 You brought me comfort in my hard humiliation  
 With your quickening words in my time of shame. 140

Often the proud will perpetrate sin  
 Until they entirely perish on this earth,  
 But I have always followed your laws.  
 I remembered your excellent judgments, Lord,  
 And discovered in them a deep consolation. 145

My spirit fainted when I saw the iniquity,  
 The sinful deeds of the wicked ones  
 Who arrogantly and utterly abandoned your law,  
 But I always took as the subject of my song  
 How I upheld your justice in foreign lands. 150  
 I called out your name every night in my need,  
 Remembering to observe your law, my Lord.  
 All this occurred to me in this life  
 Because I sincerely sought your truth.

Lord, I affirm on my part a fitting commitment: 155  
 While I live I will fervently follow your law.  
 As I enter your presence, I entreat you here  
 With the meditation of my mind, the reflection of my heart,  
 That you will show kindness and compassion to me,  
 An abundance of care, according to your word. 160  
 I contemplate wisely your righteous road  
 And turn my feet to the way of witness,  
 So I may travel in the tracks of your testimony.  
 I am always ready and by no means reluctant  
 To observe your laws and accept your commands. 165  
 The cords of the wicked were wrapped around me,  
 The treacherous bonds of terrible iniquity,  
 But I never forgot to follow your law  
 With the strength of my mind, the intent of my heart.  
 I will rise up at midnight, whatever the season, 170  
 And hasten to a place to acknowledge your presence  
 And affirm your judgments, your justice in action.  
 I am one of the faithful who fear and revere you  
 And who earnestly keep your holy commandments.  
 The earth is filled with your mercy, mighty Lord, 175  
 Your kindness and compassion. Teach me your truth.

You have always done well by your servant, Lord,  
 Acting honorably according to your covenant.  
 I will keep my trust in the surety of your word.  
 Teach me the deep discipline of your learning, 180  
 The abundant wisdom offered in your words,

For I have completely believed in your commandments.  
 Before I was humbled, I often offended;  
 Before I was chastened, I often sinned.  
 But I kept your words as my soul's source of strength. 185  
 You are good, gracious Lord, and in your goodness,  
 Teach me what I might observe and achieve  
 Of the goodness you shape and share with us,  
 So I might properly know your truthful works.  
 The crimes of the wicked, the evils of the arrogant, 190  
 Surround and assail me, so now I resolve  
 With a steadfast spirit and a resolute heart  
 That I will seek and follow your clear commands.  
 The heart of the wicked is like curdled milk,  
 But I remain pure in my love of your law. 195  
 It is good that you humbled me and made me abject  
 So that I could learn well your righteous works.  
 It is better for me to observe your precepts,  
 Understand your laws, the rule of your commands,  
 The words of your mouth, than to receive the gift 200  
 Of untold wealth in silver and gold.

Your hands have graciously shaped me, Lord—  
 With power and purpose you have formed my flesh.  
 Now grant me the gift of understanding,  
 So I can grasp well your joyful precepts. 205  
 Those who fear and revere you in life  
 And those who look fairly on me and rejoice  
 Will both know that I truly trusted in your words.  
 Your judgments have been both righteous and just;  
 Your ready justice has wholly humbled me. 210  
 May your gentle spirit, your merciful heart,  
 Grow strong and be my source of support,  
 Just as you promised success to your servant  
 With your promising words in his days of distress.  
 May your mercies increase, your kindness and care 215  
 Grow strong and become my steadfast support,  
 So I may live and thrive in that safe shelter.  
 In quiet reflection, meditating in my mind,

I often reflect on your righteousness, contemplating  
 How to comprehend and carry out your law. 220  
 Let those who are proud be confounded and shamed,  
 Those who treat me with injustice and iniquity.  
 I will boldly follow your every command.  
 Let those who offered you loyalty out of fear  
 And those who wisely understood your witness, 225  
 The truth of your testimony, now turn to me.  
 Let my heart be pure, my soul unblemished.  
 Let me trust forever in your truthful words,  
 So I will never be blamed and corrupted,  
 Shamed and confounded for all time. 230

My soul languished, my beloved Lord,  
 When I thought about your precious salvation,  
 Seeking for a way to trust in your words.  
 My eyes have grown weary in the same way, 235  
 Seeking the substance of your spoken words.  
 Rightly they cry, "Who will comfort me  
 While I am living in this ephemeral world  
 And bring me some long-lasting consolation?"  
 Now I have become like most mortals, 240  
 A slender bottle exposed to hoar-frost,  
 But I will not forget to follow your judgments  
 And fully support your righteous works.  
 How many days remain for your servant,  
 Days in which you may judge my enemies, 245  
 Those who always persecute me unfairly?  
 The wicked have spun out their compelling fables,  
 But I could not see in them a revealing truth  
 Or recognize in them any of your lasting laws.  
 All of your statutes are noble and good, 250  
 Your precepts righteous, your commandments just.  
 The evildoers have often persecuted me.  
 Help me, O Lord! Those wicked ones  
 Who hate me so in their hostile hearts  
 Have always longed for the end of my life, 255  
 But I was not ready to leave your way,

To abandon your commands on the righteous road.  
 Almighty God, be gentle and gracious,  
 Kind and compassionate according to your mercy,  
 And I shall keep the testimony of your mouth, 260  
 The wonder of your words that you taught mankind.

Always and forever, eternal Lord,  
 Your word will endure, honored in heaven,  
 And likewise your truth will abide forever.  
 You created the earth—the earth endures 265  
 Now and forever. You made the days  
 With your mighty deeds, your wondrous works.  
 The days continue through your righteous rule;  
 You wield the world in your infinite authority.  
 Without your law in the life of my mind, 270  
 I might have been lost in endless abjection.  
 I can never forget your eternal precepts  
 And will always abide by your true words  
 All the days of my life here on this earth.  
 Save me, Lord, for I am your servant, 275  
 Faithful and devoted. I seek your words  
 And strive to live by your true works.  
 The wicked plot to steal my soul—  
 They lie in wait with hatred in their hearts,  
 Longing darkly to demand my life, 280  
 But I have always trusted in your true revelation.  
 I have seen the truth that the world will end;  
 Your decree is firm, wider than the world,  
 And your infinite glory is broad and bright.

How I have passionately loved your law, 285  
 My eternal Lord, meditating on it over time,  
 Musing on its meaning devoutly in my mind.  
 As I have followed your precepts and commandments,  
 You have made me wiser than my devious enemies  
 Who scheme and plot against me on earth. 290  
 More than my teachers, I have always understood  
 That I should seek the testimony that you have revealed.

More than my elders, I have always known  
 That I must firmly keep your commandments.  
 I have turned my feet away from treachery, 295  
 Those evil paths of deceit and deception,  
 So that I might hear and heed your words.  
 I have never strayed from your just precepts,  
 Your righteous judgments, in any of my acts,  
 For you set before me the rule of law. 300  
 Your word is sweeter than honey to my mouth;  
 Your testimony too is better than bee-bread.  
 Your precepts have taught me to seek satisfaction  
 For every injustice, every evil act,  
 Because you have established your law for me. 305

Your word is a lamp to my feet, O Lord,  
 A powerful light on the path I follow.  
 I have sworn my oaths and will keep my promise  
 To respect your judgments and revere your laws.  
 I will endure and embrace humility, Lord, 310  
 With my whole heart. Forgive me now,  
 My eternal God, so that I may be glad  
 And lead a good life according to your words.  
 May the endless yearning of my heart and mind  
 And the fervent words of longing in my mouth 315  
 Quicken my joy as I come to you.  
 Teach me the truth of your judgments, Lord.  
 My soul is always in your trusted hands,  
 And I will never forget your sacred law.  
 Sinners have laid clever snares for my soul 320  
 In their cunning deceit, their cruel schemes,  
 But I would not wander away from your precepts.  
 I have received my inheritance, a gathering of gifts  
 Like a flock of sheep, your gracious testimony,  
 Your faithful trust, from now to eternity— 325  
 These are forever the joys of my heart.  
 I have set my mind to meditate on your law  
 And inclined my heart to fulfill your just works—  
 For that I shall win an eternal reward.



I have hated sinners but loved your law. 330  
 You must help me, Lord. Be firm and faithful,  
 A stalwart defender in my time of need.  
 I trust in the truth and witness of your word.  
 Let those who are wicked leave me alone,  
 Let them pass me by as long as I meditate 335  
 Fervently on God's precepts. Accept me, Lord,  
 With care and compassion, according to the words  
 You once said, that I should live a long time.  
 Do not confuse or confound me on the way,  
 Since I've so long looked forward to seeing you. 340  
 Come to my aid surely and steadily—  
 Help me soon so that I will be safe,  
 And I will firmly meditate on your truth.  
 You have always despised the wicked ones—  
 I know they dream endlessly of doing evil. 345  
 The sinners on earth are liars and schemers,  
 But I have loved and honored your testimony.  
 Imprint on my flesh the fear of you, Lord,  
 Inscribe awe in me, deny me no dread,  
 For I would walk in fear of your judgments. 350

I have always acted in accord with justice.  
 Do not hand me over to my vengeful persecuters.  
 Safeguard your servant, receive me fairly  
 With goodness and grace so that arrogant men  
 May never slander me. They care not for kindness. 355  
 My eyes have grown weak, deformed and unsightly,  
 As I pine for your promise and seek salvation  
 In your righteous laws, your powerful speech.  
 Treat your servant with much gentle mercy  
 And teach me the way of your own truthful words. 360  
 I am your servant—grant me understanding  
 So that I may learn your revealed testimony.  
 In this hour of rejoicing, everyone should strive  
 To work your will. O Lord, never allow  
 The faithless and foolish to deny or destroy 365  
 Your just laws. Listen, O Lord,

I have loved your precepts more than gold.  
 Your truth is more precious than priceless topaz.  
 I have always held the treasure of your testimony,  
 The wealth of your words, in the trove of my heart, 370  
 And I will always detest the ways of the wicked.

Your witness is wonderful, my sovereign Lord,  
 And my soul earnestly seeks your revelation.  
 Your words and wisdom enlighten my mind  
 And illuminate the world like a bright lamp 375  
 With the light of clarity. You offer understanding  
 To all earth-dwellers. I opened my mouth  
 To catch my breath at the wonder of your laws  
 When I fulfilled your command. Look down on me  
 With a merciful eye and a compassionate heart, 380  
 As you've done for those who have loved your name.  
 Keep me steady on the righteous road  
 According to your words, lest some iniquity  
 Or injustice dominate me and wield my will.  
 Deliver me now from the devious schemes 385  
 Of liars and deceivers who twist the truth,  
 So I can faithfully keep your commandments.  
 Let your blessed and beautiful face shine  
 On your beloved servant. Afterwards teach me  
 How best to observe your truthful words. 390  
 My eyes have seen a stream of tears,  
 A wonder of waves, a torment of water;  
 So shall it be with the wicked ones  
 Who refuse to keep your rule of law.

The Lord is righteous, his laws are just. 395  
 His manner is stern, his judgments severe,  
 Made known after full and fair deliberation.  
 Lord, in your testimony you have always ordered  
 That works of justice be properly practiced.  
 Harsh persecution and hard affliction 400  
 Have often brought me into the intimacy  
 Of your holy house. Sometimes I suffered

When my hateful enemies ignored your words  
 Or willfully forgot to follow your precepts.  
 Your speech is full of a righteous fire, 405  
 Tempering and true, loved without limits  
 By your own faithful servant here on earth.  
 When I was young, my enemies despised me,  
 But I never forgot to maintain your true works.  
 Eternal Lord, your justice endures, 410  
 Your judgment remains both now and forever,  
 Your majesty and law are just and abiding.  
 When hard troubles oppressed and afflicted me,  
 When anguish and sorrow harrowed my heart,  
 I carried out your commands and counted on them 415  
 To protect and sustain me. I meditated upon them  
 Constantly in my mind. Your testimony is my truth,  
 Your judgment my justice, your witness my worth.  
 Lend me insight and understanding so that I might live.

I began to cry out with my whole heart, 420  
 My mind and soul, to my beloved Lord,  
 Singing out my sorrow, my life's cares,  
 And the Lord heard me in my loyal pleading  
 And knew that I sought his justice and truth.  
 I cried out to you, "O high King of heaven, 425  
 My Savior Christ, my ruler and redeemer,  
 Come rescue me now in my time of need;  
 I promise gladly to keep your commandments."  
 I came before you in my maturity, Lord,  
 And called out to you in my gathering grief. 430  
 You received me warmly in a fitting way,  
 Knowing that I truly trusted in your words.  
 I brought you my eyes and ears in the morning  
 And listened eagerly to your spoken words.  
 Hear my voice, holy Lord, in your great mercy 435  
 And save me according to your fair judgments.  
 My enemies are entirely too close to me now—  
 These sinners have left your law far behind.  
 Be near to me, Lord—gather me in your glory,

The surety of your truth, the wisdom of your words. 440  
 I have always recognized your truth revealed,  
 The testimony you established long ago forever.

Regard my complete humiliation, Lord,  
 Rescue and redeem me without delay. 445  
 Save me now in my beleaguered need,

For I was willing to keep your commandments  
 With full courage and observe your law.  
 Render my verdict and lovingly release me,  
 Quicken me now and let me live 450  
 For the sake of your truth, your witness in words.

The sinners were far from true salvation  
 Because they refused to seek your justice.  
 Great are your mercies, almighty Lord;  
 Let me live according to your fair judgments. 455

I have watched the wicked persecute me,  
 But I was never willing to forsake your witness  
 Or turn my back on your true testimony.

I saw many people refusing to honor  
 Their promises of peace, their vows of truth,  
 And I swelled up with anger, lamenting their loss 460  
 Because they refused to recognize the power

Of your spoken words and to keep your trust.  
 I saw in myself that I love your law  
 And fervently obey your true commands,

My beloved Lord. In your reviving mercy 465  
 Quicken me, Lord, and let me live.

The starting point of all your pronouncements is this—  
 That truth always abides in your words;  
 Your judgments endure till the end of time  
 And are solely affirmed by each day's deeds. 470

Princes and elders have persecuted me  
 Without just cause, and my heart knew fear  
 When I first investigated your wise, holy words  
 With a sense of awe and began to revere

Their righteous meaning, their noble truth. 475  
 I will rejoice with a bold spirit, an assured mind,

Over the richness and abundance of your spoken words,  
 Just as one exults who takes up a treasure  
 Like a warrior's booty that once was lost.  
 I have always abhorred evil and iniquity 480  
 And detested every wicked act,  
 Desiring to follow and love your law.  
 I have always hoped to sing a hymn,  
 A praise-song to you, my beloved Lord,  
 Seven times a day with great devotion, 485  
 For I know that your judgments are always executed  
 Faithfully and fairly, secure in their justice.  
 Those who love your name shall find peace;  
 They shall never know shame or scandal in that.  
 That will never be a stumbling block for them. 490  
 I waited expectantly for your salvation, Lord,  
 And I earnestly loved all of your precepts.  
 My soul has treasured the truth of your testimony,  
 The worth of your witness in all of your words,  
 The gift that brings great joy to my heart. 495  
 I have kept your commandments with true intent  
 And confirmed your revelation with my own words,  
 For all of my ways are wisely seen,  
 Sure in your sight, my eternal Lord.

Let my prayers approach in my passionate need, 500  
 Let them stand in your sight with my supplication.  
 Deliver me, Lord, according to your word  
 From every kind of evil, every act of iniquity.  
 Let my lips pour out my words to you,  
 Let my mouth boldly sing beautiful hymns, 505  
 Provided you are willing to teach me your truth.  
 Listen, O Lord, my tongue has proclaimed  
 The truth of your precepts, the power of your word.  
 All of your laws are fair and just.  
 Let your hand be the hand of my salvation, 510  
 Offer me glory as I accept your commandments  
 In my time of need. I have always longed,  
 Almighty Lord, for salvation here on earth.  
 Let me meditate deeply on your true law.

My soul shall live and gladly praise you, 515  
 And your judgments will aid me in all my works.  
 I was led astray like a foolish sheep  
 That desired in its heart to be lost to you,  
 And in deepest despair even wanted to die.  
 Lord, seek out your servant with great passion, 520  
 For I have never forgotten your brighter commands,  
 Your enlightening laws, your illuminating grace.

## 119

I called out to my beloved Lord  
 When trials and temptations afflicted me,  
 And the Lord listened with a gracious spirit  
 And a steadfast heart. Lord of life,  
 Deliver my soul from the treacherous lips, 5  
 The malicious mouth, the deceitful tongue  
 That spits out the hatred of a hostile heart.  
 What would you expect cruelty to offer?  
 Can any goodness be given to you  
 By a devious mind, a slanderous tongue? 10  
 Sharp, bitter arrows are always dangerous,  
 Strong and deadly after they've been hardened  
 By coals from the fire. I sing this lament  
 Of suffering and sorrow because of the fate  
 That has stolen my joy—my land is lost, 15  
 My farmer has gone, so I must leave my home.  
 I am forced to live with the people of Kedar,  
 Which is not easy for me. All of my kin  
 Who cared for my life and sheltered my soul  
 Live somewhere else. When the people here 20  
 Hated peace, I kept peace with them.  
 When I tried to speak and truly teach them,  
 They attacked me cruelly without cause.

## 120

I raised up my eyes to the lofty mountain,  
 Where I found true help in my time of need.  
 My help comes from the Lord, who created  
 Heaven and earth—it is pleasing and good.

May the Lord protect you and watch over you, 5  
 Never lead your foot on an evil path  
 Into the power of the enemy, never dream  
 Of falling asleep in your hour of peril.  
 Truly, the mind of God never sleeps,  
 For he must guard Israel against its enemies. 10  
 May the holy Lord shield and sustain you,  
 Be your staunch protector, the stalwart power  
 Always abiding at your right hand in need.  
 He will not let the bright sun burn you by day  
 Or the pale moon harm you by night. 15  
 May the holy Lord earnestly guard you  
 Against all evil and protect your soul.  
 May the eternal Lord watch over you always.  
 May the true king of souls guard your going out  
 And your coming in forever and ever. 20

## 121

I am pleased to hear these things said to me  
 In a kindly spirit and will gladly go  
 Into the house of God. My feet were standing  
 Firmly in your courtyards in the city of Jerusalem,  
 Our first home built in the beginning. 5  
 In days long ago, O my Jerusalem,  
 You were built as a beautiful, glorious city  
 With separate neighborhoods linked together.  
 Tribes were born, generation after generation,  
 Who knew the Lord. The Israelites, who needed 10  
 To cherish his name and to acknowledge him,  
 Confirmed their faith, bearing witness to God.  
 Often they sat in the seats of judgment,  
 Yet you are the judge, O House of David,  
 Established aloft in the heights of heaven. 15  
 You who are ever upright in Jerusalem,  
 Ask boldly for a peace that is unsurpassed.  
 Let those who love you and cherish you deeply  
 In the gladness of their hearts share your abundance.  
 Let those who set great store in you prosper. 20  
 Let peace be yours in your boundless power,

First and foremost. And in all of your towers,  
 Let there be plenty, a timeless abundance.  
 For the sake of my brothers, my kith and kin,  
 Not to mention my neighbors, I beg you now, 25  
 Let us always have a lasting peace in you.  
 For the house of my God, I earnestly pray  
 And deeply beseech my beloved Lord  
 That I might gather good things from it.

## 122

I have lifted up my eyes to you, O Lord.  
 You rule eternally in heaven's home.  
 Listen, O Lord, my adoring eyes  
 Are most like those of a beloved servant  
 Who pleases and praises his Lord with reverence, 5  
 And also like the eyes of a humble maidservant,  
 Carefully drawn to the hands of her mistress.  
 So our eyes are always drawn to you,  
 Our eternal Lord, our excellent Maker.  
 We gaze on our God with reverent eyes 10  
 Until the Lord of angelic Powers  
 Takes pity on us in his kind compassion.  
 Have mercy on us now, O mighty Lord,  
 Have mercy on us, for we are filled with contempt,  
 Stuffed with the many rude words of men, 15  
 Sated with scorn. Our souls are bloated  
 With reproach and shame, and the arrogant ones  
 Despise and denounce us all too often.

## 123

Unless the eternal Lord is with us—  
 So say all the Israelites now—  
 Unless the Lord abides with us forever,  
 Then evil men will begin to assail us.  
 Perhaps they want to swallow us alive, 5  
 Devour us, destroy us, if only they can.  
 They are always angry and hostile toward us—  
 Their minds are mad, their hearts hot.  
 Perhaps they want to drink us down



In a voracious gulp, if only they can. 10  
 Often our soul has passed through the flood,  
 The shrieking tumult of savage waves.  
 Perhaps the soul may at last escape  
 That fist of water, the right hand of rage.  
 Blessed is the Lord who has never left us 15  
 In cruel captivity, never given us over  
 To those who would tear us apart with their teeth  
 And wolf us down in their ravenous desire.  
 Our souls have been saved from danger and death,  
 Just like the sparrow who escapes from the snare 20  
 Of the fierce hunter. The noose is snapped,  
 The snare sprung, and we are freed,  
 Released at last, redeemed from death,  
 Deserving life. In our moment of need,  
 We esteem the Lord and call on his name 25  
 For his sure strength and steadfast support.  
 For the Lord has created both heaven and earth.

## 124

Those who trust in the Lord with their acts  
 Will be as immovable as Mount Zion.  
 No one can disturb a man who is settled  
 Firmly in the heart of Jerusalem forever.  
 The sheltering hills offer their protection; 5  
 The eternal Lord guards that perimeter,  
 Now and forever. The Lord of life  
 Will never allow the lot of the wicked  
 To extend beyond his boundaries for the just  
 Or allow the just to reach out 10  
 Their righteous hands anywhere to iniquity.  
 He will suddenly, surely punish them.  
 Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,  
 Who keep their hearts upright here on earth  
 With wise words and virtuous deeds. 15  
 The Lord will lead those receptive to the bonds  
 Of evil deceit and cruel oppression  
 Into the snares of their own wickedness.  
 Peace be to Israel always and everywhere.

## 125

When the Lord at last decides to reverse  
 The harsh and oppressive captivity of Zion,  
 We will be quickly consoled and deeply comforted.  
 Our mouths will be filled with gladness again,  
 And our tongues will rejoice, our words unwind, 5  
 Our songs soar. People will boldly say  
 Among foreign peoples that they always glorified  
 The mighty Lord when he worked his wonders,  
 His marvels among them. Magnify yourself,  
 O mighty Lord, for the wondrous works 10  
 You offer us on earth that make us bold  
 And bring us joy. Turn around our captivity,  
 Like a rolling river surging south.  
 Those who sow tears of deep sorrow  
 Shall reap sheaves of genuine joy. 15  
 Those who have walked out bitterly weeping  
 Shall harvest the fruit of their own seeds  
 And return home, rejoicing in their homecoming,  
 Bearing the sheaves they have gathered on the way.

## 126

Unless the holy Lord builds a house,  
 Those who raise its roof labor in vain.  
 Their building is flimsy as an idle boast.  
 Unless the holy Lord holds and protects  
 The town with its tribes, no watchful guard 5  
 Can properly protect it and keep it safe.  
 Why rise in vain before the light  
 With the children of men? Rise up readily,  
 Sit down surely, all those of you  
 Who have eaten the bitter bread of sorrow. 10  
 The Lord will bring sleep to his beloved ones—  
 Those who are the inheritance of the eternal Lord,  
 His familial children, his cherished ones,  
 Those first brought forth from the womb  
 As mortals on earth. Surely as the arrow 15  
 Is sharpened into a hard point in the hand

Of the strong and supple, mighty and menacing,  
 So the children of the wicked will soon disappear.  
 Blessed is the man who has fulfilled his desires  
 And sees his dreams growing up beside him. 20  
 He will never be confounded or put to shame  
 When he deals with his fierce foes at his gates.

## 127

Blessed are those who fear the Lord,  
 Our eternal God, and who walk willingly  
 In his righteous way on life's long road.  
 Then you shall taste the fruits of your labor,  
 The gift of your hands working the land, 5  
 And live blessed lives in the joyful towns  
 Where you will thrive, and all will be well.  
 Your wife's abundance will be like fruitful vines,  
 Full and flourishing in the corners of your house.  
 Your children will be like olive trees, 10  
 Grown up around your outdoor table,  
 Strong and firm, glorious and formidable.  
 Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,  
 Revering the Creator in each of his actions.  
 May the Lord boldly bless you from Mount Zion, 15  
 And may you also enjoy every good thing  
 In Jerusalem all the long days of your life.  
 May you live to see your children's children  
 Walking together and witnessing peace  
 Striding with them, advancing across Israel. 20

## 128

Often my enemies fought against me in my youth—  
 Let the Israelites now say this same thing—  
 Often my enemies fought against me in my youth,  
 But the fierce foes could not prevail over me.  
 The wicked began to construct their crimes, 5  
 Loading their evil upon my back,  
 Extending their iniquity, prolonging their cruelty.  
 But the Lord is righteous and judges wisely,

Acting immediately to confront and overturn  
 The treacherous plots hatched by the wicked. 10  
 Those who harbored great hatred toward Zion  
 Will be confounded and struck with shame.  
 Let the wicked be like the grasses of earth  
 Which flourish for a time in the thatch of a house,  
 Then dry and decay, uprooted from the earth, 15  
 Weathered on the roof, withering away,  
 Never to be harvested by the mower's hand,  
 Never bound in a bundle in the gatherer's lap,  
 Never reseeding itself, lost to the land.  
 Let all those who dream desperately of consigning 20  
 The Lord's sayings to oblivion never say:  
 "Let the Lord boldly bless us and bless you also;  
 We bless you as well with the spirit of gladness  
 And great rejoicing in the name of the Lord."

## 129

Out of the depths I have called to you, Lord,  
 Out of my misery, my terrible longing.  
 Lord, Lord, please hear my prayer.  
 Let your listening ears be alert and attentive  
 To the plight and prayers of your beloved servant. 5  
 If you witness and weigh all of our iniquities,  
 Lord, Lord, who among us could endure  
 Your righteous judgment? Who could ever act  
 Always in accordance with your just laws?  
 O mighty Lord, there is mercy in you, 10  
 And because of your law, I am able to endure  
 The things of this world. Listen, O Lord!  
 My soul has always suffered and endured,  
 For I have deeply trusted in your words—  
 So my soul maintains its trust in you. 15  
 From the glorious morning till evening arrives  
 For the children of men, may all the Israelites  
 Trust in the Lord now and forever,  
 For the power of mercy rests with the Lord—  
 He will absolve all those whose hopes are in him, 20  
 Redeeming the Israelites everywhere from iniquity.

## 130

Lord, my heart is not raised up against you,  
 Nor my eyes raised up in defiant pride.  
 I have never walked in my own majesty;  
 Wonders do not hover over my head.  
 I endure all things humbly on earth, 5  
 And my soul rejoices especially in that.  
 You nurture my heart and sustain my soul  
 As a mother nurses a baby at her breast,  
 Offering an abundance in her sweet gift.  
 Let all the Israelites look to the Lord 10  
 And trust in his bounty now and forever.

## 131

Remember, Lord, the glorious David,  
 His meekness and mercy, his goodness and grace.  
 He held himself rightly before the Lord,  
 The great God of Jacob, pledging his word:  
 “At the beginning I swore in my soul, 5  
 Making a vow to the almighty Lord,  
 That I would not enter the shelter of my house,  
 Or make my way into my tent,  
 Or climb into bed whenever I please,  
 Or lay down my tired head on my temple, 10  
 Or close my eyelids and my eyes in sleep,  
 Till I find a precious place for my Lord,  
 An acceptable tent for the God of Jacob.”  
 We heard all these things said in Ephrathah  
 And found them true in Fields-of-the-Wood. 15  
 We will enter his temple and honor that place  
 Where his feet have firmly stood before.  
 Rise up, O Lord, to your resting place,  
 For you are the ark of all holiness.  
 Your priests are girded in righteous truth, 20  
 And your holy ones wisely rejoice on earth.  
 For the sake of your own dear servant David,  
 Do not turn away the face of your anointed one.  
 Then the Lord swore a solemn oath to David,  
 Affirming again his previous promise, 25

A vow that he afterwards came to fulfill,  
 Telling David that he would place on his throne  
 Worthy offspring that came from his loins,  
 Saying, "If your children will keep the covenant,  
 The true testimony that I will teach to them, 30  
 Then their sons will often occupy your throne  
 Where they will thrive and partake of the pleasures  
 Of this earthly world." For the Lord has chosen  
 Zion for himself where he would abide  
 From the beginning, making this promise: 35  
 "This is my resting place where I will dwell forever,  
 A place to cherish because I have chosen it.  
 I will bless its widows with sacred words,  
 I will feed its famished with loaves of bread.  
 I will clothe its priests with security and salvation, 40  
 And its holy ones on earth will abide in bliss.  
 I will bring forth the precious horn of David  
 And prepare a torch for my anointed one—  
 A flaming light I will always carry  
 For my chosen one who will be celebrated. 45  
 His enemies I will clothe in humiliation and shame,  
 But upon him shall shine the purest light,  
 The bright crown of my righteous blessings.

## 132

How pleasing it is and also how good  
 That two brothers should plan in harmony  
 To share their lives in a home together.  
 So too the precious ointment, the excellent herb,  
 That Aaron used to anoint his beard 5  
 Could bless his head and hold a memory  
 With a strong scent. That powerful ointment  
 Spread down onto the hem of his garment  
 Just like the delightful dew of Hermon  
 That quickly descends on Mount Zion. 10  
 For the Lord has entrusted life's blessings to us  
 From this moment onward—a world without end.

## 133

Let the Lord's own servants bless him now,  
 Rejoicing in him. Let those who are ready  
 Stand up in God's house, keeping watch  
 In the courtyards of the house of Christ,  
 For he is the Lord, our holy God. 5  
 Lift up your hands earnestly each night  
 In holy praise, in heartfelt prayer,  
 And bless the Lord. May the good Lord  
 Gladly bless you from Mount Zion  
 In your day of difficulty, your hour of need, 10  
 For he has created both heaven and earth.

## 134

Praise now the name of the Lord.  
 Let his servants also earnestly praise him.  
 You who stand heedful in the house of God,  
 Wholly vigilant there in the courtyards  
 Of the house of Christ, that glorious God— 5  
 Praise the Lord, for he is steadfast and strong,  
 Kind and compassionate to every person.  
 Honor his name, for he is wise and worthy.  
 For God has chosen the virtuous Jacob  
 And the people of Israel as his own possession. 10  
 I have always understood that the Lord our God  
 Is great and good. His power prevails  
 Over all the gods of the earth's inhabitants.  
 Our Lord and Creator has shaped and sustained  
 Everything that is, all that he willed, 15  
 In heaven and earth, in the stretch of sea  
 Where he knows the dark, secret depths.  
 He leads the clouds in their strange wonder  
 From the ends of the earth and in his power  
 With wind and lightning produces rain. 20  
 He draws pleasant breezes from his natural treasury,  
 His secret store of all good things.  
 He slew the noble firstborn of Egypt,  
 Each one, even as far as the animals.

He sent the surest signs of victory, 25  
 Portents and promises to the people of Egypt,  
 Making known to the followers of Pharaoh,  
 Both nobles and servants, his terrible truth.  
 He smote many nations, killing mighty kings—  
 Sihon was one ruler and Og was another, 30  
 The great and illustrious king of Bashan.  
 He gave their native land to the Israelites  
 As a great inheritance, a gift to his people.  
 Your name, Lord, is called eternal,  
 And your memorial will abide in bliss forever. 35  
 The Lord will judge his people fairly,  
 And he will be a comfort to his faithful servants.  
 The heathen idols of the foolish Gentiles  
 Are silver and gold shaped by craftsmen  
 With their skilled hands here on earth. 40  
 They have mouths that speak no words  
 And beautiful eyes that cannot see far.  
 They have ears that cannot hear  
 Anything that might be pleasing to them,  
 Even if someone should call out earnestly. 45  
 They have noses that cannot smell,  
 Hands that cannot grasp anything good.  
 They have feet that cannot walk  
 Even one step. Nor can they call out  
 From their silent throats or catch a breath 50  
 In their clenched jaws and rigid mouths.  
 These lifeless, unholy images resemble  
 The people who made them and trust in them.  
 May the house of Israel boldly bless  
 Our gracious God, our steadfast Lord. 55  
 May the house of Aaron boldly bless  
 The eternal Lord. May all those who live  
 In the great house of Levi gladly bless the Lord.  
 Let all those who stand in awe of the Lord,  
 Who revere his judgment and fear his wrath, 60  
 Bless the Lord—for that is the Lord  
 Who lived as a just God in Jerusalem,  
 The Lord who is lovingly blessed from Zion.



## 135

I acknowledge and praise the eternal Lord  
 For he is good, and I know in my heart  
 He is wise and merciful now and forever.  
 I acknowledge and honor the eternal Lord,  
 The God of all gods, for I know he is good. 5  
 I acknowledge the one who is Lord of all lords,  
 Mighty in deeds, because he is good,  
 And I know that his mercy endures forever.  
 He alone made the world's glorious wonders.  
 He created heaven for the understanding of man. 10  
 He first set the earth upon the waters.  
 He made the great lights for the children of men.  
 He made the bright sun to rule the day  
 And the moon and stars to rule the night.  
 He slew the Egyptians and their firstborn children 15  
 And led the Israelites unharmed out of Egypt  
 With a mighty hand and powerful arm.  
 He parted the great Red Sea in an instant  
 And led the Israelites right through the middle.  
 There Pharaoh fell, and his doomed troops 20  
 Suddenly perished in the Red Sea.  
 Then he led his beloved people through the desert  
 With a masterful purpose and a firm promise.  
 He lifted from the hard, unyielding stone  
 Streams for the people to ease their thirst 25  
 And satisfy their need. They offered him thanks.  
 He killed great kings who ruled the world—  
 Savage death carried off King Sihon,  
 The famous ruler of all the Amorites,  
 And likewise Og, the king of Bashan. 30  
 And he gave their land as a great inheritance,  
 A lasting legacy, to the people of Israel,  
 Who were his chosen ones, his very own servants.  
 For the eternal Lord was ever mindful  
 Of our abject state and gave us great gifts. 35  
 He removed us from the hands of our evil enemies,  
 And he feeds all his creatures great and small.  
 Let all now acknowledge and praise the Lord,

The eternal God who abides in the heavens.  
 Acknowledge and praise the God of all good, 40  
 For his mercy is great now and forever.

## 136

Above the broad river of Babylon,  
 We sit and weep in heartfelt sorrow  
 As we remember Zion. Often grieving,  
 We hung up our instruments on a willow tree,  
 Because our fierce captors who carried us off 5  
 Taunted us with their twisted words, saying,  
 “Sing us a hymn of the ancient songs  
 You often sang on Zion.” But how can we sing  
 Songs to the Lord in this alien land?  
 If I’ve forgotten you, O my Jerusalem, 10  
 Let my right hand forever forget me  
 In my time of need. Let my tongue cling  
 To my clenched jaws, my muted mouth,  
 If I ever forget you, if I fail to place you  
 Right at the beginning. Let me eagerly rejoice 15  
 In Jerusalem, Lord. Remember the children  
 Who are living in Edom when you improve the lot  
 Of all of Jerusalem. Now they often say,  
 “Let’s render them useless, unable to thrive,  
 Until they accept their dwelling place.” 20  
 Behold you are bound unfortunately to Babylon  
 In bitter sorrow, her wretched daughter.  
 Blessed are those who will repay you in kind,  
 Reward you with what you have given to them  
 And also to us. Blessed is the one 25  
 Who picks up his children and places them down  
 On that glorious rock, that impregnable stone.

## 137

I acknowledge and praise you, eternal Lord,  
 With my knowing mind and my whole heart,  
 For you have heard my words with your ears,  
 The prayers I have offered with mouth and mind,  
 Passion and purpose. I will sing to you 5

Fervent praise-songs in the sight of your angels.  
 I will offer reverence to your sacred temple,  
 Your holy house, with earnest intent,  
 And in duty and devotion sing out your name.  
 Beyond your mercy, beyond your truth— 10  
 Aspects entwined together as one—  
 You have glorified your name over us all  
 Everywhere on earth. At any time,  
 On any day, I know I can call you,  
 My beloved Lord, and you will hear me 15  
 And suddenly, surely strengthen my soul,  
 Enlarging my spirit with your abiding power.  
 Let all earthly kings acknowledge you, Lord,  
 For they have all heard in their own realms  
 The words of your mouth, the music of your voice, 20  
 Mighty and majestic. Let them all sing  
 Hymns and canticles to the almighty Lord,  
 For your glory gathers and extends over middle-earth,  
 Where you are greatly praised and highly exalted.  
 From your home in heaven, you look down on us, 25  
 The lowly of earth, our eternal Lord.  
 Though I should walk on the road of wickedness,  
 Surrounded by sin, severely oppressed  
 By trials and tribulations, you will always protect me  
 From my malicious enemies, my fierce foes, 30  
 Whose deep desire is to open up  
 Their hateful minds and hostile hearts  
 Mercilessly to me. You reach out  
 With your right hand and swiftly save me.  
 May the Lord reward me with a righteous judgment, 35  
 For his loving mercy endures forever.  
 Lord, never despise, forsake, or forswear,  
 The work of your hands, the endless wonders  
 You have created for us here on earth.

## 138

Lord, you have properly proved me,  
 Searching my soul, seeing into my heart  
 With your probing mind, your penetrating insight.

You have seen my sitting down and made known  
 My rising up. You have searched my thoughts 5  
 And watched my ways coming and going.  
 You have foreseen my life's road from afar,  
 Knowing there was never any treachery on my tongue.  
 You see all things from first to last,  
 Beyond beginnings, after endings. 10  
 You created me here with your own hand,  
 Placing your palm gently on my head.  
 Your wisdom has been a true wonder to me.  
 It circles and strengthens all around me,  
 Though I cannot always reach it with reason 15  
 Or fathom it fully with my imagination.  
 How could I ever escape your spirit?  
 Where would I go in any direction?  
 How could I flee from your endless presence,  
 For your countenance is everywhere on this earth. 20  
 If I soar up to heaven, I will find you there,  
 Sitting at my side. If I turn toward hell,  
 There you are again, standing beside me.  
 If I unfurl my wings and fly before dawn,  
 Until I am soaring high beyond the seas, 25  
 I feel your loving hand leading me  
 Over the sea-road, the surge of waves,  
 Your strong right hand holding me aloft.  
 I have said to myself, "Perhaps the darkness  
 Will some day surround and overwhelm me, 30  
 But your darkness will prove an ethereal light,  
 Offering me the pleasure of a pale illumination,  
 Enabling me to see what I had never seen,  
 And in that seeing, be suddenly transformed."  
 For there is no darkness except by your power, 35  
 There is no light except by your design.  
 You offer the dark to illuminate the night,  
 Just as you provide the brilliant light of day.  
 Sometimes darkness goes with the light  
 Like sun and shadow, dawn and dusk. 40  
 You are the shaper that makes this so.

You know me, Lord, heart and soul,  
 Blood and bone. You cradled me gently,  
 Even as I came forth from my mother's womb.  
 I acknowledge and praise you, eternal Lord, 45  
 For the wonder of your works, for you are everywhere  
 Worshipped in awe for the marvels you have made,  
 The miracles that my soul naturally knew.  
 My bones that you created in a secret space  
 Will never be wholly hidden from you, 50  
 Even though my body will shortly dwell  
 Down in the dark lower regions of earth.  
 Your eyes have seen that my spirit was weak,  
 And that shall be written in your books of wisdom.  
 Our days are determined as the Lord has made them— 55  
 No one can live beyond his days.  
 Your steadfast friends are dear to me, Lord,  
 Honorable and worthy. Their power has been increased,  
 Their rule strengthened over many generations.  
 If I try to count them, they will be more numerous 60  
 Than grains of sand, beyond my reckoning.  
 Afterwards I will rise up and remain with you,  
 O Lord, if you want to slay the sinful,  
 Lay waste to the wicked with the stroke of death.  
 Move away from me now, you bloodthirsty men 65  
 Who say to yourselves in your secret hearts,  
 "Let us scheme and plot in our idle dreams,  
 Our dark desires, to destroy their cities."  
 I have hated those with a bitter venom  
 Who have plotted treachery against my God. 70  
 I will always be enraged against your enemies.  
 I hate them justly because they have become  
 My own fierce foes. Try me, God,  
 Prove me again as is only proper.  
 Examine carefully the thoughts of my mind, 75  
 The words of my mouth, the inclinations of my heart.  
 Question my motives, my loyalty and love,  
 My way of walking on the righteous road.  
 See for yourself if I have wandered

On a false path or an unjust road. 80  
 Lead me then, O Lord of life,  
 That I may walk on the everlasting way.

## 139

Rescue me in your name, eternal Lord,  
 From enmity and affliction, from the evil one,  
 And from malicious men who hatch schemes,  
 Plotting terror, dreaming up depravity.  
 All day long they brood on deceit 5  
 In their sinful hearts, their malevolent minds,  
 Insinuating schemes, picking fights.  
 Their tongues are twisted with infectious words,  
 They speak like serpents with venomous lips,  
 And the poison of asps lurks in their mouths. 10  
 Protect me, Lord, from the hostile hands  
 Of the wicked ones, from cruel criminals.  
 Deliver me quickly, O Lord of life,  
 For they plot and scheme to trip me up,  
 Dogging my steps with a dangerous passion. 15  
 The proud ones have laid a snare for me  
 Hiding a trap of twisted ropes,  
 A netted noose to bind my feet.  
 But I said to the Lord in my dire straits:  
 "You are a beloved God to me. 20  
 Hear my prayer, holy Lord—  
 My voice cries out passionately to you."  
 Lord, Lord, you are the gentle strength  
 Of my salvation, the steadfast power  
 Of my deliverance. On the day of battle, 25  
 You will shield my head against my enemies.  
 Do not deliver me into the designs of the wicked  
 Against my desires. Do not abandon me  
 In my lifetime lest they become exalted over me.  
 Let the rancor of their minds, the malice of their mouths, 30  
 Hang heavy upon them, forever haunting them.  
 Let them sleep soundly beneath a blanket  
 Of burning coals. Let them feel the fire  
 Of their own evil, unable to withstand

The malice and misery of their own making. 35  
 Let the eloquent man with a hostile tongue  
 And harmful words never be led  
 Anywhere on earth. Let evil overwhelm  
 The unjust man until he perishes,  
 Unseen on earth. I know that the Lord 40  
 Will reward the needy, avenge the poor,  
 And render a fair judgment to the wretched.  
 For truly the just desire in their distress  
 To praise your name. The righteous who live  
 Wisely in this world will always be blessed, 45  
 Destined to inherit the earth in your sight.

## 140

I cry out to you, my beloved Lord—  
 Hear my voice, hearken to my prayer,  
 When full of sorrow, I ask for your aid.  
 Let my prayer rise up quickly in your sight  
 As incense burning, wisps in the air, 5  
 Curling from its coals, those devouring embers.  
 Let my lifted hands likewise be an offering  
 When I devoutly recite my evening prayer.  
 Set a benevolent guardian over my mouth  
 So I speak no evil; set a worthy watch 10  
 Upon my lips to preserve only wisdom.  
 Do not turn my heart on the twisted ways  
 Of hatred and harm so that I let loose  
 Any warped words or wicked thoughts  
 And become an apologist for loathsome sins. 15  
 Let me never be friends with cruel criminals  
 Or join the fellowship of the greatest thieves.  
 May the righteous rebuke me when I am wrong  
 And reprove me with a kind and gentle disposition.  
 May the oil of sinners never anoint my head, 20  
 For my prayer shall be secret, a sign against the evil  
 That is always perversely pleasing to them.  
 Lord, let the sinners be swallowed up  
 Beside the stone of power, the righteous rock.  
 Their judges are deaf to the truth of my words— 25

They listen without learning, hear without heeding.  
 Just as the earth is unevenly formed  
 With moors and meadows, hollows and hills,  
 So our bones are buried, thrust cruelly down  
 Near the dark pit where sinners dwell 30  
 In the bondage of hell. I believe in you, Lord,  
 In all of my actions, in all of my perceptions,  
 All I see with my eyes and understand with my mind,  
 So do not take my soul from me.  
 Save me from the devious snares of sin 35  
 Which are set for me in hatred and hostility.  
 Let no sinner deceive or seduce me.  
 Save me from those who plot evil against me.  
 Let the wicked fall into their own traps,  
 Twisting in the nets of their grasping schemes. 40  
 Let me walk alone, untouched by their evil,  
 Until I am free at last to pass on.

## 141

My stormy voice cries out, O Lord,  
 My vehement prayer, a powerful plea  
 Beseeching the Lord with a fervent voice.  
 I pour out my petition in the presence of the Lord,  
 Passionately recounting my cruel tribulations. 5  
 For my enemies scheme to exhaust my soul—  
 You know my way and lead me forward.  
 On the grassy path I now must travel,  
 Proud enemies have prepared traps for me.  
 Readily I look on the right-hand side— 10  
 No one knows me or greets me with kindness.  
 They steal my flight and seal off my escape.  
 No one wants to look out for my soul.  
 So I secretly call to you, Lord, saying,  
 “You are my truth, my trusted hope. 15  
 You are my refuge, my safe shelter,  
 My only share in the land of the living.”  
 Attend to my soul, Lord of mankind,  
 For I am sorely shamed, endlessly humiliated.  
 Deliver me from the hateful and hostile ones 20



Who suddenly assail me with a savage strength.  
 Release me now, release my soul  
 From its prison cell, its hard confinement,  
 So I am free at last to utter your name  
 In a fervent prayer. The righteous and wise 25  
 Will wait for me here till you arrive again  
 To greet me gladly with a just reward.

## 142

Lord, please lovingly hear my prayer,  
 Accept with your ears my supplication.  
 Hear me in truth and hold me in righteousness.  
 Do not enter into judgment with your servant,  
 For in your eyes no one on earth is just. 5  
 My enemies have attacked me, assailing my soul,  
 Dragging me down, diminishing my life.  
 They have spitefully put me in a secret place  
 To dwell in darkness, a grim hideout,  
 Like dead bodies you cover with earth. 10  
 My heart is troubled, my spirit stunned.  
 At last I remembered my earlier days,  
 Meditating here on your glorious handiwork.  
 I devoutly stretched out my arms to you,  
 When my soul was thirsty as parched earth 15  
 In a wasteland without water. Hear my prayer,  
 Harken to my plea. Come quickly to save me.  
 Now my soul is grieved, engulfed in sorrow,  
 My beloved Lord. Do not turn away  
 Your face from me, your kind countenance, 20  
 My Lord of glory, or I will be wretched  
 As one who plunges into the pit of darkness,  
 The depths of hell. O mighty Lord,  
 Make me hear your mercy in the morning,  
 For I trust in you and hope for your help. 25  
 Make me wise, O Lord, so that I may know  
 The right way to proceed with a clear purpose.  
 Now I long to surrender my soul to God  
 For a fair judgment. Deliver me, Lord,  
 From all of my enemies, my fierce foes, 30

For I turn to you and trust in your help.  
 Teach me how to act and work your will,  
 For you are my God who has always accomplished  
 Good things for me. Your generous spirit  
 Has led me along so that I justly journeyed 35  
 On the right road. Let me honor your name  
 With passionate praise. Save me, O Lord,  
 For your name's sake so that I may be saved  
 And live my life resolutely in your justice.  
 You have led my soul from trouble and torment, 40  
 Trials and temptations, to dwell in your mercy.  
 May you drive away all of my enemies  
 And destroy my foes with their hostile hearts  
 Who attack me, afflicting my soul with sin,  
 Because I am always your own faithful servant. 45

## 143

Blessed is the Lord, my beloved God,  
 Who first molded my hands to battle,  
 My fingers to fight. He is my source of mercy,  
 My help and refuge in my hour of need.  
 He is my loyal defender, the savior of my life. 5  
 Glorious one, you are my powerful protector.  
 My faith is steadfast, my trust holds true  
 That you will save me and justly subjugate  
 Many peoples to me. What is man, mighty Lord,  
 That you would make yourself known to him, 10  
 So clearly revealed? Or the son of man,  
 That you would take any account of him?  
 Man is a frail creature, wanting strength.  
 His days are brief, as one might see  
 A passing shadow shimmering for a moment. 15  
 Bend down your heavens, holy Lord.  
 Touch your mountains and make them smoke.  
 Let your lightning flash, your thunder roll,  
 So they light up the world—then make them vanish.  
 Scatter your enemies with fiery arrows, 20  
 Let your wrath reach out and afflict them all.  
 Stretch out your hands from on high, O Lord,

And deliver me from the deeps, the savage seas,  
 And from the hostile hands of dangerous people,  
 The evil offspring, those alien strangers, 25  
 Whose mouths speak vain and wicked words,  
 Whose right hands are always reaching for iniquity.  
 I will skillfully sing a new canticle to God,  
 Making music on the psaltery or harp  
 Strung with ten strings. So I sing out to you, 30  
 My beloved Lord, with deep devotion.  
 You offer a sustaining salvation to kings,  
 As you delivered your dear servant David  
 From the cursed blade, the cruel sword.  
 Save me, Lord, from the savage seas 35  
 And the hostile hands of dangerous people,  
 The evil offspring, those alien strangers  
 Whose mouths speak vain and wicked words,  
 Whose right hands are always reaching for iniquity,  
 Whose sons are like splendid branches, 40  
 Like noble trees planted firmly in their youth,  
 And whose daughters have been lovingly clothed,  
 Dressed and adorned with precious ornaments,  
 So they look almost like a glorious temple.  
 Their storehouses are full, bursting with grain, 45  
 Flowing from here to there like a river.  
 Their sheep are prolific, their oxen fat,  
 Moving about in their pens and pastures.  
 Those people never falter or fall to the ground,  
 Abased or abused. They do not cry out 50  
 In hopeless suffering and sorrow in the streets;  
 Nor does passing over strike them down  
 Easily or often. These people are blessed—  
 At least some others call them so—  
 For whom fortune falls out so abundantly on earth; 55  
 But truly blessed are those beloved people  
 For whom the Lord God will be their judge.

## 144

I will keep you as king, my exalted God,  
 And fervently praise your name forever.

Each and every day I will bless you  
 And fervently praise your name forever.  
 The Lord is great and should be greatly praised 5  
 With faithful purpose and fervent intent.  
 The Lord's beneficence knows no boundary—  
 His power is profound, his glory unfathomable.  
 Let each generation praise your works  
 With their spoken words, proclaiming your power. 10  
 Let them wisely describe your great majesty,  
 Your gracious nature, and your glorious wonders,  
 Speaking to the multitudes far and wide.  
 Let them declare the wise power of your wonders,  
 Your awesome strength, your endless authority. 15  
 Let them remember the liberality of your mind  
 And relate to others the generosity of your spirit,  
 The wisdom of your counsel, the sweetness of your grace.  
 Let them all understand and tell others your truth.  
 The Lord is loving, kind and compassionate, 20  
 Powerful and patient, mighty and merciful.  
 The Lord is gentle and gracious to all.  
 His mercies are manifest in his wondrous works,  
 Known to mankind now and forever.  
 May all your works acknowledge you, Lord, 25  
 May your holy ones bless you here on earth.  
 May they declare your might to the children of men  
 Among all the tribes and all the generations  
 And proclaim to all the majesty and wonder,  
 The grandeur and glory, of your great kingdom. 30  
 You have made this known over endless generations,  
 Wherever the children of men come together  
 In a shared gathering. You have also made known  
 That your might extends over all of middle-earth  
 And abides in the wisdom and glory of your realm. 35  
 Yours is the kingdom, eternal Lord,  
 Anchored in good advice and counsel.  
 You wisely govern the kingdoms of the world,  
 Ruling over all the inhabitants of earth  
 From family to family, generation to generation. 40  
 The Lord is wise in his words and works,

Holy in everything he says and shapes,  
 Faithful and true in all that he does.  
 Holy God lifts up those who have fallen,  
 Raising up the wretched, aiding the oppressed. 45  
 The eyes of the wise look up to you, Lord,  
 Longing for sustenance, a nourishing abundance,  
 And you offer them food for every season  
 In the proper time by your own measure.  
 Forever wise, you open your hands 50  
 And fill them with blessings for all living creatures.  
 The Lord is just and righteous in his ways,  
 Wise and holy in his works on earth.  
 The Lord is near to those who need him,  
 To those who seek him with sincere feeling, 55  
 Who call upon him with a faithful heart,  
 Who earnestly work his will on earth,  
 Who fervently fear and truly revere him.  
 He will hear their prayer and soon save them.  
 The Lord will protect and preserve all those 60  
 Who gladly maintain their love for him,  
 And he will scatter sinners over distant regions.  
 My mouth shall gladly praise the Lord  
 In every season. All living creatures  
 Should bless the Lord's holy name 65  
 With faithful words and a true spirit  
 Now and forever for all eternity.

## 145

Praise the Lord and Savior, O my soul.  
 I will praise the Lord willingly all my life,  
 Singing psalms to that gracious God  
 As long as I live. Do not put your trust  
 In princes or people anywhere on earth. 5  
 There is not much salvation in that direction.  
 As their souls go forth, they will return to earth,  
 The bed of clay from which they came,  
 The grave where they are bound to lie.  
 On that dark day their thoughts shall perish. 10  
 Then blessed will be those whose faith was firm,

Who maintained their trust in Jacob's God,  
 Who always aided them in days gone by.  
 He made heaven and also earth,  
 Land and sea, and the scores of creatures 15  
 Who live therein. The Lord maintains  
 His truthful word, his righteous way,  
 And renders wise judgments, his fair justice,  
 Favorable to the wretched who have endured affliction,  
 The hurt and heartache of each bitter wrong. 20  
 The Lord likewise feeds those who suffer  
 A severe hunger, a savage thirst.  
 The Lord will avenge the children of the oppressed,  
 Free the fettered and give them life,  
 And also restore sight to the blind, 25  
 For the Lord has always loved the just.  
 The Lord will gladly watch over strangers  
 And offer new life to widows and orphans.  
 He will embrace and sustain these weak ones,  
 But he will seize all sinners and destroy them utterly. 30  
 The mighty Lord rules with righteous wisdom  
 And fair judgment throughout eternity—  
 And your God, O Zion, will abide forever.

## 146

Praise the Lord for he is glorious and good.  
 Sing psalms to him earnestly and often  
 With beautiful music and eloquent words.  
 The Lord builds Jerusalem time and again  
 And gathers to her all those exiled from Israel. 5  
 That hero has sometimes afflicted hearts,  
 But he will heal suffering and bind up sorrow.  
 He can count the stars and call them by name.  
 The greatness of God is beyond measure;  
 No one can completely comprehend his wisdom. 10  
 The wonders of God are beyond all measure.  
 The Lord accepts the merciful and mild,  
 But he brings down the wicked upon the ground.  
 Begin to praise and acknowledge the Lord,

Sing gladly to God on the harp and lyre. 15  
 He covers the heavens with bright clouds  
 And readies the gift of rain for the world,  
 Sending it down to the flourishing earth.  
 He brings forth grass on the mountains and hills,  
 And hay in the fields to feed the cattle, 20  
 And the gift of grain to support mankind.  
 He sustains the fledgling raven till it grows  
 And soars into flight, calling out for carrion.  
 You have no longing for the strength of men,  
 Almighty Lord, nor do you take any pleasure 25  
 In precious tents, even though men on earth  
 Would shape and fashion such beautiful things.  
 The Lord of glory is pleased with those  
 Who fear and revere him in words and deeds  
 And who place their hopes in his merciful spirit. 30

## 147

Praise the Lord gladly, O Jerusalem,  
 And likewise praise your true God, O Zion,  
 For he strengthened you against hatred and hostility,  
 So you were able to shut your gates firmly  
 Against your enemies. He also blessed 5  
 All the children of men living within you.  
 He expanded your borders and helped you gain  
 The stability of peace in the borderlands.  
 He satisfied your hunger with the finest grains  
 Of the fattest wheat. The Lord speaks, 10  
 Pouring his words upon the earth,  
 And his speech flows on like a mighty river.  
 He sends down snow like tufts of wool  
 And scatters it like ashes everywhere on earth.  
 He hurls ice-crystals, hail from the clouds, 15  
 Like tiny bites of the hardest bread—  
 No one can stand in the face of such cold.  
 He sends down his word in a blast of wind;  
 It blows intensely and flows like a stream  
 Suddenly transformed into surging water. 20

He proclaimed his word wisely to Jacob,  
 That upright leader in ancient days,  
 As he also declared his judgments to Israel.  
 He had never offered this to earlier people,  
 Or revealed to them secretly his laws and judgments. 25

## 148

Praise the Savior, the Lord in the heavens,  
 Praise and acclaim him loudly in the heights.  
 Praise him, all you bands of angels,  
 Likewise praise him, all you hosts.  
 Let the sun and moon also praise him, 5  
 And each of the stars and the glorious light.  
 Let the heavens of all heavens gladly praise him.  
 Let the celestial waters above the clouds  
 In their heavenly home likewise praise him,  
 For he spoke and the waters were stunningly created. 10  
 The wonders of the world took shape with his words,  
 All living things, the gifts of his grandeur.  
 God commanded them all and they were created.  
 He established them all throughout eternity,  
 And they will thrive. He imposed nature's law, 15  
 His decree laid down and observed by all.  
 Let the dragons likewise praise the Lord  
 From earth and air. Let all the depths  
 Of land and sea praise the name of the Lord—  
 Fire and frost, the hardest of hail, 20  
 Icy storms and new-fallen snow,  
 The spirits of all God's natural wonders  
 That desire to fulfill his word and will;  
 Also mountains and hills, fields and groves,  
 The great trees that produce mast and fruit 25  
 For all of mankind, and the buds of cedars.  
 Let beasts and cattle praise God at once—  
 Every species of serpent upon the ground  
 By its separate name, every feathered fowl,  
 Every bird with wings, all the kings of earth 30  
 Who rule the peoples, all the earthly princes,



And the powerful ones who render judgments  
 Upon mankind anywhere on earth.  
 Let young men and joyful maidens—  
 Let all together, young and old, 35  
 Gladly praise the name of the Lord,  
 For his name is exalted over heaven and earth,  
 Acclaimed and honored over all of mankind.  
 He lifts up the horn of his faithful people,  
 Lighting up his beloved holy ones with a song. 40  
 May peace endure for his devoted people  
 Forever in Israel. May they all dwell  
 Gladly in his presence now and forever.

## 149

Sing praise-songs to the Lord in one accord.  
 Now sing a new praise-song to the Lord.  
 Let the song be sung in the assembly of holy ones.  
 Let the Israelites also rejoice in the Lord.  
 Let the children of Zion rejoice most of all, 5  
 Exulting in their king. Let them fervently praise  
 His glorious name in crowds and choirs.  
 Let them all praise him on the psaltery and timbrel  
 With great gladness at the usual times.  
 Let them all praise him on the harp and lyre, 10  
 For the Lord is surely well pleased with his people.  
 He will offer salvation to the meek and mild.  
 Then the holy ones will rejoice in glory  
 And fill their houses with bliss and joy.  
 The memory of God will be in their mouths— 15  
 They will partake of that with great pleasure.  
 They will also hold a sword in their hands  
 To execute judgment on their hostile enemies,  
 A vengeance on the wicked and wayward nations.  
 They will plan to capture foreign kings 20  
 And noble princes in alien lands  
 And bind them boldly in iron chains,  
 So they may render a grievous judgment  
 Against them all. And this solemn judgment

Will endure forever, inscribed in glory,  
Written down in doom so everyone will know—  
This is the glory of the holy ones on earth.

25

150

Praise the gracious Lord in his holy places,  
Praise him for his mercy and saving power,  
Praise him for the great gift of salvation,  
Praise him for all his glory and grandeur,  
Praise him for his endless magnificence,  
Praise him with the true sound of a trumpet.

5

\* \* \*

## THE METERS OF BOETHIUS

There are two surviving OE translations of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (The Consolation of Philosophy) by Boethius. The one in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS Bodley 180) contains prose translations of both the prose and poetic passages of the Latin text and is dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century (Godden and Irvine, v. I, 12–13). The other one in the British Library in London is part of a composite manuscript (MS Cotton Otho A.vi) that contains a translation alternating prose and poetry as in the original Latin (though not all the poetic sections are so translated) as well as other materials added later (18–19). The Boethius portion of the manuscript dates to the tenth century. This manuscript was severely damaged in the Cottonian fire of 1731, and many of its poetic passages must be taken from a copy that Franciscus Junius made of the manuscript in the seventeenth century in preparation for a book published after his death. There is also a copy of a fragment of a single leaf, now lost, that was made by Napier in 1886. (For a detailed description of these manuscripts, see Krapp, 1932b, xxxv ff., and Godden and Irvine, v. I, 9 ff.).

The relationship between the two full OE texts of Boethius is a complex and often debated one. Krapp surmises the following:

The two parchment manuscripts . . . represent two stages in the history of the Anglo-Saxon versions of Boethius. The first version, generally ascribed to King Alfred, contained the text of Boethius, verse and prose alike translated, with some omissions, from the original Latin into Anglo-Saxon prose. This is the text represented by MS. Bodley 180. Then someone, perhaps Alfred, made an Anglo-Saxon metrical

version of the Latin Meters. This metrical version, which is not found alone in any existing manuscript, was made, not directly from the Latin text, but from the earlier Anglo-Saxon prose translation of the Latin Meters, several of the Meters being omitted. After the metrical version had been made, the several Meters in their new form were available for substitution for the corresponding texts of the older prose version. A resulting composite text of the Anglo-Saxon prose, as in the older version, and the Latin Meters represented by Anglo-Saxon verse, is found in MS. Cotton Otho A.vi. (1932b, xxxv–xxxvi)

Godden and Irvine agree that the OE meters must have been based on an earlier prose translation represented by MS Bodley 180, saying:

The prose preface claims that Alfred first translated the Latin text and then turned it into verse, and it is a reasonable supposition that the verse parts are indeed based on the corresponding OE prose rather than the other way round. The prose rendering of the Latin metres is in almost every case much closer to the Latin than the verse rendering is, with the latter characteristically being more expansive and often repetitive, and the prose rendering rarely uses poetic diction or alliteration that marks the verse. If the prose were based on the verse, it would be hard to explain how the reviser managed so successfully to remove the characteristic language of verse and so much of the expansive detail. (v. I, 44)

We don't know if the original prose version was considered a draft to be used by a poetic translator to rework the metrical passages or if it was intended as a final version, circulated, and then recopied by someone who retooled most of the metrical sections into poetic form (Godden and Irvine, 45). The retooled poetic passages may also have been used separately for another purpose and only later worked into a version of the whole. Because of their similarity of prose passages, both manuscripts must derive from an earlier manuscript, now lost (46–48). Godden and Irvine note that if the attribution of the texts in their prefaces to Alfred is correct, the likely composition date for the prose passages is 894–899, at the end of his life, but if the attribution is not correct, then the meters were probably composed by someone else sometime between 890 and 950 (145 ff.). They point to “a number of factors which cast doubt on the reliability of the prefaces as evidence for the authorship” and finally support the hypothesis that “the OE Boethius was the work of an unknown

writer of substantial learning, not necessarily connected with King Alfred or his court, but working some time in the period 890 to about 930, probably in southern England” (146). Questions about the relationship between the prose translator and the metrical translator remain.

Boethius was born in about 480 CE to a noble Roman family that was Christian. He was educated in the Platonic Academy at Athens. In 510, he served as consul to King Theodoric and was an active scholar “engaged in translations and adaptations of Greek philosophical texts and the composition of theological tracts that employed his philosophical training to intervene in the bitter disputes between east and west” (Godden and Irvine, v. I, 3). In 523, he was appointed *Magister officiorum* or Master of Offices, in charge of civil servants. Sometime around 524–25, “his fortunes were reversed when he was implicated in a plot against Theodoric, who sentenced him to death” (Fulk and Cain, 53). He proclaimed his innocence, but the senate confirmed the sentence and he was executed. While awaiting his execution in prison, he wrote *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (The Consolation of Philosophy). This work is a series of Platonic dialogues in prose and poetry in which Lady Philosophy heals the mind of Boethius by showing him the transient nature of worldly goods and the eternal nature of the divine Good, and by convincing him of the providential plan and purpose of God. As Green says, “Boethius undertook to justify the ways of God to men, to explore philosophically the mysteries of the divine will as it is manifested in the order, and apparent disorder, of temporal events” (xviii). The *Consolation* draws upon many traditions. Godden and Irvine point out that it is an apology for Boethius’s life and a defense of his political actions, a consolation that explores the proper rational movement from railing against ill fortune to an acceptance of providential purpose, a philosophic exploration of the nature of true and false happiness and of the relation between God’s foreknowledge and man’s free will, and an elegant literary work interspersing prose and poetry (v. I, 3–4). Green observes that “Boethius ostensibly uses the poems for purposes of rest and refreshment,” noting that Lady Philosophy remarks “that she intends to cure the sickness of her patient gradually, and that she will use the sweet persuasion of rhetoric and the grace of music to prepare him for the strong medicine of the highest philosophical speculation” (xx). Though the *Consolation* was probably completed in 525, the earliest manuscripts date from the ninth century; some forty manuscripts survive in the period up to the early twelfth century (Godden and Irvine, v. I, 4–5).

There are a great many differences between the Latin original and the OE prose translation of the *Consolation*, and Fulk and Cain argue that the OE

version “is better considered an adaptation than a translation” (55). Godden and Irvine point out that “whether such differences are due to the author’s inability to comprehend the arguments and allusions of Boethius or his often dense syntax, or to a conscious preference for a quite different line of argument and illustration, for a very different readership, or to something between those two possibilities, has been much debated and is in part a matter of personal opinion or speculation” (v. I, 50). Some of these differences include the shift of Lady Philosophy to a masculine Wisdom and of Boethius occasionally to his own mind (see Cook, 1996, on this shift); differing attitudes toward worldly goods, political power, fame and fortune, and foreknowledge and free will; and the addition of numerous Christian references both explicit and implicit—though as Green notes, “Nothing in [the Latin original] is inconsistent with patristic theology; indeed precedent for nearly every idea which Boethius proposes can be found the work of St. Augustine” (xv). (For more on these differences, see Fulk and Cain, 55 ff., and Godden and Irvine, v. I, 50 ff.; for the role of translation during Alfred’s reign, see Benison.) The exact relationship between these manuscripts and the transmission of the texts remains much debated.

The movement from the OE prose translation of the Latin meters in the *Consolation* to the OE poetic version of those meters is complex. The OE metrical verses are almost certainly based on some early version of the prose translation of those same verses, as Godden and Irvine argue (though see Kiernan, 1998, for an alternative view). Most but not all of the original meters are translated into verse with shifts of meaning that vary from slight to substantial. Fulk and Cain argue that “Alfred’s purpose in versifying the *Meters* thus seems not to have been to compose memorable poetry but merely to give his translation a form comparable to that of his source, and thus to provide for those without knowledge of Latin an experience more nearly analogous to that of reading the original” (58). There are two possible caveats to this: (1) Producing such an analogous reading experience is no mean feat, given that the original Latin poems were composed in twenty-seven different meters (Godden and Irvine, v. I, 4). (2) The importance of the meters is underlined by Lady Philosophy, who often remarks in the original that she needs poetry and music to heal her patient and to provide him with a deeply moving sense of consolation. The importance of this empathically communicated poetic and musical truth is often reaffirmed by the analogous Wisdom in the OE versions.

For the modern poetic translations in this collection, I have used the OE poetic translations in the C text of the edition of Godden and Irvine, which are based on the Cotton MS Otho A.vi text, with readings from MS Junius

12 filling in for the damaged portions. Where there are difficult or debated passages, this sometimes calls into question what the best source is for arriving at the OE poet's intentions or his readings (or misreadings) of his original(s). At each stage of the transmission and/or translation process, some revised reading and reshaped writing is bound to take place. The OE prose translation takes some liberties with the Latin text. This is also partly true in the poetic versions, both the OE poet's and my own, since the demands of the alliterative, strong-stress line require certain subtle adjustments in meaning. As the preface to the Old English translation of the *Consolation* says, a good translator (here identified as King Alfred) will translate "sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense, in whatever way he can most clearly and meaningfully explain and interpret it, on account of the various and abundant worldly concerns which have occupied his mind and body" (Godden and Irvine, v. I, 239, B text; translation mine). For more on the complexities of translating the Boethian meters, see the section, "On Translating Translations," in the essay "On Translating Old English Poetry" at the beginning of this book.

Readers who want to read a prose translation of the original Latin text should see Green. Those who want to read prose translations of the two main Old English texts should see Godden and Irvine, to whose work I am indebted in my rendering of the modern poetic translations below. I have included in brackets here a brief summary of the prose passages that occur between the poems.

## The Meters of Boethius

### *Verse Preface*

King Alfred, ruler of the West-Saxons,  
Told this old story, weaving these words,  
Revealing his rich skill as a poet.

His desire to do this ran broad and deep—

He wanted to offer these scripted songs

5

As a generous and joyful gift to all of us

Who love poetry, its craft and power,

Hoping that these verses might help the vain

To lift up their minds, temper their pride,

Escape boredom, and embrace the good.

10

Now I will speak, proclaim in poetry,

What people should know, the precious truth

They hold in their hearts. Hear it if you will.

## 1

It was long ago that the Goths left Scythia,  
 Bearing battle-shields out of the east,  
 Two mighty nations spreading southward,  
 Growing greater with each succeeding year  
 Under the righteous rule of two conquering kings, 5  
 Raedgota and Alaric. They prospered in power.  
 Then many of the Goths came over the Alps,  
 Driven by pride and a lust for war,  
 Full of battle-boasts and eager to attack  
 The Roman lands and subdue them all. 10  
 The blood-hungry shield-bearers descended  
 With shining war-banners and slaying swords.  
 They intended to overrun all of Italy.  
 The men moved relentlessly, remorselessly,  
 From the edge of the Alps to the sea-strand 15  
 In the south across from the island of Sicily.  
 The ravaging Goths conquered the country,  
 Sacking great cities, reveling in glory,  
 Gathering power. Rome was gutted—  
 The emperor fled with his precious princes 20  
 Away to Greece. Rædgod and Alaric  
 Boldly entered the city stronghold.  
 The Roman survivors could not hold back  
 The heathen hordes in the grim battle-rush.  
 The homeland guardians reluctantly gave up 25  
 Both ancestral wealth and their holy oaths,  
 Trading treasure for terror, weal for woe.  
 That was not a good bargain—it was made in blood.  
 Their hearts and hopes rested with the Greeks—  
 If only they would offer aid, and end their agony. 30  
 Rome was occupied for many years  
 Until fate determined that all the citizens,  
 High and low, thanes and nobles,  
 Should obey Theodoric, a bold ruler  
 And baptized king committed to Christ. 35  
 The Romans rejoiced and sought peace.  
 Theodoric promised the people a chance  
 To retain their possessions and all their rights



In the city of glory as long as God wished  
 The great king to maintain his rule 40  
 Over the Goths. So they hoped to thrive  
 Throughout their lives—but Theodoric lied.  
 The Arian heresy was dearer to that king  
 Than the Lord's law or his Christian commitment.  
 He ordered the head of holy Pope John 45  
 Severed from its body. That was not a noble deed.  
 Then the brutal Goth began to commit crimes  
 Against the citizens. Sin was rampant.  
 There was a powerful man living in Rome,  
 Who was raised as a consul under Greek rule, 50  
 The finest of leaders, fittest of lords,  
 The most trusted of treasure-givers.  
 He was wise with respect to worldly things,  
 Eager for honor, a renowned scholar.  
 His name was Boethius. He saw the abuse, 55  
 The contempt and cruelty laid on the people  
 By the two fierce warriors, two foreign kings.  
 He always remained loyal to the Greeks,  
 Their ancient rights, their love and favor,  
 And carefully considered how to bring them back 60  
 And restore the emperor as ruler of the realm.  
 He sent a secret letter to his former lords,  
 Urging them for the sake of God  
 And out of old loyalty to return to Rome  
 So that Greek counselors could rule again. 65  
 Then bold Theodoric, descendant of Amal,  
 Discovered that story and seized Boethius,  
 Commanding his soldiers to hold that battle-lord.  
 The king's mind was troubled, his heart afraid,  
 For that captive was noble, powerful, and wise. 70  
 Theodoric locked him in a prison cell,  
 Where Boethius grew anxious and tormented,  
 Unnerved with his fate. He suspected the truth.  
 He had known great freedom and prosperity  
 For too long under grim Gothic rule. 75  
 He sensed the worst was yet to come.  
 The harsh reality gnawed at him,

And he grew despondent, his heart despairing.  
 He could find neither comfort nor consolation  
 In his painful state. He stretched out prostrate 80  
 On the prison floor, crying out in anguish,  
 Searching for mercy in the face of menace.  
 His sentence was sudden, his fate unforeseen.  
 He called out to God in darkest despair,  
 Singing a lament for his lost life, saying: 85

## 2

“Listen! Once I embraced life, singing  
 Songs of joy. Now my tunes are twisted—  
 My mournful melodies are winding woe.  
 Weary with weeping, I cannot conceive  
 How my fate has turned or celebrate my life 5  
 With the sustaining songs I used to sing.  
 Sometimes my talking is tongue-tied,  
 My once-wise words, wrenched and wried.  
 I struggle to shape a righteous thought  
 To suit my sorrow, but the mind is mute. 10  
 Now sometimes I misuse known words,  
 Where once I could charm my listeners  
 With unusual words and uncommon songs.  
 The bright blessings of this earthly realm  
 That I have long and foolishly trusted 15  
 Have enticed me to the edge of despair,  
 Bringing me nearly blind to this dark pit.  
 These faithless goods cannot protect me  
 Or cure the ache that ails my heart.  
 Philosophy flees from me, wisdom unwinds 20  
 From my web of words. Fate is fickle and unfair.  
 Oh, my friends, how I have fallen out of favor.  
 Why would you say that I was embraced  
 By smiling fortune in a worldly way,  
 When the truth is that time withers all blessings?” 25

[Then Wisdom comes to Boethius to lift up his grieving heart and to chase away his worldly sorrows. The mind of Boethius recognizes its

foster parent Wisdom but sees that its teachings have been torn apart by fools. Wisdom laments the mind's frailty and begins to sing:]

## 3

“Oh, how grim and dreadful is the painful pit,  
 The bottomless hole of bleak despair,  
 That the gloomy mind makes, wounding itself,  
 When the storms and struggles of worldly care  
 Batter and blast it, breaking it down. 5  
 Then the grappling heart wrestles itself  
 Into hopelessness, and the mind leaves its light  
 And abandons the radiance of eternal joy.  
 It rushes headlong into the deadly darkness  
 Of this transient world, shackled in sorrow. 10  
 This is the suffering state of this mind  
 That has lost its link with God's goodness,  
 Knowing only the menace and misery of life  
 In this alien world. The mind knows no solace  
 In the storm and strife. It needs comfort.” 15

[The mind of Boethius begins to lament the fickleness of fortune in this life, wondering why the good are often tormented while the evil thrive; it then calls out to God, singing:]

## 4

“Oh Lord and Shaper of the starlit sky,  
 Eternal ruler of heaven and earth,  
 You command heaven from your high throne  
 And keep it revolving within your reach,  
 Controlling the stars through your holy power. 5  
 Sometimes the sun slakes the darkness,  
 Quenching the night. Sometimes the moon  
 Tempers the stars, softening their shine  
 Through your perfect might; sometimes it steals  
 The light of the sun in a close conjunction 10  
 Of heavenly paths. Likewise you press  
 The great morning star, called by some people  
 The evening star, to escort the sun,

Leading heaven's candle on its yearly journey.  
 Heavenly Father, you keep the calendar, 15  
 The long days of summer, warm and winsome,  
 The short days of winter, cold and cruel.  
 You offer the ease of the southwest wind  
 To the suffering trees buffeted by storms  
 That rage savagely out of the northeast, 20  
 Stripping them of their summer leaves.  
 That dark wind destroys the life of the wood.  
 All earthly creatures obey your commands—  
 Fish and fowl, bird and beast, branch and bloom—  
 As do heavenly hosts with might and mind, 25  
 All except man, that arrogant wonder  
 Who so often acts against your will.  
 Eternal and almighty Creator and Sustainer,  
 Have pity on your people, the children of men,  
 Who suffer such sorrow. Pity us now 30  
 In our hour of need. Why have you left fate  
 To work its unstable will in this troubled world,  
 Offering twisted delight to devious men?  
 Why do you allow the existence of evil?  
 It injures the innocent, abuses the just. 35  
 Why do wicked men rule this world,  
 Wielding terrible power from untouchable thrones,  
 Trampling the faithful under their feet?  
 No one knows why fortune twists and turns,  
 Following so often an unfathomable path, 40  
 So that virtue is veiled so often in the world,  
 And sin is no secret in the brazen cities.  
 Wicked men mock and scorn the righteous,  
 Ridiculing the wise who are more worthy to rule.  
 Deceit often hides in the hearts of men 45  
 And is seldom discovered beneath their lies.  
 False vows flourish and are rarely found out.  
 If you want to leave fate unfettered, Lord,  
 If you can't control the ways of the world,  
 Then all but a few will begin to doubt 50  
 Your power and wisdom, your heavenly providence.  
 My Lord and Master, as you care for all creatures,

Look down on mankind with mercy, not menace,  
 Since we struggle and toil in this unworthy world.  
 Our enemies are legion. Our lives are wretched.  
 We are poor and miserable. Have pity on us.”

55

[Wisdom rebukes the mind of Boethius for losing sight of the truth and engages it in a clarifying dialogue about God’s governance of the world. Boethius in his mind finally admits that fate does not control the world and that God is the creator and director of the world, but he is not sure to what end each earthly beginning aspires. The mind admits that it exists in a rational, mortal man, but insists that it knows nothing beyond that. Wisdom notes that the mind is clouded by mists of misunderstanding that must be cleared away and says:]

## 5

“You can clearly see that if a hazy cloud  
 Hangs and hovers before the bright sun  
 Or the shimmering stars, those sky-candles  
 Cannot continue to light up the land  
 Till the thick mist becomes thinner.  
 You can also see that the savage south-wind  
 Can stir up calm waters, gray as old glass,  
 Whipping up the whale-road, turning smooth seas  
 Into rough sailing. Likewise a spring may surge,  
 Cool and pure, from a crack in the cliff,  
 Spilling from stone, its gray doorway,  
 Gushing out briskly, rushing toward home,  
 Till a mountain face splits, slings down  
 A boulder into the bright, burgeoning water,  
 Slashing its flow into separate streams,  
 Shifting the riverrun into rambling channels.  
 So the shadow of your soul, the mist of your mind,  
 Wants to cloud the wonder of my bright teaching,  
 To stir up a storm in your once calm heart.  
 But if you want to gaze on the radiant truth,  
 You must renounce and relinquish all idle joys,  
 Imperfect goods and pointless pleasures,  
 And also abandon the anguish and fear  
 Of worldly slights, scorns, and afflictions.

5

10

15

20

What you give up should make you eternally glad— 25  
 Your false splendor hides the heart's sadness,  
 Its innate longing for a truer treasure.  
 Suffering sometimes leads to the truth,  
 For earthly blessings can shroud the soul  
 Like a deadly mist. In your time of need, 30  
 Never despair of discovering the good,  
 Even in the face of torment and terror.  
 Desire and fear are the mind's shackles,  
 The archest of enemies, the greatest of griefs.  
 They can drag the clouds of chaos, 35  
 The mists of deception, before the mind's eye,  
 Veiling your vision, obscuring your thought,  
 Shrouding your heart till deep in the dark  
 You are blind to the beauty of the unshaded sun,  
 The eternal radiance of the Lord's shaping truth. 40  
 The mind must be freed from the shadow of despair."

[Wisdom upbraids Boethius for putting his faith in the false goods and transient pleasures of the world without realizing their limited value. He laments the fact that mankind so often substitutes wealth for wisdom and worldly delight for a deeper understanding of the divine will at work in the world. Then Wisdom urges the mind to remember its happier days when Wisdom adopted it, serving as its first and best teacher, and to find in that former state a sense of true felicity.]

## 6

Then Wisdom unlocked his word-hoard again,  
 Singing another truth-song for Boethius:  
 "When the unclouded sun shines clear and bright  
 From the arch of heaven, every light on earth,  
 Every star in the sky, finds its radiance dimmed 5  
 By that blazing candle. When the southwest wind  
 Eases across the plain, gentle and generous,  
 Seedlings sing, flowers flourish,  
 Meadows quicken, fields unfurl  
 With a gather of grain, a fullness of fruit, 10  
 And creation rejoices in its luminous life,  
 As it is rightly permitted to do—

But the cold will come, the northeast storm,  
 Blasting the bright beauty of the rose,  
 Whipping calm waves into surging seas, 15  
 Driving the ocean to storm the shore.  
 Alas, no loveliness lasts in this world,  
 No peaceful seas are permanently still.  
 Time and transience will take their toll;  
 And the fear of death, torment the soul." 20

[Wisdom argues that Boethius has not lost anything of real value such as his family and health, and that those who seem fortunate in earthly eyes may actually be deeply troubled, having lost sight of the truth. Boethius in his mind acknowledges this and finds comfort in it and hope for the future. Wisdom goes on to argue that even such worldly blessings are fleeting and urges Boethius to seek true happiness by striving toward the highest felicity, which is God. All earthly treasures are mutable as are all earthly lives. Only the soul is unchanging and eternal.]

## 7

Then Wisdom, once more following his custom  
 Of moving from word-smith to song-shaper,  
 Began to weave prose into poetry, saying:  
 "No man has ever heard of a high hall  
 Being fashioned with firm roof-beams 5  
 On the pinnacle of a mountain, and no man  
 Has ever properly mixed wisdom with pride.  
 Can you put a sturdy dwelling on a sand-dune  
 Or build a house of wisdom and judgment 10  
 On the slopes of cupidity, the ground of greed?  
 The barren sands will wolf down water,  
 Guzzling the rain, just as an insatiable man,  
 Thirsty for power, famished for possessions,  
 Wild for wealth, will feast on fortune,  
 Gorge on greatness, swallow station, 15  
 Yet find himself finally hungry at heart.  
 A house on a hilltop is blasted by wind.  
 A hall on a dune is sucked up by sand  
 After a rain-storm. The mind of man

Cannot be stable on a shaky foundation. 20  
 It will shift, sway, and be swept away,  
 When all the earthly troubles and torments,  
 Mental anxieties and worldly woes,  
 Descend upon it like ravenous rain.  
 A man who desires eternal delight 25  
 Must shun earthly beauty, abandon appearances,  
 And carefully construct the house of his mind  
 On the rock of humility, a steadfast stone,  
 A stable foundation. That soul-hall  
 Will never collapse under the wind of worry, 30  
 The storm of anxiety, the shifting sands  
 Of doubt and despair—for in that valley  
 Of humility and hope, lives the Lord himself,  
 Settled in his house, at home in his mind.  
 So wise men lead untroubled lives, 35  
 Never buffeted by shifting worries  
 Or the torments of time. They reject worldly  
 Goods and glory, escape from evil,  
 And yearn for grace. Almighty God  
 Gathers up a good man in his embracing arms, 40  
 Keeping him in a state of constant care,  
 His mind at rest, his heart at peace,  
 Even in the face of anxious storms,  
 When worldly winds batter his spirit,  
 And false fortune stalks him relentlessly— 45  
 Even when despair desires to wind him up  
 In a shroud of woe. Who shields him  
 Against these fierce forces but God.”

[Wisdom continues his argument about the nature of false fortune and worldly goods, noting that avarice is hateful to God and men and that giving treasure is far better than receiving or hoarding it. Generosity is its own gift revered by God. Wisdom also points out that one who has wealth always fears losing it, while one who has nothing walks freely without fear. Boethius argues that he loves the land and its fruits, which are part of God’s creation, but Wisdom counsels him not to yearn for earthly pleasures beyond his natural needs. To rise above the nature of animals, man must know himself and use his reason to



understand the difference between worldly goods and the eternal good  
which is God.]

## 8

When Wisdom had clearly communicated  
 With truthful words his moving message,  
 He began again to sing to Boethius:  
 “The original age was an age of fulfillment  
 For all earth-dwellers, the children of men. 5  
 There was grain to harvest, fruit to gather.  
 Everything was rich and ripe—nothing withered  
 Or wasted away. That age is long gone.  
 In that world there were no high halls,  
 No sumptuous feasts, no elegant garments, 10  
 None of those delights that people now desire,  
 None of those goods that people call precious.  
 No one knew the distinction between rich and poor  
 In that original age. People were not eager  
 To follow sinful desires in any way, 15  
 Except as they might moderately follow  
 The nature that Christ created for them.  
 Each day they ate one meal in the evening  
 Of mixed grains and fruits, a natural feast  
 From the earth’s green groves and gardens. 20  
 No one drank bright wine from a cup.  
 No one mixed meat and drink, water and honey,  
 Sewed garments with silk, embroidered their gowns,  
 Set them with gems, or built jeweled halls  
 With subtle skill. They slept outdoors 25  
 Under the trees, drank water from the stream,  
 Clear and cold. No merchant sailed  
 To an alien shore over the surging sea.  
 No hostile ship bore battle-hard warriors  
 Over the whale-road to attack an enemy. 30  
 No one thought or talked about war.  
 The earth was not yet stained with blood  
 From swords and spears and the hostility of men.  
 No one under the sun saw a wounded man.  
 No one who was evil was ever thought worthy; 35

A loathsome man was never loved.  
 If only the world we live in now  
 Were bathed in grace like that original land,  
 According to the wishes and wonder of God—  
 If only there were no evil under the sun. 40  
 Now greed has wormed its slithering way  
 Into the minds of men, who care only for wealth,  
 Treasure, power, and the pleasure these bring.  
 Avarice burns in the unholy heart  
 Like the bottomless flame of Mount Etna, 45  
 A sulfurous abyss near the island of Sicily,  
 That cavernous blaze that men call hell-fire  
 Because it is evil and eternally burns,  
 Fiercely consuming the country around it,  
 Treating the people to torment and terror. 50  
 Who was that first man ravenous for riches  
 Who ripped up the earth for a trove of gems,  
 A gather of gold, a clutch of silver?  
 He discovered in those treasures of land and sea  
 Only danger and desire, death and destruction.” 55

[Wisdom argues that power is not a good in itself and is often misused and made evil in the hands of tyrants, citing several examples of this. Power is only good in the hands of a good leader. In the hands of an evil leader, it can be devastating. Wisdom continues, saying in poetry:]

## 9

“We all know of Nero’s disgraceful deeds  
 Both near and far—that foul Roman king,  
 Whose bloodthirsty reign of savage terror  
 Was unmatched on earth and under heaven.  
 His fornication and adultery, rape and pillage, 5  
 His cruel injustice and unspeakable crimes,  
 Were legion in the land. He was mad with power  
 And murdered many people, his evil deeds  
 Matched by his venomous words and thoughts.  
 He brazenly ordered Rome burned, 10  
 The seat of government in his whole kingdom,  
 Because in his sadistic folly, he wanted to see

If the Roman flames would glow as brightly,  
 Rage as blood-red, and last as long  
 As the ravenous blaze that devoured Troy. 15  
 His sole purpose was to show his power  
 Greater than that of all leaders, all nations.  
 That savage sport was no noble game.  
 He reaped a grim glory for his ferocity—  
 His mad power was feared by everyone. 20  
 Once this infamous king also commanded  
 All the noble Roman counselors killed,  
 All the noblest high-born citizens,  
 Along with his own mother and brother.  
 They were suddenly slain by the sword's edge, 25  
 Unbound from life by that lethal blade.  
 The wicked man murdered his own wife  
 And rejoiced in his rage, his heart happier  
 For the fierce slaughter of his own spouse.  
 That vicious king cared very little 30  
 About God's vengeance for his evil crimes—  
 He relished all his ruthless tricks,  
 His cunning deceit, his bloodthirsty deeds.  
 He controlled the world from sea to shore,  
 Earth to air, east to west, everywhere inside 35  
 The ocean's embrace, under heaven's roof,  
 North and south to the earth's headlands.  
 Everyone obeyed him out of self-preservation,  
 Out of faith or fear, necessity or need.  
 His greatest delight was menacing rulers, 40  
 Killing kings. He was certainly famous  
 For that unholy sport. Now do you suppose  
 That almighty God could not undo Nero,  
 Deprive him of power, unravel his authority,  
 Unmake that murderous, blood-boasting king, 45  
 Erase that evil through his infinite might?  
 He could easily have obliterated his authority,  
 Canceled his crimes, ended his life.  
 Alas, that King Nero collared his people  
 With a heavy yoke, burdening his nation 50  
 With a weight of blood. Every man and woman

In the troubled, transient world suffered  
 Because he stained his sword with innocent blood,  
 Sweeping the land with a brutal blade.  
 This is the plain truth: there's no good in power, 55  
 If the wielder of power wishes for no good!"

[Boethius or his mind begins to argue that he sought power only as a necessary means to a good end, that of ruling wisely and well and reaping a good reputation. Wisdom rebukes him for pursuing the worldly good of fame, emphasizing its transient nature in comparison with the endless afterlife. Then Wisdom continues to counsel his student with poetic advice:]

## 10

"If any man is foolish enough to long for fame—  
 If he's greedy for glory, aching for esteem,  
 Let him listen to my words and measure his desires  
 Against the wide world, the vault of heaven  
 Above the clouds, the grandeur of God 5  
 In many directions—south, east, and west.  
 The wise man reflects, realizes in his mind  
 That the earth is small compared to creation.  
 The fool thinks that earth is everything,  
 Sees it as spacious, finds it firm in its place, 10  
 Seeks power over its broad range—  
 But a man can only extend his arms so far  
 Till he mourns for the countries he cannot conquer.  
 A man famished for fame can never be full  
 Because he feeds from an empty bowl. 15  
 Oh proud and arrogant men, why do you put  
 Your necks in a yoke, harnessed to nothing  
 Of lasting value, plowing up not glory but grief?  
 Why do you ache for something so useless,  
 Longing for something so lifeless as power? 20  
 Even though nations should sing your praises  
 In a multitude of tongues, time will take you.  
 Even though you may be noble and well-known,  
 Worshipped for wealth, followed for fame,  
 Death will not bow down before your authority. 25

When he comes at the holy commandment  
 Of the Ruler of heaven, he cares nothing  
 For your worldly glory, but gathers up everyone,  
 Rich and poor, powerful and weak,  
 Both terrible tyrant and downtrodden peasant. 30  
 Everyone is equal in death's ravenous eyes.  
 Time drags every earthly treasure down,  
 Both the gift and the giver, the reward and receiver.  
 Ask yourself: Where are bones of Weland buried,  
 The goldsmith who shaped his jeweled fame? 35  
 The bones can be buried but not the skill  
 That resides in the spirit and cannot be killed.  
 Christ the Creator grants each man his craft.  
 No one can destroy the gifts of God,  
 The skill and power of the eternal Shaper, 40  
 Any more than one could turn back the tides,  
 Control the course of the circling stars,  
 Or halt the rising of the morning sun.  
 What man can know which burial mound  
 Holds the withered bones of Weland? 45  
 Who can know what barrow holds Brutus,  
 The famous consul of the bold Romans?  
 Who can know where Cato sleeps in his tomb,  
 That famous philosopher, statesman, and leader?  
 Death has relentlessly taken them away 50  
 Without discretion, without deliberation,  
 Without appeal. Their bodies are lost,  
 Their fame is fleeting. They wander the shores  
 Of shifting memory and are washed away.  
 These were bold leaders and beloved teachers— 55  
 Their fame is flown, their reputations are unraveled,  
 Their glory is gone. Worthy men deserve more,  
 But even the wise are soon forgotten.  
 Remember these stories and learn this lesson:  
 Even though you dream of endless days, 60  
 How will a long life make you better?  
 Death will come in its own unknown time,  
 When God grants the end of your years.  
 Death leaves no one behind even though

You may live long. When his call comes,  
 And the unending darkness begins to sing,  
 What will he make of your fame? Nothing.”

65

[Wisdom now shows Boethius how fickle fortune can be, arguing that prosperity comes and goes like unpredictable gusts of wind. He then points out that worldly adversity is actually beneficial to man because it teaches him the transitory nature of earthly goods and also reveals to him just who his true friends are. The treasure of this discovery is worth more than wealth. Then Wisdom continues his teaching, once again in song:]

## 11

“There is surely no doubt about this truth:  
 There is one Creator who commands us all,  
 Our righteous Lord, who rules the world  
 Of wonderful creatures, seen and unseen,  
 From earth to heaven, sea to sky.  
 He is the Prince we strive to please,  
 The Shaper we serve, the God we glorify,  
 Whether we know it in our hearts or not.  
 He has made for all of us in creation  
 A natural code of laws and lore,  
 An orderly mode of customs and conduct,  
 A system that ensures an enduring peace.  
 It is what he wants, when he wants it,  
 For as long as he wants it to last in the world.  
 So it is and shall be, for each of us moves  
 In time to the rhythm of God’s purpose.  
 This eternal thrum is the hymn we inhabit—  
 It’s the music of both Maker and mankind.  
 The world changes, eternity stands still;  
 We move in the course that God has created.  
 He spurs us on or reins us in,  
 Giving us direction, encouragement, and restraint,  
 The push and pull of our everyday lives,  
 As we struggle and strive, arch against,  
 And finally embrace, the power and purpose  
 Of the Father who made us, our almighty Lord.

5

10

15

20

25

He bridles all creatures on earth and in heaven.  
 We move and are moved in a beautiful balance:  
 Every force and form finds some resistance—  
 Fire and water, earth and sea, land and air. 30  
 Each thing under heaven has its opposite—  
 Every twist and turn is somehow tempered  
 So that it cannot run unchecked, rampant  
 In wind or wave, earth or air,  
 Unbridled, unbound, breaking the balance, 35  
 Free to flow and undermine the others,  
 Feuding with its sisters, fighting with its brothers.  
 Each creature struggles against another,  
 But each in the end supports the other,  
 As they move together on a common course 40  
 From beginning to end, from birth to renewal.  
 There are many powerful forces on earth,  
 But nothing under heaven lasts forever.  
 The Lord made the law of mutability for all.  
 Spring sings out its song of green shoots, 45  
 Leaf and bud, tendril and bloom.  
 Autumn hauls each ripe fruit home,  
 Shrivels stems, ungreens summer's glory.  
 Winter winds freeze unfruited limbs  
 And wither grasses, bleaching the plains. 50  
 But summer always comes back again  
 On the heels of spring, making meadows,  
 Greening groves, growing grain.  
 The moon often illuminates the night.  
 The bright sun is heaven's candle, 55  
 Lighting the day throughout creation.  
 God gives us boundaries for land and sea.  
 No scaly creature from the whale-road  
 Is allowed inland without God's leave.  
 No fish can fin its way out of water 60  
 Without gasping in the breathless air.  
 No driving tide can uncouple itself  
 From the ocean's deeps to make the shore  
 Ebb and flow or the mountains surge.  
 The Lord of light, the Craftsman of creation, 65

Keeps these powerful forms and forces  
 Intact according to his eternal laws.  
 But if he wants to revoke his rules,  
 Unbridle creation's balanced being,  
 Let loose the reins he established in the beginning, 70  
 Then he is free to do this, and all friendly forms,  
 All earthly forces, will flounder and fall.  
 All peaceful leanings will be lost in conflict,  
 All natural love suddenly turn loathsome.  
 Every earthly being will then become 75  
 Another's enemy. Faithful friends  
 Will turn fierce foes. The world will unwind;  
 All creatures will uncurl from their living.  
 Life as we know it will lurch to its end.  
 But the Lord chooses to bind the world 80  
 In living love, forming friendships,  
 Affirming faith, making marriages,  
 Creating communities, establishing peace,  
 Composing creation's harmonious hymns  
 Of grace and glory both now and forever. 85  
 Oh, Lord of victories, Maker of mankind,  
 How blessed our earthly lives might be  
 If only you controlled the minds of men,  
 Directing and shaping our daily thoughts  
 As carefully as you control time and tide, 90  
 The movement of seas, of sun and stars,  
 Your balanced power would bring us peace.  
 How pleasant our lives would be then."

[Boethius acknowledges in his mind that Wisdom has offered him great comfort with his truths and says that he wishes to know more. Wisdom offers to teach his student the nature of true happiness by means of simple analogies, singing again:]

12

"If a man wants to raise fruitful grain  
 On fertile land, let him first clear away  
 Wild ferns and thorn bushes, brambles and gorse,  
 The wicked weeds that will strangle young shoots



Of pure wheat striving to see the sun. 5  
 Another analogy is equally useful:  
 Honey from the hive will be sweeter to one  
 Who has tasted bitter fruit before he comes  
 To the honeycomb for a drop of delight.  
 Likewise a man may appreciate good weather 10  
 If he's just survived a tempestuous storm  
 Of biting rain from the fierce northeast wind.  
 Daylight seems brighter after a fearful night  
 Of dark dreams and twisted torments.  
 True happiness enters the human heart 15  
 More easily after suffering and sorrow,  
 Anxiety and affliction. You can find true joy  
 In your heart's homeland if you first decide  
 To root out false pleasure, rip up fleeting delight,  
 Just as a good farmer must rid his fertile fields 20  
 Of noxious weeds that wither his plants  
 And choke his grain before the harvest.  
 You measure your gain by what you've lost.  
 So when you can clearly recognize true joys  
 Reach out for them, gather them in, 25  
 And embrace them fully, you will never again  
 Be drawn by the folly of false pleasures."

[Wisdom argues that the apparent goods of this world, such as wealth and fame, power and pleasure, honor and ambition, are merely reflections of the higher, heavenly good, and that human striving for them is a misplaced yearning for that divine goodness. Man needs to recognize his natural impulse to strive for the good. Wisdom then continues:]

## 13

"I want with truth-songs to make known again  
 How almighty God guides with his bridle  
 All earthly creatures. He holds our reins  
 In his heavenly hands, bending us to his will  
 With his holy power, shaping our purpose. 5  
 The Ruler of heaven restrains us all.  
 We are tethered to him, bound by nature  
 To the spiritual strands of his eternal wonder,

His woven grace. We cannot slip free.  
 Each of God's creatures strives to fulfill 10  
 What was always appointed. Each of us seeks  
 To lead the life that the King of angels,  
 Our original Father, intended us to live—  
 Except for certain rebellious angels  
 And some of mankind who deny their promise 15  
 And defy their Maker's purpose and power,  
 Revolting against their own nature.  
 This is like the parable of the tame lion  
 Who licks his master's hand, obeys his will,  
 Loves his lord, and serves him faithfully, 20  
 Fearing his might, until that fateful day,  
 When it tastes blood and turns wild again.  
 Who knows then what wrath will rise  
 In the ravenous heart of the unreined beast?  
 It will growl and roar, tear at its tether, 25  
 Rip free and pounce on its protector,  
 Biting the hand that lovingly fed it,  
 Feasting on flesh, and afterwards pursue  
 Every living creature, man and beast—  
 Anything to satisfy its savage hunger. 30  
 Likewise wild birds may be tamed and trained,  
 Singing delightful songs for their owners,  
 Feeding from their hands, at home in a cage—  
 But if they find themselves flying free  
 And landing in the trees in a nearby wood, 35  
 They forget their teaching, scorn their training,  
 Lose their sense of love for their owners,  
 And embrace their original untamed natures,  
 Becoming immune to their keepers' call,  
 Even to their offer of sustaining seed. 40  
 The branches are so beautiful, they forget food.  
 The wood is wondrous, the forest full of sounds  
 Echoing their own—the whistling wind,  
 The swaying boughs, and other birds piping  
 As they sport and play from leaf to limb. 45  
 Every creature contributes to the woodland hymn.  
 Likewise with trees that sway in the breeze—

It's in their nature to reach for the light  
 To green and grow tall in the forest.  
 You can bend down a bough to embrace the earth, 50  
 But the minute you leave, it will lift up its arms  
 And reach for the sun. It's the will of the wood.  
 Likewise the sun, the bright sky-candle,  
 Has its appointed road. Each day it rises  
 From dawn to noon, descends toward evening, 55  
 Disappearing at night on some unknown path,  
 Then comes back seeking to rise again  
 To the rooftop of the world, its highest place.  
 Everything in creation yearns to return  
 To its heart's homeland, its natural state, 60  
 Its place of peace, its eternal rest,  
 The care and comfort of our loving Lord.  
 Every earthly creature turns like a wheel  
 Constantly seeking its own starting place.  
 Each of us seeks our own beginning— 65  
 We move and are moved by a homing heart.”

[Wisdom explains that all people naturally desire the good and retain faint memories of their origins with God. He then explains again that earthly riches cannot satisfy one's deepest desire to return home to his place of beginning and sums up his argument in song:]

## 14

“How can the world-greedy man ever be  
 Better off in spirit? How can a wealthy miser  
 Be happier in his mind, safer in his soul,  
 Even though he has many prized possessions,  
 Money and jewels, silver and gold— 5  
 Even though he owns over a thousand acres  
 And pays men to plow them every day—  
 Even though he rules the race of men  
 Under the sun—south, west, and east?  
 Can he carry home at the end of his road 10  
 Any more of these earthly trappings,  
 These so-called treasures, than he once brought  
 Into the world when he was born?”

[Wisdom reminds Boethius that worldly fame is often capricious or unfair. The seats of earthly power are often held by those who are dishonorable and undeserving. Their apparent power is limited by time, transience, and the true power of God. Wisdom discusses the suffering of Boethius at the hands of Theodoric. He then returns to the example of Nero, saying in poetic form:]

## 15

“The unjust and evil emperor Nero  
 Dressed himself in extravagant clothes,  
 Adorned with jewels, embroidered with gold.  
 He was bound in beauty, robed in arrogance,  
 And was often wicked to the wise and worthy, 5  
 Hateful to the honorable, hostile to the humble,  
 Snared in sin. That savage king  
 Gave rich gifts to his fawning minions.  
 Were the hearts of these henchmen any better  
 For his favor? Were their souls more secure? 10  
 That infamous Nero was a king of fools  
 Who were skill-less, soulless, craftless, clueless.  
 They were never as worthy as the wise,  
 Valued as the virtuous, saintly as the sinless.  
 Though a fool may be made a famous king, 15  
 Would a wise man say he’s any better for it?”

[Wisdom explains to Boethius that kings and their chosen favorites may enjoy great power, but this does not bring them true happiness, for wealth and power often bring fear and grief. Good friends in times of fortune frequently turn indifferent or antagonistic in times of misfortune. Wisdom continues on this theme, singing:]

## 16

“A man who seeks power should first strive  
 To control himself, measure and manage  
 His own mind lest it turn loathsome,  
 Subject to sin, embracing infamy.  
 He should avoid anxiety, rule his cares, 5  
 Never brood or be a slave to sorrow,  
 Never make his fierce miseries foremost

Among his concerns. Though he wins the world,  
 Everything between the encompassing oceans,  
 The surrounding seas, as far west as the island 10  
 That is called Thule, where there is no night  
 During the summer and no hours of daylight  
 During the winter—though he rules all realms  
 From that island eastward to India,  
 How is his power then more profound 15  
 Or his grasp of truth any greater,  
 His fortune any firmer or his heart's peace  
 Any surer if he does not rule his own mind  
 And guard himself against iniquity  
 In his words and deeds, as we have argued? 20

[Wisdom wonders why people so passionately pursue worldly glory, which is always deceptive and often dishonorable. Fame comes not from true merit but from false popularity and never lasts. Noble ancestry is one form of false honor, since no one can claim true virtue from his ancestors but must show a noble character through good words and deeds. Wisdom continues his advice in poetry, saying:]

## 17

“Everyone on earth enters through one door.  
 All people proud and poor, rich and wretched,  
 Come from one pair, the blessed bond  
 Of a man and a woman. This is no wonder  
 Since everyone knows that there is one God 5  
 Of all creatures, the Father of mankind.  
 The Almighty offers us the bright gift  
 Of sun and moon, the surrounding stars,  
 The circling radiance of high heaven.  
 Our beloved Lord created mankind, 10  
 Shaping body and soul, two together,  
 Each to serve and sustain the other.  
 Now in the beginning, God created  
 Everyone equal under the clouds,  
 No one more worthy or noble than the next. 15  
 Why then do you exalt yourselves over others  
 Without reason? What makes a man ignoble?

Is it his unknown ancestry or his evil acts?  
 True nobility resides in the mind of every man  
 Who pursues the good in words and works. 20  
 There is no inherent nobility in the body,  
 Except as it serves and sustains the soul.  
 Those bound to vice, ensnared in evil,  
 Undo God's sacred, shaping purpose,  
 Undermining the bond between body and soul. 25  
 They turn their backs on God's gifts  
 And finally cripple their own creation.  
 Then the Guardian, almighty and eternal,  
 Brings them down into lasting dishonor  
 So that the world can see their ignoble nature, 30  
 Their sin and shame. Mortified they gather no glory."

[Wisdom discusses physical pleasures, particularly those of the flesh. These often bring suffering and sorrow, disease and pain. Such bodily pleasures are shared by the beasts of creation—they are mere animal lusts. There is little pleasure in the resulting pregnancy, which sometimes leads to death. Children are sometimes a pleasure to their parents, and sometimes a burden or a bane. Old stories even tell of sons who murder their fathers. Wisdom continues this theme in poetry, saying:]

## 18

"Alas! The ache for intimacy, the lust for sex,  
 The unnatural craving for illicit coupling,  
 The wicked desire for lecherous delight,  
 Seizes the soul, settles in the mind,  
 Takes the heart hostage in most of mankind. 5  
 But the wild bee, no matter how wise,  
 Must die whenever it stings someone.  
 Be careful not to perish from impure passion.  
 The soul will be lost in lustful pleasure  
 If the body is bound in such sinful delight, 10  
 Unless the heart realizes its unnatural wrong  
 And discovers repentance before departing."

[Wisdom continues to describe the folly of people's seeking for happiness in the wrong places. Prosperity often brings greater greed that is

filled at the expense of less fortunate others. Power often brings a failure of true leadership and the antagonism of other power-hungry princes. Fame often brings false security and the deeper fear of failure and ignominy. None of these earthly values can be compared to the goodness of God or the human soul. The beauty of the body, the power of the state, the honor of a hero—these are all limited earthly goods. People should cast their eyes upon higher values. Wisdom continues, singing in the same vein:]

## 19

“Most earthly goods are grim follies  
 That lead to grief. A knowing man follows  
 The right path with a natural wisdom.  
 Would you search for a vein of red gold  
 In the green treetops instead of the ground 5  
 Or gather gems like grapes in the vineyard?  
 Would you set your salmon nets on a hillside  
 Instead of the sea? Everyone knows  
 That silver-scaled fish don’t swim in the air.  
 Would you hunt for the forest hart and hind 10  
 From a sailing ship, driving your dogs  
 Into the salt-sea? A wise man knows  
 That you seek gems at the ocean’s edge  
 Or the river’s banks—there you might find  
 Red and blue jewels, stones of every hue. 15  
 Every humble man knows where to cast a net  
 Or drop a line in the water for a fish dinner.  
 Men commonly seek such earthly goods,  
 Such worldly treasures, but what will become  
 Of grapes and gold, salmon and silver 20  
 In the long run? They come from earth  
 And return to earth, taken back in time.  
 Wise men know this eternal truth,  
 But fools cannot see beyond their dreams  
 To the deeper treasures that transcend time 25  
 Or discover in their hearts the sacred place  
 Where the only true happiness is hidden.  
 It never occurs to them to search  
 For the sacred joys that satisfy the soul

And sustain the heart. Fools look for felicity 30  
 In the pleasures of the moment, the power of a realm,  
 The richness of a hoard, the health of the body,  
 The firmness of fate, their faith in the future.  
 It's hard to imagine their endless idiocy  
 Or to readily explain such unexamined ideas. 35  
 These follies pass even the power of words.  
 These unwise men seek wealth and honor,  
 Possessions and power. When the fools obtain  
 What they think they want, they begin to imagine  
 In ignorance or indifference that they've finally found 40  
 True happiness instead of a worthless treasure."

[Wisdom engages Boethius or his mind in a discussion of the five worldly goods—abundance (or sufficiency), power, honor, fame, and happiness—which he explains are mere aspects of the eternal good that is God. People pursue these lesser goods through earthly strivings instead of seeing them as reflections or shadows of the greatest good. Wisdom urges Boethius to turn his mind from false felicities to true happiness and the greatest good, which contains all the lesser goods. Boethius asks how he may find this highest good, and Wisdom tells him to do this through prayer to the Father of creation. Wisdom then shows Boethius how to pray:]

## 20

“Almighty God, high-minded, glorious,  
 Holy and eminent, a wonder to the wise,  
 Shaper and Sustainer of all creation,  
 Maker of all things seen and unseen—  
 You rule the universe with a mighty mind, 5  
 Skillful strength, and eternal insight,  
 Fostering all forms, generating all joys.  
 In the beginning you made the seasons  
 That follow forever in endless succession—  
 Spring, summer, autumn, winter. 10  
 Each one before and after another,  
 Each one disappearing and returning again.  
 You are the mover who remains unmoved,  
 The radiant center of revolving creation,



The steady heart in the pulse of time. 15  
 No earthly good approaches your glory,  
 Though you never had any need for fame.  
 You were always eternal and sufficient.  
 Through your infinite will, you created the world  
 Out of endless energy and abiding love. 20  
 Your goodness encompasses everything that is,  
 From the miracle of man to the wonder of nature.  
 All goodness abides only in you; all holiness rests  
 In your shaping spirit. You craft and contain us,  
 Guide and restrain us. Every earthly good 25  
 Comes to us from without, from you, O God.  
 You know no envy of anything on earth  
 Because nothing surpasses you in goodness,  
 Nothing is more powerful, more perfect.  
 You planned all good things in your infinite mind— 30  
 All of creation was born in your conception.  
 Before you, Lord, there was no living creature  
 Who could make either anything or nothing,  
 But almighty God, the wonder is this—  
 You made everything without any template. 35  
 You created the world according to your wish,  
 You control everything according to your will.  
 You are the one who hands out to the world  
 Every offering, every opportunity, every good.  
 Every living creature that exists on earth 40  
 Once walked in the wake of your imagination.  
 Every tree once bloomed in your divine dreams,  
 Every ocean rolled through your waves of thought,  
 Every star was brightened by your mind's light,  
 Every moment was nascent in your endless knowing. 45  
 In your unfathomed heart is the holy hymn  
 That is making the moment-by-moment world.  
 You have made us each in some ways alike  
 From walking to wailing, birth to death—  
 In some ways unlike, from man to woman, 50  
 From fish to fowl, from bird to beast.  
 We are all created and known in your name,  
 One world under the clouds of heaven.

Oh God of glory, Father of all forms,  
 You separated creation into four elements, 55  
 A wonder of earth, air, fire, and water.  
 Each has its own birthplace and station,  
 Its own boundaries, yet each can flow  
 Into the other by your eternal command.  
 Fire rises into air, air breathes in water, 60  
 Water puts out fire, fire feeds on earth.  
 Water and earth together grow fruit.  
 The river runs wet from hill to plain.  
 The earth is cold, though often green.  
 The air is a mighty mixture in the middle, 65  
 Between earth and sky, sea and sun.  
 It is dry and wet, warm and cold,  
 Depending on the season, the wind and weather,  
 The sun and storm. Air also mingles  
 Fire and earth when lightning strikes 70  
 And trees burst into flame, blazing in air.  
 Many men know that fire is the highest—  
 It always rises—and earth is the lowest,  
 The deepest down beneath the surface.  
 It is a miracle of your making, almighty Lord, 75  
 That you set up boundaries and breach barriers,  
 Making us separate and mingling us together.  
 You support the streams, rivers, and seas  
 With a cradle of land, a bed for the water,  
 Which would otherwise run restless and ravenous 80  
 Over the earth, drowning all life.  
 Water is a wonder that can't stand up alone.  
 The earth absorbs water, gathers it as a gift  
 To the greening plants and bursting groves.  
 Fruit and flower, grape and grain, 85  
 Grow upon earth as a blessing to men.  
 The earth feeds each root a delicious drink.  
 Each stem and shoot thanks through its roots  
 The gift of ground. The fruit grows full  
 On the wonder of water, sun, and air. 90  
 Without this miracle, creation would collapse,  
 The dream of sustenance would turn into dust.

Everything on earth would be borne away  
 Like ashes that float on the drifting winds.  
 Nothing would last, no present life, 95  
 No future to look forward to, no past  
 To remember and record, no generation or joy.  
 Nothing alive can thrive without water,  
 Whose cold is tempered by a deep heat  
 That makes it palatable, a pleasure to drink. 100  
 Fire is controlled by you, King of angels,  
 Who mingled the land and sea, fire and air,  
 So that creation would not freeze or burn,  
 The world end in fierce frost or a fiery blaze.  
 It's no small miracle, this eternal mingling. 105  
 The cold creatures of earth and sea  
 Can never quite extinguish the fierce flames  
 In their wet holds, their deep hearts.  
 It's your subtle skill, Lord, that makes this so.  
 Water moves from land to sea, from sea to sky, 110  
 Returning to land in the miracle of rain  
 And morning dew, sometimes in frost and snow—  
 It is everywhere in creation from stem to storm.  
 The Father of angels has bound earthly fire,  
 So it cannot seek its homeland high under heaven 115  
 In the ethereal air. Sometimes fire roams  
 Like a rapacious beast, swallowing the land,  
 But is kept on a leash by our eternal Lord,  
 And can only destroy anything on earth  
 At his command. Of all the elements, 120  
 Earth is the heaviest, lying undisturbed  
 For the longest time. It's the lowest of creatures  
 Beneath the endlessly revolving firmament,  
 The bright shell above and around us  
 That spins each day as the world turns, 125  
 Always near yet never touching anything on earth.  
 Each of these elements has its own special home,  
 Though often they mingle at God's command.  
 They are always separate, but never alone.  
 Only a sage could solve this riddle. 130  
 Sometimes they're mixed in miraculous ways.

So earth may rise in a forest fire,  
 Fire may dance in steaming water  
 Or sleep in the heat of a sun-baked stone.  
 The Father of angels has bound the fire, 135  
 So it cannot easily find its way home,  
 Where the flame-creatures dwell together  
 In the ethereal realm. Fire may meet with cold  
 On its wandering way over heaven's road,  
 A curious clash of ice and flame. 140  
 Yet each thing seeks its family homeland,  
 The comfort of kin in clashing world.  
 Oh Lord of hosts, in your wise strength,  
 You've shaped the earth without a tilt,  
 Without a wobble, so it cannot slide down, 145  
 At least no more than it's ever done.  
 Nothing cradles this enormous earth  
 In the infinite air but your unseen hands,  
 Your heavenly spirit, your infinite power.  
 The earth in the universe is like an egg 150  
 Inside its shell. The yolk in the middle  
 Remains steady while the egg glides about  
 Like the revolving heavens, the sun and stars.  
 So the egg-like world of earth and air  
 Stays still while the bright shell 155  
 Circles each day as it's always done.

Oh God of hosts, you set in each of us  
 A sacred gift, a threefold soul,  
 That imbues our bodies from head to toe,  
 No less in a finger than in the whole 160  
 Walking, worrying, willful wonder of us.  
 Sages and philosophers say that this soul  
 Is always found with three faculties.  
 The first is anger or ill-temper,  
 Which lashes out with claws of wrath. 165  
 The second faculty is willful desire,  
 Which always yearns for what it wants.  
 The third and finest faculty is reason,  
 Which debates, discusses, measures, molds,

Makes distinctions, and weighs choices. 170  
 No right thinker is ashamed of reason  
 Because it makes us more than animals,  
 Rational beings with reflective minds.  
 Reason should always rightly rule  
 Both anger and desire in the mind of man. 175  
 Reason is the mind's force, the soul's strength.  
 Lord of victories, you created the soul  
 To reflect on itself, to rotate around  
 The ideas of the mind just as the firmament circles  
 The earth each day by your divine power. 180  
 So a man's soul circles about itself,  
 Pondering the world of wonderful things,  
 Ideas and images, desires and dreams,  
 Debating them all, crafting conclusions.  
 Sometimes the soul examines itself, 185  
 Sometimes it meditates upon the mind,  
 Sometimes it contemplates its eternal Creator.  
 It travels like a wheel, turning about itself,  
 Rolling about its own still center.  
 When it considers its nature, it lives and thrives 190  
 Within itself. When it contemplates God,  
 It gathers some greatness beyond itself,  
 Like holiness hovering over its own heart.  
 It loses itself when it loves earthly things  
 Above the glory of eternal salvation. 195  
 Almighty God, you have given the soul  
 A homeland in heaven, a goal to be won,  
 A grace attained, to each according to its good,  
 The merit of its thoughts, its words and works.  
 All souls are rich but not equally radiant, 200  
 Just as all stars are not equally bright.  
 Lord of all living creatures, in your wisdom,  
 You have mixed earthly and heavenly elements  
 In each of us here, bringing the soul and body  
 Together to travel the long road of life. 205  
 One lives in the other, the soul in the body,  
 The breath of God in its home of flesh.  
 They strive with all their strength to return

Home to their Maker on the last road—  
 But the body must stay where it was made, 210  
 Miraculous living dust made by the Lord.  
 It rose from the ground and returns to the grave.  
 Body and soul will remain bound together  
 As long as they're able, according to the will  
 Of their mighty Maker, the Lord of life. 215  
 Our Savior created this wondrous world  
 And filled it with many sorts of creatures,  
 As I've heard. He made a multitude of animals  
 From beasts of the field to fierce forest hunters.  
 He sowed the seeds for grain and grove, 220  
 Shade and sustenance. Almighty God,  
 Grant us the power to lift up our hearts  
 And raise up our minds to you, our Maker.  
 Let our thoughts rise up from this troubled world,  
 From suffering and sorrow, agony and affliction, 225  
 Through the strength of your eternal, abiding spirit,  
 To the highest goodness gathered together  
 In our mighty Creator and merciful God.  
 Give us the eyes to see and the minds to know  
 Your perfect wisdom, your power and grace. 230  
 Remove the haze from our earthly eyes,  
 The mist from our minds, so that we can see  
 The clarity of creation, the light of your love.  
 You are the brightness in every blessing,  
 The truth in everything trusted by man, 235  
 The only eternal and matchless mercy  
 That exists in creation—from the cradle of beginning,  
 To the bed-rest beyond—the shaper and sustainer  
 Of the soul's yearning, the heart's homeland.  
 Your mind holds the reason and radiance 240  
 Of all eternity, of the world beyond time,  
 You are the way of creation's waking  
 And winding to heaven. You are the guide  
 And guardian of our going toward glory,  
 Our heading home to a place of peace, 245  
 A restful embrace in your radiant arms."

[Wisdom argues that there are greater and lesser goods just as there are greater and lesser forms of happiness or felicity. The greatest good and the only true happiness resides in God. People know through the use of reason that lesser goods lack something which is fully and perfectly contained in the greatest good. God is both the source and the perfect embodiment of all goods. People should seek the perfect good, the true happiness of, and with, God, but sometimes they seek lesser goods. Wisdom follows with this poetic advice to Boethius:]

## 21

“Let the children of men throughout middle-earth  
 Strive for the goodness we are talking about,  
 The highest happiness, the eternal truth.  
 Let the man bound to the wheel of this world,  
 The man who loves only earthly goods, 5  
 Who seeks happiness in fame and glory,  
 Find the freedom to break his bonds  
 And seek pure joy in the soul’s salvation.  
 Heaven is the place the heart longs for,  
 A secure port for the ship of the mind 10  
 That is buffeted by storms on the sea of life,  
 The turbulent waves of this unsteady world.  
 God’s divine harbor is the only safe haven  
 From the storm and strife for the seafaring soul.  
 Heaven is our home, our place of refuge, 15  
 A haven of true happiness for the wretched.  
 I know for certain that no earthly hoard  
 Of gold and silver, jewels and gems,  
 Will ever illuminate the eyes of the mind,  
 The sight of the soul, or improve our vision 20  
 Of the greatest good that emanates from God.  
 The wealth of the world can only blind  
 The eyes of the mind and bind the heart  
 To an earthly good that is wholly lacking  
 In what the soul seeks—that pure perfection, 25  
 The eternal goodness of almighty God.  
 All earthly treasure is touched by time—  
 Its radiance will tarnish and turn to rust,

And the hand that bears the gift of gold  
 Will shrivel, die, and turn into dust. 30  
 The brightest beauty inheres in God.  
 It blazes forth its earthly beauty  
 From seed to shoot, bud to bloom.  
 The Lord does not want our souls to perish—  
 He wishes for each human spirit to soar, 35  
 To strive for goodness, thrive in virtue,  
 Be gathered up at last in his loving grace,  
 The eternal embrace of his welcoming arms.  
 If you can look up into the perfect light  
 With clear eyes and an unclouded mind, 40  
 Then you will behold in unabated glory  
 The Lord and Creator in such rich radiance  
 That it will make the sun seem like a shadow  
 In the brilliant bliss of his eternal light,  
 Shining without end for all blessed souls.” 45

[Wisdom tells Boethius that the greatest good is unified and whole. It is eternally sufficient; it lacks nothing. This unified oneness can only be God. Each creature seeks this unmatched good, which is its place of origin and its perfect fulfillment. Each creature seeks its own highest state and an eternal existence unbound by time. Wisdom continues in this vein, saying:]

## 22

“Anyone who wants to inquire inwardly  
 After the right in proper fashion  
 Must seek the good within himself,  
 Discovering the Lord’s divine truth  
 Deeply locked in his heart’s hoard, 5  
 A secret treasure in his soul’s security,  
 Where no earthly power can ever steal it.  
 The greatest treasure cannot be grasped,  
 Saved, or spent. Let the true seeker  
 Examine his heart, abandon anxiety, 10  
 Marshall his thoughts, eagerly meditate,  
 And say to his mind, ‘All that is best,



All that is truest, exists within,  
 Not outside where you so often seek.  
 With unclouded eyes, he will finally see  
 The useless evil that afflicts his heart, 15  
 The vanity that veils his vision of the truth,  
 Now clearly revealed like the sun's radiance,  
 When the heavenly star, the jewel of the sky,  
 Shimmers and brightens the summer's day.  
 The evil and iniquity that drag down the body 20  
 Can never destroy the divine soul  
 Or remove righteousness from the human spirit.  
 Though sin may trouble a man's mind  
 And make him forget his inborn faith  
 Or follow an evil path, break his promise, 25  
 Or embrace vice instead of virtue  
 So that the veil of error obscures his mind,  
 The seed of truth, the grain of grace,  
 Always exists within the mind, safe in the soul,  
 While it dwells in the worldly house of flesh. 30  
 That seed will sprout with a simple question  
 And gather into growth with true teaching.  
 How could a right-thinking man use reason  
 To find the truth through endless inquiry,  
 If the seed were not planted long ago, 35  
 If the mind had no wisdom or discretion,  
 If the soul had no sense of its hidden strength?  
 No man is so unreasonable or inept  
 That he can't find deep in his mind  
 An answer to a question if it is asked. 40  
 For this is a truth that Plato taught us,  
 Our ancient philosopher, the sage who said:  
 'A man who has lost his way to wisdom  
 Should turn back on the road of his own mind,  
 Travel to the homeland of his inner heart, 45  
 And unearth the intelligence that is buried there  
 Beneath ignorance, confusion, suffering, and sorrow,  
 The weight of the world, the drag of flesh,  
 The earthly agony in the turbulence of time.'"

[Wisdom returns now to an earlier topic of how God rules the world and deals with those who resist his will. He teaches Boethius that God has unlimited power to do anything, but since God cannot do evil, evil is essentially nothing or the absence of good. He proposes to take up some ancient stories which, though limited in vision, will illustrate God's power, and he begins with an introductory praise-song on the power and perfection of God:]

## 23

“A man would be happy his whole life on earth  
 If he could see clearly the purest stream  
 Of heavenly radiance, the source of goodness  
 That bathes us all in a shimmering bliss,  
 And could cast away the dark mists  
 That obscure the mind and veil the truth.  
 Yet with God's help, we can heal your heart  
 And uncloud your mind with old tales  
 And ancient myths. So listen to this story  
 And find your way on the righteous road  
 To your eternal home, the soul's haven.”

5

10

[Wisdom relates to Boethius the ancient story of Orpheus and Eurydice and afterwards explains the moral of the story: Anyone who wishes to flee the darkness of hell and seek the light of the Lord should not look back, recalling his previous evil deeds, so that he replays them in his mind and begins to enjoy them once again. The story causes Boethius to remember his own unjust suffering and untold grief, and he asks Wisdom again, as he did earlier: “If God is good, why does he permit the existence of evil?” Wisdom reminds Boethius that evil is only the lack of good and is essentially a form of unbeing. He wants to show Boethius the true pathway to the heavenly city from which he came, so that he can see for himself the true goodness and happiness of God. But first he must give Boethius wings for his mind, so it can lift and fly to its true homeland, forsaking all earthly concerns. He can only do this with poetry, so he begins to sing:]

## 24

“I have wings to fly swifter than a bird  
 Over this earth and the high roof of heaven.

If I could lend your mind this miracle,  
 Stitch to your soul these sacred wings  
 So you could see and scorn this world 5  
 And lift your thinking as high as heaven—  
 You could soar above all earthly clouds,  
 Beyond the mists that dim the mind,  
 Wheel and hover in the ethereal air,  
 Gliding above the celestial fire, 10  
 Pure flames beneath the fixed firmament  
 That separate sky from space, ether from air,  
 Just as God created it in the beginning.  
 You could travel the sun-road among the stars,  
 Spreading your wings in the endless air, 15  
 Passing by the lonely, ice-cold star  
 That we call Saturn, the highest wanderer  
 Above our world. Beyond that star  
 In this strange miracle of your soaring mind,  
 You can finally pass beyond the firmament, 20  
 Leaving behind the highest sky-realm  
 To suddenly see the Lord's true light,  
 Where the King of heaven rules all creation,  
 Both heaven and earth, sea and sky,  
 Land and air, and all its creatures, 25  
 From plants to planets, beginning to end.  
 He is the wisest king, Ruler of all realms,  
 Who holds in his hands the reins of the sun  
 And all the planets, controlling creation,  
 Securing the spheres of heaven and earth, 30  
 Steering and sustaining each orb in the air,  
 Each world-wagon, each bridled chariot,  
 With his sure strength and wielding will.  
 He is the steadfast Shaper, the righteous Judge,  
 Eternal, unchanging, forever fair, 35  
 A beauty unblemished, a grace unalloyed.  
 If you're able to find that heart's homeland,  
 A glorious place you've forgotten for now,  
 If you ever return to that heavenly radiance,  
 You'll suddenly see and say to yourself: 40  
 'This is my home which has always been here

Right from the beginning before my birth.  
 This is the land I've always longed for,  
 This is the light I've always known.  
 This is the cradle of my own beginning, 45  
 The comfort of my ending, my place of peace.  
 Here I was born through my Maker's power,  
 Here I would stay with my Father's will,  
 Never again thinking to leave my Lord.  
 Then if you return from this radiant paradise 50  
 To the world of darkness where evil abounds,  
 You will finally see with unclouded eyes  
 The tyranny and torment caused by kings,  
 Who afflict the wretched and ruin the poor,  
 Who wield their power to promote their gain, 55  
 No matter what the cost in pain and suffering  
 To those who endure their lives in agony.  
 Yet these same kings are themselves as wretched  
 As those poor people who so greatly fear them.  
 Their souls are suffering, their hearts are heavy. 60  
 Their wickedness is its own dread weight."

[In the continuing dialogue with Boethius, Wisdom argues that in spite of worldly appearances, evil is actually powerless, while good is powerful. All men naturally seek goodness and happiness, but those who are evil cannot achieve it. They lack the willpower to fulfill their own God-given natures. Whoever forsakes the goodness of God and his own true happiness lessens his humanity. Whoever is virtuous and seeks the good fulfills his nature and discovers true happiness. That person is blessed by God. Then Wisdom begins to sing about earthly kings, whose power is fleeting:]

25

"Listen to my story of proud and powerful,  
 Unjust and unrighteous earthly kings,  
 Who shimmer brightly in their silver robes  
 And glimmer nightly in embroidered gold,  
 Surrounded by sycophant lords and thanes. 5  
 Adorned with jewels, they vainly occupy  
 Their haughty thrones that reach to the roofs.

Their warriors wear bright battle-gear,  
 Swords and sheaths, spears and shields,  
 Studded with gems, garnished with gold, 10  
 All serving each other and their arrogant king.  
 They oppress their neighbors near and far  
 With punishing power. The lord who leads them,  
 The king who controls them, shows no mercy  
 To anyone on earth, friend or foe. 15  
 He rushes on all men like a mad dog,  
 Drags them down, crushes their resistance,  
 Seizes their land, destroys their lives.  
 He dreams himself an unconquerable king  
 Because he thrives on his thanes' cruelty, 20  
 Their savage force. Should anyone come  
 To strip off his strength, remove his robes  
 Of power and peril one by one,  
 And steal his servants, the soldiers of death,  
 Then you might see his authority undone, 25  
 His strength sapped, himself unkinged.  
 He would be just another sycophant thane,  
 Serving someone more powerful than he,  
 Dreaming of one day becoming the king.  
 If fortune should turn bitterly against him, 30  
 Fate bring him down to the naked dust,  
 Time take back his trappings of power,  
 His new life would be like a darkening hole,  
 An endless abyss, a prison of pain,  
 Where the once proud wretch is shackled in chains, 35  
 Tortured and tormented. I'll teach you the truth:  
 From unrestrained pride and unbridled anger,  
 From immoderation in both dress and drink,  
 From guzzling wine and gorging on food,  
 From feasting on power and seeking out sin, 40  
 Life turns into a fierce frenzy of lust,  
 Seething a man's mind, heaving his heart,  
 Churning up pride, creating conflict,  
 Inviting evil, undermining his soul.  
 His heart will swell up inside his chest 45  
 With a terrible fury, a ravenous rage,

Awakening a subtle, evil enemy  
 Inside himself. He will wield the sword  
 Of his own unbound passion and power  
 Against himself and find his soul chained 50  
 To endless suffering, gripped with grief,  
 Engulfed in agony. His vengeance will hope  
 For an obvious enemy, some hostile foe,  
 But he will stay stifled, deluded by dreams  
 That his raging heart may find some release. 55  
 His anger will snarl and snap here and there,  
 Trying to gnash and gnaw his own soul,  
 Hungry for one thing or another.  
 An unrighteous spirit will prove ravenous  
 To a power-hungry king. I told you before 60  
 That each and every creature in the world  
 Deeply desires to follow his inborn nature  
 To embrace the good and discover happiness,  
 The bright blessing of being with God.  
 Earthly kings abounding in iniquity, 65  
 Embracing injustice, will never know good.  
 They are bound in sin, voluptuous in vice.  
 They may rule people but are ruled in turn  
 By their own fears, their own evil,  
 Their own unrighteous and unruly hearts. 70  
 Many will not even struggle against sin  
 To free their souls. They should strive  
 Against iniquity even if their strength is sapped  
 And they cannot succeed. Their effort to struggle  
 Against evil may ease their shame, 75  
 Reduce their suffering, and assuage some blame,  
 Even if they are overcome in the end.”

[Wisdom explains to Boethius that those who seek good are rewarded with it, while those who seek evil are both powerless and punished for their evil choices. Virtue is its own reward, and vice is its own sentence. Goodness raises someone above his nature in the direction of God; evil lowers him in the direction of a beast. So a robber is like a wolf; a deceiver is like a fox. One who is proud and angry is like a lion; one

who is lusty is like a pig. Wisdom then illustrates the dangers of evil, animalistic behavior by telling the story of Ulysses and Circe:]

## 26

“Now I will tell you an ancient story,  
 A strange fantasy crafted in poetry,  
 To illustrate the evil we are talking about.  
 Once upon a time, the warrior Ulysses  
 Controlled two kingdoms under the emperor, 5  
 Ruling the realms of Thrace and Retia.  
 He served his lord and master Agamemnon,  
 King of the Greeks, who was at the time  
 Bent boldly on battle in the Trojan War,  
 A bloody battle beneath the skies. 10  
 Ulysses sailed with him to attack Troy,  
 Leading one hundred ships over the sea.  
 They assaulted Troy for over ten years.  
 The mighty Greeks finally fashioned  
 A great victory out of power and pretense, 15  
 Devising a devious, timbered riddle  
 And rode into Troy in a horse’s belly.  
 They defeated the Trojans, sacking the city.  
 It was a costly battle on both sides  
 As the high and humble fell to the sword. 20  
 After the victory, Ulysses set sail  
 In the strongest and greatest of Greek ships  
 With a stout belly and three oar-banks,  
 Leaving behind the other ninety-nine.  
 He rode in a boat with foamy sides, 25  
 The swiftest and best of Greek ships.  
 Then a ravaging storm roiled the waves,  
 Fierce winds lifted and lashed the ship,  
 Bitter cold descended on king and crew,  
 And the dark weather relentlessly drove 30  
 The warriors across the Mediterranean Sea  
 Onto an island where the beautiful daughter  
 Of noble Apollo, the son of Jove,  
 Had lived like a goddess for a long time.

Though great Apollo was the son of Jove, 35  
 He liked to pretend in his passionate power  
 To every man and woman he met  
 That he was the highest and holiest god,  
 Deceiving his subjects, living this lie,  
 Exulting in this error. Many believed him 40  
 Because at that time each king was considered  
 A kind of god born into the glory  
 Of a noble family. Everyone thought  
 That Jove's father, who was called Saturn,  
 Was also a god. Those tribes considered 45  
 Each king in the line of succession  
 An eternal god. So Apollo's daughter Circe  
 Was deemed a goddess by her foolish followers  
 Across the island. She was a magician  
 Who performed spells, raised powers, 50  
 And practiced perversity, all the dark arts.  
 She ruled that island where Ulysses landed  
 In his storm-driven ship, the sea's exile.  
 That was a dangerous, unhealthy place  
 For the king of Thrace to harbor in. 55  
 Soon the arrival of Ulysses was known  
 To everyone who lived on Circe's island.  
 The queenly magician fell madly in love  
 With the seafaring lord, the king and captain,  
 And he also drank deeply of desire 60  
 For the brazen, beautiful, seductive sorceress.  
 His heart was turned away from home—  
 He shunned the ship and all his thanes,  
 Who felt displaced in that alien land.  
 They loved their lord but were determined to leave 65  
 This island of dreams. People began to talk,  
 Saying that Circe was transforming the men  
 Into wild animals and binding them with chains.  
 Some became wolves who lost their words  
 And could only howl for their former selves. 70  
 Some were wild boars and began to grunt  
 And snort their sorrow in a swine's lament.



Some were lions who savagely roared,  
 Fiercely calling for their lost companions.  
 The place was thick with animal warriors, 75  
 Both young and old. They nursed their anger  
 At the edge of thought, pacing restlessly  
 By the brutal bars of their cruel cages.  
 Each man was turned into the very animal  
 He often resembled in his human form— 80  
 Sly fox, mad dog, greedy pig, lone wolf—  
 Except for the king whom the queen loved.  
 None of the creatures would eat human food—  
 They wanted to feast like wild animals  
 On other meat. That was hardly fitting! 85  
 They were beasts in blood but men in mind,  
 Bound in a sorrow they could not sing out,  
 Lost in a lament of grunts and growls.  
 Some fools believed in their unholy faith  
 That Circe could change both body and mind, 90  
 Both skin and soul with her evil sorcery,  
 But no power under heaven can shift the soul  
 Or remake the mind with dark magic.  
 The power of the spirit, created and quickened  
 By the Lord himself, is a mighty miracle. 95  
 The mind rules the body from head to foot—  
 Breathing, walking, waking, talking.  
 Mind and body may move together,  
 But one is stronger, the other weaker,  
 And the mightiest one may not be seen. 100  
 Every power that the body possesses  
 Originates in the mind—from speech to step,  
 From heart to health, from fear to flight.  
 The vice of the mind will prove more blinding  
 Than the illness of the eye. An evil idea 105  
 Can destroy more good than an angry hand.  
 No one can expect the world-weary flesh  
 To divert and delight a suffering mind,  
 But a dark thought, a depraved idea,  
 Can bend a body in devious ways.” 110

[Wisdom and Boethius again debate the question of why evil appears to go unpunished in this life. Wisdom teaches Boethius that evil deeds bring their own suffering as a man turns from the greater good to a lesser one and from true happiness to worldly pleasure. He also assures Boethius that the peril and punishment of God's judgment awaits all evildoers. Wisdom then argues that those who are punished in this life for their evil deeds are more fortunate than those who are not, because they may, through suffering and reflection, amend their ways and return to virtue. He encourages Boethius to keep his mind on heavenly things instead of earthly ones and to have mercy on those who are evil. Then Wisdom begins to sing:]

## 27

“Why must you men stir up your minds  
 With unwise thoughts and unfair hatred,  
 Just as the wind-driven waves disturb  
 The ice-cold sea with terrible storms?  
 Why do you rant and rail against fate 5  
 For having no power, no obvious purpose?  
 Why can't you wait for the bitter death  
 That the Lord has wisely created for you,  
 That hastens to embrace you from the end of life's  
 Long road, coming nearer each day? 10  
 Can you not decipher this worldly truth—  
 That time unwinds every earthly purpose,  
 That inexorable death is a devouring shadow  
 That seeks all creatures from bird to beast,  
 From fish to fowl, from king to commoner? 15  
 Death is a dark hunter walking the world,  
 Stalking each life in relentless stealth.  
 Its pursuit is endless, its power pervasive.  
 It never stops to rest, it never falters.  
 Death eventually catches everything in creation. 20  
 It is a grim irony that many wretched men  
 Cannot be content to simply wait for death.  
 They rush headlong to greet their killer  
 Before their time like mad beasts  
 Or wild birds determined to slay 25  
 Their nearest neighbor on pad or wing

Or be ravaged and slain in bloodlust battle.  
 Sometimes it seems in this mad world  
 That every killer wants to be killed.  
 It's wrong for a man to bitterly hold 30  
 Hatred in his heart, murder in his mind,  
 Like a savage wolf or a carrion crow.  
 A good man should carry mercy in his mind,  
 Holiness in his heart, be slow and sure  
 In his earthly judgments. It is only right 35  
 To reward those who deserve respect,  
 To honor those who aid others,  
 To love those who accomplish good.  
 Have mercy on those snared in sin—  
 Your own evil lurks not far away. 40  
 Love the sinner but despise the sin,  
 And cut away vice from the cankered heart.”

[Boethius challenges Wisdom again, maintaining that a just and wise God would not allow the good to suffer while the wicked thrive in this world and wondering if such events are not the result of random fortune. Wisdom reaffirms that fortune is an illusion and that God rules the world with a providential hand, even if Boethius and other mortals cannot comprehend his plan and purpose. Wisdom then sings about the order of the cosmos. In the poem, the author seems not to have fully understood the cosmological details of his Old English prose source, whose author was equally confused about the details of Roman cosmology in his Latin source (see Godden and Irvine, v. II, 458, 517).]

## 28

Then Wisdom began to sing again:  
 “What man who lacks learning on earth  
 Does not marvel at heaven's holy wonder,  
 The subtle movement of the far firmament,  
 The swift circling of the shimmering stars, 5  
 The way celestial bodies revolve and rotate  
 Around the world? Who does not marvel  
 At the myriad stars and their varied orbits,  
 Some short, some long? One of the clusters  
 Is a constellation called the Wain or Plow, 10

Which circles the world in a short orbit  
 Because it's close to the northern pole  
 Of the unseen axis of the great firmament,  
 Around which everything so smoothly glides.  
 Who does not marvel, except the sages 15  
 Who understood the method long ago,  
 That some stars have a much wider orbit  
 And must move through the sky more swiftly  
 Than their sister stars circling near the poles?  
 The wise ones say this is clearly the case 20  
 Around the equator where the stars speed up  
 Because of the distance of their nightly travel,  
 Farthest from the firmament's two poles.  
 One wide traveler is known as Saturn.  
 It orbits the earth every thirty years. 25  
 A star-group called Boötes, the Herdsman,  
 Also comes and goes every thirty years.  
 Who does not wonder at the astonishing stars  
 That appear to travel beyond the sea  
 Or drop down under the ocean's edge 30  
 As it seems to watchers? Some men believe  
 That the sun dives down in the sea each night,  
 Dancing up at dawn in the morning air,  
 But this myth is now known to be untrue.  
 The sun seems to move in an ethereal arc 35  
 From sea to sea in the day's course  
 Until it rests at night in its ocean bed,  
 But it's not nearer the sea at dawn or dusk  
 Than it is at noon. Who does not marvel  
 At the full moon, sometimes robbed of its light 40  
 When it disappears suddenly behind the clouds?  
 Who does not wonder why the shining stars  
 Are so clearly seen all through the night,  
 Even next to the moon with its greater light,  
 But never during the day when next to the sun? 45  
 Why do we wonder about the strangeness of stars,  
 When we take for granted our endless feuds,  
 The earthly hostility that so often exists

Between all creatures, both beasts and men?  
 Do the heavenly bodies ever clash in battle, 50  
 Crash in their course, blast and burn?  
 Why do the sages who study the stars  
 Never wonder about the power of thunder  
 And lightning to suddenly scorch the sky,  
 Ravage the land with flaming fury, 55  
 Turning the world into a torment of flame,  
 Only to hide out again in heaven's home,  
 Then suddenly appear in blaze and boom,  
 Raining down death in intermittent rage?  
 And why do the waves lash out at the land 60  
 And war with the wind? And how can ice  
 Be born out of water, the hardest of children,  
 Hanging from a roof or riding the wave,  
 Freezing a stream or locking the land,  
 Only to be melted by the mighty sun, 65  
 Returning to the watery womb of its mother?  
 These are the miracles we see each day,  
 The wonders of creation in our daily world,  
 But men are often blind to such marvels,  
 The gifts of God. Their mundane minds 70  
 Are more often moved by things seldom seen,  
 Though these are less a wonder to the wise.  
 Men tend to dream about isolated events,  
 Nature's eruptions, the darkening sun,  
 A swallowing sea-storm, a savage wind, 75  
 Which they like to think are acts of chance  
 Or the dark face of fortune behind the mask  
 That smiles and seduces, dreams and deceives.  
 We don't see the deeper pattern or purpose  
 In the endless movement of eternal creation. 80  
 The limited mind is a pitiful thing,  
 But a man may learn. A curious student  
 Can ask a question, discover an answer,  
 Comprehend in time the ways of the world.  
 The Guardian of life can remove the shadows 85  
 That eclipse the mind of the unknowing man.

Through study and skill, he may learn the laws  
 Of land and sky, sea and air, earth and heaven.  
 What was once a miracle will seem mundane.

[Boethius is still troubled by the apparent random order of events. In the longest prose section of the work, Wisdom explains that what Boethius sees as chance or fate is only a misperception of the providential working out of God's divine purpose, which mankind can only imperfectly understand. He goes on to explain that the world is ruled by a caring and just God, who tempers judgment with mercy. God is the strength and center of all worldly movement like the axle of a moving wheel. Boethius still wonders why the good sometimes suffer while the wicked thrive, but Wisdom explains that wickedness alienates a man from God and therefore separates him from true happiness. Goodness brings a man closer to God, even if a man suffers for his good acts in this world. People cannot easily discern this because of their limited, time-bound perception. They cannot see with the eternal eyes of God. Boethius grows weary and wants another poetic song, which Wisdom provides for him:]

## 29

“If you want to see clearly the order of the universe  
 And the power of the Creator who rules all realms,  
 Consider the peace of the heavenly stars,  
 Who never battle or leave their respective places  
 In endless space. This has always been true 5  
 Since the beginning of time. Almighty God  
 Also created the fiery sun to follow a course  
 Across the sky without intersecting the path  
 Of the snow-cold one, the shimmering moon.  
 Neither of those bold heavenly bodies 10  
 Ever impacts the other. Ursa the Bear  
 Never wanders west but circles around  
 The celestial pole, never rising or setting  
 As the other stars do, descending each night  
 Under the earth, following the sun. 15  
 This is no wonder since it is so far eastward  
 And near the top of the firmament's axis.  
 One star is fairer than all the others,

Rising and beckoning the sun-bright one  
 At the edge of dawn. The children of men 20  
 Call this wonder the morning star  
 Because it proclaims to everyone on earth  
 That God's glorious candle is coming  
 To waken the towns and warm the fields.  
 The sentinel star rises out of the east 25  
 Before the sun, gracing the sky  
 With its bright beauty, then later fades,  
 Following that radiant one across the evening,  
 Westward to their unseen resting place  
 Under the world. That twilight wonder 30  
 Is renamed by watchers the evening star.  
 It is swifter than the sun in the unseen world,  
 For it always passes that traveler at night  
 Until it arrives again in the morning light  
 To announce the coming of the radiant one. 35  
 Two noble stars, the sun and moon,  
 Share the sky parceled into day and night,  
 Harmonious in heaven by God's plan,  
 His purpose and power, from the bright beginning.  
 Such stars will never tire of traveling 40  
 Heaven's road until Judgment Day.  
 Then God will gather all the stars of heaven,  
 Doing what's fitting according to his will.  
 The Lord rules the sky with his celestial laws:  
 He never lets the sun and moon come together 45  
 On the same high road at the same time  
 Lest they collide and destroy other creatures,  
 Heavenly bodies and the children of men.  
 God reconciles all the celestial forces  
 In the infinite space with his eternal power. 50  
 Sometimes the dry air drives out the wet;  
 Sometimes the cold combines with the heat  
 By the Creator's skill, the King's command.  
 Sometimes a great flame rises in the air.  
 Sometimes the fire burns deep in the earth, 55  
 Even when the land is locked in ice—  
 It hides and burns by some holy power.

Each spring the earth brings forth creatures.  
 The land gives birth to fish and fowl,  
 Beast and bird, seed and shoot. 60  
 The summer fattens fruit and grain,  
 Prepares and dries seeds and crops  
 Across the earth for the children of men.  
 Fall brings a ripe harvest home  
 Through the hands of men to fill the table. 65  
 Then follows rainstorm, snow and hail,  
 Moistening the earth all through winter.  
 The seeds of spring awake to drink  
 And send up sprouts, shoots, and blooms.  
 Our mighty Maker and merciful Lord 70  
 Nourishes everything that buds and blooms,  
 Spreads and grows, flourishes and fills,  
 Hiding some fruits in the wild wood,  
 Revealing others in the open fields.  
 Thus God the Savior serves and supports 75  
 All earth-dwellers. The King of creation  
 Sits on his throne and sustains the world.  
 The Lord of life holds firmly in heaven  
 The unseen reins of all earthly creatures,  
 All worldly forces, all ordered seasons. 80  
 He is Source and Sustainer of all creatures,  
 Lord and King of all living things,  
 Eternal Law-giver, Guardian of the universe.  
 He sends all creatures into our world  
 To live in his light, then calls them home. 85  
 His order sustains each earthly thing;  
 His steadfast hand keeps us all safe.  
 Without his power, we would not be stable.  
 We would scatter and fall, shatter and break,  
 Wither in the wind, darken into dust. 90  
 Without the Creator, we would come to nothing.  
 All the countless creatures of heaven and earth  
 Share one thing in common—love of the Lord.  
 They serve and adore this sustaining Ruler;  
 They reverently rejoice in their almighty Father. 95  
 This is no wonder since no creatures could survive



And live somewhere else in the universe  
 If they were not serving their sustaining Lord,  
 In touch with their origins, carrying out the will  
 Of their loving Creator, the God of glory.”

100

[Wisdom continues to clarify for Boethius the idea that fate is a mistaken way of explaining what happens in this world from a limited human perspective. Everything that happens, whether difficult or delightful, offers man the opportunity to respond in a virtuous way that will allow him to partake of true happiness and the goodness of God. Every form of what we call fate is useful in some way, either to teach us or to chastise us. A wise man is one who understands the balance of pleasant and unpleasant fates in the world and holds to his faith in eternal Providence. Wisdom goes on to discuss God’s infinite knowledge of all things past, present, and future and to explain how this knowledge does not limit man’s free will. Humans have the freedom to choose wisely or unwisely. When we choose eternal things, our freedom is greater. When we choose worldly things, our freedom is less. The more we choose the good, the more we fulfill our God-given nature and find both greater freedom and truer happiness. Wisdom goes on to talk about the nature of creation, contrasting the poet Homer’s powers with those of God.]

## 30

Wisdom began to sing to Boethius:

“Homer was the greatest of human shapers,  
 Skilled and gifted among the Greeks,  
 A song-smith who crafted powerful poetry,  
 A trusted friend and teacher of Virgil—  
 He provided a model for that famous poet.  
 Homer often sang of the sun’s bright beauty,  
 Proclaiming its nobility in verse and prose.  
 The sun can shine brilliantly on the world,  
 But it cannot illuminate every creature,  
 Every corner of the earth, every stretch of the sea,  
 And it cannot enlighten the inner man,  
 Offering a light both inside and out.  
 But almighty God, our majestic Maker,  
 Ruler of all radiance, illuminates everyone

5

10

15

From head to heart. He sees us  
 And sees through us. His power is pervasive.  
 He is the light that knows no darkness,  
 The brightness that exists beyond boundaries,  
 The grace that gathers in an interior space.  
 He is our Savior, the one true Sun  
 We can praise in poetry, powerful and perfect.”

20

[Wisdom pursues the discussion of what appears to be God’s foreknowledge, which is actually his omniscient knowledge of all events in all times, and its relation to human freedom. Boethius wants to know why God permits evil to occur if he knows about it beforehand. Wisdom explains that God has given man free will to make choices, whether good or evil. Each man may do as he desires and must then reap the resulting rewards on earth and in eternity. Wisdom continues to explain that God knows everything in all worldly times because of his eternal nature, but his knowing does not preclude man’s freedom to choose. This is the central paradox: We choose freely, but God knows from his eternal perspective what we choose. Angels can understand this because their perception is closer to that of God. Mankind can only partially understand this. Animals cannot understand anything of the sort. People should imitate the angels in their understanding insofar as they can. Wisdom then offers his final poem, saying:]

31

“You can see the truth if you open your eyes  
 To the various insights I’ve offered you.  
 Observe the creatures who inhabit the earth:  
 They are all different in size and shape,  
 Their colors and forms are not the same,  
 Their ways of moving are quite distinct.  
 Some creep and crawl, bellying the ground—  
 They have no wings to soar through the sky,  
 No feet to set down firmly on earth.  
 They worm and wriggle as is their lot.  
 Some tread the ground with two good feet;  
 Others plot or trot along on four.

5

10

Some wing their way in the ethereal air,  
 Soaring under sun, coasting under clouds.  
 Each creature is ultimately drawn down 15  
 By force or feeling toward the earth,  
 Gazing homeward, whether gliding in air  
 Or grazing on the ground. Some creatures come  
 Out of necessity—they feel the weight.  
 Some creatures come, driven by hunger, 20  
 Savagely seeking some four-footed feast.  
 Of all these creatures made by God,  
 Only man walks with his face raised up  
 To see the sky. This signifies a great truth:  
 A man's mind and his heartfelt faith 25  
 Need to be directed upwards toward heaven  
 And God's holy purpose, rather than downward  
 Toward the earth like an unthinking animal.  
 A man should not be looking up with his eyes  
 And down with his mind. His soul should soar, 30  
 So that heaven is always his heart's homeland."

[Wisdom concludes by exhorting everyone to seek God as ably as they can, given the limited nature of their human perception and understanding. He concludes with advice to Boethius in a passage of poetic prose, saying:

We know little of what came before us except through memory  
 or inquiry. We know even less of what will come after us. We  
 only know for certain what happens to us in present time. We  
 cannot see God with absolute clarity because we are transitory  
 while God is eternal. God's glory never waxes and it never  
 wanes because it is ever-present. God never remembers because  
 he never forgets. He never learns anything because he knows  
 everything. He seeks for nothing because he has lost nothing.  
 He pursues no one because no one can flee from his presence.  
 He fears no one because he is more powerful than anyone. He is  
 always giving without lessening his heart's hoard. He is all-  
 powerful and all-purposeful. He always desires good and never  
 evil. He needs nothing and watches everything. He never rests,

never sleeps. He is both mighty and merciful. He is eternal—there is no time or place where he is not.

He inhabits and energizes past, present, future—all time, real and imagined. He is wholly free, compelled by nothing. No one's mind can measure God's greatness. To measure his vastness, his goodness, you would need an infinite ruler. No man should exalt himself, for God is almighty and unmatched. He sits on his heavenly throne and rewards each one according to his words and works. Trust in the Lord, for he is unchanging. Pray humbly to God, for he is merciful and generous. Raise up your hands and minds to him and ask for his gifts, which are righteous and good. He will not refuse you. Seek only the eternal happiness which is his. Love virtue and loathe vice. Seek only the good in the eyes of God, for he is ever present, ever watching, ever ready to reward you rightly for everything you do.]

# THE MINOR POEMS





## INTRODUCTION

I am a gather of voices from many places,  
Book-houses in Cambridge and Copenhagen,  
Vienna and Oxford, Leiden and Leningrad,  
Dijon and Durham, Winchester and Vienna.  
I may adorn a jewel or be set in stone,  
Carved on a cross or a whale's bone.  
My stories are legion from prayer to sword-play,  
Rune to riddle, calendar to chronicle.  
I am the record of history, the play of proverbs,  
Creed, colophon, calendar, hymn,  
Whole charms and fragmented psalms,  
The mighty battles of Maldon and Finnsburg—  
All brought together from hide and bone  
Across the centuries to a modern home  
Of tree-pulp and cotton, printed and bound,  
Not the cow's skin, craftily quilled.  
Wrap your mind around my history  
To say where I come from and who I am.

**T**his collection of various so-called “minor poems” was assembled by Dobbie for volume VI of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. A better term might have been “miscellaneous poems,” for many of them, such as *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Fight at Finnsburg*, *Cædmon's Hymn*, and *Maxims II: Cotton Maxims*, are poems of major importance. In the preface, Dobbie admits this and explains the principles of inclusion:

This volume . . . contains the many verse texts, most of them short, which are scattered here and there in manuscripts not primarily devoted to Anglo-Saxon poetry. The title, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, seems the most convenient one available, although a number of the poems, notably *The Battle of Maldon*, and *Solomon and Saturn*, are not “minor” in the ordinary sense of that word. As a general rule, only those poems have been admitted which are written in the regular alliterative verse; but *The Death of Alfred*, which has rime instead of alliteration, is included with the five other Chronicle poems, following the practice of earlier editors, and the metrical charms are printed in their entirety, though most of them are only partly in verse and their metrical structure is often far from regular. . . . No special virtue is claimed for the order in which the poems are printed in this volume. All that can be said is that the order adopted seemed a natural one from the beginning, and that no better order suggested itself. (Dobbie, 1942, v–vi)

The principles of inclusion are debatable. The prose portions of the charms are printed, but not the prose portions surrounding the Benedictine Office poems (MS Junius 121). The book prefaces sometimes lead naturally into the prose texts themselves and are somewhat difficult to understand without them. The definition of what constitutes a proper Old English poem in terms of its metrical and alliterative structure is the subject of continued scholarly debate. Passages of rhythmical prose often morph into what might be called “flexible verse,” especially in the later part of the Anglo-Saxon period. It is difficult to decide when a poem or poetic passage passes from Old to Middle English, and this decision must remain to a certain extent arbitrary. Some late poems, like *The Death of Alfred*, include both rhyme and alliteration. Some lines have a flexible alliterative pattern; some have rhymes at the end of each hemistich; and a few have both rhyme and alliteration (loosely defined) in the same line. Additionally, a number of poems have been newly recognized or discovered hidden away in prose passages or obscure manuscripts since Dobbie formed his collection, and these are included in the “Additional Poems” section of the present collection of translations.

Dobbie’s edition is a miscellany of Old English poems collected from a variety of places, mostly in Britain but reaching out as far as Copenhagen and Leningrad. The poems range in importance from *Cædmon’s Hymn* and *The Battle of Maldon* to *Thureth* and *The Fragments of Psalms* in the Benedictine Office (MS Junius 121), most of which can be read in their full poetic context



in *The Metrical Psalms in the Paris Psalter* in volume V of *ASPR*. Since the poems in this collection come from various manuscripts and other non-manuscript sources such as the Franks Casket and the Ruthwell Cross, readers who want to know more about the original formats should consult the detailed descriptions of them in the introductions to the individual poems in *ASPR*, volume VI.

## THE FIGHT AT FINNSBURG

This fragment is based on a transcription by George Hickes in his 1705 *Thesaurus*; the original manuscript leaf has never been found. The poem, sometimes called *The Battle at Finnsburh* or *The Finnsburh Fragment*, tells part of the story recounted in *Beowulf* of the tragedy of the Danish princess Hildeburh, daughter of King Hoc of the Half-Danes, who is married off to Finn, king of the Frisians, in a doomed gesture of peace-weaving between warring peoples. She goes off to live with her husband's people, as is the common Germanic practice. Her brother Hnæf comes to visit with his chief thane Hengest and a retinue of retainers. The old feud between the Half-Danes and Frisians simmers, and one night a small group of Frisians attacks the Half-Danes as the old feud breaks out between the two traditional enemies. Many warriors die on both sides. Hildeburh's brother Hnæf and her unnamed son are both killed. A temporary truce is established, but later in the spring the feud breaks out again when two Danes avenge the murder of one of their kinsmen. In the second battle, Finn is killed and the Danes vanquish their old enemies and return home with Hildeburh and various treasures. Whether the conflict described here in the fragment is part of the first or second battle remains unclear. Also unclear is whether Guthlaf the Dane mentioned in lines 21 ff. is the same as the father of the Frisian warrior Garulf in line 44. If he is, then there is an added dimension of mixed loyalties and pathos added to the story as recounted in *Beowulf*. Here is a father-son conflict that echoes the other family conflicts in the story, all of which lead to tragedy and death. For a fuller summary of the battle and more information on the relation between the fragment and the passage in *Beowulf*, see *Klaeber 4*, 273–81.

## The Fight at Finnsburg

\* \* \*

“Are the gables burning?”

Then Hnæf the unhardened battle-king answered:

“This is not dawn-light from the east or dragon’s flight

With its breath-fire; nor are the hall-gables burning.

The enemy attacks and the sky seems scorched. 5

Carrion crows sing, the gray corselet rings,

The gray wolf howls, the battle-wood screams

In savage war-shrieks, shaft on shield.

The moon wanders like an exile through the clouds,

And woe and wonder will come to pass. 10

Dark deeds draw down; evil is afoot.

This will be a dire and deep drink for friends

And foes. So wake up now, my bold warriors,

Seize swords and shields, stand firm at the front.

Keep courage. Settle this fierce conflict 15

With resolute hearts and a battle-hard will.”

Then many thanes rose up—their armor,

Helmets, and armbands adorned with gold.

They took up their weapons. The brave warriors,

Sigferth and Eaha, drew their swords, 20

Stood at one door, while Ordlaf and Guthlaf

Guarded the other. Hengest himself

Followed in their footsteps. Then Guthere spoke

Among the Frisians outside the door,

Urging Garulf to back away, saying surely 25

That it would be unwise for the armored man

To risk his life in the first battle-rush

Since a stronger warrior, a fiercer foe,

Meant to deprive him of it as he opened the door—

But the stout-hearted warrior, the battle-brave man, 30

Asked openly who dared to hold the door.

“Sigferth,” one said, “A warrior of the Secgan,

A bold one with the Danes. My name is known.

I’m no stranger to slaughter, to war or woe.

The greeting you seek is here in my hands, 35

The fate you find may be glorious or grim.”

Then the hall resounded with savage noise,  
 The shriek of slaughter, the tumult of terror,  
 The cry of carnage. Shields were hefted  
 In the hands of bold men. Swords were wielded, 40  
 Bright helmets hewn, brave bodies broken—  
 The stronghold floor sang with blood.  
 Then Garulf, Guthlaf's son, fell in the fight,  
 The first to die among the fighting Frisians.  
 He lay down to rest in a clutch of corpses, 45  
 Once valiant warriors on both sides of battle.  
 The grim raven circled, dark and dusky,  
 Greedy and corpse-keen. Swords were gleaming,  
 Finnsburg was in flames. I've never heard a story  
 Of sixty such warriors bearing themselves better 50  
 In the heat of battle, and no lordly mead-giver  
 Ever had better reward for his gifts than Hnæf.  
 Young and old fought fiercely for five long days,  
 And not one of them fell—they held the doors.  
 One warrior walked away wounded, 55  
 Saying his once-strong mail-coat was useless,  
 Its woven rings ripped, a torn treasure,  
 And his helmet was hacked and hewn.  
 The prince and protector of those brave men  
 Asked immediately how they were managing 60  
 Their war-weary wounds and which of the young ones  
 Had survived the struggle, and which had gone.

\* \* \*

## WALDERE

These two fragments of what was probably a long epic poem were found in 1860 among some loose papers and parchment in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The original manuscript was probably torn apart and used for book binding. Fulk and Cain note that “the tale of Walter of Aquitaine is a familiar one, being preserved in medieval Latin, Norse, and Polish versions, as well as in several fragments and brief accounts in Middle High German” (215). The story concerns two lovers, Waldere and Hildegyth, who flee the court of Attila where they have been held hostage. They carry with them stolen treasure and survive many difficult adventures before arriving in Aquitaine to be married. In the first fragment, a spirited woman, presumably Hildegyth, urges a warrior, presumably Waldere, to use his famous sword Mimming, made by Weland, to attack Guthhere, the Frankish king, who has been pursuing them for the treasure (216). In the second fragment, one of the warriors—Waldere, Guthhere, or another Frankish warrior Hagen—praises his sword, which he claims is the legendary gift from Theodoric to Widia, son of Weland and Beadohild (characters mentioned in *Deor* in the Exeter Book). Waldere then speaks to Guthhere, daring him to attack without Hagen’s help, even though he is *headuwerig*, “war-weary.” For a good overview of the text and the legend in its various forms, see Norman, 7 ff., Zettersten, 2 ff., and Himes, 3 ff.

## Waldere

## I

\* \* \*

She spoke these words, urging him on:  
 "Surely Weland's battle-work, the savage  
 Mimming, will never fail any fierce fighter  
 Who can wield that mighty blade in battle.  
 One after another, warriors have fallen, 5  
 Sword-struck and blood-stained  
 By that sudden slash, finding a grim  
 War-bed. So now, Son of Ælfhere,  
 Best and boldest of Attila's war-chiefs,  
 Don't hide your heart, conceal your courage, 10  
 Stifle your strength in this hard combat.  
 The time has come when you must choose  
 To gain glory among men or lose your life.  
 I could never weave any words of blame  
 To fault you, my dear lord and friend, 15  
 For fleeing the battlefield or shunning sword-play  
 To hide behind walls to save your skin,  
 Even though fierce foes sought to bash  
 Through your mail-coat with battle-axes.  
 You have always looked over the shield-wall, 20  
 The front line of battle, for another fight.  
 I feared for your fate, dreaded your destiny,  
 Because your courage always carried you  
 Too keenly from one clash to the next,  
 From your own safety to your enemy's 25  
 Battle-station. Win fame with great deeds,  
 Gather glory while God watches over you,  
 Your guardian Lord. Don't think twice  
 About your sword. The greatest of treasures,  
 The best of blades, was fated to sustain you. 30  
 With this weapon you will bear down the boast  
 Of Guthhere since he sought sword-strife,  
 Fixed on feud. He refused our peace-offering,  
 Cups and jewels, swords and gems,  
 Arm-bands and rings. Now he must return 35

To his lord and homeland, ringless,  
 Bare of war-booty or else lie down here  
 In the deep sleep of death, if he so chooses.”

\* \* \*

## II

\* \* \*

“I have never seen a better sword,  
 Except for the one I have hiding here  
 In the hard cave of my jeweled scabbard.  
 Theodoric thought of sending it to Widia  
 As a warrior’s gift with an abundant treasure, 5  
 Riches and relics adorned with gold.  
 Widia, son of Weland, kinsman of Nithhad,  
 Received this reward for his brave service  
 Of rescuing him from cruel captivity;  
 He escaped through the realm of monsters and giants.” 10  
 Waldere spoke, a stout-hearted warrior  
 Weaving brave words. He held in his hands  
 A battle-comfort, a bright war-blade,  
 Grim steel in a grip of joy, saying:  
 “Listen carefully, friend of the Burgundians. 15  
 Surely you hoped that the hand of Hagen  
 Would strike me down, separate me from standing,  
 Cut down my courage with a cold killing.  
 War-weary, I welcome your coming,  
 Draw near if you dare in this deadly game— 20  
 Clutch, if you can, my gray mail-coat,  
 Steal my battle-shirt, my heart’s protection.  
 Ælfhere’s heirloom, a lord’s legacy,  
 Hangs from my shoulders, a wide-webbed,  
 Good corselet, adorned with gold— 25  
 A princely plunder, no mean shirt  
 For a lord to wear when he defends himself,  
 Protecting his treasure of life and limb  
 From fierce foes with his hard hands.  
 It will not betray my trust, break open 30  
 My bone-cave, when my enemies attack,  
 Greet me with swords as you have done.

One will grant victory who is strong and sure,  
Swift to settle judgment with a righteous hand,  
Hard and resolute in his grim reckoning. 35  
A man who has faith in that holy power,  
Who trusts in God to deliver divine aid,  
Will find his support always at hand,  
His strength and power ready to sustain him,  
If he has done good deeds and deserves help. 40  
Then proud men will share their wealth,  
Hand out riches, rule over lands.  
That is—”

\* \* \*



## THE BATTLE OF MALDON

*The Battle of Maldon* is based on a transcription by John Elphinston in the early eighteenth century before the original in MS Cotton Otho A.xii was destroyed in the fire of 1731. This is a heroic poem that gives poetic treatment to a battle that took place in 991 between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings; it was probably written in the decades after the battle. Donoghue notes that “although it draws on the specifics of the local geography and personal names, the poem clothes the action with literary conventions that create a general tone of nostalgia for a timeless heroic past” (15). Grand speeches are offered in the middle of violent battle-clashes. Arrows are suspended to give time for the making of moral judgments. Vikings blend into a horde of tormenting demons, and Byrhtnoth prays that his spirit will be “carried in peace / To the place of angels.”

A little geography is necessary to explain the nature of Byrhtnoth’s controversial decision to allow the Vikings access to the mainland battlefield. Near the town of Maldon in the tidal flats is Northey Island; the river Pante (now Blackwater) flows to the north of it and Southey Creek to the south. The rivers flow into the sea. At high tide, the island is entirely cut off from the mainland to the west. At low tide, there is a causeway of stones about eight feet wide and eighty yards long that allows passage of limited numbers at a time between the island and the mainland.

The Vikings have anchored their ships and set up camp on the island. They stand at the western shore waiting for the tide to go out so they can come west across the causeway or “bridge” to engage the Anglo-Saxon troops gathered on the mainland. At the beginning of the poem, the two sides call out their challenges and responses across the water while the tide is in and

passage is blocked. When the tide goes out, the Vikings start to come across the causeway in small numbers at a time and are easily ambushed by the Anglo-Saxon archers. Obviously the war-savvy Vikings will not march endlessly to their doom in this fashion. They call out to Byrhtnoth to allow them to come across for a “fair fight,” snidely questioning the Anglo-Saxons’ courage and offering to take tribute instead of lives, mocking the English with devious and dark humor.

Unfortunately, Byrhtnoth allows the Vikings to come across the causeway because of his *ofermod*, literally his “overweening pride,” or “too much heart or temper.” Perhaps Byrhtnoth’s *ofermod* is like Greek hubris, a necessary self-confidence carried into battle, but here passing over into unbounded pride that leads to tragedy. What is never in doubt, however, is the courage shown by most of Byrhtnoth’s battlefield retainers as they die avenging the death of their lord.

The opening and closing lines of the poem are missing, probably a few lines from the beginning and a more substantial passage at the end (Scragg, 16). From the context it is also clear that something is missing after line 285, and I have supplied lines 286–88 in an attempt to recover the sense of the lost passage. For more on the poem from a variety of contexts (heroic tradition, military tactics, geography of the causeway, etc.), see Scragg’s collection of essays, *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*.

## The Battle of Maldon

\* \* \*

and that was broken.

Then Byrhtnoth commanded his courageous warriors

To dismount quickly and drive off their horses,

Move forward on foot, trusting hands and hearts.

That’s when Offa’s kinsman first found

5

That the earl would never endure slackers,

Keep cowards in his company. The leader let fly

From his hand his beloved, brave hawk

Which took to the woods while he stepped up

To meet the battle, a man of his word.

10

Then warriors knew that he would not weaken

In war-play but wield his battle-weapon.

Eadric also intended to serve his lord;

He lifted his shield and broad sword,

Embracing battle. He fulfilled his boast 15  
 On the mead-bench that he would drink danger  
 And fight fiercely to defend his lord.  
 Then Byrhtnoth began to rally his troops,  
 Advising his men. He rode to each group,  
 Giving instructions, teaching and telling them 20  
 How they should stand and hold their lines,  
 Grasping their shields hard in their hands,  
 Forgetting fear, refusing to yield.  
 When his troops were ready, he gave up his horse,  
 Walking among them where he longed to be, 25  
 Where his hearth-companions kept courage.  
 Then a Viking messenger, the marauders' mouthpiece,  
 Stood up on the shore, announcing from the island  
 On the opposite bank a boast to the earl  
 From bold seafarers, baiting Byrhtnoth: 30  
 "Brave sea-warriors sent me here to simply say  
 That you might want to give us gold rings  
 As a defense, rich gifts and offerings  
 To ease your peril, protect your people.  
 A tribute of treasure is always better 35  
 Than receiving a rush of battle-spears  
 When we exchange both blade and blood.  
 If you, Byrhtnoth, lord and leader,  
 Mightiest of men, would redeem your people,  
 Then give us what we ask, the price of peace— 40  
 Then seafarers can go home with your gold,  
 Offering a promise of protection and peace,  
 And you can be whole in heart and home."

Byrhtnoth responded, raising his shield,  
 Brandished his ash-spear, angry and resolute— 45  
 Calling on courage, he threw back this answer:  
 "Can you hear, seafarer, you hated pirate,  
 What my people say? They will give you spears  
 As a take-home treasure, bitter blades  
 And savage swords. Trust this tribute— 50  
 A booty that will not help you much in battle.  
 Messenger of the Vikings, mouthpiece of evil,

Bear back to your men this hard, grim vow:  
 Here on this shore stands an earl with his troop  
 Who will defend his homeland, kith and kin, 55  
 The land of Æthelred, my own dear lord.  
 You heathens shall be hewed down in battle.  
 It would be a shame to have come so far  
 Only to retreat to your ships with our tribute,  
 Embarking in boats instead of in battle. 60  
 Seamen cannot so easily steal our gold.  
 Let's resolve this argument with the edge of iron  
 In the battle-play of blades, not devious words."

Then Byrhtnoth ordered his men to bear shields  
 To the stream's bank by the causeway-bridge. 65  
 The tide was in, so neither band could safely cross;  
 The ebb-tide flowed across the bridge.  
 It seemed too long to wait to lift their spears.  
 On both sides of the River Pante, the warriors waited,  
 East-Saxons on the shore, seamen on the island, 70  
 An army of ash-spears. They couldn't kill  
 Each other except by death-arching arrows.  
 The tide turned, the flood went out,  
 The causeway cleared. Vikings stood ready,  
 Ravenous for war. Byrhtnoth ordered 75  
 The battle-hard Wulfstan, son of Ceola,  
 To hold the bridge. He speared the first seaman  
 Bold enough to step across the stones.  
 Two fearless fighters, Ælfhere and Maccus,  
 Guarded the ford against the fiends' crossing, 80  
 Letting no one pass while they might wield weapons.  
 When the Vikings knew that the narrow bridge  
 Would be blocked by fierce fighting Saxons,  
 Those alien guests began to offer guile,  
 To bait their trap with warped words, 85  
 Asked out of courtesy the chance to come  
 Across the causeway for a fair fight.  
 Then with a brash heart, Byrhtnoth began  
 To yield the bridge to the savage seamen—  
 Offered too eagerly an untouched crossing. 90

Byrthelm's bold son called across the stream,  
 Where the Viking warriors laughed and listened:  
 "The causeway is opened to you. Come quickly to us.  
 Let's greet each other as equals in battle.  
 Only God knows who will wield power  
 And be standing after strife in the slaughter-field."

95

The ravenous wolves crossed the bridge  
 Without worry over the shallow water.  
 Over the river came the Viking hordes,  
 Bearing linden-shields over bright water.  
 Byrhtnoth and his men were brave guardians  
 Against the grim wolves' fierce crossing.  
 He ordered the shield-wall raised high  
 Against the surge of seafarers. It was battle-time—  
 The hour for heroes to gather glory,  
 For hard, fated men to fall in fight.  
 Screams were raised in the clash of swords—  
 Ravens circled, screeching for corpses—  
 The eagle was ravenous for a feast of flesh—  
 All earth was in endless uproar.  
 Warriors thrust file-hardened spears  
 From their hands, grim shafts at guts—  
 Bows were busy, shields shot with arrows—  
 Bitter was the battle-rush. Warriors fell  
 On both sides—youngbloods lay dead.  
 Wulfmær was wounded, nephew of Byrhtnoth—  
 He chose a slaughter-bed, savaged by swords.  
 Cruel death was common, repaid in kind.  
 I heard that Eadweard slew one with his sword—  
 The doomed Dane fell dead at his feet.  
 His lord gave him thanks for that later.  
 The Saxons stood strong-hearted in battle,  
 Each man looking for a life to take,  
 To catch the heart of a warrior with his weapon.  
 Slaughter fell on earth like bloody snow.  
 The Saxon defenders were all steadfast.  
 Byrhtnoth directed them, urged them on,  
 Bade each warrior to brood upon battle,

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To win great glory against the Danes,  
 Fame in fighting and a warrior's doom. 130  
 A battle-hard Dane came after Byrhtnoth,  
 Who lifted his shield to defend his body.  
 Each warrior was resolute, earl against churl—  
 Each plotted murder against his aggressor.  
 The churl was quicker—the seaman thrust 135  
 His southern spear into the earl.  
 Byrhtnoth broke that shaft with his shield  
 With such force that it shattered and shook out.  
 That battle-lord sprang up in bold rage,  
 Stabbed the proud Viking who had speared his breast— 140  
 The wise warrior shoved his Saxon spear  
 Through the Viking's neck, guiding with his grip  
 So that he reached the life of the fierce raider.  
 Then he speared another venomous Viking  
 Whose chain-mail burst. He was breast-dead, 145  
 Killed through his corselet, pierced through his heart.  
 This pleased Byrhtnoth more—he lit up with laughter,  
 Thanked God for a good day's work with the Danes.  
 Then a pirate speared him, threw his shaft  
 Through Byrhtnoth's chest with his hard hands, 150  
 Draining the life of Æthelred's noble thane.  
 By the earl's side stood a boy in battle,  
 A brave young Saxon who plucked the spear,  
 The bloody shaft out of Byrhtnoth's body.  
 The youngster was Wulfmær, Wulfstan's son. 155  
 He sent the spear back to its Viking owner,  
 Point-first so the fierce one fell to the ground,  
 Killing the one who had wounded his lord.  
 Then an armed Viking approached the earl  
 To plunder his body, seize armor and rings, 160  
 Take home the treasure of his decorated sword.  
 Then Byrhtnoth drew his sword from its sheath,  
 Broad and gleaming, and cut through the mail-coat  
 Of the Viking marauder. Like lightning  
 Another seaman slashed through his arm 165  
 So his gold-hilted sword fell to the ground.  
 Byrhtnoth could no longer hold up his spear,

Wield his weapon. Yet the grizzled warrior  
 Encouraged his troops to go boldly forward,  
 Never forgetting camaraderie and kin, 170  
 Never forgoing their commitment and courage.  
 He couldn't stand any longer on his feet—  
 He looked up at Heaven and spoke these words:  
 "I offer you thanks, Lord of my people,  
 For all of the joys I've experienced in this world. 175  
 Now I have need, gentle protector,  
 For the gift of grace, so my spirit can soar  
 Away from this slaughter into the arms  
 Of my Father's embrace, carried in peace  
 To the place of angels. I beg this boon: 180  
 Let me be freed from the savage hell-fiends."  
 Then the heathens hewed him down  
 With two warriors who stood beside him,  
 Ælfnoth and Wulfmær, loyal Saxons  
 Who gave up their lives, fighting for their lord. 185  
 Then three warriors bolted from battle,  
 The sons of Odda, cowardly brothers,  
 Deserting their lord to save their lives.  
 Godric was the first to flee in shame,  
 Leaving his lord who had given him horses. 190  
 He leapt in the saddle of Byrhtnoth's steed  
 And galloped off. That was not right.  
 Godwine and Godwig followed behind;  
 They shunned their duty and sought safety  
 In the nearby woods. Many warriors followed 195  
 Who should have remembered their lord's favors  
 And kept their trust. So Offa had once said  
 To his lord Byrhtnoth in a meadhall meeting  
 That many who spoke boldly there in the hall  
 Would never make good on the field of battle. 200

So Byrhtnoth fell, Æthelred's earl,  
 The protector of his people. His hearth-companions  
 Knew in their hearts that their lord lay dead.  
 Then the proud thanes went forward  
 Eager and undaunted, hungry for battle. 205

They wanted one of two outcomes:  
 To leave life or avenge their lord.  
 So the noble Ælfwine, Ælfric's son,  
 Young in his years, urged them on,  
 Exhorted the warriors with bold words: 210  
 "Remember the speeches we bravely shared  
 At the meadhall tables—we boasted from the benches  
 That we would be heroes, hard-fighting in battle.  
 Now we'll see who's worthy of his vow,  
 Who'll back up his boast in the rush of battle. 215  
 I will make known my lineage to all of you:  
 I come from a mighty family of Mercians;  
 My grandfather was Ealhelm, a wise nobleman,  
 A lord and landowner. My people at home  
 Will have no reason to reproach me for flight 220  
 From the battlefield, for seeking safety  
 And skulking home, now that Byrhtnoth  
 Lies broken in battle. This is my greatest grief—  
 For he was both my kinsman and lord."  
 Then he went forth, his mind on vengeance, 225  
 Reaching a seafarer's heart with his spear,  
 Piercing that pirate's loathsome life.  
 He urged the troops on, his friends and comrades.  
 Then Offa shook his spear and spoke:  
 "So Ælfwine, you've encouraged us all 230  
 In our time of need. Our lord lies dead,  
 Slain by a spear, an earl on the earth.  
 Each of us needs to encourage the other  
 To battle these heathens with hand and heart,  
 Spear-thrust and blade-bite, 235  
 While we can still wield weapons.  
 Godric the cowardly son of Odda  
 Has betrayed us all. Too many believed,  
 When they saw him mounted on that fine horse  
 And fleeing to the wood, that it was our lord. 240  
 Many broke ranks—the shield-wall was breached.  
 Curse him and his memory for his lack of courage  
 Which has caused too many men to flee."  
 Leofsunu lifted his strong linden shield



In defense and defiance, speaking these words: 245  
 “I promise not to flee one foot from this field.  
 I will avenge my lord Byrhtnoth in battle.  
 The steadfast warriors in my hometown Sturmere  
 Will have no reason to reproach me with words,  
 Saying that once my leader lay dead on the ground, 250  
 I left the battlefield lordless to come home safe.  
 I will seize sword and spear, wield my weapons.”  
 He went like a warrior full of righteous wrath,  
 Fighting boldly in battle and scorning flight.  
 Then Dunnere spoke, shaking his spear, 255  
 A simple man with short words,  
 Urging each warrior to avenge Byrhtnoth:  
 “A man who means to avenge his lord  
 Cannot flee. He must keep courage,  
 Fight keenly, and have no care for his life.” 260

Then the men surged forward—they feared nothing  
 For their lives. The troops and retainers,  
 The grim spear-bearers, fought fiercely,  
 Praying for God’s help in avenging their lord  
 By fighting the fiends, bringing death to the foe. 265  
 Then even a hostage began to help—  
 Æscferth, son of Ecglaf, a hard Northumbrian.  
 He shot all his arrows without flinching,  
 Threw every spear without wavering once  
 From the war-play. Sometimes he hit a shield; 270  
 Sometimes he pierced through a man’s skin.  
 As long as he stood, he slew someone,  
 Handing out wounds while he wielded weapons.  
 Eadweard the Tall held his place in the battle-line,  
 Ready and eager to meet the enemy. 275  
 He vowed he’d never flee from the Vikings,  
 Give one foot of land to the foreign fiends,  
 Or turn back now that his better lord lay dead.  
 He broke through the shield-wall, fighting the foe  
 Until he avenged the death of his dear lord, 280  
 His treasure-giver, on the deadly Danes,  
 Before he lay down in the bed of slaughter.

So did Ætheric, brother of Sibyrht—  
 Wading eagerly into battle, with many others  
 Defending their homeland keenly with courage. 285  
 [Then one of the slaughter-wolves attacked Offa,  
 The second-in-command of Byrhtnoth's Saxons—  
 The seafarer shoved a spear at his chest.]  
 His shield-rim broke and his mail-shirt sang  
 A song of horror. Offa slew his attacker, 290  
 Then fell to the ground--the kinsman of Gadd  
 Was quickly cut down in that cruel fray.  
 He had kept both his courage and his vow  
 To his lord in the hall, his good ring-giver,  
 That they should ride home whole together 295  
 Or fall side by side, wasted by wounds,  
 Comrades together in the field of corpses.  
 Then shields were shattered and seamen came through  
 In a rage of battle. The ravenous spear  
 Often thrust through a man's bone-house. 300  
 Wistan went forward, Thurstan's son,  
 Fought against seamen, the slayer of three  
 In a battle-throng, before he lay down  
 In a heap of slaughter, the son of Wigelm.  
 That was a murderous meeting, a savage struggle. 305  
 Warriors clashed, fought without yielding,  
 Killed without wavering. The field filled with corpses.  
 All through the battle, Oswald and Eadwold,  
 Brothers fighting together, encouraged the troops  
 With strong battle-words, telling them all 310  
 To stand firm against savage seafarers,  
 Wield their weapons without weakening.  
 Then Byrhtwold spoke, raising his shield—  
 Byrhtnoth's old retainer urged on the others,  
 Boldly instructing the last of the troop: 315  
 "The spirit must be stronger, the heart fiercer,  
 The courage keener, as our strength slips away.  
 Here lies our lord, savagely slain,  
 A great leader on the ground. Ever may a man mourn  
 Who thinks to flee from this fierce war-play. 320  
 I am old in winters, weary with years,

But I will not leave this field. I mean to lie down  
Beside my dear lord, the leader I love.”

So also Godric, Æthelgar’s son,

Urged them all, battle-comrades together,

325

To keep their courage, continue fighting.

Often he let his slaughter-spear fly

Against the Vikings; he was first in the front,

Striking and slaying till he fell in battle.

That was not the Godric who fled

330

\* \* \*

## THE POEMS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE

**T**he *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a collection of interrelated texts, which, as Swanton says, “have a similar core, but considerable local variations; each [with] its own intricate textual history” (xxi). Some of the texts begin as early as the time of Julius Caesar, but most of the entries range from the fifth century to the eleventh or twelfth. Swanton notes that “this is the first continuous national history of any western people in their own language; at this time no other European nation apparently felt confident enough in its own language to record its own history” (xx). The *Chronicle* not only records history—it shapes history as well by building connections and articulating a national consciousness. Thormann argues: “*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* makes history as it records events [because] through the effort of arranging lists of events in a chronology, maintaining those records over a period of time in various manuscripts, and combining and rewriting those manuscripts in various combinations, the writing of the Chronicle produces the idea of a nation, an Anglo-Saxon England that may legitimately lay claim to power [so] the textual records produced in the manner constitute a national past [and] they support the conviction of the nation’s persistence in time” (60). Smith adds that “in this view, the poems function as political texts which continue the Chronicle’s ideological work of championing the West Saxon dynasty” (2010b, 180). All of the poems in the *Chronicle* occur at relatively late dates from the tenth century on. They mix elements of OE meter, often in more flexible forms than traditional verse, with forms of rhyme (perfect rhyme and slant rhyme), especially in the later poems. They are embedded in the prose lines of the manuscripts and not set off, so there

has been some debate over time about when conventional OE prose turns to rhythmical prose and when this becomes formalized enough to be considered poetry. The six poems included here are the ones accepted by Dobbie (1942, 16–26), but a number of other poems have been identified in the *Chronicle* and are included in the “Additional Poems” section of this book. The year of the entry in the *Chronicle* for each poem is indicated in parentheses in the title.

## I. THE BATTLE OF BRUNANBURG (937)

This poem appears in four of the *Chronicle* texts. Pope summarizes the historical situation of the battle: “The victory of the English forces at Brunanburh under the command of Athelstan and his brother Edmund was the climax of a movement by which Alfred the Great and his immediate successors, having first freed their hereditary West Saxon kingdom from the threat of Danish conquest, gradually gained power over the whole of England and made themselves secure against their enemies abroad” (58). Thormann notes that in this poem, “the authority of poetic language represents the battle as the continuation of a tradition of heroic action [as] the West-Saxon leaders, Athelstan and his brother Edmund, are cast as actors in a heroic role they inherit through their genealogy,” and points to Irvine’s analysis of the poem’s “traditional language and genre” (65). Irvine says: “The traditional form was used to create an image of unbroken tradition of national and racial heroic glory extending from the earlier kings in the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogy to the house of Alfred: the poetic medium for representing the heroic past was appropriated for representing a new ‘heroism’ of the English kings in the creation of a national kingdom” (202).

### The Battle of Brunanburg

In this year King Æthelstan, ruler of earls,  
 Ring-giver of men, and his brother Edmund,  
 A proud prince, won lifelong glory  
 At a fierce battle near Brunanburg—  
 Bold brothers wielding sharp, bitter swords,  
 Offering their enemies the edge of destruction.

The sons of Edward gave no respite—  
 They hacked through the shield-wall,  
 Splintering the hand-held, sheltering wood,  
 Brought death with the gift the forge-hammer left, 10  
 A whistling steel, a deadly strike.  
 Their family legacy was firm: fight the foe,  
 Protect the heritage of land and treasure,  
 Hoard and home. Enemies perished—  
 Scots and seafarers, Viking pirates. 15  
 The battlefield was flattened with heavy bodies  
 And saturated with blood from the day's dawn—  
 When the star-fire sun knifed through the dark,  
 God's bright candle lifting its light,  
 Gliding high over earth's broad plains— 20  
 To the day's darkening down at long last,  
 As the shaping radiance slipped to its rest.  
 Warriors lay wounded, a multitude of men,  
 Their unshielded flesh in unwaking sleep.  
 Norsemen and Scots lay dead on the field, 25  
 Guttled by spears thrust over the shield-wall,  
 All of them battle-weary, sated with slaughter.  
 The warriors of Wessex dogged the enemy  
 All day long, hacking and hewing from behind  
 The hostile heathens with whetted swords. 30  
 Nor did the Mercians make any concessions.  
 They refused no hard hand-play of swords  
 With the savage Vikings who landed in hordes  
 With their leader Anlaf from across the ocean.  
 They rode in the belly of wood over rough waves, 35  
 A sea-steed stuffed with daring warriors  
 Doomed in battle. Five young kings  
 Were camped on the battlefield, all cold,  
 Tucked into a final rest with ravaging swords,  
 A blade's quick kiss, an unseen swipe. 40  
 Seven of Anlaf's earls, countless Scots,  
 And seafaring Vikings shared that bed,  
 Broken bodies in unbroken sleep.  
 Then the Norse leader was forced to flee,

Seeking protection at the ship's prow 45  
 With his paltry remnant. The sea-floater  
 Set sail, angling on the ocean, driven out  
 On the dusky waves, saving the king.  
 Crafty Constantine, king of the Scots,  
 Also fled north to his native land. 50  
 The gray-haired warrior had no need to boast  
 Of sword-strike and blade-play  
 Since his kinsmen were cut down  
 In the fiercest of battles. He lost many friends,  
 Left them sleeping in the field of slaughter. 55  
 Also his young son, savagely undone,  
 Went weary to bed with bitter wounds.  
 The crafty old king had no cause to brag  
 Or have sung the story of great battle-deeds.  
 Anlaf also sailed home, humbled. 60  
 His scop was silent, his song unsung.  
 With the small remnant left, they had no need  
 To laugh or exult over their accomplishments  
 In the spear-clash and battle-crush,  
 In that savage meeting of men and standards, 65  
 The sword-conflict with the sons of Edward.  
 The Norsemen sailed off in their nailed ships,  
 Skulking home on the sea with their battle-shame,  
 A hacked host of what the Saxon swords left.  
 They sailed on the waves of Dingesmere Sea, 70  
 Over deep water home to Dublin, humiliated.  
 The victorious brothers, both king and prince,  
 Went home to Wessex, exulting in triumph.  
 They left behind them a feast of corpses,  
 Carrion comfort for the savage scavengers, 75  
 The dark-feathered raven, his horny beak  
 Ravenous, the gray-feathered eagle  
 With his white tail, a greedy war-hawk,  
 And that gray stalker, the wolf in the wood.  
 Books tell us that never before on this island 80  
 Has there ever been such a slaughter  
 Of warriors struck down by the sword's edge—

Never since the Angles and Saxons came sailing  
 Across the broad sea, seeking Britain,  
 Proud warriors and battle-craftsmen  
 Who overcame the Welshmen, conquering their country.  
 They were bold in battle, eager for fame.

85

## 2. THE CAPTURE OF THE FIVE BOROUGHS (942)

In this poem King Edward fights as a Christ-like warrior to rid Mercia of its heathen Norse invaders and free the enslaved Danes who had earlier settled there and had come to consider themselves natives. Thormann (66 ff.) argues that politics, religion, and poetry here come together to shape the sense of a nation. Just as religious figures like Christ and Elene are often portrayed in partly heroic terms, so history is poetically shaped here in partly religious terms. Edmund is both a great battle-warrior like Beowulf and a redeemer of those in bondage like Christ. The power of poetic words is used here and elsewhere in the *Chronicle* to shape a sense of national cohesion and purpose. As Thormann argues, “Power is inserted into history by being written as the continuation of poetic convention” (66).

### The Capture of the Five Boroughs (942)

In this year King Edmund, lord of the English,  
 Beloved protector of people, famous for great deeds,  
 Conquered Mercia, overran all the boundaries,  
 From Dore to Whitwell Gap and the River Humber,  
 That broad stream, seizing the five boroughs—  
 Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby, and Stamford.  
 The Danes living there had long been held  
 In cruel captivity, heathen bondage,  
 By the fierce Norsemen until finally freed  
 By the brave deeds of Edmund, son of Edward,  
 The worthy protector of warriors, the conquering,  
 Righteous king who rescued and released them.

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### 3. THE CORONATION OF EDGAR (973)

We know from the *Chronicle* entry for 957 that Edgar came to the throne of Mercia. In 959, when his brother Eadwig passed away, he also became king of Wessex and Northumbria at the age of sixteen. Why, then, was he crowned at Bath some fifteen years later? Nelson argues that the event was a second consecration meant to inaugurate him “in his later years as ruler of a British Empire, tenth-century style” (303). Thormann points out that “thirty was the earliest age at which a man could be ordained, because thirty was the age of Christ when he began his ministry and at the same time the age at which entry into the priesthood was allowed in Old Testament practice” (69). The poem typically combines religious and heroic language, and also the interests of both church and state. Thormann notes that “the representation of the scene draws on the traditional heroic figuration of the leader surrounded by his retainers,” noting that “monks take the place of thegns to compose a sort of ecclesiastical comitatus to function as witnesses for the spectacle” (1986, 69). Smith argues that “Edgar becomes a sign underwriting the ascendancy of the Benedictine reform and his consecration represents the confluence of royal and ecclesiastical authority in a single figure” (2010a, 106).

#### The Coronation of Edgar (973)

In this year Edgar, the renowned English ruler,  
 Was consecrated king with a great company  
 In the ancient city of Acemannesceaster,  
 Also called Bath by the inhabitants of this island.  
 There was great joy on that blessed day, 5  
 Which was called Pentecost by all people.  
 I've heard that there was a band of priests  
 And a host of monks, a troop of wise men,  
 Gathered together in great bliss.  
 As dates are reckoned and documents record, 10  
 Ten hundred years less twenty-seven  
 Had passed since the blessed birth of the Lord,  
 Our creator and commander, champion of victories,  
 Prince and protector, guardian of the light.  
 Edmund's son had spent twenty-nine years 15

In this world when the coronation came about.  
 In his thirtieth year he was consecrated king.

#### 4. THE DEATH OF EDGAR (975)

Thormann points out that this *Chronicle* poem reports a sequence of discrete events: the death of King Edgar, the succession of his son Edward to the throne, the departure of Bishop Cyneweard of Wells from the country, the exile of ealdorman Osric of Northumbria, the appearance of a comet, widespread famine, and God's restoration of a fruitful land (73), but she argues that "the consecutive elements are directed by an overriding design, that is, by a logic and narrative meaning . . . [that] is God's purpose and will, an intention and motivation manifested as what happens in time" (74). Smith argues that the poem "rolls out an imagistic panorama of misfortunes beginning in Edgar's death" (2010a, 122) and points to similar dire events predicted in *Beowulf* after the hero's death (123).

#### The Death of Edgar (975)

In this year ended all the earthly joys  
 Of King Edgar of England, who chose the light  
 Of another life, radiant and rewarding,  
 Blessed and beautiful, and gave up this weak  
 And worldly, troubled and transitory, life. 5  
 All men everywhere, from our native land  
 To beyond the sea-road, who read calendars  
 And are skilled with numbers, say that Edgar,  
 The young king and ring-giver, left this life  
 On the eighth day of the month of July. 10  
 His young son Edward, an untested child,  
 Assumed the throne, becoming king,  
 Lord and leader of England's earls.  
 Ten days before, a good and glorious bishop  
 Departed from Britain. His name was Cyneweard. 15  
 Then I heard men say that in Mercia  
 Far and wide, the love of the Lord,  
 People's praise of the Prince and Protector,

Their firm faith, was cast to the ground,  
 So that many wise servants of God were scattered. 20  
 That caused great grief and hard suffering  
 To those whose hearts and minds were alight  
 With love for their Lord. Then the Ruler of heaven  
 Was rejected, the Prince of people despised,  
 The Lord of victories mocked and scorned, 25  
 And his laws reviled. Oslac the earl,  
 Famous for his brave heart, was also banished  
 Across the sea-swarm, the gannet's bath.  
 The gray-haired hero, wise with words,  
 Shrewd in counsel, traveled wearily 30  
 Across the long unrest of ocean waves,  
 The whale's domain, deprived of his homeland.  
 Then suddenly in the sky, a star appeared,  
 A harbinger in heaven that sages and scholars,  
 Confident in science-craft, call a comet. 35  
 Then the vengeance of the Lord was made manifest  
 When hunger and famine ravaged the land.  
 Later the holy Lord of heaven,  
 The high Ruler of angels remedied  
 That rack and ruin, restoring joy 40  
 With his generous gift of a fruitful earth.

## 5. THE DEATH OF ALFRED (1036)

This *Chronicle* entry describes the arrival at Guildford of the atheling Alfred, son of Æthelred, from his exile in Flanders and his terrible fate, possibly the result of political intrigue. His company was then slaughtered, and he was imprisoned, blinded, and taken to Ely to live out his days with the monks. The poem contains elements of both alliterative verse and rhymed verse, sometimes alternating back and forth, sometimes combined in the same line. In the rhyming lines, the rhymes occur at the end of each half-line. In the translation, I have modified the scheme to include perfect and half-rhymes in a wider variety of places.

*ASPR* prints the opening lines as prose, but I have followed the suggestions of Robinson and Bergman that these lines are poetry (noted in Bergman, 16).

## The Death of Alfred (1036)

In this year Alfred, the innocent atheling,  
 Son of King Æthelred, came traveling here,  
 Wanting to visit his mother in Winchester,  
 But those in power would not permit this.  
 Earl Godwine and other great men 5  
 Refused his request because of strong sentiment  
 In favor of Harold, though this was not right.  
 So Godwine stopped him, dropping him in prison,  
 Driving off his companions, thriving in his misery.  
 He killed some, spilling their blood in various ways, 10  
 Sold some for evil money, slew some quite cruelly,  
 Bound and blinded some, mutilated and scalped some.  
 This was the darkest deed, the most egregious evil,  
 Done in this country since the Danes came  
 And brought their painful peace-making power. 15  
 Now we must trust to our beloved God  
 That those who were blameless and shamelessly destroyed  
 May rejoice happily in the company of Christ  
 With their just reward, a home in heaven.  
 The atheling still lived, loved by many. 20  
 He was derided and chained until someone decided  
 To drag him to Ely. On board the ship,  
 He was blinded—his poor eyes undone.  
 There he lived the rest of his life without strife  
 In the company of monks, thanks to their care. 25  
 In the end he was carried by those who loved him  
 To the west end of the south chapel and buried  
 In the best fashion, humbly and honorably,  
 Near the tall steeple where all faithful people  
 Could congregate, contemplate his fate, 30  
 And hear the bells declare and ring:  
 “Alfred’s soul is with Christ the King.”

## 6. THE DEATH OF EDWARD (1065)

The *Chronicle* entry for 1065 contains a poetic eulogy for King Edward the Confessor, praising his wise leadership, great generosity, and political skill. The poet also refers to Edward's difficult early years in exile, when he *wunode wræclastum wide geond eorðan*, "lived in exile-paths widely over the earth." Before he died, Edward nominated Harold to succeed him.

## The Death of Edward (1065)

King Edward came to Westminster toward midwinter and had consecrated there the minster which he had built to the glory of God, Saint Peter, and all God's saints. The consecration was on Holy Innocents' Day, and he died on the evening of Twelfth Night and was buried in that minster, as it is said:

5

Here King Edward, lord of England,  
 Sent his righteous soul to Christ,  
 A holy spirit into God's safe keeping.  
 He lived his life in kingly splendor,  
 Giving skilled advice and shrewd counsel, 10  
 Ruling in a prosperous time for twenty-four years.  
 A glorious lord, he gave out great riches  
 And rewards to his people. This son of Æthelred  
 Ruled over Angles and Saxons, the best warriors  
 In the world—Britons, Scots, and Welshmen too. 15  
 The cold seas surround all the loyal young men  
 Who eagerly obeyed Edward, their noble king.  
 His heart was generous, his spirit gracious,  
 His mood joyful, his manner blameless,  
 Even though he had endured exile, 20  
 The life of a wanderer long ago,  
 Deprived of his homeland when Cnut conquered  
 The race of Æthelred and the Danes ruled  
 This dear England, controlling its wealth,  
 Distributing its treasures for twenty-eight years. 25  
 Afterwards he arrived in noble arms and array,  
 Honorable, innocent, merciful, and mild—  
 A good king with a great and virtuous heart.

The lordly Edward defended his homeland,  
His nation and its people until suddenly 30  
Bitter death snatched him, seizing his dear life,  
Stealing him away. The proud prince  
Left this world, his body broken,  
His spirit saved. Angels lifted the soul  
Of our righteous ruler into heaven's radiant 35  
And welcoming light. The wise king  
Had committed the kingdom to Harold himself,  
A noble earl who had faithfully followed  
His lord's commands in words and deeds,  
Neglecting nothing and meeting every need 40  
Required of a great nation's king.

## DURHAM

This poem is based on two sources, one MS Ff.i.27 of the University Library, Cambridge, and the other a transcription by Hickes from Cotton Vitellius D.xx, which was burned in the 1731 Cottonian fire (Dobbie, 1942, xliii). The poem was written for a famous occasion in 1104, “the Translation of the incorrupt body of St. Cuthbert into the shrine prepared for it in the apse of the great Norman cathedral which was at that moment under construction on the high bluff above the river Wear” (Kendall, 507). The poet here sings the praises of the city, its surrounding woods and water, full of wildlife, and its noble kings and holy saints, who sleep in endless repose in the city, waiting for the Judgment Day. Fulk and Cain note that “this is the only vernacular specimen of a type called ‘encomium urbis’ ‘praise for a city,’ of which there are numerous Latin examples from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages” (188). Kendall points out a number of enigmatic elements in the poem and argues that one of the spellings of Cuthbert, “Cuthberch,” might well hide in riddlic fashion the elements, *cuð*, “famous,” plus *burch*, “city,” so that the saint and the city seem one at the end, both awaiting the Judgment Day (520).

### Durham

This city is celebrated throughout Britain,  
Its buildings constructed on a high bluff,  
Surrounded by stones wondrously grown.  
The River Wear runs around it, wave-strong,  
And in that flood-house, fish-families swim,

A cold catch of kin. A forest-stronghold  
 Rises there, a great growth of wild wood  
 Where animals dwell, beasts and birds,  
 And in the deep hollows and dark dales,  
 Countless creatures make their homes. 10  
 In this same city, known to men  
 And the sons of God who carried the coffin,  
 Lies the body of the blessed Cuthbert,  
 Also the head of Oswald the innocent king,  
 Protector of the English, lion of the Angles; 15  
 Also Bishop Aidan, Eadbert and Eadfrith,  
 Noble comrades, faithful companions.  
 Inside also sleeps Bishop Æthelwold  
 And the scholar Bede, a man of books 20  
 Known everywhere, and Abbot Boisil,  
 Who keenly taught the saintly Cuthbert  
 As a young boy: the lad loved his lessons  
 And learned them well. Beside the blessed one,  
 Inside the sacred minster many relics dwell 25  
 Where miracles are made, wonders worked,  
 As writings say. They lie there waiting  
 With the man of God for Judgment Day.



## THE RUNE POEM

This poem has led a charmed if precarious life. Its original home, Cotton MS B10, was largely destroyed by fire. The poem had been copied early in the eighteenth century by Henry Wanley for the *Thesaurus* of George Hickes, and the poem in modern editions is based on this transcription, which in several places is suspect (Page, 63). Shippey notes that the poem's purpose is "to provide a list of rune-names in a memorable and recitable form," but admits that "the length and complexity of its definitions seems too much for perfect mnemonic efficiency" (19). The poem is a kind of alphabet poem for the Anglo-Saxon runic *futhorc*, similar to other such poems in Icelandic and Norwegian. The OE word *run* has a variety of meanings, including "runic character, secret, counsel, mystery, advice, whispering, letter, writing." Halsall explains the central theme of the poem as follows: "The author of *The Rune Poem* recognized in the *futhorc* an opportunity to compose a poem about the temporal world in which he lived and its relationship to the eternal world in which he hoped and believed" (56). The runes in this translation are represented by bold capital letters followed by their OE names in italics; for the runes themselves in their original shapes, see Halsell or Shippey. The meanings of most of the OE names for the runes are well understood, but some are not. *Peorð* has been read as "chess pawn, dice-box, throat, apple-tree, dance, penis, pipe or flute, and nothing" (Halsall, 128; Shippey, 135; Niles, 2006, 26 ff.), and I have tried to capture some of this ambiguity in the translation. The *B*-rune is normally read as *Beorc*, "beechn," but as Niles points out, the description does not fit that tree, and he argues for another *B*-word, *Boc*, which means both "beechn" and "book," though this involves a complex and enigmatic shift of meanings in the verse (2006,

268 ff.). The meaning of the war-weapon *Yr* is also debated; I've included both "Bow" and "Battle-ax" as the most likely meanings. The ambiguity of some runes begins to approach that of the Exeter Book riddles. Since the meaning of the rune *Ior* is so much debated, and guesses include "eel, newt, beaver, serpent, and ocean" (see Halsell, 159, and Niles, 271 ff., who also suggests the possibility of *Ig*, "island"), I have left this verse as a miniature riddle. The last rune, *Ear*, is generally taken to mean "earth, grave," though the evidence for this name is much debated (see Niles, 274 ff., who argues for *Ea*, "alas!"). For more on the relation between riddles and *The Rune Poem*, see Sorrell and also Niles, 251 ff.

## The Rune Poem

**F** is for *Feoh*, a wealth of goods  
 In cash or cattle, a comfort to each man  
 Who should give it generously, not gather it in,  
 If he wants God's glory on Judgment Day.

**U** is for *Ur*, aurochs or wild ox, 5  
 Fierce and fearless with savage horns,  
 Moorland-stepper, wild-wanderer,  
 A bold attacker, a headlong harrower.

**Þ** is for *Þorn*, a sliver of sharpness, 10  
 A piercing of pain, a threat of thistle.  
 Don't lay a hand on nature's needle  
 Or lie down to sleep in a lap of thorns.

**O** is for *Os*, mouth and speech-maker, 15  
 Song-shaper, word-weaver,  
 Keeper of wisdom, comfort to man,  
 Hope and happiness to everyone on earth.

**R** is for *Rad*, riding the hard road. 20  
 In the meadhall everyone is an easy rider—  
 It's all talk and beer. It takes a brave man  
 To ride a powerful horse on mile-stoned paths.

**C** is for *Cen*, a torch of flame,  
 A blaze of brightness, a branch of fire.

This creature lights up the hall of heros  
Where princes rest in its welcome warmth.

**G** is for *Gyfu*, generosity and gift-giving, 25  
Which bring a man honor, glory, and grace.  
Praise comes to a man who gives to the poor  
A chance for hope from a helping hand.

**W** is for *Wynn*, the joy a man knows 30  
From wonder and wealth, not sorrow and woe—  
He stores up for himself an abundance of bliss,  
Prosperity and pleasure in the city stronghold.

**H** is for *Hægl*, hail from the storm-skies, 35  
The hardest of grains, the whitest of seeds.  
It descends in the air and strikes in the wind—  
In the end a riddle: the water-stone.

**N** is for *Nyd*, the need that binds 40  
The human heart, a heavy burden—  
But sometimes it heals the harried soul  
If a man makes out its meaning in time.

**I** is for *Is*, ice clear as glass,  
The slippery cold that escapes the clutch,  
The morning gem that melts at noon,  
The floor of frost, the glittering ground.

**J** is for *Ger*, the year's time of planting, 45  
The hope of harvest, when God's glory  
Arrives in the earth, the goodness of grain,  
The fulness of fruit for rich and poor.

**EO** is for *Eob*, the unsmooth yew, 50  
Wrinkled and rough, rooted and firm,  
Hard and hale, a wind-break by the house,  
A feast for the fire, a joy for the home.

**P** is for *Peorð*—play and laughter,  
Dice or chess pawn or power in the pants.

It brings pleasure to proud men  
Who make their moves in the meadhall. 55

**X** is for *Eolhx-secg*, a rush or reed  
Which grows in the fen with sharp strength  
To wound men. It brings burning blood  
To any foolish hand that would hold it. 60

**S** is for *Sigel*, the sun that sustains us,  
The hope of travelers from dawn to dusk.  
The seafarer follows the sun's road  
On a sea-stallion in his lookout for land.

**T** is for *Tir*, a star-sign, a token, 65  
Something for princes to trust in the sky—  
A clear constellation above the night-clouds.  
Keeping faith for its followers, it never fails.

**B** is for *Beorc*, birch, (beech or poplar),  
A fruitless tree which sends out suckers 70  
And shoots, becoming a canopy of branches,  
A bright crown of leaves under the curve of heaven.

**E** is for *Eb*, a hoof-proud horse  
Prancing on the road, a prince's joy.  
Rich riders mix words as they amble along; 75  
The restless at heart find comfort in a horse.

**M** is for *Mann*, mirth-maker, word-weaver,  
Dear to his loved ones, kith and kin,  
But death can break any human bond  
When God calls the bone-house back to the ground. 80

**L** is for *Lagu* where the seafarer sails—  
The ocean looks endless to the long-wave-rider.  
The unsteady sea-horse chafes at his bridle  
And suddenly the sailor is a friend of fear.

**NG** is for *Ing*, first king of the East-Danes, 85  
A legendary hero everyone has heard about.

He ruled well till he rode across the waves  
With a wagon that walked on water behind him.

**CE** is for *Cēpel*, the family homeland,  
The precious ground, the place of fathers 90  
And grandfathers before them, where a man  
Can enjoy peace and prosperity in his own house.

**D** is for *Dæg*, the day dear to men,  
The gift of God, the dawn and daylight  
Lent by the Lord, the radiance of the sun, 95  
Bringing hope and happiness to rich and poor.

**A** is for *Ac*, the oak tree rising from earth,  
A precious sustainer as it feeds mast to pigs,  
Who are food for our flesh. As a wave-walker  
It rides the sea-road, testing itself on water. 100

**Æ** is for *Æsc*, a tall tree, a terrible weapon,  
Prized by men. It holds its ground  
In a battle-hand or walking the wave,  
Resisting attack or attacking resisters.

**Y** is for *Yr*, some dangerous war-weapon, 105  
Battle-ax or bow, slayer or shooter,  
Bringer of blood. It rides hand and horse,  
Flies straight to the enemy's head or heart.

**IO** is for *Ior*, the riddle of a river-fish  
That kills its food fiercely and drags 110  
Its dinner up on the land. It lives happily  
In a home surrounded by water. Say what it is!

**EA** is for *Ear*, earth-grave, ground-home,  
A horror to man when flesh falters,  
Corpse cools, the bone-house breaks down, 115  
Death comes calling, no time for counsel,  
The richness of life turns to rot—man is mulched.

## SOLOMON AND SATURN I

Two versions of the *Solomon and Saturn* poetic dialogues are found in separate manuscripts: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41 and 422. The second manuscript also contains *Solomon and Saturn II* (see below), a fragment from the same poem, and a prose Pater Noster dialogue (see Anlezark, 2009, for a complete edition of these separate texts). Fulk and Cain note that the texts “are fragmentary, metrically irregular, and textually corrupt, and thus difficult to interpret” (168). In these dialogues Saturn represents the knowledge of the ancient world, while Solomon represents the wisdom of the Judeo-Christian world. Solomon is an Old Testament figure well known for his dialogic wisdom and is also conceived in early Christian writings as an allegorical prefiguration of Christ. The possible sources for these poems are much debated and include biblical passages, Rabbinic legend, and a Greek version (see Menner, 21 ff., and Anlezark, 2009, 12 ff.). In *Solomon and Saturn I*, Saturn is curious about the “palm-twigged Pater Noster,” so-called because, as Greenfield notes, “the palm [is] a traditional medieval symbol for victory over the devil” (Greenfield and Calder, 274). Saturn wants to go beyond the wisdom of the ancient books, and he “desires not simply to *know* the power of the Pater Noster, but beyond that, to *experience* it” (O’Keeffe, 49). Solomon details the nature and power of the prayer in a variety of ways from its healing the lame to its harrowing demons. Near the end of the poem, Solomon anatomizes the Latin letters of the Pater Noster, which each act to combat and overcome the devil. The letters are represented by runes in the poem (and by boldface capital letters in the translation) and point to the biblical or liturgical form of the prayer (see Anlezark, 2009,

28–31, and Menner, 36–37, for a discussion of this). The succession of letters follows roughly that of the prayer, but once a letter is introduced in the poem, it is not repeated. Thus after the letters PATER NOS, the TER of NOSTER is not repeated. Several of the letters are missing, and the order of the letters is not properly followed, probably because of textual corruptions. As the poem moves forward, the Pater Noster as the canticle of Christ takes on the power and presence of the Word of God in its capacity to destroy devils no matter what their particular disguise. The person who commits the prayer to memory and can speak or chant it partakes of this power so that “the Word of God through the mouth of man / Can put each and every fiend to flight.”

## Solomon and Saturn I

Saturn said:

“Listen! I have tasted many truths  
 And devoured much of the lore and learning  
 Of the books of the islands. I have patiently unlocked  
 The secrets of the literary arts and sciences, 5  
 The lore of the Libyans, the scholarship of the Greeks,  
 The whole history of the Indian empires.  
 The commentators made clear the meanings  
 Of the wise words in the great book.

\* \* \*

Still I searched for wisdom sharper than steel, 10  
 A truth more keen than anything I could find  
 In the ancient writings to stimulate the spirit,  
 Whet the hungry mind’s need to know,  
 Encourage virtue, prompt a deeper power—  
 I wanted the palm-twiggèd Pater Noster. 15  
 I would give you everything, wise Solomon,  
 Son of David, prince of Israel—thirty pounds  
 Of pure gold and my twelve precious sons—  
 If you could leave me in awe of the Lord’s Prayer,  
 The canticle of Christ. If you can tell me this truth 20  
 In a wondrous way that will sustain my spirit,  
 Heal my heart’s yearning, then I will walk away,  
 Finally satisfied, following the fathoms  
 Of the River Chobar to find the Chaldeans.”

Solomon said: 25  
 “A man will be miserable and useless in life  
 Without wisdom, wandering in a wasteland  
 Like a wild beast, or feeding aimlessly in a field  
 Like dumb cattle, if he cannot worship Christ  
 Through the canticle. He will wander full of wind, 30  
 And the fierce fiend, the dragon of hell,  
 Will knock him ruthlessly down on Doomsday  
 With iron balls from a black sling,  
 Like dark apples flung out of Eden.  
 He will be washed down by waves of shame. 35  
 If he has Christ’s canticle to keep him afloat  
 On a sea of flame, he will be better off  
 Than if he owns all the radiant silver and gold  
 From the far corners of this ancient creation—  
 But faithless, he will wander, alien and estranged 40  
 From the grace of God, outlawed from angels.”

Saturn said:  
 “Who of all creatures can easily open  
 The holy doors of the kingdom of heaven  
 In the right order and reveal the radiance 45  
 Of that blessed realm, the eternal light?”

Solomon said:  
 “The palm-twigged Pater Noster  
 Opens up the doors of high heaven,  
 Blesses the holy, makes the Lord merciful, 50  
 Casts off crime, saves us from sin,  
 Strikes down murder, destroys the devil’s fire,  
 Igniting the soul with the light of the Lord.  
 With the Lord’s Prayer, you can heat the blood  
 Of the devil himself in seven ways, 55  
 That thick evil dross, boil it up in a blaze  
 Of torment more terrible than any brass cauldron  
 Could do when, because of the twelve faults  
 Or frailties of men and the gathering guilt,  
 His blood boils over in the embrace of flames, 60  
 Seething ravenously for twelve generations.



So the words of the canticle are more widely read,  
 More often studied and devoutly said,  
 Than any other passage in Christ's books.  
 The Pater Noster pulls us in, firms our faith, 65  
 Mentors our minds, heals our hearts,  
 Shields us with a corselet of Christ's words,  
 Wages war against the fierce fiend,  
 And wins us a place in heaven's kingdom."

Saturn said: 70  
 "But how is the song to be revered in memory,  
 The prayer to be practiced by a dedicated man  
 Who would purify his soul, cleanse it of crime,  
 Smelt and refine it, separating out sin,  
 Removing the impulse for mayhem and murder? 75  
 How does the song separate guilt from grace,  
 Sin from salvation, in the man who remembers it  
 Or recites it aloud? Is this part of the power  
 And beauty that was made and blessed by God?  
 My curiosity is killing me—it tears here and there 80  
 In twisted confusion. No man under heaven knows  
 How my spirit darts and drags, wandering the world  
 Of words in books, the landscape of the mind.  
 Sometimes the heat rises inside my heart.  
 My spirit surges, my soul wants to soar." 85

Solomon said:  
 "The Word of God is always golden,  
 Studded with gemstones, brightly adorned  
 With beautiful silver on its lustrous leaves,  
 Proclaiming the Gospel with the gift of grace. 90  
 The living Word is the spirit's wisdom,  
 The soul's honey, the mind's sweet milk,  
 The greatest of glories, the best of blessings.  
 It can bring back the soul from eternal night,  
 From under the earth, from the devil's torments, 95  
 The cruel clutch of those fiery fiends.  
 Though the devils bind it with fifty locks,  
 Bars and bolts, it will break and blast

Those unholy bonds, however deep,  
 Bearing the soul home safe and sound. 100  
 It can harrow hunger, plunder hell,  
 Wrack and ruin the surge and swell  
 Of waves of water, waves of fire.  
 It can timber truth, hammer glory.  
 Its heft and heave is firmer than the foundation 105  
 Of all middle-earth or the curl of creation.  
 Its grasp is greater than the grip of stones.  
 It is the healer of the lame, the light of the blind,  
 The door of the deaf, the tongue of the dumb,  
 The shield of the guilty, the hall of the Shaper, 110  
 The bone-house of God, the bearer of the flood,  
 The protector of people, the guardian of waves,  
 The muscle and sinew of fish and fowl,  
 The breath and beauty of beast and bloom,  
 The blaze of serpents, the surge of dragons, 115  
 The wielder of the wild, the gatherer of glory,  
 All honor, all grace, all air, all creation—  
 Everything that exists in an eternity of space.  
 Whoever earnestly chants the word of God,  
 Sings out the truth of the Savior's song, 120  
 And celebrates its spirit without sin,  
 Can chase away the fierce foe,  
 The champion of evil, if you use the power  
 Of the Pater Noster. **P** will punish him—  
 That warrior has a strong staff, a long rod, 125  
 A golden goad to strike the grim fiend.  
 Then **A** pursues him with mighty power,  
 Beating him back, and **T** takes a turn,  
 Stabbing his tongue, twisting his neck,  
 Breaking his jaws. **E** afflicts him, 130  
 Always ready to assault the enemy.  
**R** is enraged, the lord of letters,  
 And grabs the fiend by his unholy hair,  
 Shakes and shivers him, picks up flint  
 And shatters his shanks, his spectral shins. 135  
 No leech will mend those splintered limbs—  
 He will never see his knees again.

Then the devil will duck down in the dark,  
 Cowering under clouds, shivering in shade,  
 Hatching in his heart some hopeless defense. 140  
 He will yearn for his miserable home in hell,  
 The hardest of prisons, the narrowest of homelands,  
 When those churchly twins, **N** and **O**,  
 Come sweeping down with sharp whips  
 To scourge his body, afflict his evil flesh. 145  
 Those stern siblings care little for his life.  
 Then **S** will arrive, the prince of angels,  
 The letter of glory, our Lord and Savior—  
 It will haul the fiend up by his hostile feet,  
 Swing him in the air, striking the stone 150  
 With his insidious head, cracking his cheeks,  
 Shattering his mouth, scattering his teeth  
 Through the throngs of hell. Each fearful fiend  
 Will curl up tightly, concealed in shadow  
 As the thane of Satan lies terribly still. 155  
 Then **Q** and **U** will trouble and torment him,  
 Beat him down to a humble bow—  
 Those bold commanders carry long light-shafts,  
 Sword-gleam and spear-glow, a bright stroke  
 And bitter scourge. They hold back no blows, 160  
 Singeing and severing that loathsome demon.  
 Then **I**, **L**, and angry **C** will come crashing down,  
 Surrounding the devil in the clash and conflict.  
 The crooked letter carries bitter terror  
 And can easily catch and crush hell's captive, 165  
 Who will cry out in pain and try to retreat.  
 Then **F** and **M** will harass the hell-fiend,  
 That guilty enemy, that shameless foe,  
 With sharp spears and a fierce flight  
 Of flaming arrows which will bite his head, 170  
 Blaze his hair, burning him bare,  
 Scalding him bald, a singeing slaughter.  
 The arrows of God will seek that slayer—  
 A sky-snake can easily bite through a boast.  
 Then **G** the crooked will be sent by God 175  
 To support his friends, seek out the fiend,

And quiet his cruelty—his heart will stand still.  
 Then **D** follows that fellow, full of five virtues,  
 Including fire, no gentle judgment.

\* \* \*

**B** is the third letter silently waiting, 180  
 Wanting to strike at the edge of the street.

**H** will hasten in an angel's robes,  
 A warrior of Christ in quickening clothes,  
 God's grim pursuer, a purveyor of pain.  
 Then the life-twins (you remember **N** and **O**) 185

Will hurl the hated fiend into the sky  
 With their silver whips and savage spears  
 Till his veins burst in a shower of gore  
 And his blasted bones begin to shine  
 With the bright radiance of blood-rage. 190

The Word of God through the mouth of man  
 Can put each and every fiend to flight,  
 The unholy host of loathsome lives,  
 Destroy a deadly bale of black demons,  
 Even if they alter their form and hue, 195

Feather up or scale down, shriek or swim.  
 Sometimes they seize an unsuspecting sailor;  
 Sometimes they slither like venomous serpents,  
 Stinging a fierce beast or biting field-cattle,  
 Or morph into mighty, death-dealing dragons. 200

Sometimes the evil one skulks in the water,  
 Seeking to make the poor horse stumble,  
 Carving it up with his cruel horns  
 Until its blood runs red in the waves,  
 And its life runs down into the riverbed. 205

Sometimes it binds a doomed man's hands  
 On the battlefield, weighs down the warrior's  
 Grip of sword and shield as he enters the strife.  
 Sometimes it carves a cache of letters,  
 A clutch of its own secret, savage curses 210

On the wretched warrior's shield-board and blade,  
 Thieving all chance of the thane's glory.  
 A man should not draw his weapon without thinking,  
 Even though he loves its bright-bladed beauty.

He should always sing the Lord's Pater Noster  
When he draws his sword—he should pray to that palm,  
The figure of peace, for power and protection  
Over life and limb, for the Lord's favor,  
When enemy attacks and the battle begins.

## SOLOMON AND SATURN II

See the previous headnote for manuscript details. The two *Solomon and Saturn* poems show enough similarities of theme and treatment that they may have been written by the same author or by authors in the same circle (Anlezark, 2009, 49). This poem is more dialogic than the previous one, as it moves continually between question and answer. Fulk and Cain note that “the questions, most of which are posed by Saturn, are various, dealing chiefly with natural phenomena (why snow falls, why water is restless, etc.), the workings of fate (why wealth is distributed unevenly, why twins may lead different lives, etc.), and Judgment Day (why we cannot all go to heaven, whether we can die before our appointed time, etc.), in no particular order” (170). Anlezark argues that “the dialogue form imparts to the poem an oppositional structure, which is developed in contrasts between heat and cold, the divergent fate of twins, fate and foreknowledge, spirits who contend for the soul, and others” (2009, 46). Hansen points out the way in which the poem explores “language as an active and co-operative interchange between two parties, speaker and addressee, poet and audience; and hence language as a paradigm for the creation and (possible) containment of opposition and difference” (147). There seems to be a delicate balance in the poem between elucidation and mystification, which, according to Shippey, “does indeed, by its human drama and combination of detail and mystery, create an impression of profundity beyond any of the other didactic poems” (25). The reference to *Vasa Mortis* (Vessels of Death), the four-headed bird of the Philistines in line 124, echoes a line from Psalm 7:14, *Et in ipso praeeparavit vasa mortis sagittas suas ad conburendum operatus est*, “And in it he has prepared the instruments

of death, he has made ready his arrows for them that burn” (Anlezark, 2009, 125), and is “clearly derived from the talmudic account of Solomon’s binding of the demon Ashmedai” (Fulk and Cain, 170). The final section of the poem (lines 452–62 in the translation) appears in the manuscript as a separate fragment before the poem itself and is positioned at the end of *Solomon and Saturn I* in *ASPR*, volume VI (lines 170–78, pp. 37–38), but most editors now take this fragment to be the conclusion of *Solomon and Saturn II* (Anlezark, 2009, 45).

## Solomon and Saturn II

Listen! I have heard about men of learning,  
 Wise counselors, disputing, debating,  
 Trading truths in the halls of middle-earth,  
 Engaged in the clash and collaboration of ideas.  
 Each one argues his own thoughts and theories, 5  
 But the worst will lie or contradict the truth.  
 Solomon was famous and Saturn was a chieftain,  
 A bold strategist and born leader of men’s minds,  
 Who held the keys to certain books  
 In which learning was locked, knowledge stored. 10  
 Eager for ideas, he traveled widely  
 Through many countries with different cultures—  
 The far land of India, the East Cossias,  
 The Persian kingdom and also Palestine,  
 The city of Nineveh, the North Parthians, 15  
 The Medes’ treasure-halls, the land of Marculf,  
 The kingdom of Saul from Gilboa in the south  
 To Gadara in the north, the halls of the Philistines,  
 The Cretan forts, the Egyptian forests,  
 The Midian waters, the Horeb cliffs, 20  
 The Chaldean kingdom—seeking to comprehend  
 The arts of the Greeks, the race of Arabians,  
 The learning of Libya, the lay of Syrian land,  
 The borders of Porus, the place called Pamphilia,  
 Bythinia, Bashan, Macedonia, Mesopotamia, 25  
 Cappadocia, and all of Christ’s homeland,  
 Jericho, Galilee, and his birth-place Jerusalem.

\* \* \*

[Solomon is speaking]

“I could argue again or even keep quiet  
 And think of something worthwhile to say, 30  
 Letting my mind run instead of my mouth.  
 I know that if you travel on the Mediterranean  
 Past the river Chobar to seek your homeland,  
 You mean to boast that you’ve rebutted and rebuked,  
 Castigated and conquered, the children of men. 35  
 I know that the Chaldeans were so boastful in battle,  
 So proud of their gold and worldly wealth,  
 So vain over victories, arrogant with glory,  
 That they were sent a warning in the south,  
 In the field of Shinar, at the rising Babel. 40  
 Tell me of the land where no man can tread.”

Saturn said:

“The famous sea-traveler was called Raging Wolf,  
 Known to the Philistines, a friend of Nimrod.  
 He slew twenty-five dragons one day at dawn— 45  
 Then death devoured him, for no man may seek  
 Or search that wilderness, that desolate wasteland,  
 No bird can fly there, no beast tread there.  
 In that dark wasteland are all venomous creatures,  
 Where snakes, stingers, serpents, and burn-bringers 50  
 First woke and slithered, swarmed and spread,  
 Bearing their unhealthy bite and breath.  
 Wolf’s grim sword still shines there,  
 Gleaming steel over a glut of graves.”

Solomon said:

“Only a fool wades through deep water, 55  
 Not knowing how to swim, braving the waves  
 Without a ship and its lifting sails,  
 Without wings or fathomless feet.  
 His toes cannot touch that sea-bed ground. 60  
 He’s testing God and tempting fate.  
 He’s bound to fail, to find death in the deep.”



Saturn said:

“What dumb creature rests in its valley,  
 Wise and silent with seven tongues, 65  
 Each tongue pointed with twenty blades,  
 Each blade an angel’s wisdom that can raise  
 The gold walls of Jerusalem and cause  
 The righteous rood of Christ, the glory-cross,  
 The truth-sign to shine? Say what I mean.” 70

Solomon said:

“Books are bound with glory—they bode  
 Good counsel and conscious will.  
 They are man’s strength and firm foundation,  
 His anchored thought. They lift the mind 75  
 From melancholy and the body from pain.”

Saturn said:

“A man who takes a taste of learning  
 Becomes bold; a man who makes a meal  
 Of understanding and imagination becomes wise.” 80

Solomon said:

“Books bring a reward to the righteous,  
 Sustenance and safety to the suffering spirit,  
 And a safe harbor to the souls who love them.”

Saturn said:

“There is a difficult riddle that has teased my mind 85  
 Morning and night for more than fifty years  
 In its mysterious nature—the restless mind,  
 The sorrowing spirit. Where does it go?  
 Why does it yearn? Even now I need 90  
 The Lord to send me a man of learning  
 To unravel this riddle and teach me the truth.”

Solomon said:

“What you say is true, so let me satisfy  
 Your deep curiosity with another strange riddle. 95

The Philistines guard a bright, precious bird  
 In the middle of their borders, circled and surrounded  
 By a high mountain, a golden wall.  
 Their wise men believe (but it's not so)  
 That an alien enemy will steal the bird, 100  
 So two hundred sentries watch that wonder  
 From the north and south on both sides.  
 The bird has four lifelike heads,  
 Each the measure of a man's skull,  
 The belly of a whale, the wings of a vulture, 105  
 The feet of a griffin. It's bound to the earth,  
 Gazes fiercely, beats its wings futilely,  
 Rattles its chains, reviles its clutch.  
 It sings in sorrow, mourns in misery,  
 Gathers pain and pines in grief. 110  
 Its struggling limbs will never hold still.  
 It yearns deeply for the Day of Doom  
 And fears its wait will be forever  
 Or nearly ninety thousand years  
 Before it hears the crack and chaos, 115  
 The rip and roar, of time unraveling  
 And arrives at last at the day of doom.  
 No man in the world knew of this wonder  
 Before I discovered it. I ordered it bound  
 Across the sea by the brave son of Melot, 120  
 Prince of the Philistines, to prevent terror  
 And protect his people. The far-off leaders  
 Of the Philistines call this winged wonder,  
 This strange bird, the Vasa Mortis,  
 The Vessels of Death, the instruments of doom, 125  
 That carry mankind on the judgment journey."

Saturn said:

"What creature walks the world, shaking  
 Its firm foundations, causing tears  
 Whenever it comes, waking up sorrow 130  
 Like a grim wanderer, often struggling  
 On its way here? No star or stone,  
 No bright gem, water or wild beast,

Can deceive that creature, escape its grip.  
 Things great and small, hard and soft, 135  
 Are in its hands. It feasts on ground-walkers,  
 Sky-floaters, sea-swimmers everywhere.  
 Each year three times thirteen thousand  
 Living creatures walk into its voracious mouth.”

Solomon said: 140  
 “Old age has power over everything on earth.  
 In its shackles all living things struggle;  
 In its endless chains every creature is subdued.  
 Working its will, it crushes tree,  
 Rips twig, whips the standing ship 145  
 In the water, beats it to the ground.  
 It jaws birds, death-wrestles wolves,  
 Outlasts stones. It slays steel,  
 Bites iron with rust, and takes us too.”

Saturn said: 150  
 “But why does snow fall, covering and concealing  
 The green ground? It hides heather,  
 Strangles shoots, freezes flowers,  
 Winter-withers every good thing that grows,  
 Catches warm life in a clutch of cold. 155  
 It often makes wild animals miserable,  
 Tests and torments them, unlengthens their lives,  
 Builds a bridge over still waters,  
 Lakes and streams, breaks walls and gates,  
 Strides boldly across the land like a warrior, 160  
 Strikes suddenly, rips branches, robs lives.”

\* \* \*

[Solomon is speaking]  
 “What is much stronger than the cunning malice  
 That can lead a man to a land of terror  
 And heartfelt hatred to the devil’s delight.” 165

Saturn said:  
 “Night is the darkest weather, need the hardest fate,

Sorrow the heaviest burden—it gathers grief.  
Sleep is most like death, a darkening dream.”

Solomon said:

170

“Leaves are green in their short lives;  
Later they fade and unburnish to brown,  
Find themselves free and floating down  
To flake, rot, and mulch the ground.

So too sinners may branch and bloom,

175

Wither and fall even when they feel

Fully alive in the clutch of crime,

Keeping their stolen transient treasures

Concealed in their dark, deceitful hearts

To the fiends’ delight. These evil fools

180

Believe that almighty God, the King of glory,

Will listen to their sad story forever.”

Saturn said:

“Oblivious fools will find in the end

Only oblivion when the sea surges,

185

Swallows the land, sends flesh and flower

To a watery grave at the crack of doom.

God’s thunder shall still all sinners

Who will breathe water and lose life.”

Solomon said:

190

“So the proud sinners will certainly perish,

Those who lead their evil lives on loan.

Time will not wait for anyone in the world.

Your long lost people have made that clear;

They fought like fools against God’s power.

195

Their strength was sapped—their world withered.

I don’t mean to make you angry, dear brother,

But your race was bitter, your culture cruel,

Your power savage. Step back from sin,

Evade that evil, attack iniquity.”

200

Saturn said:

“Tell me, King Solomon, if you can, what are

The four ropes of fate that bind a doomed man?”

Solomon said:

“Fate is what’s happened, the life a man’s lived—  
Nothing more, nothing less. These are the four ropes.” 205

Saturn said:

“But when Doomsday comes, who will judge Christ,  
When the Lord lines up all of life’s creatures?”

Solomon said:

“Who would dare to judge the Lord of light,  
Who shaped us from dust, the darkness of earth,  
The wound of night? Are you wise enough to say  
What things were and what things were not,  
Or how something could be created out of nothing?” 210  
215

Saturn said:

“Why can’t the sun shine everywhere at once  
Across all of creation? Why does it cast shadows  
On moors and mountains, deserts and wastelands?  
How can the shade be shaped out of light?” 220

Solomon said:

“So why weren’t worldly goods given out equally?  
One man who is eager for spiritual good  
Owns almost nothing, but the value of virtue  
Remains great in God’s eyes. He will find rest  
And a home with the blessed because of his merits.” 225

Saturn said:

“Can you tell me why these two are kept together,  
Laughter and tears, such strange companions?  
Why do sorrow and joy walk together in this world?  
Sometimes they undermine the happiness of the worthy  
And well-intentioned. How does this happen?” 230

Solomon said:

“A man is miserable who cultivates grief.  
Often he wants to dwell in the dark,  
Drinking sorrow. God finds this shameful.” 235

Saturn said:

“Why can’t we all just go forward together  
Into God’s kingdom, wrapped in glory?”

Solomon said:

“The clutch of fire and the chill of frost,  
The heat of sun and cold of snow,  
Cannot bear to share the same space.  
Each one wants to weaken its opposite,  
And the less powerful one must give up its place.”

240

245

Saturn said:

“But why does the more sinful man live longer  
When he gets less respect from family and friends?  
Why is evil rewarded while good goes wanting?”

Solomon said:

“No man can defer life’s journey for a moment;  
Every man moves toward death and judgment.”

250

Saturn said:

“But how does this happen? A woman gives birth  
To a pair of twins. Whether good or evil,  
They should be the same, but their lives are unlike.  
One mopes in misery without many friends;  
The other is lucky and makes friends everywhere.  
One finds fortune, the other a sad fate.  
One gathers grief in a sad, short life  
And leaves unloved in the grip of gloom.  
The other lives long, enjoying generosity—  
His life is a gift. I ask you, lord Solomon,  
Which of the two twins has the better lot?”

255

260

Solomon said:

“When a mother bears a child, she never knows  
How long he will live or controls his fate.  
She will often raise a son to ruin,  
A daughter to disaster, and suffer sorrow,  
Enduring grief at the child’s dying day.

265

270

Time and again she will weep bitter tears  
 From a well of woe when her son wanders  
 The wide world with a wild heart  
 And a wicked mind, a miserable man.  
 Nothing goes his way, the sinner is led astray, 275  
 Stripped of honor, separated from glory,  
 Without purpose, without place,  
 Without family and friends, alone in exile.  
 Sometimes depressed, he hides out in the hall.  
 Sometimes he lives without his gift-giver. 280  
 His beloved lord has turned his face from his fate.  
 Sometimes he lives like an outcast alone  
 In a wasteland of woe. A loving mother  
 Has no means to control his coming and going,  
 To ensure his happiness, secure his wealth. 285  
 From birth to death, that's the way of the world."

Saturn said:

"But why won't a man labor in his lifetime  
 To serve faithfully a lord and leader,  
 To pursue learning and gain understanding?" 290

Solomon said:

"A wise man seeks to serve a kind lord,  
 Mighty and merciful, generous and gentle.  
 He knows his own mind. A fool does not."

Saturn said:

"Why does water struggle and strive 295  
 Over all the earth? Why is its fate unfathomable?  
 It cannot relax by day or rest at night.  
 It rushes and runs, driven by the desire  
 To seek some still home at road's end. 300  
 It cleanses and christens many of the living,  
 Refreshing, reviving, bringing them beauty.  
 Why can't the stream be still at night?"

\* \* \*

[Solomon is speaking]

"And the power of light is beyond question. 305

It illuminates truth and serves its seekers.  
 Often it overthrows the devil's forces  
 Where wise men are gathered in its glory.  
 When a piece of food falls on the floor,  
 A man needs light to seek it out, 310  
 Find and bless it, salt or season it,  
 Bite this breakfast and bolt it down.  
 So too a piece of bread is better taken,  
 If it's been blessed in the Lord's light,  
 And a man remembers the right rules for this— 315  
 It's more sustaining than seven feasts.  
 Light has the hue and form of the Holy Spirit,  
 The nature of Christ—often it makes this known.  
 If a fool holds firelight for too long a time  
 Without locking it carefully in a container, 320  
 It may rise to the roof, torching house-timbers,  
 Blazing the building, burning it down.  
 It always climbs according to its nature,  
 Searching for a pathway up into heaven,  
 Hurrying home to its Father where it all began. 325  
 This light is visible to any faithful follower  
 Who carries the Lord's lantern, the torch of truth,  
 Because there is nothing living in this wide world,  
 Neither fish nor fowl, rock nor river,  
 Mountain nor moor, sea nor stone, 330  
 Branch nor bloom, on all of middle-earth  
 That does not belong to the race of fire."

Saturn said:

"Often I've heard in the old days wise men  
 Disputing and debating another opposition, 335  
 Fate and foresight, wondering which of them  
 Was stronger in their relentless struggle  
 In men's minds and who would tire in time,  
 Exhausted by the argument. It's true, I know,  
 That the Philistine scholars said in the past, 340  
 When we sat considering this difficult question  
 With books in our laps, exchanging ideas,



That no one can fully understand and appreciate  
This deep dichotomy or resolve this conflict.”

Solomon said:

“The twists of fate are hard to fathom.

Fate finds its own unknown road.

It rests and runs, sleeps and surges,

Harrowes the heart, disturbs the mind,

Hauls in suffering, hands us woe,

Inspires fear, fosters pain,

Spawns tears. It haunts our years.

Yet the wise man can moderate the effect

Of fate in a steady mind by keeping calm,

Resisting rage, seeking support

From family and friends, finding faith

In the Lord, strength in a godly spirit.”

Saturn said:

“But why does this mighty and terrible fate,

The unfathomable mother, twist and torment us—

This origin of evil, the source of sin,

Creator of crime—this mother of mayhem,

Father of depravity, daughter of death?

Why is fate finally the lord of our lives?

It will always bear suffering and sorrow,

Weeping and woe. Will it never tire

Of its gruesome task, its grim chaos,

Its endless conflicts, its dark disputes?”

Solomon said:

“In God’s heavenly kingdom, no one wished

For fellowship between those two angels,

The blessed and baleful, the pure and proud.

One obeyed God—the other rebelled,

Began through secret craft to shape war-gear,

A sword and standard, an iron corselet,

Preaching power to his restive companions,

Making mutiny. That traitor meant

To lay waste to the Lord's glorious kingdom,  
 Become the lord of his own unholy half,  
 Breed with a batch (one-tenth) of angels, 380  
 Propagate his own proud and perverse kind,  
 End his suffering and establish himself  
 In a kingdom of spite. Then the noble Lord  
 Was a little disturbed by the devil's plan.  
 He unleashed the force of his righteous anger 385  
 And hurled the devil down beneath the earth  
 And ordered him bound in an underground hell.  
 These are the fierce forces arrayed against us—  
 They offer a sword of sorrow to the sinful soul.  
 Every wise man knows and feels this cruel conflict. 390  
 When the blessed Lord of all the angels  
 Realized that some would no longer accept him  
 As their mighty Mentor, he gathered up the traitor  
 In his terrible grip and cast him down,  
 Exiled from glory, into a prison of pain 395  
 And sent his faithless followers with him.  
 The children of heaven now lost in hell  
 Were condemned to suffer eternal agony  
 In the house of flame. Those rebels realized  
 That the Lord meant them to live in misery, 400  
 And they began to mourn. The traitors traded  
 Heaven for hell, a winter-cold death,  
 A shroud of suffering, a lake of serpents,  
 A pit of snakes, a cruel collection  
 Of beasts with horns forged of iron, 405  
 Screaming eagles ravenous for blood,  
 Black adders, blazing flames,  
 Heartsick hunger, unquenchable thirst,  
 Savage strife. That was no paradise.  
 There was never to be an end to their agony." 410

Saturn said:

"Tell me, is there any man on middle-earth  
 Who has sinned whom death can suddenly seize  
 Before his run of days is done? Can you answer this?"

Solomon said:

“The Lord of heaven sends a holy angel 415  
 To each one at dawn to discover and discern,  
 As the day goes by, how the man or woman  
 Walks in the way of the Lord, watches  
 How their minds move toward his will, 420  
 Respecting his power or rebelling against it.  
 Two struggling spirits circle around him.  
 One of the spirits is brighter than gold;  
 One blacker than hell’s endless abyss.  
 One descends from the breath of heaven, 425  
 One climbs up from the bite of hell.  
 One gleams with the radiance of the sun,  
 One is all smoke and mirrors.  
 One teaches a man to hold firm his faith  
 In the Lord’s love, the Maker’s mercy, 430  
 Rely on the fellowship of family and friends,  
 Seek good counsel and avoid sin.  
 The other tempts him to revel in ruin,  
 Reveals no truths but subtle misconceptions,  
 Shaping his mind in malicious ways, 435  
 Deluding him with delight, leading him astray  
 Until his eyes burn with hostility and hatred,  
 His rage feeds grimly on his buried guilt,  
 And he blames the wretched for his own woes.  
 Some books say the faithless devil fights 440  
 In the hearts of men in four dark ways—  
 Subtle insinuation, devious delight,  
 Crafty consent, and outright rebellion—  
 Until a man turns, twisting into evil,  
 And does the devil’s darkest bidding. 445  
 His better angel heads for home,  
 Weeping on the way, singing sadly,  
 ‘I could not dislodge the evil seed,  
 The steel-hard stone, the pit of peril,  
 From his faithless heart. It sticks there still. 450  
 I mourn this man. His fate is fixed.’”

\* \* \*

[Solomon is speaking]

“His arrogance will tire till he knows the truth—  
That sinful souls are stuck in hell  
Together with their tormenters, fierce demons.  
Then the high King of heaven will order hell  
Closed and locked in the clutch of fire,  
An abyss of agony for devils and men.”

455

So wise Solomon, the son of David,  
Overcame the Chaldean, put him to shame.  
Still Saturn rejoiced—he had traveled far  
And learned to laugh in the depths of his heart.

460

## THE MENOLOGIUM: A CALENDAR POEM

This poem is found in MS Cotton Tiberius B.i along with some *Chronicle* poems and *Maxims II: Cotton Maxims*. This is a calendar poem of the saints' feast days, the holidays marked by several of the major moments in Christ's life, the arrival of each of the four seasons, and the onset of each month. Fulk and Cain point out that "this vernacular poem is inspired by sanctoral calendars in Latin hexameters, which appear from the late eighth century, and which are simply versifications, for non-liturgical use, of the calendars of saints that preface missals and breviaries," noting also that "in its manuscript context it seems to have been intended as a preface to version C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" (133). The actual dates of the various celebratory days set out in the poem are not included in the text itself; only the time that intervenes between each of the succeeding dates is noted in convoluted ways such as "after four weeks minus two days" and "after thirteen plus ten days." This is probably to help meet the alliterative constraints in the poem. Some of the intervening day-counts are in error. All of this causes what Stanley calls "arithmetical complexities" in the poem (2006, 259), and he indicates each of the proper dates. Malone (1969) indicates the actual dates in the margin to his translation. I have simplified all of this complexity in my translation by indicating both the dates themselves and the actual number of days (sometimes corrected) between the dates in question.

There is in this poem an interesting relationship between different forms of time. The saints' days are celebrated in present time but honor an event in past time. These events seem to "recur" periodically, as do the entry of the months and the seasons. Present listeners or readers are invited to recall these past events as they prepare for present celebrations. In this way, linear history

takes on a cyclical pattern, as does the metaphoric dying and rebirthing of the earth from winter to spring; and this in turn underlines the death and rebirth of Christ in the poem. Every significant earthly event is marked in recurring time, which imbues the poem with a sense of eternity. The word *tid* is often repeated in the poem and stands as a marker of these complex perspectives on time and has a wide range of meanings: “time, period, season, while, hour, feast-day, festal-tide, canonical hour or service, proper time” (Clark Hall, 340).

### The Menologium: A Calendar Poem

Christ was born, the glory of kings,  
 Mighty, magnificent, on a midwinter day,  
 Our eternal Lord, the Guardian of heaven.  
 Eight days later, he was named “Savior”  
 On New Year’s Day, as it’s known by many 5  
 In town and village, hearth and home.  
 Five days later the feast day arrives,  
 When the Lord was baptized, that holy day  
 That battle-brave men, blessed with glory,  
 Call Twelfth Night here in Britain. 10  
 Four weeks later minus two days,  
 As is told by wise calendar-counters,  
 February arrives and settles down.  
 The next night on February 2nd,  
 Is Mary’s mass, when Christ’s mother 15  
 Brought her beloved boy, the Son of God,  
 To the holy temple, the Lord’s house.  
 Five nights later on February 7th,  
 Winter begins to leave our lodgings.  
 The Lord’s warrior, Matthias was martyred— 20  
 He left life seventeen days later on the 24th,  
 When the hint of spring was slipping in  
 To fields, furrows, and the homes of men.  
 Five days later, everyone always looks out  
 For fierce March, except for leap-year, 25  
 When it lags later by an added day.  
 That savage month sometimes brings  
 Hoarfrost and hailstones, terrible sleet-storms,  
 Over much of middle-earth. Holy Gregory

Left life eleven days later on March 12th. 30  
 A blessed man well known in Britain,  
 He hastened into the Lord's embrace.  
 Nine days later on March 21st, brave Benedict,  
 Spirit-strong, faith-firm, sought the Savior.  
 He earned the praise of those raised strictly 35  
 By the learned rules of the Lord's laws.  
 Books laud Benedict as God's obedient servant.  
 Now the number-crafty calendar-counters  
 Make known the equinox on March 21st,  
 Because on that day our glorious Shaper 40  
 Created the sun and moon, heaven's candles.  
 Four nights after equinox on March 25th,  
 Our Heavenly Father sent forth his archangel,  
 A holy emissary who announced to Mary  
 A great salvation—that the mother and maiden 45  
 Should bear the Creator, the best of kings,  
 The Lord of heaven. That act of Providence  
 Was proclaimed to the multitudes of middle-earth.  
 The wonder was no small gift to the world.  
 Seven nights later, our Lord and Savior 50  
 Sends us April, a month of gifts  
 When the glorious feast of the Lord's resurrection  
 Often occurs as a comfort to mankind.  
 April is a month of green beauty and great blessing.  
 The wise prophet once sang in praise: 55  
 "This is the day the wise Lord made for us,  
 For all the blessed ones who dwell on earth,  
 For all the generations of mankind to come,  
 As a source of joy for the human race."  
 We cannot keep that date fixed on the calendar 60  
 Or know the exact day of the Lord's Ascension  
 Because these days change, always depending  
 On count and custom, learning and law,  
 The plotting of planets, the signs of seasons.  
 These matters and motions remain a wonder. 65  
 Perhaps those wise in winters, old in years,  
 Will one day discover this elusive truth.  
 Now we must weave words once again,

Mindful of martyrs, and sing out their stories.  
 Twenty-four days after April moves in 70  
 To gladden the homes and hearts of men,  
 Rogation arrives on the 25th of Easter month,  
 When the right-minded raise up relics  
 In a holy and profound time of prayer.  
 Six days later, lovely May moves in. 75  
 She brings in beauty, greening the earth  
 With a glorious gown of new shoots,  
 Gorgeous leaves, a fruitful living gift  
 That serves our needs. On that same day,  
 The 1st of May, the dedicated disciples, 80  
 The faithful followers, Philip and James,  
 Laid down their lives for their love of the Lord.  
 Two days later on May 3rd, God revealed the rood,  
 The holiest of beams, to blessed Helena.  
 On that gallows-tree, the Son of God, 85  
 The Lord of angels, was cruelly crucified.  
 By his Father's leave, he offered his life  
 For his love of mankind. Six days later  
 On May 9th, glorious summer blazes in,  
 Brings to the fields and farms of men 90  
 Sun-bright days and warmer weather.  
 Then meadows blossom, groves bloom—  
 Earth's gift is a cornucopia of colors.  
 Men and women rejoice on middle-earth,  
 All kinds and creatures are quickened with life, 95  
 And they praise their Creator in manifold ways,  
 In each muscled movement, each greening reach.  
 After seventeen nights, on May 26th,  
 God took Augustine to a place of pure light.  
 The holy one was glad-hearted here in Britain 100  
 To have found so many men, leaders and earls,  
 Who would listen to him and follow God's will,  
 As the wise Gregory had so often counseled.  
 I have never heard of a better bishop  
 Or a wiser mentor in all of middle-earth 105  
 Between the salt-seas. Now he rests  
 In Canterbury, close to a kingly throne



In a famous monastery. Next the calendar-count  
 Brings us six days later to the 1st of June,  
 When heaven's gem, the brightest of stars, 110  
 Soars in the sky to its highest point,  
 Then sets in the evening under the edge  
 Of sea and sand. In this summer setting,  
 The sun lingers in field and furrow  
 And leaves its lovely gift of daylight 115  
 A little longer before it disappears  
 Down under the horizon. Twenty-three days later  
 On June 24th, John the Baptist, thane of glory,  
 Beloved servant of the Son and Savior,  
 Was born long ago. We observe that feast 120  
 On midsummer day with great dignity.  
 Five days later on June 29th is the saints' day  
 Of the apostles Peter and Paul. Loyal to the Lord,  
 These holy martyrs were murdered in Rome  
 For their faith. That was an infamous day. 125  
 They had worked wonders in many nations  
 Throughout middle-earth, and after death  
 Continued their count of mysteries and miracles  
 Through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit.  
 Two days later in timely fashion comes July, 130  
 And on the 25th day, James met his death  
 With a strong heart and steadfast spirit.  
 He was a wise and constant counselor of people,  
 The son of Zebedee. Seven nights later,  
 August enters the world with its radiant sun, 135  
 Lammas Day for all of earth's peoples.  
 Six days later on August 7th, autumn arrives  
 With fields overflowing with fruit and grain,  
 A wonder of wealth, a season of sustenance.  
 Three nights later on August 10th was the day 140  
 When Laurence left his life, a mighty martyr  
 And famous deacon. For his firm faith  
 In words and works, he met his Master  
 And now lives a blessed life with God.  
 Five days later on August 15th is the time 145  
 When the fairest of maidens, the glory of women,

Ascended into paradise, seeking her Son  
 And the Lord of hosts. That purest of women  
 Was given a place of peace in paradise.  
 The Savior had paid her for a precious loan 150  
 With a well-earned home in eternal heaven.  
 After ten days on August 25th, we celebrate  
 Bartholomew's Day with a feast in Britain.  
 Four nights later, a long while ago,  
 John the Baptist died on August 29th.  
 That worthy servant sprinkled the holy waters 155  
 Of baptism on the blessed head of the Son of glory.  
 Our Lord and Master once said about him  
 That there was never any greater person born  
 Of man and woman in all of middle-earth.  
 Three days later through time and tide, 160  
 Holy-month September is ushered in,  
 As all the wise ones of old once predicted.  
 Seven days later on September 8th,  
 We celebrate the day that the best of maidens,  
 Blessed Mary, Mother of God, was born. 165  
 Thirteen days later on September 21st,  
 The sinless Matthew sent forth his spirit  
 Soaring into heaven. He was wise in Gospel  
 Law and lore. Three days later on the 24th,  
 The equinox arrives to the children of men. 170  
 Five days afterwards on September 29th,  
 Everyone on earth honors the archangel  
 In singing Michael's mass and celebrating  
 A joyous feast. After three days' time,  
 The tenth month October arrives in town, 175  
 Bringing abundance and the beginning of winter,  
 As the year winds down. Men and women  
 All over the island, Angles and Saxons,  
 Know this month. Then we patiently wait  
 Twenty-seven days to October 28th, 180  
 When we celebrate the mass for two together,  
 Simon and Jude, those warrior-apostles.  
 We've learned that they were dear to our Lord—  
 They won great glory in their blessed ascension.

Four nights later, November rolls around 185  
 With plenty in the pantry for princes and people,  
 A heft of harvest, a fullness of feasts.  
 This month holds hope for the children of strife,  
 An ease of suffering, an end of anguish,  
 God's mercy for those who endure much misery. 190  
 On November 1st, we celebrate All Hallows' mass  
 With a feast for the saints who have worked God's will.  
 Six days later on November 7th, we all know  
 That winter storms in, chasing the sun-bright,  
 Heavy-footed, late harvest out, 195  
 Routing the welcome warmth of the year  
 With hard hailstorms, sleet and snow,  
 Locking down the land with firm ice-bonds,  
 At the Lord's command so that the earth's  
 Green garment grows suddenly white. 200  
 The meadow is meltless, the ground gripped  
 In a frozen clutch. Four days later  
 On November 11th, we celebrate the day  
 When the glorious Martin left life,  
 A sinless man seeking his Master, 205  
 The Lord of angels in high heaven.  
 Twelve days later on November 23rd,  
 The enemies of God sent sinking to the sea-bed  
 The glorious Clement, a wise gray-beard—  
 People still invoke his name in need. 210  
 Seven nights later on November 30th,  
 Splendid Andrew, dear to his Savior,  
 The Lord of victory, yielded his life,  
 Eagerly sending his soul on high  
 Into the embrace of God. The next morning, 215  
 As everyone knows, brings in December,  
 A chilly month for the children of men.  
 Twenty days later on December 21st,  
 The Savior gave brave-hearted Thomas  
 The treasure of everlasting life in heaven 220  
 For the trouble and strife the bold warrior bore.  
 He won God's favor for his unshakeable faith.  
 Four days later on blessed December 25th,

The Father of angels sent us his Son  
As a comfort to mankind all over creation. 225  
Now whoever seeks can find the saints' days,  
The celebration feasts, the months and seasons  
Throughout the year in this calendar poem,  
As time is traced, and the yearly cycle repeats,  
According to the rule in the realm of Britain, 230  
Commanded herein by the king of the Saxons.

## MAXIMS II: COTTON MAXIMS

This poem, found in MS Cotton Tiberius B.i, consists of a list of short, pithy statements about various creatures, human and non-human, and their appropriate, typical, or desired context, action, or condition. There is a longer set of maxims in the Exeter Book. These poems derive from a medieval and classical tradition of catalogic and encyclopedic works, but they have a tone and structure uniquely Anglo-Saxon. Each maxim is a mini-definition usually built on the verb *byð* (is, is always, will be) or *sceal* (shall be, should be, must be, ought to be, is typically). These simple verbs are notoriously difficult to translate. Greenfield and Evert list the following possibilities for the opening half-line, *Cyning sceal rice healdan*: “‘A king ought to rule (or preserve) a kingdom’ (i.e., a king ought to rule it rather than abuse or neglect it), or ‘A king shall rule a kingdom’ (i.e., it is the nature of a king to rule a kingdom), or ‘A king must rule a kingdom’ (i.e., each kingdom must be ruled by some king)” (342).

Beneath the apparently straightforward gnomic half-line, the poem points to a wide variety of possible kingly behaviors. What is slides into what should be or might be. The possibility of “might not” lurks beneath the surface. The ideal is haunted by the shadow of real-world kingly faults and failures. Nearly every gnome is like this, hiding beneath its supposedly simple statement a provocative mixture of possibilities. We could assume that the Anglo-Saxon poet had a haphazard pattern of construction or embraced an ordered worldview that we no longer comprehend. Or we might strain to make modern order out of the catalogue only to erase some significant points of disjuncture in the poem. Alternatively, we can assume that the gaps between maxims serve some purpose, some intended ambiguity, some moment of surprise intended to challenge our ordi-

nary way of perceiving and ordering the world. At the very least, we should recognize in the maxims and their gaps what Howe calls a “strangeness of taxonomy,” whose apparent disjunctions force us to see beyond our ordinary categories of perception, and whose apparent absurdity “is also deeply disconcerting, for it challenges our fundamental ways of ordering experience” (10).

## Maxims II (Cotton Maxims)

A king shall rule a kingdom. Cities are seen from afar,  
 The cunning work of giants, wonderful wall-stones,  
 Their works left on earth. Wind is the swiftest creature in air,  
 Thunder the loudest at times. The glories of Christ are great.  
 Fate is the firmest, winter the coldest, 5  
 Spring the frostiest, its chill the longest.  
 Summer is sun-brightest, the sky then hottest,  
 Autumn most glorious, harvest-heavy,  
 Bringing the year’s fruit given by God.  
 Truth is the trickiest, treasure the dearest, 10  
 Gold made for men, the old one wisest,  
 Rich in experience, enduring for years.  
 Woe is wondrously clinging. Clouds drift off.  
 Good companions should encourage a prince  
 To be a battle-warrior and ring-giver. 15  
 A man must have courage, the sword a helmet  
 To bite in battle. The wild hawk must find  
 A home on the glove; the wolf haunts the wood,  
 The eagle soars alone. The boar in the forest  
 Shall be tusk-strong. A good man seeks glory 20  
 In his homeland. A spear dwells in the hand,  
 Stained with gold. A gem stands on the ring,  
 High and prominent. The stream will be wave-bound  
 To mix with the flood. The mast must stand on a boat,  
 Lifting the sail-yard. The sword shall be on the lap, 25  
 A noble iron. The dragon shall dwell in a barrow,  
 Old and treasure-proud. The fish must spawn  
 Its kin in water. The king must give out  
 Rings in the hall. The bear shall be on the heath,  
 Old and awesome. The river flows from the hill 30  
 To the flood-gray sea. The army shall fight together,

Fixed on glory. Faith and trust must be in a lord,  
 Wisdom in a man. The wood shall be on the earth  
 With fruit and bloom—the hills of the world  
 Stand green and gleaming. God is in heaven, 35  
 The judge of deeds. The door of a building  
 Is its broad hall-mouth. The boss must be on the shield,  
 Finger-fast protection. The bird must sail and soar,  
 Sporting with the wind, the salmon dart through water  
 Like a quick shot. Showers shall start in the heavens, 40  
 Churning with wind, then fall on the land.  
 A thief must hide out in gloomy weather.  
 A demon must live alone in the fen.  
 A woman must seek her secret lover  
 With craft and cunning if she has no wish 45  
 To be bound in marriage, bought with rings,  
 Thriving as a proud wife among her people.  
 Water-flow shall be salt-surge, cloud-cover,  
 Sky-mist, and mountain stream. Cattle on earth  
 Shall teem and thrive. Stars in heaven 50  
 Shall shine brightly as the Creator commanded.  
 Good shall oppose evil, youth oppose age,  
 Life oppose death, light oppose darkness,  
 Army oppose army, one enemy against another.  
 Foe against foe shall fight over land, 55  
 Engage in feud, accuse each other of crimes.  
 Ever must a wise man think about struggle  
 And strife in this world. An outlaw must hang,  
 Pay for the terrible crime he committed  
 Against mankind. The Creator alone knows 60  
 Where the soul will turn after the death-day,  
 When all spirits journey to the judgment of God  
 In their Father's embrace. The shape of the future  
 Is secret and hidden—only the Lord knows that,  
 Our saving Father. No one returns here 65  
 Under our earthly roofs to tell us the truth—  
 What the Lord's shaping creation holds forth,  
 Or what heaven's hall with its victory-people  
 Looks like in that place where the Lord lives.

## A PROVERB FROM WINFRID'S TIME

This short, so-called proverb, which sounds more like a maxim, was “found in a Latin letter . . . by an anonymous monk [and] dated to the period 757–86 . . . among those [letters] of Boniface (Wynfrith)” (Fulk and Cain, 172–73). Stanley notes that “it may be the oldest of all extant English verse, as it is certainly the oldest in linguistic form of all English proverbs” (1987, 121). It issues a warning to the *daedlata*, or “late-deed-doer,” who never achieves glory or thinks about judgment or finds a community of dedicated friends.

### A Proverb from Winfrid's Time

The sluggard delays striving for glory,  
Never dreams of daring victories  
Or successful ventures. He dies alone.



## JUDGMENT DAY II

This poem is found in MS 201 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Dobbie notes that “viewed as a whole, this manuscript is a miscellaneous collection of homilies, laws, and other ecclesiastical and legal documents” (1942, lxix). This is one of two *Judgment Day* poems; the other is in the Exeter Book. The theme is also found in *Christ III: Judgment* in the Exeter Book and in other religious poems and homilies (see, for example, *Verse in a Homily: The Judgment of the Damned* in “Additional Poems”). Caie notes that “Doomsday with its potential for hell-fire rhetoric was one of the most effective devices to instill a penitential mood in an audience; Judgement Day presented a terrifying picture not only of the horrors of the conflagration and total destruction of the world, but also of the individual sinner’s confrontation with his Maker and a public revelation of all secret sins” (2000, ix). The timeframe in the poem is complex. The end of the world is superimposed on the end of a person’s life, and reckoning is a process that occurs eternally in the present. The narrator encourages his listener or reader here to contemplate a variety of ends—his or her own death, the end of the world with its judgment and doom, and the end or purpose for which mankind was created, as well as the end for which Christ came into the world.

The poem is based on Bede’s *De die iudicii*, as is an OE prose homily, *Be Domes Dæge* (Caie, 2000, xi). The poem begins with a Latin introduction, which Caie translates: “Here begins Bede’s poem on Judgement Day: ‘Among the flowering grasses of the fertile earth with the branches echoing on every side from the wind’s breath’” (85). It concludes with an OE prose passage: “Here ends the book that is called *Inter florigeras*—that is in English ‘Between

the blossoming ones who go to God's kingdom and how those endure who go to hell'" (Caie, 2000, 103).

*Judgment Day II* and the following three poems occur together in MS 201 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. *Judgment Day II* and the next poem are probably connected in their basic theme and movement. They are penitential poems that progress from Doomsday terror to confession and absolution; each is narrated by a wise teacher who mentors a listener. Together they move from harrowing fear to heavenly hope (for more on this linkage, see Caie, 2000, 15–19, and Robinson, 1994, 180 ff.). See the headnotes to the following three poems for other possible connections.

## Judgment Day II

Listen! I was sitting alone in a leafy grove,  
 Covered by a canopy, sheltering in the shade,  
 Where streams murmured and sang, running  
 Through the green glade, just as I've said.  
 I saw bud and blossom, beauty in bloom, 5  
 Lovely plants everywhere in that perfect place.  
 Sometimes the trees were swaying and sighing,  
 Sometimes swinging, rustling in the wind.  
 The sky stirred, the whole of heaven  
 Began to storm, and my solitary spirit 10  
 Was twisted and troubled, torn with grief.  
 Suddenly from a well of unwelcome thoughts,  
 Out of fear or frailty, misery or mad inspiration,  
 I began to sing these sad verses,  
 Just as was said. I remembered my sins, 15  
 My wicked words, my cruel deeds,  
 The things I've lamented doing in life,  
 And I thought how death never stops  
 Stalking the living no matter how long  
 We walk or wait in the day's vibrant light, 20  
 Hoping to outrun or outwait or outwit the dark.  
 I feared God's wrath, righteous or ravening,  
 His judgment of sinners, fiercely just,  
 When he comes to separate and sentence  
 All of mankind on middle-earth, 25  
 The holy and hell-bound, by his mystery

And might. I also remembered God's glory  
 Shining on the saints in heaven's home  
 And the darkening doom of the exiled and lost,  
 The misery of sinners, their torment and terror, 30  
 The cries of the faithless who twist in flame.  
 I recalled these things, mourning for myself,  
 Lifting this song from a well of grief:  
 "Let my tears be a torrent, a bitter flood,  
 While I beat my breast with a sinner's hands, 35  
 Prostrate my body and begin to pray,  
 Naming the sorrows I so well deserve.  
 Let my bitter salt-tears be as unceasing  
 As those sins I've committed, those acts  
 Of unfaith. Let them flood my face 40  
 And reveal my gathering guilt to God.  
 Let all the secrets of my unhallowed heart,  
 Whatever was wicked I've said or done,  
 Be drenched in tears, disclosed in words.  
 Let dark lust be laid bare to the light of day, 45  
 Envy be unfurled, pride left unprotected,  
 So that my hapless heart may be healed.  
 I know hope walks hand in hand with grief,  
 The promise of mercy with the pain of memory.  
 The only hope for the wretched and sinful 50  
 Is to disclose their wounds to the heavenly Doctor,  
 Who alone can save us and make us whole.  
 The Ruler of angels will never bruise or break  
 A man's mind, his rash or reckless heart,  
 Nor will the Lord Christ quench with water 55  
 A feebly smoking wick, whether flax or flesh.  
 Did not the thief who was cruelly crucified  
 With Christ create a model of the worth  
 Of true repentance for his worldly sins,  
 His countless crimes, and receive redemption? 60  
 That thief on the gallows-tree was truly guilty  
 And deserved to die without hope of heaven.  
 His heart was heavy, his soul was mired in sin;  
 Yet close to death, at the edge of the abyss,  
 He offered prayers from his hidden heart 65

With a few faithful words and found a cure,  
 The gift of salvation from his Lord and Savior.  
 He entered the peerless gates of paradise,  
 Where he found his heart's home with God.

I ask you, my anxious mind, my unhappy heart: 70  
 Why do you linger so long before revealing  
 Your shameful condition and confessing your sins  
 To your Father and Physician? And why are you silent,  
 My sinful tongue, when you have time to beg  
 For the Lord's forgiveness while he is listening? 75  
 Now the God of glory will hear you gladly,  
 But the day of doom, the time of reckoning,  
 Is coming soon when he will judge the world,  
 The orb of earth and all its inhabitants.  
 Then you will be called to come alone 80  
 To render your account to God the Creator,  
 Your resolute Ruler, in words and works.  
 Now is the time to shed penitent tears  
 To relieve God's wrath and redeem yourself.  
 Why do you grovel in filth, my flesh, 85  
 Wallowing in misery, floundering in sin?  
 Clean up your act, confess your crimes,  
 Flush out sin by shedding staunch tears.  
 Pray to the Life-lord for poultice, plaster,  
 And medicines to heal your sinful soul. 90  
 This is the hour of weeping, the season of sorrow.  
 Repent this night. The Son of God  
 Will delight to see you truly remorseful,  
 Suffering for your sins, condemning your crimes.  
 Judge yourself and he will not avenge your offenses 95  
 More than once. Have faith in forgiveness.  
 Do not despise lamentation and weeping—  
 The time is ripe for those who confess.

Remember how terrible the torment will be  
 For the wretched of the earth who have no faith, 100  
 No penitence, no forgiveness, no heart's hope

Before a relentless Ruler, a righteous God.  
 He will not be generous to them at judgment  
 For their wicked words and sinful deeds.  
 They will twist in terror at the sacred signs, 105  
 The savage tokens proclaiming Doomsday,  
 Declaring that Christ the Judge is coming.  
 The earth shall tremble, the skies split,  
 The hills heave and crash upon themselves.  
 Mountain peaks will crack and perish, 110  
 The sea turn savage, roar, and ravage  
 The minds of men. Heaven shall darken,  
 Creation bow down, chaos come calling.  
 A looming shadow shall lengthen on the land.  
 The moon will be helpless to brighten the night. 115  
 Stars will slide down in terrible trails,  
 And the glorious sun will darken at dawn.  
 Terrible death-tokens will descend from heaven  
 To haunt the living. Fear will rule the land.  
 Then a host of angels, a troop of glory, 120  
 Will descend in strength, surrounding the Lord,  
 Our eternal Maker. The Ruler of heaven  
 Will ascend his throne, radiant as the sun.  
 We will all be summoned to judgment then,  
 And each will receive his just reward, 125  
 Bliss or bale, for his words and deeds.  
 I beg you to remember the grim terror  
 You may meet before the judgment throne.  
 The multitudes will gather before God,  
 Each imperfect person alone and anxious, 130  
 Confused and confounded, daunted by dread.  
 An army of angels, a host from heaven,  
 Will surround the eternal, all-powerful Lord.  
 A trumpet will sound, summoning suddenly  
 The race of Adam, all earth-dwellers 135  
 Who came through the doors of delivery  
 Of their human mothers—whoever existed,  
 Exists, or will exist in past, present, and future—  
 An endless trail of mankind through time.

Then shall each person's sins be revealed— 140  
 The mind's secret thoughts, the heart's  
 Hidden desires, the tongue's wicked words,  
 The hand's hard crimes, all the malice-making  
 Misery laid on others, ruining their lives—  
 All the evil unexposed, the sins that no one 145  
 Dares to tell for fear of unleashed shame.  
 Everyone will be required to own up  
 To their devious plots and broken promises,  
 Crafty schemes and savage crimes.  
 Nothing will be hidden from the mind of God. 150  
 The air will be filled with poisonous fire,  
 A hot clutch of death that cannot be quenched.  
 The sky which has always seemed empty to us  
 Will be thick with flame—lethal, blood-red—  
 An agony as far as the eye can see. 155  
 That cruel fire will crackle and burn,  
 Blazing skin, blackening bone.  
 That ravenous flame will offer no mercy  
 To any man unless he is confessed and cleansed,  
 Shriven and saved. Countless people 160  
 In numberless nations will beat their breasts  
 Fiercely with their fists, fearing the worst  
 Because of their secret sins and dark desires.  
 Kings and commoners, privileged and poor,  
 Will all be judged according to one law. 165  
 Wealthy and woeful will all know fear  
 When the Doomsday flood and fire rage  
 Like twin terrors, singeing souls,  
 Drowning lungs, devouring limbs.  
 Great serpents will rip out the sinful hearts 170  
 And hell swallow up the agonizing undead.  
 What's left after this dark devastation  
 Will be food for worms, a feast of flesh.  
 No one can come forward to face God  
 Wholly confident of his eternal outcome: 175  
 Some will find a generous judgment,  
 A rich reward in the radiance of heaven;  
 Some will find a harder justice,

Torment and terror in the halls of hell.  
 The multitudes will stand before God, 180  
 Still as stone. The fate of the faithless  
 Will be grim. Many will find no mercy.

What will you do then, my sinful flesh,  
 To escape damnation? What are you doing now?  
 The time for your tears will be long gone. 185  
 The Lord will come—life will be past lamenting.  
 Woe to the one who serves only himself,  
 Who lives lustily in his wanton ways  
 With a stiff goad to prick him on.  
 Why don't you fear the blazing terror, 190  
 The ravenous fire? Why don't you dread  
 The pain and punishment, the endless agony  
 That God gave Satan and the demon-spirits  
 As a grim reward for their rebellious sins?  
 These torments surpass the mind of man. 195  
 No words can catch this terror, no story  
 Or song do justice to this flaming fear,  
 No thought be as dark as the deep abyss,  
 No earthly grief equal the anguish of hell.  
 There is the cruelest chaos mixed together— 200  
 Burning frost and biting flame.  
 Sometimes the eyes weep in that unholy oven,  
 Sometimes the teeth gnash in that hellish cold.  
 Sometimes the black night seethes with pitch,  
 Sometimes the bright blaze singes the flesh. 205  
 There is nothing but woe in that underworld.  
 There is no voice but the wailing of the damned,  
 No face but the horror of faceless demons,  
 No scent but the stench of filth and flesh,  
 No sight but the endless agony of the abyss. 210  
 Those who can open their mouths at all  
 Will swallow a throatful of loathsome flame.  
 Serpents will crawl up their arms and legs,  
 Slit open their skin, feed on their flesh,  
 Gnaw their sinews and scorch their bones 215  
 With their razor teeth and blazing fangs.

The worms of hell will shred their bodies,  
Slaughter-snakes ravenous for the taste of blood.

Beyond all this, the breastbone will break,  
The exposed heart will know bitter sorrow, 220  
The soul discover terror and torment,  
The mind wonder why the foolish flesh  
Devised for its pleasure such dark delights,  
Such dangerous desires, such senseless sins,  
So that the horrors of hell would surely be 225  
The endless outcome, where unleashed tears  
Would find no respite, where unmitigated misery  
Would have no hope for heaven's mercy.  
No spark of light will brighten that hell-hall;  
No silence provide peace in the endless squall 230  
Of pain and punishment. No pity will be possible.  
Comfort and consolation will be long gone,  
Having fled the flames. No friendly face  
Will be found in hell but faceless terror—  
No mercy for the mind, no solace for the soul, 235  
No bliss for the body. The flesh will only feel  
The grinding of teeth. Ubiquitous despair  
Will haunt the demon-halls, ravaging everywhere.  
Disease and darkness, fear and fury,  
Woe and wailing, will savage the body, 240  
And the sinful soul will slide slowly down  
Into a pit of perilous fire, a blind hole  
Of burning bale and unholy dreams.

Then the dangerous delights of the world,  
The wounding ways, will fade and fall: 245  
Gluttony will shrivel on an empty belly,  
Debauchery fall down in a drunken dive,  
Foolish laughter echo and fade away,  
Lust leave its cruel conquests behind  
On the solitary road. Stinginess will be strangled, 250  
Desire driven down like a dangerous dream.  
Sloth will keep sleeping its life away,  
Eternally a do-nothing. These evils will then



Emerge in hell like living memories  
 To torment the sinners, terrorize their souls, 255  
 Drench their bodies in liquid flame.  
 The bodies unblinded will finally see  
 The prison of their sins, and everything good  
 Will be loathsome to them, withheld from them—  
 The wonder of heaven, a hell in their hearts. 260  
 What will be blessed then, and blessed again  
 And again, will be the humble, penitent one  
 Whose heart is healthy, his soul free from sin,  
 Who serves the Lord and rejoices with him,  
 Trading in misery for mercy, sin for salvation, 265  
 The grimmest gloom for the greatest glory,  
 A plague of pains for the peace of heaven,  
 Where night will never steal the shining,  
 Ever-rich radiance of the Lord's light.  
 There will be no sadness or sorrow, 270  
 Poverty or pain, illness or old age,  
 Hunger or thirst, sloth or shame,  
 Fever or fury, punishment or plague—  
 No bitter frost or burning flame,  
 No loneliness or loss, anxiety or evil, 275  
 No storm-lightning or winter freeze,  
 No thunderclaps or hard hail-blasts,  
 No distress or deceit, decay or death.  
 There peace shall reign with prosperity,  
 Mercy with grace, goodness with glory, 280  
 Comfort with compassion, honor with an abiding  
 Life of eternal love in the embrace of the Lord.

To those who are called homeward to heaven,  
 God will grant them every benefit and boon,  
 A gathering of gifts to favor the faithful. 285  
 He will bless them together and gladden their hearts,  
 Cherish and clothe them in the radiant robes  
 Of grace and glory, celebrate their beauty,  
 Lift them on high to the heavenly throne.  
 The Son of God, gentle and generous, 290  
 The Giver of victory, Ruler and Redeemer,

Will offer each person a priceless treasure,  
 A place in heaven in the peerless company  
 Of saints and angels, prophets and patriarchs,  
 In the celestial cities. There they will find 295  
 The holy apostles of almighty God,  
 Faithful martyrs who have spilled their blood,  
 Red roses ever radiant in their reward,  
 And a train of virgins, spotless in their virtue,  
 White blooms blessed by the sacred Son 300  
 And led by the matchless Mother of God,  
 The Virgin Mary, peerless and pure,  
 Who brought forth the blessed child  
 Who is Christ the Lord. She stands radiant  
 In the shining realm between Father and Son, 305  
 The greatest of maidens, the gift of women,  
 Leading the hosts of heaven to their eternal home.

If you are always willing to tell the truth  
 To anyone who asks, what hardship can there be  
 Here in this life when you understand 310  
 That you can live forever without sin,  
 And enjoy endless bliss among the blessed,  
 At one with God in that homeland of heaven?

## THE REWARDS OF PIETY

This poem is a combination of two poems in *ASPR, An Exhortation to Christian Living* and *A Summons to Prayer*. Robinson has argued convincingly that “the visual evidence of the manuscript [MS 201 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge] considered by itself indicates clearly that these two (so-called) [poems] are in fact one continuous text subdivided into sections, as most longer Old English poems usually are divided” (1994, 182). The break between the two sections occurs after line 90 in the translation here. The first half of the poem is written in Old English, while the second half is in macaronic verse, with the first half of each line in OE and the second half in Latin. This seemed to earlier editors to indicate two distinctly separate poems, but Robinson points out that such a mixture is found elsewhere in OE—for example, at the end of *The Phoenix* (183). Following a suggestion by Whitbread (1957), Robinson summarizes the thematic linkage between the two poems: “In both poems a confessor addresses a penitent: in the first poem, the confessor explains how to repent and live properly; and, in the second, he promises a happy afterlife to the friend who follows this advice” (1994, 181). In making this translation, I have relied on Robinson (1994, 180 ff.) for his edition of the combined poems and also on Cain (2001) for his edition of the macaronic section. Because of the complex demands of the poetic translation here, I have not attempted to indicate the OE and Latin half-lines in the macaronic section of the poem. For both text and a literal prose translation with the separate OE and Latin half-lines indicated, see Jones (134–37).

## The Rewards of Piety

Now I will teach you, lend you some learning,  
 As a good mentor should endeavor to do  
 With a dear student. If you desire to reach  
 That flourishing realm where blessing blooms,  
 Be humble and charitable, merciful and mild, 5  
 Wise in words, prudent in speech,  
 Virtuous in acts, vigilant in thought.  
 Maintain a gentle spirit, a saintly mind—  
 Keep a sense of joy, a belief in blessings  
 In this wayward world, this transient time. 10  
 Pursue your prayers day and night  
 When you're alone because holy prayer,  
 A pure love of God and other people,  
 Giving out alms and keeping the heart's  
 Hope in the Healer, the Son and Savior, 15  
 That he may be willing to wash away your sins—  
 All these and many other good works  
 Will adorn the spirit and bring the righteous soul  
 To a resting place in a realm of joy,  
 The sublime happiness of the celestial city. 20  
 Whatever you do each day in words or deeds,  
 Respect and fear your Ruler and Lord  
 As you move among men, for surely that  
 Is the beginning of wisdom, so that you will keep  
 From losing his love and the everlasting light. 25  
 The world lurches toward its inevitable end,  
 And we are left poor beggars bereft of the kingdom—  
 That's a heavy burden to bear on the last road.  
 Even after death, if you distribute your goods  
 And let the world inherit all your acquisitions 30  
 Like some ghostly alms-giver to appease God,  
 You still won't save your soul with all that  
 If it's caught in the clutch of evil demons,  
 Deprived of comfort, denied all joy,  
 Unhappy and undone. You might ask 35  
 With an earnest heart that the God of glory,  
 Eternal and almighty, not deliver you up

To the claws of devils, the clench of demons,  
 The terrible delight of the fierce fiends  
 Who dog your heels as you try to flee. 40  
 Give alms now, often and without ostentation.  
 Let charity be your heart's secret consolation—  
 That is the Lord's gift, a quiet sacrifice  
 For anyone who follows faith and believes in God.  
 Buy with your earthly goods eternal light, 45  
 A life without end, the price of unperishing,  
 Before you lose the power of giving.  
 It's a terrible evil to love God less  
 Than selfish pleasures or earthly treasures.  
 Guard against gluttony, filling the belly, 50  
 For it gathers into greatness these sins for the soul:  
 Deep drunkenness and secret, sexual pleasures,  
 Fornication, folly, unchecked desire  
 For guzzling and gobbling, fat wickedness,  
 And endless sleeping. These excessive sins 55  
 Can only be expelled by fasting and temperance,  
 And attending church in the coldest of weathers  
 To pray humbly and earnestly to the Lord of heaven,  
 Your merciful protector, to grant you salvation,  
 If he believes in your faith and it seems fit. 60  
 Beware of secret desires that lurk in dreams,  
 Dangerous thoughts that slide into sins,  
 Those wailing wounds that will not humanly heal  
 As your hair grows gray and your limbs wither.  
 This will be an unbearable burden, 65  
 The soul's inescapable, wearisome weight.  
 Know then that you must give up all earthly goods,  
 Trinkets and treasures, hearth and home.  
 Only God can determine when your end arrives,  
 And your daylight falls down into darkness, 70  
 Shrouding your memory of earthly delights.  
 Now you must guard against demons who desire  
 Your soul, who surround you with devious sins  
 Day and night, struggling with your spirit,  
 Snagging your life against the Lord's leave. 75  
 You can banish these banes, drum out these demons,

By taking to heart my private teachings:  
 Begin each dawning day with a quiet and careful  
 Morning meditation on the state of your soul.  
 Consider how your faith can help you find 80  
 An eternal light and live in that radiance.  
 Work hard day and night in the hope of heaven.  
 Abhor drunkenness and abandon gluttony.  
 If you want to seek a celestial home  
 And be gathered in glory in a hall in heaven, 85  
 Then begin planning for your own posterity.  
 Restrain yourself from the byways of sin;  
 Keep virtuous company on the righteous road.  
 Abandon those vices you've always valued,  
 The pleasures you've practiced and loved in life. 90  
 Then the world-ruler, the King of creation,  
 From his glorious, high throne in heaven,  
 Almighty God may have mercy on you,  
 Be a friend to your soul forever without end.  
 May the Author of peace, the Shaper of salvation, 95  
 Grant you the gift of blessing and tranquility;  
 May the all-wise Creator, the almighty Poet,  
 And the righteous Son, Savior and Redeemer,  
 Master and Maker of the unending universe,  
 Protect and preserve you, shelter and save you— 100  
 Our Lord who was begotten without sin  
 In a spotless virgin, born of the benevolent,  
 Best of women and acclaimed Christ—  
 Born the Son of God and Redeemer of the world  
 Through his mother Mary and the Holy Spirit. 105  
 Beseech him often to bestow his blessings.  
 Call out to Christ, the consoling God,  
 Who was sent from heaven's high throne  
 To help and heal us. Celebrate in clear song  
 The childbearing Virgin, pregnant and pure, 110  
 A chaste maiden who brought us the child,  
 Our Creator Christ, King of all kings.  
 Come as a suppliant, petition the Virgin,  
 Blessed and beautiful, mild and merciful,  
 Beseeching her aid, and afterwards pray 115

To the blessed saints with a joyful heart,  
Asking them to intercede for you with one voice  
In unified song to the Lord of high heaven,  
Who holds the power of healing in his hands,  
So that the Ruler and Judge, Lord and Savior, 120  
Prince of all peoples, will lead your soul  
To the eternal light where all the blessed  
Are gathered together, holy ones in heaven,  
At peace in the kingdom, in the endless embrace  
Of our Redeemer Christ, Lord of Creation. 125

## THE LORD'S PRAYER II

See the previous two headnotes for a description of the manuscript, MS 201 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. This is the longest of three Lord's Prayer poems in Old English. The much shorter *Lord's Prayer I* is in the Exeter Book, and *The Lord's Prayer III* is included in the Benedictine (MS Junius 121) Office materials below. Dobbie explains that *The Lord's Prayer II* "is ostensibly a verse paraphrase of the Latin text, but in view of its length it is perhaps better regarded as an original poem on the theme of the Lord's Prayer" (1942, lxxiii). Keefer points out that *The Lord's Prayer II* "departs more frequently from its liturgical model than do the other two Lord's Prayer poems, by incorporating material from different prayers or hymns, or from texts at a substantial remove from the ritual language of Mass or Office" (2010, 52). The poem offers a commentary on the various Latin lines of the prayer, weaving in themes from other OE religious poems. Caie argues that *The Lord's Prayer II* and the next poem, *Gloria I*, which follow *Judgment Day II* and *The Rewards of Piety* in MS 201 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, are "devotional works and in their manuscript context are thematically linked to the[se] preceding [two] poems; they might well be exercises given by the confessor to the penitent as part of the necessary act of satisfaction" (2000, 19). A version of the Gloria (see below) is also part of the Office poems in MS Junius 121 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and Ure suggests that both *The Lord's Prayer II* and *The Gloria I* might well be parts of these Benedictine Office poems (53). Jones argues that "monks and secular clergy celebrated slightly different versions of the daily office, and while some features of [the] compilation in Junius 121 do suggest a monastic or 'Benedic-



tine' background, others seem to point to a secular one," and he prefers the term, "Junius Office" (284–85). Keefer reminds us that "there is no standardized Old English version for the Lord's Prayer as we might have expected; instead, for the Anglo-Saxons it was a dynamic and living act of commitment, praise, and humble request, whose various translations allowed its spiritual immediacy to be accessible both to well-read monastic scholars and to illiterate members of the parish" (2010, 25). In the translation below, the lines originally in Latin are printed in italics; the lines originally in OE, in Roman type.

## The Lord's Prayer II

### *Our Father:*

You are our Father, Ruler of all,  
 King of glory. We call out to you,  
 Pleading for mercy, praying for grace.  
 You are the one who can set the soul free, 5  
 The gift you sent by your holy hand  
 To dwell in this humble house of flesh.  
 But where will it go, O Lord of angels,  
 If you do not release the soul from its sins  
 By your righteous power, your just mercy? 10

### *Who is in heaven:*

You are in heaven our sheltering hope,  
 The brightest of joys. The glorious hosts  
 Bow down before you, bearer of bliss,  
 Calling out to Christ with a clarion voice: 15  
 "Holy are you, holy forever,  
 King of all the angels in heaven.  
 Your judgments are just, your righteous reach  
 Extends to us all as we bow before you,  
 Awaiting our desserts according to our deeds. 20  
 It will go well for one who works your will."

### *Hallowed be your name:*

Your name is noble, sanctified everywhere  
 In earthly tongues, seventy-two in number.

Ancient books say that the Lord of angels 25  
 Created custom and habit for all nations.  
 You mold our manners, shape our forms.  
 Men honor your works with words and deeds.  
 All of creation calls out to Christ,  
 Extolling the glory of the living Lord— 30  
 It's in their nature, embedded in their being.  
 Your name is honored over all the world.

*Your kingdom come:*

Come grant us mercy, Ruler of all,  
 And gather us into your embracing arms. 35  
 Grant us a place in the kingdom of heaven,  
 O righteous Judge, where we may discover  
 In the happiest of homes eternal life.  
 There we shall find peace and love,  
 Kinship and comfort, mercy and mirth, 40  
 The brightness of vision, the voices of angels.  
 In that bright homeland, songs of your praise  
 And power will be heard, and the might of God  
 Will be made manifest as a consolation to all.  
 Bless us, O Lord, and bear us to bliss. 45

*Your will be done:*

Let your will be done as you are the Lord,  
 Our mighty Ruler, eternally revealed  
 Throughout the world, our righteous Judge,  
 Our steadfast Counselor across the earth. 50  
 Your throne is high and gathered in grandeur,  
 Noble and eternal, as your Father fashioned it.  
 You sit in honor at your own right hand,  
 Two persons in one, both Father and Son.  
 Majesty of kings, you offer us aid 55  
 And raise your voice above all creation.  
 Your glorious word will always be heard  
 As you gladden the host, an army of angels,  
 With protecting power and guardian grace.  
 About your throne thousands of voices 60  
 In a chorus of angels sing out your name.

*As it is in heaven:*

High up in heaven, a majesty of the faithful,  
 Servants of Christ, mighty and eternal,  
 Pure and appointed, are praising the Lord, 65  
 Praying for mercy for all of mankind.  
 Our radiant Ruler, shining in glory,  
 You grant them this gift, this eternal grace  
 Since you are benevolent to all the world.  
 Let us lift up our voices in praise of the Lord 70  
 For his care and compassion, his unending love.  
 Lord, you are the exalted emperor of heaven.

*So too on earth:*

You are the Ruler of everyone on earth,  
 The head and help of all great kings, 75  
 A holy physician, a compassionate healer,  
 Righteous and firm, generous and just.  
 You have shaped and sustained all living creatures,  
 Dividing them up and delivering them all  
 To their proper places according to their kinds. 80  
 You have given each one its mold and meaning,  
 Its name and nature, its being and blessing,  
 And have offered your mercy to the children of men.

*Our daily bread:*

With peace and love, you send your followers 85  
 A precious gift, their daily bread,  
 The bounty of earth to sate and sustain them,  
 And after life's labors, you promise them more,  
 The bread of life, the hope of heaven,  
 Your Father's kingdom, that was and is 90  
 And ever shall be, before beginning,  
 After ending, the happiest of homes—  
 If we seek the truth and strive for righteousness.

*Give us this day:*

Lord, give us today, your precious gifts, 95  
 Your strength of spirit, your mending mercy.  
 Incline our thoughts, our hopes and dreams,

So that we may faithfully work your will.  
 Let the Holy Spirit have a home in our hearts.  
 Deliver our souls into your sheltering hands, 100  
 Our blessed Lord abounding in glory.

*And forgive us our debts:*

Forgive us our sins so we are not ashamed,  
 O Lord, when you sit in judgment upon us  
 As all of us born of man and woman 105  
 Rise up from our graves in the cold ground,  
 Our crumbling bones and rotting flesh  
 Growing whole again as we head for home.  
 Then all of our deeds will be revealed,  
 Both better and worse. We'll recognize 110  
 Everything we've ever done in this world—  
 Nothing will be hidden from the eyes of God.  
 The witnesses of the world will be gathered there,  
 The inhabitants of earth, of heaven and hell.  
 Terror and torment will stalk the land. 115  
 Some will find favor in the eyes of the Lord,  
 Entering the eternal halls of heaven;  
 Some will find horror in the thrall of Satan,  
 Falling suddenly into the abyss of hell.  
 Judgment will be based on the lives we led 120  
 When our minds were whole, our bodies strong.

*As we forgive us our debtors:*

But the living Lord will set our souls free,  
 As we must also learn to forgive  
 The miserable people who sin against us. 125

*And lead us not into temptation:*

Let no evil ones deceive or seduce us,  
 Drawing our souls downward in temptation  
 To the blazing abyss, the eternal flames,  
 Even though we have offended you, Lord, 130  
 With idle thoughts and foolish speech,  
 With wicked sins both day and night.  
 We are blind to the truth and have lost our way—

We break your commandments night and day.  
 We pray for forgiveness, pleading for mercy. 135  
 Do not let the living handiwork you've made  
 Perish so shamefully at the end of days.

*But deliver us from evil:*

Absolve us from sin, free us from evil.  
 We are all in need of God's forgiveness 140  
 For we have sinned and are lost in misery,  
 Living in shame. We praise you, Lord,  
 And beg for mercy. You are the Savior,  
 The righteous Redeemer, at once revealed  
 To the living and the dead as the noble Son, 145  
 The eternal Creator. You cradle the world  
 In your holy hands, enfolding us all  
 In your embracing power, your endless mercy.  
 Such is the grandeur of our glorious king!

*Amen:*

So let it be as you would wish it, 150  
 Our mighty Ruler, our righteous Judge.  
 We raise up our praise-songs in a clarion voice  
 To the God of angels, our beloved Lord:  
 You are gathered in glory both now and forever. 155

## THE GLORIA I

See the previous headnotes for a discussion of the manuscript, MS 201 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. This is the first and longer of two OE doxology poems (see *Gloria II* below for the shorter one). This version occurs in two places—both at the end of the Corpus Christi manuscript poems above and as part of the poems from the Office in MS Junius 121, which are included below in this collection. Keefer bases her edited text on the best readings of both manuscripts and notes that, like *The Lord's Prayer II*, this poem “expands substantially on its liturgical original, but while the expansions are elegant, they are also orthodox . . . [so that] this kind of expansion is logical and sensible, didactic in its sentiment, somewhat creative but in no way startlingly so, and ultimately not enterprising in the scope of its vision” (2010, 99–100). This poem and the following three poetic texts below (*The Lord's Prayer III*, *The Creed*, and *Fragments of Psalms*) are part of the Old English Office, described by Bradley:

Bodleian MS Junius 121 is one of a small group of related MSS which were evidently compiled and copied at Worcester about the time of the Norman Conquest. The codex contains documents of which the broad purpose was to regulate the government, liturgical practice and spiritual discipline of the English (Benedictine) monasteries, and perhaps of the English church more widely. Amid the penitentials, confessionals, canon, politics, homilies and pastoral letters occurs a text which has come to be called *The OE Benedictine Office*—with only approximate accuracy, since the work is not explicitly related to the

Rule of St Benedict, nor does it set out to present a complete act of worship. It is in fact a rendering, not in Latin, but in OE prose and verse, of parts of the Latin liturgy of six of the Hours into which the monastic day's worship (the *opus Dei*, "God's work") was divided. (536)

For more on the role of the English Benedictine Reform movement, see Drout (2006, chapters 3 and 4) and Ure (58 ff.). For a complete edition of the Benedictine Office, see Ure and also Jones; for a text and translation of the Latin and OE service of Prime, see Thomson and also Griffiths. Jones, however, argues that "monks and secular clergy celebrated slightly different versions of the daily office, and while some features of [the] compilation in Junius 121 do suggest a monastic or 'Benedictine' background, others seem to point to a secular one," and he prefers the term "Junius Office" (284–85). In the translation below, the lines originally in Latin are printed in italics; the lines originally in OE, in Roman type.

## The Gloria I

### *Glory:*

Let glory and praise be proclaimed to you  
 Among all peoples, almighty God—  
 Thanksgiving and affection, might and mercy,  
 The love of our hearts, the devotion of our minds, 5  
 Our steadfast commitment, our firm faith—  
 For you control the width of the world  
 From the forces of earth to the powers of air.  
 You hold the whole of creation from wind-way  
 To cloud-curl in the curve of your hands, 10  
 Ruling everything with a righteous love.

### *To the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:*

Father of compassion, Shepherd of the soul,  
 You are Lord of light, Sustainer of life,  
 Separated from sin like your only Son, 15  
 Pure in nature, spotless in form,  
 Bold and blessed, King over all,  
 Teacher of texts, Comforter of hearts,  
 Saver of souls, and the Holy Spirit.

*As it was in the beginning:* 20

In the beginning, the Lord of mankind  
Was brightness and beauty, radiating grace  
Into each moment's making of the waking world.

You revealed to us this eternal truth:  
You shaped sea and sky, heaven and earth, 25

The living land and its countless creatures,  
Crafting each animal according to its kind,

Creating life for six days, setting aside  
The seventh for rest, giving us the gift  
Of holy Sunday as an aid to us all. 30

The Son's day is kept by all Christians  
Who care for our customs and the Lord's command.  
That day is honored with the Lord's name.

*Is now and ever shall be:*

Now and forever you reveal your forms, 35

Their embodied shapes, the craft of creation,  
Through your wise purpose and infinite power,  
A wielding of wonder all over the world.

The handiwork of God endures forever,  
Grows to your bidding, gathers to a greatness, 40

As choirs of angels exalt your name  
With the purest voices, as scripture unfolds  
Your goodness and grace, your holy purpose,  
While down here on earth we gratefully sing:  
"Praise God in his glory, give thanks for his love." 45

*Forever and ever:*

Forever and ever, the King in his glory  
Abides and rules this wondrous world  
With his chosen servants, a host of angels,  
Those holy spirits, mighty and magnificent. 50

His gifts endure—the promise of peace,  
The gratitude of souls, his endless embrace,  
The infinite life in his loving heart.

Heaven is alive with a burgeoning joy,  
The unending grace of your eternal words. 55  
Your majesty shines over all middle-earth.



Your power is revealed in your words and works.  
All things testify to your making might.

*Amen:*

Our beloved Lord, we all say truly, 60  
That through your clean conception and pure birth,  
Your sinless nature, you are rightfully King,  
Pure and powerful, mighty and majestic.  
You revealed as much when you shaped creation,  
Making mankind, breathing life in our bodies, 65  
Securing our souls, offering us speech,  
Language and understanding, the miracle of a mind,  
And the fertile gift of generations to come.  
Yet the mightiest wonder is yourself, Christ!

## THE LORD'S PRAYER III

This poem is part of the Office poems in MS Junius 121 (see headnote to *The Gloria I* above). This version of *The Lord's Prayer* is longer than the version in the Exeter Book and shorter than the Corpus Christi version, *The Lord's Prayer II*, above. Dobbie considers this version to be “a clear, straight-forward paraphrase, and is probably to be regarded as the best of all the Anglo-Saxon verse translations of Latin liturgical texts” (1942, lxxvii), though Keefer judges it “midway between the *Exeter Lord's Prayer* [*The Lord's Prayer I*] and the *Corpus Lord's Prayer* [*The Lord's Prayer II*] in terms of its sophistication,” noting that it is “more than a simple, lightly ornamented articulation of the Latin original but far less than a creative series of digressions around the *Pater Noster* prayer” (2010, 72). Keefer notes that the prayer derives from Matthew 6:7–14 and Luke 11:2–4 and that it was “incorporated into the liturgy of the young Church from its earliest days” (2010, 22).

### The Lord's Prayer III

*Our Father who is in heaven:*

Father of mankind, I pray for your aid,  
Pleading for comfort and consolation.  
Hear me, O Lord, from your home in heaven.

*Hallowed be your name:*

May your name be hallowed, savior Christ,  
Firm in our minds, fast in our heart's hold.

*Your kingdom come:*

May your kingdom come to all of mankind,  
 Almighty God, our righteous Judge. 10  
 May our faith in you find a glorious home  
 In our hearts and minds throughout our days.

*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:*

Let your will be worked out among us  
 In the hearths and homes of this earthly kingdom 15  
 As clearly and purely as in the glory of heaven,  
 Radiant with rapture, bright and beautiful,  
 Adorned with joy, now and forever.

*Give us this day our daily bread:*

Give us today, God of all men, 20  
 High King of heaven, our beloved Lord,  
 This loaf of bread that you send to sustain us,  
 The spiritual food to save our souls,  
 The bread called Christ, our pure Lord.

*And forgive us our debts:*

Forgive us our sins, Guardian of mankind. 25  
 Remit our wrongs of body and mind,  
 Our wicked words, our evil deeds,  
 As we often offend against you, God,  
 Wounding again our compassionate Lord. 30

*As we forgive our debtors:*

Likewise we forgive those here on earth  
 Whose sins often offend against us.  
 And for the sake of earning eternal life,  
 We mean to hold nothing against them 35  
 For their deceitful works, their perverse deeds.

*And lead us not into temptation:*

Lead us not into temptation and torment,  
 Sorrow and suffering, wickedness and woe.  
 Carry and keep us firm and faithful, 40  
 Christ our Savior, lest in our weakness

We fail and fall, forgoing your grace,  
Missing your mercy because of our malice.

*But deliver us from evil:*

Deliver us from evil of our enemies  
And free us from the iniquity of our own hearts.  
We give thanks to you, Lord of angels,  
Prince of victories, and we glory in this—  
That through the power of your eternal mercy,  
You have saved us from hell's endless torment.

45

50

*Amen:*

So be it.

## THE CREED

This poem is part of the Junius Office poems (see headnote to *The Gloria I* above). Drawing upon the works of Kelly on early Christian creeds (1955, 1972), Keefer summarizes the medieval tradition of their use as follows:

It is important to realize that catechesis—the teaching and examining of candidates for baptism—gave rise to the formulation of those statements of faith called “creeds” (from the Latin *credo*, “I believe”), rather than the other way around. Baptism, worship, preaching, catechetical instruction, anti-heretical and anti-pagan polemics, and exorcism all provided occasions for giving concrete expression, along lines determined by the needs of the moment, to the cardinal articles of Christian belief. Oft-repeated legend had it that the twelve apostles gathered together after Pentecost (Acts 2:1–47) to establish a common basis for their preaching, and that each contributed to a general statement of faith. So from the very earliest period of the development of organized Christianity, statements of belief were known and used to help the Church grow.

The credal form that eventually developed into what is now known as the Apostles’ Creed and was used at baptism throughout the Western Christian church is known technically as the Old Roman Creed, described at the beginning of the fifth century in detail by Rufinus, who was responsible for promulgating the legend of its apostolic composition. (2010, 25–26)

In the translation below, the lines of *The Creed* originally in Latin are printed in italics; the lines originally in OE, in Roman type. The Latin lines, sometimes abbreviated in the original, are expanded in the translation.

## The Creed

*I believe in God the Father almighty:*

Almighty Father in heaven on high,  
 Who shaped this shining, wondrous world,  
 The sweep of creation, the earth's expanse,  
 I fervently believe and fully profess 5  
 That you are the one and only God.  
 You are the Lord of life, the Author of angels,  
 The Source and Sustainer of all creatures,  
 From the ocean's depths to the spectacular stars  
 That only you, Lord, are capable of counting. 10

*And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord:*

I believe in the Savior, your own true Son,  
 The redeeming King sent down from heaven,  
 The high realm of angels, whom Gabriel,  
 God's messenger, announced to holy Mary, 15  
 That innocent maiden. She accepted that gift,  
 Bearing the Father's Self and Son  
 With a chaste heart, pure and pregnant.  
 There was no sin or shame at that wedding  
 For the Holy Spirit gave mother and maiden 20  
 A nuptial gift, a noble child conceived  
 In a virgin's womb, filling her heart  
 With gladness and joy, rapture and radiance.  
 Mary gave birth to the Shaper of angels,  
 A living gift to all of earth's children, 25  
 The Christ-child who came as our consolation,  
 Our comfort and care, our righteous Redeemer,  
 As the angels circled and sang round Bethlehem,  
 Proclaiming that Christ the Lord was born.

*Who suffered under Pontius Pilate:*

When Pontius Pilate, a hard prefect, 30

Wielded power under the Romans,  
 Our beloved Savior was put to death.  
 The Lord of mankind mounted the gallows,  
 Climbed on the cross, suffered and died. 35  
 He was buried by Joseph, sad and brooding,  
 And out of hell, that prison of pain,  
 Christ brought back the devil's plunder,  
 A treasure of souls rescued from torment,  
 And he told them all to go home to heaven. 40

*On the third day he rose from the dead:*

On the third day the Lord of all peoples,  
 The mightiest of masters, rose up from the ground,  
 His earthly grave, and for forty days  
 He comforted his disciples, his faithful servants, 45  
 With spiritual counsel, his laws and lore,  
 Then set out at last for his heavenly homeland,  
 Promising his followers he would never abandon  
 Any believer whose spirit was steadfast,  
 Whose faith was firm, whose heart was true. 50

*I believe in the Holy Spirit:*

I embrace with hope the Holy Spirit,  
 One and eternal with the Father and Son,  
 As it is said in our way of speaking.  
 These are not three gods with three different names, 55  
 But one God, who is known by a trinity of names—  
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—  
 In the might and mystery of his noble nature,  
 The divine riddle of the living Lord,  
 Our righteous Ruler, whose power will prevail 60  
 Throughout creation over time and tide,  
 Our Giver of glorious gifts to the faithful,  
 Our bold Redeemer, our eternal Lord.

*In the holy Catholic Church:*

I also believe that they are beloved by God 65  
 Who praise the Lord with a singular purpose,

Gathered together, worshipping wholly  
With heart and mind the King of heaven.

*In the communion of saints:*

I believe in the glorious fellowship of saints, 70  
Your faithful followers who served in this life.

*In the forgiveness of sins:*

I believe in forgiveness, the remission of sin.

*In the resurrection of the body:*

I believe in the resurrection of the flesh 75  
For everyone on earth in that hour of dread.

*And in life everlasting:*

I believe that you will deliver us, Lord,  
To eternal life if we measure up,  
And our thoughts and deeds, our words and works, 80  
Prove pleasing in the eyes of almighty God.



## FRAGMENTS OF PSALMS

**T**he psalm fragments translated here occur as part of the Office in MS Junius 121 in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (see headnote to *The Gloria I* above). Most of the fragments are part of the service of Prime. Each of the OE fragments is preceded by a corresponding Latin verse, and each is a translation of that verse. The translations range from reasonably faithful to moderately expansive. Since the Latin and the OE verses are reasonably close, I have not included translations of the Latin here. Dobbie explains the source of the Latin verses:

The Psalm fragments in the Benedictine Office were taken from a complete Anglo-Saxon verse translation of the Psalter, from which Psalms 51.6–150.3 of the Paris Psalter, that is, all the metrical portions of the Paris Psalter, were also taken. The Psalm passages which appear in both manuscripts show so complete an agreement between the two texts that no other conclusion is possible. Our Benedictine Office, then, preserves the only remains of the Anglo-Saxon verse translation of the first fifty Psalms. The Latin Psalm verses which appear in the manuscript usually follow the Roman Psalter, St. Jerome's earlier revision of the Old Latin, rather than the Gallican Psalter, the later revision which is found in the Vulgate Bible. A few of the Latin verses, however, are closer to the Gallican Psalter than to the Roman. (1942, lxxvii–lxxviii)

Jones argues that “monks and secular clergy celebrated slightly different versions of the daily office, and while some features of [the] compilation in Junius

121 do suggest a monastic or ‘Benedictine’ background, others seem to point to a secular one,” and he prefers the term, “Junius Office” (284–85).

The psalm fragments are given in biblical order as they are in *ASPR*, volume VI, not as they are in the Junius Office itself. The verse numbers are given here in two forms: the first is that in *ASPR* (Dobbie, 1942, 80 ff.), and the second, in parentheses, corresponds to the recent edition of *The Vulgate Bible*, volume III: *The Poetical Books*, by Edgar and Kinney. For a complete edition of the Office with Latin and OE, see Ure and also Jones (which includes translations of both the Latin and Old English). For a translation of the office of Prime, which contains most of the psalm fragments, see Thomson and also Griffiths. The version of the Junius Office with its OE translations of selected passages was probably meant “to be used by literate monks for the instruction of ignorant secular clergy in the performance of the seculars’ own proper divine service” (Houghton, 445) or by both monks and secular clergy (Jones, 284; see also Caie, 2000, 20–21, and Fulk and Cain, 122). The psalm fragment at 122.4 is not included in *ASPR*, probably because, as Ure notes, the Latin text “has been dropped out of our text in the process of copying” (126); it is included, however, in both Ure (93) and Jones (310).

The psalm fragments here are sometimes translated more literally than they are in the Paris Psalter section of this collection, where the context of the whole psalm often requires more poetic flexibility. I have followed Jones’s text and drawn occasionally upon his literal prose translation.

## Fragments of Psalms

### 5.1a (5.2)

Receive my words, Ruler of glory—  
Let my song rise up to your listening ears.  
Accept my prayer, my eternal Lord.

### 5.1b (5.3)

Listen to my voice, my familiar supplication.  
Look upon my prayer with a favorable mind,  
For you are my eternal God and King.

### 5.2 (5.4)

I sincerely pray to you, O Lord.  
Listen to my voice in the morning light.

## 5.3 (5.5)

I stand before you in the early morning  
 And behold you, Lord. I know truly  
 That you will never do anything unjust.

## 19.9 (19.10)

Lord, save the king with your works,  
 Make the king whole in his heart,  
 Just in his deeds, generous in his acts,  
 And hear our prayer with favor and grace  
 When we call out each day to you, O Lord.

5

## 24.3 (24.4)

Teach me the truth of your ways, O Lord,  
 Show me also the steps of your sure paths.

## 24.4 (24.5)

Give me your counsel, guide me along,  
 Teach me swiftly so that I may know  
 Your truth and live in your righteousness.

## 24.5 (24.6)

Remember the mercies, almighty Lord,  
 You have always offered us here on earth  
 Since you shaped creation in your infinite wisdom.

## 24.6 (24.7)

Do not recall too keenly, Lord,  
 The oppressive sins of my youthful days  
 That went unrecognized, unnoticed by many,  
 When my heart was heedless, my mind ignorant.  
 Remember me, Lord, in your endless mercy.

5

## 27.10 (27.9)

Save your people, O holy Lord,  
 Bless and protect your living inheritance.  
 Rule them and raise them into righteousness,  
 So they may live and thrive in joy forever.

32.18 (32.22)

Let your mercy be over us, beloved Lord,  
As we hope and believe in your holy power.

34.1 (34.1)

Judge now, Lord, those who have injured me.  
Overthrow my enemies, defeat my attackers.

34.2 (34.2)

Take up your spear and shield, O Lord,  
Stand before me against my fierce foes.

34.3 (34.3)

Preserve me, Lord, with your powerful weapons,  
Protect me from the ferocity of my savage foes,  
Then speak to my soul with shielding words,  
Reminding it that you stood firm for its salvation.

40.4 (40.5)

I pray to you now with a keen conviction:  
“Pity me, Lord, heal my heart,  
Save my soul, for now I repent  
That I have so often sinned against you.”

43.27 (43.26)

Rise up, O Lord, and rush to our aid.  
Rescue us now from all our enemies,  
For we fervently praise your beloved name.

50.1 (50.3)

Have mercy on me, mighty Lord,  
Spare and sustain me, as you have saved  
So many before in your great compassion.

50.10 (50.11)

Turn aside your eyes from my grievous sins,  
Almighty God, wash away my iniquities,  
My wicked deeds, always and everywhere.

## 50.11 (50.12)

Grant me a pure heart, O holy God.  
Renew the righteous spirit in my mind.

## 50.12 (50.13)

Do not cast me out, King of glory,  
From your vision, your power and presence,  
Or withhold the Holy Spirit from my heart,  
Lest it suddenly become a stranger to my soul.

## 50.13 (50.14)

Grant me the grace and bliss of salvation  
And strengthen my spirit, Lord of hosts.  
Fortify my faith according to your will.

## 53.1 (53.3)

Save me, God, in your holy name.  
Release me from my enemies, my fierce foes.  
Deliver me now through your precious power.

## 58.1 (58.2)

Deliver me, holy God, from the hostility of my enemies,  
The oppression of my foes. Release me from the wicked  
Who would rise up against me without your aid.

## 58.2 (58.3)

Deliver me from those who do evil against me.  
Save me from those who embrace injustice  
And from all battle-hungry, bloodthirsty ones.

## 60.6, 2–4 (60.9)

So I fervently sing in praise of your name,  
Fulfilling my promise, keeping my vow  
From day to day as is only fitting.

## 64.6 (64.6b)

Hear us now, our God and Savior.  
You are the hope of the ends of the earth,  
Of everyone at home and across the seas.

69.1 (69.2)

Be a precious help to me, Lord God—  
Look down on me now in my urgent need  
And come to my aid without delay.

70.7 (70.8)

May my soul be strong, my mouth empowered  
To proclaim your glory all day long,  
Singing praise-songs to you in all places.

79.18 (79.20)

Turn us around, restore us, Lord of hosts,  
Show us your kind face and we will be saved.

84.4, 1–2 (84.5)

Turn us around, O Lord and Savior,  
Transform us, avert your anger from us.

87.13 (87.14)

I have called out fervently to you,  
Eternal Lord, in my secret soul.  
May my impassioned prayer, my true words,  
Enter into your presence every morning.

89.15 (89.13)

Turn back to us just a little, holy Lord,  
Be openly entreated by your own servants.

89.18 (89.16)

Look upon your servants with loving eyes  
And upon your handiwork, the whole of creation.  
Lead their children with a gracious spirit.

89.19 (89.17)

Let the brightness of the benevolent Lord be upon us,  
The radiance of our great God shine over us,  
Directing the work of our hands from above.

## 101.1 (101.2)

Listen to my prayer, O glorious Lord,  
Guardian of heaven, and let my cry  
Reach up to you, Ruler of all peoples.

## 102.1 (102.1)

Bless the Lord gladly, O my soul.  
Let everything inside me, body and spirit,  
Bless the name of the eternal Lord.

## 102.2 (102.2)

Bless the Lord surely, O my soul—  
May you never desire to forget his favors,  
All the good things he has done for you.

## 102.3 (102.3)

He has offered you mercy for your sinful deeds,  
Healing you of all your illness and infirmity.

## 102.4 (102.4a, 5a)

He has redeemed your dear life from destruction  
And fairly fulfilled your desires with goodness.

## 102.5 (102.4b, 5b)

He has made you triumphant, crowned with mercy,  
And strengthened your spirit with true compassion—  
So your life is renewed like that of an eagle,  
In molting made keen and young again.

## 118.175 (118.175)

My soul shall live and gladly praise you,  
And your judgments will aid me in all my works.

## 118.176 (118.176)

I was led astray like a foolish sheep  
That desired in its heart to be lost to you,  
And in deepest despair even wanted to die.  
Lord, seek out your servant with great passion,  
For I have never forgotten your sublime commands.

121.7 (121.7)

Let peace be in your power, first and foremost,  
Let your towers be filled with a timeless abundance.

*Not in ASPR* (122.4)

Have mercy on us now, O mighty Lord,  
Have mercy on us.

139.1, 1–2 (139.2)

Rescue me in your name, eternal Lord,  
From enmity and affliction, and from the evil one.

140.2 (140.2)

Let my prayer rise up quickly in your sight  
As incense burning, wisps in the air,  
Curling from its coals, those devouring embers.



## THE KENTISH HYMN

This poem and the next one are contained in MS Cotton Vespasian D.vi in the British Library. They are both “among the few and scattered Kentish texts written during the Anglo-Saxon period” (Dobbie, 1942, lxxviii). Fulk and Cain note that *The Kentish Hymn* “bears no relation to the Latin hymns of the Divine Office” and is rather a poem “in praise of the triune God, alluding to several liturgical and biblical texts, including the Te Deum, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Agnus Dei” (121; see also Shepherd, 395–97, and Keefer, 2010, 119 ff., on the possible sources). Keefer notes that the composer of the poem was surely “familiar with the monastic Offices as well as with the liturgy of festal Mass, and was probably a monk or nun,” arguing that the poem “was composed in the first flush of the Benedictine Reform, sometime between 960 and 975, when the Rule of St Benedict was being learned (and indeed translated) throughout monastic establishments that were being revitalized or newly founded across Anglo-Saxon England” (2010, 120).

### The Kentish Hymn

Let us glorify the Lord God of hosts,  
The Guardian of heaven, with holy words.  
Let us lovingly embrace the Author of life.  
Let triumphant glory be given to him  
In the air with angels without end,  
And on earth peace to all men of good will.  
We praise and bless you with our holy voices,

Honor and adore you, merciful Father,  
 Thank you profoundly, Lord of all peoples.  
 We bless you always for your bliss in glory, 10  
 Your heavenly rapture, your celestial joy,  
 And the great mysteries and holy sacraments  
 You hold in your power and wisely wield,  
 Almighty God, over heaven and earth  
 By the strength of your spirit, always abiding. 15  
 You are the King of kings, Lord of the living,  
 The triumphant Son, the true Savior  
 Of all of creation, angels and men.  
 You are the God who dwells in glory  
 In the celestial city in the heights of heaven, 20  
 The Lord of all lands, Ruler of all nations,  
 Just as you were in the bright beginning,  
 The Son equally blessed with his Father.  
 You are the heavenly Light, the holy Lamb,  
 Who cast down the sins of all middle-earth 25  
 In your might and mercy, your goodness and grace.  
 You drove out the devil, overcame your enemies,  
 Both fiend and foe, rescued and redeemed us,  
 Ransomed the children of Israel with your blood  
 When you raised up your body on the holy tree, 30  
 The cruel cross, and vanquished the power  
 Of sin and darkness so that you might sit,  
 Rejoicing in victory at the right hand  
 Of God your Father, mindful of souls.  
 Have mercy on us now, almighty God, 35  
 Release your cherished creation from sin,  
 Save us, Creator, Savior of men,  
 Sustain us here for the sake of your name.  
 You are forever holy, forever good.  
 You are the only eternal God. 40  
 You are the Judge of all of creation,  
 The living and the dead, our redeeming Christ,  
 For you rule in glory, in three-ness and one-ness,  
 The holy Trinity, the eternal Unity,  
 The high King of heaven, fairly fulfilled 45  
 In the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## PSALM 50

This is the second poem in MS Cotton Vespasian D.vi which is written in the Kentish dialect (see also the poem above). Krapp (1932b) rightly notes that *Psalm 50* “is quite different in style from the metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter, and [is] the work of a versifier possessed of an ampler art than that which appears in the Paris Psalter” (xx). Keefer, in her edition of the psalm, which she retitles *The Kentish Great Miserere*, notes that “careful reading of each meditation uncovers evidence to show that [the poet] was making use, not only of St Jerome’s *Romanum* and *Gallicanum* versions of the Book of Psalms, but also of a scholarly recension of Jerome’s third translation, the *Hebraicum*” (2010, 132). She goes on to explain the religious context and narrative structure of the poem:

Its poet has also constructed a narrative framework—the sin of King David in seducing Bathsheba and then sending her husband Uriah to certain death in the front lines of the battle—by which to contextualize the lengthy vernacular meditation. This narrative frames the actual confession of the king, which relies verse by verse on the Latin of the “Great Miserere” psalm with the same words, *ðingode þioda aldor David* [David prayed to the Lord of hosts], opening and then closing David’s confession to God. (2010, 130)

The narrator of the poem calls King David “the keenest of kings, dearest to Christ,” even though David was an Old Testament patriarch who was thought to be an ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth. The poem is laced with this

sort of divine anachronism, as the Christian story places Christ both in the timeline of human history and in the timelessness of God's eternal being.

The psalm begins with a panegyric to King David, lauding him for his wisdom as a ruler, his capacity as a singer and poet, and his might as a warrior, and then turns to an enumeration of his sins, reflecting the penitential mode of the psalm in the Latin psalter. The Latin lines from each verse of *Psalm 50* appear in faded red ink in the manuscript, "functioning as a series of verse-headings" (Keefer, 1991, 22). These are followed by the OE lines which constitute both a translation and a poetic extension of the verse. Sometimes only a portion of the Latin verse appears in the manuscript, probably for reasons of scribal economy (Keefer, 1991, 24; 1998, 25 ff.), but the sense of the whole verse is almost certainly implied, so I have restored in brackets the rest of the missing verses. The Latin verses appear here in a slightly modernized version of the Douay-Rheims translation in italics. The Douay-Rheims translation follows the Gallican version of the psalm rather than the Roman version used by the poet, but as Keefer notes, "the differences are not major and the sense is apt" (2010, 33, n. 53). Note that because of numbering differences, Psalm 50 in the Vulgate and Douay-Rheims translation corresponds to Psalm 51 in other biblical versions.

For more on this psalm's interactive relation with other psalmic texts and the sense of allusion and adaptation in the psalm, see Toswell, 2012 and 2014, 33 ff. In my translation, I have followed a number of Toswell's suggestions in her articles and also in a private communication to me about the poem.

## Psalm 50

A bold, brave-hearted warrior called David  
 Was ruler of Israel, royal and renowned,  
 A man of courage, mighty and noble,  
 The keenest of kings, dearest to Christ.  
 He was the greatest harper under heaven,  
 At least among the people we have heard about.  
 He was the truest and most righteous singer,  
 The most powerful poet, thoughtful and wise,  
 Praying for his people, interceding for them  
 With the mildest and most merciful Lord,  
 The compassionate Creator, the Shaper of men.

5

10

David was God's servant, a bold battle-warrior,  
 A crafty champion, and courageous king,  
 When the crash of banners, the clash of soldiers,  
 Came together in days of hard conflict. 15  
 Yet guilt was stalking him with sinful thoughts,  
 His dreams of desire and bodily lust,  
 And the fear of God was tormenting him.  
 So it happened that he was sent a seer  
 By the God of hosts, the Savior of souls, 20  
 A wise prophet, skilled in word-craft,  
 Who was firmly commanded to confront the king  
 With God's judgment, a righteous doom,  
 And reveal all of his offenses and iniquities  
 Which were the source of his sin and shame, 25  
 Putting his soul into great peril,  
 For King David had committed a crime  
 In causing Uriah to be abandoned in battle  
 And robbed of his life—a bold warrior  
 Suddenly entrapped, betrayed by his leader, 30  
 Meeting his death—all so that the king,  
 Could take Bathsheba, Uriah's wife,  
 To bed with him in his greedy lust.  
 For that dreadful sin, he earned God's ire,  
 As he soon discovered in the dire deeds 35  
 Of days to come. Then King David,  
 Ruler of nations, begged for himself,  
 Pleading earnestly, praying to the Lord,  
 Revealing his whole hoard of sins.  
 He eagerly confessed his crimes to God, 40  
 To the Lord of hosts, speaking these words:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy.*

“Have mercy on me, Lord of nations,  
 Ruler of powers, now that you know  
 The thoughts of men, their dreams and desires. 45  
 Help me, my Savior, almighty God,  
 Offer the aid of your singular creation,

The help of your handiwork, your glorious making,  
Through your great mercy, your kindness and compassion.”

*And according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my iniquity.* 50

“And according to your multitude of mercies, Lord,  
Blot out my sins, erase my unrighteousness,  
And offer forgiveness to my suffering soul.”

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

“Wash away my sins, my soul of its stains, 55  
Shaper of spirits, cleanse me of iniquity,  
The crimes I have so long committed in life  
By way of the wicked thoughts of my body.

*For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.*

“For I acknowledge all my unrighteousness 60  
And see everywhere the iniquity of my eyes.  
The force of my sins is a terrible fury  
That rises up and rushes against me—  
Their evil nature is clearly known.

Forgive my faults, cancel my crimes, 65  
My Source of light, my Sustainer of life,  
And bring me the bliss of your merciful love.”

*Against you only have I sinned and have done evil before you, so you may  
be justified in your words, and may overcome when you are judged.*

“Often I have sinned against you alone,  
Committing ongoing evils and offenses, 70  
Driven by my fierce and hostile thoughts.

Now I ask for aid, Ruler of spirits,  
Christ the Savior, my spiritual Lord,  
So the sins of my soul might be forgiven,  
The wounds of my spirit eased and forgotten, 75  
And I might go forth to a brighter future,

A better life, since your words of promise  
 Will be fulfilled—that you do not desire  
 Death for anyone, but always attempt  
 To teach the sinful and transform the fallen, 80  
 So that by converting and praising Christ,  
 They can acquire a long-lasting life,  
 An eternity with you, just as you, O Lord,  
 Protector of peace, preserver of souls,  
 Have conquered at judgment all kinds of sins.” 85

*For behold! I was conceived in iniquity, [and in sin did  
 my mother conceive me.]*

“Almighty Lord, you alone know  
 How I was conceived in sin, born of my mother  
 In guilt and shame, waking into a world  
 Of wickedness and woe. Forgive me, Lord, 90  
 And let me turn away from my own transgressions,  
 From my unrighteous return to sinful ways,  
 From the crimes I’ve committed, old and new,  
 Against you, O Lord, and against myself.”

*For behold! You have loved truth; [the uncertain and hidden things  
 of your wisdom you have made manifest to me.]* 95

“Lord, you have always loved the truth,  
 So let me offer this supplication,  
 A prayer for life, a prayer for peace,  
 A prayer for favor, for mercy unmeasured.  
 You are the Lord of light, secretly revealing 100  
 Unknown truths and hidden meanings  
 From your hoard of wisdom, your true treasure.”

*You shall sprinkle me with hyssop, [and I shall be cleansed; you shall  
 wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow.]*

“Cleanse me with hyssop, almighty God,  
 Merciful and mild. Then pure and pristine, 105  
 I can call out to Christ, beaming with bliss,

So I can rise up brighter than the snow,  
To meet your familial love, O Lord.”

*To my hearing you shall give joy and gladness, [and the bones that  
have been humbled shall rejoice.]*

“Open up your song for my ears, Almighty, 110  
So I may listen in bliss as I turn toward you.  
Then my humbled flesh, my harrowed bones,  
Will find rapture and joy in your radiant grace,  
Merciful Lord, and escape from humiliation,  
The sin and shame of my unrighteous ways.” 115

*Turn away your face from my sins [and blot out all my iniquities.]*

“Turn your face away from my sins, O Lord,  
Avert your eyes from my evil deeds,  
My uncounted crimes, O Savior of souls.  
Forgive my faults through the power of your mercy, 120  
Erase all my iniquity, almighty God.”

*Create a clean heart in me, [O God, and renew] a right spirit  
[within my bowels.]*

“Create a clean heart in me, Lord Christ,  
And a resolute mind to endure your will,  
To make wise decisions and holy judgments. 125  
Lord of heaven, almighty God,  
Renew the spirit of righteousness in my soul.”

*Cast me not away from your face and [take not] your holy spirit  
[from me].*

“Do not cast me off from your countenance, Lord,  
Or keep me away from your many mercies, 130  
Or withhold the grace of your holy spirit,  
Or separate me from your care and compassion,  
Merciful Lord, almighty God.”



*Restore unto me the joy [of your salvation and strengthen me with  
a perfect spirit.]*

“Grant me your grace, merciful Lord, 135  
The hope of salvation, holy Protector  
Of all creatures. Strengthen me with your spirit,  
Shepherd of the soul, living Lord of light,  
So that I might honor and work your will  
Nobly both now and forevermore.” 140

*I will teach the unjust your ways, and the wicked [shall be converted  
to you.]*

“I have always taught the weak-minded your ways  
So the wayward and wicked would turn back again  
To the Guardian of their souls, God himself,  
And seek the spirit’s protection from you 145  
Through your loving grace, your familial favor.”

*Deliver me from blood, [O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue  
shall extol your justice].*

“Free me in spirit, Father of mankind,  
Free me from spite, from malice and bloodshed.  
Cleanse me of sins, my living Lord— 150  
Be my helper and healer, Guardian of heaven.  
Then my faithful tongue may happily rejoice  
In your firm truth, your fair justice.”

*O Lord, you will open my lips, and my mouth shall declare [your praise.]*

“Open my lips, Lord God, so my mouth 155  
May eagerly praise your power and glory,  
Saying forever as I’ve always said,  
My true Lord of victory, that you alone  
Are the joy and blessing of all people.”

*For if you had desired [sacrifice, I would indeed have given it;  
with burnt offerings you will not be delighted.]* 160

“I would have brought you a sacrifice, Lord of hosts,  
 If only you had desired or demanded it—  
 But you are the kind Lord of the living,  
 A Giver of life who took no delight  
 In a burnt offering of dead beasts  
 That I might bring to the sacrificial altar.”

165

*A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; [a contrite and humbled heart,  
 O God, you will not despise.]*

“O mighty Lord, O living Christ,  
 The more gratifying gift to you is always  
 A contrite spirit and a humbled heart—  
 A clean conscience you would never reject.”

170

*Deal favorably, O Lord, in your good will [with Zion so that the walls  
 of Jerusalem may be built up.]*

“Grant favorably your gracious aid, O God,  
 Your comfort and consolation, to the good power  
 And purpose of the spirit, so the holy hill  
 Of Zion will be triumphant, the walls of Zion  
 Secure in joy, and the blessed Jerusalem  
 Strengthened and protected, O living Lord.”

175

*Then you shall accept the sacrifice [of justice, oblations, and whole  
 burnt offerings; then they shall lay calves upon your altar.]*

“Accept now, mighty Lord, this loving gift,  
 The offering of your people, Lord of mankind,  
 As they set a holy calf on your altar  
 With a joyful purpose, O Lord of light.  
 And forgive me now, my living Lord,  
 Mighty Ruler, Creator of mankind,  
 For the sorrowful wounds I’ve inflicted on my soul  
 With my thoughtless sins and unbridled iniquity  
 From youth to age, beginning to end,  
 In the home of my flesh, my flawed body.”

180

185

By the power of your love, your compassionate spirit,  
Let my sins be forgiven and slide away.” 190

So King David, the prince of his people,  
Mindful of his deeds, prayed to the Almighty,  
So that the saving Christ, the ruling Redeemer,  
Afterwards considered him worthy of kingship, 195  
A comfort to his people, a consolation to mankind.  
King David therefore atoned with a contrite conscience  
For the hoard of evils he had long treasured,  
His wicked thoughts and dark desires,  
The wounds to his soul and his wayward mind. 200

Forgive us, O God, grant us the strength  
To overcome our sins, a hoard of iniquity,  
And earn for ourselves everlasting joy,  
An eternal treasure in the land of the living.

Amen.

## THE GLORIA II

**G**loria II, found in MS Cotton Titus D.xxvii in the British Library, is the shorter of the two doxology poems (see above for the longer *Gloria I*). Keefer notes that the book in which it is found “was the private prayer-book of Ælfwine of Winchester when he was the dean of the New Minster but before he became its abbot (therefore written between 1023 and 1035) . . . [and] it contains a variety of materials in addition to private devotions, many of which would have been of use to an eleventh-century monastery official either for personal study or public responsibilities” (2010, 115). The doxology poem occurs at the end of a prose alphabet series in which each letter introduces a brief sentence that sounds like a maxim with overtones of fortune-telling (116). The last letter, Z, introduces the doxology so that the alphabet sequence “acquires Christian closure through the inclusion of a formula that is appropriate to the ending of prayer, psalm, and hymn [and] at the same time, the doxology for ‘z’ within itself becomes either a maxim, modeling a direction for the reader to a right way of thinking at the close of each daily task, or a prognostic solution that can never be inappropriate” (117).

### The Gloria II

Glory and honor be to you, Lord of hosts,  
And glory to the Father here on earth  
In fair and harmonious fellowship  
With your own Son and the true Holy Spirit.

Amen.

## A PRAYER

This poem is preserved in two copies—MS Cotton Julius A.II in the British Library and an incomplete version in the Lambeth Psalter, MS 427, Lambeth Palace Library (Dobbie, 1942, lxxxv–lxxxvi). This is a penitential poem which, as Raw points out, “illustrate[s] the movement which took place in the late Anglo-Saxon period away from that kind of prayer which was concerned with universal needs, and towards the expression, often in emotional and contrived language, of the more intimate feelings of the individual” (123). Keefer notes that the prayer “has no single liturgical source and seems to draw from a number of disparate influences (epithets for God that resonate with litanies, echoes of the Nicene Creed, and substantial confessional material)” (2010, 157). Raw identifies a tripartite structure to the poem: “In the first the poet calls on God, the best of doctors, to heal the soul which has been wounded by sin; in the second he contrasts the wretchedness of the man beset by sin with the happiness of the righteous; in the third he praises God’s nobility and power, contrasting his greatness with man’s smallness and propensity to sin” (123).

### A Prayer

O beloved Lord, listen to my prayer,  
O God, my Judge, my eternal Ruler.  
Hear me and make me ready, Lord.  
I know that my soul is wounded with sins,  
But you may heal it, Lord of heaven,  
Recover it, care for it, cure it, redeem it,

Lord of creation, Lord of all life,  
 For you are the finest of all physicians,  
 Gentlest of leeches in the wide world.  
 Hear me, bright Lord, Creator of peoples, 10  
 Lend me your mercy, grant me your grace.  
 Temper your judgment with generosity  
 For the unworthy penitent, a patient in need.  
 A man is a poor wretch who struggles to serve  
 The devil day and night, always attempting 15  
 To work his will earnestly here on earth.  
 Woe to that one for his dark delight  
 When he finally discovers he has foolishly traded  
 Torment for joy, suffering for salvation,  
 And finally reaps his hellish reward— 20  
 Unless he abandons evil, turns traitor to sin.  
 Blessed is the one who always obeys God,  
 Working his will earnestly here on earth  
 Both day and night. He will reap rewards,  
 A good return for his steadfast labor, 25  
 Provided he can carry his work through  
 To a proper conclusion, a perfect end.

O Light of all light, Joy of all life,  
 Grant me your grace, O glorious King,  
 Your everlasting favor, when I pray for a place 30  
 For my soul in heaven. You are gentle and good,  
 Almighty God. You govern creation,  
 Savior and Sustainer of all living things.  
 No person can ever properly praise you,  
 No wordsmith can shape your glory in words. 35  
 Even if we summoned the world's wisest men  
 From across the broad plains of middle-earth,  
 We still could not see or say the vast truth,  
 Or finally know how unfathomably noble  
 You are in the end, our eternal Lord. 40  
 Nor could an army of angels or a supplication of saints,  
 The company of wise ones across heaven,  
 Ever reckon your power, spell out your glory,

Catch your wonder in words, O Lord of victory.  
 It's a marvel and mystery to us how you know 45  
 Your own fame and glory, majesty and meaning,  
 King of all kings, creator of worlds,  
 Lord of angels, Shaper and Savior,  
 Greatest of glories, the living Christ.  
 You are the blessed child born in Bethlehem 50  
 To the Virgin Mary, the joy of all women,  
 To be helper and healer, comfort and consolation  
 To the children of men who trust and believe  
 In the living God and the eternal Light  
 Emanating from heaven. Your power and glory 55  
 Are so great, mighty Lord, that no man on earth  
 Can mark its boundaries, discover its depth,  
 Or comprehend its power, just as no angel,  
 No matter how wise, can measure your majesty.  
 I pray and promise you, almighty God, 60  
 That I believe in you, my beloved Savior.  
 You are the greatest and most wondrous,  
 Strongest and surest, purest and most powerful,  
 Mildest and most merciful of all gods,  
 And the eternal King of all creation. 65  
 I humble myself before you as the least of men,  
 A poor, wicked wretch who has so often sinned,  
 Embracing evil both day and night,  
 Having often done what I should have shunned,  
 Sometimes in words, sometimes in works, 70  
 Sometimes in thoughts, cunning and crafty,  
 Hostile and hateful. I am bound in sin.  
 Now I eagerly entreat you, Lord of heaven,  
 And beg you, the best of all beings,  
 The marvel of men, greatest of sons, 75  
 That you pity me and offer me mercy,  
 The gift of grace, almighty Lord,  
 High King of heaven, and the Holy Spirit as well.  
 Protect and sustain me, help me and heal me,  
 Almighty Father, so that I may work your will 80  
 Before I finally leave this fleeting life.

So I humbly pray, Lord of glory,  
Please don't turn me away from the doors  
Of delight, the gates of joy, but deliver me  
Into the arms of heaven with all of the angels,  
Singing praise-songs to God with one holy voice.

Amen.



## THURETH

This is a difficult poem that has rarely been translated. It is found in MS Cotton Claudius A.iii in the British Library. Fulk and Cain point out that the speaker “adopts the persona of the book itself, a benedictional/pontifical that it says was commissioned by *Dureþ*, for whom God’s favor is asked” and that this Thureth is “very likely the earl *Dored* . . . who held estates in Yorkshire during the reign of Æthelred II, when he witnessed some charters” (135). The poem employs the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, which enables the inanimate object to speak. This is a device commonly used in the OE riddles (see, for example, Riddle 24, “Book or Bible,” in the Exeter Book). Ronalds and Ross, in their edition of the poem, point out that “unlike the inanimate speakers of the Riddles . . . the object makes only a small effort to characterize itself and that not in a riddling way, referring to its splendid ornamentation,” adding that “the main focus of the poem, once the *halgunþoc* [hallowing book] has been introduced, is the donor’s piety” (369).

### Thureth

I am a pontifical or blessing book.  
May the Lord preserve the man who made me,  
Artfully adorned me with ink and ornaments.  
Thureth ordered me formed in thanksgiving  
To praise and honor our holy Lord,  
The one who created the light itself.  
I praise each shaper in my scripted song.

Thureth is mindful of the myriad works  
Of might and beauty that have been made  
In this wondrous world. May the high Prince 10  
Of all peoples offer Thureth a rich reward  
For my holy beauty, because the Lord of heaven,  
Mindful of many sacred treasures,  
Beautiful earthy offerings, will accept and honor me  
As a glorious gift. So a man will earn 15  
His eternal reward if he holds to what is right  
And acts justly and generously in his earthly life.

## THE BOOK'S PROLOGUE TO ALDHELM'S *DE VIRGINITATE*

This poem, known simply as *Aldhelm* in *ASPR*, appears in MS 326 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. It occurs immediately following the table of contents of *De virginitate* and leads into the Latin salutation and preface of the work (see Whitbread, 1976, 193 ff., and Robinson, 1994, 184–85). This macaronic poem is difficult to translate because it contains elements of Latin and Greek interwoven with the Old English. Other examples of OE macaronic poetry include the epilogue to *The Phoenix* in the Exeter Book and the last half of *The Rewards of Piety* above. Whitbread says such macaronic poems “may be called mere exercises in ingenuity and in the literature of display” (1976, 193–94), and Robinson notes that a translation of this poem is “notoriously difficult . . . apparently because the poet’s ambition to compose a poem in three languages at once . . . exceeded his talents” (185). The device of the inanimate object speaking owes something to the classical tradition of prosopopoeia and also to the tradition of medieval riddle-creatures telling their tales. There is a speaking book in *Thureth* and also in OE Riddle 24, “Book or Bible.” Robinson argues that the end of this poetic prologue leads quite naturally into the following text of Aldhelm’s salutation to *De virginitate*, so that it is difficult to separate the poem from the rest of the work. I agree with this and have chosen to include the salutation at the end of the poem, enclosed in brackets. For editions of the poem along with translations and commentary, see Whitbread (1976), Robinson (1994), and Jones; I am indebted to their work for my own poetic translation here. Since the poem weaves back and forth between Old English, Latin, and Greek in such complex fashion, I have not indicated the separate

languages in my poetic rendering. Jones (126–27) has a prose translation that does indicate these elements.

### The Book's Prologue to Aldhelm's *De virginitate*

Thus the saintly and righteous Aldhelm,  
 A skilled word-smith and sound scholar,  
 A book-learned man and bishop in Briton,  
 Eminent in the land of the Anglo-Saxons,  
 Author and poet, composed and created me. 5  
 Now as a book, an opus and authority,  
 I must honestly convey the full content  
 Of his noble youth with a weight of words,  
 Relate his long labors, lament his woes.  
 I must speak the truth and not falsehood, 10  
 Revealing in the face of a sorrowful struggle  
 That recognition forever remained his friend  
 In a homeland where he could always claim  
 An abundance of aid, even when he was unfairly  
 Faulted and criticized. In simple words, 15  
 No slander ever sullied his good name.  
 His work was always steady and sure,  
 For restraint should never slide into slacking.  
 So he never excused himself from hard work  
 But would always pray eagerly for aid 20  
 Through his earnest thoughts and the faithful  
 Movements of his mind, the wholeness of his heart.  
 He hoped that the Lord of life, his Creator,  
 Might lend him strength, a poet's power,  
 The gift of inspiration, a graceful imagination, 25  
 So that afterwards on earth, [he, Aldhelm,  
 The unhurried and humble servant of the Lord,  
 And his one Church might send his best wishes  
 For perpetual prosperity to the virgins of Christ.]

## THE SEASONS FOR FASTING

This poem, which is concerned with Ember days and the Lent fasting season, was discovered in 1934 by Robin Flower in a copy of MS Cotton Otho B.xi made by Laurence Nowell in 1562; the original manuscript was largely destroyed in the Cottonian fire of 1731 (Hilton, 1; Leslie, 555). Hilton notes that “it is the longest regularly stanzaic poem in OE; its English position on the Ember fast controversy and its attack on lax priests are atypical of OE verse as is the poem’s intended lay audience” (iii). The poem shares some lines with *The Creed* (Sisam, 1953, 47–48), and it draws on homiletic works by Wulfstan and Ælfric (Fulk and Cain, 135; Richards, 2007, 355 ff.). Richards points out that “the proper observance of fasts . . . is our poet’s subject, and his major topics are three: the English calendar of seasonal fasts, Lenten observances, and priestly conduct, especially fasting after Mass” (2014, 57). The poem opens with a discussion of the Jews’ observation of the law of Moses and their fasting, then moves on to endorse the Ember dates set forth by Gregory, as opposed to the imported continental practices arising from the Benedictine Reform (Richards, 2007, 349 ff.). The later verses deal with the forty-day Lenten fast and the importance of priests setting a proper example for parishioners. The poem concludes with a lament over those lax priests who have fallen into slovenly or sinful ways. Greenfield notes that “the last three verses present a vigorous portrait of the sinful priests who, instead of observing the fast, hurry after mass to the tapster and persuade him it is no sin to serve oysters and wine before noon” (Greenfield and Calder, 234). There are many difficult and debated passages in the poem (see the notes in Hilton; Jones; and Richards, 2014, for a discussion of these passages).

The poem is incomplete in the final stanza, and I have supplied two lines to bring it to a proper conclusion.

## The Seasons for Fasting

The people of Israel were mentored by Moses  
 In ancient days, instructed and enlightened  
 By that famous teacher, when the Lord of life,  
 The high King of heaven, with his own words  
 Appointed him counsel for the people's sake 5  
 While he lived on earth and made clear to him  
 The meaning of mysteries and divine truths  
 So he could teach his beloved people the true way.

Then the leader of his people obeyed the teachings  
 Of heaven's high King, and so did his followers 10  
 Who were taught the laws and lore of the nation.  
 If they weakened or wavered in their tasks,  
 God would send them a scourge from heaven  
 As a just reward for their unrighteous works.  
 In the throes of woe, they would beg for peace 15  
 And discover whether they could cease sinning.

The people's glory was great, their power unparalleled,  
 Their armies unconquered, as long as they loved  
 Their God and guardian, the Lord of life—  
 But their end was wretched when they slew the Savior 20  
 On the gallows-tree, the Redeemer's rood,  
 And buried him in a grave. That was the beginning  
 Of their unholy woe. Christ was concealed  
 For three days before revealing himself to men.

We have heard many men celebrate and set down 25  
 In their sacred books of wisdom that four fasts  
 Were held at that time, and afterwards pure meat  
 Was served—a clean calf or innocent lamb,  
 A sacrifice in token to their beloved Lord,  
 Who was seen as flawless in the eyes of the world. 30

Then the powerful Prince, Ruler of all realms,  
 Began to rise up from the grave in glory,  
 Seeking his heart's homeland in heaven  
 With a host of angels, honoring his promise  
 That bliss everlasting would await us all 35  
 If we follow his teachings with a righteous spirit.  
 No one will enter heaven, gluttoned with wickedness,  
 Soaked with sin. That one is delivered to doom.

Now let us praise our perfect Prince,  
 Our beloved Lord, who accomplished great deeds 40  
 And freed us all if we follow him faithfully  
 For the length of our lives and fill our days  
 With charitable deeds, alms-giving and fasts,  
 As wise Moses taught, and if we keep the dates  
 For the Ember fasts among all English people, 45  
 As the great Pope Gregory in Rome decreed.

We ought to observe the initial Ember fast  
 In the first week of Lent in the month of March,  
 So called in the calendar of the Roman kingdoms,  
 And we should read out the twelve mysteries 50  
 And radiant miracles in the holy house of God,  
 Our Lord and Ruler, in the proper sequence  
 And sing praise-songs to the King of creation,  
 Exalting the name of the Giver of glory.

The second Ember fast comes after Eastertide 55  
 With worship and readings for the people of Britain  
 Who keep the calendar, the sacred schedule.  
 This is the time to sing God's praise  
 With the faith and fervor the redemption holds  
 In the week following that sacred Sunday 60  
 That priests far and wide call Pentecost  
 In the month which men aptly name June.

The third Ember fast is appointed for everyone,  
 All God's creation and the children of men,

And celebrated in church, his holy house. 65  
 It's a time of bright song and week-long  
 Praise of the power and purpose of the Lord.  
 This fast takes place in the week leading up  
 To the equinox, which I've heard wise ones  
 Skilled in calendar-craft call September. 70

We ought to observe the fourth Ember fast  
 The week before the birth of our Lord,  
 When we praise and celebrate in words and works  
 The King of glory, and through our mysteries  
 Honor our Father as was done before, 75  
 Asking our Protector, our beloved Lord,  
 To shield and sustain us, gather us in glory,  
 And wrap us forever in his embracing arms.

These fasts are appointed on three days  
 Of each week—the fourth, sixth, and seventh— 80  
 That is Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday—  
 To serve and celebrate the Lord of life  
 At the ninth hour, to glorify God,  
 Gathering in the miracles and mysteries  
 Of the holy books. No one is allowed 85  
 To break the fast, taste food, or drink  
 Before that hour unless he is ill, as the law allows.

If any of the Bretons or the Franks from the south  
 Order you to observe any Ember ordinance  
 According to their own calendar calculations, 90  
 Which some claim Moses taught to his people,  
 You should never assent to this alternate schedule  
 But always follow the rule of the realm  
 That came from Pope Gregory of Rome,  
 Who was wisely skilled in the calendar count. 95

It was Gregory himself, the great teacher  
 Of princes and peoples, who established and ordered  
 These times of fasting for the ministry of faith  
 That we still follow freely throughout England.



Just as Gregory decreed from the throne  
 Of Saint Peter. This is the same plan 100  
 That priests taught to people in their time on earth,  
 So you should never follow any other schedule.

Also we observe forty days of fasting  
 Before the resurrection of our beloved Lord— 105  
 People now name this period Lent.  
 Our ancient leader and mentor, Moses,  
 A glorious hero, first began such a fast  
 Before he ascended the mountain, maintaining it  
 For forty days and forty nights, eating no food 110  
 Before he received the Lord's cherished law.

The Lord himself, that radiant ruler  
 Enveloped in flame, gave to Moses  
 A sacred knowledge, a scripted glory  
 From his holy hands, telling him to explain 115  
 His ancient teachings sagely to his followers  
 As a sign to the faithful that with proper fasting  
 People can find wisdom, grasping his mysteries,  
 If God gives us something of value,  
 A share of virtue, a means to salvation. 120

Likewise Elijah the legendary prophet  
 Wandered the desert, only eating  
 When one of the Lord's angels set him free  
 From his fast with a feast of bread and water.  
 He was strengthened with such sustaining food, 125  
 The gift of God, for a long wilderness  
 Of forty days and forty nights. After his time  
 Of hard hunger, he ascended Mount Horeb.

Let us rightly consider the following mystery:  
 How could that hero, that holy servant, 130  
 Lose the power to proceed, then ascend the mountain  
 After the angel offered him that meager feast?  
 We live in a wilderness, separated from bliss  
 Apart from glory. The time has come!

We know in this hour that we need to pray: 135  
 “Lord, help us ascend this mighty mountain?”

Those who teach God’s word with their deeds  
 Are known to him and considered as angels.  
 He offers us sustenance for the body and spirit  
 In his divine teachings. We devour his words. 140  
 In this wicked world we need to fast,  
 And without food to be free of sin,  
 So in our holy abstinence we may ascend  
 God’s glorious mountain as Elijah did.

Here we consider how the holy saint 145  
 Departed from this world to seek God’s glory.  
 A fiery chariot with four proud horses,  
 Splendid steeds, carried him heaven-high  
 Into God’s perfect paradise, his heartland  
 Where Christ the Lord, the Son and Savior, 150  
 Has promised us all a heavenly home  
 Full of bliss and blessing if we fast for our sins.

Next we remember how Christ our Savior,  
 Our shield and protector, the Guardian of heaven,  
 Taught and helped us. The holy Redeemer 155  
 Was first immersed in the waters of baptism,  
 Free from sin, fasting for forty days  
 And as many nights, guilty of nothing,  
 To show us the way so that during Lent  
 We should keep the fast for forty days. 160

Christ’s adversary, that proud, perverse foe,  
 Tempted and tormented him in the desert solitude.  
 Seeing the glorious Savior bound in the body  
 Of a humble man, he began to plot and scheme,  
 Twisted in sin, how he might stick his arrows 165  
 In the Lord’s bone-house. No sin came of that,  
 And the bearer of evil, the bringer of harm,  
 Fled when the angels came seeking their Lord.

Consider, O sinner, whether the guardian of evil,  
 The wielder of wickedness, traitor of torment, 170  
 Will try to tempt you, seduce your soul,  
 As he did with Christ, our sinless Lord.  
 That devious devil is under constraint—  
 He can only aim at a target of guilt.  
 He can stalk and seduce, but he can't force sin, 175  
 And angels will aid if you follow the Lord's lead.

Now we have noted how the glorious ones  
 Held a tradition of fasting for forty days,  
 And so we command through the Son of God  
 That each man and woman inhabiting the earth 180  
 Should fast during Lent for a full forty days  
 Before the Lord's resurrection day  
 Until the ninth hour, and abstain from sin  
 And eating flesh lest he devour doom.

Priests should sing the mass and beseech God 185  
 In daily fasting to be a friend to people  
 Across the earth. The faithful should always  
 Be properly penitent, confessing to their priests  
 Each and every sin, engaging in penance,  
 Promising to atone with actions for their sins 190  
 Of words and works, and to offer alms  
 To appease and gladden the God of glory.

There is a great need among all people  
 That their holy priests should refrain from sin  
 And refuse firmly to lie down in iniquity. 195  
 Who can intercede for a servant with his lord  
 If he has angered him? How can a priest pray  
 For a sinner, if he himself continues to sin,  
 Offers no atonement, makes no amends,  
 But repeats his unrighteous acts each day? 200

If a holy priest doesn't know how to behave,  
 To keep righteous conduct with respect and fear

Of almighty God, then a man must keep  
 To the sacred standards, performing firmly  
 What scripture advises in words and works. 205  
 If a priest stoops to drink dirty water,  
 Let the supplicant sip from the clear stream  
 Of divine doctrine, imbibing God's glory.

Now I speak in sorrow, lamenting the laxity  
 Of certain priests who renew strife daily 210  
 With their divine Lord, inciting his anger,  
 As they neglect God's law and lead astray  
 All the lay people who would follow them.  
 As soon as they sing the morning mass,  
 They desire a drink and take to the streets, 215  
 Searching for a tapster to quench their thirst.

Listen! The thirst of a priest is pernicious.  
 It will drive him to lie and deceive the tapster,  
 Saying that one might innocently bring him  
 A fine, full feast of oysters and wine 220  
 During the morning. It seems such a priest  
 Has animal instincts as he forages for food,  
 Desperate for drink, like a wolf or a hound,  
 Seizing whatever he finds without restraint.

So these priests take pride in sitting at the table, 225  
 Blessing the wine, pouring out full portions,  
 Toasting each other, saying God permits this,  
 Stuffing themselves with anything available.  
 They urge anyone exhausted after mass  
 To guzzle wine, gobble oysters, gorge on fish— 230  
 [Their blasted words and bloated bellies  
 Will one day invite a hot, hellish feast.]

## CÆDMON'S HYMN

**C***ædmon's Hymn* comes down to us from a story in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and exists in Latin and English in twenty-one medieval manuscripts with a number of variant readings (Fulk and Cain, 142). The poem is an important cornerstone in Anglo-Saxon history and legend. It purports to be the first poem in which the new Christian teachings were set down in the alliterative, strong-stress poetic tradition of the Germanic peoples who had migrated to England.

Bede says that Cædmon worked in a secular capacity at the monastery at Whitby. After dinner the harp would sometimes be passed around the table for each person to sing something, but on such occasions Cædmon would excuse himself and leave the festivities because he didn't know how to sing. On one such occasion, he left the harp-passing party, went to the livestock shed where he was assigned night duty, and lay down to sleep. Then an awe-inspiring figure came to him in a vision or dream and called to him, *Cædmon, sing me hwæthwugu*, "Cædmon, sing me something." Cædmon answered humbly, "I don't know how to sing—that's why I always leave the table." The voice answered, "Yet you will sing for me." "What shall I sing?" Cædmon asked. The voice answered, *Sing me frumsceaft*, "Sing me Creation, the beginning of all things." And Cædmon, who had never sung anything before, began miraculously to sing the song now known as *Cædmon's Hymn*.

## Cædmon's Hymn

Now let us praise the Creator and Guardian  
Of the heavenly kingdom, his power and purpose,  
His mind and might, his wondrous works.  
He shaped each miraculous beginning,  
Each living creature, each earthly kind. 5  
He first made for the children of men  
Heaven as a roof. Then our holy Shaper  
Crafted middle-earth, a home for mankind:  
Our God and Guardian watching over us—  
Eternal, almighty—our Lord and King. 10

## BEDE'S DEATH SONG

This poem exists in numerous manuscript versions in both Northumbrian and West Saxon dialects (Dobbie, 1942, c–cvii; Fulk and Cain, 173). It was probably composed or recited from memory by Bede shortly before his death in 735. It appears in a letter written by Cuthbert, a disciple of Bede, in numerous manuscripts in various dialects and must have been quite popular. The poem shares motifs from other OE poems, such as the *Soul and Body* poems, the *Last Judgment* poems, and *Christ III: Judgment*. Fulk and Cain note that “for all its brevity, the song is a poignant expression of humility by the greatest scholar of the age, remarking simply that all the intellect one requires in preparation for the afterlife is the ability to consider how one’s soul will be judged” (173).

### Bede’s Death Song

Before he departs on that inescapable journey  
Down death’s road, no man is so wise  
That he knows his own end, so clever or unconstrained  
That he need not contemplate the coming judgment,  
Consider what good or evil resides in his soul,  
What rich reward or bounty of un blessings  
Will be offered in eternity when his time runs out.

## THE LEIDEN RIDDLE

This is a Northumbrian version of Riddle 33 in the Exeter Book; it appears in MS Voss. Q.106 in the University Library at Leiden. It is a translation of Aldhelm's Latin *De Lorica* riddle. Most editors believe that this version was probably written earlier than the Exeter version since it follows Aldhelm's Latin ending, whereas the Exeter version substitutes a common formulaic riddlic ending for the final two lines of the poem. For more on riddles, see the headnote to Riddles 1–57 in the Exeter Book section.

### The Leiden Riddle

The earth was my mother—I was raised  
From her cold, wet womb. I know in my mind  
I was not woven from hair or wool  
By skilled hands. I have no winding  
Weft or warp, no thread to sing 5  
Its rushing song; no whirring shuttle  
Moves or shakes me, no weaver's sley  
Strikes belly or back. No silkworms spin  
With inborn skill their subtle gold  
For my sides, yet warriors call me 10  
A coat of joy. I do not fear  
The quiver's gift, the deadly arrow's flight,  
Though they must certainly aim and shoot.



## LATIN-ENGLISH PROVERBS

**T**hese metrical proverbs, preserved in MS Cotton Faustina A.x and Royal MS 2B.v in the British Library, contain rhyming half-lines in both Latin and Old English. The OE and Latin versions are, as Dobbie points out (1942, 201), in close agreement, so I have given only a single translation, including as much rhyme as it is possible to muster. The one exception to the closeness is the Latin half-line *amor abolescit* (love fades), which is paired with the OE *leof aladap* (the dear or beloved becomes hateful or hostile). My compromise translation occurs at line 2a, where the word “threatened” can carry elements of both meanings.

### Latin-English Proverbs

Heat is cooled; white is soiled.

Love is threatened; light is darkened.

Everything fades except what’s made

Eternally to last, forever steadfast.

## THE METRICAL PREFACE TO *THE PASTORAL CARE*

This poem is a verse preface to Alfred's translation of *The Pastoral Care*. It occurs along with the epilogue below in several manuscripts (see Dobbie, 1942, cxiii–cxiv). Greenfield points out that here “Gregory’s work, personified, speaks briefly of its original composition in Rome, its transmission by Augustine to the English, and Alfred’s translation and dispatching of it to his bishops ‘because some of them, who least know Latin, needed it’” (Greenfield and Calder, 247). There is also a “speaking book” in *Thureth*, in “The Book’s Prologue to Aldhelm’s *De virginitate*,” and in the book or Bible riddle, Riddle 24.

### The Metrical Preface to *The Pastoral Care*

Augustine brought this message from the south  
Over the salt-sea to our island-dwellers,  
As the Pope of Rome, the Lord’s champion,  
The leader of the church, had earlier ordered.  
Through the wise study of sacred texts,  
Gregory held in mind a hoard of learning,  
A treasure of wise truth for the telling,  
So he acquired and increased knowledge,  
Winning over a multitude of people  
To the Guardian of heaven; that greatest Roman,  
So rich in spirit, was rewarded with fame.  
Afterwards King Alfred translated my words  
Into English, sending me to all his scribes,

5

10

North and south, commanding them to copy me,  
So that he could bring these copies to his bishops  
And enable those who knew the least Latin  
To read the translation and learn the truth.

## THE METRICAL EPILOGUE TO *THE PASTORAL CARE*

In this poem the words of *The Pastoral Care* are compared to the transforming waters of baptism and the fulfilling waters of redemption associated with the power of the Holy Spirit. Campbell and Rosier point out that “this spirit flows through Gregory’s book for those who wish to partake, a fact which the poet . . . elaborates by adding many details to the basic metaphor” (79). Isaacs adds that “the *Pastoral Care*, then, is the body of water, as distilled from its original source in God, from which priests can draw in order to transmit its blessings to their flocks; but their vessels must not be leaky, lest the *scirost wetre*, ‘brightest waters’ be dispersed” (84). The motif of the address to the reader at the end of the poem is also found in the colophon to Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* below.

### The Metrical Epilogue to *The Pastoral Care*

These are the healing waters that the Lord of hosts  
Promised us as comfort and consolation to mankind.  
He wanted the living waters to flow into the world  
From the hearts and minds of the faithful followers  
Who believed in him on earth and under heaven. 5  
No one can doubt that the wellsprings of this water  
Abide in the high fathoms of heaven—their source  
Is the Holy Spirit. From there it is drawn down  
To earth by a selection of saints and scholars,  
Wise ones chosen to champion the truth. 10  
Those who have heard the Lord’s words

Channeled the truth through the holy books  
In manifold ways to the minds of men.  
Sometimes sages dam up the streams of wisdom,  
The treasure-house of thoughts and words, 15  
Hold it back behind unspeaking lips,  
So that the Lord's waters might not flow  
Needlessly away and their wisdom be wasted.  
But the springs run deep and still in the heart  
Through God the Father's fathomless grace 20  
Sometimes the unwise let the waters run,  
Streaming unchecked across the plains,  
So the bright, clear flow becomes clouded,  
Pouring out its power into endless marshlands,  
Where the mind is mired and the words are wasted. 25  
But you, dear reader, can now draw and drink,  
For God has granted Gregory the power  
To dig this well at your own doorway.  
Let the wise man who comes quickly  
Fill up his jug, drink from his cup, 30  
And come back for more. If anyone arrives  
With a leaky jug or a cracked cup,  
Let him hurry home first to repair it,  
Lest he should lose the clearest of waters  
From the deepest spring and find himself 35  
Away from the well without the drink of life.

## THE METRICAL PREFACE TO GREGORY'S *DIALOGUES*

This poem “precedes the text of Bishop Wærferth’s translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues* in MS. Cotton Otho C.i, Part 2” (Dobbie, 1942, cxv). This is yet another “speaking book” preface like “The Book’s Prologue to Aldhelm’s *De virginitate*” and “The Metrical Preface to *The Pastoral Care*” (see above), where the riddle-like voice of the book explains what is to follow and sometimes asks for prayers for those involved in the writing and/or making of the book. There is some debate about the bishop identified in line 12. The name has been altered by a scribe over an erasure in the manuscript and appears as “Wulfstan,” but it is now thought to have originally read “Wulfsig” (see Sisam, 1953, 201 ff., and Yerkes, 510 ff.). The reference to Alfred in line 26 probably indicates that Wulfsig was the bishop of Sherborne in Alfred’s time (Sisam, 1953). The OE translation of Gregory’s Latin *Dialogues* has been ascribed by Asser to Wærferth, bishop of Worcester, 872–915 (Cook, 1902, 14), but it may have been made by more than one translator (Fulk and Cain, 66).

### The Metrical Preface to Gregory’s *Dialogues*

If you want to read me, take some time  
And trouble to find my excellent examples  
Of spiritual life so that you can rise up  
Easily and eagerly to your heavenly home  
Where you will find goodness and grace,  
Bliss and blessing, in that holy hall  
Where the fortunate gaze upon the Son of God.

You can do this if your mind is sound,  
 Your soul righteous, and you believe  
 In your heart in the help of the holy saints 10  
 And follow their example as this book exhorts.  
 Bishop Wulfsige, beadsman and servant  
 Of the Lord of life, the Giver of glory,  
 Everlasting Ruler of radiant heaven,  
 Author of creation, commanded me 15  
 To be written. The bishop who owns the book  
 Which you now carefully hold in your hands  
 Humbly begs you to pray for him,  
 Seeking help from the saints for his soul,  
 From the holy ones commemorated in this book, 20  
 That God may forgive him for all his sins  
 In words and works and grant him rest  
 With the Ruler of heaven; and he asks the same  
 For his earthly king and kind ring-giver  
 Who commanded him to have this book written, 25  
 Who is Alfred the greatest treasure-giver,  
 Boldest leader and kindest king  
 Among the English from first to last  
 That anyone has heard of in legend or life.

## COLOPHON TO BEDE'S ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

This poem, entitled *The Metrical Epilogue to MS. 41, Corpus Christi College in ASPR*, is a colophon which appears at the end of an OE version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* in the Cambridge manuscript noted in the *ASPR* title. Robinson (1994, 3–24 and 167–79) explains the organic movement from the end of the *History* itself through three related petitions (two in prose and this third in poetry), noting that “the petitions themselves form a connected series of appeals for access to God—through direct admission to the Presence, through intercessory prayers of readers, and through devotion to God expressed through pious labor” (13). Robinson explains that the first two petitions are almost certainly by Bede and argues that the formal and thematic connections between the three petitions point to the writer of this poem (either poet or scribe) taking on Bede's voice (15). See Robinson's two related articles for more on the complexities of this poem and the colophonic tradition and for his editions of the poem with corresponding translations to which I am indebted in my own poetic rendering. The new title here is suggested by Robinson's work.

### Colophon to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*

Also I beseech each reader of this book,  
Ruler of a realm, lord of men,  
Who might hold this history in his hands  
And cradle its covers, that he might promote  
With benevolent power the humble word-smith  
Who wrote this book with both hands,



So that he might craft many more copies  
At his lord's request, his ruler's pleasure;  
And may the Lord of heaven, who reigns over all,  
Grant this writer the power to rightly praise  
Our Lord until the end of his days.

10

Amen. So be it.

## THE RUTHWELL CROSS

The Ruthwell Cross is a stone cross in Scotland which contains, among various religious passages and images, an eighth-century poem fragment in runes, in which the Cross speaks of Christ's crucifixion. Cassidy describes the Cross as follows: "The Ruthwell Cross stands today in the little church on the edge of the village of Ruthwell, just south of Dumfries, on the site for which, most probably, it was made, ris[ing] at seventeen feet and four inches in height, almost to the roof of the church from a four foot deep well set into the floor of the apse behind the altar. . . . It is ornamented on all four sides with images and inscriptions in both Latin letters and runes" (3). The language of the Ruthwell Cross poem is similar to that of the central lines of *The Dream of the Rood*, though there are a number of missing runes on the stone cross, and the exact relation between the two accounts is still the subject of some debate. Elliott argues that "the most likely hypothesis is that the runic passages represent the main portion of an original Northumbrian poem which was later expanded into the much longer poem preserved in the Vercelli Codex" (1989, 120). In my translation, I follow the reading and reconstruction of the runes by Howlett with occasional borrowing from *The Dream of the Rood* to help with the missing portions.

### The Ruthwell Cross

#### *EAST SIDE*

##### 1. North Border

God almighty stripped himself  
When he wanted to ascend the gallows-tree,

A brave warrior before a gathering of men.  
I dared not bow down—[I had to stand fast.]

### 2. South Border

[A rood, I raised up]  
The mighty King, the Lord of heaven,  
I dared not bow down to earth.  
Men mocked us both, taunting us together.  
I was drenched with blood soaking from his side.

### *WEST SIDE*

### 3. South Border

Christ was on the cross, raised up on the rood.  
Noble ones gathered there from far away.  
I beheld it all, afflicted with sorrows,  
Bowing down [to the hands of men.]

### 4. North Border

He was [wounded with arrows.]  
Then they laid him down limb-weary,  
Huddled together near the head of his body,  
While they beheld [the Lord resting awhile.]

## THE BRUSSELS CROSS

The Brussels Cross is an eleventh-century reliquary kept in the Cathedral of Saints Michel and Gudule in Brussels. How it came to be in Brussels remains something of a mystery. The poem is inscribed on a silver strip around the edges of the cross. It is a condensed statement of the role of Christ's rood in the crucifixion, and its sentiments are echoed in several lines of *The Dream of the Rood* in the Vercelli Book. The poem is followed by a prose statement which reads: "Æthelmær and his brother Athelwold had this cross made for the glory of Christ and for the soul of their brother Ælfric." Donoghue notes that even though this poem uses the device of prosopopoeia common to many of the Exeter Book riddles, it turns the tables on the riddlic game by announcing the solution up front (78). I have expanded the original two lines of the Old English to three in the translation to better keep the alliteration and communicate some of the ambiguities of the original.

### The Brussels Cross

Rood is my name—I raised a mighty king,  
Bearing his body when I was a cross,  
Sorely trembling, soaked with blood.

## THE FRANKS CASKET

**T**he Franks Casket is a small whale-bone casket that is also known as the Auzon Casket because it was first discovered in Auzon, France. The casket (minus part of its top and all of its right side) is housed in the British Museum in London. The right side is in the Bargello Museum in Florence. Webster points out that “the scenes that decorate its sides and lid are crammed with detail and have been chosen from a curious mixture of sources—Germanic and Roman legend, Jewish and Roman history, and the New Testament—few of which are instantly recognizable to us” (7), noting further that “the inscriptions that frame the scenes are equally puzzling; mostly written in the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet, the *futhorc*, and in Old English . . . they perform ostentatious contortions, some running backwards, some upside down, others shifting into Latin and Roman lettering; one is even encrypted” (7). What the casket was used for remains unclear, but it may have held relics or a religious book (Webster, 53–60).

Two of the inscriptions are in verse and are included here. The front panel contains a poem whose exact meaning is much debated. It describes in riddlic fashion the stranding of the whale out of which the casket is made and then gives the solution to the riddle. The right side contains three lines of verse that Fulk and Cain say “allude to a Germanic legend that has not been identified conclusively, elements of which are also depicted graphically on the panel” (45). These lines are difficult to translate because the vowels have been cryptically encoded. The word *Hos* should possibly be emended to *Hors*, “Horse,” since there is a horse in the carved scene on this side, but the horse is not sitting; it does seem to be named “rush-biter” in riddlic fashion in the scene. The other named character *Ertæe* might be the Erce or earth-mother of

the *Charm for Unfruitful Land* (see below), but this is also uncertain. See Elliott (1989, 133 ff.), Page (177 ff.), and Webster (11 ff.) for a discussion of the lines and the stories depicted on the casket.

## The Franks Casket

### *Front*

The flood lifted up a fish on the high beach,  
 A burial ground. The savage king was sad  
 When he swam on the shore. Whale's bone.

### *Right Side*

Here Hos sits on a misery-mound,  
 A bank of anguish, suffering the ache  
 Of distress that Ertae has imposed on her—  
 A den of sorrows, the torments of the heart.

## THE METRICAL CHARMS

The Old English charms are found in a collection of manuscripts described by Dobbie (1942, cxxx–cxcxvii), who notes that “there are only twelve which are in metrical form or which contain verse passages of sufficient regularity to warrant their inclusion in an edition of Anglo-Saxon poetry” (cxxx). Bjork notes that these charms “may contain the oldest pre-Christian material in the Old English corpus” (2014, viii). The charms are part of both magical and medical traditions. They are often accompanied by medicinal directions such as “boil feverfew and plantain and the red nettle that grows in grain,” by practical advice such as “throw earth over [swarming bees],” and by magical incantations such as “get out little spear, don’t stay in here.” The magical element of charms often involves some form of comparison or substitution corresponding to the poetic devices of simile and metaphor. In the “Charm for a Sudden Stitch,” the charmer uses simile in exhorting the tumor to “shrivel like coal in the catch of fire” or “disappear like dirt on the wall.” In the other charms, the charmer uses metaphor in comparing swarming bees to a band of “victory women” or rheumatic pain to an “iron stitch . . . the work of witches.” The use of such poetic and incantatory language may be a means of preserving and passing down effective practices. It may lend concrete visual imagery to a practical cure at hand. It may also function as a way of verbal healing since we know from both anthropological studies of primitive cures and from modern medical experiments that a patient’s response to positive feedback from a physician is sometimes as effective as any prescribed potion. Bjork points out that “the Old English word for charm, incantation, or spell is *galdor*, which derives from the verb *galan* (to sing) and which indicates that singing or chanting is central to the

charm tradition” (2014, ix). The charms are thus both poetical and practical, and they serve the twin purposes of cure and care. In a larger sense, as Beechy argues, the charms may function “to bind the world through language in its primeval, perfect function: naming = binding . . . to order the cosmos in relation to human beings,” so that “through sympathetic signification (verbal and ritualistic action) the world is made more favorable to humanity” (2010a, 55).

The sympathetic function of magic assumes a metaphoric equation between objects or actions (“things alike are equivalent”). Thus, the knives of elves and the pains of a “sudden stitch,” which might be anything from a muscle cramp to rheumatism or an angina pain (Cameron, 141), may be poetically and magically linked since they both attack the body. The contagious function of ritual magic assumes a metonymic equation between objects or actions (“things contiguous are equivalent”), so that by controlling dirt, which is a part of the bees’ world, the charmer can magically control the bees as well. Throwing the dirt or dust might also help to settle the bees in a purely practical way. In addition, the charm for the swarm of bees may be sent forth in a veiled metaphoric fashion against other angry or harmful bee-like creatures such as the “slandrous tongues of man.” The beekeeper and charmer need the bees to form a properly sustaining community, just as they need a supportive human community free from slander and threat. The human and natural stingers must be sheathed and a sustaining honey produced.

The charms often include passages in Latin as well as Old English. The poetic portions of the charms may be in traditional or nearly traditional OE metrical form or in what Fulk and Cain rightly call “semi-metrical” form (156). The incantational form of charms, which includes a variety of repeated phrases, sometimes approaches meter, even if it is not scannable according to the traditional techniques. The poetic lines of the charms are often embedded in prose directions. Since it is difficult to make sense of the charms without the full context, both prose and poetry, I have included both in each of the cases here as is traditionally done.

## I. CHARM FOR UNFRUITFUL LAND

This charm shows a not uncommon mixture of Anglo-Saxon Christianity and paganism. Jolly argues that Christian charms such as this one “are not some kind of ‘Christian magic’ demonstrating the weakness of early medieval Christianity but constitute evidence of the religion’s success in conversion by accommodating Anglo-Saxon culture” (9). The charm contains both symbolic



actions and poetic chants, intended together to promote fertile fields and to ward off any acts of witchcraft that might have tainted or stunted the crop growth in the fields. Portions of sod are dug up to represent the field as a whole (metonymic magic) and are taken to the church, where masses are said over them. Crosses are made to put into the sod-holes under the sod pieces, which are returned in blessed form to the field. The charmist prays to various powers, including his heavenly Lord and Erce, presumably some kind of ancient earth-mother, for help in protecting the field and encouraging the plants to flourish so that fruit and grain together can sustain the lives of people.

### Charm for Unfruitful Land

Here is the remedy for how you may restore or improve your fields if they do not grow well, or if some harm has been done to them by sorcery or witchcraft. At night, just before dawn, take four pieces of sod from the four sides or corners of the field. Mark them and arrange them as they stood before. Then take oil, honey, yeast, and milk from each of the cows on that land, and a part of every kind of tree growing on that land except hardwoods, and a piece of every well-known herb except buckbean—and pour holy water on them and let it drip three times on the underside of the pieces of sod, saying: “*Crescite*, grow, and *multiplicamini*, multiply, *et replete*, and fill, *terre*, the earth. *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti sit benedicti* [In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, may you be blessed].” And say the Pater Noster as often as the other. 5

And then carry the pieces of sod into the church and let the mass priest sing four masses over them, and let the green, grassy side be turned toward the altar; and after that let someone carry the carry the pieces of sod to the field where they were before. Do this before the sun sets. Then make four crosses of quickbeam or aspen and write or carve upon the end of each: *Matheus* and *Marcus* [Matthew and Mark], *Lucas* and *Iohannes* [Luke and John]. Lay a cross in the bottom of each hole where the sod has been cut, saying: “*Crux Matheus, Crux Marcus, Crux Lucas, Crux Sanctus Iohannes*” [Cross Matthew, Cross Mark, Cross Luke, Cross Saint John]. Then take the pieces of sod and put them down on the crosses and say nine times these words, “*Crescite* . . . [grow],” and the Pater Noster as often as that. Then turn toward the east and bow humbly nine times, saying these words: 15 20 25

Eastward I stand and pray for this land.  
 I pray for pity, I pray for favor.  
 I pray to the God of glory, to the Lord of power,  
 I pray to the holy Guardian of heaven's kingdom, 30  
 I pray to the earth, I pray to the sky,  
 I pray to the true Saint Mary, the holy Mother,  
 To the power of heaven in the highest of halls—  
 That through heaven's healing and the gift of grace,  
 I can open up this field-charm with my thought, 35  
 Invoke its magic with my mighty words,  
 Singing up shoots, gathering up green life,  
 Filling the fertile earth by my firm faith,  
 Making beautiful grasslands and meadows,  
 As the old psalmist, the wise one said, 40  
 That a farmer should find favor on earth  
 Who gave alms to the poor and practiced  
 His faith according to the will of the Lord.

Then turn three times with the course of the sun, stretch yourself out  
 on the length of the ground and say these litanies: "*Sanctus, sanctus,*  
*sanctus*" [Holy, holy, holy], to the end. Then sing *Benedicite* with out- 45  
 stretched arms and *Magnificat* and the Pater Noster three times, and  
 commend the land to Christ and to Saint Mary and to the sacred cross  
 in praise and worship and for the benefit of the person who owns the  
 land and all those who work and serve under him. When all that is 50  
 done, take uncertain seed from beggars and give back to them twice as  
 much as you took. Then gather together all the plowing tools and bore  
 a hole in the plow-beam and put in it incense and fennel and hallowed  
 salve and salt. Then take the seed and set it on the body of the plow,  
 saying: 55

Erce, Erce, Erce, Mother of earth,  
 May the eternal, all-powerful Lord grant you  
 Spirited fields, sprouting and greening,  
 Budding and blooming, flowering and flourishing,  
 Growing and graining, heavy with harvest— 60  
 Bright shafts of millet, broad fields of barley,  
 White stalks of wheat, all the crops of the earth.  
 May the eternal Lord and his holy saints in heaven

Grant that this farm be protected against any foe,  
 This land delivered from every evil curse, 65  
 From spells and seed-poisons sown by witches.  
 Now I pray to the Lord, who created this land,  
 Who shaped this world, that no unholy, conjuring  
 Witch-woman and no devious, crafty witch-man  
 May have the power to unmake these mighty words, 70  
 Unseal this song, undo this charm.

Then let the plow be driven out and the first furrow cut, and say:

Hail, blessed earth, mother of men—  
 Be whole and hearty, fertile and fulfilling.  
 Grow bountiful and flourish in God's embrace, 75  
 Bearing fruit and grain for the benefit of men.

Then take each kind of flour and have a loaf baked into bread about  
 the size of the inside of your hand, knead it with milk and holy water,  
 and lay it under the first furrow, saying:

Field full of food for all of mankind, 80  
 Brightly blooming, may you be blessed  
 In the holy name of the Lord, who created  
 Heaven and earth, sky and land,  
 The fields of the earth that we inhabit.  
 Our heavenly God, who shaped this ground, 85  
 Grant us abundance, the gift of growing,  
 Firm fruit and grain to feed and sustain us.

Then say three times, "*Crescite, in nomine Patris sit benedicti*" [Grow in  
 the name of the Father and may you be blessed], and also "Amen" and  
 the Pater Noster three times. 90

## 2. NINE HERBS CHARM

This is a charm that celebrates the powers of nine different herbs in curing a  
 variety of illnesses and infections. According to Jolly, "These nine herbs were

effective against various kinds of invisible, malicious ills, such as poison, worms, and ‘flying venoms,’ possibly airborne infections” (127). There is a potency in each plant that must be energized or brought to life by the magical words of the charmer. The exact herbs referred to in the OE text have been much debated. I have used the identifications made by Cameron (145–47). The sequence of lines in the middle section of the charm (lines 35–45 in the translation) is also much debated. I have followed the suggestions and readings of Gratton and Singer (153) and Storms (188–89), which are slightly different than those of Dobbie (1942, 119–20), in order to place the last two herbs together with the first seven before the Woden section. In the last section of the poem, Woden comes to the aid of the charmer with the nine herbs. Storms says, “He takes nine glory-twigs, by which are meant nine runes, that is nine twigs with the initial letters in runes of the plants representing the power inherent in them, and using them as weapons he smites the serpent with them” (195). The serpent probably represents both the danger of being bitten by a venomous snake and also various poisonous ills and infections. It might also represent general evil in a culturally melded conflict between Woden and the devil.

### Nine Herbs Charm

Remember, Mugwort, what you meant to disclose,  
 What you revealed and established at Regenmeld.  
 You are Una, the one, the oldest of herbs,  
 With might against three and might against thirty,  
 Might against poison and might against infection, 5  
 Might against the loathsome who roam the land.  
 And you, powerful Plantain, mother of herbs,  
 Open from the east, so mighty within—  
 Over you have ridden chariots and queens,  
 Brides and children, carts and snorting bulls. 10  
 All of this hard stepping you have withstood,  
 Resisted and repelled. May you now withstand  
 Venom and infection, and all the wandering ills,  
 Those hateful ones who roam the land.  
 This herb is Lamb’s Cress—it grew on stone; 15  
 It withstands poison and pushes back pain.  
 It’s a valiant warrior against all venom,  
 Treats all toxins, braves all banes.

This is the herb that strove with the serpent,  
 Battled the worm; it has power against poison 20  
 And power against secret, slithering infections,  
 And power against the loathsome who roam the land.  
 And now, Attorlothe the venom-hater,  
 Attack these foes, the fiercer poisons,  
 As you are subtle, and the subtler poisons, 25  
 As you are strong, till you cure them both.  
 Remember, Chamomile, what you revealed  
 And what you accomplished at Alorford—  
 That no one's life would end with infection  
 Or some unknown, evil, airborne illness, 30  
 If they had Chamomile or Mayweed as a meal.  
 This is the herb that is known as Nettle,  
 That the seal sent over the ridges of the sea  
 To heal the horror of other strong venoms.  
 It stands against pain and pushes back poison; 35  
 It has power against three and power against thirty,  
 Against the fiend's fist or its sudden attack,  
 Against the wily witchcraft of evil creatures.  
 Then Crabapple and poison struggled so  
 That the venomous one had to leave the house. 40  
 Chervil and Fennel are two mighty herbs  
 Created by the Lord, holy and wise,  
 As he hung in heaven; he established each,  
 Set them up and sent them to the seven worlds  
 As a remedy and cure for the rich and poor. 45

These nine herbs have power against nine poisons.  
 A worm came crawling but killed nothing.  
 A serpent came stealing but stung no one.  
 Then Woden grabbed the nine glory-twigs  
 And struck the adder so it burst into nine pieces. 50  
 These nine herbs hold power over nine demons—  
 Against nine hell-fliers, nine dark spells,  
 Against nine poisons, against nine infections,  
 Against the red venom, against the reeking venom,  
 Against the white venom, against the purple venom, 55  
 Against the yellow venom, against the green venom,

Against the dark poison, against the blue poison,  
 Against the brown poison, against the crimson poison,  
 Against worm-blister, against water-blister,  
 Against thorn-blister, against thistle-blister, 60  
 Against ice-blister, against poison-blister—  
 Should any powerful poison, any vicious venom,  
 Come flying in from the east or the north,  
 From the west or the south, over the world of men.  
 Christ stood over all the old illnesses, 65  
 All the evil and malevolent creatures.

Now I alone know the running waters,  
 The healing streams where the nine adders  
 Are held watching for the nine herbs.  
 Let the herbs spring up from their roots, 70  
 Their roots spring up from the earth.  
 Let the saltwater seas relax and roll,  
 As I breathe and blow this poison out,  
 As I suck and spit this venom out.

Take mugwort and plantain which open to the east, along with lamb's  
 cress, attorlothe, chamomile, nettle, crabapple, chevril, fennel, and old  
 soap. Grind the herbs into powder, then mix them with the soap and  
 the pulp of the apple. Make a paste of water and ashes. Take the fennel  
 and boil it in the paste, and bathe it with an egg mixture when you  
 apply it both before and after. Sing the charm over each of the herbs 80  
 three times before you prepare them and also over the apple; then sing  
 the charm into the patient's mouth, into both of his ears, and sing the  
 same charm also on the wound before you apply the salve.

### 3. CHARM AGAINST A DWARF (FEVER)

This charm is probably meant for someone suffering from a disease with a high fever since such fevers are often associated with dwarves' evil power in OE medical literature. Cameron says that "*dweorb* has almost always been translated as 'dwarf,' which may be its primitive meaning, but there is ample evidence in other Old English medical texts that it also means 'fever,' apparently

fever accompanied by delirium or convulsive seizures” (152). Gratton and Singer (163) explain that the seven names mentioned in the charm’s introduction are the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, Christians who fled from the Emperor Decius (249–51) and who hid in a cave, only to be walled up and left for dead. The tradition has it that many years later, when the Roman Empire had converted to Christianity, the cave was opened and the sleepers awoke. Storms notes that the Seven Sleepers are often used against fevers in the charms.

### Charm Against a Dwarf (Fever)

Against a dwarf (fever), you should take seven little wafers like the ones used in the sacrament and write these names on each of the wafers: Maximianus, Malcus, Johannes, Martinianus, Dionysius, Constantinus, and Serafion. Then you must sing the charm mentioned below, first into the left ear, then into the right ear, then on top of the patient’s head. Then let a maiden go up to the patient and hang this (the wafer-bag) around his neck. Do this for three days and then he will be well. 5

Here came a spider-creature crawling in;  
 His web was a harness held in his hand.  
 Stalking, he said that you were his steed. 10  
 Then he threw his net around your neck,  
 Reining you in. Then they both began  
 To rise from the land, spring from the earth.  
 As they leapt up, their limbs grew cool.  
 Then the spider-dwarf’s sister jumped in, 15  
 Ending it all by swearing these oaths:  
 No hurt should come to harm the sick,  
 No pain to the patient who receives this cure,  
 No harm to the one who sings this charm.

Amen. Let it be done. 20

## 4. CHARM FOR A SUDDEN STITCH

This is a charm against something called *ferstice*, some sort of “sudden sharp, terrifying pain.” The word is found only in this charm. Cameron says that it is “probable that *ferstice* meant any sudden pain anywhere in the body, such as a

muscular cramp, a joint pain (which might be rheumatism), a ‘stitch in the side’ from overexertion or even an angina pain or lumbago” (141), and that “there is good evidence that many ailments which appear suddenly were once thought to be caused by elves or witches shooting arrows at the sufferer” (142). Jolly notes that the charm “invokes ancient stories of powerful heroes and spiritual battles, particularly the image of the militant Æsir, but portrays the pagan pantheon as malicious aggressors defeated by superior power” (140). The charm uses magical words to undo the power of those enemies who shoot pain-darts into the body of the sufferer. The reference to the blade at the end of the charm may mean that some sort of surgery was being performed while the charm was being chanted.

### Charm for a Sudden Stitch

Boil feverfew and plantain and the red nettle that grows in the grain—  
boil in butter, saying:

Loud, they were loud, riding over the mound,  
Fierce and resolute, riding over the land.  
Find a shield for their evil and save yourself. 5  
Get out, little spear, if you are in here.  
I stood under linden, under a light-shield,  
When the mighty women stole strength  
And sent screaming spears against my skin.  
I will send them back an answering spear, 10  
An arrow flying back at their savage front.  
Get out, little spear, if you are in here.  
A smith sat shaping a little knife,  
Forging a blade, a wounding iron.  
Get out, little spear, if you are in here. 15  
Six smiths sat, shaping slaughter-spears.  
Get out, little spear. Don’t stay in here.  
If there is any iron stitch in here,  
The work of witches, let it melt in here.  
If you were shot in skin or shot in flesh, 20  
Or shot in blood or shot in bone,  
Or shot in limb, may your life be unscathed.  
If you were shot by Æsir or shot by elves,  
Or shot by hags, I will help you now.



Take this for Æsir-shot, this for elf-shot,  
 This for hag-shot—this will help and heal.  
 Fly out, fly away, to the woods or hills.  
 Be whole, be healthy. May the Lord help you.  
 Take this knife now and wash it in water.

25

## 5. CHARM FOR LOSS OF PROPERTY OR CATTLE

This charm is meant to be spoken after one's property has been stolen. Hollis says that this type of charm "consist[s] of instructions for a performance (involving words and actions), which are to be carried out by the owner of *ceap* (valuables, particularly livestock) as soon as a theft is known to have occurred" (144). Lines 8–16 have alternating lines of OE and Latin (the Latin lines are those in italics), and this may indicate that such charms "were developed and used by priests who ministered to the laity" (161).

### Charm for Loss of Property or Cattle

When someone tells you that your cattle or goods are lost or stolen,  
 then before you do anything else, you should say:

Bethlehem is the town where Christ was born—  
 Its name is known all over middle-earth;  
 So let this deed also be openly known  
 By the might of the holy cross of Christ.

5

Amen.

Then pray three times to the east and say three times:

*Crux Christi ab oriente reducað*

[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the east].

10

Then pray three times to the west and say three times:

*Crux Christi ab occidente reducat*

[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the west].

Then pray three times to the south and say three times:

*Crux Christi ab austro reducat*

[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the south].

15

Then pray three times to the north and say three times:

*Crux Christi ab aquilone reducãd;*

*Crux Christi abscondita est et inuenta est*

[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the north;

20

The cross of Christ was hidden and is found].

The Jews crucified Christ, the cruelest of crimes.

Then they hid what they could not conceal.

So may this deed be uncovered and made clear

Through the power of the holy cross of Christ.

25

Amen.

## 6. CHARM FOR BIRTHING DIFFICULTIES

This is a charm against a variety of birthing difficulties. It contains a number of symbolic actions intended to protect the mother from the forces that led to the death of a previous baby. Storms notes that “the woman’s stepping across the grave signifies that she is victorious, that she is stronger than death” (199). When she becomes pregnant again, she repeats the stepping-over gesture of power, this time over her husband in bed, who is hopefully the bringer of a new life and not another death. When she feels the child moving in her womb, the woman must go to church to thank Christ for the living child and invoke his power for sustaining the child. Then she must put away her fear and grief associated with the death of the former child by taking some dirt from the grave of that child, wrapping it in black wool, and selling it off. This symbolically rids her of the old evil. Then to ensure that she has sufficient milk for the child, she must sip milk from a cow of a single color (representing no mixed motives or forces?), spit it into running water, and drink from the stream. This magically ensures that her milk will flow as forcefully as the stream. Finally, she must celebrate the strength of the baby that will be nourished by her milk and affirm her desire to bear the baby successfully and take it home. When she returns from the stream, she must go to a house different from the one where she departed, representing a new kind of birth experience from the previous deadly one, and there she must enjoy a celebratory feast to strengthen her body for the baby.

## Charm for Birthing Difficulties

A woman who has trouble with birthing should go to a dead person's grave and step over it three times and say three times:

Here is my help against the harmful late birth,  
 Here is my help against the painful slow birth,  
 Here is my help against the hateful lame birth.

5

And when the woman is pregnant and she goes to bed with her lord and husband, she should say:

Up I go, lifting my lap. I step over you  
 With a living child, not with a dying child,  
 With a full-born child, not with a doomed child.

10

And when the mother feels that the child is alive within her, she should go to church, and when she comes before the altar, she should say:

I have said by Christ that it is made manifest.

The woman who cannot bring her child to term should take part of the grave of her own deceased child, wrap it up in black wool and sell it to merchants, saying:

15

I sell it to you, you should buy it from me—  
 This dark wool, the seeds of sorrow, the grains of grief.

The woman who cannot bring her child to term must take the milk of a cow of one color in her hand, sip a little milk in her mouth, and then go to running water and spit the milk into it. Then with the same hand she should take a mouthful of that water and swallow it, saying:

20

Everywhere I have carried my strong son,  
 Strong because of this mighty mouthful.  
 Let me have my will and have this baby—  
 This is the child I will have and take home.

25

When she goes to the stream, she must not turn around or look back.  
 When she leaves the stream, she must not turn around or look back.

When she comes back, she should go into a different house from the one where she departed, and there eat some food.

30

## 7. CHARM FOR THE WATER-ELF-DISEASE

This charm for *water-elf-adl*, “water-elf-disease,” like a number of others for elf-diseases in the OE medical texts, seems to deal with skin eruptions of some sort. Cameron says that it “appears to have designated cutaneous eruptions of various kinds . . . a skin ailment having a watery manifestation” (154). Storms believes the disease in question here is chicken pox since “its symptoms are a burning feeling on the affected spots, and when the sores burst a liquid runs out and infects other parts of the body,” and argues that the “way in which chicken-pox appear and disappear may well have given rise to the belief that a mischievous elf was playing his tricks” (160). Cameron suggests measles as another possible disease in which the eyes become oversensitive to light (155).

### Charm for the Water-Elf-Disease

If someone has the water-elf-disease, then his fingernails will be livid and his eyes watery, and he will want to look down. Make this his medicine: boarthroat, hassock, the lower portion of iris, yewberry, lupin, elecampane, marshmallow tops, fenmint, dill, lily, attorlothe, pennyroyal, horehound, dock, elder, centaury, wormwood, strawberry leaves, comfrey. Soak them in ale and add holy water. Sing this charm three times:

5

I have written down the fiercest troops,  
An army of herbs to combat this disease.  
I have wrapped these wounds with the best war-bandages  
So they will not fester, burn, or burst.  
They will not swell up, spread, or spoil.  
The wounds will not flourish or the sores go deep.  
Let the patient hold this holy cup of healing.  
Let it ache no more that your ear might ache  
With a mud poultice or the earth might ache  
With a good growth of grain in the ground.

10

15

Sing this many times: “May the earth diminish you and bear you off with all its power and protection.” This charm may be sung over a wound.

20

## 8. CHARM FOR A SWARM OF BEES

Storms explains the meaning and purpose of this charm: “It is meant to make a swarm of bees come down in the neighbourhood of the bee-keeper, and to prevent them from flying away too far and getting lost” (133). He points out that “honey was in great demand among the Anglo-Saxons, indeed it was the only sweetening stuff they possessed,” noting that “it was required as the principal ingredient of mead, and it is repeatedly mentioned in medical prescriptions throughout the *Leechbook* and *Lacnunga*: sweeten with honey” (133). The beekeeper throws earth or dust in the air to settle the bees. This is probably both practical (it may actually settle the bees down) and magical (power over the earth equals power over the bees). The potentially dangerous bees are also metaphorically equated in the poem with human evils such as the “slandering tongues of man.” Both beekeeper and the culture at large need to calm down the potential stingers and keep them productive and sustaining.

### Charm for a Swarm of Bees

For a swarm of bees, take earth and throw it down with your right hand under your right foot, saying:

I catch it under foot—under foot I find it.  
 Look! Earth has power over all creatures,  
 Over grudges, over malice, over evil rites,  
 Over even the mighty, slanderous tongue of man.

5

Afterwards as they swarm, throw earth over them, saying:

Settle down, little victory-women, down on earth—  
 Stay home, never fly wild to the woods.  
 Be wise and mindful of my benefit,  
 As every man remembers his hearth and home,  
 His life and land, his meat and drink.

10

## 9. CHARM FOR THEFT OF CATTLE

Whereas Charm 5 is intended to effect the return of stolen cattle or goods, this charm is meant to stave off the stealing. Hollis says of this charm: “It is apparently designed for recitation by shepherds and herdsmen,” noting that “it is capable of functioning as a night-spell (that is, as a means of protecting livestock and other property against theft before retiring to sleep), but is more appropriate for use when livestock are missing, in order to avert the possibility of theft” (142). The identity of Garmund, who is conjured to find and return the missing cattle, remains in doubt. Is he really a good shepherd and servant of God, or is he potentially just another mischievous thief (like Mak in *The Second Shepherds’ Play* in the later medieval Wakefield mystery cycle)? There is some question as to whether the opening lines, or at least the last three of them, are prose or poetry. I have followed Storms in my reading of them as being a kind of rhythmical prose or flexible poetry.

### Charm for Theft of Cattle

Let nothing I own be stolen or hidden in secret,  
 Any more than Herod could secret away our Lord.  
 I have thought often of Saint Helena,  
 And I have thought of Christ hanged on the cross,  
 So I think of finding these cattle, not of their stealing away, 5  
 Of knowing where they are and keeping them safe,  
 Of holding them dear, not of harming them in any way.

Now let that fellow Garmund, servant of God,  
 Find those cattle and carry back those cattle,  
 Control those cattle and keep those cattle, 10  
 And finally bring back home those cattle.  
 May he never have land to lead them to,  
 Or a place to put them or carry them to,  
 Or a house or pen to confine them in.  
 If anyone steals them, may it never succeed. 15  
 Within three nights, I shall know his might;  
 Within three days, I shall know his power,  
 What he hopes to keep, and make him pay.  
 Let him perish as wood is consumed by fire,  
 Let the thief be weak and fragile as thistle, 20

Who dreams of driving away these cattle  
Or desires to carry off these precious goods.

Amen.

## 10. CHARM FOR LOSS OF PROPERTY OR CATTLE

Dobbie notes that “Charm 5 and Charm 10 represent two separate versions of the same original, Charm 5 being somewhat superior textually” (1942, cxxxvi). There are several minor variations in the two charms.

### Charm for Loss of Property or Cattle

This must be said by someone who has been robbed of his cattle or some of his goods. He should say this before he says any other words:

Bethlehem is the town where Christ was born—  
It is known all over middle-earth;  
So let this deed also be openly known—  
*Per cruce[m] Christi* [by the cross of Christ].

5

Then pray three times to the east and say three times:  
*Crux Christi ab oriente reducat*  
[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the east].

And three times to the west and say:

*Crux Chriti ab occidente reducat*

[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the west].

And three times to the south and say:

*Crux Christi a meridie reducat*

[Let the cross of Christ bring it back from the south].

And three times to the north and say:

*Crux Christi abscondita sunt et inuenta est*

[The cross of Christ has been hidden and is found].

The Jews hung Christ, the cruelest of crimes.

Then they hid what they could not conceal.

So may this deed be uncovered and made clear

*Per cruce[m] Christi* [through the power of Christ’s cross].

10

15

20

## II. JOURNEY CHARM

This charm retains a few pagan elements, but it turns mostly to religious images to stave off the concatenation of evils that may beset the wary traveler. Storms notes this religious tone, saying that this charm is “a typical instance of the change that has come over magic,” adding that “the intensity and the emotional depth of the magical atmosphere [here] . . . has given way to another emotional atmosphere, namely that of popular religion, and the forces evoked by performing magical actions and pronouncing magical words have been replaced to a large extent by the power of God, the Creator of heaven and earth” (220).

### Journey Charm

I surround myself and protect myself  
 With this rod, this staff, this drawn circle,  
 And commend myself to God’s grace—  
 Against the sore stitch, the sudden stab,  
 Against the fierce blow, the sore bite, 5  
 Against the sudden terror, the savage onslaught,  
 The hostile dread that is hateful to everyone.  
 Against every evil that lurks in the land,  
 I carry a victory-staff and chant a victory-song,  
 A charm of overcoming, of overthrowing, 10  
 Of winning over by the word and by the deed.  
 May this victory avail me. May no nightmare  
 Haunt my head, no might overpower me,  
 No drowning devour me. May I easily escape  
 All evil that intends to attack and afflict me, 15  
 Every fierce foe that makes me fear for my life.  
 May almighty God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
 The glorious Lord, cure and console me,  
 Protect and save me as I have heard.  
 I call to my aid against all evil foes 20  
 Abraham and Isaac and such holy men,  
 Moses and Jacob, David and Joseph,  
 Eve and Anna and also Elizabeth,  
 Zacharias and Mary, mother of Christ,



And also the brothers, Peter and Paul, 25  
 Along with a throng, thousands of angels.  
 May they guide me and keep me as I go along,  
 Protect my journey, watch over my way.  
 May they shield me from all my evil enemies,  
 Protect me from harm, and preserve my life. 30  
 May a band of angels, a host of saints,  
 Be the hand of blessing, the hand of protection,  
 And the hope of glory over my head.  
 Let Matthew be my helmet, Mark my mail-coat,  
 The bravely radiant light of my life, 35  
 Luke my sword, sharp and shimmering,  
 A blade against bale, an edge against evil,  
 John my shield, my defense and shelter,  
 The Seraph, my deadly adorned spear.  
 As I go forth, may I find friends, 40  
 Keep the company of angels, the counsel of the wise.  
 Now I pray for favor from the God of victory,  
 For a safe journey and light, steady winds  
 Leading to the shore. I have heard of harsh storms  
 And roiling waters, the savage sea, 45  
 But let me be safe and secure against all dangers,  
 Terrible demons, fiendish foes.  
 Let me meet with friends, live in the shelter  
 Of almighty God, protected from the evil one  
 Who harrows and harasses my coming and going, 50  
 Who seeks to assault me and steal my life.  
 Let me live with the Lord in his power and protection  
 With my heart in his hand, my soul in his keeping,  
 So that I may travel under the comforting shield  
 Of heaven's hold, the angels' bright aid, 55  
 And the glory of God as long as I live.

Amen.

## 12. CHARM FOR WENS (OR TUMORS)

Storms explains the purpose of this charm: “It serves as a cure against wens, and in order to make them disappear, a threat is uttered against the disease spirit, and a number of comparisons that stress the annihilation of some object are chanted, so that finally nothing of the wen will remain” (156). The charmist here makes use of powerful natural creatures through metonymic magic (part for the whole) by taking parts of them (wolf’s paw, eagle’s wing) and using them to threaten the invading tumor. He or she also uses metaphoric magic (things alike are the same) by equating the wen with coal, dirt, a worm, etc.—all of which may be contained or conquered. Finally, the wen is shriveled smaller and smaller until it “becomes something that is not” and disappears.

### Charm for Wens (or Tumors)

Wen, wen, chicken-wen,  
 Build no house to enter in,  
 No town to hold. Go north, wretch,  
 To the neighboring hill where your brother waits  
 With a leaf for your head. Under wolf’s paw, 5  
 Under eagle’s wing, under eagle’s claw,  
 May you shrivel like coal in the catch of fire,  
 Disappear like dirt on the wall, water in a bucket,  
 Tiny as linseed, smaller than a hand-worm’s  
 Hip-bone, smaller than something that is not. 10

# ADDITIONAL POEMS





## INTRODUCTION

We were once the long-lost children—  
Unseen, undiscovered, wandering the way,  
While everyone else in our far-flung family  
Came together to be acknowledged and accepted  
Between the boards. Sometimes we wonder  
Why it's taken scholars so long to find us.  
Some of us were hiding out in old histories,  
Concealed in prose; some of us were carved  
On brooches, rings, and memorial stones.  
Some of us were holy hymns or proverbs;  
Some of us were tucked away in homilies;  
Some of us were lost in forgotten leaves.  
Many of us were born late and sang  
In a middling tongue. We tried to be strong,  
But sometimes stressed, we resorted to rhyme.  
Now we're found and can join our family.  
Welcome us home by saying who we are.

A number of Old English poems or poetic fragments that were not included in the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* are included in this section. What to count as an OE poem occasionally becomes problematic, especially in cases where what look like possible lines of poetry are embedded in rhythmical prose or where quasi-poetic passages occur in documents written late in the Anglo-Saxon period when the metrical norms become more fluid and the line of demarcation between Old and Middle

English becomes a bit indistinct (see, for example, N. F. Blake, 1969, on “rhythmical alliteration”). For a good introduction to the difficulty of distinguishing between prosaic verse and rhythmical prose, see the discussions in Wright (2002), Bredehoft (2005), Trahern (2008), and Beechy (2010b). There is also the question of whether single-line inscriptions or marginalic comments can be considered poetry in any fundamental sense, even when they obey the metrical rules of OE verse. In deciding which poems and fragments to include here, I have consulted various post-*ASPR* lists of poems such as those of Fulk and Cain (237, n. 31); Swanton for passages in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (106, n. 4); Frank and Cameron for texts in the *Dictionary of Old English* (42–43); Robinson and Stanley in their facsimile edition; and Bergman in her supplement to the Anglo-Saxon Concordance to *ASPR*. Unfortunately, there is not complete agreement about which texts should be included in a post-*ASPR* section such as this. My decisions have been made from my vantage point not only as a scholar but also as a translator and poet. Where a fragment or part of a prosaic text strikes me as having its own integrity as a poem, even a very short one, I have included it here. Where some late poems seem a mixture of Old and Middle English, I have sometimes included them, especially in cases that seem to reflect earlier Old English treatments and themes. I have tried to be liberal in my inclusion, especially in cases where a scholar or editor has made a reasonably convincing argument about the selection’s poetic nature. In a collection of this sort, it seemed to me better to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Even though *The Complete Old English Poems* sounds definitive, no collection of this sort can ever hope to satisfy all readers with its rules of inclusion and exclusion, whether based on metrical norms, notions of organic unity, period of supposed composition, or poetic appeal. If readers take issue with my choices here, I can only offer a *mea culpa* in appropriate medieval fashion.

## ADDITIONAL POEMS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE

**D**obbie includes six poems from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in *ASPR*, volume VI (see “Minor Poems”). A number of other poetic passages have been identified by editors and scholars in the *Chronicle* manuscripts since *ASPR*. There is some debate about whether the rhythmical passages, which utilize alliteration and rhyme, often in inconsistent ways, should count as poems, but most of the passages below are noted by Fulk and Cain (69; 243, n. 23) or printed as poems by one or more of the editors and translators. The translated verses below are accompanied by a brief explanation of the prose passage which encapsulates each poetic text and occasionally by an excerpt of the prose passage itself. The year of the entry in the *Chronicle* for each poem is indicated in parentheses in the title.

### I. THE ACCESSION OF EDGAR (959)

This entry from the Peterborough Manuscript (E) begins with a prose introduction about King Eadwig’s death and then proceeds with a praise poem of sorts about his brother Edgar’s succession and his accomplishments. In her edition, Whitelock calls this passage “alliterative prose” (74, n. 10). Fulk and Cain call it “broadly rhythmical,” and treat it as poetry, noting that its “stylistic traits strongly suggest that it was the homilist Wulfstan who adapted this text for use in the *Chronicle*” (69). Swanton (114–15) treats this as prose. The passage celebrates King Edgar’s enlightened leadership but takes issue with his interest in foreign or heathen customs.

## The Accession of Edgar (959)

In this year King Eadwig died and his brother Edgar succeeded him.

Everything improved and prospered in his reign.  
 God granted him a peaceful life as long as he lived.  
 He loved God's law and raised up his glory,  
 Praising him always, promoting his works. 5  
 He improved security and promoted the peace  
 More than any king who had come before him  
 In the memory of mankind. God gave him aid,  
 Supported and sustained him so that kings and earls  
 Submitted to him on earth. He worked God's will. 10  
 He was admired in all countries in the wide world  
 For honoring God's name, contemplating his laws,  
 Counseling people wisely in complex matters  
 Of church and state. He had only one fault:  
 He was always interested in heathen customs 15  
 And invited foreigners, harmful outsiders,  
 Into this land. But may God grant him this—  
 That his virtues outweigh his vices, his faith  
 Outweigh his faults, so that his good works  
 May be a shield to his soul on its everlasting journey. 20

## 2. PRINCE EDWARD'S RETURN (1057)

This passage from the Worcester Manuscript (D) is treated as poetry by some but not all editors. It praises Prince Edward, who was exiled by King Cnut to Hungary for some unknown reason, and speaks of his return at last to England, where he died suddenly, to the distress of the nation.

### Prince Edward's Return (1057)

In this year Prince Edward came to England,  
 Nephew of King Edmund, known as Ironside  
 For his great bravery. King Cnut had banished  
 The worthy prince into Hungary, betraying him,



But he grew up there to be a good man, 5  
 As God granted him and as it suited him,  
 So that he took the emperor's kinswoman Agatha  
 As a wife and raised a fine family with her.  
 No one knows why he was exiled from his uncle,  
 King Edmund. Alas! It was a cruel fate 10  
 And a great harm to all of his kith and kin  
 That he ended his life so quickly after he came  
 Into England. It was a source of great sorrow,  
 A web of woe, for the people of this nation.

### 3. MALCOLM AND MARGARET (1067)

The *Chronicle* entry for 1067 in the Worcester Manuscript (D) describes how Prince Edgar went with his mother Agatha, his sisters Margaret and Christina, and also Mærleswein, the sheriff of Lincoln, to Scotland, where King Malcolm desired to marry Edgar's sister Margaret. Both Margaret and her family initially opposed the marriage because she desired to serve God as a chaste maiden. Ultimately, the family was persuaded to approve the marriage, and the chronicler says that this actually worked out well (even though Margaret came reluctantly to be wed) because "she was meant to increase the glory of God in that land and turn the king and all of his people from the path of error."

Lines 5–10 of the translation below have been considered poetry by some but not all editors (see Bredehoft, 2010, 32, n. 3, for a summary). Bredehoft (2010), however, has recently argued that the larger passage here should be considered poetry by the standards of late Old English verse. Swanton notes that the passage "is rhetorically heightened and may derive from some *Life of St. Margaret*" (201, n. 15). Bredehoft summarizes the passage as follows:

It begins with Malcolm's wooing of Margaret (including her initial refusal), and it concludes with a general statement of her accomplishments in his country. The two references to scripture (one referring to Matthew 10.29; the other a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 7.14) bracket the reference to the actual marriage, and both serve (in context) to articulate the salutary effects of Margaret's religious feeling upon her husband. The parallelism—as well as the scriptural content—serves to

emphasize the power of God’s will in the circumstances and results of the marriage. (2010, 38–39)

My poetic translation is based on Bredehoff’s edition (2010) and is indebted to his prose translation in several respects.

### Malcolm and Margaret (1067)

Then King Malcolm began to desire  
 Edgar’s sister Margaret to be his wife,  
 But Edgar and his men resisted this  
 And argued against it for a long time.  
 Margaret swore that she would never be 5  
 The king’s bride if God’s great mercy  
 Would grant her the grace to keep pure and chaste  
 In her bodily heart, to take no man,  
 But serve the Almighty with her maidenhood  
 As well as she might in this brief life. 10  
 The king persisted and pressed her brother  
 Until he relented, saying “Yes” in response,  
 And indeed he dared not refuse the king  
 Because they were guests in his own country  
 And under his rule. So it came to pass, 15  
 As surely God had seen from the beginning  
 (Otherwise it could never have happened),  
 Just as the Lord himself says in his Gospel  
 That not even a sparrow can fall into a snare  
 Without his foreseeing. The foreknowing Creator 20  
 Knew from the beginning what he would do  
 With respect to Margaret because she was meant  
 To increase the glory of God in that land  
 And turn the king and all of his people  
 From the path of error to a better way, 25  
 So they could give up their sinful customs,  
 The shameful deeds they had always done.  
 So Margaret did as she was meant to do.  
 The king accepted her against her will  
 For her customs and behavior pleased the ruler, 30  
 And he thanked God for giving him

Through his great power such a good mate.  
 Thus Malcolm thoughtfully turned to God  
 And wisely gave up his wicked ways.  
 With regard to this, the apostle Paul, 35  
 A wise teacher of peoples, said:  
*“Salvabitur vir infidelis per mulierem fidelem.  
 Sic et mulier infidelis per virum fidelem (et reliquiae).”*  
 That means in our tongue: “The unbelieving man  
 Is very often made holy and healed 40  
 By means of a true and righteous woman,  
 And likewise is a woman made holy and healed  
 By means of a believing and faithful man.”  
 So the previously mentioned queen Margaret  
 Afterwards performed many worthy acts 45  
 In praise of God throughout the country  
 And prospered in all the affairs of state  
 With great character as was natural for her.

#### 4. THE WEDDING CONSPIRACY AGAINST KING WILLIAM (1075)

This entry occurs as poetry in the Worcester (D) and Peterborough (E) manuscripts. Swanton notes that “the Old English lines form a rhythmic epigram, the version in D with some rhyme” (212, n. 2). The passage explains that King William gave to Earl Ralph of Norfolk, lord of Gael in Brittany, the daughter of William fitz Osbern. Ralph was Breton on his mother’s side and English on his father’s side. Earl Ralph was then involved in a Breton conspiracy against the king, which apparently began to take shape at the wedding. The first poetic line in the passage is a grim epigrammatic summary of the effects of the wedding plot. Eventually King William imprisoned the plotters, and all the Bretons who were at the wedding were sentenced to a variety of punishments detailed in the second poetic passage.

### The Wedding Conspiracy Against King William (1075)

#### *1. The Wedding Plot*

That bridal-ale was to many men a death-bale.

## 2. *The Punishments*

Some were blinded, some were blamed,  
 Some were exiled, some were shamed.  
 Those betrayers of the king had no prayer—  
 Straightway the traitors were laid low.

## 5. THE RHYME OF KING WILLIAM (1086)

A long entry about King William occurs in the Peterborough Manuscript (E) under the mistaken date of 1087. Swanton notes that “this part of the annal, marked by poetic rhetoric and opening and closing with rhyming couplets, is best set out as a poem” (221, n. 11; see also Whiting). The chronicler talks at length of the terrible storms, fevers, and famine that killed many people, declaring, “Who cannot pity such a time or be so hard-hearted he cannot weep for such woe.” He ascribes such suffering to the sins of the people, especially the king and royal court who “loved gold and silver too much and didn’t care how they came by it.” The chronicler goes on to record William’s death and to summarize his life, noting that the king was a study in contrasts, both gentle and stern, gracious and greedy, power-hungry and protective. The poem in the middle of the entry epitomizes these characteristics with a nod to the darker elements. At the end of the poem, the chronicler admits: “We have written about both the good and evil characteristics of the king in order that good men may imitate the good points and avoid the bad points and travel on the way to heaven.” Whiting discusses the complex rhymes in the poem that occur at the ends of the (sometimes overlong) half-lines. The combination of inconsistent alliteration and perfect and imperfect rhymes makes the poem difficult to translate (compare *The Rhyming Poem* in the Exeter Book), so I have taken some liberties with the placement of the rhymes in the translation.

### The Rhyme of King William (1086)

He had castles built and felt no guilt  
 For crushing the poor, wretched commoners.  
 The king was stark, seizing marks from his subjects,  
 A royal pilfer, pounds of gold and silver.

It was his people's plight, an unright thievery— 5  
 They had little need for the king's greed.  
 He embraced avarice and lost face.  
 He set up game preserves to save animals  
 For himself. It was compassionate self-service.  
 If any man killed hart or hind, he was blinded. 10  
 He loved stag and boar as if he were their father  
 And let hares go free with no kind share  
 Of meat for the common table. Men were unable  
 To feed their families. It was a dark deed.  
 The powerful complained, the poor lamented— 15  
 Everyone was constrained. People everywhere  
 Suffered and were unsustained. He didn't care.  
 This was the law: obey the king's command  
 If you want life and land, a share of property  
 With his royal favor. He was slow to compassion, 20  
 Sharing out woe. Alas, that such pride  
 Should reside in a king's heart, that self-praise  
 Should be raised up as a standard, and no eye  
 Lifted heavenward in honest humility.  
 May God Almighty whom all good men extol 25  
 Forgive his sins and have mercy on his soul.

## 6. THE SUFFERING UNDER KING HENRY (1104)

This passage from the Peterborough Manuscript (E) is almost always edited as poetry. The passage describes and decries the excessive taxes levied by King Henry on the commoners as well as the devastation of land and lives by the king's court as they traveled about the country. The OE lines form a rhymed couplet, *Eall þis was God mid to gremienne / And þas arme leode mid to tregienne* (Plummer and Earle, vol. 1, 239), which can be translated literally, "All this was to anger God / And these wretched people to harass." It is difficult to catch the rhythms, rhymes, and meaning in a simple couplet, so I have expanded the two lines into three and varied the rhyme scheme a little with the off-rhyme in the second line. I include the prose introduction here, which explains the context of the poem.

## The Suffering Under King Henry (1104)

It is not easy to describe the miseries that the country was suffering at this time because of various injustices and taxes which never ceased or diminished. Wherever the king went, there was always, because of his court, the raiding and ravishing of the land and people, and often the burning of houses and the slaughter of men.

5

All this was done in spite and gall  
To God and also to torment and trouble  
Poor, wretched people and harass them all.

## CAPTIONS FOR DRAWINGS

**T**he Junius Manuscript (MS Junius 11) in the Bodleian Library contains a number of ink drawings, some of which have captions (which are listed by Krapp, 1931, xvi–xvii). Bliss noticed that several of the captions were in OE metrical form. The first three have meter and alliteration. The fourth has meter and no alliteration, but since, as Bliss notes, a number of lines in the manuscript follow the same non-alliterative pattern, I have included a translation for it as well.

### Captions for Drawings

*1. Page 3*

Here the angel began to be arrogant.

*2. Page 3*

Here the Savior shaped hell as his torment.

*3. Page 7*

Here he divided day from night.

*4. Page 6*

Here he separated water and earth.

## CNUT'S SONG

**C***nut's Song* appears in the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*. E. O. Blake calls this work “unique among post-Conquest monastic histories in the extensive use it makes . . . of vernacular documents,” adding that “this makes it an important source for the history in pre-Conquest times of an area of England for which evidence is not plentiful” (1962, ix). In section 85 of the history (Blake, 1962, 153–54), the Latin chronicler describes Cnut rowing on the river near Ely and includes the Old English song. Gummere describes the narrative setting and translates the Latin passage immediately leading up to the song as follows: “Cnut, with his queen Emma and divers of the great nobles (*optimatibus regni*), was coming by boat to Ely; and, as they neared land, the King stood up, and told his men to row slowly while he looked at the great church and listened to the song of the monks which came sweetly over the water. “Then he called all who were with him in the boats to make a circle about him, and in the gladness of his heart he bade them join him in song, and he composed in English a ballad (*cantilenam*)” (58). The song, taken by Gummere to be the beginning of an English ballad tradition, includes both alliterative and rhyming elements.

### Cnut's Song

Merrily sang the monks of Ely  
When King Cnut came rowing by.  
“Row, knights, near the land,  
So we can hear these monks sing.”



## DISTICH: PSALM 17:51

In their edition of *The Salisbury Psalter*, the Sisams point out that “Roeder in his edition [BM MS Royal 2B.v, c. 950] notes OE words in the marginal gloss, but does not mention that at 17:51 the interpretation *Omnis rex in antiquis diebus apud Iudeos nominabatur Christus* is translated by an alliterative couplet” (1959, 52–53).

### Distich: Psalm 17:51

Among the Jews in ancient days,  
Each of the kings was called Christ.

## DISTICH ON KENELM

**K**er explains that the distich or couplet on Kenelm and the following one on the Sons of Lothbrok occur as notes on the first leaf of the twelfth-century MS Cambridge, Pembroke College 82. He points out that the Kenelm lines here are “well known from their occurrence, in a slightly different form, in the histories of Roger Wendover and Matthew Paris [and] this seems to be the earliest extant copy of them” (124). The OE verse is accompanied in the manuscript margin by a rhyming Latin version. The Kenelm distich is based on a legend (see Wilson, 99) in which King Coenwulf is said to have died in 821, leaving a son Kenelm, who at the age of seven was acknowledged as king but was slain a few days later. News of Kenelm’s death was carried to Rome by a white dove, bearing a letter that included the couplet. Kenelm is said to have been buried under a thorn bush in a pasture in Worcestershire. Clayton notes that “the eleventh-century life includes a story about one of the cows pastured in the hills eating the grass near where Kenelm was buried and producing twice as much milk as the entire herd together” (391). I am indebted to David McDougall at the *Dictionary of Old English* Project for several suggestions with respect to the translation and notes to this and the following poem.

### Distich on Kenelm

In Clench cow-pasture under a thorn bush  
Lies Kenelm, the king’s child, bereft of his head.

## DISTICH ON THE SONS OF LOTHEBROK

**T**his couplet about the legendary Viking scourge, Ragnarr Loðbrók, and his sons occurs as a note on the first leaf of the MS Cambridge, Pembroke College 82, noted above (Ker, 124). Wilson points out that the lines in the manuscript “are followed by a note in Latin telling how Hubba was slain at ‘Vbbelaue’ in Yorkshire, whilst Beorn, after having destroyed the church at ‘Scapeia’ and violated the nuns there, was engulfed by the earth as he was riding in full armour and with lance erect at ‘Frendesbiri’ near Rochester,” adding that “it is possible that [the lines] may at one time have formed part of a longer poem on the sons of Lothbrog of which the remainder has been lost” (38). David McDougall at the *Dictionary of Old English* Project notes the presence of a “folk-etymological pun, taking the *Loð-* of Ragnarr’s nickname, *Loðbrók*, ‘Shaggy-breech,’ as if ME *loth*, OE *lað*, ‘loathsome, hateful’” (private communication).

### Distich on the Sons of Lothebrok

There were Ynguar and Ubbe—Beorn was the third:  
The sons of Lothebrok were loathsome to Christ.

## FIVE MEMORIAL STONE INSCRIPTIONS

**R**obinson and Stanley identify the following five stone inscriptions as being metrical (28). They are also noted by Page and/or Okasha.

### I. DEWSBURY MEMORIAL (OR STONE CROSS)

This is a Roman-lettered inscription that Okasha identifies as a “carved sandstone, probably incomplete cross-shaft, with incomplete, slightly deteriorated text set without framing lines on one face . . . in insular majuscule, eighth to ninth century” (no. 30, p. 65).

#### Dewsbury Memorial (or Stone Cross)

A monument set here in memory of . . .  
His child [or lord]. Pray for his soul.

### 2. FALSTONE HOGBACK MEMORIAL

Page notes that this memorial stone “has two inscriptions set side by side on the face of the stone [and] both are fragments but enough is left to show that they were substantially the same, one in Roman characters—insular majuscule to be precise—the other in runes” (142). See also Okasha (no. 39, pp. 71–72).

## Falstone Hogback Memorial

A monument set up here in memory  
Of Hroethbeht, his uncle. Pray for his soul.

### 3. GREAT URSWICK MEMORIAL

Page notes that “Great Urswick is a standing monument, with its carved foliage, beads and human figures,” and notes that it dates to the ninth century (141). It contains a metrical runic inscription.

## Great Urswick Memorial

Tunwini set up this monument  
For Torhtred his son. Pray for his soul.

### 4. OVERCHURCH MEMORIAL

Page notes that “the Overchurch stone is a flat slab, presumably designed for a grave [and] its top has animal interlace and the [runic] inscription is in two lines on one of its sides” (142).

## Overchurch Memorial

People raised a monument. Pray for Æthelmund.

### 5. THORNHILL III MEMORIAL

Page identifies this as a ninth-century runic memorial stone, similar in style to the Great Urswick Stone (141–42).

## Thornhill III Memorial

Gilswith raised a memorial on a mound  
In memory of Berhtswith. Pray for her soul.

## GENEALOGICAL VERSE

In his 1823 edition of *The Saxon Chronicle*, Ingram notes in the appendix the existence of a poetic portion of genealogical verse in OE meter that he describes as follows:

To the Saxon genealogy of the kings of Wessex, which properly belongs to the year 494, and is probably the production of King Alfred, an interesting addition may be made from a copy preserved in the Cathedral Library at Rochester, which escaped me before, because it is merged in the miscellaneous volume denominated "Textus Roffensis," compiled by bishop Ernulf, who flourished in the reign of Henry I. As this genealogy is sometimes found prefixed to Alfred's Saxon version of Bede, so here it immediately precedes a copy of his Saxon laws. Those who continued the genealogy from the reign of Alfred to the accession of Edward the martyr seem to have omitted the passage in question as too great an interruption to the series of kings. It is, however, well worthy of occupying the first place in our Appendix, as an early specimen of Saxon poetry, consisting of three irregular stanzas in Cædmonian metre, which may be read thus. (375)

Cerdic, who is mentioned in the poem, is generally considered to be the first of the West Saxon kings. The fact that his name seems to be of Breton origin is cause for some debate. It is possible that the name derives from his mother's side of the family and that his father was an invading Saxon, as the *Chronicle* states, or he may have been a Breton-born leader whose ancestry was given Germanic mythic origins over time.

## Genealogical Verse

So Cerdic was, as I said before,  
The first king to battle the Bretons  
With his brave-hearted war-band  
And secure the land of the West-Saxons.  
His offspring arose and defended the realm  
He had earlier conquered and kept it safe.  
They also seized by the same war-skill  
That God had lent them, wider lands,  
And wisely ruled those realms as well.

## GODRIC'S HYMNS

These poems, sometimes called *Godric's Prayers*, occur in a Latin *Vita* of that saint's life found in MS Royal 5 F.vii in the British Library in London and appear with musical notations. Jones notes that it also is transmitted in numerous other manuscripts (353). Each poem was inspired by a divine visitation to Godric, similar to that which came to Cædmon, as recorded by Bede (see *Cædmon's Hymn*). Treharne explains that "Saint Godric had led a varied life before his decision to become a hermit: he had been a pedlar, and travelled widely as the master of a ship and as a pilgrim" (272). The first hymn is sung by Godric's deceased sister Burgwine in a vision. The second is a hymnal prayer to the Virgin Mary and "represents one of the earliest such Marian lyrics, and illustrates the personal devotion afforded to this saint that was burgeoning by the last decades of the twelfth century" (272). The last poem is a prayer to Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors. The poems contain both alliteration and end-rhyme, which is typical of the late period of OE verse. The combination here is difficult to translate, and I have occasionally expanded the verses slightly to accommodate the complex style. The translation is based on Treharne's edited text.

### Godric's Hymns

#### *1. Hymn of Godric's Sister, Burgwine*

Christ and Saint Mary led me to the sweet  
Holy altar, the footstool of the church,  
That I in this earthly life could never reach,  
Touch or tread, with my poor bare feet.



*2. Hymn to Saint Mary*

Saint Mary, beloved Blessed Virgin,  
 Mother of Jesus Christ the Nazarene,  
 Accept my hymn and help poor Godric—  
 Be my shield as heaven's Queen,  
 Keep me honorably in God's reach.

5

Saint Mary, beauty of Christ's bower,  
 Mother and maiden, purest flower,  
 Erase my sins, rule my mind,  
 Bear me to bliss that I might find  
 Some share of God's embracing power.

10

*3. Hymn to Saint Nicholas*

Saint Nicholas, God's servant dear,  
 Build us a hall, shining and clear,  
 So when we travel from birth to death  
 And move beyond this earthly breath,  
 Saint Nicholas, you can lead us there.

5

## THE GRAVE

**T**he *Grave* was probably composed in the century after the Norman Conquest and is considered Old English by some and Middle English by others. It is an important link between OE poetic traditions and those of the fourteenth-century alliterative revival. Fulk and Cain note that it was “copied onto a blank leaf ca. 1200 in the important homily manuscript Oxford, Bodleian, Bodley 343” (139). Jones notes that “the final three verses [lines 34–38 in the translation] have been added by a later thirteenth-century hand” (36), and Siebert discusses possible sources for these lines. Ricciardi notes, “We have no record of [the manuscript] until 1603, when it was presented to Oxford University by Sir Robert Cotton—assuming the validity of Humphrey Wanley’s identification of it with Cotton’s ‘Sermones Anglici’ in folio” (4–5). In the poem, a narrator addresses a body in the grave somewhat in the manner of the soul in the OE *Soul and Body* poems. Conlee argues that the poem’s “general implications of *memento mori* (especially reminiscent of Job 17:11–16) and its use of specific themes and images found in the early Middle English death lyrics and Body and Soul poems associate *The Grave* with this important group of poems” (4). Woolf points out that the poem “plays with the conceit of the grave as a house, exploiting with ironic wit the discords that arise from this basic metaphor,” noting that “the oddity of the grave, thought of as a house, is stressed: the walls are disproportionately low, there are no doors, and the roof lies immediately above its inhabitant’s chest; and the older idea of the loneliness of the corpse is here expanded into the idea that no friends will call upon the dead to ask him how he likes his new home” (1968, 83). Short adds that the impact of the poem “results as much from the manipulations and embellishments of the rhetori-

cal mode in which it is cast as from the *grave-hus* [grave-house] metaphor inherent in the poem” (299). For the OE text of the poem, see Short, Ricciardi, or Jones.

## The Grave

This house was built before you were born;  
 This mold was made before your making.  
 This soil was shaped before your crawling  
 From your mother’s womb. Grave men  
 Come quietly now to take your measure 5  
 For the measureless ground. The earth’s embrace  
 Is dark and deep. It hems the heart  
 In a harrowing sleep. Take heed.  
 You dream to wake to the day of doom.

No breath remains in your spent body; 10  
 No spirit sings in your soulless flesh.  
 Your house has no rafters, no high halls;  
 It’s low and loathsome where you lie.  
 The sheltering walls slide down inside;  
 The roof-ridge runs too close to your breast. 15  
 The cold creeps into your windowless room.  
 The smell of flesh disturbs your sleep,  
 Your doorless dreaming underground.

You once were free. You found your fate  
 In a house that’s locked against the living. 20  
 Take heed—it’s Death who holds the key.  
 This teeming mulch has always been  
 Your appointed end. Can’t you see?  
 Your house is grim, a home for worms  
 Who are welcomed into a feast of flesh, 25  
 A screech of teeth inside your skin—  
 Your rotting flesh ushers them in.

These are your only friends on earth.  
 No one else will visit you here.  
 No one wants to open your door 30

And share your dinner. It's too late  
To shed some light on your living.  
Soon you will be loathsome to look at—  
Your festering head will lose its hair.  
No one will ever care to comb it again  
Or run gentle fingers through its fine filigree.  
It's all rust and rot in the airless deep—  
No one wants the company you keep.

## HONINGTON CLIP

Hines reports that a small metal artifact, which might be a base silver clip, a pair of tweezers, a gripping instrument of some sort, or “what survives of an object used in liturgical ritual” (272), was found in 2011 in one of the neighboring parishes of Honington in Lincolnshire (its exact location remains a secret, and it was first reported as located in Barkston Parish). It was submitted to the British Museum for identification in 2012 and subsequently acquired by the museum called The Collection in Lincoln. Hines notes that the inscription on the clip “consists of a single row of runes along the outside of each of the arms” (259) and that the runes correspond roughly to the *Benedicite* canticle in lines 362 and 363b–364a of *Daniel* in the Junius Manuscript and lines 73 and 74b–75a of *Azarias: The Suffering and Songs of the Three Youths* in the Exeter Book (lines 365–67a and 76–78a in my translations). See Hines for more details on the discovery and the reading of the runes.

### Honington Clip

Let us bless you, gracious Father . . .  
And each of works. Heaven and angels . . .

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS

This poem occurs at the end of the twelfth-century MS. I.i.I.33 in the Cambridge University Library. The title was given to the poem by Rosier, who edited it in 1964, noting that “the style of these verses owes nothing to the heroic tradition and is quite undistinguished as poetry” (1964a, 5). Youngs argues that although the poem appears to be “a rather disorganized list of maxims giving instructions for Christian living . . . the text contains an unusually tolerant and encouraging attitude (for an Anglo-Saxon text) towards the possession of the good things of this world . . . with a direct purpose: to encourage the giving of alms by a wealthy audience” (13). Hansen points out that the themes in the poem are similar to those found in other wisdom poems such as *Precepts* and the two *Maxims* poems. These include “the contrast between the fool and the wise man; admonitions to teach the young; warnings against laziness and sluggishness; foolish speech and pride; and statements about the limitations of human knowledge, the need for stoic endurance, and the value of wisdom and learning . . . [and] admonitions to tithing, prayer, penance, fasting, almsgiving, and meditation on death and the life hereafter” (109). The poem often alternates religious advice and admonition with gnomic utterances, some of them strangely convoluted and difficult to follow. At the end of the poem, Rosier notes that “there is a [prose] passage of alternating Old English and Latin in the same scribal hand,” which he prints not in the text but in a footnote (1964a, 22). Each of the two Latin prose passages is followed by a rough translation in Old English. My translation at the end of the poem begins with the Old English version and includes some shadings of meaning from the Latin as well.

## Instructions for Christians

Give to your eternal God a tenth share  
 Of the goods you own, the property you possess,  
 And he will greatly increase the other nine.  
 There are four things that lead finally  
 To full happiness and eternal blessing— 5  
 Try not to miss them when you meet them.  
 The first is honest labor; the second, spoken prayer.  
 The third is learning the laws of life.  
 The fourth is the fasting that we must perform.  
 There are likewise four worldly means 10  
 That make it possible to depart from the devil  
 And be a loving servant of our blessed Lord.  
 The first is to weep and practice penitence  
 For all of our sins in words and works.  
 The second is to praise the Prince of heaven. 15  
 The third is to always seek eternal life.  
 The fourth is to be moderate in meat and drink.  
 Our worldly woes are nothing compared  
 To the rich rewards prepared for us  
 In the kingdom of God. So we endure for Christ 20  
 The wounds of this world, the pain and punishment,  
 The torments of time, then enter into eternity  
 To dwell forever in the house of the Lord.  
 A man must always adopt patience,  
 For that is surely the soul's greatest strength. 25  
 Oh, wretched, miserable and mortal man,  
 Why can't you remember death's decay,  
 The relentless rotting of fallen flesh,  
 That once beautiful bone-house?  
 Do you not see mortality as a gift from God? 30  
 If all you want are earthly pleasures  
 And worldly wealth, then how are you different  
 From beasts of the field who know nothing?  
 All you can see here on earth is emptiness.  
 All you can hold is a fistful of shadows. 35  
 Everything you desire darkens and drifts  
 Like pale clouds or a pall of rain.

So cherish the reward that waits in heaven—  
 Its eternal radiance is greater than gold.  
 All the treasure you hoard will turn to dust, 40  
 And your reward will be hard before the Lord.  
 You should never delay in keeping your promise,  
 In paying your debt to the King of heaven,  
 For he is vexed with evil habits, aggravated with sin,  
 Righteous in his anger over a broken trust— 45  
 Nor should you fear or flinch from judgment.  
 A man should give alms for two good reasons:  
 It largely absolves one of shameful deeds  
 Or at least lightens his punishment and pain  
 On earth or in hell. Giving alms 50  
 May be rightfully repaid on Judgment Day,  
 When God's grace may match your giving.  
 If we guard against sin in all of our works,  
 The almighty Prince will not punish us.  
 A man who seeks self-restraint after sinning 55  
 And practices abstinence, remaining chaste,  
 Will be like a good man right from the beginning,  
 Held clean and pure for the sake of Christ's love.  
 The man who refuses to learn anything  
 Is loathsome to the Lord. He sins in his soul. 60  
 A man who yearns to learn something  
 And who loves wisdom is precious to the Lord,  
 Who offers him the priceless gift of understanding  
 With his heart and hands through the Holy Spirit.  
 A wise man knows that a concealed vice 65  
 And a hidden hoard are not entirely different.  
 Sometimes it is better for a fool to lock  
 His lack of wisdom in a guarded heart  
 Than it is for a wise man to hoard his learning.  
 Teach and mentor each day with God's blessing, 70  
 While the Almighty sustains your strength of spirit,  
 The measure of your mind, lest you look back  
 In the end when you have lost your learning  
 And sorely regret both the time and talent  
 You might have used to the glory of God. 75  
 Teach your children and everyone around you



The right rules of virtuous living  
 By your own example, so you may earn  
 Great honor and eternal glory  
 When the world you live in passes on. 80  
 A man who loves learning and studies scripture  
 Will gain wisdom, instruct his students,  
 Educating the learned and unlearned alike.  
 Holy wisdom humbles every earthly king.  
 Likewise it lifts up the poor man, 85  
 Clearing his mind and cleansing his soul.  
 It makes a man proud of his learning  
 And sometimes liberates an enslaved spirit.  
 The Lord must judge—a man must deliberate.  
 A wise man ponders in his daily prayers 90  
 What he will say to God when he stands in judgment.  
 Anyone who gives a gift and then takes it back  
 Leaves scorn behind and shame in his heart.  
 He often finds that he has no friends.  
 When a man gives up meat and drink, 95  
 The belly's delights, God fills his breast  
 With spiritual sustenance. Fasting for the Lord  
 Leaves room in the heart for holy fare.  
 If you give nothing you cherish to a friend,  
 You will receive nothing of value in return. 100  
 The mass-priest is called a *sacerdos* by men  
 Because he is holy and gives purely to all.  
 He is chosen for this by the Lord of victories.  
 He must teach holy scripture and the sacred laws  
 At the clear command of the King of heaven. 105  
 A monk is meant for fellowship and community—  
 He is not allowed to own anything exclusively.  
 What God grants him he must share with the group.  
 Listen to the sayings passed down from David.  
 You must never think that the Lord will not listen 110  
 To each man's prayer and save the penitent,  
 Even though that man owns worldly wealth,  
 A splendid treasure of silver and gold,  
 Along with land and prized possessions.  
 But it is also wise to remember the words 115

Of the apostle Paul, who taught all Christians  
 That wealthy men might prove too proud,  
 Be haughty in their hearts, and despise others.  
 An arrogant man who exalts himself  
 Is paltry and pathetic in the eyes of God. 120  
 His worth is worthless on the day of doom.  
 Listen, we know that in ancient Israel  
 Jacob and Moses were prosperous leaders,  
 Also Abraham and Isaac. And God gave David  
 Vast walled vineyards and untold wealth. 125  
 Likewise the Lord rewarded Noah  
 With power and prosperity after the flood.  
 These were noble leaders, respected lords,  
 Who used their wealth wisely, their power  
 Judiciously, and God listened to their prayers. 130  
 Abundance cannot harm an enlightened man  
 As long as he doesn't fall in love with his goods,  
 Treating his treasure as the heart's hoard,  
 Counseled in greed by the crafty fiend.  
 A man must own some wealth in this world, 135  
 Property and possessions, hearth and home.  
 With these goods he can help the poor,  
 Heal the sick, and clothe the naked.  
 Goods and good deeds can help the giver  
 Bring his soul to salvation, his heart to heaven. 140  
 Each man must work at some skill or craft  
 Given to him by Christ, a loan in time,  
 In order to prosper and work the Lord's will.  
 A man should not worry that God will demand  
 More from him than he thought him able to achieve. 145  
 Long ago the Lord, the Prince of heaven,  
 Spoke to the wise prophet Jeremiah,  
 Saying these words: "Go now throughout  
 All the kingdoms of earth, seeking a man  
 Who is constant and true, steadfast and strong, 150  
 Who desires the good and brings it into being  
 With his wit and wisdom, his words and works—  
 Who understands the faith, who instructs and inspires

Others around him in the ways of truth.  
 If you find such a man, I will show him mercy.” 155  
 You should not be too careless or uncaring,  
 Too restless or reluctant, lazy or sluggish,  
 If you want to please the Prince of heaven  
 In his holy struggle against his enemies.  
 If a man repents in his innermost heart 160  
 For all of his sins and firmly resolves  
 That he will not turn back and accept temptation,  
 Then even though he does not continue to fast  
 For even three days with a committed spirit,  
 The Lord will accept him in a fatherly embrace 165  
 When he comes home after his final journey.  
 As a man gives up sin more and more in this life  
 For the Lord’s sake, he will be rewarded  
 With even more gifts from almighty God.  
 What seems to man his greatest affliction, 170  
 His sorrow and suffering in the ways of the world,  
 Will prove in the end the dearest of treasures  
 Because it will bring him closer to God—  
 But nothing can be amended at the end of life  
 If a man does not willingly embrace the truth 175  
 While he endures hardship on this earth.  
 Anything attained by means of easy labor  
 Will bring a reward barely worth having.  
 Hard work often heals the heart,  
 Strong labor strengthens the soul. 180  
 Earlier evils cannot harm a man  
 If he finds them deeply displeasing,  
 If they chafe and gall his good soul,  
 And if he always gives alms to the poor,  
 The wretched of this world who cry out in pain. 185  
 The hand in need on earth is a helping hand  
 At the door of heaven. An empty hoard  
 May hold a full heart—it is God’s treasure.  
 A man is a Christian who eagerly offers  
 Kindness and comfort to all other men. 190  
 A merciful man finds mercy in heaven.

The Lord of hosts, our almighty Father,  
 Spoke these words to the prophet Isaiah:  
 “I tell you truly that the unrighteous man  
 Must rightly perish—but if he repents 195  
 And rejects sin with all the power  
 Of his heart and soul, then he may survive  
 The day of judgment and escape death.”  
 A man need not walk to the ends of the earth,  
 Seeking to discover the kingdom of God. 200  
 He can live at home where he’s always lived  
 Because the kingdom of heaven is everywhere  
 That the spirit of the Lord settles securely  
 Into the hearts and minds of the children of men.  
 A faithful man already owns what God wants. 205  
 Would you wander away from hearth and home,  
 Seeking for heaven? Stay where you are  
 And have faith in God. He is your comfort  
 And your Creator, your shield and sustainer.  
 The Lord of hosts does not want you wandering 210  
 Away from your heart’s home, your place of faith.  
 The road to God runs not from door to distance,  
 But from contemplation to compassion,  
 Morality to mercy. This path to perfection  
 Is not outside your door but inside your soul. 215  
 This is true advice and ancient wisdom.  
 The foul slough of sin is no source of dread  
 For any man determined to escape that swamp  
 And travel the hard road of virtue—  
 Though it’s difficult to guard against dangers 220  
 Without and within. Strive against evil,  
 Struggle with yourself. No man on earth  
 Can escape the Lord’s law, death’s doom.  
 You can’t fully know the way of your soul,  
 How it came to your body, shaped and sustained 225  
 By the living Lord, or where it came from,  
 How it descended to its earthly home,  
 When it will depart or where it will go.  
 You can’t fully know the craft of creation,

The plan and promise of the heavenly Lord, 230  
 Who is Architect of everything, Weaver of the world,  
 Of the endless tapestry of heaven and earth.  
 He holds the curve of creation in his hand  
 From land to sea, earth to air, beginning to end,  
 And all the world's wonderful creatures 235  
 Who move through time and transient tenure  
 In this God-given, Christ-quickenning world.  
 Wisdom is the light that should live in men.  
 It is kindled with humility and comes from God.  
 It cannot be carried too proudly to another, 240  
 For arrogance extinguishes the inner light.  
 I've never heard it said that a good person  
 In old age ever came from anything except  
 A good youth in service to God and mankind.  
 Anyone who wants comfort in his old age 245  
 Needs to comfort others while he is young.  
 Do not speak foolishly about your fellow man.  
 Do not offer enmity to anyone around you,  
 Even if you arbitrarily name him an enemy.  
 Respect people not for power or possessions 250  
 But for both their holiness and humanity.  
 Respect yourself. Guard your thoughts against pride,  
 Your heart against evil, your soul against sin.  
 Cleanse yourself so that you can serve Christ,  
 The King of creation, the Lord of life. 255  
 Serve the Lord for it pleases him.  
 Through goodness and grace, you may find peace,  
 The soul's security, a portion of heaven,  
 Where the highest fulfillment of hope exists,  
 The purest desire, a perfect bliss, 260  
 The comfort of kin with a holy host,  
 The sweetest life, the richest reward,  
 The greatest gift given by Christ.  
 Understand this truth of the apostle Paul:  
 There are three victory-paths leading to heaven. 265  
 The first is faith, the second is love,  
 And the third is hope among those who aspire

With a true passion to a home in heaven.  
May the Son of God, our Savior, aid us  
And bear us back to our place in creation,  
The heart's homeland where we belong.

270

Amen.

O Lord, order our lives and dispose of our days in your peace and love,  
and let us be saved from eternal damnation. Let us be counted as kin  
among the flock of the saved. Let it be so.

275

Truly God almighty would never allow his chosen ones to pass into  
evil purposes but would fill their hearts with grief, their minds with  
sorrow, if they should desire to do evil, so that by this suffering of spirit  
and understanding of evil, they would recover their righteousness and  
return to the Lord.

280

## LAMENT FOR THE ENGLISH CHURCH (FROM THE WORCESTER FRAGMENTS)

This poem occurs in MS Worcester, Cathedral Library, F. 174, fol. 63r, and is edited most recently by Jones (264–65, 371–72, 425–27), drawing on the previous work of Hall (1920), Dickins and Wilson, and Brehe. The poem is sometimes called *The First Worcester Fragment* or *St. Bede's Lament* and is sometimes combined with *The Soul's Address to the Body* (see below) as in Johansen (1985). Jones notes that the poem is by “an anonymous poet, active at Worcester perhaps a century after the Norman Conquest” (ix). Like all the transition poems, it shows evidence of Old English forms morphing into Middle English (and is often included in Middle English anthologies). I have followed Jones's text and drawn upon his literal prose translation. My poetic translation of the Latin passage at the end of the poem, which draws on Deuteronomy 32:11, appears in italics in slightly expanded form.

### Lament for the English Church (From the Worcester Fragments)

Saint Bede was born among us in Britain,  
And he wisely translated wonderful books  
Used for instruction by the English people.  
He untangled the knots called *Quaestiones*,  
Those precious secrets, those sacred mysteries.  
Abbot Ælfric, whom we call Alcuin,  
Was a scholar who translated the five books—  
Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus—  
To teach us the scriptural truth in English.

These were the bishops who preached Christianity: 10  
 Wilfrid of Ripon, John of Beverly,  
 Cuthbert of Durham, Oswald of Worcester,  
 Ecgwin of Evesham, Aldhelm of Malmesbury,  
 Swithun, Æthelwold, and also Aidan,  
 Birinus of Winchester, Paulinus of Rochester, 15  
 Dunstan, and also Ælfheah of Canterbury.  
 These wise men instructed all of our people  
 In English. Their spiritual light was not dim—  
 It was glowing brightly, gathering into greatness.  
 The people have passed on and the wisdom is lost. 20  
 Now other teachers come to instruct us,  
 But many of them perish, both teachers and pupils.  
 Now our Lord says this: *He will certainly find us*  
*As the eagle lifts up her beloved fledglings*  
*And hovers over them with her guardian wings.* 25  
 These are God's words sent into our world,  
 And we should shield them always  
 With our earthly feathers and sheltering wings.



## LANCASHIRE GOLD RING

**R**obinson and Stanley classify the Lancashire Ring inscription as metrical (28). Page notes that the Lancashire ring “is a plain gold hoop, its legend, part runic part roman, set within beaded borders round the outer circumference [and] the craftsman cut away part of the surface and blackened it with niello, leaving the letters standing bright and clear in relief” (162). See also Okasha (no. 66, p. 89).

### Lancashire Gold Ring

Ædred owns me; Eanred inscribed me.

## METRICAL PSALMS 90:15–95:2

This set of verses is found in “Eadwine’s Psalter,” MS R.17.1 in Trinity College, Cambridge, and constitutes a variant text on the metrical psalms in the Paris Psalter. Baker points out that both the Paris Psalter texts and the Eadwine’s Psalter texts apparently derive from a common ancestor, but that “the late West Saxon of P[aris Psalter] is surely closer to [its dialect] than the idiosyncratic twelfth-century Kentish of E[adwine’s] P[salter]” (1984, 266). As a result of comparing the two texts, he suggests only three emendations to Krapp’s *ASPR* text (1932b) of *The Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter*, which I have taken into account in my translations of those poems elsewhere in this collection.

## THE SOUL'S ADDRESS TO THE BODY (FROM THE WORCESTER FRAGMENTS)

The following fragments from the Worcester Cathedral Library MS F. 174, fols. 63v–66v, are taken from Jones's edition, which draws upon previous work by Buchholz, Moffat (1987), Ricciardi, and Johansen (1994). Jones notes that the text "is considered a poem by some, a rhythmical-prose homily by others . . . [and] perhaps belongs more to early Middle than to Old English" (xxx). The poem nonetheless shows some evidence of the same loose OE metrical style and vocabulary found elsewhere in late OE verse and shares many elements with the *Soul and Body* poems in the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book and with another late OE poem, *The Grave* (above). Jones points out that "of particular interest in the Worcester *Soul's Address* is the poet's attention to the common rituals of death in medieval society, such as the preparation of the corpse . . . [and] the poet candidly portrays the reactions—bereft, greedy, relieved, or indifferent—of those who survive the departed" (xxx). I follow Jones's text and draw occasionally upon his literal prose translation in making the poetic translation here. Translations of the Latin phrases and lines in the poem are given in italics.

### The Soul's Address to the Body (From the Worcester Fragments)

#### *Fragment A*

\* \* \*

The Lord created man and middle-earth  
And all the creatures that live in that land.  
He shaped man's soul and gave him life,  
Mixing together from spirit and dust

What makes us whole, body and soul— 5  
 But these must soon be sorely separated.  
 So a child prophesies in its painful cries,  
 That long journey from groan to grave,  
 From womb to tomb, birth to death,  
 Wailing in woe that the soul must depart 10  
 One day from the body, an aching split.  
 Every child is born weeping  
 And dies wailing. Its life is brief.  
 Death stings the body that twists and turns,  
 Arching away, bound to the pain, 15  
 Often complaining, protesting its end.  
 The body tosses on its bed of sorrow,  
 Saying, “These days of suffering are endless,  
 These nights of pain endure forever.”  
 It wails in misery, groans in grief, 20  
 Its ears grow deaf, its eyes dim,  
 Its nose splits, its lips shrivel,  
 Its bones shrink, its tongue clutches,  
 Its mind fails, its strength fades  
 Its limbs chill, its life pales. 25  
 Then the soul-house will lose life,  
 A body bereaved, a quickness crushed.  
 All joy will flee from that flesh-home.  
 The child’s prophecy will be fulfilled  
 From babe’s breath to sudden death, 30  
 From mother’s wail to withered womb,  
 From early affliction to endless woe.  
 When the body and soul find their severing,  
 Their miserable life will meet its end  
 As unjoy gives way to judgment’s journey. 35  
 The doomed life will be laid out  
 On the cold floor, facing east,  
 Stiff as a stick, cold as clay,  
 Its nature fixed as the first dust.  
 The body is measured, the grave matched— 40  
 It is what the soul-house deserves after death.  
 This cold clay, this dust undone,  
 This mud unmade, lies alone on the floor.

Everyone flees—a body has no friends.  
 Its previous favors are now as nothing. 45  
 No one wants to ease its limbs,  
 Adjust the angle of its bent head  
 With his living hands. No one wants  
 To defile his life with the touch of death.  
 Then the dead man's distressed wife 50  
 Comes in, cursing his unhappy fate,  
 Binds his mute mouth and blind eyes  
 For brute burial, her life's love  
 Twisted into misery, sewn into sorrow.  
 Her care is cold, her wanting worthless. 55  
 In the grave's gloom, the soul sees the body.

\* \* \*

*Fragment B*

\* \* \*

“You made me miserable while I lived in you,  
 Embracing evil with a cunning guile,  
 Always rejecting what was generous and right.  
 Where is your pride now, your precious vanity?  
 Where is your treasure of pounds and pennies? 5  
 Where is everything you coveted and counted,  
 Everything you measured, everything you marked?  
 Where are the gold-plated vessels you gathered?  
 Your hoard has slipped from your greedy grasp.  
 Your joy has fled and left me in sorrow. 10  
 Your rapture has run off and left me wretched.  
 Where are the garments you proudly wore?  
 Where are the kinsmen who courted your favors,  
 Who sat grieving over your illness and age,  
 Who prayed so earnestly for your uncertain healing? 15  
 They secretly seethed that you lived too long,  
 Greedy by the grave for all of your goods.  
 Now they divest themselves of grief  
 And divide your goods as they carry you out  
 To a cold, cruel bed in the ground. 20  
 They haul you out through your once welcome door,  
 Deprived of wealth, deprived of wonder.

Why couldn't you just have cared for me  
 While I lived in your home, a hallowed guest,  
 Instead of loading me down with sin, 25  
 Leaving me alone, ashamed and suffering?  
 Alas, that I ever sought to sustain  
 This house of flesh, this sorry carcass.  
 You never sought the counsel of wise men,  
 Holy teachers who could heal your thinking. 30  
 You never offered alms to the poor  
 Or wealth to anyone who would pray for you.  
 With their psalms and songs, they might have erased  
 Your immoral sins, interceding for your evil.  
 They might have offered sacrifices for your sake, 35  
 Calling on the precious and powerful gift  
 Of the body of Christ, freeing you finally  
 From the tortures and torments of unholy hell.  
 You might have been saved by the red blood  
 Christ shed on the cross for the sake of sinners. 40  
 Then you might have been lifted into heaven  
 Instead of hauled down by the devil's doing,  
 His unholy teaching, into hell's slavery.  
 The scripture teaches what is true about you:  
*Whoever seeks wealth is a slave to wealth,* 45  
*Whoever hoards gold is held in its clutches.*  
 You served wealth, its lifetime slave,  
 Giving no gold for the Lord's sake,  
 Greedily gathering it all for yourself.  
 In your vice you have lost everything of value. 50  
 In your sin you have sold your most precious possession.  
 Now I endure, a soul set in suffering,  
 Made miserable by the evil deeds you've done.  
 You are loathed by those who might have loved you,  
 Despised by your friends. It seems to them 55  
 That you lie too long before you are carried  
 Cold to the grave, lowered into the pit  
 Of a doorless house where worms will rule  
 Over a delightful dinner, a feast of flesh.  
 What was once so sweet, a beautiful body, 60  
 Will become so foul, rich with rot,

A carcass for the cruel underground teeth,  
 A munch of mulch. You have traded a treasure  
 Of sweet delight for savage devouring.  
 Your bitter taste will endure forever— 65  
 Except, of course, to the ravenous worm.”

\* \* \*

*Fragment C*

\* \* \*  
 Again the soul speaks in sorrow to the body:  
 “Now you can no longer stand up in the stirrups  
 Or sit on a golden saddle for this grim journey—  
 Now you must ride backward into unbliss, 5  
 Galloping into the grave. Once you pass  
 Through that dark, one-way door,  
 You will never come back, riding forever  
 Without worldly wealth, without spirit.  
 Now it can be truly said of you:  
 ‘This man is gone, his gold is here— 10  
 He wasted his wealth in unchecked greed,  
 Never wanting to do the Lord’s will.’  
 You garnered riches from all your enemies,  
 But gold does not care who gathers it up.  
 You traded treasure for torment, wealth for woe. 15  
 You travel now into a wasteland of sorrow  
 Beyond the marks of misery, the margins of pain.  
 Your enemies will rejoice that your mouth is shut,  
 Your insults stifled, your slander suffocated.  
 Death has swallowed your mischief and malice. 20  
 Truly it says in the book of Psalms:  
*Your mouth was always abounding with evil—  
 Your tongue was always twisted with deceit.*  
 Wickedness was at home in your devious heart.  
 You never wanted to shelter the wretched 25  
 In your rich house or offer them rest  
 Under your roof but would sit in splendor  
 On your glorious cushion with your legs crossed  
 And your future secure, guarding your gold.  
 You knew no one, not even yourself, 30

Or ever suspected that instead of feasting,  
 You would appear on earth's table, a feast for worms.  
 Now you dwell in a newly dark house  
 With little space, cold and cramped,  
 With the walls and ceiling closing in. 35  
 Your roof is resting on top of your chest.  
 You lie naked in a bed underground,  
 Stripped of the clothes that your servants kept,  
 A meager gift from a greedy lord.  
 Finally they hold what you hoarded. 40  
 Your wealth is gone—it was only on loan.  
 Now your long road begins after living.  
 Worms will arrive to see you off,  
 Ravenous fiends who will devour your flesh,  
 Feeding themselves with muscle and meat, 45  
 Sucking your sinews, gnawing your bones.  
 They will curl in your arms like greedy lovers,  
 Burrow through your breast, hot for your heart.  
 They will creep and crawl through every cavity  
 Till your fleshly treasures become their treats. 50  
 They will burrow in your belly, gobble your guts,  
 Taste your liver, tear at your lungs.  
 Your stomach will sour, your spleen will be sweet.  
 The worms will devour all that you hold dear.”

*Fragment D*

\* \* \*

“Now worms will completely devour your flesh.  
 You will feed and sustain your crawling enemies  
 Who will crunch your body and chew you up.  
 You would never give succor to those who suffered.  
 Now you suffer at the mouths of suckling worms 5  
 Who will set up a treasure-house inside your skull  
 And a feast-hall inside the haven of your heart.  
 They will gnaw your lips to a fierce rictus,  
 The grimmest of grins that would frighten anyone—  
 If anyone could see through the wriggling dirt. 10  
 They will take you on a long journey  
 Through the bowels of earth, a misery of your making.



Now someone will want to sweep the floor  
 And wash away the vestige of your vile flesh,  
 Where you lay down in your last rest. 15  
 They will sprinkle the walls with holy water,  
 Blessing themselves for protection from you.  
 They will carry out your bed of stinking straw  
 And burn it to oblivion. This is how you are loved  
 After losing me, severed from your soul. 20  
 Your end is loathsome after a life of misery.”  
 The soul speaks again in sorrow to the body:  
 “Why did you think you could live forever?  
 Couldn't you see or sense your mortality,  
 Know that your nature was always to die? 25  
 Wasn't this your father's fate? your mother's misery?  
 Didn't this cruelty come to all of your kin?  
 Didn't I open your eyes to this truth  
 When I dwelled within you for a lifetime?  
 Why are you blind to the death of your forefathers? 30  
 Where in the world did you think they had gone?  
 Now they sleep unfleshed in a bed of earth,  
 Where worms have gnawed their sinews to strings,  
 Their bones to bits, their flesh to nothing  
 Except the feast within their bellies. 35  
 This is the end of flesh and bones  
 That were stained with sin, savaged by time.”  
 The sad soul speaks once more to the body:  
 “While you lived in the world, you were always wicked,  
 Cunning and crafty, devious and deceitful, 40  
 Malevolent and malicious. You embraced evil.  
 You harmed Christians with your vicious sins,  
 Your words and deeds, whenever you could.  
 I came to you pure, a gift from God,  
 But you have degraded and destroyed us both 45  
 With your wicked ways. You were gorged with greed,  
 Puffed up with pride, swollen with anger.  
 Where could I find a safe home inside  
 This house of iniquity? You worshipped your belly,  
 Venerated your lust, bowed down before your body. 50  
 You traded paradise for pleasure, heaven for gold.

Pride cannot travel to that sacred place.  
 Greed must go down to the devil's playground,  
 An endless abyss. You never had enough of anything  
 Until you reveled in excess. Now that joy is ended, 55  
 That sweetness is sucked out, that living lost.  
 Only bitter gall is left to you, the taste of hell.  
 Terror and torment are your eternal gifts.  
 Go down that road to your miserable prison.  
 You thought your end would never arrive, 60  
 That death would endure your living forever,  
 That he never dreamed of dragging you down.  
 You were always secretly sowing strife,  
 Campaigning for cruelty, causing mayhem.  
 I was bound in a filthy prison of flesh. 65  
 You were oath-breaker, friend-hater,  
 Sin-slaker, malice-maker, enemy of all.  
 The devil had wormed his way deep down,  
 Next to your heart. His want was your will."

\* \* \*

### *Fragment E*

\* \* \*

"And you never wanted to work God's will."  
 So the sad soul says again to its body:  
 "The earth was pure before you defiled it  
 With your unclean corpse, your filthy flesh,  
 Your unliving limbs, your baleful bones. 5  
 Now you are hidden in a dark treasure-house  
 Without windows, without doors,  
 A pit of pain, a bed of worms.  
 Here you will rot, molder, and mulch.  
 Your limbs will lament their loss of clothes, 10  
 Each one twisted and tugged from the next.  
 Your bones will be broken, silent and still,  
 Until the Lord calls them up from the grave,  
 Raising them from the dead on Judgment Day.  
 Then your wretched flesh will rise up, 15  
 Wracked with pain, suffering from sin,  
 Sad at heart, to meet your Maker

And confront your depraved, degenerate deeds,  
 All of the evil you found so delightful  
 As you wandered wickedly on life's long road. 20  
 Now your ears are stuffed with death and dirt,  
 Hearing no joyful sound, no sweet music.  
 These were the ears that loved to listen  
 To cunning words, crafty judgments,  
 And the evil utterances of your own mouth. 25  
 At the devil's urging, which you always desired,  
 You robbed and pillaged the rich and poor.  
 That demon lured you down with his tempting,  
 Sultry harp-songs, the seductive strains  
 That you loved but the Lord loathed. 30  
 The devil lulled you into his dark dream  
 And sullied the sleep you thought so sweet.

\* \* \*

Now you cannot wake and walk to church  
 To hear the music of the holy bells  
 That tolled a warning to each of us. 35  
 Now you cannot take in the teaching,  
 The holy scripture, that might have saved us.  
 You heard the devil's lyre but not the bells.  
 Now your hearing-holes are bunged with dirt,  
 The bells of joy are beyond silence. 40  
 You are deaf and dumb until Judgment Day,  
 When the trumpets of God will summon us both  
 To rise up and return to the gates of justice.  
 There you will hear the righteous judgment  
 For your wicked ways, your debauched days, 45  
 The madness and misery that you called life."  
 Then the sorrowful soul says to its body:  
 "Now you are sadly sent far from friends.  
 Your mouth is sealed shut, stoppered by death.  
 It cannot be opened until the Lord calls, 50  
 Heaven's King arrives to deal out doom.  
 Then the words of the psalm will be manifest:  
*They shall offer a reckoning for their own deeds.*  
 Then the souls shall recount wisely and well  
 What the Lord knows—for he knows all— 55

Their living history of words and deeds.  
 Each will receive its righteous judgment  
 From the mouth of God, as it was written:  
*Depart from me, O cursed ones,*  
*Into the deep doom of everlasting fire.* 60  
 Then the two of us will travel together  
 To the greatest of sorrows, the surest of pains,  
 In the company of demons who draw us down  
 Into the torture and torment of eternal fire.  
 There will be no end to that heartless heat. 65  
*And those who have done good will depart*  
*Into everlasting life.* Then the good will go  
 To dwell with God in the greatest of glories.”

\* \* \*

*Fragment F*

\* \* \*

“Listen to what the psalmist says:  
*I opened my mouth and drew in breath.*  
 You opened your mouth and inhaled me then—  
 Alas, that I ever entered your flesh.  
 Your mouth was a source of malice and misery, 5  
 Never castigating sin but embracing the evil  
 In your devious mind, your deceitful heart.  
 You never acknowledged your abounding sins  
 In the presence of a priest where you might find  
 Both penance and pardon, the gift of grace. 10  
 You never lamented your loathsome acts  
 In honest confession, seeking the mercy  
 Of Christ the Lord. You never told  
 Your terrible crimes, unfolding your iniquity,  
 Or sought repentance for your soul’s rest. 15  
 My peace has flown, my life is lost.  
 Your deeds have darkened our last road  
 Leading to judgment. When did you ever  
 Use your mouth to pray for mercy to me?  
 Now you stand dumb at an empty doorway 20  
 Opened by death, who clutches the key.  
 You are wrapped in rags, a threadbare shroud,

Ugly and hateful for your friends to look at.  
 Your road of remorse is a route of misery.  
 You are surrounded by sins like a hedgehog's spines, 25  
 Piercing and pricking your soul from within.  
 That animal at least is safe from its spines  
 Since they're softest next to its sensitive skin  
 And sharply pointed outward toward its enemies.  
 But your spines are pointed sharply within 30  
 To prick and pierce your sensitive soul.  
 I lived with your stabbing, stinging sins,  
 The puncture and pain of enduring evil.  
 Now these sins endlessly prick me in hell,  
 The needles of iniquity, the spines of vice. 35  
 I was created in glory and given the name  
 Of Soul by my Shaper. As books tell us,  
 I was the seventh creature that God made  
 Through his might and mercy, his infinite word.  
 This is how everything came to be— 40  
 Heaven and earth, clouds and angels,  
 Wind and water, and the human soul.  
 These are the seven original creations  
 Made by the Lord, the Father's formations,  
 God's grandeur and glory. From these foundations 45  
 He created the world, as it is written  
 In the holy wisdom of sacred scripture:  
*Let everything be, and everything was.*  
 The world was brought into being with a word.  
 He shaped in his wisdom, in the aspect of the Son, 50  
 All of creation in his unending power,  
 His promise and purpose. He gathers and guides  
 Everything that is *in his image and likeness*.  
 And I bore that blessed likeness of the Lord."

\* \* \*

*Fragment G*

\* \* \*

"I was linked to you with loathsome affection,  
 An unwilling slave to your worldly wants.  
 I curse your desires that have caused me grief.

You were my body and also my betrayer,  
 Food for maggots, a feast for worms. 5  
 Why have you dragged me down into hell?  
 Why must I suffer for your filthy life?  
 Now I am free from your foul flesh  
 As we part in pain. Shoulder the blame  
 You must rightfully bear for your wretched life. 10  
 Your teeth are rotted, your tongue drawn back  
 That once pleased and deceived your enemies  
 But also yourself. It slandered your soul.  
 With false judgments, you robbed others  
 Of their rightful earnings, cleverly stealing 15  
 Wealth from the rich, pennies from the poor,  
 Gathering their goods into your grasping hoard,  
 A treasure of transgression, a storehouse of sin.  
 Your wealth has turned into worthless dust  
 Through the devil's devising. Your gold is gone. 20  
 Your tongue is silent in its cave of cold.  
 Your treacherous words were deceitful in the beginning  
 And poisonous at the end. Your unrighteous judgments  
 Were loathsome to the Lord. The psalm says truly,  
*Your mouth was evil, your tongue framed deceit.* 25  
 It babbled falsely, amusing your enemies.  
 It hewed the helpless, maimed the miserable,  
 Punished the poor. Its piercing slander  
 Pleased the devil with its cunning deceit,  
 Its unleashed anger, its unholy iniquity. 30  
 All these sins were the devil's delight.  
 May your words find woe, your tongue torment,  
 Your mind misery, your heart a heartless  
 Home in hell. We are bound together  
 Beyond blessing in the eternal abyss. 35  
 It's no wonder what wickedness brings—  
 You can see it in scripture and holy books,  
 This terrible truth that I touch on here.  
 I was taught the truth by my beloved Father  
 Before I began my sad life with you. 40  
 I was God's daughter whom you always despised,  
 The righteous one your wickedness ruined,

The soul supposed to sustain the body,  
 Shape a virtuous life without such sin  
 And the suffering that was not willed by God. 45  
 Once I left, you were lifeless and lost.  
 I was your spouse as the psalmist says:  
*Your wife is like a fruitful vine,*  
 With the sweetest grapes ready to sustain you.  
 We were wedded together at the baptismal font, 50  
 Which you have fouled with your filthy oaths,  
 Your broken promises, your sinister deeds.  
 You have traded baptism for an evil end.  
 Once you were anointed front and back  
 And high on your head with holy oil, 55  
 A soul's signature, a royal sign.

\* \* \*

You were supposed to be raised high into heaven,  
 The servant of God, but you tossed this away  
 For the devil's teachings. At our baptismal blessing,  
 Before handing you over, your godparents promised 60  
 That you would always shelter and sustain me  
 Through the love of Christ and lead me to him  
 Through virtuous living and righteous deeds.  
 You renounced the devil, his pernicious pride,  
 His dark deceit, and cunning desires, 65  
 Echoing the holy words of Christ.  
 But you left your Lord, hating his laws,  
 And began to love that loathsome demon.  
 The children we were always meant to bear,  
 Our holy offspring, were left unborn. 70  
 Our trust was undone, our marriage unmade.  
 You were meant to be their bodily father,  
 So that I could be their sacred mother.  
 We were meant to bear and bring our children  
 To the arms of Christ. These children I mention, 75  
 As the psalmist says, *are like olive plants*  
*From the fruitful vines.* Our vines are withered,  
 Our olives unborn, our offspring unmade."

\* \* \*

## SUTTON DISC BROOCH

Stanley explains that the Sutton disc brooch was first found by a plowman in 1694, as reported by Bishop Edmund Gibson in 1695; it was lost for two centuries, rediscovered in 1950, and then acquired by the British Museum (1987, 401). Thornbury notes that a poetic inscription is located “on the inner rim of the late tenth- or early eleventh-century silver brooch found near Sutton, Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire (now in the British Museum)” (375), and considers the first line a possible elaboration of the patron-formulae such as the inscription on the Alfred Jewel, *Ælfred mec heht gewyrcan*, “Alfred ordered me made.” Okasha notes that “the owner formula is followed by a Christian curse, as occurs in wills and charters” (117).

### Sutton Disc Brooch

Ædwin keeps me—may the Lord keep her.  
May the Lord curse whoever carries me off  
Unless she wants to give me up willingly.



## TWO MARGINALIC LINES

Bergman accepts as poetry two marginalic lines noted by Robinson (Bergman, 13–14, 22, and Robinson, 1994, 18). The first is in a margin of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* that echoes a line in *Durham*. Robinson notes that the writer of this line “may be quoting a line from a lost Old English poem on Bede” (18). The second is a line from MS Harley 208, which is apparently a pen trial, which Bergman notes, echoes line 869 in *Beowulf* (867 in my translation) and “might be the opening line of a lost Old English poem” (22, n. 21).

### Two Marginalic Lines

1

Thus Bede the renowned scholar said.

2

Listen! I will tell everything of old.

## VERSE IN A CHARTER

**K**itson discovered that “alone among the more than a thousand boundary surveys extant in Anglo-Saxon land charters, the second of the two in Æthelred I’s grant in 868 to Cuthwulf bishop of Rochester, no 3 in Sawyers’ hand-list, is in verse [and] more remarkably that part of the charter’s dispositive clause dealing with the same piece of land casts high-sounding Latin words into a rough equivalent of Old English verse form” (147).

### Verse in a Charter

The second section is outside the city,  
North of the wall, with marshes and meadows,  
To the Medway River. The rightful boundaries  
Are marked as follows: beginning with the Medway,  
Then between two streams rightly named  
The Shipfleet and Pearfleet that enclose the land,  
To the east and west up to the walled place.  
Thus are the boundaries marked by charter.

5

Amen.

## VERSE IN A HOMILY: THE JUDGMENT OF THE DAMNED

Jones points out that “the Old English prose text with the greatest admixture of verse is a sermon about Judgment Day preserved in different forms in two Vercelli Homilies (nos. II and XXI) and within a composite eleventh-century sermon that also draws from sermons by Archbishop Wulfstan (d. 1023)” (270). The passages exist in several varying forms, embedded in the Vercelli Homilies and in MS 201, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, as well as other manuscripts (see Jones, 372). The verse passages are sometimes edited as prose like their surrounding contexts and sometimes separated out as poetry. In a detailed study that concentrated primarily on the Corpus Christi manuscript, Stanley concluded that several passages constituted legitimate poetic texts, though admitting that “the dividing line between what looks more like prose than verse or verse than prose is far from sharp” (1985, 367). The prose passages in and around the poetry sections below are indicated in the translation by their farther left-hand margin. I have followed the text edited by Jones, who identifies more verse passages than some other editors (269 ff.), and I have made occasional use of his literal prose translation (which itself draws upon Stanley’s translation) in making the poetic one here.

### Verse in a Homily: The Judgment of the Damned

Listen! To the wicked in this world, there is nothing that seems  
So hot or cold, so hard or soft,  
So delightful or disagreeable, so easy or difficult,  
So cherished or hated, so loved or loathed,

that it might cut them off from the Lord's love, if they could wield the  
power to control the outcome. Yet those wretched souls give little  
thought to carrying out God's will while they can. 5

Alas, it is a source of shame and sorrow,  
A gathering guilt, a grief beyond measure,  
A story to be told in great anguish, 10  
That such faithless sinners must finally come  
Before the face of God and all the saints,  
Before the blessed beauty and great glory,  
of high heaven and be thrust in judgment into the terrible torments  
of hell. 15

Listen! The minds of men are so murky,  
So darkened and deceived, foolish and faithless,  
that they continue to let that death-dragging devil lead them astray  
with untold temptation so that they can indulge endlessly in sin and  
cannot carry out the will of the one who lifted them from dust, mak- 20  
ing them out of mud, breathing life into them from his own spirit,  
offering them everlasting life.

Listen! What are we thinking when we do not dread the great day of  
judgment, of impending doom?

That will be a dark day of suffering and sorrow, 25  
A hard day of misery and harrowing pain.

On that day we shall finally see revealed to every one on earth

The opening of heaven, a host of angels,  
The fall of the faithless, the agony of creatures,  
The dissolution of life, the destruction of earth, 30  
The strife of the sinful, the plummeting of stars,  
The crash of thunder, the slash of storms,  
The flash of lightning, the crackle of fire,  
The battle of souls, the grip of fear,  
The grimmest of visions, a godly power, 35  
A scalding rain, the shriek of fiends,  
A burst of hills, a blast of trumpets,  
A hungry fire stalking the land,  
Gnawing the night, devouring the day,  
A sense of evil, a slaughter of men, 40  
The separation of souls, the hour of judgment,

Bliss for some, the abyss for others,  
 A bitter torment, a river of blood,  
 The fear of demons, a fiery rain,  
 Heathens groaning in a pit of pain, 45  
 Robbers moaning, thieves wailing,  
 The lamentation of the loathsome, the unloved,  
 The utterly undone, an outcry of angels,  
 The terror of judgment before the Lord  
 And his gathering of glory in the anticipant air, 50  
 The forbidding face of almighty God,  
 His mystery to some, his menace to others,  
 The justness of judgment, the shame of our sins,  
 The accusation of demons, the despair of fiends,  
 Pale human faces petrified with fear, 55  
 The shouts of sinners, the screams of nations,  
 The weeping of the world before God's judgment,  
 The lament of lost souls separated from grace,  
 The inhuman sound of unholy hymns  
 From the eternal abyss, the savagery of serpents 60  
 Seizing each soul in a dread clutch,  
 The dark fear of being beyond dead,  
 Tormented by an army of implacable foes,  
 Ruthless, remorseless, utterly unforgiving,  
 On that day of darkness, that day of doom. 65  
 On that day such terror will be revealed that the sinful will wish they  
 had never been born from father and mother so that the gift of unbe-  
 lying would be a blessing to them greater than all gifts.

Listen! We are foolish not to heed our own advice, warning ourselves  
 and dreading this fate as we watch our neighbors and loved ones fall- 70  
 ing in desperation, dying before our eyes.

Then a grave will be readied for the cold corpse,  
 The body-house lowered in a hole in the ground,  
 A loathsome bed, a rest-home in the rot,  
 Where the flesh will be a feast for worms. 75  
 Then the body and soul will finally separate  
 In a painful parting, a miserable unmeeting,  
 Since the soul must travel into eternal torment,  
 The endless, abysmal tortures of hell,

Wounded, wretched, raging, reeling, 80  
Wracked with pain in a perilous prison,  
Confined with demons, murder and mayhem,  
Suffering with serpents, in a woe of worms,  
In the arms of death, the embrace of devils,  
In burning and bitterness, rancor and resentment, 85  
An aching inferno of flames and filth,  
Agony and affliction, an endless perishing,  
A grinding of teeth, a hopeless howling,  
The anxiety of ever increasing pain,  
The unchecked misery of immutable woe, 90  
From the moans of morning to the gnashing of night,  
In hunger and thirst, heat and hardship,  
Fire and filth, unrest and ruin,  
In the venomous dark of the endless abyss,  
In the soul-slashing storm of wracking rain, 95  
In torture and torment, wickedness and woe,  
In the mouth and gut, bowel and belly,  
Of the death-dealing dragon who is called the devil.

## VERSE PARAPHRASE OF MATTHEW 25:41

**T**rahern (1977, 2008) identified the following verse paraphrase of Matthew 25:41, which he notes “not only meets the metrical and alliterative standards for classical verse but also shows a good deal of rhetorical sophistication” (2008, 40). The passage is a description by Christ of the Last Judgment of those who have not shown any concern for people who were suffering in this life and who called out for help. For the OE text, see Trahern (2008, 40). The passage appears in MS 302 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Napier’s homily 49). Trahern notes that it can be compared with a similar passage in Vercelli Homily X. I have added the introductory line from Matthew in brackets to indicate the biblical context of the poem.

### Verse Paraphrase of Matthew 25:41

[Then the Lord will say to those on his left hand:]  
“Depart from me, deprived of glory,  
Shorn of grace, separated from friends,  
Delivered to fiends, entrusted to evil,  
Embraced in a wave of ferocious flame,  
Hideous hell-fire, where you will dwell forever  
In the torture and torment of hell’s hatred,  
Wandering in a world of woe without end.”

## VERSE PROVERB IN A JUNIUS HOMILY

Trahern (1982) points to a two-line verse passage in an Old English homily, *De Descensu Christi ad Inferos*, preserved on folios 148v–154v of Bodleian MS Junius 121 (419). He notes that the homily begins by recounting “Satan’s capture of the soul of John the Baptist and his subsequent plan to obtain the soul of Christ following the crucifixion. The end result is Satan’s being bound in hell” (419). The homily writer leads up to the verse proverb as follows: “Satan was not so much overcome with might as with right, and he was thrown into the punishing abasement of hell. So the Savior himself said about this: ‘What evil do you hope to find in me? Why do you lay hold of me?’” Christ then speaks the proverb. The OE phrase *his agen . . . forlysed* in the proverb probably means literally “loses his property,” a possible result of serious criminal action, but since *his agen* can also mean “his own,” and *forlysed* can mean “to destroy or ruin,” the phrase might also mean “destroy himself.” I have incorporated both possibilities in the translation.

### Verse Proverb in a Junius Homily

A man who attacks another with evil  
Will often end up losing everything,  
Sometimes even slaying himself.



## VERSES IN VERCELLI HOMILY XXI

Selected homiletic passages are thought by several editors to contain passages which cross over from rhythmical prose into poetry, especially the following passages in Vercelli Homily XXI in the Vercelli Book. Trahern, for example, in defining these passages as poetry, uses the standard of Blake's definition of "rhythmical alliteration," which "emphasizes that the boundary between verse and prose was so blurred that a clear division is impossible [and] at times, the rhythm in rhythmical alliteration becomes so regular, as in passages of great intensity or emotion, that the result is close to poetry; at other times, when the rhythm becomes less insistent, prose results" (2008, 37; citing Blake, 1969, 119–20). For more on the subject of rhythmical prose, see McIntosh; Wright; and Trahern (2008). The OE poetic texts for the verses in this homily may be found in both Wright and Trahern. See also *Verse in a Homily: The Judgment of the Damned* above, where one of several source texts also comes from Vercelli Homily XXI.

### Verses in Vercelli Homily XXI

#### *1. Doomsday*

We are mortal men who in this world  
Will drop down dead and turn to dust,  
Food for worms, a feast of flesh.  
We will all rise again from the grave,  
Out of the earth on Doomsday,  
To disclose to God what we have done  
And receive the reward of righteous judgment.

## 2. *The Fall of Angels*

Through overweening pride, the rebel angels  
 Were turned into devils, demon-thanes,  
 And thrust into hell, an abyss of pain,  
 Where they suffer forever flaming torment  
 Because they hated and loathed the Lord,  
 The God of glory, Giver of victories,  
 Ruler of all heaven and earth.

5

Those sinful angels meant to make  
 A separate home in the heavenly kingdom,  
 But that pernicious plan could not succeed,  
 For God almighty, righteous and resolute,  
 Cast their arrogant leader, an evil fiend,  
 From his usurped seat into endless exile,  
 Along with his demon horde, unholy thanes.

10

They landed in hell to a woeful welcome  
 Of blaze and bale, terror and torment.  
 Those fallen angels now know  
 Who their adversary is—almighty God.

15

## APPENDIX OF POSSIBLE RIDDLE SOLUTIONS

Solutions to the Exeter Book riddles are not given in the manuscript, so scholars continue to debate them. Some solutions are now generally accepted; others are still hotly contested. Solutions often depend on different readings of ambiguous passages or on whether to take a particular description as literal or metaphoric. I have given below a brief but nonexhaustive list of proposed solutions, listed in order from those generally accepted or probable to those possible or unlikely. New solutions are, of course, proposed all the time. I have also explained the occasional runes and other problematic or ambiguous features of some of the riddles. For more on the riddles, their structure and sources, their solutions and proposers, see the discussions in Williamson (1977, 1982), Muir, Niles (2006), Bitterli, and Murphy. For the various sources and analogues noted here, see the Notes and Commentary section for the riddle in question in Williamson (1977).

Riddle 1. *Wind, Storm, Wind-Master (God)*. This riddle is sometimes edited as three separate storm riddles (land-storm, sea-storm, thunderstorm, etc.). As separate riddles, lines 14–27 have also been solved as *Fire*; lines 28 ff. as *Cross* or *Spirit*; and these two separate riddles together as *Sun*. In classical and medieval writings, the wind was often thought to be responsible for a variety of phenomena, including storms, earthquakes, and sub-marine tremors. The riddle characterizes the wind as a warring creature wreaking havoc upon the land and sea, destroying the high halls and bone-houses (bodies) of men. The riddler asks not only, “Who is this destroyer?” but also, “Who shapes and drives the destroyer?”

Riddle 2. *Uncertain*. This riddle remains much debated and is called by Muir “perhaps the most perplexing of all the riddles” (655). Possible solutions include *Bell, Well-Bucket, Bucket, Plow* or *Plow Team, Handmill, Millstone, Flail, Lock, Pen, Phallus, Watchdog, Devil*, and *Man Called Back from the Dead*. None of the

proposed solutions satisfies the riddic details entirely. It is difficult to translate this riddle because of the ambiguity of some of the language. OE *þragbysig*, for example, might mean “sometimes busy,” “always busy,” or “periodically employed,” and *slæpwerigne* could mean “weary from lack of sleep” or “weary from too much sleep.” The number of “ring” and “ringing” words in the riddle would seem to point toward the *Bell* solution.

Riddle 3. *Shield*. The shield is portrayed as a fierce wooden warrior, difficult to slay, impossible to revive with ordinary herbal medicines. Anglo-Saxon shields were made of wood, sometimes covered with leather, often adorned with metal fittings and ornamental mounts. The “hard hammer-leavings” and the “battle-sharp / Handiwork of smiths” are both kennings referring to the shield’s enemy, the sword. In the OE manuscript, the riddle is followed by a marginal S-rune that may indicate the solution, OE *scyld* (shield).

Riddle 4. *Sun*. The sun is portrayed as a warrior of Christ, benefactor and scourge, comfort and torment. The association between the Son (OE *sunu*) and the sun (OE *sunne*) is often found in OE religious poetry (see, for example, *Advent Lyric II* and *The Phoenix* in the Exeter Book). Christ’s coming on Judgment Day was often depicted in medieval texts as a great sun whose fiery countenance would warm and comfort the righteous while fiercely tormenting the damned (see, for example, the end of *Christ II: The Ascension*). In the manuscript, there is a marginal S-rune below this riddle that may indicate the solution, OE *sigel* or *sunne*, or Latin *sol*, all words for “sun.”

Riddle 5. *Swan*. The exact kind of swan is debated. Proposals include *Whistling Swan*, *Whooper*, *Mute Swan*, and *Bewick’s Swan*. These different swan types were probably not distinguished until the nineteenth century (Bitterli, 39). The idea of the silent swan whose feathers “sing” may derive from “the medieval idea repeated in learned circles and anchored in the system of Christian typology, that there is a special type of wild swan whose wings make actually tuneful music when it flies” (Niles, 2006, 110), or it may refer to the Mute Swan, which is common in the British Isles, whose “broad wings produce a strong, throbbing noise” (Bitterli, 40). The swan’s singing feathers are also referred to in *The Phoenix* at line 141 (my translation).

Riddle 6. *Nightingale, Jay, Wood-Pigeon, Chough, Jackdaw, Thrush, Starling*. A songbird of some sort is indicated, though other non-bird solutions such as *Bell*, *Flute*, *Frogs*, and *Crying Baby* have been proposed. The bird is called an *eald æfensceop* (old evening singer), which seems to indicate the nightingale. Alcuin’s *De Luscinia* praises the nightingale whose “harmonies grace its tiny throat” and whose “melody remains through night-shadow.” In the manuscript, there is what looks

like a post-medieval letter *N* above the riddle that may indicate someone's guess as to the nightingale solution.

Riddle 7. *Cuckoo*. This changeling destroys its foster brothers and sisters. Its bizarre craft and ungrateful behavior have made it a villain of the bird world. The mother cuckoo leaves her egg in the nest of another bird, and by an evolutionary adaptation known as egg mimicry, fools the host mother into adopting the egg as her own. The hatched cuckoo, often stronger than its siblings, is skilled in ejecting both eggs and fledglings from the nest.

Riddle 8. *Barnacle Goose* is now generally accepted; earlier solutions included *Sea-Furrow*, *Anchor*, *Bubble*, and *Water-Lily*. The barnacle goose breeds in the Arctic and visits Britain in the winter. This is the earliest account of the bird's mythical transformations, though the story is recounted in later sources such as the twelfth-century *Topography of Ireland* by Giraldus Cambrensis, who says that the baby barnacles, which look like marsh geese, hang down from pieces of driftwood, elongating their beaks and growing feathers until they detach themselves and fly off. The bird was even classified as a shellfish by some churchmen who enjoyed eating roast barnacle goose on fast days.

Riddle 9. *Wine-Cup* or *Beaker of Wine* is the most popular solution; others include *Night*, *Gold*, and *Wine Debauch*. Like the lady "mead" of Riddle 25, who is "binder and scourge of men," this seductress lures and lays out the strongest of warriors, stripping them of strength. There is a grim death-joke at the end of the riddle: As drunk fools continue to raise and praise the wine-cup, which they take to be their "dearest treasure," grim God will raise, judge, and damn their souls (the real treasure) to an eternal drinking of hell's "dark woe in the dregs of pleasure."

Riddle 10. *Ox* or *Oxhide*. This is one of several medieval ox riddles in Old English and Latin. The riddles are all fashioned about the central paradox: Living (ox), I break the land; lifeless (leather), I bind man. Medieval Latin riddles by Aldhelm and Eusebius use the same motif. The ox of this riddle binds and braces lord and servant (shoe), brings wine to man (wineskin), arches up for the fierce-footed woman (boot), and thrusts against the lecherous slave girl who comes to warm, wet, and work over her lord's or her own new "skin" (shirt or garment). At the end of the riddle, the drunken, dark-haired slave woman works the leather in a way that leads to her bawdy pleasure.

Riddle 11. *Ten Chickens* or *Hatchling Chicks*. Other less likely solutions are *Ten Fingers and Gloves*, *Ten Pheasants*, *Butterfly Transformations*, and *Alphabet Letters*. The house of each chicken is a shell with a filament skin or membrane hung on the inside

wall. The six brothers and four sisters are difficult to explain with any of the solutions. They may represent the consonants and vowels of OE *tien ciccenu* (ten chickens) in a Northumbrian dialect spelling.

Riddle 12. *Horn*. This creature may be a humble ox or cow horn or a more elaborate aurochs horn such as the one discovered at Sutton Hoo. The animal's horn (already a weapon) is stripped by a hunter, adorned by a smith, borne to battle as a war-horn by a lord or to the table as a mead-vessel by a serving lady. The horn is thus war-weapon and hall-joy: its song bodes wassail or slaughter—and sometimes at the banquet table of feuding families, a grim mixture of both.

Riddle 13. *Fox, Red Fox, Vixen, Fox and Hound, Badger, Porcupine, Hedgehog, Weasel*. A number of fierce animals have been proposed for this riddle, but the habits and coloring favor some form of fox. The savage protectress of this riddle is probably a female fox, or vixen, known to be a passionate mother and fierce defender of her young. The fox's natural enemy is the dog, called a "slaughter-hound" in the riddle, probably a terrier of some sort. When the dog attacks, the vixen first secures her young. Then she leads the stalker through tight burrow tunnels and lures him out her back door (Grimsgate), where she turns to offer him an unexpected feast of battle-tooth and war-claw.

Riddle 14. *Anchor*. This riddle shares some motifs with the fifth-century riddle of Symphosius, but the anchor here is more animated in the storm and strife of the sea than the Latin *Ancora*. Like an epic warrior, the OE anchor seizes glory in the pitch of war. Against its enemies, wind and wave, it holds its floating hoard with the help of the stones' clutch.

Riddle 15. *Uncertain*. None of the proposed solutions completely fits the details of this riddle, but the most likely possibilities are *Bee-Skep* (a woven basket used as a domestic beehive), *Beehive*, and *Quiver*. The "death-spears" could be stinging bees or arrows. Other proposed solutions include *Fortress*, *Ballista*, *Catapult*, *Forge*, *Ink-Well*, *Oven*, and *Samson's Lion and Bees*. In some of the proposed solutions, the weapons are real Anglo-Saxon instruments of war; in others, they are only metaphorical weapons.

Riddle 16. *Uncertain*. The few remaining clues of this fragment point to a broad-bellied container of some sort used in the shipping trade—probably an amphora, large pottery jug, or perhaps a leather bottle or wooden cask of some sort. Such objects were associated with the continental wine trade.

Riddle 17. *Ship*. The key to this riddle lies in reading the runes in each group backward to spell OE *hors* (horse), *mon* (man), *wega*, (warrior), *haofoc* (hawk). The horse

is a sea-horse (a kenning for ship) that carries a man or warrior on its back along with a bold hawk (the sail flying in the air). Taking the first runic letter of each word group spells *Snac*, which is a light war-ship (see Griffith, 1992). Other proposed solutions include *A Man on Horseback with a Hawk on His Fist*, *Horse-Man-Servant*, *Hunting*, *Falconry*, *World Riddle*, and *Writing*.

Riddle 18. *Sword*. This creature celebrates its ominous splendor, the glint of death, then cuts through court-praise to its savage description of killing battle-foe and even bench-friend. The last half of the riddle plays upon an elaborate and bawdy conceit. The celibate weapon brings real death to men, not the metaphoric “sexual death” that women love. If the sword battles well, it begets no children; if it fails on the field, it is sent to the smithy to be melted down and reforged. In contrast, the phallic sword engenders life as it thrusts and parries. The battle-sword that serves well is a celibate killer; the phallic sword that serves well, seeds life.

Riddle 19. *Plow*. The strange ground-skulker and dirt-biter is a wooden Anglo-Saxon plow; its dagger and sword are the metal coulter and share that turn over the earth. The plow is drawn by the “dark enemy of forests,” the ox that has uprooted trees and turned woodlands to fields. It is driven by a “bent lord,” the farmer who guides it. Paradoxically, this driving lord of the plow must also slave over his fields.

Riddle 20. *Wagon of Stars*, *Charles’s Wain and the Circling Stars*, *Ursa Major*, *Month of December*, *Bridge*, *Ice-Bridge*. Some form of the constellation and surrounding stars is the most likely solution. The wagon is Charles’s Wain. The eleven special riders are the stars of Canes Venatici (just under the Wain), four of them especially bright. The “sixty” riders may represent a “multitude” of circling stars, according to a briefly documented medieval tradition.

Riddle 21. *Bow*. This riddle-creature announces its OE name as *Agob*, which is *Boga* (Bow) spelled backward. The riddlic bow is a wizard-warrior: when bent with the battle-sting in its belly, it is not dying (as a man might be) but preparing to kill. It spits what it swallows—the whistling snake, the death-drink. The motif of the venomous cup hearkens back to the Devil’s death-feast in the Garden of Eden. Man’s fallen legacy seems symbolized by the bow. Bound, it serves its warlord properly but murderously in a world of vengeance.

Riddle 22. *Jay* or *Magpie*. The solution to this riddle is indicated by rearranging the runes to spell *higora*, a variant of OE *higora*, which has been identified as either a jay or a magpie. Both birds, closely related, are well-known mimics and saucy janglers. The bird here is pictured as an imitator and trickster, hiding its true identity in a multitude of disguised voices.

Riddle 23. *Onion* is almost universally accepted; other solutions have included *Leek*, *Garlic*, *Hemp*, *Rose Hip*, and *Mustard*. This is one of several Anglo-Saxon double-entendre riddles with a sexual solution for the bawdy and a plain solution for the prim. On the kitchen-counter carving-bed, the lady lays an onion—back in the bedroom, another bulb and skin. The onion begins its “song of myself” with a litany of power, but after the entrance of the warrior woman, eager-armed and proud, the “I” fractures into body, head, and skin—as the lady grabs, rushes, holds, and claims. The power struggle is resolved in the paradox of the fast catch, the mutual delight of “our meeting,” the oblique conclusion, the enactment of “something to come.” The phallic onion links the green world with the world of human sexuality. Nature is charged with human metaphor; passion is charted with natural myth.

Riddle 24. *Bible*, *Gospel Book*, *Holy Scripture*, *Book*. The riddle celebrates the parchment’s life from beast-skin to book. The holy book suffers its own form of passion as it is ripped, stretched, scraped, cut, scratched by the quill (“the bird’s once wind-stiff joy”), and tracked with ink; but as keeper and conveyor of the Word, it transcends its fate to bring grace, honor, and glory to men. Its inner treasure is reflected in its outer appearance—multicolored illuminations, gold leaf, and a jeweled cover.

Riddle 25. *Mead*. This powerful creature is an alcoholic beverage made from honey. The nectar is taken by bees from flowers and carried to the hive, where honey is made. In turn, man takes the honey to make a powerful drink that can render him reckless or sap his strength. This is the central paradox of the riddle: Helpless to withstand man’s plundering and processing, mead is transformed into a mighty agent that enters man’s home (and head!) to render its conqueror helpless.

Riddle 26. *Uncertain*. Proposed solutions for this much debated riddle include *John Barleycorn*, *Beer*, *Ale*, *Barley and Ale*, *Malt Liquor*, *Winesack*, *Harp*, *Stringed Instrument*, *Yew-Horn*, *Tortoise-Lyre*, *Parchment*, *Codex*, *Damascened Sword*, and *Barrow or Trial of the Soul*. Most of the solutions are either about alcoholic beverages or musical instruments (two sources of Anglo-Saxon hall-joy). The OE text has a number of textual, grammatical, and semantic ambiguities that make it possible to sustain different solutions. My translation tends to support some musical instrument solution. If, however, the OE *dream* (joy, mirth, melody, music) that is within the creature is alcoholic joy instead of musical melody, then the last half of the riddle might be transformed poetically to read:

This creature brings in hall-joy—sweet  
Mirth clings, lingers in the mouth  
Of the living who love it and say nothing  
Against it. Then after death or drunken sleep,



They clamor in confusion and find fault  
 With its dangerous pleasure. Sober listeners  
 Will know what this creature is called.

Riddle 27. *Moon and Sun*. This riddle describes an imaginary celestial conflict. A few days before new moon, a waning sliver rises, stealing its strand of light from the sun. This “curved lamp of the air” fetches home to its night-chamber another booty of pale light between its tips or horns (sometimes called by sailors “the old moon in the arms of the new”) that is actually earthlight—sunlight reflected from earth to moon. The crescent-moon marauder plots to keep this light-treasure in its sky-castle, but dawn appears and the pale treasure disappears, retaken by the sun. As the sun becomes visible, the moon itself pales, then disappears over the horizon. The next night (new moon), the plundering moon has disappeared, and groundlings wonder where the wandering thief has gone. Other less likely solutions are *Cloud and Wind*, *Bird and Wind*, *Swallow and Sparrow*, and *Star-Riddle*.

Riddle 28a. *Tree or Wood*. This riddle occurs twice in the Exeter Book with slight variations. Though other solutions have been proposed (*Rainwater*, *Snowflake*, *Cornfield*, *Harp*), most scholars agree that this creature is the OE *treow* or *beam*, which can refer to the variety of wooden forms in the riddle. The living tree endures wind and weather until it is cut and crafted by man into cup or cross, when it is loved and worshipped by hall-thanes. Whether the last lines refer to the holy cross or demonic cup (compare Riddle 9) may be less important than the transformation of the wounded wood to a place of power over men.

Riddle 29. *Bagpipe* is generally accepted. Other proposed solutions include *Fiddle*, *Organistrum*, *Hurdy-Gurdy*, *Organ*, and *Harp*. This riddle is one of the earliest known descriptions of the bagpipe. Like a canny shaper or dream-singer, the bird plays mute—her beak (chanter) hung down and her hands and feet (drones and mouthpiece) slung up. Helpless but song-hungry, she is passed round the hall and pressed to sing. She drinks no mead but a bellyful of air—her hoard. Jeweled and naked, she sings through her dangling legs—makes melody with her chanter while the drones ride dangling from their glory-sister’s neck. While her shape is strange, her song is sublime. She transforms the plain hall of earls into a dream-world of dance and song.

Riddle 30. *Ship*. Other suggestions include *Wagon or Cart*, *Millstone*, *Wheel*, and *Wheelbarrow*. This one-footed monster from the workshops of men that sails on the smooth plain is probably a merchant ship. Strangely misshapen, with a belly full of food for the disgorging, she slides onto the shore, carrying “corn-gold, grain-treasure,

wine-wealth.” Her hoard is not gold or jewels but the sustaining treasures of food and drink.

Riddle 31. *Iceberg, Ice-Floe*. Today these are not normally found in British waters, but occasional “erratics” from Greenland were probably sighted there in earlier times. The legendary creature may also derive from earlier tales. The iceberg or floe is depicted as a beautiful but dangerous woman-warrior armed with ice-blades and a ready curse. The solution of the riddle-within-a-riddle of the last five lines is “water.” Water is the mother of ice and also its daughter (pregnant again with potential ice). A more general solution might be *Ice*.

Riddle 32. *Rake*. This virtuous ground-dogger, plant-scratcher, crop-catcher is not some weird pooch but an Anglo-Saxon rake. It noses, scruffs, and plunders weeds, thins gardens and fields for a crop of fair flowers and good grain. It is both weed-warrior and farmyard slave. It feeds cattle with its catch of teeth. The tone here is a curious mixture of mock heroic and pastoral joy.

Riddle 33. *Mail-Coat*. This riddle and a Northumbrian version of it, *The Leiden Riddle* (see “The Minor Poems”), are both based on the Latin *Lorica* riddle of Aldhelm. The creature here defines itself mainly by negatives: it is not made by the traditional weaving process. Chain-mail was formed from iron rings welded together by a skilled smith. Like jeweled swords, mail-coats were heirlooms of great value worn only by leaders and lords. Ordinary soldiers probably wore leather jerkins on the battlefield.

Riddle 34. *Ship* is the most likely solution here, though the riddle is extremely difficult, and one editor says he wishes it “at the bottom of the Bay of Portugal [for] there is no poetry in it, and the ingenuity is misplaced” (Wyatt, 93). There is also what appears to be in the middle of line 3, a non-metrical, scribal interpolation in Latin and OE of an earlier marginalic, cryptic note: *monn . homo . wiif . mulier . hors . equus* (indicating “man, woman, and horse”—some scribe’s guess as to the meaning of the “eight feet”). Some editors try to include this in their solutions; others treat it as an interpolation and ignore it, as I do. Some editors read the literal clues as the solution, positing some odd combination of a man, woman, child, dog, and hawk riding on a horse. I take the four feet below to be the oars in the water; the eight feet above to be those of the oarsmen. The wings are sails; the twelve eyes and six heads belong to the four oarsmen and two headlike prows. The likeness of the dog and the face of the woman may describe the figureheads such as those seen on ships in the Bayeux Tapestry and in some manuscript representations of Noah’s Ark. The boat leaves one track. The shape of the horse is the sea-horse or ship with its birdlike sail (a motif in Riddles 17 and 62). Not all of the details can be completely explained, but

*Ship* seems a better solution than the others, which include *Sow with a Litter of Five Pigs*, *Waterfowl Hunt*, *Family on the Go*, and (in two parts) *A Boat/A Pregnant Horse with Two Pregnant Women on Its Back*.

Riddle 35. *Bellows*. This is the bawdy bellows riddle; the plain one is Riddle 83. Here the hard-muscled man labors over air at the forge fire, while his double struggles with the pump of love. The creature fills, gorges, spills, dies, and rises with another “breath.” It sires a son—air or child—and fathers a newly engorged self.

Riddle 36. *Young Ox or Bull Calf*. This is one of three *Ox* riddles (see Riddles 10 and 70) that share motifs with Latin riddles by Aldhelm and Eusebius. This riddle, with its colloquial language, its prescient country bystander chiming in with a riddle-within-the-riddle, and its natural celebration of Bess and boy, seems wrought with the tone and humor of a country poet.

Riddle 37. *Uncertain*. Suggested solutions include *Dream*, *Language*, *Speech*, *Time*, *Death*, *Fate*, *Faith*, *Moon*, *Cloud*, *Comet*, and *Day*. There is no general agreement about the creature in this riddle, despite the riddler’s insistence that writings reveal its plain presence among men. We should know it—it seeks each living person, moves everywhere in the wide world, and carries comfort to the children of middle-earth. Yet its power passes knowing. No wonder—it has no hands, feet, mouth, mind, or soul. Yet it lives. It is the poorest of creatures, yet it reaps glory. It is marvelously difficult to catch with words, yet everything said about it is true.

Riddle 38. *Creation, Nature*. This riddle is based on a long Latin original by the seventh-century English churchman Aldhelm, who composed a “century” or set of one hundred Latin riddles. The OE riddler expanded and reshaped portions of the Latin to make a leaner style. The riddle celebrates what the Anglo-Saxons called *forð-gesceaft* or “creation-bodying-forth,” the divine and discernible spirit infused in all things. The reference to the mythical *pernex* in line 47 is a mistranslation of the Latin *plus pernix aquilis*, “swifter than the eagle.”

Riddle 39. *Water*. This riddle fragment gives only general clues, but a similar water-creature is described in Riddle 80 as the “mother of any well-known creatures” whose “lineage sings the spawn of creation.” Other suggested solutions are *Nature*, *Creation* (as part of the previous riddle), *Earth*, *Fire*, and *Wisdom*.

Riddle 40. *Cock and Hen*. Bedroom carousers and barnyard hands may know from experience these bawdy birds. Bookworms will have to unravel the runic clues of the central lines, which rearranged spell OE *hana* (cock) and *hen* (hen). The heart

of the riddle is love's stronghold unlocked with a literate or libidinous key. Scholars will take sublimated pleasure in discovering the solution. Common carousers will simply enjoy the low-down humor in the riddle.

Riddle 41. *Soul and Body*. The lordly guest of great lineage is the soul; its servant and brother, the body. Earth is mother and sister to both: mother because man was shaped from clay; sister because earth, soul, and body were all created by God the Father. The body must serve the soul in liege-lord fashion, but each must love and care for the other as a brother because finally they are bound in judgment. United again on Judgment Day, they will find bliss in heaven or torment in hell. There are three other *Soul and Body* poems—one in the Exeter Book, one in the Vercelli Book, and one in the Worcester Fragments (see "Additional Poems").

Riddle 42. *Key*. This is the first of two key riddles in the Exeter Book; the other, less bawdy rendering is Riddle 87. The key itself may dangle on a belt beneath the Anglo-Saxon tunic; its lascivious double is also hung boldly beneath and below. The small miracle may open love's lock as it slips snugly into the "hole it has long come to fill." The only other proposed solution is *Dagger-Sheath*.

Riddle 43. *Bread Dough*. For polite company the answer to this riddle is bread dough—though lustier spirits may find the phallic solution barely concealed. As in other bawdy double-entendre riddles, the poet is at pains to tease us with both solutions. In playful fashion the riddle is also an elaborate and punningly obscene etymological joke, since the Old English word for "lord," *blaford*, comes from *blaf-weard*, "guardian of the loaf," and the word for "lady," *blefdige*, comes from *blaf-dige*, "kneader of the dough." The lady in question is presumably making more than bread.

Riddle 44. *Lot and His Family*. This riddle is based on the confusion of kinship terms arising from Lot's siring sons with his own daughters, as told in Genesis 19 and in other medieval sources. Lot's wives are also his daughters; his sons are their sons and also his grandsons. Mothers and sons together, since they are all Lot's children, are also brothers and sisters. This makes each son paradoxically both uncle and nephew of the other. Midrash tradition has it that this impossible riddle was the second query proposed by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon to test his wisdom.

Riddle 45. *Bookmoth, Bookworm, Maggot, and Psalter*. The central idea here is based on a fifth-century Latin riddle by Symphosius. The thief who swallows songs is a bookworm. The moth lays its eggs in the spine of a manuscript made of cowhide. The larvae hatch and feed on the vellum leaves. To the worm, *Beowulf* or the Bible is just like beef jerky. The riddler pokes mock-heroic fun at the worm, a mid-

night marauder who like a pedant devours the substance without the spirit. The word *wyrm* in Old English can mean “worm, moth, bug, dragon”—in short, everything that treats man as a material body and wants to devour him. There is a wordplay in the riddle between *cwide*, “sayings,” and *cwidu*, “cud” (see Robinson, 1975, on this and other examples of ambiguity and wordplay in the riddle). The worm treats our songs and sayings like so much lunch. But the riddler reverses this by turning the moth’s munching into a rumination of song, and in so doing reclaims what was lost in the original word-hoard of the mind and memory.

Riddle 46. *Paten* or *Chalice*. This creature, crafted of gold, whose inscription sings silently to the supplicant, must be one of the sacred vessels of the Mass. The circle or *bring*, which can refer to anything round in OE, holds its own sacred riddle, the blood-wine or embodied host of Christ. It sings the supplicant’s plea, urging man to partake of the deeper mystery of the Mass. Riddle 57 is another chalice riddle.

Riddle 47. *Uncertain*. What are the treasures “dearer than gold,” swallowed by the creature and sought by man each day to sustain him? Probably bread or books. *Oven* and *Bookcase* are thus the two likeliest solutions. Other suggestions include *Mill*, *Falcon-Cage*, and *Pen and Ink*. If the daily sustenance is metaphorical (wisdom), the bookcase shelves it; if literal (food or bread), the oven bakes it. The race of shapers may be scribes or cooks.

Riddle 48. *Fire*. This warrior has dumb parents, flint and steel. Scourge and protector, helpmate and hearth-devil, it serves well when ruled with a firm hand and hard mind. Without discipline and care, it grows wild and brings fools a grim reward. Restrained, it serves; unrestrained, it destroys.

Riddle 49. *Quill-Pen and Fingers*. The four strange creatures on the gold-adorned road are the quill-pen and thumb and two fingers that hold the pen. The brash bird, reduced to a feather, darts from inkwell to the gilded vellum road and back again. The warrior who pushes them on is the writer. The OE *feþer* can refer to both the bird and the quill-pen that facilitates the playful movement in the riddle. The motifs in the riddle are echoed in a number of medieval Latin riddles.

Riddle 50. *Flail*. The two hard captives bound together as one punishing creature, wielded by a Welshwoman and slave, are probably the handle and swipple of a threshing flail. Other suggested solutions include *Well Buckets*, *Yoke of Oxen*, and *Broom*.

Riddle 51. *Battering Ram* is the most likely solution, though *Gallows Tree/Cross*, and *Spear* have also been suggested. OE *ram(m)* occurs in the glosses and in Alfred’s

translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* as either a war tool or the animal (Latin *aries* may also be either), so presumably the Anglo-Saxons knew of the weapon—though without castles and fortifications, they would not have used it. The solution was probably based on literary and iconographic sources. The *Gallows Tree* proposal has interesting possibilities, but it is hard to see how it would have dark trim or trappings in its front or how it might batter its way through some resistance with its head.

Riddle 52. *Butter-Churn*. Like the earlier sexual double-entendre “bread” and “onion” riddles (23 and 43), this one also has ostensibly to do with food. The male servant thrusts his plunger into the female churn—together they make the baby, butter. The riddle opens with a burst of machismo, slightly surreal in its ravishing treatment of the passive woman in the corner. The man has the action—he steps, lifts, thrusts (his “something” is mock modesty), and works his will. Yet the paradox of sexuality here is that as man pumps, his power wanes. The dichotomy between active and passive, male and female, man and churn, disappears in a moment of lyric frenzy—“*Both* swayed and shook.” The narrative voice swings over to the feminine: the man is a servant, only sometimes useful, and too often tired before the work's end. The woman's power is in the making: she bears the butter.

Riddle 53. *Weapon-Rack*. This riddle presents a number of challenges and has elicited a wide variety of solutions, including *Sword-Rack*, (*Ornamented*) *Sword-Box*, *Mead-Barrel and Drinking Bowl*, *Shield*, *Scabbard*, *Gallows*, *Cross*, and *Harp*. The most likely solution is that of Niles, who argues that the creature is “a weapon-rack or (possibly) a cart used to store and transport military equipment,” including swords (in the shape of a cross), spears, and also mail-coats; he notes that “when hung with one or more byrnies, this structure bore a resemblance to a gallows” (2006, 83–84). This solution satisfies most, but not all, of the details in the riddle. The four woods remain something of a mystery since it is unlikely that four different woods would be used in the construction of such an object. The cross-gallows here is called a “wolfshead-tree” because an outlaw was sometimes called a “wolf” and could be hunted and hung from a wooden gallows as Christ was from the cross.

Riddle 54. *Web and Loom* in some form (*Tapestry and Loom*, *Web and Weaver's Loom*) is accepted by most editors. Less likely suggestions are *Turning-Lathe* and *Flail*. The loom has vertical warp-threads suspended from a horizontal beam. The threads are divided into alternate rows by a parting plank and kept taut by loom weights attached to their ends. This forms an opening or shed through which the shuttle moves, carrying the weft-thread. After the shuttle glides through the loom, the weft is struck tight by a toothed batten, the “small spears” of line 4. In the process of weaving, one of the alternate rows of weighted warp-threads dances up and

down (pulled by a leash-rod) so that each pass of the shuttle moves on alternate sides of its strands. Thus the web in the riddle has a fixed and a furiously swinging foot. The bright tree may be either the loom with its colorful web or a distaff of flax or wool nearby. The loom's leaving, presumably a tapestry, is borne to the high hall of heroes.

Riddle 55. *Swallows*. Most of the suggested solutions to this riddle are birds, including *Starlings*, *Swifts*, *Jackdaws*, *Crows*, and *House Martins*. Non-aviary solutions include *Gnats*, *Flies*, *Bees*, *Hailstones*, *Raindrops*, *Storm Clouds*, *Musical Notes*, *Letters*, *Damned Souls*, and *Demons*. The small dark-coated, song-bright wind-riders who seem equally at home in the high wooded cliffs and the halls of men and who travel together in a troop are most likely swallows—though the requirement that the birds name themselves (with their cry?) would fit the crow or jackdaw more aptly.

Riddle 56. *Well Sweep*. This is a device for drawing water from a well. The sweep is a long pole attached to an upright that serves as its fulcrum. The longer, lighter end of the sweep is connected to another pole or rope that lowers and raises the bucket in the well. The shorter end of the sweep may be weighted to help in raising the bucket. The creature has three runes in its name, beginning with *Rad* (the *R*-rune). This has long puzzled critics, but Niles (2006, 91) has solved this puzzle by reading the runic clue as *R-ROD*, where the initial rune is read with its name, *Rad*. An OE *Rad-rod* is a “riding-rod” or “sweeping pole.” When spelled with runes in this way, there are only three different runes since the *R* is doubled.

Riddle 57. *Chalice*. This riddle celebrates the chalice. Here the sacred “ring” (an Old English *bring* can be something circular) is passed to the communicants who celebrate the deep mystery of the mass. The circle of gold “speaks” of Christ in two ways: it offers the sacred blood-wine of the Savior, and its body like Christ's is scored with wounds, probably icons and inscriptions. Like the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*, the chalice is both glorious token and wounded object. As it passes, “twisting, turning in the hands / Of proud men,” its celebrants seem to reflect the torturers at the foot of the cross.

Riddle 28b. *Tree* or *Wood*. This is the second, only slightly different version of this riddle. See the headnote to Riddle 28a.

Riddle 58. *Reed* (*Reed-Pipe*, *Reed-Pen*). This riddle has been thought by some to be a *Rune-Stave* and by others a *Reed-Pen* or *Reed-Pipe* (*Flute*), but Niles (2006, 130–32) argues convincingly that the creature is OE *breod*, which can be all things reedy—a reed in the water, a reed-pipe or flute, and a reed-pen. This same range of

meanings holds true for the Latin *harundo*, which is also the subject of a riddle by Symphosius. Other proposed solutions include *Kelp-Weed*, *Cross*, and *Letter-Beam*.

Riddle 59. *Shirt* or *Helmet*. This is another bawdy riddle. The overt answer is something a man sticks his hairy head through, and this could be either a shirt (or mail-shirt) or helmet—it makes little difference to the wonderful off-color play of the riddle. The covert solution is hardly in question. Other suggestions solutions are *Kirtle* and *Hood*.

Riddle 60. *Auger (Gimlet, Boring Tool)*. This is another bawdy riddle about a boring tool that heats up as it bores into the body of wood. Other suggestions include *Burning Arrow*, *Poker or Fire-Rod*, *Oven-Rake*, and *Tool for Tapping a Smelting Oven*. The reference to the “southern thruster” or “southern man” in the riddle remains obscure. It might be someone who lives in the south (a Welsh slave? a continental craftsman?). It might also indicate the direction of the thrust, similar to a “southern spear” in *The Battle of Maldon*, with obvious bawdy implications here.

Riddle 61. *Beaker*. At this point in the manuscript, the text begins to be obliterated in places from the long diagonal burn that resulted from someone placing something like a hot poker or fiery brand on the back of it. The creature of this riddle fragment is a drinking vessel, probably a glass beaker. Continental and Anglo-Saxon glass cups, jars, and beakers are a common find in early English archaeological sites. The riddle shares motifs with Aldhelm’s *Calix Vitreus* (Glass Beaker) riddle. Other solutions include *Flute*, *Flask*, and *Can*.

Riddle 62. *Ship*. This riddle is structured in ways similar to Riddle 17. Both are built on the common OE kenning of the ship as a sea-horse. Here the runes (represented by bold capitals in the translation) indicate the first two letters of the words they stand for: *Wlcg* (Horse), *BEorn* (Man), *HAfoc* (Hawk), *þEgn* (Hero), *FÆlca* (Falcon), and *EASPor* (Sea-Track). The sea-horse is a ship with birdlike sails, carrying a man or hero over the sea-track (for various interpretations of the runes, see Williamson, 1977, 325–30). Other less likely solutions include *Falconry*, *Writing*, *Hunting*, and *Snake-Eating Bird*. This riddle presents such difficulty that someone has scratched in dry-point runes in the margin *BUNRB* (though the exact runes are debated), which may indicate OE *Beo unneþe!* (Don’t be cruel!).

Riddle 63. *Onion*. This is the plain onion riddle; for the bawdy version, see Riddle 23. The “biter bitten” motif is also found in the Latin riddle of Symphosius. This is one of many OE riddles in which a creature of nature is wounded or destroyed by man only to find a new power to overcome man. Other suggested solutions are *Leek* and *Chive*.



Riddle 64. *Creation or Nature*. This riddle is a shortened version of Riddle 38. Some scholars, citing the riddle's emphasis on the divine power at work in nature, prefer the solution *God* or *God in Creation*. The flight at the end of the poem over the angels' homeland may reflect Christ's Ascension in *Christ II: The Ascension* in the Exeter Book (lines 229 ff. in my translation). Another proposed solution is *Water*.

Riddle 65. *Bible*. This fragment identifies a creature that offers charmed words of wisdom to mankind and is decorated with gold and silver. It seems to be a religious book of some kind, probably a Bible.

Riddle 66. *Iceberg*. Lines 1–2 of this riddle and line 3 appear in the manuscript to be two separate riddles, but the scribe in a number of places seems to have separated riddles in two or joined separate riddles together. Most editors now treat these lines as one riddle. The opening lines echo the opening lines of Riddle 31, the other iceberg riddle. The wave-walker, water turned to bone, is surely an iceberg, though other solutions have been offered, for either the two- or three-line riddle. These include *Ice*, *Frozen Pond*, *Icicle*, *Winter*, *Petrified Wood*, *Running Water*, and *Christ Walking on Water*.

Riddle 67. *Lyre or Harp*. Riddles 67 and 68 were once thought to be one riddle (the two together solved as *Shepherd's Pipe*, *Rye Flute*, *Harp*, *Hurdy-Gurdy*, and *Shuttle*), but a missing folio is now thought to separate the two riddles. The round-necked chanteuse of this riddle who "sings through her sides" is probably an Anglo-Saxon harp or lyre similar to the ones discovered at Sutton Hoo and Snape. Other suggested solutions for the single riddle are *Church Bell* and *Nose*.

Riddle 68. *Lighthouse? Candle?* There is barely enough descriptive evidence in this riddle fragment to hazard a guess as to the solution. Both a lighthouse and a candle would burn brightly. A lighthouse would stand *be wege* (by the road or sea), but the road would have to be metaphorical for the candle (a shelf-road or a manuscript-road?).

Riddle 69. *Sword*. This steep-cheeked creature wrapped in gold and garnet is, like the creature of Riddle 18, a sword. It combines the stark beauty of an heirloom with the stinging strength of a slayer. The plain of bright flowers in line 3 may be the field from which the ore is mined or the radiant iron above the anvil (sparked by the smith's blows) from which the blade is forged. The ring in line 9 is a sword-ring or ring-knob used on Anglo-Saxon hilts to symbolize the warrior's liege-lord relationship. Other suggestions for this riddle include *Dagger*, *Iron Helmet*, *Iron Shield*, and *Cupping Glass*.

Riddle 70. *Ox*. This is the last of the three Ox riddles in the Exeter Book (see also Riddles 10 and 36) that share certain motifs with similar Latin riddles. The strippling ox is here drawn from the pleasure of its mother's four fountains (leaving the herdsman to pull in its place for milk) and yoked to the hard life of the plow. Other solutions include *Axle and Wheels* and *Slave*.

Riddle 71. *Spear* or *Lance*. This weapon is hauled from its homeland, stripped and reshaped, and forced to battle against its will for a grim lord. Like the tree in *The Dream of the Rood*, it is ripped from a natural innocence and made to murder in man's world. The riddle is a strange combination of heroic celebration and grotesque irony. Bright glory is a bit dimmed when warriors become marauders; and weapons, muggish tools for bashing brains. The unnamed one that "breaks ready for the road home" at the end of the riddle is the soul of the dying warrior whose brain-house has been burst by the spear. Other suggested solutions are *Battering Ram*, *Beam*, *Bow* and *Incendiary Arrow*, and *Cross*.

Riddle 72. *Uncertain*. This riddle has given the riddle-solvers fits. Among the proposed solutions are *Ship*, *OE "Ac" (Oak, Ship)*, *Ship's Figurehead*, *Sun*, *Whooper Swan*, *Sea Eagle*, *Water Bird*, *Barnacle Goose*, *Siren*, *Soul*, *Cuttlefish*, *Rain*, *Water*, *Writing*, and *Reflection or Shadow*. The quill, for example, might dip in and out of the sea of ink and fly through the air to the shore of the page; the water might soar as clouds, fly as rain, make war as ice, dive as a sea-stream, and run on the shore as a river. The ship (in many ways the most likely solution) would charge the waves like a great warrior, swoop through the air and dive through the spray, stand up on the shore as part of a beached boat.

Riddle 73. *Piss*. These riddles were traditionally treated as two (lines 1–2 and line 3) on paleographical grounds, but are now generally taken to be a single riddle (compare Riddle 66 for a similar situation). Solutions for the two-riddle model include, for lines 1–2, *Hound*, *Hunting Dog*, *Savior*, and *Groom*; for line 3, *Hen*. Other solutions for the three-line riddle are *Hound and Hind* and *Elk-Hunter*. The riddle obviously turns on one's reading of the cryptic runes for *D*, *N*, *L* (or *U* or *I*?), and *H*. Reading them backwards and supplying missing vowels gives OE *hælend* (Savior) or *bland* (Piss). Taking *D* and *N* as code for the vowels that follow them in the alphabet gives OE *eolb* (elk). Reading *U* for *N* and reading backwards gives *hund* (hound, dog); and reading *I* for *U* gives *hind* (hind). For a summary of the runic possibilities, see Williamson (1977, 352–55), Muir (737), and Niles (2006, 96–100). The "piss" solution is based on the visual distinction between men's and women's modes of urination, a motif found occasionally in the folklore of certain primitive traditions: men shoot it out on the road while women sit quietly alone. This may be another of the bawdy riddles in the Exeter Book.

Riddle 74. *Oyster*. The footless, fixed creature of the sea with its bone-skin and sweet flesh is an oyster. The sea-mouth is caught, cracked, and hauled to its own door of doom (man's mouth!). The paradox of the "eater eaten" motif echoes that of the "biter bitten" in Riddle 63.

Riddle 75. *Uncertain*. The clues for this greatly damaged riddle are not enough to identify the creature with any certainty. It seems to be a migratory fish or creature that kills its prey in a special way. Proposed solutions include *Lamprey*, *Crab*, *Fish*, and *Oyster*.

Riddle 76. *Horn*. Although this creature sounds like a cross between a musical battle-sword and a flowerpot, it is actually an animal horn that can be shaped into a war-horn or a drinking horn (compare the *Horn* of Riddle 12). In the battle-rush it can sing out with a clarion call. At the supper table it can bear what blooms in the wood (pollen) transformed into the bee's delight (mead made from honey). It can both sing and reward singers with the gift of brew. Tongue in cheek, it laments because the hands of the noble lady who serves its mead are a little too honeyed. Other proposed solutions include *Falcon/Hawk*, *Spear*, and *Sword*. In the manuscript, line 1 appears as a separate riddle.

Riddle 77. *Weathercock* or *Weathervane*. Because Peter denied Christ three times before cockcrow, iron cocks were placed on church towers as a sign of Christ's coming and as a call to vigilance and repentance. These apparently gave rise to the medieval weathercock. The riddler here has artfully created a Christlike cock perched on its nail, twisting in torment, bound to its fate, serving faithfully, a gift to men. Buffeted by storm, it marks the wind, and in that act of charting, rises above its fate. Its act of passion, like Christ's, is both literally and spiritually transcendent as it swings high above men. Other suggestions include *Ship* and *Visored Helmet*.

Riddle 78. *Harrow*. This riddle is so severely damaged that it is difficult to arrive at a solution. The creature seems to devour dirt and be without skin or flesh. This suggests that the ground-gobbler may be a harrow. The Anglo-Saxon harrow pictured in the Bayeux Tapestry was a sharp-toothed implement dragged across a field after the initial plowing to break up clods of soil. The harrow "eats" clods, drawing them through its teeth to deposit them back on the ground as fine soil. A spade might also swallow dirt, but it would have only one foot.

Riddle 79. *Gold*. This riddle deals with the origin and outcome of some metal used in the making of artifacts and coins, probably gold. Other forms of this solution include *Ore*, *Metal*, *Coins*, and *Money*. The ore is ripped from its homeland, smelted, wrought by a legendary smith (probably Tubal Cain), and shaped to bear

man's icons and inscriptions. Its wounds are many, yet paradoxically its power is great. Unable to defy miner, smelter, artisan—it reaps revenge on the collective shaper, man. Separated from its family in the ground, it separates and enthralls the family of man.

Riddle 80. *Water*. This mother of many creatures is allied with the generative power of God. From the womb of water the myriad shapes of creation issue forth. Water bears and sustains, soothes and punishes. Herself a shape-shifter—ice, snow, rain, hail, stream, lake, sea—she dies and is born again, both mother and child (compare this motif in iceberg Riddle 31). The riddle shares certain motifs with Latin riddles by Aldhelm and Eusebius.

Riddle 81. *Fish and River*. This riddle is based on a fifth-century Latin riddle of Symphosius:

This house echoes with a loud, clear sound  
On earth, resounds while its guest is silent.  
Bound together, guest and home course and run.

The Old English riddle draws upon the Latin motif of the loud house with its quiet creature, then elaborates on a theme of common and contrastive movement. It concludes with a vital paradox: separated from its house, the creature dies.

Riddle 82. *One-Eyed Seller of Garlic*. This riddle, like the previous one, is based on a fifth-century Latin riddle by Symphosius:

Step up and see what you won't believe:  
A one-eyed man with a thousand heads.  
He sells what he has. Can he buy what he lacks?

This sort of riddle is commonly known as a neck-riddle since in some traditions a condemned man could save his neck by asking such an unsolvable riddle.

Riddle 83. *Bellows*. This is a plain treatment of the subject—its bawdier cousin is at Riddle 35. The creature is seized by a strong servant, muscled and pumped so that the cold wind, the “tooth of heaven” (a kenning), sings through its eye. Like a hysterical prima donna, the creature continues to puff up and pass out, reviving on air to repeat its monstrously ocular song. Another proposed solution is *Cask and Cooper*.

Riddle 84. *Inkhorn*. This is the first of two inkhorn riddles in the collection—the other is Riddle 89. Both riddles trace the horn's history from its natural home on

the stag's head through its capture and cutting by a craftsman to its place of suffering on the scribe's desk. Although both riddles are a lament for things past, this riddle seems more properly elegiac with its shifting timeframes, its brooding sense of memory, its contrast between past glory and present suffering, its focus upon the separation of brothers (the two horns), and the resulting sense of isolation and loss.

Riddle 85. *Uncertain*. This damaged riddle does not offer enough clues to lead to a solution. Proposed solutions include *Bellows* and *Leather Bottle or Flask*.

Riddle 86. *Uncertain*. This is the only Latin riddle in the Exeter Book; it is included in this edition because its solution may depend upon OE wordplay. The reasons for its inclusion in the collection remain uncertain. Tentative solutions have seemed as surreal as the riddle itself. One solver argues that the various meanings of Latin *lupus* (wolf, pike, hops) are the subject of the riddle. Another sees in the combination of OE *ewu* and *wulf* (ewe and wolf) a reference to the final letters in the name Cynewulf, a possible but unlikely riddle poet. Another word-player suggests that OE *wulf* (wolf) and *flys* (fleece) together render *wulflys* or (fleece of wool), referring to the woolen web on an Anglo-Saxon vertical loom. The three wolves would then represent the odd and even sides of the warp, tormenting the weft; the four feet would combine the two of the loom with the two of the warp (also called "feet" in Riddle 54); the seven eyes might be pairs of ring-shaped, clay loom weights. Another solver sees in the riddle the Lamb of God who destroys the wolflike Devil, who stands with the Trinity on Calvary (or as seems more likely, with the wolfish thieves), whose feet are the four Gospels, and whose eyes are the seven eyes of the apocalyptic Lamp or the seven Spirits of God sent forth in Revelation. Another pair of riddle-solvers take the four feet to belong to two spiritual men who see with the seven eyes of revelation; the solvers then manipulate the words *lupus* and *agnus* into *augustinus*, which resembles *Augustinus*, and twist *tertium* into *tertullium*, which suggests *Tertullianus*—thus arriving at the solution, *Augustine and Tertullian* (Davis and Schlueter). Finally, it seems that every proposed solution to the riddle has to work so hard to twist the clues that none of the suggestions (including my own *wulflys*) works. Bitterli wisely concludes that "the insurmountable obstacle of the riddle lies in its numerical scheme, which is both conspicuous and utterly incomprehensible" (79).

Riddle 87. *Key*. This is the second of two key riddles in the Exeter Book; a lustier version occurs at Riddle 42. This key begins its history with hammer and forge then leaps to its tongue-in-cheek confrontation with a sensuous brass foe. The conjunction of lock and key recalls the sexual entendre of Riddle 42, but in a more subtle fashion. Does the treasure at the end of the riddle refer to gold of the lord's hoard or the bedroom gifts of a gold-adorned woman waiting for him to claim the

riches she offers? Or does the mixture imply a riddlic world in which gold is as sensual as delight is rich? Other suggested solutions to the riddle are *Keyhole* and *Sickle*.

Riddle 88. *Beech/Book* (OE *Boc*). The OE *boc* can mean “beech” (as a tree or as beechwood) or “book.” The various meanings are brought into play in this riddle. The “boast of brown snufflers” is beech mast, fodder for pigs. The opening lines celebrate the tree in the wood. In the middle of line 3, the image shifts, probably referring to a secret love letter on a strip of bark or perhaps the wooden boards in the gold-adorned binding of a book. The weapon may be a wooden shield adorned with a ring. Other proposed solutions include *Beechwood Shield* and *Beech Battering Ram*.

Riddle 89. *Inkhorn*. This is the second of two inkhorn riddles; the other is Riddle 84. While the earlier riddle is highly elegiac, this riddle has its heroic elements. The horn speaks first not of its present suffering but of the former glory of its lord. It suffers its fate of cutting, scraping, shaping, swallowing wood and stained water (ink made from hawthorn bark), and the darting birdlike quill with stoic equanimity. The battle-companion of the wolf in line 20 is probably the raven whose quill now plunders ink from the horn’s belly.

Riddle 90. *Creation*. The language of this riddle fragment resembles that of the Creation or Nature Riddles 38 and 64.

Riddle 91. *Book*. This much debated riddle is the last one in the riddle collection in the Exeter Book. Its creature claims to be well known and often in the keeping of men, but it has yet to be identified to the satisfaction of all. Proposed solutions include *Book*, *Dream*, *Thought*, *Moon*, *Riddle*, *Soul*, *Wandering Singer*, *Quill Pen*, *Beech*, and *Prostitute*. Is the “plunderers’ joy” (a kenning and inset miniature riddle) the book’s gold ornaments, the pen’s ink, the moon’s treasure of light, the singer’s studded lyre, the prostitute’s favors, the riddler’s mystery, the spirit’s quickness, or the splendors of dream? These questions continue to haunt the solvers. The creature seems so near—yet still strangely undiscovered. Guess what it is!

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