

The Wife's Lament - Translation

I tell this tale about me, very melancholy,
of my own journey (into exile). I that speaking may
what I endured because of troubles after I grew up,
of new or old, never more than now.

5 Always I suffer torment of my exile's paths.

First my Lord went hence of his people
over the rolling waves; anxiety before dawn had I
where in the land was my leader of men (Lord).

Then I went travelling seeking retainers (exiled Lord) or
service (new Lord),

10 a friendless exile, because of my woeful need.

(Then) That man's kinsmen began to plot
through secret design that they might separate us two,
that we two most widely in this world
have been living most wretchedly, and (how) I pined.

15 My Lord commanded me to become one (with the pagan
sanctuary)

few loved ones had I in this region,
(few) loyal friends. Therefore my spirit is sorrowful
then I 1) a most suitable man found,
2) my most suitable man found,
ill-fortuned, sad-spirited,

20 heart concealing. Murder plotting,
(with) a happy demeanour, very often we two vowed,
that nothing else would separate us except death,

Original (Interpretative transcription)

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

A ic wite wonn minra wræcsiþa.
ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of
leodum
ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
hwær min leodfruma londes wære.
ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,

wineleas wræcca, for minre weaþearfe.
Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan
þurh dyrne geþoht, þæt hy todælden unc,
þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice
lifdon laðlicost, ond mec longade.

Het mec hlaford min herheard niman,
ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede,
holdra freonda. Forþon is min hyge geomor,
ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde,

heardsæligne, hygegeomorne,

mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne,
bliþe gebæro. Ful oft wit beotedan
þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana

(nothing else). Now it is reversed;
it is now as if (it) never were (dramatic abruptness),

owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
is nu swa hit no wære

- 25 our friendship (love). Must I, far and near,
1) endure the feud of my loved one.
2) enmity endure of my much-loved one.

freondscipe uncer. Sceal ic feor ge neah
mines felaleofan fæhðu dreogan.

The man commanded me to dwell in a grove of
trees,
beneath an oak-tree (place of pagan worship) in
the hollow of the earth (or earth grave, or cave)

Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,
under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.

Old is this earth-dwelling, pierced I am with
longing;

Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad,

- 30 the dales were dark, the mountains high,
biting enclosures, with briars overgrown,
a home without pleasure. Here my Lord's
leaving often assailed me with wrath.

sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,
bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne,
wic wynna leas. Ful oft mec her wrabe begeat

1) Friends beloved (while) living, in the earth
occupy their beds (dead)

fromsiþ frean. Frynd sind on eorþan,
leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,

2) Lovers on earth are beloved (and) living, lying in
their beds

- 35 while I at dawn walk alone
under the oak-tree around this earth-cave.
There must I sit the summerlong day,
there I may weep my persecution (exiles),
(my) many hardships. Forthwith I never may

þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
þær ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg,
þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsipas,
earfoþa fela; forþon ic æfre ne mæg

- 40 find rest from that heart-sorrow,
nor all the longing you poured (afflicted) on this
life of mine.

þære modceare minre gerestan,
ne ealles þæs longapes þe mec on þissum life
begeat.

Always (the) young man may have to be sad-
hearted,

A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,

hard his heart's thought; just as he must have
glad state (disposition), so also (must he have) a
heavy heart,

45 a multitude of constant sorrows. Let all
the joy (pleasure) in the world depend on him alone,
may he be widely outlawed
in a far country, so that my friend (lover) sits
under a stony slope, frost-coated by the storm,
a sad spirited friend, soaked

50 a dreary desolate abode(hall), that friend of mine
will endure

much grief; he will think about too often
a more pleasant dwelling. Woe be to those who
shall wait for (their) beloved in longing.

heard heortan geþoht, swylce habban sceal
bliþe gebæro, eac þon breostceare,

sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong
eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð
under stanhlīþe storme behrimed,
wine werigmod, wætre beflowen

on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine

micle modceare; he gemon to oft
wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
of langope leofes abidan.