The Wife's Lament

Ic þis giedd wrece     bi me ful geomorre,
minre sylfere sð.     ic þæt secgan meg
hwæt ic yrmþa gebad,     siþþan ic up weox,
iwes ðeþe ealdes,     no ma þonne nu.
A ic wite wonn     minra wræcsiþa.
ærest min hlaford gewat     heonan of leodum
of er yþa gelac;     heftde ic uhtceare
hwæt min leodfruma     londes were.
ðæ ic me feran gewat     folgð secan,
wineleas wæcca     for minre weaþe
ongunnon þæt þæs monnes     magas hycgan
þurh dyrne geþoht     þæt hy todælden unc,
pæt wit gewidost     in woruldrice
liaftæn laðlicost;     ond mec longade.
het mec hlaford min     her heard niman;
ahte ic leofra lyt     on þissum londstede,
holdra freonda;     forþon is min hyge geomor.
ðæ ic me ful gemæcne     monnan funde,
heardsæligne,     hygegomorne,
mod miþendne,     morþor hycgendne,
bliþe gebæro.     ful oft wit beotedan
þæt unc ne gedælde     nemne deað ana,
owiht elles;     siþþan me þæt onh
freondsceipe uncer.     sceal ic feor ge neah
minres felalcofan     fæhðu dreogan.
Heht mec mon wunian     on wuda bearwe,
under actreo     in þam eorðscræfe.
eald is þes eorðsele,     eal ic eom oflongad;
bitre burgtunas     brerum beweaxne,
wick wynna leas     ful oft mec her wraþe begeat
fromsiþ frean.     frynd sind on eorþan,
þær ic sittan mot     sumorlangne dæg,
þær ic wepan meg     mine wreascþas,
earþa fela;     forþon ic æfre ne meg
þære modceare     minre gerestan
ne ealles þæs longþes     þæt mec on þissum life begeat.
a scyle geong mon     wesan geomormod,
hedt heortan ge     þoht;     swylce habban sceal
þæt þæs monnes     þæt þæs eorðscrafu.
þær ic sittan mot     sumorlangne dæg,
þær ic wepan meg     mine wreascþas,
earþa fela;     forþon ic æfre ne meg
þære modceare     minre gerestan
ne ealles þæs longþes     þæt mec on þissum life begeat.

I sing this wretched song of my absolute sadness, my journey into exile, that I might tell what hardships I have dwelt in since I grew up, new or old, never more than now. Always I have suffered torments, miseries and wretchedness. First my lord departed hence from his people over the waves' destructive uproar; I could not sleep for fear of where my lord might be on Earth. Then I departed on my journey, to follow and seek to serve, a friendless wandering exile, my poverty caused by men who undertook to think and plan, my lord's own kin, that he might separate us through secret counsel, that we two might live far apart in this worldly realm, where I live most horribly, grieving and longing since my lord commanded me here to this hard dwelling. I have few that are close in this place, few loyal friends; therefore my heart was sad when I found my equal, my companion unhappy and miserable, hiding his intentions, planning murder.

Happy in our outward manner, we very often boasted that nothing could divide us except death alone, nothing else—now all that is changed; now that is as if it had never been... Our love, our friendship... I shall for now, and for long, My dearly-beloved's feud endure. He called me to remain in this forest grove, under this oak-tree, in this earthen-hovel, this ancient cave, in which I am tortured with longing. The valleys are dark here, the mountains high, the towns blasted by overgrown thorn-bushes, joyless dwellings. Too often I am cruelly afflicted here because of the departure of my lord. Earthly friends, do you live and love, occupy beds, or graves, while I walk alone at dawn under oak-trees, and through this earthen-hovel? There must I sit the long summer day; there must I weep and mourn my wretched exile, my many hardships that will not ever let me give rest to my sorrows and my griefs, nor all the longing that afflicts me in this life.

Always may the young man be burdened, be sad at heart, have hard and bitter thoughts in mind; likewise, if he shall have happiness and cheer, let him also have sorrow and grief, enormous and in multitudes. Keep him dependent on himself for all his worldly joy, surrounded by foes, stained by enmity in distant lands and by strange folk, since my lover sits under rocky cliffs, surrounded by storms,
wine werigmod, wætre beflowen
on droorsele, drogeð se min wine
micle modecare; he gemon to oft
wynlicran wic. wa bið þam þe sceal
of langœhe leofes abidan.

my despondent friend, floodwaters rising around him
in a dark and dreary house, where he endures and suffers
much heartfelt sorrow, since he too often remembers
a more joyful dwelling. Woe shall be to all of us
who wait in longing for one we love.
(Trans. M. Bryson)

Wulf and Eadwacer


Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gif;
willað hy hine aþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð.
ungelic is us.
wulf is on ieg i on oþerre.
fæst is þæt eglond fenne biworpen
sindon wælreowe weras þær on ige;
willað hy hine aþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð
ungelice is us.
wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum hogode;
þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt.
þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað.
wulf min wulf wena me þine
seoce gedydon þine seldcymas
murnende mod nales meteliste
gehyrest þu, eadwacer uncerne earne hwelp
bireð wulf to wuda
þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs
uncer giedd geador.

My people treat him like a sacrificial gift,
And they will devour him if he comes threatening war.
We are so different.
Wulf is on one island; I am on another.
His island is fortified, surrounded by fens.
This island is filled with slaughter-crazed men.
And they will devour him if he comes threatening war.
We are so different.
Wulf tracks my hopes like a bloodhound,
When I sit, crying, in the rain
He clasps me within his warrior's arms,
Such joy to be held, such pain to be let go.
Wulf! My Wulf! Pining for you
Makes me sick; your rare visits
Have starved me more than lack of meat.
Do you hear, Eadwacer? Our poor whelp,
Take, Wulf, to the woods.
That man easily tears what was never made one:
Our song together.
(Trans. M. Bryson)