

The Cambridge Old English Reader

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The Seafarer

Interpretations of *The Seafarer* have suffered much from its being pigeon-holed almost invariably with *The Wanderer* (Text 38), a near-neighbour in the anthology of secular and religious poetry known as the Exeter Book (see below), as an ‘elegy’. There is in fact little that is elegiac about it. Rather, it is an exhortatory and didactic poem, in which the miseries of winter seafaring are used as a metaphor for the challenge faced by the committed Christian, who perceives the spiritual emptiness of an easy life on ‘dry land’ and actively seeks to earn future heavenly bliss by embracing a rigorous exile from that life. This creates the crucial paradox of the poem, which is exposed in line 33: Seafaring is a wretched business – as the speaker has firmly persuaded us with his own ‘true story’ – and *therefore* (OE *forþon*) he must embrace it all the more. The more uncompromisingly realistic the opening account of seafaring, the more disturbing – and therefore effective – the paradox. This has been resisted by those readers of *The Seafarer* who have sought a smooth passage through the poem, yet the wilful desire of the seafarer to embrace the very hardship which he has just so graphically evoked is at its heart. At a literal level the message is harshly ascetic, but it is predicated unambiguously on hope and the (metaphorical) ‘seafarer’ will not therefore have regrets, though the allure of the life on land may still have its effects.

The theology underlying *The Seafarer* is unmistakably that of the most influential of all Christian writers, St Augustine of Hippo (*d.* 430), reflecting his concept of two ‘cities’ – the earthly city of fallen mankind, who are preoccupied with ephemeral human concerns, and the heavenly city of God, where an eternity of bliss awaits those exiles who have waited patiently for salvation, distancing themselves from ungodly distractions as they live the life of *peregrini* (‘pilgrims’), wanderers and exiles from the ancestral heavenly home (see Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei*, ‘On the City of God’, bk. 15, ch. 1). Anglo-Saxon Christians will have been familiar with the pilgrim-hermits who put into literal practice the idea of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*, ‘pilgrimage for the love of God’. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 891 records the journey of three Irish monks who had cast off from Ireland in a boat without oars and with provisions for only a week, ‘because for the love of God they wished to be on a pilgrimage, they cared not where’. The seafaring in *The Seafarer* is as real as we imagine it to be.

Thus in the first part of the poem the 'seafarer' sets up a contrast between himself, all too conscious of his spiritual needs, and complacent land-dwellers; even the delights of springtime in the earthly city only incite him to higher aspirations. A lyrical pivot between this and the second part of the poem is provided by lines 58–66, in which the mind escapes the confines of the body, has a glimpse of the future and returns greedy for it. With his oxymoron 'this dead life' in line 65, the poet encapsulates the hollowness of earthly existence and the second half of the poem becomes a homiletic development of the theme of the transitoriness of that existence. The conclusion is as logical as it is clear: Let us (good Christians, that is) remind ourselves where our true home lies and concentrate on getting there. If a comparison is to be made between *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, it is better done in terms of contrast and complement, rather than congruence. In the course of the former poem, the poet steers his 'wanderer', who is in involuntary exile from human society, to a position of resigned acceptance of his earthly fate and preparedness to accept a new (Christian) perspective on life. The first-person poet of *The Seafarer*, on the other hand, has already accepted the consequences of the Christian position and goes further, voluntarily embracing hardship as a necessary step towards the promised salvation. Close parallels with the ideas of *The Seafarer* will be found in another OE poem, *Resignation*.

The Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3501, fols. 8–130), in which *The Seafarer* is preserved, was compiled c. 975 somewhere in the south of England, and is one of the four major codices of OE poetry to have survived. It acquired its name because it has been in Exeter at least since it was donated to the cathedral library there by Bishop Leofric, some time before his death in 1072. The text of *The Seafarer* reached the Exeter Book in a defective state; there are apparent problems especially around lines 15–16, 23–6 and 112–15 (see notes below). Linguistic evidence for dating or place of composition is inconclusive. The consistent use of the prefix *bi-* rather than *be-* in *bigeat* (6), *bidroren* (16), etc, and *u* for *w* in *huilpan* (21), along with the 'unsyncoated' (i.e. uncontracted) verb-ending *-eð/-að* (as in *limpeð*, 13, and *gewītað*, 52: cf. *limpð*, 15a/7, and *gewīt*, 4/14), have been taken as 'early' features but in fact they occur also in poetical texts known to be of tenth- or eleventh-century composition. The lack of syncope has been identified also as an Anglian feature, along with forms such as *calde* (8; not *cealde*), *welda* (77; not *ealda*) and *meotudes* (103; not *metod*, but cf. *meotod*, 108), but as dialectal indications these are all very weak.

Further reading

- I. L. Gordon, ed., *The Seafarer* (Manchester, 1979)
 D. Whitelock, 'The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*', in *Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and S. J. Kahrl (Hamden, CT, 1968), pp. 442–57

- P. A. M. Clemons, 'Mens absentia cogitans in the Seafarer and The Wanderer', in *Medieval Literature and Civilisation: Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway*, ed. D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London, 1969), pp. 62–77
- R. Woolf, 'The Wanderer, The Seafarer and the Genre of *planctus*', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. L. E. Nicholson and D. W. Frese (Notre Dame, IN, 1975), pp. 192–207
- R. F. Leslie, 'The Meaning and Structure of *The Seafarer*', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. M. Green (Rutherford, NJ, 1983), pp. 96–122
- P. Orton, 'The Form and Structure of *The Seafarer*', *SN* 63 (1991), 37–55; repr. in *OE Poetry*, ed. Liuzza, pp. 353–80

MÆG° ic be° mē° sylfum° 「sōðgied」 wrecan°, Can about me myself relate
 sīpas° secgan°, hū ic 「geswincdagum」¹ journeys (or experiences) tell
 earfoðhwīle° oft þrōwade°, times of hardship *ap* suffered
 bitre brēostceare° gebiden° hæbbe, 'heart-care' *as* endured
 5 gecunnad° in cēole° 「cearselda」 fela, experienced 'keel' (*i.e.* ship)
 「atol yþa gewealc」. Þær 「mec oft bigeat」
 nearo° nihtwaco° æt nacan° stefnan° oppressive night-watch ship's prow
 þonne° hē be° clifum 「cnossað」. 「Calde」 geþrunge° when along pinched
 wæron mīne fēt, forste° gebunden° by frost fettered
 10 caldum clommmum°, þær þā ceare° seofedun° chains *dp* anxieties sighed
 「hāt」 ymb° heortan. Hungor innan° slāt° around within rent
 merewērges° mōð°. Þæt se mon ne wāt° of the sea-weary one mind *as* knows
 「þe him on foldan° fægrost limpeð」, land

1 **sōðgied** 'true story (or song)' (acc. sg.); cf. the start of *The Wife's Lament* (40/1).

2 **geswincdagum** dat. of time: 'in days of toil'.

5 **cearselda** 'dwellings of sorrow' (partitive gen. after *fela*, 'many'); an ironical metaphor, for *seld* is normally used of solid land-dwellings.

6 **atol yþa gewealc** Parallel with *cearselda fela* as a further obj. of *gecunnad*: 'the terrible surging of the waves'. The phr. is partly repeated in 46 and also occurs in the OE *Exodus* (18/10). **mec... bigeat** 'seized (or came upon) me' (*mec* is an alternative form of acc. *mē*); the subj. is *nearo nihtwaco* in 7. Cf. a similar use of the vb. in 40/32.

8 **cnossað** 'beats' or 'dashes'. The switch to the pres. tense is presumably made because an habitual action is now being described; the vb. is intrans. (cf. the related trans. form used in 33). **Calde** dat. of instrument: 'by cold'; similarly *forste* (9) and *caldum clommmum* (10).

11 **hāt** Either adj. 'hot' (nom. pl. fem.), describing *ceare*, or adv. 'hotly', modifying *seofedun*; in either case, the ending *-e* has been elided before the vowel of the following word. 'Hot', meaning here 'intense' or 'violent', makes a telling contrast with the external coldness of the seafarer's situation.

13 **þe him... limpeð** impers. vb. with dat. rflx. pron.: 'whom [lit. "who, for him"] it suits (or happens) most agreeably', or 'for whom it goes most agreeably'.

- hū ic earmcearig° īscealdne° sǣ wretched ice-cold
 15 ƿinter¹ wunade° ƿræccan lāstum¹, inhabited
 winemægum° bidroren°, kinsfolk bereft (of +d)
 bihongen° hrīmgicelum°; hægl scūrum° hung about with icicles in showers
 flēag°. flew
 Þær ƿ ic ne gehyrde būtan hlimman sǣ¹,
 īscealdne wæg°. Hwīlum° ylfete° song wave as At times swan's
 20 dyde° ic ƿmē tō gomene¹, ganetes° hlēoþor° took gannet's cry
 ond huilpan° swēg° fore ƿhleahtor° ƿera°, curlew's sound laughter of men
 mǣw° singende° fore medodrince°. seagull singing mead-drinking
 Stormas þær stānclifu° bēotan° ƿ þær him stearn rocky cliff as pounded
 oncwæð¹
 īsigfeþera°. Ful° oft ƿæt earn bigeal¹ icy-feathered Very
 25 ūrigfeþra°. Nǣnig° hlēomǣga° wet-feathered No protecting kinsman
 fēasceaftig° ferð° frefran° meahte°. desolate spirit as comfort might sbj
 Forþon° ƿim gelyfeð lýt¹, sē° þe ƿāh līfes wyn° Therefore he pleasure
 gebiden¹ in burgum° bealosīþa° hwōn°, cities bitter experiences few +g
 ƿlonc ond wīngāl¹, hū ic wērig oft.
 30 in brimlāde° bīdan° sceolde°. ocean-path remain had to
 Nǣp° nihtscūa°, norþan° snīwde°, Darkened night-shadow from north snowed

15 **winter** acc. of time: 'in the winter'. **wræccan lāstum** adv. clause: 'in the paths of exile' (*wræccan* is an *n*-noun, gen. sg.). It has been suggested that this formulaic half-line is a late accretion to the text and has pushed the succeeding phr. into a metrically incomplete line by itself (16).

18 **ic ne gehyrde būtan** 'I did not hear (anything) except', or 'I heard nothing but'. **hlimman sǣ** acc. and infin. construction [§G6d.i.3] after *gehyrde*: 'the sea resounding'.

20 **mē tō gomene** poss. dat. *mē*: 'for my entertainment'.

21 **hleahtor** The form is acc., whereas *medodrince* in 22 (also following *fore*, 'for') is dat. Such variation is not unusual in OE (and *for(e)* may take acc. or dat.), but possibly *hleahtor* is an error for *hleahtre*.

23 **þær him stearn oncwæð** 'where the tern answered them [i.e. the storms]'.

24 **þæt earn bigeal** *þæt* is puzzling. The simplest solution would be to take it as the demons. pron., but *earn* is usually masc., not neut. If *þæt* is obj. pron. 'it', *bigeal* could be interpreted transitively: 'screamed around it' – but what then is 'it'? Some critics have assumed that the vb. is intrans. and (less convincingly) that *ful oft þæt* is an elliptical way of saying 'it happens very often that'. Perhaps *þæt* is simply a scribal error for *þær*, which would offer a parallel with 23a; then again, *þæt* does *sound* better here than *se*.

27 **him gelyfeð lýt** impers. vb. with rflx. dat. pron.: 'he little believes'.

27–8 **āh... gebiden** The 3rd-pers. pres. of *āgan* is used instead of a part of *habban* as an auxil. vb. with past part.: 'has experienced'.

29 **wlonc ond wīngāl** 'proud and merry (or elated) with wine'. A stock poetic description of the good-living town-dweller, used also in *The Ruin* (37/34).

	hřim° hrřsan° bond°, hęgl fęol on eorþan,	frost earth as bound
	corna° caldast.	of grains
	Forþon cnyssað nř	
	heortan geþōhtas ⁷ þæt ic hęan° stręamas°,	deep currents ap
35	sealtýþa° gelęc°, sylf cunnige°.	salt-waves' tumult as experience
	Monað° mōdes lust° 7 męla gehwylce ⁷	Urges desire ns
	ferð° tō fęran° þæt ic feor heonan°	spirit as set out from here
	7 elþęodigra eard ⁷ gesęce°.	seek out sbj
	Forþon° 7 nis þæs mōdwlonc mon ofer eorþan ⁷	Because
40	ne° his gifena° þæs gōd° ne in geogupe tō þæs	nor of (or in) gifts generous
	hwæt°	bold
	ne in his dędum tō þæs dęor° 7 ne him his dryhten tō þæs hold ⁷	brave
	þæt hę 7 ā his sęfōre sorge næbbe ⁷ ,	
	7 tō hwon hine Dryhten gedōn wille ⁷ .	
	7 Ne biþ him tō hearpan hyge ⁷ ne tō hringþege°,	for ring-receiving
45	7 ne tō wīfe° wyn ⁷ ne 7 tō worulde hyht ⁷ ,	in woman
	ne ymbe° ōwiht° elles, nefne° ymb 7ða gewealc.	for anything except

33–4 **Forþon** This very common word, with the basic sense of 'for that (reason)' or 'for (the reason) that', may operate as an adv. ('therefore...'), as apparently in 27, or conj. ('... because'). This allows for a certain amount of creative ambiguity in OE. A contrastive meaning, 'yet', is less easy to demonstrate. In this line, *forþon* ('therefore') launches the key paradox of the poem: the seafarer embraces the very hardship he has so graphically evoked. (A case might be made for the trans. 'because', with the sentence beginning *monað* then consequential, but that reduces the dynamic of the poem to a mere list of loosely connected ideas.) **cnyssað nř heortan geþōhtas** The probable subj. of the vb. is the phr. *heortan geþōhtas*, with *heortan* as gen. sg. of an *n*-noun and the vb. intrans.: 'the thoughts of my heart press (or urge) now (that...)'. Alternatively, *heortan* could be the acc. sg. obj. of *cnyssað* taken as trans.: '(my) thoughts press (my) heart now (that...)'.

36 **męla gehwylce** dat. of time: 'time and again' (lit. 'in each of times').

38 **elþęodigra eard** 'the land of foreigners (or strangers)'. This may be an unspecified place of further pilgrimage or exile, or perhaps heaven (see Heb 11.13–16 and Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*, bk. 15, ch. 1).

39 **nis þæs . . . ofer eorþan** Here, and in 40–1, *þæs* is used as an adv. (with additional *tō* in three cases) and is best translated 'so': 'there is not anyone on earth so proud of heart'.

41 **ne him . . . þæs hold** 'nor (a man) whose lord is so gracious to him'.

42 **ā his sęfōre sorge næbbe** 'never has anxiety about his sea-voyage [gen. of respect]'.

43 **tō hwon . . . gedōn wille** '(as) to what the Lord will bring him to', or 'as to how the Lord will treat him'.

44 **Ne biþ him . . . hyge** poss. dat.: 'his thought is not'.

45 **ne . . . wyn** 'nor (is his) joy . . .'. **tō worulde hyht** 'in hope of the world'; i.e. trust in worldly things.

	Ac ā° hafað ʾlongungeʾ sē þe on lagu° fundað°.	ever sea sets out
	Bearwas° ʾblōstmum nimaðʾ, byrig ʾfægriað,	Groves
	wongas wlitigaðʾ, woruld ðnetted°.	hurries onward
50	Ealle þā° gemoniað° ʾmōdes fūsne	these (things) urge
	sefanʾ tō sīþe°, ʾþām þeʾ swā þenceð°,	journey intends
	on flōdwegas° feor ʾgewītað°.	ocean-paths sets out
	Swylce° ʾgēac°ʾ monað ʾgēomran reordeʾ,	Likewise cuckoo
	singeð sumeres weard°, sorge bēodeð°	watchman announces
55	ʾbitterʾ in brēosthord°. Pæt se beorn° ne wāt,	heart man
	ēstēadig° secg°, hwæt ʾþā sumeʾ drēogað°	‘favour-blessed’ man suffer
	þe þā ʾwræclāstasʾ wīdost° lecgað°.	most widely follow
	ʾForþonʾ nū mīn hyge hweorfeð° ofer°	journeys beyond
	hreþerlocan°,	breast
	mīn mōdsefa° mid° mereflōde°	mind <i>ns</i> with ocean tide
60	ofer hwæles° ēþel° hweorfeð wīde,	whale’s home

47 **longunge** Probably the ‘longing’ or ‘yearning’ is for the onward journey and the half-line is a restatement of the seafarer’s spiritual urge; but he might be making the point that, even though he turns his back on earthly pleasures, he is still human enough to have longings for them.

48–9 **blōstmum nimað** Apparently, ‘take with blossoms’, i.e. ‘come into flower’, although there are no other examples in OE of *niman* construed thus with the dat. (and *blōstman*, acc. pl., may have been intended). **fægriað . . . wlitigað** If these vbs. are trans., the subj. of both is still *bearwas*, and the (acc.) objs. are *byrig* and *wongas*, respectively: ‘(they) make the cities lovely, adorn the meadows’. Alternatively, the vbs. may be taken as intrans. and the nouns as their (nom.) subs.: ‘the cities become lovely, the meadows become beautiful’.

50–1 **mōdes fūsne sefan** Both *sefan* and *fūsne* are best taken as objs. of *gemoniað*: ‘the (one) eager of spirit, his heart’. **þām þe** Here *þām* is a pron.: ‘in the one who’.

52 **gewītað** The ending *-eð* would be more usual in the sg. Many editors emend to inf. *gewītan*, which is then the complement of *þenceð* in 51.

53 **gēac** The cuckoo as a bird of lament with a sad voice appears also in the OE poem *The Husband’s Message* (23), and is a notable feature of early Celtic elegies. **gēomran reorde** dat. of manner: ‘with sad voice’.

55 **bitter** If the adj. describes *sorge*, ‘sorrow’, it is acc. sg. fem., with terminal *e* elided before the vowel of *in*. Alternatively, it may qualify *weard* (nom. sg. masc.), in which case its form is correct.

56 **þā sume þā** is probably the demons. pron. in apposition with pron. *sume*: ‘those ones’, i.e. ‘certain people’ or simply ‘some’.

57 **wræclāstas** The ‘paths of exile’ (acc. pl.) are a recurring motif in OE poetry; see *The Wanderer* (38/5 and 32).

58 **Forþon** Again the paradoxical ‘therefore’. The active mind of the seafarer anticipates the intended journey and returns with longing. The repetition of *forþon* in 64 may be best interpreted as correl., ‘because’, marking the start of the explanation of the paradox; but it might be argued to be a parallel ‘therefore’.

	ƿeorþan scēatas ¹ , cymedð eft ^o tō mē	again
	gīfre ^o ond grædig; gielleð ^o ƿanfloga ¹ ,	avid cries
	hweteð ^o on ƿælweg ¹ hreþer ^o unwearnum ^o	incites heart <i>as</i> irresistibly
	ofer holma ^o gelagu ^o . Forþon mē hātran ^o sind	seas' expanses more inspiring
65	Dryhtnes drēamas ^o þonne þis dēade lif,	joys
	lāne ^o on londe. Ic gelýfe nō ^o	fleeting not
	þæt ƿim ¹ eorðwelan ^o ēce ^o stondeð ^o ;	earthly riches eternally remain
	simle ^o ƿrēora sum þinga gehwylce ¹	always
	ær his tīdege ^o ƿtō twēon weorþeð ¹ :	final day
70	ƿād ¹ ^o oþþe ylðo ^o oþþe ecghete ^o ¹	sickness old age sword-violence
	ƿfægum fromweardum ¹ feorh ^o oðþringeð ^o .	life <i>as</i> wrests
	Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwām æftercweþendra	
	lof lifgendra lāstworda betst,	
	þæt hē gewyrce ¹ , ær hē on weg ƿscyle ¹ ,	
75	ƿfremum ¹ on foldan ^o wið ^o fēonda nīþ ^o ,	earth against malice
	dēorum ^o dædum dēofle tōgēanes ^o ,	brave against <i>+d</i>
	þæt hine ælda ^o bearn ^o æfter hergen ^o	of men children <i>np</i> may praise <i>sbj</i>
	ond his lof ^o siþþan ^o lifge ^o mid englum	glory then may live <i>sbj</i>

61 **eorþan scēatas** A phr. parallel with *hwæles ēþel*: '(over) the regions (*or* surfaces) [acc. pl.] of the earth'.

62 **ānfloga** i.e. the cuckoo; almost certainly not the soul, as some critics have suggested.

63 **wælweg** Probably for *hwælweg*, 'whale's path', i.e. the sea (cf. 60); *w-* for *hw-* occurs elsewhere in the Exeter Book. But conceivably *wæl* is the word meaning 'slaughter' or 'the dead'.

67 **him** 'for him'. There is no obvious antec. for the pron. here, nor for *his* in 69, but both clearly refer to 'a man', the land-living man of 71 who is subject to the trials of mortal life and fated to die (*fīge* and *fromweard*).

68 **þrēora sum** 'one of three (things)'. **þinga gehwylce** 'in each of circumstances', i.e. 'invariably'.

69 **tō twēon weorþeð** 'becomes (a matter) for doubt'.

70 **ād¹ . . . ylðo . . . ecghete** These three earthly enemies are listed also by King Hrothgar in *Beowulf*, 1735–9, in a speech about kingship and destiny.

71 **fægum fromweardum** 'from (the man) fated to die (and) about to depart' (*fromweard*, lit. 'from-ward', on the pattern of 'to-ward').

72–4 **Forþon þæt bið . . . hē gewyrce** The syntax is complex but the meaning is clear: 'Therefore for each man (*eorla gehwām*) the best of reputations to leave behind (*lāstworda* ['track-words']) is the praise (*lof*) of those who will speak after his death (*æftercweþendra*), the living (*lifgendra*), that he may bring about (*gewyrce*) . . .'. The pron. *þæt* in 72 is correl. with conj. *þæt* in 74, and both are better left out of the trans. The obj. of *gewyrce* is the clause beginning *þæt hine* in 77.

74 **scyle** A vb. of motion is needed: 'must (go)' [§G2d].

75 **fremum** dat. of instrument: 'by good actions'; this is an emendation of the manuscript's *fremman*, which is impossible to construe plausibly. The phr. *dēorum dædum* in 76 is parallel.

- 80 *ƿāwa tō ealdre*°, *ēcan lifes* ƿ*blǣð*°, splendour
drēam° mid *dugebum*°. ƿ*Dagas*° sind *gewitene*°, hosts Days departed
ealle onmēdlan° *eorþan rīces*; poms
 ƿ*nearon*° nū *cyningas ne cāseras*° emperors
ne goldgiefan swylce° iū° *wæron*° such as once
 85 *þonne hī* ƿ*mǣst* mid° *him*° *mǣrþa*° *gefremedon*° among themselves performed
ond on dryhtlicestum° *dōme*° *lifdon*. most noble renown *ds*
Gedroren° is *þeos duguð*° *eal*, *drēamas* sind *gewitene*°, Perished company
wuniað° *þā wācran*° *ond þās woruld healdap*°, remain weaker (people) inhabit
 90 ƿ*brūcað þurh bisgo*°. *Blǣd* is *gehnǣged*°, humbled
eorþan indryhto° *ealdað*° *ond sēarað*° nobility *ns* ages withers
 ƿ*swā nū monna gehwylc*° *geond*° *middangeard*°. throughout world
 ƿ*Yldo him on fareð*°, *onsȳn*° *blācað*°, face grows pale
gomelfeax° *gnornað*°, *wāt his iūwine*°, grey-haired (man) mourns past friends
æpelinga bearn, *eorþan forgiefene*°. committed (to + *d*)
 Ne *mæg* ƿ*him þonne se flǣschoma*°, *þonne* ƿ*him*°
 95 *þæt feorg*° *losað*° life fails
ne swēte° *forswelgan*° *ne sār gefēlan*°, sweetness swallow pain *as* feel
ne hond onhrēran° *ne mid hyge*° *þencan*. move mind
 ƿ*Þeah þe grǣf wille golde strēgan*
brōþor his geborenum°, ƿ*byrgan be dēadum*

79–80 *āwa tō ealdre* ‘always in eternity’, i.e. ‘for ever and ever’. **blǣð, drēam** These appear to be parallel with *lof* as subsj. of *lifige*, i.e. states which it is hoped will endure for ever. *blǣð* is for *blǣd*, showing a confusion of *ð* and *d* common in late manuscripts.

80 **Dagas sind gewitene** . . . For an expression of the transience of the world similar to that expressed here (80–102), particularised in terms of the passing of the heroic way of life, see *The Wanderer* (38/92–6, etc). In 82, cf. the rhetorical question from the author of the tenth Vercelli Homily: ‘Where are the powerful emperors and kings that there once were?’ There are also classical parallels.

82 **nearon** ‘are not’ (*ne* + *earon* [§G1a.ii]). The scribe wrote *nǣron* (‘were not’), which seems illogical; hence the emendation.

84 **mǣst** . . . **mǣrþa** ‘the greatest [acc.] of glorious deeds’.

88 **brūcað þurh bisgo** ‘(they) use (it) in toil’, or ‘occupy it with trouble’.

90 **swā nū monna gehwylc** ‘just as now each man (does)’.

91 **Yldo him on fareð** Here *on* is an adv. (and takes the alliterating stress): ‘For him old age marches onwards (or advances)’.

94 **him** . . . **se flǣschoma** poss. dat.: ‘his body’; this is the subj. of the vbs. in 95–6. **him** poss. dat., referring either to the dying man or to his body.

97–8 **Þeah þe . . . his geborenum** The subj. is *brōþor* and the obj. *grǣf*: ‘Though a brother may wish to strew the grave with gold for his brother’ (*geborenum*: lit. ‘one born [in the same family]’). These lines carry an implicit censure of heathen burial practices (cf. Text 24) and express the Christian warning that material wealth will count for nothing on Judgement Day.

- māpmum mislicum þæt hine mid wille⁷,
 100 ʿne mæg þære sǎwle þe biþ synna ful
 gold tō gēoce⁷ for° Godes egsan°, in face of awesomeness
 þonne⁷ ʿhē⁷ hit ær hýdeð° þenden° hē hēr (even) when hides while
 leofað°. lives
- Micel biþ se meotudes° egsa ʿfor þon hī sēo molde oncyrrēð⁷. creator's
 Sē° gestapelade° stīpe° grundas°, He established firm foundations
 105 eorþan scēatas ond ūprodor°. the heavens above
 ʿDol° biþ sē þe him his Dryhten ne ondrædeþ°⁷: cymeð Foolish fears
 him° se dēað unþinged°. to him unexpected
 Eādig° bið sē þe ēaþmōd° leofaþ: cymeð him Blessed humble
 sēo ār° of heofonum. grace
- Meotod him° þæt mōd° gestapelað° forþon hē in him heart makes firm
 in his meahte° gelyfeð. might
- Sfīeran° mon sceal strongum° mōde ond ʿþæt on Restrain +d headstrong
 stapelum healdan⁷;
- 110 ond, ʿgewis wērum wīsum⁷ clāne°, pure
 scyle monna gehwylc ʿmid gemete°⁷ healdan moderation
 ʿwip° lēofne° ond wið lāþne° bealo°⁷ against friend enemy malice

98–9 **byrgan . . . mislicum** The infin. is still governed by *wille* and *deādum* (adj. as noun) may be sg. or pl.; either 'to bury (it [gold]) beside the dead (man), along with various treasures', or 'to bury him [the brother] among the dead, with various treasures'. **þæt hine mid wille** 'that he may wish (to go) with him' (*mid* may take acc. as well as dat.).

100–1 **ne mæg þære sǎwle . . . tō gēoce** The vb. 'be' is required for the modal [§G2d]: 'cannot (be) of (any) help to the soul'.

102 **hē** i.e. the dead man.

103 **for þon hī . . . oncyrrēð** Here *þon* is best taken as an instr. pron., with antec. *egsa*, and *hī* as a rflx. pron. (acc. sg. fem.) with antec. *sēo molde*: 'before which the earth turns itself away'. Cf. Rev 20.11.

106 **Dol . . . ondrædeþ** This line occurs in almost the same form in the OE poem *Maxims I*, 35. Rflx. *him* is best not trans.

109 **þæt on stapelum healdan** 'keep it on firm foundations'; i.e. under control.

110 **gewis wērum** 'true to (his) pledges'; but, conceivably, the noun here is *wer* 'man' and the meaning 'reliable among men'. **wīsum** dat. of respect: 'in (his) ways'.

111 **mid gemete** The wisdom of acting with moderation is emphasised also in *The Wanderer* (38/65–72).

112 **wip lēofne . . . bealo** This and the next three lines are clearly incomplete. As it stands, the meaning of this one seems to be '(govern with moderation) malice against friend and against foe'. One speculative restoration adds *lufan* at the beginning: 'love towards friend, malice (*bealo*) towards foe'.

- ʿpēah þe hē hine wille fȳres fulne
 oþþe on bæle forbærnedne
 115 his geworhtne wine⁷. Wyrd^o biþ swīþre^o, Fate stronger
 meotud meahtriga^o þonne ænges^o monnes gehygd^o. mightier any conception
 Uton^o wē hycgan^o hwær wē hām āgen^o Let us consider may have *sbj*
 ond þonne geþencan^o hū wē þider^o cumen^o think there may come
 ond wē þonne ēac tilien^o ʿpæt wē tō mōten⁷ strive *sbj*
 120 in þā ēcan ēadignesse^o, blessedness
 þær is lif gelong^o in^o lufan Dryhtnes, dependent on
 hyht^o in heofonum. Pæs^o sȳ^o þām halgan^o hope For that be holy one
 þonc^o thanks (to +*d*)
 þæt hē ūsic^o geweorþade^o, wuldres ealdor^o, us (has) honoured prince
 ēce Dryhten, in^o ealle tīd^o. through time
 125 Āmen.

113–15 **pēah þe . . . wine** If we assume that the antec. of *hine* is *lāþne* (112), a possible interpretation is: ‘though he may wish him [his foe] full of fire and the friend he has made (*geworhtne*) consumed on the funeral-pyre (*bæle*)’. A contrast is then being made between the fires of hell for the foe and a proper cremation for the friend.

119 **þæt wē tō mōten** adv. *tō* (‘thither’), belonging to an unexpressed vb. of motion: ‘that we may (arrive) there’.

The *Durham Proverbs*

The *Durham Proverbs* are so called because they are found in a manuscript now in the library of Durham Cathedral. In one of the curious juxtapositions which characterise the preservation of OE literature, they were copied, by a none too skilful scribe, onto five blank pages between a collection of hymns and a series of liturgical canticles. These hymns and canticles are in Latin, but with an OE gloss, and they seem to have been copied out in the second quarter of the eleventh century, with the proverbs being added a little later. The manuscript was made at Canterbury, and a second part contains a copy of Ælfric's grammatical work, his *Excerptiones* (see p. 22). Two of the proverbs (nos. 37 and 39) appear also as additions to a mid-eleventh-century Latin psalter (London, British Library, Royal 2. B. v) and two (nos. 14 and 42) are included in the thirteenth-century Middle English collection of the *Proverbs of Hendyng*. There is one other major set of proverbs in OE (surviving in three manuscripts), a version of the *Disticha Catonis* (the 'Dicts of Cato'), a third-century collection of wise sayings in Latin which enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages; it was widely used as a class-text in the monastic schools of Anglo-Saxon England. The only connection between these and the *Durham Proverbs* is the occurrence of the first of the latter as part of dict no. 23 (see 1n, below).

The forty-six OE proverbs in the Durham collection are all accompanied by Latin versions, but these derive from no known source. It is indeed not certain that the Latin versions came first and scholars have been tempted to see the collection as an original vernacular work, a native English collection of proverbs which someone then tried to put into Latin. The uneven and in places incomprehensible nature of the latter might suggest that it was supplied by a novice monk attempting the translation as a learning exercise. However, comprehension problems occur in the OE versions of the *Durham Proverbs*, too, and there are several cases (such as no. 16) where we have to turn to the Latin to make sense of the OE. The relationship between the English and Latin versions thus remains unclear. (The Latin versions given for the two proverbs occurring in Royal 2. B. v are identical with those in the Durham manuscript.)

A 'proverb' – at least as represented in the Durham collection – has a special quality of transferability which a 'maxim' in general does not. Thus the statement that 'a man can't have a mouthful of meal and also blow the fire' (see no. 43)

certainly has a simple practical truth in it, but the man's dilemma is also paradigmatic: it stands for any situation where it is impossible to do two things at once. The *Durham Proverbs* offer a compelling mixture of the familiar and the bizarre. The cheerful observation of everyday affairs allows, and probably demands, the incursion of humour, something which the more serious and cerebral maxims have little scope for, and one example borders on the surreal (no. 11). Some of the proverbs are hoary old favourites from antiquity, but others are unknown in Latin or any other literatures. Several are echoed in the proverbial statements made in many OE poems, and a few have fairly close Old Norse parallels, though this need not suggest any direct connection. Some of the proverbs in the Durham collection remain tantalisingly obscure, perhaps through textual corruption, though only one all but defies rational interpretation (no. 15).

No overall structural coherence is apparent in the collection, but there is a cluster of four proverbs on the theme of 'a friend', nos. 2–5 (with another at no. 26), and in a few cases, pairs of proverbs seem to be deliberately juxtaposed, such as nos. 8 and 9, and 24 and 25. Several distinct styles may be seen. The plain aphoristic statement with *sceal* ('must', with all its ambiguities: see p. 296) occurs in five proverbs. The gnomic *bip* is used in eleven, and the formula *sē þe*, 'he who', occurs twelve times, along with two similar cases where the relative pronoun is omitted. Of especial note are five *cwæþ* proverbs (nos. 10, 11, 15, 44 and 45), which we are surely entitled to call jokes. Their structure is bipartite, with a comparatively unremarkable initial statement rendered ludicrous by a second, which reveals the unexpected identity of the first speaker. Half of the proverbs use alliteration for effect and in some cases this results in complete metrical lines (see especially nos. 17, 19, 27, 35, 40 and 42). The language of the proverbs is late WS with a few non-WS spellings, such as *fele* (no. 26), *gehere* (no. 39) and *gelpedð* (no. 46); these cannot be shown to be local to Kent, despite the apparent origin of the Durham manuscript in Canterbury (as noted above). Eight emendations have been made below (see p. 353), the most important being signalled in the notes. In the glosses and in the main Glossary, reference is made to proverb-number, not line-number; there is, however, no numbering in the manuscript.

Further reading

- O. Arngart, *The Durham Proverbs*, Lunds Universitets Årsskrift 1.52.2 (Lund, 1956)
 'The Durham Proverbs', *Speculum* 56 (1981), 288–300
 R. S. Cox, 'The Old English Dicts of Cato', *Anglia* 90 (1972), 1–42
 N. F. Barley, 'A Structural Approach to the Proverb and Maxim with Special Reference to the Anglo-Saxon Corpus', *Proverbium* 20 (1972), 737–50
 G. Schleich, 'Die Sprichwörter Hending und die Prouerbs of Wysdom', *Anglia* 51 (1927), 220–77

- B. J. Whiting, ed., in collaboration with H. W. Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial phrases from English Writings mainly before 1500* (London, 1968)
- T. A. Shippey, 'Miscomprehension and Re-Interpretation in Old and Early Middle English Proverb Collections', in *Text und Zeittiefe*, ed. H. L. C. Tristram, *ScriptOralia* 58 (Tübingen, 1994), pp. 293–311

- [1] Geþyld° byð ʳmiddles ēadesʳ.
 [2] Frēond dēah° feor° ge° nēah: byð nēar° nyttra°.
 [3] Æt þearfe° man ʳsceal freonda cunnianʳ.
 [4] Nafað° ænig mann frēonda tō feala°.
 [5] Beforan his frēonde ʳbiddeþʳ, sē° þe his wædle° mæneþ°.
 [6] ʳGōd gēr° byþʳ þonne se hund þām hrefne° gyfeð°.
 [7] Oft on sōtigum° bylige° ʳsearowaʳ licgað°.
 [8] Hwīlum° æfter medo° ʳmenn mæst geþyrsteðʳ.

1 Patience 2 is useful far and nearer more useful 3 (time of) need 4 Does not have [ne hafað] many +g 5 he poverty laments 6 year raven gives 7 dirty bag lie 8 Sometimes mead as

1 **middles ēades** gen. of definition: 'of half of happiness', i.e. 'halfway to happiness'. This proverb forms the second half of an item in the OE *Disticha Catonis*, no. 23 (see headnote), and this has prompted emendation of the Durham manuscript's *ēa* to *ēades*. The first part of the dict is *Forþær oft ðæt þū ēaðe wrecan mæge*, 'suffer often what you might readily avenge'.

3 **sceal freonda cunnian** Either 'must needs put (his) friends to the test', or, taking *sceal* as the fut. auxil., 'shall find out (his) friends'. *Cunnian* takes a noun in the gen.

5 **biddeþ** 'entreats' or 'will entreat'. The Latin version has the sbj. vb. *postulet*, and OE sbj. *bidde* ('let him beg...') would better suit the context.

6 **Gōd gēr... gyfeð** Cf. 'Pigs might fly'.

7 **searowa** The noun *searo* has primary meanings of 'art', 'cunning' or 'craft', extended to that which is made skilfully or cunningly (including 'war-gear'), so a general sense of 'things of value' or 'treasure' may be intended; this would correlate with the Latin version's *aurum*, 'gold'. However, this meaning of the noun is not attested elsewhere and the more abstract treasure of 'cunning', issuing from an otherwise unprepossessing person, is a perfectly viable idea. The form *searowa* is unusual for nom. pl. [§B2g]. An Old Norse analogue has wisdom coming from a shrivelled leather bag, i.e. an old man. Whatever the case, the message is simple: Don't judge by appearances.

8 **menn... geþyrsteð** The construction is impers.: lit. 'it thirsts most to a person [dat. sg.], i.e. 'a person thirsts most'. 'Man' might have been chosen as the more specific trans. here, for mead-drinking (with its ironical consequences) does seem to have been a male occupation in Anglo-Saxon England.

- [9] ƿÆfter leofan menn langað swīðost⁷.
 [10] Nū hit ys ƿon swīnes dōme⁷, cwæð ƿse ceorl sæt⁷ on eoferes^o hricge^o.
 [11] ƿNe swā þēah trēowde þēah þū teala ēode⁷, cwæþ sē þe geseah^o hægtessan^o
 ƿæfter hēafde geongan⁷.
 [12] ƿEall on mūðe þæt on mōde⁷.
 [13] ƿGemæne sceal⁷ māga^o feoh^o.
 [14] Man dēþ^o swā hē byþ ƿþonne hē mōt swā hē wile⁷.

10 boar's back 11 saw witch 13 of kinspeople wealth 14 will do

9 **Æfter ... swīðost** The syntactical parallels between this and no. 8 suggest that the two were deliberately juxtaposed, but there are differences. The impers. vb. *langian* usually takes its obj. in the acc. (though dat. is also possible, as with *geþyrsted*), in which case *menn* may be acc. pl.: 'people long most strongly'; then *leofan* is a noun: 'for the beloved'. But the first three words may be taken together as a prep. phr., 'for the beloved person' (*æfter* plus dat. sg. *menn*, with the apparently weak inflection of the adj., *-an*, standing for strong *-um*); the two-word shorter phr. at the end then means simply, 'one longs most strongly' – a sentiment which has a strong echo in *Beowulf*, 1879–80. The Latin version supports the second interpretation of the first three words (using *hominem*, 'man'), but the vb. used is *tedet* with the meaning 'it becomes most tedious (or wearying)'. That is a possible meaning for the OE vb. *langað*, but the whole proverb then becomes less clear. The Latin could in fact be seen as a bungled attempt to render the OE; *post* does not accurately reflect OE *æfter* when it has objective sense, rather than temporal or local.

10 **on swīnes dōme** 'in the judgement of the pig'; perhaps, 'up to the pig'. **se ceorl sæt** 'the man who sat'. This proverb is as enigmatic as it is memorable. The *ceorl* astride the boar's back might simply be a 'peasant' or 'yeoman' but is more likely a 'husband' (as in the Latin: *maritus*). Presumably the *swīn* (often a domesticated pig) and the *eofer* (usually a wild boar) are the same creature; see the analogy in *Beowulf* (31a/49–50). Some joke about the perils of marriage is probably intended. Among the many grotesque little thirteenth-century stone carvings which are to be seen high up in the nave and in the chapter house of York Minster in England are two which depict a man precariously astride a pig.

11 **Ne ... ēode** If, like *ēode*, *trēowde* be taken as sbj., the interpretation seems to be: 'I would not trust (you) anyway (*swā þēah*), even though you walked properly'. **æfter hēafde geongan** Presumably the prep. has the sense 'by means of'; thus, 'go (or pass by) on (her) head'; *geongan* is emended from *geo ...*

12 **Eall ... mōde** 'Everything is in the mouth that is in the mind (or heart)', i.e. 'What the heart thinks, the mouth speaks'. There is a ME version: 'That the hert thynkyt the mowte spekyt', and Lk 6.45 provides a biblical analogue: '... for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh'.

13 **Gemæne sceal** 'must (be) shared [lit. "in common"]'. Families ought to look after their own.

14 **þonne hē mōt swā hē wile** 'when he may (do) as he wishes'. A man will reveal his true character when free from constraints. Cf. *Proverbs of Hendyng*: 'Wan man mai done als [= as] he wille, þan doth he also [= as] he is'.

- [15] ʿNe saga sagan, cwæð sē gesēah hwer fulne hēalena sēoþanʿ.
 [16] Eaðe° ʿwīsʿ man mæg witan° spell° and ēac secgan.
 [17] Blind byþ ʿbām ēagum, sē þe brēostum ne staratʿ.
 [18] ʿÐā° ne sacað° ʿþe ætsamne° ne bēoð.
 [19] ʿNe dēah eall sōþ āsæd ne eall sār ætwitenʿ.
 [20] ʿGyf þū wellʿ sprece°, wyrce° æfter° swā°.
 [21] ʿSōþ° hit sylf ācýþeð°.
 [22] Earh° ʿmæg þæt ānʿ þæt hē ʿhimʿ ondræde°.
 [23] ʿNe sceal manʿ tō ær° forht° ne tō ær fægen°.

16 Easily understand narrative **18** Those quarrel together **20** speak do afterwards so **21** Truth reveals **22** Coward is afraid **23** soon fearful joyful

15 Ne saga... sēoþan This is the most obscure of the proverbs, no doubt owing to transmission error. The best that we can do with the OE as it stands is to accept *saga* as imper. of *secgan*, and *sagan* as acc. pl. of masc. *n*-noun *saga*, ‘narrative’ or ‘tale’. In the second part of the proverb, *hēala* (here gen. pl.) is a ‘hydrocele’, a tumour filled with fluid – or so the Latin equivalent (*ponderosum*) seems to tell us. Thus we have: ‘Tell no tales, said he who saw the pot full of hydroceles boil’. But what might it mean? One critic suggests, ‘What you attempt to persuade us to is not good for us’, but that seems a bit far-fetched. The Latin version has a vb. in the opening part with no equivalent in the OE and appears to say, ‘He doesn’t make good flesh with flesh (*caro carnem*), said he who boiled a pot full of hydroceles’. So far, we must accept defeat on this one.

16 wīs Although *wīs* is not in the manuscript, the Latin version indicates that it ought to be, and certainly it gives purpose to an otherwise rather empty idea: a wise man may easily understand a discourse or story and also explain it or pronounce on it.

17 bām ēagum ‘in both eyes’. **sē þe brēostum ne starat** (with *starat* for *starað*, and *brēostum* used with sg. meaning [§D4i]). Perhaps ‘he who does not see with (his own) heart’, but ‘into his own heart’ has also been suggested. In either case, we are near to a sense of ‘he who does not *understand* his own heart or mind’. Cf. ‘There are none so blind as those who will not see’, though this rather implies a conscious refusal to see truth.

18 Ðā ne sacað... bēoð Cf. ‘It takes two to make a quarrel’.

19 Ne dēah eall sōþ āsæd ‘It does no good (for) all truth (to be) told’. **ne eall sār ætwiten** ‘nor all wrong imputed’, i.e. blamed on someone. Cf. ‘You can tell too much of the truth’.

20 Gyf þū... swā Cf. ‘Practice what you preach’.

21 Sōþ... ācýþeð Cf. ‘Truth will out’, or the biblical ‘Great is truth, and it prevails’ (3 Esd 4.41).

22 mæg þæt ān ‘can (do only) the one (thing)’. **him** The refl. dat. pron. can be ignored in trans.

23 Ne sceal... fægen The vb. ‘be’ must be supplied [§G2d]. There is striking correspondence with *The Wanderer* (38/65–8): *Wita... ne sceal nō tō hātheort... ne tō forht ne tō fægen*, but calls for moderation are a commonplace of wisdom literature; the OE *Disticha Catonis* include several.

- [24] 'Forworht mann' friþes° behōfað°.
 [25] 'Sēltre° byþ þæt man hund heona gesēce þonne man hund hynþa° geþolie°.
 [26] Ne byð þæt fele° frēond, sē þe 'ōþrum facn hēleð'.
 [27] 'Swā cystigran hīwan°, swā cynnigran' gystas°.
 [28] Gyfena° gehwilc° 'underbæc besihþ'.
 [29] 'Ne wāt° swētes° ðanc°, sē þe biteres ne onbyrgeð°.
 [30] 'Tō nāwihte ne hopað', se° tō hāme ne 'higeð'.
 [31] 'Eall here° byþ hwæt° þonne se lātēow° byþ hwæt'.
 [32] 'Wīde tīmbreð, sē þe wegferendum hýreð'.
 [33] 'Tiligera hūs' lencgest° standað.

24 refuge has need of +g 25 Better oppressions endure 26 faithful 27 household guests 28 Gift(s) each +gp 29 knows of sweetness pleasure as tastes +g 30 who 31 army bold general 33 longest

24 **Forworht mann** 'A condemned person' or 'outlaw'. In the Anglo-Saxon lawcodes, *friþ*, 'refuge' or 'sanctuary', may also indicate the restoration of rights to an outlaw.

25 **Sēltre... geþolie** If *heona* is the gen. of the pl. noun *hiwan*, and if this is given its common meaning 'members of a religious household', then the proverb may allude to the refuge afforded by monasteries (but perhaps with an ironical suggestion that in normal circumstances monks are the last people one would wish to be with?): 'It is better to seek out a hundred (*hund*) monks than to endure a hundred oppressions'. The juxtaposition with no. 24 seems deliberate. See also no. 27, where *hiwan* is again used, though not in an alliterating environment.

26 **ōþrum facn hēleð** 'hides (*or* harbours) treachery against another'.

27 **Swā cystigran... swā cynnigran** Here *swā* is used as an adv. with the comp. adj.: 'The better... the nobler'.

28 **underbæc besihþ** 'looks back'. Gifts are always given in the expectation of a return. Cf. the Old Norse proverb, *Ey sér til gildis gíof*, 'a gift always looks for a return' (*Hávamál*, 1145).

29 **Ne wāt... onbyrgeð** Cf. Alfred's version of Boethius's *De consolazione Philosophiae* (ch. 23; see p. 38 for edition): *ælcum men þincð huniges biobrēad þý weorodra gif hē hwæne ær biteres onbirigð*, 'to every man the honeycomb seems the sweeter if he previously tastes something bitter'.

30 **Tō nāwihte ne hopað** 'he hopes for nothing', i.e. 'he has no hope'. **higeð** 'sets his mind on', 'hopes for' and 'remembers' are all possibilities here. Cf. 'There's no place like home'. It seems unnecessary to identify, as one editor has, a Christian dimension.

31 **Eall here... hwæt** Cf. the similar sentiment about leadership expressed proverbially in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 1003 (8/79–80).

32 **Wīde tīmbreð... hýreð** It is not clear whether the second vb. is from *hýran*, 'obey' or 'serve' (with dat.), or *hýrian*, 'hire'. The meaning seems to be, 'He builds widely (*or* spaciously?) who serves (*or* hires out to) wayfarers (*or* travellers)'. Perhaps some comment on the unpredictability and/or unreliability of travellers is intended. For *wīde*, the Latin version has *crebro*, 'repeatedly' or 'often', but the rest is senseless.

33 **Tiligera hūs** The noun *tiligea* (gen. pl.), from the vb. *tilian*, 'labour' or 'exert oneself', should perhaps be interpreted here as 'those who labour', rather than simply 'labourers'; *hūs* is pl.: 'the houses of those who labour'. Cf. 'Hard work brings prosperity'.

- [34] ʾMete gæþ on banan handʾ.
 [35] Lēana° forlēosaþ°, sē þe hit lȳþran dēðʾ.
 [36] ʾSēo nȳðþearf° feala° læreð°ʾ.
 [37] ʾBetere byþʾ oft feðre° þonne° oferfeðre°.
 [38] ʾCræfta gehwiltʾ byþʾ cealdeʾ forgolden°.
 [39] ʾCiggendra gehwiltʾ wile° þæt hine man gehēre°.
 [40] ʾWeard seteð, sē þe wæccendum wereðʾ.
 [41] ʾNe sceall sē for horse murnan°, sē þe wile heort° ofærnan°ʾ.
 [42] ʾSwā fulre fæt swāʾ hit mann sceal fægror° beran°.
 [43] ʾNe mæg man mūþ fulne° melewes° habban and ēac fȳr blāwan°ʾ.

35 Gifts *ap* loses 36 necessity much teaches 37 loaded than overloaded 38 repaid
 39 wants listens to +a 41 be anxious stag overtake 42 more gently carry 43 full of
 meal blow

34 **Mete ... hand** Apparently a statement about the positive consequences of (perhaps the justification for?) killing: 'Food comes to the slayer's hand'. Whether the killing referred to is of enemies or simply food-animals is not clear. It has been suggested that *banan* ought to be emended to *benan* 'supplicant', producing a proverb with the sense of 'ask and ye shall receive'. The Latin version uses a noun meaning 'dispenser', which has led to the further suggestion that OE *brytta* was meant.

35 **þe hit lȳþran dēð** The sg. pron. has the pl. antec. *leana*; the adj. *lȳþran* is used as a noun: 'who bestows them on a base [i.e. unworthy] person'.

36 **Sēo nȳðþearf ... læreð** Cf. 'Necessity is the mother of invention'.

37 **Betere byþ** 'It is better to be ...'. This proverb occurs also in a later manuscript (see headnote), with the first word replaced by *sētre* (with the same meaning). Cf. 'little by little'.

38 **Cræfta gehwilt** Here *cræft*, often meaning 'skill' or 'strength', must have a more negative sense: 'Every deceit (or trick)'. **cealde** lit. 'coldly' or 'with coldness'; the Latin has *acerbior*, 'more bitterly' or 'more harshly'.

39 **Ciggendra gehwilt** The noun is formed from the pres. part. of *ciegan*, 'call out' or 'shout': 'Everyone who shouts'. The version in a later manuscript (see headnote) has a rather different emphasis: *clipiendra gehwylc wolde þæt him man oncwæde*, 'everyone who calls out would like someone to answer him'.

40 **Weard ... wereð** In the manuscript, the OE version begins *eard seeð* and the emendation to *weard seteð* is made on the strength of Latin *custodem ponit*, but thereafter the Latin is not much help (*qui uigilans minat*). The (emended) OE version could mean, 'He sets a watchman, who guards against (or defends, *wereð*) the watchers'. This brings to mind (and perhaps answers) the question famously asked by Juvenal in the context of setting guards to keep a wife from lovers: *sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*, 'but who is to guard the guards themselves?'.

41 **Ne sceall ... ofærnan** Cf. 'Needs must'.

42 **Swā fulre fæt swā** 'The fuller the cup, the ...'. Cf. *Proverbs of Hendyng*: 'When þe coppe is follest, þenne ber hire feyrest'.

43 **Ne mæg ... blāwan** Cf. 'No man can both sup and blow at once' and 'A man cannot whistle and drink at the same time'. There are close parallels in other Germanic languages, including one in Old High German more or less contemporary with the OE.

- [44] 'Wīde' ne biþ wel, cwæþ sē þe ʳgehȳrde on helle hrīman'.
- [45] 'Āge þē, sē þe æfter cīge', cwæþ sē þe gesēah hungor of tūne faran°.
- [46] 'Hwon° gelpeð°', sē þe wīde sīpað°.

45 go 46 Little boasts travels

44 **wīde** adv. 'widely', 'far and wide' or 'afar'; perhaps an understatement for 'everywhere'. **gehȳrde... hrīman** A var. on the acc. and infin. construction [§G6d.i.3], with no obj. expressed: 'heard (people) wailing', or, treating the pres. part. as a noun: 'heard the wailing'. The whole proverb might be rendered: 'Far and wide things aren't well [or, with more irony, "Things are far from well"], said he who heard the wailing in hell'. In the OE poem *Christ and Satan*, hell is described as 'that miserable hall, where wailing and weeping are heard afar (*wīde*)' (331–2), in contrast with heaven, where 'holy rejoicing' is to be heard (327), and a few lines later we read: 'Therefore he who was twelve miles away from hell could hear that there was a loud and sad gnashing of teeth'.

45 **Āge þē** sbj. vb.: 'he may have you', or 'let him have you'. **sē þe æfter cīge** 'he who calls (you) back'.

46 **Hwon... sīpað** The taciturnity of the experienced wayfarer (who has seen much to talk about) is implicitly praised here; cf. the promotion of the same virtue in *The Wanderer* (38/11–14 and 111). There are several medieval analogues in other languages.

Reference Grammar of Old English

For readers unfamiliar with grammatical terminology, a Guide to Terms is given on pp. 504–12. The ‘cases’ (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative and instrumental) relevant to pronouns, nouns and adjectives are explained in §D. Where appropriate, specific grammatical usage is illustrated by quotation from, or reference to, the texts of the main Reader, cited by text-number and line-number (e.g. 12/33). Where alternative inflections are given in the paradigms, the first form will usually be the one occurring more commonly. Paradigms are for reference, but beginners in Old English are heartily encouraged to learn at least the first one (§A1a) by heart. This gives the forms of the word for ‘the’ (or ‘that/those’), some of which will not be immediately recognisable but which are often the key to the understanding of a sentence. For nouns, familiarity with the general paradigms given for each gender [§§B1a, B2a/b and B3a/b] is recommended; the minor variations [§§B1b–h, B2c–i and B3c–h] can be noted as and when necessary.

§A PRONOUNS

§A1 Demonstrative Pronouns

(a) **se, þæt, sēo** ‘the’, ‘that’, ‘those’

	Sg.			Pl.
	Masc.	Neut.	Fem.	All genders
Nom.	se	þæt	sēo	þā
Acc.	þone	þæt	þā	þā
Gen.	þæs	þæs	þære	þāra, þære
Dat.	þæm, þām	þæm, þām	þære	þæm, þām
Instr.	þȳ, þī, þon	þȳ, þī, þon		

Variations. 1. *sēo* frequently occurs as *sīo* in early texts (6/14, 19, etc).

2. *se* and *sēo* occasionally appear as *þe* and *þeo*, respectively, in late manuscripts: *þe gebēorscipe* (27/60).

3. *þām* replaces *þæm* in later WS texts, and *þæne* replaces *þone*.

Uses

(i) AS the DEFINITE ARTICLE ‘the’: e.g. *se mōna* ‘the moon’.