

### The Seafarer

- I** Mæg ic be mē sylfum sōðgied wrecan,  
 sīþas secgan, hū ic geswincdagum  
 earfoðhwile oft þrōwade,  
 bitre brēostceare gebiden hæbbe,  
 5 gecunnad in cēole cearselda fela,  
 atol yþa gewealc, þær mec oft bigeat  
 nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,  
 þonne hē be clifum cnossað, calde geþrunge.  
 Wæron mine fēt forste gebunden,  
 10 caldum clommum, þær þa ceare seofedun  
 hāt' ymb heortan; hungor innan slāt  
 merewērges mōd. Pæt se mon ne wāt  
 þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð:  
 hū ic earmcearig iscealdne sē  
 15 winter wunade wræccan lāstum,  
 winemægum bidroren,  
 bihongen hrīmgicelum.
- II** Hægl scūrum flēag,  
 þær ic ne gehyrde būtan hlimman sē,  
 iscealdne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song  
 20 dyde ic mē tō gomene, ganetes hlēoþor  
 ond huilpan swēg fore hleator wera,  
 mæw singende fore medodrince.  
 Stormas þær stānclifu bēotan þær him stearn oncwæð,  
 isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal,  
 25 hyrnednebba. Nænig hlēomæga  
 fēasceaftig ferð frēfran meachte,  
 for þon him gylýfeð lýt, se þe ah lifes wyn  
 gebiden in burgum, bealosīþa hwōn,  
 wlonc ond wīngāl, hū ic wērig oft  
 30 in brimlāde bīdan sceolde.
- III** Nāp nihtscūa, norþan snīwde,  
 hrīm hrūsan bond, hægl fēol on eorþan,  
 corna caldast. For þon cnyssað nū  
 heortan geþōhtas, þæt ic hēan strēamas,  
 35 sealtýþa gelāc, sylf cunnige;

Translated by Anthony Mosakowski

**I** I will recite a true story about myself,  
 tell of journeys; how I in days of hardship  
 often suffered times of trouble,  
 and experienced bitter heart-ache;  
 [5] how I on board ships explored many abodes of sorrow,  
 hateful rolling of waves, where anxious night-waking  
 often befell me at the stem of the ship,  
 whenever it would crash along the cliffs, pressed on by the cold.  
 My feet were bound with frost,  
 [10] with cold fetters, while worries sighed  
 hot around my heart; hunger from within  
 tore the spirit of the sea-weary one. All this is unknown  
 to those who fare most happily on land:  
 how I, wretched and sorrowful on the ice-cold sea,  
 [15] spent the winter in paths of exile,  
 deprived of friendly kinsmen,  
 hung around with icicles.

**II** Hail showers flew,  
 wherein I heard nothing but the roaring of the sea,  
 the ice-cold wave. At times I had the swan's song  
 [20] as my entertainment, the cry of the gannet  
 and the sound of the curlew instead of men's laughter,  
 the singing sea-gull in place of mead-drink.  
 Storms beat the rock-cliffs where the tern answered them,  
 icy-feathered; very often the eagle screamed round about,  
 [25] horny-beaked. None of the protecting kinsmen  
 could console the wretched spirit,  
 because he who has experienced the joy of life  
 in cities, few painful journeys,  
 proud and flushed with wine, little believes how I  
 [30] often had to remain weary on the sea-way.

**III** The night-shadow grew dark, from the north it snowed,  
 frost gripped the earth, hail fell on the ground,  
 the coldest of grains. Therefore thoughts now  
 impel the heart that I myself, humble, venture upon the ocean,  
 [35] the salt-waves' tumult;

monað mōdes lust      mæla gehwylce

ferð tō fēran,      þæt ic feor heonan

elþeodigra      eard gesēce:

for þon nis þæs mōdwlonc      mon ofer eorþan,

40 ne his gifena þæs gōd,      ne in geoguþe tō þæs hwæt,

ne in his dædum tō þæs dēor,      ne him his dryhten tō þæs hold,

þæt hē ā his sǣfōre      sorge næbbe.

Tō hwon hine dryhten      gedōn wille:

ne biþ him tō hearpan hyge,      ne tō hringþege,

45 ne tō wīfe wyn,      ne tō worulde hyht,

ne ymbe ōwiht elles,      nefne ymb yða gewealc;

ac ā hafað longunge      se þe on lagu fundað.

**IV**      Bearwas blōstmum nimað,      byrig fægriað,

wongas wlitigað,      woruld ōnetted;

50 ealle þā gemoniað      mōdes fūsne

sefan tō siþe,      þām þe swā þenced

on flōdwegas      feor gewitan.

Swylce gēac monað      gēomran reorde,

singed sumeres weard,      sorge bēodeð

55 bitter in brēosthord.      Þæt se beorn ne wāt,

eftēadig secg:      hwæt þā sume drēogað

þe þā wræclāstas      widost lecgað.

**V**      For þon nū mīn hyge hweorfeð      ofer hreþerlocan,

mīn mōdsefa      mid mereflōde,

60 ofer hwæles ēþel      hweorfeð wīde,

eorþan scēatas,      cymed eft tō mē

gīfre ond grædig,      gielled ānfloga,

hweted on hwæweg      hreþer unwearnum,

ofer holma gelagu;      forþon mē hātran sind

65 Dryhtnes drēamas      þonne þis dēade lif,

lāne on londe.

**VI**           Ic gelyfe nō

þæt him eorðwelan      ēce stondað.

Simle þrēora sum      þinga gehwylce,

ær his tiddege,      tō twēon weorþeð:

70 ādl oþþe ylde      oþþe ecghete

fāegum fromweardum      feorh oðringeð.

the spirit's desire constantly urges me  
 to journey, that I far away from here  
 seek the dwelling-place of pilgrims:  
 because no man throughout the earth is so proud in spirit,  
 [40] nor so generous with his gifts, nor in youth so vigorous,  
 nor in his deeds so brave, nor his lord so gracious to him,  
 that he does not always have sorrow of a sea-voyage.  
 His lord will do too little for him:  
 his thought is not of the harp, nor of receiving of rings,  
 [45] nor of the delight of woman, nor of the joy of the world,  
 nor about anything else, except the tossing of the waves;  
 but he who eagerly sets out on the sea always has longing.

**IV** Groves blossom, cities grow fair,  
 meadows become beautiful, the world hastens;  
 [50] all these things urge one eager of spirit,  
 urge the heart to journey in one who thinks  
 to depart on the far flood-ways.  
 Likewise urges the cuckoo with melancholy voice,  
 summer's guardian sings, forbodes sorrow  
 [55] bitter in the heart. All this is unknown  
 to the man prosperous in turn: what is endured by those  
 who lay the tracks of furthest exile.

**V** Therefore my mind now travels beyond the heart's enclosure,  
 my spirit with the sea-flood,  
 [60] travels wide over the whale's home,  
 the world's surface, comes back to me again  
 ravenous and greedy, the lone-flier yells,  
 irresistably incites the heart on the whale-way,  
 over the ocean's waters, because to me the Lord's delights  
 [65] are warmer than this dead,  
 transitory life on land.

**VI** I do not believe  
 that earth-wealth remains forever.  
 Always one of three things in every circumstance  
 brings uncertainty before his final hour:  
 [70] sickness or age or violence  
 wrests life from one doomed to die, about to depart.



Therefore for every warrior the praise of posterity,  
 the living, is the best epitaph,  
 which he may earn before he must go away,  
 [75] by good deeds on earth against the hatred of the enemy,  
 by brave deeds against the devil,  
 so that children of men praise him afterwards,  
 and his praise live from then on among the angels  
 for ever and ever, in the glory of eternal life,  
 [80] bliss among the heavenly host.

**VII**

Gone are the days,

all the magnificence of the kingdoms of earth;  
 now there are neither kings nor caesars  
 nor gold-givers such as there formerly were,  
 when among themselves they accomplished the greatest of glorious deeds  
 [85] and lived in the most lordly glory.  
 Fallen is all this noble company, pleasures are gone;  
 weaker men live and hold this world,  
 possess it through toil. Glory is brought low,  
 the nobility of earth grows old and withers,  
 [90] as does everyone now throughout this world.

**VIII**

Old age overtakes him, the face grows pale,  
 the gray-haired one mourns, realizes that is former friends,  
 children of princes, are given to the earth.  
 When he loses his life, his body will be of no use to him,  
 [95] neither to swallow sweetness, nor to feel pain,  
 nor to move the hand, nor to think with the mind.  
 Even though a brother will strew with gold  
 his sibling's grave, bury beside the dead one  
 various gifts which he wishes to go with him  
 [100] gold can be of no help to the soul which is full of sin  
 in the presence of the terrible power of God,  
 when he hides that gold while he lives here.

**IX**

Great is the Creator's terrible power, before which the earth turns itself aside;  
 he established firm ground,  
 [105] the surface of the world and the heavens above.  
 Foolish is he who dreads not his Lord; death will come to him unprepared for.  
 Blessed is he who lives humbly; the grace of heaven will come to him.

Meotud him þæt mōd gestapelað,      for þon hē in his mehte gelyfeð:  
 stieran mon sceal strongum mōde,      ond þæt on stapelum healdan;  
 110      ond gewis wērum,      wīsum clāne,  
             scyle monna gehwylc      mid gemete healdan.  
 (111.1)\*      Se þe welan fylgeð      Waldend forlæteð;  
             āh lufan wiþ lēofne      ond wið lāþne bealo,  
             þeah þe hē hine fýres      fulne wille  
             oþþe on bæle witan      forbærnedne  
 115      his geworhtne wine;      wyrd biþ swiþre,  
             Meotud meahtigra      þonne ānges monnes gehygd.  
 X      Uton wē hycgan      hwær wē hām āgen,  
             ond þonne gepencan      hū wē þider cumen,  
             ond wē þonne ēac tilien      þæt wē tō mōten  
 120      in þā ēcan      ēadignesse,  
             þær is lif gelong      in lufan Dryhtnes,  
             hyht in heofonum.      Þæs sý þām Halgan þonc,  
             þæt hē ūsic geweorþade,      Wuldres Ealdor,  
             ēce Dryhten,      in ealle tid. Amen.

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\*This and the following three lines have been emended and reconstructed by John Vickrey; they are used by his permission.

The Creator establishes his spirit in him, because he believes in his might:  
a man must control a strong spirit, and hold it steadfast;

[110] and true to his pledges, pure in his ways,  
should each man hold himself with moderation.

[(111.1)] He who follows wealth abandons the Ruler;  
he loves the one and despises the other,  
even though he will know himself full of fire  
or his wrought friend burned up

[115] in fire; fate is stronger,  
the Creator mightier than anyone can comprehend.

**X** Let us think where we have a home,  
and then consider how we may come to that place,  
and then also strive that we may go there  
[120] into that eternal blessedness,  
where there is long life in the love of the Lord,  
bliss in heaven. Let there be thanks to the Holy One,  
that he may honor us, Prince of Glories,  
Eternal Lord, for all time. Amen.