

The Seafarer

The tale I frame shall be found to tally:
the history is of myself.

Sitting day-long
at an oar's end clenched against clinging sorrow,
breast-drought I have borne, and bitteresses too.
I have coursed my keel through care-halls without end
over furled foam, I forward in the bows
through the narrowing night, numb, watching
for the cliffs we beat along.

Cold then
nailed my feet, frost shrank on
its chill clamps, cares sighed
hot about heart, hunger fed
on a mere-wearied mind.

No man blessed
with a happy land-life is like to guess
how I, aching-hearted, on ice-cold seas
have wasted whole winters; the wanderer's beat,
cut off from kind. . . .
hung with hoar-frost.

Hail flew in showers,
there was no sound there but the slam of waves
along an icy sea. The swan's biare
my seldom amusement; for men's laughter
there was curlew-call, there were the cries of gannets,
for mead-drinking the music of the gull.
To the storm striking the stone cliffs
gull would answer, eagle scream
from throats frost-feathered. No friend or brother
by to speak with the despairing mind.

This he little believes whose life has run
sweet in the burghs, no banished man,
but well-seen at wine-round, my weariness of mind
on the ways stretching over the salt plains.
Night thickened, and from the north snowflakes;

hail fell on the frost-bound earth,
coldest of grains.

There come thoughts now
knocking my heart, of the high waves,
clashing salt-crests, I am to cross again.
Mind-lust maddens, moves as I breathe
soul to set out, seek out the way
to a far folk-land flood-beyond.

For no man above mould is so mood-proud,
so thoroughly equipped, so quick to do,
so strong in his youth, or with so staunch a lord
that before faring on the sea he does not fear a little
whither the Lord shall lead him in the end.
His heart is not in harping nor in the having of rings,
has no delight in women nor the world's gladnesses
nor can think of any thing outside the thrash of waves,
sea-struck, is distracted, stillness lost.

The thriving of the treeland, the town's briskness,
a lightness over the leas, life gathering,
everything urges the eagerly mooded
man to venture on the voyage he thinks of,
the faring over flood, the far bourn.
And the cuckoo calls him in his care-laden voice,
scout of summer, sings of new griefs
that shall make breast-hoard bitter.

Bliethe heart cannot know,
through its happiness, what hardships they suffer
who drive the foam-furrow furthest from land.
Spirit breaks from the body's chest
to the sea's acres; over earth's breadth
and whale's range roams the mind now,
homes to the breast hungry and thirsty.

Cuckoo's dirge drags out my heart,
whets will to the whale's beat

across wastes of water: far warmer to me
are the Lord's kindnesses than this life of death
lent us on land.

I do not believe
earthly estate is everlasting:
three things all ways threaten a man's peace
and one before the end shall overthrow his mind;
either illness or age or the edge of vengeance
shall draw out the breath from the doom-shadowed.
Wherefore, for earl whosoever, it is afterword,
the praise of livers-on, that, lasting, is best:
won in the world before wayfaring,
forged, framed here, in the face of enmity,
in the Devil's spite: deeds, achievements.
That after-speakers should respect the name
and after them angels have honour toward it
for always and ever. From those everlasting joys
the daring shall not die.

Days are soon over,
on earth imperium with the earl's hand fails;
kings are not now, kaisers are not,
there are no gold-givers like the gone masters
who between them framed the first deeds in the world,
in their lives lordly, in the lays renowned.
That chivalry is changed, cheer is gone away,
it is a weaker kind who wields earth now,
sweats for its bread. Brave men are fewer,
all excellence on earth grows old and sere
as now does every man over the world;
age fares against him, his face bleaches
and his thatch thins: had a throng of friends
of noble houses, knows now they all
are given to the ground. That grieves his white head.
Once life is going, this gristle slackens;
nothing can pain or please flesh then,
he cannot stir a finger, fix his thinking.

A man may bury his brother with the dead
and strew his grave with the golden things
he would have him take, treasures of all kinds,
but gold hoarded when he here lived
cannot allay the anger of God
towards a soul sin-freighted.

[103-24]

Great is the terrible power of God, before which the earth shall turn aside; He established the firm foundations, the expanse of the earth, the heavens above. Foolish is the man who does not fear his Lord; death shall come upon him unprepared. Blessed is the man who lives in trust; grace shall come to him from the heavens. The Lord shall confirm that spirit in him, for he believes in His might. A man should manage a headstrong spirit and keep it in its place, and be true to men, fair in his dealings. He should treat every man with measure, restrain enmity towards friend and foe. He may not wish his cherished friend to be given over to the fire nor to be burnt on the pyre, yet Doom is stronger and God is mightier than any man's conception. Let us think where it is that we may find a home and then consider how we may come thither, and then indeed we may strive so that we may be able to enter into that everlasting blessedness where all life is in the Lord's love, the bliss of heaven. Thanks be to the Holy One therefore, the Prince of Glory, the everlasting Lord, that He has raised us up forever. Amen.