



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Sede Amministrativa: Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Anglo-Germaniche e Slave

SCUOLA DI DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN: SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE, FILOLOGICHE E LETTERARIE
INDIRIZZO: LINGUISTICA, FILOGIA E LETTERATURE ANGLO-GERMANICHE
CICLO: XXIV

**FEMALE ELEGIAIC CHARACTERS IN THE EXETER BOOK.
A CRITICAL EDITION, WITH A CRITICAL HISTORY AND A VARIORUM COMMENTARY OF
*WULF AND EADWACER, THE WIFE'S LAMENT AND THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE***

Direttore della Scuola: Ch.ma Prof.ssa Rosanna Benacchio

Coordinatore d'indirizzo: Ch.ma Prof.ssa Annalisa Oboe

Supervisore: Ch.mo Prof. Giuseppe Brunetti

Dottoranda: Elisa Gianna Pastorello

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	p. 3
PART ONE. THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE POEMS	
1. INTRODUCTION	p. 5
1.1 The Manuscript	p. 5
1.2 The Poems	p. 9
2. THE CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE POEMS	p. 13
2.1 <i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	
2.1.1 The First Riddle theory	p. 13
2.1.2 The Dramatic Monologue theory	p. 18
2.1.3 Old Norse parallels	p. 23
2.1.4 The Exeter Wen-Charm	p. 29
2.1.5 The ambiguity of <i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	p. 32
2.1.6 Riddle-like features in <i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	p. 39
2.1.7 Editing <i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	p. 41
2.2 <i>The Wife's Lament</i>	
2.2.1 The exile's lament	p. 51
2.2.2 The wife's lament	p. 54
2.2.3 Old Germanic and Norse parallels	p. 59
2.2.4 Celtic connections	p. 67
2.2.5 Christian allegories	p. 77
2.2.6 The speaker as a living dead	p. 85
2.2.7 The wife's abode	p. 94

2.2.8 The ambiguity of <i>The Wife's Lament</i> l. 34b	p. 111
2.2.9 The problem of structure	p. 117
2.3 <i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i> and <i>The Wife's Lament</i> as <i>Frauenlieder</i>	p. 127
2.4 <i>The Husband's Message</i>	
2.4.1 The unity of the poem and its connection with the riddles	p. 137
2.4.2 Christian allegory	p. 143
2.4.3 The speaker's identity	p. 150
2.4.4 The runic passage	p. 159
2.5 Feminist readings of the poems	p. 165
3. REMARKS ON THE CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE POEMS	p. 175
BIBLIOGRAPHY	p. 183
 PART TWO. CRITICAL EDITION AND VARIORUM COMMENTARY	
1. CRITICAL EDITION	p. 201
<i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	p. 201
<i>The Wife's Lament</i>	p. 203
<i>The Husband's Message</i>	p. 207
2. VARIORUM COMMENTARY	p. 211
<i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	p. 211
<i>The Wife's Lament</i>	p. 221
<i>The Husband's Message</i>	p. 239

ABBREVIATIONS

WE: Wulf and Eadwacer

WL: The Wife's Lament

HM: The Husband's Message

OE: Old English

ME: Middle English

MnE: Modern English

PART ONE. THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE POEMS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE MANUSCRIPT

The three poems edited in this thesis have been handed down to us in a single manuscript, Exeter Cathedral Library MS. 3501, known as the Exeter Book or Codex Exoniensis. It is one of the four extant poetic codices in Old English, which were all written between the last forty years of the tenth and the first twenty years of the eleventh century, although the material they contain could be earlier. The dating of Old English poetry is a controversial issue, since the language of poetry, rich in formulas, poetic words and compounds, and *apax legomenon*, is crystallised at least to some extent. However, among the many uncertainties surrounding the Exeter Book and its texts, the approximate date when the manuscript was copied can be established between 965 and 975 thanks to codicological and palaeographical evidence. The codex is written in square minuscule, a script that belongs to the second phase of the Anglo-Saxon minuscule and that appeared from *circa* 920, lasting until the beginning of the eleventh century, when it was replaced by the round phase under the influence of the Caroline minuscule – the latter being the product of the simplification of script which spread from Benedictine monasteries from *circa* 950, and which was used just for writing in Latin up to the turn of the century. Square minuscule is the most formal type of Anglo-Saxon minuscule, and the exemplar in the Exeter Book is particularly elegant, being embellished by decorative hairline strokes¹. The codex has been identified with an entry in a donation list left to Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, the bishop who moved the see from Crediton to Exeter in 1050, and who left to the cathedral books and other gifts at his death in 1072. The above-mentioned list is found in folios

¹ Information on Anglo-Saxon minuscule script comes from J. Roberts, *Guide to Scripts used in English Writings up to 1500*, London: The British Library, 2008, pp. 38-41, 60.

1-7 of the manuscript, together with some legal documents; in the introduction to the facsimile edition of the MS., Förster² argued that these folios belonged to Cambridge University Library MS. Ii.ii.11, a gospel book, and his hypothesis was proved correct by Malmberg's discovery of a piece of parchment missing from fol. 5 of the Exeter Book and still preserved in the above-mentioned Cambridge MS.³ The entry usually connected to the Exeter Book is the following: *i mycel englisc boc be gehwylcum þingum on leoðwisan geworht*, meaning "one great English book on various things wrought in verse". In other words, it is an anthology of Old English verse – an anthology in the true sense of the word, as it contains specimens of the most diverse poetic genres: Christological, hagiographic, allegorical, elegiac, heroic, penitential, enigmatic and wisdom poetry. The different types are not grouped together: actually, the poems with religious themes are scattered throughout the MS., and so are the elegies, and the riddles. This peculiar arrangement has originated much debate on the nature of the Exeter Book and on the way in which it was composed. One question concerns the possible sources, that is the codex or codices where the anthologist or the scribe found the different texts. The beginning of each poem is marked by an initial capital which is much larger than the other letters; the end of a text is indicated by a space which usually corresponds to one or two lines, and by particular punctuation marks. Krapp and Dobbie⁴ point out that most of the poems are divided into sections similar to those found in the other Old English poetical MSS., but, unlike the poems of the *Beowulf* MS. and the Junius MS., the sections are not numbered. The scribal divisions in the MS. have been interpreted in contrasting ways: since they sometimes seem to mark the beginning and ending of distinct poems where there are really only separate sections of the same

² R.W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower (eds.), *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, London: Percy Lund, 1933. Förster's hypothesis is on pp. 13-14.

³ This information is reported in G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, III, New York: Columbia University Press, 1936, pp. x-xi.

⁴ G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, cit., pp. xvi-xvii.

text, some scholars take them as an indication that the MS. was copied by a scribe who not always had a clear idea of what he was copying. Others point out that the divisions might have already been present in the exemplars, and that, therefore, at least some of them might be authorial. After carefully studying the codex and the criticism on it, and after comparing the MS. with the other Old English poetical MSS., Bernard J. Muir,⁵ the latest editor of the whole Exeter Book, argues that the sections were copied exactly as they were in the exemplars.⁶ He also believes that there is an order in the book, although it is not so evident to modern readers. For instance, the first eight poems convey the ideal of Christian life from various viewpoints: the life of Christ, which is the paradigm for every Christian; the lives of two saints; the presence of the same ideals in the Old Testament; life after death, which awaits all those who follow God's commandments. He finds another example of deliberate juxtaposition of texts towards the end of the MS., in a series of poems dealing with penitential themes, which he considers related to the Easter liturgy. The case of *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message*, which will be discussed in chapter 2.4.1, is taken by Muir as evidence that the compiler put together texts having some kind of thematic relationship, rather than as an indication that the scribe mistook the elegy for three riddles – the latter being the contention of several scholars.

The MS. has 131 folios, but the first leaf was not numbered in the latest foliation; therefore, the numbering goes from 1 to 130. It measures *circa* 320 by 220 millimetres, and the written area on the folios measures *circa* 240 by 160 millimetres. It is composed of seventeen gatherings, of which eight are complete, being made of eight folios, while the remaining nine gatherings are made of five or seven folios; the presence of gaps in some of the texts indicates

⁵ B.J. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, pp. 16-25.

⁶ Muir has found correspondences between the sectional division on fol. 54v., in *The Canticles of the Three Youths*, and the version of the poem in the Junius MS., and between the sectional divisions in *Soul and Body II* (Exeter Book) and *Soul and Body I* in the Vercelli Book.

the loss of folios in at least some of the gatherings.⁷ Some of the folios were already damaged by stains when they were bound in the codex, as proved by the fact that words are written around the stained parts, but not underneath. There has been a severe damage to the last fourteen folios, which has been caused by a burn; some of the text has been lost as a consequence, especially from fol. 126 to fol. 130, where the damage is worse. *The Husband's Message* is written on fols. 123r.-123v., and the holes in these pages make it impossible to reconstruct some parts of the text.

The codex is a vellum and it is written in one hand; Flower argues that the script is too varied to be the product of one scribe,⁸ but Krapp and Dobbie highlight the presence of variations in the quality of the folios, and the use of different pens, and they consider these the reasons for the small scribal variations that can be observed in the MS.⁹ Although it contains poetry, it is written in continuous lines from the top to the bottom of the pages, so that the verses have to be reconstructed according to the rules of Old English metre.

The first mention of the Exeter Book in modern times is in Wanley's catalogue.¹⁰ The *editio princeps* was made in 1842 by Benjamin Thorpe, who transcribed all the poems with facing translation – except in the case of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, of which the editor was not able to understand even how the verses were to be reconstructed. The first facsimile edition was made in 1831 by Robert Chambers,¹¹ and the latest is Muir's digital facsimile edition of 2000.

⁷ A complete description of the gatherings, the folios and the missing material can be found in G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, cit., pp. xi-xiii.

⁸ R.W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower (eds.), *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, cit., p. 83.

⁹ G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, cit., p. xiii.

¹⁰ H. Wanley, *Antiquae literaturae Septentrionalis Liber Alter. Seu Humphredi Wanleii Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium, qui in Angliae Bibliothecis extant, nec non multo rum Vett. Codd. Septentrionalium alibi extantium Catalogus Historico-Criticus, cum totius Thesauri linguarum Septentrionalium sex Indicibus*, Oxford, 1705, pp. 279-81.

¹¹ London, British Museum, Additional MS. 9067. Robert Chambers made this transcript of the Exeter Book at the British Museum in 1831.

2. THE POEMS

The poems edited in this thesis are written on the last thirty folios of the Exeter Book, among the *Riddles*, penitential and homiletic poems, and two other elegies. *Wulf and Eadwacer* is written on fols. 100v.-101r., it is preceded by *Deor*, an Anglo-Saxon *scop*'s lament on the loss of his privileged status, containing references to heroic figures of Old Norse and Old Germanic literature; and it is followed by the first group of *Riddles*, namely number 1 to number 59 – for this reason, and for its enigmatic quality, *WE* has been considered, and therefore edited, as the first riddle by a number of scholars. This issue is discussed in chapter 2.1.1 “The First Riddle Theory”.

The Wife's Lament is written on fols. 115r.-115v.; it is preceded by the first group of *Riddles*, and followed by ten poems, eight dealing with penitential and homiletic themes, and the last two being riddles– namely, *Judgement Day I*, *Resignation A and B*, *The Descent into Hell*, *Almsgiving*, *Pharaoh*, *The Lord's Prayer I*, *Homiletic Fragment II*, *Riddle 30b* and *Riddle 60*.

The Husband's Message immediately follows *Riddle 60* on fols. 123r.-123v.; it is followed by *The Ruin*, a peculiar poem, usually considered an elegy, describing the desolation of a ruined Roman city. Following *The Ruin*, the last group of *Riddles*, number 61 to number 94, closes the MS. The fact that *Riddle 60* immediately precedes *HM*, the fact that the poem itself is one of those that contain sectional divisions and the theme it deals with have caused it to be considered and edited as three separate riddles, or as a riddle and a poem by various scholars. This problem is examined in chapter 2.4.1 “The Unity of the Poem and its Connection with the *Riddles*”.

I have described the poems as elegies, but the definition is really controversial, because these poems, as well as the others categorised under this label, have not much in common with the classical elegies. Scholars have adopted this term to indicate them because they are laments

of various kinds; their themes are the loss of social status, exile, the consequent separation from loved ones – who can be friends or lovers –, the contrast between former happiness and present misery, the decadence of the world and the acknowledgment that all earthly joys are doomed to finish, the desolated landscape that mirrors the speakers' feelings. *WE*, *WL* and *HM* feature a particular type of longing, that is love-longing; another element they have in common is their having women as protagonists: they are the speakers in the two former cases, and a silent listener and recipient of a love message in the latter.

The presence of female characters in a prominent role in the poems in question has been the first reason for deciding to study and edit them together. What initially prompted me towards these texts was the wish to determine what exactly they have in common, both thematically and stylistically. To achieve this aim, an examination of the critical contributions on the poem was necessary, as so many theories on their nature, possible sources and literary connections have been published since the *editio princeps* appeared. However, the study of the criticism on *WE*, *WL* and *HM* has disclosed a more interesting field of analysis: the critical history of the poems itself. One thing is certain about these texts: no known manuscript contains other copies of them. This means that their controversial readings cannot be compared to anything else, and that the gaps in the text of *HM* cannot be filled by comparison; the only thing that guides editors in reconstructing the texts and their meanings is conjecture. The problem is that some scholars have been carried away with conjecture, and have manipulated the texts in order to make them agree with their views. In fact, this is the danger when approaching these poems: one finds in them elements that remind one of other literary works, and so one is tempted to follow the lead until a connection is established – even when said connection requires to strain the text. The chapters in the first part of this thesis review the main currents of interpretation of *WE*, *WL* and *HM* with the aim to show that if, on the one hand, all the

possible readings of the poems seem convincing when taken one by one, on the other hand many of those readings are contrasting, sometimes to the extent that choosing one requires rejecting another completely. By this analysis I hope to demonstrate that forcing an interpretation upon one of these texts by editing them heavily or by straining the sense of words and phrases does not ultimately add to their meaning, because all the readings suggested so far can be proved to be wrong by the other readings – which means that no reading of words, lines or the general theme of the poems can be proved to be the right one beyond doubt.

Chapter 2 of Part One of this thesis contains the analysis of the main streams of interpretation, and chapter 3 draws some conclusions about the critical history of the poems. Part Two consists of a critical edition of *WE*, *WL* and *HM* that accounts for all the readings proposed by previous editors; this type of edition has been chosen in order to highlight the amount of conjectural emendation the poems have undergone, and also to provide the most objective version of the texts: if my edition shows the way I see them, the apparatus I have devised accounts for all the other manners in which it is possible to read them – something that other editions lack, with the result that the reader's understanding of the poems is biased until he or she undertakes the task to analyse the numerous editions and critical discussions that have appeared up to now.

2. THE CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE POEMS

2.1 *WULF AND EADWACER*

2.1.1 THE FIRST RIDDLE THEORY

The first critic who proposed an interpretation of *WE* was Heinrich Leo (1857). In his opinion, the poem would be a riddle which hides the name of its author, Cynewulf, in a charade. The syllables composing the above-mentioned name are referred to throughout the text by means of synonyms, and the poem is a wordplay challenging the reader to see beyond the literal meaning. The play starts in ll. 1-2, where *leodum* stands for “limbs” and indicates the parts composing the name Cynewulf: the lines in question say that the “limbs”/“syllables” will have different meanings if they are taken individually and if they are put together. The different meanings are found in the subsequent sections of the poem. Ll. 3a-7b — which Leo prints as a stanza — plays on the image of brave men (*walreowe* — the same as *cêne*) fighting a wolf (*wulf*): when the hunters meet the prey, they will come together — on another level of meaning, when *cêne* meets *wulf* the result is *Cênewulf*, a possible form of the famous Anglo-Saxon poet’s name. Ll. 8-15b are based on the same type of wordplay, although the image is different: two lovers, a queen (OE *cven*, *coen*) and a man called *Wulf*, have been separated, and the lady longs to be reunited to her beloved. Finally, ll. 16-17 play on another possible variant of the syllable *cyn*: the wolf (*wulf*) is taking away to the woods (*cên*, “wood”) the queen and her lover’s offspring, that is *Eadwacer* — a reference to the letter *e*, which must be added to *cên* in order to obtain the name *Cynewulf*. The problem with Leo’s interpretation is that it only explains single words, and then provides a translation of whole groups of lines based on those few words, without examining each word and line carefully.

Frederick Tupper revisits Leo's theory concluding that *WE* is actually a riddle, but based on a combination of charade and acrostic (1910, pp. 235-41). The charade would be present in the form of synonyms of the word *cyn* and mentions of the noun *wulf*. For instance, *leodum* (1a) can be substituted with *cyn*, that is "kin", but also the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon poet's name; *hy* (2a, 7a) is referred to *leod*, that is *cyn* again, while *hyne* (2b, 7b) is a reference to *wulf*. The acrostic would be spread throughout the poem in the form of synonyms of the runic letters composing the name *Cynwulf*. For example, *lac* (1b) has the same meaning as *feoh*, which is the name of the rune "f"; *þreat* (2b, 7b) is the same as *nyd*, the name of the rune "n"; the sequence of letters as it stands in the text is *fnlcywu*, but they can be anagrammed into the form *Cynwulf*. Tupper's purpose is to fill in what he considers the gaps in Leo's theory, namely the lack of a search for sources and analogues of this riddle, a background against which *WE* should be read. Tupper points out that such rhetoric devices as the acrostic and the charade were known to and used by other Anglo-Saxon poets, like Aldhelm, Tatwine, Boniface, Æthelwald and Æthelwulf. He also quotes a passage from the prose *Edda* in which Snorri states that his purpose is to provide an alphabet to the Icelanders after the example of the Anglo-Saxons: the fact that Icelandic poets read Old English poetry could indicate that the runic acrostics which are so often found in Icelandic poems came from Anglo-Saxon poetry — more specifically, from Cynewulf's poetry. Tupper provides us with a number of examples from Icelandic literature to prove that it was customary for Icelandic poets to hide their names in their compositions through runic acrostics. He also highlights that Cynewulf used these poetic devices in his religious poems, although in different ways. Difference between the Icelandic and the Old English name-poems: in the former the rune-names and their synonyms are the only meaning of the text; in the latter the word-plays are woven into the story of a lady and her love

for a man, in the form a lyrical monologue, which, according to Tupper, was a common literary type in Cynewulf's time — however, the scholar does not elaborate on this statement, and does not provide any evidence or reference to prove his statement. However, he believes he has demonstrated that *WE* is actually a riddle, and also that its author was Cynewulf, who composed it as a “gift” to his friend Eadwacer and to reveal, through a word-play, that he had written it. The fact that both the first and the last riddle of the Exeter Book collection contain Cynewulf's signature proves beyond any doubt that he is really the author of the whole collection.

Fewer and fewer scholars supported the first riddle theory in the following years. Walter Sedgefield (1931, pp. 74-75) was the very last, and he did so after decades of publication of notes to Grein's edition of the “first riddle” on the pages of the periodical *Anglia*. In his article of 1931 he states that, if the speaker is understood to be a female dog, the whole poem, and especially the last four lines, gain meaning. The poem is actually a riddle of the “mystification type”: a female dog is dreaming about an affair she has had, or dreams she has had, with a wolf. The men in the poem would be the dog's masters, hunting the wolf on an island in the middle of the marshes. Her puppy, which is sleeping by her side, yelps in its dream, and she is awoken by this sound, believing that the wolf in her dream is actually taking her puppy away. Therefore, she calls her dog-companion for help, but then realises that she had just been dreaming, and that is the meaning of the last sentence: the story between the wolf and the she-dog has never been, so there is no pain in parting with her dream. The evidence for such a reading would be in the name Eadwacer, which means “guardian of wealth”: Sedgefield considers it very apt for a dog, and he points out that it also reminds of Odoacer, the king of

Italy. He claims that it has always been customary to name dogs after important historical characters, such as kings and emperors.

The history of the riddle theory ends forty years after Sedgefield, with a reading that puts *WE* in relation with the riddles, although it does not actually consider the poem itself a riddle. Norman Eliason (1974, pp. 225-34) suggests that *WE* is not an elegy about a troubled love story, but rather a poet's complaint to another poet, or to a scribe, about the fact that their work has been divided in two parts and written on different places of the manuscript. He compares it to Chaucer's "Wordes unto Adam", his scribe, which has also been preserved in one copy, which in Eliason's opinion indicates that it was a private exchange addressed exclusively to Adam. *WE* would be a playful reproach to a scribe who has separated what was originally a unitary poetical work by copying it into two different parts of the Exeter Book: the poetry in question would be the two groups of riddles, and if this theory were true the most obscure poem in the manuscript would become the clue to understand another puzzle, that is the reason why the Exeter Book riddles are not grouped together. *WE* is obscure to us because we do not know the underlying story, while the intended recipient — that is, the author's colleague — would have been able to understand it without any difficulty. Anyway, a hint at the true meaning of the poem must be present somewhere in the text, and Eliason believes it can be found in the last two lines, where *uncer giedd* indicates the poet and his scribe's "joint poetic endeavour" (p. 229), and in the first line, where *leodum* is an error that must be emended to *leoðum* ("songs"). The scholar's words about the interpretation to be given to the above-mentioned passages are illuminating, in that they clearly indicate the degree to which he is willing to force the text into the meaning he has imagined for it: the reason for emending is "bringing the first and the last words of the poem into nice accord". He explains the *iege* of l. 4

as a metaphor for the separate and distant pages on which the text would have been transcribed. Wulf and the speaking voice would be the two portions of the poem in question, and the *hwelp* of the final lines would be the same as Wulf, while the wood where it is being carried would be an allusion to the part of the manuscript on which one of the two pieces of the work would have been written and which, for some reason, is considered unsuitable. *Bogum bilegde* (l. 11b) should be interpreted as “in folded parchment leaves”.

2.1.2 THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE THEORY

After being published for more than forty years as the first riddle, *WE* suddenly underwent a radical change when in 1888 a review of the most recent history of English literature¹ appeared on *The Academy*. By providing his personal opinions on that work the reviewer, Henry Bradley (1888, pp. 197-98), became the author of the crucial turning point in the criticism of the Old English poem.

Bradley discards all the theories explaining *WE* as a riddle, and proposes to read it as “a fragment of a dramatic soliloquy” (p. 198), finding in it some similarities in theme and tone with “*The Banished Wife’s Complaint*” (*WL*) and *Deor*. He suggests that its enigmatic quality comes from the lack of context due to the fact that it is the surviving fragment of a lost longer work, possibly of Teutonic origin, and also from its “monodramatic form” (p. 198), which he compares to Browning’s dramatic monologues. Bradley is also the first scholar to recognise that the inflection of *reotugu* (l. 10b) indicates that the speaker is female. His explanation of the situation in the poem is still the most widely accepted, even by critics who classify the text under other literary categories: the speaker is a prisoner in some foreign place, Wulf is her outlawed lover, and Eadwacer her tyrant husband.

Bradley’s theory has continued to have success among modern editors and commentators, as well. Wesley S. Mattox (1975, pp. 33-40) carries out an examination of the language, the images and the psychological elements in *WE*, coming to the conclusion that the poem is a dramatic monologue – more precisely, a “psychodramatic monologue” (p. 40), because the situation is exactly that described by Bradley, but there are some implications about the

¹ The above-mentioned work is: H. Morley, *English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature. Vol. 2: From Cædmon to the Conquest*, London: Cassel, 1888.

speaker that Mattox throws new light on. The scholar identifies two patterns, two sets of images which coincide with the main textual cruxes. *Lac* (l. 1b), *aþecgan* (ll. 2b, 7b), *tosliteð* (l. 18a), together with the less problematic, but not less important word *meteliste* (l. 15b) belong to the semantic field of food and eating, but with particular overtones suggested by *lac*. Mattox points out that the latter word often means “offering” or “sacrifice” in Old English, both in Biblical and heathen contexts; if this meaning is applied to *WE*, *lac* must be understood as referring to a human sacrifice, more exactly the sacrifice of Wulf carried out by the hostile men on the speaker’s island. Toller’s translation of *aþecgan* as “consume”² agrees perfectly with this reading: Wulf will be consumed as a sacrifice if he comes to the place where the woman is held captive. *Meteliste* and *tosliteð* contribute to the eating-sacrifice imagery; the latter, in particular, plays on the idea of humans slaughtered and sacrificed as animals. The other pattern is encirclement, and it is outlined by the words *biworpen* (l. 5b), *dogode* (l. 9b) and *bilegde* (l. 11b). Mattox accepts Fry’s reading of *dogode* as related to the OED entry *dow* (“to press, squeeze, wring”), and explains it as an image of oppression, suggesting that l. 9 means “I was bound in cares during my Wulf’s far-wanderings”; among the possible meanings of *bilegcan* he chooses “to afflict”, and describes both terms as metaphors of the speaker’s situation. She is oppressed by Eadwacer, held prisoner in his embrace, and her personal condition is paralleled by the place where she lives: the *fenne biworpen* island is another image of encirclement and imprisonment, in contrast with Wulf’s situation of continuative movement. However, the woman is not resigned to her passive role of sufferer and prisoner: l. 16 marks a change in her attitude, as shown by her indifference to the fact that her child is going to be killed. Mattox explains that her leaving the baby vulnerable is tantamount to taking part in murder. The verb *tosliteð* is

² T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Supplement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921.

referred to the slaughtering of this child, and it is meant to parallel *apecgan* at the beginning of the poem; since Eadwacer and his men are going to sacrifice her lover, the woman is going to repay them by sacrificing her and Eadwacer's offspring. Mattox describes the poem as a psychodramatic monologue because he believes that the change from oppressed to oppressor comes over the speaker while she is uttering her monologue (Mattox 1975, pp. 39-40).

Richard F. Giles provides a new explanation of the story in *WE* starting from the assumption that the poem is "a coherent lyrical monologue spoken by a woman who has been abandoned by her wandering lover (Giles 1981, pp. 468-72; quotation on p. 470). More exactly, he interprets the work as an interior monologue in which the speaker moves alternately from past to present and from dream to reality following the flow of her thoughts; this movement is recognisable in the succession of the stanzas that, according to Giles, form the poem. His reading of the last stanza is quite unique. *Eadwacer* is not a third person, but rather an ironical epithet the woman gives herself to symbolize her uncommon situation: she is growing her *hwelp*, that is her child, alone, because her man is always wandering far from her and only seldom visits her; she sarcastically calls herself a "property-watcher" because in her culture the father has the task to guard, protect and grow his children, and the irony is enhanced by the masculine inflection of *eadwacer*, intended to lay the blame on Wulf for her having to accomplish his duties. The reference to the *hwelp* being taken away is just a metaphorical way of saying that, while she was lost in thought, her child came into some sort of danger, and this brings her back to reality once and for all: the last two lines mean that it is pointless to brood over past memories and present desires that are not likely to be fulfilled.

Few critics recognise the presence of just two persons – a man and a woman – in *WE*; the majority of them take the presence of a love triangle in the poem for granted, although they

divide on the roles – lover versus husband – played by the two male protagonists. A voice that is – at least to some extent – outside the choir is Jones’s (1983, pp. 323-27), who, like other scholars, identifies Wulf with the speaker’s lover and Eadwacer with her husband, but reads the woman’s relationships with the two of them in an original way. Jones rejects the idea that the epithet *beaducafa* (l. 11a) may be referred to Wulf on the basis of the simplicity characterising all mentions of him in the poem – he is always called either by his name or by a personal pronoun. Moreover, to identify the *beaducafa* with Wulf means to understand his love encounter with the speaker as one of his *seldcymas* (l. 14b); but the text does not make it clear whether these “rare visits” are part of the past or are still continuing in the present; also, although the woman’s feelings towards him are ambiguous, *lað* is too negative, to extreme to denote them. On the other hand, Jones deems it difficult to understand that the speaker has such a feeling about love-making with her husband, too. He suggests that ll. 11-12 describe the woman’s first encounter, or maybe the first sexual encounter, with Eadwacer; this would explain both her ambivalent emotions and the apparent contradictions in Wulf’s situation as described at the beginning and in the middle of the poem: he was the speaker’s lover and came to visit her in the past, but some time later she married Eadwacer who, being jealous, had Wulf imprisoned on another island. This implies that the poem mentions two distinct periods in the past, and that Wulf’s visits are now over, as indicated by his being guarded on the *fæst eglond* (l. 5a). It also means that ll. 2a and 7a should be translated as a question, “Will my people help him...?”, and ll. 3-8 as “It is not like us [to do so]”, where us is referred to the speaker’s people. Jones argues that this is the easiest explanation of the otherwise obscure refrain; he also maintains that the simple narrative pattern of the poem demands that ll. 2-3 and 7-8 mean the same thing and refer to the same characters. Regarding the role of Eadwacer and the important epithet he is

given, *beaducafa*, Jones suggests that the name could be an adjective or a significant name; in either case, it matches *beaducafa* perfectly, giving the passage an ironical tone when it is contrasted with the *earmne hwelp* of l. 16b. Actually, the latter is neither the woman's son nor her and Wulf's story, but rather Eadwacer himself, who earlier is called a "property-watcher" and "one brave in battle" sarcastically in view of what is going to happen to him, that is being killed by Wulf – *tosliteð* (l. 18a) indicates this. The speaker is going to be rescued by Wulf, as suggested by l. 17 (*bireð Wulf to wuda*). Jones's analysis becomes quite confusing at this point, since first he states that *uncerne earmne hwelp* refers to Eadwacer, and soon afterwards he maintains that he sees

no difficulty in addressing Eadwacer and using *uncerne* of the woman and Wulf (since she regards this as the real union); when *uncer* is used a few lines later of herself and Eadwacer it is, in effect, to deny its validity.

Jones claims that word order supports this reading of his, but he does not explain how it does so. His overall view of the poem is that it is a dramatic monologue with mimetic features: the speaker's direct addresses to Wulf, and then to Eadwacer, give the story and the feelings expressed in it a touch of realism; this is her explanation for what she calls "the simplicity of the thought pattern and directness of tone" characterizing the poem (p. 324).

2.1.3 OLD NORSE PARALLELS

The first to propose an Old Norse derivation for *WE* was William W. Lawrence (1902, pp. 247-61), who was also the first critic who took over from Henry Bradley's theory that the poem is not a riddle, but rather "a fragment of a dramatic soliloquy" (Bradley 1888, p. 198). The purpose of Lawrence's work is to demonstrate that Bradley's reading is right, and also to provide the evidence that Bradley's article lacks, namely, the presence of metrical and linguistic elements that point to an Old Norse origin in *WE*. Contrary to Bradley, Lawrence believes that something is missing after l. 1, rather than before it, because the referents of *hine* and *he* in l. 2 are missing. He supposes that two lines are missing in that place, and that originally there was a group of four lines immediately followed by the short line *Ungelice is us* (l. 3/8) — exactly the same pattern found in the following five lines: *WE* has a strophic structure which is not immediately recognisable because of the lost lines after l.1, and because the length of the stanzas and the metre are irregular. The latter features have parallels in Old Norse poetry: *Eiríksmól* is a tenth-century poem in which we see a combination of long and short lines (*málabóttr* / *ljöðabóttr*); *Hákonarmól* is characterised by a similar mixture. The date of the Old English and the Old Norse poems cannot be taken into consideration when comparing them: *WE* is generally dated back to the end of the eighth century, but some scholars date it even earlier; the oldest Old Norse literary works date from the end of the ninth century. *Guðrúnarkviða II*, which is similar in subject and tone to *WE*, dates from the eleventh century. Therefore, the fact that *Guðrúnarkviða II* and *The Lament of Oddrun* do not have a refrain does not form conclusive proof that there is no connection between *WE* and Old Norse poetry. Another metrical element that seems to point to Scandinavian sources for this text is the refrain, which

is very seldom found in Anglo-Saxon poetry — and, however, an instance of it is found in the poem immediately preceding *WE* in the Exeter Book, namely *Deor*. Comparison between the repeated lines in the two poems lead Lawrence to conclude that they both have the function of expressing the speakers' most important feelings. He also points out that *Deor* — the only Old English poem in which a refrain occurs for sure — is closely connected in subject to sagas which have been handed down by Scandinavian sources, and that its juxtaposition to *WE* in the manuscript cannot be a case. Lawrence connects several linguistic elements to Old Norse poetry, as well: a few example are *on þreat cuman*, l. 2/7, a hapax in Old English, but similar to the common Old Icelandic expression *at þrotum koma* (“to come to want” or “to come into heavy straits”); *to þon*, l. 12, possibly the rendering of the Old Norse *at því* (“in that”); *ig*, ll. 4,6, the only case in the whole Anglo-Saxon corpus in which this word does not occur in a compound, the usual word for “island” being *egland*, while the Old Norse *ey* is common. Actually, ON *eyland* literally means “island-land” in opposition to “main land”. Both the metrical and the linguistic features of *WE* lead Lawrence to conclude that the poem is a close translation from an Old Norse source, made by a Norseman who had first written it in his mother tongue. This would explain the presence of words which are found nowhere else in Anglo-Saxon poetry, in favour of words which have Old Norse equivalents, because a medieval writer would undoubtedly translate “as nearly as possible word for word”, choosing to strain the alliteration rather than to change the meaning of the original (Lawrence 1902, p. 259).

W.H. Schofield published an article on the possible Old Norse source of *WE* in the same number of the same journal where Lawrence's contribution is found (Schofield, 1902, pp. 262-95). He believes that the poem makes reference to the Eddic story of Signý, whose husband Siggeir kills almost all of her relatives. Her twin brother Sigmund escapes the murder and hides

in the forests. Signý wants her children to slay their father in order to avenge her, but they are too cowardly to do what she asks, therefore she disguises herself, finds her brother and has a son with him, Sinfjötli. When the child grows up, he carries out the revenge on Siggeir together with his father Sigmund, but Signý chooses to die with her husband. Schofield believes that Wulf in *WE* is Sigmund: it would be a reference to Signý's and Sigmund's family name, Wolfings. He explains the speaker's contrasting feelings towards him (l. 12, *wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæpre eac lað*) as Signý's unwillingness to commit incest with her brother, mixed with her desire to get a child who will be brave enough to take vengeance on her husband.

Ruth Lehmann (1969, pp. 151-65) carefully analyses Lawrence's and Schofield's theories, and finds flaws in both. As for the former's metrical analysis, she points out that *WE* is peculiar in many respects: its refrain is quite different from that in *Deor* — a line and a half versus one line — and seven out of its nineteen lines are longer than the usual Old English line — more than twelve syllables —, although they cannot be considered hypermetric — hypermetric lines being usually longer than twenty syllables. For what concerns Schofield's comparison of the situation in *WE* with Signý's story, Lehmann finds a gap between Signý's feelings as described in the *Edda* and the speaker's feelings in *WE*: while the former is dominated by a desire for revenge, the latter is overwhelmed with love-longing. She also highlights how improbable it is that Signý would call her brother by their family name — Wulf, from Wulfing — rather than by his first name. Lehmann believes that the story behind the Exeter Book poem is a mixture between two distinct Germanic traditions which came to be confused at a certain point before *WE* was composed. She thinks that Imelmann was right in recognising Odoacer in Eadwacer, although there is no Germanic source telling a story of love and marriage about him. However, there is a historical figure, connected with Odoacer, who is

mentioned in other Old English poems datable from the same period as *WE*: Theodoric is referred to in *Deor* and in *Widsith*, even if very little is said about him in those texts. The problem is that there are two historical Theodorics: one was the Ostrogoth who defeated Odoacer, and forced him to find refuge in the marshes around Ravenna; the other was a Frankish prince, Clovis's son, who had a son called Theodebert, who came to be called Theodoric like his father. Germanic sources call the father Hugdietrich and the son Wulfdietrich; according to the legend, when he was a child the latter was carried away and brought up by wolves. The fact that both the Ostrogoth Theodoric and the Frankish one have stories of exile led the two figures — and the legends connected with them — to be confused, as is evident also in the Rök runic inscription. The story underlying *WE* would come from the Frankish legend, while the names would come from the Ostrogothic sources.

Arie C. Bouman (1962, pp. 93-105) believes that the characters in *WE* are somehow connected to Odoacer and Theodoric, as well, but he bases his interpretation on the position of *WE*: the fact that it immediately follows *Deor* is not a chance, in his opinion, and actually the two poems are similar in form — both have a refrain — and have some affinity in content — both point to Old Icelandic stories. The starting point of his reading is the only proper name that occurs in *WE*, namely Eadwacer, which Bouman relates to the historical character Odoacer, who appears twice in a copy of Bede's World Chronicle known as *Annales Quedlinburgenses*, in which he is associated to Theodoric and Ermanaric — who appear in *Deor*, as well. One of these occurrences has the form Adaccaro, which is similar to Adward for Edward, an usual spelling variant in Old English charters. This proves that Odoacer as a historical character was known to the Anglo-Saxons. It also demonstrates that in Anglo-Saxon tradition Odoacer had the particular role of evil counsellor: no matter the figures he is related to in the *Annales*

Quedlinburgenses, he always plays a decisive part in the banishment or killing of his lord's relatives.

Bouman finds another connection between the Eadwacer-Odoacer of the homonymous poem and *Deor*. He quotes the Old English poetic fragment *Waldere II*, which tells the story of Theoderic's liberation from the banishment in which he had been sent by Ermanaric on Odoacer's advice. According to this source, his savior was Widia, the legendary son who was born from Weland's violence on Beadohild — and a stanza in *Deor* is devoted precisely to Beadohild's story. On these grounds, Bouman concludes that “there is no need to eliminate Eadwacer as a person with some definite standing in Old English legend” (p. 99). He also states that the only character among the above-mentioned ones who could have spoken *WE* is Beadohild. According to this theory, Wulf would be Weland, and the *hwelp* Widia, and Beadohild would avoid calling them with their true names because “a woman when complaining [...] has strong reasons to veil her utterances” (p. 99); Wulf would be a reference to Ulfdalir, the “valley of the wolves” where Weland had his smithy before being robbed and imprisoned. *Völundarkvida* actually says that Weland has been banished to an island by king Niðud, and it also says that Beadohild leaves that island in tears, after Weland's act of violence —circumstances that are both found also in *WE*. Finally, Eadwacer would be Odoacer, and he would also be the one who carries away the *hwelp* in l. 17: in *Waldere II* and in continental tradition Widia is the one who frees Theoderic from the banishment into which Ermanaric has forced him, on Odoacer's advice, and Bouman infers that Widia must have been Odoacer's enemy for this reason.

Bouman recognises that *WE* is an ambiguous text, and that his theory is not proved by the presence of names or direct allusions to the Weland story. However, he points out that most Old English and Old Germanic heroic poetry would be impossible for us to understand if

we did not have a context, that is other texts providing more information on the obscure parts. The problem with *WE* is that it was never supposed to be informative, because it is an elegy: it does not have to tell facts, and an Anglo-Saxon audience would not need the whole story to be told, either, because they would already know it, and they would immediately recognise it behind the words of this poem.

2.1.4 THE EXETER WEN CHARM

The difficulty of interpretation of *WE* is evident in the fact that new readings have emerged throughout the history of the criticism on the poem: from time to time, some scholar seems to find a way of connecting it to some genre whose possible relations with this short text had never been explored before. Interestingly, *mutatis mutandis* the result has never changed so far: while *WE* seems to bend itself to each reading to some degree, no interpretation has been convincing enough to discard all the other interpretations, yet.

Donald K. Fry ventured on a new path of the kind described above in the 1970s, that is after decades of interpretation of the poem as either a fragment of a longer heroic work, or a lyrical poem (Fry 1971, pp.249-63). He reinterprets *WE* as a charm to cure wen-disease on the basis of comparison between the poem and a few charms found in other MSS: *Wiþ Wennum*, British Museum Ms. Regius 4 A XIV, f. 106b and *Wiþ Færstice*, British Library Ms. Harley 585, ff. 175-176a.¹ Fry's thesis is that Wulf is an evil disease spirit who has caused a tumour (a *wen*) on the narrator-victim; the poem is a 'diminishing or exorcising charm' that the victim speaks against the disease (p. 253). The words *lac* and *wena* are reinterpreted and shown to have medical meanings. *Wena* (l. 13b) is usually read as a form of the feminine noun *wen* ('expectation, yearning, hope'), while Fry states it may come from *wenn* ('wen, tumour'), which is masculine according to some lexicographers and feminine according to others. If it is feminine, *wena* could be a spelling variant of the nominative plural: Fry quotes the passage in Campbell's grammar² where the scholar explains that in early Middle English and in late Old

¹ Fry uses the texts and numbering in G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1948: *Wiþ Wennum* is no. 4, pp. 154-59; *Wiþ Færstice* is no. 2, pp. 140-51.

² A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 183.

English geminated consonants were usually simplified at the end of syllables. Campbell also notes that double consonants in Old English were usually simplified graphically, although they were pronounced as double, at the ends of syllables and of words. Sievers³ also notes this phenomenon in his grammar. Fry concludes that Old English spelling is too variable to be taken as a guide to establish word meanings. He also quotes Kenneth Sisam's opinion that the spelling of the Exeter Book cannot be trusted, because scribes did not have to keep the spelling when reproducing Old English texts: modernization and dialectal variations were accepted, and even considered necessary. And at a certain point the Exeter Book was copied by someone who changed the forms of the original familiarising them.⁴ This would be the explanation for the simplified forms *wenum* and *wena* for *wennum* and *wenna*. As for the word *lac* (l. 1b), three glosses prove that it may mean 'remedy' or 'medicine',⁵ although it must be noted that Napier, that is the editor of the glosses, observes that in all the occurrences *lac* stands for *lacnunga*, and therefore the *lac* quoted in the dictionaries with the meaning 'medicine' does not really exist. Fry also reinterprets *aþecgan* (l. 2a) as 'receive', which, in his opinion, would refer to the speaker's family receiving either the medicine itself or the doctor supposed to cure the disease. The refrain, *ungelic is us*, would indicate that the nature of the victim is different from that of Wulf, since she is human, while he would be a spirit. Finally, Fry proposes not to emend *dogode* to *hogode*, believing that it means 'suffer'—a reading provided by Bosworth-Toller for the verb *dogian*—and that the whole line means 'I suffered from my Wulf's wens in his journeying (or exile)', and he also suggests to understand *bogum* as the branches of a tree used to stroke the

³ Eduard Sievers, *An Old English Grammar*, A.S. Cook (transl. and ed.), Boston: Ginn, 1903, pp. 164-65.

⁴ K. Sisam, 'The Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts', in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, K. Sisam (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 36.

⁵ The glosses are quoted from A.S. Napier, *Old English Glosses*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900, section I, eleventh century glosses to Aldhelm's *De Laudibus Virginitati*, MS. Digby 146 (late tenth-early eleventh century).

victim, something which was common in rituals to cure diseases. Eadwacer would be an epithet for the spirit meaning 'easily-weaker', which would make reference to the diminishing of the evil being's power over the victim thanks to the charm she would be reciting with the priest's help.

2.1.5 THE AMBIGUITY OF *WULF AND EADWACER*

The 1960s saw the rising of a new trend in the criticism of *WE*. Up to that moment, scholars had focused on explaining either the genre or the sources of the poem, but, after the publication of Alain Renoir's "Noninterpretation" (Renoir 1965, pp. 146-63), some of them started to focus on the content leaving aside any issue of classification. Surprisingly, this type of method has often highlighted the ambiguity inherent in the text, and most of the scholars undertaking this path have deemed this ambiguity intentional on the part of the poet.

The purpose of Renoir's work is to find the structural features that make *WE* irresistible to any critic, regardless of their different interpretations and translations. Renoir examines the form and content of the text against each other, finding that the main themes of suffering and separation are highlighted by the structure. What he does not do is try to propose new readings for controversial passages, or add a new interpretation to all those that have already been put forward. His approach to *WE* is descriptive rather than explicative, and yet he succeeds in providing an analysis that highlights both the themes which are uncontrovertibly present in the poem, and the fact that the form works together with the meaning to create and convey those themes.

Among the critics following this line, Arnold E. Davidson (1975, pp. 24-32) has the most innovative – and maybe also the most daring – approach. Starting from the assumption that if so many different readings of *WE* are possible, then there is a concrete possibility that the poem is deliberately ambiguous, he proposes a Modern English translation in which all the possible readings of all the problematic words are accounted for. For example, he glosse *lac* (l. 1b) as "a battle / sacrifice / gift / message / game" (1975, p. 25). He believes that this line refers

to Wulf, and that its ambiguity mirrors the speaker's uncertainty about the way in which Wulf will be received by her people when he comes *on þreat* ("with a troop of men" and "in violence") to take her. Davidson's reading is interesting because it throws new light on the old cruces every scholar before and after him has tried to solve. One of the key problems is the use of *us* – first person plural – versus *uncer* – first person dual; Davidson suggests that it embodies the central paradox on which the poem is based, namely, the contrast between the physical and the emotional. On the one hand, the speaker is emotionally tied to her lover, Wulf, although they are physically separated – on different islands; on the other hand, she is held, literally embraced, by her husband, Eadwacer, without having any emotional proximity with him. Although the physical connection does bring some pleasure to the woman, the poem seems to suggest that the emotional bond is far more significant. Yet, there are a few signs indicating that the relationship with Eadwacer is not so unimportant as the speaker would like it to be. A child was born as a consequence of that relationship, and Davidson believes that the woman is not ready to see him killed: when speaking of the baby, the protagonist switches to *uncerne*, the dual, which indicates a strong connection with her husband. Also the opposition of *wyn* and *lað* (l. 12) suggests that the woman has contrasting feelings towards Eadwacer, although she is not willing to admit it. The last two lines highlight the deliberate ambiguity of the poem more than anything else: "that which was never united", the *giedd* ("poem / story / riddle") applies perfectly to the woman and Wulf's situation, and equally perfectly to the woman and Eadwacer's one. Davidson interprets this as an open question similar to those found at the end of the riddles in that it leads the reader to question the nature of the situation it describes; it is different in that the answer is yet another riddle: no one, even the speaker herself, can tell which relationship is really joined, because neither has all the qualities that a love story should have. Quite

surprisingly, Davidson reinterprets *WE*'s similarity with the riddles in a modern way. He compares the situation in the Old English poem to that in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, where the protagonist is torn between two men who represent respectively freedom of feeling and social rules, a problem which applies to the circumstances in *WE*, as well: Wulf is an outlaw and represents free love, while Eadwacer is part of the woman's clan and represents what her community wants from her.

John M. Fanagan (1976, pp. 130-37) states that the "internal interpretations" — those explaining *WE* as a riddle, a charade, a charm, a dramatic soliloquy — and the "external interpretations" — those drawing from material outside the text in order to understand its background — are similarly useless in that they do not clarify the situation described in the poem: they concentrate on everything but the story, "the moving depiction of human misery" which is the subject of *WE*, and which is all that matters in order to understand the poem (p. 131). Fanagan finds that there are a few certain points in *WE*: the speaker is a woman, and this is proved by the inflection of the adjective *reotugu* (l. 10b); Wulf is a person, as well, as demonstrated by the woman's invocation *Wulf, min Wulf* (l. 13a) and by the despair that their separation on different islands causes her. This is the main theme of the poem: the protagonist's sadness caused by her beloved's absence. Everything else is enigmatic, and Fanagan believes that this not due to our missing either the context or some lines of the original poem, but rather to the poet's intentional use of words having multiple meanings. An example is *Eadwacer*, which could be a proper noun, indicating a third, specific person — the same as the *beaducafa* (l. 11a), or a common noun simply indicating a guardian. It is not essential to the meaning of the poem to know which possibility is the right one, because the poet's intention here is to convey the idea that someone else than *Wulf* is watching and possessing the woman.

The same ambiguity is found in l. 11 where *bogum bilegde* may be translated as “afflicted me with his bows” or “encircled me with his arms”; Fanagan exhorts the reader not to cross out either interpretation, because this mingle of war and love imagery is probably meant to highlight the speaker’s feelings of pleasure and loath (*wyn* and *lað*, l. 12) towards the *beaducafa*.

As Fanagan’s study shows, the ambiguity of *WE* is both in the poem as a whole– its structure, its meaning – and in the single words composing the text. In the critical history of this text there have been numerous examples of articles which focused on single textual cruces; even among these, one has highlighted the ambiguity of *WE*. Carole A. Hough analyses the importance of the refrain, and especially the term *ungelic(e)*, which she considers the key point because it is deliberately highlighted by the absence of the b-verse. She argues that the traditional translation of the term (“different, unlike”) does not suit this particular context, and this is the reason why it results one of the most obscure parts of the poem. Hough draws evidence from *Beowulf* and other Old English texts to prove that the prefix *un-* sometimes works as an intensifier rather than as a negative element. She compares *ungelice* in *WE* with *unforht* in *The Dream of the Rood*, l. 117: the latter usually means “unafraid”, but in that particular occurrence it means “very afraid”. Hough suggests that a similarly peculiar way of using *ungelice* in *WE* would be in line with the “deliberately allusive” vocabulary of the text (p. 5) and its affinity with the riddles, which it actually immediately follows in the MS. She proposes to translate ll. 3 and 8 as “It is too much the same with us” or “We [Wulf and I] are too much the same” (p. 5), which would fit the context perfectly if one identified the story told in the poem with that of Signý and Sigmund: it would be very like Signý to utter a lament over her incestuous union with her brother, stating that, being so close relatives, they should never have been together.

Peter S. Baker (1981, pp. 39-51) has quite a different approach to the question of ambiguity, although he, too, recognizes its presence in the text. He claims that many ambiguities are due to modern scholars and their “fallible tools” (p. 41). For instance, he shows that the interpretation of *aþecgan* (l. 2/7a) proposed by Bradley and accepted by most scholars is based on wrong premises. Toller’s gloss “to take food, consume”, coming from his translation of the form *aþecge* as a subjunctive in a medical recipe, is considered correct by most critics. Baker, however, points out that, if it is a derivative of *þicgan*, as Bradley suggested, the above-mentioned occurrence must be an imperative, and, consequently, its translation must be “to give food to”, “to serve someone with”. He also provides evidence that this verb was used in various metaphorical expressions with the meaning “to kill” (see *Variorum Commentary*). If one proceeds to read ll. 4-7, the apparent ambiguity of l. 2 vanishes: Baker claims that *wæltreow* usually denotes hostility and cruelty in Old English, and this eliminates any possibility that the *wæltreowe weras* of l. 6 are going to feed Wulf; the only possible meaning of *aþecgan* is, therefore, “to kill”. Ambiguity is actually found in the syntax of ll. 9-12, where it is impossible to tell for sure whether the two *þonne* clauses are both “when” clauses, or whether the second one is a “then” clause, and also in which way they are subordinated to the preceding and following clauses. Baker proposes to interpret these lines as a complex *apo koinu* structure, because this leaves the ambiguity of the passage untouched. The last clue ambiguous image Baker finds in the poem is *hwelp*, which he thinks could be taken either literally, as the woman’s child, or metaphorically, as an image of the speaker and Eadwacer’s relationship, as suggested by Fanagan. Baker’s work shows that much of the ambiguity other critics talk about is not inherent in the poem, but rather due to early scholars’ and glossers’ mistranslations and guesswork. However, he states that the genuinely enigmatic passages or words in *WE* are intentionally ambiguous,

and that they are part of the poet's technique of delaying information in order to increase the tension and "the emotional power of the poem" (p. 41).

James J. Donahue (2004) goes further than Baker in condemning the amount of critical discussions on *WE*. The key problem stems from the absence, within the poem itself, of any context in which the poem can be understood: it leaves the reader under the impression that originally there was a context, and also that the Anglo-Saxon audience for whom the poem was written had some clue to understand it. The consequent numerous attempts to reconstruct the background have originated a maze of plausible interpretations and possible contexts, with the result that there is much more confusion about *WE* now than at the beginning of its critical history. In Donahue's words, this poem is "an example of the destabilization of meaning set into motion by the discourse community" (p. 2), and this is due also to the fact that critics have concentrated almost exclusively on the linguistic ambiguities, although the date and place of composition are open questions, as well. Donahue points out that even Baker's interpretation incurs in the same kind of mistakes it criticizes, since it tries to narrow the possibilities of translation of the problematic words, and in one case – the meaning of *lac* – it draws on Old Icelandic linguistic evidence to do so. The problem with this type of approach is that once a position is taken, the reading of the rest of the text is inevitably biased – and also limited: since there is no context within the poem itself, no reading can be proved to be the right one, and therefore any interpretation is possible. To choose one over the others means to make arbitrary decisions about the sense and to lose the overall view of the poem. Furthermore, Donahue suggests that the poem might have been just as deliberately ambiguous for an Anglo-Saxon audience as it is for modern readers: we have always assumed that those for whom *WE* was composed had a clue to the context, but there is nothing to prove that such a conjecture is

correct. Starting from these considerations, the scholar undertakes a completely new type of approach, and examines the research over the poem rather than the poem itself, in order to throw light on “the play of meanings that has been generated by research constructed around this work” (p. 5). Following Aertsen’s classification of the interpretations of *WE* (Aertsen 1994, pp. 119-44) Donahue highlights the lack of fail-proof evidence to substantiate any of the readings proposed. He then proceeds to examine a new, more recent type of approach, that is post-structuralism, and finds out that, although its purpose is the deconstruction of superimposed meanings, it ends up in the same circular logic as the other kinds of reading; actually, seeing literary texts as contributors to the values of the society they come from, post-structuralist scholars try to reconstruct their meaning by contextualizing them in their culture, while trying at the same time to reconstruct the culture on the basis of the texts. The problem with our poem is that such a logic has been proved to fail in hundreds of ways so far, and it will continue to do so, because, as Donahue writes:

so long as the idea that a meaning exists for *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the critical community will continue to employ strategies that assist in the construction of that meaning, which construction will often take the form of (at least in part) a contextualizing of the poem. (p. 12)

In other words, unless some new manuscript is found containing a longer version of the poem, or some information about its context, no one will ever be able to say a definitive word about it. Having become aware of this, Donahue thinks it more worthy to study and explain the “critical discourse” on *WE* than the poem itself, because all critics can do successfully is to uncover the “play of meanings” they have constructed around the work (p. 13).

2.1.6 RIDDLE-LIKE FEATURES IN *WULF AND EADWACER*

Sedgefield's reading has not been properly followed or developed, although two scholars after him concentrated on the animal images on which he based his theory. Peter Orton (1985, pp. 223-258) maintains that the poem cannot be interpreted as talking about human beings, since this reading does not account for the animal vocabulary, and, moreover, it compels critics to look for clarification outside the text — for instance, in Old Norse literature or mythology. Orton starts from Sedgefield's theory, believing that the characters are wolves, but he disagrees with him on the genre of the text, which cannot be a riddle, since the solution — a story about wolves — is not cryptic. Furthermore, the alienating effect is normally achieved in the Riddles through personification, that is, by giving the hidden object human qualities, while in *WE* one can observe a total distance from human society, which is never referred to. For this reason, the text can be said to be characterised by anthropomorphism rather than personification. As for genre, Orton does not provide a final answer: he recognises in *WE* the influence of personal lyric as well as that of the riddles, but does not classify the poem within either category, or within any other text type, and describes it “as another product of the...fundamental conception of man as part of the world he lives in” (p. 258). He finds a ground for this reading in the fact that the Anglo-Saxons saw themselves “lycomorphically”, as testified by the use of *Wulf* as a proper name, especially in compound-names, and by the tendency, common to all Old Germanic cultures, to see animal qualities in warriors.

The other critic who focuses her attention on the “animal imagery” in *WE* is Anne L. Klinck, who, however, limits herself to point out the irony deriving from the use of words that carry an animal meaning (1987, pp. 3-13). These words are, of course, *Wulf*, a name which

hints at the condition of the outcast, since the wolf is the animal connected with the exile in Old English gnomic verse, and *hwelp*, an animal appellative for a child who, in Klinck's opinion, is likely to be killed, as the verb *tosliteð* ("tears apart", l. 18a) suggests the image of the wolf rending its prey's flesh apart. Klinck believes that a number of terms in the poem lend themselves to this interpretation. The manuscript reading *dogode* (l. 9b) — emended to *bogode* by most scholars — could be explained as a verb derived from *docga*, a word recorded in place names whose meaning would be "pursued like a dog". She also believes that Eadwacer could be the name of a dog, and that *bogum* (l. 11b) would be better understood if read with its literal meaning "shoulder of an animal", which would perfectly match the "animal imagery" of the poem without compromising the sexual hint of the phrase *bogum bilegde* (l. 11b). Nevertheless, Klinck does not explain the text as a riddle, but as "a love poem, essentially serious though infused with irony" (p. 13), in which the animal imagery has the function of presenting the characters, and even the speaker herself, in a critic and derisive way.

2.1.7 EDITING *WULF AND EDWACER*

Since much of the debate on *WE* has involved the punctuation of controversial lines, the capitalisation of the names Wulf and Eadwacer, and the way in which the poem should be edited, I have deemed it useful to include in this chapter an analysis of the most important editions of the poem, both old and modern. I think that this analysis, together with the examination of the critical studies on the poem, shows that no final word can be said on this text, and that another type of approach could be more useful; this point is discussed in chapter 3 “Remarks on the Critical History of the Poems”.

The first edition is, of course, Thorpe’s (1842, p. 527). His note to *WE* is: “Riddle I — Of this I can make no sense, nor am I able to arrange the verses”. His preface claims that it was not an easy task to edit and translate the Exeter Book, and in fact it seems that he decided not to commit himself too much, with the result that his edition is little more than a transcription of the texts. The font reproduces the Old English alphabet, the abbreviations are not solved, and there is an arrangement by verses, but there is no punctuation except for the middle dots, which he uses at the end of each half-line. There is an apparatus, but it is very reduced, and in the case of *WE* no emendation is proposed. The most interesting passage in this version of the text is, perhaps, ll. 14-16 (Thorpe’s numeration):

ungelice·

is us wulfes·

ic mines widlastum·

His arrangement of these verses suggests that he did not recognise ll. 3 and 8 as a refrain. Moreover, there is no separation between the two main clauses in ll. 15 and 16: *is* is a main verb, and it does not agree with *ic* in the following line, which requires an other main verb, presumably *dogode* (l. 17). The fact that the editor leaves *ungelice* alone, and that he conceives the following half-line as a self-standing clause, might suggest that he imagined a textual corruption to be present at this point. His opinion on the scribe of the Exeter Book is not flattering: the manuscript “abounds in instances of false orthography and ignorance on the part of the scribe, to a greater degree than any other manuscript I have seen of Anglo-Saxon poetry” (p. iv).

Another important early edition, always referred to by later scholars, is Christian Grein’s (1857-58, pp. 183-84). The apparatus is much more developed here than in Thorpe’s work; the orthography is normalised at least to some extent, although some abbreviations are not solved. *WE* is edited as the first Riddle, but the verses are arranged in the same way as in recent editions, and modern punctuation is used. The refrain *Ungelic(e) is us* is set apart, presented as a single half-line and punctuated by a colon in both its occurrences, which links it respectively to l. 4 and l. 8, and clarifies that *ungelice* (“different”) is the characters’ situation, in both cases described in the lines immediately following the refrain. The use of a comma between ll. 10 and 11 suggests that the two *þonne*-clauses are understood as coordinated, while the colons at the end of ll. 9 and 11 leave the question open about the subordination of each of them. Interestingly, *wulf* is never capitalised — it is at the beginning of l. 13, but just because l. 12 ends with a period — while *Eadwacer* is.

Ernst Sieper (1915, p. 126) expresses the idea that part of the poem is missing. For this reason, in his edition the initial word, *leodum*, is not capitalised and it is preceded by a line of dots, indicating that, in the editor’s opinion, there is a lacuna in that place. Sieper emends the

text much more than the majority of other scholars, and in many instances he does so in the name of metrical regularisation and reconstruction. Such is the case in l. 9, where *wenum* is omitted to shorten the line; in l. 10, which is rearranged freely from *þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt* to *wæs hit reonig weder and ic reotugu sæt*. Sieper's reading actually solves two problems: it makes the line regular from the viewpoint of both scansion and alliteration, and it gets rid of one of the main cruxes in this text, turning the first subordinate *þonne*-clause into a main clause. The same treatment is reserved to l. 11, where *þonne* is omitted, as well, and *mec* is edited to *me*. In this way, ll. 9-12 become a sequence of coordinated clauses. The other emendations are *earone* for MS. *earne* (l. 16), and *gæd* for MS. *giedd* (l. 19), the latter proposed on the basis of the occurrence of that word in *Solomon and Saturn* l. 449, where it means "fellowship", a meaning that could suit the context in our poem, as well. In one case, the editor changes a line without giving any explanation and without any plausible reason: l. 4 reads *wulf min is on iege*, whereas *min* is nowhere to be seen in the manuscript. Similarly to Grein, Sieper does not treat *wulf* as a proper noun, while he does so with *Eadwacer*. The result of this edition is not satisfactory: the emendations are proposed as solutions to metrical and stylistic problems, but the meaning of the text as a whole seems not to be given the same importance and it is not clearer in Sieper's work than in any other edition.

A similar free handling of the poem is exerted in Walter Sedgefield's edition, whose preface makes it clear that it is aimed at scholars, philologists and students at the same time (1922, pp. 39-40, 159-60). As is general practice with students' books, each text is immediately preceded by its introduction, which prepares the reading by providing a brief summary of the situation and a reading context for the work in question. This feature might have advantages for those who are studying the text for the first time, because it sets at least a few firm points to which one may cling in the middle of the almost utter darkness which is the story and the

context of *WE*. The disadvantage lies in the readers inevitably approaching the poem with a bias. In this specific instance, a number of controversial interpretations are given as matter of fact: Wulf being the speaker's lover; his being threatened by the woman's kinsmen; the poem being self-standing rather than a fragment of a longer work. Actually, Sedgefield classifies it as an early example of *ljóðabattr*, a poetical form which developed in Icelandic literature after the Exeter Book was copied, and he marks the presence of the refrain as "a crude attempt to divide the whole into stanzas of irregular length" (p. 39). The only mention of scholarly dispute in this introduction refers to the editing of *WE* as the first riddle by the earliest editors of the Exeter Book. The choice of the title is significant, as well: *Wolf* is used, instead of the Old English name *Wulf*, in the title, in the introduction and in the notes. However, it is not used in the poem itself, where the Old English spelling is retained, although the word is treated as a personal name and capitalised. It is not listed in the section "Names of Persons and Places", though, while *Eadwacer* is. It must be noted that no explanation is provided for the latter, which is only marked by an asterisk, indicating that "the person or place denoted by the name has not been identified" (pp. 243-48). The absence of the name *Wolf* from the list is striking: why did the editor not treat it in the same way as *Eadwacer*? The answer might be that "Wolf" is simply an outlaw in Sedgefield's opinion, he is not a historically significant figure; but neither is *Eadwacer*. It is true that Rudolf Imelmann based his theory on the existence of an Old English Odoaker cycle on this name, but Sedgefield makes no mention of it either in the introduction or in the notes to the text.¹ For what concerns emendations, the editor reads *hogode* for MS. *dogode* in l. 9, and glosses it in the notes simply by pointing out that *dogode*

¹ Rudolf H.R. Imelmann, *Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung*, Berlin: Julius Springer, 1907. This work attempted to place *WE*, *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* within the frame of a supposed Anglo-Saxon Odoaker cycle. A year later, Imelmann published another work, *Wanderer und Seefahrer im Rahmen der altenglischen Odoaker-Dichtung*, Berlin: Julius Springer, 1908, in which he connected *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* to the Odoaker legend, as well. His interpretation of the poems and his assumption that an Odoaker cycle really existed in Old English literature were based on the occurrence of the word *Eadwacer* in the homonymous text.

makes no sense. He also reads *earmne* for MS. *earne*, but does not comment on it: he only translates the word as “poor”. His punctuation of ll. 9-12 is consistent with his explanation of them: for him, the *beaducafa* (l. 11) is *Wulf* rather than *Eadwacer*, and in fact no punctuation mark separates l. 9 and l.10, and there is only a comma at the end of l. 10, which makes it clear that the two *þonne*-clauses are understood to be coordinated between themselves and at the same time subordinated to l. 9, while l. 11 is considered an additional remark standing on its own. *Uncerne* (l. 16) is glossed as ambiguous: it could mean both “yours and mine”, that is, the speaker and *Eadwacer*’s, or “his and mine”, i.e. the speaker and *Wulf*’s. A lacuna after l. 17a is indicated by a line of dots. The most distinctive note is that on *bogum bilegde* (l. 11b): “surrounded me with branches, i.e. made an arbour to keep the rain out”. The image of the rain is not linked to the speaker’s emotions, it is considered a description of her material situation, and the *beaducafa*’s act is read in the same pragmatic way.

If the 1910s and the 1920s saw a tendency to massive editing and free handling of our poem, the 1930s marked a return to an attitude of non-commitment on the part of many editors. The decade opens with William Craigie’s edition of the third volume of his *Specimens of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1931, p. 50). Except for a very short preface, in which the author states that he has altered the texts very little, this work is nothing more than a reprint of a number of Old English poems taken from various manuscripts and variously related to Germanic legends and historical themes. There are neither a general introduction nor brief introductions to individual poems, nor apparatus, nor notes or commentaries on the texts. The editor’s viewpoint on some aspects of *WE* can only be inferred by analysing his choices of punctuation. Ll. 9-10 are separated by a comma, which means that the first *þonne*-clause is interpreted as depending on the previous clause. Similarly, the second *þonne*-clause is seen as dependent on the following main clause. The semicolon between ll. 10 and 11 indicates that they are not to be intended as

coordinated. The names of both male characters are capitalised; *Wulf* has a capital initial also in l. 17, where the majority of editors print the word in minuscule in order not to deprive this line of the ambiguity coming from the image of the wolf carrying away the whelp. This makes it clear that Craigie undoubtedly considered *Wulf* a person.

William Mackie's edition is even more conservative (1934, pp. 86, 244). The only changes he makes to the text are the emendation of MS. *earne* to *eargne* (l. 16), the arrangement in verses and the position of the refrain (ll. 3, 8), which is centred in both cases, a layout that is also used for the other single half-lines in the poem (ll. 17, 19). Even the punctuation is exactly the same as in the manuscript: only middle dots are used, just in the places where they are seen in the Exeter Book. No capital letters are present, except the initial "I" in *Leodum*, the opening word of the poem, which is capitalised in the MS. as well. The facing translation reveals the editors' interpretation of the poem and its cruces. The most striking feature of the Modern English version is perhaps the systematic capitalisation of the word *Wulf*, which, just as in Craigie's case, leaves no doubt about Mackie's belief that the character in question is a man. Some peculiar readings emerge from the translation; namely, *on þreat* (l. 2) is rendered as "to their troop", rather than "armed" or "with an army" — the most common readings. *Fæst* (l. 5) is glossed as a noun meaning "fastness". The refrain — l. 3, 8 — is translated as "Our lots are different", with a reference to fate which is quite precise, while these lines are usually treated as ambiguous, and therefore glossed in general ways, by most editors. L. 9 is punctuated by a period, that is, it is considered a self-standing statement, while l. 11 is treated as depending on l. 10, from which the *þonne* — which marks it as a subordinate clause — disappears. L. 11 "the man brave in battle gave me shelter" echoes Sedgefield's understanding of the passage as a reference to the speaker's physical — rather than emotional — situation. The effect of this edition is quite puzzling: on the one hand, the Old English text is handled

with the utmost conservative attitude; on the other, the translation gives away the fact that the editor's idea of the meaning of this poem is quite evident; and the absence of any notes or commentaries results in the editor's failure to explain viewpoints that emerge clearly anyway from his Modern English version.

The 1930s close with an edition of the Exeter Book which is still considered standard by most scholars: volume three of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (1936, pp. 179-80). The work is composed of an extensive introduction to the manuscript and to each poem; a comprehensive bibliography divided in sections — MS. reproductions, editions of the whole Exeter Book, editions of parts of the MS. or of single texts, translations, and critical discussions; the texts edited with an apparatus; detailed notes. The approach to the poems is quite conservative. In the case of *WE*, no emendation is present. As for the punctuation, ll. 1-8 are almost all closed by periods, the exceptions being ll. 1 and 6, ended by a semicolon. The resulting parallelism of ll. 1-3 and ll. 6-8 highlights the presence of the refrain. The controversial lines 9-12 are resolved with a semicolon at the end of l. 9, setting the sentence there contained apart, as if self-standing; and two commas at the end of lines 10 and 11, which indicate that the two *þonne*-clauses are to be read as dependent upon l. 12. Interestingly, Krapp and Dobbie resume the choice of the earliest editors and capitalise the noun *Wulf* in all occurrences but the last, leaving l. 17 with its ambiguity. Of the context of the poem, the introduction gives a clear view: the fact that a “heroic story” is “the basis” of *WE* is taken for granted. The possible links with Old Norse and Middle High German literature are accounted for, but the possibility that the story behind the poem was known to its contemporary readers but has been lost to us is taken into consideration, and actually emphasised (pp. lvi-lvii). This edition is characterised by an attitude of non-commitment in its conservative treatment of the text. The introduction and

notes explain the reading proposed, and all the other suggested interpretations for each word and passage are mentioned and explained. There is no clash between text and explanatory notes.

WE has never been edited alone in a monographic edition. It was once edited separately by Peter Baker, professor of Old English, for his students, and this work was then published in the appendix of an issue of a periodical (1983, PSB1-PSB8). The author makes it clear in the prefatory note that this is not a scholarly critical edition, but a simplified edition for didactic purposes. It is for this reason that it gives no account of past scholarship on the poem, apart from a very brief summary of the main interpretations it has undergone, in which he criticises the past readings based on a free handling of the text, because the poem is really “precisely worded”. His distinctive readings involve *leodum*, l. 1, and *wæltreowe weras*, l. 6: the latter are not the woman’s people, they are a third party who are going to kill Wulf and then give his body as a present to the woman’s people. Also l. 4 is understood in a peculiar way: Baker believes that the woman is actually living on an island, guarded by Eadwacer, who has abused her and possibly fathered her child. The peculiar feature of this poem, according to the scholar, is its ambiguity, which lies not only in the meaning, but also in the structure. The speaker is not revealed to be a woman until l. 10; the meaning of *aþecgan* is not clear — it could indicate violence and killing or welcoming. As for syntax, it is not clear whether the two *þonne*-clauses depend both on l. 9, or both on l. 12, or the first one on l. 9 and the second one on l. 12. The more sensible approach seems to understand them as an *apo koinu* construction — both depend on l. 9 and on l. 12 at the same time — as this allows the ambiguity of the original to pass on to the translation and edition. The usual controversial words are emended: MS. *dogode* to *hogode*, on the basis that the MS. reading is attested nowhere else in Old English, and *hogode* is the best emendation that has been proposed for it; and MS. *earne* to *eargne*, although in the notes to the text he acknowledges that *earmne* is also a sensible emendation. With regards to punctuation,

Baker differs from Krapp and Dobbie only in ll. 9-12, which he ends with commas, in accord with his view that the poem is ambiguous on purpose, and that, therefore, this ambiguity should be taken into account and respected as far as possible in modern editions. For what concerns capitalisation, *Eadwacer* is printed with capital initial, and so is *Wulf*, except in its last occurrence (l. 17). The editor explains that the common noun fits best with the image of the whelp, but that a pun is probably intended here, and that it is unfortunate that modern editorial procedures do not let editors enjoy this kind of ambiguities. Finally, the metrical irregularities are seen as effective, since the alternation of long lines and half-lines adds to the tension and to the emotional climax conveyed by the poem, culminating in the desperate exclamation “Wulf, min Wulf!”, l. 13, and continuing in the image of the speaker’s child being taken away from her.

Anne Klinck’s edition of *WE* (1992, pp. pp. 47-49, 92, 168-77) expresses the same ideas as her contribution on the animal imagery of the poem (1987, pp. 3-13). The latest edition of the poem is Muir’s (2000, vol I p. 282, vol. II pp. 603-05). Muir proposes the most accepted emendations for both major cruces (*hogode* for MS. *dogode*, l. 9b, and *earmne* for MS. *earne*, l. 16b). The layout of his edition highlights the refrain *Ungelic(e) is us*, but it does not stress the other repetition, ll. 2 and 5. A period at the end of l. 4 seems to make what most editors have regarded as a further description of the situation in l. 4 in l. 5 a separate statement, an additional commentary on the place, rather than on the emotional state of the speaker and her lover, conveyed as a second level of meaning through l. 4. The two *þonne*-clauses are understood as both subordinated to l. 12, while l. 9 is seen as self-standing, as the semicolon at the end of it shows. Like most editors, Muir does not capitalise *Wulf* on its last occurrence, and he does not provide any explanation for this choice in his commentary. He might have followed Baker’s interpretation of the poem as deliberately ambiguous, or he might have simply chosen the most supported reading. His notes on *WE* do not give away any particular new editorial position or

interpretation. They simply summarise the main readings proposed for the poem, and they refer to other works for discussions of specific topics or particular literary discussions. The only personal remark the editor makes is that *WE* is best understood as an Old English love poem, together with *WL* and *HM*.

2.2 *THE WIFE'S LAMENT*

2.2.1 THE EXILE'S LAMENT

The identity of the narrator in *WL* is one of the questions which has bothered critics more. Early editors understood the poem to be the lament of a retainer who has lost his lord, that is, they saw in this text a situation similar to the one in *The Wanderer* and in *Deor*. Thorpe (1842, pp. 441-44) did not recognise the presence of feminine inflections in the text, as well as Conybeare before him (1826, pp. 244-49). Ettmüller (1850, pp. 214-15) was the first to recognise their presence and to state that the speaker must be female – a view that has since been generally accepted. Nevertheless, in the 60's some scholars proposed again the reading of the speaker as a man, although it had been discredited for so many years. The proponents of this view are Rudolph Bambas and Martin Stevens.

Bambas (1968, pp. 229-236) maintained that the narrator cannot possibly be a woman for a number of reasons. Firstly, as far as we know the poets were only men in the Anglo-Saxon times; with regards to this, he says that the instances in which women have parts in Old English poetry have a dramatic quality that our poem lacks, since there is no dialogue, and there is not even any introduction that clarifies that a female character is going to speak. Secondly, the vocabulary used to identify the relationship between the speaker and the lord is the one used to indicate the relations between lord and retainer; if *The Wife's Lament* is read as a love poem, the situation described is similar to those found in courtly love poetry, which is far later in time than the text at issue: it would be anachronistic to read *The Wife's Lament* as belonging into a genre that only developed some centuries later. Third, the word *fōlgað* has a very specific meaning, as it means “service” and it is referred to the pact of mutual loyalty taken between a

lord and a retinue. Instead, if referred to a woman, this word would imply her reduction to the level of a servant, which would be an unusual literary situation for an Anglo-Saxon audience.

Consequently, Bambas proposes to emend the manuscript's reading in l. 1 to:

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorum

Mine sylfne sið,

so that the morphology of the word is masculine instead than feminine. Actually, he admits that it is hard to believe that the scribe could make three mistakes in two lines giving three feminine inflections instead of three masculine ones, and he also admits that emendation is a delicate practice to deal with. Anyway, he believes he is justified in his behaviour by the fact that the interpretations of the text that keep the manuscript's reading and see the speaker as a woman have not been able to account for all the problems of understanding that the poem arises.

Stevens (1968, pp. 72-90), similarly, maintains that the reading of the speaker as a woman is not supported either by the context, or by the setting, or by the diction of the poem. He explains the feminine inflections of the first two lines as depending on *sið* (2a), which should be considered a dative feminine rather than an accusative masculine; this reading of the word is indeed supported by other instances in the Old English corpus. So, the relation that governs the inflection of the words in the first two lines is one of grammar rather than one of gender. Support to this view is provided by what he calls the "semantic implications" of the poem (p. 83). The only words that could have a feminine connotation in the poem are *gemæcne* and *felaleofan*. The first one indicates a marital relationship in other examples in the Old English corpus, but this is not the only meaning the word has. The same can be said of *leof*, which is used also to describe the relation of friendship between men. Furthermore, the expression *folgað*

secan is technical and refers to the relationship between lord and retainer; finally, the term *fæhðu* is technical, as well, as it indicates the blood-feud provoked by a murder, and it is not a word that would be normally used to describe a state of enmity between husband and wife. So, Stevens comes to the same conclusion as Bambas, but with a great difference: the former respects the manuscript reading and looks for a linguistic explanation of the text as it is, while the latter resorts to heavy emendation.

The last part of the poem, in Stevens's opinion, reveals an underlying pattern: the speaker talks about the condition of the world in general at the beginning, then moves to his own suffering, and, in the last part, to the sadness of his soul, which he compares to that of all the other young men in his same situation. This interpretation provides another key to the understanding of *WL* as an exile poem with a moral ending of the same kind as *The Wanderer*.

2.2.2 THE WIFE'S LAMENT

Ettmüller (1850, pp. 214-15) was the first scholar to recognise the presence of feminine inflections in the first two lines of *WL*, and to argue that the speaker is a woman. Grein (1857, pp. 245-46) took up the view that the narrator was not a man, but instead a woman, and that the theme dealt with was not exile, but rather love. From that moment on, critics have not put in doubt the feminine inflections of the first lines, nor, consequently, the nature of the narrator as a woman, except in the cases discussed in the previous chapter (Bambas 1968, pp. 229-236; Stevens 1968, pp. 72-90; see chapter 2.2.1), after which the debate over the speaker's gender rose again for a few years.

Angela Lucas (1969, pp. 282-297) is the first of the scholars whose contribution have the only purpose to demonstrate that the speaker of *WL* is a woman. She refutes the theories of Bambas and Stevens on the basis of the grammar of the poem. Her interpretation is based on the morphology of some words, on the lexicon and on the tone of *WL*. For what concerns the grammar, she analyses the inflexion of the words *geomorre* (1b) and *minre sylfre* (2a). The problem with the latter is that what determines its inflexion is not sure. Stevens maintains that the first person possessive adjective *minre* is governed in its inflexion by the grammatical gender of the noun it modifies, namely *siðe* — an emendation for the manuscript reading *sið* — involving that *siðe* is a dative feminine depending on *bi* (1b), and that *sylfre* is an adjective modifying *minre* (Stevens 1968, p.82). Lucas, however, quotes Campbell's explanation of the phrase *ura selfra* — and similar constructions: in his opinion, the possessive adjective has to be in agreement with the reflexive adjective or pronoun, or with the noun it modifies¹. This means that it is the inflexion of the possessive adjective to be governed by the gender of the reflexive

¹ A. CAMPBELL, *Old English Grammar*, London, 1959, p. 289.

rather than the contrary; if this is true, *sylfre* must be in agreement with something else, which can only be the person to whom it refers. Obviously, such an agreement would be in personal rather than in grammatical gender (Lucas 1969, p. 286).

The problem with *geomorre* is, again, what governs its inflexion, since it modifies the first person personal pronoun *me*: Lucas maintains that the agreement is determined by personal gender, because the pronoun can only refer to the speaker, whose sex is responsible for the grammatical relationships of this verse. This is the answer to Stevens's argument that a masculine adjective can modify a second person personal pronoun whose referent is a woman, which occurs, for instance, in Ælfric's translation of *benedicta tu* referred to the Virgin Mary, namely, *eadig eart þu*. Another example he quotes is *ic reotogu sæt* in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, l. 10b which, however, is not clear, since *reotogu* is feminine and the speaker of that poem is universally held to be a woman – or, at least, a female being. This argument is meant to demonstrate that the audience of *WL* would not have been able to determine that the narrator is a woman only by the inflexion of three words in the first two lines, since there was a certain amount of confusion in the use of the masculine and the feminine forms of the adjectives. Lucas reverses this statement by maintaining that if either masculine or feminine adjectives could be used of a female referent, then the feminine inflexion of *geomorre* makes it more probable that the pronoun it qualifies stands for a female speaker. Stevens also suggests that *geomorre* could be an orthographical variant for *geomore*, an adverb: but Lucas's opinion is that this is not probable, because it is not supported by the language of the poem: it would be the only case in which variation or consonant doubling occur.

Lucas also takes into consideration the tone of our text while analysing the lexical choices that led Stevens to support the view of a male narrator. First of all, the oath of loyalty in *WL* is different in tone from that in *The Battle of Maldon*: the former is set in a domestic

situation, while the latter is made in a heroic context, namely, during the battle. These vows can be considered similar only when they are taken outside their respective references, and this is a mistake, since the power of poetry is in its exploiting evocative meanings of words and in its drawing meaning from context. Secondly, the scholar underlines that the similarity between *WL* and *The Wanderer* is only apparent, too: even though both are laments for the past, in the former *longian* and *langoþ* are associated with words that make reference to the love relationship between the speaker and her husband, and *freonscip uncer* is recalled, never things that have to do with war and the lord-retainer relationship like in *The Wanderer*, where the lament is for the *meoduhealle*, the gifts and the joy in the hall.

Mitchell (1972, pp. 222-234) believes that Lucas's attempt to deconstruct the theory of a male narrator is not convincing enough. He does not take into account the tone or the mood of the poem, but rather carries out a detailed analysis in order to invalidate the grammatical evidence Stevens provides to support his assertions concerning the narrator. Firstly, he proves that some of Stevens' s examples regarding *sylfre* and *geomorre* and their respective syntactical agreement are not significant to his thesis. Secondly, he rejects the critic's hypothesis that the Anglo-Saxon audience of *WL* would not have been able to understand the narrator to be female only on the basis of the feminine inflexion of *geomorre* since there are instances in Old English poetry in which a masculine adjective seems to be used of a feminine subject². More or less the same is said of *ana* (35b) which, according to Stevens, ought to be *ane* — that is, the nominative feminine singular of the adjective — if its referent were a woman: in Mitchell's opinion, both the masculine and the feminine forms are used for a feminine referent. Thirdly, Mitchell maintains that Stevens's new proposal of Conybeare's emendation *gemæc ne* for manuscript reading *gemæcne* does not have either metrical or syntactical support in the context

² See Stevens's discussion on *eadig* in *Catholic Homilies* in STEVENS 1968, p. 81.

of l. 18; in particular, the metrical reasons he provides are the same as Lucas's, while the syntactical argument is that if *ne* were a negation it would be placed immediately before the verb negated, namely *funde*, while l. 18 reads *gemæc ne monnan funde*. Similarly, he challenges Stevens's suggestion that *gemæc* is equivalent to the MnE preposition 'like' in constructions of the type of l. 18: this hypothesis is based on a reading of Juliana 547b-549b that Mitchell proves to be wrong (pp. 224-226). Stevens's reading of *geomorre* (1b) — which is an adjective — as a possible variant spelling for *geomore* — which is an adverb — is accepted: it is true that the word in question could possibly be an adverb in the context of l. 1. However, *minre sylfre sið* (2a) irrefutably testifies to the view of the speaker as woman, so that it becomes inevitable to accept the reading *geomorre*. In fact, to consider *minre* (2a) a singular dative feminine agreeing with *sið* involves the already-mentioned emendation of *sið* to *siðe* which, on its turn, results in another problem: in *minre sylfre siðe* the adjective is declined strong, while according to Old English syntactical rules the adjective has to be declined with the weak inflexion when it is combined to a preceding possessive and a following noun (Mitchell 1972, pp. 226-227). Since in the case of our line the adjective in question is the reflexive *sylf*, Mitchell examines instances of its use in *Christ*, *Genesis*, *Beowulf* and king Alfred's *Metres of Boethius*, and concludes that even though it can be declined strong or weak, the instances in which its inflexion is strong are the product of a Latin influence. But the possibility that *WL* was affected by some Latin influence does not seem likely to him, so, the only explanation left if one were to accept Stevens's reading would be that the poet used an irregular and non-native construction in l. 2a. The point is: this line makes sense the way it stands in the manuscript, therefore it seems useless to emend it when the emendation involves such difficulties and when there are instances in the Old English corpus showing that the use of *sylfre* as a pronoun in this kind of construction is possible. The emendation of *sið* to *siðe* is questionable for two reasons: the first one is that it results in a

hypermetrical verse, which is strange, since the remaining verses in the passage are regular; the second one is that it is based on the assumption that a feminine form of this noun actually exists. Evidence for that comes from Riddle 64 in Stevens's opinion; the problem is that the word found here is *sipþe*: it would be necessary to show that a spelling variation in this noun is possible, which is not done in Stevens's article (Mitchell 1972, p. 232). Stevens's explanation of the necessity to emend the manuscript in this passage is even more questionable, as he states that *sið* cannot depend on *wrece* (1a) on the basis of MnE: his point is that a journey cannot be recited — *wrece* (1a) — but this is true of nowadays English, while there is at least one Old English example proving that this and other similar verbs were used in association with *sið*, namely *The Seafarer*, l. 2a: *sipas secgan*, — “say journeys”. Finally, Mitchell underlines that if the emendation is accepted, one must read *siðe* as depending on a preposition — *bi* — in the preceding verse: the noun phrase and its prepositional head would thus be separated by an adverb. The scholar argues that the syntactical agreement would not be so clear in this way and that the preposition would have been repeated, as happens of other prepositions in some passages he quotes from *Elene*, *Deor*, *Waldere II* and *Maldon*.

2.2.3 OLD GERMANIC AND NORSE PARALLELS

The Wife's Lament is obscure for any modern reader, because the text leaves many points unexplained, thus giving the impression that something is either missing or taken for granted. Actually, the text itself does not provide answers to the doubts it raises, namely, who the speaker is, who the *blaford* ("lord") is, why he went away and where, what the feud was about and who was involved, and also whether the lady went to look for her *blaford* or for another lord, and what is the place in which she is at the moment when she speaks.

Usually, when some information is missing in a text, it is provided by the context: in the case of our poem, this would imply that some information was shared by the poet and his audience. Unfortunately, we do not know what such context was, and the effort of many critics has been to guess it. Some of them have tried to reconstruct it on the basis of old Norse and Germanic legends, that is, by searching material outside the text's boundaries.

Bouman (1962, pp. 41-91), as an instance, explains *WL* as linked to *HM*, and puts both texts in relation to the story of Sigurd, the most famous Germanic hero – *Sigurðr* or *Sigvorþr* in Old Norse and *Sigeward* in Old English –, arguing that the name is suggested by the runes in *HM*. He identifies the male character in the two poems as the same figure, and the poems themselves as referring to the same group of legends. His interpretation is based on the similarities he finds between some elements in the Sigurd cycle in the Eddic lays and in the two Exeter Book poems; namely, a formerly happy marriage and pledges of everlasting love and loyalty; the murder of the man by the plotting of the woman's kinsmen – but actually, in *WL*, it seems that the *blaford's* own kinsmen killed him ; the consequent separation of the lovers; the lady's new marriage to a cruel lord whom she does not love; her final curse upon him for

betraying her. In the Eddic lays this is the story of Sigurd, Guðrún and Atli, that is, Attila king of the Huns. Another common feature is the fact that Guðrún, just like the speaker of *WL*, later in her life sits and cries while telling her many woes. Bouman provides evidence to support the hypothesis that Old Germanic legends were known in early Anglo-Saxon England: the passage of *Beowulf* in which Hrothgar's thane celebrates the hero by comparing him to Sigemund, Sigurd's father; *Widsith*, a catalogue of Germanic lands and famous kings probably composed in the 7th century, where some Eddic characters connected with the Sigurd's cycle are quoted; the fragment *The Fight at Finnsburh*, where two of the protagonists are once again Sigeferþ and another figure of his legend; finally, the Franks Casket, which shows that Old Germanic legends, such as the story of Weland, were known in Northumbria in the early 8th century. Bouman suggests that the narrator of *WL* could be a blending of more than one female character in Germanic and Norse lore rather than one of these women in particular: these different legendary figures could have been mixed in later folklore because of their similar stories. The women Bouman quotes as possible prototypes for the Wife are Brynhildr, who suffered from a separation from her beloved Sigurðr caused by machinations, and who, just like the lady of our poem, was exiled under an oak tree, which had religious connotations in Germanic and Norse mythology; and Sigrún, Helgi's wife— whose story, too, is told in the Eddic lays—who re-united with her dead husband in his burial mound. Actually, Bouman supports the hypothesis that the *eorðsele* in which the Wife is exiled is actually a grave, and that her *hlaforð*, too, could be dead, since his sea-voyage, in his opinion, could be interpreted as a funeral by ship of the kind described in *Beowulf*.

Fitzgerald (1963, pp. 769-777), too, believes it necessary to look for “evidence from outside the poem to clarify the situation” (p. 769). Nevertheless, quite differently from any

other critic who has followed the path of old legends, he finds such evidence in a folktale widespread across Europe in different versions and generally known as *The Search for the Lost Husband*. He uses the analysis of this tale made in 1955 by a Swedish scholar, Swahn¹, who classified the variants according to the place where they were found and the recurrent motifs which could be recognised in them. Fitzgerald methodically relates each passage in the Exeter poem to one of Swahn's motifs, thus reconstructing another version of the tale, whose motifs would be mainly of Scandinavian origin, with some Danish influences, as well. He excludes the possibility of Celtic influence – although this would better explain some elements in our text – because he considers it more difficult to motivate and trace back. The critic describes the elements of the poem which seem not to fit well into the folktale pattern by stating that *WL* is a rationalised version of the story, which was originally known in its legend shape both in Scandinavia and in Anglo-Saxon England, and which was then attached to some Germanic god – who could be, for example, Freyja, who, according to the myth, travelled among many peoples in search of her husband –, or maybe to some historical or legendary figure, which has happened for other tales. Then, according to his reconstruction, a poem would have been written out of this tale, and a later collector would have copied only the passage we see in the Exeter Book for its intrinsic value. Or, maybe, the poem was originally composed as we have it and meant to be recited as a lament uttered by one of the female figures of the Eddaic lays.

On the contrary, Doane (1966, pp. 77-91) believes there is not enough evidence to support the theory of a relation between *WL* and Old Germanic legends and, consequently, rejects it; instead, the poem's lexical choices suggest to him a reference to a pagan religious theme. He argues that the speaker is a heathen goddess, probably a minor one, abandoned by

¹ J.Ö. Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, Lund 1955. Reference in R. P. FITZGERALD "The Wife's Lament and "The Search for the Lost Husband" cit., p. 770.

her priest – and, consequently, by her worshippers – for a new god, namely Christ. So, Doane considers the poem to be the product of an age when Christianity had just dawned in Anglo-Saxon England and maybe was not well rooted yet, an epoch when paganism was still close or, perhaps, even not completely forsaken. He thinks that *WL* is an example of attempt on the part of the Anglo-Saxon poet to present the conversion to Christianity from the pagan viewpoint, a way of reflecting on the old and the new religion by opposing Christ and the heathen deities. The critic suggests that this could have been a chief preoccupation among Germanic peoples at a time when conversion was still being carried out, and he reads *Guthlac A*, *Juliana* and *Christ and Satan*, too, in this light; in fact, he finds a common purpose in these texts and *WL*, namely, the one “to present from the mouths of heathens and devils themselves the agony and loss which the non-Christian suffers”(p. 91). So, in a situation in which people probably still feared the pagan gods, the absence of proper names in our poem can be understood as an attempt to avoid to offend both them and Christ on the poet’s part. Doane explains *eorðsele* as the sacred grove where the heathen goddess would have been worshipped before the advent of the new religion, and *fæhðu* as some sort of interdiction practiced upon her by the priest and the worshippers; finally, the *geong mon* would be Christ himself, that is, the god – qualified as *geong* because of his recent advent – for whom she would have been deserted, and the whole text would be a curse the heathen deity would be casting upon him, by which she would wish him the same fate she is suffering at present.

Another critic who looks for an explanation of *WL* in mythology rather than legend is Orton (1985, pp. 223-258). He finds a parallel for the poem in an Eddaic lay, namely *Skírnismál*, which tells the story of a giant’s daughter, Gerðr, and the curse which Freyr’s servant Skírnir threatens to cast upon her if she will not agree to marry his lord. A large part of the lay consists

of the curse itself: Gerðr will be banished in a solitary place among the giants, where she will live a wretched and sorrowful existence, sitting on an “eagle’s mound” (Orton 1989, p. 217). The scholar argues that the way Gerðr’s prison is described – that is, by contrast with the blissful life she would live among the gods if she accepted Freyr’s proposal – illustrates a vision of the universe as a *kosmos*, so that “different worlds, however divergent in character, are nonetheless comparable” (1989, p. 218). He recognises the same idea to be the source of the opposition of hall and anti-hall in Old English poetry, and inside this kind of view he finds an explanation for the place where the Wife is exiled. In fact, he believes that both the lady’s dwelling and Gerðr’s threatened prison are symbols of the life outside society, which means essentially existential sorrow, and he consequently interprets their situation as a sort of limbo, a condition of non-life and non-death at the same time. The word *eorðscræf* could be thus read as “grave” but with an ironic undertone hinting at the fact that the Wife cannot even find peace from her sorrows in death, which reminds of the image of Gerðr sitting on the mound and “watching wistfully towards *Hel*” (1989, p. 217). However, the most striking element of similarity between the two texts is the situation of the respective protagonists under a tree: “under *actreo*” in *WL*, and “á *viðar rótom*” in *Skírnismál*. Orton rejects the idea of a textual relationship between the poems, since he does not find enough stylistic similarities; rather, he believes it possible that both poems originated from a common background, which he attempts to reconstruct. He bases his theory on Mircea Eliade’s study² of the heathen temple as the *omphalos* and as a microcosm reproducing the universe as Germanic and Scandinavian people conceived it, both in its form and in the events that were remembered and enacted inside it, which were thought of having taken place at the beginning of time, when the world was young.

² M. Eliade, *Patterns in comparative religion*, New York 1963, and M. Eliade, *The myth of the eternal return*, Bollingen series, XLVI, Princeton 1975.

So, he reconstructs this image of the cosmos with Yggdrasill, the tree of life, at its centre, and the three worlds of humans, frost-giants and the dead lying at its three roots and brought to life by the rivers flowing from Hvergelmir, the well under the tree. Evidence from historical and literary sources and archaeology proves that the temples re-created these elements, and it is probable that rituals took place inside them enacting cosmological myths, which reflects a sense of analogy between the cosmic and the terrestrial in the old Germanic vision of the world. He believes that the link which connects the Exeter poem and these myths is historical: in fact, *WL* could be the literary remainder of some such myth. Orton highlights the similarities between the thematic pattern of *WL* and the myths of the Vanir, the deities of nature and of the changing of the seasons: first of all, *Freyr* and his story with *Gerðr*; then the goddess *Freyja*, *Freyr*'s sister, who travels around the world in search of *Oðr*, her husband, who has gone away, weeping tears of gold for him. It is most interesting that *Freyja* is the goddess of the burial mound and is represented as dwelling inside it. Another divine couple whose story Orton associates with that of *WL* are *Njörðr*, god of the sea, and *Skaði*, goddess of the mountains and of winter, whose marriage ends in a separation because they are too different. All the male characters in these myths have a common feature, namely their going away over the sea, while the female ones are similar in their reaction to the abandoning, that is, they all go and travel in search of their lost husbands shedding many tears and lamenting their grief: precisely the salient elements in *WL*. Consequently, Orton comes to the conclusion that the poem is what has remained of a ritual enacting the cyclical changing of the seasons, symbolised by the marriage of the earth and the sun and their separation in winter, when the latter goes away over the sea and to the north; furthermore, he illustrates the poem's structure as a blending of centrifugal and centripetal movements, the former pertaining to the *blaford*, whose travel *ofer yþa* can be related

to the symbolic death of the sun during winter, and also to the kind of funeral by ship described in *Beowulf*—possibly connected with the same type of myths; the latter pertaining to the Wife, whose situation in the mound puts her in relation to the idea of the temple as the *omphalos*. In the light of these considerations, he suggests to read *herheard* as a compound, *herb-earð*, which he explains by relating it to the West-Saxon form *hearb*, meaning “temple” and “grove”, a reading that now becomes clear in the context of the cosmological explanation of the temple and the Wife’s *eorðsele*.

Luyster, too, (1998, pp. 243-270) follows the path of mythology to explain *WL*. Differently from both Doane and Orton, he goes so far as to identify the characters with some of the Germanic gods, rather than just trying to reconstruct a background from which the figures could possibly have originated. Actually, Luyster reads the poem as the literary relic of the old and original Anglo-Saxon culture, which was the same as Germans’ and Scandinavians’ culture. More specifically, he identifies the characters in *WL* with the Great Goddess, a very ancient deity whose cult was widespread across Europe already in the Bronze Age, and her divine mate. In Norse mythology the fertility Goddess had taken the shape of Freyja, whose name means simply “lady”, most significantly in relation to our text; as already mentioned, she was one of the Vanir, that is, the deities of nature and fertility, but also of death. In fact, Freyja herself as the goddess of the burial mound was the protector of the slain warriors who were believed to carry on their existence inside the grave, where they continued their eternal battle. Furthermore, the *blaford* in *WL* can be identified with many a male Vanir gods, such as Freyr and Baldr, whose names mean exactly ‘lord’; both of them are associated to fertility, and, consequently, to the sun. Another name given to Freyr is Yng, and actually the Ynglingas—the Swedish royal family—claimed that Yng himself was their ancestor; moreover, the Swedish

kings were considered the reincarnations of the god, and their queens were believed to be the reincarnations of the Fertility Goddess. Luyster notes that both Freyr and Baldr meet with death and travel to the World of the Dead across the Ocean inside a funeral ship, and he explains the *blaford's* journey “*ofer yþa*” in this sense. Also the Wife’s journey can be understood in this light: in fact, in Norse mythology the fertility Goddess was kept responsible for her mate’s death, and truly, in the *Yngliga Saga*, the Swedish queens are often indicated as the murderers of their husbands. Nonetheless, the new king as a personification of Yng and the new queen as an incarnation of the Great Goddess provided with their marriage a historical parallel to the return of the sun to the earth after winter, that is, from the underworld place in the North and over the Ocean where was situated also *Hel*, the World of the Dead. In these myths, it is the Goddess herself who weeps for the departure of her husband and travels across the world to find him and reunite with him. Summing up all these elements, Luyster argues that the Wife is the Anglo-Saxon literary memory of the Fertility Goddess, and the *blaford* her mythic mate, and, especially in the light of the *Ynglinga Saga*, he explains the lord’s apparently contradictory behaviour towards the lady as the result of his blaming her for his forced journey, which is nothing more than a voyage to death; in this sense also his kinsmen’s hostility toward her can be explained. Furthermore, the Wife’s hopeful wait for her beloved represents the certainty of the return of the sun after winter in the eternal cycle of the seasons.

2.2.4 CELTIC CONNECTIONS

Some scholars have looked for the missing contextual elements in *The Wife's Lament* in Celtic literature. However, most of them have aimed at highlighting the similarities they had found both in our text and in Irish or Welsh ones, rather than going so far as to claim a Celtic background for the Old English elegies. So does Bray in comparing a medieval Welsh poem to *WL* (1995, pp. 147-154). Her aim is to analyse the similar situations of two women coming from backgrounds which are different, and nevertheless similar in that they share the same kind of heroic culture; such similarities, however, are not explained as cross-cultural influences.

The Celtic poem produced by Bray is part of a cycle called *Llywarch Hen*, whose protagonists are a woman named Heledd and her brothers, who have been slain in battle, thus leaving her alone and homeless, since her elder brother Cynddylan's hall, where she used to live, has been destroyed. The interesting aspect about these texts is that they are not a heroic report of the battle itself; it is the effects of war which are described, and the viewpoint is the woman's. She is depicted as living in misery and mourning her loss, which is the loss of her family – her brother, who was also her lord – and consequently of her status. As a matter of fact, Heledd's attitude to Cynddylan as prince and lord together with her tone, which is formal, elegiac and eulogistic, make her lament akin to that of the poet who has lost his patron and retainer, which is social rather than personal, since it foresees the people's suffering and the loss of the land. Really, the people and the land speak through the voice of the poet, whose role is social for this reason. But to compare Heledd's lament to the poet's own means to claim a social value for her words; and, actually, her song is a public performance, as shown by the opening address to the audience, who are invited to join Heledd in her grief. Thus, Heledd's lament is similar to the formal heroic elegy, and that is the first common feature that Bray finds in this text and the

Exeter poem: although the Wife's sorrow is private and not performed in front of a public, anyway it is raised in the form of the conventional Anglo-Saxon heroic-elegiac poem, as the nouns through which the man is invoked demonstrate – *blaford*, *wine*, *leodfruma* are the nouns that retainers give to their lord, so that the lady seems to put herself in the position of a follower, which means that the setting she is establishing is both heroic and political. In this sense, also *WL* can be considered the formalisation of personal grief inside the context of a political conflict. The critic explains the similarities she has thus established between our poem and the *Llywarch Hen* cycle by a *topos* in the Irish poetic tradition: the poet laments the loss of his lord, but in doing so he embodies a female character, namely the prince's bride. According to Bray, this is a literary remainder of an ancient ritual which actually took place in early Irish tradition, that is, the symbolic marriage of the king to the land and the subsequent mourning of the bride for the loss or abandonment of her mate and lord. However, one more explanation is suggested beside this one: the poet could be simply enacting the role of the mourner, which was traditionally female. There is evidence in both Irish and Old English literature that women were charged with the social task of mourning the heroes' death, just like the Geatish woman in *Beowulf*, who conveys through her lament not only her own personal grief, but also, and above all, the people's despair and fear for their future now that they have lost their lord and guide. Bray explains the last section of *WL* in the light of the heroic context she has found for the poem; the lady's bitter tone is due to her exclusion from the heroic society, having she lost the status of wife after she has been abandoned by her lord. So, Bray describes her dwelling in terms of the contrast with the *medusel* from which she has been driven out, thus providing one more contribution to the theory of the opposition between hall and anti-hall in Old English poetry. The attempt to demonstrate that both *Heledd's* song and *WL* are to be read within the context of heroic society is functional to Bray's overall view of these poems as the counterpart of the

celebrative song, which represents the climax, the moment when the heroic society gives reasons for and celebrates its own existence. The critic rejects the view of the Exeter poem as a *Frauenlied*, that is, the idea that the speaking voice mourns the separation from a lover after a night of love. Evidence for this thesis is provided, in her opinion, by the language of *WL*: the use of words belonging to the semantic field of war sets the story within a heroic setting rather than a court-love one. However, the mourning tone hides a criticism of that society, and reveals the opposite viewpoint from such celebrative poems as we find, for instance, in *Beowulf*: namely, the viewpoint of the weak, who lose their status together with their lord when the latter dies in battle. But, in the end, it is the voice of the people and the whole land that is conveyed by the Wife's mourning and by Heledd's song: it is the materialisation of the fears and perils hidden behind the shining sword and shield of the hero, performed in a woman's voice as traditionally it is women's task to mourn the dead lord and the fate of the country.

A similar view had already been proposed by Melia (1983, pp. pp. 8-30), who believes that *WL* and *WE* are political metaphors rather than personal expressions of feelings. He thinks it necessary to look outside the poems to clarify their meaning for two reasons: the small number of Old English literary works preserved over the centuries, and the cultural break with the Anglo-Saxon society caused by the Norman invasion. Both events make it difficult for modern scholars to determine the genre to which the texts which we now consider elegies originally belonged, as the concept of genre involves the notion of the expectations shared by author and audience, expectations that we are not able to reconstruct in the present case. The critic aims at finding out the original intention of the poet, and, consequently, the possible reception of the poems by an Anglo-Saxon public. His search leads him to the Celtic world, since, although there were no contacts between the two cultures at the time, the Anglo-Saxon and the Celtic societies are to some extent comparable. For instance, they share the same kind

of social structure, and also similar poetic features; actually, Irish bardic poetry — just like its Old English mate — is the product of professional poets at the service of a lord or king, and has the task of celebrating the value of the heroes in battle. Furthermore, their formulaic character testifies the existence in both cultures of a poetic tradition that was passed down over the centuries. The Irish text provided as evidence is a poem called *Féuch féin*, probably composed in the 16th century. Scholars traditionally read it as the bard's praise of his lord, O'Rourke, and his friend Thomas Costello through the voice of the former's wife, who contemplates adultery with her husband's ally but finally remains faithful. The facts told in this story are not only a literary remainder of a king's true personal story, but rather an instance of the personification of sovereignty represented as a woman mourning for her beloved ruler, which is topical in Irish bardic poetry. In this particular case, the land is torn apart between her king and his young and strong friend to whom she has been entrusted while her lord is away. Evidence for this view is provided by a line in *Féuch féin* in which the female speaker protests that, contrary to what everybody believe, she is not "a harlot" (p.11): a statement that the scholar considers weird for a poem if referred to a real lady. Even though Anglo-Saxon poetry does not share the vision of the land and the sovereignty on it as a lady who, in most cases, is represented as the king's spouse, it is nevertheless familiar with the mimetic convention of the poet personifying the characters of his stories, which happens, for example, in *Beowulf*. For the same reasons Melia believes that he could as well speak in a female voice, and this would be exactly the case with *WL* and *WE*, the latter, quite similarly to Irish poetry, being the pleading on the part of some weak line of lords to a more powerful one who used to protect the former but then went away, thus leaving them unsheltered and deprived of their status. It is important to note that Melia does not deny the emotional force of the Old English poems; on the contrary, he states that the poet chose the shape of female laments for his criticism of heroic society on purpose, since it

would have a greater suggestive force on the public than a political speech. In summary, the answer he finds out to his starting question is that the Anglo-Saxon audience was probably expected to understand both the personal and the political context in those poems which we now consider elegies.

The problem of genre in our texts had already been examined by a critic interested in the connections with Celtic poetry, although from a different perspective. Actually, Dunleavy (Dunleavy 1960, pp. 78-92) did not question the elegiac nature of the Exeter Book poems, but rather the origin of the elegiac genre in Old English poetry, as in his opinion this is what distinguishes Anglo-Saxon literature from the other Germanic literary traditions. Put aside any possibility of Greek or Roman influence, as in those cultures the elegy took the shape of a praise for a dead relative, the analysis of Old German funeral practice does not provide any point of connection either, since there is no evidence that the death songs performed by mourners in front of the pyre had the same elegiac and gnomic tone as our poems. Instead, the Old English elegies may be the product of the influence of Celtic monastic culture in Britain, an influence that spread from Lindisfarne, the most important Irish monastery on the British land and a real cultural centre before the Viking invasions. Actually, the Exeter Book was written with scribal techniques originally brought to Lindisfarne by the Irish monks, who settled their monasteries first on the Hebrides and then on Northern Britain, and thus introduced their ecclesiastical culture in Anglo-Saxon England. The elements of influence of the Irish tradition on Old English poetry would be, according to Dunleavy, the elegiac mood, the gnomic attitude and the love for nature, which is depicted as matching the speaker's feelings. Concerning *WL*, a parallel may be drawn with some Irish tales about the separation of lovers in the context of monasticism. For example, the tale of *Líadan and Cuirithir* explains in a prose introduction that *Líadan* had promised to marry *Cuirithir*, but later changed her decision and became a nun, so

that Cuirithir saw no other solution than to become a monk. This explanation of the situation is followed by Líadan's lament for her beloved, whose tone and mood Dunleavy compares to those of *WL*, since both speakers are women mourning their lover's exile. The scholar inserts the theme of the exile into the context of some particular Irish monastic uses. One was the habit for monks and nuns to take ecclesiastic consorts; law acts provide evidence that this usage was common in Northern England in the monasteries of Irish origin, and it was accepted, although not completely approved of, in early times by the ecclesiastic authorities. Another of those customs—which, however, is not testified by any legal document—was to test the spiritual force of celibate monks by having an attractive woman sleeping in their cells. It is worth noting that lust sins were commonly punished with exile. In the scholar's opinion, the element of exile in *WL* would have been understood in such a context inside an Anglo-Saxon monastic environment, which would be the setting where our poem would have been generated. Further evidence for the links between the Exeter Book and the Irish monastic culture are found, according to Dunleavy, in *The Ruin*, which—contrary to what most critics believe—he reads as a description of Chester rather than Bath. In fact, the elements depicted in the elegy, such as the red walls, the hot baths and the great monuments and buildings better comply with a big city like Chester, a city of central importance in Roman Britain, and linked to Bangor, a great monastery of Irish foundation destroyed by the Northumbrian king Ethelfrith in the seventh century. The destruction of Bangor and the massacre of Chester gained central importance in Irish and Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical chronicles and annals, so Dunleavy believes it was more probable that the public imagination viewed Chester as the paradigm of the ruined city, and, therefore, that a monk wrote an elegy about it rather than about Bath. This provides another connection between the Exeter Book and the Irish monastic culture.

A different approach and viewpoint is expressed by Higley (1983, pp. 45-66), who compares the Exeter Book elegies with some Welsh poems with the aim of demonstrating their essential divergence through the analysis of their dissimilar use of syntax. Actually, if it is true that both English and Celtic poems of the ninth and tenth centuries make reference to the natural world as matching the human soul, this correspondence cannot be considered an element of total overlapping of the two cultures. Comparison of *The Seafarer* to two contemporary Welsh poems reveals that while analogy takes the shape of similarity between the man's state of mind and the surrounding landscape in the former, it has the form of a contrast between nature's beauty and men's sadness in the latter. Furthermore, the first makes the relation human-nature clear through the use of connecting syntax; the second leaves it unexplained due to its recourse to simple juxtaposition of images whose link, however, is often not immediately grasped. Higley explains this divergence in both content and form starting from the observation of another scholar, namely P.K. Ford¹, who maintains that the perspective of the Old English elegies is due to their being concerned with the concept of mutability, that is, the idea of the necessary passing of time in this world and of the consequent corruption and death of all things, opposed to eternity, that is the timeless dimension of God, where nothing ever changes or passes. Contemplation of the former is meant to rise in the heart desire for the latter and to alleviate the suffering of the soul by the hope to reach heaven. On the contrary, Welsh poetry is worried by no such view, but instead involves the notion of the decay of valour and glory that comes together with the death of the hero. In substance, while the Old English elegy is Christian and didactic, the Welsh is heroic; while in the former wild nature reminds one of God's power, in the latter it draws attention on man's grief. Following the path traced by this analysis, Higley examines the style and subsequently stating that it not only strengthens the

¹ P. K. Ford, *The Poetry of Llywarch Hen*, Los Angeles 1974.

content of the relation between man and world, but also reveals a different attitude of the poet to the audience. The main stylistic difference is found in organisation and syntax, which in the Welsh elegies concur to create the rhetorical device of non-sequitur, achieved through the juxtaposition of divergent images and the lack of syntactic connectors already mentioned as typical features in this poetry, and explained as the product of the Welsh poet's desire to surprise his audience through sudden changes of subject and image (Higley 1983, p. 51). Higley suggests that connectors are missing partly due to metrical reasons, since Welsh poetry is syllabic, contrary to the English that is stress-rhythmic. In fact, the rhythm of syllable-stress metre is based on a regular number of syllables and on the constant alternation of tonic and unstressed syllables, so that it is rather more difficult to insert superfluous words in the line in this kind of verse than it is in stress metre, where the rhythm is provided by the regular alternation of beats and offbeats, so that syllables can be either extended or squeezed according to the requirements of the rhythm. However, the lack of connecting syntax in the Welsh elegy is so pervasive as to seem programmatic, and, actually, Higley understands it to be the product of the poet's will to put the human and the natural on the same level, in order to show that they are equal in that they are subject to the same forces. The result is ambiguity in meaning for the modern reader, who is not able to decide whether the natural images are juxtaposed to human feelings in order to simply describe them or provide a gnome to them. The overall impression, according to Higley, is that Welsh poetry is essentially descriptive, as it is meant to be a description of the heroic world against the background of natural world. On the contrary, the complex syntax of Old English poetry can be read as the effect of the poet's aim to explain rather than describe. In fact, the massive use of connectors, hypotaxis and parataxis, conjunctions, and linking adverbs make the analogies clear, and the relation established between the human soul and the natural world has a didactic purpose. It is not casual that, contrary to

what happens in the Welsh, the natural phenomena in the Anglo-Saxon elegy match the human mood and state of mind – rain corresponds to melancholy, the cold winter sea to solitude, etc. – so that the world outside provides the protagonist with a mirror of his own spiritual situation. To see his or her own mental universe paralleled in the physical universe leads the characters to conclude that their own personal experience is part of human history in general, and so their lives, too, can find room inside the design of salvation. The reason for this inclination of Old English poetry is explained, according to Higley, by its form, which is suitable for adapting itself to narrative, a genre that, in her opinion, lends itself naturally to didacticism. The aim of this kind of poetry was to instruct the audience, and this explains the reason why it lacks the element of surprise: the poet readily reveals details still to come of the story when it is useful for his didactic purposes. And, actually, the gnomic value of the analogies between the human and the natural is unmistakable, thanks also to the use of the verb *sceal* to indicate moral obligation and natural necessity. In summary, contrary to the Welsh elegy Anglo-Saxon poetry has the aim to explain rather than describe. All this shows that there are different visions of the world in the two cultures: in the case of the Old English elegies, the *scop*'s will and capacity to establish relationships of co-ordination or subordination between the words reveal the mental power to “put the world into perspective” and, consequently, to explain it; in the case of the Welsh poems, the bard's, and, evidently, the audience's taste for startling juxtapositions of divergent images together with the absence of syntactic connectors show a world whose phenomena cannot be understood and clarified, and reveals “the inability of the will to modify the human condition”(p.61). These different attitudes towards life can be explained by analysing the English and the Welsh societies of the ninth and tenth centuries, which displays two very different situations, since while the former is divided and threatened by invaders, the latter is characterised by unity. As society provides the background from which our

poems originated, by taking it into consideration we can say that in the first case poetry has the aim to unify what is divided, and to do so it makes reference to a virtual context that has to be explained; in the second one, instead, the reference context is so cohesive that there is no need to make it explicit, as “information is widely assumed” and, so, it is implied rather than explained (p.59).

As for *WL* in particular, the scholar recognises in this poem some elements of the Welsh poetic tradition in its obscurity; actually, she reads the passage where the lady describes her strange dwelling as an example of non-sequitur, since it is structured through the juxtaposition of natural images whose relationship to the rest of the text is not made clear. However, Higley only describes very shortly her view of *WL*, and does not attempt to reconstruct any historical or literary reasons to justify the similarity she notes between this poem and the Welsh ones. Actually, her contribution is kept within the field of linguistic and textual analysis, apart from a few historical hints at Old English and Welsh societies that are only meant to provide a description of the context in which the two poetic traditions originated; nevertheless, just like many critics who have compared the Anglo-Saxon and the Celtic elegy, she is not interested in finding evidence of mutual influence, but rather limits herself to provide a careful and deep analysis of the texts as we have them.

2.2.5 CHRISTIAN ALLEGORIES

In the 1960s a new way of interpreting *WL* appeared among the readings based on the search for symbolism and imagery that linked the poem to external sources. Swanton (1964, pp. 269-290) is the first to follow a path already suggested by Lawrence¹ and never explored by earlier critics: it is the examination of Christian images and symbols exploited in other eighth-century poems and well-known to the Anglo-Saxon audience of that time. The images identified by Swanton as having these characteristics are the Journey Of Life And Death and the Heavenly Bride, both coming from the Bible and widely used in homilies and religious texts in the eighth century. The former was handed down from the medieval Latin tradition to the Anglo-Saxon religious literature through Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, and is found in the *Life Of Saint Guthlac A*, composed at the beginning of the same century and recorded in the Exeter Book. The latter was used with rather strong erotic connotations in patristic works and thence passed on to theological writings thanks to Gregory and Augustine; then it was borrowed by Cynewulf in his *Juliana*, Bede in his already-cited work and Ælfric. Old English literature, however, deprived these images of their original erotic overtones in order to tune them to the Anglo-Saxon literary mind, which was not used to erotic symbolism. The motif of the journey to salvation in particular is the central theme of *Guthlac A*: the saint is summoned to travel to Heaven where he is to meet God, whom he has been longing to see during his whole life. His existence has been one of sorrow and exile in a wood under a hill, a situation which reminds one of the Wife's banishment and isolation in an *eorðsele* in a grove surrounded by steep mountains and dark valleys. The theme of journey itself is

¹ W. W. LAWRENCE, "The Banished Wife's Lament", *Modern Philology*, 5, 1908, pp. 387-405.

central in *WL*, too: the *sið* of which she tells can be read as ‘exile’, and she is banished as an outcast; so seems to be her lord, who left his land on a sea journey and is now envisaged to be dwelling alone in a gloomy place on the seashore (Swanton 1964, pp. 278-79). The features of the Wife’s dwelling, in particular, are remindful of the pictures of the world in the last age before Doomsday found in the *Blickling Homily* and in *Judgement Day II*, while the young man’s abode resembles the traditional visions of Hell found in Anglo-Saxon literature. Moreover, the mood of *WL* is, in Swanton’s words, “continuous”, a distinctive feature of gnome and religious poetry in Old English literature. It is true that the sorrowful tone is provoked by what looks like a broken love-oath and even, in some scholars’ opinion, an affair involving a third man other from the husband; however, these elements are typical of the romances of the southern European tradition, which are much later than *WL* and cannot therefore be a source for it. In addition, the term *mon* used in the concluding gnomic section can be read as a general word indicating mankind; when contrasted to the vision of the world in its last days expressed in the final section, this casts a universal shade on the whole poem comparable to the moral in the concluding lines of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, which are usually interpreted as conveying a Christian message. The decisive evidence that such an interpretation is possible and supported by the text is the description of the *mon* in ll. 19-21a: *heardsælige* — ill-fated—, *hygegeomorne* — sad in his heart —, *mod miþendne* — concealing his mind —, *morþor bycgendne* — meditating on violence — and *blife gebæro* — with a joyful countenance are contradictory features for one and the same person, unless one understands this person to be Christ, whose destiny was to die and to whom the approaching death caused sorrow. The violence on which he meditates is his own murder, but he is joyful despite all that because he is the Saviour (p. 282). In this view, the wife can only be understood to be the Church in its role of Heavenly

Bride, an image born in the early centuries of Christianity as an interpretation of the *Song of Songs* and the book of *Revelation* and subsequently spread in Europe. Christ, the bridegroom, has commanded the Church to live in this world, and life on earth is the sorrowful exile that the Bride must necessarily endure in order to finally reach Heaven and obtain the craved union with God. So, l. 15 represents Christ's order, and the place in which the Church is banished is indeed the world, desolate and sorrowful because Doomsday is already approaching. The *fæbðu* — that is the reason for their separation — is the hostility of the world against both Christ and his Church, and the people who started the feud were indeed God's kin, as he is the father of mankind (pp. 284-86). In summary, what Swanton is proposing is to interpret *WL* as originated from the tradition of Christian symbolism, which was already rooted in England in the eighth century; the central theme is blended with the Anglo-Saxon mood: it is in this light that the Germanic elements in the text must be understood, that is, as the stem onto which the Christian tradition has grafted.

Paul Cavill (1999, pp. 60-70) adds to Swanton's reading by setting *WL* in the context of the Exeter Book. All the elegies in the manuscript share the same concern with religious and homiletic motifs, among which the most emblematic are exile and consolation from the Lord for the decay of earthly happiness. However, *WL* and *WE* are distinct from the other poems because here the consideration of the above-mentioned themes does not lead to moralistic thoughts and consolation through the vision of Christian salvation. They never mention God and they do not teach any Christian lesson. An allegorical reading of *WL*, nonetheless, is possible. Firstly, the situation of the lady in the *eorðscræf* — which can be seen as both a cave and a grave — casts a "smell of death" over the poem. Secondly, the concluding gnome is a topical expression of the horrors of Hell in Old English literature. Thirdly, the nouns for

church and soul are feminine in Old English. When put together, these elements encourage the interpretation of the speaker as either the Church or the Soul, imprisoned respectively in the world or in the body and lamenting the sorrow of existence without its beloved — Christ. Such an existence is actually comparable to Hell, which in the Christian view is the separation from God and the impossibility to see him and achieve union with him. Summing up, although there is neither open expression of Christian doctrine nor open mention of God in *WL*, the poem is imbued with religious themes, since — in view of the occasion of its donation to the Exeter Cathedral — its author must have been someone whose life perspective was Christian. The fact that the protagonist is a woman in a difficult situation can be explained by the Anglo-Saxon attitude towards religion, which was all-inclusive: pagan and secular motifs and preoccupations were not shunned, since Anglo-Saxon Christianity was human and life-based and affected by curiosity for every aspect of culture and learning, as is proved by the presence in the Exeter Book of such poems as the Riddles.

Alain Renoir (1977, pp. 19-24), on the contrary, recognises some elements of Christian ideology rather than religious allegory in *WL*. His analysis of the poem's structure draws attention to the passivity of the Wife, which emerges from the type of verbs used with reference to her: to suffer, to endure, to stay, to sit; ll. 32b-33a even say that the departure of the lord has 'caught her cruelly'. The image resulting from this set of verbs is that of a woman acted upon by the events. Instead, the man — who Renoir takes to be only one — shows an active behaviour, at least up to the concluding section. First he leaves his country and sails over the seas, then he somehow orders the lady to dwell in the desolate place which is now her home, then he plans to commit some violence: every time he is mentioned, he is in the middle of some action. The contrast thus established in the first part between husband and wife is nevertheless undone in ll.

42-53, where the man's situation suddenly becomes parallel to the woman's: he is envisaged as sitting alone under a cliff, just like she is said to be sitting alone under an oak-tree; he is having cares and sorrowful thoughts, just as she is weeping her miseries; he is remembering the warm home he dwelled in the past just as she is recalling her previous joys. Such a "catastrophic inversion" (p. 22) in the lord's situation is remindful of the gospel's teaching that the powerful will be overturned: in other words, he undergoes a "Christian inversion" that changes his social position of authority into one of weakness and banishment. The scholar argues that, although it cannot be proved that the poet of *WL* intentionally fashioned the poem as a means to convey a Christian message, the said message is present and was likely to be grasped by the audience to which the Exeter Book was directed, that is monks and priests. It has to be remembered that the manuscript was given to the Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, whose purpose as a bishop must have been to instruct his fellows. Actually, his donation includes sixty-six manuscripts, the majority of which are religious texts, while the remaining books are moral works by such authors as Boethius. Most texts in the Exeter Book itself have a religious nature, being concerned with lives of saints, or moral teachings and warnings, or biblical material. In particular, *WL* is immediately preceded by Riddle 59, whose solution, 'chalice', has open Christian connotations, and immediately followed by *Judgement Day I*, whose first theme is the overthrow of the powerful at the hands of the Lord. Renoir's argument is that the incipit of our poem is the same as that of Riddles 58 and 59, which legitimates one to seek hidden meanings in the text, meanings that were almost certainly understood by the eighth-century readers of the Exeter Book, whose main concern in preserving and copying manuscripts was the transmission and the teaching of the Christian doctrine.

Shari Horner, too, (2002, pp. 381-391) reads *WL* in the view of Christian ideology, but with the aim to stress the gendered nature of the poem's language. The situation of the speaker in our text is one of enclosure: she has been forced to live isolated from the world in a secluded place, where a grove, some steep hills and dark walls exclude her from society. This picture evokes imprisonment, but since the context in which the poem was written is the religious environment of the Exeter Cathedral, it is natural to see this imprisonment in terms of female monastic enclosure, a theme over which the Church has elaborated from the times of the early Fathers. In fact, the nun was considered subject to a twofold enclosure, the first one being the convent where she was supposed to live her whole life isolated and protected from the world, and the second one being her body, which preserved her purity untouched and unstained by avoidance of any physical and spiritual intrusion. The ideology behind this vision of the nun is the male will to control and dominate over the female, just as the soul and the reason must govern the body and the instinct — an image found in the patristic writings. Evidence for this reading is provided by the comparison of *WL* and *WE* with *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The former present a situation of confinement of the narrators, while the latter show the speakers wandering over the seas. Yet, differently from the protagonists of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, the women in *WL* and *WE* have no restraint on their emotional outpouring: they are not subject to the Anglo-Saxon costume of concealing one's sorrows and locking them into the mind; their physical imprisonment, in other words, is balanced by the freedom of their speech, which offsets the impossibility of a real travel with an interior journey. According to Horner, it is the insistence of the text on the women's enclosure that "genders their voices" as female, since gender is a matter of culture rather than of personal identity, it is the set of social and cultural behaviours associated with the male and the female (pp. 383-384). Indeed, the

eighth-century Anglo-Saxon culture is the means of explaining the narrator's situation in *WL*. A woman who lost her husband was at danger as her legal rights were threatened by the man's relatives, who could claim her inheritance; if her own family could not or would not grant her protection, she was likely to be sent to a nunnery, which would allow for her relatives to obtain the goods left by the dead husband. In fact, at the moment of their entrance into the convent, women lost all their legal rights, together with their social status, and were thus considered legally and socially dead. This sheds a new light on the Wife's dwelling, the *eorðscræf*, whose deathly overtones can be considered real if understood to signify her social death and her existence into a convent, that is, in a world which is other than the world of men. The use the poem makes of words indicating physical and earthly love is normal in the context of monasticism, as is proved by the surviving correspondence of Anglo-Saxon monks and nuns, who regularly employed terms denoting conjugal relationships between themselves, so that a nun could address her spiritual father as her 'most beloved' and her "very dear friend" (p. 386). The mention of the dawn, too, fits in this reading, since it can be seen as a reference to matins, the earliest service in the day, and the whole poem thus becomes a matins song performed under the cross, represented by the *actreo* — the cross was often called *treow* in Old English poetry. More specifically, this song could be an elaboration on the *Magnificat*, the paradigm of the hymn sung by a woman because the singer is Mary, who is the example to be followed not only by nuns, but also by every woman. Horner draws this conclusion from Renoir's suggestion that the last part of the poem represents a Christian inversion: the sentence he quotes from Luke's Gospel I, 52 — "he hath put down the mighty from their seat" — is part of the *Magnificat*, which fits the context if we understand *WL* to be a lamentation sung by a nun in a convent. Swanton's allegorical interpretation cannot be totally dismissed, of course, as the image

of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as his Bride was popular in Anglo-Saxon Christianity; however, what really matters to Horner is that the poem's belonging into the Christian tradition must be acknowledged, and that the gender of the speaker is recognisable thanks to the text's expression of the medieval Christian doctrine regarding women.

2.2.6 THE SPEAKER AS A LIVING DEAD

Among those critics who support a mythological reading of *The Wife's Lament*, one small group has emerged since the 1970's proposing the view of the narrator as dead and speaking from inside her grave. The scholars who support this interpretation have shown slightly different positions regarding the details of the lady's situation and her condition as a dead person, ranging from the revenant—that is a dead body returning to a life from dusk to dawn—to a pure spirit—that is, the soul torn apart from the body, regretting the time when they were one.

The first to propose this view was Elinor Lench in 1970 (pp. 3-23). Differently from the other critics whose interpretations have been accounted for in this section, Lench does not look for possible Germanic or Norse literary parallels to find an explanation of the obscure points in the poem; however, she does search evidence outside the text itself, and she finds it in history. The reason for her position is that her aim is to explain the poem without resorting to any attempted—and, above all, guessed—reconstruction of the knowledge shared by the Anglo-Saxon poet and his audience concerning the reason for a lady to be confined to a solitary place. Lench's reading is based primarily on two words, namely *morþor*, which she interprets as a true murder, and *fæhðu*, which she renders in its literal meaning of blood-feud. The latter, indicates that someone died, and in the critic's opinion it could be either the speaker or her husband. While there is not any evidence in the text that the lord could be dead or have been killed, such evidence can be found with respect to the wife, and this is not strange from the point of view of the Anglo-Saxon law, since it did not consider husband as wife as kin, so that it was possible for a man to have his wife killed without incurring into legal punishment. The reason for the lady's murder would be the schemes of the lord's relatives, who wanted to punish her for her

misbehave. Actually, it seems that the plots against her began when she left to go and look for her husband. This appears to have been a wrong behaviour on her part, to the extent that her lord's family decided to find a way of getting rid of her, so as to separate her from their relative once and for all. According to Lench, the kind of plot set up against her is indicated in the poem: l.12b says that the kinsmen began to scheme *þurb dyrne gebobt*, which is commonly translated as "with evil thought"; anyway, she provides evidence from other Old English sources that the word *dyrne* was normally associated with adultery (pp.13-14). She suggests that the husband's family accused her to have been adulterous, a crime possibly punished by death in Anglo-Saxon society. The good outcome of this scheming is hinted at by the Wife's complaint that she has to suffer because her "perfect match" has been discovered to be *hygegeomorne, mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne*, and because she is enduring a state of blood-feud, in truth, between her husband and herself. It could be argued that the lord could be the victim of the murder as well as the Wife; however, textual evidence supports the view that it is she who has been killed. Firstly, she dwells in a *herbeard* (15b), an "hard place"; secondly, she refers to the life on earth in the past tense in l. 16: *abte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede*, "I had no dear ones on this country". Furthermore, she uses 'remain' instead of 'live' in l. 27a: *wunian*, which makes it not sure that the lady is truly living in that place. Finally, the words that define her dwelling, namely *eorðscræf* and *eorðsele* (28b-29a), which Lench translate respectively as "earth-pit" and "earth-hall". In her opinion, the elements that compose the description of this place are "most appropriate, not to an ordinary cave or hut, but to a grave" (p. 15). History provides further evidence to her opinion: it would be strange that a woman in the Anglo-Saxon times was exiled as a consequence of her husband's crimes and of the refusal of his kin to grant her protection and provide for her needs, since in such cases women were sent back to their families and kin.

On the contrary, if her husband had believed the accusations of adultery on the part of his kinsmen and had put her to death, the situation would be just ordinary for Anglo-Saxon society (Lench 1970, p.15). With regard to this analysis, Lench's reading proves closer to the historical reality of the Anglo-Saxon world, and it succeeds in providing an explanation that takes Anglo-Saxon culture, society and customs into account without parting with the text.

One of the points where Lench's interpretation hinges is the reading of *eorðscraef* as a literal grave; in her words, this translation "is economical, in that it provides answers to other puzzling questions" (p. 16), namely how she can manage to stay alive without any food, and why she is not able to escape from the *eorðscraef*: if she is dead and she is a sort of ghost, she does not feel any of the basic needs of the living, and she cannot leave the place because she is bound to it, as the grave is her natural dwelling as a spirit. Furthermore, she cannot share the same happiness of the *frynd on eorþan* (33b) because her condition is essentially different, that is, she is not alive as they are. Finally, the statement that she can never have rest from her care is explained by her nature of "earth-bound spirit", a condition provoked by her wrongful murder. In this view, the poem's concluding section becomes a real curse cast by the lady upon her husband as a punishment for his crime against her. It is worth noting that Lench compares the place where the Wife wishes her lord to be exiled to a Northern Hell: the cliff beneath which the husband is wished to be sitting reminds of the description of the entrance to *Hel* in *Gylfaginning*, where the gate is a cave in a cliff called *Gnipahellir*. The references Lench makes both to Anglo-Saxon history and to Germanic literature is the reason why she can be considered to belong in the group of those scholars who try to explain the poem by resorting to external evidence, although she does so just to provide further support to her view, which is, nevertheless, already based on textual analysis.

As regards the evidence needed to substantiate her reading, she thinks it necessary to prove on the one hand that “belief in such supernatural happenings was a familiar notion to an eight century Anglo-Saxon audience”, and on the other hand that “the language of the poem, through denotation and connotation, would lead such an audience to such an apprehension” (p. 17). The first type of documentation is plentiful. First of all, the belief in the so-called ‘barrow-wights’—animated corpses which wandered at night and returned to their graves at dawn—which was widespread across Anglo-Saxon England before the Christianisation. Such spirits were not necessarily considered evil; on the contrary, the living fed them and asked them for advice, and they were believed to be sometimes able to spend nights of love with their living beloved. Second, *þas eorðscrafu* (l. 36b) — an accusative neuter plural — cannot be related to a group of huts under an oak-tree, while it complies well with the image of the grave. Moreover, ll. 38-39 clearly state that she is bound to that place: she must remain, *þær ic sittam mot*, while she may mourn, *þær ic weþan mæg*. Finally, to those critics who say that the imagery and language of this poem points to the semantic field of exile, she answers that in the common Christian understanding death is truly an exile from life. The second kind of evidence is more difficult to be found. Old English poetry shows many examples of supernatural speakers, such as demons, angels and saints, but it has no instances at all of ghosts speaking from their graves as is the case in *WL*. This type of speakers, however, is not unusual in Old Norse literature: in *Hervarar Saga* we find Angantyr, in *Njals Saga* Gunnar and in *Grettis Saga* Glam. The three of them either prophesise fate, or sing songs to raise their kin to revenge, or cast curses upon those who provoked their death, so that the three themes of *WL*, namely song, prophecy and curse, are exemplified. The only problem with our poem is that, contrary to the above-mentioned texts, it does not have any open statement concerning the nature of the speaker as dead, and we

are not sure whether the audience would understand that anyway. Lench thinks so on the basis of some elements: the behaviour of the lady and the features of her dwelling, which could well remind the listeners of the barrow-wights of the legends; the “denotative and connotative meaning of all the words used to describe her residence” (p. 19), which, in the scholar’s opinion, report to the semantic field of burial. Actually, the repetition of *eorðscræf*, *eorðsele*, *leger* set a “funereal” background that is reinforced when one notices the absence of words pertaining to the semantic field of the earthly dwelling. Another element is the image of the oak, which bears strong connotations of heathen religion and gives a supernatural haze to the setting. In Lench’s words “it seems not at all unlikely, therefore, that the poet’s audience, alerted to expect a death by the words *morþor* and *fæhðu*, would have understood the Wife’s description of her dwelling as a fact, not fancy” (p. 19). As a conclusion to her analysis, she finds that a pattern of reversal can be recognised in the poem: the first part sets the expectation that the theme is exile, but this expectation is disappointed in the second part, where it becomes clear that the speaker is dead rather than a wanderer or an exile. Also the structure is that of a conventional poem of exile, and this makes the reader expect a Christian consolation at the end, while the last part of this poem turns out to be a curse which, paradoxically, does give consolation to the speaker, even though it is not of the kind expected. Lench recognises that it is impossible to prove that the speaker is not alive; however, she thinks that the difficulties aroused by this reading prove that “the assumption itself is the principal difficulty”; on the contrary, the reading she proposes is economical in that it “integrates [the details of the poem] into a complete pattern” (p. 20).

The nature of the narrator of *WL* as a revenant is acknowledged by Raymond Tripp, as well (1972, pp. 339-361). However, he relates it to the popular ballad tradition, which is oral but more recent than the Old English elegies. According to Tripp, the revenant is a “corporeal

ghost who, returning from the grave as one of the “living dead”, seeks either to live again or to warn his all living fellows against their fate” (p. 339). The scholar criticises readings of the poem up to his time because they have been lead either by attempts to connect it with classical and Mediterranean models — which are later than their northern counterparts — or by endeavours to explain it according to modern models of life, while it talks about something which is extraneous to the modern experience. Tripp recognises himself to belong into the group of those critics who base their readings on the search for ideas and beliefs contemporary to the poet and the audience, of which traces can be found in the language of the elegies. He quotes one scholar in particular, Vivian Salmon, who explains the image of the *anfloga* in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as a metaphor for the soul in its bird form, an idea which is not strange at all in the fields of Old Icelandic literature and anthropology¹. Moreover, he states that in Eighth Century Anglo-Saxon England the revenants were considered not only real, but also an everyday matter, and it is essential to understand this fact in order to recognise the traces of myth in *WL* without reducing them to mere metaphors. And traces can indeed be found in the language: the semantic field of death is recognisable in the Old English elegies, and it helps see the archaic structure which underlies them. This does not mean that he denies a Christian nature to these poems: on the contrary, he believes it necessary to carry out an analysis which singles out the features of Christian interpolation and those more ancient of archaic Germanic origin. With regard to this, Tripp recognises in three of the elegies, namely *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wife’s Lament*, examples of the so-called “doomsday rhetoric” akin to that found, for instance, in *The Soul’s Address To The Body*. He suggests a new title for *The Wife’s Lament*, that is, *The Soul’s Lament*, as he reads the poem as the soul’s lament for the body that it has lost

¹ Vivian SALMON, “*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, And The Old English Conception of the Soul”, *Modern Language Review*, 55 1960, p. 9. See TRIPP, “The Narrator as Revenant: A Reconsideration of Three Old English Elegies” cit., p. 340 footnote 4.

with death. His view is different from Lench's in this respect, since Tripp believes that the speaker is truly the soul of a dead person; furthermore, in this vision the *blaford* is dead as well, quite obviously, as he is the dead body. A first piece of evidence to his interpretation comes from comparison with *Deor* and *Riddle 43*. Both texts share with *WL* the concept of *folgað*, "service", and indeed *Deor*, too, seeks service because he has lost his lord, and Tripp believes that he is dead and his situation is of the same kind of the one described in *WL*. Moreover, *Riddle 43* talks about a servant and a lord, and of life as a journey, elements clearly recognisable in *WL*, as well; the interesting thing is that the solution usually given to this Riddle is "soul and body". Therefore, it seems that the interpretation which best explains the linguistic choices of the poem is that the *blaford* is the rational soul, and the narrator the animal soul in the body, the revenant as the animated body, indeed, who laments the loss of life on earth and of its pleasures. In this view, the *eorðscræf* in which the speaker dwells is truly a grave, and she is wandering inside it while longing for the blissful state of those who are still living. Tripp makes reference to Wimberly², who describes the world of the ballad as one in which death is represented as a journey of the soul under the shape of a bird or a ship to a place in the underworld or beyond the sea, where it continues its life in the same way as it did on earth, and has a sort of corporeity which resembles that of the living.

The last part of *WL* is an admonition to the living, to persuade them to abandon their pagan beliefs and way of life so to avoid the destiny befallen upon the narrator, that is, to be separated by her own rational soul and to live a lonely half-life in a sort of earthly limbo from which it is impossible to escape. This is the element of Christian interpolation in the text: early Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England conceived the soul as something corporeal, and the reason

² Wimberly, *Folklore in The English and Scottish Ballads*, Chicago 1928, pp. 226-227.

is that the earlier pagan religion did so. The missionaries took up the well-rooted heathen beliefs and accorded them to the Christian vision of the world: these elements survived, the only thing that changed was the perspective from which they were viewed, so that the heathen tradition was rationalised into the superimposing Christian one. This happened, for instance, also with Christmas: the birth of Christ was set in that particular period of the year because in the pagan religion it was already the season when the Year, that is, God, was born (Tripp 1972, pp. 360-361).

A particular reading, which anyway can be considered similar, to some extent, to the ones already accounted for in this chapter, is that of Barbara Lalla (1993, pp. 55-72). She compares *WL* to a modern novel, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and finds that the most important feature they have in common is the nature of their respective narrators, who she recognises to be both "women dispossessed of life" (p.56). Actually, Lalla's reading is a feminist one, as she explains both works as examples of the male attempt to exclude the women in question from society and the latter's consequent rage and curse upon their husbands. Both female narrators possess the conditions of "non-life" and "non-death" at the same time. For Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the ship voyage from the Caribbean to England should be a journey from wilderness to civilization, but it turns out to a state of "non-wilderness" and "non-civilization", since she is segregated to the attic of her husband's house and thus excluded from society (p. 61). This results in a state of insanity which leads her to see herself as a ghost, a grey shadow who has lost her identity and whose existence cannot be said to be either life or death. For the lady in *WL* the exile in the desolate place where she has been compelled to dwell is actually a death, since in the Anglo-Saxon world life was social life and to be excluded from society meant to be dead not only from the social, but also from the existential point of view.

Being an exile means to be dead to the society of men, that is, to be outside existence. It is not relevant, therefore, that the Wife is truly dead and buried in her grave or metaphorically dead because she is an exile: hers is a limbo state similar to that of the *Wide Sargasso Sea's* protagonist.

2.2.7 THE WIFE'S ABODE

Two of the most debated words in *WL* are *eorðscræf* (28b) and *eorðsele* (29a), since they define the narrator's dwelling and, therefore, hold a clue to the understanding of the woman's situation, which, on turn, could help solve the story told in the text. Actually, criticism is divided on the meaning and referent of the two terms because of the effect of the way to translate them on the whole poem: different readings of these words lead to completely divergent views of the narrator and her situation. The most discussed one, however, has been *eorðscræf*, of which there have been three main interpretations so far, namely "grave", "underground dwelling" and "cave". The first one involves the vision of the narrator as dead, and links the poem to the Germanic tradition of the "death-song", while both the second and the third readings want her alive and only debate the nature and features of her dwelling, drawing evidence from history, archaeology and literature, as well.

The reason why it is so difficult to determine the correct translation of these words is that the Old English literary corpus survived up to the present is small, and, therefore, there are not many texts in which to look for correspondences and differences in use and meaning of the debated words. For this reason some scholars have turned to Germanic sources of the continent or of Northern Europe to find examples or evidence in support of their readings, and this has caused more discussion since some maintain that the Anglo-Saxons had still memory of the traditions and religion they followed on the continent, before moving to England, while others suggest they would have almost forgotten their origins by the time when *WL* was written and, for this reason, it is both useless and incorrect to look for evidence in Old German or Old Norse parallels. It is always hard to establish whether it is the interpretation the critic has already given

the poem to guide the search for evidence, or if it is the opposite, that is, the uses of the words in question in other texts lead the scholar to a particular reading. Some critics are more interested in the poem as a whole and as a literary expression, and, therefore, try to explain it from a literary viewpoint, that is, classifying it into some genre, and to do so they search possible relations with other literary expressions—which usually leads them to recognise features of Christian religion or Germanic mythology.

However, there is a line of scholars who pursue a literal reading of the poem, trying to explain it only on the basis of text analysis and analysis of single words; this has been called the “realistic reading”, since it only takes into account the text itself and its particular words, and only admits comparison with other works from a linguistic point of view, that is to say, in order to look for similar and different uses of certain specific words in other contexts; but by no means do they try to explain our poem by putting it into literary relation with other texts.

Such is the case of Harris (1977, pp. 204-208), who rejects the interpretation of the narrator as dead on the basis of text analysis, in particular the analysis of the words *eorðscraf* and *eorðsele*. He quotes a commentary on Tacitus’s *Germania* written by two scholars, namely Munch and Jankuhn¹, which, among other things, describes two typical Germanic underground buildings, one completely sunken that was used to store food, and the other emerging above earth-level and covered with a roof that in winter was utilised as a dwelling where women carried out the weaving according to many Germanic testimonies — Old Norse, Middle High German, North High German, Old English, etc. — and to archaeological evidence, as well, which, however, was found only on the continent. Harris believes that the narrator is situated in an underground dwelling of this kind, even though there are no references to weaving; in his

¹ *Die Germania des Tacitus*, erläutert von Rudolf Much, 3rd ed. rev., Herbert Jankuhn (ed.) Wolfgang Lange, Heidelberg 1967.

opinion, the word *burgtunas*, l. 31a is referred to a settlement constituted by subterranean dwellings of the kind already described, built by humans a long time before and now deserted. Of course, this reading denies the possibility that the lady is dead, instead viewing her as an exile who was ordered to hide in an underground refuge, a situation testified by both archaeological and historical Germanic sources. Nevertheless, Harris provides evidence also from the text itself, through the analysis of the kernel *scræf* and its meanings according to Bosworth-Toller: “cave in the earth” or “miserable dwelling, den”; in his opinion, the etymology of the word bears evidence to its being related to the concepts of “digging and scraping rather than with death” (Harris 1977, p.205). Further support to his thesis comes from the analysis of the occurrences of *eorðscræf* in other Old English texts in which the word is commonly held to mean “grave”: the scholar finds out that even in the case of *Beowulf*, where it indicates the dragon’s mound, that is a burial, it is not associated with human burial, in the same way as in any other instance in the Old English poetic corpus. Other points in the poem that reinforce Harris’s reading are the complaint about the breaking of the love promise, which would be meaningless if the lady had died, since death was the limit imposed upon said oath; furthermore, the expression *on þissum life*, l. 41b, which seems referred to the earthly life, since the narrator says that all the sorrowful events that have happened during her lifetime have been oppressing her from her childhood up to her present age, that is, up to the time when she is speaking. It is true that *þissum*, l. 41b, sets a contrast, but between “this life on earth and that to be *anticipated* after death” rather than between a former life on earth and the present life in the world of the dead (p. 206). Moreover, the term *lifgende*, l. 34a, must be referred to the contrast between the love enjoyed by lovers who can live together and the lack of it experienced by the lady, who is alone and an outcast from society. The emendation to *licgende* proposed by

Rissanen is not necessary to avoid reading the word as a contrast between the condition of being alive and that of being dead.

The kind of analysis carried out by Harris, which he defines a “traditionalist realistic reading” (p. 205), leads him to reject Doane’s theory that the narrator is a forsaken heathen goddess speaking from a heathen temple, and Swanton’s allegorical reading, as well, the latter because it is based on an “a priori reasoning about the Germanic mind” in relation to the Christian religion, and also because the evidence provided in support of it is made of parallels drawn only between phrases, while it does not take into account the text as a whole; furthermore, it assumes that there exists a link between *WL* and *HM*. This is a fault of Bolton’s interpretation, as well, even though Harris admits that his reading is more valuable because it is based on the text more than Swanton’s is. However, Harris does not completely deny any validity to the allegorical interpretation, since in his opinion it “does not preclude the realistic reading”, contrary to the interpretation of the speaker as dead, which for this reason should be rejected (Harris 1977, p. 207).

Another critic who belongs in the stream of the “traditional realistic reading” is Wentersdorf (1981, pp. 492-516), who gives a thorough account of the possible meanings of *eorðscræf* through analysis of historical sources dating from the Roman times to the late Modern Age, and of archaeological evidence and of literary witness, as well. He shares some ideas with Harris, for instance the conviction that the narrator is not dead nor speaking from a grave, but his analysis is carried out through a distinct perspective and comes to different conclusions: as an example, he rejects the translation of *eorðscræf* as “burrow” because the lady talks of herself wandering through the *eorðscræfu*, and a grave is too small to permit somebody to move inside it. He excludes the possibility that the word refers to the *deneholes*, the caves described by

Tacitus's *Germania* and spread in England and North-Western Europe. According to Wentersdorf, archaeological evidence proves that these buildings were used as refuges until the XV-XVI centuries, and their existence with the same function is attested by Plutarch, who tells the story of Julius Sabinus, the leader of the Lingones who stayed hidden in a *denehole* during nine years with the aid of two freedmen, and who was even visited secretly by his wife and fathered a child in his hiding place (Wentersdorf 1981, p.501). The third example of Germanic architecture worth to be taken into consideration is the earth-house described by Pliny in his *Natural History*, 19.2.9, as "excavations used as regular winter quarters" (Wentersdorf 1981, p.501), that is the same underground building taken by Harris as the possible historical analogue of the lady's dwelling in our poem. Pliny testifies that inside these winter houses women manufactured linen, and this is proved by archaeological evidence. However, Wentersdorf considers this kind of underground dwelling unsuitable as well, because he believes it had not enough room inside to allow somebody to wander around. On the contrary, he believes that the place to which *eorðscræf* refers is a natural cave. Some historical sources testify that caverns were used as refuges until the late Middle Ages: there are instances of it in the work of Gildas, a British historian who wrote about the persecution of Christians by the Romans in the IV century. Some archaeological evidence supports Wentersdorf's thesis, too: actually, many natural caves have been found throughout Britain containing treasures, coins, sometimes even human relics and woman dresses, which leads to suppose that they were used as shelters during the invasions. Finally, English literature provides matching evidence to his view through Anglo-Saxon texts as, for example, *Andreas*, one of Ælfric's sermons, and the *Vita Haroldi*, but also through Medieval and Elizabethan works. The correspondence of historical, archaeological and literary evidence leads the scholar to conclude that the Anglo-Saxon audience

of *WL* would not consider it unusual for a woman to find shelter in a cave and to dwell there alone and without comforts (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 503). Moreover, the insistence upon the detail of the oak-tree does not seem occasional in the light of its association with heathen religion, which is proved to have survived until the eleventh century on the continent by acts and laws promulgated by the church or the kings to condemn these worships and to invite the authorities to destroy the places associated to them. There is evidence of the destroying of groves or old trees where pagan rites were discovered to take place, and often in those areas churches were built with the wood of the groves in question; or sometimes the groves or trees themselves were consecrated to Christ so to turn pagan sanctuaries into Christian ones, that is, so to preserve the idea of the holiness of those places and at the same time introduce the worship of the new god among the people without violence. It seems likely, therefore, that an Anglo-Saxon audience listening to *WL* would have envisaged the narrator of the poem as dwelling secretly in an ancient pagan sanctuary that included a cave opening up into other caves, located at the foot or in the side of a cliff or hill, in a wooded area with a great oak on or near the top of the cliff or hill. The poem itself bears witness to this reading with the phrase *herbeard niman* (15b), which Wentersdorf reads as *herb-eard*, that is, a variant of *bearg-eard* according to Grein, where *bearg* would be a noun meaning “pagan sanctuary”, and consequently the whole phrase would indicate “to take refuge in a [heathen] sanctuary” (p. 509). In his opinion, any emendation that separates the form *herbeard* is metrically unnecessary; actually, in the reading *her heard* the second word would be a predicative of *blaford* in the previous line, which is quite unusual in Old English literature; similarly, Leslie’s reading *her eard* and his translation “take up abode here” (Leslie 1961, pp. 1-13) changes the manuscript reading without

any true necessity of doing so, since his version does not make any difference from the metrical viewpoint.

The translation “to take refuge in a sanctuary” has grounds in history, since from the antiquity sanctuaries were places of refuge where even criminals were granted protection and safety; this habit was part of the Greek and Judaic traditions — from which it then passed to the Christian society — and of the heathen Germanic society, too, as the laws of Anglo-Saxon kings demonstrate; furthermore, this practice lasted until the fifteenth century in England. Long after the Christianisation, people continued to believe in the pagan gods in the continent as well as in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, and the places where the deities had been worshipped were still considered sanctuaries and places of refuge; trace of this usage could be found in rural settlements in France until the nineteenth century, whose inhabitants still held memory of some stones regarded as sacred and used as refuges by fugitives (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 509).

The objection usually made to the translation of *eorðscraef* as “natural cave” is the observation that the adjective *eald* (29a) is referred to men’s buildings elsewhere in Old English literature; anyway, Wentersdorf believes it could also refer to a natural dwelling used by humans since ancient times, which, in his opinion, is exactly the case of the cavern in *WL*.

The result of this analysis is the vision of the speaker as a woman married to a nobleman, maybe as a peace-weaver, who introduces herself and summarises her story in ll. 6a-10b: she has suffered during all of her life because of many sorrows, and in particular because of her lord’s departure over the sea. He could have fled either because he was in danger in his homeland or because he was exiled; on the contrary, it is improbable that he has gone to war, otherwise the lady would know where he is. The narration does not develop according to a chronological order, but rather follows the narrator’s memories of the past: the thought of her

husband far away makes her think of the reason of his abandoning, and this on turn makes her remember the measures taken to ensure her safety: her lord ordered that she took refuge— *herheard niman* — in a natural cave, which anciently had been dedicated to the worship of some pagan gods and for this reason is considered a safe place of shelter for her (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 512). It is interesting to note that Wentersdorf reads ll. 16a-17a as the reason for her confinement out of their country: because she had few friends, that is, he thinks that these lines refer to her husband’s homeland rather than to her new solitary dwelling. Of course, this reading involves the understanding of *fehðu* as an act of violence the lord is meditating against his kinsmen, rather than against his wife, and that he has concealed it from her not to make her responsible of his schemes, as well. Furthermore, the promises of l. 21b must have taken place before the feud, and the memory of those promises lead the lady to consider that now it is if they had never been made, since she and her lord are living “farthest apart in the world” (p. 513). The scholar’s conclusion about the nature of the poem is that it is a “*cri de coeur*”, but this interpretation of it as romantic in its substance does not divert Wentersdorf from his literal reading, well grounded on historical, archaeological and literary bases.

Paul Battles is another critic who concentrates on the words *eorðscræf* and *eorðsele* to give an interpretation of the situation of the narrator in *WL* (1994, pp. 267-286). Just as Harris and Wentersdorf, he rejects any non-realistic and non-literal reading of the poem; however, he criticizes Harris’s interpretation of the *eorðscræf* as a sunken-featured building because it does not comply with the situation of the lady in our poem: such dwellings were visible since they had a roof over earth-level, while the Wife is supposed to be hiding; moreover, the other occurrence of the word in question in *Beowulf* refers to the dragon’s mound, which is described as *eald enta geweorc*, a description that doesn’t agree with the illustration of the sunken-featured

buildings provided by Tacitus in his *Germania*. He also rejects Wentersdorf's interpretation of the place as a natural cave, and proposes instead to see the dwelling as a *southern*, that is, an artificial underground dwelling or chamber mostly associated with fugitives — often women — in Old Norse and Middle English literature, which well matches the themes of confinement and hostility in *WL*. Archaeology and history — the Irish *Annals of Ulster* and the Icelandic annals *Landnámabók*, and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, as well — prove that *southern*s were widespread in Scotland and Ireland, but also in Denmark and Brittany, Cornwall and Iceland in the early Middle Ages. There were different kinds of them, as they could be either small or large, they could be used either for storing food or for giving shelter to people, mostly — and noticeably — women, during the Viking raids. Etymology bears witness to the historical sources: the Old English *eorðscraf* seems to correspond to *jarðhús*, an Old Norse word indicating both *southern*s and “cellar-like chambers underneath a house” (Battles 1994, p. 271). In Saxo's passage, in particular, the *southern* is described as a well-provided dwelling with long tunnels and large chambers: such a description well complies with the image of the Wife walking up and down her place, and, above all, would explain the occurrence of the word in the plural in l. 36b: *geond þas eorðscrafu*. Moreover, in the *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga* there is a hint at women hidden in a *jarðhús* during the Scottish raids, but the author does not feel the need to explain what these dwellings are nor the reason why women are hidden in them, and this means that they were normal and common refuges.

What is really interesting in the scholar's interpretation, though, is his search for parallels of *WL* in Middle English literature with the particular purpose to explain the function and meaning of the oak tree. The first one is *Sir Tristrem*, a late thirteenth century adaptation of Thomas's *Tristan*, in which there is a description of a *erþe house* in the forest where *Tristrem*

and *Ysonde* hide from King Mark, of which it is said: *Etenes bi old dayn/ Had wrouȝt it, wiþ outen wouȝ* (“Giants in old days had fashioned it, without doubt”), which reminds of the description of the *eorðscræf* in *Beowulf* as *eald enta geweorc*, and of the feature of the Wife’s *eorðscræf* as *eald* (Battles 1994, p.274 and footnote 43). There exists also a Norse version of the *Tristan*, probably a copy of Thomas’s, in which there is mention of a *souterraine* in the side of a hill on top of which stands “a very beautiful tree” (p. 275 footnote 44). The second example is *Lazamon’s Brut*, which provides a parallel to the story as well as to several features of *WL*. Actually, this romance talks about the hiding of a woman in a *souterraine* on the part of her lover: *Locrin* has cast off his fiancée *Guendoleine* after promising to marry her, because he wants to marry *Astrild*, a stranger. But his people compel him to marry *Guendoleine* in order to avoid a war with her father, so he agrees but secretly hides *Astrild* near London in an *eorð-bus* — that is, a earth-house — and keeps her there secretly for seven years. The similarities with our poem are evident: a woman is hidden after that love pledges between her and her lover were broken because of the hostility of the lord’s kinsmen. But an even more interesting thing is a passage in the source of *Lazamon’s Brut*, namely *Wace’s Roman de Brut*, in which the author hints at an *eorð-bus* and glosses it as “un célier,/ desos terre parfondement” (Battles 1994, p. 276), which means that, contrary to both the author of the *Sir Tristrem* and *Lazamon*, he feels the need to explain the word and the type of building to which it refers. The image of the oak-tree standing over a *souterraine* is found also in a passage of the *Flóamanna saga* that describe a group of Irish hiding from the Vikings in a *jarðbus* over which there is a tree that conceals the shelter. Moreover, the *souterraine* appears in the *Volsunga saga*, too, in the passage where *Signý* builds such a dwelling as a refuge for herself and her brother *Sigmund* who are hiding from King *Siggeir*. The critic rejects the theory that the narrator is dead and explains it by comparison of

WL with *Beowulf*: if it is true that in the latter the word *eorðscraef* is used of the dragon's mound, it cannot be translated as "grave", anyway, since there is neither explicit mention nor hint at bodies buried inside, not even that of the last survivor of the extinguished kinship who hid his people's treasure there before dying; the same can be said of *WL*. This is why he is sure that in both poems the word in question has to be translated with *souterrains* rather than "grave". All the texts that Battles quotes provide a parallel of some kind to *WL*: in almost all of them there are *souterrains* meant to conceal people who, in most cases, are women; moreover, in all these texts these buildings are strictly associated with trees or forests. The interpretation of the whole poem that follows from his reading involves, therefore, that the lady has followed her husband in a foreign country but, due to the plots of his kinsmen, they have been separated and he has ordered her to dwell in a *souterrains*, where she can be safe. Battles notes that although the texts cited do not explain all the controversial points, they help us realise that the poem does make sense by proving that the *souterrains* actually existed and were normally used by women as refuges for various reasons.

A completely different kind of place is what Michael Patrick has imagined the *eorðscraef* to be (1970, p. 50). He imagines it as a "monastery or nunnery" located under the branches of an oak tree or in an oak grove. The detail that leads him to reject the idea that the lady's dwelling place is a cave is the fact that she can stand inside it, and walk through it and, in the meantime, she is able to see the landscape outside and the towns on the background. His suggestion is that she is living in an uncomfortable cell of a monastery or nunnery, which appears to her as a desolate place compared to the comfortable house where she lived before, when she was still with her husband, since, in his opinion, she is a woman of high status. Evidence for this interpretation is provided by history: it is more probable that a lady who found

herself in trouble in the Anglo-Saxon times sought refuge in a monastery or nunnery rather than in a cave in the forest. In Patrick's opinion, this reading supports the interpretation of those critics who believe that the relationship between the husband and the wife is good: according to this view, the man has concealed his thoughts from her in order to protect her, and has ordered her to flee from his country and go and live in such an isolated place for the same reason.

Opposed to the literal realistic reading, there are some scholars who interpret the *eorðscraef/eorðsele* either as a grave, or as a metaphor for the lady's state of mind. The latter is the case with Emily Jensen (1990, pp. 449-457), whose starting point is the criticism of the literal interpretation and of the death-song tradition, as well: "the problem of studies of character and plot and of source studies is the conviction that through them we can identify those particular qualities that make *WL* the moving poem it is" (p. 449). By examining the situation of the lady, namely the *eorðscraef under actreo* — the element on which both the death-song criticism and the literal realistic reading rely as evidence — she finds that *eorðscraef* can be interpreted either as a "literal sign" or as a "metaphorical sign". The problem with the first reading is that the scholars who support it seek to trace the linguistic associations of the word, and to do so they draw linguistic evidence from other texts — usually *Beowulf* as their first choice — to prove either the reading "grave" or the translation "cave" — which is exactly what Harris himself did, as we have already seen; or, otherwise, they look for "the historical associations" of the word — Wentersdorf's *modus operandi* — and in this case archaeological sources are analysed, as well as literary and historical ones, so to prove that there existed certain types of refuges in Anglo-Saxon and continental Germanic countries, and that therefore it is not strange to assume that the narrator is alive and speaking from a cave or another kind of underground dwelling rather

than from a grave. By doing so, these critics draw our attention outside the poem itself and “we are forced always to the most literal associations”, which lead us to see the speaker either as dead in a grave or as alive in a cave, while, in Jensen’s opinion, it is not certain that either condition occur in *WL*. The metaphorical reading she proposes, on the contrary, considers *eorðscraf* a way of manifesting the lady’s sadness. Quite unusually and surprisingly, Jensen sets a comparison between *WL* and Shakespeare’s sonnet *How like a winter hath my absence been*, which develops a central image meant to signify the poet’s feeling, and which is in discord with the literal context of the poem. The author believes that *WL* uses the same rhetorical device, the only difference is that the narrator does not explicitly state that the image she uses is in contrast with her true feelings: that is, in Shakespeare winter is not a true season, but a feeling inside the poet, while it is actually summer at the time when he speaks. In *WL* the same thing occurs: the *eorðsele* is neither a real cave nor a grave, but just a metaphor for the woman’s feelings. Moreover, the choice of the word is intentional, as it recalls by contrast the *meodubealle*, and by similarity the *dreorsele* that she imagines to be her beloved’s dwelling.

The central point in Jensen’s contribution is her reading of the phrase *Swa hit no were* (24b) and of the word *fehðu* (26b). In fact, the former demonstrates that the narrator is alive, since if she complains that *freondscipe uncer* (25a) has changed as if it had never been, this means that the vow has changed, because if death had divided them she could not complain (p. 451); it was the man’s kin who separated them, and it seems to her that this separation “has totally obliterated any feelings of love between them”, and “it is so painful that it makes the love feel like its opposite, a state of feud” (pp. 451 452). Therefore, *fehðu* indicates an expression of her desperate feeling of isolation from her lover rather than a real feud. Ultimately, “*eorðscraf* is neither a literal cave nor a grave but a powerful image for the speaker’s feelings of loss and

isolation when apart from her lover” (Jensen 1990, p.452). Therefore, the central image of the *eorðscraf*, when intended as a metaphor for the woman’s state of mind, is the starting point for the understanding of the whole poem, since it recalls the idea of the hall as the place of existential joy where the human and social relationships take place, but it does so in terms of a contrast set between this image and the emotional situation of the narrator and her lover.

By examining the above-mentioned image in relation to the poem as a whole, Jensen finds out that a pattern seems to emerge going from a wider view of life as a journey, to a narrower focus on the lovers’ respective and matching places of exile, to an even narrower view on the Wife’s dwelling, and inside the latter, the narrowing of the focus from the description of the landscape in general to that of the *eorðsele* in particular. Afterwards, a shift of perspective can be noticed: this time the view widens from the cave to its surroundings again, and finally to the consideration of the whole world in ll. 33b ff., *Frynd sind on eorþan*. The scholar believes that this shift in perspective indicates the speaker’s ability to move out of the meditation on her own misery to a philosophical attitude somewhat similar to the *Wanderer’s* and the *Seafarer’s*, that is, the acceptance of the idea that sorrow is part of life. As an instance, the fact that the last image in the text is the *dreorsele* of her beloved means that she does not blame him for her situation but, on the contrary, she shows solidarity toward him: “She shows her wisdom by moving beyond indulgence in that suffering to a vision of the two lovers, “fully equal” in sorrow as they had been *ful gemæcne* (18a) “fully equal” in love” (p.455). So, the Wife shows to have acquired the same kind of wisdom of the *Wanderer*, which has originated from sorrow and personal suffering; the only difference between the two poems is that the former limits its considerations to the personal experience of the speaker rather than extending them to life in general as the latter does. Jensen concludes that *WL* is so moving because it hinges on a “powerful expression

of feelings” achieved through the central metaphorical image of the *eorðscræf*, which is developed in a system of related ideas throughout the text.

The significance of the speaker’s state of mind in the narrative structure of the poem is underlined by another critic, namely Jorge Luis Bueno (1998, pp. 157-170). He explains *WL* as an expression of the narrator’s sufferings, and believes that all the elements in the text are meant to stress her grief. Actually, he reads *Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad* (l.29) as the sum of the three parameters that, in his opinion, cooperate to build the conceptual world of the poem, namely psychology, space and time, ecology. Among them, psychology is the most important, as the others seem to be used just to enhance the main preoccupation of the narrator, namely the sharing of her sufferings — that is to say her psychological situation — with the audience, or better, with all the other human beings, since “everything in the text is placed to make us see the expression of the narrator’s distress, feelings, and sufferings, as something that forms part of human experience” (p. 168). The description of her dwelling fits into this framework, as the features of the place where she is living are related to her state of mind: for instance, the hardness of the landscape, the loneliness of the area match her feelings of distress and isolation. The element of space seems strongly connected to psychology in all the events narrated: the lady’s sorrow comes from her being separated from her lord and from her isolation. It is interesting that she imagines and describes the place where her husband is exiled, and that she imagines that he is regretting happier and warmer dwellings just as she is; this proves that her psychological situation is closely related to the space situation. Nature is evidently the setting for the expression of her emotions in two points, namely ll. 27-41, where the Wife’s dwelling is described through parallels between elements in the landscape and feelings in her mind; Bueno underlines Jensen’s observation that there is a focusing from the

more general to the more specific in this description. The other passage is found in ll. 46b-52a, where the Lord's place is imagined. This is true both for her past and her present misery, since the time of the poem can be defined as a contextual present from which many references to the past are made. Both present and past events are related to the lady's sufferings; however, she clearly states that her sorrow has never been greater than now, so more emphasis is put on her present situation. Actually, also the past events contribute to her present sufferings: *Forþon is min hyge geomor* (17b) comes after a description of past happenings, which, however, have still effect on her state of mind. The scholar notes that this insistence on the present has been seen by some critics (Green 1983 pp.125-129) as a "negation of future", a sort of everlasting/never-ending present to which the woman would be condemned. And, actually, the present is the time of her psychological expression of feelings (Bueno 1998, p.164). It seems evident to Bueno that space and time on the one hand, and nature on the other hand are meant to enhance the central feature of the poem, that is, psychology.

A "complex interaction of emotion and environment" is what Bruce Moore understands to be at issue in this poem, too (Moore 1976, 65). The most important feature that he recognises in our text is the attitude of the woman, who is not active at all: rather, she undergoes suffering provoked by the acting of others, namely, of all those persons and things that surround her: the kinsmen of her husband, the landscape of her dwelling, and her memories, as well. Ll. 27-32a in particular are framed by the sudden movement from the past, which is remembered, to the present: actually, the memory of the moment in the past when she was ordered to dwell in that place leads her to consider her situation, and, consequently, her condition. This is made evident by syntactic parallelism in the passage: as an instance, l. 29 has *Eald is...* in the a-verse, and *eal ic...* in the b-verse, which is meant to draw a parallel between

the oldness of the earth-hall and the long period of time during which the woman has been suffering, both before and after going to live in that place. Furthermore, the image of the *eorðsele* is meant to set a contrast with the image of the hall, the *meadu-beall*, which was surely immediately grasped by an Anglo-Saxon audience. The Wife has been expelled from that joyful place, and so has her husband, since the *dreorsele* in which she imagines him to be living carries the same meanings as the *eorðsele*. The analysis of the features of the landscape surrounding the *eorðscræf* reveals that not only enhances it the woman's suffering, but it also provides a metaphor for her loneliness; the *burgtunas* of l. 31a can be seen either as "overgrown with briars", which symbolises the lady's state of imprisonment and distance from society, or as "towns" that represent the social life from which she has been excluded. Moore concludes by interpreting the *eorðscræf* as a literal cave, but he also believes that the place and the landscape are intended to be metaphors of the speaker's isolation, which means, therefore, of her state of mind.

2.2.8 THE AMBIGUITY OF *THE WIFE'S LAMENT* L. 34B

Recent criticism agreed in translating l. 34b, *leger weardiað*, as “rest in their beds” or “share their beds” up to a few years ago. However, in 2002 Kathryn A. Lowe (2002, pp. 122-143) suggested a translation first proposed by the early editors of *WL* and then abandoned after Grein’s and Kershaw’s readings. She interprets ll. 33-35 as: “There are friends, dear ones dwelling in the earth, they inhabit graves. In consequence, I walk alone under the oak-tree throughout these barrows” (p. 137). Concerning the meaning of *leger* in Old English, she notes that it is seldom used with the meaning of “bed” without being associated with the concepts of sickness and disease, which can be also of a moral kind. She points out that there is just an example in the Old English corpus where the word means simply “bed”, namely, the Northumbrian gloss to the *Durham Ritual*, where it glosses the Latin *lectum* in the prayer for marriage. Furthermore, the compounds with *leger* as their first element often have overtones of sickness or moral deviation, and sometimes they indicate sexual intercourse or fornication. Therefore, Lowe considers it a strange choice on the poet’s part to use a term so full of specific and even negative connotations if his purpose was to indicate simply a bed where people have rest. The development of the word in Middle English is analysed in the attempt to shed some light on its use in Old English. Some of the meanings, namely “bed”, “burial place” and “sexual intercourse or fornication” come from their Old English parallels, but the interesting thing is the meaning ‘a place where someone dwells’, since it could fit the context in *WL*; however, Lowe says she was not able to find evidence that the word was used in this sense during the Anglo-Saxon period. With regards to the collocations of *weardian*, she finds that the most frequent one is with *eard*, which indicates that this verb was used in Old English with the meaning “to inhabit a place, territory or other site” (p. 130), and which leads the scholar to think that in the passage in question it

indicates more likely somebody dwelling in a grave rather than resting in a bed. The verb *libban* has given problems to critics because Bosworth-Toller says that it only assumed the sense “dwell, inhabit” after the Norman Conquest; this seems to be the reason why Kershaw rejected the early translation of l. 34b. Nevertheless, the meaning “to make one’s abode, reside” is one of the senses given to the words by Bosworth-Toller. Furthermore, Lowe provides two Old English examples where the only meaning that can be assigned to *libban* is “to dwell”: the first one is found in *Leechdoms*, while the second one is from Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*.

After establishing the right way of translating *leger* and *libban* in the context of the poem, Lowe finds that the grammar of l. 34 turns out to be the only actual problem of interpretation. In fact, the meaning of the clause changes if *lifgende* is considered adjectival—in which case the translation would be “There are dear, living friends on earth” — or if it is taken as verbal — its meaning being “there are friends, dear ones living in the earth”. The presence of the verb *beon* renders the sentence ambiguous, so that the only way to decide which reading is the correct one in this passage is to examine other Old English instances. Lowe takes into account Robinson’s study of Old English poetry¹ and comes to the conclusion that the most likely interpretation of *lifgende* is as a verbal periphrasis, since in this way the sentence is understood to have a parallel structure and to fall into the category of the variation, a poetical technique much exploited in Old English poetry. The case here is that of a referent “designated at least once in literal terms and once by a figurative expression which might be mystifying were it not for the clarification provided by the second, unmetaphorical element”.² In l. 34 *lifgende* is the mystifying element, while *leger weardiað* is the element that clarifies the meaning of the statement. Lowe concludes that this passage of *WL* actually talks about the loneliness that

¹ F.C. Robinson, ‘Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry’, in *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style*, ed. by D. G. Calder, Berkeley 1979, pp. 127-145. Lowe 2002, footnote 73 p. 136).

² Quotation from Robinson, cit., p. 73.

comes with the death of beloved friends, rather than of lovers sleeping together whose thought rouses a feeling of regret in the speaker who cannot enjoy such pleasures.

In the same year as Lowe, Thomas Hill published a study on the problem of ll. 33b-34 (2002, pp. 34-37). Contrary to Lowe, Hill believes that ll. 33b-34 truly refer to living lovers sharing the same bed, and that this image is used in order to draw a contrast with the solitary situation of the narrator. His analysis focuses on the word *leger* in particular, and it is based on comparison with the Old Norse and the Middle English equivalents of the word. First, Hill accounts for its meaning in Old English: as long as *leger* is attested in the sense of “resting place” or “bed”, *leger weardiað* can be assumed to mean “share a bed”, that is “sleep together”. The following translation of the lines in question comes as a consequence: “there are lovers on earth, dear living ones, who share a bed” (p. 35). It is worth noting that this reading is the opposite of Lowe’s, since while she comes to the conclusion that *lifgende* is a predicative to be translated as a verb — namely, “living in the grave” — Hill’s translation shows that he takes it as an attributive, as he renders it with “dear living ones”. With regards to the “lovers”, Hill says that this is the only occurrence of *frynd* in which its meaning can be compared to the Modern English “lovers”; however, there is evidence of this use of the equivalents of this word both in old and in modern European languages.

Concerning the reading of *leger weardiað*, the translation “share a bed” is not supported by further evidence in Old English; on the contrary, many Old English authoritative dictionaries gloss *leger* as “grave” or “sickbed”. Consequently, the image that many editors have seen in these lines is that of people now dead and “resting in the graves”. Nevertheless, *leir* — that is, the Middle English equivalent of Old English *leger* — commonly means “bed” or “resting place”, and, most important, it is attested to have erotic connotations which are so strong that in the Middle English Dictionary one of the senses of the word is “fornication”. Furthermore, there is

a Middle English list of fines collected for the crime of fornication in which the word *leir* is used to indicate the crime of a maid who was found to have slept with her chaplain. Finally, the fine for fornication was specifically called a “*leire-wite*”, which proves that the meaning “fornication” for *leir* was very common. Therefore, Middle English evidence does support the reading of *leger* as having erotic connotations, even though this evidence is not found in literary texts, but rather in court records of fines.

Hill comments over his own method of analysis and justifies his use of the Middle English corpus by stating that “the distinction between OE and ME is essentially an academic convenience and that at least some of the evidence in this case can be dated to the early ME period when the distinction between ME and OE is purely nominal” (p. 36); moreover, the Old English poetic corpus, in his opinion, cannot be used as a term of comparison with *WL*, since it is made above all of religious poems, and the love described in those texts is completely different from the nature of the feeling of which *WL* talks about.

Carole Hough comments both Lowe’s and Hill’s contributions in her work (2003, pp. 5-8), and her conclusions are interesting, since in her opinion one reading does not necessarily exclude the other one: the fact that both interpretations are supported by the text proves that the poem has more than one level of reading and understanding. Moreover, she thinks that this poem is too carefully constructed to believe that this ambiguity in meaning is unintentional; rather, she imputes it to the poet. The right way to read this text is, actually, as a riddle, that is, being prepared to grasp all the meanings at all the different levels. This suggestion of Hough’s comes from Christine Fell’s statement that the Old English elegies exploit techniques which are akin to those used in the Exeter Book *Riddles*: the speaker’s identity is hidden, and the point of the riddle is to identify it. This is what happens in *The Wife’s Lament*, too; the only difference is that while the *Riddles* have animals or objects as speakers, the elegies have human beings, but

the purpose of the text is the same, namely, to challenge the reader in trying to discover who — or what — the speaker is. Fell thought that in the case of our poem — like in the other elegies— the character to be identified is a legendary or mythological figure, and that is the reason why we are not able to solve their mystery: because we have lost the background of shared knowledge to which the poet was making reference when composing these texts.³ The fact that it is difficult even to decide whether the narrator is male or female is another riddle-like feature: just as the riddles often talk about an object as it were something alive or animate, *WL* could be using language to hide the identity of the speaker as a woman and make the audience believe that it is actually a man. For what concerns the phrase *leger weardiað* in particular, it seems to carry the same kind of pun found in some of the *Riddles*, namely, the ones which make jokes on sex through words having multiple meanings. Actually, *leger* in OE could mean both “garden bed” and “bed”; in the context of *WL* it can be translated both as “bed”, with sexual overtones, and with “grave”, and it is possible that the poet was ambiguous on purpose here, and, therefore, that one reading does not exclude the other.

In connection to this reading of *The Wife's Lament* as having riddle-like features, the interpretation of another scholar can be quoted here, namely Faye Walker-Pelkey (1992, pp. 242-266). He sees the poem as a riddle whose solution is “sword”, and he compares it to *Riddles 69, 84 and 18* of the Exeter Book, among which the last one, no. 18, is the one that most resembles the situation in our poem: the object speaking, that is, the sword, first describes its appearance, and then goes on to describe its cultural and social meaning. The thematic elements shared by the two texts are: the theme of the lost lord and the consequences of the separation from him; the feeling of longing provoked by this loss in the speaker; and the “attribution of human responses to familiar/sexual desires and unnatural predicaments” (p. 257).

³ Christine Fell, “Runes and –Riddles in Anglo-Saxon England”, in *“Lastworda Betst”*: *Essays in memory of Christine E. Fell with her Unpublished Writings*, ed. by C. Hough and K. A. Lowe, Donington, Tyas 2002, pp. 264-277.

The scholar takes into consideration some passages of *WL* in order to explain his view. One of them is l. 7a, *ofer yþa gelac*: he reads this image of the man going away over the seas as a funeral by ship, and supports this interpretation through other phrases, namely *of leodum*, l. 6b, that is “away from his people”, and *folclondes*, l. 47a, which he considers to be a metaphor for the underworld, the heathen world of the dead; moreover, he interprets the *dreorsele* of l. 50a as the lord’s grave. Walker-Pelkey draws evidence from archaeology for his understanding of the poem in the Sutton Hoo discoveries, which involve a ship burial inside a mound, and argues that the tomb does not contain the body of the person for which it was built because the corpse was sent over the seas, while the underground mound was only meant to host the properties of the dead person in question. If so, then one must suppose that the speaker is actually one of the buried objects speaking from inside the grave, in particular, the sword which is complaining because the situation in which it finds itself is not usual. Actually, swords were often buried together with their owners in Anglo-Saxon times, and also among Scandinavian and continental Germanic peoples, while here not only is it separated from its lord, but it is also buried alone without him. The *eorðscræfleorðsele* of ll. 28b-29a is truly a grave, and its description is mysterious because obscurity forms part of the essence of the riddles. According to this view, the *magas* are the lord’s son who have parted the sword from its owner because they are his heirs and want to inherit it, as long as it is precious: swords were valuable and expensive, and for this reason they were often left as an inheritance to sons.

2.2.9 THE PROBLEM OF STRUCTURE

The analysis of the structure of *WL* has been one of the methods by which critics have tried to solve the main problems of interpretation of the poem, namely, the reasons for the lord's departure and the woman's exile, the husband's attitude towards his wife, and her feelings for him especially in relation to the last part of our text, which can be interpreted as either a curse or a description of the man's situation in his exile as the lady imagines it to be. Different answers to these questions led scholars to different views of the way the narrative structure and the sequence of the events are related. However, all the readings based on the study of the poem's formal features have an element in common: they come to the conclusion that the poem's structure is so well balanced that it must be the result of careful organisation on the part of the poet.

With regards to the relation between the narrative structure and the sequence of the events, Ward (1960, pp. 26-33) expresses the opinion that the poem does not follow a chronological order. The time adverbs *ærest* (l. 6a) and *ða* (l. 9a and l. 18a) make reference to the speaker's past as a whole: *ærest* means 'before the present time, the time when I am speaking' and is not a correlative with *ða* which, in its turn, does not indicate the time span subsequent to the moment when the lord left his country, but rather hints at the whole period of the lady's life in which her present sufferings had their origin. Therefore, it can be translated as "at that time" (pp. 27-28). Ward divides the poem into six sections. The first one, from l. 1 to l. 5, is a conventional opening of the same kind as those in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*: its function is to state the theme and the tone, that is, respectively, the lady's exile and her feeling of sorrow. The second one, beginning in l. 6 and ending in l. 14, is a declaration of the reasons for the separation of the woman from her lord. The third one, from l. 15 to l. 27, has the

purpose of drawing a contrast between the Wife's former happiness and her present sorrow. The fourth section, that is, ll. 27-41, is a description of the place where the lady is living in her exile and of her state of mind. The fifth section, starting in l. 42 and ending in l. 47a, is a curse cast upon the husband on the part of the Wife. Finally, the last part, namely ll. 47b-53, is another depiction of the physical and spiritual state in which an exile must live. Earlier critics used to see in l. 9 and ll. 15 and 27 the evidence that the Wife left her country twice, the first time to seek her husband of her own free will, and the second one to go into exile at her lord's command. Ward, on the contrary, interprets the passages in question as referring to only one banishment ordered by the husband himself to protect the woman from his kinsmen's revenge. He thinks that ll. 9 and 16 resemble each other: the former says that she had to leave in order to look for some protection – which means that she has none in her homeland – and the latter states that she had few friends in that country. The two lines make reference to the same thing: the lady was lonely and helpless in her husband's land and, for this reason, she had to go and seek aid somewhere else. In this perspective, l. 16 provides the reason why the lord ordered her to go away, rather than describing a supposed second banishment of the lady (Ward 1960, p.29). There is also evidence that the husband went on exile, too: in ll. 12 and 13, the speaker uses dual pronouns to talk about the secret plots of the kinsmen – their purpose was *þæt hy todælden unc* (12b), *þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice / lifdon laðlicost* (13-14a), which indicates that they aimed at destroying the husband as well as the wife. Actually, l. 33a shows that the husband is an outcast: *fromsið frean* is “the departure of the lord”. The fact that the poem does not explain the cause of his exile, and that the stress is on the kinsmen's will to separate him from the lady depends on the point of view, which is the wife's throughout the whole text: what matters to her is the separation from her husband and lord, and the focus is mainly on the consequences that she suffers from that separation.

The lady shows a sympathetic attitude towards her man, and the negative adjectives in her description of his personality are meant to describe his behaviour with his kinsmen rather than with his wife. Thus, *morþor bycgende* (l. 20b) should be translated as ‘plotting murder’ or ‘mindful of death’ and should be understood to indicate the lord’s schemes against somebody who is not the speaker; otherwise, there would be a contradiction between the man’s planning of his wife’s death and the feeling of love she shows towards him throughout the text. Similarly, *fehðu* in l. 26b should be read as the enmity suffered by the lord rather than the enmity directed by him towards the lady: “the husband possesses hatred in the sense that he endures the hatred of his kinsmen” (p. 31), and she suffers the consequences of this enmity because she is left friendless in her husband’s country and consequently has to go into exile. Evidence for this reading can be found in l. 26: there is an antithesis between *felaleofan* and *fehðu* if the latter means ‘enmity directed towards myself by my husband’, since it is strange to find such complexity of feeling — namely, a woman who loves her husband even though he hates her — in an Anglo-Saxon poem. In Ward’s opinion, this complexity of characterization in the description of feelings is only found in modern literature, and we must not expect to find it in Old English poetry. In order to view of the husband as a victim, one has to interpret the *mon* of the fourth section as somebody else, a second man who has nothing to do with the *blaford* of the first three parts. He is probably the lord of the land where the speaker has been banished and the mistreatment she suffers in this new country – the fact that she has been commanded to dwell in a solitary and joyless place – is due simply to the fact that she is an outcast, and this kind of persons were neglected in Anglo-Saxon society. For the same reason, the *geong mon* of the last section, too, has to be seen as a third man: in fact, he is cursed while the *blaford* of sections 1, 2 and 3 is described in loving terms. The formal features of the different sections demonstrate it, too: the mood associated with the *geong mon* is the subjunctive and it expresses

the wife's wish, while the mood connected to the *blaford* is the indicative. Ward's hypothesis is that this young man is one of the kinsmen, probably the leader of the revolution against the lord.

Other scholars analyse the structure of the poem more in depth, believing that the evocative force of the text depends not only on its mysterious matter, but also on its formal qualities, which highlight some themes and provide a careful organisation of the content. Stevick (1960, pp. 21-25) believes that the above-mentioned qualities are: repetition, use of certain lexical chains, syntactic parallelism. The rhetorical device of repetition involves above all the adjective *geomor* and its derivatives and compounds, which are found in ll. 1, 17, 19 and 42, but also the phrase *bliþe gebæro* (ll. 21 and 44), and the construction *ful ofi*, which is used to begin two different sentences (ll. 21 and 32). This feature also concerns words pertaining to the semantic field of longing – *langop* – (ll. 14, 29, 41 and 53). Moreover, there are some repetitions with variation connected to the word *wræc-sið* (ll. 2, 5, 38). The use of repetition is so extensive that it seems to indicate a careful organization of the poem's structure on the poet's part, and, actually, the function of this rhetorical device throughout the text is to iterate the key-concepts. For instance, the setting of sadness as the "dominant mood" of the speaker and the tone of the story is achieved through the repetition of *geomor*, which is systematic to the point that it becomes a pattern. It opens the first part of the poem with a statement of the narrator's personal feelings, and it also opens the last section with a general consideration on the situation of those who must suffer for love, thus becoming the central theme of the whole gnomic passage. Another example of the careful organisation of the poem's structure is the repetition of the theme of *langop*. Words expressing this feeling mark three out of four of the divisions that split the text, namely l. 1, l. 15, l. 27 and l. 42. The said divisions are *ond mec longade*, l. 14, *ealles þes longades*, l. 41, and *of langope*, l. 53: it is interesting to notice that the gnomic passage

that concludes the poem ends on this note. The last instance showing that rhetorical devices are used in the poem in order to underline the most important themes is the repetition of the concept of sorrow at dawn: *ubtceare*, l. 7 and *ic on ubtan ana gonge*, l. 35; the second example has particular connotations, as it is part of a contrast the woman draws between herself, who is alone, and the lovers who can stay in bed together: Stevick suggests that this contrast is the expression “of ungratified sexual passion”. (p. 22). The use of lexical chains involves a massive exploitation of terms belonging to the semantic field of misery, that is, words expressing sorrow, longing, loneliness, and exile which, scattered throughout the poem, stress the mood of the lament. Furthermore, verbs indicating “long-lasting or repeated action” are used to express the idea of endless endurance on the part of both the speaker and the lord, which gives unity to the text by providing a common element to the two characters, although they are in different situations.

The last part of the poem is difficult to interpret; it could be a curse or a description of the husband’s condition. Stevick believes that it can be better understood if analysed with the same method he has used for the rest of the poem, that is, looking for rhetorical devices with unifying function. Such devices are the repetition of the phrase *bliþe gebæro* in l. 21 and 44. In both occurrences, the phrase begins the a-verse, and the punctuation of these passages is crucial to the understanding of this section: in both cases the phrase occurs little after a compound of *geomor* – *hygegeomorne* l. 19b, and *geomormod* l. 42b – and for this reason it should be considered part of the preceding sentence, that is, the full stop marking the beginning of a new sentence should be put after it. This punctuation also grants a parallel rhythm in ll. 19-21 and 30-32, in which the b-verse of the last line would thus begin with *Ful oft*, preceded by a sequence of adjectives and adjectival phrases: as the device of repetition is central to the whole poem, syntactical parallelism should be stressed wherever possible. Actually, the fact that *bliþe gebæro*

co-occurs in both cases with the adjective “sad” has as a consequence the paradox of the lord showing a joyful countenance while being as sorrowful as the lady for their separation; this opposition of contrasting characteristics results in the ambivalence of this last section.

It is interesting to note that Stevick’s reading depends on the punctuation of ll. 21 and 44, while Ward claims that it makes no difference for his reading to put the phrase with the preceding or with the following sentence.

Jane Curry (1966, pp. 187-198) takes into account the rhetorical structure of the poem in order to choose between the different ways of translating it that have been proposed so far. She does not exclude the possibility that the poem makes reference to themes known to an hypothetical Anglo-Saxon audience and linked to sagas or legends; however, a true analogue for this text has not been found, yet, and the elements that according to some scholars connect *WL* to other texts belonging to Old Germanic and Norse literature are too small to provide evidence of a relationship of any kind. It is better to concentrate on the poem’s structure and to interpret it more simply, respecting the text as we read it in the manuscript rather than changing it to make the content fit our preconceived interpretation. Curry examines the most debated elements and indicates what, in her opinion, are the best translations given by other critics. She agrees with Ward’s idea that the *blaford* left his country as an exile. Evidence for this is provided by ll. 7b-8: if the lord’s destination is unknown to the lady, he cannot have gone to some war expedition; the only explanation is that he has been banished and compelled to wander far from his country and from men’s society. She agrees with Ward also in the interpretation of the use the speaker makes of the dual pronouns: it indicates that her husband and herself share the same lot in being victims of the kinsmen. Finally, like Ward she thinks that the lady went on exile at her lord’s command and that the husband’s purpose in sending her far from their homeland is to protect her from revenge. The analysis of *morþor* and *bliþe gebæro* leads Curry to

propose a new possible way of interpreting the first section of the poem: *morþor* could be read as “thinking of a great misery” and the misery could be the separation of husband and wife; this, on its turn, would be the cause of the man’s showing a joyful countenance while concealing his true thoughts. According to this reading, the kinsmen’s plot come first, and the man’s meditating on *morþor* comes afterwards. As a consequence, *Ða* in l. 18a has to be translated as “when”, and it could be referred either to the first time the lady met her husband, or to the moment in which she found him after leaving her country to seek him, who had already been banished. Concerning the last part of the poem, Curry, just as Stevick, does not make a definite choice between curse and gnome. However, differently from Ward, she believes it more logical to read this passage as referring to the *blaford* – that is, to the same man of the first part – and as being related to the particular situation narrated in the text rather than concerning a general philosophical statement.

The originality of Curry’s approach is the analysis of the structure of the poem in relation to its main themes. This examination reveals a perfect structural balance, given by the development of the poem through parallel constructions involving the statement of deprivation, the description of the deprivation and the consequence it has on the protagonists. Thus, the departure of the lord is followed by the departure of the speaker; their separation is first said to be under scheming, and then to be achieved, and in both passages a reference to the narrator’s situation immediately follows the mention of the kinsmen’ plot. Then, the description of the speaker’s state of misery is immediately followed by the description of her lord’s situation, which is very similar. At the centre of this structure there is the account of the love oaths, whose breaking is the cause of the narrator’s grief (Curry 1966, p. 192). Curry believes that it was the poet’s intention to create this effect of unification and balance, since in medieval literature rhetoric was essential: the main theme of *WL* is the suffering coming from the separation, and this feeling is

highlighted by a rhetorical pattern achieved through the repetition of the same pieces of information at different points in the text, and through the parallelism set between the situations of the two victims of the kinsmen's schemes. Moreover, there is a shift from the theme of separation in the first part to that of isolation in the last one, and both themes involve both the speaker and the lord, which creates an effect of unification.

Johnson, too, (1971, pp. 497-501) considers the structure of *WL* carefully organised. It is the expression of the wife's emotion, and therefore it is made up of mixtures of "narrative conclusions and emotional reflections" (p. 499); nevertheless, this does not involve any lack in logical structure – contrary to what Bouman believes – or in chronological sequence – contrary to what Ward thinks. A chronological sequence is actually present and recognisable in the first section from the time adverbs and conjunctions that introduce the different parts of her story: *ærest* (l. 6), *ðā* (ll. 9 and 18), *ongunnon þæt* (l. 11): these time expressions provide precise chronological references and, for this reason, the events have to be read in the order proposed by the narrator, while any rearrangement of the narrative sequence should be avoided. However, a breaking of the chronological sequence in the narration occurs in l.17. Up to this point the speaker relates chronologically the happenings that led to her present situation, while from this line on she mixes memories – that is, objectivity – with present emotions – that is, subjectivity – so that it is necessary to reconstruct the sequence of the events. First, husband and wife exchange oaths of loyalty; then the man starts to consider the possibility to commit a crime against one of his kinsmen. At this point, he conceals his thoughts from the lady in order not to expose her to revenge. Afterwards, he commits the above-mentioned crime or is discovered to be thinking about committing it, and is consequently exiled from his homeland: this was a common punishment for crimes in Anglo-Saxon times. Consequently, the woman has to seek protection to someone else's because she is in danger, as she is the wife of a criminal, but her

husband's kinsmen are hostile toward her; so, she is friendless in his country. Like Ward and Curry, Johnson believes that the dual pronouns *unc* and *wit* indicate that the kinsmen's plots involve both husband and wife. However, differently from them, she provides a literal interpretation of *fæhðu*: 'enmity which the relations of the deceased waged against the kindred of the murderer'¹: the lord kills somebody and subsequently orders his wife into exile because she is a possible victim of the feud, one of the persons on whom the kinsmen could take their revenge. From the place of her exile the woman utters her lament. The evidence Johnson provides for her interpretation of the *blaford* as a criminal is quite unusual: she reads *ful*, l. 46b, as "foul", according to an entry in Bosworth-Toller, rather than as the adverb "full", and *fab* – in the same line – as "criminal, outlawed", while the conventional interpretation of this word is "banished, exiled". It is possible to divide the poem into two sections according to its formal features: the first one, beginning in l. 1 and ending in l. 16, is narrative, since the speaker relates the events and the feelings they provoked. Unity is granted to this part by the time sequence: the first lines are a mixture of past and present experiences, and the final line goes back from past to present again. The second section is descriptive, and it is parallel to the first part in that the narrator returns over the events she has already told: ll. 32b-33 recall ll. 6-7a in the description of the lord's departure; ll. 26-27 repeat ll. 15-17a, that is, the husband's command to the wife to go into exile to the place where she is now: l. 29 retells the narrator's state of mind. Finally, the conclusion describes the present situation of the protagonists: they both suffer from their separation.

What emerges from this analysis is that the parallel situations of husband and wife is highlighted by the use of syntactical parallelism, repetition, narrative structure, and recurrent motifs. One recurrent motif is sorrow, a feeling that pervades the poem, as is proved by the

¹ This definition is taken from BOSWORTH-TOLLER, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary and Supplement*, Oxford 1898, 1921. See JOHNSON 1971, p. 500, footnote 11.

presence of words belonging to the semantic field of suffering in both sections. Connected to sorrow, there is the motif of longing, which is pervasive, too. There are also the motifs of “former happiness” and of “present estrangement from friends” (Johnson 1971, p. 501). The repetition of these concepts grants unity to the text and to its two different parts. Other stylistic devices that unify the poem are: the use of figurative language, for instance l. 37b *sumorlangnæ dæg*, l. 7b *ubtceare* and line 44b *breostceare*. Moreover, the use of syntactical parallelism, which can be seen in l. 28 that is repeated almost exactly by l. 36, with only a variation in the b-verse: “*in þam eorðscrafē*” becomes “*geond þas eorðscrafu*”; and in ll. 37- 38, which begin with the same expression: “*þær ic*” followed by a modal verb. Like Curry and Stevick, she considers repetition and the other rhetorical devices the unifying element of the text.

2.3 *WULF AND EADWACER AND THE WIFE'S LAMENT AS FRAUENLIEDER*

In the 1950s a new trend of interpretation of *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* appeared in consequence of Frings's theory about the popular *Frauenlieder* and Spitzer's discoveries of a small number of Mozarabic lyrics¹, short poems belonging to the genre of folk poetry voiced by women lamenting their separation from their beloved. Frings's thesis is that the courtly love poetry developed from the *Frauenlieder*, examples of which can be found in almost every European language and even in extra-European literatures such as the Chinese and the Russian. Spitzer provides the newly found Mozarabic lyric in support to Frings's ideas, that is, a corpus of lyric poems composed in Mozarabic, a romance language spoken in Spain during the Arabic domination. Both types of poetry share the feature of being love laments voiced by women, often at dawn, for some absent lover whose embrace they long for. Since the 1960s some scholars, following this path, have put *WL* in relation to the *Frauenlieder*, reading it and *WE* as Old English examples of medieval women's songs.

The first critic to propose this interpretation of *WL* was Kemp Malone (1962, pp. 106-17), who takes the poem to be the lament of woman upon the separation from her beloved husband, made hostile towards her by his kinsmen's slanders, probably about a supposed infidelity on her part. The gnomic conclusion reveals that the lady has not lost the hope of being reunited with her lord and that she is waiting for him to come. Some linguistic features and the style lead Malone to the conclusion that the poem must have been composed earlier than the middle of the tenth century and that it is not a typical product of the classical tradition of Anglo-Saxon poetry, although it does show to have been influenced by it. The fact that the

¹ T. FRINGS, "Minnesinger und Troubadors", *Vorträge und Schriften*, 34, 1949.

L. SPITZER, "The Mozarabic Lyric and Theodor Frings's Theories", *Classical Literature*, 4, 1952, pp. 1-22.

composition of *WL* was affected just to some extent by the tradition is a sign that the poem is of popular origin. This testifies to the existence of an English *Frauenlied* earlier than the tenth century. Concerning *WE*, Malone argues that it is based on a story known by the poet and his audience, but unknown and impossible to reconstruct for us. What has remained is a “lyric monologue, put in the mouth of a woman, who tells us how she feels rather than what has happened” (p. 108). Malone insists on the point that the poem is only a part of a longer work because this is essential to his interpretation of it as a piece of popular poetry rather than of courtly or learned poetry. His translation and notes to the text show a few discrepancies with previous readings and editions. The first is found in l. 2, where the verb *apecgan* is glossed as “take him in” in the sense of “welcome him as they would a gift” (p. 108): when he is in danger, Wulf can ask for refuge to the woman’s kinsmen, or to the fierce men on the island where he is — which means that Malone believes that the *wæltreowe weras* of l. 6 have nothing to do with the *leodum* of l. 1. Another peculiar interpretation is that of *to þon*, l. 12a, as meaning “up to a point”. It would be referred to the pleasure the speaker experienced in Eadwacer’s embraces, which was just to a certain extent, because she missed her lover and could not be consoled by her husband. Malone comments that these lines show the poet’s understanding of the complexities and contradictions of the human heart. On the structure of the poem, the critic follows the idea that it is an early example of *ljóðabáttr*, on the basis that half of the lines form part of couplets composed by a long line followed by a half-line. He stresses the presence of irregular metre in some lines, and the fact that repetition is a feature of this poem, rather than variation. All these considerations are used, again, as evidence that the text cannot have a learned or courtly origin.

Davidson (1975, pp. 451-62) provides further evidence to Malone's theory by comparing *WL* to some of the *Cambridge Songs*, a corpus of Latin lyrics preserved in a manuscript in Cambridge University Library², whose theme is erotic love. If it is true that these poems are written in Latin, it is also significant that they were copied for the English monastery of St. Augustine at Canterbury, which proves that interest in love and physical desire was not extraneous to the Anglo-Saxon culture (p.451). This is also testified to by the Church's attempt to eradicate erotic songs in northern countries ever since the end of the eighth century, when we have proofs that Carolingian nuns were prevented from writing love poems. The same effort can be recognised in the erasures in the most explicitly sexual of the *Cambridge Songs*, Song no. 49 . The Church's and monks' uneasiness with this kind of theme demonstrates that erotic songs were indeed composed in Anglo-Saxon England, contrary to what most scholars maintain on the basis of Tacitus' description of women's way of life. His *Germania* provides a chaste image of both girls and married women and shows that tough punishments were inflicted upon the charge of infidelity: a disloyal wife could be banished from her country. Davidson, however, points out that Tacitus's purpose in writing his work was to praise Rome's civilisation against the example of the Germanic tribes' barbarism; in this light, the description of the Germanic chastity and uninteresting in the erotic acquires the shade of an indirect criticism of the Roman lenient attitude towards sex. Davidson compares *WL* to three of the Cambridge Songs. The first one is *Veni dilectissime* — the above-mentioned no. 49 — a woman's invocation for her beloved to enjoy love's pleasures together with her effected through rather explicit metaphors. The second one is *Nam languens*, a lady's account of her waking up at dawn to walk bare-footed in the snow to the shore, in the hope to see her man's ship approaching. The last one is *Levis exurgit zephirus*, which shares with *WL* the picture of the woman sitting alone and suffering for

² Cambridge University Library MS. Gg. v. 35.

her beloved's absence. All of them are examples of women's love song, a popular genre widespread across the world from antiquity: their first instances are recorded in ancient Egypt and they are present in both northern and southern Europe in the Middle Ages. The presence of this literary type in medieval England, and hence the proof that erotic themes were not extraneous to that culture, suggest that *WL* and *WE* can be considered native Old English expressions of that tradition. The fact that there exist just two Anglo-Saxon women's songs must not prevent one from acknowledging their belonging in that genre, as they are expressions of a popular form of poetry, which was naturally transmitted orally: this means that *WL* and *Wu* are the only two surviving love poems, rather than the only two love poems ever composed in medieval England. Davidson explains *WL* and *Wu* to be manifestations of the archetype of women's love song, which he considers a *mythos* on the basis of the almost universal existence of this literary form. The themes of the two Old English poems respond to the fundamental features of this archetype, namely, the themes of desire and separation, which are the central elements with which the texts deal. In other words, it is not the external causes of the speakers' longing that have to be analysed, but rather the longing itself, which has the function to have the audience sympathise with the narrator and participate in her desire: the more final the separation, the higher the erotic desire. The situation of the Wife in a desolate dwelling increases the desire, because it underlines her being socially and psychologically "displaced" (pp. 458-59).

Lois Bragg (1989, pp. 257-68), too, places *WL* in the tradition of women's love songs. She analyses *WL* and *WE* in terms of similarities with women's lyrics of various genres, such as the Mozarabic *kharjas*, the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo* and the *Frauenlieder*, and in terms of differences with the male-voiced love poems. Contrary to Davidson she believes that

the two Old English texts are instances of women's love lyrics rather than of women's folksongs: there is not enough evidence to testify to the oral and popular nature of these compositions, while there are proofs that connect them to the contemporary men's lyrics and the later continental courtly women's love poetry. The conventions that characterise every type of women's lyrics throughout the Middle Ages and everywhere in Europe are: the manifestation of sexual desire, the lamented separation from a lover and the return of the said lover to the speaker. The first two are the themes of both *WE* and *WL*, whose speakers lament their situation of distance from their beloved; the Wife in particular expresses erotic desire explicitly by contrasting her situation with that of the "*frynd on eorþan*" (33b). The third one is not present in the Old English poems, but, as a matter of fact, the man's return is made impossible by external factors in some of the women's lyrics and in almost all the poems of the women troubadours. This latter subtype of women's lyrics shares with *WL* also the feature of the mature woman: the Wife says that she has suffered ever since she was young, which implies that she is not so anymore. Moreover, *WL* and *WE* have two of the typical conventions of men's love lyrics: the first one is the presence of some people who cause the lovers' separation; the second one is the love-sickness felt by both of them: the narrator of *WL* envisions her beloved enduring the same sorrows as hers. The two English lyrics, however, are characterised by the presence of a natural background that is tuned to the speakers' state of mind reflecting their emotions, which is quite a unique feature for women's love poems, since usually they either lack any kind of natural imagery or set a contrast between the beauty of the landscape and the grief in the protagonists' heart; this element can be explained as typically Anglo-Saxon, as it is present in the other elegies of the Exeter Book (Bragg 1989, pp. 266-67).

More recently Glenn Wright (2001, pp. 11-14) has compared *WL* to a Middle English lyric called *Now springs the spray*, found in Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 135. It presents the situation of a male narrator who overhears a girl's lament for her love cares, and its formal features seem to point to closer similarity with the older French *chanson d'aventure* than with the corresponding but later English tradition, except for the absence of the last stanza in which the narrator typically consoles the maiden. The conclusion of *Now Springs the Spray* rather resembles quite strikingly the final gnomic passage of *WL*: the former says "*wai es him I louue-longinge / sal libben ai*", which is the translation of "*Wa bið þam þe sceal / of langoþe leofes abidan*". Moreover, in both poems the speakers dwell in isolated places and lament broken love oaths, and envision their beloved's punishment in the form of a similar situation. Wright suggests that *WL* is the survivor of a genre of elegiac female lament which was typically insular and which influenced the way the later French *chanson d'aventure* was assimilated in England, in the sense that English poets could have used French material adapting it to an already existing tradition of women's lyric, which would explain the differences between *Now Springs the Spray* and the French love poems.

A different type of comparison between *WL* and the Latin poetic tradition has been set by Ashby Kinch (2006, pp. 121-153), who puts the Old English poem in relation to a Latin elegiac lament found in Catullus 64. It is Ariadne's complaint for Theseus, who has betrayed the love oaths they had previously exchanged abandoning her on a desert island. The situation of Ariadne is very similar to that of the Wife, as she is left alone by a man in a solitary place, desolate and distant from other human beings; the gloominess of the island mirrors the woman's feelings just as the grimness of the Wife's dwelling provides a sympathetic background to her state of mind. But the resemblance is even closer: the male characters share the same

features, which are described with the same terms. Ariadne says of Theseus: *celans dulci crudelia forma / consilia* (175-76), and the lady in *WL* says of her lord *morþor hycgende / bliþe gebæro* (20b-21a), both sentences meaning exactly “concealing evil thoughts under a cheerful demeanour”. Not only the image of the men, but also the use of rhetoric in these sentence is strikingly similar. Catullus’s syntactical structure in these lines is meant to underline Theseus’s moral corruptness by placing the terms *malus* and *hospes* respectively at the beginning and at the end of the sentence — the whole passage is *nec malus haec celans dulci crudelia forma / consilia in nostris requiesset sedibus hospes* —, thus achieving the effect of emphasising the contrast they make, as the laws of hospitality were sacred in ancient Greek and Roman culture. *WL* expresses the concepts of deceit, of a cheerful behaviour and of evil plans through the use of paratactic oppositions, which has a rhetorical effect in Old English. Another element of similarity is the final passage of both poems. Ariadne’s last words are a curse to the man who has broken the oath he had made to her: she invokes the goddesses’ punishment upon him, so that he may experience the same suffering, the same state of mind as hers; and actually, after her words the poem ends with the account of Theseus forgetting the promise made to his father to unfurl white sails if he was still alive, and Aegeus consequently committing suicide by drowning himself into the sea. The Wife’s concluding lines are a curse, too: she wishes her husband to suffer the same pains as hers by envisioning a parallel situation for him: isolation in a desolate place and yearning for the former happiness. Both Ariadne’s and the Wife’s curse are expressed in the subjunctive mood. The above-mentioned formal features are not the only elements of similarity between the two poems: the most important thing they share is their criticism to the respective cultures in which they belong. The rhetorical emphasis Catullus puts on the theme of betrayed hospitality is meant to highlight his vision of his world as degraded, which is due to

the lack of *fides*, that is fidelity, in social relationships. The poet is concerned with the same topic also in the Lesbia cycle, where his love relationship to the woman is described in normative ethical language, so that the value of fidelity that in the Roman culture was central to the relation of friendship between men is applied to the love relation between man and woman. The same ethical language is used by Ariadne in her lament, and the effect is a critic of the hero's behaviour which is intended to convey a wider criticism of the heroic code of values, depicted as contrasting with the moral code of fidelity that is at the basis of personal relationships in ancient Rome. Similarly, the rhetorical device used in the last passage of *WL* has the function to stress the contrast between the heroic ethical code requesting the hero to hide his thoughts under a cheerful behaviour, and the necessity of loyalty and sincerity in interpersonal and love relationships. Kinch explains this clash of values in the light of the Freawaru episode in *Beowulf*: the poet says that Ingeld's love for his wife will grow colder and colder with the raising of the feud between his people and hers; this implies that the prince loved the young woman, but the Anglo-Saxon ethical code wants a lord to choose kin relations over love ones in the case of a feud. The situation in *WL* is similar, as it stages a man's decision to abandon his wife, that is, to break a personal oath of loyalty, in order to follow his kin, that is, to preserve the social bonds based on other vows of loyalty. Kinch believes that the similarity of pattern in the Latin and the Old English poem is due to the reception of Catullus 64 or another Roman source in the tenth century in England; the closeness in form, theme and purpose of the two lyrics seems more than mere chance. Rather, it looks like the Anglo-Saxon poet has recognised the force of the criticism effected by Catullus by applying the language of ethical norms to a personal love relationship between a man and a woman, and has exploited that potential by having a female voice criticising one of the central moral rules of the heroic

Anglo-Saxon world through a personal lament. In support of her theory, Kinch argues that Catullus's reception in England may have started in the tenth century. Although the English role in the medieval transmission of the Latin poet is held to be secondary, a Catullian echo is found in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. This can be explained by supposing that a manuscript containing Catullus's poetry may have reached England as early as the Anglo-Saxon period, thanks to the key role played by English monasteries in the preservation and circulation of Latin culture in the Middle Ages.

2.4 THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

2.4.1 THE UNITY OF THE POEM AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE *RIDDLES*

In his *editio princeps* of the Exeter Book, Benjamin Thorpe recognizes the presence of three riddles before *HM*, entitling the latter *A Fragment*. His first line corresponds to K-D l. 12, *Hwæt þec þon biddan het*. Thorpe's Riddle 1 corresponds to what is now called Riddle 30b, his Riddle 2 to Riddle 60, and his Riddle 3 to *HM* ll. 1-12. The editor gives no reasons for his edition of these texts; the only note he makes on them is a complaint about "the profound ignorance of the circumstances under which they were written and of the persons, the events, and the places to which they allude" (Thorpe 1842, pp. ix-x).

Louis Klipstein's version of *HM* starts at the same point as Thorpe's *Fragment*, but his treatment of the text is curious, and also unique in comparison with every other edition (Klipstein 1849, pp. 322-24, 437). Actually, the scholar changes the order of the last two passages as they appear in the MS. Klipstein's text roughly corresponds to the present edition of *HM* up to l. 35a – roughly in the sense that his line-division and numbering do not coincide with mine; actually, my l. 35a corresponds to his l. 44, although his text omits what in mine are the first twelve lines. Then, ll. 35a-40 of my edition are completely omitted in Klipstein's edition, which in their place has three lines of asterisks indicating that the MS. is not readable. The peculiar feature of this work, however, is that the passage immediately following the above-mentioned lines, that is ll. 41a-48a of my edition – *nyde gebæded ... þeodnes dohtor* – is printed after what in every other edition is the last passage, the one containing the runic symbols, namely ll. 48b-54b – *gif he þin beneah... ofþ gespræconn*. The reason is explained in a note to the text (Klipstein 1849, p. 437), which points out that the passage is "evidently a continuation of

the preceding address". Klipstein believes that *HM* is the fragment of an episode from a longer poem, probably composed before the advent of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. He explains it as the story of two male friends who have been separated in former times, one of whom now sends a messenger carrying a runestick with an invitation to join him. The transposition of the above-mentioned passage makes it clear, in Klipstein's opinion, that the story ends with the actual meeting of the two men.

Ettmüller's incipit of *HM* (1850, pp. 202-03) coincides with l. 13 of the present edition – and also of K-D and all subsequent editions. Contrary to Thorpe, he gives the poem a title, namely *Wreccan þeodnes ærend to his bryde* ("A banished lord's message to his wife"), but the only note he makes on the text is about its position among the riddles, whose reason he finds in the presence of the runic passage. He also points out that the poem seems fragmentary – there is a line of omission marks between the title and the first line –, and suggests that it might be a part of a heroic poem.

F.A. Blackburn is the first scholar to provide a full analysis of *HM* (Blackburn 1900, pp. 1-13). He challenges Grein's view – proposed again by Wülker and Assmann – that Thorpe's third and fourth pieces are one poem. He states that Thorpe's first piece is surely a riddle on the basis that, as Grein had already recognized, the text in question is another version of Riddle 30 – which is also the reason why now it is known as Riddle 30b. The scholar excludes the possibility that the copy of a text already present in the codex was made intentionally; he also points out that the differences between *Riddle 30* and *Riddle 30b* are many, which means that they come from distinct sources. Therefore, he suggests that the Exeter Book scribe found this text in a MS. in which it had been attached to *HM*, and that he copied it in the same way because he did not realize that it was a copy of a riddle he had already transcribed in another

place in the MS. The mistake may have been generated by some copyist who, at some point in the transmission of these texts, understood Riddle 30b to be part of *HM* because both texts are spoken by a beam (“tree, log, ship and cross”) – which is also the solution of the riddle.

Regarding Thorpe’s second piece – Grein’s *Riddle 61*–, Blackburn criticises the other editors’ belief that it is a riddle on the grounds that none of the proposed solutions makes perfect sense, and that the poem lacks the contradictory sentences which are usually found in the riddles of the descriptive type. He considers the text an Anglo-Saxon type of letter, that is, carved on a piece of wood and in runic form. Since the poem following it is nothing else than a letter, he thinks it sensible to state that Riddle 60 is actually a part of *HM* in which the letter-messenger introduces itself, that is its origin and its life before being transformed into a runestick. As for the content of the message itself, and the situation described in the poem, Blackburn explains it as a medieval romance in which a man woos his lord’s daughter and is subsequently banished for this. After gaining wealth and fame in a foreign country, he sends his beloved a letter to let her know that he is now worthy of her and how she can reach him. The idea that the poem is a romance would be substantiated by the tone of secrecy conveyed by *HM* l. 1, Riddle 60 ll. 16-17, and the presence of the runes, which must be a secret cipher meant to be understood just by the lady. The reference to the cuckoo’s song as a signal for departure would be another feature consistent with the romance theory.

Frederick Tupper (1910, pp. 198-99) includes Thorpe’s second piece in his edition of the Exeter Book riddles, numbering it as 61. He follows Dietrich’s view that a close analogue of this poem is found in Symphosius’ *Aenigma 2*, and he points out that both the Latin and the Old English texts have the same solution, that is “reed-pen”. He comments on Blackburn’s theory that it is based on an “ingenious” attempt to make the parts of the text fit together

conveniently, and that “it calmly ignores the very real relation between Rid. 61 and Symphosius” (Tupper 1910, p. 199).

Ernst Sieper criticizes Blackburn’s view on *Riddle 61* by stating that the absence of contradictory statements alone cannot be considered a final proof that the poem is not a riddle (Sieper 1915, p. 211). He supports the view that Thorpe’s third and fourth fragments are one poem, and he also claims that it is complete in itself – that is, he writes against the view that it is a fragment of a longer work. He expresses the opinion that the speaker of *HM* is not the rune-stick, but rather a human messenger carrying the stick on which just the runic letters are carved.

Nora Kershaw (1922, pp. 37-43, 176-77) summarizes the views of the above-mentioned critics, highlighting especially those of Blackburn and Tupper, and concludes: “the evidence does not seem to me to be sufficiently decisive to admit of a positive answer to the questions that have been raised”. As for Blackburn, his observation that Riddle 61 and *HM* seem connected in theme is not senseless, but their being one and the same poem cannot be proved, and considering the former a unit in itself does not necessarily mean reading it as a riddle, rather than another type of poem. Regarding Tupper, his remarks about the similarity of Riddle 61 and the Arundo Riddle seems more than reasonable, but the texts he produces as evidence are too late to support his thesis that Symphosius’ *aenigma* was very popular and well-known at the time of composition of the Exeter Book.

The debate over the nature of *Riddle 61* and its connection with *HM* has been the main topic of discussion on this poem during all its critical history. Although Nora Kershaw’s work was considered the most complete with regards to the notes and the commentaries on the texts edited, subsequent scholars did not accept the view it expresses on the impossibility to decide

whether riddle 61 is actually a riddle or rather a part of *HM*. A few years after Kershaw's edition, Albert S. Cook published a collection of translations from Old English verse containing, among the other texts, also *HM* (Cook 1926, pp. 61-63). The brief introduction to the translated poem gives it for a fact that riddle 61 is the first of the two portions composing a lyric that Cook entitles *A Love-Letter*, and also that the speaker is the letter itself, rather than a human messenger. Cook acknowledges that both the translation and the arrangement are Blackburn's, but he does not mention the large commentary and demonstration Blackburn makes before coming to that arrangement. The only note recognizing all the past criticism on the texts in question is a line pointing out that the two parts of Cook's *Love-Letter* "were formerly designated respectively as *Riddle 61 (60)* and *The Husband's Message*" – a remark that is quite conclusive in tone, and whose confidence has been proved to be wrong by all the subsequent scholars who have challenged Cook's opinion.

Modern editors usually have a more objective approach to the critical history of *HM*. Anne Klinck accounts for all the main theories on the poem in her introduction to the text and in the textual notes (Klinck 1992, pp. 56-60). She acknowledges that there is a resemblance between *Riddle 61* and the opening lines of *HM*, and she quotes the past theories about the connection between them; moreover, she prints the two texts together, even though she believes that they are distinct, for the sake of objectiveness towards the "significant body of counter-opinion". However, she points out that the riddle and the elegy have been juxtaposed because some scribe noticed the similarity that we also recognize. About the question of the genre, Klinck highlights that *HM* is not elegiac in the usual sense of the word", referring to the possibility that the speaker is the message itself and to the use of the runic letters, elements which give the poem a certain riddle-like quality. The similarity of *WE* to the *Riddles*, and the

enigmatic nature of *WL* lead the scholar to the conclusion that “there is a certain overlap in technique between the genres”.

2.4.2 CHRISTIAN ALLEGORY

The idea that *The Husband's Message* is connected with Christian symbolism is quite recent, but since its appearance in the 1960s it has never ceased to be re-examined and re-proposed.

The father of this theory is M.J. Swanton (1964, pp. 269-90), who reads *WL* as an allegory of the Church yearning for its reunion with its lord, that is Christ, after his departure, and lamenting its miserable life in the world, which is wasting away in the Last Age before Christ's second coming. *HM* would be a complementary poem, in the form of the Lord's exhortation for his Heavenly Bride, the Church, to set on the same journey that he has already taken and be reunited with him in Heaven. Swanton's reason for reading the two pieces together is their similarity in form and content, and their position in the MS. – that is, between religious texts –, which is meaningful because the arrangement of the Exeter Book is not casual: if these poems appear in this codex among such works, they must be connected in some way with them. Swanton also assumes that the source of the poems must be something familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience, probably an eighth century audience, since some of the religious texts in the same MS. are linked with the Cynewulfian school. There is no reason to believe that *WL* and *HM* were originally pagan works, and that some copyist at some point eliminated all references to an Old Germanic source from them in order to give them a universal tone, for the salvation of the soul, because some poems with such specific references – *Deor* and *Widsið* – have survived in the Exeter Book.

Swanton sets a comparison with the eighth-century poem *Guðlac A*, based on the similarity of its theme with those in *WL* and *HM* – the Journey of Life and Death and the idea of the Heavenly Bride. The saint lived a life of deprivation and isolation in a grove under a hill,

and at his death he was summoned to journey towards his eternal home in heaven. The image of God and the Church as a bridegroom and his bride comes from the *Song of Songs*, it is commonly found in patristic writings and it became part of the theological apparatus thanks to Gregory and Augustine. This love imagery was then absorbed by Celtic and Anglo-Saxon church literature – Ælfric’s homilies are an example of this process; hence it passed to the other Anglo-Saxon literary genres, as shown by its presence in the works of Cynewulf. Some of the thematic features peculiar of these texts can be read in the same light; for instance, the abodes of both women are similar to the descriptions of the world in its last days found in Bede’s writings and in some Old English homilies. Their present gloomy situation is contrasted with their former state of happiness by means of the term *woruldrice*, a word which, in religious texts, indicates the world of men as contrasted with the heavenly kingdom. Another example is the tone, which Swanton defines “continuous” (1964, p. 280), since there are no perfective actions in either *WL* or *HM* except for the departure of the Man; the scholar points out that the continuous mood in Old English poetry is usually found in religious or gnomic poetry. Even the main problem in *HM* may be solved within the framework of the Christian interpretation. The right reading of the runes is that proposed by Kock (1921, pp. 122-23), *sigel-rad, ear-wyn on mon*, where all the symbols, except M, are combined in couples, and whose meaning is that the oath was taken by “Heaven, Earth and Man”. Swanton quotes Kock’s observation that this oath is forbidden by Christ in Matthew V, and explains that to an eighth century audience it would be clear that such an oath could have been pronounced just by Christ himself.

W.F. Bolton’s aim in his paper (Bolton 1968-69, pp. 337-51) is to examine “the lexical and structural materials most directly assimilated into the OE poems” (p. 338), and to explain the reason why these poems were composed by defining the way in which the Christian Latin

tradition was reworked in the process of composition. His starting point is Swanton's article (1964, pp. 269-90), which Bolton considers lacking in the substantiation of the comparison with the documents of the Christian tradition he takes into account. Bolton points out a series of very close lexical resemblances between *WL*, *HM* and the *Song of Songs*, which Swanton indicated as a source for the two poems. Some of them appear to be literal OE translations from the Latin, others sound more like echoes, but they all point to a "recurrent relationship between the OE poems and the *Song of Songs*". He takes this as a proof that the two texts are strongly related, and suggests that the runes in *HM* are involved in this textual relationship, as well. Swanton was right in confirming Kock's interpretation of the runes and in explaining them as the oath that only Christ himself can make, because he has forbidden everyone else to make it in Matthew 5.33-35. He was also right in explaining the presence of the runes at that point in the poem as similar to the use of Greek letters at crucial points in the Scriptures (Bolton 1968-69, p. 339). The runes are the object of the verb *gehyre/genyre*, together with the infinitive *benemnan*. This construction implies that they stand for either a person or a personified object. In the former case, it is reasonable to believe that they indicate the person's name: SR-EAW-M can be anagrammed into *SMEARW-*, an OE word used in glosses of the Bible to translate the Latin *oleum*, and a term found in *Song of Songs* 1.2: *Oleum effusum nomen tuum* – one more indication of the close textual relationship between *HM* and the biblical poem.

R.E. Kaske's study (1967, pp. 41-71) proposes to read *HM* and *Riddle 60* as one poem containing a religious allegory. This article was published after Swanton's, but an earlier and shorter version of it had already been presented as a paper in 1963. Kaske's reason for exploring the possible connections between two Old English poems generally held to be secular and

Christian literature is the belief that the eighteenth century scholars who started the exploration of Anglo-Saxon poetry were biased in their approaches, because they were already interested in Old Germanic myths and legends, and, therefore, they were naturally inclined to look for this type of source in the extant corpus of Old English literature. It is true that *HM* deals with a situation that seems recognizable, and that this points to some lost longer work of which the poem could have been a part, or to some forgotten story of which our text could be an allusive version. However, Kaske believes that, unless the longer work or lost story in question are found in some other manuscript, there is no way for us to verify the correctness of such theories, which, therefore, should only be taken into consideration when any other possible explanation is proved to be unsustainable. Kaske's interpretation is based on the meaning of the runic passage. His article on *Medium Ævum* 33 (Kaske 1964, pp. 204-06) relates the results of the examination of fol. 123b under ultra-violet light, concluding that the verb on l. 66a, generally edited as *gecyre* or *gehyre*, is actually spelt *genyre* in the MS.; it is explained as a variation of the first person singular present indicative of *genyrwan* ("to constrain"). Kaske's translation of the passage is: "I constrain into unity heaven, a delightful earth and mankind – [constrain] it to be declared by oath, etc." (Kaske 1964, p. 49). These lines remind him of the body of literature on the Cross, which is identified with the Lignum Vitae and is described as a mystery "binding into unity all creation" (p. 47). Homilies, religious poems and hagiographies in Latin, dating back to early Christianity, portray the Cross as a tree whose roots are in the earth – that is, in the world of Men – and which bears fruit in Heaven; such works often stress the fact that the Cross strongly connects mankind, heaven and earth. Kaske finds evidence of this particular view of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon art and literature: an instance is the Newent funerary stone¹, representing

¹ Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Newent (Glos.).

God's hand above the cross, which is planted on earth. Assuming that the speaker in *HM* is a piece of wood or a tree, the poem can be compared to Tatwine's and Eusebius's Latin riddles and to the *Dream of the Rood*, in which the speaker is the Cross; the fact that in *HM* it is called simply a *beam* is easily explained by the medieval usage of the Latin words *arbor* and *lignum*, and of the Old English words *tree*, *beam* and *wudu* to refer to the Cross. In this case, Kaske's interpretation of the runic passage would correspond perfectly with the traditional image of the Cross unifying heaven, earth and mankind. The scholar believes that an alternative reading is possible, and that it reinforces the view of the speaker in *HM* as the Cross. Medieval religious writings also propose a more complex explanation of the Crucifixion: the Cross is compared to Jacob's ladder, actually extending from earth to heaven and thus physically joining the two worlds, while, at the same time, supporting Christ – the Man – between them. In the light of these considerations, Kaske suggests that the rune \mathfrak{M} be read as "the man", that is Christ, rather than "mankind". The oath mentioned in the last part of the runic passage in *HM* would be a reference to the common Anglo-Saxon practice of using the Cross to confirm vows. The whole poem can be proved to support this reading of ll. 123-24 when it is compared to some of the Church Fathers' sermons, in which the Cross is described as the means of the reunification between the divine Bridegroom – that is, Christ – and humankind. Kaske concludes that *HM* is a poetical development of the theme of God as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Heavenly Bride, in the form of a lover's message exhorting the beloved to join him, a message carried by the Cross, which is the means of this reunification.

Margaret E. Goldsmith reads the poem as an obscure, deliberately enigmatic allegory on the theme of the spreading of the gospel, composed by intertwined images from the Psalms, the Prophets and Revelation (1975, pp. 242-63). Bede's exegetical works offer a good starting point

to understand the way in which the biblical themes are at work under the surface of *HM*. The interpretation of 𐌺.𐌹. (“S.R.”) as *sigel-rad*, that is “sun-road”, “sun-course”, reminds Goldsmith of *Beowulf* 1. 1966 *sigel suðan fus*, and leads her to interpret the runic passage as Elliott, namely “Follow the sun’s path south across the ocean to find joy with the man who is waiting for you”, where the ocean is ƿ (“EA”), *ear* possibly meaning “sea” as well as “earth”. Bede’s commentaries on the Bible present Christ as an exile refused by his own people, and welcomed by the Gentiles, and they couple this image to that of Abraham setting on his southward journey to find the promised land, according to the exegetical practice of reading the Old Testament typologically, that is as an allegorical prophecy of the life of Christ. Bede explains that the southern land Abraham is to seek represents the warmth of Christ’s love, which heats the hearts of the chosen ones. Bede’s commentary on these passages from the Scripture proceeds with a moral and analogical interpretation that includes Psalm 44 and its exhortation to the “daughter” to leave her homeland and family in order to join her lord – an image that the Anglo-Saxon scholar explains as God’s summons to the Church, his Heavenly Bride. Goldsmith recognises that, so far, her analysis reaches quite the same results as Swanton’s and Kaske’s readings. However, she focuses on a phrase that the above-mentioned scholars overlooked, namely *wordbeotunga...on ærdagum* (ll. 15-16, “promises...in earlier days”), arguing that it is another biblical echo. The books of Genesis, Isaias, Ezechiel and the Psalms contain references to the renewal of the old promises the Lord made to Abraham, and in the Psalms and Isaias oaths are taken to confirm the vow. On the basis of these correspondences Goldsmith claims that “the ideas in *HM* are [...] a distillation from these and other allegorical interpretations of associated biblical texts” (p. 254), and this leads her to believe that the central object in the poem, that is the rune-staff, has its source in the Bible, as well. She quotes the rod described in

the book of Ezechiel, inscribed with the names of all the tribes of the north and the south and symbolising the union of all the nations under the King of Heaven; this idea would be supported by interpreting *treocyn* in l. 2a (literally “species of tree”) as “the lineage of the Tree”, referring to the Tree of Jesse, whose descendant is Christ, and, therefore, ultimately indicating “the people of the Cross”. The association of the tree and the Cross is the key to understand the image of the sea-journey that the lady – who stands for the Church – must undertake: in one of his commentaries Bede explains that the Cross, which is the tree of the Lord’s passion, can be connected to the boat in which Jesus and his disciples crossed the Galilee sea, since the latter image represents the voyage through life on earth to the heavenly kingdom. Goldsmith concludes that the speaker of the poem is not the Cross, as Kaske maintains, but rather the reed-pen representing the instrument through which the word of God has been written down for mankind. The source of this image would be a line in Psalm 44: *Lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis*; Augustine explains that the tongue is that of God, who has inspired the writing of the Scripture, and that it is described as a *calamus* – that is a reed, a reed-pen – because the word of the Lord is more similar to written than to spoken texts, as it lasts forever. In this light, it is possible to interpret the runic passage at the end of *HM* as a reference to the oath that Christ will speak during his Second Coming, which the reed-pen will witness: Revelation 10: 6-7 describes the Seventh Angel, having a face like the sun and standing on earth and sea, and swearing by Christ – the Man – that the mystery of God will be finished. According to Goldsmith, the complex imagery of *HM* is deliberately enigmatic, because it is meant to be “a paradigm for the work of propagating the hidden truths of the gospel” (p. 261).

2.4.3 THE SPEAKER'S IDENTITY

The question of the speaker has often been connected to that of *Riddle 61* and its connection with *HM*; for this reason, it has been one of the most debated.

Roy F. Leslie objects to Blackburn's idea that the speaker is the personified rune-stave on the basis of some textual elements that make him think of a human speaker (Leslie 1988, pp. 12-22). The first of these is the reference to the several voyages that the messenger has made throughout his life: the rune-staff mentioned in *HM*, carrying that particular message, can only have made the journey from the lord to his distant lady. The second element in contrast with Blackburn's theory is l. 13b *se þisne beam agrof* ("who carved this stick"): if the speaker were the rune-stick, it would be referring to itself in the third person in this passage, but Leslie deems it unlikely on the basis of the opening of the poem, where the messenger describes his life in the first person (see l. 3a *mec*, "me"). The scholar believes that the vocabulary denoting the relationship between lord and speaker supports his theory, as well, since terms like *mondryhten* (l. 7a, " "), *freatan* (l. 10b, "lord") and *wine* (l. 39b, "friend") typically describe the lord-retainer relationship in Old English poetry. Finally, according to Leslie the use of the verb *sægdan* in l. 31b *þæs þe he me sægde* ("those which he told me") points to a human speaker, because the rune-staff would have used the verb "write" instead. The poem is best explained as a human messenger's speech composed of an introduction, where he shows the stick and the carved message, and he talks about his identity, his past voyages and this particular journey, a central part containing the husband's message, and a final climatic passage where the runic message is shown.

Earl R. Anderson has written twice on the question of the speaker. In his first work on the subject (Anderson 1973, pp. 238-46), he responds to Leslie's statement that the speaker is human by arguing that the last part of *HM* (ll. 50 ff.) rather agrees with the theory that the rune-staff is the speaker, and he accordingly suggests that the poem is composed of two parts, the former – ll. 1-12 – being spoken by the human messenger who brings the stick to the woman, and the second – ll. 13-54 – being a prosopopoeic speech of the object itself, used as a means of conveying the lady's thoughts while reading the runic message. The scholar argues that the question of the speaker must be answered separately from the interpretation of the runic passage at the end of the poem, and that the problem with the previous interpretations is their attempt to explain both aspects at the same time. This is what Kaske (1964, pp. 204-06) does in reading *HM* as a poem on the Cross: he first reconstructs the meaning of the runes, and then suggests that the message they convey is best understood if placed in an allegorical frame of reference in which the messenger is the Cross and the message is an invitation to the Church to join her Heavenly Bridegroom. Anderson points out the details in the text of *HM* that tell against Kaske's interpretation: among the others, ll. 44b-48, which Kaske compares to the contrast between heavenly and earthly life drawn in *The Dream of the Rood* ll. 135-44, and which Anderson reads as a clear indication that the lord in *HM* has found joy in his new life on earth – new because he has started it in a foreign place, after being driven away by the feud that involved him in his homeland. The phrase *ofer eorþan* ("on earth", l. 47a) is the clue to the unravelling of this passage, together with ll. 30-35a, which clearly state that the husband wants nothing in this world except for his wife (or lover). To Leslie's argument that the reference to the frequent voyages points to a human speaker, Anderson answers that the meaning of final sentence of *HM*, ll. 49-54, has to be strained to agree with the human messenger theory: the

problem is in the verb, which Anderson reads as *genyre*, following Kaske's examination of the word under ultra-violet light (Kaske 1964, pp. 204-06) and his conclusion that any emendation is unnecessary, since *genyre* ("I constrain") makes perfect sense if only the speaker is accepted to be the rune-stick. Leslie's theory, on the contrary, presupposes the reading *gebyre* ("I hear"). To Leslie's objection that it is unlikely that the rune-staff speaks of itself in the third person in l. 13b, Anderson answers by quoting instances of prosopopoeia in *Riddle 35*, featuring a personified coat of mail asking the reader to guess *hwæt þis gewædu sy*, and in *The Dream of the Rood*, where the Cross uses alternately the first and the third person when referring to itself. Another riddle, Exeter Book number 60, shows that a *verbum dicendi* – specifically, *sprecan* – may be used by an object alluding to a written message; this proves that Leslie is wrong in believing that *sægde* in l. 31b unmistakably supports the human messenger theory. The solution to all the problems of interpretation of *HM* is recognising the presence of two different sections in the poem: one, constituted by ll. 1-12, is uttered by a human speaker, and is a prologue in which the messenger greets the lady, identifies himself and gives the woman the rune-stick her husband has inscribed; the other, formed by ll. 13-54, is spoken by the rune-staff, and here the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia is at work, with the aim to convey the lady's thoughts when receiving and watching the stick and the message carved on it. Anderson highlights that this theory would explain also the scribal divisions at ll. 13 and 26, which have generated all the confusion about the nature of *HM* in the first editors and critics of the poem. He draws attention to the fact that the Exeter Book scribe uses division to mark separate sections within poems, as well as to indicate the beginning and endings of different texts. Thus, in his opinion, the division at l. 13 marks the beginning of the rune-stick's prosopopoeic speech, while the one at l. 26 shifts the focus from the staff to the runic symbols that it carries.

Anderson's second contribution (1975, pp. 289-94) comes after Greenfield's discussion of the subject (Greenfield 1972, pp. 133-59), which interprets the verb opening the runic passage as *genyre* – following Kaske (1964, pp. 204-06) – and translates the two lines as “I crowd together (the runes) S.R.EA.W. and M. (on this stave) to declare by oath, etc.” (Greenfield 1972, p. 152). Greenfield explains passage as the moment of climax when the human messenger shows the rune-staff containing the lord's message to the lady. Anderson argues that there is no climax, as ll. 2a and 13b show that the woman has already seen the rune-staff, and also that “crowd together” cannot be assigned to any human messenger, since l. 13b states that it was the exiled husband who carved the message on the stick. About the verb *genyre*, Anderson points out that there are examples of *genyrwan* governing the preposition *ofer* in Bosworth-Toller, and he suggests to read ll. 49-50 as an instance of this type of construction where *genyrwan ofer* means “superimpose”. His translation of the lines in question is “I superimpose on the old promise between you two .S.R. together, .EA.W. and M. To declare by oath” (p. 290), whose meaning is that the messenger, that is the rune-staff itself, has been given the task to “superimpose” the runic oath on the old vow to renew it. Anderson argues that this strong renewal of the promise of loyalty is part of the “rhetoric of persuasion” (p. 291) which underlies the structure of the whole poem, and which is formed by the continuous references to the old oath, to the feud that separated the lovers, and to the husband's unchanged love, as well as by the continuous switch from present to past. The scholar believes that these elements have the function to emphasise that much time has passed, and this is the reason why the woman needs persuading – and the reason why the poem is built with the aim to persuade her: the references to the past and to the old promises are the crucial features of the rhetoric of persuasion, because they are the clue to convince her to renew the old love in the present.

Leslie notices this need of persuading the woman as well (Leslie 1988, pp. 22): he states that the poem is meant to convince the lady to join her husband and to assure her of his loyalty, and he considers this fact as an indication that there might be some reason for the lady not to be so confident any more.

Margaret E. Goldsmith (1975, pp. 242-63) carries out an analysis of *HM* whose ultimate purpose is to demonstrate that the poem is a Christian allegory based on some biblical passages; however, her work includes a detailed examination and interpretation of the speaker and its role, which is best understood in comparison with the other theories on the speaker. Goldsmith considers *Riddle 60* the first part of *HM*, and she argues that the speaker is the same in both poems. She describes *Riddle 60* as the story of a reed which is taken by man and transformed into a reed-pen, thus gaining a power it did not have before, a power coming from the human mind that gave it its new purpose – namely, the capacity to convey human thought to other human beings. This ability is wonderful and no human servant has it: the reed-pen can address directly the addressee’s mind, because the written message does not have to be uttered aloud. Goldsmith claims that the reed-pen is the speaker of *HM*, as well. She reads l. 2b, *ic tudre aweox* (“I grew up from childhood” or “I grew up from a plant”) as deliberately ambiguous, just like the other images in the first lines, some of which seem to indicate a human character, and some other an object, and she points out that the reed-pen “which communicates through the words it ‘utters’ on the page fills this human/non-human role quite well” (p. 248). Goldsmith answers Leslie’s objection that a particular object would serve just one purpose and would make just one journey by suggesting that “as Pen, the speaker ‘voyages’ whenever the writings done at his lord’s command are disseminated across the world” (p. 248). This part of the poem describes the role of the reed-pen, continuing from *Riddle 60* – which is just the introduction of *HM* –

and nothing in these lines support the idea that the runes are carved either on the speaker or on the tree he is talking about, which is a representation of both the Cross and Christ's sceptre (for a discussion of this part of Goldsmith's theory see chapter 2.4.3).

Peter Orton provides an interpretation of the speaker as a rune-stick based on a reconsideration of the precedent theories against it (Orton 1981, pp. 43-56). By cross-examining Leslie's reconstruction of ll. 2-7 and the transcription of the same part in the facsimile edition of the Exeter Book, Orton discovers that the punctuation and the meaning of these lines is not certain, and, therefore, that they cannot be considered final proofs in establishing whether the speaker of *HM* is human or not – something that Leslie, Greenfield and Anderson have done. He also highlights that Pope's reading of the first word in l. 3 as *iw* ("yew") is not absolutely certain, either, and, for this reason, it cannot be used as evidence in favour of the theory that the speaker is the rune-stick. About the first word of the poem, *nu* ("now"), which has been taken as evidence that *HM* is linked to *Riddle 61*, Orton suggests that it actually refers to the moment when the lady receives the stick and looks at the runes, thus releasing the message they contain. This rhetorical device could be intended as a personification of the text carved on the wood, which would be comparable to what happens in the *Metrical Preface to Gregory's Pastoral Care*; otherwise, the messenger's speech could be explained as "an expression of what it was meant to imply to the recipient" (p. 47), something which the recipient already knew and was waiting for, because it was a signal agreed between her and the man.

Orton answers Leslie's four objections to "the rune-staff theory" (Orton 1985, p. 44) by means of a deep and methodical analysis. To the first objection, that is the impossibility for the speaker to have been on several voyages if he is not human, Orton answers that the Exeter Book *Riddles* feature various examples of personified objects which describe a larger experience than is

actually possible for an inanimate thing. The reason may lie in the solution, which usually alludes to a generic category rather than to a particular token from that category. The second objection is based on the syntax of l. 13b – *se þisne beam agrof* –, which would indicate that the speaker and the rune-stave are two distinct beings. Orton highlights the similarity between this line and *The Dream of the Rood* l. 40 – *gestah he on gealgan heanne* – and l. 56 – *Crist wæs on rode* –, where the Cross refers to itself in the third person. The use of the word *frea* on the part of the objects to indicate their owners in the *Riddles* is Orton’s response to Leslie’s objection that *frea*, *mondryhten* and *wine* are the titles given by retainers to their lords. The fourth objection is similar to the third one: Leslie argues that in l. 31, *þæsþe he me sægde*, the right verb for a rune-stick would be “write”, rather than “say”. Orton’s opinion is that the above-mentioned verb is a metaphor for the human act of carving the runes into the wood. As for the verb introducing the runic passage, the scholar quotes Goldsmith’s re-examination of the codex and her subsequent conclusion (Goldsmith 1975, pp. 242-63) that it is impossible to determine whether the MS. reading is *genyrwe* or *gehyre*. Orton chooses *gehyre* (“I hear”), because it is not problematic from a syntactical viewpoint, and he points out that a human messenger could in no way have heard the runic message, since he would only have read it; on the contrary, if the speaker were the rune-staff, the use of this verb would be easily explained as a metaphor on the act of carving that set the symbols on it. The problem with the rune-staff theory is the fact that the first lines of the poem are used by the object to identify itself with the lady – something apparently unnecessary, since she would recognise what the object is at the first glance. Orton explains this feature as intentional ambiguity on the poet’s part, and he finds evidence for this interpretation in the use of the word *tudre* in l. 2b – *ic tudre aweox*: the half-line could mean “I grew up from a child” as well as “I grew up from a shoot” (1985, p. 47). Orton argues that this kind of

ambiguity is common in the Exeter Book *Riddles*, and that the latter must have been the poet's source of inspiration for what concerns the personification of an object "to put the enigmatic style to a fresh and memorable purpose" (1985, p. 52). In fact, while in the *Riddles* the above-mentioned rhetorical device is used to disguise the solution, in *HM* it is employed to convey the idea that the runes and the stick carrying them have the magical power to represent the strength of the relationship between the man and his woman.

A totally new suggestion on the speaker's identity was proposed by John D. Niles in recent years (2003, pp. 189-223).¹ The scholar believes that the clue to the problem is found in the words *treocyn* ("type of tree", l. 2a) and *beam* ("wood, piece of wood", l. 13b). He argues that the former indicates the speaker's physical nature, and that it is used in contrast with the word denoting the sender's spiritual character, namely *treow* ("truth") – occurring either as an isolated word or in compounds in ll. 12b and 52b. Concerning *beam*, Niles points out that nowhere in the Old English corpus it indicates so small an object as a rune-stick.² He provides evidence that it usually denote something quite large, such as a tree, the rood on which Christ was crucified, or a ship mast. In his opinion, the latter is the right reading of the word in *HM*: the speaker is "the ship's personified mast" (p. 204). This would account for the messenger's frequent voyages by sea, for the word *treocyn* and the phrase *ic tudre aweox* ("I grew up from a sapling"), which would be hints at the speaker's past as a tree, before being made into a mast; it would also explain the expression *on bates bosme* ("in the hold of a ship"), which would refer to the place where the mast is located in a ship. Niles compares it to the Ruthwell Cross and the

¹ The article in question was first published in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32, 2003, pp. 189-223, and then included in J.D. Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 13, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, pp. 213-50.

² This idea was first suggested by Lois Bragg, "Runes and Readers: In and Around *The Husband's Message*", *Studia Neophilologica*, 71, 1999, pp. 34-50. For a detailed discussion on the word *beam* and its meaning in *HM* see chapter 2.4.4 "The Runic Passage".

Bewcastle Cross, since like them the mast in *HM* is inscribed with runes that “bear witness [...] to the truth of the story that it tells” (p. 206). Actually, the scholar believes that the runic symbols are carved on it, and that they convey in shorter form the same message that the mast is uttering in the poem.³

³ For Niles’s explanation of the meaning of the runes in *HM*, see chapter 2.4.4 “The Runic Passage”.

2.4.4 The Runic Passage

The runic passage at the end of *HM* is a subject that every editor and critic has had to comment upon, because it is essential to the understanding of the poem. Most scholars have touched upon this matter as a necessary step in the interpretation of the text; some others have made the runes the main theme in their investigation. As the former have already been quoted in the previous paragraphs, the latter will be the focus of the analysis carried out in the present section.

Ernst A. Kock is the critic whose interpretation of the runes in *HM* has been most widely accepted (1921, pp. 122-23). He reads the runes as words, rather than as letters composing a name: S.R. is *sigel-rad*, that is “the sun’s road”, a metaphor for “heaven”; he explains it as a kenning similar to some Old Norse compounds used for “the lofty regions of the sun, the moon, and the stars” (p. 123); EA.W. stands for *earwynn* (“earth’s joy” or “lovely earth”), similar to *eorðan wynn*, from *Beowulf* 1. 1730, which has the same meaning; M. stands for *mon* (“man”). These images are used to give force to the vote confirming the lord’s love and loyalty towards the woman. Kock points out the similarity between these lines and a passage from the Gospel, namely Matthew 5,33, in which Christ forbids his disciples, and therefore all humans, to swear by heaven, earth and one’s head; the segment in *HM* seems a biblical quotation that disregards the commandment it is citing.

After briefly summarising the main readings of the runic passage, Kershaw suggests that each of the runes is the initial letter of a name, and she puts forward the hypothesis that they indicate the five oath-helpers who, according to the Laws of Æthelstan, II, 9, were required in the *cyre-að*. However, in the same note she also points out that the *cyre-að* is just a suggestion,

and that it entails a reading in which the syntax must be distorted, a fact that casts doubts on the validity of this theory (Kershaw 1922, p.42).

Leslie (1988, pp. 15-18) accepts Elliott's reading of S.R. as *sigelrad*, but he translates it differently: he considers it similar to the kennings *swanrad* and *bronrad*, referring to the sea, and consequently interprets it as a kenning for "sky". He groups EA and W together, as well, on the basis of the punctuation, which is the same as in S.R., and he reads the compound as *earwyn*, giving it the meaning of "the lovely earth". Taking the introductory verb to be *gebyre*, he interprets the passage as a traditional form of the kind used by the pagan Irish kings, who called as their witnesses the elemental forces in oaths; Leslie points out that this type of vows survived the advent of Christianity, and he argues that the words in question must have been the same the husband and the lady had used in their *eald gebeot* (l. 49, "old promise"). The final sentence of the oath is very important, because it repeats exactly l. 16, thus conveying more strongly the idea of the reaffirmation of the promise, and also the fact that the vow was mutual, that is, the woman must respect it just like her man has done.

Teresa Fiocco (1999, pp. 167-85) argues that the runic passage should be reinterpreted on the basis of the recognition that the last rune is \mathfrak{M} ("d"), rather than \mathfrak{M} ("m").

Recent criticism has seen a change of approach to the runes in *HM*. Lois Bragg (1999, pp. 34-50) shifts the viewpoint on the passage from identifying the runes and what they stand for to establishing what was their original function – that is, how the runic alphabet was used in the tenth century – and in what way the prospective audience of this poem would consider them. She claims her analysis to have been carried out from two Anglo-Saxon viewpoints, which she calls "the world *of* the poem" – that is, the tenth- or eleventh-century world in which this text was created – and "the world *in* the poem" – the setting of the poem, namely the legendary Germania, which, in Bragg's opinion, was a place of the mind by the time the Exeter

Book was composed. Concerning the former point of view, the scholar argues that the Anglo-Saxon readers would have responded to the runic passage in the same way as we do, that is, by trying to decipher it, because to them, just like to us, it is a cryptographic play. Elsewhere in the MS., runes separated by single raised points stand for the letter-names, rather than for alphabetical characters; therefore, there is no reason why the case should be different here. Bragg points out that runes were actually used as alphabetical signs only in epigraphic context – for instance, grave inscriptions –, while in manuscripts they usually stood for Roman letters; they were used as logographs just in genres implying word-play of some kind, like the riddles, or when abbreviations were needed. For these reasons, she argues that the symbols in this particular poem were meant to be read by their names, as indicated by meter and punctuation, but to be taken as “alphabetic characters that spell a word” (p. 38). She denies that any magical value was given to the names of the runes, and therefore she rejects the view that in *HM* their function is to strengthen the renewal of an oath. She also openly criticises Elliott’s and the other critics’ interpretation of the passage as “Follow the sun’s path across the sea to find joy with the man who is waiting for you”, which she considers an inaccurate and indeed far-fetched translation, as the verbs and prepositions in it are not to be found anywhere in the Old English version, and are construed with the aim to match the invitation for the woman to set on a journey to join her husband, already expressed in the previous lines of the poem. Bragg finds evidence for her explanation of the runes in the love medieval scholars had for alphabet lore, cryptography and word-play based on the substitution of a letter for its correspondent in a foreign alphabet, as, for example, the Greek one. She quotes Bede, Aldhelm, Boniface, Hrabanus Maurus and Alcuin as instances of very learned monks who practised this kind of erudite play. Then, the Anglo-Saxon readers of the Exeter Book would surely have considered the runic passage in *HM* analogous to the riddles employing runic encryption that are found in

the same MS. Regarding the object on which the symbols would be carved, Bragg draws evidence from archaeology to demonstrate that the real rune sticks which have been found are too small to be called with the word used in the poem, namely *beam*, which in Old English generally indicates a tree, a mast, the gallows, or a ship. In fact, she believes that the word in question is a reference to the boat on which the speaker has travelled throughout his lifetime, and on which he has now come to deliver his message to the lady. There is an Icelandic poem, *Atlamál hin grænlenzku*, dating from the twelfth century, in which a rune stick is used to deliver a warning to the recipient, but it fails to achieve its purpose because an enemy distorts the letters, making them unintelligible; the character in danger is finally alerted thanks to his wife's dream. Bragg notices that earlier versions of this work does not contain the rune episode, which, therefore, must be understood as an instance of "monastic enthusiasm for cryptography retrojected onto a legendary cast of characters" (p. 43), rather than a proof that runes were used in long-distance communication in the reality in the Migration Era. She concludes that

the putative rune stick in *The Husband's Message* [...] appears to be a creation of modern scholars expecting to find functionalism and retrojecting an anachronistic writing practice from the Middle Ages onto the Anglo-Saxon period. The runes stand in the text of the manuscript without confirmation of their material existence in the world of the poem. The runic passage of the poem suggests that the Exeter Book's public imagined legendary Germania to have been a society that used runic writing for encrypting messages – in short, a society just like theirs.

Thus, ultimately, the failure of modern criticism to understand this viewpoint comes from the assumption that the situation in *HM* is a literary depiction of a common Anglo-Saxon practice and form of communication. I find this conclusion interesting in that it shows the same process going on in the modern reception of our poem – and of the other poems analysed in this thesis, as well: modern readers and critics of Old English poetry project onto the Anglo-Saxon times

their vision of Anglo-Saxon England, just like the eleventh-century readers of the Exeter Book did. What is at work behind any modern interpretation of *HM* is what we may call the Middle Ages of the mind – our beliefs of what the age in question was, and our consideration of literary texts as sources that can provide evidence of Anglo-Saxon life just like history and archaeology.

John D. Niles follows Bragg's suggestion that the word *beam* should be analysed more closely, and he accounts for all its possible meanings in Old English, none of which supports the view that it can be a small rune-stick. It may indicate a tree, a yoke, a gallows, Christ's rood, and a ship's mast, and the scholar takes the latter as the right solution in *HM*: the speaker is the mast of the boat that comes to deliver the *blaford's* message to the lady, and the runes have been carved on it. To decipher the meaning of the symbols, Niles adopts what he defines "a hermeneutic strategy" (p. 212), based on some assumptions, namely: that the runic passage has been used in the poem as a process of "runification", that is a way of making a text look more archaic and more cryptic than it really was – which was the intention of the author of this poem; that the runes have to be understood as initial letters of words that repeat the message conveyed by the whole text, rather than as the concepts conveyed by their supposed names in the Anglo-Saxon futhorc. The critic highlights that there are no stable, certain names for the Anglo-Saxon runes: some of the older ones, deriving from the futhark, are given different names in different sources, and as for the ones introduced in order to interpret the sound changes of Old English, such as "ea", there is no proof that they were ever given a name – in fact, they may have been given only phonetic values after the example of the Latin alphabet.

2.5 FEMINIST READINGS OF THE POEMS

The last two decades have seen the rise of a trend of criticism on the poems based on feminist theory. It has involved above all *WL*.

Feminist criticism has tended to revalue the figure of the Wife by rejecting most theories of former male critics. It is worth quoting Christine Fell's study *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*¹, which explores the world of women during the Anglo-Saxon period and their legal and social conditions through archaeological and historical research, and provides evidence of their actual position in marriage and family life. On the side of literary history, feminist scholars have claimed in particular the Wife's active role in her story as evidence of the cultural and social role women had in England in the early Middle Ages, which was more dynamic than it later became after the Norman Conquest.

Barrie Ruth Straus (1981, pp. 268-85) rejects the interpretations that see the Wife as a passive sufferer. She reads *WL* on the basis of speech act theory² and reaches the conclusion that the whole poem is an illocutionary act, that is, an action effected through words. By telling her story she is trying to guide the audience's perception of her tale by providing them with her own vision of the events. The first two lines are emphatic in the repetition of her will to speak: 1. 1a *ic þis giedd wrece*, 1. 2b *ic þæt secgan mæg*; the unmarked form for talking about something is to say it straightaway, without stressing one's intention to do so. According to the speech act theory, verbs like "to tell" and "to say" are performative when used in the non-past form and

¹ Fell, Christine E. *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*. London: British Museum Publications, 1984.

² Straus quotes Austin's and Searle's theory and makes reference to the following works: J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1962; J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1969; by the same author "What is a Speech Act?" in Searle J., ed., *The Philosophy of Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1971, pp. 39-53, and "Classification of Illocutionary Acts", *Language in Society*, 5, 1976, pp. 1-23.

with the first person pronoun, that is, they constitute an action which, in the case of *WL*, is the assertion of the narrator's will to speak of her experience. In the second section of the poem, the lady describes her situation as the effect of a series of illocutionary acts performed by one or more men: 'command' and 'order' are again performative verbs, and the lord's action achieved through words causes a limitation in the Wife's possibility of acting, since it confines her to an enclosed place from where she cannot escape, nor travel as she used to do earlier. However, contrary to what most critics think, her present situation of confinement does not constitute a total annihilation of her possibility of action; she has not been reduced to utter passivity, because she can still tell her story and state her viewpoint on the world (pp. 274-75). The third section constitutes one more illocutionary act, possibly the strongest. Some scholars believe that it is a prediction of the lord's fate, but Straus does not agree, since foreseeing events involves a certain amount of confidence about what is going to happen, a confidence of which there is no evidence in *WL*. She also rejects the idea that the final lines are an example of gnomic wisdom, because this would imply a sudden shift from personal to general orientation in the speaker. Rather, she believes that ll. 42-53 are a curse, which better complies with the illocutionary function of the whole poem, as the act of cursing is the expression of the speaker's desire, that is, her attempt to "make the world correspond to her words" (p. 276), a suitable conclusion for the process which has been going on in the first part of the poem where the Wife tries to convince the listeners of her truth about the story by choosing "words to fit her vision of the world" (p. 276). Thus, she takes revenge on the man or men who banished her to her present desolate dwelling by casting a similar situation of isolation and confinement upon them through her curse, in other words, she builds a world by means of words. Parallel instances to the attitude of the Wife in *WL* are Guðrun and Wealthew. The former, in *Guðrunarkviða I*,

laments the loss of Sigurd and foresees his murderers' destruction; the latter, in *Beowulf*, uses words carefully in order to achieve her purpose to keep the inheritance for her sons rather than making Beowulf the successor as Hrothgar would like to do. Together with the Wife, they are not passive sufferers, but active avengers through words (Straus 1981, pp. 279-280). Straus finds further evidence for her interpretation in the fact that traditional heroic societies show a great consideration for speech acts, as is proved by the power attributed to curses and oaths. An example is in the Bible, in Psalm 137, which ends with the wish that Babylon experiences the same sufferings it has caused to the Hebrews³. And she notices that, the Old English *wræccan* (l. 1a) can mean both "to utter" and "to avenge": the Wife is an instance of woman who acts through words by using them as weapons, in order to obtain what she cannot get through physical force (Straus 1981, p. 283).

Marilynn Desmond (1990, pp. 573-590) has a different approach to the poem: she reclaims *WL* and *Wu* to female literature as examples of anonymous texts voiced by women. Her considerations are based primarily on Virginia Woolf's writings on anonymous literary texts and female writing in the Middle Ages, in particular on Woolf's idea that oral poetry was sung by both men and women during the Anglo-Saxon period, and that it was the press and the subsequent fixation of texts that introduced a patriarchal conception of literature and authorship. Desmond distinguishes between "authoritative authorship" (p. 581), produced under Latin, monastic influence in England after the Christianisation and made of prose texts whose subjects are lives of saints, letters and other religious texts; and "secular, vernacular poetry", which is anonymous, "performative and rhetorical" (p. 581), since its author is unknown and it is recited by a *scop* who is responsible for the form the text takes in his

³ Straus quotes Anderson's comparison of *WL* with Psalm 137 in G. K. Anderson, *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1966, p. 163.

performance — at the oral stage, of course, the form is not fixed. The Old English elegies belong to the corpus of Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetry and, as such, they possess the above-mentioned qualities; even *Deor*, which expresses the speaker's name, has nothing to do with modern authored poetry, because *Deor* is not the name of the performer, that is, the *scop*; it identifies the narrator of the story, a court-poet who has lost his job and consequently laments his situation. Which means that the name *Deor* labels a social function of the Anglo-Saxon world, that of the official court-poet. Similarly, the name *Widsith* in the homonymous poem in the Exeter Book symbolises the role of the *scop* as a witness to heroic events through the ages. Thus, the anonymous and performative character of the elegies overshadows the author and foregrounds the speaker, the first-person narrator whose story is being told. The gender of the speakers of *WL* and *WE* has to be taken into serious consideration in this perspective, and the presence of female voices in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus has to be studied in the view of the social and cultural position of women in that world. Noble women had the right to own lands and goods and to administrate them, and widows were granted legal protection; however, although ladies shared the power with their husbands within the *comitatus*, they were not warriors, that is, they lacked the fundamental quality which granted a place in the heroic society. As such, women were “other” within their world, they were subject to a kind of cultural and social exile, not being able to participate fully in the central activities of their community and surrounding these activities with their marginal roles. *WL* and *WE* express precisely this “otherness” (pp. 585-6): their speakers present themselves as exiles both in social and emotional terms. This is made clear by the Wife's lexical choices in describing the cause of her isolation, namely her separation from her husband, who is named with terms that denote his social position of power and command within a *comitatus* rather than indicate his relation to the

woman; the resulting perspective is that of the lady as a retainer to her husband. The theme of separation is connected to that of longing for the lord and for his hall, compared to which the *eorðsele* is an anti-hall, so that the language of the poem conveys the woman's awareness of her isolated and subordinate position both in the domestic and in the social dimension. The words chosen, moreover, highlight another important feature of *WL*, that is the use of language as a means to achieve consolation: the speaker's telling of past memories represents her attempt to build a linguistic picture of the world at whose margins she lives, and yet this effort is precisely what marks her marginality and otherness from that world. Female exile is "inscribed in her language and in her culture" (p. 588) — and in this sense the language of *WL* is gendered — because the Anglo-Saxon woman was truly an emarginated member of her community, her social position notwithstanding.

The linguistic depiction of loss and sorrow is the chief point in the interpretation of Patricia Clare Ingham, too (2003, pp. 17-31), whose concern, however, is the gendering of loss from a cultural viewpoint rather than the gendering of language. Actually, she explains the lack of consolation in *WL* and *WE* — which is the distinctive feature of these poems with respect to the other Old English elegies — as caused by the identification of women in the Anglo-Saxon world with the idea and fear of utter loss and consequent despair. Her reading is based on analysis of the figures of *Wealtheow* and *Hildeburh* in *Beowulf*. The former is depicted as sharing power to some extent with her husband and lord, *Hrothgar*, and her political function is complementary to his with regards to the sovereign's preoccupation to grant the people's survival after his death. However, king and queen show opposite attitudes towards this issue, as the former thinks about adopting *Beowulf*, the hero, to ensure protection to the Danes, thus revealing that his main concern is the preservation of kingship, while the latter insists upon

keeping the inheritance of power for her sons as the means to warrant continuity of ruling to the nation, thus making clear that her chief interest is the safeguarding of kinship. The interesting thing is that the poem does not take anybody's side in this controversy. Indeed, one of *Beowulf's* main themes is the extinction of peoples and dynasties, a fate foreseen even for the Geates in the end. Historical evolution would wipe out the social model of the *comitatus* based on kin relationships, and lead to the establishment of a political system founded on loyalty to one sovereign for the whole country, but the Anglo-Saxon culture portrayed in *Beowulf* reveals a reluctance to accept this ongoing change, a reluctance identified with the female characters. The poem sympathises with Hildeburh, as well, who is described as innocent victim of a feud that led to the death of her original kin, in the figure of her brother, and her new kin, in the figures of her son and husband. Her lament, only described by the poet of *Beowulf*, accompanies her presiding to the funeral rites, and it is not a chance that she decides the disposition of the corpses on the pyres: she executes the reconnection of the kin bonds dissolved in death (Ingham 2003, pp. 22-25). Female characters in the Old English epic poem are the keepers of family ties and the witnesses to family losses: it seems, indeed, that Anglo-Saxon culture assigns this particular kind of preoccupation and loss to women, which implies that the grief originated by the extinction of kin is gendered in a female sense. Ingham underscores the anthropological implications of the gendering of loss by saying that in traditional societies the physical and horrid aspects of death are dealt with by women, who are the ones to preside funeral rites: *Beowulf* ll. 1114-1121a, indeed, describe the concrete and morbid effects of fire on the corpses, whose only spectator is Hildeburh. The confinement of the fearful aspects of death to the world of women is men's means to exorcise loss and extinction, which allows them to see just the other side of death, that is, the union of the soul and its Maker in a dimension beyond this

world. This is the reason why the male Old English elegies end with images of Christian consolation, while the female ones close on a tone of despair. Most critics have underlined the passive dimension of the Wife's lamentation, which is beyond any possibility of relief; Ingham, instead, stresses the cultural importance of this distinctive feature:

Women's identification with loss as ignoble, with a hopelessness beyond consolation, with linguistic inexpressibility constitutes the "other" through which the male elegiac texts are understood to constitute "good", "Christian", even "healthy" mourning. As such, these texts are part of the structure of Anglo-Saxon "traditional society" (Ingham 2003, p. 30).

In other words, the lack of consolation in *WL* and *WE* is crucial to its presence in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* and the other texts whose speaking voices — and viewpoint — are male; they represent the other side of the matter, whose existence grants the possibility of hope to the male elegies. In this respect, they have an active role in the history of Anglo-Saxon culture and its evolution "from kingship to kinship" (p. 18), because they testify to the transition from a family-based to a monarchical society and, at the same time, they have the role of repository of ancient but — as *Beowulf* seems to point out — not necessarily evil values.

Arlene Walsh (1991, pp. 1-7) has the aim to prove that "the average Anglo-Saxon wife was both valued and respected, enjoying economic and marital rights, her independence safeguarded and her interests protected" (p. 7). Walsh's argument stems from the contributions of two feminist critics, namely Christine Fell and Patricia Belanoff: their works show the difficulty of determining anything certain about the role and social position of women in the Anglo-Saxon period, due to the incompleteness of the historical and literary sources which could throw light on the subject — the Church being in all probability the responsible for the loss of

documents whose contents did not conform to its views.⁴ Walsh attempts to find new indications on the status of women in Anglo-Saxon society in some Old English poems featuring female characters: *Waldere I*, *Deor*, *WL*, *WE* and *HM*. As Walsh wants to discover the female role in Anglo-Saxon England before the influence of Christianity and of the Latin culture, she needs to prove that the texts in question are examples of the earliest Old English poetry that has been handed down to us. The fundamental mistake she makes in her analysis is to assume the theme of a poem can be taken as evidence of the age in which that poem was composed: she states that *Widsith* must be early because it refers to “people and events from the fourth century onwards”, *Deor* because it is concerned with the figure of the *scop*, who, being connected to the oral transmission of texts, points to an early composition in this case, as well. *WE* and *WL* are taken as *Frauenlieder* with no further argument, and they are deemed early on the ground that Germanic medieval women songs must needs be related to the heroic age. It is also taken for granted that Wentersdorf’s analysis of the dwelling place described in *WL* is correct (see 2.2.9, “The wife’s abode”) and consequently considers it another proof that the poem refers to the Anglo-Saxon pagan times. The presence of female protagonists or narrators in Old English poetry is regarded as indicating that women occupied a prominent position in their community. Walsh describes Hyldegyth, the narrator in *Waldere I*, as a bride sharing her husband’s belief in the heroic ideals, and ready to share also his fate, should he come unto danger or hardship. Her words of exhortation and warning against foolish bravery in battle set her apart from the weak, emotional female protagonists of early Latin poetry. While Hyldegyth is portrayed at a moment when her husband is in battle, the women in *WE* and *WL* are depicted after their men have been defeated and exiled. Overlooking the difficulty of

⁴ Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Patricia M. Belanoff, *The Changing Image of Women in Old English Poetry*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1982.

interpretation of the final passage in *WL*, namely ll. 42a-52a, the scholar explains ll. 46b-48b as suggestive of the woman's position of equality in sharing her husband's fate: "she is an equal partner in all things. [...] The wife is a victim, but she is not a victim because she is a woman: the couple together are victims" (pp. 3-4). Although the protagonist of *WE* is tearful and apparently powerless, she is not the only one: her lover, Wulf, is in a similar situation; this poem, just like the previous ones, clearly shows that men and women in the Anglo-Saxon society were equal – in their ideals, in their fates, in their attitudes towards love. The latter point is developed more fully in *HM*, where emphasis is placed on the faithfulness to love promises. Walsh judges the message sent to the woman as "respectful" (p. 5), because it is not a simple order for her to set on a journey to join her husband, and because the messenger has been told to discover what her feelings towards her man are, as stated in ll. 9b-11a. What is more, no certainty is expressed in the poem as to the fact that the lady will eventually accept to leave her homeland in order to live with her lord in a foreign country – and this proves that women were independent and respected enough to be granted the power to choose for themselves in everything regarding their lives.

3. REMARKS ON THE CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE POEMS

The chapters and paragraphs constituting the first part of this thesis have been aimed at simplifying the approach to the criticism on *WE*, *WL* and *HM*. The interpretations have been arranged thematically and, at the same time, chronologically, in order to facilitate the reader's understanding of the way the trends in the criticism of these poems were born, developed, and sometimes came to an end. These texts have similar stories for what concerns the ways in which they have been read: all of them have underwent comparisons with Old Norse and Old Germanic sources, with the riddles, and with modern English works – poems and novels. *WE* and *WL* have been related to the medieval *Frauenlieder* and *Canciones de alba*, and they have been studied in the light of the feminist literary theory. Both *WE* and *HM* were first interpreted as riddles, and the debate over their elegiac or riddle-like nature is still open. Finally, all the poems have a history of titling that could form a separate chapter within this thesis. Their having women as protagonists is the reason that led me to study them in the first place, but the ways in which their critical histories have developed contain more elements of similarity than the poems themselves.

WE was first interpreted as a riddle, and this reading was unchallenged for the first forty years of editing of the Exeter Book. The poem was interpreted in this way because it came just after a number of religious pieces, with which it had nothing in common, and just before the riddles, whose enigmatic qualities it shared in the vague description of the situation. The presence of the name Wulf was determinant, as well, as it prompted critics to go out of their ways in order to find any possible connection with Cynewulf – perhaps because it would have been thrilling to be able to demonstrate the paternity of a text, when almost all of Old English poetry is anonymous. Bradley's dramatic monologue theory certainly represents a turning point

in the criticism of *WE*, in the sense that it changed the theme of the debate from the authorship of the poem to its genre. Every editor and critic after Bradley has come to terms with his theory, and most critical editions propose it as the most probable explanation of the story. In critical studies it has been reworked up to recent times: the poem has been called a psychodramatic monologue (Mattox 1975, pp. 33-40), a lyrical monologue (Giles 1981, pp. 468-72) and a monologue with mimetic features (Jones 1983, pp. 323-27); each of these theories also proposes a different explanation of the relationships between the speaker and the other characters, but they all have Bradley's interpretation as their starting point, and they recognize that a love story is the theme.

An element of Bradley's article which has remained an ever-actual object of discussion is the integrity of the poem. Many scholars in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century took up the idea that it is a fragment of a longer work, and they elaborated on it with different results: Lawrence (1902, pp. 247-61) provided metrical and linguistic evidence to demonstrate that *WE* has a Scandinavian source, although he did not point to any specific Old Norse text. Schofield (1902, pp. 262-95) identified the Old English poem with the Eddaic story of Signý and her brother Sigmund. Lehman (1969, pp. 151-165) considered *WE* the result of the mingling of the Wulfdietrich story and the Ostrogoth legends about Theodoric and Odoacer. Bouman (1962, pp. 93-105), too, explored the possible connections of Eadwacer and the historical Odoacer, and found what he considers the most probable link in Beadohild's story: the son she had from Weland was Widia, who saved Theodoric from the exile imposed on him by Ermanaric on Odoacer's advice. The close examination of these theories – carried out in the chapter on *WE* – is striking in that it shows how even the same interpretation of a word in *WE* leads to utterly different outcomes – the best example is the name Eadwacer and all the ways in which critics have connected it to the historical Odoacer, and all its possible bearings on the

story told in the poem. None of the textual evidence provided is conclusive in demonstrating the correctness of a reading over the others; on the contrary, the same evidence is often used by different scholars to support distinct interpretations. This is certainly due to the fact that in the case of this poem the text is completely detached from any context, but it also indicates that, when this happens, it is easy for scholars to bend the text to their theories.

The absence of external reference and the possibility to explain the same words in *WE* in very different ways has led some scholars to write about the poem's ambiguity and riddle-like nature in recent times; actually, the critical history of this poem has, at least to some extent, a circular trend: it begins with the interpretation of *WE* as a riddle, continues with the dramatic monologue theory and with the exploration of the possible connections with other literary works, and ends with a return to the acknowledgment of the riddle-like quality and enigmatic features of the text.

Renoir's "Noninterpretation" is, in my opinion, the most successful type of approach to so controversial a poem as *WE*, because it is descriptive rather than explicative. Instead of proposing new readings for controversial passages, or adding a new interpretation to all those that have already been put forward, he succeeds in providing an analysis that highlights both the themes which are uncontrovertibly present in the poem, and the fact that the form works together with the meaning to create and convey those themes.

Like any other Anglo-Saxon poem, *WE* has undergone a number of different readings, due to the obscurity of the context in which this text was composed, and then copied in the Exeter Book. Unlike other texts, it has been edited, translated, commented upon and made part of verse-books and readers even when its meaning resulted so obscure that the scholar trying to tackle it decided not to be committed to any explanation. It has also been the object of studies

which have admitted their failure to understand the sense of the poem while trying anyway to say something about its peculiarity — like Renoir’s “Noninterpretation”.

What this analysis suggests is, perhaps, that editorial violence on the text has not shed more light on its meaning. Sieper’s elimination of some words and re-working of some lines might provide a text which is more regular from a metrical viewpoint; it does not succeed in clarifying the meaning of the passages in question, though. Paradoxically, Renoir’s decision not to attempt an edition of the text results in an analysis that tells more about the poem as a whole than any etymological or philological study of single words, and their possible forms and emendations, have done. Does this imply that editorial work on *WE* is useless? It rather suggests that editorial practice runs the risk of resulting in partial, lame and blind accounts and readings when it loses sight of what should be its primary purpose: being the loyal companion of literary analysis in explaining texts in their wholeness. It also suggests that, when the poem in question survives in a single MS., clever attempts at reconstruction of assumed original and uncorrupted forms result more often in useless speculation than in the clarification of the meaning of the text. If it is true that a single witness cannot be trusted to be good, because the text it keeps does not necessarily come from a good line of textual transmission, it is also true that that extant text, even when it is fragmentary or corrupt, is all we have. And trying to understand a poem in the form in which it has been handed down may be more productive than attempting to reconstruct an original form that will always remain just an assumption, an opinion among hundreds of other opinions.

Concerning *WL*, the differences between the interpretations reviewed in the foregoing chapters show that criticism is far from reaching an agreement on this poem, too. The majority of scholars have tried to explain the poem by looking for analogues somewhere else, be it in Norse or Celtic literature, in Christian sources, or in women’s folksongs and lyrics. The

problem with all these readings is, again, that none of them can be proved to be the right one, the one that deprives every other interpretation of its meaning. The only safe thing that can be said about *WL* is that some of its central themes –longing, separation from loved ones, the sorrow connected to exile, the desolation of the world mirroring the speaker’s inner misery – are present in the other elegies, as well; Cavill argues that they are also found in the religious texts contained in the Exeter Book, all of which are concerned with exile, be it physical or symbolical (Cavill 1999, p. 62). These images are present also in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*; the latter, in particular, ends with an exhortation to leave the world’s pleasures and to live as exiles, so that suffering and longing remind us of the transitoriness of the earthly goods and of the eternal joy that exist only in Heaven. But the themes of exile and longing do not have religious and moralistic connotations in *WL*; here, they are represented in their earthly and physical form. On the other hand, a recent contribution on the poem suggests that the reason why it can be interpreted in so many different ways is its deliberately ambiguous language. John Niles (2003, pp. 149–207), the scholar who proposes this view, maintains that the last twelve lines are the woman’s curse to her husband, her way of exacting revenge on him for not accomplishing his most important duty towards her, that is protecting her. By having himself exiled he has left her alone, and he caused her to be banished, as well. Niles points out that the author of *WL* was most likely a member of the clergy, and he knew that cursing was forbidden and censured by the Church: he had to hide the curse somehow if he wanted the text to be preserved as he composed it. Therefore, he deliberately used ambiguous grammar and syntax in this passage to allow for different readings. Niles even argues that the poem caused different responses by Anglo-Saxon readers in the same way as it still provokes discussion among modern readers, and that debate was likely aroused by it in the Anglo-Saxon scholarly community, as well. The important point of Niles’s argument is the parallel he draws between the ambiguous nature of

WL and that of the *Riddles*, whose language is deliberately enigmatic. This provides another possible viewpoint on the reason for the inclusion of the poem in the Exeter Book: it could have been copied in the MS. because it featured themes that were dear to the Anglo-Saxon society, or because its readers recognised in its language the same enigmatic qualities present in the *Riddles*. It seems important to remember, at this point, that other scholars have recognised the presence of ambiguities in *WL*, and have connected them with the *Riddles*: Carole Hough (2003, pp. 5-8) argues that the language is deliberately ambiguous in the poem, and Walker-Pelkey (1992, pp. 242-266) actually reads *WL* as a Riddle (see 2.2.10 “The Ambiguity of l. 34b *leger weardiað*”). What this analysis suggests, ultimately, is that maybe *WL* was just as puzzling to Anglo-Saxon readers as it is for us.

The critical history of *HM* has quite an interesting development, as well. The summary of the main readings of the poem carried out in chapter 2.4 shows that, like *WE*, it was first interpreted as a riddle, and only later as one of the elegies. Its belonging to the latter genre, too, has been questioned, because its tone has been sometimes taken to be optimistic, since the message delivered by the speaker lets the reader imagine a happy ending, a final reunion of the lovers. However, Anderson (1975, pp. 289-94) argues that the text of *HM* is built around a rhetoric of persuasion that demonstrates the husband’s uncertainty concerning the lady’s response to his call. The review of the criticism on this poem also highlights that, although some attempts at finding possible sources for this poem have been carried out, scholars have tended to focus on the runic passage and on the identity of the speaker; it also shows that, like in the case of *WE*, the issue of the riddle-like quality of the text has emerged again recently.

The analysis of the critical history of *WE*, *WL* and *HM* has highlighted that elements of similarity between these poems go beyond their having women as protagonists, and their being remindful of pagan myths and heroic legends or of biblical texts; the strongest connection

between them is the way in which they continue to puzzle readers after one hundred and fifty years of editing and studying. One might argue that the similarities between the poems must be real, as they keep coming up in critical studies: the problem is that the above-mentioned similarities sometimes regard the possible links of the poems with Old Norse literature, sometimes with Christian literature, sometimes with the riddles – that is, the elements of similarity are so diverse that one wonders whether it is possible that they are all present, or whether some are really there and some others only exist in the readers' minds.

Recently there have been attempt at quite different approaches to the poem. Some of them have been illustrated in the chapters dealing with the feminist readings; an isolated, but interesting one is Melanie Heyworth's contribution (2004, pp. 3-11). The scholar concentrates on what she considers a constant in all the Old English elegies, namely the theme of nostalgia, which she defines as "a historical constant in cultural evolution and enduring and common attribute of societies" whose expression is, however, "culturally, ethnically, chronologically, and geographically specific" (p. 4). This specificity means that studying the way nostalgia is expressed in a particular culture throws light on the culture itself – and this is what she tries to achieve by analysing the Old English elegies. The things that the speakers of the elegies regret and long for are social life, the relationship between lord and retainer, and between man and wife, the oaths of loyalty. Heyworth claims that, on the one hand, the presence of these themes indicates that they were really the values of Anglo-Saxon society; on the other hand, it suggests that the poet was deliberately providing an exemplum to his audience by reflecting "an idealised construct of what Anglo-Saxon society should be like" in order to "support the social order by idealising it as nostalgically worthy" (p. 7).

There is a problem with all the critical approaches that consider these poems mirrors of the values of Anglo-Saxon society, and it is highlighted by the scholarly contributions that

highlight the ambiguity of the texts – ambiguity that is present in their language, their syntax, and their general meaning. Can one be sure that *WE*, *WL* and *HM* are very early poems reflecting the early Anglo-Saxon England that existed before, or immediately after the advent of Christianity? The answer is no: the poems might be early, or they might have been composed shortly before being copied in the Exeter Book. And then there is the question of the MS, whose pages contain almost one hundred riddles – the expression of the medieval delight in playing with words and texts, that is in literature as learned entertainment. One must allow for the possibility that *WE*, *WL* and *HM* were included in the Exeter Book for their enigmatic qualities, and that they were just as enigmatic to Anglo-Saxon readers as they are to modern scholars, suggesting to the former all the literary echoes and possible suggestions that they suggest to us, as well. The culture and society depicted in the poems analysed in this thesis could be an Anglo-Saxon England of the mind, of the tenth- or eleventh-century scholarly mind, which was centuries away from the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England.

I believe that critics should remember this when studying these poems, because otherwise they might incur in the mistake of constructing a modern Anglo-Saxon England of the mind. They should also acknowledge that the beauty of these texts, and their value as literary works, does not depend on our emendations and strained explanation. I think that, in the case of these poems, since it is not possible to establish for certain their origin, their sources, the right way of interpreting them – unless other MSS. are found containing other versions of the texts or their sources – the most fruitful approach is what Alain Renoir has called the “noninterpretation”, which consist in bringing to light everything that is present in the poems while recognising that no definitive position can be taken on their origin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EDITIONS AND FACSIMILES

- Baker, Peter S. (ed.), "A Classroom Edition of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Old English Newsletter*, 78, 1983, PSB-1-PSB-8.
- Bolton, Whitney F. (ed.), *An Old English Anthology*, London: Edward Arnold, 1963.
- Cassidy, Frederic G. and Richard N. Ringler (eds.), *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader*, 3rd edition, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.
- Chambers, Robert W., Max Förster and Robin Flower, *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, London: Percy Lund, 1933. Facsimile edition.
- Conybeare, John J. and William D. Conybeare (eds.), *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, London: Harding and Lepard, 1826.
- Craigie, William A. (ed.), *Specimens of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, vol. 3, Edinburgh: I.B. Hutchen, 1931.
- Ettmüller, Ludwig (ed.), *Engla and Seaxna Scôpas and Bôceras*, London: William and Norgate, 1850.
- Grein, Christian M.W. (ed.), *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, vol. 1, Göttingen: Georg H. Wigand, 1857.
- Grein, Christian W.M. and Richard P. Wülker (eds.), *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Poesie*, vol. 2, Leipzig: Georg H. Wigand, 1897.
- Imelmann, Rudolf (ed.), *Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung*, Berlin: Julius Springer, 1907.
- Kershaw, Nora (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922.
- Klinck, Anne L. (ed.), *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, Montreal: Mc-Gill-Queen's University Press, 1992.

- Klipstein, Louis F. (ed.), *Analecta Anglosaxonica. Selections, in prose and verse, from the Anglo-Saxon literature, with an introductory ethnological essay*, vol. 2, New York; London: George P. Putnam, 1849.
- Kluge, Friedrich (ed.), *Angelsächsisches Lesebuch*, Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1888.
- Krapp, Georg P. and Elliott V.K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, 'The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records', 3, New York: Columbia University Press, 1936.
- Lehmann, Ruth P.M. (ed.), "The Metrics and Structure of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Philological Quarterly*, 48, 1969, pp. 151-65.
- Leslie, Roy F. (ed.), *Three Old English Elegies: The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, The Ruin*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966.
- Mackie, William S. (ed.), *The Exeter Book: part II: poems IX-XXXII*, Early English Text Society, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934.
- Magoun, Francis P. (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Poems in Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader done in a normalized orthography*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Malone, Kempe (ed.), "Two English Frauenlieder", *Comparative Literature*, 14, 1962, pp. 106-19.
- Mandel, Jerome (ed.), *Alternative Readings in Old English Poetry*, New York: Peter Lang, 1987.
- Muir, Bernard J. (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000.
- Osborn, Marijane, "The Text and Context of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", in M. Green (ed.), *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, London; Toronto: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983, pp. 174-189.
- Rodrigues, Luis (ed.), *Seven Anglo-Saxon Elegies from the Exeter Book*, Felinfach: Llanerch, 1991.
- Schücking, Levin L. (ed.), *Kleines angelsächsisches Dichterbuch: Lyrik und Heldenepos*, Cöthen: Otto Schulze, 1919.
- Sedgefield, Walter J. (ed.), *An Anglo-Saxon Verse-Book*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1922.
- Sieper, Ernst (ed.), *Die altenglische Elegie*, Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1915.

Stefanovič, Svetislav (ed.), 'Das angelsächsische Gedicht *Die Klage der Frau*', *Anglia* 32, 1909, pp. 399-433.

Suzuki, Shigetake (ed.), *Old English Poetry. Elegy*, Tokyo, 1967.

Thorpe, Benjamin (ed.), *Codex Exoniensis*, London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1842.

Tupper, Frederick Jr. (ed.), *The Riddles of the Exeter Book*, Boston: Ginn and Company, 1910.

Wülcker, Richard P. (ed.), *Kleinere Angelsächsische Dichtungen*, Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1882.

CRITICISM

EXETER BOOK

Chambers, Robert W., Max Förster and Robin Flower (eds.), *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, London: Percy Lund, 1933.

Klinck, Anne L. (ed.), *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992, pp. 3-30.

Krapp, George P. and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, III, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. ix-lxxxviii.

Muir, Bernard J. (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, pp. 1-41.

Roberts, Jane, *Guide to Scripts used in English Writings up to 1500*, London: The British Library, 2008, pp. 38-41, 60.

Wanley, Humphrey, *Antiquae literaturae Septentrionalis Liber Alter. Seu Humphredi Wanleii Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium, qui in Angliae Bibliothecis extant, nec non multo rum Vett. Codd. Septentrionalium alibi extantium Catalogus Historico-Criticus, cum totius Thesauri linguarum Septentrionalium sex Indicibus*, Oxford, 1705, pp. 279-81.

WULF AND EADWACER

- Adams, John F. "Wulf and Eadwacer: An Interpretation", *Modern Language Notes* 73, 1958, pp. 1-5.
- Aertsen, Henk, "Wulf and Eadwacer: A Woman's Cri de Coeur — For Whom, For What?", in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, H. Aertsen and R.H. Bremmer (eds.), Amsterdam: Vrije University Press, 1994, pp. 119-44.
- Alexander, Michael, *The Earliest English Poems*, London: Penguin Classics, 1970, p. 116.
- Anderson, James E., "Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, and *The Soul's Address*: How and Where the Old English Exeter Book Riddles Begin", in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, M. Green (ed.), Rutherford; London: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983, pp. 204-30.
- Åstrom, Berit K., *The Politics of Tradition: Examining the History of the Old English Poems The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Umeå University, 2002.
- Baker, Peter S. "The Ambiguity of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Studies in Philology*, 78, 1981, pp. 39-51.
- "A Classroom Edition of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Old English Newsletter*, 16, 1983, PSB 1-PSB 8.
- Belanoff, Patricia A. "Women's Songs, Women's Language. *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*" in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, H. Damico and M. Olsen (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990, pp. 193-203.
- Biggs, Frederick M., "Deor's Threatened "Blame Poem"", *Studies in Philology*, 94, 1997, pp. 297-320.
- Bouman, Arie C. *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature*, Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1962, pp. 93-105.
- Bradley, Henry, "Review of *English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature*", *The Academy*, 24, 1888, pp. 197-98.
- Bragg, Lois, "Wulf and Eadwacer, *The Wife's Lament*, and Women's Love Lyrics of the Middle Ages", *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 39, 1989, pp. 257-68.

- Bueno Alonso J.L., "New Trends, Old Paths or Vice Versa: A Literary Anthropological Approach to *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval* 7, 1997, pp. 51-81.
- Daniëlli, S., "Wulf, min Wulf: An Eclectic Analysis of the Wolf-Man", *Neophilologus*, 90, 2006, pp. 135-54.
- Davidson, Arnold E., "Interpreting *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 16, 1975, pp. 24-32.
- Desmond, M. "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy", *Critical Inquiry*, 16, 1990, pp. 572-90.
- Donahue, James J. "'Of This I Can Make No Sense': *Wulf and Eadwacer* and the Destabilization of Meaning", *Medieval Forum*, 4, 2004. Electronic publication.
- Eliason, Norman E., "On *Wulf and Eadwacer*", in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, R.B. Burlin, E.B. Irving and M. Borroff (eds.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, pp. 225-34.
- Fanagan, John M., "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Solution to the Critics' Riddle", *Neophilologus*, 60 1976, pp. 130-37.
- Frese, Dolores W., "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: The Adulterous Woman Reconsidered", in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, H. Damico and A.H. Olsen (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 273-291.
- Fry, Donald K., "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Wen Charm", *Chaucer Review*, 5, 1971, pp. 247-63.
- Gameson, Fiona and Richard Gameson, "*Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and the Discovery of the Individual in Old English Verse", in *Studies in English Language and Literature: "Doubt Wisely"*, M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (eds.), London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 457-74.
- Giles, Richard F., "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A New Reading", *Neophilologus*, 65, 1981, pp. 468-472.
- Greenfield, Stanley B., "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: All Passion Pent", *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15, 1986, pp. 5-14.
- Hough, Carole A., "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Note on *Ungelic*", *ANQ: a quarterly journal of short articles, notes and reviews*, 8, 1995, pp. 3-6.

- Jamison, Carole P., "Wulf and Eadwacer: A Mother's Lament for her Son", *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association*, 1987, pp. 88-95.
- Jensen, Emily R., "Narrative Voice in the Old English *Wulf*", *Chaucer Review*, 12, 1979, pp. 373-83.
- Jones, F., "A Note on the Interpretation of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 86, 1985, pp. 323-27.
- Kavros, Harry E., "A Note on *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *English Language Notes*, 15, 1977, pp. 83-84.
- Keough, Terrence, "The Tension of Separation in *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 77, 1976, pp. 552-60.
- Kerling, Johan, "Another Solution to the Critics' Riddle: *Wulf and Eadwacer* Revisited", *Neophilologus*, 64, 1980, pp. 140-143.
- Klinck, Anne L., "Animal Imagery in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and the Possibilities of Interpretation", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 23, 1987, pp. 3-13.
- Lawrence, William W., "The First Riddle of Cynewulf", *PMLA*, 17, 1902, pp. 247-61.
- Lehman, Ruth P.M., "The Metrics and Structure of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Philological Quarterly* 48, 1969, pp. 151-65.
- Leo, Heinrich, *Quae de se ipso Cynewulfus (sive Cenevulfus, sive Coenevulfus) poeta anglosaxonicus tradiderit*, Halle: Formis Hendeliis, 1857.
- Malone, Kemp, "Two English Frauenlieder", *Comparative Literature*, 14, 1962, pp. 106-17.
- Mattox, Wesley S., "Encirclement and Sacrifice in *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 16, 1975, pp. 33-40.
- North, R., "Metre and Meaning in *Wulf and Eadwacer*: Signý Reconsidered", in *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry & Prose*, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), Groningen: Forsten, 1994, pp. 29-54.
- Oppelt, Csaba, "Meaning in Hiding-Deciphering *Wulf and Eadwacer*", in "What Does It Mean?", K. Dubs (ed.), *Pázmány Papers in English and American Studies* 3, Piliscsaba, 2003, pp. 46-56.

- Orton, Peter, "An Approach to *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Royal Irish Academy Proceedings*, 85, 1985, pp. 223-258.
- Osborn, Marijane, "The Text and Context of *Wulf and Eadwacer*", in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, M. Green (ed.), Rutherford; London: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983, pp. 174-189.
- "Dogode in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and King Alfred's Hunting Metaphors". *ANQ: a quarterly journal of short articles, notes and reviews*, 13, 2000, pp. 3-9.
- Pulsiano, Phillip and K. Wolf, "The "Hwelp" in *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *English Language Notes*, 28 1991, pp. 1-9.
- Renoir, Alain, "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Noninterpretation", in *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, J.B. Bessinger and R.P. Creed (eds.), New York: New York University Press, 1965, pp. 147-63.
- Schofield, W.H., "Signý's Lament", *PMLA*, 17, 1902, pp. 262-95.
- Sedgefield, Walter J., "Old English Notes. 1. *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Modern Language Review*, 26, 1931, pp. 74-75.
- Stanley, Eric G., "Wolf, My Wolf!", in *Old English and New: Studies in Language and Linguistics in Honor of Frederic G. Cassidy*, J.H. Hall, N. Doane and D. Ringler (eds.), New York: Garland, 1992, pp. 46-62.
- Suzuki, S. "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Reinterpretation and Some Conjectures", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 88, 1987, pp. 175-85.
- Tasioulas, J.A., "The Mother's Lament: *Wulf and Eadwacer* Reconsidered", *Medium Ævum*, 65, 1996, pp. 1-18.
- Tupper, Frederick Jr., "The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle", *Modern Language Notes*, 25, 1910, pp. 235-41.
- Whitbread, Leslie, "A Note on *Wulf and Eadwacer*", *Medium Ævum*, 10, 1941, pp. 150-54.

THE WIFE'S LAMENT

- Bambas, Rudolph, "Another View of The Old English *Wife's Lament*" in *Old English Literature: twenty-two analytical essays*, M. Stevens and J. Mandel (eds.), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 229-236.
- Bately, Janet, "Time and the Passing of Time in *The Wanderer* and Related OE texts", *Essays and Studies*, 37, 1984, pp.1-15.
- Battles, Paul, "Of Graves, Caves and Subterranean Dwellings: *Eorðscræf* and *Eorðsele* in *The Wife's Lament*", *Philological Quarterly*, 73.3, 1994, pp. 267-286.
- Belanoff, Pat. " Women's song, Women's Language. *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*", in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, H. Damico and A.H. Olsen (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990.
- "Ides...geomrode giddum'. The Old English Female Lament", in *Medieval Woman's song: cross-cultural approaches*, A.L. Klinck and A.M. Rasmussen (eds.), Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002, pp. 29-46.
- Bennet, Helen T., "Exile and the Semiosis of Gender in Old English Elegies", in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*, B. Harwood and G.R. Overing (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 43-58.
- Bolton, Whitney. "*The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*: A Reconsideration Revisited", *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 205, 1969, pp. 337-351.
- Bouman, Arie C., *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature*, Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1962, pp. 41-105.
- Bragg, Lois, "*Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and Women's Love Lyrics of the Middle Ages", *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 39, 1989, pp. 257-268.
- Bray, Dorothy A., " A Woman's Loss and Lamentation: Heledd's Song and *The Wife's Lament*", *Neophilologus*, 79, 1995, pp. 147-154.
- Bueno, Alonso J.L., "Eald Is þes Eorðsele, Eal Ic Eom Oflangad': Psychology, Space/Time and Ecology in *The Wife's Lament*", *SELIM: Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature*, 8, 1998, pp. 157-170.

- Burton, Raffel, "Translating Old English Elegies", in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, M. Green (ed.), Rutherford; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated Ups, 1983, pp. 31-45.
- Cassidy, Frederic G., "*The Wife's Lament*", *Old English Newsletter*, 16, 1982, pp. 25-26.
- Cavill, Paul, *Anglo-Saxon Christianity*, London: Fount-Harper Collins Religious 1999, pp. 60-70.
- Chase, Dennis, "*The Wife's Lament: An Eight Century Existential Cry*", *The Language Quarterly*, 24, 1986, pp. 18-20.
- Corral, Esther, "Feminine Voices in The Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo*", in *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, A.L. Klinck and A.M. Rasmussen (eds.), Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002, pp. 82-98.
- Curry, Jane L., "Approaches to a Translation of the Anglo-Saxon *The Wife's Lament*", *Medium Ævum*, 35, 1966, pp.187-198.
- Davidson, Clifford, "Erotic 'Women's Songs' in Anglo-Saxon England", *Neophilologus*, 59, 1975, pp.451-462.
- Davis, Thomas M., "Another View of *The Wife's Lament*", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 1, 1965, pp. 291-305.
- Desmond, Marilyn, "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy", *Critical Inquiry*, 16, 1990, pp. 572-90.
- Doane, A. N., "Heathen Form and Christian Function in *The Wife's Lament*", *Medieval Studies*, 28, 1966, pp. 77-91.
- Ellis, Deborah, "*The Wife's Lament* in the Context of Early English Literature: The Paralysis of Desertion", *Journal of Women's studies in Literature*, 1, 1979, pp. 220-232.
- "Words and Women in Anglo-Saxon England", in '*Lastworda betst*': *essays in memory of Christine E. Fell with her unpublished Writings*, C.A. HOUGH and K.A. LOWE (eds.), Donington, Lincs.: Tyas, 2002, pp. 198-218.
- Fitzgerald, Robert P., "*The Wife's Lament* and 'The Search for the Lost Husband'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 62, 1963, pp. 769-77.

Foley, J. M., "Literary art and oral tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry", *Anglo-Saxon England*, 12, 1983, pp.183-214.

Gameson, Fiona and Richard Gameson, "Wulf and Eadwacer, *The Wife's Lament*, and the Discovery of the Individual in Old English Verse", in *Studies in English Language and Literature: "Doubt Wisely"*, M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (eds.), London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 457-74.

Green, Martin, "Time, Memory, and Elegy in *The Wife's Lament*", in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, M. Green (ed.), Rutherford; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983, pp. 123-132.

Hall, Alaric, "The Images and Structure of *The Wife's Lament*", *Leeds Studies in English*, 33, 2002, pp. 1-29.

Harris, Joseph, "A Note on *eorðscraf* / *eorðsele* and Current Interpretation of *The Wife's Lament*", *English Studies*, 58, 1977, pp. 204-208.

Henry, Paul L., *The Early English and Celtic Lyric*, London, 1966.

Heyworth, Melanie, "Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege in the Old English Elegies", *Studia Neophilologica*, 76, 2004, pp. 3-11.

Higley, Sarah, "Lamentable Relationships? 'Non-Sequitur' in Old English and Middle Welsh Elegy", in *Connections between Old English and Medieval Celtic Literature*, D.F. Melia (ed.), Old English Colloquium Series, 2, 1983, pp. 45-66.

Hill, Thomas D., "Leger weardia(d)': *The Wife's Lament* 34b", *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Notes, Articles and Reviews*, 15, 2002, pp. 34-37.

Horner, Shari, "En/closed Subjects: *The Wife's Lament* and the Culture of Early Medieval Female Monasticism", in *Old English Literature: Critical Essay*, R. M. Liuzza (ed.), New Havens: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 381-391.

Hough, Carole. "*The Wife's Lament* line 15b and *Daniel* line 499b: Two Notes on Place-Name Evidence", *English Language Notes*, 35, 1998, pp. 1-4.

_____. "The riddle of *The Wife's Lament* line 34b", *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, 16, 2003, pp. 5-8.

- Howlett, D.R., “*The Wife’s Lament* and *The Husband’s Message*”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 79, 1978, pp. 7-10.
- Ingham, Patricia C., “From Kingship to Kinship: Mourning, Gender and Anglo-Saxon Community”, in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, J. Vaught, L.D. Bruckner and D. Miller (eds.), New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, pp. 17-31.
- Jensen, Emily, “*The Wife’s Lament’s* ‘eorðscraef’: Literal or Figural Sign?”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 91, 1990, pp. 449-457.
- Johnson, Lee A., “The Narrative Structure of *The Wife’s Lament*”, *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*, 52, 1971, pp. 497-501.
- Johnson, William C., “The Wife’s Lament as Death-Song”, in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, M. Green (ed.), Rutherford; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983, pp. 69-81.
- Kinch, Ashby, “The Ethical Agency of the Female Lyric Voice: *The Wife’s Lament* and Catullus 64”, *Studies in Philology*, 103, 2006, pp.121-132.
- Lalla, Barbara, “Discourse of Dispossession: Ex-Centric Journeys of the Un-Living in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the Old English *The Wife’s Lament*”, *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 24.3, 1993 July, pp. 55-72.
- Lench, Elinor, “*The Wife’s Lament: A Poem of the Living Dead*”, *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1, 1970, pp. 3-23.
- Leslie, Roy F., *Three Old English Elegies: The Wife’s Lament, The Husband’s Message and The Ruin*, Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1961, pp. 1-13.
- Lowe, Kathryn A., “‘A Fine and Private Place’: The Wife’s Lament, ll. 33-34, the Translators and the Critics”, in ‘*Lastworda betst*’: essays in memory of Christine E. Fell with her unpublished Writings, C.A. Hough and K.A. Lowe (eds.), Donington, Lincs.: Tyas, 2002, pp. 122-143.
- Lucas, Angela M., “The Narrator of *The Wife’s Lament* Recosidered”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 70, 1969, pp. 282-297.
- Luyster, Robert, “*The Wife’s Lament* in the context of the Scandinavian myth and ritual”, *Philological Quarterly*, 77.3, 1998, pp. 243-270.
- Malone, Kemp, “Two English ‘Frauenlieder’”, *Comparative Literature*, 14, 1962, pp. 106-117.

- Mitchell, Bruce, "The Narrator of *The Wife's Lament*: Some Syntactical Problems Reconsidered", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 73, 1972, pp. 222-234.
- Moore, Bruce, "*The Wife's Lament*, 27-32a", *Explicator*, 34, 1975-76, item 65.
- Morrison, Susan S., "Unnatural Authority: Translating beyond the Heroic in *The Wife's Lament*", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 27, 2000, pp. 19-31.
- MacLelland, Jackie, "The Cultural Myth of Gender in *The Wife's Lament*", *Mount Olive Review*, 7, 1993-94, pp. 30-32.
- Old English Literature in context: ten essays*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer; Totowa, New Jersey: Rowma and Littlefield, 1980.
- Niles, John D., "The Problem of the Ending of *The Wife's Lament*", in *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts*, J.D. Niles (ed.), Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, pp. 149-207.
- Orton, Peter, "*The Wife's Lament* and *Skírnismál*: Some Parallels", in *Úr Dölum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, R. McTurk and A. Wawn (eds.), Leeds: *Leeds Studies in English*, 1989, pp. 205-37.
- Patrick, Michael D., "*The Wife's Lament*, 27-41", *Explicator*, 28, 1969-70, item 50.
- Renoir, Alain, "A Reading Context for *The Wife's Lament*", in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, L.E. Nicholson, D.W. Frese and J.C. Gerber (eds.), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975, pp. 224-41.
- "Christian Inversion in *The Wife's Lament*", *Studia Neophilologica*, 49, 1977, pp. 19-24.
- "A Reading of *The Wife's Lament*", *English Studies*, 58, 1977, pp. 4-19.
- Rissanen, Matti, "The Theme of 'Exile' in *The Wife's Lament*", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 70, 1969, pp. 90-104.
- Rountree, Thomas J., "*The Wife's Lament*, 21-26", *Explicator*, 29, 1970-71, item 24.
- Short, Douglas D., "The Old English *Wife's Lament*: An Interpretation", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 71, 1970, pp. 585-603.
- Stevens, Martin, "The Narrator of *The Wife's Lament*", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 69, 1968, pp. 72-90.

- Stevick, Robert D., "Formal Aspects of *The Wife's Lament*", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 59, 1960, pp. 21-25.
- Straus, Barrie Ruth, "Women's Words as Weapons: Speech as Action in *The Wife's Lament*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 23, 1981, pp. 268-285.
- Swanton, Michael J., "*The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*: A Reconsideration", *Anglia*, 82, 1964, pp. 269-290.
- Tripp, Raymond P. Jr., "The Narrator as Revenant: A Reconsideration of Three Old English Elegies", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 8, 1972, pp. 339-61.
- Walker-Pelkey, Faye, "*Frige hwæt ic hatte*: *The Wife's Lament* as Riddle", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 28, 1992, pp. 242-266.
- Ward, J. A., "*The Wife's Lament*: An Interpretation", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 59, 1960, pp. 26-33.
- Waugh, Robin, "Literacy, Royal Power, and King-Poet Relations in Old English and Old Norse Compositions", *Comparative Literature*, 49, 1997, pp. 289-315.
- Wentersdorf, Karl P., "The Situation of the Narrator's Lord in *The Wife's Lament*", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 71, 1970, pp. 604-10.
- "The Situation of the Narrator in the Old English *Wife's Lament*", *Speculum*, 56, 1981, pp. 492-516.
- Whitbread, Leslie, "The pattern of misfortune in *Deor* and other Old English poems", *Neophilologus*, 54, 1970, pp.167-183.
- Wright, Glenn, "'Now Springs The Spray' and *The Wife's Lament*", *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 14, 2001, pp. 11-14.

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

- Anderson, Earl R., "Voices in *The Husband's Message*", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 74, 1973, pp. 238-46.
- "*The Husband's Message*: Persuasion and the Problem of *genyre*", *English Studies*, 56, 1975, pp. 289-94.

- Bragg, Lois, "Runes and Readers: In and Around *The Husband's Message*", *Studia Neophilologica*, 71, 1999, pp. 34-50.
- Elliott, Ralph W.V., "The Runes in *The Husband's Message*", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 54, 1955, pp. 1-8.
- Fiocco, Teresa, "Le rune ne *Il messaggio del marito*", *Linguistica e Filologia*, 10, 1999, pp. 167-185.
- Goldsmith, Margaret E., "The Enigma of *The Husband's Message*", in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation. For John C. McGalliard*, L.E. Nicholson and D.W. Frese (eds.), Notre Dame and London, 1975, pp. 242-63.
- Greenfield, Stanley B., *The Interpretation of Old English Poems*, London; Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972, pp. 133-59.
- Kaske, Robert E., "The Reading *genyre* in *The Husband's Message*, line 49", *Medium Ævum*, 33, 1964, pp. 204-06.
- "A Poem of the Cross in the Exeter Book: *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message*", *Traditio*, 23, 1967, pp. 41-71.
- Kock, Ernst A., "Interpretations and Emendations of Early English Texts. VIII.", *Anglia*, 45, 1921, pp. 122-23.
- Leslie, Roy F., *Three Old English Elegies: The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message and The Ruin*, Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1988, pp. 12-22, 49-50, 59-66.
- Niles, John D., "The Trick of the Runes in *The Husband's Message*", *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32, 2003, pp. 189-223.
- Orton, Peter, "The Speaker in *The Husband's Message*", *Leeds Studies in English*, 12, 1981, pp. 43-56.
- Schneider, Karl, "*The Husband's Message* – Eine Analyse", in *Studien zur englischen Philologie, Mainusch*, Herbert/Rolle, Dietrich (eds.), Frankfurt: Peter D. Lang, 1979, pp. 27-49.
- Trautmann, Moritz, "Zur *Botschaft des Gemahls*", *Anglia*, 16, 1894, pp. 207-25.
- Walsh, Arlene, "The Depiction of Secular Women in Early Old English Poetry", *UNISA*, 29, 1991, pp. 1-7.

Wehlau, Ruth, "Seeds of Sorrow': Landscapes of Despair in *The Wanderer*, Beowulf's Story of Hrethel, and *Sonatorrek*", *Parergon*, 15, 1998, pp. 1-17.

REFERENCE WORKS

Belanoff, Patricia A., "*Ides...geomrode giddum*: The Old English Female Lament", in *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, A.L. Klinck and A.M. Rasmussen (eds.), Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002, pp. 29-46.

Bennet, Helen T., "Exile and the Semiosis of Gender in Old English Elegies", in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*, B.J. Harwood and G.R. Overing (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 43-58.

Bessinger, Jess B. and Robert P. Creed (eds.), *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, New York: New York University Press, 1965.

Conner, Patrick W., "The Old English Elogy: a historicization", in *Readings in Medieval Texts. Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, D. Johnson and E. Treharne (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 30-45.

Davidson, Clifford, "Erotic 'Women's Songs' in Anglo-Saxon England", *Neophilologus*, 59, 1975, pp. 451-62.

Dewa, Roberta, "Of Editors and the Old English Poetry of the Exeter Book", in *'Lastworda betst': essays in memory of Christine E. Fell with her unpublished Writings*, C.A. Hough, and K.A. Lowe (eds.), Donington, Lincs.: Tyas, 2002, pp. 18-40.

Dunleavy, Gareth W., *Colum's Other Island: the Irish at Lindisfarne*, Madison, 1960, pp. 78-92..

Fell, Christine E., *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, London: British Museum Publications, 1984.

———"Runes and Riddles in Anglo-Saxon England". In HOUGH, Carole A.; LOWE, Kathryn A. (eds.). *'Lastworda betst': essays in memory of Christine E. Fell with her unpublished Writings*. Donington, Lincs.: Tyas, 2002, pp. 264-277.

Gale, Sigal, *Erotic dawn-songs of the Middle Ages: voicing the lyric lady*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996.

- Horner, S. *The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature*. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Ingham, Patricia C., "From Kinship to Kingship: Mourning, Gender, and Anglo-Saxon Community", in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, J.C. Vaught, L.D. Bruckner and D.L. Miller (eds.), New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2003, pp. 17-31.
- Jamison, Carole P., "Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of Peace Pledge in Marital Exchanges", *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture*, 20, 2004, pp. 13-36.
- Jensen, Emily R., *Narrative voice in Old English lyric poetry*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1972.
- Kliman, Bernice W., "Women in Early English Literature, 'Beowulf' to the 'Ancrene Wisse'", *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 21, 1977, pp. 32-49.
- Klinck, Anne L., "Poetic Markers of Gender in Medieval "Woman's Song": Was Anonymous a Woman?", *Neophilologus*, 87, 2003, pp. 339-59.
- Klinck, Anne L. and Anne Marie Rasmussen (eds.), *Medieval woman's song: cross-cultural approaches*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002.
- Lee, D. "Wulf and Eadwacer: For Whom, For What?", *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies* 12 (2004), pp. 341-56.
- Melia, D.F., "An Odd but Celtic Way of Looking at Old English Elegy", in *Connections between Old English and Medieval Celtic Literature*, P.K. Ford and K.G. Borst (eds.), Lanham, Berkeley: Old English Colloquium, 1983, pp. 8-30.
- Mines, R. "An Examination of Kuhn's Second Law and Its Validity as a Metrical-Syntactical Rule". *Studies in Philology*, 99, 2002, pp. 337-55.
- Neville, Jennifer, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, "Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England", 27, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 19-201.
- Roolvinck, Hedwig, "El origen céltico de la poesía rimada medieval (sobre todo en relación con el zejel español)", *Neophilologus*, 59, 1975, pp. 1-13.

- Scragg, Daniel G., "The Nature of Old English Verse", in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, M. Godden and M. Lapidge (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 55-70.
- Shippey, T. A., "Approaches to Truth in Old English Poetry", *The University of Leeds Review*, 25, 1982, pp. 171-189.
- Stanley, Eric G., "Loyal Letters: Studies in Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose", *Notes and Queries*, 44, 1997, pp. 377-378.
- Stemmler, T., "Erotic Dawn-Songs of the Middle Ages: Voicing the Lyric Lady", *Notes and Queries*, 44, 1997, p. 538.
- Tiffany, Daniel, "Lyric Substance: on Riddles, Materialism and Poetic Obscurity", *Critical Inquiry*, 28, 2001, pp. 72-98.
- Zehnder, Ursula, "Hypermetrical Verse Patterns in the Riddles of the Exeter Book", *Notes and Queries*, 47, 2000, pp. 405-09.

PART TWO. CRITICAL EDITION AND VARIORUM COMMENTARY

1. CRITICAL EDITION

WULF AND EADWACER

- 01 Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife;
02 willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
03 Ungelic is us.
04 Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre.
05 Fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen.
06 Sindon wælreowe weras þær on ige;
07 willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
08 Ungelice is us.
09 Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum hogode;
10 þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt,
11 þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
12 wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað.
13 Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine
14 seoce gedydon, þine * seldcymas, * fol. 101r.

-
1. *Sieper* omission marks before l. 1; *Lehmann* omission marks indicating two missing lines before l. 1
gife *Imelmann* gefe
2a. **hy** *Imelmann* hie
2b. **on þreat** *Imelmann* in þreate
3. **Ungelic** *Sieper* ungelice; *Schücking* ungelic'; *Imelmann* ungelimp
4a. **Wulf** *Sieper* Wulf [min]
iege *Imelmann* ege
5a. **fæst** *Sieper* fæste
6b. **þær** *Imelmann* her
iege *Imelmann* ege
8. **ungelice** *Imelmann* ungelimp; *Malone, Bolton, Lehmann, Rodrigues* ungelic
9b. **hogode** *MS., Grein, Grein-Wülker, Sieper, Schücking, Craigie, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Suzuki, Lehmann, Giles, Osborn, Rodrigues, Klinck* dogode; *Sieper* omits wenum
10a. *Sieper* wæs it reonig weder
weder *Grein* wæter
10b. **reotugu** *Imelmann* reotigu
11a. *Sieper* me se beaducafa
13a. Wulf, **min Wulf** *Imelmann* se min Wulf; *Tupper* min wulf, min wulf
13b. **wena** *Imelmann* wene
14a. **gedydon** *Imelmann* gededun

- 15 murnende mod, nales meteliste.
16 Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Uncerne earmne hwelp
17 bireð wulf to wuda.
18 Þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs –
19 uncer giedd geador.

15b. **nales** *Imelmann nalles*

meteliste *Imelmann metelestu*

16a. **Gehyrest þu** *Imelmann georstu*

16b. **earmne** *MS., Grein, Grein-Wülker, Imelmann, Tupper, Craigie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Osborn, Rodrigues earne; Sieper earone; Mackie, Baker eargne*

18b. **gesomnad** *Schücking, Imelmann gesomnod*

19. **giedd** *Sieper, Schücking, Imelmann gæd*

geador *Imelmann gador*

THE WIFE'S LAMENT

01 Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,
02 minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,
03 hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox,
04 niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu:
05 a ic wite wonn minra wræcsiþa.
06 Ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
07 ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
08 hwær min leodfruma londes wære.
09 Ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,
10 wineleas wræcca, for minre weaþearfe,
11 ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan
12 þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc,
13 þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice

-
- 1a. **giedd** *Conybeare, Ettmüller gied; Klipstein gyd*
1b. **bi** *Klipstein, Magoun be*
ful geomorre *Klipstein ful-geomorne*
2a. **minre sylfre** *Klipstein min-sylfes; Grein-Wülcker, minre selfre*
sið *Mandel siðe*
3b. **up weox** *Conybeare upaweox; Ettmüller up avox; Grein up-veox; Sieper, Schücking, Mackie, Suzuki, Leslie, Muir*
up aweox
4b. **no** *Klipstein ne*
5a. **wonn** *Conybeare won*
5b. **minra** *Mandel minre*
6a. **ærest** *Conybeare, Klipstein. l. 5b*
7b. **hæfde** *Stefanovic ahte*
uhtceare *Conybeare wht ceare*
8a. **hwær** *Ettmüller hvar*
londes *Klipstein landes*
10a. **wræcca** *MS., Mackie wræcca; Ettmüller vrecça; Klipstein, Stefanovic, Magoun wrecca*
10b. *Klipstein mine wea-thearfa ongunnon*
for *Conybeare l. 10a; Klipstein faer, l. 10a*
11a. **Ongunnon** *Conybeare l. 10b*
monnes *Klipstein mannes*
11b. **magas** *Klipstein maegas*
hycgan *Klipstein hycgdon*
12a. **dyrne** *Conybeare tyrne; Klipstein dyrnne*
12b. **hy** *Ettmüller hî*
todælden *Ettmüller tōdældon; Klipstein to-daeldon; Magoun todælen*
13a. **gewidost** *Klipstein gewidoste*

14¹³ lifdon laðlicost, ond mec longade.
 15 Het mec hlaford min her heard niman,
 16 ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede,
 17 holdra freonda. Forþon is min hyge geomor,
 18 ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde,
 19 hearsæligne, hygegeomorne,
 20 mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne.
 21 Bliðe gebæro ful oft wit beotedan
 22 þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana
 23 owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
 24 is nu [***] swa hit no wære,
 25 freondscipe uncer. Sceal ic feor ge neah
 26 mines felaleofan fæhðu dreogan.
 27 Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,

¹³ 14a. **laðlicost** *Klipstein* lathlicoste

14b. **ond** *Conybeare, Ettmüller, Klipstein, Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie* and **longade** *Klipstein* langade

15a. **Het** *Conybeare* Hat

15b. **her heard** *Thorpe, Kluge, Schücking, Krapp-Dobbie, Malone, Bolton* herheard; *Ettmüller* Herheard; *Grein, Sieper, Craigie, Suzuki, Leslie, Hamer* her eard; *Klipstein* her heorde; *Magoun* hearg-eard

16b. **þissum** *Ettmüller* þisum
londstede *Klipstein* land-stede

17b. **Forþon** *Klipstein* furthon; *Kershaw* for þon
hyge *Klipstein* hogu

18a. **þa** *Ettmüller* þæt

gemæcne *Conybeare* gemæc; *Mandel* gemæc ne

18b. **monnan** *Conybeare* ne monnan; *Klipstein* mannan; *Malone* monna

20a. **miþendne**: *Conybeare* unðendne

20b. **hycgendne** *MS.* hycgende. *Conybeare, Klipstein, Wülcker, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Klinck* hycgende

21. *Grein- Wülcker* Ful oft wit beotedan bliþe gebærum

21b. **ful oft** *Kluge, Schücking* fuloft

beotedan *Ettmüller* beotôdon; *Conybeare, Klipstein* beotedon

22a. **ne gedælde** *Klipstein* negedælde; *Schücking* ne-gedælde

23a. *Conybeare* 22b

owiht *Klipstein* awiht

23b. **onhworfen** *Conybeare* on hworfan

24. *Conybeare, Thorpe, Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Stefanovic, Kershaw, Mackie, Malone, Bolton, Cassidy-Ringler, Mandel* no omission marks; *Ettmüller* is nu swa hit no wære: nið todælde; *Klipstein* is nu swa hit ne wære; *Leslie, Suzuki, Muir* is nu fornumen

25b. **Sceal** *MS.* seal. *Conybeare, Malone* seal

ic *Conybeare* is

ge neah *Conybeare, Thorpe, Ettmüller, Grein, Wülcker, Stefanovic* geneah; *Klipstein* genoh

26b. **fæhðu** *Conybeare, Ettmüller, Klipstein* fæhða; *Magoun* fæhþe

28 under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.
 29 Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad;
 30 sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,
 31 bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxne,
 32 wic wynna leas. Ful oft mec her wraðe begeat
 33 fromsiþ frean. Frynd sind on eorþan,
 34 leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,
 35 þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
 36 under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
 37 Þær ic sittam mot sumorlangne dæg,
 38 þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas,
 39 earfoþa fela. Forþon ic æfre ne mæg
 40 þære modceare minre gerestan,
 41 ne ealles þæs longapes þe mec on þissum life begeat.

* fol. 115v.

27a. **mon** *Conybeare, Etmüller, Klipstein* man

27b. **wunian** *Etmüller* vunjan

wuda bearwe *Conybeare* wuda bearwa; *Etmüller* vudubearve; *Klipstein* wudu-bearwe; *Craigie* wudu bearwe

28a. **actreo** *Klipstein, Sieper* ac-treowe

28b. **in þam** *Magoun* on þæm

29a. **eald** *Conybeare, Etmüller, Klipstein* cald

þes *Conybeare* ðis

29b. **eal** *Klipstein* eall

oflongad *Klipstein* of-langad

30b. **duna uphea** *Conybeare* duna up hean; *Grein* dune up-hea; *Grein-Wülcker* dunu uphea

31a. **burgtunas** *Conybeare* burg-tanes; *Klipstein* burh-tanas

31b. **brerum** *Klipstein* braerum

32b. **mec** *Malone* me

begeat *Conybeare, Klipstein l. 33a*

33a. **fromsið** *Conybeare* from sið; *Klipstein* fram-sith

frea *Schücking* frigan

34a. **leofe** *Conybeare* leof

lifgende *Etmüller* lifigende

35b. **þonne** *Conybeare* þon

ana *Etmüller* ane

gonge *Conybeare, Klipstein* gange

36a. **actreo** *Klipstein, Sieper* ac-treowe

eorðscrafu *Conybeare* eorð scrafa

37a. **sittam** *Conybeare, Thorpe, Etmüller, Klipstein, Grein, Grein-Wülcker, Stefanovic, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Magoun, Suzuki, Leslie, Cassidy-Ringler, Mandel, Klinck* sittan

39a. **earfoþa** *Mandel* eorfoþa

39b. **forþon** *Klipstein* furthon; *Kershaw* for þon

ne mæg *Kluge* nemæg; *Schücking* ne-mæg

40b. **gerestan** *Conybeare* gerestanne

42 A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
 43 heard heortan geþoht, swylce habban sceal
 44 bliþe gebæro, eac þon breostceare,
 45 sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong
 46 eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
 47 feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð
 48 under stanhlīþe storme behrimed,
 49 wine werigmod, wætre befloweren
 50 on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
 51 micle modceare; he gemon to oft
 52 wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
 53 of langoþe leofes abidan.

-
- 41a. **ne ealles** *Conybeare ealles*
 longaþes *Conybeare longa*
 41b. **þe** *Conybeare ðæs; Etmüller þäs*
 þissum *Etmüller þisum*
 42a. **A scyle** *Conybeare Ascyle*
 mon *Conybeare, Etmüller man; Klipstein mann*
 42b. **geomormod** *Klipstein l. 43a*
 43b. **swylce** *Conybeare swylc; Etmüller, Klipstein svylc*
 44b. **eac þon** *Klipstein eac thonne; Schücking eaþon*
 45a. **sinsorgna** *Klipstein sin-sorga; Grein-Wülcker sinsorga*
gedread *Malone gedræg*
 45b. **gelong** *Klipstein gelang*
 46a. **eal** *Klipstein eall*
 worulde wyn *Klipstein woruld-wyn*
 47a. **folclondes** *Klipstein folces landes*
 47b. **þæt** *Etmüller, Klipstein þær*
 siteð *Klipstein sitteth*
 48a. **stanhlīþe** *Conybeare stan hliðu*
 50b. **min wine** *Sieper wine min*
 51b. **gemon** *Klipstein geman*
 52b. **þam þe** *Schücking þamþe*
 þe sceal *Conybeare l. 53a*

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

Note: the dots between square brackets indicate the holes and the places in the MS. where the text is illegible.

01 Nu ic onsundran þe secgan wille
02 [. . . .] treocyn. Ic tudre aweox;
03 in mec ælda [.] sceal
04 ellor londes settan [.]c
05 sealte streamas [.]sse.
06 Ful oft ic on bates bosme [. . . .] gesohte,
07 þær mec mondryhten min onsende
08 ofer heah hafu; eom nu her cumen
09 on ceolþele, ond nu cunnan scealt
10 hu þu ymb modlufun mines frean
11 on hyge hycge. Ic gehatan dear
12 þæt þu þær tinfæste treowe findest.
13 Hwæt, þec þonne biddan het se þisne beam agrof
14 þæt þu sinchroden sylf gemunde

-
- 2a. [...] *Grein, Craigie* ymb; *Kluge* ymbe þæt; *Sedgefield* be; *Mackie, Bolton, Suzuki* ymb þisum
2b. **treocyn** *Kluge* treocynn; *Sedgefield, Mackie, Bolton, Suzuki* treocynnne
3. *Thorpe* eal; *Grein* omission marks
in *Sedgefield* ond
ælda *Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Klinck* æld; *Sedgefield* ælces;
Mackie [...]ld; *Suzuki* ælda bearn
sceal *Grein* eall
4. **settan** *Thorpe* omission marks; *Grein* sette siðfæt ofer; *Sedgefield* settan on siðas
5. *Thorpe, Grein, Craigie* sealte streamas; *Wülcker* sealte strea[...]; *Kluge* [...]n sealte streamas [...sse]; *Sedgefield*
sealte streamas / fus oferferan frean be hæse
6a. **bosme** *Thorpe, Wülcker, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Klinck* omission
marks; *Kluge* bearme
6b. **gesohte** *Thorpe, Grein* sohte
7. **onsende** *Thorpe, Wülcker, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie, Klinck* omission marks
8a. *Thorpe, Grein* om. ofer; *Wülcker* [...]fer
hafu MS. hofu. *Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton* hofu
9b. **ond** *Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie* and
cunnan *Kluge* cunnian
scealt *Grein* sceall; *Kluge, Sedgefield* sceal
10a. **modlufun** *Thorpe, Craigie* mod-lufan; *Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Sedgefield, Mackie,*
Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Suzuki, Klinck modlufan
10b. **frean** *Schücking* frigan
11a. **hyge** *Sieper* hyge þin

15 on gewitlocan wordbeotunga,
 16 þe git on ærdagum oft gespræcon,
 17 þenden git moston on meoduburgum
 18 eard weardigan, an lond bugan,
 19 freondscype fremman. Hine fæhþo adraf
 20 of sigeþeode; heht nu sylfa þe
 21 lustum læram, þæt þu lagu drefde,
 22 siþþan þu gehyrde on hliþes oran
 23 galan geomorne geac on bearwe.
 24 Ne læt þu þec siþþan siþes getwæfan,
 25 lade gelettan lifgendne monn.
 26 Ongin mere secan, mæwes eþel,
 27 onsite sænacan, þæt þu suð heonan
 28 ofer merelade monnan findest,
 29 þær se þeoden is þin on wenum.
 30 Ne mæg him on worulde willa gelimpan
 31 mara on gemyndum, þæs þe he me sægde,
 32 þonne inc geunne alwaldend god
 33 þæt git ætsomne siþþan motan
 34 secgum ond gesiþum sinc brytnian
 35²¹ næglede beagas; he genoh hafað
 36 fædan goldes [.]

* fol. 123 v.

-
- 17a. **þenden** *Klipstein* þendan
 17b. **meoduburgum** *Ettmüller, Grein* meodoburgum
 18b. **an lond** *Klipstein, Ettmüller* an land; *Sieper* anlond
 19b. **fæhþo** *Craigie* fæhþe
 20b. **heht** *Klipstein* haet
 21a. **læram** *Thorpe, Ettmüller, Grein, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Sedgfield, Craigie, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton, Suzuki, Klinck* læran
 21b. **lagu** *Klipstein* lage
 24a. **þec** *Craigie* om.
 27a. **onsite** *Klipstein* on-sitte
 27b. **heonan** *Grein* heonon
 30a. **on wordulde** *Thorpe, Klipstein, Wülcker, Kluge, Schücking, Sedgfield, Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton* om. on; *Grein* to worulde; *Kershaw* [...]n worulde; *Klinck* ofer worulde
 30b. **gelimpan** *Thorpe, Ettmüller, Sieper, Kershaw, Craigie, Klinck* omission marks; *Klipstein, Wülcker* om.
 33a. **þæt git** *Thorpe, Ettmüller, Wülcker, Sieper, Kershaw, Craigie, Krapp-Dobbie, Klinck* omission marks
motan *Klipstein, Ettmüller* moton
 34a. **ond** *Klipstein, Ettmüller, Grein, Wülcker, Sieper, Schücking, Craigie* and
 34b. **sync brytnian** *Thorpe, Klipstein, Ettmüller* omission marks; *Wülcker, Kershaw, Craigie, Krapp-Dobbie* s[...]; *Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Mackie, Klinck* sync gedælan; *Bolton* sync bryhtnian
 35a. **næglede** *Thorpe, Ettmüller, Kershaw* ætlede; *Klipstein* omission marks; *Wülcker* æglede
 35b. *Klipstein* omission marks
 36. *Klipstein* omission marks

37 geond elþeode eþel healde,
 38 fægre foldan [.]
 39 holdra hæleþa, þeah þe her min wine
 40 [.]
 41 nyde gebæded, nacan ut aþrong,
 42 ond on yþa gelagu ana sceolde
 43 faran on flotweg, forðsiþes georn,
 44 mangan merestreamas. Nu se mon hafað
 45 wean oferwunnen; nis him wilna gad –
 46 ne meara ne maðma ne meododreama,
 47 ænges ofer eorþan eorlgestreona,
 48 þeodnes dohtor, gif he þin beneah.
 49 Ofer eald gebeot incer twega,
 50 gehyre ic ætsomne .S.R. geador
 51 .EA.W. ond .M. aþe benemnan,
 52 þæt he þa wære ond þa winetreowe

-
- 36a. *Grein* adds feohgestreona
fædan MS. fēdan. *Grein, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Sedgfield, Craigie, Mackie* fættan
goldes *Thorpe, Etmüller* go[...]; *Wülcker, Kershaw* gol[...]; *Krapp-Dobbie* gold[.]s
 36b. *Kluge* feohgestreona; *Sieper* þeah þe he feorran wunie; *Sedgfield* Frea sylfa cwæð
 37. *Klipstein* omission marks
 37a. **geond** *Thorpe, Etmüller, Schücking, Craigie* omission marks; *Grein* þeah he on; *Wülcker* d; *Kluge, Sieper*
 and mid; *Kershaw, Klinck* [...]ed; *Sedgfield* þæt he on; *Mackie* mid; *Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton* [...]d
 37b. **healde** *Kluge* healdeð

 38. *Klipstein* omission marks
foldan *Wülcker, Kershaw, Craigie* folda
 38b. *Grein* him fela þegnað; *Kluge* and ðær fela hafað; *Sedgfield* folgað hæbbe
 39. *Klipstein* omission marks
 39a. **holdra** *Thorpe, Etmüller, Wülcker, Kershaw, Craigie, Mackie, Krapp-Dobbie* [...]ra; *Grein* vlanca; *Kluge*
 wloncra; *Sedgfield* wlanca
 39b. **wine** *Thorpe, Etmüller* w[...]; *Grein, Kluge, Sedgfield* winedryhten; *Krapp-Dobbie, Bolton* wine[...]
 40. *Grein, Kluge, Sedgfield, Craigie, Bolton* no omission marks
 41b. **aþrong** *Klipstein* athrang
 42. **ond** *Klipstein, Etmüller, Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Craigie* and
gelagu ana *Thorpe* gong; *Klipstein* gang; *Etmüller* gong ana; *Grein* begong ana; *Wülcker, Schücking, Kershaw,*
Craigie geong; *Kluge, Mackie, Suzuki* geong ana; *Sieper* geong anred; *Krapp-Dobbie* geong [...]; *Klinck*
 ge[...]g[.] ana
 44b. **mon** *Klipstein* mann
 48b. **beneah** *Klipstein* be-hnige
 50a. **gehyre** *Thorpe, Etmüller, Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Kershaw, Craigie, Krapp-Dobbie* gecyre; *Klipstein, Sedgfield*
 gecyrre
 51a. **EA** *Sedgfield* EO(lh); *Craigie* Æ
ond *Klipstein, Etmüller, Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Craigie* and
M *Grein, Wülcker, Kluge, Kershaw, Craigie* D; *Sedgfield* D(æg); *Craigie* M (D?)

- 53 be him lifgendum læstan wolde,
54 þe git on ærdagum oft gespræconn.
-

52b. **ond** *Klipstein, Wülcker, Kluge, Sieper, Schücking, Kershaw, Craigie* and

54b. **gespræconn** *Klipstein, Ettmüller, Grein, Sieper, Sedgfield, Craigie, Suzuki* gespræcon; Mackie gespræcon†

2. VARIORUM COMMENTARY

WULF AND EADWACER

1a *Leodum*: Tupper believes that the present poem is a riddle composed by Cynewulf as a play on his name. Acrostic and charade would be used in the text: the former would be found in synonyms of the runic letters composing the Anglo-Saxon poet's name, scattered throughout the poem; the latter would be recognizable in the synonyms of the words *cyn* — MnE “kin”, but also the first syllable of the name *Cynwulf* — and in the occurrences of the word *wulf*. According to his theory, Tupper proposes that *leod* be understood as a synonym of *cyn* (*The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle*, 1910, p. 238).

1b *lac*: “gift, present” is the most common interpretation (Bradley 1888, p. 198). A synonym of *Feob*, the name of the rune “f”: the construction *lac gifē* is similar to *feob-gift*, a compound which occurs three times in *Beowulf* (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle*, 1910, p. 239). A. Davidson (1975, pp. 24-32), believing that the poem is intentionally ambiguous, proposes to keep all the possible translations of this word, as it is crucial to the understanding of the text, and therefore translates “battle / sacrifice / gift / message / game” (p. 25). Peter S. Baker (1981, pp. 39-51) points out that “battle” comes from an erroneous interpretation of a passage in Guthlac B by B-T, and so crosses this rendering out; he also underlines that the meaning “game” never occurs in Old English, and that Old Icelandic evidence for it cannot be taken as proof of its validity. He concludes that the word means “gift”, also “message” as an extension of “gift”, or “offering, sacrifice”, and that in the latter case it is usually accompanied by a “more

ceremonious” verb than *gifan*. This indicates that its occurrence in l. 1b of *WE* means simply “gift”, and this shows that there is no ambiguity in this part of the text (pp. 40-41).

2/7 willað by hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð: Tupper points out that “they” is referred to, the speaker’s people or kin. If *leod* is accepted as a synonym of *cyn* — the first part of the name *Cynwulf* — the whole line can be read as a word-play: *Cyn* will press upon “him”, that is *Wulf*, if *Wulf* comes to *Nyd*, that is the last letter of the syllable *Cyn*. The resulting form is *Cynwulf*, which is found also in *Christ* and *The Fates of the Apostles*. There must be a missing line before l. 2, in which the referent of *by* — *Wulf* — was introduced. Tupper discards the theory that the first riddle is a translation of some Old Norse source. Some critics before him (see below, Lawrence 1902) proposed this idea on the basis of the presence of the refrain, which, together with strophic structure, is typical of Old Norse poetry. He states that in *Wu* the refrain is different from the kind of refrains found in Old Norse, because it is more closely connected with the following rather than with the preceding lines. The presence of features typical of Old Icelandic literature can be best explained as the result of the surviving of old Germanic modes of expression in Anglo-Saxon (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle*, 1910, p. 239).

by: “them”, referred to *leod*, 1a (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes*, 1910, p. 239).

hine: the referent is *Wulf*, l. 4a. Lawrence suggests that two lines are missing before l. 2, because the pronouns *hine* and *he* do not have any referents (1902, p. 251). If this were true, there would be a group of four lines immediately followed by the short line “Ungelic(e) is us”. Lawrence highlights that this would be exactly the same pattern found in the following four lines. The presence of the refrain and the idea that the poem has a strophic structure are the main points in which the scholar bases his theory that *Wu* is a translation from some lost Old Norse source (Lawrence 1902, pp. 247-61). Greenfield prints *cyme* in l. 2b and *cymeð* in l. 7b: it

is a misprinting, as clarified by the statement that the text followed is that of Krapp-Dobbie (Greenfield 1986, p. 5).

aþecgan: a *hapax*. Bradley interprets it as the causative of *þicgan*, and translates it as “to give food”: the speaker’s people will feed Wulf should he need it (Bradley 1888, p. 198). Baker (1981, pp. 39-51) makes reference to an occurrence of the word Bradley did not know of, namely a medical recipe in which it means “serve someone with”, “administer”. The simplex *þecgan* is well attested, and in one case, in *Genesis A* l. 2002b, it is part of a metaphor: *ecgum of þegde* (“served with swords”, that is “killed”). Baker hypothesises that *þecgan* was part of a stock phrase or metaphor in which its meaning was “to kill”, and concludes that *aþecgan* in WE means both “to feed” and “to kill” (p. 43).

2b/7b *he*: referred to Wulf, again.

þreat: “to come to want”, just as the Old Icelandic expression *at þrotum koma* (Bradley 1888, p. 198). Lawrence accepts Bradley’s reading and adds Cleasby-Vigfusson’s and Cook’s translation: “to come into heavy straits”. He highlights that the phrase *on þreat cuman* is a *hapax* in Old English, while it is a common expression in Old Icelandic. On these grounds, he states that there must be an Old Norse influence at work here (Lawrence 1902, p. 256). It means “compulsion”, “distress”, just as *nyd*, which is the name of the rune “n” and which here forms part of the acrostic (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle*, 1910, p. 238). “The lady’s people do not succor him when he falls into trouble”: R.W. Chambers’ s quotation of Sir Israel Gollancz’s translation as reported by Sedgefield (Sedgefield 1931, p. 74).

3 *ungelice is us*: “it is otherwise with us” (Bradley 1888, p. 198). Lawrence translates it as a cry expressing the speaker’s inner feelings: “They will *aþecgan* him! Unlike is our lot!”. He highlights that refrain is very seldom found in Anglo-Saxon poetry. He quotes the famous

example of *Deor*: *þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg*, “That he endured, this also can I!” (Lawrence’s translation). He compares the refrain in *Deor* to the repeated lines in *Wu*, and concludes that they have the same features and function: in both poems they seem to serve a similar purpose, namely, “to express what is uppermost in the speaker’s mind”. To support his theory that *Wu* has Old Norse origins, he points out that *Deor* is closely connected in subject to sagas which have been handed down by Scandinavian sources, and also that *Wu* immediately follows *Deor* in the manuscript, which could indicate similarity of theme (Lawrence 1902, pp. 254-55). By this statement the lady says that she is more loyal to Wulf than to her people (Sedgefield 1931, p. 74).

4a Wulf: the guesser of the riddle, according to Trautmann; the speaker would be the personification of the riddle itself, which would be addressing its guesser directly. The guesser, like a wolf, seizes the solution and carries it away with him (Trautmann 1883, p. 164). Explicit mention of the second part of the poet’s name (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle*, 1910, p. 239). Holthausen suggests that the name here was substituted by a scribe for an original *he*, the same pronoun that is found in l. 2/7. He believes the name could not be in the text originally because it does not alliterate, making the line irregular (Holthausen 1919, p. 54). An actual wolf, about which the protagonist — a female dog — has a dream: they have had an affair, but now her masters are hunting the beast, which is kidnapping the dog’s puppy (Sedgefield 1931, p. 74).

iege: Lawrence points out that this poem is the only case in the whole Anglo-Saxon corpus in which this word does not occur in a compound — the common word for island is *egland*. In Old Norse, on the contrary, the uncompounded word is more usual: *ey* alone means island, therefore *eyland* literally means “island-land”. He quotes an example from the *Konungskugsjá*:

forvitnar mér ok þat, hvárt þér ætlit, at þat sé meginland eða eyland — “I am curious to know whether you think that is the mainland, or the land of an island”. Hence he draws the conclusion that the use of *ig* in ll. 4 and 6 is due to an Old Norse influence. The fact that the other word for island, that is *eglonð*, occurs in l. 5, is due to the presence of *fenne*: in that case the earth of the island was contrasted with the marsh around. Lawrence states that it would have been quite natural for a Scandinavian to use *eyland* here, rather than the common word *ey* (Lawrence 1902, p. 257).

4b ic: one of the elements on which Leo bases his charade theory. An older form of this pronoun is *cwen*, and Leo considers *cyn* its variant. Tupper rejects this reading as unacceptable. However, he believes the charade is present in another way: *leodum minum*, l.1a, is a synonym of *cyn* — the latter would be thus identifiable with *cyn*, and, as a result, l. 4 would become a pun on the two syllables composing the name of the famous Anglo-Saxon poet (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 239). Morley takes the speaker to be a Christian preacher fighting against the devil — “the wolf” (Morley 1888, pp. 223 ff.). Bradley is the first scholar to point out that the referent of this pronoun must be feminine, as indicated by the inflection of the adjectives *reotogu*, 10b, and *seoce*, 14a. He suggests that the protagonist is a woman and that the poem is a fragment of a longer dramatic monologue that she is uttering, lamenting the separation from her beloved, Wulf (Bradley 1888, p. 198). Sedgefield supports the riddle theory, but with peculiar arguments: the speaker would be a female dog, and the text would be the account of her dream about a love story with a wolf (Sedgefield 1931, p. 74).

5a fæst: variously interpreted as an adjective or an adverb. Bradley translates it as “closely”, taking it as an adverb (Bradley 1888, p. 198). Holthausen states that it is not an adverb, and he

proposes to make it clear by inserting a comma after *eglond*, at the end of the a-verse (1893, p. 188 and 1912, p. 168).

eglond: *eg* is otherwise found in the form *ea*, which means “sea”, in Old English *lagu* — the name of the rune “l”, part of the acrostic. *Eglond* might be a corruption of *ealond*, but it could also be the intended form: both variants are found in *Whale* ll. 12, 16, 21, and *eglond* is also comparable to *egstream*, meaning “water”, “sea” (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, pp. 238-239).

6a wæltreowe: Leo identifies the noun with *cene*, which he considered an variant on the first syllable of the name *Cynewulf*. Tupper corrects his theory, and suggests that *wæltreowe* is a synonym of *Cene*, which in *Christ*, *Elene* and *Fates* indicates the name of the rune “c” (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240).

9a widlastum: Bradley takes it as an adjective a pre-modifying *wenum*, meaning “with far-wandering” (Bradley 1888, p. 198).

9b wenum: “longings” (Bradley 1888, p. 198).

dogode: one of the most disputed words in the poem. Holthausen highlights that the form usually taken as appropriate on metrical grounds, namely *dogōde*, does not make sense here, since it would come from *adōgian*. He states that an Anglo-Saxon verb *adōgian*, though not attested, would resemble the West Saxon form *diegan*, coming from Gothic **daugjan*. He proposes to take the word in the latter sense, and to solve the metrical problem by making *widlastum* the b-verse in l. 9, and *wenum dogode* the a-verse in l. 10 (Holthausen 1919, p. 54).

10a renig: *ren* means the same as *Lagu*, the rune “l” (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240).

10b *reotogu*: nom. sg. fem. of the adjective *reotig*, “sad”, “mournful”. Together with *seoce*, 14a, this adjective makes it clear that the speaker is female, although the first scholar to point this out was Bradley in 1888 (p. 198). Prior to that, editors did not seem to recognize the feminine inflection at all.

11a *beaducafa*: synonym of *Cene*, the rune “c”

11b *bogum bilegde*: “encircled me with his arms” (Bradley 1888, p. 198). *Bog* may come from *boga*, “bow”, which is the same as *Yr* — the name of the rune “y”, but also a word possibly meaning “bow”, “gold” or “horn” (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240).

12a *wyn*: Holthausen proposes to emend it to *leaf*, a synonym that would keep the meaning unchanged while making the line perfectly metrical, since *leaf* alliterates with *lað*. The two opposites would be further emphasized if *lað* were moved immediately after *hwæpre* (Holthausen 1893, p. 188). Later, he seems to change his mind about the emendation, although he still points out that it cannot alliterate with *hwæpre*, 12b (1914, p. 75).

to þon: Lawrence quotes Bosworth-Toller, which translates “to that degree” or “to the end that”, just to point out that the first one does not make any sense here, and the second one does not fit the context. The “expected” phrase here is “I had pleasure in that” — possible if *to þon* is the rendering of the Old Norse *at því*. As evidence for this reading, he quotes Gering’s translation of a passage from *Gripessþó* in which the critic translates the phrase precisely in this way. (Lawrence 1902, p. 256).

12b *lað*: sometimes read as a noun, “pain”(Bradley 1888, p. 198), sometimes as an adjective, “loathsome”. Holthausen proposes to emend it to the synonym *wá* or *wéa* in order to make the line regular, if we consider *wyn* to be right reading in the a-verse (Holthausen 1893, p. 188).

Sedgefield translates the line as “I liked it, yet I liked it not”, and explains it as a statement of the speaker’s coyness (1931, p. 74).

13a *Wulf, min Wulf*: this half line is irregularly from a metrical viewpoint. Holthausen proposes to add a syllable to make it metrical: “Wulf, min Wulf la!” (1893, p. 188).

13b *wena*: it comes from *wen, wyn*, the name of the rune “w”. Sievers proved that in Old English poetry “w” is always to be interpreted *wyn*, as shown by Ms. Salzburg, where the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet is explained. Tupper points out that in many other runic alphabets “w” is solved as *wen*, which appears in l. 9 — *wenum* — and 13 — *wena* —, and which has the same function as *wyn*, l. 12: to indicate the rune “w” (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240).

14a *seoce*: almost unanimously interpreted as “sick”, although sometimes the meaning is taken literally and sometimes figuratively.

16a *Eadwacer*: Leo proposes to read it as an equivalent of the letter “e”, but this is not acceptable, because this vowel is always called *Eh* or *Eoh*, “horse”. Schofield suggests that it is the translation of an Old Norse epithet, *Auðvagr*, which means “The Easily/Very Vigilant One”(1902, p. 267), but Tupper points out that the name is attested twice in Old English, and, therefore, there is no reason to look for a Norse analogue for it (Tupper *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240). Morley translates it as *custos bonorum*, the keeper of wealth, but he takes the meaning figuratively rather than literally: he would be the same person as the *hwelp*, that is the child of the speaker — the Christian preacher — and the flesh. He takes away the wolf, that is the devil and his temptations, to the wood of the Holy Cross (Morley 1888, p. 223 ff.). Trautmann identifies Eadwacer with the *hwelp*, too: he would be the answer of the riddle, personified because it is the child of the riddle and its guesser (Trautmann 1883, p. 164).

Imelmann considers it the Anglo-Saxon version of Odoacer, and grounds on it his theory that this poem, *Wi* and *Hu* form an Old English cycle on the Gothic king (Imelmann, *Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung*, 1907). Tupper discards Imelmann's view because the runes closing *Hu* cannot be read as *Eadwacer* (p. 240). On the contrary, he believes that it is simply the friend to whom Cynewulf dedicates his poem, after the Old Norse fashion (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 241). Sedgefield thinks that this is the watch dog whose mate is the protagonist of the poem. He points out that *Eadwacer* means "guardian of wealth", which he considers very apt for a dog, and that it reminds also of Odoacer, the king of Italy. He claims that it has always been customary to name dogs after important historical characters, such as kings and emperors. Here the protagonist is calling him for help because she has just dreamt that the wolf is taking their puppy away (Sedgefield 1931, p. 75).

16b *uncerne*: it is the equivalent of *ur*, and it is also the name of the rune "u" (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240).

earne: one of the most discusses cruces in the poems. Bradley takes it as the accusative of *earh*, an adjective meaning "cowardly" (Bradley 1888, p. 198). Emended to *earmne*, "miserable", by many editors and critics: Holthausen (1893, pp. 188-89) explains that *eargne* or *earhne* are not possible readings, because -g- or -h- in Old English are never found between "r- and -n, as Sievers shows in his grammar. He proposes to emend to *earmne*. Bradley claims that he had thought of this reading before Holthausen, although he did not mention it in his article on *The Academy* of 1888 (1893, p. 170). Lawrence believes that this form comes from *earu*, meaning "swift", although it is irregular — the regular form is *earone*, as Cook says, although this does not completely exclude the possibility that the form *earne* derives from *earu*. Lawrence states that *earu* is the Old English equivalent of the Old Norse *ǫrr*, whose meaning is similar. If this

was the word in the source, it would be inflected in the form *orvan*: the translator chose *earne* instead of *earone* in order to keep the metrical value of the original word, which was disyllabic, while *earone* is trisyllabic (1902, p. 258)

hwelp: in Trautmann's reading of the poem as a riddle whose solution is "riddle", the whelp is the child of the guesser — Wulf, see note 16a above — and of the personified riddle, that is the solution (Trautmann 1883, p. 164). It could be a reference to progenies, kin, in Old English *Cyn* though Tupper admits that it is never used of a single offspring. Anyway, he believes that here the use of the word could have been adapted to the needs of the charade, and that the line could be read: "*wulf* carries away *cyn*", another word-play on the supposed author's name. The noun "wood" would appear in the line just because its association with "wolf" is conventional, as shown by comparison with *Judith*, l. 206, *Brunaburh* l. 65, *Cotton Gnomes* l. 18, *Elene* l. 113 (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240). Sedgefield believes that the *hwelp* is really the female dog and the watch dog's puppy, which is sleeping by her side. When it suddenly yelps in its dream, she is awoken by this sound, believing that the wolf in her dream is actually taking her puppy away (Sedgefield 1931, p. 74).

17a wulf: another explicit mention of the second part of the name *Cynewulf* (Tupper, *The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle* 1910, p. 240).

18b gesomnad: the protagonist — the female dog — realizes that she has never had an affair with any wolf, and utters this sentence in relief (Sedgefield 1931, p. 74).

19a giedd: Morley reads it as the subject of ll. 18-19: our — the Christian preacher and Eadwacer's — music, that is, the preaching in the form of this poem, can bring together sinners who had never been united in Christian brotherhood (Morley 1888, p. 223 ff.). "Song" (Bradley 1888, p. 198).

THE WIFE'S LAMENT

1a. *Ic*: the speaker is a living mortal woman in the most accepted interpretation. Lench, however, suggests that she is a living-dead, a barrow-wight, that is an animated corpse able to walk and speak during the night and compelled to go back to its grave at dawn (Lench 1970, p. 17). Luyster argues that she is the “Germanic Great Goddess” herself, or one of its mythological representations, such as *Freyja* (Luyster 1998, p. 243). Wentersdorf understands her to be “a woman married to a man of high rank”, who came from a country different from that of her husband and who could be a “*friðo-webba*”, a peace-weaver bride (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 511).

***giedd*:** Doane translates it as “wise speech” on the basis of the other occurrences of the word in Old English poetry: he finds that it is mostly associated with wisdom, especially when co-occurring with the verb *wreccan* (Doane 1966, pp.79-80).

***wrece*:** “tell” is the reading normally proposed for this verb. Kinch interprets it as the speaker’s vindication of the poem as the product of her own craft, and accordingly translates it as “craft” (Kinch 2006, p. 126).

1b. *bi me*: “by myself” according to Kinch, who considers the first line an authentication of the speaker as the one who has composed the poem (Kinch 2006, p. 126).

***geomorre*:** a feminine dative meaning “sad”. Together with *minre* and *sylfre* (2a), it indicates the gender of the speaker as female, although the first editors did not recognise it. A few scholars have maintained that the protagonist must be a man even recently. Rissanen does not reject either possibility: he believes that the feminine forms could be “satisfactorily explained away” and the speaker could be easily proved to be a man; he also acknowledges that an Anglo-Saxon poet could have used the traditional theme of exile to talk about the relationship between man

and wife, although it is usually connected with the relationship lord-retainer — such as in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* (Rissanen 1969, p. 104).

2a. *sið*: a word that has many meanings in Old English: “journey”, “fate”, “lot”, “experiences”, “condition”. It means “course”, but possibly also “conduct, experiences, fortunes” in Malone’s view. He rejects “fate” because it is “too final” in this context (Malone 1962, p. 113). Its basic connotation is “travel in a foreign land”, “banishment”, which best suits the context if the subject of the poem is exile, as Rissanen believes. In *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* it provides a parallel to *wræclast* (Wa 5a, 32a; Se 56a), which undoubtedly means “exile track” (Rissanen 1969, pp. 93-94). “Journey” is Lench’s translation, indicating metaphorically the speaker’s death as a departure from life (Lench 1970, p. 13).

3b. *aweox*: Malone suggests that *weox* be emended to *aweox* in order to regularise the meter (Malone 1962, p. 113).

5a: *wite*: “blame” according to Malone, who nevertheless points out that this meaning is used for the corresponding verb, but not usually for the noun *wite*. He suggests it anyway because it fits the context (Malone 1962, p. 113).

6a. *Ærest*: “firstly”. Malone believes that the narration follows a chronological sequence: the husband went away possibly on a military expedition, then he returned and his kinsmen slandered the wife, and consequently he banished her (Malone 1962, p. 113). The presence of a precise chronological sequence in the poem is demonstrated by the opposition of this adverb to *nu* (24a). Actually, the text can be divided into units beginning with the statements of the reasons for her grief and ending with the manifestation of the sorrows she has consequently suffered (Davis 1965, p. 300). Wentersdorf understands this time adverb and *ða* (9a) to introduce a prologue, an abstract of the whole story. He rejects the idea that they establish a

chronological sequence together with *Ongunnon þæt* (11a) and *Het* (15a) (Wentersdorf 1981, p.494).

blaford: a priest, according to Doane. Evidence for this reading is drawn from other occurrences in Old English texts of this and the other words that designate the man in the poem, namely *frea* (l. 33a), *wine* (ll. 49a, 50b) etc., in which it either refers to God, or means “patriarch”, that is “lord of men”, head of a people or a tribe with religious authority. In the latter meaning it is used of the patriarchs of the Old Testament (Doane 1966, pp. 82-83).

7b. *ubtceare*: “sleepless nights” (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 512). “Dawn-care” in the interpretation of *WL* as a woman’s love lyric or love song: the sorrow at dawn is a typical feature of the Mozarabic *kharjas*, of the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo* and of the German *Frauenlieder* (Bragg 1989, pp. 257-68).

8a. *leodfruma*: “prince” in Malone’s translation. He believes the man to be member of the royal family, if not a reigning prince (Malone 1962, p. 114).

9b. *folgað secan*: Malone translates *folgað* as “service [i.e., protection]”, believing that the woman went to seek refuge away from her husband’s country after his departure. In his view, the Wife entered the household of some protector to escape the kinsmen’s hostility (Malone 1962, p.114). “Favor”, according to Davis: once left alone because of her husband’s exile, the lady has sought protection from her lord’s relatives, but she has been refused, because of the feud in which her husband has got involved (Davis 1965, p. 302). Fitzgerald supports the literal translation, namely “to seek service or employment”. He connects the poem to the tale *The Search for the Lost Husband* and explains *folgað* as the jobs or services that the female protagonist of that tale is compelled to do in order to regain her husband (Fitzgerald 1963, p.772). According to Leslie, the phrase means that the Wife went to look for her husband, that is, she

set on a travel (Leslie 1961, p. 53). Doane, on the contrary, thinks that it means “religious service”, “worship”: the speaker is a heathen goddess abandoned by her priest, and therefore compelled to search for other worshippers (Doane 1966, p. 85). “Exile, refuge, asylum” for Wentersdorf, on the basis of a passage in the Old English version of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* where the Latin *in Merciorum regionibus exsulabat* referred to the bishop Wilfrid, expelled from his country, is translated as *in Mercna lande folgade*, where *folgade* means “found security in exile” (Wentersdorf 1981, pp. 497-98). Orton is inclined to interpret it in its usual Old English sense, that is, “service” or “office”, thus comparing the relation of the woman and the man to the relationship between a retainer and his lord. However, he does not completely exclude the possibility that it has sexual overtones (Orton 1989, p. 208).

11a. *ongunnon*: a preterite pluperfect in the view of those scholars who believe that there is only one man in the story and that the narrative sequence does not reflect the chronological sequence of the events. For instance, Wentersdorf translates it as “had plotted” (Wentersdorf 1989, p. 496).

11a-b. *þæs monnes magas*: the relatives of the man the speaker’s husband has murdered, rather than his own relatives. They have exiled the woman as a form of retribution against her husband (Davis 1965, p. 302). The lord’s kinsmen, who have caused his separation from the speaker — a situation similar to that described in *Deor*, where a *scop* in some way connected with *Deor*’s *blaford* has had the protagonist banished (Rissanen 1969, pp. 102-103).

12a. *dyrne*: “adultery” is Lench’s suggestion for this word, on the basis of Bosworth-Toller’s entries, which reveal that this term had pejorative connotations and was usually applied to sinful deeds, best kept hidden. Moreover, there are two compounds in which it means adultery: *dyrne-geliger* and *dyrn-licgan* (Lench 1970, p. 14).

14b. *mec longade*: “I longed for him” for Malone, who discards Bosworth-Toller’s gloss “I was ill at ease” because “it does not fit the situation”, and because here the woman wants to emphasise her feeling as contrasting to those of the kinsmen, whose schemes to separate her from the object of her love were successful (Malone 1962, p. 114).

15a. *blaford*: Fitzgerald believes there is only one male character in the poem, namely the “lost” and enchanted husband. The orders he gives his wife are the instructions to break the spell cast upon him and thus let him go back home together with her (Fitzgerald 1963, p. 773). Wentersdorf, too, maintains that the different terms the Wife uses for “man, lord” are referred to her husband, whom she calls by distinct names according to the situations she is evoking: *blaford* and *leodfruma* denote his formal function, while *freond* and *wine* refer to his love relationship to the woman (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 493).

15b. *her beard*: Malone proposes the reading *herb-eard*, meaning “grove-dwelling”, which is supported by *wuda* (27b). However, he also suggests that the word could have pejorative connotations related to the term *hearb* or *hearg*, which indicates a pagan temple in a grove, consecrated to a heathen god. The translation in this case would be “heathenish abode”, conveying the Wife’s contempt for the place where she has been banished (Malone 1962, p. 114). Davis proposes Grein’s reading *her beard*, meaning “my lord bade me here to take a dwelling”. In his opinion, it is the only way the time sequence of the poem can be accounted for. The question of the irregular alliteration — raised by Krapp and Dobbie — is easily answered through Malone’s words: “alliteration...bears witness to the fact that the poet felt free to ignore the classical rules when they did not serve his purpose” (Davis 1965, p. 301). Davis considers this the first stage of the chronological sequence characterising the poem: the Wife’s lord orders her to stay “here”, that is in the place where they have been living together (Davis

1965, p. 302). Doane reads the two words as one, namely *herb-eard*, which is unattested in Old English, and translates it as “heathen idol”, “heathen altar”, on the basis of the use of the word in Old English and Old Norse texts, where it is opposed to the Christian altar (Doane 1966, p. 87). Lench’s interpretation is “hard place”, referring to her condition of dead spirit living in the grave (Lench 1970, p. 15). Orton accepts Doane’s reading on the basis of the similarity of the form *herb* and the West Saxon *bearb* or *bearg*, whose meaning is usually “temple” or “idol”. Nevertheless, he translates it as “grove”, drawing evidence from some glossaries and from the poem itself, since l. 15 is very similar to l. 27, where the dwelling is said to be a wood, and also from place names, which testify that the Anglo-Saxon heathen worship usually took place in sacred groves (Orton 1989, p. 210). More specifically, he thinks that the *herbeard* is a “heathen fane” reproducing the Old Norse cosmology, that is, the tree of life at the centre of the universe and the three worlds of the living, the dead and the giants at its roots (Orton 1989, p. 220). Wentersdorf, too, reads the compound as *herb-eard*, considering it a variant of *bearg-eard*, where *bearg* means “pagan sanctuary”. The lord has commanded the Wife to take refuge in a pagan sanctuary, a common practice ever since the times of ancient Israel, ancient Greeks and Romans and attested by laws of Anglo-Saxon kings up to the eleventh century (Wentersdorf 1981, pp. 508-09). Luyster, too, emends the MS. reading to *herbeard* and translates it as “sacred grove”, connecting it to the Germanic custom to worship the gods in holy woods (Luyster 1998, p. 244).

16a. *abte*: the past tense indicates that the speaker regards her life on earth as finished, and is thus a prove that she is dead (Lench 1970, p. 15).

***leofra lyt*:** a lytote for “no dear ones” in the opinion of most critics, for example Malone (Malone 1962, p. 112). “Few dear ones”. According to Wentersdorf, this is the woman’s

explanation of the command referred to in l. 15 — that is, the reason why the husband sent the woman to seek refuge to another place (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

16b. *on þissum londstede*: the specific reference to “this” land is widely accepted to indicate that the Wife is a stranger in her husband’s country.

18a. *gemæcne*: “the perfect mate for me”, Malone’s free rendering of the literal meaning “fully suited to me” (Malone 1962, p. 114). “Well-matched”, “equal”, according to Doane, who believes it refers to the matching states of mind in the speaker and the *blaford* rather than to a marital relationship between them. He finds evidence in the similarity of the words used to describe their respective mental situations, for instance *is min hyge geomor* referred to the speaker and *hygegeomorne* referred to the lord (Doane 1966, p. 84). “Well- suited to me” (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

20a. *mod miþendne*: Wentersdorf translates “was concealing in his mind”, taking the phrase to be dependent on *funde* (18b). He believes the husband has concealed the woman his evil thoughts against his kinsmen not to make her responsible for his schemes (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

20b. *morþor*: “thoughts about an act of violence” directed against the kinsmen and not the Wife, whom the husband wants to protect (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513). “Murder”, according to Lench: the woman’s murder committed by her husband after the accusation of adultery made by his kinsmen. Death was a possible punishment for adulterous women in Anglo-Saxon England (Lench 1970, p. 15).

21a. *Blīðe gebæro*: “with a blithe bearing” in Malone’s interpretation. He relates it to 44a, where the same phrase is used to set a contrast between “outward appearance and inward reality”,

concluding that it is in the instrumental case and that it forms part of and ends the sentence beginning with l. 17b (Malone 1962, p. 114).

21b. *beotedan*: it is the term that denotes the formal oaths of loyalty between a lord and his retainers. Wentersdorf refers this promise to the time when husband and wife were still together, before the kinsmen succeeded in separating them (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

24b. *no*: Malone points out that this line is metrically defective and therefore suggests to emend *no* with *næfre*, which does not change the meaning “never” (Malone 1962, p. 114).

25b. *Sceal*: the manuscript reading is *seal*, usually emended to *sceal*. Malone finds this emendation unnecessary, as *seal* is attested as a common form in Middle English (Malone 1962, p. 114).

26b. *fæbðu*: according to Fitzgerald, the husband’s hostility towards the wife, due to the breaking of the taboo on her part, which caused their separation and his being compelled to wander away from home (Fitzgerald 1963, p.773). The revenge that the family of the deceased exacted on the kindred of the murderer. In this specific case, the speaker’s husband has exacted his feud on a member of a clan who had killed some relative of his, and he has been exiled because that is the punishment for getting involved in a blood-feud in the Anglo-Saxon law. The victim belonged to the same community in which the speaker and her husband lived, and this is the reason why she is suffering the consequences of his crime (Davis 1965, p. 302). For Doane, an “interdiction or formal exorcism” cast upon the heathen goddess by her former priest, who now worships a new god (Doane 1966, p. 89). Lench reads it as a true state of feud between the husband and the Wife, caused by the kinsmen’s accusations of adultery on her part (Lench 1970, p. 15). Luyster explains *fæbðu* as the “enmity” of the lord, more specifically, the fertility god *Yng-Freyr*, to his wife, who has caused his death, as happens in the *Ynglinga Saga*,

where the Swedish kings are thought to be the incarnations of *Freyr* and their queens the incarnations of the Great Goddess (Luyster 1998, p. 247). On the contrary, Wentersdorf translates it as “my husband’s feud” in the sense that the husband is involved in the said feud and the Wife suffers the consequences of it, namely the hostility of the lord’s kinsmen and the exile she has been forced into as a protection (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

27a. *mon*: “man”. Various interpretations as the same person as the *blaford* and the *frea*, that is the speaker’s husband, or as another man who has some authority in the *wuda bearwe*, the place where the woman is living now. Davis reads this word as an “indefinite pronoun”. He suggests that there is a clear contrast between this generic word and the specific terms used in the previous lines, which testifies to the fact that her present situation is not the result of her husband’s command, but rather of some unidentified third party (Davis 1965, pp. 302-303).

***wunian*:** “remain”; a proof that the speaker is dead, otherwise the poet would have used the verb for “live” (Lench 1970, p. 15).

27b. *wuda bearwe*: Davis explains the wood, the oaks (*actreo*, ll. 28a and 36a) and the ruins (*burgtunas*, l. 31a) as the constitutive elements of a pagan temple built in an oak grove. He suggests that Anglo-Saxon people were still only partially Christianised as late as the beginning of the 11th century, when the poem could be dated. Semi-Christianised communities would still be aware of the old heathen religion, and they would probably see a solitary woman, banished from her own community, as a witch. A pagan temple connected with ancient magic and witchcraft would be seen as the right place where a woman like this belongs — this is the reason why she has been forced to live there alone (Davis 1965, pp. 303-304). Rissanen states that the description of the speaker’s place of exile has the same function of the description of the sea in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, that is it provides a natural background in which the

protagonist's mood is mirrored (Rissanen 1969, p. 103). "Heathen sacred grove", paralleling the *herb-eard* of l.15b (Doane 1966, p. 87). A sacred wood in "an ancient pagan sanctuary" in Wentersdorf's opinion (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 508).

28a. *under actreo*: Bouman relates the oak tree to the *Egils Saga* and the *Volsunga Saga*, where the oak is the sacred tree, devoted to Odinn, under which it is customary to build one's house. He connects it also to the Eddic lay *Helreið Brynhildar*, in which Brynhild seems to have been banished to a dwelling under an oak-tree "with cruel purpose" (Bouman 1962, p. 88). Orton connects it to *Yggdrasill*, the tree of life of Old Norse and Germanic mythology, comparing the oak of our poem to that of *Skírnismál* and to the tree at the centre of the hall of the *Volsungar*. This puts the lady's dwelling in relation with *Hel*—the Hall of the Dead, and the Hall of the Giants in the Underworld (Orton 1989, pp.219-223). Luyster, too, connects the oak-tree to the Tree of Life and to the Germanic and Norse habit to link the fate of a family to the tree standing beside the house (Luyster 1998, p. 244). Wentersdorf relates it to the Germanic worship of trees that the Anglo-Saxons brought with them when they settled in England, and which was still alive in the eleventh century, as is proved by the banishment on the part of the Church of heathen rituals involving trees dating to that time. The worship of trees, oaks in particular, did not disappear, but turned into superstition when the Church eventually succeeded in eradicating pagan beliefs (Wentersdorf 1981, pp. 504-505).

28b. *in þam eorðscræfe*: there have been three main interpretations of this word so far, namely "grave", "underground dwelling" and "cave". The first one involves the vision of the narrator as dead, and links the poem to the Germanic tradition of the death-song, while both the second and the third readings want her alive and only debate the nature and features of her dwelling, drawing evidence from history, archaeology and literature, as well.

Bouman reads *eorðscræf* as “grave-chamber” on the basis of the meaning of the word in *Wanderer*, vv.83b-84 and in Bosworth-Toller. However, he does not consider the Wife a living dead. In his opinion, the word may be used either to convey the woman’s feeling that the place where she is confined will be her grave (Bouman 1962, p. 55), or to hint at those Old Germanic and Norse legends and sagas in which a wife is re-united to her husband in his grave (p.87). Malone translates it as “earth-den” and considers it a pejorative name the Wife gives her dwelling: it does not have to be understood literally as a cavern, but rather as a miserable place (Malone 1962, p. 115). Fitzgerald considers it a rationalised evolution of the tale’s motif of the place in the Underworld where the wife has to work as a servant during several years in order to set her husband free, namely the house of a witch, or sometimes the fairies’ kingdom inside the hills or mounds, or even Hell (Fitzgerald 1963, p. 773-74). Lench translates it as “earth-pit”, a literal earth-grave, a mound where the speaker is buried at the time when she speaks (Lench 1970, p.15). Wentersdorf interprets it as a natural rather than artificial cave. Although the adjective *eald* is normally used of handmade things, it could possibly mean also “formerly used by men”. There is historical evidence that natural caverns were used as refuges during the Roman occupation and later during the invasions of other barbarian peoples. Archaeological finds of human remains and jewels throughout England testify to this theory, too (Wentersdorf 1981, pp. 501-02). Orton, rejecting the idea that the speaker is dead, refuses the translation “grave”, and renders the word as “earth-cave” (Orton 1989, p. 213). Luyster translates *eorðscræf* as “grave”, relating it to *eorðsele* in the following line; he connects it to *Freyja* as the goddess of the life in the burial mound (Luyster 1998, p. 244). Patrick understands it to be a monastery or nunnery where the woman has been sent for her safety, so that the place is truly a refuge. The lady sees it as a prison because it is far less comfortable than the place where she dwelled earlier

(Patrick 1969, p. 50). Harris reads *eorðscræf* as a underground house of the type described by Tacitus in his *Germania*, in which women dwelt and weaved during the winter months. He rejects the reading “grave” on the basis of the meaning of the simplex *-scræf* according to Bosworth-Toller — “cave in the earth” or “miserable dwelling, den” — and of archaeological and literary evidence that subterranean dwellings were normally used by Germanic peoples. He also points out that the occurrences of the word in other Old English texts are never associated with human burial, contrary to what other scholars have said (Harris 1977, pp. 204-208).

29a. *eorðsele*: Doane considers it an “old heathen burial mound”, since this word only occurs twice more in Old English, namely in *Beowulf*, where it designates the dragon’s mound (Doane 1966, p. 88). “Old heathen burial mound” is also Luyster’s reading of the word (Luyster 1998, p. 245). Orton translates it as “earth-hall”, and explains the word as an example of the opposition between hall and anti-hall which is common in Old English poetry (Orton 1989, p. 214). So does Moore, who reads the word as contrasting with the human *sele* from which the Wife has been banished. He sees it as physical environment, but also as a metaphor for the speaker’s state of mind (Moore 1975, p. 65). Lench, too, interprets it as “earth-hall”, but she considers this definition of the Wife’s dwelling place “most appropriate, not to an ordinary cave or hut, but to a grave” (Lench 1970, p. 15).

31a. *bitre burgtunas*: a hapax legomenon (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513). Malone divides the compound and reads it as “the yards of the stronghold”. He views the Wife’s dwelling place as a “neglected but fortified building that may originally have been a heathen temple in a grove” (Malone 1962, p. 114). Orton rejects the common translation “sharp fortified cities”, and reads the phrase as a summarising description of the area of land surrounding the lady’s dwelling, since *-tun* in Old English usually indicates a fenced area such as “a garden, yard, court or estate”.

The first element of the compound, *burg-*, is an ironical hint at the fact that this desolate place is the woman's home (Orton 1989, pp. 211-212). Moore suggests that the phrase can be translated as "protecting hedges", an image of the Wife's captivity and isolation, or literally as cities, the visualization of the society from which the woman has been banished (Moore 1975, p. 65). Harris considers the *burgtunas* a deserted settlement of the kind built by Germanic peoples as dwellings in wintertime according to Tacitus's *Germania* (Harris 1977, pp. 204-208). Wentersdorf discards the literal reading "defences of a stronghold or settlement", which referred to the refuge where the Wife is living may indicate the "cliffs or beetling crags of the area". He suggests to understand it metaphorically as "the confines of this joyless habitation" (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

33a. *fromsiþ*: "departure" is the widely accepted interpretation of this term. However, Malone translates it as "absence" on the basis of Toller's quotation from the Old English version of Gregory's *Dialogues* where the word glosses the Latin *absentia* (Malone 1962, p. 115).

33b. *on eorþan*: "on earth", that is "alive", not "in the ground", according to Orton (Orton 1989, p. 218).

34a. *leofe lifgende*: Rissanen proposes to emend the word to *licgende*, the present participle of *licgan*, "to lie", so that the line means "the loved ones lying dead, they dwell in the tomb". He quotes Bosworth-Toller's definition of the verb to support his statement that the most common meaning of *licgan* is "to lie dead", and that its present participle frequently means "dead". He points out a parallel in *The Wanderer*, ll. 78b-79a, where the image of the lord lying in the grave is present, as well. Thus read, the passage would highlight the idea of the speaker's loneliness already expressed in ll. 16-17, a concept spread throughout the texts of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, too — which would demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between

the Old English poems treating the theme of exile (Rissanen 1969, pp. 95-96). Orton rejects the view that the poem talks about dead and buried characters, so he translates this phrase literally, that is “living their lives” (Orton 1989, p. 218). Harris, too, rejects the idea that the phrase indicate the Wife’s non-living condition. Rather, he believes that *lifgende* sets a contrast between the lovers who can sleep together and the speaker who cannot enjoy the company of her beloved (Harris 1977, p. 206).

34b. *leger weardiad*: “bed” or “grave”. Rissanen points out that “grave” would be in contrast with *lifgende*, “living” (34a), while his emendation to *licgende* (see note on l. 34a above) makes perfect sense in connection to “grave”, which is the most common meaning of *leger* (Rissanen 1969, p. 95). Orton translates it as “resting in their beds” rather than “living in their graves” (Orton 1989, p. 218).

35a. *on ubtan*: “at dawn”. This is the main basis on which the interpretation of the poem as a dawn-song is grounded. Other critics rather look for a connection with occurrences of this time expression in other Old English poems. Rissanen notices a parallel between the Wife’s wandering in sorrow around her dwelling at dawn and the Wanderer lamenting his grief at dawn: “Oft ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce mine ceare cwīpan” (*The Wanderer*, ll. 8a-9a). The similarity cannot be casual, as proved by the close correspondence of the images used in the two poems (Rissanen 1969, pp. 94-95).

36b. *geond þas eorðscrafu*: underground passages or rooms in the abandoned fortified building in Malone’s opinion (Malone 1962, p. 115). “Through a series of connected caves” according to Wentersdorf, who states that there are many caverns of this kind in England and that there is historical and archaeological evidence that they were used as refuges in time of war or invasions (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 502).

37a. *sittam*: Malone suggests that the usually proposed emendation to *sittan* is unnecessary, because the *-m* here is due to assimilation (Malone 1962, p. 115). For Lench *sittam mot*, that is “I must sit”, indicates that the Wife cannot leave the *eorðscraf*; the reason is that she has become an earth-bound spirit consequently to her violent death (Lench 1970, p. 19).

37b. *sumorlangne dæg*: Luyster reads this phrase as a hint to Midsummer, which was a sacred day in Old Germanic and Norse religion, when fertility rites took place, celebrating the reunion of the Mother Goddess to the fertility god and the latter’s re-birth after the winter (Luyster 1998, p. 252).

41b. *on þissum life*: Harris takes this phrase as evidence that the speaker cannot be dead. The expression cannot refer to the life after death, because this line echoes ll. 3-4, in which the speaker says she has been suffering ever since she was young (Harris 1977, p. 206).

42a. *scyle*: this last section — ll. 42-53 — has been interpreted as a gnomic passage, a curse on the speaker’s husband or lover, a curse on the man who has caused their separation, or a description of the husband/lover’s situation. Malone translates the line as “It may be that by nature the young man [i.e., her husband] is always gloomy-minded”. He takes it to be the speaker’s assertion about her husband’s personality (Malone 1962, p. 115). Davis believes this line begins a gnomic passage which should not be considered detached from the rest of the poem, but rather its natural conclusion. All the sorrows the Wife has experienced in her life have taught her endurance: she is now able to understand and accept that grief is part of human life. A similar poetic structure and an analogue conclusion are found in *The Wanderer*, where a gnomic conclusion asserts once again that endurance is the only way human beings can face suffering. On these premises, Davis elaborates on Greenfield’s theory that all the Old English poems dealing with the theme of suffering have similar modes of expression, which testify to

the “formulaic character” of Anglo-Saxon poetry (Greenfield 1955, p. 201). Davis suggests that this formulaic quality is found not only in the modes of expression, but also in the thematic organization and the structure of Old English poems dealing with similar subjects and belonging to the same genre. Actually, he claims that *The Wife’s Lament* is not a lament, but rather a “statement of a moral lesson similar to that of *The Wanderer* (Davis 1965, p. 300). Doane reads this passage as a curse cast on Christ, the new God, by a heathen goddess (Doane 1966, p. 88). Lench sees it as a curse cast by the speaker upon her husband, as an invocation of punishment for murdering her. The place where she envisages him has the connotations of a Northern Hell (Lench 1970, p.16). According to Wentersdorf, it is part of a formula, *A scyle...sceal*, which is “demonstrably gnomic” (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513). Bragg sees this last section as the development of a typical theme of the medieval love lyric, namely the love-sickness felt by both lovers. The Wife envisions her beloved as suffering from their separation as much as her (Bragg 1989, p. 266). Wright, instead, while considering *WL* as an example of woman’s love lyric, relates this passage to that in the Middle English *Now Springs the Spray*, where the speaker envisions her beloved’s punishment in the form of a situation similar to hers (Wright 2001, pp. 11-14). Kinch compares this concluding section to the last words of Ariadne’s lament in Catullus 64, where the protagonist curses Theseus by invoking the goddesses’ punishment upon him (Kinch 2006, p. 136).

geong mon: “the young man”: another reference to the husband in Malone’s opinion, who discards the reading of the passage as gnomic wisdom (Malone 1962, p. 115). “A young man” — a generalisation opening the gnomic passage (Fitzgerald 1963, p. 775). Orton, too, translates this phrase as “young man”, but, in his opinion, it is the same man as the *blaford* of l. 6 (Orton 1989, p. 206). “The god who won away the *gōði*—Christ” (Doane 1966, p. 89), “young” because

his worship has been brought to England only recently from the pagan goddess's — i.e. the Wife's — viewpoint. Impersonal also for Leslie, who states that *mon* as a general term could be used of both men and women, and that in the present case it indicates the speaker herself (Leslie 1961, p. 8). Wentersdorf rejects Leslie's interpretation on the basis of *him* (45b), a male pronoun which would not have any antecedent if *mon* were referred to the woman. Rather, *geong mon* is impersonal: "A young man", and *him* (45b) refers to "the one nearest her heart" (Wentersdorf 1981, p. 513).

44a. *bliþe gebæro*: "with cheerful demeanour". Rissanen considers it as a reference to the Germanic heroic code, which requested that men suppressed their grief and showed a cheerful countenance even when overwhelmed by misery or misfortune. He considers it "natural" that a hint to such an aspect of Anglo-Saxon culture is made in the poems dealing with the themes of suffering due to exile, and he compares this passage to the one in *The Wanderer* (ll. 11-21) where the same idea is expressed (Rissanen 1969, pp. 101-02).

45b-46b. *sy*: "whether" is Malone's translation, reflecting his idea that the two clauses introduced by *sy* are two extreme examples by means of which the Wife explains that it is her husband's nature to conceal his cares under a cheerful behaviour — "whether all his world's joy be at his own disposal or be it outlawed full widely on far-off folkland". These circumstances are not real, but fictitious in his opinion (Malone 1962, p. 115).

46b. *fab*: together with *folclondes* (47a), this is a legal term indicating the outlawed state (Davis 1965, p. 302).

47a. *folclondes*: a legal term here used in order to stress the legal condition of being an outlaw in a foreign land (Malone 1962, p. 115; Davis 1965, p. 302).

47b. *þæt*: "and so", introducing a result clause (Fitzgerald 1963, p. 775).

min freond: “my husband”. Fitzgerald believes that at this point the speaker shifts from the generalising gnomic passage to her husband’s personal experience: the exile is the rationalisation of his sufferings as told in *The Search for the Lost Husband* (Fitzgerald 1963, p. 775).

49b. *wætre beflowen*: together with *storme bebrimed* (48b) and *on dreorsele* (50a), this image points to the possibility that the *blaford* has died by drowning and is now lying at the bottom of the sea. This reading would be supported by the co-occurrence of the storm and the cliff (*stanblijp*) in relation to the death of relatives and companions in both *The Wanderer* (ll. 99-102) and *The Seafarer* (ll. 23-26), the other two Old English poems dealing with the theme of exile (Rissanen 1969, pp. 98-99).

50b. *dreogeð*: “experiences” for Malone, who considers this verse the point in which the Wife goes back to the real situation of her husband, who is at home suffering from his separation from her and remembering happier times. She believes that, although he has banished her, he is missing her as much as she is missing him (Malone 1962, p. 115).

52b. *Wa bið*: the almost universally accepted interpretation of ll. 52b-53 is as a concluding gnomic statement. Malone, however, reads this sentence as the expression of the Wife’s confidence that she will eventually achieve reunion with her husband, which shows that she has not lost all hopes and is waiting for him (Malone 1962, p. 113). On the contrary, most scholars consider this passage the proof that the woman’s grief has turned to despair, as she is aware that her situation is not going to change. Feminist scholars in particular support this view and explain the last section as the Wife’s way of acting through words, as she cannot perform actions as men do.

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

1a. *onsundran*: “in private”, “secretly”. Renoir argues that this secrecy is a clue to understand the reason why the husband has not gone and fetched his wife himself. He is probably not welcome by her people, who are those who have exiled him. He must also contact the woman secretly, because her relatives are not likely to let her join him (Renoir 1981, pp. 74-5). Orton suggests that it means “especially”, indicating the fact that the rune-staff will deliver its message to the lady alone (Orton 1985, p. 47).

2-5. The MS. is quite damaged at this point, and it is not possible to read all the words. Various reconstructions have been attempted: Sedgefield (1922, pp. 37, 159) completes all the missing parts and understands the passage as “I grew up and (now) I have to go on journeys to every foreign land, to cross promptly the salt water at the bidding of my master”.

treocyn: “kind of tree”. This word is one of the elements taken as evidence by those scholars who believe the speaker to be a rune staff, since it immediately follows the statement that opens the poem, in which the speaker, in the first person, starts delivering his message to the woman. Orton points out that the hole following it, which is in the margin of the page, makes it impossible to determine whether the word was actually inflected in such a form as, for instance, *treocynne*; for this reason he suggest to quote it as *treocyn(-)* (1985, p. 44). About the punctuation and syntactical reconstruction of the passage, Orton rules out the possibility that l. 2b forms part of the same clause as l. 2a on the ground that, if this were the case, the rules of stress and its relation to personal pronoun would require *ic* as the first word of l. 2a. Niles (2003, pp. 189-223) argues that the word is used intentionally to construct a contrast between two homophones. Actually, here the first part of the compound *treocyn* is *treow* (“tree”), neuter, while in l. 12b and in the compound *winetreowe*, in l. 52b, the term in question is *treow*, a

feminine meaning “truth”. The words play on the qualities they denote: the former indicates the material substance of which the speaker is made, the latter the sender’s spiritual character.

tudre: “from a branch” or “from a child”. Orton highlights the ambiguity of this word, and he attributes to the speaker’s intention to make the poem enigmatic (Orton 1985, pp. 47-8).

6a. *on bates bosme*: “in the hold of a boat”. The reference to several ship voyages contained in this line has been taken as evidence that the speaker is human by Leslie (1988, pp. 12-22) and by the scholars who support his reading.

8a. *beab hafu*: Sedgefield observes that the MS. reading *beab hofu* does not fit the context, meaning “high dwellings”; the emendation makes more sense: “deep waters” (1922, p. 159).

9a. *on ceolþele*: “on a ship”. Orton notes the analogy of this compound with *Finnsburh Fragment*, l. 30, *buruhþelu* (literally “castle-plank”, usually translated as “castle-floor”), and suggests the translation “ship-plank”, which refers to “a part of a ship in which a passenger as well as cargo might be carried” – the cargo in question being the rune-staff (Orton 1985, p. 49). Niles (2003, pp. 189-223) points out that the second part of the compound, *þel*, is translated by Bosworth-Toller as “a thin piece of wood or metal, a plank, plate”, but that it usually indicates “a substantial piece of timber”. The dative singular case of the noun makes it impossible to determine whether the speaker has been resting on a plank – in which case he could be a human messenger – or whether it has been secured to a plank-like timber – this circumstance would indicate that the messenger is an object, although the reason for its having been fastened to the ship would not be clear. Niles allows for a third possibility, namely, that the speaker is a part of the ship itself.

10. *ymb modlufun mines frean*: Sedgefield proposes two possible translations: “concerning the love of (or, thy love for) my lord” (1922, p. 159).

12a. *þær*: “there”. Sedgefield (1922, p. 159) “in him”, that is in the carver of the rune-stick.

12b. *findest*: present indic. Sedgefield reads the verb as future – “shalt find” – pointing out that the present tense often has a future sense in Old English (1922, p. 159).

13b. *þisne beam*: “this piece of wood”; accusative, the nominative – and subject of the sentence – being the relative pronoun *se*, “the one who”. The scholars who believe the speaker to be human read this line as the moment when the messenger shows the rune-stick he is carrying to the woman. On the contrary, the critics who think the speaker is the rune-staff claim that in this line the object is referring to itself in the third person. Sedgefield interprets it as nominative: “myself, the speaker” (1922, p. 159). Bragg (1999, pp. 34-50) points out that in Old English the word *beam* generally indicates a tree, a mast, the gallows, or a ship, and in the context of *HM* she takes it as referring to the boat on which the speaker has travelled to reach the lady. Niles (2003, pp. 189-223) supports Bragg’s view, and he expands her analysis of the term, highlighting that it can indicate a tree, a timber, a gallows, the yoke under which oxen labour, and Christ’s rood (he quotes the meanings of the word as listed under the corresponding entry in the Toronto-based *Dictionary of Old English*, and he draws examples from charms and from the Exeter Book Riddles). His final interpretation, however, is “mast”: he argues that the speaker of *HM* is the ship’s mast, and that the runes are carved on it.

14a. *þu sinchroden*: “you, adorned with gold”. In Bolton’s opinion, the same image as in *Song of Songs* 7.1: *Juncturae femorum tuorum, sicut monilia* (Bolton 1968-69, p. 339).

15. *wordbeotunga*: Swanton treats this word as a prove that the man and the woman in the poem are not married, but that she has to travel and join him as his bride (Swanton 1964, p. 272).

17b. *meoduburgum*: “mead-fortress”. An indication of the happiness in which the lovers lived before being separated by a feud (Swanton 1964, p. 279).

19b. *fæhþo*: “feud”. Goldsmith (1975, pp. 242–63) suggests that it is a reference to the image of husband and wife’s separation that the prophets of the Old Testament use to describe man’s alienation from God (p. 256).

23. *galan geomorne geac on bearwe*: the cuckoo’s song, which marks the beginning of springtime, is understood as an invitation to travel in another Old English elegy dealing with the themes of journey and exile: see *The Seafarer* ll. 53–57 for the image of the cuckoo, and ll. 48–52 for the idea of spring as the time when man yearns to travel. An element of similarity with *The Wife’s Lament*, together with the water and the hill: the places where the women of both poems live are gloomy, and they are meant to be in contrast with the former state of joy in which the speakers once lived (Swanton 1964, p. 279). A direct allusion to *Song of Songs* 2.10–13 — *vox torturi audita est in terra nostra* — in which the original is translated faithfully in terms of both concept and form. Actually, the reference to the bird of spring is the same, it is just adapted to the native fauna in the English poem. Moreover, just like in the *Song of Songs*, the image is enclosed between two invitations for the woman to set out on a journey to join her lover (Bolton 1968–69, pp. 338, 341). Goldsmith (1975, pp. 242–63) explains the connotation of the bird’s voice as sad by suggesting that it contains an invitation to repentance; her reading is based on Alcuin’s commentary on the *vox turturis* as calling mankind to penance because the advent of the Lord is not far (p. 256).

24. *Ne læt þu þec siþþan siþes getwæfan*: the sentence implies that the woman’s people are not willing or likely to let her go and join her lover, probably because it was a feud with them that drove him away (Renoir 1981, p. 74).

26a. *Ongin mere secan*: a paraphrase of *Song of Songs* 2.13: “Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni” (Bolton 1968–69, p. 338).

28b. *monnan*: the woman's husband or lover, the one who has sent the message. Sedgefield suggests that the noun is plural in this particular occurrence, and, therefore, that l. 29a *þær* means "among whom" rather than "where" (1922, p. 159).

30b. *willa*: "desire". Bolton suggests that this expression conveys the same idea as *Song of Songs* 7.6: "Quam pulchra es, et quam decora carissima, in deliciis!" (Bolton 1968-69, p. 339).

35b-39a. Although the MS. is corrupted at this point, the few extant words in this passage seem to convey the idea that the *blaford* has reached some position of power in the new country, although he went there as an exile in the first place.

48a. *þeodnes dohtor*: "daughter of kings". A direct translation of *Song of Songs* 7.1: "filia principis", actually one of the closest resemblances between the two texts, which leads Bolton to believe that the Biblical song is the source of the Old English poem (Bolton 1968-69, p. 339).

48b. *gif*: Sedgefield reads this verse as connected to l. 49: "if only he has thee, to crown the vows ye once exchanged" (1922, p. 159). Renoir reads the presence of "if" rather than "when" as an indication that, in spite of the seemingly optimistic tone of the poem, the fact that the woman is actually able to join her husband/lover is not taken for granted, because he people will probably try to stop her (see notes 1a and 24). The awareness that the protagonist will never obtain what she desires, although the fulfillment seems so near, adds to the melancholy of the poem, which, far from being optimistic, is indeed just as elegiac as the other Old English elegies (Renoir 1981, pp. 74-6).

50a. *gebyre*: the verb introducing the runic passage: "I heard" – literally, it is a present, but it is usually interpreted as a perfective use of the present. Sedgefield reads it as beginning a new sentence, and translates it with *geador* as "I turn together, i.e. rearrange" (1922, p. 159). Kaske states that the manuscript reads *genyre*, and therefore analyses the possible etymon and meaning of the word. The scholar reports the results of an examination of f. 123v under ultra-violet

light: *gecyre* — the MS. reading according to Krapp and Dobbie, and a plausible reading under natural light — is discarded by the presence of a right vertical stroke only visible under ultra-violet light. The same examination reveals that there never was the top wedge of an *h* in that place, because the small mark on top of that letter is shown to belong to the stain over the word, so that the most frequently proposed reading, *gehyre*, is also discredited. Kaske explains what he considers the true MS. reading, *genyre*, as the present indicative of *genyrwan*, where the *w* would have been lost by analogy with the conjugations of verbs like *gierwan*, which lose the *w* in certain forms — *gierest*, *gierēð*, etc. (Kaske 1964, pp. 204-05). The problem with this explanation is that there is no other evidence in the Old English corpus that *genyrwan* could behave in this way in the present indicative, which renders this reading quite strained, in spite of Kaske's claim that "its improbability results ... only from a lack of positive investigation" and that "the new fact of the manuscript-reading *genyre* ...contributes substantially to its plausibility" (1964, p. 205). After a re-examination of the MS., Goldsmith (1975, pp. 242-63) argues that it is not possible to state which reading is the right one. Anderson (1975) believes that *genyre ætsomne ofer* is a phrasal verb whose meaning is "superimpose". Orton points out that this reading is not supported by the extant Old English corpus. He also highlights the syntactical difficulties of *genyre*: the verb *benemnan*, which depends on it, should be explained as an infinitive of purpose ("I crowd together the runes in order to declare"), and elsewhere in the corpus this type of infinitive is introduced either by a verb of motion or by the verb *sellan*. For these reasons he prefers *gehyre*, and explains it as a metaphorical reference of the rune-staff to the act of carving by which the "husband" inscribed his message to the lady (Orton 1985, pp. 49-50).

50b-51a. *.S.R. geador / .EA. W. ond .M.*: Trautmann (1894, pp. 207-25; p. 221) interprets the runes as personal names, namely Sigered, Ealdwine, and Mon or Monna. Imelmann (1907)

proposes an alternative to the interpretation of the first rune. By rule, *ætsomne* should be the alliterating element in the line, but Imelmann suggests that this is a poetic license, and the alliterating word is really the verb, which he reads *gecyre*. He consequently reads the first rune as a ᵛ (“C”), explaining the presence of the rune ᵛ (“S”) in the MS. as a scribal error due to the similarity of the two symbols. He also states that the rune ƿ (“EA”) has a duple value in the line: the first time it should be read as the diphthong “ea”, the second as the two distinct letters composing it, namely “e” and “a”. By anagramming the runic letters interpreted in this way, Imelmann finds out that they stand for the name Eadwacer, and he claims that this proves a connection between *HM* and *WE*: the exiled man in both poems would be a historical character, a Saxon lord recorded in Gregory of Tours’ history, who invaded Gaul with his tribe in 463 A.D., whose name was precisely Eadwacer. Imelmann believes that his story must have been the subject of some heroic poems now lost and surviving in fragments in *WE*, *WL* and *HM*. Sieper (1915, p. 213) reads *Sige-run, Ead-wine ond mon*, (“der sigerune gelobt sich eadwine als mann”). Schneider believes that the runes stand for the names Sigelræd, Ealhwynn and Ealhdæg o Ealhmon, where ealh is a variant of ƿ, *eohl* (1979, pp. ; p. 34). Sedgefield (1922, p. 159) interprets the runes as *Sigel, Rad, Eolh, Wen, and Dæg*, and he understands them as forming the word *sweord*, “sword” in order to remind the woman that “he has sworn on his sword to be true to his love”. Sedgefield believes this is a reference to the Germanic use to swear solemn vows on weapons. Swanton reads *winetreowe* (“conjugal fidelity”), and sees the runic passage as a climax in the repetition of the pledge of faith between the lovers, already mentioned in ll. 15-19 and l. 49a (Swanton 1964, p. 278). Bolton believes the runes compose a name, and rearranges them into *SMEARW*: in his opinion, this is a slightly deviated form of the word *smeoru*, which glosses the Latin *unguentem* and *saevo*, while a related term, *smirwung*, glosses *oleum*. The use of *-ea-* instead of *-eo-* would be required by the presence of the kenning *earwyn*

and by the need to use a rune — there is no rune for the sound “eo” — *u* and *w* were both used to represent the same sound, exactly as in Latin writing. The word thus formed by the runes would be a direct reference to another verse of the *Song of Songs*: “*Oleum effusum nomen tuum*” (1.2), which Bolton interprets as providing the name of one of the lovers — namely, *Oleum* (Bolton 1968-69, pp. 340-41). Bragg (1999, pp. 34-50) points out that the rune for “ea” is seldom found both in manuscripts and in epigraphic inscriptions; its name is *ear* or *eor*, and while its only recorded meaning in “ordinary Old English usage” is “sea” (p. 34), in the *Rune Poem* it certainly stands for “grave”, although the latter is not recorded elsewhere. Many critics gloss it as “earth”, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support it. The *Rune Poem* also provides a usually overlooked meaning for the rune “s”, namely *segl*, “sail”. Bragg explains that the original rune name, *sigel* (“sun”), coming from Old Norse, became soon obsolete in Old English and was substituted by the near homophone *segl*. She concludes that no theory on the meaning of the passage can be built on the assumption that the rune in question stands for the word “sun”. As for “w”, she highlights the possibility that here it indicates the vowel “u”. Finally, she reminds the reader that the last rune looks like something between ᚠ and ᚡ, which represent respectively “m”, *mann* (“man”) and “d”, *dæg* (“day”), and that while most scholars take the former reading to be the right one, the lack of any other occurrence of the d-rune in the Exeter Book prevents us from knowing how the scribe would write it and how he would differentiate it from the m-rune. Therefore, she deems it impossible to state which symbol is actually represented in the passage in question.

51b. *aþe benemnan*: depending on l. 50a *gebyre*, “I hear...declaring by an oath”. Sedgefield reads it as a main verb and translates “(and so) declare by his oath” (1922, p. 159). Goldsmith (1975, pp. 242-63) quotes the occurrences of the phrase in *Beowulf* and in the Paris Psalter, pointing

out that in both cases the oath is something that the witness are meant to hear, and she takes it as evidence that l. 50a reads *gebyre* (“I hear”).