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THE BANISHED WIFE'S LAMENT

The company of ladies in Anglo-Saxon poetry is not a large one. If Judith, Elene, and other heroines from foreign lands are left out of consideration, their number is small indeed. This is of course due in large measure to the fact that a relatively small amount of poetry based upon Germanic themes has been preserved. If woman plays a minor part in *Beowulf*, one of the *Waldhere* fragments gives a hint that the case may have been otherwise in some of the epic material that has perished. It is doubtful if the dramatic intensity of such figures as Brunnhild or Gudrun in the poetic *Edda* would have been paralleled in the less impassioned West Germanic verse, but it seems likely that the emotions of women would have interested poets who could depict so graphically the feelings of men like the Wanderer or the Seafarer. And there are, as is well known, illustrations of this interest in the woman's point of view in the Anglo-Saxon lyrics. The most conspicuous of these illustrations is the poem generally known as the *Banished Wife's Lament*.¹ Here the whole emphasis is thrown upon the element of love. Oppressed by profound grief, the wife briefly reviews her unhappy career, bewails her present desolate situation, and ends with a cry of despair surprisingly modern in its intensity.

The piece is an unusually significant one. Its sustained passion, its well-rounded form, and its vivid portrayal of a dramatic situation give it an important place in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Like so much of the minor verse, however, it is far from being easy of comprehension. There is much in the language which offers difficulty, and the larger questions of the interpretation of the whole, and its possible connection with incidents of heroic saga, are not easily disposed of. The lady has succeeded in throwing over her tale something of the obscurity of her gloomy abode in the forest. As to her present unhappy condition there can be no doubt, but her lamentations give no very clear idea of the series of

¹Or *Complaint*. Gröin-Walker, "Klage der Frau," *Bibliothek der aeg. Poesie*, Vol. I, pp. 302 ff.

distressful strokes in her past history. There is, then, in addition to the literary merit of the piece, all the fascination of a problem, or a series of problems, and scholars have not failed to attack these with energy and patience. But the results of these investigations have often been radically dissimilar. Indeed, a review of critical opinion from the beginning shows a considerable lack of unanimity all along the line, and confirms the impression that the last word about the poem has not yet been spoken.¹

The purpose of the following notes is to call attention to the translation of certain passages which appear to have been generally misunderstood, and to consider the probable explanation of the whole situation, which is only vaguely outlined in the poem. For the sake of brevity, detailed references to the work of previous investigators have generally been omitted, excepting where a special examination of their theories seems profitable.

Our first duty appears to be the rehabilitation of the character of the husband of the unfortunate lady. True, she says that he has banished her into the woods, but this is a matter in which she may have been deceived, as we shall see. It is more important to look at the passage following, in which she is held to accuse him of treacherously masking murderous thoughts under the pretense of friendliness—as Trautmann puts it—"die verse . . . in denen die frau bejammert einen seine gedanken verhehlenden und auf mord sinnenden gemahl gefunden zu haben."²

Forþon is mīn hyge gēomor,
 ðā ic mē ful gemæcne monnan funde,
 heardsǣlignē, hygegēomorne,
 20 mōd mīpendne, morþor hycgend(n)e,
 bliþe gebæro. Ful oft wit bēotedan
 þæt unc ne gedælde nemne dēað āna
 ōwiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen!
 is nū swā hit nō wære,
 25 frēondscipe uncer.³

Do not the characteristics set forth in ll. 19–21 explain the

¹ For a review of critical opinion, see Wülker, *Grundriss der ags. Litteratur*, pp. 224–26; Schücking, *Zeitschrift f. deutsches Alterthum*, Vol. XLVIII, pp. 436 ff.

² *Anglia*, Vol. XVI, p. 223. Miss Edith Rickert, *Modern Philology*, Vol. II, p. 366, n. 4, gives a similar meaning to the passage. See also Roeder, *loc. cit.*, below.

³ The text is that of the Grein-Wülker *Bibliothek*, with the addition of the vowel-quantities, and some changes in punctuation.

phrase *ful gemæcne*? And are they not virtues, at least according to Anglo-Saxon conceptions, and not the reverse? The correct translation would, I believe, run something as follows: "And so my heart is sad, since I (had) found a man well suited to me, one who had experienced misfortune, serious-minded, concealing his feelings, mindful of death, of pleasant demeanor." The husband was congenial in the first place, because he had, like her, known misfortune. Trouble has been her companion since her youth (ll. 2-4), and the man who also had known the uses of adversity might well be in sympathy with her. The adjective *hygegēomor* seems to describe the effect of misfortune upon the character of the man—"sad (or, more probably, *serious*) of thought."

This word *hygegēomor*, as well as the rest of the passage, can perhaps best be explained in connection with ll. 42-45.

A scyle geong mon wesan gēomormōd,
 heard heortan gepoht, swylce habban sceal
 bliþe gebæro, ēac þon brēostceare,
 sinsorgna gedrēag.

Leaving the interpretation of ll. 17-21 for a moment, let us consider the meaning of this section of the poem. Here, too, I believe that critics have been astray. Roeder,¹ for example, understands this and what follows as a series of imprecations; here "ruft die Frau Verwünschungen herab" upon a nameless young man who is involved in an intrigue which has caused the separation of husband and wife. There appears to be no reason for introducing a third person into the story. The main thing to notice at present is that the lines are only a series of reflections of a general character—one of those moralizing incursions into poetry of which the Anglo-Saxons were so fond. "Ever ought a young man to be serious of mind, steadfast the thoughts of his heart, (he should have) a pleasant demeanor as well, also care, the weight of constant anxiety." This train of thought, although beginning in the conventional, abstract manner, is obviously suggested by the man whom the lady has ever in mind, the man of whom she speaks openly again in ll. 47b ff., her husband.

¹ For Roeder's interesting and ingenious, though unconvincing interpretation, see his monograph, "Die Familie bei den Angelsachsen," in Morsbach's *Studien zur engl. Philologie*, No. 4, pp. 112-19.

It is unnecessary to emphasize the fact that Anglo-Saxon poets frequently turn aside from the matter in hand, both in the epic and the lyric, to introduce moral reflections suggested by the situation. The Wanderer forgets his personal misfortunes for a time, and reviews at some length the characteristics which should distinguish a prudent man.¹ The *Seafarer* affords a curious parallel, in a didactic passage,² to the use of the two forms *seal* and *scyle* in the lines above. In Old Norse the passion for pointing a moral is fully as strong. In the *Sigrdrifumól*, for instance, Sigrdrifa (Brunnhild), after having been awakened by Sigurd on the fire-encircled mountain, proceeds to reward the hero with a series of moral precepts. In the *Hovamól* this material constitutes the chief interest. The considerable amount of gnomic verse in Anglo-Saxon affords many parallels to the passage under discussion. Consider the word *gēomormōd*. One virtue frequently emphasized was a proper realization of the serious future. A young man ought to have his mind on other than trivial subjects. The wise father instructs his son:

Seldan snottor guma sorglēas blissað,
 swylce dol seldon drȳmeð sorgful
 ymb his forðgesceaft, nefne hē fæhpe wite.³

The upshot of this clearly is that the wise man seldom gives himself up to unrestrained joy—it is not well to be *sorglēas*, constant seriousness is desirable; while the foolish man is seldom plunged into gloomy thoughts about the future, unless he is in some present trouble. The condition of the world, the transitory character of human things, dwelt upon by the Wanderer and the Seafarer, go to make a man's disposition sober.

For þon ic gepencan ne mæg geond þās wuruld
 for hwan mōdsefa mīn ne gesweorce,⁴

is the cry. I take *gēomormōd*, then, to express this due sense of the seriousness of life, and *hygegēomorne* to have a similar meaning. Compare the Elizabethan word *sad*. *Brēostceare* and *sinsorgna gedrēag* form poetic repetitions of *gēomormōd*. After the caution that a young man should be of cheerful exterior, the

¹ Ll. 65 ff.

² Ll. 109 ff.

³ "Des Vaters Lehren," Grein-Wülker *Bibliothek*, p. 355, ll. 54-56.

⁴ *Wanderer*, ll. 58 f.

moralizer hastens again to drive home the main lesson. Yet it was none the less a virtue to be amiable. The wise father, in the course of his moral instructions, utters the warning: "ac bēo lēofwende!"¹ Evidently a seriousness which manifested itself in a gloomy demeanor was as much of a mistake as frivolity.

We shall take up this passage again later, in connection with what follows. It will be noticed that the parallelism to ll. 17 ff. is striking. In those the lady grieves that she has had to lose a man who was serious, self-restrained, and prepared for calamity, yet cheerful. The same phrase, *blīþe gebæro*, occurs in each passage, and *hygegēomor* is much like *gēomormōd*.

Let us now consider l. 20, *mōd mīþendne, morþor hycgend(n)e*. The wise man keeps his thoughts to himself, which is the virtue brought out in *mōd mīþendne*. The father's instructions, from which quotations have already been made, are again in point:

Wærwyrde sceal wīsfæst hæle
brēostum hycgan, nales breahme hlūd.²

The Bosworth-Toller lexicon renders the unusual word *wærwyrde* "cautious of speech." The general sense is in any case plain. The *Wanderer*, too, offers a good parallel:

Ic tō sōþe wāt
þæt bip in eorle indryhten þeaw
þæt hē his ferðlocan fæste binde,
healde his hordcofan, hycge swā hē wille.³

Other citations are hardly necessary. The phrase *morþor hycgendne*, however, requires more attention. I believe it may have been universally misunderstood in this passage. I take it to mean "meditating upon death," and not "brooding over murder," *mord sinnend* (Roeder).⁴ The similarity of certain Anglo-Saxon words to their representatives in modern English and German occasionally blinds us to differences in their meaning. "Murder" means nowadays "intentional and unlawful homicide."⁵ But the use of the term *morþor* in early days was much less specialized. It meant, apparently, any kind of violent death. Its use in

¹ L. 92.

² Ll. 57, 58.

³ Ll. 11-14.

⁴ "Wir bekommen nicht zu wissen, welche Ränke die Sippe des Mannes tbtte. Sollte sie ihn vielleicht zu einem Morde angestiftet oder ihn so gereizt haben, dass er einen Angehörigen seines eigenen Geschlechts erschlug?" Roeder, p. 114.

⁵ Webster's *International Dictionary*.

Beowulf illustrates perfectly the fact that the modern word "murder" will not always serve as a translation. Grendel is spoken of (l. 683) as *morþres scyldig*, although killed in a fair fight. The purely accidental slaying of Herebeald by Haethcyn is referred to thus:

Wæs þām yldestan ungedēfelice
mæges dædum morþor-bed strēd.¹

The citations which have already been given à propos of the word *gēomormōd* are again in point here. Meditation upon one's latter end cannot fail to induce seriousness. Nothing in the text justifies giving an adversative meaning to *blīþe gebāro*, and translating "holding murder in his thoughts, yet so blithe of bearing," as Stopford Brooke does.² Of course the rendering "murder" is not absolutely impossible, since that was one of the ways to meet a violent end. But the word as it stands is not so specialized in meaning, and unless something hitherto undiscovered is revealed in the context to justify that rendering, it gives a false impression of the passage. In days when a man was as constantly beset by peril as he was in the eighth century, it was well to have the possibility of a sudden end in mind, in whatever form that might come.

The husband emerges from the ordeal of a rigid examination of the lines, then, not only unscathed, but with added virtues to his credit. We may now briefly consider an attack recently made upon the personality of the unfortunate lady, which is no less than an attempt to prove that the piece does not depict the sorrows of a woman at all. Upon a hasty review, this revolutionary theory sounds plausible, especially as the author, Dr. L. L. Schücking,³ has incidentally made comments upon the text, some of which are entirely sound. But the more closely the hypothesis is examined, the more evident its untenability becomes. It is not wholly a new one; the earliest editors were of the opinion that a man must be regarded as the protagonist. This was due to

¹ *Bēow.*, ll. 2435-6. The Heyne-Socin glossary defines *morþor* as "gewaltsame Tötung, Mord," but is not equally careful in defining the compounds. The meaning of the word is further extended to "torment, injury," or sins of various kinds, even adultery. See Grein's *Sprachschatz*, and the Bosworth-Toller lexicon.

² *History of Early English Literature*, p. 360.

³ For Schücking's article, see n. 1 above, p. 388.

defective knowledge of Anglo-Saxon, however, or to failure to notice the feminine terminations which indicate the sex of the speaker. Dr. Schücking thinks he finds a way to get rid of these troublesome endings, and adds many other reasons to support his view. Before we can allow the unhappy lady to have another woe added to her store by being put out of existence altogether, in the pages of the *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, it may be well to show briefly how strong is her defense, and how weak the case of her adversary. So much seems to be demanded by galantry, if not by scholarship.

A most serious objection to Schücking's view presents itself at the very outset—the feminine endings just mentioned.

Ic þis giedd wrece bi mē ful gēomorre,
 mīnre sylfre sið; ic þæt secgan mæg,
 hwæt ic yrmþa gebād, siþþan ic up wēox,
 nīwes oþþe ealdes, nō mā þonne nū;
 ā ic wīte wonn mīnra wræcsiþa!

Schücking acknowledges that *gēomorre* and *mīnre sylfre* cannot be explained away as lapses due to the scribe, and properly rejects Thorpe's high-handed restoration of the masculine forms. But his method of disposing of the case is hardly less arbitrary. He thinks that these two lines, at least in their present form, are not original, since feminine inflections applying to the speaker do not elsewhere occur, and suggests that the last man who dealt with the poem in its original form misunderstood the situation, and either inserted the feminine forms instead of the masculine, or else prefixed the two lines in question to the poem as he found it. The latter hypothesis he thinks more probable, since the meter in 1*b* requires the feminine termination. The piece perhaps began originally, he maintains, as follows:

Hwæt! ic yrmþa gebād, siþþan ic up āwēox,
 nīwra oþþe ealdra nō mā þonne nū.

Textual errors occur in various places, and he calls upon the patchwork theory to help out his case. "Wie vielleicht auch die zusammensetzung des Wanderers dartut (vgl. Boer, *Z. f. d. Ph.*, 35, 1 ff., nicht in allen punkten überzeugend), haben wir es

bei den im *Exeterbuch* überlieferten lyr. gedichten nicht mit einer reinen Überlieferung zu tun."¹

To attribute to misunderstanding or interpolation the two lines which absolutely contradict the theory is practically to beg the whole question. Schücking sees in the addition of the first two lines a "lyric tradition," and compares the opening of the *Seafarer*. But if the hypothetical beginning of the piece, *Hwæt! ic yrmþa gebād*, etc., is as natural as he finds it, would it have been necessary to prefix the two opening lines, when this lyric tradition is only occasionally observed? Suppose, for the sake of argument, we grant that the lines were added later. We should then have to assume that the redactor intended *þæt* to refer to *giedd*, and so placed a full stop after the end of l. 2. This seems improbable—*giedd secgan* is unusual, at least. Moreover, this would leave *nīwes opþe ealdes* without other antecedent than *yrmþa*, which is feminine. It will be observed that Schücking, in his reconstruction of the old beginning of the piece, changes this phrase to *nīwra opþe ealdra*. It might be conjectured, on the other hand, that the reviser ingeniously altered *hwæt* from an interjection to a pronoun, its antecedent being *þæt* (l. 2), which is the accepted construction of the lines today, and also that he gave the present form to the first half of l. 4. This is much like the processes of Boer, in the article to which Schücking alludes. I have already criticized those arguments elsewhere, both in matters of detail and of method. Anyone who believes that the *Wanderer* is a composite of the sort that Boer makes it out to be will have little difficulty in regarding these first two lines as an excrescence to be lopped off at will. No one will deny that there are many textual errors in the lyrics, but that these are necessarily evidences of divided authorship or of editorial revision I see no reason to believe.

These observations apply equally well to the alternative theory, that the first two lines were not prefixed, but merely altered. The whole idea that some man who recast the piece misunderstood its meaning makes argument almost impossible. If we cannot take

¹ P. 447. For a review of Boer's work, cf. article by the present writer in the *Journal of Germanic Philology*, Vol. IV, pp. 460-80.

the plain evidence of grammatical forms for what it signifies, we might as well forsake all reasoning from the known facts the poem affords. The men who perpetuated it in Anglo-Saxon times must have had at least as good an idea of its meaning as we, and the presumption is all in favor of their having had a better.

Schücking lays much stress upon the word *leodfruma*¹ (l. 8), emphasizing the fact that it does not mean "husband" but "prince," which no one will dispute for a moment. But he seems to think it strange that a noble lady should speak of her husband as her "lord," although he admits that Wealhtheow addresses Hrothgar as *freo-drihten mīn*, and that *sin-frēa* is likewise used of a husband, *Beow.*, 1170. Why is not the analogy of such words as *drihten* or *frēa* perfect? Here too the original meaning is not "husband," yet they are clearly used of a lord in this relation. Perhaps a quotation from Roeder's investigation of the Anglo-Saxon family will clear up this matter most quickly. It will be observed that Roeder is not making these statements in connection with this particular poem. "Der Mann erscheint als der Herr und Gebieter der Frau: *Gen.*, 2225 nennt Sarah ihren Gatten *drihten mīn!* oder er heisst ihr *man-drihten*, 2242 . . . 2729 *frēa-drihten*, ebenfalls von Abraham. 2783 apostrophiert ihn Sarah: *mīn swāes frēa!* . . . Es lässt sich also auch hier bemerken, dass man die eheliche Gemeinschaft als ein Komitatsverhältniss ansieht . . . Einmal wird in den Rätselfn 62.4 der Mann sogar der "holde" Herr der Frau genannt: *holdum þēodne.*"² Other examples might be cited.³ The common later English usage makes it seem entirely natural for an Anglo-Saxon lady to have addressed her husband as her lord. Schücking admits: "An sich ist dies wohl nicht absolut ausgeschlossen . . . immerhin gibt diese stelle im verein mit dem folgenden zu denken,"⁴ proceeding then to other arguments. But if this point has no weight, it cannot support subsequent proofs. In logic, as in mathematics, $X+0=X$, and no more. There is no chain of reasoning more fallacious than that built of separate arguments each of which amounts to nothing in itself.

¹ P. 438.

² Roeder, *loc. cit.*, pp. 109, f.

³ *Genesis*, l. 655; *Beow.*, l. 641; *Gnom. Exon.*, l. 91.

⁴ P. 440.

Nothing in ll. 9, 10 makes it improbable that the speaker is a woman, although we are told they are "von der grössten wichtig-keit." Schücking is probably right in translating *folgað sēcan* "gefolgshaftsdienst zu suchen." As for the phrase *winelēas wræcca*, there is no reason why it may not apply to a woman as well as to a man; cf. *Dohtor se Babiloinisca wræcca, filia Babiloinis misera*; *Ps. Lamb.*, 136, 8. Yet upon this point Schücking lays great stress, not stating it quite exactly; "damit ist nun der wichtigste punkt für die erklärung des gedichts berührt: kann der sprecher der von sich sagt, dass er als freundloser 'recke' neue gefolgshaft suche eine frau sein? ich halte es für unmöglich."¹ But the word *wræcca* does not mean "recke," it means "der umherirrende heimatlose," as Schücking himself says. He admits, too, that the expression may be used of a woman entering service in a foreign land. But this, he says, is "unwahrscheinlich." Why? Such incidents are common in early story.² All this is worth no more than the *lēodfruma* argument, as far as proof goes. Similarly, *frēondscipe* (l. 25) may certainly be used of the love of a man and woman, cf. *frēondmynd, cogitationes amatoriae, Gen.*, 1830, 1831; *frēond-rāden(n), conditio amatoria, Jul.*, 34, 71, etc.³ But Schücking remarks: "*frēondscipe* mit Roeder als 'liebesbund' zu übersetzen, liegt kein grund vor. vgl. *frynd* v. 33." What the point of this reference is does not appear. Of course the dual form *uncer* disposes of any idea that *frēondscipe* may refer to the relation between others than the speaker and the *mon* of l. 18.

Moreover, Schücking's interpretation involves much shifting of subject. *þæs monnes* (l. 11) is not the same person as *mīn lēodfruma* (l. 8), although there is no intimation of any other man's coming into the narrative except what one may imagine in *folgað sēcan*. The person whose kinsmen are plotting to estrange him from the speaker is not the one whom the speaker has men-

¹ P. 440.

² Miss M. R. Cox, in treating the variants of the Cinderella-story, enumerates many instances of the "menial heroine" incident (*Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, XXXI*). Cf. especially her Preface. "Numberless instances," she says, "might be adduced in which a hero or heroine must undergo a term of servitude before fulfilling an exalted destiny" (p. xl).

³ Cf. Roeder, p. 95.

tioned with tenderness in l. 7; the *hlāford mīn* of l. 15 is not the *mīn hlāford* of l. 6. Another shift comes in l. 18. The *ful gemæcne monnan* is not the *mon* of l. 11, the new lord to whom our attention has supposedly been diverted, but lord number one is introduced without any indication that a change has been made. It is scarcely conceivable that anyone reading or hearing this for the first time would interpret the situation as Schücking imagines it, unless the outlines of the story were familiar. There are shifts of subject in early poetry, but nothing quite so wild as this.

It is hardly worth while to examine these arguments further. Other errors might be pointed out,¹ but enough has been said to lead to a safe conclusion. There is no valid evidence that the speaker must be a man and cannot be a woman, while there are the best of reasons for holding that the speaker must be a woman and cannot be a man.

More interesting to the general reader, and more important for literary history and aesthetic criticism is the question of what the interpretation of the poem as a whole shall be. What is the story, obscurely shadowed forth, which it tells?

It is a difficult problem to solve—an impossible one, I believe, unless one looks beyond the limits of the text. There is so much in the language that admits of varied translation that it is hardly surprising that there has never been any unanimity about the underlying plot. Even if an exact and literal translation could be agreed upon, it is highly doubtful if it would be possible to reconstruct from this the situation as the poet conceived it. Moreover, in a poem of lyrical character a detailed and circumstantial narrative cannot be expected. It seems likely that three or four hypothetical plots might be proposed, none of which would be inconsistent with the text, because so much allowance must in any case be made for the omissions in the story. The interpretation of the piece as it stands, with all its ambiguities upon its head, is ten times more difficult. And if it is obscure to the lynx-eyed modern investigator, who reads it over and over again, and weighs

¹ Cf. n. 2, p. 403, below; on *bissum londstede*, l. 16, does not appear to mean that the speaker is living "im neuen lande," but rather in the country of the *hlāford* of l. 6, who departed *heonan* of *lēodum*; *āhte*, too, is preterit. Does *on eorþan* (l. 33) mean "fern" ? (Schücking, p. 441).

the evidence of each detail with minute care, would it not have confused the people for whom it was originally composed? What would a listening throng have made of it, if they had been obliged to evolve the story for themselves?

Assume, on the other hand, that we are dealing with a lyric treatment of some theme familiar to everyone in Anglo-Saxon times, and these difficulties vanish. With the general course of events already in mind, an audience could have understood and appreciated the telling of the tale, and the minstrel would have been unhampered in bringing out its pathos and its passion. And this proceeding was just what such an audience would have expected. Nothing was commoner than for the poet to touch only upon certain moments in a story and suppress others, as suited his artistic purpose. Certain situations are thus thrown into high relief, as in the poetic *Edda*. But unless the audience knows the story, this procedure is impossible. The *Wife's Lament* may well be like certain episodes in *Beowulf*—the Finn-episode, for instance, a narrative the true course of which can only be guessed at from the lines as they stand. Unfortunately, the story of Finn has not been preserved in other sources, but there is reason to think that we are more fortunate in the present case. At all events, whether one believes a priori that the poem is based upon *heldensage* or not, it is clear that one cannot properly interpret any piece of Anglo-Saxon verse by focusing his gaze upon it alone, and disregarding all the material in song and story which it recalls today, and which it must have suggested even more to a man of the eighth century.

Identification of the events here narrated with those of some heroic tale has already been proposed several times, but never worked out in a wholly convincing way. Nor has the relation of the Anglo-Saxon lyric in general to material of this sort been satisfactorily treated. Ten Brink's statement that it is improbable that such relations exist¹—with the exception of *Deor's Lament*—has frequently been quoted, and deserves all consideration, as coming from so high an authority. Miss Rickert, in the article already alluded to, disagrees with him, and argues at some length

¹ *History of English Literature*, transl. Kennedy, Vol. I, p. 61.

for the identification of this poem with the *Offa-saga*.¹ Her monograph is careful and complete, yet exception may be taken to some of her observations upon this particular poem, and especially to some of her conclusions regarding the lyric. Let us first consider the general situation, and then the claims of the *Offa-saga* to be a key unlocking the mystery of the misfortunes of the distressed wife.

It seems evident, upon careful examination, that no such statement as ten Brink's, that the Anglo-Saxon lyrics are or are not based upon *heldensage*, will serve. In three of these, the *Wanderer*, the *Seafarer*, and the *Ruin*, it appears to play no part. In three others, the *Banished Wife's Lament*, the *Husband's Message*, and *Signy's Lament* (the First Riddle), the very backbone of the dramatic structure is in all probability a well-known heroic tale. In two others the connection is of a different sort. Widsith—if we may include his story under lyric verse—cites famous warriors as his patrons with unblushing insouciance, in one instance introducing himself in a circumstantial way at the courts of Eormanic and Eadgils.² But he deals with names, not with situations. The interest of his tale is that of a catalogue, in the main. What little story there is in the poem is his own, not that of the heroes whom he has seen. Again, Deor, in his lament, fortifies his heart in adversity by recalling the misfortunes of famous personages. Here, too, the connection is external. Incidents of saga have nothing to do with his troubles except as affording parallels.

It will be observed, then, that the Anglo-Saxon lyrics are not all of a similar character as regards plot, for it is here that the distinction must be made. In the *Wanderer* the events narrated are simple. The exile's lord has died; he has been forced to seek a new one. This is all; the interest of the poem depends not upon the events of the *Wanderer's* life, but upon his description of the effects of exile and the decay of the fair things of the world upon the heart. There is no need to turn to saga to explain all this, and the situation is too vague and general to permit of satisfactory

¹ *Modern Philology*, Vol. II, pp. 365 ff.

² Cf. article by the present writer, *Modern Philology*, Vol. IV, No. 2.

identification. The *Seafarer* shows even less "plot" than the *Wanderer*. No train of events is narrated. A sailor contrasts the hardships of voyaging with the security of life upon shore, yet emphasizes the mysterious call of the sea. As for the *Ruin*, it was obviously inspired by the remains of some city, the name of which it would be interesting to know, but this is not necessary to the enjoyment of the piece, and there is nothing to suggest connection with the *heldensage* about this bit of realistic description.

On the other hand, the *Husband's Message*, the so-called First Riddle—not a riddle at all, but a dramatic soliloquy—and the poem at present under discussion are very different. Here, despite the "lyric cry," there is obviously a very definite and somewhat involved story underlying the whole, a story not clearly set forth, but one which must be understood if the piece is to be fully appreciated. These three poems seem, then, to stand entirely apart from the rest in this regard. Moreover, they have all been connected with familiar old stories, and the resemblances seem too strong to be purely fortuitous. Following the demonstration that the First Riddle contains Scandinavianisms which indicate connection with Old Norse,¹ Professor Schofield pointed out the striking likeness to a situation in the *Volsungasaga*, and renamed it *Signy's Lament*.² He has also noted that the *Husband's Message* is much like an episode of the *Tristram saga*, which appears to have been current in England in early times,³ and has promised an article upon this subject. The parallelism between the *Wife's Lament* and certain parts of the *Offa-saga*—or, if one prefers, the *Constance-saga*—is remarkable, especially when certain resemblances not hitherto noted are considered.

Miss Rickert suggests that the lyric poems may have formed portions of lost epics. This affords an opportunity for interesting speculation, but in the scarcity of surviving epic material, no ground for satisfactory conclusions. There seems to be no reason why the *giedd* or short monologue of the epic should not have been current in isolated form as well, or even have been preserved after

¹ *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. XVII, pp. 247 ff.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 262 ff.

³ *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 202.

the longer poem had passed out of memory, since an epic was to men of early days a necklace the pearls of which might be detached at will. And when lyric interludes in stichic verse formed a part of epic poems, there would have been no incongruity in giving this form to similar pieces having no direct connection with longer works. But it is hard to see how Miss Rickert can see in the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* "a definite dramatic situation the details of which are more or less obscure,"¹ and believe that a definite saga-episode must have been in the poet's mind. The point seems to be that the whole is indefinite. Any exile in the conventional position of the *Wanderer*, any sailor who has experienced the strange fascination of the sea may be the protagonist. It is easy to pick out moments in various sagas to which the experiences of these men apply—Miss Rickert suggests two for each poem—but nothing leads to satisfactory identification. On the other hand, consider the *Husband's Message* or the *Wife's Lament*. Any woman banished into a wood or any husband or lover writing to his lady will not satisfy the demands of the situation. There is of course no way of proving that the poet of the *Wanderer* or the *Seafarer* may not have had saga-figures in mind, but there is nothing to show that such was the case. They may be explained and enjoyed as typical figures; the others may not.

In the absence of documentary evidence, it seems equally impossible to prove that the *Banished Wife's Lament* is or is not based on the Offa-saga. The question is rather whether the resemblances in incident and mood are sufficiently close, and whether such facts as have been determined in regard to the early history of the Offa material render the hypothesis a likely one. It should not be forgotten that the general reasons stated above for assuming a saga-basis for the poem will still hold, even if the particular identification here reviewed be rejected.

It is not the design of the present paper to give a summary of the arguments which point to this relationship with the Offa-saga. For this the reader is referred to Miss Rickert's monograph, and to Gough's discussion of the Constance-saga in *Palæstra XXIII*. The twelfth-century *Vita Offæ Primi*, which Miss Rickert uses

¹ P. 371.

as the basis of her work, deserves careful attention as the earliest elaborated account, and doubtless preserves many details of the story as it existed in the eighth century, but various changes and additions must have taken place in the four centuries intervening, for many of which the fusion with the Offa II-Cynethryth material is doubtless responsible. While Gough's reconstruction of the hypothetical primitive form shows certain elements which must have been prominent in early times, no extant version reproduces the tale as it existed when this lyric was probably written.

There is no doubt, however, that the story of the shadowy Anglian king Offa, blended with *märchen* elements, was well known in England in the time of Cynewulf. Some details in regard to him are familiar from *Beowulf* and *Widsith*, and both Suchier¹ and Gough agree in locating the earliest form of the saga in Anglian territory. Everything goes to show that it would have been entirely natural for the author of this lyric to have used the saga as literary material. The resemblances of incident are thus fortified by the inherent probability of such borrowing.

These resemblances, if accidental, are remarkable. The heroine's early years of misfortune and exile, her husband's departure, the hostility of his kinsfolk, her banishment into a wilderness at his orders—all this is quite in keeping with the account in the saga. The narrative element, however, soon becomes subordinated to the lyric complaints. Certain passages for which I would suggest another interpretation than Miss Rickert's have already been discussed. It remains to explain the closing lines, which she has had difficulty in reconciling with the earlier part of the poem and with the saga itself. There is a strong resemblance to the *Vita* here which she has failed to note.

The translation of ll. 42-53, as I understand them, runs as follows:

Ever ought a young man to be serious of mind, steadfast the thoughts of his heart, (he should have) a pleasant demeanor as well, also care, the weight of constant anxiety, whether² he have achieved all his worldly

¹ "Über die Sage von Offa und Dryþo," Paul-Braune *Beiträge*, Vol. IV, p. 521.

² I should accept Schücking's explanation of *sy . . . sy*. *Gelong* means literally, "proceeding from, dependent upon." Cf. mod. colloquial "along of." The contrast in the lines that between a successful and an unfortunate man — to paraphrase, "whether he have as

joy, or be far and wide surrounded by hostility¹ in a far-distant land—where² my friend³ sitteth beneath the rocky cliff, beaten by the storm, weary-hearted, drenched with water in his dreary hall! He endureth mighty sorrow; he remembereth too oft a more joyful dwelling. Woe is his who must in longing await the coming of a dear one!

It is important to recollect that we are getting the story from the woman's point of view, that she does not know the real state of affairs. Vaguely she feels that her husband's relatives are at the bottom of the trouble, but cannot particularize. The forged order of banishment has brought, in addition to her physical sufferings, the agony of supposing that her husband is estranged from her. More than this, the false letter contained the news of the king's defeat and of his imminent peril.⁴ So she has also to bear the thought that he is now among victorious enemies. This explains the closing lines. After the lyric elaboration of ll. 29–41, her thoughts turn to the qualities of the ideal man, whether he be fortunate or be *ful wīde fāh feorres folclondes*, which she supposes

a result of his efforts all the joy that can be his on earth, or be hunted down in a foreign land, he should still be mindful of the future life." Perhaps the implication is that the lady's husband was lacking in this high seriousness.

¹ *Fāh* means literally "proscribed."

² I read *þær* (Thorpe, Ettmüller) instead of *þæt*. One wonders how Schücking would translate the entire passage, especially how he reconciles ll. 43, 44, and 45a with his conception. In his paraphrase he completely ignores them: "denn ein junger mann (wie ich) muss immer traurig sein, ob es ihm selbst nun gut geht oder böse, wenn es seinem herrn so schlecht geht, wie dem meinen." This really gives a false idea of the train of thought. The construction of *þæt*, (l. 47) is in any case harsh as the text stands. Schücking takes it as a conjunction referring to *geomormōd*, five lines back, with another independent clause, *swylce habban sceal bliþe gebæro*, etc., and the "alternative hypothesis" ll. 45, 46 intervening. This is surely a good deal of a strain, "grammatisch . . . ein wenig aus der rolle gefallen," indeed. The meaning seems to be, on this hypothesis, that the young man is not only sad, but resolute of heart and of blithe exterior because his lord is faring so badly. The passage intervening between *geomormōd* and *þæt* is not parenthetical in form, and it is difficult to see how it can be in sense.

³ *Wine*, as well as *frēond*, may mean "husband;" cf. Bosworth-Toller.

⁴ Cf. *Originals and Analogues*, Chaucer Soc., Vol. I, pp. 71–84, for a reprint of the *Vita*. The text of the forged letter is as follows: "Rex Offa, majoribus et præcipuis regni sui, salutis et prosperitatis augmentum; universitati vestræ notum facio, in itinere, quod arripui, infortunia et adversa plurima tam mihi quam subditis meis accidisse, et majores exercitus mei, non ignava propria, vel hostium oppugnantium virtute, sed potius peccatis nostris justo Dei judicio interiisse. Ego autem instantis periculi causam pertractans, et conscientie meæ intima perscrutatus, in metempso nihil aliud conjicio altissimo displicere, nisi quod perditam et maleficam illam absque meorum consensu, uxorem imperito et infelici duxi matrimonio: Ut ergo de malefica memorata, voluntati vestræ ad plenum quam temere offendi, satisfiat, asportetur cum liberis ex ea genitis ad loca deserta, hominibus incognita, feris et avibus aut sylvestribus prædonibus frequentata; ubi cum pueris suis puerpera truncata manus et pedes exemplo pereat inauditum."

is the condition of her lord at the present moment, and this in turn brings the direct mention of him, overcome by his foes in the rainy and dreary Scottish country. The keynote of the poem, expressed in the last two lines, applies equally well to husband or wife.

Two objections to this identification should be considered. Wülker finds it strange that the child or children mentioned in the saga are not alluded to in the lyric.¹ Miss Rickert replies: "But these in V¹ play no part except as they are connected with the foundation of St. Albans." It ought to be added at this point that this did not take place until the latter part of the eighth century, the foundation being due to the repentance of Offa II (died 796) for the murder of Æthelbert, king of the East Anglians.² If the children are unimportant in the twelfth-century story except in this connection, it is unlikely that they were prominent in the eighth-century form of the saga. Moreover, this touch, of which such skilful use was made by Chaucer, may well have appealed less to the Anglo-Saxon poet, who was directing all his energies to making the relationship between the wife and the husband vivid, and confining himself to the compass of a brief lyric.

Again, the interpretation of the phrase *folgað sēcan* in relation to the saga is not clear. Possibly the lyric adds a touch not in the *Vita*. The meaning sometimes adopted, that the lady sought her lord or his body of followers, receives a little support from the statement in the *Vita* that he departed "cum Equitum numerosa multitudine." But Schücking's rendering of the phrase, "to seek service," is probably the right one. In various versions of the tale the wife does the work of a servant at different stages of her career. Miss Rickert seems to regard *feran gewāt* as referring to the banishment of ll. 15 and 27, but these particularize the punishment; she must dwell in a cave in the forest—a very different thing from any meaning to be read into *folgað sēcan*. Perhaps we are to take the situation to be that, driven from home by the hostility of her husband's kin, she returned to

¹ *Grundriss, loc. cit.*

² Cf. Hunt, *History of the English Church from Its Foundation to the Norman Conquest*, p. 235.

an occupation similar to that before her marriage. The wicked relatives, not content with this, then ordered her banishment to the wood. The question is difficult of solution, but the discrepancy does not seem a serious one.

Taking due account of these resemblances and differences, it is difficult to sum up the question with absolute impartiality. The Offa-saga certainly explains most readily the puzzling situation in the lyric. Schücking asks, for example: "Wie sollte der mann, der gatte, den v. 47 ff. selbst in der bedrängtesten lage im fremden lande zeigen, der frau befehlen können, im wald zu leben?" If one tries to answer this from the evidence of the lines alone, one struggles about in a maze of blind conjecture. The saga makes the solution plain at once. Yet in the absence of the confirming evidence of proper names, a matter which Miss Rickert has discussed at length, it is impossible to speak with confidence of the connection which the resemblances of incident lead one to assume between the two. Operations with saga-material are always dangerous. But the general proposition that the true elucidation of the poem will come from a heroic tale nevertheless remains sound. It must be conceded that some such story as this is far more likely to form the basis of the lyric than an imaginary train of events concocted in the brain of some modern critic. Invention was rare in early times; poets were not given to originating their plots when there were such ample stores from which to borrow. Their preference was ever for reshaping a twice-told tale, giving it freshness by new touches added here and there. All this is really too familiar to call for repetition, although one of the most dangerous pitfalls into which the critic stumbles is forgetfulness of the literary methods of early times. Whatever may be thought of the Offa-saga as a parallel, then, there remain the best of reasons for believing that the lyric is founded upon material of the same general character.

Finally, if we may trust the evidence of the old tale, it is pleasant to think that this Anglo-Saxon Mariana finds happiness in the end, like her later sister in the moated grange.

WILLIAM WITHERLE LAWRENCE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY