

Tradurre: un viaggio nel tempo

Maria Grazia Cammarota

sīþ, *wræcsīþ*: Literal or Figurative? Considerations on Genre and Gender Conventions in Translating from Old English

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Abstract The Old English poem *The Wife's Lament* is an extremely conventional and, at the same time, original text. It portrays a female character suffering for the absence of her loved one, through the framework of the so-called 'elegiac' style and a mainly heroic vocabulary. The traditional exile theme is, thus, interwoven with the uncommon motif of love sickness. While this appraisal of the poem is the most widely accepted one, disagreement still remains about the translation of some keywords, strictly related to the exile theme, such as *sīþ* or *wræcsīþ*. The aim of this paper is to examine diverging readings and glosses of the above mentioned 'exilic/elegiac' keywords, and to show that an accurate translation should not neglect a thorough appraisal of the text in its complexity and the association with related literary patterns and imagery in other poetic and prose texts.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Aim of this Paper. – 3 The Opening Lines of the *WL* and the Word *sīð*. – 4 Fashioning the *sīð* as Banishment. – 5 Sense of Movement and Digressions in the *WL*. – 6 Final Remarks.

Keywords The Wife's Lament. Translation. Genre. Literal or figurative. Exile.

1 Introduction

The *Wife's Lament* (*WL*), an Old English poem in 53 alliterating long lines, found in the Codex Exoniensis (Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3501 fols. 115^{r-v}),¹ is about a woman who suffers because she has been separated from her husband, probably a chieftain or a man from the ruling class in his land. For unknown reasons, she is forced to become an outcast and to dwell in an earth-cave under an oak-tree, in an unfamiliar and deserted region. The

¹ The manuscript was given to Exeter Cathedral by Leofric (+ 1072), the first bishop of Exeter; its previous abode is unknown. The Exeter anthology, containing a rich collection of secular and religious poetry from Anglo-Saxon times, was compiled in the last decades of the tenth century.

WL shares many features with a group of poems conventionally labelled as Old English elegies, such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.²

Despite the many similarities with other elegies, the *WL* is almost unique in the entire Old English poetic corpus. Its speaker is a woman, as is revealed by the feminine adjectival endings in the first lines; furthermore, the poem focuses on love sufferings and sexual desire, which are very unusual topics in Old English (Magennis 1995), with the exception of two other short poetic texts, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Husband's Message*, included in the Exeter Book as well. As female voices are not so often heard in Old English poetry (with the exception of the above mentioned *Wulf and Eadwacer*) and despite the material proof, the first editors (Conybeare 1826; Thorpe 1842; Schücking 1906) of the poem simply ignored, or failed to recognise the female voice of the poem. In more recent times, a few scholars have again tried to dismiss the female identity of the speaker, on the basis of the cultural and social conditions of that time (Bambas 1963), or on purely literary evidence (Stevens 1968; Mandel 1987, 152-5).³

2 Aim of this Paper

In the present paper I wish to address one problem associated with this poem: namely, how to read and translate some lexemes occurring in its opening lines. In dealing with the *WL*, I had the opportunity to compare many translations of the poem, mainly in modern English, and also consulted some common Old English readers, with appended glossaries; I realised, with some disappointment, that the majority of translators and glossators made some translational choices, which I was unable to understand or could not agree with.⁴

Part of these unsatisfactory interpretations concern the opening lines of the text, and particularly the lexemes *sīþ* 'voyage', and *wræcsīþ* 'journey of exile', which, together with *wineleas wræcca* 'a friendless outcast', a phrase occurring a few lines later, contribute to creating a certain expectation about the poem itself, and recall a definite web of images, which may be found in other poetic texts. These words are relevant both to the

2 Common features of the 'elegies' are a first person speaker, a gloomy atmosphere, an unfriendly natural environment, a sense of loss and separation, feelings of loneliness and isolation. A 'working' definition of 'elegy' was first provided by Greenfield (1966, 143); and later by Klinck (1984, 130); however, the existence of such an Old English genre has been questioned several times (Mora 1995; Ashurst 2010, 136-9; Fulk, Cain 2013, 259).

3 For a survey of the main critical issues raised by the *WL* see Klinck (2001, 49-54; 177-88); Niles (2003, 1107-20); Kinch (2006, 121-6).

4 Translations and readers are listed, in chronological order, in the appendix to this paper, together with the passages and *interpretamenta* under examination.

domain of ‘voyage’, ‘travelling abroad’ and, at the same time, and more meaningfully, to the imagery of ‘exile’, ‘wandering in exile’, a very common theme in the Old English poetic corpus, not only in secular poetry, but in religious poems as well.

3 The Opening Lines of the *WL* and the Word *sīð*

The opening lines of the *WL* introduce the topic of the poem: the first person speaker declares she will tell the audience about herself and her present and past sufferings. In this way the *giedd*, ‘song, story, narration’, takes the form of a lament on the speaker’s own sorrows, and, according to her utterances, subject of this ‘song’ will also be her own *sið* (quoted from Leslie 1988, the translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own; emphasis mine):

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Ic þis giedd wrece bī mē ful geōmorre, | I sing this song about my fully sad self, |
| 2 | mīnre sylfre sīð . Ic þæt secgan mæg, | my own path. That I will tell, |
| 3 | hwæt ic ymþa gebād , sīþpan ic ūp [ā]wēox, | what distress I endured, since I grew up, |
| 4 | nīwes oþþe ealdes, nō mā þonne nū. | in recent times, and past ones, no more than now. |

According to Bosworth, Toller (1898, 878) *sīþ* could be translated as 1) ‘going, journeying, travel’, but also 2) ‘a journey, voyage, course, expedition’. In a more abstract meaning, without any reference to motion, it could also be glossed as 3) ‘proceeding, course of action, way of doing, conduct’, and still as 4) ‘lot, condition, fate, experience’ or ‘course of events’.

Most scholars, commentators and translators do not read *sīþ* according to its basic meaning, as ‘travel, voyage’, probably in order to give the word a connotation more in agreement with the general tone of the opening lines, and the statements of sorrow uttered by the speaker. Thus I have found ‘Schicksal’ (Schücking 1919), ‘my own experience’ (Mackie 1934), ‘the tale of my trouble’ (Kennedy 1939), ‘my own course’ (Malone 1963), ‘lot’ or ‘condition’ (Curry 1966),⁵ ‘lot, plight’ (Cassidy, Ringler 1971), ‘experience, trial’ (Pope, Fulk 2001), ‘my own distress’ (Hamer 2006). The Italian scholars also chose to render the phrase in a more emotional way, so we find ‘il mio destino’ (Ricci 1921), ‘la mia dolorosa esperienza’ (Sanesi 1975). It is also interesting to evaluate how the first translators and editors of the *WL* interpreted *sīþ* in their anthologies. So in Conybeare’s first translation and *editio princeps* of the Exeter Book (1826) *mīnre sylfre sīð* is translated as ‘my own journeyings’, while Thorpe (1842) rendered the phrase as ‘my own fortune’. As we have previously seen, at that time,

5 In her approach to a translation of the *WL*, Curry (1966, 198) explained her choice to translate *sīþ* as ‘lot’ or ‘condition’ because these lexemes “are more expressive of the speaker’s concern”, according to “the poem’s context and tone”.

neither Conybear nor Thorpe recognised, from the adjectival inflections in the opening lines, that the speaker was a woman.

The opening lines of the *WL* have often been compared with the very first verses of the Old English elegy *The Seafarer*, which are similar in content and diction, sharing a few keywords and phrases and some identical lexemes, such as *sīþ* and *-gied* (quoted from Cucina 2008; Author's translation and emphases):

1	Mæg ic be mē sylfum sōðgied wrecan	I will sing a true song about myself,
2	sīþas secgan , hū ic in geswincdagum	tell of my travels, how in days of sorrows,
3	earfoðhwile oft þrōwade;	I oft suffered times of hardships;
4	bitre brēostceare gebiden hæbbe,	bitter hearth cares I endured,
5	gecunnad in cēole cearselda fela	I experienced on a ship many places of anxiety

Among the modern anthologists, Hamer (2006) prefers to translate the wording *sīþas secgan* of *The Seafarer* as 'tell my travels', while, as we have seen, he understood the wording *mīnre sylfre sīþ* of the female speaker in the *WL* as 'my own distress'.

Cassidy, Ringler (1971) list in their glossary different meanings for *sīþ* in both occurrences: given the general meaning 'journey', they record the gloss 'experience, trial' for the lexeme *sīþas*, occurring at the beginning of *The Seafarer*, and 'lot, plight' for the *sīð*, in the opening lines of the *WL*.

Pope, Fulk (2001) attribute to *sīþ* the general meaning 'travel, journey, voyage', but they prefer to give to both occurrences, in the opening lines of the *WL* and *The Seafarer*, the meaning 'experience, trial'. Other scholars give the general meaning 'travel, journey' to the word *sīþ*, but then specify a distinctive rendering for the *WL* as 'my own experience' (Mitchell, Robinson 2007), or as 'plight' (Baker 2007). In this way, we can notice that most translators and glossators of the *WL* ascribe a meaning to the word *sīþ* that does not correspond to its basic or literal sense, as given in the first glosses by Bosworth, Toller (1898, 878) and, at the same time, some of them interpret the word in a different way, according to different poetic contexts.

4 Fashioning the *sīð* as Banishment

The lexeme *wræcsīþa*, '[of my] exile-journeys', occurs at line 5 of the *WL*, and, a few lines later, we find the alliterating formula *winelēas wræcca* 'friendless exile'.⁶ *Wræcsīþ* appears a second time in the poem (at line 38), as the speaker portrays herself sitting in sorrow, inside an earth-cave, weeping for her despairing situation:

6 Greenfield (1955, 201) considers this formula a key-phrase "designating a status of excommunication"; it belongs to "the typical exile 'images'".

5	ā ic wīte wonn mīnra wræcsīþa .	I always suffered the torment of my exile-journeys.
9	Ðā ic mē fēran gewāt folgað sēcan,	When I went off, to look for a retinue,
10	winelēas wræcca for mīnre wēaþearfe [...]	a friendless exile, for my woeful needs...
38	þær ic wēpan mæg mīne wræcsīþas ,	there I can weep for my banishment,
39	earfoþa fela	my many troubles...

Wræcsīþ is a compound of *wræc* ‘punishment, misery, exile’ and *sīþ*; its basic meaning is ‘exile-journey’ or ‘journey into exile’; it is also etymologically linked to the word *wræcca* ‘exile, outcast’, which follows a few lines below. Bosworth, Toller (1898, 1269) list three different interpretations of this lexeme: I) ‘travel in a foreign land, peregrination’; II) ‘exile, banishment’, III) ‘misery, wretchedness’. While in the dictionary we find a large number of instances of the word in the first two mentioned meanings,⁷ the third gloss occurs only three times.⁸

Some of the translations I compared did not express *wræcsīþ* with ‘exile’, ‘path of exile’ or ‘travel into exile’, but had markedly different readings, as for example ‘Unglück’ (in both instances, Schücking 1919), ‘sorrows’, ‘miseries’ (Mackie 1934), ‘miseries’, ‘hardships’ (Malone 1963), ‘durissime pene’, ‘miserie’ (Sanesi 1975); in his edition Leslie (1988) glossed the word as ‘misery’ too.⁹ Almost half of the translators and commentators decided to render the word in agreement with its etymology, as ‘exile’ or ‘wandering (in exile)’, in one or both occurrences, so too Thorpe (1842, ‘wanderings’, only the first instance), Ricci (1921, ‘lo straziante mio esilio’), Kennedy (1939, ‘exile’, only in the first instance), Pope, Fulk (1981, ‘hardship’, ‘experience of exile’), Bradley (1991, ‘my exile’s paths’, ‘the ways of my exile’), Raffel (1998, ‘(darkness of) exile’), Hamer (2006, ‘banishment’), Treharne (2009, ‘(the torment of my) exile’).

It is also remarkable to learn how some translators explain their readings of the word. Curry (1966, 198) rejects the first two meanings given by Bosworth, Toller (1898, 1269), ‘travels in a foreign land’ or ‘exile, banishment’, and prefers to read the word as ‘wretchedness’, since “neither of the first two meanings fit the extent or nature of all of the possible variations in interpretation of the speaker’s situation”; according to this

7 *wræcsīð* is frequently used both in poetry (*Andreas* 889, 1358, 1431, *Guthlac* 480, 595, 660, 1047, *Beowulf* 338, 2292, *Descent into Hell* 128), and in prose, particularly in the homilies and in some passages of the Alfredian translations of Orosius’ *Historiae adversus paganos* and of Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae*; it appears as a technical and legal term in Knut’s *Laws* (Liebermann, 1903, I.340,39) and in some *Anglo-Latin Glossaries*, wherein it corresponds to the Latin word *exilium* (Wright 1884, I.116,16; I.172,36; I.397,8).

8 And even in these last three cases, the basic meaning, ‘exile-journey’, could also be considered acceptable (*Beowulf* 2292, *Andreas* 1358, 1431).

9 Rissanen (1969, 93) too noticed the prevalence of this interpretation of the lexeme, “but there is no compelling reason to reject the original meaning ‘travel in a foreign land’, ‘exile, banishment’”.

scholar, 'wretchedness', on the other hand, seems to echo the words of the female speaker at the beginning of her utterance (*bī mē ful geōmorre*), "and anticipates the feeling of the song itself". Even if the word is glossed by Cassidy and Ringler (1971, 344) according to the general meaning as 'exile-journey, exile', two alternative explanations of the sentence are proposed, in a footnote beneath the text itself: "I always got pain in return for my exile-journeys", or "always I suffered (the) torment of my miseries".

Morrison (2000, 23) considered these discrepancies as the result of a gendered approach concerning the female speaker: in this way, the different readings of *sīþ* and *wræcsīþ* are explained as the effect of the application of the dominant, heroic model. Namely, according to Hennesey-Olsen (cit. in Morrison 2000, 23) "the concept of genre influences the way that we read particular works, but preconceptions about the genre of a work can prevent us from reading that work, except as it has been read traditionally [...] many readers view Anglo-Saxon men as active and heroic and women as negatives [...] in a heroic, brightly illuminated male world". In this way, while an identical word is rendered neutral for a male agent, it suggests passivity and suffering for a female agent (Morrison 2000, 23).¹⁰

As a matter of fact, a gendered reading could also explain the different interpretation of words such as *sīþ* or *wræcsīþ* in different poetic contexts, as in the *WL* or the so called 'male' elegies. But such a suggestion could be disputed on the ground of Conybeare's and Thorpe's translations. Both thought of the speaker as a male agent, and nevertheless they did express the lexeme *sīþ* in different ways, respectively as 'journeyings' and 'fortune'. On the other hand, the great majority of the interpreters and translators somehow considers a non-literal or figurative reading of both lexemes as the most suitable. This is particularly true of the word *sīþ*, to which many abstract meanings have been given, such as 'fortune', 'Schicksal', 'destino', 'experience', 'lot', 'course', 'esperienza'. Some of them are also more or less deeply emotion-charged, such as 'trouble', 'plight', 'trial', 'distress', 'sorrow'. In my own translation I chose 'my own path' as the most fitting way to render *mīnre sylfre sīð*, in order to give an interpretation, whose literal meaning does not preclude a less material or metaphoric reading. As mentioned above, as far as the 'technical', exilic term *wræcsīþ* is concerned, many translators and interpreters chose an abstract or metaphoric reading ('Unglück' 'sorrows', 'miseries', 'hardships' 'durissime pene', 'wretchedness'), in agreement with the speaker's own sorrows. This could moreover be a suitable interpretative choice, since an outcast

¹⁰ Some scholars define the behaviour of the female speaker of the *WL* in terms of a 'dignified passivity' (see e.g. Niles 2003, 1116). On the gendered nature of the theme of exile in Old English poetry see, among others, Belanoff (1990), Bennett (1994) and, more recently, Klein (2006).

has surely his/her own share of unhappiness and sorrows during his/her solitary journeys, far from homeland and friends.

In the following paragraph I will try to take a closer look at the text of the *WL*, and explain why I believe that those translations, ascribing to the word *sīþ* an abstract or metaphoric meaning (such as ‘plight’, ‘lot’, ‘distress’), are somehow lacking of a thorough interpretation of the short poem as a whole.

5 Sense of Movement and Digressions in the *WL*

If we analyse the text, and examine more closely what the speaker declares, we perceive an idea of motion, especially in the first part of the poem. This consideration is also emphasized by Jensen (1990, 452-453), who states: “when we examine the poem as a whole, a pattern emerges: we see a progressively narrowing focus in the imagery, a movement that begins in the first lines of the poem and culminates in the earth-cave”.

Concerning the idea of travelling abroad, conveyed by the word *sīþ*, by which at first the speaker describes her life, we can see that both the speaker and her husband are first seen in movement, he *ofer yða gelac*, ‘over the tossing waves’, and she as a *winelēas wræcca*, ‘a friendless outcast’, in search of a retinue. In this way the movement made by the wife parallels that of her husband, who went forth from his people, as the woman states a few lines before.

A second image connected with space and movement suggests a wider setting, involving indefinite spaces: the man and the speaker are separated ‘as far apart as possible in the world’, since the man’s relatives conspired to separate them. This image is also evoked by the indirect questioning of the speaker about the present location of her husband: he must be somewhere, in a distant land, far from his country, and his people, in an unknown place. A third type of movement is represented in the poem by the progressive concentrating of the narrator on the place of her dwelling, and of her ultimate stasis. She is commanded to take her place in a desolate region, where she has no friends at all, and suffers loneliness. This place is first referred to as *þissum londstede*, ‘this region’, but a few lines later (27), she begins to describe her new dwelling in detail, first as a sorrowful forest grove; but, from the more generalised image of a wood, the narrator moves to a specific oak-tree, under which she is confined in an ‘underground cave’ (*eorðscræfe*, 28). After a short pause, the speaker gives us more details about this unfriendly place, which she now calls *eorðsele* (29, ‘earth-hall’), describing its surroundings (dark valleys, high hills, sharp town-walls overgrown with briars). So we have followed the speaker in her shift from the journey, to the country of her exile, to the forest, and finally to the earth-cave, where she looks outward to that oppressive location.

Only at this point does the woman depict herself, in spite of the closed environment of her dwelling, as walking alone at dawn through the earth-caves, while she suffers for her abandonment. The image apparently conveys an idea of acceptance of her sorrowful situation but, at the same time, she reveals the impossibility for her to rest under the weight of her passionate desire for the absent man. At the end of the poem, the woman imagines her husband sitting in a desolate environment, under a cliff over the sea, surrounded by water, in unfriendly climatic conditions. In this way, while at the beginning of the poem, both wife and husband are seen as travelling abroad, at the end her present stasis and impossibility to move correspond to the supposed, ultimate location of her husband.

Some other poetic analogues show striking similarities with the passages from the *WL*, containing the lexemes *wræcsīþ*, *wraecca* and *sīþ*. At this point I will briefly introduce the Old English poem known with the title of *Resignation B*. Also contained in the Exeter Book, this poem shares with both the *WL* and *The Seafarer* similarities in the use of phrases and words, even if they occur in the middle of the text and not at its beginning:¹¹

90	Ne mæg þæs ānhoga,	A solitary man, excluded from the joys
91	lēodwynna leas, leng drohtian,	of human company, cannot any longer live on,
92	winelēas wræcca [...]	a friendless exile [...]
96	Ic bi mē tylgust	This sorry tale I most decidedly
97	secge þis sārspel ond ymb sīþ spræce ,	tell, concerning myself, and I speak about a journey,
98	longunge fūs, ond on lagu þence.	eager with longing, and think about the ocean.

Here a first person speaker, like the female speaker of the *WL*, announces his intention to utter his ‘sad song’ (*sārspel*), and, like the woman, he will relate a *sið* ‘voyage’. In this case the voyage has not been accomplished yet, and the speaker, a would-be traveller, wishes to undertake his sea-journey, if he only had money and a boat. This envisaged voyage of exile has the feature both of a *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* as well as of a metaphoric journey to the heavenly homeland (Greenfield, Calder 1986, 289). The exile is fashioned as a kind of relief from the speaker’s present sufferings. If we credit the speaker of *Resignation* with his imaginary journey, why should we not consider trustworthy the wife’s utterance regarding her already accomplished wanderings?¹²

¹¹ Quotations (with added diacritics) of *Resignation B* from Krapp, Dobbie (1961), my own translations; emphasis is also mine. Critical issues about the real length of the poem and the question of its unity are discussed by Bliss, Frantzen (1976); Nelson (1983).

¹² Other analogues show interesting similarities with the *WL*. *Wræcsīþ* appears in alliteration with *wēpan* ‘to weep’ (as in line 38 of the *WL*) in the following passages, respectively

6 Final Remarks

Each translator's choice is acceptable and debatable at the same time, and the difficulties in translating from Old English are known. Furthermore, the *WL* is not an easy task for each interpreter, due to its elusive language and its complex syntax. The translations I compared also have different features: line to line paraphrases, prose renditions, even blank verse and modern alliterating versions.¹³ Obviously, metrical and prosodic requirements could, in some way, influence the lexical choices of the translators.

As I have shown in a couple of examples,¹⁴ such words as *sīþ*, *wræcsīþ*, *wræcca* construct a web of images that recalls other poems and texts and creates meaning, placing a story in a recognisable horizon. Exile and travel imagery permeate the Old English poetic corpus: the use of such terms in the *WL*, even by a female speaker, is clearly a conventional device, which allows the author, whether male or female, to shape a familiar pattern for his/her audience, who were assuredly well acquainted with the hardships of travelling abroad, and of living alone, far apart from friends and relatives. Even though most of glossators and translators seek for a non-literal or figurative rendering of the word *sīþ* in the *WL*, its basic meaning 'travel, journey' in the poem "makes good sense and goes well with the general exile theme" (Rissanen 1969, 93), and, I would add, is in perfect agreement with the speaker's words. Leaving out the basic ideas of 'journey' and 'exile' is a disservice to our understanding of the poem. Furthermore, translating *sīþ* as 'journey' or 'path', or *wræcsīþ* as 'exile-journey' or 'banishment', does not exclude the metaphoric and symbolic value of those terms, a value they have for us, even in our everyday speech, and as they probably also had for an Old English audience.

from the Old English poems *Andreas* (1431-32a) and *The Life of St. Guthlac* (1075-76a): *Ne wēp pone wræcsīþ, wine lēofesta; | nis þē tō frēcne*. 'Do not weep for your banishment, dearest friend; it is not too severe for you'; [...] *wræcsīþ wēpan, wilna bescirede | in ðām dēaðsele* 'They must] weep on banishment, excluded from pleasures, in that death-hall'; quotations of *The Life of St. Guthlac* and *Andreas* are respectively from Krapp, Dobbie (1961) and Krapp (1961) [Author's translations]. The Old English *De consolacione philosophiae* (I,10) also has an interesting analogue to lines 38-9 of the *WL*, since it outlines the afflictions of Boethius in strikingly similar fashion, using both *earfoðe* 'sufferings' and *wræcsīþ*: *Hē is swīðe sārīg for ðinum earfoðum and for ðinum wræcsīþe* (He is very sad for your troubles and your banishment); quotations from Irvine, Godden (2012) (Author's translations).

¹³ I added a summary description of each translation in the appendix.

¹⁴ Above all *The Seafarer* and *Resignation B*, but also the poems and texts quoted at notes 7 and 12 respectively.

Appendix: Keywords Translation – WL 1-5, 9-10, 38-9a

Original text from: Leslie, R.F. [1961; 1966] (1988). *Three Old English Elegies*. Exeter: Liverpool University Press.

1 Ic þis giedd wrece bī mē ful geōmorre,
 2 mīnre sylfre sīð. c þæt secgan mæg,
 3 hwæt ic yrmþa gebād, sibþan ic ūp [ā]wēox,
 4 nīwes oþþe ealdes, nō mā þonne nū;
 5 ā ic wīte wonn mīnra wræcsīþa.

9 Ðā ic mē fēran gewāt folgað sēcan,
 10 winelēas wræcca, for mīnre wēaþearfe.

38 þær ic wēpan mæg mīne wræcsīþas
 39a earfoþa fela

- 1 Coneybeare J.J.; Coneybeare, W.D. (1826). *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, London: Harding and Lepard. Facing original text, half-line layout both in text and translation; Coneybeare did not recognise the female identity of the speaker. He entitled the poem *The Exile's Complaint*.

1 I set forth this lay
 2 Concerning myself, full sad,
 3 And my own journeyings.
 4 I may declare
 5 What calamities I have abode
 6 Since I grew up,
 7 Recently or of old.
 8 No man hath experienced the like;
 9 But I reckon the privations
 10 Of my exiled wanderings [...]

17 Then I departed on my journey
 18 To seek my following,
 19 A friendless exile's travel; [...]

73 There may I weep
 74 My exiled wanderings
 75 Of many troubles; [...]

- 2 Thorpe, B. (1842). *Codex Exoniensis. Edition with English Translation*. London: Society of Antiquaries. Facing original text, half-line layout both in text and translation; Thorpe did not recognise the female identity of the speaker. He entitled the poem *The Exile's Complaint*.

1 I of myself this lay recite
2 full sadly,
3 my own fortune:
4 I that may say,
5 what miseries I 've sustain'd,
6 since I grew up,
7 new or old,
8 yet not more than now.
9 Ever have I the penalty gain'd
10 of my wanderings.

17 When I departed journeying,
18 to seek my lord,
19 a friendless exile,
20 for my sad misery [...]

74 there I can weep
75 my exile-journeyings,
76 my many hardships; [...]

- 3 Schücking, L.L. (1919). *Kleines Angelsächsisches Dichterbuch*. Cöthen: Verlag Otto Schulze.

sīð (2): General meaning :1. 'Gang, Weg'; 2. 'tempus, vicis'; 3. 'Unternehmung, Werk'. In *Klage der Frau*: 'Schicksal'.

wræcsīpa (5), *wræcsīpas* (38): 'Unglück'.

- 4 Ricci, A. (1921). *L'elegia pagana anglosassone*. Firenze: Sansoni. Facing original text, line-to-line paraphrase.

1 Canto questa canzone di me miserrima
2 del mio destino; ben posso io dire
3 che tutto ciò che sofferesi di affanni dacché sono donna
4 di antichi dolori e di nuovi, mai sofferesi più d'ora!
5 Sempre ho dovuto sopportare il tormento dello straziante mio esilio: [...]

9 Allora mi dipartii per cercare una corte che mi accogliesse,
10 misera, senza amici, nel mio penoso bisogno; [...]

38 per questo posso piangere il mio straziante esilio,
39 i molteplici tormenti, [...]

- 5 Mackie, W.S. (1934). *Poems IX-XXXII*. Pt. 2 of *The Exeter Book*. London: Oxford University Press. Facing original text, line-to-line translation.

1 I compose this lay about my own wretched self,
2 about my own experience. I can tell
3 what miseries new or old I have endured
4 since I grew up, and never more than now.
5 I have always been struggling against my cruel sorrows.

9 Then, on account of my woeful need, I went forth,
10 a friendless wretch, to seek service.

38 there can I weep my miseries,
39 my many hardships.

- 6 Kennedy, C.W. (1939). *Old English Elegies. Translated into Alliterative Verse with a Critical Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. No original text, alliterating paraphrase.

1 I sing a song of sorrow unceasing,
2 The tale of my trouble, the weight of my woe,
3 Woe of the present, and woe of the past,
4 Woe never-ending of exile and grief,
5 But never since girlhood greater than now.

11 Far I wandered then, friendless and homeless,
12 Seeking for help in my heavy need.

42 Here must I weep in affliction and woe;[...]

- 7 Malone, K. (1963). "Two English Frauenlieder". Greenfield, Stanley B. (ed.), *Studies in OE Literature in Honor of A.G. Brodeur*. Eugene; Portland: University of Oregon Press, 106-17. Prose translation.

I sing this song about myself, a very sorrowful woman, [I tell of] my own course. That I can say, what distresses I have undergone since I grew up, new and old, never more than now. Always I have borne the blame of my miseries.

Then I went out, a friendless outcast, to seek service [i.e. protection] in my grievous need.

[...] there I can bewail my woes, many hardships

- 8 Curry, J.L. (1966). "Approaches to a Translation of the Anglo-Saxon Wife's Lament". *Medium Aevum*, 25, 187-98. Prose.

I make this song about my full wretched self, my own lot. That I can tell - the distresses, new or old, which I have endured since I grew up - never more than now. Always I suffer the woe of my wretchedness.

Then I myself departed to seek [his] service, a friendless wanderer because of my woeful need.

[...] there I may weep my wretchedness, [my] many hardships.

The author prefers to translate *sīð* as 'lot' or 'condition' because they "are more expressive of the speaker's concern. 'Fate' would also be acceptable, but in its finality contradicts the hope of reunion which may be read in the *abīdan* of l. 53b". Curry also proposes for *mīnra wræcsīþa* 'wretchedness' "as neither of the first meanings in Bosworth, Toller fit the extent or nature of all the possible variations in interpretation of the speaker's situation. 'Wretchedness', on the other hand, is an effective echo of *ful geōmorre* and anticipates the feeling of the song itself".

- 9 Cassidy, F.G.; Ringler, R.N. [1891] (1971). *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader*. 3rd Edition. New York et al.: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

sīð (2): 'lot, plight'; (*The Seafarer* 2: 'experience, trial').

wræcsīþa (5), *wræcsīþas* (38): general meaning: 'exile-journey', 'exile', in *WL* 5 'misery'.

Two alternative translations suggested in a footnote: "I have always got pain in return for my exile-journeys"; "always I suffered (the) torment of my miseries".

- 10 Sanesi, R. (1975). *Poemi Anglosassoni VI-X secolo*. Napoli: Guanda. No facing original text, line-to-line paraphrase.

1 Canto questo lamento di me misera, e della
2 mia dolorosa esperienza, e posso dire
3 che tutte le afflizioni antiche e nuove
4 sopportate da me da quando sono donna
5 non furono mai così atroci come lo sono ora.
6 Sempre nella mia vita ho dovuto combattere
7 contro durissime pene.

11 Allora anch'io me ne andai, misera e senza amici,
12 alla ricerca di un nobile che mi potesse accogliere
13 al suo servizio.

43 resto seduta a piangere tutte le mie miserie,
44 tutti i miei duri affanni.

- 11 Leslie, R.F. [1961; 1966] (1988). *Three Old English Elegies*. Exeter: Liverpool University Press.

sīð (2): 'lot, journey'.

wræcsīþa (5), wræcsīþas (38): 'misery'.

- 12 Alexander, M. [1966; 1977] (1991). *The Earliest English Poems*. 3rd Edition. London: Penguin. No facing original text, alliterating translation.

1 I have wrought these words together out of a wryed existence
2 the heart's tally, telling off
3 the griefs I have undergone from girlhood upwards,
4 old and new, and now more than ever;
5 for I have never not had some new sorrow,
6 some fresh affliction to fight against.

10 I left, fared any road, friendless, an outcast,
11 sought any service to staunch the lack of him.

39 here [I must] weep out the woes of exile,
40 the hardships heaped upon me.

- 13 Bradley, S.A.J. [1982; 1991] (1995). *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London: Dent. No original text, prose paraphrase.

This riddle, my personal experiencing, I put, about my most melancholy self. I can tell what tribulations I have endured recently or of old since I grew up, and never more than now. I have suffered perpetually the misery of my exile's paths.

When on account of my woeful plight I went wandering, a friendless exile, to find a following, [...]

There I may weep for the ways of my exile, my many hardships; [...]

- 14 Raffel, B. (1998). *Poems and Prose from the Old English*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press. No facing original text, free metrical paraphrase.

1 This song of journey into sorrow
2 Is mine. I sing it. I alone
3 Can ravel out its misery, full-grown
4 When I was, and never worse than now.
5 The darkness of exile droops on my life.

8 [...] I traveled
9 Seeking the sun of protection and safety,

10 Accepting exile as payment for hope.

38 There I can water the earth with weeping
39 For exile and sorrow, [...]

- 15 Pope, J.C.; Fulk, R.D. [1966; 1981] (2001). *Eight Old English Poems*. 3rd Edition. New York; London: Norton and Company.

sīð (2): 'journey, voyage, venture'; in *WL* 2: 'experience, trial'.
wræcsiþa (5), *wræcsiþas* (38): 'hardship, experience of exile'.

- 16 Hamer, R. [1972] (2006). *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse*. London: Faber & Faber. Facing original text, blank verse.

1 I sing this song about myself, full sad,
2 My own distress, and tell what hardships I
3 Have had to suffer since I first grew up,
4 Present and past, but never more than now;
5 I ever suffered grief through banishment.

9 When I set off to join and serve my lord,
10 A friendless exile in my sorry plight

39 Where I may weep my banishment and all
40 My many hardships, [...]

- 17 Baker, P.S. [2003] (2007). *Introduction to Old English*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

sīð (2): General meaning: 'travel, journey'; in *WL* 2: 'plight'.
wræcsiþa (5), *wræcsiþas* (38): 'journey of exile'.

- 18 Mitchell, B.; Robinson, F.C. [1964; 1968; 1982; 1986; 1992; 2001] (2007). *A Guide to Old English*. 7th Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

sīð (2): General meaning: 'journey, fate, lot, venture'; Footnote *WL* 2: 'my own experience'.
wræcsiþa (5), *wræcsiþas* (38): 'misery'.

19 Treharne, E. [2000; 2004] (2009). *Old and Middle English, 890-1400. An Anthology*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Original facing text, line-to-line paraphrase.

- 1 I relate this very mournful riddle about myself,
2 about my own journey. I am able to relate
3 those miseries that I endured since I grew up,
4 of new and old ones, never more than now.
5 Forever I have suffered the torment of my exile.
- 9 Then I departed on my journey to seek a refuge,
10 a friendless exile because of my woeful need.
- 38 where I can only weep about my exile,
39 about my many hardships; [...]

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