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## *Wulf and Eadwacer*

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I use the generally accepted title of this attractive but almost totally obscure poem, though as will be seen it seems to me inappropriate. It was early regarded as a riddle, but this now appears quite unacceptable. Ingenious attempts have been made to relate it to one or other of the known Germanic stories, as has happened to *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*, and some scholars have also tried to link these three poems or combinations of these and others together. None of these theories is at all persuasive. It is clear that a lady is speaking, and that she addresses a character as Wulf and another as Eadwacer. The critics have variously cast them as husband and lover. I do not believe it is possible to reconstruct the story, though I now offer my own solution. The *lāc*, l. 1, is the lady's pregnancy by a raider from the other island brought about during some raid. Her people want vengeance. She calls her lover *Wulf* because he was a raider, compare *The Battle of Maldon*, l. 96, where the Viking raiders are called *walhulfas*. Their brief encounter is brilliantly described, with a masterly paradox in the recalling of her feelings, l. 12, and the power of evocation in the passage is increased when she tells of her longing for her lover's presence, ll. 13-15. *Hwelp*, l. 16, must surely be a punning reference to a child of *Wulf*, whom ironically a wolf is bearing or shall bear to the wood, which may be a reference to the child's impending death, perhaps to be brought about by the lady's kinsfolk to whom this birth is unwanted. If this interpretation is anywhere near the truth, it seems that there is no-one except Wulf whom the lady would be likely to address at this time, and particularly in such terms, so my proposal is that Eadwacer is the real name of Wulf. It may be significant that the dual pronoun *uncerne* immediately follows the name *Eadwacer*,

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and it might therefore contextually imply that the two people meant are the lady and Eadwacer, in which case the point of *hwelp* as a pun would be lost if he were a different person. This proposal is however as unprovable as any of the others. What is beyond doubt is that the poignancy of expression of the lady's grief emerging through all the obscurities has still power to move.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## Wulf and Eadwacer

Lēodu: 1 is minum swylce him mon lāc gife;  
 willað h̄ h̄ hine āþecgan, gif h̄ on þrēat cymeð.  
 Ungelīc is ūs.

Wulf is on iēge, ic on oþerre.

5 Fæst is þæt ēglond, fenne biworpen.

Sindon wælrēowe weras þær on iēge;

willað h̄ h̄ hine āþecgan, gif h̄ on þrēat cymeð.

Ungelīce is ūs.

Wulfes ic mīnes wīdlāstum wēnum dogode;

10 þonne hit wæs rēnig weder and ic reotugu sæt,

þonne mec se beaducāfa bōgum bilegde,

(28) wæs mē wyn tō þon, wæs mē hwæpre ēac lād.

Wulf, mīn Wulf, wēna mē þīne

sēoce gedydon, þīne seldcymas,

15 murnende mōd, nāles meteliste.

Geh̄yrest þū, Eadwacer? Uncerne earmne hwelp

bireð wulf tō wuda.

Þæt mon ēape tōsliteð þætte nāfre gesomnad wæs,  
 uncer giedd geador.

16. earmne, MS earne. The MS reading suggests the adjective *earh*, 'cowardly'. It is contextually better (or perhaps better fits my theory) to read *earmne* from *sarm*, 'wretched'.

19. *giedd*. Substitution of *gæd*, 'fellowship', has been proposed, but *giedd* may be taken to imply poetically the relationship of marriage.

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It is as though my people had been given  
 A present. They will wish to capture him.  
 If he comes with a troop. We are apart.  
 Wulf is on one isle, I am on another.  
 Fast is that island set among the fens.  
 Murderous are the people who inhabit  
 That island. They will wish to capture him  
 If he comes with a troop. We are apart.  
 Grieved have I for my Wulf with distant longings:  
 Then was it rainy weather, and I sad,  
 When the bold warrior laid his arms about me.  
 I took delight in that and also pain.  
 O Wulf, my Wulf, my longing for your coming  
 Has made me ill, the rareness of your visits,  
 My grieving spirit, not the lack of food.  
 Eadwacer, do you hear me? For a wolf  
 Shall carry to the woods our wretched whelp.  
 Men very easily may put asunder  
 That which was never joined, our song together.