

Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyright material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction not be "used for any purposes other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that use may be liable for copyright infringement.



The Husband's Message

The general situation in the poem is perfectly clear. Two problems are however still the subject of debate. First, does the poem start with Riddle 60, which comes immediately before it in the manuscript? (For Riddle 60 see p. 106.) The answer to this depends largely on whether one considers that the rest is spoken by a human messenger or a personified rune-stave, a device of which the Anglo-Saxons were quite capable (see *Metrical Preface to the Pastoral Care*, p. 130).

The second problem is what the runes in ll. 50-1 signify. Runes were the letters of an ancient Germanic alphabet, ultimately derived from the Mediterranean alphabets, which was used for carving on wood or stone and which to some extent survived the introduction of writing. Each rune (with minor exceptions) had a name which was a word beginning with the sound it represented, and the runes could therefore be used for punning statements. Thus the poet Cynewulf signed his poems by closing with a passage which contained the names of the runes which spelt his name. In this case there are two attractive solutions offered. These runes stand for *Sigel*, 'sun', *Rad*, 'road', *EAr*, either 'earth' or 'water', *Wynn*, 'joy', *Mann* or *Dæg*, 'man' or 'day'. E. A. Kock proposes that the runes represent three objects by which oaths were commonly sworn, the sky (sun-road), the earth (earth-joy), and the swearer himself (man). R. W. V. Elliott suggests that the runes summarise the whole poem, hence either: 'Follow the sun's path across the sea and ours will be joy and the happiness and prosperity of the bright day;' or: 'Follow the sun's path across the sea to find joy with the man who is waiting for you.'

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Editions as for *Wife's Lament*

E. A. Kock, 'Interpretations and Emendations of Early Engl Texts', *Anglia*, XLV, 1921

R. W. V. Elliott, 'The Runes in *The Husband's Message*', *Journ of English and Germanic Philology*, LIV, 1955

The Husband's Message

Nū ic onsundran þē secgan wille
..... trēocyn ic tūdre āwēox;
in mec ælda sceal ellor londes
settan sealte strēamas

5 Ful oft ic on bātes
..... gesōhte

þær mec mondryhten mīn
ofer hēah hafu; eom nū hēr cumen
on cēolþele, and nū cunnan sceal

hū þū ymb mōdlufan mīnes frēan
on hyge hycge. Ic gehātan dear

þæt þū þær tīrfæste trēowe findest.

10 Hwæt, þec þonne biddan hēt se þisne bēam āgrōf

þæt þū sinchroden sylf gemunde

15 on gewitlocan wordbēotunga

þe git on ærðagum oft gespræcon,

þenden git mōston on meoduburgum

eard weardigan, ān lond būgan,

frēondscype fremman. Hine fāhþo ādrāf

20 of sigepēode. Heht nū sylfa þē

lustum læran, þæt þū lagu drēfde,

sippan þū gehyrde on hliþes ðran

galan gēomorne gēac on bearwe.

Ne læt þū þec sippan sīþes getwāfan,

lāde gelettan lifgendne monn.

Ongin mere sēcan, mæwes ēþel,

onsite sēnacan, þæt þū sūð heonan

ofer merelāde monnan findest,

þær se þēoden is þīn on wēnum.

Ne mæg him on worulde willa gelimpan

māra on gemyndum, þæsþe hē mē sægde,

The Husband's Message

Now will I tell to you who live apart
How I grew up in youth among the trees.
On me must sons of men write messages,
Send me from foreign lands across the waves,
Thus guide their thoughts across the salty streams.
Often by boat have I sought out some land
Where my lord sent me forth to take some message
Over the deep wide sea; now have I come
On shipboard here, and now must I find out
How you feel in your heart about your love
Towards my lord. For I dare promise you
That you will find great loyalty in him.
He bids me tell you, then, who carved this wood,
That you, bejewelled, should yourself recall
In your own secret heart the vows and oaths
That you both made in former times together,
When you might still together live among
The festive cities, both dwell in one land,
And love each other. Feud drove him away
From this great people. Now he orders me
Himself to urge you joyfully to cross
The sea when at the hill-side's edge you hear
The cuckoo singing sad amid the grove.
Do not let any living man deter you
From travelling or stay you from the journey.
Go to the sea, the country of the gull,
And board a ship, that you may southwards thence
Rejoin your man across the water's ways,
There where your lord is waiting for your coming.
For in the world no stronger wish could come
Into his heart, he told me so himself,

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

þonne inc geunne alwaldend God
 þæt git ætsomne siþþan mōtan
 secgum and gesiþum sinc brytnian,
 35 næglede bēagas; hē genōh hafað
 fædan goldes
 þæt he mid elþeode ēpel healde,
 fægre foldan
 holdra hæleþa, þeah þe hēr min wine

 40 nýde gebæded, nacan út āþrong,
 and on yþa gelagu āna sceolde
 faran on flotweg, forōsiþes georn,
 mangan merestrēamas. Nū se mon hafað
 wēan oferwunnen; nis him wilna gād,
 45 ne mēara ne māðma ne meododrēama
 ænges ofer eorþan eorlgestrēona,
 þeodnes dohtor, gif hē þin beneah.
 Ofer eald gebēot incer twēga,
 gehyre ic ætsomne .S.R. geador
 50 .E.A.W. and .M. āþe benemnan,
 þæt hē þā wære and þā winetrēowe
 be him lifgendum læstan wolde
 þe git on ærdagum oft gespræconn.

THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

Than that almighty God should grant you both
 That you may distribute together treasures
 And well-made rings to comrades and retainers.
 He has in his possession burnished gold
 Enough for him to hold a fine estate
 Among the foreign people noble land
 And loyal warriors, though here my lord
 Compelled by need pushed out his boat and left,
 And had to cross the rolling waves alone,
 Sail on the sea, and, anxious to depart,
 Stir up the water ways. Now has this man
 Conquered his woes; he lacks not what he wants,
 Horses or treasures or the joys of hall,
 Or any noble treasure in this world,
 O prince's daughter, if he may have you.
 About the former vows between you both,
 I understand he coupled in his oath
 Heaven and earth, and joined thereto himself
 That he would keep, as long as he has life,
 Truly with you the bond and pledge of faith
 Which you made frequently in former days.

33-41. The MS is again damaged. Some words and letters are here supplied following various editors. For full details see ASPR and Leslie. Much of the translation is guessed at.

41. *gelagu*, following Leslie, the MS being illegible.