

of Christ's entry into heaven with the souls he has liberated from Hell reflects the Dreamer's response to the hope that has been brought to him. Christ and the Rood both act in keeping with, and yet diametrically opposed to, a code of heroic action: Christ is both heroic in mounting and passive in suffering on the Rood, while the Rood is loyal to its lord, yet must participate in his death.

The Dream of the Rood¹

Attend to what I intend to tell you
 a marvelous dream that moved me at night
 when human voices are veiled in sleep.
 In my dream I espied the most splendid tree.
 5 looming aloft with light all around,
 the most brilliant beam. That bright tree was
 covered with gold; gemstones gleamed
 fairly fashioned down to its foot, yet another five were standing²
 high up on the crossbeam —the Lord's angel beheld them—³
 10 cast by eternal decree. Clearly this was no criminal's gallows,⁴
 but holy spirits were beholding it there,
 men on this earth, all that mighty creation.
 That tree was triumphant and I tarnished by sin,
 begrimed with evil. I beheld Glory's trunk
 15 garnished with grandeur, gleaming in bliss,
 all plated with gold; precious gemstones
 had gloriously graced the Lord God's tree.
 Yet I could see signs of ancient strife:
 beneath that gold it had begun
 20 bleeding on the right side.⁵ I was all bereft with sorrows;
 that splendid sight made me afraid. I beheld the sign rapidly
 changing clothing and colors. Now it was covered with moisture,
 drenched with streaming blood, now decked in treasure.
 Yet I, lying there for a long time,
 25 sorrowfully beheld the tree of our Savior
 until I could hear it call out to me,
 the best of all wood began speaking words:
 "That was years ago —I yet remember—
 that I was cut down at the edge of the forest
 30 torn up from my trunk. There powerful enemies took me,
 put me up to make a circus-play to lift up and parade their criminals.
 Soldiers bore me on their shoulders till they set me up on a mountain;
 more than enough foes made me stand fast. I saw the lord of mankind
 coming with great haste so that he might climb up on me.

1. The translation by Alfred David is based on *Eight Old English Poems*, 3rd ed., edited by John C. Pope, revised by R. D. Fulk (2000).

2. This longer line and the two following, as well as lines 20–23, 30–34, 39–43, 46–49, 59–70, 75–76, and 133, contain additional stresses and are designated as "hypermetric." Fewer than 500 such lines survive in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

3. The translation follows R. D. Fulk's emenda-

tion: "beheold on þam engel dryhtnes."

4. Constantine the Great, emperor from 306 to 337, erected a jeweled cross at the site of the crucifixion, transforming the Roman "felon's gallows" from a symbol of shame into a universal icon of Christian art.

5. According to biblical tradition, following John 19.34, Christ was wounded by the centurion's lance on the right side.

Then I did not dare act against the Lord's word
 bow down or fall to pieces when I felt the surface
 of the earth trembling.⁶ Although I might
 have destroyed the foes, I stood in place.

Then this young man stripped himself —that was God Almighty—
 strong and courageous; he climbed up on the high gallows,
 brave in the sight of many, as he set out to redeem mankind.
 I trembled when the man embraced me; I dared not bow down to earth,
 stoop to the surface of the ground, but I had to stand fast.

I was reared a rood; I raised up a mighty king,
 the heavens' lord; I dared not bow in homage.
 They drove dark nails into me; the dints of those wounds can still be seen,
 open marks of malice; but I did not dare maul any of them in return.
 They mocked both of us. I was moistened all over with blood,
 shed from the man's side after he had sent up his spirit.

On that mountain I have endured many
 cruel happenings. I saw the God of hosts
 direly stretched out. Shades of darkness
 had clouded over the corpse of the Lord,
 the shining radiance; shadows went forth
 dark under clouds. All creation wept,
 mourning the king's fall: Christ was on the cross.

"Yet from afar fervent men came
 to that sovereign. I saw all that.

I was badly burdened with grief yet bowed down to their hands,
 submissive with most resolve. There they took up almighty God,
 lifted him from that cruel torment. Then the warriors left me there
 standing, blood all over me, pierced everywhere with arrows.
 They laid him there, limb-wearied; they stood at the head of his lifeless
 body.

There they beheld the lord of heaven, and he rested there for a while,
 spent after that great struggle. Then they set about to construct a sepulcher
 warriors in the slayer's⁷ sight. Out of bright stone they carved it;
 they laid the lord of victories into it. They began singing a lay of sorrow,
 warriors sad as night was falling, when they wished to journey back
 wearily far from that famous lord; he rested there with few followers.⁸

We,⁹ grieving there for a good while,
 stood still in place; the soldiers' voices
 faded away. Finally men brought axes
 to fell us to earth. That was a frightful destiny!

They buried us in a deep pit. But thanes^o of the Lord,
 friends learned about me¹ * * *

retainers

* * * adorned me with gold and silver.

"Now, man so dear to me, you may understand
 that I have gone through grievous sufferings,
 terrible sorrows. Now the time has come

6. According to Matthew 27.51, the earth quaked at the crucifixion.

7. I.e., the Cross. See John 19.41-42.

8. An example of Anglo-Saxon litotes, ironically expressing something by its contrary. In fact, Christ's tomb is now deserted.

9. I.e., Christ's Cross and those on which the two thieves had been crucified.

1. The reference in this gap in the manuscript must be to the discovery of the Cross by St. Helena.

so that far and wide men worship me
 everywhere on earth, and all creation,
 pray to this sign. On me the son of God
 suffered a time; therefore I now tower
 85 in glory under heaven, and I may heal
 any one of those in awe of me.

Long ago I became the most cruel punishment,
 most hated by men, until I made open
 the right way of life to language-bearers.
 90 So the lord of glory, guardian of Heaven,
 exalted me then over all forest-trees,
 as Almighty God before all humankind
 exalted over all the race of women
 His own mother, Mary herself.

95 "Now I command you, my man so dear,
 to tell others the events you have seen;
 find words to tell it was the tree of glory
 Almighty God suffered upon
 for mankind's so many sins
 100 and for that ancient offense of Adam.
 There he tasted death; yet the Redeemer arose
 with his great might to help mankind.
 Then he rose to Heaven. He will come again
 to this middle-earth to seek out mankind
 105 on Judgment Day, the Redeemer himself,
 God Almighty and his angels with him,
 so that He will judge, He who has power of the Judgment,
 all humanity as to the merits each
 has brought about in this brief life.
 110 Nor may anyone be unafraid
 of the last question the Lord will ask.
 Before the multitude he will demand
 where a soul might be who in the Savior's name
 would suffer the death He suffered on that tree.
 115 But they shall fear and few shall think
 what to contrive to say to Christ.
 But no one there need be afraid
 who bears the best sign on his breast.
 And on this earth each soul that longs
 120 to exist with its savior forevermore
 must seek His kingdom through that cross."

Then compelled by joy, I prayed to that tree
 with ardent zeal, where I was alone
 with few followers. Then my heart felt
 125 an urge to set forth; I have suffered
 much longing since. Now I live in hope,
 venturing after that victory-tree,
 alone more often than all other men,
 to worship it well. The will to do so
 130 is much in my heart; my protection
 depends on the rood. I possess but few
 friends on this earth. But forth from here

they have set out from worldly joys to seek the King of Glory.
 They dwell in Heaven now with the High-father
 135 living in glory, and I look forward
 constantly toward that time the Lord's rood
 which I beheld before here on this earth
 shall fetch me away from this fleeting life
 and bring me then where bliss is eternal
 140 to joy in Paradise where the Lord's people
 are joined at that feast where joy lasts forever
 and seat me there where evermore
 I shall dwell in glory, together with the saints
 share in their delights. May the Lord be my friend,
 145 who on earth long ago on the gallows-tree
 suffered agony for the sins of men:
 he redeemed us and gave us life,
 a home in Heaven. Hope was made new
 and blossomed with bliss to those burning in fire.²
 150 The Son was victorious in venturing forth,
 mighty and triumphant when he returned with many,
 a company of souls to the Kingdom of God,
 the Almighty Ruler, to the joy of angels,
 and all those holy ones come to Heaven before.³
 155 to live in glory, when their Lord returned,
 the Eternal King to His own country.

2. This line and those following refer to the so-called Harrowing of Hell. After his death on the Cross, Christ descended into hell, from which he released the souls of certain patriarchs and prophets, conducting them into heaven (see *Piers*

Plowman, Passus 18). The analogy is to the triumphal procession of a Roman emperor returning from war.

3. The line probably refers to a belief that God had sanctified a chosen few before the crucifixion.

BEOWULF

Beowulf, the oldest of the great long poems written in English, may have been composed more than twelve hundred years ago, in the first half of the eighth century, although some scholars would place it as late as the tenth century. As is the case with most Old English poems, the title has been assigned by modern editors, for the manuscripts do not normally give any indication of title or authorship. Linguistic evidence shows that the poem was originally composed in the dialect of what was then Mercia, the Midlands of England today. But in the unique late-tenth-century manuscript preserving the poem, it has been converted into the West-Saxon dialect of the southwest in which most of Old English literature survives. In 1731, before any modern transcript of the text had been made, the manuscript was seriously damaged in a fire that destroyed the building in London that housed the extraordinary collection of medieval English manuscripts made by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571–1631). As a result of the fire and subsequent deterioration, a number of lines and words have been lost from the poem.