

## **The Seafarer**

[rendered into modern English by Ezra Pound, from the early Anglo-Saxon text]

May I for my own self song's truth reckon,  
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days  
Hardship endured oft.  
Bitter breast-cares have I abided,  
Known on my keel many a care's hold,  
And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent  
Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head  
While she tossed close to cliffs. Coldly afflicted,  
My feet were by frost benumbed.  
Chill its chains are; chafing sighs  
Hew my heart round and hunger begot  
Mere-weary mood. Lest man know not  
That he on dry land loveliest liveth,  
List how I, care-wretched, on ice-cold sea,  
Weathered the winter, wretched outcast  
Deprived of my kinsmen;  
Hung with hard ice-flakes, where hail-scur flew,  
There I heard naught save the harsh sea  
And ice-cold wave, at whiles the swan cries,  
Did for my games the gannet's clamour,  
Sea-fowls, loudness was for me laughter,  
The mews' singing all my mead-drink.  
Storms, on the stone-cliffs beaten, fell on the stern  
In icy feathers; full oft the eagle screamed  
With spray on his pinion.  
Not any protector  
May make merry man faring needy.  
This he little believes, who aye in winsome life  
Abides 'mid burghers some heavy business,  
Wealthy and wine-flushed, how I weary oft  
Must bide above brine.  
Neareth nightshade, snoweth from north,  
Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then  
Corn of the coldest. Nathless there knocketh now  
The heart's thought that I on high streams  
The salt-wavy tumult traverse alone.  
Moaneth alway my mind's lust  
That I fare forth, that I afar hence  
Seek out a foreign fastness.  
For this there's no mood-lofty man over earth's midst,  
Not though he be given his good, but will have in his youth greed;  
Nor his deed to the daring, nor his king to the faithful  
But shall have his sorrow for sea-fare

Whatever his lord will.  
He hath not heart for harping, nor in ring-having  
Nor winsomeness to wife, nor world's delight  
Nor any whit else save the wave's slash,  
Yet longing comes upon him to fare forth on the water.  
Bosque taketh blossom, cometh beauty of berries,  
Fields to fairness, land fares brisker,  
All this admonisheth man eager of mood,  
The heart turns to travel so that he then thinks  
On flood-ways to be far departing.  
Cuckoo calleth with gloomy crying,  
He singeth summerward, bodeth sorrow,  
The bitter heart's blood. Burgher knows not --  
He the prosperous man -- what some perform  
Where wandering them widest draweth.  
So that but now my heart burst from my breast-lock,  
My mood 'mid the mere-flood,  
Over the whale's acre, would wander wide.  
On earth's shelter cometh oft to me,  
Eager and ready, the crying lone-flyer,  
Whets for the whale-path the heart irresistibly,  
O'er tracks of ocean; seeing that anyhow  
My lord deems to me this dead life  
On loan and on land, I believe not  
That any earth-weal eternal standeth  
Save there be somewhat calamitous  
That, ere a man's tide go, turn it to twain.  
Disease or oldness or sword-hate  
Beats out the breath from doom-gripped body.  
And for this, every earl whatever, for those speaking after --  
Laud of the living, boasteth some last word,  
That he will work ere he pass onward,  
Frame on the fair earth 'gainst foes his malice,  
Daring ado, ...  
So that all men shall honour him after  
And his laud beyond them remain 'mid the English,  
Aye, for ever, a lasting life's-blast,  
Delight mid the doughty.  
Days little durable,  
And all arrogance of earthen riches,  
There come now no kings nor Cæsars  
Nor gold-giving lords like those gone.  
Howe'er in mirth most magnified,  
Whoe'er lived in life most lordliest,  
Drear all this excellence, delights undurable!  
Waneth the watch, but the world holdeth.  
Tomb hideth trouble. The blade is layed low.

Earthly glory ageth and seareth.  
No man at all going the earth's gait,  
But age fares against him, his face paleth,  
Grey-haired he groaneth, knows gone companions,  
Lordly men are to earth o'ergiven,  
Nor may he then the flesh-cover, whose life ceaseth,  
Nor eat the sweet nor feel the sorry,  
Nor stir hand nor think in mid heart,  
And though he strew the grave with gold,  
His born brothers, their buried bodies  
Be an unlikely treasure hoard.