

Wulf and Eadwacer: Translation and Performance

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Summary

- *Wulf and Eadwacer* is a somewhat obscure secular poem in the Anglo-Saxon Exeter Book (c. 10th century)
- Many and disparate are the interpretations that have been made: dogs and wolves, mother and son, funeral lament, but most commonly a love triangle.
- Working from various other translations, glossaries and scholarly analysis of the poem, I created a new translation which also follows the rules of Old English alliterative poetic composition
- The accompanying paper goes over the short poem line by line, compares the various expert analyses, and gives my final interpretation
- I accept the most common and most obvious reading, that this is about a woman in the care of (married to?) one man, Eadwacer, who longs for another man, Wulf.
- I have improvised music for parts of the poem; through practice, the tune has become fairly fixed.
- The tune is not especially based on Gregorian chant composition. It does meet most of the requirements of composition as set down by Guido d'Arezzo (c. 1050) but the melodic contour does not have the rolling feeling often found in chant. The melody is fairly flat and is an attempt to be chant-like.
 - Which is to say, not Gregorian chant, but chanting as a secular oral poet might perform
 - There is a lack of evidence to support the approach.
- Except for one note (which can be sung unaccompanied), the tune fits on a six-stringed Saxon lyre. However, we have no evidence that this instrument was used by women. It has been found in male graves and, in the literature and poetry, seems to be the accessory of men.
 - So I can use the lyre, but it's falling out of popularity in the conversion era and isn't a woman's instrument anyhow. Better performance but worse authenticity. Pick your poison.
 - Honestly, the clincher is a lack of practice with the lyre.