

# ANONYMOUS

7th–10th century

(translated by Michael Alexander)

## *The Dream of the Rood*

*Hwaet!*

A dream came to me  
at deep midnight  
when humankind  
kept their beds  
—the dream of dreams!  
I shall declare it.

It seemed I saw the Tree itself  
borne on the air, light wound about it,  
—a beam of brightest wood, a beacon clad  
in overlapping gold, glancing gems  
fair at its foot, and five stones  
set in a crux flashed from the crosstree.

Around angels of God  
all gazed upon it,  
since first fashioning fair.

It was not a felon's gallows,  
for holy ghosts beheld it there,  
and men on mould, and the whole Making shone for it  
—*signum* of victory!

Stained and marred,  
stricken with shame, I saw the glory-tree  
shine out gaily, sheathed in yellow  
decorous gold; and gemstones made  
for their Maker's Tree a right mail-coat.

Yet through the masking gold I might perceive  
what terrible sufferings were once sustained thereon:  
it bled from the right side.  
Ruth in the heart.

Afraid I saw that unstill brightness  
change raiment and colour  
—again clad in gold

or again slicked with sweat,  
spangled with spilling blood.

Yet lying there a long while  
I beheld, sorrowing, the Healer's Tree  
till it seemed that I heard how it broke silence,  
best of wood, and began to speak:

'Over that long remove my mind ranges  
back to the holt where I was hewn down;  
from my own stem I was struck away,  
dragged off by strong enemies,  
wrought into a roadside scaffold.  
They made me a hoist for wrongdoers.

The soldiers on their shoulders bore me,  
until on a hill-top they set me up;  
many enemies made me fast there.  
Then I saw, marching toward me,  
mankind's brave King;  
He came to climb upon me.

I dared not break or bend aside  
against God's will, though the ground itself  
shook at my feet. Fast I stood,  
who falling could have felled them all.

Almighty God ungirded Him,  
eager to mount the gallows,  
unafraid in the sight of many:  
He would set free mankind.  
I shook when His arms embraced me  
but I durst not bow to ground,  
stoop to Earth's surface.  
Stand fast I must.

I was reared up, a rood.  
I raised the great King,  
liege lord of the heavens,  
dared not lean from the true.  
They drove me through with dark nails:  
on me are the deep wounds manifest,  
wide-mouthed hate-dents.

I durst not harm any of them.  
How they mocked at us both!  
I was all moist with blood  
sprung from the Man's side  
after He sent forth His soul.

Wry wierds a many I underwent  
up on that hill-top; saw the Lord of Hosts  
stretched out stark. Darkness shrouded  
the King's corse. Clouds wrapped  
its clear shining. A shade went out  
wan under cloud-pall. All creation wept,  
keened the King's death. Christ was on the Cross.

But there quickly came from far  
earls to the One there. All that I beheld;  
had grown weak with grief,  
yet with glad will bent then  
meek to those men's hands,  
yielded Almighty God.

They lifted Him down from the leaden pain,  
left me, the commanders,  
standing in a sweat of blood.  
I was all wounded with shafts.

They straightened out His strained limbs,  
stood at His body's head,  
looked down on the Lord of Heaven  
—for a while He lay there resting—  
set to contrive Him a tomb  
in the sight of the Tree of Death,  
carved it of bright stone,  
laid in it the Bringer of victory,  
spent from the great struggle.

They began to speak the grief-song,  
sad in the sinking light,  
then thought to set out homeward;  
their hearts were sick to death,  
their most high Prince  
they left to rest there with scant retinue.

Yet we three, weeping, a good while  
stood in that place after the song had gone up  
from the captains' throats. Cold grew the corse,  
fair soul-house.

They felled us all.  
We crashed to ground, cruel Wierd,  
and they delved for us a deep pit.

The Lord's men learnt of it,  
His friends found me...  
it was they who girt me with gold and silver...'