

Old English Riddles

Old English text is from George Phillip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vol 3 (New York, 1936) (ASPR). Words in bold are editorial reconstructions.

Translations and commentary are by Craig Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures* (Philadelphia, 1982).

Riddle 3 (ASPR 5)

Ic eom anhaga	iserne wund,	I am the lone wood in the warp of battle,
bille gebennad,	beadoweorca sæd,	Wounded by iron, broken by blade,
ecgum werig.	Oft ic wig seo,	Weary of war. Often I see
frecne feohtan.	Frofre ne wene,	Battle-rush, rage, fierce fight flaring—
5 þæt me geoc cyme	guðgewinnes,	I hold no hope for help to come
ær ic mid ældum	eal forwurðe ,	Before I fall finally with warriors
ac mec hnossiað	homera lafe,	Or feel the flame. The hard hammer-leavings
heardecg heoroscearp,	hondweorc smiþa,	Strike me; the bright-edged, battle-sharp
bitað in burgum;	ic abidan sceal	Handiwork of smiths bites in battle.
10 laþran gemotes.	Næfre læcecynn	Always I must await the harder encounter
on folcstede	findan meahte,	For I could never find in the world any
þara þe mid wyrtum	wunde gehælde,	Of the race of healers who heal hard wounds
ac me ecga dolg	eacen weorðað	With roots and herbs. So I suffer
þurh deaðslege	dagum ond nihtum.	Sword-slash and death-wound day and night.

Riddle 23 (ASPR 25)

Ic eom wunderlicu wiht,	wifum on hyhte,	I am a wonderful help to women,
neahbuendum nyt;	nængum sceþþe	The hope of something to come. I harm
burgsittendra,	nymþe bonan anum.	No citizen except my slayer.
Stapol min is steapheah,	stonde ic on bedde,	Rooted I stand on a high bed.
5 neoþan ruh nathwær.	Neþeð hwilum	I am shaggy below. Sometimes the beautiful
ful cyrtenu	ceorles dohtor,	Peasant's daughter, an eager-armed,
modwlonc meowle,	þæt heo on mec gripeð,	Proud woman grabs my body,
ræseð mec on reodne,	reafað min heafod,	Rushes my red skin, holds me hard,
fegeð mec on fæsten.	Feleþ sona	Claims my head. The curly-haired
10 mines gemotes,	seo þe mec nearwað,	Woman who catches me fast will feel
wif wundenlocc.	Wæt bið þæt eage.	Our meeting. Her eye will be wet.

Riddle 24 (ASPR 26)

Mec feonda sum	feore besnyþede,	A life-thief stole my world-strength,
woruldstrenga binom,	wætte siþþan,	Ripped off flesh and left me skin,
dyfde on wætre,	dyde eft þonan,	Dipped me in water and drew me out,
sette on sunnan,	þær ic swiþe beleas	Stretched me bare in the tight sun;
5 herum þam þe ic hæfde.	Heard mec siþþan	The hard blade, clean steel, cut,
snað seaxses ecg ,	sindrum begrunden;	Scraped—fingers folded, shaped me.
fingras feoldan,	ond mec fugles wyn	Now the bird's once wind-stiff joy
geond speddropum	spyrede geneahhe,	Darts often to the horn's dark rim,
ofer brunne brerd,	beamtelge swealg,	Sucks wood-stain, steps back again—
10 streames dæle,	stop eft on mec,	With a quick scratch of power, tracks
siþpade sweartlast.	Mec siþþan wrah	Black on my body, points trails.

hæleð hleobordum, **hyde** beþenede,
 gierede mec mid golde; forþon me gliwedon
 wrætlic weorc smiþa, wire bifongen.
 15 Nu þa gereno ond se reada telg
 ond þa wuldorgesteald wide mære
 dryhtfolca helm, nales dol wite.
 Gif min bearn wera brucan willað,
 hy beoð þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran,
 20 heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygebliþran,
 ferþe þy frodran, habbaþ freonda þy ma,
 swæsra ond gesibbra, soþra ond godra,
 tilra ond getreowra, þa hyra tyr ond ead
 estum ycað ond hy arstafum
 25 lissum bilecgað ond hi lufan fæpmum
 fæste clyppað. Frige hwæt ic hatte,
 niþum to nytte. Nama min is mære,
 hælepum gifre ond halig sylf.

Shield-boards clothe me and stretched hide,
 A skin laced with gold. The bright song
 Of smiths glistens on me in filigree tones.
 Now decorative gold and crimson dye,
 Cloisoned jewels and a coat of glory
 Proclaim the world's protector far and wide—
 Let no fool fault these treasured claims.
 If the children of men make use of me,
 They will be safer and surer of heaven,
 Bolder in heart, more blessed in mind,
 Wiser in soul: they will find friends,
 Companions and kinsmen, more loyal and true,
 Nobler and better, brought to new faith—
 So men shall know grace, honor, glory,
 Fortune, and the kind clasp of friends.
 Say who I am—glorious, useful to men,
 Holy and helpful from beginning to end.

Riddle 25 (ASPR 27)

Ic eom weorð werum, wide funden,
 brungen of bearwum ond of burghleoþum,
 of denum ond of dunum. Dægес mec
 wægum
 5 feþre on lifte, feredon mid liste
 under hrofes hleo. Hæleð mec sippan
 baþedan in bydene. Nu ic eom bindere
 ond swingere, sona **weorpe**
esne to eorþan, hwilum ealdne ceorl.
 10 Sona þæt onfindeð, se þe mec fehð
 ongean,
 ond wið mægenþisan minre genæsteð,
 þæt he hrycge sceal hrusan secan,
 gif he unrædes ær ne geswiceð,
 15 strengo bistolen, strong on spræce,
 mægene binumen; nah his modes
 gewæld,
 fota ne folma. Frige hwæt ic hatte,
 ðe on eorþan swa esnas binde,
 dole æfter dyntum be dægес leohte.

I am man's treasure, taken from the woods,
 Cliff-sides, hill-slopes, valleys, downs;
 By day wings bear me in the buzzing air,
 Slip me under a sheltering roof—sweet craft.
 Soon a man bears me to a tub. Bathed,
 I am binder and scourge of men, bring down
 The young, ravage the old, sap strength.
 Soon he discovers who wrestles with me
 My fierce body-rush—I roll fools
 Flush on the ground. Robbed of strength,
 Reckless of speech, a man knows no power
 Over hands, feet, mind. Who am I who bind
 Men on middle-earth, blinding with rage
 And such savage blows that dazed
 Fools know my dark power by daylight?

Riddle 26 (ASPR 28)

Biþ foldan dæl fægre gegierwed
 mid þy heardestan ond mid þy sceanpestan
 ond mid þy grymmestan gumena gestreona,
 corfen, sworfen, cyrred, þyrred,
 5 bunden, wunden, blæced, wæced,
 frætwed, geatwed, feorran læded
 to durum dryhta. Dream bið in innan

Part of the earth grows lovely and grim
 With the hardest and fiercest of bitter-sharp
 Treasures—felled, cut, carved,
 Bleached, scrubbed, softened, shaped,
 Twisted, rubbed, dried, adorned,
 Bound, and borne off to the doorways of
 men—

cwicra wihta, clengeð, lengeð,
 þara þe ær lifgende longe hwile
 10 wilna bruceð ond no wið spriceð,
 ond þonne æfter deape deman onginneð,
 meldan mislice. Micel is to hycganne
 wisfæstum menn, hwæt seo wiht sy.

This creature brings in hall-joy, sweet
 Music clings to its curves, live song
 Lingers in a body where before bloom-wood
 Said nothing. After death it sings
 A clarion joy. Wise listeners
 Will know what this creature is called.

Riddle 45 (ASPR 47)

Moððe word fræt. Me þæt þuhte
 wrætlicu wyrd, þa ic þæt wundor gefrægn,
 þæt se wurm forswealg wera gied sumes,
 þeof in þystro, þrymfæstne cwide
 5 ond þæs strangan stapol. Stælgieost ne wæs
 wihte þy gleawra, þe he þam wordum swealg.

A moth ate songs—wolfed words!
 That seemed a weird dish—that a worm
 Should swallow, dumb thief in the dark,
 The songs of a man, his chants of glory,
 Their place of strength. That thief-guest
 Was no wiser for having swallowed words.

Riddle 89 (ASPR 93)

Frea min
 ...de willum sinum,

 heah ond hyht...
 5 ...rpne, hwilum
 ...wilum sohte
 frea... ...s wod,
 dægrieme frod, deo... ...s ,
 hwilum stealc hliþo stigan sceolde
 10 up in eþel, hwilum eft gewat
 in deop dalu duguþe secan
 strong on stæpe, stanwongas grof
 hrimighearde, hwilum hara scoc
 forst of **feaxe**. Ic **on** fusum rad
 15 oppæt him þone gleawstol **gingra** broþor
 min agnade ond mec of earde adraf.
 Sipþan mec isern innanweardne
 brun bennade; blod ut ne com,
 heolfor of hreþre, þeah mec heard bite
 20 stiðecg style. No ic þa stunde bemearn,
 ne for wunde weop, ne wrecan meahte
 on wigan feore wonnsceaft mine,
 ac ic aglæca ealle þolige,
 þæt ...e bord biton. Nu ic blace swelge
 25 wuda ond wætre, w... ...b... befæðme
 þæt mec on fealleð ufan þær ic stonde,
 eorpes nathwæt; hæbbe anne fot.
 Nu min hord warað hiþende feond,
 se þe ær wide bær wulfes gehleþan;
 30 oft me of wombe bewaden fereð,
 steppeð on stið bord,
 deapes d... þonne dægcondel,

I was point and high pleasure for my lord

* * *

Sometimes startled he broke for the wood,
 Sometimes leapt with the years' lean grace
 Over plunging streams, sometimes mounted
 Steep cliff-trails home or sought hoof-proud
 In hollows the horned shield of the troop—
 Sometimes pawed at ice-grass locked like stone,
 Sometimes the gray frost shook from his hair.
 I rode my fierce lord's butting brain-chair
 Till my younger brother stole helm and
 headland.

Cast homeless to the brown blade, seized
 By burnished steel, gutted without gore—
 I felt no blood-rush, wept no death-song,
 Dreamed no dark vengeance. I endured
 The sharp torments of shield-biters.
 Now I swallow black wood and water,
 Bear in my belly dark stain from above.
 One-foot, I guard black treasure seized
 By a plundering foe that once bore
 The battle-companion of the wolf far:
 The scavenger darts from my belly blackened
 And steps towards the table, the stount board

* * *

Sometimes a share of death when the day-candle

Slides and no man's eyes see my work

* * *

sunne
...eorc ealum witeð
35 ond spe....

Commentary

Riddle 3

This fierce wooden warrior, the *shield*, is the first of many weapon riddles in the Exeter collection—others include the horn (12, 76), an unknown creature that swallows and spits battle-treasures (15), sword box or rack (53), helmet (59), and spear (71). War and violence were an ever-present part of Anglo-Saxon life—as is clear in the following grim catalogue of fates in “The Fortunes of Men”:

Sometimes a fierce fate follows a man—
A gray wolf may eat him and his mother mourn
(Man’s power is small in the savage world).
Hunger haunts, the storm slays, the spear guts—
War is his stalker, battle his bane.
Blind-eye gropes with his hands through life,
Lame-foot crawls wingless from the tree
Doing wind-tricks (till root-sick his bloom is done).

The gallows-rider hangs high, his bone-chest broken
His soul-frame done. A dark raven feeds on his eyes.
No quick hands shield him from the plundering bird.
His life is lost, his spirit shrouded, his name cursed.

The sword slays one at the mead-bench,
Angry ale-quencher, wine-weary man—
His words were quick (his life short).

In the Anglo-Saxon world of violence, vengeance, Viking hostility, and often internecine war, it is no wonder that warriors came well-equipped, as did Beowulf’s band to the dangerous hall (321 ff.):

Their war-corselets shone, hard and hand-locked
(The glittering ring-iron groaned in battle)—
Grim guests came to the hall in war-gear.
The sea-weary thanes set their broad shields down—
Hard roofs for battle-rain—by the building’s wall,
Came to the mead-benches, mail-coats ringing,
The war-shirts of men. Sea-men stacked
Ash-spears together, steel-gray at the top,
Armed warriors iron-proud of battle-weapons.

Anglo-Saxon shields were made of wood, sometimes covered with leather, and embossed with metal fittings and ornamental mounts. The shield of the riddle is a super-warrior who can withstand greater blows than any man; yet unlike man it has no naturally rejuvenative power, and so it continues to endure blows without the

hope of a doctor's healing—a creature hard to kill or to cure. The “hard hammer-leavings” and the “battle-sharp / Handiwork of smiths” are both kennings referring to the shield's enemy, the sword.

Riddle 23

This is one of several Old English double-entendre riddles with a sexual solution for the bawdy and a plain solution for the prim. On the kitchen-counter carving-bed, the lady lays an *onion*. Back in the bedroom—another bulb and skin. The onion begins its “Song of Myself” with a litany of power, but after the entrance of the Achillic woman, eager-armed and proud, the “I” fractures into body, head, and skin—as the lady grabs, rushes, holds, and claims. The power struggle is resolved in the paradox of the fast catch, the mutual delight of “our meeting,” and the oblique conclusion (the enactment of “something to come”). The phallic onion links the green world with the world of human sexuality. Nature is charged with human metaphor; passion is charted with natural myth.

Riddle 24

This *Bible* or *book* riddle is probably the earliest sustained piece of book-art poetry in English. A number of Latin riddles treat the same subject—among them the “parchment” riddles of Tatwine and Eusebius, two eighth-century English churchmen:

A fierce robber ripped off my hide,
Plundered the breath-pores of my skin.
I was shaped by an artist and author
Into a flat field. Furrowed and wet,
I yield strange fruit. My meadows bloom
Food for the healthy, health for the sick.

* * *

Once silent, voiceless, wordless, dumb—
Now voiceless, silent, bearing words we come,
White fields crossed by myriad black tracks:
Alive we are dumb—dead, answer back.

The Old English riddle celebrates in longer, more lyrical fashion the life of the parchment from beast to book. The Bible suffers its own form of passion as it is ripped, stretched, scraped, cut, and scratched by the quill (“the bird's once wind-stiff joy”); but as keeper and conveyor of the Word, it transcends its fate to bring grace, honor, and glory to men. Its inner treasure is reflected in its outer appearance—multicolored illuminations, gold leaf, and a jeweled cover. The process of making the medieval manuscript was a long and arduous one liking the talents of leather-worker, artist, scribe, and poet—as is clear in the following tenth-century description of manuscript preparation by a monk of Saint Gallen:

I cut the parchment for my lord's books,
Rub it with pumice and lift it off dross,
Line it with a stylus and straight rule,
Labor over letters with a long point,
Yoke the painter's passion—figures grant
And fine—smooth and fasten it for my lord:
A writer's delight and a reader's joy.

Riddle 25

This powerful creature is *mead* made from honey, a favorite Anglo-Saxon drink. The number of “mead-“ compounds in Old English attests to its central place in the culture. Comrades come to the mead-hall on the mead-path, sit at mead-benches drinking from mead-cups and getting mead-high until they drop, mead-weary. All this in a gay city called mead-burg. When Beowulf returns home from monster-killing in Denmark, he and his troop are made welcome in proper meadish fashion (1975 ff.):

The mead-hall was clearerd as the king ordered,
Mead-benches readied for the marching men.
The survivor sat down, kinsman with kinsman,
Beowulf with his king, after he greeted
With ceremonial speech his liege-lord.
Haereth's daughter, Hygelac's queen,
Who loved and served her proud people,
Passed through the high hall bearing mead-cups,
Powerful drink to the hands of war-men.
.
.
.
.
.
There was joy in the troop, more than man's
Measure under heaven's arch: hall-thanes
Held mead-mirth.

But the drinking could sour and the vengeful spirit erupt as the riddle implies, so weapons were often forbidden at the mead-table. The dangerous effect of drink on a war-man's mind is aptly described in “The Fortune's of Men”:

Sometimes the sword's edge steals the life
Of an ale-drinker or a wine-weary man
At the mead-bench. His words are too quick.
Another drinks beer from the cup-bearer's hand,
Grows drunk as a mead-fool, forgets to check
His mouth with his mind, seeks suffering,
A long life's end, a joyless hall.
Men name him the mead-wild self-slayer

The riddlic mead also seizes power, binding and laying low young and old alike. The central paradox of mead is this: Helpless to withstand man's plundering and processing, it is transformed into a mighty agent that enters man's home (and head!) to render its conqueror helpless.

Riddle 26

This riddle was long solved as *John Barleycorn* or *beer* but the traditional solution has recently come under hard scrutiny. Barley is not hard and fierce unless its bristles are taken as spears. Beer needs mashing, boiling, and fermenting—none of which is mentioned in the process verbs of lines 3-5. These verbs might fit the fashioning of barrel staves in a *wine cask*, but this solution, like “beer,” does not fit the musical terms at the end of the riddle. These instruments have been suggested: *harp (lyre)*, *tortoise shell lyre*, and *horn of yew*. All of these fit the central paradox of the riddle (which is also found in several Latin riddles on musical instruments): Living, it is silent—dead, it sings. The tortoise lyre, though a classical instrument, was neither known nor played in Anglo-

Saxon England. The Old English lyre was made of maple, which is not the hardest or fiercest of woods. The hard, fierce killer of the opening lines might be the yew, hardest of Anglo-Saxon woods whose needlelike leaves contain the alkaloid poison responsible for its grim reputation. The hard wood might be carved and shaped into a long horn in the fashion described in lines 3-5 and borne to the hall to produce its clarion joy. Irish horns of this sort have been discovered and the existence of a similarly made English wooden horn seems likely. A more recent solution is *damascened sword*. The riddic verbs of lines 3-5 fit neatly the pattern-welding process (various iron rods are twisted, shaped, and forged to produce a hard steel). In this case the initial lines must be taken to describe jointly the original ore's homeland and the ultimate steel's fierce strength. The musical imager must be toned down at the end of the riddle and slain swordsmen made to sing a different tune after death instead of the creature itself. The Old English riddle has a number of textual, grammatical, and semantic ambiguities which makes manipulation in support of each of the solutions possible. My own translation reflects a fairly common bias that the creature is a musical instrument of sorts.

Riddle 45

The thief who swallows songs is a bookworm. The riddler pokes mock-heroic fun at the pedantic worm, transformed into word-wolf or midnight marauder, who devours the substance without the spirit. The idea is based on the fifth-century Latin riddle of Symphosius:

I feed on words without knowing.
I live in books without learning.
I devour Muses without improving.

But the Old English riddle is also a lament for things past. The oral tradition of the singer has been supplanted by the literary conjunction of poet, missionary, and scribe. The old form of memory, the rhythmical word-hoard, has given way to the material storehouse of the vellum page. What the mind of the singer guarded and passed on, the book makes plain and perishable. The voiceless word is ravaged by time and the worm. What is left is a ruin. The theme is echoed by William Carlos Williams in the third book of Paterson:

We read: not the flames
but the ruin left
by the conflagration

Not the enormous burning
but the dead (the books
remaining). Let us read

and digest: the surface
glistens, only the surface.
Dig in—and you have

a nothing, surrounded by
a surface, an inverted
bell resounding, a

white-hot man become
a book, the emptiness of
a cavern resounding

For Williams, as for the riddler, written words are ruins, voice-shards left on the page. The fire that gave rise to the vision must be rekindled, the song resung. The resounding space of the inverted bell is like the catalytic space of the riddle solver shaping the word-wolf out of the worm, waiting for the beast to sing. In the metaphor is the key to becoming other. The bookworm devours dead words in a ruin of substance without spirit. What the riddler dares us to do is to devour, substantiate, and sing.

Riddle 89

This is the second of two *inkhorn* riddles—the other is riddle 84. While the earlier riddle is highly elegiac, this riddle has its heroic elements. The horn speaks first not of its present suffering but of the former glory of its lord. While it uses this history to explain its lot, it does not seem haunted by the past. Its suffering is physical; it endures the pains of cutting, scraping, shaping, swallowing wood and stained water (ink), and the darting birdlike quill with stoic equanimity. The battle-companion of the wolf in line 20 is the eagle or raven (these three are the carrion-eaters or “beasts of battle” in Old English poetry) whose quill now plunders ink from the horn’s belly. A similar description of quill and ink occurs in “Bible” or “book” riddle 24:

Now the bird’s once wind-stiff joy
Darts often to the horn’s dark rim,
Sucks wood-stain, steps back again.

A medieval recipe for the making of ink is contained in the twelfth-century *Diverse Arts* (2.38) of Theophilus, a German Benedictine:

To make ink, cut for yourself some wood of the hawthorn—in April or May before they produce blossom or leaves—collect them together in small bundles and allow them to lie in the shade for two, three or four weeks until they are fairly well dried out.

Then have some wooden mallets, and with them pound these thorns on a hard piece of wood until you can completely peel off the bark, which you immediately put in a barrel full of water. When you have filled two, three, four or five barrels with bark and water, allow them to stand like this for eight days until the water has drawn off all the sap of the bark. Then put this water into a very clean pot or into cauldron, place it on the fire and heat it. From time to time, put some of this bark into the pot so that, if there is any sap left in it, it can be boiled out, and, when you have heated it for a little, take it out and put in some more. This done, boil down what remains of the water to a third [of its original quantity], pour it from this pot into a smaller one and continue to heat it until it becomes black and begins to thicken, taking particular care that you do not add any water except that which was mixed with sap. When you see it become thick, add a third part of pure wine, put it in two or three new pots and continue to heat it until you see that it develops a kind of skin at the top.

Then lift these pots off the fire and put them in the sun until the black ink resolves itself from the red dregs. Afterwards, take some small, carefully sewn, parchment bags like bladders, pour the pure ink into them and hang them up in the sun until it is completely dried. When it is dried, take from it as much as you want, mix it with wine over a fire, add a little iron vitriol and write. If, as a result of carelessness, the ink is not black enough, take a piece of iron, an inch thick, put it on the fire until it is red hot and then throw it into the ink. [Trans. C.R. Dodwell, *Theophilus’ De Diversis Artibus/ The Various Arts*, pp. 34-35]

Hardy modern scribes and eclectic cooks might like to try the recipe.

Annotated Version of three Riddles in Old English

Riddle 3 (ASPR 5)

	lc eom anhaga	iserne wund°,	wounded
	bille° gebennad°,	beadowerca° sæd°,	by sword hurt war-deeds sated with
	ecgum° werig°.	Oft ic wig° seo°,	by (sword-)edges exhausted battle see
	frecne feohtan.	frofre° ne wene°,	consolation expect
5	þæt me° geoc cyme°	guðgewinnes,	to me (will) come
	ær° ic mid° ældum°	eal° forwurðe° ,	before among men wholly perish
	ac° mec° hnossiað°	homera lafe,	but me batter
	heardecg° heoroscearp°,	hondweorc	hard-edged deadly sharp of smiths
	smiþa°,		bite (me) strongholds await must
10	bitað° in burgum°;	ic abidan° sceal°	more hostile meeting Never physician
	laþran° gemotes°.	Næfre° læcecynn°	town could (I)
	on folcstede°	findan meahte°,	herbs wounds
	þara þe mid wyrtum°	wunde° gehælde,	of swords wounds
	ac me ecga dolg°	eacen weorðað°	death-stroke
	þurh deaðslege°	dagum ond nihtum.	

1 anhaga 'solitary one, loner'; iserne 'by iron'

4 frecne feohtan 'bold ones fighting'

5 geoc...guðgewinnes 'relief from battle-strife'

7 homera lafe 'the legacy of hammers'; i.e. the sword

12 þara þe...gehælde 'of those who might heal', i.e. 'of the sort who might heal'

13 me...eacen weorðað 'become augmented on me', i.e. 'grow bigger on me'

14 dagum ond nihtum 'by days and nights'

Riddle 23 (ASPR 25)

	lc eom wunderlicu° wiht°,	wifum on	wondrous creature
	hyhte,		neighbours a service to
	neahbuendum° nyt°;	nægum sceþþe	except (my) slayer alone
	burgsittendra,	nymþe bonan anum°.	Stem erect stand up in
5	Stapol° min is steapheah°,	stonde° ic on°	Dares sometimes
	bedde,		very comely yeoman's
	neoþan ruh nathwær.	Nepeð° hwilum°	proud maiden
	ful° cyrtenu°	ceorles° dohtor,	plunders
	modwlonc meowle°,	þæt heo on mec	feels directly
10	gripeð,		she who confines
	ræseð mec on reodne,	reafað° min	wet eye
	heafod,		
	fegeð mec on fæsten.	Feleþ° sona°	
	mines gemotes,	seo° þe mec nearwað°,	
	wif wundenlocc.	Wæt° bið þæt eage°.	

1 wifum on hyhte 'to women in expectation'; perhaps 'in women's expectation'

2-3 Nægum sceþþe burgsittendra (I) harm none of the citizens'

5 neoþan ruh nathwær 'hairy somewhere down below'

7 þæt heo on me gripeð 'that she grasps at (or takes hold of) me'
 8 ræseð mec on reodne 'attacks me in (my) redness'; perhaps 'attacks my red self'
 9 fegeð mec on fæsten 'fixes (or confines) me in a stronghold'; perhaps '...in a firm grip'
 10 mines gemotes 'my encounter'; i.e. her encounter with me
 11 wundenlocc 'with braided hair'

Riddle 45 (ASPR 47)

Moððe word fræt.	Me þæt þuhte	ate	To me seemed
wrætlicu wyrd,	þa ic þæt wundor	curious	happening marvel heard about
gefrægn,			swallowed down
þæt se wyrm forswealg	wera gied sumes,	thief	the dark glorious discourse
5 þeof in þystro,	þrymfæstne cwide		Thieving visitor
ond þæs strangan staþol.	Stælgieost ne	at all	the wiser when swallowed
wæs			
wihte þy gleawra,	þe he þam wordum		
swealg.			

1 word 'words'. The context suggests the pl., and this is confirmed in 6 (*wordum*, dat. pl.)
 3 wyrm 'worm'; wera gied sumes 'the speech of a certain one of men', i.e. 'some man's speech (or words)'
 5 þæs strangan staþol 'the foundation of that mighty (thing)'

Annotations from Richard Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader*.