

Concetta Sipione

DISUM - Dipartimento di Scienze Umanistiche,
Università degli Studi di Catania,
Monastero dei Bendettini,
Piazza Dante 32,
95124 Catania

csipione@unict.it

ruedeger@tiscali.it

+393385059042

«*sip*, *wræcsip*, *wræcca*: literal or figurative? Considerations on genre and gender conventions in translating from Old English.»

The Old English poem known as *The Wife's Lament* (Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501, fols. 115^{r-v}) is at the same time an extremely conventional and original text. It portrays a female character suffering for the absence of her loved one, through the framework conventions of the so-called "elegiac" style and an established, mainly heroic vocabulary; the traditional exile theme in Old English elegiac poetry is thus interwoven with an almost unique motif (in Old English), that of love suffering and sickness. Once this appraisal of the poem (among many others) is the most widely accepted one, disagreement still remains about the translation of some keywords, strictly related to the exile theme, such as *sip*, *wræcsip*, *wræcca*. These words are commonly employed not only in secular, heroic poetry but also in religious verse. The choices made by different glossators and translators of the *Wife's Lament* seem sometimes arbitrary, perhaps depending on the gender of the agent involved, especially if they are compared with analogous translations elsewhere. In other words, assigning a certain connotation to a lexeme means also to make a suggestion or express an assessment on the character involved and his/her attitude. But it is not only a gender-oriented or gender-biased reading which can produce diverging interpretations of identical phrases and locutions; context-based interpretations and genre conventions could also be the ultimate source of such differences in the translational process. Aim of this paper is to examine diverging readings and glosses of the above mentioned "exilic/elegiac" keywords not only under the point of view of the male/female opposition, but also considering other plausible dichotomies, such as established vs. unconventional, or literal vs. metaphoric as well.

References:

C. J. Clover, *Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, «*Speculum*» 68 (1993), 262-87.

E. Jensen, "The Wife's Lament's" *eorðscræf*. *Literal or Figural Sign?* «*Neophilologische Mitteilungen*» 91 (1990), 449-457.

S. S. Klein, *Gender and the Nature of Exile in Old English Elegies*, in C. A. Lees - G. R. Overing, *A Place to Believe in. Locating Medieval Landscapes*, University Park 2006, 113-131.

Klinck, A. L., *The Old English Elegies. A Critical Edition and Genre Study*. Montreal [1992] 2001.

S. S. Morrison, *Unnatural Authority: Translating beyond the Heroic in "The Wife's Lament"*, «*Medievalia et Humanistica*» 27 N. S. (2000), 18-32.

M. Rissanen, *The Theme of "Exile" in "The Wife's Lament"*, «*Neophilologische Mitteilungen*» 70 (1969), 90-104.