

# Old English Riddles

## / The Book of Exeter

Last semester we discussed various Codices from before the Common Era and from the Common Era.

As a means of wrapping up the Anglo Saxon traditions, let's look at one last example of an important codex from early English history: **The Book of Exeter**.

### Important Facts regarding *The Book of Exeter (Codex Exoniensis)*

<b>1.</b>	Largest surviving copy of <b>Old English</b> writing.
<b>2.</b>	Only four known manuscripts exist (using Old English exclusively) from this time period.
<b>3.</b>	Poems used in the text vary in the type of genres. The book contains prayers, poems, and epigrams.
<b>4.</b>	Both "The Wanderer" and "The Wife's Lament" appear in this text.
<b>5.</b>	A section of the text is devoted to <b>Anglo Saxon riddles</b> . Approximately 100 riddle poems exist in the text.
<b>6.</b>	Some of the works have solutions to the riddle disclosed in the titles. Most of the riddles we do not have a solution due to changes in the language and the culture.
<b>7.</b>	Many of these works are termed as <b>extended metaphors</b> , lengthy descriptions in a cryptic tone.

# Riddle 14

I was a weapon, a warrior—  
Now pride covers me, youthful bachelor,  
with gold and with silver, twisted wire knots.

Sometimes men are kissing—  
sometimes I summon familiar comrades  
to battle with my voice; sometimes the horse bears  
me over the marches; sometimes an ocean-steed  
fares me over the flood, bright with baubles;  
sometimes some ring-adorned maiden fills my belly.

Sometimes I must lie on the tables,  
hard, headless, plundered. Sometimes I hang,  
fretted with fittings, beautiful on the wall,  
where men are drinking, noble battle-tackle.

Sometimes warriors are carried on their horses,  
then I must, studded with treasure,  
swallow the winds from someone's bosom.

Sometimes I invite proud warriors  
to wine with my voices; sometimes I must  
rescue what has been stolen from wrathful men  
with this crying of mine, putting the robbers to flight.

Ask me what I am called.

# Sylvia Plath, “Metaphors”

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,  
An elephant, a ponderous house,  
A melon strolling on two tendrils.  
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!  
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.  
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.  
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
I've eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded the train there's no getting off.