

Modern English, Old English and German

not so far apart....

Draw lines to match the English, Old English and German vocabulary below.

English

Old English

German

need

daege

vor

evil

deoth

übel

day

Fore

Hingang

death

God

Not

before

hingongae

tag

good

neid-(faerae)

tod

going (away)

Yfel

Gut

Bede's death song

In 735, Bede wrote his death song, below you can see the original poem in the Old English version. Your task is to use the glossary and provide a translation into modern day English. You may need to change the word order or think of alternative ways to express the translations to create something which is readable and poetic.

Fore thaem neidfaerae ll naenig uuiurthit

.....
thoncsnotturra, ll than him tharf sie

.....
to ymbhycganna ll aer his hiniongae

.....
huaet his gastae ll godaes aeththa yflaes

.....
aefter deothdaege ll doemid uueorthae

Glossary

ær 'before'

d(o)eman 'to judge' (cf. ModE *to deem*)

fore 'before'

god 'good'

hin-gang 'passing, departure'

nænig 'no one'

ned-faru 'inevitable journey'

oððe 'or'

sien 'to be' (cf. German *sein*)

þonc-snottur 'wise in thought'

þurfan 'may' (cf. German *dürfen*)

weorþan 'to become' (cf. German *werden*)

yfel 'bad, evil'

ymb-hycgan 'to consider' (lit. 'think around')



Bede's death song

Compare your version of Bede's Death Song to the three translations below, which version do you think is most accurate? Which version is most effective as a poem? When translating, what is important?

Before the needful journey no one becomes
wiser in thought than he needs to be
to think over, where his going hence,
what of good or evil about his spirit,
after his day of death, may be decided.

Malone (1948)

Before the compulsory journey,
from here, no one becomes wiser of thought
than when it is necessary to consider
what of good or evil in his soul
will be judged henceforth after death

Bjork (2014)

Before embarking on the peril of that fated
journey,

No man is above the necessary wisdom,

That he must consider before his passing,

What good and evil dwelled in his spirit,

And what judgement he faces when he
reaches his end.

Gwilliam (2022)

