

The Journey of Life in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*

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Introduction

The Wanderer and *The Seafarer* can be interpreted as poems about men who, wandering the paths of exile, not only embark on a physical journey, but also on a spiritual one. It is the object of this paper to reconstruct the progress of this journey with regard to these two levels of meaning and to the way they are connected with each other. Having left behind a golden past as heroic warriors, the speakers find themselves in the most desolate state of exile and are challenged to find a path both physical and spiritual that could lead them towards a new future.

In my analysis, I will trace the development of this path, in the course of which the exiles have to locate themselves in time and in space, in order to find out more about where the speakers of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* come from, where their journey leads to, and how they might get there. My aim is to show that both characters undergo an intellectual development during their time in exile, in which they realise the transience of earthly goods and renounce their former life in order to find comfort in heaven.

I argue that each journey is characterised by a constant tension between the attempt to exercise free will, the repressive impact of external factors, and the controlling force of Fate as an instrument of divine will. Thus I will further examine what determines the course of the journey. To this end, I will start by analysing the speakers' identities, their relation to time, and their cultural background

as heroic warriors, and continue with an investigation of the exile-theme and its significance. I will then illustrate to what degree the depiction of transience influences their search for a new future. A closer look at the power of Fate over these journeys will conclude my analysis.

Man in Time

The poems' apparent themes form a good starting point from which to work towards an in-depth analysis. Firstly, the highly personal perspective through which the poems are presented calls for an examination of each character's construction of identity. As a second step, I will analyse the conceptualisation of time as a dimension in which both speakers have to locate themselves.

The Wanderer

Construction of Identity

In the first line, the speaker is introduced as an *anhaga*, a small but meaningful word that straightforwardly reflects the main features of his situation: his loneliness and his hitherto undefined dwelling. The complete opening phrase continues as follows:

Oft him an-haga are gebideð,
metudes miltse, þeah þe he mod- Cearig
geond lagu-lade longe sceolde
hreran mid hondum hrim-cealde sæ,
wadan wræc-lastas. (1–5b)¹

The first words prefigure the proverbial quality of the poem and the third person singular presents the speaker as a representative rather than as an individual. Griffith notes that the subsequent “lengthy qualification gives a powerful sense of mood and situation, but is not proverbial, for proverbs are generally pithy, and do not deal in lengthy concession” (135); thus the passage successfully creates a personal atmosphere. The speaker's desolate situation on the ice-cold sea makes him feel *modcearig* (2), but the subsequent “oft ... are gebideð, / metudes miltse” (1–2) emphasises that he is far from giving up all hope. There is a great deal of uncertainty about how to properly translate *gebidan* here.² Translating it as

¹ “Often the lonely dweller experiences mercy, the mildness of the Creator, though anxious at heart for a long time he has had to stir with his hands, away across the water, the ice-cold sea, pass the tracks of exile.” All translations are my own. The edition used for both *The Wanderer (Wd)* and *The Seafarer (Sf)* is Bjork; I have occasionally taken the liberty of modifying Bjork's punctuation according to my own insights.

² See Griffith, “Does *nyrd* mean ‘Fate?’” for a concise summary of the discussion.

“await” would imply that the receiving of *are* and *miltse* is still pending, but if it is understood as “experience,” it signals that the speaker has already received *are* and *miltse* before and therefore has reason to hope for more. In either case, the verb allows the reader to recognise a sense of hopefulness in the speaker’s situation, and I personally agree with Griffith who argues that “the *anhaga* is active in his search for divine favour, and not just a passive recipient of it,” the references to grace suggesting “that his activity may be rewarded ... in heaven” (150).

Various accounts of self-identification can be traced in a subsequent passage of direct speech: the speaker himself refers once more to his loneliness (8, *ana*) and then regards himself as *hean* (23). *Hean* (“humble”) also allows for multiple readings. One may understand it socially, in which case it suggests a decline in status as a material result of his master’s death. Alternatively, we may take it dispositionally to mean “meek” or “modest,” describing a psychological consequence of his loss. I suggest a combined reading of both, and an interpretation of the second association as a sign of the speaker’s personal development towards humility, triggered by his lord’s death and its factual consequences expressed in the first meaning.

Furthermore, the wanderer describes himself as “wintercearig” (24, “sad from the gloomy winter”) and “seledreorig” (25, “sorrowful for [lack of] a hall”), two terms that can be interlinked insofar as “whoever finds himself ... in a scene of wintry desolation is to feel all the misery there can be on earth ... [and] may well remember the joyous feasting in the wine hall” (Stanley 441). *Wintercearig* immediately evokes a feeling of dejection, and *seledreorig* conveys a sense of deprivation. Interestingly, the speaker chooses compounds to express his grief, one of which refers to his present situation (winter) and the other to the past (the hall). The abovementioned solitude is reiterated by the speaker with the term *freondleas* (28) and again by the narrator with the word *wineleas* (45, “friendless”). Social isolation and the stay on the wintry ocean constitute formative elements in the construction of identity here.

With regard to his behaviour, the wanderer generally seems to be a man of thought rather than of action, for he appears multiple times as “remembering” (6, “gemyndig”; 34, “gemon”) or “contemplating” (60, “geondþence”; 89, “deope geondþence”). His thoughts drift away to the past again and again, providing only limited information about his present activity aside from wandering around aimlessly (see *wod*, 24), and even then he has hardly any possibility for action because he is paralysed by sorrow and sleep.³ The wanderer is not a daydreamer: at the end of his ruminations, he becomes “snottor on mode” (111, “wise in mind”), one of the only two instances of verbal identification in the text; the other one is *eadstapa* in line 6. Though there has been much scholarly discussion on whether

³ See 39–40, “Donne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre/ earmne an-hogan oft gebindað,” “then sorrow and sleep together often bind the lonely dweller.”

the attributes “earth-stepper” and “wise man” symbolise two individual speakers,⁴ I have come to the conclusion that the poem tells the story of one and the same character, but of one who has undergone a fundamental personal development, which enables us to understand the *eardstapa* and the *snottor on mode* as the same person in “two spiritual states” (Osborn 6). In view of all the bitter experiences that the wanderer illustrates, such a process is very likely and evidence that “he has gained wisdom through experience” (Lumiansky 106) can in fact be found right in the text: “forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer ær he age wintra dæl / in world-riče” (64–65a).⁵ This phrase proves that the speaker has obviously lived through his share of winters and thus experienced first-hand that “man’s life is commonly fraught with hardship, the patient endurance of which strengthens the virtues of his mind, and brings him ultimately to wisdom” (Hogan 45). A similar realisation, though less definite, has already been pronounced earlier: “forþon wat se þe sceal his wine-dryhtnes / leofes lar-cwidum longe forþolian” (37–38).⁶

However, it is line 64 that demarcates a significant turn in the tone of the poem. The speaker’s intellectual development may be reconstructed as follows: his life at court was dominated by abundance and self-indulgence, thus anything but “humble.” He then set off on his voyage, in the course of which the loss of his lord and companions made him aware of the worthlessness of earthly goods. Finally, he learned to value and strive for higher goods, such as the mercy of God. As Lumiansky puts it, “the fundamental contrast which is present in *The Wanderer* is between the individual who set great store by earthly things and who is desolated by their loss ... and the individual who knows that earthly things must perish and who conducts himself virtuously and trusts in God ... [T]he ‘eardstapa’ means to represent himself as a person who originally fitted into the former category but who afterwards learned that the latter view is wiser” (108).

As a final step, it is worth having a closer look at the speaker’s personal agency. First of all, it should be kept in mind that his opportunities for action are

⁴ Osborn provides a comprehensive overview of each position’s central representatives and their respective arguments. Above all, it was Pope who, in his article “Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*” suggested that the poem be read as narrated by “dramatic voices” belonging to two different speakers like those in a dramatic dialogue; his position is presented and partly refuted by Greenfield in his article “Min, Sylf and ‘Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,” who claimed that what Pope construed as change of speakers is rather a shift in the attitude of one speaker, which conforms to my theory of personal development. According to Griffith, the number of speakers depends on the interpretation of *nyrd* in line 5 and 15: we are either dealing with two speakers having different attitudes towards the same concept, or with one single speaker who understands it slightly differently in each of the lines. Shippey pointed out that the theory of two speakers has been “spoilt by the inability of any two readers to agree where the dividing lines between one speaker and another might be” (54). Lumiansky adds to the discussion by reciting Huppé’s viewpoint of the poem’s structure as formed by two separate monologues (104).

⁵ “Therefore a man cannot grow wise before he has a share of winters in this earthly empire.”

⁶ “Therefore he understands who has had to live a long time deprived of the guidance of his beloved gracious lord.”

limited by outer circumstances. He is paralysed not only by the extent of his grief, but also by the restricting impact of the wintry weather. Apart from these external factors, the speaker's self-determination is limited by another influence, as indicated by the frequent use of the verb *sculan*. With regard to volition, *sculan* is significant because it denotes a moral obligation or duty, but not explicitly an authoritative command that has to be followed without resistance. Thus where *sculan* is used, the possibility of alternative actions still exists, but some moral authority or higher law actually prohibits them. Since *sculan* can also be translated as "denoting the necessity of fate,"⁷ the speaker's construction of identity is characterised by a constant tension between implementing his own will and yielding up to a higher power.

Cyclical Time

Under the premise that "the dominant problem for the central figures of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is locating their lives in a meaningless present" (Green 506), I will now analyse how time is conceptualised in the wanderer's narration in order to find out what makes his relation to it so complicated.

To begin with, it is striking how often the poem uses the adverb *oft*. It is the poem's very first word, and it is used four more times in the first 40 lines (1, 8, 17, 20, and 40). This frequency denotes the speaker's ability to identify recurring phenomena insofar as he can tell which things happen "often" in exile, implying that he has already spent a considerable amount of time out there, which is confirmed by remarks on how *longe* (3, 38) he has already been exposed to the perils of exile.

Though it can, as here, convey a sense of long duration, *oft* first and foremost indicates a structure of repetition. The fact that everything the wanderer perceives continually reappears presents time as an infinite "historical continuum" (Green 505). To be more precise, this infinity takes on the form of a repetitive cycle of mourning, expressed in the phrases "sorg bið geniwad" (50, "sorrow is renewed") and "cearo bið geniwad" (55, "care is renewed"). Sorrow constantly reproduces itself, as the passive construction suggests, in an automatic process the speaker is subject to and has no power to influence. Apparently, his personal agency is thus also limited in his attempt to locate himself in time. The mourning is caused by ever-present memories of the past, of "hu hine on geogude his gold-wine / wenede to wiste" (35–36, "how in youth his prince entertained him at feasts") and "swa he hwilum ær / in gear-dagum gief-stolas breac" (43–44, "as he at times before, in days of old, enjoyed the thrones of grace"). Considering time as divided into past, present, and future, it is the past, or rather the memory of it, that without doubt dominates the wanderer's notion of time insofar as it overshadows his

⁷ Greenfield in particular strengthens this position and provides sufficient evidence for it ("Min, Sylf" 200).

view of the present, owing to the contrast that “the past was joyful and rich, the present is painful and abject, and the future is, at best, uncertain” (Green 506).

Allusions to the dualism of night and day, or of sleep and waking, reveal the extent to which the wanderer is trapped in time: he is situated in a constant in-between stage. “He “ceare cwīpað ... uhtna gehwylce” (8–9, “mourns his care ... each time before daybreak”)—thus in a time neither really at night nor at day, but at a moment of indefiniteness, and he is fluctuating between sleep and wake when he “onwæcneð eft” (45, “awakes again”) after a long dream about the time with his lord. The repeated use of *þonne* (23, 39, 45, 49, 70, 89) conveys a minor sense of temporal or causal succession, yet it remains unclear what constitutes its final point. While the poem emphasises singular moments in time, and single images of memory, it shows no clear temporal progression. The question arises whether the speaker is unable to see advancement or whether he willingly turns a blind eye to it, which again is a matter of volition and restriction. In the first case, the cause for this inability might be the captivating effect of his memories, taking away from him any power to move on. In the second case, he deliberately refuses to advance, unwilling to let go of the security of his past once and for all.

Following Green’s precise observations (506–07), we may conclude that it is the wanderer’s inability to see a connection between past, present, and future that makes his confrontation with time so difficult. One cannot adapt to, let alone influence, what is invisible, which is why the wanderer clings to the well-known past and thereby virtually stabilises the repetitive cycle that has him trapped. In his in-between stage, he cannot grasp the passing of time, either in the metaphorical or in the literal sense, and this is precisely what makes him feel powerless.

The Seafarer

Construction of Identity

The Seafarer shares many similarities with *The Wanderer* in terms of form and general tenor, but there are some significant differences regarding the construction of identity. First of all, the poem opens with an introductory statement by the speaker himself:

Mæg ic be me sylfum soð-gied wrecan,
 siþas secgan, hu ic geswinc-dagum
 earfoð-hwile oft þrowade,
 bitre breost-ceare gebiden hæbbe. (1–4)⁸

The first person singular here has the effect that “the mood of the poem is brought closer to the audience than would be possible by an entirely impersonal

⁸ “I can recite a true tale about myself, speak of my voyages, how in days of toil I often suffered times of hardship, have endured bitter breastcare.”

treatment” (Stanley 447). It is a demonstration of literary authority that hints at the content of the following lines and at the same time confirms its correctness. The subtly communicated self-confidence signifies a capacity for action broader than that of the wanderer. The notion of the seafarer’s activity is carried to extremes in the idea that he has even entered into exile on a voluntary basis.⁹ Irrespective of whether or not this is the case, there is no doubt that he likewise expresses his exhaustion and depression by calling himself *werig* (29, “weary”) and *earn-cearig* (14, “miserable and sad”). A self-determined, verbal construction of identity is thus far from preventing one from affliction and is by no means a guarantee for unrestricted vitality. To characterise the speaker, the narrator uses *mere-werges mod* (12, “the mind of the sea-weary one”), a noun phrase containing a compound similar to those already encountered in *The Wanderer*, and describes how the outside reality of the sea-journey affects the mental and physical condition of the *fea-sceafstig ferð* (26, “destitute soul”).

In contrast to *The Wanderer*, self-reflective assertions occur throughout the entire poem. After the phrase *be me sylfum* has already signalled distinct agency, the importance of personal experience is emphasised:

Forþon cnysað nu
 heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
 sealt-yþa gelac sylf cunnige. (33b–35)¹⁰

The speaker in *The Seafarer* consciously exposes himself to the challenging voyage and demonstrates a keen introspection into his body and mind, as can be seen in the following lines:

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþer-locan,
 min mod-sefa mid mere-flode
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide. (58–60)¹¹

He is not only able to explore and follow the desires of his heart, but also to verbalise the operations of his mind. Moreover, his capability to give decisive, rational judgements about personal preferences indicates clear intellect. In the course of his journey through exile, he comes to the conclusion that

Forþon me hatran sind
 Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,

⁹ Greenfield argues that the seafarer, like a pilgrim, decided to actively seek God’s favor in exile after he has realised the vanity and increasing sterility of earth (*Hero and Exile* 119–20). Stanley, with reference to Whitelock’s approach in 1950, adds that “voluntary exile was a penitential discipline in Anglo-Saxon society” (454). I will analyse the possible voluntary motivation of his experience in the section on “Finding a Home.”

¹⁰ “Therefore now the thoughts of my heart urge me that I experience the ocean, the play of salt waves on my own.”

¹¹ “Thus now my mind wanders beyond my breast, my spirit along with the flood of water widely wanders around the realm of the whale.”

læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
 þæt him eorð-welan ece stondað. (64b–67)¹²

A similar affirmation of personal belief has already been observed in *The Wanderer*, but that in *The Seafarer* is more specific. The wanderer claims that experience has given him insight, but he does not clearly express the nature of his transformation. The seafarer, by contrast, decidedly turns away from *þis deade lif* in order to gain access to *Dryhtnes dreamas*, suggesting that he has ceased to believe in the value of earthly goods.

The seafarer has undergone a personal development similar to that of the wanderer, but in the end is much more strengthened in his belief, and his initial sense of selfhood has increased in the course of his experience. In the end, he is self-determined enough to invite others to follow his lead, thereby revealing the poem's didactic aim:

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
 ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
 ond we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten
 in þa ecan eadignesse
 þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes,
 hyht in heofonum. (117–22a)¹³

The personalities of both speakers are shaped in an almost identical way, with the seafarer being more aware of this formative process on which he actively reflects, while the wanderer mostly just accepts it. The latter indulges in memories of the past that offer little consolation, whereas the former risks a look into the future just far enough to realise that consolation lies there, and not in the past. Both exiles nevertheless share “a turn from the active life towards a more contemplative experience” (Osborn 6).

Linear Time

Time is presented in *The Seafarer* as a more complex unit that comprises well-structured, linear features in addition to cyclical patterns. What both poems have in common, however, is the sense of repetition created by the adverb *oft* that also occurs four times in the first third of *The Seafarer* (3, 8, 24, 29) and assumes a function similar to that in *The Wanderer*, namely to identify recurring phenomena. Another similarity between the poems is how memories of the past make up a large part of the narration, for instance when the seafarer vividly recalls “ealle

¹² “Consequently fiercer are to me the joys of the Lord than this dead life, transient on earth. I believe not that earthly wealth remains forever.”

¹³ “Let us now think where we have a home, and then think how we may get there, and then we must also strive to proceed to that eternal happiness, where life goes along with the love of God, hope in heaven.”

onmedlan eorþan rices” (81, “all the glory of earthly kingdoms”) and the way “cyningas, caseras” (82, “kings, emperors”) and “gold-giefas” (83, “gold-givers”) “mærþa gefremedon / ond on dryht-licestum dome lifdon” (84–85, “achieved most glory and lived in the most lordly majesty”).

Yet the seafarer’s relation to the present is fundamentally different: although he endures similar sorrows, his attitude towards the present is much more positive, even allowing him to discern an interruption of the daily monotony in the song of the swan.¹⁴ Further evidence for this positive attitude towards time is provided by the fact that the seafarer often uses the past tense to refer to the woes of exile, so that phrases like “gebiden hæbbe” (4), “wunade wræccan lastum” (15) and “in brim-lade bidan scolde” (30) categorise his sufferings as part of the past. I understand this grammatical feature as an expression of his ability to mentally leave exile behind and to look ahead. Although he still wanders the tracks of exile, its end and a next phase in his life are in sight, even if still obscure. This prospect gives him the necessary strength to break away from the fetters of memory. A focus on the present dominates the notion of time in the seafarer’s world: it is a *longung* (47) he feels *nu* (33, 58) that controls him and influences his view of the past.

Besides this significance of the present, the seafarer, in contrast to the wanderer, is far from being blind to progress when he describes how with the upcoming spring “woruld onnetedð” (49, “the world hastens on”) and is then followed by the already announced *sumer* (54).¹⁵ However, these symptoms of progress do not have a positive meaning in his worldview, as they remind him of his own mortality. The general restriction of a man’s life is hinted at in *The Wanderer*, but described with much detail in *The Seafarer* by reference to the process of aging: “monna gehwylc geond middangeard ... ealdað ond searað” (89–90, “every man throughout the middle-earth ... grows old and withers”) and when “ylde him on faredð” his “onsyn blacað” (91, “old age happens to him” his “face grows pale”) until eventually his “feorg losað” (94, “soul escapes”). The awareness of personal mortality is indicative of an overall notion of the finiteness of life and therefore stands in clear contrast to the infinite temporal continuum in the wanderer’s narration. Moreover, the seafarer assumes that events in life follow a scheduled, yet unpredictable order, because

¹⁴ 19–20, “Hwilum ylfete song dyde ic me to gomene” (“At times I took swansong for my pleasure”).

¹⁵ Greenfield argues that the fact that all seasons are mentioned (winter, spring, and summer explicitly, and autumn implicitly by references to decay and aging) constitutes a strong evidence for the sequential structure of time in the poem (“Sylf, Seasons” 208).

Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær his tid gegang, to tweon weorþeð:
 adl oþþe ylðo oþþe ecg-hete. (68–70)¹⁶

A last aspect that constitutes the seafarer's notion of time is the knowledge about a possible life of *ece eadignes* (120, “lasting happiness”) in eternity that will last “awa to ealdre” (79, “for evermore”). He knows that after exile there is another, probably better life lying in front of him, a goal to have in mind that might be the cause for his ability to look ahead and the ease with which he leaves the past behind. We may conclude that in *The Seafarer*, the theme of present—as a preparation for the future—outweighs that of past, and that memories of former joys also play a role here, but are explicitly classified as components of the past, allowing the speaker to concentrate on his dealing with the present. The linear structure of time explicitly aims at arriving in the heavenly home, while acknowledging that life on earth may not take one there in a straight line but may be interrupted or unexpectedly diverted.

Life on Earth

After an analysis of their personalities, I will now demonstrate that the seafarer and the wanderer were born and raised in an almost identical cultural environment. Their lifestyle was that of warriors in a heroic society, full of prosperity, entertainment, and abundant luxuries. This society taught them fundamental heroic virtues, some of which become objects of reflection in their exile. This section will outline this culture and the heroic virtues it comprises before discussing the relevance their cultural background still has in the exiles' present lives. With the idea of a physical and spiritual journey in mind, the following pages illustrate the starting point of this journey, providing an answer to the question where the exiles come from.

Heroic Community

In the heroic community, the mead-hall as a place to perform the social practice of mead-drinking is of central importance, with regard to which Green designates “the function of the hall as container and boundary of human activity ... and [as] the symbol of the social order” (510). Although the wanderer plays rather a passive role in the lyric present, he recalls his active participation in the social domain. The memory leads him to bewail its loss: *seledreorig*, he travels in search of a *sinces brytta* (25, “sorrowful for [lack of] a hall”; “dispenser of treasure”). The constantly

¹⁶ “Always one of three things happen before his time is to come, becomes a matter of uncertainty: disease or age or sword-hate.”

recurring image of the *meodubeall* (27; 78 *winsalo*) haunts his memory.¹⁷ Mead-hall culture formed an integral component of the seafarer's life as well, although his account of it is less definite. He describes the archetypal landsman as “se þe ah lifes wyn / gebiden in burgum, bealo-siþa hwon, / wlonc ond wingal” (27–29a, “he who has spent his life in towns, endured few misfortunes, proud and flushed with wine”). Despite the general tone of this account of the common life, it can easily be read as one of his own life, too, because his mind is full of vivid recollections of *bleabtora wera* (21, “laughter of men”) and *medodrinca* (22, “mead-drinking”), pleasures he now looks for in vain. Prior to their departure, the warriors found joy in mead, the harp, and women (*Sf* 44–45; *Wd* 34–36). Taken together, these feasting images “imply warmth and hope for the exile who sees only his narrow predicament as one capable of remedy in another place, another time” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 101).

An equally important element of their socialisation was wealth. The wanderer contrasts the paths of exile to his former existence in his observation that those are neither *wunden gold* (32, “wound gold”) nor *foldan blæd* (33, “the prosperity of the land”). In the seafarer's culture, it seems to have been common practice to use riches in an effort to procure God's favour for those who have passed away:

þeah þe græf wille golde stregan
 broþor his geborenum, byrgan be deadum
 maþmum mislicum þæt hine mid wille,
 ne mæg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful
 gold to geoce for Godes egsan. (*Sf* 97–101)¹⁸

His familiarity with this custom is overshadowed by his now irrevocable certainty about its vanity. Treasures served not just as funerary objects but also formed part of an important social custom amongst the members of heroic societies. Irving argues that “to the Germanic mind, what binds such a community together is the exchange of material wealth, the gold and silver” (155). This ritual is recalled in our poems as *bringþege* (*Sf* 44, “ring-receiving”) or *sinþege* (*Wd* 34, “treasure-receiving”), along with its significance for the reproduction of loyal bonds between lord and retainer. In terms of spatially locating oneself, setting off for exile means stepping out of the protective boundaries of the hall and leaving behind all known sources of orientation. Given that the heroic culture defined every aspect of their former life, it is hardly surprising that the speakers now sink into deep mourning and melancholy when “the fall of princes, the ruin of courts

¹⁷ See Hume's article “The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry” for a comprehensive account of the social meaning of the hall in Anglo-Saxon literature; she would even go so far as to suggest a reading of the exile as a form of *anti-hall*.

¹⁸ “Although a brother may want to strew gold in the grave of his born brother, bury by the dead various treasures that he wants with him, he cannot give gold to the soul full of sins as a help before the wrath of God.”

and the dispersal of the *comitatus*” are to be read as “the most potent symbols for the mutability of worldly glory” (Stanley 463). In addition, the detailed commentaries on heroic life serve to increase, by means of contrast, the effectiveness of the image of present misery.

Heroic Virtues

Apart from being trained how to feast and drink like a warrior, their culture has given the wanderer and the seafarer the fundamental virtues that guide the everyday behaviour of the *modge maguþegnas* (*Wd* 62, “bold young retainers”) and constitute a code of heroic conduct that is still recognisable in their current behaviour. The virtue of emotional control, for instance, is perfectly illustrated in a statement by the wanderer:

Ic to soþe wat
 þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þeaw,
 þæt he his ferð-locan fæste binde,
 healde his hord-cofan, hycge swa he wille. (11b–14)¹⁹

The ability, if not duty, to always keep emotions under full control was important in order to maintain a reputation, “forþon dom-georne dreorigne oft / in hyra breost-cofan bindað fæste” (*Wd* 17–18)²⁰—which is reflected in the wanderer’s behaviour: “swa ic mod-sefan minne sceolde ... feterum sælan” (19–21).²¹ Neville observes that “the binding is performed by the individual, not upon him”; against a backdrop of larger forces outside his control, he “maintains himself through the exercise of control over his mind—a limited kind of power, but still valuable” (Neville 113). For a profound interpretation of this act, Malcom Godden’s observation that “the Anglo-Saxons typically figured emotions as acts of personal volition” (Klein 121) is indispensable. Generally speaking, “the self-discipline of the isolated individual” is an expression of what “in the context of heroic poetry are the fundamental human virtues: courage and open-eyed resistance to the irresistible forces of the world” (Irving 163). The disintegrating world around the exile hardly provides any orientation, so that he willingly recalls the rules that guided his past life (Irving 160). Even though the wanderer might proceed on his journey in a physical sense, he remains mentally at his starting point and thereby inhibits his overall progress.

The seafarer gives a comparable account of emotional control, yet it cannot be said with certainty whether he had already internalised this rule from the beginning, or whether he only comes to acknowledge its validity during exile. He claims:

¹⁹ “I truly know that it is a noble custom in a man to firmly bind his soul’s enclosure, confine his heart, think what he may.”

²⁰ “Because the ambitious ones often bind dreariness firmly in their breast-chamber.”

²¹ “Thus I had to restrain my spirit with fetters.”

Stieran mon sceal strongum mode ond þæt on stapelum healdan,
 ond gewis werum, wisum clæne;
 scyle monna gehwylc mid gemete healdan
 wiþ leofne lufan ond wið laþne bealo. (109–12)²²

Aside from keeping composure, showing loyalty was also crucial in the heroic community. The wanderer's dream of an encounter with his master depicts a ritualistic exchange of loyalty for protection, in which he "his mon-dryhten / clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge / honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær / in gear-dagum gief-stolas breac" (41b–44).²³

The seafarer states that in order to be remembered after death, one has to prove one's courage in brave deeds to earn the praise of those one has left behind; it is in this way that the forefathers "mærþa gefremedon" (84, "achieved glory"). While bravery probably also plays a role in the wanderer's community, it is the seafarer who explicitly makes it a subject of discussion when he states that "eorla gehwam æfter-cwependra / lof lifgendra last-worda betst" (72–73),²⁴ a reputation one earns through deeds on earth against enemies secular or spiritual (72–80). In summary, emotional self-discipline, loyalty, courage in brave deeds and temperance in speech were the central virtues in the heroic communities of the wanderer and the seafarer.

Man in Transition

On their journey, the individuals characterised in the above pages not only have to locate themselves in time, but also in space. The locus of exile is characterised first and foremost by "physical and psychological alienation from the heroic hall"; it "is figured as a loss of place and consignment to perpetual movement" (Klein 115). Exile is thus conceptualised at once as a place in the factual sense and as a loss of place in a more symbolic sense. In this section I will analyse how exile is presented in the poems, focusing on the individual's response and the function of exile in the overall context of the journey.

Representations of Exile

Greenfield provides a comprehensive typology of the exile theme in Anglo-Saxon literature, identifying "four aspects or concomitants of the exile state" (*Hero and Exile* 126). I will deploy his categorisation here in order to outline the representation

²² "A man must steer with a strong mind and keep that in fixed condition, true to his pledges, clean in his manners; each man should keep in proportion love for his friend and malice towards the hated."

²³ "Embraces and kisses his lord, and lays hands and head in his lap, as he at previously, in days of old, used to enjoy the thrones of grace."

²⁴ "The praise of the living spoken after him is every man's best reputation."

of exile in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* without having to elaborate on every detail given in the texts, and to prove that each poet draws on this traditionally formulaic expression of the theme in his work.

The first formative aspect is a “status of excommunication” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 126) that refers to the utter loneliness of the exiles, expressed not only in the abovementioned friendlessness, but also in the absolute silence perceived by the seafarer (*Sf* 18), which is only interrupted by occasional sounds of non-human nature. The second aspect can be considered an augmentation of the first, as it regards the “deprivation” of “properties rang[ing] from the physical ones of gold and land to abstract concepts of comforts and joy” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 126): the wanderer mourns the absence of gold and prosperity together with his being “eðle bidaled” (20, “bereft of a home”), and the seafarer laments how he wanders “wine-mægum bidroren” (16, “deprived of loving kinsmen”). The third concomitant of exile describes the interior condition of the individual, more precisely his “state of mind” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 128). In the case of the wanderer, formulaic expression for his sorrow is to be found in terms such as *earnmcearig* (*Wd* 20), *wintercearig* (24) and *seledreorig* (25); emotional suffering in exile is traditionally referred to by a combination of compounds with *-cearig*, *-dreorig* or *-werig* (*Sf* 29), and more periphrastic figures such as “beoð þy hefigran heortan benne” (*Wd* 49, “the wounds of his heart are the heavier for it”). Ultimately, the “movement in or into exile” forms the last component of the formulaic tradition, which can be further subdivided into five “major categories” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 128). As was the case with all previous aspects, these subcategories recur in the poems. “A sense of direction away from the ‘homeland’,” (128) the first step of this progress, emerges in the wanderer’s being “freo-mægum feor” (21, “far from kinsmen”) and even more clearly in the seafarer’s compulsion to “on flod-wegas feor gewitan” (52, “depart away on waterways”), while *gewitan*, together with *bean streamas* (34), at the same time exemplifies the second subcategory, the “departure or initiative movement into exile” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 128). This departure is temporally and spatially expanded into an “initiative-continuative movement” (128), as for instance when the wanderer “longe sceolde wadan wræclastas” (3b–5a) and the seafarer’s “mod-sefa ... ofer hwæles epel hweorfeð wide” (59–60, “spirit wanders widely in the realm of the whale”). A yet further expansion of the movement is indicated by the fourth subcategory, the “endurance of hardships” (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 129) the exiles have to withstand in their abode, while they either *wadan* (*Wd* 5), *stondan* (*Wd* 97), *wunian* (*Sf* 15) or *leggan* (57) in “exile-tracks,” a term whose frequent occurrence forms a leitmotiv in both narrations (*Wd* 5, 33, 97; *Sf* 15, 57). The final part of this generic movement is the “seeking” of its overall goal (Greenfield, *Hero and Exile* 129), which is perfectly expressed in the seafarer’s question “hwær we ham agen” (117).

Interpretations of Exile

Now that it has been sufficiently demonstrated that both poems represent the exile-theme in full compliance with the formulaic tradition identified by Greenfield, its meaning and function for the individual will constitute the second analytical step.

Both speakers are exposed to a threatening snowstorm, in the course of which “hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged” (*Wd* 48, “hoar-frost and snow, mixed with hail”) aggravate their plight on the *isceald sæ* (*Sf* 14, “ice-cold sea”), a weather that constantly “provides the impetus for [each] speaker’s recognition of his personal mortality” (Greenfield, “Sylf, Seasons” 208). Aside from the fact that the “imagery of frozenness and barrenness” (Holton 210) stands in marked contrast to the warmth of the hall, it also symbolises the general sterility of earth, so that the *corna caldast* (*Sf* 33, “coldest of grains”) of the hailstorm can be interpreted as “a conscious inversion of the fecundity of Paradise” (Holton 210) brought out in contrast with the observation “bearwas blostmum nimað” (48, “the groves move into blossom”) in the following passage.

The surrounding water is a concept both characters mention repeatedly, never without a remark on its paralysing coldness, for the wanderer complains of the *brimceald sæ* (4) and its *wapuma gebind* (24, “binding of waves”), and the seafarer emphasises the iciness of the waves (14, 19). The temperature not only freezes the landscape, but also impedes the seafarer’s bodily functions: he laments how “calde geprungun. / Fruron mine fet, forste gebunden, / caldum clommu” (8b–10a).²⁵ The part of the body most important for forward movement is bound by fetters of frost, to the effect that the natural world around him literally holds him prisoner. It is unclear who or what really controls his movement here, as it is rather the “atol yþa gewealc” (6, “horrid tossing of waves”) than the seafarer’s own effort that determines the direction and speed of his odyssey—the forces of nature prevail over his self-determination simply by impairing his physical abilities. This bitter struggle against the destructive waves of the ocean is further complicated by an all-surrounding darkness evidenced in the tautology “nap nihtscua” (*Sf* 31a, “the shades of the night grew dark”; *Wd* 104). I suggest an interpretation of this image of cloudiness as an allusion to the clouded minds of the exiles, which can only be enlightened in the course of time with the growing insight that is only to be gained through the wisdom of experience.

Besides all these causes of misery, it is their social isolation that especially gnaws at the men, yet at the same time it constitutes the one critical aspect of their experience that impels their progress and prompts them to leave the past behind. The absence of lord and kinsmen, or rather that of any other human being at all, is referenced in a way that is of particular interest for the analysis here due to a remarkable structural congruence. Each of them bemoans a lack of comfort:

²⁵ “Oppressed by coldness were my feet, bound by frost, by cold fetters.”

hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte

...

mec freondleasne frefran wolde. (*Wd* 26–28)²⁶

nænig hleo-mæga

fea-scaeftig ferhð frefran meahte. (*Sf* 25b–26)²⁷

The perceived scale of suffering constantly increases because there “nis nu cwicra nan” (*Wd* 9) with whom to share the own sorrow. The fact that each exile considers the idea of openly voicing his distress shows on the one hand that the misery has reached a dimension where it is impossible to bear it all alone any longer, on the other hand that the exiles start to question the validity of heroic values outside of heroic societies. As they realise that to disguise thoughts and emotions is of no help anymore, they start to detach themselves from the behavioural bonds that tie them to the past and are finally able to advance in the spiritual sense, too. Because comfort cannot be found in kinsmen, the speakers develop a motivation to seek it elsewhere. The wanderer is stuck in a repetitive cycle of mourning that requires effective strategies of coping in order not to perish under its threat. His “sorg bið geniwad” (50, “sorrow is renewed”) again and again and he claims that no one who has not gone through an experience like his will ever understand “hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan” (30, “how cruel is sorrow as company”). I argue that his personal strategy of coping can be discerned between the lines of the poem as a whole, a strategy that can be described as entering into a dialogue with God, whom the wanderer believes will eventually answer his constant lamentations. Even though he is aware of the importance of not talking about feelings, he has by now realised the insignificance of this principle—in exile there is nobody to notice whether he *asæcgð* (11) or *bindeð* (18) his heart, except for God, who will reward only those who actively seek for mercy.

With consideration of all the imagery mentioned above, “its distinctive combination of emotional, physical and social stress produces a vivid and pathetic picture of the Anglo-Saxon exile” (Shippey 56). The highly effective multi-layered challenge of exile demands “the ability to negotiate his environment—physically, psychologically, and intellectually—[which] is figured as a crucial component of the exile’s spiritual awakening” as part of which “the hardships of the natural world function as educative tools” (Klein 118). The turbulent ocean is the place where this spiritual awakening takes place, the tossing waves initially “indicate the spiritually lost condition” (Holton 210) of the once heroic warrior, with “the chaos of the sea [being] a metaphor for lack of grace” (214). Yet it turns out that the sea has further significance for the physical and spiritual journey of the exiles, because “transcendentally it has been endowed with a far more inspiring notion:

²⁶ “Where I might find one far or near who would comfort my friendless self.”

²⁷ “Not any protection of kinsmen could comfort the destitute soul.”

the passage to heavenly life” (214). The almost unbearable suffering on the wintry ocean is thus necessary because “the progress by which the heavenly fatherland can be reached always starts with the experience of tribulation” (Diekstra 438), which is exactly the sort of experience that represents the only possible path to understanding. In treading this path, the wanderer and the seafarer have learned that in order to find comfort in heaven and to ensure a life in eternity, it is absolutely essential to turn away from those values and goods cherished on earth and to actively open up to the receiving of grace.

Having said this, it seems reasonable that the seafarer might have departed into exile on a voluntary basis, which is why at the end of this section I would like to make a final comment on three passages that provide sufficient evidence for this theory. The first one is the following:

Forþon cnyssað nu
 heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas,
 sealt-yþa gelac self cunnige;
 monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
 ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
 el-þeodigra eard gesece. (33b–38)²⁸

It is his *heort*, not his mind, together with his *modes lust* that urges him to travel. Desire is a sentiment of an inherently strong nature, and can be considered the opposite of reason. Although an exploration of dangerous waters also complies with the heroic notion of proving courage, and might therefore be a conscious decision to acquire renown, in this case it is clear that the seafarer is admonished by an intrinsic, more spiritual than merely social motivation, initiated by his preceding recognition of the sterility of earth. This impression is confirmed in his explanation that “hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað” (47, “he who puts out to sea experiences longing”), which is the reason why he personally focusses on the experience itself, the *yða genealc* (46), and tries not to be distracted by memory of former joys. In addition, he states that

ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
 sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
 flod-wegas feor gewitan. (50–52)²⁹

Right before this statement, the arrival of spring in the city is described, a phenomenon that for the seafarer is a reflection of the transitory character of the

²⁸ “Therefore now the thoughts of my heart urge me that I experience the ocean, the play of salt waves on my own; the desire of the mind each time admonishes the soul to make a journey, that I seek a foreign land far from here.”

²⁹ “All these things admonish the one keen of mind to make a journey, for the one who thinks thus to depart on far waterways.”

earth and therefore reason enough for him to follow his urge to explore the waterways for a possible alternative to the transitory life.

Finding a Home

The issue of transience and the way the individual comes to terms with it is distinctive of elegiac poems such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The transience of earth and life is a problem both speakers address and attempt to deal with in similar ways. One effect of its depiction is to highlight the emptiness and mutability of earth, another is the glorification of the heavenly kingdom owing to the marked contrast between earthly instability and divine stability. I will now outline the transience of earth and the way it affects the worldview and behaviour of the speakers in order to shed a light on the significance of heaven in the journey of the exiles, and on the way it represents a desirable aim.

Transience and Instability on Earth

The most straightforward reflection on transience is the extensive application of the *ubi sunt*-motif in *The Wanderer*:

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþpum-gyfa?
 Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon sele-dreamas?
 Eala beorht bune! Eala byrn-wiga!
 Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
 genap under niht-helm, swa heo no wære! (92–96)³⁰

It can be derived from this comprehensive account that decay does not spare anything, neither living beings nor material objects nor abstract concepts, but that everything constitutive of the heroic life is transient. The seafarer adds that “gedroren is þeos duguð eal” (86, “perished is all this nobility”; see also *Wd* 36, 79). In addition to its apparent reference to lifelessness, I argue that the verb *dreosan* (“fall, perish”) can also connote uselessness. In our poems, it appears to suggest both: past heroes have themselves ceased to be, but the joys of the hall have also lost their value for the characters.

In combination with statements like “dreamas sind gewitene” (*Sf* 86, “joys have departed”) and “wyn eal gedreas” (*Wd* 36), the following lines affirm how everything living, material and abstract is impermanent:

³⁰ “Where has the horse gone? Where has the man gone? Where has the treasure-giver gone? Where have the seats of feasts gone? Where are the hall-joys? Alas, the bright cups! Alas, the mailed warrior! Alas, the lord’s majesty! How that time departed, darkened under the night’s curtain, as if it had not been.”

Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
 her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,
 eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð! (*Wd* 108–10)³¹

Forþon me hatran sind
 Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
 læne on londe. (*Sf* 64b–66a)³²

The word *læne* reemphasises the transience of earthly life and stresses the spatial and temporal instability of these things. All float away, and therefore nothing is worth holding on to.

In the course of their experience, both speakers have gained the wisdom to recognise the barren emptiness of earth and of life, which enables them to turn away from “þis deade lif,” a life whose reality the wanderer ends up questioning with the words “swa heo no wære.” These statements reflect the speakers’ awareness of the inherent mortality of all existence. Moreover, they imply that earth is no lasting source of vital energy, because it is subject to the change of time due to its material nature, which is why energy and motivation have to be sought elsewhere. Besides, by questioning whether *seo þrag* has ever been an actual part of reality at all, the wanderer also asks whether all that constituted his former life was even true, unconsciously knowing that it was not, as real truth can be found in heaven only.

In response to the all-encompassing transience of which the exiles become increasingly aware, they choose to employ patience and endurance. It is therefore a combination of two central principles that constitutes their strategy of coping: on the one hand, they have internalised that patience is a virtue (see *Wd* 65, 70), a principle they now draw on even in total isolation from the society from which it derives; on the other hand, their experiences have taught them that endurance is the only possible way to positively increase one’s chance of survival. Even in isolation the wanderer does not scrutinise the importance of patience, a virtue that will pay off immediately after having borne the miseries of exile. Enduring can be understood as a form of acceptance here: the seafarer has realised that enduring the challenges of earthly life significantly enhances the probability of receiving comfort in heaven because God will have mercy on those who prove persistent in their faith. However, this facet of endurance is one none of them has been taught in his community, but learned by *yulf cunnian* during his experience.

³¹ “Here money is transient, here friend is transient, here man is transient, here kin is transient, all this earth’s frame loses its value!”

³² Translated in fn. 12 above.

Comfort and Security in Heaven

The wanderer has learned early on that a weary spirit and a troubled heart are not of help on the passage through exile (see 15–16), as both are effects of indulgence in false goods, in other words, redundant ballast to get rid of. In turn, one who “his treowe gehealdeþ” (112, “keeps his faith”) is much more likely to find the path to heaven. It is therefore crucial not to cling to earthly goods, but to let them go and to keep the faith instead. Though it remains unclear until the very last lines what exactly the wanderer and the seafarer are searching for, there are instances that allow for educated guesses. The wanderer “sohte sinces bryttan” (25), which in view of his lamentations over the death of his former lord suggests the search for a new “treasure-giver,” yet the possibility of translating *brytta* as Lord with a capital L, indicative then of a search for God, cannot be ruled out. The seafarer’s search for *elþeodigra eard* (38) even transgresses “eorþan sceatas” (61, “the corners of the earth”), and since the translation here is similarly ambiguous, “foreign land” can easily be read as an allusion to heaven as well, the more so since *eard* strongly connotes a homeland (Cameron et al. s.v. *eard*, sense 1.a). Both of them are desperate for comfort and already know that they probably will not find it on earth anymore, because everything that once served as a source of *frofor* is either floating away or gone already. By method of elimination, consolation can only be found where stability is to be found, and that is in heaven. The earthly instability is the consequence of the citizens’ addiction with false goods and indulgence in sinful pleasures, all of which arouses *meotudes egsa* (108, “the anger of the Creator”). Their behaviour imparts ingratitude towards God’s creation, so that He punishes their ignorance inasmuch as he “seo molde oncyrreð” (*Sf* 103, “turns the earth aside”), in the course of which he “ypde swa þisne eard-gearð” (*Wd* 85, “has devastated this dwelling place”) until “eall þisse worulde wela weste stondeð” (*Wd* 73, “the wealth of all this world stands waste”). God is both the initiator of destruction and the creator of stability. He has in the same way “gestapelade stiþe grundas, eorþan sceatas ond up-rodor” (*Sf* 104–05).³³ After this irreversible act of devastation, those who hold to a steadfast belief will be saved and eventually accepted into heaven, because “eadig bið se þe eaþ-mod leofaþ; cymeð him seo ar of heofonum, / meotod him þæt mod gestapelað forþon he in his meahte gelyfeð” (*Sf* 107–08).³⁴ The seafarer would not make such an affirmation if he did not believe it to be true. In the end, the wanderer, too, arrives spiritually and factually at a point where he can finally confess that “wel bið þam þe him are seceð, / frofre to Fæder on heofonum þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð” (*Wd* 114–15).³⁵

³³ “Established firm grounds, the corners of the earth, and the sky.”

³⁴ “Blessed is the one who lives humbly; to him comes the mercy of heaven, the Creator restores in him the spirit, because he believes in his might.”

³⁵ “It will be well for the one who seeks mercy, comfort in the Father in heaven, where all stability stands for us.”

Both exiles are now searching for the security of a heavenly home. The narration of the wanderer begins with one who “often experiences mercy,” and it ends with the realisation that those who actively seek mercy will in fact receive it and be rewarded with the consolation in God. Even though it is not evident in the beginning, the wanderer has striven for “fæstnung on heofonum” all along, and the same holds true for the seafarer, who even set out to his journey of his own accord, with the clear aim of “foreign land” in mind. The purpose of their entire transition from earth over exile into heaven is summed up in the seafarer’s conclusion:

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
 ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
 ond we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten
 in þa ecan eadignesse
 þær is lif gelong in lufan Dryhtnes,
 hyht in heofonum. (117–22a)³⁶

The lesson that *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* convey through the example of the exile is that “in spite of misfortunes and hardships, one should not lose hope, but remain faithful to God: in Heaven one finds the security one cannot find on earth” (Timmer 221).

A Matter of Fate?

When reading the poems, I perceived a certain tension between each individual’s attempt to self-determination and its factual impossibility within the unalterable course of events ordered by Fate, which is why I will now delineate the underlying concept of Fate in the poems in order to figure out what this tension consists in. Thereby I will focus on *The Wanderer*, since Fate is less prominent in *The Seafarer*.

The first time *nyrd* is mentioned is in “wyrð bið ful aræd” (5), a phrase whose proper translation still causes much disagreement.³⁷ I chose a rather common version by translating it as “Fate is fully resolute,” denoting a meaning of determination and inalterability at the same time.³⁸ No matter which exact translation the reader decides on, what all of them have in common is an emphasis on man’s lot on earth being determined (*aræd*) from the very beginning by a higher power that lies beyond his range of influence, and that there is no way to elude this lot.

Line 15 describes the inescapability of Fate in detail: “ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstondan, / ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman,”³⁹ clarifying that nobody,

³⁶ Translated in fn. 13 above.

³⁷ See Griffith, “Does *nyrd* mean ‘Fate?’”

³⁸ I find my decision supported by Timmer’s suggestion to read *aræd* as the past participle of *arædan*, “to appoint/ determine” (221).

³⁹ “The one weary in spirit cannot withstand Fate, nor can the troubled heart provide help.”

but especially not those with weary minds or troubled hearts, can obstruct or influence the course of events because the operations of Fate stand above what is happening on earth and are uncoupled from it. Here the importance of self-discipline is once again underlined as a necessary requirement for self-determination, which in turn is necessary in order not to break in under the struggle with Fate. It is worth considering the seafarer now, who in line 109 starts to elaborate on the immense importance of self-control and steadfastness. As shown above, the wanderer really strives for self-discipline, but that he at least partly reveals his feelings in the end, because their exposure will bring him closer to God, poses the question in how far Fate and God are connected. I understand both as two self-contained entities that are still closely linked without being synonyms.⁴⁰ The ultimate struggle is thus not to withstand Fate—which is futile—but to find the right balance and to know when and to what extent it is appropriate to disclose one's inner self without being categorised as weary spirit. Only those who have found this balance are truly wise.

Line 100 shows on the one hand that *wyrð* is presented in the poem as the instrument of God's will executing the divinely imposed destruction;⁴¹ on the other hand, the attribute *mare* implies that to accept the might of Fate is to accept the will of God and thereby honour him, all in all an expression of true wisdom again. A last reference to *wyrð* appears in line 106: "eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice; / onwendeð wyrða gesceaft woruld under heofonum" (106–07).⁴² This passage reveals the genuine function of Fate: to challenge man's willpower and his fortitude. Even though withstanding Fate is evidence of mental and physical strength, the reward of this effort is not the manipulability of the course of life. The real challenge is to endure transience and inalterability long enough to learn that the reward awaits the patient ones in heaven, and "the general idea expressed by these lines seems to be that the solitary one, the exile, lives to see grace, Mercy of God, although he has to undergo all kinds of troubles. He cannot avoid these troubles, for his lot is appointed by God" (Timmer 221). In addition, the effectiveness of this passage is heightened by the fact that it is preceded by considerations about *lanc*: if everything one holds dear will float away, will one give way at the sight of its destruction, or stay strong-minded in the service of God? Fate challenges fortitude and patience. I would like to conclude by returning once more to the seafarer and repeat his only explicit reference to Fate, summing up all that I derived from the single references in the wanderer's narration: "wyrð biþ swiþre, / meotud meahtriga þonne ænges monnes gehygd" (115b–16).⁴³

⁴⁰ Since a profound analysis of the concept of Fate is not the primary aim and would exceed the framework of this paper, I would like to leave it at this short account.

⁴¹ *Wyrð* functions as the subject of a long verse describing the extent of the devastation of the earth.

⁴² "All is irksome in the earthly kingdom; the operations of Fate change the world under the heavens."

⁴³ "Fate is stronger, the Creator is mightier than any man's thought."

Conclusion

The speakers in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* set out on their journeys as two quite different personalities, but both are significantly influenced in their development by external conditions in their state of mind, and thus in their construction of identity, not least because the untamed forces of nature exercise a restricting power over their personal agency. Although they differ in the way they reflect upon and assess their current situation, both of them, in their attempt to cope with the challenges of exile, grow in experience and ultimately gain true wisdom.

Their relation to time is complicated, and their past in the heroic community plays an important role for both men. Firstly, because the contrast to it makes it even harder to bear the present, secondly, because its heroic code of conduct still functions as behavioural orientation, but, thirdly, at the same time symbolises a literal burden from which the exiles have to free themselves in order to advance on their journey.

Exile reminds the wanderer and the seafarer of the finitude of life, and has paralysing effects on them that evolve into a constant power struggle about life and death. At the same time, it triggers a change of attitude towards their former lives and allows them to open up to God. Fate is likely the force that poses the manifold challenges of exile to them in order to test their fortitude. As they master these challenges, they undergo a process of maturation at the end of which they are able to recognise heaven as a source of comfort, and divine consolation as the only good of true value.

In the course of this process, the confrontation with transience constitutes the main lesson the exiles learn, as it emphasises earthly instability and thereby glorifies heavenly stability, making heaven the only desirable aim. After all, heaven is the “home” both the seafarer and the wanderer sought on their journey through exile, a home only open to those who, when physically weakened, remain spiritually strong.

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