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Third Place Winner

Loss, Separation and Struggle: Self-Imposed Exile in *The Wanderer*

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Open Education Statement:

At a farm show in Plymouth in 1906 Francis Galton, half-cousin of Charles Darwin, determined that the average guess made by visitors of an ox's weight was more accurate (within 1%) than expert beef-ranchers. Many people have noticed since then that the aggregate of people's perspectives can lead to results that differ from that of either consensus or expert opinion. I believe that individuals always bring something to the table that is often missed in traditional knowledge gathering, and that we can come to better solutions when we involve everyone.

I am currently studying medieval literature. History can expand our ideas of democracy. We are decent at a horizontal democracy by giving a vote to everyone living in Canada. But what about considering the voices of all time – a vertical democracy through time? Either way, participatory democracy today requires informed education, and the best educations are one where students are involved in the learning process, making it their own.

When I have a question (my papers always begin with one), my first introduction to a topic is usually open source material online. For example, in finding a relevant translation of the Old English poem The Wanderer (see the attached paper), I found some of the most insightful work done by Sean Miller on anglo-saxon.net, whose innovative line-by-line translation allowed me to change the annotations to see how the translation into modern English was being made, helping me as a I am just beginning to learn the language.

My all-time favourite (and most used) institution is the public library. It gives access to learning and other resources, as well as control over education. It also works in another way, by curbing our impulse to buy new things for ourselves. Public libraries demonstrate what sharing might look like in other areas. For example, when I lived in Geneva for only a year while growing up, my siblings and I made good use of a toy-library. We would enjoy a game for a week, then, when we grew tired of it, we passed it on to another child. What if the idea of the public library expanded to all areas of our lives?

Part of my interest in history has led me to learn some cartography. Langara's GIS class uses two phenomenal open source GIS software: GRASS GIS and QGIS. These allowed me to learn GIS not only within the context of the school institution (which traditionally pays the hefty subscription service for exclusive use of industry software, such as Esri's ArcGIS). The open-source GIS we used is run with Python (which I also first dipped into with free online learning tools), and so when we ran into issues our teacher was able to problem solve on the spot, rather than rely on external bug fixes, pointing to how open sourced might open vast possibilities for adaption in the many different educational contexts around the world. When things aren't straight forward, there is always a very helpful online community which has the added benefit of having the latest information on a particular topic.

I think open education is an important part of where education is moving, and definitely makes education more democratic.

Loss, Separation and Struggle: Self-Imposed Exile in *The Wanderer*

by Simeon Faehndrich

> *If pilgrimage was a voyage to the center*
> *and exile a voyage to the margins,*
> *those who journeyed sometimes saw*
> *that as they changed places,*
> *places changed.*
> – Allen J. Frantzen

The Anglo Saxon poem *The Wanderer* describes the hardships faced by a lone exile in the north, and the eventual wisdom gained upon reflection on the transience of all earthly things. The Icelandic *Saga of Burnt Njal* preserves a chilling sentence: "So it shall be also, […] I say that in this suit he ought to be made a guilty man, an outlaw, not to be fed, not to be forwarded, not to be helped or harbored in any need. I say that all his goods are forfeited". [1] Open up the scene with Tacitus' description that the "inclemency of the seasons never relents" in the Germanic lands, and a small sense of the devastation of exile is provided.[2] Old English poetry is full of that terror; Grendel is characterized as one who lives in "an obscure land" and "trods the exile's path" (ll. 1345-61a),[3] or when Beowulf is killed, the implications of the loss of a lord are expressed in an unimaginably haunting passage:

> A Geat woman too sang out in grief;
> with hair bound up, she unburdened herself
> of her worst fears, a wild litany
> of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
> enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,
> slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke. (ll. 3150-3155)

The Old English term *wræcca* (exile) has given the present day English word "wretch".[4] So why would anyone wish to commit themselves to exile voluntarily?

The Wanderer poet's characterization of the speaker, from passive object to subject with volition, signals an increased acceptance of the speaker's responsibility for personal fate. In the opening lines the speaker is presented: "Often the solitary one / Finds [*gebideð*] grace [*are*] for

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[1] René A Wormser, *The Story of Law and the Men Who Made It: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 155.
[2] Wormser, 153.
[3] "Beowulf," trans. Dr. Aaron K. Hostetter, *Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project*. February 2019. Accessed March 2019. https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/beowulf/; all futher Beowulf quotations are taken from Seamus Heaney's translation.
[4] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "wretch," accessed March 2019, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.langara.bc.ca/view/Entry/230654?rskey=6GZh93&result=1#eid. The OED notes the remarkable contrast in development to the present German word *Recke*, meaning warrior or hero. Of some interest to the present study is the path through Old High German, when *reccheo* meant exile, adventurer, knight errant.

himself, // the mercy [*miltse*] of the Lord" (ll. 1-2a).[5] Not the typical image one thinks of when one has lost everything, but notably figured as a passive receiver to what is given. The verb "*gebideð*" is alternatively translated as "experiences", perhaps better illustrating the wanderer's helplessness.[6] This then is transformed by the concluding lines: "It is better for the one that seeks mercy [are]…" (l. 114b), indicating a new level of control over the situation. The former passiveness is supported by evocative lines such as: "those men *cut down* / by the might of spears // *liege to fate*, / *fashioned for slaughter*" (Moul, ll. 100-101, emphasis added). The wanderer is just as much in exile by the close of the poem, but now an exile with a purpose, a desire. He will attempt to extricate himself from the fate of decay by will power.

Another important development is the increased distance formulated between the speaker and the hold of his departed home-culture. Despite the strong pull of recurring images of feasting and his former lord (gold-friend), the poet is able to write: "the path of exile holds him, / not at all twisted gold, // a frozen spirit, / not the bounty of the earth" (ll. 33-34). The trappings of his culture slowly exert less and less pull on the figure of the wanderer. This demonstrates that the initial exile (by the death of his lord), is overtaken by another exile, self-imposed, in which gold and all its associations such as renown are forsaken.

One of the fascinating aspects of this poem is how it sets up some facet of the wanderer's culture, and then transgresses it. This is of particular importance in the question of the wanderer voicing his sufferings. Early on the speaker acknowledges: "I know it truly, // that it is in men / a noble custom, // that one should keep secure / his spirit-chest [mind], // guard his treasure-chamber [thoughts], / think as he wishes" (ll. 11b-14). And reasserts this way of life in lines 17-18 (for glory seekers), 66 (for the wise), and 70-72 (for men generally). Despite this prohibition, every time the poet intervenes to weigh in on the narrative, the speaker is described as speaking (ll. 6-7, 88-91, and 111). In fact, the very act of reciting this poem is very much a grumbling lamentation. In line 111, though, it is specified that the wanderer speaks "in his mind," allowing for some tension to be established between maintaining a stoic silence and falling into loud emotional complaining.

In this way the wanderer allows for the foundations of Nordic culture to be carefully thought through. He can see the value to a strong will in remaining calm in the face of trouble, and similarly keeping peace while others might boast in self-praise. In contrast, he also sees remedy in recounting suffering. Having seen both sides of his culture he develops a synthesis, contemplating what he has undergone. Recounting his history of loss in the poem is firstly, a creation of a path to understanding, wisdom of a bigger picture of his particular, but also an ownership of what has come and what will come to pass.

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[5] A. J. Bliss and T. P. Dunning, eds , The Wanderer (London: Methuen & Co, 1969), 82. My interpretation relies on Bliss & Dunning's edition and commentary, Sean Miller's translation (all quotations are his rendering unless otherwise specified), as well as occasionally Phil Barthram's oldenglishtranslator.co.uk. Bliss & Dunning read the poem as having the poet only intervene at ll. 6-7, 88-91, and 111; the rest of the poem the wanderer is the speaker.
[6] Moul translates to "waiting". "The Wanderer [Poem]," trans. Keith Moul. *The Sewanee Review* 81, no. 3 (1973), Accessed February 2019, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.langara.bc.ca/stable/27542747, 629.

The makings of a self-imposed exile are all there: a voluntary subject who takes direct control of how he will no longer participate in a former culture. Having taken responsibility for his situation, the wanderer changes the exile's nature. It is by no means any easier to bear the physical realities of being removed from his clan, but he no longer takes his identity from his membership there. He is satisfied in an individual identity, thus making sense of the final line: "It is better for the one that seeks mercy, // consolation from the father in the heavens, / where, *for us*, all permanence rests" (ll. 114b-115, emphasis added). The phrase is occasionally rendered "for us *all*," which makes this line stand out to even greater effect. The problem is, if the speaker ends by turning to the audience, he is no longer truly an exile.[7] Patrick Cook suggests *The Wanderer*'s final phrase might more properly represent a "state of being", one where identity is complete without fall-back on membership.[8] The wanderer's cultural alienation leads to the creation of a novel identity, a voluntary exile. This incredible capacity to bend situations to his will is seen again in another interesting remark concerning the wanderer's final position: "where he sat apart in counsel" (l. 111b). Illustrated as seated, the speaker has eschewed the traditional options open to him, either a chronic drifter (standing) or lying down in death.[9] He has made exile his own.

Many scholars have looked at the Anglo-Saxon elegies with especial focus on the relationship between the Pagan and Christian elements so often mixed in Old English verse. For example, I. L. Gordon quotes C. W. Kennedy in seeing a basic structural duality in *The Wanderer*: "Conversion to the Christian faith may well have separated adventurous seafaring years from a later period of religious devotion".[10] This breakdown of the poem is overly simple, and avoids the obvious question of what kind of Christianity it was that forgot Christ.

A better analysis is to see a Christian poet, with a specific authorial intent. The poet conjures a warrior from his misty heritage of the Germanic *comitatus*, and creates a Pagan saint. What is meant is a hero who is fully from the historical fabric of the Anglo-Saxon past, but whose special sensitivity to the human condition and to the nature of the world around him has achieved some vaguely theistic understanding, without the later special revelation of the New Testament. As an exemplary parallel, Sulpitius Severus sees St Martin of Tours acting in a "Christian" spirit in the context of his Pagan upbringing, long before Christ appears to him.[11]

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[7] Some critics have suggested a metaphoric exile, where the speaker is in the cultural world, but not of it. This is not necessary; indeed to validate words a nobleman must have matching behaviour. As the Danish coast guard had replied to Beowulf's boasts: "Anyone with gumption / and a sharp mind will take the measure / of two things: what's said and what's done" (ll. 287b-289).

[8] Patrick Cook, "*Woriað þa Winsalo*: The Bonds of Exile in *The Wanderer,*" *Neophilologus* 80, no. 1 (1996) Accessed March 2019. doi:10.1007/bf00430024, 135.

[9] Cook, 135.

[10] C. W. Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry* (Oxford, 1943), p. 113. qtd. in I. L. Gordon, "Traditional Themes in The Wanderer and The Seafarer." *The Review of English Studies* 5, no. 17 (1954) Accessed March 2019. http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/stable/510874, 4.

[11] Sulpitius Severus, "The Life of St. Martin," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. trans. Alexander Roberts. Vol. 11. Second Series. New York, 1894. August 2005. Accessed March 2019. http://www.users.csbsju.edu/~eknuth/npnf2-11/sulpitiu/lifeofst.html#tp, Chpt. II-III.

Because the author of *The Wanderer* sees his faith as foundational, aspects of God's part in the world are assumed to be breaking through, and hintingly perceived by so-called heathens.[12]

The natural retort to the above argument is, yes there is no Christ, but the terms "creator" and "heaven" are mentioned several times. As introduction, a note on *wyrd* is required, which Bliss & Dunning translate as follows: "man's lot l. 5; destiny l. 100; course of events l. 15, (ordered) course of events l. 107".[13] Some critics have, perhaps mistakenly, contrasted *wyrd* to the more Christian elements, seeing parallels with the Classical Pagan Fate.[14] But if this Germanic word has even slight earlier heathen connotations, it is useful in understanding *metud* (creator l. 2), *scyppend* (creator l. 85), *fæder* (father l. 115), and *heofon* (heaven l. 115; sky l. 107) all normally seen as the Christian voice. Indeed these are used frequently in Christian context, but not monopolized by it. It can be suggested that the wise man of the poem is trying to express a search for something eternal. In keeping with a theme of earthly transience, he uses words of origin (creator, father) to get at something outside the realm of things which die. So also *heofon* is used in contrast to (and above) earthly mutability: "All is troublesome / in this earthly kingdom, // the turn of events [*wyrda*] changes [for the worse]/ the world under the heavens" (ll. 106-107). This seems to be in general in keeping with the Classical conception of the universe, where below the moon's orbit, nature is corrupt, and each higher sphere is purer.[15] In short, expressions of the stable and incorruptible are not necessarily Christian. The wanderer is grasping at some view of the world, not fully formulated, but one that would see its full expression in Christian terms. Bede allows one of King Edwin's (c. 586 – 633) chief men to speak the famous "This is how the present life of man, O king, seems to me" speech prior to that courts eventual conversion.[16] He describes man's life as a sparrow flying through a heated hall, beginning and ending in a dark unknowing. This view, supposedly Pagan, has definite ideas of what is and isn't known, but what might be understood if only the veil on either side of life were lifted. These secular observations pave a foundation upon which Christianity can be accepted, but are essentially pre-Christian.

So, the wanderer is adrift in a world no longer Norse-pagan, while not yet Christian. Finding no place for himself, the speaker has embraced exile as his only (non-)place in the world.[17] Had he been a Christian with Christ, his wanderings would have been a pilgrimage. Being without Christ, he is an exile.

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[12] Tolkien points out that in *Beowulf*, the Nordic giants are described by Hrothgar, in terms of the Old Testament accounts. Upon the author's faith and imagination, between the sagas and the scriptures, one is taken as closer the 'historical' source, and is given priority. See J. R. R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, ed. Daniel Donoghue (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 118, note 8. cf. *The Wanderer* ll. 85-87

[13] Bliss, 140; see also discussion 71-74.

[14] E.g. Cook 131-134, c.f. Bliss 71-74.

[15] For the medieval worldview see C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), throughout.

[16] Joseph Black, ed. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Concise Edition*, 2nd ed. Vol. A. (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2012), 44.

[17] Another element of the Anglo-Saxon history in Britain the author may have picked up on is the changed ties of loyalties in the wake of the mass Germanic migrations post Roman occupation. Wormser writes that "the Anglo-Saxon clan organization broke down in the confusion of nationalities during the invasion of England". The

Æthelwulf (r. 839-858), father of Alfred the Great, decided in 855 to make a pilgrimage to Rome. He arranged for two of his sons to take charge during this sabbatical, gave a tenth of his wealth to the people and went off to Rome. The Pope warmly received him there, thinking he was destitute, as all former Anglo-Saxon kings who had made their way to Rome had either retired there to die or were political exiles (the Pope's biographer writes: "he left all that he had, having lost his own kingdom"). But having had his fill, Æthelwulf returns home a year later, only to find his son refusing to return rulership.[18] This illustrates the fine line between concepts of exile and pilgrimage, but also how pilgrimage (and its novelty) in another context, another time is chosen exile, a voluntary banishment punishment.

In a later age the wanderer might simply have been a pilgrim, and the poem would have been titled *The Pilgrimer*. As is, he is an exile adrift, knowing he cannot return to his former life because it will not satisfy or last. Jon Furberg calls the Old English elegy speakers individualized and alienated, "the oldest solitaries in English literature".[19] The wanderer's choice is a triumph of the indomitable will of a hero. Indeed, a comparison with the likes of Holden Caulfield would be fitting. The Irish St. Columbanus' (543-615) establishment of remote retreats on the continent later became centers of busy pilgrimage.[20] He typifies the character who seeks the margins, taking no notice that this position will soon – but not yet – be the center. The wanderer moves to the outside, which is the movement of exile. But this locality on the margins would soon become the center, the place of pilgrimage. The author of *The Wanderer* has captured a truly astounding moment in the mind of the Anglo-Saxon individual.

Wanderer's exile is clearly due to the loss of his lord and kin: "mindful of hardships, // of fierce slaughters / and the downfall of kinsmen," (ll. 6b-7) yet may also stand in for what had happened in a wider cultural story. Wormser, 239; similarly Cook, 129.

[18] Joanna Story, "Francia and the Rise of Wessex," in *Carolingian Connections*: *Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750-870*, (London: Routledge, 2003), Accessed March 2019 https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.4324/9781315260860, 239-240; *Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes*, trans. Davis, 186 qtd. in Story, 139.

[19] Jon Furberg, *Anhaga*, (Vancouver: Smoking Lung Press, 2011), 13.

[20] Allen J. Frantzen, "Exile," in *Anglo-Saxon Keywords*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), Accessed March 2019. doi:10.1002/9781118255575, 95.

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