

**László Iliásics**

## **The Paradox of Context**

### **Wyrd, God and Progression Presented through *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer***

The aim of this paper is to resolve the paradoxical nature of the juxtaposition of Germanic pagan with Christian teachings and ideas in Old English elegies. First, the most relevant notions of religious encounter are discussed. Then, the notion of 'Wyrd,' the Germanic fate motif, shall be introduced. Subsequently, after giving a concise summary of the history and story of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, the paper deals with the narrative structure of each, then analysing their relevant parts in depth. The paper also elaborates on the phenomenon of 'progression.' The word is here used to refer to the shift in tone (from earthly to transcendent) which occurs to emphasise the importance of the new religion and is achieved by presenting Christian teachings as consolation for the exiled protagonists. In *The Wanderer*, the pagan retrospective view is exchanged for the eschatological, while in *The Seafarer* the development from a lament to sermon is what will be the means of this consolation.

### **Introduction**

Religion is a meaning-making enterprise that imposes a certain order on the chaos of the universe.<sup>1</sup> When two of these meet this coherence becomes questioned, therefore, to relieve this tension, the cultural codes need be altered to form one consistent system of meaning.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is unique for every instance of religious encoun-

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1. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz (London: Fontana Press, 1993 [1973]), pp. 87–125.

2. Lilla Kopár, *The Iconography of Viking-Age Stone Sculptures: Visual Evidence of Religious Accommodation in the Anglo-Scandinavian Communities of Northern England*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Szeged: University of Szeged, 2003), p. 142.

ter.<sup>3</sup> During the course of this essay I shall present this merging of religions in the case of the Anglo-Saxon community.<sup>4</sup> My main topic will be the position of “*Wyrd*” and the ‘God Almighty’ in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons, through two of the most well-known elegies of the *Exeter Book: The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The sheer fact that the teachings of the Christian Church and of Germanic paganism existed side-by-side is rather odd. This is the reason why the title of my paper includes the word “paradox,” for as the definition of paradox states it is “a statement which, though it appears self-contradictory, contains a basis of truth that reconciles the seeming opposites.”<sup>5</sup> In the course of this paper I will make an attempt to reveal that “basis of truth” and thus show how the two beliefs could coexist.

First, we must mention that the two supreme powers of these fundamentally different religions existed side-by-side in Old English poetry. They, however, were not mentioned on the same level (i.e. they were not equals), which we shall see most clearly through what I term ‘progression’ in the elegies. ‘Progression’ in this case will mean a shift from one world-view to another, to achieve reconciliation.

To understand why this shift was necessary, we must note that the adaptation or accommodation of religious elements into a religion is always motivated by some sort of discontent with the present religion.<sup>6</sup> In poetry this need for a change is depicted as being triggered by the futility of the world that is dying around the speakers.<sup>7</sup> As Germanic paganism was a dominantly worldly, community-centred world-view, as opposed to the world-rejecting, individualistic world-view of Christianity<sup>8</sup> it is not hard to imagine why the latter was more appealing to the lonely outcast of the elegies.

However, since the religion of one (not to mention a whole community) does not change overnight, the change needs to be gradual. Luckily – as W. A. Chaney has

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3. Kopár, p. 143.

4. Although we must bear in mind that the old form of paganism that merges into Christianity was a non-codified, non-centralised, and non-institutionalised religion (Kopár, p. 145). I shall only use the term ‘religion’ for this mass of beliefs and codes to make the discussion simpler.

5. Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, *Literary Terms: A Dictionary* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975), p. 173.

6. Kopár, p. 145.

7. Even though we suspect that in the case of the settled Scandinavian invaders the process was motivated by political and social pressure (Kopár, p. 145).

8. James C. Russel, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 176.

pointed out – the old religion provided so many parallelisms that the tribal culture could absorb the conquering God without disrupting many of its basic preconceptions;<sup>9</sup> therefore a violent conversion to the new religion was even unnecessary.

Baffling as it may seem, Chaney was right to say so. There are numerous parallels that can be drawn between Germanic and Christian mythology, which helped the Anglo-Saxons accommodate to Christianity. Lilla Kopár lists these and points out the overlap between biblical and Germanic myths.<sup>10</sup> These notions include the idea of the evil serpent in *Genesis* compared to the story of the Midgard Serpent, or Odin's death compared to the crucifixion of Christ. In these myths the emphasis simply shifts to a certain detail of the story (like Odin being hanged on a tree).

The integration of the native elements into the new religion was crucial, for this was the only way the natives could understand the new religion.<sup>11</sup> As Kopár also states certain forms of representation (she speaks mostly of visual forms) do not easily “go out of fashion,” rather they gain a new layer of interpretation to fit the new cultural context. In such a way they provide a sense of continuity.<sup>12</sup>

The notion that makes this possible is ‘indigenisation,’ which means that the universal Christian faith may be translated into the forms and symbols of any particular culture.<sup>13</sup> This process may take the form of ‘contextualization’ that is the integration of values, ideas, and teachings of the Church in the recipient culture, by the people of that culture<sup>14</sup> This is what we witness for instance in *The Dream of the Rood*, where Christ is depicted as the heroic warrior, who mounts the cross bravely, ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of others.<sup>15</sup>

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9. W. A. Chaney, “Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Harvard Theological review* LIII (1960), p. 209.

10. Kopár, pp. 164–65.

11. Helmer Ringgren, “The Problems of Syncretism,” in *Syncretism: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Cultural Contact, Meeting of Religions, Syncretism: Held at Åbo on the 8th–10th of September, 1966*, ed. Sven S. Hartman (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1969), 7–14, p. 12.

12. Kopár, p. 142.

13. Harvie M. Conn, “Indigenization,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, gen. ed. A. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland and Charles van Engen, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 481–82, p. 481.

14. Scott Moreau, “Inculturation,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* gen. ed. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland and Charles van Engen, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 475–76, p. 476.

15. We must note here that the term that is generally used to describe the process and result of the encounter of the two cultures is ‘syncretism.’ This word is now understood to mean

So, as we may suspect, this is why *Wyrd* was mentioned several times through the period. Before we may engage in the analysis, we must clarify what “*Wyrd*” (might have) meant for the Old English historical audience.<sup>16</sup>

In Old English mythology the word refers to ‘Fate,’ which is not merely the string of predestined events. *Wyrd* is rather a personification of a deity-like entity, something which is above the power of old Germanic gods. This was pointed out by G. V. Smithers,<sup>17</sup> who also claims here a parallel between *Wyrd* and the Old Norse Norns, who were the so-called weavers of Fate, the trio of goddesses, who controlled all the fates in the world, even that of gods, as mentioned above. *Wyrd* is often referred to in plural (*Wyrda*, *Wyrde*), which may support his argument.

What we surely know, however, is that *Wyrd* is a destructive force that carries away and sweeps away men in battle;<sup>18</sup> it is something stubborn (*The Wanderer*, l. 5b). *Wyrd* in Old English poetry is usually associated with death and disaster, as we can see in the first line of *Ruin*, where the poet exclaims: “Splendid is this masonry – *Wyrd*(s) destroyed it!”<sup>19</sup> (“*Wrætlic is þes wealstan – Wyrde gebræcon*,” l. 1). We also find another instance of it being displayed as a destructive force, such as in line 24, where we read “until *Wyrd* the mighty changed it”<sup>20</sup> (“*opþæt þæt onwende Wyrd seo swibe*”).

During my analysis I will treat *Wyrd* as an entity, which has no modern correspondent, thus cannot (and will not) be translated. In the process of analysing the poems I will only highlight instances, where the poet clearly refers to *Wyrd* (i.e. not merely to a course of events), and under that name.

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the mixture of two or more religions, where elements of one religious system are adapted into the other, and the systems merge and influence each other mutually (Ringgren, p. 7). However, we cannot talk of classical syncretism in the Anglo-Saxon culture, as the Christian thought remained largely unaltered, merely enriched by pagan elements to promote the understanding of the new religion (Kopár, p. 147).

16. By “historical audience” I mean the community familiar with the notions present in a text and how to interpret them. This notion was taken from Martin Irvine’s “Anglo-Saxon Literary Theory Exemplified in Old English Poems: Interpreting the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*,” *Style* 20 (1986), pp. 157–81. He speaks of a “textual community” and takes the notion from Brian Stock. In the essay I refer to these people, when I use the word ‘audience.’

17. G. V. Smithers, “Destiny and the Heroic Warrior in *Beowulf*,” in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in honour of H. D. Meritt*, ed. J. L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 65–81, pp. 67–9.

18. Like “war” (l. 81) and “spear” (l. 99), also cf. *Beowulf* (l. 477 and l. 2814).

19. Translations, when not otherwise marked, are mine.

20. The line may also be translated as ‘*Wyrd* changed it exceedingly,’ however, this emendation is irrelevant for this paper.

## The Wanderer

### Overview

The manuscript of *The Wanderer* can be found in the second half of the *Exeter Book* (76B–78A), which is considered to be the section containing the so-called “wisdom literature,” named as such for the genre ‘elegy’ was not invented yet.<sup>21</sup> The book itself is considered to have been written by one scribe.<sup>22</sup> As one can guess, it got its name from the location of its discovery. The book is thought to be the “big English book” (“*micel englisc boc*”) that Leofric, the Bishop of Exeter named amongst the donations to the cathedral, between 1050 and 1072; therefore we can date the text no later than 1072, and generally it is surmised to have been written a hundred years earlier (Klinck, p. 13). Robin Flower, who tried to date it more precisely, also giving the location of its composition, said that it must have been written “in the West Country early in the period 970–990.”<sup>23</sup> The dialect of the poem is Late West Saxon.

My main reason for choosing the poem was that – at least in my perception – it illustrates the merger of the faiths wonderfully, moreover its narrative structure (often compared to that of *The Seafarer*) illustrates the progression from earthly to transcendent, which is made explicit by the speaker, should we examine it properly.

As I perceive it *The Wanderer* begins with talk of a “lone-dweller” (“*anhaga*,” l. 1), which in Old English poetry is a reference to an exile. We know that he is an exile, because his lord has died (ll. 22–3). He talks of suffering terrible hardships at sea and laments the lonely state that he must endure and mentions how he has been striving to find another home where he might experience the same kind of joys he had had before his retainer had passed away.

His agonies grow worse after he awakens from a dream about the past joys to the harsh reality of the sea. This experience makes the pain of loss so intense that he begins to hallucinate, seeing his kinsmen floating around him.

There is a sudden shift here from description to contemplation, as a voice starts to describe how sad the present state of the world is, and how much worse it shall be, when all of this realm will be destroyed. This is the point where what I call progression is triggered, and he begins to leave one viewpoint behind, to present the other.

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21. Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies – A critical edition and genre study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), p. 30.

22. Klinck, p. 21)

23. “*The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*” (Facsimile with introductory chapters) ed. R. W. Chambers, Max Förster and Robin Flower (London, 1933), p. 90.

Finally, after a classical ‘ubi sunt’ motif (ll. 92–110), we are told that we should seek solace with God, for there rests all our security (ll. 114–5).

Before we may proceed with an in-depth analysis of the poem, we must clarify who the speaker is (or the speakers are).

### **Narrative Structure**

The narrative structure of the poem has been discussed by many critics, and various ideas have emerged about the position and even existence of the narrator. Here, after presenting what the most important critics said about the poem, I shall present a new narrative structure that I find more legitimate than the ones I encountered during my research. In my theory the narrator is the one who introduces the poem (ll. 1–7, except 5b), and interrupts twice afterwards (ll. 88–91, l. 111).

*The Wanderer* begins with someone speaking of the protagonist in third person. Therefore we may regard him as a narrator, which seems rather factual. The narrator, however, will only reflect on the Wanderer’s state (therefore they do not communicate), therefore the poem may still be a monologue, as many modern critics have suggested (e.g. Leslie, Richman, Klinck etc.).

As we can derive from Richman’s theory of an interior monologue,<sup>24</sup> in accordance with Leslie<sup>25</sup> – claiming that the “*swa cwæð*” (l. 6 and l. 111) formula can refer both backwards and forward – we may interpret lines 1–5 as either the narrator’s or the Wanderer’s. Richman is in favour of the latter, however, I am inclined to assign it to the narrator<sup>26</sup> (except for l. 5b) along with the line introducing the final speech of the Wanderer (l. 111), deeming them a sort of introduction and conclusion. In doing so, I am to rely on Greenfield and Erzgräber (whose views I came across in Pope’s essay<sup>27</sup>), who took lines 1–7 as prologue and lines 111–5 as epilogue. I will be using their terminology of the mentioned parts. However, in my analysis I shall take the first exclamation (l. 5b) and the final lines (ll. 112–5), as spoken by the Wanderer, being convinced of the superiority of that reading after seeing Richman’s points on

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24. Gerald Richman, “Speaker and Speech boundaries in *The Wanderer*,” *JEGP* 81 (1982), pp. 469–79.

25. Roy F. Leslie, *The Wanderer* (Manchester: University of Exeter Press, 1985), pp. 2–3.

26. “Most earlier editors were in the favour of this view” (Klinck, p. 107).

27. John C. Pope, “Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of *The Seafarer*” in *Old English Elegies: Basic Readings*, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1994), 213–229, p. 224.

the use of ‘*swa cwæð*,’ but only for the exclamation and the concluding part, as the prologue is spoken in third person.

According to this reading the ‘*swa*’ clause both in the introductory and the concluding part can refer both backward and forward, exactly as Richman suggested. However, unlike Richman, in the case of the prologue, I take it to refer back to one clause only.

The speech, which follows after the dream sequence, and sharply contrasts the two parts of the poem (58ff.), is considered to be the continuation of the Wanderer’s monologue.<sup>28</sup> Most early critics regarded these lines as either later additions (Sieper) or as mistakes of the scribe who copied the poem (Craigie).<sup>29</sup>

It was my previous view that this is the same kind of outburst (of the narrator) as the “*Wyrð* is full resolute” (“*Wyrð bið ful aræd*,” l. 5). According to this reading what we are facing is a deliberate transition from one viewpoint of the poem to the other.<sup>30</sup> This is most probably an addition that strengthens the didactic nature of the poem (i.e. a transition needs to be explicit between the Wanderer’s suffering (up to l. 58), the decline of the world (ll. 58–110), and looking forward to heavenly security (l. 111). According to that reading the interruption lasts until he introduces another speech (“and speaks these words” / “*ond þas word acwið*,” l. 91). However, I was compelled to change this opinion in favour of the reading which only allows the narrator to interrupt the speech at ll. 88–91.<sup>31</sup> I was inclined to take this stance, because thus the Wanderer’s shift from one aspect of life to the other would not be so swift and this way we may further weaken the importance of the narrator, while we may more clearly follow the Wanderer’s progress from pagan to Christian. Additionally, now I see the mentioned part of the poem as being triggered by the dream, awakening the Wanderer to the transitory nature of life.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, I found an interesting parallel, which assured me of the validity of that structure. In every instance the two critics would denote to be the narrator’s lines, the Wanderer is named in the first line of the narrative speech. This shows that

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28. At least by modern critics like Leslie (p. 10) and Richman, and even by J. C. Pope, who retracted his previous opinion of introducing a second major speaker here (pp. 75–6).

29. Examples taken from Klinck, p. 118.

30. Before this part we saw the Wanderer’s horrible experiences at sea, while after this we proceed to a more general view of the world (as stated in Leslie, *The Wanderer*)

31. This is in accordance with a Dunning and Bliss’s (1969) interpretation, see Pope, p. 224.

32. This recognition was emphasised by Stanley Greenfield; cf. his “*Sylf*, Seasons, Structure and Genre in *The Seafarer*” in *Old English Elegies: Basic Readings*, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 231–249, p. 248.

the clause is spoken by someone other than the Wanderer, (simply because the protagonist has to be named), additionally that person will talk about the Wanderer in third person.

First he calls him “lone-dweller” (“*anhaga*,” l.1), then a clause is skipped (l. 5b) and he is called “earthwalker” i.e. “wanderer” (“*eardstapa*,” l. 6) in the second clause of his prologue, then he is referred to as one, who “thinks wisely” (“*wise gēbohte*,” l. 88), and finally as “wise” (“*snottor*,” l. 111). By using these instances as milestones – signalling the narrator’s interruption, which lasts until the end of the clause – we may assume the narrative structure of the poem, put forth by Greenfield and Erzgräber, along with Dunning and Bliss would be at least partially correct, had they regarded that in every case of the narrator’s interruptions, he names the Wanderer.<sup>33</sup>

While I dedicate these lines (prologue, transition, and introduction to the epilogue) to the narrator I would not go as far as to violating the reading of the poem as a monologue. In my analysis I treat the narrator as a person,<sup>34</sup> who – as I have mentioned in the beginning of my discussion – is an omniscient spirit monitoring the Wanderer and commenting on his situation. Therefore, the narrator only speaks from the beginning to line 7 (except l. 5b), then from lines 88–91, and lastly in line 111.

### **Analysis**

In the course of the analysis, I shall prove the inherent pagan notions, merging with the Christian teachings. I shall also present the protagonist’s ‘auto-didactic conversion;’ which – according to my hypothesis – is presented exactly through the juxtaposition of the Germanic values, with the Christian ones. At the beginning the Germanic notions will dominate, in the end the emphasis will shift towards the Christian ones, however the synthesis will be visible in both. Basically, we can claim that the Wanderer, in his exile, will face several hardships, which eventually will lead him to realise that he must yield to his fate, quit any search for a new lord and look towards the security in God.

In the first part of the poem, which we term the prologue (1–5a, 6–7), we encounter the Wanderer, who often “wishes for mercy” (“*are gebideð*,” l.1), because he is alone and seeks grace as he travels through the rime-cold sea. Although Klinck (p. 31) proposes ‘receives,’ it is not hard to realise the faultiness of that translation here, as it seems the composer of *The Wanderer* used the word in the sense ‘wait,’ as we

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33. Therefore, l. 5b and 112ff. are not spoken by the narrator, because they constitute different clauses.

34. Most probably the poet himself, as suggested by Leslie (*The Wanderer*, p. 21)



can see in the line “A man must wait, then utter a boast” (“*Beorn sceal gebidan, þonne he beot spricedð*,” l. 70), where the verb ‘endure’ would make no sense at all.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, if we consider that he is on the ice-cold sea, with haunting images in his mind, it would be hard to imagine Klinck’s proposal.

I offer a chronological order of events, where at the beginning, the protagonist received no mercy, he merely wished he had, as he “long traversed the watery ways” (“*geond lagulade longe sceolde*,” l. 3), “sick at heart” (“*modcearig*,” l. 2); while in the end, after he is already “thinking wisely” (“*wise gebrohte*,” l. 88), he will become “wise” (“*snottor*,” l. 111).

This change will be explicitly put forward by the Wanderer,<sup>36</sup> who will first claim that “*Wyrd* is resolute” (“*Wyrd bið ful aræd!*,” l. 5b), but will, in the end, speak of “solace in the Father in Heavens” (“*frofre to Fæder on heofonum*,” l. 115).

By the sentence “*Wyrd* is resolute” the poet has shown us that he still holds these beliefs, although – as we shall observe – he is definitely Christian. This then will prove to be a fine example of the merging of the old and the new religion.

When the Wanderer begins his speech (l. 8), he immediately starts to lament, which is what we may expect, after the previous line, when the storyteller says that he spoke thus of hostile slaughters and dear kinsmen’s fall (“*wraþra wælsleahta winemæga hryre*,” l. 7)<sup>37</sup>. He speaks of a battle (or perhaps a sequence of battles), which resulted in the death of all his friends. The consequence of the attack he presents as the day when the “earth’s darkness covered his bounteous friend” (“*goldwine minne / hrusan heolster biwrah*,” ll. 22b–23a). These lines are to be taken in the literal sense, as the cause of his wandering. We can also see that he is alone, because everyone died whom he called a true friend, and to whom he could speak his mind (“*Nis nu cwicra nan / þe ic him modsefan minne durre / sweotule asecgan*,” ll. 9b–11a). Although he perhaps tries to express that this in a sense is good, for it is noble in a warrior to keep his thoughts to himself (“*þæt he his ferðlocan fæste binde*,” l. 13), still after the previous exclamations this seems rather as if he was trying to convince himself that his wretchedness has its advantages as well. Although

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35. Nevertheless, we must note that the Old English word “*gebiddan*” has different shades of meaning. In l. 1 we see it as ‘wait,’ as in the sense ‘wait for something passively,’ i.e. ‘long for,’ while in l. 70 it is used in the sense ‘stop.’

36. Following the view on the narration of *The Wanderer*, which I proposed in the previous section.

37. Actually ‘hostile slaughter-slaughter,’ and ‘friend-friend’s fall,’ as suggested by the compounds in this line. This I regard as extra emphasis on the way he perceived the gore, and the extent to which he loved his comrades.

Leslie mentions that fortitude is one thing that would be expected of him in these times, so it may be taken as a sort of heroic value.<sup>38</sup>

What comes after these lines is baffling at first, for he declares here that “a weary mind cannot resist *Wyrð*” (“*Ne mæg werigmod Wyrð wiðstondan,*” l. 15). This opens a new perspective on *Wyrð*. Should we say that a weary mind cannot resist it, then we imply that some sort can do just that, as suggested by the word “*mæg*.” The answer we shall find in *Beowulf*,<sup>39</sup> when after the swimming contest with Breca he says that “*Wyrð* often spares a warrior, who is not ripe for death, if his courage is strong”<sup>40</sup> (“*Wyrð oft nered / unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah,*” l. 572–3). Also, as we can observe in *Laxdæla Saga*, where the protagonist is running from men seeking revenge on him, and when he and his helper come to the bank of a river half frozen, they either fight the men against the odds or swim. In the end they decide to take the risk of swimming, and so the author says: “And because the men were brave and Fate ordained they should live longer, they got across the river.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore we may know that *Wyrð* can be averted, should the person live accordingly to Germanic heroic values. It is interesting to mention that in this aspect *Wyrð* is more flexible than the Greek *Avayκη* (the ‘Inexorable Fate’), who is assumed to represent roughly the same kind of deity-like entity for the Greeks that *Wyrð* did for the Anglo-Saxons.

This notion supports the reading that, at this point in time, the Wanderer is thinking (and trying to act) according to the heroic values that were of prime importance in the society which he lived in before his exile began. This will be contrasted by the ‘ubi sunt’ motif of the wise man (which refers to the Wanderer in a later stage of conversion, in l. 88), which is “widely current in medieval Christian homilies.”<sup>42</sup>

Then comes the dream sequence, and after awakening from that he begins to hallucinate from the severe grief. From what we can see here we can decipher that

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38. Leslie, p. 5.

39. Noted by Smithers, “Destiny and the Heroic,” p. 73.

40. Smithers translated “*unfægne*” as ‘ripe for death,’ thus he had to face a paradox of why someone is spared from death, when he is not fated to die anyway. This is due to his inconsistency of the use of the word, which he translated on p. 67 of the essay as ‘ripe for death.’ Yet, we must note that they held the belief that every man has his time to die, and should live no longer than that (*Battle of Maldon*, ll. 104b–105), still what we are facing here is dying *before* one’s time (which was, of course, possible) prevented by acting accordingly to a sort of heroic code.

41. Smithers, “Destiny and the Heroic,” p. 73.

42. Leslie, pp. 18–9

this occurs often, while the Wanderer is at sea. This is obvious from the word “*eft*” (l. 45 & l. 53). Probably recalling these instances the protagonist begins to contemplate on how he considers the world to be declining. Although this interpretation is not accepted by all critics, we must note that the word “*gesweorcan*” (l. 59) means darkened, and it can only be interpreted in a metaphorical sense, since minds cannot darken literally.<sup>43</sup> Also we know that this verb modifies “*geþencan*” (“think,” l. 58).<sup>44</sup>

So what he says is that he cannot imagine why his mind should not be saddened, as he surveys this world, where I would like to emphasise the word “this” (“*þas*,” l. 58). Thereby we can assume that it is only this world that saddens him, which foreshadows a shift in tone which will occur explicitly first a few lines later, in an obvious reference to the material world, calling it “middle-earth” (“*middangeard*,” l. 62).<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the Christian reference is reinforced on the Wanderer’s side when he commences a tutorage, which not only sounds like a Christian homily or tutorage, but was proved by Roy F. Leslie (*The Wanderer*, pp. 13–15) to be one. Furthermore, since this is the first instance of such a notion, we may be reassured that this is the point, where the shift in tone commences, and thus ‘progression’ begins.

An oddity appears in line 73, which is the word “*gæstlic*,” when he says that “a wise one must grasp how ghastly it will be, when all the wealth of this world stands waste” (“*Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið / þonne ealle þisse worulde wela weste stondeð*,” ll. 73–4). Now the word is only peculiar, since it is usually used in a sense meaning ‘ghastly,’ but here it might be in the sense ‘spiritual,’ just like in *Juliana*.<sup>46</sup> Although, should we consider the original meaning, we may think the poet was trying to imply a ‘spiritual time,’ like Judgement Day with the use of the word. What eventually will support this thesis is that a multiplicity of horrible events always seems to predict the apocalypse to people, as pointed out by Martin Green.<sup>47</sup>

When talking about how the world is crumbling, as it approaches its demise, the speaker mentions a few ways how men can fall. The imagery he uses clearly repre-

43. Cf. Ida L. Gordon, “Traditional themes in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,” *RES* n.s. 5, (1954), p. 6.

44. Leslie, *The Wanderer*, p. 83.

45. Then in l. 85 (“*þisne eardgeard*,” meaning ‘this world’) and later in l. 107 (“*weorlde under heofonum*,” meaning ‘world under heavens’).

46. G. V. Smithers, “The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*,” *MÆ* 26 (1957), p. 141.

47. Martin Green, “Man, Time and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*,” in *Old English Elegies: Basic Readings*, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (New York & London: Garland, 1994), 281–302, p. 282.

sents the ways men in those times thought about passing away;<sup>48</sup> therefore it seems quite pagan. Perhaps we could draw a parallel with another poem from the era, which is *The Fates (or Fortunes) of Men*. In that poem a great number of these items also occur.<sup>49</sup> *Wyrd* also appears in the poem as something that has to be endured (l. 41). This elegy is nevertheless a religious poem, for at the end the poet notes that either you die in one of the ways mentioned above, or live long (ll. 58–63), which will be due to God’s might. By inserting such a list in *The Wanderer* the author may have been trying to imply to the same kind of teaching.

What follows here is the transition – spoken by the narrator – where the Wanderer is referred to as someone who “contemplates wisely” (“*wise gepohte*,” l. 88), which signals his shift, from a lamenting soul to a Christian philosopher; which in my opinion occurs because the Wanderer is finally beginning to think the Christian way.

Then comes the ‘ubi sunt’ motif, which is not only relevant for our analysis because of its Christian reference, but it also contains two interesting notions. The first is when he mentions a “wondrous high wall decorated with worm-shapes” (“*Weal wundrum heah wýrmlicum fah*,” l. 98), which according to Green’s analysis is a representative of the world the Wanderer lost.<sup>50</sup> I would go further in seeing the wall as an extended metonymy and claim that it is actually a link between the mead-hall, representing the past and the present decline, as sort of answer for the questions raised in the beginning of the ‘ubi sunt’ motif.<sup>51</sup> This then would be supported by Eliade’s notion, which says that the hall is a literal and symbolic recapitulation of the divine order of the cosmos,<sup>52</sup> which Green supports by comparing the construction of Heorot in *Beowulf*, and the song of *Genesis*. All in all, the wall may as well represent the oncoming destruction of Judgement for the Wanderer (as Green says), from which only God can save him.

The other interesting notion in this section is in ll. 99–100, where the Wanderer makes mention of nobles, whom “slaughter-loving weapons have swept away,”<sup>53</sup> which is obviously a metonymy for battle. The problem arises in the next half line,

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48. For instance being born off by a bird.

49. For example the wolf, the battle, and the bird.

50. Green, “Man, Time,” p. 288

51. We could also claim that it forces him to realise that the old days are irredeemable, and so he must give up the search for a new hall that he mentions earlier (ll. 25–29a)

52. Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (1961, reprinted in New York, 1969), pp. 37–57.

53. Translation taken from Martin Lehnert, *Poetry and Prose of the Anglo-Saxons*, Vol. I., 2nd edition (Halle: Kreuz-Verlag, 1960), p. 94.

where the poet states that “theirs was glorious *Wyrd*”<sup>54</sup> (“*Wyrd seo mære*,” l. 100b). We may suggest that *Wyrd* here is not a personification, but a mere reference to fate, however, there need be a personification here too, because of the inverted word order, which would further our analysis.<sup>55</sup> In any case the predicament remains: we still cannot comprehend how a destructive force could be ‘glorious.’

To grasp exactly what we are facing we must bear in mind that in the Old English society it was better to die in battle than to face defeat, which was exceedingly widespread in Old Norse and Old Germanic societies. So the poet may be suggesting that the fate of those who died in battle was better than the Wanderer’s, who has to roam the world without friends; in which case we have discovered another instance of the blending of the paganism of old times and the new religion.<sup>56</sup>

Some may argue that there is also an aspect of *Wyrd* we have not considered here. This notion was presented by Smithers, who took all the mentions of *Wyrd* in *Beowulf* and arrived at the conclusion that *Wyrd* is not only the destructive force that causes death, but also the power which bestows glory in battle there.<sup>57</sup> Yet, this is irrelevant for this paper, as in the line we are analysing the nobles died, thus they could not possibly have won. Still we must note that the notions are somewhat parallel for dying during battle was similar to winning – it made the warriors heroes in the other world.<sup>58</sup>

Another interesting line may be found a little later in the poem, which claims that “*Wyrd*’s decree changes the world under the Heavens” (“*onwendeð Wyrdas gesceaft weoruld under heofonum*,” l. 107). This is not only another instance of the personification of *Wyrd*, but also arouses the sense that we have encountered yet another instance of the blending of beliefs. We may think this since in the preceding line the Wanderer refers to “the realm of earth” (“*eorþan rice*,” l. 106) and now the place of the action is “the world under the Heavens.” So not only is he restricting the place where *Wyrd* may be dominant, he additionally reiterates that it is only under

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54. The translation is taken from Lehnert (*Poetry and Prose*, p. 94), and we must note that “*mære*” may be translated as ‘mighty,’ thus the meaning changes to ‘their *Wyrd* was mighty,’ which may roughly cover the same notion. However, it may also mean ‘mighty was *Wyrd*,’ which would mean that none protected them against the force of *Wyrd*.

55. Leslie, *The Wanderer*, p. 91.

56. However, let us not forget that the Anglo-Saxon type of Christianity thought that death in battle was better, than outliving the leader.

57. Smithers, “Destiny and the Heroic,” p. 68

58. In the same way as Old Norse mythology shows the warrior’s path to Valhalla through death in battle.

the Heavens, thus alluding to the other world, where only God is mighty, and *Wyrd* cannot even intrude. Although one may suggest that these are simple metaphors for the Earth, we must bear in mind that it expounds how they imagined their place in space (i.e. they are under the Heavens, where *Wyrd* is a significant power).

Not only are these lines a fascinating example of the paradox,<sup>59</sup> where he juxtaposes *Wyrd* with God's realm, but we can also note that by this time the Wanderer himself was bound to have arrived at a stage (assuming the theory on chronological order is correct), where he is no longer mourning the past, but anticipates a better world beyond the veil. Of course he will still be sad about the present decline, but it will no longer seem a hopeless state to him.

The speaker continues to lament the passing of this realm, however, if we take a careful look at what he is elaborating, we may find another influence. In the following lines (108–9) we hear of what is “passing away” (“*læne*”) in the world, which he refers to as “here” (“*Her*”).<sup>60</sup> There is an allusion to the Biblical teaching that in this world everything is to die, therefore nothing is permanent. Now, if we also bear in mind that the word he uses as the verb of the clauses (“*læne*”) may also mean ‘loaned,’<sup>61</sup> then we can definitely declare that there must be such a notion in the underlying meaning.<sup>62</sup>

After this section the narrator – commencing the epilogue – will interrupt the Wanderer's speech only to introduce the final section, which is the conclusion the Wanderer has arrived at, after all the contemplation. Here he refers to him as “wise” (“*snottor*,” l. 111) once more,<sup>63</sup> and by this time we add that he is wise not only because he seeks solace in God, but also because he does not lament out loud, but keeps

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59. It may only be treated as a paradox if we disregard that in Old English mythology the two ‘religions’ existed side-by-side.

60. We may decipher that “here” is a reference to this world, for he concludes with the line “all this earth's structure becomes empty” (“*eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð!*,” l. 110).

61. In the sense loaned from God to the period of time one spends on Earth (in accordance with the Christian philosophy).

62. I would also suggest that we translate the word as ‘loaned,’ using the evidence from the dictionaries I have consulted. The three dictionaries I used to assure myself of the meaning of certain problematic words were J. Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898) supplemented by T. N. Toller (London, 1921) with addenda by Alastair Campbell (Oxford, 1972) (hereafter referred to as Bosworth–Toller); Martin Lehnert, *Poetry and Prose of the Anglo-Saxons: Dictionary* (Berlin: VEB, 1956); Jane Roberts and Christian Kay, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, Vol. II (Index and Impression), ed. C. C. Barfoot, Theo D'haen, and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: GA, 2000).

63. The previous occurrence is in lines 88–91, while introducing the ‘ubi sunt’ motif.

his thoughts to himself.<sup>64</sup> The latter notion is what he claimed as a noble virtue (ll. 11–4), by which we may examine another merger of Christian and heroic values, since he seems to achieve to abide by both.<sup>65</sup>

Here the Wanderer concludes his story (or teaching) by claiming that we must keep the faith, and he, who seeks grace from the Father in the Heavens, does so well, for there rests our security (ll. 114–5).<sup>66</sup> This quite clearly is a Christian tutoring, the most explicit instance of those that we may observe in the poem. This is truly the ultimate state he achieves – seeking earthly things no more (like the new hall he had sought earlier; see l. 25) but awaiting his own death with new hopes. Thus he has become wise and is an example which was most probably set for the contemporaries.

### Conclusion

Now, should we carefully consider the beginning of the poem and the very end (‘prologue’ and ‘epilogue,’ as I have called them during the analysis), we will observe the shift from worldly to transcendental, and additionally will face a progression: the prologue contained the Wanderer’s desperateness, with the exclamation that “*Wyrð* is resolute,” from which – after the Wanderer’s hardships and seeing his development – we come to the phrase “Well is with him, who seeks grace, Solace of the Father in Heaven.” Thus, the Wanderer’s hardships have led him to the only security that he may surely trust (as opposed to that of the earthly lord, who passes away just like all else), and that is the security of the Heavens. Although the speaker still believes in *Wyrð*, he also knows that there is someone who can subdue it.

The idea that God is stronger than *Wyrð* is not uncommon. For instance in *Beowulf* God does not replace *Wyrð*, but can overrule *Wyrð*’s decisions,<sup>67</sup> which is stunning for Old Norse gods were subject to the workings of the Norns. So we ob-

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64. To see this we must realise that modern critics (Richman, based on Leslie) proved that “*on mode*” (meaning ‘internally,’ according to Bosworth-Toller, and ‘in heart,’ according to Lehnert) is linked with “*cwæð*” and not with “*snottor*,” thus the meaning of the half-line is “So said the wise to himself (i.e. internally, not out loud)” (l. 111a)

65. Although as Leslie pointed out, this notion may be parallel with the teaching St. John Chrysostom and St. Ambrose (*The Wanderer*, p. 6). Still, we know this notion is heroic (and Leslie mentions this as well).

66. Word by word the translation would be as follows: “Well is with him, who seeks grace, Solace of the Father in Heaven, where rests all our security” (“*Wel bið þam þe him are seceð / frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstung stondeð*”).

67. As pointed out by Smithers pointed out instances of this in *Beowulf* in general (Smithers, p. 69).

serve a God superior to a force which was considered the supreme force. This has been observed by many scholars, including Erzgräber,<sup>68</sup> who scrutinized the Boethian notion of ‘*fatum*’ in the same manner. The book he was analysing has also been mentioned by F. Anne Payne.<sup>69</sup> She, however, represents *Wyrd* as God’s agent, or his other face. In her reading *Wyrd* is merely a force that helps preserve universal order that the free will of men may cause to disrupt. In the case mentioned above it comes to play a role in maintaining order by means of disaster, as far as we can decipher.

While this seems legitimate through her analysis of King Alfred’s version of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*,<sup>70</sup> I cannot but disagree with her when she tries to draw a parallel with the same notion in *Beowulf*, when after the fight with Grendel, Hrothgar claims that Grendel would have eaten more men had not Beowulf stopped him. In this case Beowulf is God’s agent, however *Wyrd* is something that had to be averted: “had not wisest God *Wyrd* averted” (“*nefne him witig god / Wyrd forstode,*” l. 1056). According to the passage, we may assume that Beowulf would have died, were it *Wyrd*’s decision. Here – since the Christian God can overrule *Wyrd* – when the heroic warrior Beowulf is about to be prevented from doing justice to Grendel by *Wyrd* itself, we can propose that *Wyrd* is a destructive force (therefore not God’s other face) simply by claiming that the meaning of the lines quoted above makes any other interpretation invalid (since in any other case God would have to avert himself).

However, the Boethian notion of ‘*fatum*’ is somewhat similar to what we are expounding here. That perception depicts fate as something that is only blind to us, therefore God can oversee it as a whole.<sup>71</sup> What we have to add in light of the situation discussed is that God can even manipulate it.

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68. Willi Erzgräber, “*Der Wanderer: Eine Interpretation von Aufbau und Gehalt,*” in *Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Theodor Spira*, ed. Vietrock and Erzgräber (Heidelberg, 1961), 57–85.

69. F. Anne Payne, “Three aspects of *Wyrd* in *Beowulf*,” in *Old English Studies in honour of J. C. Pope*, ed. B. Burlin & Edward B. Irving Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 15–34, p. 17.

70. All her quotations from that book are taken from W. J. Sedgefield’s *King Alfred’s Old English version of Boethius* (Oxford, 1899).

71. Jill Mann, “Chance and destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight’s Tale*,” in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion* ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 75–92, pp. 78–80.



Lastly, in *Elene* (when the angel addresses Constantinus) God is referred to as “*Wyrda wealdend*” (l. 80), which may be translated merely as ‘controller of events,’ but after all the instances we have seen of God being thought of as someone who is beyond *Wyrð*’s limits, it would not be far-fetched to assume that the same notion is presented here as well (consequently God is then presented as ‘controller of *Wyrð*’).

Thus, in conclusion, we may assume that the poet who composed *The Wanderer* (and we may suppose that his audience as well) did not eradicate one faith completely for the sake of the other, rather attempted to merge one into the other. In that path however they subordinated the supreme power of the old faith for that of the new one, thereby creating the hierarchy of the powers of the old and the new ‘religion.’ This is quite logical, for – as Kopár puts it – the radical monotheism of Christianity demanded undivided devotion towards the only God,<sup>72</sup> therefore the Christian God was not (and could not have been) simply integrated amongst the other gods in their pantheon.

We must also add that while at the beginning he was only waiting for mercy, in the end he is seeking it actively.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in the first half of the poem (before progression is triggered) he is looking back to the past, which is considered to be a pagan view-point, for the temporal orientation of Germanic paganism concentrated mostly on the past, unlike the eschatology-oriented Christian religion.<sup>74</sup>

## The Seafarer

### Overview

The only exemplar of *The Seafarer* is also in the *Exeter Book* (81B–83A). My reason for choosing the poem is that it contains, although in a subtler form, the same intermingling of cultures. Many critics compared the poem to *The Wanderer*, while not being aware just how much they are alike. Not only is the same kind of progression present in both elegies, but the attitude of the speaker – although *The Seafarer* is professed to be more religious – is Christian to the same degree in both cases. The thought that has aroused my interest in the poem is that these pagan heroic values appear almost accidentally (i.e. subconsciously, unwillingly; unlike in *The Wanderer*).

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72. Kopár, p. 147.

73. Leslie (*The Wanderer*, p. 24) pointed out the contrast between the phrases representing passivity towards mercy (“*gebideð*,” l. 1) and the active counterpart (“*seceð*,” l. 114).

74. Kopár, p. 148.

According to my perception, in *The Seafarer* the speaker is made explicit from the beginning (unlike in *The Wanderer*), as he begins by saying that he will tell a true story about himself (“*Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,*” l. 1).<sup>75</sup> His story is of numerous hardships that he had to experience while at sea. During the description of his agonies he refers many times to the people with whom everything goes well (“*fægrost limpeð,*” l. 13) and are thus incapable of comprehending his sorrows.

Surprisingly, after this he commences to talk of a new journey he is longing for, still with mentions of the people on land. He now elaborates on the past he left behind, and how it is no longer redeemable. He decries how the world is declining, but not in the depressed mood, which we saw in *The Wanderer*. He finishes his speech with the same kind of conclusion we saw in the previous elegy, but he adds more emphasis to the Christian teachings, and ends the poem with a formal “Amen.”

### **Narrative Structure**

The discussions of the identity of the speaker in *The Seafarer* have been similar to those of *The Wanderer*. In this poem too, many critics suggested a second speaker, who is perhaps an eager young seafarer, talking to a worn-out old one.<sup>76</sup> This notion, however, has been withdrawn in favour of a monologue theory. This progress is most clearly visible, when the process takes place within the same mind, as was the case with J. C. Pope.

Pope first regarded it as a poem with two imaginary speakers,<sup>77</sup> then – first triggered by Dorothy Whitelock’s disagreement during a lecture – retracted this in favour of a monologue theory, with the *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* motif.<sup>78</sup> Pope claims that the previous reading had been based on the word “sylf” occurring at line 35, which they usually interpreted as ‘I myself’ rather than ‘by myself.’ With this minor correction in the translation, the Seafarer is saying that he will go alone. However, this was not accepted by Greenfield, who proposed ‘of my own accord,’<sup>79</sup> and so,

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75. Although both Lehnert (p. 90) and Bosworth-Toller use “can” or “may” for “*mæg*” it has been revealed that the word has an undertone suggesting futurity rather than probability, and has a more possible outcome, than “may”; as presented by Anne Klinck, pp. 160–61.

76. First proposed in Max Rieger, “Über Cynewulf,” *ZfdP* 1 (1869): 330–339.

77. John C. Pope, “Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,” in *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr. and Robert P. Creed (New York: New York UP, 1965), pp. 164–93.

78. Pope, “Second Thoughts,” p. 224.

79. Stanley B. Greenfield, “*Min, Sylf,* and ‘Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*,’” *JEGP* 68 (1969): 212–20; pp. 217–9 on the discussion of ‘*sylf*’.

in his reply to Pope, he presented numerous occasions in which the authority of such a translation was defended.

Greenfield's translation is too logical not to be accepted, as the Seafarer had been travelling alone all along (cf. ll. 15–6 and ll. 25–6), thus 'alone' would make no sense at all. The only plausible solution here is that the speaker is stressing that this is a voluntary journey, unlike the previous one.<sup>80</sup>

So we can claim that in this poem there is no narrator, as it is the Seafarer himself, who is telling his own story (most probably for some didactic purpose<sup>81</sup>) from his present point of view.

### **Analysis**

In the course of the analysis I shall attempt to demonstrate the shift from literal to transcendental, which (most probably) occurs, because the poet is seeking to call the audience's attention to their mortality, and the importance of Christianity.

The poem begins with the speaker announcing that he will tell us a true story, how he suffered.<sup>82</sup> We do not have any convincing evidence that he is speaking in the past tense, and the present perfect was not used in Old English.<sup>83</sup> He claims that he has "got to know many abodes of suffering in his boat" ("*gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela*," l. 5).<sup>84</sup> This image is also interesting if we bear in mind that the Church is often represented as a ship upon raging waves.<sup>85</sup>

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80. Dorothy Whitelock has also noticed that the overwhelming emphasis on the journey must mean a voluntary journey (Dorothy Whitelock, "The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*," in *The Early Cultures of Northwest Europe*, ed. Sir Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickens (Cambridge, 1950).), spiritual exile, a so-called *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*. However, let me add that in this case the journey would be a continuation of the previous (therefore not a new trip). Still, whether the journey is an actual journey, or a mere allegory does not affect my analysis in the least; what matters is that he is thinking of God by this time.

81. Roscoe E. Parker argued that "*giedd*" was a message, maxim or tale told for a purpose; see Roscoe E. Parker, "*Gyd, Leod, and Sang* in Old English poetry," *Texas Studies in Literature* 1 (1956), p. 63.

82. "Endured hardships often" ("*earfoðhwile oft prowade*," l. 3)

83. Nevertheless, by the end of the poem the images of suffering will subside, so we could postulate that his torments are either over, or he simply does not care.

84. Some argue that the compound "*cearselda*" contains the word 'care' as opposed to 'sorrow.' However, as presented by Fr. Klaeber ("Review of Sedgefield's 'Anglo-Saxon verse book,'" *JEGP* 23 [1924], pp. 121–4), the word rather means 'sorrow.' As I perceive it, 'care' would never even fit the context, due to the fact that the Seafarer is suffering in the boat,

He then proceeds to tell us of how he had lamented the sorrows of life, deprived of kinsmen, hearing the screams of seabirds, instead of men's laughter, then he introduces the man with whom everything goes well (12bff.). This is an important and recurrent motif in the poem, therefore it needs further discussion.

First he says "The man with whom everything goes well does not realise how miserably I plied the ice-cold sea in the winter" ("Pæt se mon new wat / þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð, / hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ / winter wunade," ll. 12b–15a), then in the second instance he claims that "he who has delight in life, lives in a castle, experiences few hardships, delighted and wanton of wine can little believe how I often had to experience weariness in the sea-path" ("him gelyfeð lyt, se þe at lifes wyn / gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon, / wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft / in brimlade bidan sceolde," ll. 27–30). These references are surely intended to mean the people who have not yet suffered, thus are not in the possession of the knowledge he may have.

However, before we could dissect the phrase to discover its true meaning, we must clarify a problematic word, which is the sentence initial "Forþon" (l. 27). This word normally means 'hence' or 'therefore,' but here it would not fit the context perfectly, moreover there will be lines where the sentence's initial word may make even less sense.<sup>86</sup> In the cases where the original meaning cannot be applied we should consider the idea Gordon suggests in her book and accept that the word means "For this,"<sup>87</sup> in the sense 'For this reason this comes to my mind.' This solution seems adequate in providing the problematic lines with sense.<sup>88</sup>

So the Seafarer is implying that remembering his hardships brought the care-free men to his mind. When speaking about these people, the Seafarer uses the word "wanton of wine" ("wingal," l. 29), which may mean that he is speaking of ignorant city-dwellers, who do nothing but drink in peacetime. What may be an-

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which is obvious from the context. Thus the compound means 'sorrow-hall,' which is simple to interpret, if we consider Brian K. Green's lines "the sea is a hall, where *Wyrd* is lord" (Brian K. Green, "The Twilight Kingdom: Structure and Meaning in *The Wanderer*," *Neophilologus* 60 [1976]: 442–51).

85. Noted by Klinck, who base her argument on Old English Homilies, where the same image appears.

86. It appears again in lines 33, 39, 58, 64, 72, 103, and 108. Some of these, of course, do mean 'therefore.'

87. Ida L. Gordon, *The Seafarer* (London: Methuen, 1960).

88. For instance the lines 27–30 could make sense, for they would mean – adapting Gordon's view – 'For this the man comes to my mind, who has the delight of life . . .'

other reference to them is where the protagonist mentions anxiety about the last voyage (“*a his sæfore sorge næbbe,*” l. 42), which are lines 39 to 43.<sup>89</sup> Leslie has drawn a parallel between the above-mentioned characters and the “wanton of wine.”<sup>90</sup> This seems to be rather logical: the Seafarer is using the image of the oblivious of care to call our attention to the importance of preparing for the journey to the other realm.

The fact that he is preparing to leave the world is not obvious at first. The concept is introduced with the seemingly baffling line, where – after the terrifyingly vivid description of winter (ll. 31–33b) – he is telling us that (exactly because of this picture of winter<sup>91</sup>) he is ready to try the “high streams” (“*hean streamas,*” l. 34). The problem we are facing is evident: who in his right mind would be desirous to attempt a voyage to the high seas, after so much suffering at sea, when winter has come.

The complexity of the sentence requires several images and words to be clarified, before the paradoxical nature of the lines can be dissolved. First we must note that the journey may be a metaphor for leaving the world, as Schücking has suggested.<sup>92</sup> This way the “high streams” do not refer to the deep seas, but to a different level of faring (i.e. seeing his life as a journey to God).

Accepting this idea, we can further relieve ambiguity by assuming that the sentence initial “*Forþon*” is used in the sense that Gordon has suggested, meaning ‘For thinking of winter the idea of the high streams comes to his mind.’ Still, the predicament remains: why does the coming winter urge him to try the high streams (even if they are metaphoric). The answer is simple: although the coming winter is to be taken literally, the “*forþon*” shows us that he is reminded of something by it, and this

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89. It is interesting to note that – as Smithers has pointed out – the speakers in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* compare the old generation, with the younger one for eschatological purposes; where the former represents sorrow, and the latter carelessness (Smithers, 1957: 141).

90. Roy F. Leslie, “Meaning and Structure of *The Seafarer*,” in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. Martin Green (Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, 1983), pp. 103–4.

91. Suggested by the phrase-initial “*Forþon*.”

92. Levin Schücking, “Die altenglische Elegie” (review of Sieper’s edition) in *Englische Studien* (1917), p. 109. Schücking was influenced by Gustav Ehrismann “Religionsgeschichtliche Beiträge zum germanischen Frühchristentum,” *BGdSL* 35 (1909): 209–39. Although Schücking’s is not a recent study, I referred to it for the simple reason that since the theory emerged, most critics happily embraced the notion that *The Seafarer* includes the figurative level of interpretation.

– as Greenfield proposes<sup>93</sup> – is his sinfulness, and going a bit further I would assume, his own mortality.

Greenfield also adds that not only is the winter's image to be taken literally but the next mentioned season, spring (ll. 48–52), should also be interpreted as such.<sup>94</sup> This may not seem evident at first, but becomes convincing as soon as we remember that “the revival of nature at spring may be seen as men's resurrection before Doomsday.”<sup>95</sup> Moreover, he uses the expression “*woruld onetteð*” in l. 49, which may simply be interpreted as ‘the world is moved,’ but as Cross has suggested it may mean ‘the world hastens to its end.’<sup>96</sup>

Now, as we are able to grasp just what the poet was trying to imply here, we begin to understand that the “land of foreigners” (“*elþeodigra eard*,” l. 38) may be an allusion to the afterworld. This is the same kind of allegory that is present in *Genesis* 12.1, where Abraham is presented as ready to leave his kindred and his father's home for a land the Lord would show him.<sup>97</sup>

After this motif we see a sort of spiritual travel, where the soul of the speaker is presented as flying over the “whale's domain” (“*hwæles eþel*,” l. 60) and the “earth's surface” (“*eorþan sceatas*,” l. 61).<sup>98</sup> What is interesting for our analysis in this passage is that the soul is described with ferocious adjectives. The expression used for the state of the returned soul is “ravenous and greedy” (“*gifre ond grædig*,” l. 62). This is especially stunning, since this particular formula was used to describe the rapacity of devils in *Christ and Satan* (l. 32 and 191), the all-consuming voracity of fire in *Phoenix* (l. 507), and the gluttonous maw of Hell in *Genesis B* (l. 793), as pointed out by Greenfield.<sup>99</sup> Still, as Pope has revealed, this could be an appetite for spiritual good, as according to the beatitude “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.”<sup>100</sup>

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93. Greenfield, “Sylf, Seasons,” p. 240.

94. Greenfield, “Sylf, Seasons,” p. 240.

95. As pointed out in Norman F. Blake, “*The Seafarer*, Lines 48–49,” *NQ* 207 (1962), pp. 163–4.

96. James E. Cross, “On the allegory in *The Seafarer* – Illustrative Notes,” *MÆ* 28 (1959), pp. 104–6.

97. This notion was taken from Pope (“Second Thoughts,” p. 218).

98. It is Vivian Salmon who talks about the popular superstition about the soul's power to leave the body in the form of an animal, especially a bird; cf. “*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, and the Old English Conception of the Soul,” *Modern Language Review* 55 (1960).

99. I read the examples quoted above in Pope (“Second Thoughts,” pp. 221–2).

100. Pope, “Second Thoughts,” p. 222.

Immediately after this the Seafarer talks about how he is desirous to go on the “(h)wælwæg” (l. 63). The manuscript has “wælwæg” here, which was amended to “hwælwæg” thus meaning ‘road of the whale.’ However, I am certain that this was not a mistake and it should be “wælwæg,” thus meaning ‘road of the dead.’<sup>101</sup> This option seems valid pursuing our current reading.

In the next clause we learn that the joys of God are now dearer to him than this life on earth. It is interesting that he describes life as dead (“*deade lif*,” l. 65), which is “loaned on earth” (“*læne on lond*,” l. 66).<sup>102</sup> The fact that after the joys of God are mentioned, the life on land is beginning to look less attractive is stunning.

He then commences to tell us that we should try to earn the “glory of eternal life” (“*ecan lifes blæd*,” l. 79) so our praise will live amongst the angels. This could be perceived as an average Christian thought, yet, as Pope has pointed out, he wants not only the praise of angels but of his successors on earth as well.<sup>103</sup> Even, if we claim that “man’s child” (“*ælda bearn*,” l. 77) is not in direct correspondence with “praise” (“*lof*,” l. 78), and so he only wishes for glory in Heaven, we are still facing the predicament that he craves for glory,<sup>104</sup> so he somehow retains heroic values. Even though the protagonist uses them to elaborate on Christian disciplines, the underlying heroic notion informs his form of speech.

An even more explicit example of the ‘heroic’ thinking he retains comes in the next paragraph, as he expounds that the world is declining, because the new generation of rulers is not as good as the previous. Now, following Pope’s assertion on the lines,<sup>105</sup> we see that the speaker does not consider the new generation worse, because

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101. However, I would also suggest a sort of word-punning here. For we know the Seafarer is using the voyage metaphor for the spiritual journey, and he has also mentioned the ‘whale’s domain’ (“*hwæles eþel*,” l. 60) a few lines earlier; and if we bear in mind that the poem was most probably presented orally, then we see how the poet may be trying to pun on the compound (merely because “*hwælwæg*” and “*wælwæg*” in pronunciation are similar enough).

102. The translation I encountered saw this line as meaning “dead and transient life on earth” (Lehnert), but I persevere in thinking that “*læne*” here (as well as in *The Wanderer* ll. 108–9) means (or is at least suggesting an undertone of) ‘loaned’ (all three dictionaries I used supported this meaning). The line would make more sense, as this way it would read “Therefore the joys of the Lord are dearer to me than this dead life, loaned on earth.”

103. Pope, “Second Thoughts,” p. 220.

104. Moreover, as Pope suggests here, he must feel some sort of pride about how he is able to endure affliction (“Second Thoughts,” pp. 220–222).

105. Pope, “Second Thoughts,” p. 220.

they follow old ideals, but because they are not equals of old kings, who were most probably pagan.<sup>106</sup>

After this he proceeds to elaborate on the futility of earthly goods (ll. 94–101), then tells us about the greatness of God, and how we should keep measure (“*wisum clæne*,” l. 110), however, these lines are not relevant to our analysis, yet what comes after them is. We find an interesting juxtaposition of *Wyrd* and God (ll. 115b–116a). Although this is the only reference to *Wyrd* in the poem, it is a truly striking one. He says that “*Wyrd* is stronger” (“*Wyrd biþ swiþre*,” l. 115b) and “God is mightier” (“*Meotud mehtigra*,” l. 116a), “than any man thinks” (“*þonne ænges monnes gehygd*,” l. 116b). By this line we can see that he still believes in *Wyrd* (as there is surely personalization here), and still claims it is stronger than any man can comprehend.

While this may be a fascinating example of the coexistence of the old faith and the new religion, I would like to emphasize that we have subordination here as well. While this may not be explicitly put, we see that immediately after he mentions *Wyrd*’s strength, he inserts God’s might, which may be higher on the scale for him. An even more convincing attestation for this hypothesis is that this is the only mention of *Wyrd* in the poem, and never before<sup>107</sup> has he mentioned it, nor afterwards will he allude to it. Therefore, we may postulate that he completely disregards it, as God is greater.<sup>108</sup>

After these lines we encounter a strange formula, as the sentence begins with “Let us” (“*Uton*,” l. 117). While this may not mean much to the modern reader, when we note that it has been shown to be the introduction of the Homilies in Bethurum,<sup>109</sup> the word gains importance. In the light of this evidence we may suggest that the Seafarer might have wanted to construct a verse with a structure similar to a religious speech. The final “Amen” (l. 124) makes this probable as well, as it does not take part in alliteration, so is not a poetic device, probably rather an element intended to make the poem end as a sermon.

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106. We need also note that there is a sort of “praising of the past” that I have mentioned in the conclusion to the analysis of *The Wanderer*, which is essentially Germanic pagan.

107. If we disregard ‘fated for death’ or ‘ripe for death,’ which translation Smithers suggested for the word “*fægne*” (appears in l. 71 as “*fægum*”), as a reference to *Wyrd* (Smithers, “Destiny and Heroic”). Yet, this is irrelevant for us, as I only look at cases, where the word “*Wyrd*” is used as a reference to ‘Fate.’

108. Another notion we may assert here is that this “*Wyrd*” may actually mean ‘God.’ However, we cannot prove either; and since my analysis is based on the occurrences of the word “*Wyrd*,” this interpretation seems adequate.

109. For instance in Dorothy Bethurum “*The Homilies of Wulfstan*”. Oxford, 1957: pp. 275, 260, 266.



These two words (i.e. “*Uton*,” l. 117 and “*Amen*,” l. 126) are not the only evidence we may quote to support the theory that the poem intended to make his work sound like a sermon. After reading Andy Orchard’s essay on oral tradition<sup>110</sup> I was convinced that the repetitive formula he portrays King Alfred to be using to impose a pattern on his discourse<sup>111</sup> is strikingly similar to the “*Forþon*” clauses the Seafarer uses to organise his speech, and to develop a certain train of thought.

In these lines (ll. 117–9) we also find a parallel for the foreigner’s land, which he sought (“*elþeodigra eard*,” l. 38).<sup>112</sup> Here he says we must consider where we have our home (“*hwær we ham agen*,” l. 117b), and then think how we can get there (“*hu we þider cumen*,” l. 118b). Therefore, in his conclusion, he clarifies the aim of our spiritual journey.<sup>113</sup>

### Conclusion

From what we have seen there was a slow shift from the earthly level to the transcendent, which began roughly in the picture of winter, and the urge to try the high streams (ll. 31–6). From this point forward the speaker’s thoughts turned towards the Heavenly home, and his elegy slowly turned itself into a sermon. He not only used homiletic devices to perform this task, but he also made it clear at the very end.

The hierarchy of beliefs was present in the poem as well, although it was not quite as explicit as in *The Wanderer*; which may also be obvious if we contrast the sort of land they seek. The Wanderer sought another hall, which is clearly literal (l. 25), whereas the Seafarer seeks the land of foreigners (ll. 27–8), which – as we have seen – is allegorical. *The Seafarer* is considered a religious poem by most critics, nevertheless it is the Old English type of Christian religion, which as we have seen still retains a number of heroic values (praising the rulers of the past), even if in a radically new form (aiming at Heavenly glory, rather than earthly).

In my analysis I have treated the poem as a whole, although many critics used to regard the second half of the poem as a homiletic addition. However – even if we do not see the inherent integrity of the poem through the analysis I have presented –

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110. Andy Orchard, “Oral Tradition” in *Reading Old English Texts* ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 101–23.

111. “When I remember all this I remember” (“*Ða ic ða ðis eall gemunde ða wundrade ic*”) (Andy Orchard’s translation).

112. Notion presented by G. V. Smithers (“Meaning,” p. 151), alluded to in Pope (“Second Thoughts,” p. 229).

113. The “eternal bliss” (“*ecan eadignesse*,” l. 120).

Anne Klinck offers a convincing piece of evidence by claiming that there is a connection between the lines that contain reference to seafaring, and those which don't. This is the hypermetria occurring at line 23,<sup>114</sup> where he is talking about suffering, and later the same kind of hypermetria occurs, in a l. 103,<sup>115</sup> which is about "God's might" (*"Meotudes egsa"*).<sup>116</sup>

Furthermore, the loss of (literal) seafaring lines is only too logical from the shift the protagonist is making from earthly to transcendent, and his claim that the joys of the Lord are greater to him than the dead life loaned to him on earth.<sup>117</sup>

## Ultimate Conclusion

To sum up what we have discovered in the course of the essay in the light of what we have encountered in these two elegies (with the help of some other works) we can assume that the transition from one belief to the other did not occur in the Anglo-Saxon community in the terms of syncretism. In that culture the basics of Christianity altered little and the pagan elements were only added to the basic Christian teachings so that the people could assimilate the new notions more efficiently, and thus understand the essential message of the Gospels.

In this process they – as it is thus logical – subordinated the supreme power of the old pagan faith, *Wyrd*, to the supreme power of the Christian religion, God Almighty, who demanded undivided devotion. Using this hierarchy, they often, shifting from one end (past, tribal society, *Wyrd* etc.) to the other (new religion, consolation, God etc.), presented the importance of conversion through what I called 'progression' in the paper.

However, no matter how much they wanted to present the benefits of the new religion, the remnants of the old pagan beliefs lingered on (which is quite logical, since the conversion of a society is not an overnight change), sometimes explicitly, maybe for a purpose (as in *The Wanderer*), sometimes subtly, or even subconsciously (as in *The Seafarer*).

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114. "Storms beat the cliffs there the (icy-feathered) tern gave them answer" (*"Stormas þær stanclifu beotan þær him stearn oncwæð"*).

115. "Great is the fear of God, from which the earth turns away" (*"Micel biþ se Meotudes egsa, forþon hi seo molde oncyrreð,"* l. 103)

116. This was suggested by Anne Klinck amongst her textual notes (Klinck, p. 129).

117. *"Forþon me hatran sind / Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif, / læne on londe,"* ll. 64b–66a.