

# **The Seafarer**

An abridged version

Translated from the Anglo-Saxon

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**Translator's Note:** This is an abridged version. I have concluded with line 99, as did Pound, for artistic coherence, and from lack of sympathy with the undistinguished ending of the manuscript. Instead of displaying the caesura between half-lines of the original Exeter Book (which is dated prior to 1050AD), or running the two halves of each line together as in Pound's translation, I have preferred, for clarity and impact, to give each half-line as a separate full line. The original Old English text may be found online [here](#).



This knows he not  
Who on land  
Lives lightly,  
How I care-wretched  
On ice-cold ocean  
Weathered winter 15  
In ways of exile,  
Bereft of my brethren,  
Hung with ice-shards;  
Hail showers flew.  
There I heard naught  
But sea roaring,  
Ice-cold wave.  
Whiles the swan's song  
Had I for pleasure; 20  
Gannet's clamour,  
Curlew's crying,  
For men's laughter;  
The mew's singing  
For mead-drinking.

Storms beat on stony cliffs  
Where spoke the tern,  
Icy-feathered;  
Full oft the eagle screamed  
Sea-foam-feathered;                   25  
No bright companion  
There to comfort  
The careworn soul.  
For he treats as light,  
Who drinks life's joys,  
And bides in burgh,  
Far from baleful journey,  
Wine-proud and wanton,  
How I weary oft  
On brine-paths                           30  
Must abide.

Night-shadows neared,  
Snow from the north,  
Rime bound the land,  
Hail fell on earth,  
Coldest of crops.  
Now are they troubled,  
The thoughts of my heart,  
That I on high streams  
With salt-surge  
Should strive –  
Mind-lust urging  
In every moment,  
That spirit fare onward,  
Seeking afar  
The fastness  
Of foreign folk.

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For there's none so proud-minded  
No man on this earth,  
Nor so generous of goods,           40  
Nor so bold in his youth,  
Nor so dread in his deeds,  
Nor so dear to his Lord,  
That he in sea-faring  
Has never a care  
As to what Fate  
May will for him.  
Not for him harp-hearing,  
Ring-giving,  
Wife-winning,                           45  
Nor worldly glory,  
Nor ever aught else  
Lest it be wash of the wave;  
But he ever has longing,  
Who strives on the sea.

Grove bears blossom,  
Burghs grow fair,  
Fields show fruitful,  
World seems new.  
All spurs on 50  
The eager-minded  
Spirit to sail,  
In one who seeks  
On flood-ways  
His faring.  
So cuckoo admonishes  
With sorrowful voice,  
Sings, summer's guardian,  
Boding sorrow  
Bitter in breast-board. 55

This he knows not,  
The well-found warrior,  
What some must endure,  
Who, wretched outcasts,  
Widest must wander.  
For now my heart writhes  
Out of my breast,  
My mind's gone  
Mid mere-flood,  
Over the whale's path,                   60  
Widely wandering  
All earth's corners.  
Comes oft to me  
Greedy and eager,  
Lone-flyer screeching  
Whets for the whale-road  
The heart unwearied,  
Over the sea's hold.

Far brighter for me  
Are the joys of my Lord,           65  
Than this dead life  
Lingering on land.  
I'll not believe  
That the world's weal  
Will stand.  
Always, ever will one  
Of these three things  
Ere a man's ending  
Turn towards doubt:  
Age or sickness                       70  
Or sword-hatred,  
Tear the frail life  
From the fated.

So for every man  
After-praise  
Of the living,  
Last word and best,  
He must work for,  
Before he be gone;  
Fearless in fold 75  
Against fiend's malice,  
Daring in deeds  
Against devil,  
So men's sons  
Shall praise him after,  
And his fame ever  
Live with the angels,  
On and forever,  
In life eternal  
A joy among many. 80

The days are gone,  
All of the glory  
Of earthly riches;  
Now are no kings  
Nor Caesars  
Nor gold-givers  
As once there were,  
When the most among them  
Marvels performed,  
And lived in majesty           85  
The most lordly.  
Gone are the old watch  
Their joys are over,  
Now wane the weaker  
And yet hold the world,  
With sweat, they enjoy.

