

# **The Wanderer**

An abridged version

Translated from the Anglo-Saxon

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**Translator's Note:** This is an abridged version. I have started with line 8 and concluded with line 110 (of 115) for artistic coherence. 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 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](#).

## **The Wanderer**

Of I alone must 8  
Utter my sadness,  
Each day before dawn.  
Living there's none,  
No man, to whom  
I'd clearly speak  
My innermost mind.  
I know among  
Men the custom 12  
Truly is noble,  
That a man his  
Thoughts fast bind,  
Hiding his mind-hoard,  
Whatever he thinks.  
For weary spirit may not  
Withstand fate's ways,  
Nor does a sad heart 16  
Offer men aid.  
Thus oft the glory-bound  
Bind fast their  
Drear thoughts  
In their own breast.

So I, wandering,  
 Bereft of my homeland,  
 Far from my kinsmen, 20  
 Oft in wretchedness,  
 My innermost feelings  
 Am forced to fetter,  
 Over these long years  
 Since my lord I buried  
 Deep in the dark earth,  
 And from there, dully,  
 Went winter-freighted 24  
 Over the icy waves,  
 Seeking, hall-bereft,  
 Some giver of treasure;  
 Where I, far or near,  
 Might find one  
 In mead-hall, who  
 Knew my own clan,  
 Or might console me, 28  
 I, the friendless one,  
 Win with his welcome.  
 He who suffers it  
 Knows how sorrow  
 Makes cruel companion  
 To one who goes light  
 Of all loving friends.  
 Wandering wreathes him 32  
 Not the winding gold,  
 A frozen spirit, now,  
 Not the fruits of earth.  
 Halls of the warriors  
 He recalls, gold-giving:  
 How in youth his lord,  
 Ever treasure's friend,  
 Won him to wining. 36  
 Dead now all joyfulness!

Thus he suffers it,  
Who the true counsel  
Of his own dear lord  
Has long time forgone:  
Then sleep and sorrow,  
Working together,  
Often will bind 40  
The lonely sufferer.  
He thinks there in mind,  
That he his own lord  
Clasps there and kisses,  
And to his knees  
Presses hand and head,  
As when once before  
In times gone by, 44  
He held the throne.  
Then he awakens,  
A friendless man,  
Seas before him  
The barren waves,  
Sea-birds bathing  
Preening their feathers,  
In rime and snow fall, 48  
And hail there mingling.

Then are they heavier  
Wounds of heart  
Sore for its lord.  
Sorrow succeeds  
When mind surveys  
Memories of kinsmen:  
He greets them gladly, 52  
Scans them eagerly,  
A man's companions,  
Swimming ever away,  
Seafaring spirits,  
Bringing him little  
Of their human speech.  
The care is renewed  
Of he who must send 56  
Time after time  
His weary heart  
Out over wave's ply.

Truly I know not  
Why my spirit  
Fails to darken  
Seeing the whole  
Earthly life of men 60  
All the world over,  
How swiftly they  
Flee the stage,  
The proud nobles.  
So this middle-earth  
Day by day  
Decays and falls:  
So no man can call 64  
Himself wise, ere he's aged  
A deal of years in this world.  
The wise must be patient,  
Not too impulsive,  
Not too hasty of word,  
Nor too weak a warrior,  
Nor too recklessly wild,  
Nor too fearful, too hopeful, 68  
Nor too greedy for gifts,  
Nor too ready to boast,  
Before he knows clearly.  
A man shall abide  
Before he speaks oaths,  
Until proud-hearted  
He sees clearly  
Where the intent 72  
Of his heart will tend.



The wise man must see,  
 How all will be ghastly,  
 When all the weal of this  
 World lies wasted,  
 As now here and there  
 Over this middle-earth,  
 Wind-beaten 76  
 The walls stand  
 Rime be-frosted,  
 Buildings storm-swept.  
 The halls are broken,  
 Warrior lords lie  
 Bereft of delight.  
 Fallen the throng,  
 Proud by the wall. 80  
 Some war wasted,  
 Ferried on their way,  
 Him the bird took  
 Beyond the deep seas,  
 Him the grey wolf  
 Garnered for death,  
 Him all dreary  
 Man hid in an 84  
 Earthly grave.  
 So He who made men  
 Shattered the city,  
 Till empty of sound,  
 Its citizens silent  
 The old work of giants  
 Stood empty.

One who in wisdom 88  
 Pondered this estate,  
 And of this dark life  
 Considered deeply  
 Knowing in spirit,  
 Oft thought from afar  
 Of countless conflicts,  
 Speaking these words:  
 Where is the horse now? Where is the rider? 92  
 Where is the gold-giver?  
 Where is the seat at the gathering?  
 Where now are the feasts in the halls?  
 Alas for the gleaming cup!  
 Alas the mailed warrior!  
 Alas for the prince's pride!  
 How that age has passed,  
 Dark under night-helm, 96  
 As though it never were!  
 Now there stands at last  
 Where were the dear host,  
 A wall wondrous high  
 Wound with serpents.  
 The warriors were taken  
 By the spear's glory,  
 Weapons ripe for kill, 100  
 Fame of the fated;  
 These cliffs of stone  
 Storms batter,  
 Falling frost  
 Earth fetters,  
 Promise of winter;  
 Then comes darkness,  
 Night-shadows deepen, 104  
 From the north descends  
 Fierce hail,  
 Malicious to men.

All is sorrowful  
In this earthly realm,  
The wheel of fate alters  
World under heavens.  
Here be gold fleeting,  
Here be friend fleeting,  
Here be man fleeting,  
Here be kin fleeting,  
All this Earth's estate,  
Idle, is wasted!

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