

# The Wanderer

Anonymous, Late 9th Century

Adapted from the Anglo-Saxon by [Jeffrey Burghauser](#)  
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The Philosopher in Meditation (Rembrandt, 1632)

**The solitary mortal** chases Grace,

His Maker's mercy. Even though his heart  
Be sick, he longs to cross the icy sea

To navigate the all-demanding path  
Of Exile. Submit, for this is Fate.

*So said the Wanderer, his burdened mind,*

*A codex overstuffed with miseries.*

*And slaughters. Kinsmen's corpses. Ruined halls.*

Each time the barren sun expresses forth

Her icy light, my soul laments its woes.

There isn't any man alive to whom

I can confess my innermost concerns.

The mournful soul a treasure chamber is.

It is a soul-confounding virtue to  
Maintain the door's uncompromising lock.

A weary, weary mind cannot confront  
The merciless indignities of Fate.

I quested far and near for some new king  
Dispensing gems, delicious mead, and love—

Dispensing solace to the desolate.

I quested far and near for some new king

To cheer me with delights. The lonely man

Has only awful sorrow for a friend.

He's rich in woe, not golden filigree.

Soon Sleep and Sorrow fuse upon the wretch.

His dreams reconstitute the image of

The regal hall's profuse comradery.

He dreams of someone's brotherly embrace.

He dreams of former days, when he was loved.

But slung into alertness with a start,

He sees prepared before him fallow ways

Unfolding through the swirls of snow and hail.

The heart's distress becomes more ponderous;

And melancholy, inexhaustible.

The wincing faces of my slaughtered kin

Process before me. Tell me why my mind

Should not be dolorous when I reflect

On dark, impulsively abandoned halls.

No man discovers Wisdom till he takes

His share of sorrows. Patience marks the wise—

The stoicism born of knowing that

No mortal man should be too passionate,

Too quick to speak, too timid, rash, afraid,

Exultant, greedy, or engaged before

He comprehends the substance of this world—

Before he sees how Life unmakes herself.

The wise man grasps how ghastly it shall be

When every specimen of earthly wealth

Is wasted in the manner of these walls—

\_\_\_These wind-assaulted walls, confined in ice;

Substantial blackthorn plucked from loamy earth.

The mead-halls crumble, and the Masters lie

Bereft of joy. The band of warriors,

Impressively arrayed upon the ridge:

Resounding battle carried some away.

I know of one enfolded by the keen,

Encrimsoned talons of a shrieking bird,

And then conveyed across the icy waves;

Another one I knew, assigned to Death

\_\_\_In searing increments by thrashing wolves,

And yet another hidden in the earth.

The Maker of the World unmade this place,

Until (the noise of its inhabitants

Resolving into Silence's estates)

The mighty castle stood untenanted

The wretched mortal who reflects upon

This palisade-surrounded place (...upon

The darkness that must be a human life)

Will often summon from the charnel vaults

Of Memory so many battles with

A worthy foe. But when the daylight finds

These present miseries, the mortal cries:

"The horse is gone. The potentate is gone.

The blade is gone. The always-open hand

So freely circulating gold is gone.

The benches in the hall, the hall itself,

The chalice, chainmail, pride of princes, all

So shockingly, so consummately gone."

For life on Middle Earth is aught but pain,

And Fate's caprices hurriedly rewrite

Whatever might be written in the sky.

Divine abundance levered from the hills,

Mementos, chanted verses, turquoise glass,

Enameled aestels, bold compatriots,

Sweet lyres, heroes mounted on their steeds,

The slaughter-horns composed of hammered bronze,

Attentive womenfolk...they pass away.

And Fate (that brutally impulsive lass)

Produces vacancy upon the earth.

*So said the briny, casket-chested man  
Reduced into a state of wisdom by  
Experience's sheer primeval heft.  
It is a worthy man who keeps the faith.  
It is a worthy man who never too  
Impetuously throws ajar the cage  
Containing his accumulated grief...  
Unless he knows beforehand how to find  
The humble ear associated to  
Eternity's sublime Anointed One.  
For well is it with him who follows Grace—  
Authentic solace's eternal source.  
For well is it with him who knows the Lord  
In whom abides our true security.*

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