

# The seafarer: loneliness and exile in the poem



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Throughout the history of British Literature, there have always been issues centered on the themes of loneliness, desolation, or exile. Often time's authors speak from their own experiences that describe their conflicts with misery and discomfort. During the Anglo-Saxon era, times were not always blissful and authors chose to pass along stories to generations to reveal their feelings and experiences through poems. In the excerpt, "The Seafarer" the themes of loneliness and exile coexist throughout the poem. The unknown author utilizes many literary elements to portray an immense amount of emotion within this ambiguously perceived piece of literature.

The "Seafarer" is one of the very few pieces of Anglo-Saxon literature that survived through the use of oral tradition. Eventually this poem was translated and recorded so that readers can enjoy the poem without it having to be told orally. Within the reading of "The Seafarer" the author utilizes many literary elements to appeal to the audience. The author's use of imagery is the first element that portrays the desolate tone. In the leading stanzas the speaker's voice is one of hopelessness, sadness and fearfulness. The imagery used by the voice is also evident when the author refers to the effects of the powerful sea. "My feet were cast in icy bands, bound with frost, with frozen chains, and hardship groaned around my heart. Hunger tore at my sea-weary soul." "The Seafarer" line 8-12. The tone of deep sadness causes for the audience to feel a certain sense of empathy for the seafarer and this is also where the connection the writer and reader begins.

The author continues to strengthen the appeal with the reader by perpetuating the feeling of loneliness and exile through the use of tone. The elegiac poem, is established with a personal tone of exile from the

beginning. The speaker pleads to his audience about his honesty and personal self-revelations to come. He tells of the immeasurable suffering, sorrow, and pain without revealing the direct reasons behind the agony. "How wretched I was, drifting through winter on an ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow, Alone in a world blown clear of love Hung with icicles. The hailstorms the only sound was the roaring sea, Lines 6-11. The tone revealed by seafarer is first mournful about the loss of his pass. However, the tone has shifted towards optimism when the seafarer begins to yearn for acceptance into heaven. The Seafarer is once again relating his own story, describes how his " spirit leaps across the seas and travels the waves, wandering for miles before returning, filled with anticipation." The seafarer is now proclaiming that he desires to overcome his battle with being exiled and become accepted into heaven to gain eternal life. The author begins to formulate allusions that give insight on the true character of the seafarer.

This poem also grasps the concept of religion and how it plays a role in this work. The character states that his exile is his " sanctuary" from the sea. " Thus the joys of God are fervent with life, where life itself fades quickly into the earth." (Lines 64-66). The feeling of exile is presented throughout the writing. Symbolically, the powerful sea is what keeps him apart from the world that was for the creation of his exile. The seafarer then admits that he has been lost and wants God to lead him back from where he strayed " Death/ Can only bring you earthly praise/ And a song to celebrate a place/ With the angles, life eternally blessed/ In the hosts of Heaven," In this section, the speaker urges the reader to forget earthly accomplishments and anticipate judgment by God in the afterlife. The poem addresses both pagan

and Christian beliefs of overcoming the feeling of suffering and loneliness. For example, the speaker discusses being buried with treasure and winning glory in battle (pagan) and also fearing God's judgment in the afterlife (Christian). Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother/ Opens his palms and pours down gold/On his kinsman's grave, strewing his coffin/ with treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing/ Golden shakes the wrath of God/ for a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing/ hidden on earth rises to Heaven/ We all fear God. He turns the earth, Moreover, (Lines 96-103) "The Seafarer" can then be interpreted as an allegory discussing life as a journey and the human condition as that of exile from God on the sea of life.

The Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer" is an ambiguously perceived piece of literature. The author's great use of literary elements strengthened the connection with the reader and allows for many diverse assumptions to be formulated. Based on the title and imagery many perceive that this poem details the struggle for an individual to overcome their moment of mournful exile and find hope towards the end. However, many may also perceive this poem by the use of allegories and allusions as a story that teaches a lesson that correlates the beliefs of being saved through the power of God. Either way the formulated assumptions are both correct because the speaker has achieved their goal of connecting with the reader and conveying their emotions through everlasting poetry.