

# Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer and The Penitent's Prayer.



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# OLD ENGLISH POETIC DICTION AND THE INTERPRETATION OF *THE WANDERER*, *THE SEAFARER* AND *THE PENITENT'S PRAYER*

**E. G. STANLEY**

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OLD ENGLISH POETIC DICTION  
AND THE INTERPRETATION  
OF *THE WANDERER*, *THE SEAFARER*  
AND *THE PENITENT'S PRAYER*

*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* deal with the miseries of exile, and if the Christian moral ending is ignored they provide stirring evidence for a view of Germanic heroes as men who willingly bore the hardships that were their lot, and exulted in them. The endings of the poems are not now looked upon as 'spurious,' but rather as the culmination of the poems. The exiles no longer exult in their miseries but are miserable. The OE. "wrecca" is no longer the cognate "Recke" but the "wretch" of which he was the etymon. The Wanderer and the Seafarer are no longer Teutonic heroes hedged about with pietistic innovations but a part of medieval Christian literature. That was the view of Ehrismann in 1909 and of Dr. Dorothy Whitelock quite recently<sup>1)</sup>. Ehrismann took *The Seafarer* to be allegorical, and Dr. Whitelock takes him to be a voluntary exile, who has laid upon himself the hardships of exile as a penitential discipline.

The connexion of *The Seafarer* with penitential discipline has been placed beyond doubt by Dr. Whitelock's study. It seems possible to extend this connexion to *The Wanderer*, though not if her very literal interpretation of the poems is maintained. In support of the view that both poems

<sup>1)</sup> G. Ehrismann, *Religionsgeschichtliche Beiträge zum germanischen Frühchristentum*, Beitr., vol. XXXV, pp. 213—18; D. Whitelock, *The Interpretation of 'The Seafarer'*, in *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe (H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies)*, edited by Sir Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins, 1950, pp. 259—72. No attempt will be made in this article to discuss the various interpretations of the poems.

↓ About the article

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