

**Article Title:** Preparing the Mind for Prayer: *The Wanderer*, *hesychasm* and *theosis*

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## Abstract

This article reads the celebrated Old English lament *The Wanderer* within the context of the early monastic tradition of *hesychasm*, the harnessing of meandering thoughts prior to approaching the stillness of prayer, and the doctrine of *theosis*, the belief that humankind can share in the divine nature of God through grace. In identifying new analogues and possible sources in scriptural and patristic writings, it suggests how the poem might have been understood within an Anglo-Saxon monastic milieu.

**Keywords** Old English . Anglo-Saxon . Poetry . Patristics . Monasticism . Contemplation . Prayer . *The Wanderer* . Exeter Book

## I: *The Wanderer*: a Theological Poem?

Lines 40-57 of *The Wanderer* describe the nightly imaginings of an *eard-stapa* (lit. “land-stepper”)<sup>1</sup> in which his weary mind is tormented by the memory of absent friends and generous treasure-givers in former days:

þinceð him on mode    þæt he his mondryhten  
 clippe and cysse    ond on cneo lecge  
 honda ond heafod    swa he hwilum ær  
 in geardagum    giefstolas breac.  
 Ðonne onwæcneð eft    wineleas guma,  
 gesihð him biforan    fealwe wegas,  
 bapian brimfuglas    brædan feþra,

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron *et al.* 2007 (hereafter *DOE*): “wanderer (through the land)”.

hreosan hrim and snaw    hagle gemenged.  
 Ponne beoð þy hefigran    heortan benne,  
 sare æfter swæsne.    Sorg bið geniwad  
 þonne maga gemynd    mod geondhweorfeð,  
 greteð gliwstafum,    georne geondsceawað  
 secga geseldan—swimmað eft on weg  
 fleotendra ferð—no þær fela bringeð  
 cuðra cwidegiedda.    Cearo bið geniwad  
 þam þe sendan sceal    swiþe geneahhe  
 ofer waþema gebind    werigne sefan.<sup>2</sup> (ll. 41-57)

In his important 1969 essay, “*Mens absentia cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*”, Peter Clemoes identified a possible source for this account of the mind’s journey beyond the confines of the body in a passage in Ambrose’s *Hexaemeron* (VI, c.viii).<sup>3</sup> I quote Clemoes’s translation below:

Therefore the flesh cannot be after the image of God, but our soul which is  
 free and in widespread thought and deliberations roams hither and thither,  
 which in considering looks at everything. Behold we are now in Italy and we

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<sup>2</sup> “He thinks to himself in *his* mind that he embraces and kisses his dear lord, and places *his* hands and head on *his* knees, just as he for a time, previously, in former days, enjoyed the gift-throne. Then the joyless man awakens again, sees before him dark waves, sea-birds bathing, spreading *their* feathers, falling hoarfrost and snow, mingled with hail. Then the heart’s wounds are the heavier, sorrowing after the beloved one. Sorrow is renewed, when the memory of kin passes through the mind; he joyfully greets *them*, eagerly studies the companions of men. Afterwards they swim away. The spirits of floating ones do not bring many familiar sayings there. Care is renewed for the one who must send very often, over the binding of the waves the weary spirit.” All quotations from *The Wanderer* are taken from the edition of Leslie (1985). Other Exeter Book poems are quoted from Krapp and Dobbie (1936). All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> In the same essay, Clemoes identifies a passage in Alcuin as a possible source for *The Seafarer* ll. 58-64a. I would suggest the relationship between these two passages is closer than that which he proposes between the Ambrosian passage and *The Wanderer*. Harbus (1996), drawing on medieval dream theory, reads *The Wanderer* ll. 41-57 as a “deceptive dream”.

think of those things which seem to look towards eastern and western parts and we seem to live with those who are in places in Persia and we see those who live in Africa if that land has received any who are known to us: we follow them when they are setting out, we keep with them when they are journeying, we are united with them when they are absent, we speak to them when they are separated, even when they are dead we revive them to talk to, and we embrace and hold them as we would living people and accord them the courtesies and usage of life. The soul therefore is after the image of God, being measured not by bodily but by mental activity, for it sees those who are absent, casts its gaze upon things across the sea, scans them with its glance, examines what is hidden, and hither and thither in a single moment makes its perceptions range throughout the limits of the world and the secrets of the universe [...]. (Clemoes 1969, pp. 66-7, n. 3).

Clemoes's essay has done much to encourage the view that *The Wanderer*, like its Exeter-Book companion-piece *The Seafarer*, is a product of Christian-Latin tradition, rather than, as had once been commonly thought, a pagan lament against an implacable *wyrd* clumsily framed by Christian interpolations.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently scholars have identified the poem as a precursor to the English meditative tradition (Seltzer 1983; Savage 1987), while others have compared it with Boethian philosophy (Horgan 1987; North 1995), wisdom literature (Shippey 1994), the genre of *consolatio* (Cross 1961), stoic philosophy (Hill 2004), Old English homiletic tradition (Orchard 2002),<sup>5</sup> and, most recently, the Lament Psalms (Toswell 2014, pp. 354-58).

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<sup>4</sup> For a sample of this view, see Anderson (1957, pp. 159-60). For discussion of possible biblical influence, see Leslie (1985, pp. 36-7); Muir (1994, II, pp. 503-05); and De Lacy (1998).

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Klinck (1992, pp. 231-38).

Yet, despite the widespread acceptance of the fundamentally Christian background of *The Wanderer*, scholars still tend to treat the poem as essentially a secular work, closer in spirit to the heroic culture of the Germanic warband than the monastic cloister,<sup>6</sup> while in a recent essay, Daniel Anlezark contrasts the poem's "more philosophical, less penitential" treatment of emotion and suffering with the more "theological" approach of its Exeter Book companion-piece, *Resignation* (2015, p. 84). However, the poem's unique survival in the Exeter Book, a manuscript which was probably copied in a Benedictine Reform monastery in the late tenth century and was included among other pious reading materials in a list of items donated to Exeter Cathedral by the Benedictine Bishop Leofric in 1070 (Robertson 1939, pp. 228-29), certainly suggests that it was considered useful reading material for monks in late Anglo-Saxon England. But *The Wanderer* has yet to be considered in any depth in the light of monastic thought and prayerful reading. How would a tenth- or eleventh-century English monk have responded to this poem?

Although the Ambrosian passage cited by Clemoes resembles in several striking ways the poem's account of mental journeying, there are also some important differences, notably the fact that, for Ambrose, this quality of the mind is an example of its godlike nature, whereas in the Old English poem the *eardstapa*'s realisation of the illusory nature of his visions is a source of continual torment, making the heart's wounds heavier (l. 49). In this article I suggest that a closer analogue to the above passage—and indeed a possible source for the poem's structure and theme as a whole—is provided by the writings of the influential monastic treatises of two of the Church Fathers, Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian, who provide detailed accounts of how a monk should clear his mind of meandering thoughts, which cause suffering

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<sup>6</sup> Orchard (2002) argues persuasively that the poem laments the passing of the old, heroic culture, while utilising the tropes of the new Old English homiletic tradition.

(described in terms of passions or vices), as a preliminary to the stillness of prayer. Drawing on scriptural analogues and Bede's account of St Chad, I argue that the poem's imagery of stormy weather, typically interpreted by modern critics as an example of the "pathetic fallacy", can also be understood as a penitential motif. In order to contextualize this reading of *The Wanderer* in the light of early English and wider monastic tradition, I discuss ways in which the poem engages with the concept of *theosis*, or deification, "the doctrine that the destiny of human kind, or indeed of the cosmos as a whole, is to share in the divine life, and actually to become God, though by grace rather than by nature" (Louth 2005, p. 229).<sup>7</sup>

## II: *Hesychasm* and *Theosis* in Monastic Tradition

The Egyptian desert father Evagrius Ponticus (344-399) delineates the process by which a monk achieves the state of *hesychasm*, stillness in prayer,<sup>8</sup> by progressing from *katharsis*, the purging of sins, to *theoria*, the vision of the place of God, to *theosis*, a union with or partaking in the nature of divinity. The monk's progress, however, is constantly impeded by the workings of *logismoi* (λογισμοί) wicked thoughts "who oppose the ascetic struggle", namely the eight interconnected vices of gluttony, immoderate sexuality, wrath, pride, vainglory, melancholy, depression and avarice (*On Thoughts* 1; Casiday 2006, p. 91).<sup>9</sup> Evagrius's main concern is with the

<sup>7</sup> For the scriptural foundations of *theosis* see, for example, Ps 8:1, 5; John 10:33-6; 2 Peter 1:1-5; Luke 20:35-6 and Romans 8:15-24.

<sup>8</sup> For a definition, see Ware (1983).

<sup>9</sup> Burton-Christie (2012, pp. 49-51), discusses Athanasius's Life of St Anthony in terms of *anachoresis* (seeking the place of God), *prosoche* (discernment and the struggle with the self) and *proseuche* (dwelling in the place of God). Evagrius's scheme was later modified by Gregory the Great, who condensed melancholy and depression into the single vice of sloth and made vainglory a facet of pride, adding the sin of envy, giving rise to the conception of the seven deadly sins. For the Greek text of Evagrius's *On Thoughts* I cite the edition of Géhin and Guillaumont (1998).

distracting impact *logismoi* can have on the mind of a monk as it strives for a better understanding of God in the act of prayer:

through the disorder caused by these powers, the mind commits adultery and fights in its thinking so that it is unable to take up the appearance of God the law-giver, whereas *this luminosity appears to the governing faculty at the time of prayer after the suppression of all the concepts of things*. (*On Thoughts* 2; Casiday, p. 92). (Emphasis added).

Central to Evagrius's treatment of demons (Gk. *δαίμων*) is his understanding of the workings of memory: demons are conjured from the memory to oppress the monk's mind, especially when "the organ of perception rests in sleep and is inactive" (*On Thoughts* 4; Casiday, p. 93). Of particular significance to this discussion is the demon called "wanderer" or "vagabond" (Gk. *πλανος*, 'planos') which leads the mind out of itself in a sort of trance-like state to encounter former acquaintances, thereby distracting it from the contemplation of divine things:

*There is a demon called 'Wanderer' [πλανος]<sup>10</sup> who, coming near the brethren chiefly around dawn, leads the mind around from city to city, from village to*

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<sup>10</sup> Géhin and Guillaumont (1998: 180-81) translate *πλανος* here as Fr. 'vagabond', noting: "Évagré se réfère à une appellation qui était probablement en usage dans le milieu monastique, comme il le fait en *Pratique* 12 à propos du démon de l'acédie appelé aussi démon de midi. *πλανος* est à prendre ici non pas au sens de *trompeur, séducteur* qu'il a ordinairement quand il s'agit des démons dans l'Écriture [...], dans la *Vie d'Antoine* (94, 2), parfois chez Évagré lui-même (*Prière* 94), mais au sens premier *errant, vagabond*." Géhin and Guillaumont also note parallels with Cassian (*Conferences* 7.32): "qui parle de certains démons *quos etiam Planos uulguis appellat* [Migne 1841-55, col. 713], avec même référence à une usage commun que chez Évagre; mais Cassien appelle ainsi des démons qui se tiennent sur les chemins, se moquent des passants et cherchent à les tromper! il note cependant que certains d'entre eux s'en prennent, la nuit, à ceux qui dorment et se livrent sur eux à des incubations", and Origen *In Ezech.* 6.11 (180-81, n. 9). See also the discussion of Sinkewicz (2003: 142-43): "The name of the demon 'Vagabond' was probably a commonplace in Evagrius' milieu, although the known parallels do not exactly fit the description in the treatise."

*village and from house to house. By making supposedly simple encounters, then encountering acquaintances and talking at length, the mind thus corrupts its own status by these meetings and gradually becomes further from the knowledge of God and even forgetful of virtue and of its own profession. So it is needful for the anchorite to observe whence this demon begins and where he leaves off—for not by accident nor by chance does he make this long trip. Instead he does these things wishing to corrupt the anchorite's status, so that the mind, incited by these things and inebriated by the many encounters, will fall more readily to the demon of impurity or of wrath or of grief, who particularly ruin the radiance of its status. (On Thoughts 9; Casiday, p. 96).*

(Emphasis added).

On encountering such a demon, Evagrius recommends that the monk should sit down and remind himself of the experience, considering what it was that caused his appearance, be it memory of family, friends, wealth or other distractions (*On Thoughts* 9; Casiday, pp. 9-10). In turn, Evagrius stresses the importance of not giving in to other demons such as wrath or grief, offering remedies for each vice or sin. This process of *katharsis*, the conscious rejection and gradual stripping away of sins leading to the purification of the soul before God, is the first stage in the monk's quest for *theosis*. The reward for the one who holds firm and negotiates the assaults of demons is *theoria*, a clearer, mystical vision of "the place of God":

The mind could not see the place of God in itself, unless it had become loftier than all [concepts] from things. But it would not become loftier, unless it had put off the passions that bind it to perceptible things through concepts. It will



put aside the passions through virtues: it will put aside the base thoughts through contemplation; it will even put aside contemplation itself, when there appears to it that light at the time of prayer which sets in relief the place of God. (*On Thoughts* 40; Casiday, pp. 114-15).

Elsewhere Evagrius warns of the distractions of “concerns and chains of thought” which will “agitate and trouble you so that they may divert your attention” (*On Prayer* 9; Casiday, p. 188). Such demons present unattainable images to the mind; in vainly striving after these memories, the mind is brought to grief, falling into the sins of melancholy and depression:

When the demons set you yearning to pray truly, then they propose representation of certain things that are supposedly necessary and shortly thereafter they raise up and implant the memory of them, *setting the mind in motion to search for them. When the mind does not find them, it is grieved and discouraged.* Then when it stands in prayer they remind it of the things sought and remembered, so that the mind, having become vain with the knowledge of them, will lose its fruitful prayer. (*On Prayer* 10; Casiday, p. 188). (Emphasis added).

For Evagrius, undistracted prayer is “the highest function of the mind; Prayer is the mind’s ascent to God” (*On Prayer* 35-6; Casiday, p. 190); it is impossible “to pray purely while being tangled up with material things and shaken by unremitting cares. For prayer is the setting aside of representations” (*On Prayer* 71; Casiday, p. 193). So

in order to conquer *logismoi* the monk must set himself apart from the world and its concerns:

The source of a wandering mind is vainglory, by which the mind is moved to try circumscribing the divine by a shape or figures. [...] Blessed is the mind that at the time of prayer becomes free from matter and from possessions. [...] *The one who is separated from all and united with all is a monk. (On Prayer 116, 118, 124; Casiday, p. 198). (Emphasis added).*

The biblical commentaries of the school of Canterbury indicate that at least some of Evagrius's Greek writings were brought to Anglo-Saxon England by Theodore of Tarsus and Hadrian in the seventh century (Bischoff and Lapidge 1994, pp. 217-18, 298-99, 378-79, 427-28, 491; Lapidge 2005, p. 32), but his ideas about monastic training were widely disseminated in the West through the writings of John Cassian, whose *Monastic Institutes* and *Conferences* were required reading for all Benedictine monks and well known to the Anglo-Saxons from an early date (Lake 2003).<sup>11</sup> In his seventh Conference, Cassian describes the attacks of various forms of demons, among them the Evagrian "wanderer", whom he calls *Fauni*, after the Roman mythological spirits:

Tot autem esse in immundis spiritibus quot in hominibus studia, non dubie comprobatur. Nam nonnullos eorum, quos etiam Faunos vulgus appellat, ita seductores et joculatores esse manifestum est, ut certa quaeque loca seu vias

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<sup>11</sup> Lapidge (2006), lists citations of Cassian by Theodore and Hadrian, Aldhelm, Bede, Asser, Lantfred and Ælfric on pp. 176, 179, 205, 238, 240-41, 257, and provides a list of known Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of his works on pp. 295-96 (including three for *Conferences* and two for *Monastic Institutes*).

jugiter obsidentes, nequaquam tormentis eorum quos praetereuntes potuerint decipere delectentur, sed de risu tantummodo et illusionem contenti, fatigari eos potius studeant quam nocere; quosdam solummodo innocuis incubationibus hominum pernoctare; alios ita esse furori ac truculentiae deditos, ut non sint contenti illorum tantummodo corpora quos suppleverint atroci dilaceratione vexare, sed etiam irruere super eminens transeuntes, atque afficere illos saevissima caede festinent, quales illi in Evangelio describuntur (Matth. VIII), ob quorum metum per viam illam transire jam nullus audebat [...]. (Migne 1841-55, coll. 0713A-0714A).<sup>12</sup>

Ælfric, drawing on Cassian and Alcuin, produced an Old English treatise on the eight vices and virtues around the year 1000, close to the time of the copying of the Exeter Book.<sup>13</sup> Particularly relevant to our discussion of *The Wanderer* is Ælfric's treatment of the third, fifth, sixth and seventh vices, namely avarice, melancholy, depression and vainglory:

Nu syndon eahte heafodleahtras þe us onwinnað swiðe. [...]

Se þrida is *auaritia*, þæt is seo yfele gitsung. And seo is wyrtruma ælcere wohnysse. [...]

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<sup>12</sup> "But it is clearly proved that there exist in unclean spirits as many desires as there are in men. For some of them, which are commonly called *Plani* [Gibson translates Lat. *Fauni* as *Plani*], are shown to be so seductive and sportive that, when they have taken continual possession of certain places or roads, they delight themselves not indeed with tormenting the passers by whom they can deceive, but, contenting themselves merely with laughing at them and mocking them, try to tire them out rather than to injure them: while some spend the night merely by harmlessly taking possession of men, though others are such slaves to fury and ferocity that they are not simply content with hurting the bodies of those, of whom they have taken possession, by tearing them in a dreadful manner, but actually are eager to rush upon those who are passing by at a distance, and to attack them with most savage slaughter: like those described in the gospel, for fear of whom no man dared to pass by that way." (Gibson 1894: 425-26).

<sup>13</sup> Clayton (2013), pp. 72-107, provides a detailed examination of the development of the tradition of the eight vices and virtues from Evagrius and Cassian to Ælfric. Aldhelm follows the eight-vices scheme rather than the seven deadly sins in his *De uirginitate*; see Wieland (1986).

Se fifta is *tristitia*, þæt is þisre worulde unrotnyss, þonne se man  
geunrotsað ealles to swiðe for his æhta lyre, þe he lufode to swiðe, and cit  
þonne wið God and his synna geeacnað. Twa unrotnyssa synd: an is þeos  
yfele; oðer is halwende, þæt man for his synnum geunrotsige.

Se sixta leahter is *accidia* gehaten, þæt is asolcennys oððe slæwð on  
Englisc, þonne þam men ne lyst on his life nan good don.

Se seofopa leahter is *iactantia* gecweden, þæt is idel gylp on Englisc  
spræce, þonne se man bið lofgeorn and mid licetunge færð and deð for gylpe,  
gif he hwæt dælan wyle. [...]

(*The Vices and Virtues* 1-8; Clayton 2013, pp. 144-46).<sup>14</sup>

We may observe here that while Ælfric is influenced by the Gregorian system in transforming *acedia* into sloth, he retains the Evagrian vice of *tristitia*, echoing Cassian's statement in his *Institutes* that sadness can only be useful if "it comes to us through sorrow for our sins, the desire for perfection, or the consideration of future bliss" (*Institutes* 9.10; Bertram 1999, p. 142).<sup>15</sup> Cassian follows Evagrius in recommending the rejection of worldly riches (*Conferences* 3.8) and in describing the

<sup>14</sup> "Now there are eight capital sins which attack us fiercely [...]. The third is *avaritia*, that is evil avarice, and it is the root of all evil. [...] The fifth is *tristitia*, which is sadness of this world, when a person is too sad on account of the loss of his possessions, which he loved too much, and complains against God and adds to his sins. There are two sadnesses: one is this evil one; the other one is salutary, in that one is sad on account of one's sins. The sixth vice is called *accidia*, which is indolence or sloth in English, when a person does not desire to do any good in his life. [...] The seventh vice is called *iactantia*, which is vainglory in the English language, when a person is eager for praise and behaves with hypocrisy and, if he be willing to give something in alms, he does it for vainglorious display. [...]" (Clayton, pp. 145-7). Cf. Cassian, *Conferences* 5.10-11: Migne 1841-55, coll. 0621A-0627A.

<sup>15</sup> "Ideoque utilis nobis una re tantum tristitia iudicanda est, cum hanc vel poenitudine delictorum, vel desiderio perfectionis accensi, vel futurae beatitudinis contemplatione concipimus" (Migne 1841-55, coll. 0348A). Cf. Cassian, *Conferences* 5.1: "tertium [...] id est, avaritia, sive amor pecuniae; [...] quintum tristitia; sextum acedia, id est, anxietas, sive taedium cordis; septimum cenodoxia, id est, iactantia, seu vana gloria" (Migne 1841-55, col. 0611A), ("[...] the third is avarice, understood as greed or even lust for money; [...] the fifth melancholy; the sixth depression, which is anxiety or listlessness of heart; the seventh vainglory, meaning silly or frivolous conceit") (Luibheid 1985, p. 69).

spirit of melancholy as an external force which distracts the weakened or tired mind from contemplation of God:

*In our fifth round we must fend off the attacks of morbid melancholy (Lat. Quinto nobis certamine edacis tristitiae stimuli retundendi sunt). If that can once again gain the mastery over our hearts, through individual occurrences, and unspecified chances, it will eventually cut us off from any insight of divine contemplation, and cast the mind down from its general state of purity to weaken it and to depress it. [...] When all sound discernment is lost, and the heart is worried and perturbed, it makes us all but distracted and dazed, and breaks us with overwhelming gloom (Lat. omnique perduto salubri consilio, et cordis constantia perturbata, velut amentem facit et ebrium sensum frangitque et obruit desperatione poenali). (Institutes 9.1: Migne 1841-55, coll. 0351B-0353A; Bertram 1999, p. 139). (Emphasis added).*

The cure for the vice of melancholy is, Cassian explains, to build up the mind with meditation on divine things, filling it with hope for the future in the promise of heaven, and to remain steadfast despite the vagaries of transient fortune:

*In this way we shall be strong enough to overcome all types of melancholy, whether they arise from anger beforehand, or through the loss of property or some injury done to us (Lat. sive quae amissione lucri, vel detrimenti illatione nobis adveniunt); or are caused by some wrong we have suffered or spring from an irrational mental anxiety or bring upon us a deadly despair. In the prospect of eternity and our reward to come (Lat. irrationabili mentis*

*confusione procedunt, seu quae lethalem desperationem nobis inducunt, valebimus superare, cum aeternarum rerum ac futurarum intuitu*) we shall always be joyful and remain steadfast, neither cast down by present misfortune, nor elated by good chance, but *considering both to be temporary and soon to pass* (Lat. *velut caduca et mox transeuntia contemplantes*). (*Institutes* 9.13: Migne 1841-55, coll. 0360A-0360B; Bertram 1999, p. 143). (Emphasis added).

In his description of the primacy of contemplation over action in the first Conference, Cassian cites the Egyptian Abbot Moses, who describes the former as “the gaze turned in the direction of the things of God” (*Conferences* 1.8; Luibheid 1985, p. 43). Similarly, in the ninth Conference, he quotes Abbot Isaac who explains that the stillness required for such contemplation can only be attained through the systematic “clearing away [of worldly concerns] (Lat. *repurgii emundatione praemissa*) which results in purity and in the simplicity of innocence, [after which] we have then to lay the indestructible foundations of deep humility”:

After that, *the soul must be restrained from all meandering, from all slippery wanderings* (Lat. *et ab omni discursu atque evagatione lubrica animus inhibendus*), *so that it may rise bit by bit to the contemplation of God* (*ut ita paulatim ad contemplationem Dei*) and to the gazing upon the realms of the spirit. *Because of the workings of memory whatever has preoccupied our mind before the time of prayer must of necessity intrude on our actual prayers* (Lat. *Quidquid enim ante orationis horam anima nostra conceperit, necesse est ut orantibus nobis per ingestionem recordationis occurrat*). Therefore in

advance of prayer we must strive to dispose ourselves as we would wish to be during prayer. (*Conferences* 9.3; Migne 1841-55, coll. 0773B-0773C; Luibheid 1985, pp. 102-03). (Emphasis added).

I will now review the treatment of *theosis* in *The Wanderer* in the light of these influential accounts of monastic contemplation and preparation for prayer.

### III: *Hesychasm and Theosis in The Wanderer*

Scholars have long debated the precise meaning of the subject, verb and object of the gnomic line with which *The Wanderer* begins: *Oft him anhaga are gebideð*.<sup>16</sup> Central to this problem is the question as to whether the line should be read in a secular or religious context (or both). A clue is provided by the following half-line, where the object *ar* is varied by the noun-phrase *metudes miltse*. Although the argument could be made for translating *metudes miltse* in a secular context as “the reward of fate”, as

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<sup>16</sup> DOE s. v. *anhaga*: “solitary being, lonely being” (12 occurrences, mainly poetic); among the many possible meanings of *ar*, DOE has honour, reverence, respect, dignity, honourable rank, mercy, grace, favour, help, pity, compassion, kindness, benevolence, temporal prosperity, good fortune, benefit, property, possessions, goods, resources and benefices. As examples of the specifically Christian usage of *ar* in the sense of “grace, favour granted by God, salvation” preferred by most translators of *The Wanderer* l. 1, DOE cites *Andreas* l. 977 and *Seafarer* l. 107, as well as examples in a Rogationtide Homily, the Will of Ealdorman Alfred, and the Old English *Boethius* and *Pastoral Care*. The verb *gebideð* has been almost universally understood as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present indicative form of the verb *gebidan* (‘to wait for’ or ‘to experience’). Hence DOE cites *The Wanderer* l. 1 to illustrate the sense of ‘gebidan’ as ‘to experience, live to see/ endure (hardship); enjoy (pleasure)’, noting “‘to wait for’ [sense 2.a] has also been suggested’. The same verb appears in its infinitive form at l. 70 of *The Wanderer*, in the sense of “‘to wait till (*op* followed by time when, or (*op*)*þæt*/ *hwonne* followed by a clause) [2.d.]’: “beorn sceal *gebidan*, þonne he beot spriceð, oppæt collenferð cunne gearwe hwider hrepra gehygd hweorfan wille”. Leslie (pp. 69-70) translates *gebideð* as “experiences”; Orchard (2002, p. 10) argues that the poem charts a progression from the “seemingly detached passivity of someone waiting for (or experiencing) favor [...] to the engaged effort of someone actively seeking it”; Klinck (1992, pp. 106-07): “although in this context the word is most closely rendered “experiences,” it conveys also the sense of enduring through hardships until grace is granted.” However, *gebideð* is occasionally used in prose for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present indicative form of the verb ‘gebiddan’, which DOE defines: “1. To ask, entreat [...]. 2. With reference to formal petitions, demands of various kinds [...]. 3. To ask in prayer, pray”. Cf. for example, *Old English Martyrology* 7, B.42: ‘swa hwelc mon swa [...] mid tearum him to Gode *gebideð* on ðinum noman, he bið fram his synnum gefreod (C mid tearum to gode *gebyddeð*)’. Gordon (1962, p. 73), perhaps influenced by the closeness of *gebideð* and *gebiddedð*, translates *The Wanderer* l. 1 as “Often the solitary man *prays for* favour”.

Bosworth and Toller comment, both *metod* and *milts* usually occur in Old English in specifically Christian contexts, so a preferable translation might therefore be “the comfort of the Creator”.<sup>17</sup>

A number of scholars have proposed that the gloomy introspection of the *anhaga/eardstapa* in the opening lines gives way to the *apatheia* of the *snottor* at the close. For example, Robert Bjork has argued that the poem describes the *anhaga*’s inner transformation from “the inferior, world-bound, essentially hopeless exile track of the Germanic world into the superior, heaven bound, hope-filled exile track of the Christian faith” (Bjork 1989, 126).<sup>18</sup> Further support for reading the opening line within a Christian context is provided by the opening text in the Exeter Book, *Christ I* (The Advent Lyrics), where we find the collocation of the verbs *gebidan* (“to wait”) and *gebiddan* (“to pray”) with *ar* (“mercy/grace”), as well as the theme of humanity wandering in exile from God in this life:

Nu is þæt bearn cymen,  
awæcned to wyrpe weorcum Ebrea,  
bringeð blisse þe, benda onlyseð  
niþum genedde. Nearoþearfe conn,  
hu se earma sceal *are gebidan*.<sup>19</sup>

(*Christ I*, ll. 66b-70). (Emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Bosworth and Toller (1898-1921), s. v. *metod*: “A word found only in poetry (the phrase *se metoda drihten* occurs twice in Ælfric’s Homilies, but in alliterative passages). The earlier meaning of the word in heathen times may have been *fate, destiny, death* (cf. *metan*) [...]. But the word, which occurs frequently, is generally an epithet of the Deity as the O. Sax. *Metod*”; *milts*: “mildness, kindness, favour, mercy (most commonly with reference to the Deity)”.

<sup>18</sup> See also Greenfield (1951); Rumble (1958); Orchard (2002).

<sup>19</sup> “Now the child has come, born to the relief of the sufferings of the Hebrews, He brings bliss to you, loosens the bonds wickedly forced upon you. He recognizes the terrible need, how the wretched must *wait for mercy* (or *grace*).” (Emphasis added).



Us is þinra *arna* þearf!

Hafað se awyrgða wulf tostenced,  
 deor dædscua, dryhten, þin eowde,  
 wide towrecene. Þæt ðu, waldend, ær  
 blode gebohtes, þæt se bealofulla  
 hyneð heardlice, ond him on hæft nimeð  
 ofer usse nioda lust. Forþon we, nergend, *þe*  
*biddað geornlice* breostgehygdum  
 þæt þu hrædlice helpe gefremme  
 wergum wreccan [...].<sup>20</sup> (Emphasis added).

(*Christ I*, ll. 255b-64a)

Habbað wræcmæcgas wergan gæstas,  
 hetlen helsceapa, hearde genyrwad,  
 gebunden bealorapum. *Is seo bot gelong*  
*eall æt þe anum, ece dryhten.*

[...]

*Ara* nu onbehtum ond usse yrmþa geþenc,  
 hu we tealtrigað tydran mode,  
 hwearfiað heanlice.<sup>21</sup>

(*Christ I*, ll. 363-66, 370-72a). (Emphasis added).

<sup>20</sup> “We are in need of your *grace/mercy*! The accursed wolf, beast and shadow of darkness, Lord, has scattered your flock far and wide, that you, Ruler, had before bought with blood, that the baleful enemy fiercely injures and takes away into captivity for himself, against the yearning of our needs. Therefore, Redeemer, *we earnestly pray to you* in the thoughts of our hearts that you quickly bring about help to us weary exiles.” (Emphasis added).

<sup>21</sup> “Cursed souls from hell have cruelly constrained us exiles, bound us with baleful bonds. *The remedy is yours alone, Eternal Lord.* [...] *Have mercy* now upon your servants and think upon our miseries, how we stumble along, faint of heart, and wander in misery.” (Emphasis added).

Elsewhere in Old English religious verse, *gebiddan* (“to pray”) collocates with *ar* on several occasions. For example, *The Lord’s Prayer II*, ll. 2b-3a: “Forðam we clypiað to þe,/ *are biddað*” (“Therefore we call to you, *pray for mercy*”); *Christ and Satan*, l. 208: “Gemunan soð and riht, þonne we to hehselde hnigan þencað, and þone anwaldan *ara biddan*” (“Remember truth and right, when we think to kneel before the high throne, and *pray* to the All-Ruler *for mercy*”); and *Daniel*, ll. 293-94: “nu we *þec* for þreaum and for ðeonydum and for eaðmedum *arna biddað*” (“now we *pray to you for mercy* on our hardship and our slavery and our humiliation”).

Given these contexts, and the (possibly intentional) ambiguity of the near-homonyms *gebidan* and *gebiddan*, we might, then, read the opening line of *The Wanderer* as “The solitary one always waits (or prays) for grace (or mercy)”. Accepting this open-ended reading, the image of the *anhaga* stirring the icy sea with his hands (ll. 2b-4) may be interpreted as a metaphor for the manner in which a contemplative sifts through thoughts in preparation for prayer, in the manner recommended by Evagrius and Cassian. But at this early stage in the poem, the *anhaga*’s prayer is intruded upon by meandering thoughts which give rise to pessimistic outbursts of grief and gloom; in such a state of turmoil, the mind cannot yet approach the stillness necessary for the contemplation of divine things. In particular, the *anhaga* is prevented at this stage in his meditation from receiving *ar* or *metudes miltse* because of his mind’s preoccupation with his state of earthly exile, which is causing him misery (ll. 1-5). Approached from a contemplative perspective, the much-discussed gnomic statement *wyrd bið ful aræd* (5b: “Fate is fully fixed”)<sup>22</sup> may suggest that the *anhaga* is as yet unable to receive *ar* because of his abnegation

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<sup>22</sup> For an alternative reading, see Griffith (1996).

of the will. This mental passivity—resulting in the sin of despair—is contrasted at the end of the poem with the advice of the *snottor* (“wise one”), who recommends *Wel biþ þam þe him are seceð* (l. 114b: “It will be well for the one who seeks grace for himself”); it is only by actively *seeking* grace through the acquisition of *wisdom* that the mind can begin to contemplate the vision of the place of God, the *fæstnung*. Forced to lament his cares alone *uhtna gewylce* (l. 8b: “every dawn”)—the time of the onset of Evagrius’s “wandering demon”—the *anahaga*’s mental state is utterly wretched and seemingly without hope of comfort or remedy.

Later we read that his mental wanderings, in which his *mod* fleetingly encounters friends and family, take place in a sort of delirium between sleep and waking (ll. 39-40: *sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre/ earmne anhogan oft gebindað*, “sorrow and sleep joined together often/always bind the wretched solitary one”; l. 45a: *Donne onwæcneð eft*, “then he awakens again”), a perilous state in which, according to Evagrius, perception is dulled allowing for the onset of the wandering demon. The mind here is described in terms of an enclosure which the speaker—now referred to as an *eardstapa*—dare not open to others (ll. 8-11a).<sup>23</sup> These lines are often interpreted as a positive expression of the stoic endurance of suffering, advocating the value of “keeping a stiff upper-lip” (Diekstra, 77), or as an expression of “cardiocentric restraint” (Lockett 2011: 81-2). An alternative reading, such as might have occurred to an Anglo-Saxon monk familiar with the writings of Cassian, is that the speaker, in lamenting his inability *ceare cwipan* (l. 9a: “to lament sorrow”), expresses his mind’s unfitness for prayer, an activity which—particularly in the tradition of the Psalms—often takes the form of lament addressed directly to God. The “lordly custom” (l. 12b: *indrythen þeaw*) of binding thoughts within the heart

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<sup>23</sup> On the importance of this motif in Old English poetry, see Mize (2013).

brings no relief to the “weary mind” (*werigmod*) and “afflicted heart” (*hreo hyge*) (ll. 15-16).

The source of this suffering is soon revealed to be the memory of absent friends and family, many of whom seem to have died as a result of nameless battles. At ll. 21-9 the *eardstapa* reveals that he has had to bury his lord before being forced to wander the land in pursuit of another treasure-giver. In the lines that follow it emerges that, despite his yearning for *ar*, this *eardstapa* had formerly sought comfort exclusively in earthly things: *seledreorig* (l. 25a: “hall-sad”) he vainly searched far and wide for *wyn* (l. 29a: “joy”), which he hoped to find in the company of *selesecgas* (“hall men”) and in *sincpege* (l. 34b: “treasure giving”), feasting and wound gold (ll. 32-6). As we have seen, in Evagrian terms, this longing for earthly riches can be considered a manifestation of the vice of *avaritia*, greed or lust for money, the root of all evil, which distracts the mind from God, the source of grace.

From line 34 onwards we enter more deeply into the narrator’s inner thoughts, as the poem carefully describes the workings of memory, how the *eardstapa* calls to mind images from his youth of feasting, earthly joys and comforts. But despite this indulgence in painful memories of happier times, the act of contemplation—of consciously moving away from such earthly concerns—is already underway, as these vain longings (Evagrian *logismoi*) are offset by gnomic utterances, such as *wyn eal gedreas*, “joy all perished” (l. 35b), emphasising the emptiness of such pursuits.

Lines 40-57, the passage cited at the beginning of this discussion in which the *eardstapa* imagines that he encounters old companions in his sleep, can be understood in Evagrian terms as an account of the visitation of wandering thoughts which distract the mind from the contemplation of eternity. Echoing Evagrius’s account of the effects of demons, in vainly searching for these absent forms (ll. 51-3), the mind is

consumed by grief and drawn towards the sins of despair and melancholy (l. 50b: *Sorg bið geniwad*; l. 55b: *Cearo bið geniwad*). Indeed, in the following lines, the *eardstapa* marvels at his own mind's ability to combat these same vices:<sup>24</sup>

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg    geond þas woruld  
for hwan modsefa    min ne gesweorce  
þonne ic eorla lif    eal geondþence,  
hu hi færlice    flet ofgeafon,  
modge maguþegnas.<sup>25</sup> (ll. 58-62a)

In the remainder of the poem, the answer to this question is provided in the foregrounding of the speaker's hard-won mental fortitude, gained through experience and deep reflection (l. 60b: *geondþence*, "meditates"; ll. 88b-89b: *wise gepohte* [...] *deope geondþence*, "wisely thought [...] deeply meditates") on the meaning of the events of his own life in a universal, Christian context. We might say that his sorrow is of the sort considered useful by Cassian (and Ælfric) in that it serves as an impetus to "the consideration of future bliss". Here, as throughout the poem, we can observe a careful balancing between the painful recall of past happiness and the present awareness of the meaninglessness of such thoughts and their distracting nature. Reflecting the meandering movement of the speaker's thoughts, the poem alternates between despair at the cruelty of events and the stoic acceptance of one's fate, leading finally to pious optimism. Again the *eardstapa*'s wandering thoughts of the premature death of former comrades provides material for contemplation, as he draws universal

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<sup>24</sup> Seltzer (1983, p. 234), notes that this passage echoes the rhetorical questions found in the meditative writings of Augustine, Ignatius and later writers, such as John Donne.

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I cannot think, throughout this world, why my mind does not grow gloomy, when I deeply ponder all about the life of men, how quickly they departed from the floor, proud young thegns."

observations on the transience of earthly things from this example of his own fleeting joys (ll. 62b-65a).

Lines 65b-72 constitute a gnomic section, warning against the vices which hinder the contemplative or deep thinker on the path to wisdom, among them wrath (l. 66a: *ne sceal no to hatheort*), avarice (68b: *ne to feohgifre*) and vainglory (l. 69a: *ne næfre gielpes to georn*). Moreover, like Cassian, as well as numerous other classical and Christian stoic thinkers, the poet warns against becoming either too downcast by difficulties or too elated by good fortune (l. 68a: *ne to forht ne to fægen*).<sup>26</sup> In terms which echo the teachings of Evagrius and Cassian on preparing the mind for prayer, this section emphasises that the *wita* (l. 65b: “wise one”) must also be able to anticipate the direction in which his wandering thoughts will turn if he chooses to give voice to them by making a *beot* (“vow”):

Beorn sceal gebidan, þonne he beot spricedð,  
 oþþæt collenferð cunne gearwe  
 hwider hreþra gehygd hweorfan wille.<sup>27</sup>  
 (ll. 70-2)

It follows that the *wita* who, through years of practice, has trained his mind so that he can anticipate the direction of its wanderings, can give a freer rein to such thoughts, using them as a meditative exercise and a springboard for contemplation.

This gnomic section is followed by a long passage, dominated by imagery of the ruined cities and stormy weather, illustrating the theme of the vanity of earthly ambitions, when considered in the light of the awesome creative and destructive

<sup>26</sup> On sources and analogues for this passage, see Diekstra (1971) and Hill (2004).

<sup>27</sup> “The warrior must be patient, when he utters a vow, until brave in heart he should readily know in what direction the thoughts of *his* heart will wander.”

power of God (ll. 73-91). Both these *topoi*—the ruined city and stormy weather—have attracted a considerable amount of critical interest. The former has typically been interpreted as an evocation of the physical ruins of Roman or perhaps prehistoric Britain (Frankis 1972, 255-59; Howe, 2008, 84-90; Dean 1965), while the latter is usually understood in terms of the pathetic fallacy as a projection of the *eardstapa*'s miserable mental state (Calder 1971, 264; Stanley 1987, pp. 252, 268; Greenfield 1989, p. 99).<sup>28</sup> However, both *topoi* can also be fruitfully read in the light of biblical, and indeed penitential, imagery. As P. J. Frankis (1972, 268-69) has noted, the imagery of the ruined city echoes prophetic accounts of the fall of Babylon (Is. 13, Jer. 50, 51).<sup>29</sup> I would suggest that an even closer analogue (and possible source), not only for the ruined city and stormy-weather *topoi* but also for much of the elegiac imagery of the poem, is presented by Is. 24, in which the destruction of cities and the cessation of earthly joys are both interpreted as signs of God's judgement on the sins of the world:

1. Ecce: Dominus dissipabit terram et nudabit eam et adfliget faciem eius (cf. *Wanderer* ll. 85-110) et disperget habitatores eius (cf. *Wanderer* ll. 3-7, 22-4) [...]  
 3. Dissipatione dissipabitur terra, et direptione praedabitur, Dominus enim locutus est verbum hoc (cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 85-110). 4 Luxit et defluxit terra et infirmata est. Defluxit orbis; infirmata est altitudo populi terrae (cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 62b-3, 92-5). [...]  
 7. Luxit vndemia; infirmata est vitis; ingemuerunt omnes qui laetabantur corde. 8. Cessavit gaudium tympanorum; quievit sonitus laetantium; conticuit dulcedo citharae. 9 Cum cantico non

<sup>28</sup> Similarly bleak natural imagery is often employed in Old English verse, both in the other short elegiac poems of the Exeter Book such as *The Seafarer* (esp. ll. 23a, 31-33a) *The Wife's Lament* (49b-51a), *The Husband's Message*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Ruin*, and gnomic pieces such as *God's Advice to Humankind*, and in longer works such as *Beowulf*. See further Burlin (1974).

<sup>29</sup> See also Liuzza (2003) for connections with the Tower of Babel.

bibent vinum; amara erit potio bibentibus illam. 10. Adrita est civitas vanitatis; clausa est omnis domus nullo introeunte. 11. Clamor erit super vino in plateis. Deserta est omnis laetitia; translatum est gaudium terrae. 12. Relicta est in urbe solitudo, et clamatis opprimet portas (cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 36b, 92-6).<sup>30</sup>

Is. 24 ends with an eschatological vision in which the *praevaricantes* (“prevaricators”) are punished with *formido et fovea* (“fear and the pit”) (Is. 24: 16) and the earth is shaken by storms and floods (Is. 24: 18-19; cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 75-7, 101-05) when the Lord visits upon the host of heaven and upon the kings of the earth (Is. 24: 21; cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 78b, 95a), reigning in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 114b-15).

Further support for reading the stormy-weather imagery in *The Wanderer* as a sign of God’s anger with the sins of mankind intended to inspire penance is provided by Bede’s story of St Chad’s reaction to natural phenomena in the light of his interpretation of the Psalms:

Namque inter plura continentiae humilitatis doctrinae orationum uoluntariae  
paupertatis et ceterarum uirtutum merita, in tantum erat timori Domini  
subditus, in tantum nouissimorum suorum in omnibus operibus suis memor ut  
[...] si forte legente eo uel aliud quid agente repente flatus uenti maior

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<sup>30</sup> “1. Behold: the Lord shall lay waste the earth and shall strip it and shall afflict the face thereof and scatter abroad the inhabitants thereof [...]. 3. With desolation shall the earth be laid waste, and it shall be utterly spoiled, for the Lord hath spoken this word. 4. The earth mourned and faded away and is weakened. [...] 7. The vintage hath mourned; the vine hath languished away; all the merry-hearted have sighed. 8. The mirth of timbrels hath ceased; the noise of them that rejoice is ended; the melody of the harp is silent. 9. They shall not drink wine with a song; the drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. 10. The city of vanity is broken down; every house is shut up; no man cometh in. 11. There shall be crying for wine in the streets. All mirth is forsaken; the joy of the earth is gone away. 12. Desolation is left in the city, and calamity shall oppress the gates.” The Book of Isaiah was, of course, very well known to the Anglo-Saxons. The *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database lists 265 citations in Anglo-Saxon authors (<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>; accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2015). For a recent discussion of Isaiah’s influence on *Andreas*, see Appleton (2015).



adsurgeret, continuo misericordiam Domini inuocaret et eam generi humano propitiari rogaret. Si autem uiolentior aura insisteret, iam clauso codice procideret in faciem atque obnixius orationi incumberet. At si procella fortior aut nimbus perurgeret, uel etiam corusci ac tonitrua terras et aera terrerent, tunc ueniens ad ecclesiam sollicitius orationibus ac psalmis, donec serenitas aeris rediret, fixa mente uacaret. Cumque interrogaretur a suis, quare hoc faceret, respondebat: ‘Non legistis quia “intonuit de caelo Dominus et Altissimus dedit uocem suam. Misit sagittas suas et dissipauit eos, fulgora multiplicauit et conturbauit eos”?’ Mouet enim aera Dominus, uentos excitat, iaculatur fulgora, de caelo intonat, ut terrigenas ad timendum se suscitet, ut corda eorum in memoriam futuri iudicii reuocet, ut superbiam eorum dissipet et conturbet audaciam, reducto ad mentem tremendo illo tempore, quando ipse caelis ac terris ardentibus uenturus est in nubibus, in potestate magna et maiestate, ad iudicandos uiuos et mortuos. Propter quod’ inquit *‘oportet nos admonitioni eius caelesti debito cum timore et amore respondere ut, quoties aere commoto manum quasi ad feriendum minitans exerit nec adhuc tamen percutit, mox inploremus eius misericordiam et, discussis penetralibus cordis nostri atque expurgatis uitiorum ruderibus, solliciti ne umquam percuti mereamur agamus.*<sup>31</sup> (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV.3; Colgrave and

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<sup>31</sup> Colgrave and Mynors (1969, pp. 343-45): “For in addition to all his merits of temperance, humility, zeal in teaching, prayers and voluntary poverty and other virtues too, he was greatly filled with the fear of the Lord and mindful of his last end in all he did. [...] if he happened to be reading or doing something else and suddenly a high wind arose, he would at once invoke the mercy of the Lord and beg Him to have pity upon the human race. If the wind increased in violence he would shut his book, fall on his face, and devote himself still more earnestly to prayer. But if there were a violent storm of wind and rain or if lightning and thunder brought terror to earth and sky, he would enter the church and, with still deeper concentration, earnestly devote himself to prayers and psalms until the sky cleared. When his people asked him why he did it he replied, ‘Have you not read, “The Lord also thundered in the heavens and the Highest gave his voice. Yea, He sent out His arrows and scattered them and He shot out lightnings and discomfited them” [Ps. 17:14-15]? For the Lord moves the air, raises the winds, hurls the lightnings, and thunders forth from heaven so as to rouse the inhabitants of the world to fear Him, to call them to remember the future judgement in order that He may scatter their pride and

Mynors 1969, pp. 342-44). (Emphasis added).

Cassiodorus, in his *Expositio Psalmorum*, interprets the thundering of the heavens in Ps. 17:14-15 as denoting the voice of the Lord, while the arrows represent His evangelists whom He sent to spread His word among the gentiles (Walsh 1990, pp. 182-83). For Chad, however, in this remarkable and seemingly unprecedented interpretation of the psalm verse, stormy weather is read as an eschatological sign of God's anger which should inspire compunction.<sup>32</sup> Chad's reaction to stormy weather is to ask God for mercy and to retreat further from the world. Similarly, *The Wanderer* articulates an individual contemplating natural phenomena such as storms within an eschatological and—arguably—penitential context, examining his inmost heart and imploring God for mercy.<sup>33</sup>

The poem then moves into a final lament on the loss of the joys of the hall, answered by a series of maxims on the impermanence of the earthly kingdom (ll. 106-11), again recalling Cassian's advice to consider good and bad fortune alike "to be temporary and soon to pass" (Lat. *velut caduca et mox transeuntia contemplantes*) (*Institutes* 9.13). Proceeding from this contemplation of the transience of earthly

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confound their boldness by bringing to their minds that dread time when He will come in the clouds in great power and majesty, to judge the living and the dead, while the heavens and the earth are aflame. And so', said he, 'we ought to respond to His heavenly warning with due fear and love; so that as often as He disturbs the sky and raises His hand as if about to stroke, yet spares us still, we should implore His mercy, examining the innermost dregs of our sins, and behave with such caution that we may never deserve to be struck down.'" (Emphasis added). Vernacular versions of this story were circulated in the Old English *Bede* and the *Life of St Chad*.

<sup>32</sup> See Ward (1991) on Bede's often personal, contemplative interpretation of psalm verses, despite his deep knowledge of the commentary tradition (though she does not discuss this particular episode in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*). See also Darby (2012), pp. 101-3, on Bede's eschatological interpretation of weather in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and other texts. In the first dialogue of the *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, preserved in the twelfth century Southwick Codex, Saturn asks, "Sage me hwær god sete þa he geworhte he fona and eorðan" ("Tell me where God sat when He made the heavens and earth"), to which Solomon replies, "Ic þe sege, he sætt ofer winda feðrum" ("I tell you, He sat on the wings of the winds"). For connections between this passage and Ps. 17.11 ("volavit super pennas ventorum") and various other sources, as well as the frontispiece illustration in MS Junius 11, see Cross and Hill (1982), pp. 60-61; for the Old English text, see p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> On compunction in *The Wanderer*, see Palmer (2004).

concerns, the poem reaches its natural, prayerful conclusion, marked by a shift to hypermetric verse in ll. 112-15. Now that the mind has harnessed its meandering thoughts and measured them against natural phenomena and the universality of human suffering, the focus finally turns to *theoria*, a vision of the permanence of the heavenly kingdom:

Swa cwæð snottor on mode;    gesæt him sundor æt rune.  
 Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ,    ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene,  
 beorn of his breostum acyþan    nemþe he ær þone bote cunne;  
 eorl mid elne gefremman.    Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,  
 frofre to Fæder on heofenum,    þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð.<sup>34</sup>  
 (ll. 111-15).

Taking *Swa cwæð snottor on mode* as anticipating the final, homiletic exhortation to keep one's faith in the hope of heavenly reward which follows,<sup>35</sup> Leslie encloses ll. 113-14 in speech-marks. But, as Andy Orchard points out, echoing the statement *Swa cwæð eardstapa* at l. 6, this half-line may equally refer backwards to the long "speech" (ll. 8-111) which has preceded it (2002, 7-8). Following this reading, the entire preceding text can be understood as an interior monologue, a conversation with the self, the purpose of which—this article has argued—is preparation for the final vision of the place of God. Certainly this line emphasises through alliteration (*snottor* [...] *gesæt* [...] *sundor*) the implicit connection running throughout the poem between wisdom and the active, hesychastic choice of solitariness, which allows for reflection

<sup>34</sup> "So spoke the wise one in *his* mind, sat himself apart in contemplation. Blessed be he who keeps his faith, he must not ever his grief too quickly, the warrior, reveal from his breast, unless he already knows the remedy, the warrior to bring it about with courage. Blessed be the one who seeks grace for himself, comfort from the father in the heavens, where for all of us the stronghold stands."

<sup>35</sup> See Orchard (2002, pp. 7-8).

and contemplation (*cwæð on mode [...] æt rune*).<sup>36</sup> Couched within this conventional, homiletic language is a final treatment of the careful examination of thought processes, which constitutes the poem's main theme: the wise one must not reveal his grief too quickly (in other words, he must not give voice to his depression or melancholy) or reveal his thoughts from his breast too soon, unless he already knows the remedy, which is now expressed in terms of hope in the permanence of heaven. The poem naturally reaches an anagogical conclusion with this vision of the heavenly *fæstnung* ("stronghold").

Evagrius taught that for the monk "True stillness is when one sits in one's cell having not one memory of an earthly thing" (*Excerpts* 31; Casiday, p. 176). *The Wanderer*, as we have seen, is dominated by imagery of restless and seemingly purposeless movement, both physical and mental: the aimless stirring of the sea and the physical meanderings of the *eardstapa* in pursuit of a new treasure-giver provide a counterpart to his wandering thoughts, Evagrian *logismoi*, which distract him from the vision of God, from the stillness of true prayer. But in these concluding lines we come to understand that the *snottor* ("wise one") allows the intrusion of these *logismoi*, knowing already in what direction the thoughts of his heart will turn. The poem can, therefore, be thought of as a controlled thought-experiment: because he knows the *bot* ("remedy") to these potentially dangerous thoughts, he, who has experience, a share of winters in the world, knows that this ultimately preparatory meditation will eventually lead him to the stillness of prayer and true contemplation of the vision of God. Ultimately this process of *katharsis* resulting in *theoria* will allow him to participate in *theosis* and receive the *ar* ("grace"), which he now actively seeks.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ware (1983, p. 190): "the hesychast is one who 'returns into himself', who seeks the 'kingdom within' (cf. Luke 17.21) and 'guards the heart with all watchfulness' (Prov. 4.23), closing not merely the outward door of his cell against visitors, but also the inward door of his heart against evil thoughts and distractions. Thus St John Climacus [d. 649] defines the hesychast as 'one who strives to confine his incorporeal self within his bodily house, paradoxical though this may sound' (*Ladder* 27)".

#### IV Conclusion: an Image of Man

Reading *The Wanderer* in the context of monastic writing on thoughts and prayer helps to account for some of its idiosyncrasies of structure and theme and may also shed some light on its manuscript context. We have seen that the Exeter Book was considered useful reading material for Anglo-Saxon monks in the eleventh (and probably tenth) centuries. The three poems which the compiler(s) combined to form a sequential narrative life of Christ at the beginning of the codex (*Christ I* or *Advent Lyrics*, *Christ II* or *The Ascension*, and *Christ III* or *Christ in Judgement*) describe how God first became man, in order that we might partake in His divinity on Judgement Day—in other words, they chart the process of *theosis*, of God becoming man so that we might share in the hope of becoming like Him. This scriptural narrative provides a theological context for understanding the predicaments of the various exiles and wanderers of the poems that follow in the codex. Following this exemplary narrative of Christ's advent, ascension and judgement, the two poetic lives of the Anglo-Saxon hermit St Guthlac describe an individual who rejected the transient *seledreamas* ("hall joys") of the *comitatus* to seek the permanent, heavenly reward of those who, like the *snottor* of *The Wanderer*, set themselves apart *æt rune* ("in meditation") through their dedication to an ascetic life:

Sume þa wuniað    on westennum,  
*secað* ond *gesittað*    sylfra willum

hamas on heolstrum. Hy ðæs heofoncundan

boldes *bidað*.<sup>37</sup> (Emphasis added).

(*Guthlac A*, ll. 81-84a)

In order to attain his own *theoria*, this *anhaga* must also overcome the assaults of demons who attempt to distract him from his devotion to God by presenting him with a vision of his former home (*Guthlac A*, ll. 413-34a) and tempting him with the vice of *orwennysse* (“despair”) (ll. 574-76a). Reichardt has described *Guthlac A* as “the product of a monastic mind” (1974, 331). I would suggest that *The Wanderer*, too, can be considered a monastic poem—or at least one that would have been useful for monastic reading. It too describes the process of patiently acquiring a monastic frame of mind, separated from (and united with) all, as Evagrius puts it. The so-called Exeter Book “elegies” describe humanity’s struggle to reconcile its fallen, sinful image with the perfect model of Christ, the ultimate source of *ar*.

Anglo-Saxon monks inherited the belief of the desert fathers that sin manifests itself in the form of evil thoughts which distract the mind from the contemplation of the place of God and a life lived in *imitatio Christi*. In Cassian’s first Conference, Germanus asks whether the mind can ever fully free itself from wandering thoughts, to which Abbot Moses replies:

“It is impossible for the mind to remain undisturbed by thoughts (Lat. *Mentem quidem non interpellari, cogitationibus impossibile est*), but anyone serious about the matter can certainly permit them entry or drive them away, and although their origin does not lie entirely under our control we can choose to

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<sup>37</sup> “Some dwell in desolate places, *seeking* and *settling* of their own free will homes in the darkness. They *wait for* the heavenly home.” (Emphasis added).

approve of them and to adopt them. Above all we should realize that there are three sources for our thoughts—God, the devil, and ourselves. They come from God whenever He deigns to approach us through an illumination of the Holy Spirit, thereby lifting us up to a more sublime terrain. [...] A train of thoughts comes too into being from the devil when these undermine us with the attractiveness of sin and when the devil gets to us with his hidden snares (Lat. *Ex diabolo vero cogitationum nascitur series, cum subvertere nos tam vitiorum oblectatione, quam etiam occultis conatur insidiis*) [...]. Thoughts come from within ourselves when we think of what we do or have done or have heard (Lat. *Ex nobis autem oriuntur, cum naturaliter ea quae gerimus, vel gessimus, vel audivimus, recordamur*). And this is natural. Regarding such matters, the blessed David said, “I thought of the old days and in my mind I had the everlasting years; I gave myself to meditation and by night I was busy in my heart and I looked deeply into my own spirit” (Ps. 76: 6-7). Or again: “The Lord knows the thoughts of men, for they are empty” (Ps. 93: 11) [...]” (*Conferences* 1.17-19; Migne 1841-55, coll. 0506B-0510A; Lubheid, pp. 51-4).

This article has argued that, viewed from the perspective of monastic training as outlined by the Church Fathers Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian, *The Wanderer* presents an image of a solitary who is unable to pray, waiting for grace, but oppressed by memories—thoughts intrude on his mind, causing him grief and misery. As the poem progresses, it describes this same process of looking deeply into the self and contemplating the origins of thoughts, some the products of memory, some demons, some from God. For an Anglo-Saxon monk, the poem might, therefore, have served

as a useful meditative tool, inviting them to turn their thoughts away from the self towards the vision of God (*theoria*); away from the Evagrian passions and towards the luminosity of the place of God. *The Wanderer* teaches that in order to contemplate a vision of heavenly reward, an *anhaga* must perform “leaps of thought”, strengthening the heart against sin, in imitation of the “leaps of Christ” described in *Christ II* (*The Ascension*):

þus her on grundum    godes ece bearn  
ofer heahhleopu    hlypum stylde,  
modig æfter muntum.    Swa we men sculon  
heortan gehygdum    hlypum styllan  
of mægne in mægen,    mærpum tilgan  
[...]

Is us þearf micel

þæt we mid heortan    *hælo secen*,  
[...]

Forþon we a sculon    idle lustas,  
synwunde forseon,    ond þæs sellran gefeon.  
Habbað we *us to frofre    fæder on roderum*  
ælmeahtigne.<sup>38</sup> (Emphasis added).

(*Christ II*, 744-48, 751b-52, 756-59a)

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<sup>38</sup> “Thus here on the earth God’s eternal son sprang in leaps over the high hillsides, courageous over the mountains. So we men must spring in leaps in the thoughts of our heart from strength to strength and strive after glorious things [...]. It greatly behoves us that we should *seek salvation* with our hearts [...]. Therefore we must despise vain desires, and delight in the better part. We have as *our comfort* the Almighty Father in the skies.” (Emphasis added). Cf. *The Wanderer* l. 115: *frofre to Fæder on heofenum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð*.



Read within this theological context, *The Wanderer* can be understood as an instructive account of how, in preparation for prayer, a contemplative trains the mind to transcend meandering thoughts and thereby actively *seek* divine grace, the source of *theosis*.

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