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## The wanderer old english

My latest limited edition book from The Folio Society is The Wanderer illustrated and signed by Alan Lee. An artist best known for his decades long association with works by Tolkien, both in illustrating his books and his many years in New Zealand working on the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit trilogies. The text is largely from a 1966 Penguin Classic 'The Earliest English Poems', translated by Michael Alexander, which also included four pages of Beowulf. Over the years this has been revised until the 2008 edition which provides the entire text for this book, with some amendments, which by then was entitled 'The First Poems in English'. Lee was approached by The Folio Society to see if he would like to illustrate something for them and between them chose this work as it takes him back to the source materials that so inspired Tolkien in his writings. This is by no means a typical way round, the society would normally choose a book that they wanted to publish and then approach an artist to illustrate it; but what it has produced is a book where you can see the love the artist has for the material and I suspect they eventually had to stop him from creating any more artwork so that the book could actually get published. As it is each poem has its own distinctive decorative borders along with the beautiful tipped in colour paintings and on page printed black and white illustrations. The poems and riddles themselves come from a very short window in time, between the reign of King Alfred the Great over the Anglo Saxons (866 to 899AD) where he started the process of moving the written word from Latin to Old-English and the Norman invasion of 1066 when all that was swept away with the imposition of Norman French. In truth there were probably just thirty or forty years where Old-English hit its peak before becoming almost extinct. The greatest source material for the work of this period is The Exeter Book which was regarded as largely worthless for centuries before becoming recognised as the treasure trove that it is. The poems are much more powerful than might be expected from their great age, they clearly come from an oral tradition as they are directed at the reader as though being read to them, I am reminded of the Icelandic sagas in concept if not in size. Indeed as Bernard O'Donoghue writes in his especially commissioned foreword There's a vitality to these poems, written as they were at a time when life was so much more embattled, more desperate and fragile Along with the general introduction and note on translation each poem has its own introduction setting the scene for the following work and providing mush needed context. The works are over a thousand years old and the people who wrote and read them were very different to ourselves. The original Penguin book its variants and companion volumes have sold over a million copies in the fifty years since they came out and the quality of the work shows exactly why Michael Alexander is such a respected translator and this edition makes reading them so much more of a joy than the original paperbacks. The text is presented with the original on the left hand side and the translation on the right as can be seen in one of my favourite works included the fragment of 'The Battle of Maldon' from the section of Heroic Poems. I suspect I like these more than the somewhat more introspective other poems is my fondness for the sagas and these have more of a feel of those. However this is an account of a real battle that can be also seen in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to such a level of detail that there is also an accompanying map included with the text so the reader can easily see how the fight progresses, which frankly is not well for the English side and a lot better for the attacking Vikings. The riddles are great fun and at the back are a set of proposed solutions, however the one that I have shown as an example also has drawings by Alan Lee which somewhat give away the answer. All the riddles are from The Exeter Book where presumably there are a lot more as these start at number seven and there are lots of numeric gaps. The answer is of course mead. As only 750 copies were printed at £395 each and these are all sold out from the Folio Society it would be difficult to get a copy of this fine edition, but if I have whetted your appetite for Old-English poetry and riddles then the Penguin paperback is still in print and considerably cheaper. There is a short video showing the book from the Folio Society and a longer video of an interview with Alan Lee. Old English poem For other uses, see Wanderer. The WandererFirst page of The Wanderer from the Exeter BookAuthor(s)UnknownLanguageOld EnglishDateImpossible to determine[1]ProvenanceExeter BookGenreElegyVerse formAlliterative verseLengthc. 115 linesPersonagesThe narrator of the "wise man"’s speech, and the "wise man", presumably the "Wanderer" himself. The Wanderer is an Old English poem preserved only in an anthology known as the Exeter Book, a manuscript dating from the late 10th century. It counts 115 lines of alliterative verse. As is often the case in Anglo-Saxon verse, the composer and compiler are anonymous, and within the manuscript the poem is untitled. Origins The date of the poem is impossible to determine, but it must have been composed and written before the Exeter Book. The poem has only been found in the Exeter Book, which was a manuscript made at around 975, although the poem is considered to have been written earlier.[2] The inclusion of a number of Norse-influenced words, such as the compound hrimecaald (ice-cold, from the Old Norse word hrímkaldr), and some unusual spelling forms, has encouraged others to date the poem to the late 9th or early 10th century.[3] The metre of the poem is of four-stress lines, divided between the second and third stresses by a caesura. Each caesura is indicated in the manuscript by a subtle increase in character spacing and with full stops, but modern print editlons render them in a more obvious fashion. Like most Old English poetry, it is written in alliterative metre. It is considered an example of an Anglo-Saxon elegy.[4] Contents The Wanderer conveys the meditations of a solitary exile on his past happiness as a member of his lord's band of retainers, his present hardships and the values of forbearance and faith in the heavenly Lord. The warrior is identified as eardstapa (line 6a), usually translated as "wanderer" (from eard meaning 'earth' or 'land', and steppan, meaning 'to step'[5]), who roams the cold seas and walks "paths of exile" (wrecclastas). He remembers the days when, as a young man, he served his lord, feasted together with comrades, and received precious gifts from the lord. Yet fate (wyrd) turned against him when he lost his lord, kinsmen and comrades in battle—they were defending their homeland against an attack—and he was driven into exile. Some readings of the poem see the wanderer as progressing through three phases; first as the anhogā (solitary man) who dwells on the deaths of other warriors and the funeral of his lord, then as the modcearig man (man troubled in mind) who meditates on past hardships and on the fact that mass killings have been innumerable in history, and finally as the snottor on mode (man wise in mind) who has come to understand that life is full of hardships, impermanence, and suffering, and that stability only resides with God. Other readings accept the general statement that the exile does come to understand human history, his own included, in philosophical terms, but would point out that the poem has elements in common with "The Battle of Maldon", a poem about a battle in which an Anglo-Saxon troop was defeated by Viking invaders.[6] However, the speaker reflects upon life while spending years in exile, and to some extent has gone beyond his personal sorrow. In this respect, the poem is a "wisdom poem". The degeneration of "earthly glory" is presented as inevitable in the poem, contrasting with the theme of salvation through faith in God. The wanderer vividly describes his loneliness and yearning for the bright days past, and concludes with an admonition to put faith in God, "in whom all stability dwells". It has been argued by some scholars[by whom?] that this admonition is a later addition, as it lies at the end of a poem that some would say is otherwise entirely secular in its concerns. Opponents of this interpretation such as I. L. Gordon have argued that because many of the words in the poem have both secular and spiritual or religious meanings, the foundation of this argument is not on firm ground.[7] The psychological or spiritual progress of the wanderer has been described as an "act of courage of one sitting alone in meditation", who through embracing the values of Christianity seeks "a meaning beyond the temporary and a transitory meaning of earthly values".[8] Interpretation Critical history The development of critical approaches to The Wanderer corresponds closely to changing historical trends in European and Anglo-American philology, literary theory, and historiography as a whole.[9] Like other works in Old English, the rapid changes in the English language after the Norman Conquest meant that it simply would not have been understood between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.[10] Until the early nineteenth century, the existence of the poem was largely unknown outside of Exeter Cathedral library. In John Josias Conybeare's 1826 compilation of Anglo Saxon poetry, The Wanderer was erroneously treated as part of the preceding poem Juliana.[11] It was not until 1842 that it was identified as a separate work, in its first print edition, by the pioneering Anglo-Saxonist Benjamin Thorpe. Thorpe considered it to bear "considerable evidence of originality", but regretted an absence of information on its historical and mythological context.[12] His decision to name it The Wanderer has not always been met with approval. J. R. R. Tolkien, who adopted the poem's Ubi sunt passage (lines 92–96) into The Lord of the Rings for his Lament for the Rohirrim, is typical of such dissatisfaction. As early as 1926–7 Tolkien was considering the alternative titles 'An Exile', or 'Alone the Banished Man', and by 1964–5 was arguing for "The Exile's Lament".[13] Despite such pressure, the poem is generally referred to under Thorpe's original title. Themes and motifs A number of formal elements of the poem have been identified by critics, including the use of the "beasts of battle" motif,[14] the ubi sunt formula,[15] the exile theme,[16] the ruin theme,[16] and the journey motif, as also seen in The Seafarer.[17] The "beasts of battle" motif, often found in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, is here modified to include not only the standard eagle, raven, and wolf, but also a "sad-faced man". It has been suggested that this is the poem's protagonist.[18] The ubi sunt or "where is" formula is here in the form hiper cpon, the Old English phrase "where has gone". The use of this emphasises the sense of loss that pervades the poem. Speech boundaries A plurality of scholarly opinion holds that the main body of the poem is spoken as monologue, bound between a prologue and epilogue voiced by the poet. For example, lines 1–5, or 1–7, and 111–115 can be considered the words of the poet as they refer to the wanderer in the third person, and lines 8–110 as those of a singular individual[19] in the first-person. Alternatively, the entire piece can be seen as a soliloquy spoken by a single speaker.[20] Due to the disparity between the anxiety of the 'wanderer' (anhaga) in the first half and the contentment of the 'wise-man' (snottor) in the second half, others have interpreted it as a dialogue between two distinct personas, framed within the first person prologue and epilogue. An alternative approach grounded in post-structuralist literary theory, and posited by Carol Braun Pasternack identifies a polyphonic series of different speaking positions determined by the subject that the speaker will address.[21] Settings The Argentine-American composer Ezequiel Viñao wrote a setting of The Wanderer for a cappella voices in 2005.[22] See also Deor The Ruin The Seafarer References ^ Sanders, Arnie. ""The Wanderer," (MS Exeter Book, before 1072)". Goucher College. Retrieved 28 January 2013. ^ "The Wanderer." The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. Julie Reidhead. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012. 117-118. Print. ^ Klinck 2001, pp. 19, 21 ^ Greenblatt, Stephen (2012). The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume A. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. p. 117. ISBN 978-0-393-91247-0. ^ "eard-stapa". Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. ^ Donaldson, E. T. "The Battle of Maldon" (PDF). wwnorton.com. W.W. Norton. 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