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Research Article



Exile as a Timeless Problem for Humankind – Mirrored Through Pre-Modern German and Other Literary Texts

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Abstract

Tragically, human history has always been determined by the experience of being exiled. This has been discussed in historical documents and especially in literary texts throughout time. The present essay first reflects on the wide range of examples for this topic, and then illustrates it through a critical reading of the Old High German heroic poem, “Hildebrandslied,” and the Middle High German heroic epic, *Nibelungenlied*. Each time, the experience of exile is described in moving, horrific terms and utilized as a metaphor of the tragedy of the human

existence. Insofar as these two medieval examples strike us as so timeless and universal, we can recognize here, once again, the great significance of medieval literature for the exploration of fundamental aspects in our lives, particularly in extreme cases.

Keywords: Exile, Literary Treatment, Medieval Exiles, Hildebrandslied, *Nibelungenlied*

Introduction

It is one of the many human weaknesses that people cannot tolerate criticism, opposition, or even rebellion. This begins in the private, personal sphere, and is soon reflected in social conflicts in public, and then reaches the highest level with governments, rulers, princes, and others resorting to harsh and brutal methods to silence alternative voices. There is nothing surprising about the dictatorial measures employed by the Russian President Vladimir Putin to repress the most famous political opposition leaders in his own country and to mute their voices, with the lawyer and political activist Alexei Navalny being the most prominent one at the current moment (2022), undergoing a nine-year prison term for fake charges against him (see, for instance, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-alexey-navalny-putin-critic-melekhovo-prison-called-torture-conveyor-belt/>; last accessed on Oct. 6, 2022).

In other regimes, the political enemies are simply thrown into prison or taken to a concentration camp to be killed there, as was commonly the case in Nazi-Germany. Other methods to get rid of uncomfortable critics have involved kidnapping, blackmailing, and sending the individual person or an entire group into exile, most infamously, the ancient Israelites whom Nebuchadnezzar II sent into the so-called Babylonian Captivity in 597 B.C.E. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_captivity). This strategy has been employed throughout the world and throughout history, especially when it was more convenient or effective for the political system than mass killing.

Exile is not as devastating as being murdered, but it still constitutes an existential crisis for the affected individual or group. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers this useful definition of exile: “Prolonged absence from one’s native country or a place regarded as home, endured by force of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for some purpose. Also: an instance or period of this” (OED I.1.a, online). The exiled person is forced out of his/her own culture, religion, community, political group, and language, and has to struggle hard to survive in a different world, being forced to learn a new language and to familiarize himself with a foreign culture. Considering that exile constitutes a profound existential crisis, it is little wonder that poets across the globe and throughout time have addressed this topic in a myriad of fashions since the destiny of exile has a deep impact on one’s identity, self-concept, well-being, and political concept.

Alexei Navalny, for instance, voluntarily went home from his forced exile in Germany and returned to Russia although he knew that he would face imprisonment, perhaps torture, and even death. Exile would not have given him, as he obviously viewed it, the necessary influence on the public discourse in his own country; instead, he had to expose the Russian government in its dictatorial features by becoming victimized. In fact, the more the Putin

government attempts to silence him, the more Navalny is gaining in fame and respect as a noble fighter for justice, freedom, and democracy in Russia.

To be more specific, we find the theme of exile often reflected in world literature, whether we think of the famous Roman poet Ovid or the twentieth-century German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht. Exile as a central theme appears in the famous Hindu epic poem *Ramayana*, and it matters critically in the life of the Italian poet Dante Alighieri. Already the ancient Greeks discussed exile as a tragic experience, such as Euripides in his *Medea*, written in the fifth century B.C.E. The story of *Apollonius of Tyre* (2nd or 3rd century C.E., popular far into the seventeenth century), was predicated on the topic of exile, though the protagonist still enjoys the freedom to roam the world (Milbauer and Sutton, 2020).

The more repressive a political regime proves to be, the more it forces its domestic enemies into exile, either by violent means or by their own volition to escape state terrorism against them. During the Nazi regime, for instance, many of the best artists, composers, writers, scientists, and other intellectuals fled Germany, such as Thomas Mann and his son Klaus Mann, Anna Seghers, and Stefan Zweig. Others hid from deadly persecutions by the Nazi and fled into the so-called Internal Exile, such as Werner Bergengruen.

Following the Cuban Revolution from 1953 to 1958, more than a million Cubans fled the island and went into self-imposed exile, especially in Florida. In 2015, millions of Syrians fled their war-torn country and went into exile, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and in the European countries, that is, especially in Germany. We could almost argue that a major aspect of world history has been forced exile, which is not to be confused with economic refuge, a motive for millions of people today all over the world trying to escape personal misery and to make a better life for themselves and their families.

We might also refer to the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet, who lives in exile from his country. Other famous exiles were, at random, Seneca, Napoleon Bonaparte, Victor Hugo, Marlene Dietrich, Chiang Kai-Shek, Pablo Neruda, Benazir Bhutto, Edward Snowden, and many others (<https://www.pastfactory.com/history/the-most-famous-exiles-in-history/?view-all&chrome=1>). Exiles are regarded from various perspectives; some are identified as suffering heroes, others are viewed as evil opponents whose departure is greeted by the supporters of the system, but we can be certain that exile itself always constitutes a form of suffering for the individual because s/he is outside of his/her cultural context and has to live abroad forcefully divorced from his/her cultural roots, if not her/his identity. This applies even when the exile experiences great economic success, even political influence, and public esteem, such as in the case of the Dalai Lama.

Exile in Medieval Times

The purpose of this paper consists of discussing a few very early medieval literary examples of exile dealt with by poets of the heroic genre. It might not come as a real surprise that heroic poets projected their protagonist as a man of extraordinary stature, tragic and awesome at the same time. The suffering from a difficult destiny comes almost automatically with the genre itself, although we normally would have assumed that the hero's greatness would have rested primarily in his ability and willingness to face an almost insurmountable

enemy, like Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon in the Old English *Beowulf* (ca. 750). In fact, the topic of exile does not play any role here because the protagonist arrives in Denmark coming voluntarily from Sweden to fight the monsters and was certainly not expelled or exiled (*Beowulf*).

By contrast, in many of the Old Icelandic Sagas, whether in *Egil's Saga* or *Njál's Saga*, individual characters are exiled as a consequence of their actions in defending themselves or exacting revenge, in the course of which they killed their opponent. They then spend a number of years abroad, but then return again, but are then no longer part of the story, as the narrators tend to comment.

The most dramatic example of an exile can be found in the Old Spanish *El poema de mio Cid* (ca. 1100) where the protagonist appears to have been badly maligned by jealous courtiers, which makes the King Alfonso VI of Castile and León send the El Campeador, or Rodrigo Díaz, away from his court into exile. Not having money, military support, or any political standing, El Cid sees his entire existence endangered in a critical fashion. This famous epic poem is predicated on the outstanding hero's constant effort first to regain an economic and military base and to expand it to the best of his abilities, and second on his tireless attempts to regain the king's favor, which would lift his banishment into exile and restore his honor. The beginning of the poem is lost, but the remaining text explicitly enough illustrates Cid's long-term suffering far away from the court, surrounded only by a small cohort of his best friends. The accusation that he stole money from the king is never confirmed, and the role which the accusers, probably the Infantes of Carrión, play once they have married Cid's two daughters, underscore the evil nature of that false charge. The poem traces the protagonist's long military campaign, presents his many triumphs, and his constant effort to send the king proofs of his loyalty and honor. Indeed, this is the virtually most honorable character in all of medieval European literature, but he still suffers badly from being in exile. However, at the end, he regains this military and political status again, regains the king's favor, and will be redeemed against the Infantes who are defeated in a royal court proceeding employing a system of ordeals (jousts) to determine the truth of the conflicting claims raised by them versus those by El Cid.

In a way, El Cid emerges from his exile like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes, and his exile actually serves exceedingly well to profile his tragic situation and his strong character which allows him to overcome all challenges (*Poema de mio Cid*).

“Hildebrandslied” – “The Song of Hildebrand”

Most fascinating, however, proves to be the case of two medieval German literary figures who suffer in exile and also die as a consequence of their difficult political situation. Exile puts them into a precarious situation, and they both find themselves, in the respective texts, as victims of a system that forced them out of the country. The first text to be discussed here is the famous “Hildebrandslied,” the ‘Song of Hildebrand,’ composed sometime in the sixth or seventh century, but recorded only in the early ninth century, when two monks in the monastery of Fulda (today northeast of Frankfurt) copied it down on some empty pages in a liturgical manuscript around 820 C.E. (for an edition, see Braun and Ebbinghaus; for an online text edition and modern German translation, see [https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Hildebrandslied](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Hildebrandslied;);

for an English translation, see https://www.dorthonion.com/drmcm/west_to_dante/Readings/hildebrand.html; both last accessed on Oct. 7, 2022).

As we learn quickly, the protagonist is an exile, having returned from the Hunnish lands where he had served the ruler Attila for thirty years. The reasons for his exile are not so clear; he only states to his opponent, the young Germanic general Hadubrant, that he had to follow his liege lord Theodoric into exile, both being pursued by the hostile Odoacer. The poet seriously mixed up the historical situation, as scholarship has clearly identified but this would not really matter in the context of this brief heroic epic. As far as we can tell, the Ostrogothic King Theodoric the Great (454–526) had defeated and then killed the Byzantine general, or rather self-appointed king of Italy, Odoacer in 493. This historical event became the source for many Middle High German heroic epics, all of them, however, turning the situation upside down, claiming Theodoric's suffering at the hand of Odoacer who forced him out of Italy and into exile, normally among the Huns under Attila. Mythmaking plays a central role here, especially because the poet, like many before and after him, intended to reflect on the condition of exile.

There have been many suggestions as to the question why the two scribes in the Fulda monastery copied down this text in a liturgical manuscript. The most critical aspect proves to be the fundamental conflict between the two protagonists, the old warrior Hildebrand and the young general Hadubrand who encounter each other on the battlefield, both heading their own armies. Before the actual clash takes place, the two men engage in a brief, actually not very effective conversation which reveals a number of significant facts that conflict with each other. Instead of making any realistic efforts to listen to each other and gain some mutual understanding, the two warriors quickly get embroiled in a major disagreement over their respective claim, and then prepare themselves for a fight.

The poem ends as a fragment, so we do not know the outcome, but whatever the situation might be, tragedy certainly strikes. The old Hildebrand proudly points out that for thirty years he has never lost in any battle, and we know that he continues to be the leader of his army. There is a high likelihood that he will overcome his opponent also now. However, the other man is a young man, a proud leader of his Germanic people who has obviously experienced tremendous success and so represents a formidable warrior. So, he might be victorious as well. Or, what would be the third option, both men might kill each other (for an excellent critical discussion, see Haubrichs, 1995; cf. Classen, 1995).

Who are these two awesome warriors? Why would the outcome of their fight constitute a form of tragedy? Once we have understood that, we will gain a clear understanding of what exile means and how this is reflected in this short epic poem. Even though both figures represent two different cultures, the Hunnish (Hildebrand) and the Germanic (Hadubrand), as far as their external appearance is concerned, the initial conversation signals that the two are actually closely related. The older man begins by inquiring about the opponent's background and family, and underscores that a few names would suffice him to recognize him immediately. The other one, however, never asks him anything in return. He only explains what he knows about himself, and then reacts to the other warrior's actions, which altogether leaves everything

in a most unsatisfactory condition. After all, Hadubrand reveals that he had lost his father Hildebrand a long time ago because he had to go into exile, but not out of personal guilt. Instead, due to his oath of loyalty to his lord, Theodoric, who had to escape Odoacer's hostility, Hildebrand had been forced to accompany him into exile.

The young man knows this well, but he also adds that sailors had informed him about Hildebrand's death in battle, dying as a glorious hero. As hard as it had been for himself and his mother, he had acknowledged his father's accomplishment and had then followed his path, emerging as a new military leader. As such, he now stands ready to defend himself and to fight this stranger, of whom he knows nothing, and about whose identity he also does not inquire.

In that situation, Hildebrand tries to resort to a material gesture of friendship, maybe even love, taking off golden bands from his arm and extending them as gifts to the young man. However, as Hadubrand immediately recognizes, those bands are of Hunnish origin, as is everything on Hildebrand's body, whether armor or weapons. After all, thirty years of military campaigning have taken their tolls, and whatever Germanic equipment Hildebrand might have had, must have fallen apart or gotten lost in the course of time. In short, this old man looks very much like a Hunnish general, and the offer to accept those bands of gold as gifts makes Hadubrand even more suspicious. Referring one more time to the reports by sailors about his father's death in distant lands, Hadubrand identifies the offer as an expression of weakness by the other man who in his old age no longer dares to battle his enemies. Instead of engaging with him any further, Hadubrand then readies himself for the fight, stops talking, and waits for the attack.

Hildebrand deeply regrets this development but he is also firm in his decision not to let his own honor be smirched by this rude rejection, and since there are no further options left for him, he appeals to the fortunes of his destiny, prepares himself as well, and then both men engage in a bitter fight which can have only a tragic outcome. For Hildebrand, the situation is the worst because he as an exile is no longer recognized back home and confronted with the general idea that he has died already.

Further, upon his return home, the first one since he had to leave for the exile, at least on a military campaign, he encounters his own son who does not acknowledge him and firmly believes what the sailors had told him about his father. Hildebrand faces the difficult situation of still being a Germanic warrior within himself but appearing as a Hunnish fighter on the outside. Although he can communicate linguistically with his son, there is no true conversation between both men. While Hadubrand never even cares about the identity of the stranger and only talks about himself, emphasizing his suffering as a half-orphan, Hildebrand appears as incompetent in talking effectively with his opponent. The attempt to use the precious gold as an instrument to convince Hadubrand to accept him as his father utterly fails. Only weapons can speak here, so Hildebrand abandons his previous effort and responds in kind, engaging in a deadly fight. Considering the implied emphasis on communication as a critical bond holding together people within a community, it comes as no surprise that the monks were allowed to write down this epic poem (Classen, ed., 2022). After all, despite the seemingly secular topic of this account of a battle between father and son, this Old High German ballad really reflects

on fundamental conflicts in human life and the great need to learn how to communicate properly in order to avoid the tragic outcome as outlined here.

Moreover, father killing his son, or son killing his father, or both slaying each other constituted a complete breakdown of society, the loss of love, the disappearance of the family bonds, and of the basic respect for the fellow human being. Christianity, as practiced and preached by these Benedictine monks in Fulda, aimed at establishing a loving community, avoiding the traditional conflicts between men, and creating solid bonds between people. However, Hildebrand is the victim of his time in exile, and so is Hadubrand who had to grow up without a father and now objects radically to the claim by the total stranger that he is his closest relative (sic). In fact, the young man has apparently predicated his entire existence on the realization that he was an orphan and had to struggle all on his own to overcome that loss and to rise in public esteem based on his own accomplishments.

From a Christian perspective, this ancient heroic ballad expressed well the fundamental teachings by the Church about the condition of the human being here on earth, living in an exile from God, whether we think of the original story of Adam and Eve as exiles from paradise, or the story of the Israelites' Babylonian Captivity, or of various statements in the New Testament, such as in 1 Peter 1:1: "To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." Or: 1 Peter 5:13: "She who is at Babylon sends you greetings." The statement by the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament (29) also deserves to be quoted here: "This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" (see, e.g., Eskola, 2015).

In light of those textual passages, it suddenly makes good sense that the two monks recorded this poem because it highlighted so well the dramatic consequences of exile, with the son no longer recognizing the father and the father being forced to fight against his own son at the risk of killing him or being killed by his son. The absolute idealization of the feudal bonds and the complete adherence to the concepts of heroic loyalty and honor, as it had been practiced by Hildebrand, ultimately destroys the family bonds and alienates the son from his father.

The only means left for them to communicate with each other consists of deadly weapons, and hence killing. Due to his long life in exile, there was no real language that was left for the old hardened warrior, so he resorted to objects to convey to the opponent that he was really his father. However, considering his tenuous position and his pride in his role and rank as the leader of his army, Hadubrand has no alternative but to reject that gift, to refuse to acknowledge the old Hun's 'pretenses' of being his father, and to resist the temptation to arrange himself with the stranger on the open battlefield (Classen, 2013).

The "Jüngere Hildebrandslied" – The Exile Returns and Is Welcomed Again

Strangely, and inexplicably until today, ca. 620 years later, another German poet drew from the same material, Kaspar von der Rhön, who created the so-called "Jüngere Hildebrandslied" in 1472 (Dresdner Heldenbuch, Mscr.Dresd.M.201; for a version more easily available, see the broadsheet in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek from 1570:

https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN804396841&PHYSID=PHYS_0005&DMDID=), which is not only considerably longer than the original Old High German poem, but is determined by a very different, much more emotional outcome (Classen 1996).

Whereas the epic poem from ca. 820 never experienced any popularity – apart from the fact that the figure of Hildebrand appears throughout medieval German heroic poetry, though with no direct connection with the fighter in the old ballad – the “New Hildebrandslied” turned into a highly appealing balladic song text reproduced well until the nineteenth and even twentieth century). Although here as well the two men fight each other, Hildebrand succeeds in throwing Alebrant to the ground and to force him to reveal the names of his parents. This then facilitates mutual recognition and leads over to a loving reunion of father and son, later also of husband and wife, which harmoniously brings to a conclusion Hildebrand’s exile because he has happily returned to his family (Classen 2012). Exile still matters to some extent, but it has lost here its existential threat and catastrophic consequence.

Nibelungenlied

From this early ninth-century case and its continuation in the late fifteenth century, let us turn to another famous exile, who also figures within a heroic context, and who experiences a truly tragic destiny because of his various attempts to please various sides in a bitter conflict pitting the Burgundian and later Hunnish Queen Kriemhild against the Burgundian court steward, Hagen, who had murdered her first husband, the Netherlandish hero Siegfried. The *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200) belongs to one of the most famous heroic epics from the entire Middle Ages and has been discussed already from countless angles and perspectives (for a good recent English translation, see Whobrey, 2018). It would hence not be possible or necessary here to offer a full discussion of the entire narrative; suffice, instead, to reflect on the role of the one major exile in this text, Rüdiger, of whom we know not enough in biographical terms, except that he serves the Hunnish ruler Etzel/Attila, occupying the role of a margrave over a territory bordering Bavaria to the west and the Hunnish heartlands to the east.

Although he is happily married and has a daughter, the poet projects him as a sorrowful man who would love to return home, whatever that might mean in the larger schema of things. He serves as Etzel’s emissary to woo for Kriemhild’s hand in marriage, and this ten years after her shining first husband had been murdered by Hagen. The reasons for that murder remain somewhat murky, but it is clear that Hagen had primarily pursued the intention to eliminate his own nemesis although Siegfried had not been at fault for any of the charges raised against him. Even though the three Burgundian kings, led by their brother Gunther, had demurred at the idea of killing Siegfried as an evil plan, ultimately, the prospective of destroying an ominous superpower from the outside at their own court appealed to them enough to allow Hagen to carry out his nefarious plan.

The widow knows exactly that Hagen was the culprit, but all of her attempts to avenge the murder fail, and this for a whole decade until when Etzel woos for her hand. Hagen is deeply concerned about this proposition and warns the brothers about the dangerous consequences, but this time to no avail. Worse, when Kriemhild later invites the Burgundian

court to come for a visit in the Hunnish lands, Hagen is truly alarmed, yet he cannot prevent Gunther and his men to accept that invitation. However, before they cross the river Danube, Hagen learns from water nixes that they are all doomed to die. During the crossing, he tests that prophecy and finds out that it holds truth. Consequently, once the entire army has reached the other shore, Hagen destroys the ferryboat, which symbolizes, unbeknown to the other Burgundians, that they will never return and will die heroic deaths at Etzel's court (Müller 1998). He had destroyed the boat also with the purpose to ensure that none of his warriors would ever even think of escaping the Armageddon awaiting them. Faced by certain death, he wants them to fight bitterly and heroically to the very end.

As to be expected, the fighting breaks out soon enough, and thousands of people, young and old, die, especially after Kriemhild has indirectly provoked Hagen to kill her own son, Ortlieb, which finally convinces her husband Etzel to drop all of his reserves and to fight with all of his resources against these monstrous guests at his court. Tragically, the *Nibelungenlied* concludes with the death of virtually everyone; only Etzel, his liege man Dietrich, and the latter's companion Hildebrand escape alive.

But there is more tragedy involved, directly associated with exile. Rüdiger had sworn to Kriemhild, when he had wooed her on behalf of his Hunnish lord, that he would avenge any wrong ever to be committed against her, implying this in future terms. Kriemhild, however, interpreted that in past and future terms, and identifies this promise as the ultimate means to avenge Siegfried's murder. The poet clearly reflects racist concepts here because the queen considers only Germanic warriors as competent and strong enough to overcome a monstrous hero such as Hagen.

Indeed, during the final fighting, no one can get dangerously close to Hagen, but then Kriemhild calls in Rüdiger and demands his help in return for the many years of support the royal couple had granted. He demurs, however, begs her and Etzel to spare him this bitter task attacking his own fellow men, the Burgundians, refers to the fact that he has promised his daughter in marriage to Giselher, one of the three Burgundian kings, and even goes so far as to offer the return of his margraviate: "Take back what thou hast given me – castles and land. Leave me nothing at all. I will go forth afoot into exile. I will take my wife and my daughter by the hand, and I will quit thy country empty, rather than I will die dishonoured. I took thy red gold to my hurt" (according to Armour's trans., available online, 163). But this is all to no avail; he is forced to take up his weapons, and after he has killed many of the Burgundians, both he and Gernot, Gunther's and Giselher's brother, slay each other.

The poor exile cannot profit from his many years of service in the name of Etzel; all of his attempts to establish peace between the Burgundians and Huns ultimately fail, and he himself has to pay with his life for his sense of loyalty and duty in the name of the feudal bonds. He had lived in the borderland between east and west, he had observed all ideals of knighthood, he had welcomed the Burgundians in a most hospitable manner, and he had promised to help Kriemhild under any circumstance. And just this commitment meant his death and that of his men. The poor exile thus faces his tragic end, never having seen his homelands again, which we must associate with Burgundy since Gunther and his court belong to the same tribe.

As much as the *Nibelungenlied* is characterized by global tragedy, with none of the heroes (or Kriemhild) surviving in the end, the experience of Rüdiger as an exile adds a further level of suffering for the individual hero who is helplessly exposed to his destiny. Although the poet does not address the status of the exile in very specific terms, he explicitly profiles him as a tragic figure who cannot live among his own people. None of his wealth and political power can satisfy him because he is far away from his own culture, separated from his people, and he would rather abandon it all if he could return home.

His efforts to create family bonds with the Burgundians through marrying off his daughter speak volumes in that regard. However, because he is bound by his feudal oath, he has to fight against them and die in that last major battle at King Etzel's court, apart from the one attempted by Hildebrand. Little wonder that research has consistently identified Rüdiger as the one and only truly moving character in the *Nibelungenlied* who is always loyal to his own values and has to die for that purpose. His tragedy is underscored particularly by the fact that he lives in exile and never has a chance to regain his previous position, as was the case with El Cid in the Spanish heroic epic (Grosse 1995).

We never learn specifically the reasons for Rüdiger's exile, but he is not the only one who has to live abroad. At Etzel's/Attila's court, numerous other refugees have found a new home, such as the heroes Dietrich and Hildebrand, but the poet does not go into details and is content with presenting these figures as larger than life and yet suffering deeply because of their extraordinarily liminal status.

Conclusion

The theme of exile found expression also in other medieval narratives, such as the various epics in the Dietrich tradition, such as *Rabenschlacht*, *Dietrichs Flucht*, *Rosengarten*, *Wolfdietrich A* and *Wolfdietrich B*, etc., all from the later Middle Ages and consistently situated in the Alpine world. The issue of exile, however, does not find any more specific explanations and serves simply as an important narrative motif to paint the protagonist in tragic light. The protagonist in the "Hildebrandslied" also had to live in exile without any fault on his own, but it distances him so extremely from his son that when they finally meet on the battlefield, they can only fight against each other, certainly with a deadly outcome.

Considering the great weight of exile in the modern world, as a terrible destiny which individuals and groups have to suffer, the few medieval examples discussed here demonstrate that motifs such as exile deserve to be studied from many different perspectives and from various historical angles (Wagner, forthcoming, 2025). Tragically, people in the Middle Ages already faced fundamental problems and challenges, such as exile, which clearly signals to us the great value of medieval literature to explore those issues through a literary-historical lens.

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