

THE SPACES OF MEDIEVAL INTERTEXTUALITY:  
*DEOR* AS A PALIMPSEST

The 42 lines contained in folios 100r and 100v of the *Exeter Book* (Exeter, Cathedral Library Ms 3501) have remained one of the most enigmatic texts in the Old English corpus, ever since Benjamin Thorpe first edited the manuscript and entitled them *Deor, the Scald's complaint* (1842). The conundrum of these lines does not exclusively lie on textual factors or possible interpolations by subsequent copyists, as might be the case of other medieval works. On the contrary, the analysis of the late tenth-century extant version evinces a very careful design which may allow us to consider it an attempt to preserve a highly valued text as literature. It is well known that the extract is divided into clearcut sections marked by capital letters and separated by a repeated refrain, which is properly punctuated to detach it from the words which follow. The main reason for the mystery of *Deor* seems to be, rather, a very allusive manner of expression which could have been familiar to a contemporary audience acquainted with the traditions it embodies, but distresses the modern reader and seems tangential for his or her perspective (Wrenn 1967: 81). Furthermore, the amalgamation in these lines of a basically heroic theme with a lyric frame and a very persuasive insistence on its proposition - as if the speaker wished to cause some kind of unspecified effect - has inclined scholars to propose a varied range of generic epithets: from a wisdom lyric, "... suggesting the ability of the mind to control itself and resist its surroundings" (Shippey 1972: 78; Boren 1975), to a sophisticated christianized charm against a social, personal or unknown misfortune (Bloomfield 1964); from a *scop* begging poem (Eliasson 1966; 1969), to a consolatory work, directed either to relieve the speaker's own suffering (Forster, 1937: 117-121; Pearsall 1977: 5), or to hearten someone who, because of misfortune, has become depressed in spirit (Malone 1933: 1).

In either case, all critics agree that the poem - whether it be didactic, consolatory, protective or mendicant - is firmly grounded on his torical experience

and legendary knowledge, and progresses by the combination of topics belonging to a Germanic tradition of “infortuniis illustrium virorum”, to use the classical label proposed by Conybeare in his *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826: 239). The different *exempla* are connected to one another by the famous refrain: ? *æs ofereode; pisses swa mæg*.<sup>1</sup> This idea is so widespread that most criticism has been directed towards unveiling the allusions the poem makes to other texts of the Germanic world. In this respect, there are some voices which regard it as an interesting example of the intertextual drive in recent critical theory; as a practical instance of “... the lesson ... that no text is an island, that every work is a response to a conversation or dialogue that it presupposes but need not mention” (Frank 1991: 101). In this paper I would like to explore the possibility of applying this concept to an early medieval poem. Although I assume the difficulty, implied by Frank herself, of connecting literary works that are “... the preserved tips of icebergs that melted away long ago” (1991: 101), I understand that this attempt may shed some light both on the enigma of *Deor* and on the operation of textual transference in the medieval period.

*Deor* opens with an allusion to the adversity of Welund, the elf-smith of the Scandinavian *Völundarkviða* and ? *Íríkssaga*. However, the message is conveyed by means of typically exile formulas which merely inform that he *wræces cunnade* (l. 1b) [“experienced the persecution of exile”], *earfopa dreag* (l. 2b) [“endured hardship”], *hæfde him to gesippe sorge and longap* (l. 3) [“had with him as company sorrow and longing”] and *wean ... onfond sippan hine Niðhad on nede lenge* (l. 4b-5) [“experienced misery after Niðhad lay fetters on him”]. In line 7, the refrain reveals that he had overcome his hardship. Such brief and stereotyped references imply that the original

---

<sup>1</sup> All references to the poem are from Malone ed. 1933: *Deor*. Exeter: U. of Exeter P. (1977). While critics agree in considering the refrain as a “... key to the poem’s meaning for its audience” (Hill 1983: 18), there are differences of opinion regarding the textual correlates of each neuter demonstrative in genitive singular. Those who assign *Deor* to the genre of charm or catalogue it as a *scop* begging poem believe that the first genitive - *pæs* - refers to the temporary situation described in the lines preceding it, while the second one - *pisses* - refers to any current circumstance which requires a solution (Isaacs 1968). Nevertheless, those who consider the poem as a consolatory piece, relate *pæs* to the *exemplum* which has just been given, and *pisses* both to the particular unknown misfortune affecting the individual listener, and to the adversity of the speaker, clearly rendered in the last section (ll. 35-42). This helps the poem to extend its soothing message from the personal domain to the universal one (Malone 1933: 17; Mandel 1977: 1-9; Swanton 1987: 42-43).

audience was expected to be fully conversant with oral legends on the captivity of Welund by king Níluír of the Niárar, with his having been hamstrung and forced to serve as the royal smith, and with his conclusive vengeance by ravishing Böívildr, the king's daughter, killing his two sons and presenting their skulls, eyeballs and teeth in the shape of bowls, gems and brooches to the royal family (Malone 1933: 4-5).

The misfortune of Böívildr herself - Beadohild in the Old English text - functions as a second *exemplum* of surmounted distress in *Deor*. The reasons for her affliction are concisely mentioned in lines 8-15: *hyre bropra deap* (l. 8b) ["the death of her brothers"], *hyre sylfre ping ... pæt heo eacen wæs* (ll. 9b-11a) ["her own affair ... that she was pregnant"], and particularly her inability to ponder calmly *hu ymb pæt sceolde* (l. 12b) ["how regarding that should be"]. The allusive technique permits us to infer that the contemporary audience was expected to be familiar with the above-mentioned cycle of orally transmitted legends, and thus was possibly aware that Beadohild's disgrace was partially overcome when, as a result of her rape, she gave birth to the hero Widia (See: *Waldere* II: l. 4b, l. 9b; *Widsith*, l. 124b, l. 130b).

The references of lines 14-17 are more puzzling. Although the speaker appeals to the knowledge of non-identified external sources of information - *We ... gefruggnon* (l. 14) ["We ... have learnt"] - a number of textual problems impinge on the interpretation of Mælhilde's discomfort. Provided that the correction of *monge* to *mone* (l. 14b) proposed by Malone (1933: 9) is accepted, so that this *hapax legomenon* is rendered as the noun meaning "moan", and that the apposition *Geates frige* (l. 15b) is related to the passionate feeling of a certain Gaute (Hill 1983: 43), then it is not difficult to link these lines to the previous ones as another *exemplum* of someone who suffered distress and overcame it. Line 17, however, makes clear that the source of anguish was, in this case, a painful love affair: *hi seo sorglufu slæp ealle binom* ["that distressing love robbed her of all sleep"]. We may also assume that both speaker and audience shared the knowledge required to understand the passage. Not only does the former embrace the listeners by using the first person plural personal pronoun, but he also hints in the brief space of two lines at a story which might have stirred the expected connotations in the minds of the latter. The present state of knowledge does not allow us to sort out whether this source was an early oral version of the story of Gaute and Magnild as retold

in nineteenth-century Scandinavian ballads (Malone 1933: 8), a narration of the incestuous affair of the queen of the continental Angles, as the well-known digression of *Beowulf* informs (ll. 1932-1962) (Eliasson 1965), or if it is associated with the legend of Hogená, Hild and Heoden included in Sturluson's *Skaldskaparmál* (49-50) and in the German *Kudrun* (5-8) (Norman 1937).<sup>1</sup>

The existence of external sources of information is announced again in lines 18-20: *? æt wæs monegum cup* (l. 19b) ["that was known by many"]. However, their contents are still very enigmatic: *Íeodric ahte prittig wintra Mæringa burg* (ll. 18-19a) ["Theodric held the stronghold of the Maeringas for thirty years"]. Malone draws on Frankish history to interpret these lines and proposes that Íeodric is either the eldest son of the chieftain Clovis, Theodoric I (d. 533 or 534), or, more plausibly, Sigiwald - Theudebert (d. 548) in Frankish history - who, according to the *Historia Francorum* (III, 13: 16, 23), fled to Lombardy in order to avoid being punished by the above-mentioned king. He returned after thirty years to discover that his prosecutor had been his own father who, thinking that he was an illegitimate son, had repudiated him; thus he changed his name to Theodoric the son - Wolfdietrich in MHG legends - (1933: 9-10). The same author claims that the Rök inscription - a runic monument of the early ninth century - mentions the same Theodoric as *skati marika*, chief of the Maeringas. The family name may refer either to the tribe in southern Tirol which was ruled by Sigiwald as exiled king for thirty years, or to the Emperor's retainer, Berchtung von Meran, whose family brought up Wolfdietrich after his repudiation (Malone 1934). Although this

---

<sup>2</sup> Gaute's vain efforts to avoid Magnild's - his bride's - drowning in the Vending or Skotberg river constitute the subject of traditional Scandinavian ballads recorded in the 1850s in Norwegian and Icelandic versions. Although both sources diverge in minor details, they tell how the former built a high and strong bridge which fell down anyway, and picture the recovery of his bride's body after a faithful and tireless mourning accompanied by the music of the harp (Malone 1937). The possibility that Geat in these lines is Offa's son, and that they allude to the story of the latter's wife's distress after her incestuous affair has been pointed out by Eliasson to support his view of *Deor* as the begging poem of an Anglian *scop* (1966; 1969). Finally, the implied reference to the expedition of Heoden against King Hogená after having snatched Hild, the latter's daughter, and the possibility that *Deor* refers to the valkyrie-like activity of the maid, who, at night, raised up the slain to fight the next day, was first mentioned by Norman (1937). The three approaches suit the scant and ambiguous textual evidence provided by the poem, so that their accuracy must be sought somewhere else; the close analysis of intertextual connections may give some clues in this respect.

solution agrees with the previous stanzas by offering another example of surmounted misfortune, due to exile in this case, other critics believe that it is more feasible to understand that the proper name alludes to Theodoric the Ostrogoth (454-526), as all other uses of the name in OE texts do. Hill supports the hypothesis by examining the cycle of legends about the famous king, compiled in the OHG *Hildebranslied* (c. 800) (1983: 100). In this poem he is reputed, unhistorically, to have been in exile for thirty years. Hill associates the *Mæringa burg* with the city of Ravenna, the citadel of the Ostrogoths, assuming that other sources, particularly Notker Labeo's prologue to the translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (c. 1000), describe the Gothic king as ruler of the "Megothorum et Ostrogothorum" (Hill 1983: 93). Either solution confirms the point of view that these sections of *Deor* functioned as mere hints to remind the listeners of well-known legendary or historical episodes which may have helped them to fill up the brief allusions with the expected signification. However, the identification of Æodric with the Gothic king does not fit in with the portraits of overcome disgrace offered in previous sections. Even though we are not sure that the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with traditions circulating in the continent which depicted Theodoric the Ostrogoth as a disgraceful exile, we do know that he was appreciated in early medieval England as a tyrant and, as Martyrologies prove, the cruel murderer of Pope John I (d. 526) and Boethius (d. 524).

The structural problem is resolved when the following section (ll. 21-27) is reached. Rather than another *exemplum* of misfortunes outlived, this is the illustration of a tyrannical chieftain: Ermanaric, king of the Ostrogoths (d. c. 375). The final reference to an external, non-identified source opens the stanza - *We geascodan* (l. 21a) ["We have learnt"] - but, in this case, the speaker engages in a longer rendering of the effects of this king's *wylfenne gepoht* (l. 22a) ["wolfish thought"]:

Sæt secg monig,      sorgum gebunden,  
wean in wenan,      wyscte geneahhe  
pæt pæs cynerices      ofercumen wære (ll. 24-26)

[Many a warrior sat, bound by sorrows, expecting misery, wished constantly that the kingdom was overthrown]

It is clear that distress and misfortune did not affect the powerful king, but instead his subjects, who could only expect to be freed from their troubles by the former's defeat and death. The accurate message conveyed by these lines does not hinder the possibility that both speaker and audience had other sources of information in mind. Descriptions of Ermanaric as cruel a king are found, for instance, in Icelandic eddic poetry where he is said to have had his son hanged and his own wife trampled to death by horses on account of their supposed liaison. Similarly in the eleventh-century MHG *Würzburg Chronicle*, Ermenrich is described as "more cunning than all in guile, more generous in gifts" (Hill 1983: 83).

A Christian reflection on the nature of adversity (ll. 28-34) follows this *exemplum*. These lines, in the tradition of other OE gnomic and elegiac verses, remark that fortune, whether good or evil, derives ultimately from God, and that its nature *wendep geneahhe* (l. 32b) ["changes constantly"]. They also function as a bridge between "... the factual Germanic past and the reflective present" (Condren 1981: 74) by leading, without the intervention of the refrain, to the conclusive section where the details of Deor's story are exposed. The speaker tells in the first person that he has been the *scop* of the Heodeningas for a long time, but Heorrenda, a rival skilled minstrel - *leoſcraeftig monn* (l. 40a) - has recently supplanted him in the favour of his lord, so that the latter *londryht gepah pæt me eorla hleo ær gesealde* (ll. 40b-41) ["has received the proceeds of a state, which formerly the lord of noblemen had granted to me"]. The autobiographical statement is closely tied to the background of the previous sections. Firstly by means of the allusion to well-known figures of the Germanic legendary, historical or literary traditions. In this case, the audience is confronted with the story of Heoden, king of the Heodeningas in continental Anglia (See: *Widsith*, l. 21), whose minstrel Horant enjoyed a well-reputed fame as poet, as later written sources also reveal: Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (VI), the Scandinavian *Guðrúnarkviða* (Magoun 1942: 1-5), or the MHG poem *Kudrun* (Hill 1983: 17; Norman 1965: 210-211). Secondly, both sections are linked by the final refrain - ? *æs ofereode; pisses swa mæg* - which, in light of the preceding *exempla*, and through insistent repetition, proclaims the possibility that Deor the *scop* will enjoy a similar triumph to those previously outlined: in due time he will rise above a kind of earthly misfortune whose nature is reversible. Finally, the confluence of this personal section with the preceding passages contribute to the poem's organic unity.

The hardship of losing his position to another poet makes Deor analogous to Welund, Beadohild and Geat, who suffered disgrace or dishonour, and correlates his lord to the cruel kings Theodoric and Ermanaric, who were liable for the harsh conditions of their subjects (Condren 1981: 75-76).

The review of the structure of *Deor* sanctions the hypothesis that the poem relied on the expectation that the audience was able to make use of Germanic history and traditional legends in order to fill in the gaps which mere hints in the text leave open. The meaningful existence of *Deor* depends, therefore, on the connections that may be drawn from its brief and ambiguous references, which "... in addition to their literal meaning, constitute a large balloon allusion floating at some distance from the poem" (Condren 1981: 63). In other words, *Deor's* significance could only be grasped if those addressed understood that they were required to stimulate their knowledge of other texts, and to activate the mechanism of intertextuality.

In any literary text of the early Middle Ages the impulse towards intertextuality must first be seen in the context of orality: a primeval mode of existence of the text which relies on the aesthetics of identity and operates in an "additive, aggregative, redundant, copious and traditionalist" way (Ong 1982). Within this prevalent state, the medieval literary work unfolds through a previously established junction of textual and extratextual codes, so that form and content conform to the expectations of an audience already acquainted with well-known rules of literary production and reception (Lotman 1970: 268-269). In the words of the French medievalist Paul Zumthor, the aesthetics of identity "... fonctionne par assimilation de stéréotypes pourtant jamais automatisés, flottant dans le milieu instable de l'expérience vécue", and is consequently erected on "... une trame continue, horizontale, successive" of intertextual relations (1983: 252). Zumthor proposes that medieval intertextuality - or "intervocalité", as he prefers to call it - exhibits itself on three main discursive spaces: a) the space of the *hic et nunc* hearing of the text, which is ruled by "... un code plus ou moins rigoureusement formalisé, mais toujours en quelque manière incomplet, entrouvert sur l'imprévisible"; b) a discursive space of intertextual modulation, where "... chaque discours se définit comme le lieu de transformation (par et dans une parole concrète) d'énoncés venus d'ailleurs"; and c) the space of the textual surface itself, "... engendré par les relations qui s'y nouent" (1987: 161).

The first space opens intertextuality to the social performance of the text by exposing the textual surface to explicit or implicit references to the *hic et nunc* of oral poetic communication (Zumthor 1983: 83). The allusions usually differ from one performance to another, but some of them may eventually abide in the written versions. Thus, in *Deor* the use of the first person plural personal pronoun and the presupposition that speaker and audience shared non-identified sources of information (ll. 14, 19b, 21a) are worth noticing. The second space is also connected to typical features of medieval orality; the oral text is the common property of the members of the social group where literature is produced and received, to such an extent that the individual poem becomes a mere manifestation of this wider discourse, from which it can borrow freely. The process leads to a "... mouvement perpétuel fait de collisions, d'interférences, d'échanges, de ruptures" (Zumthor 1987: 168). This space of "intervocalité" accounts for the repeated use of formulas as a discourse strategy - "mémoriel et verbal" - which, within the aesthetics of identity, aims to frame the individual poetic utterance in the whole speech of the community (Zumthor 1987: 217). Just by way of an example, the recourse to a formulaic style connected to images of exile in the opening lines of *Deor* - ll. 1b, 2b, 4a, 4b - could be pointed out. At the same time, this intertextual drive promotes the use of allusions to raise expectations in the audience which may bring the poem to the intended semantic closure. The references to Welund (l. 1a), Niðhad (l. 5a), Beadohild (l. 8a), Mælhilde (l. 14a), Geat (l. 15b), Íeodric (l. 18a), Eormanric (l. 22b), Heoden (l. 36b) and Heorrenda (l. 39b) not only give a clue to the oral transmission of *Deor*, but they implicitly directed the original audience - and may still direct the modern reader - to the common social discourse which has survived in other written versions of medieval Germanic texts: the Scandinavian *Völundarkviða*, *? íríkssaga* and *Guðrúnarkviða*, the OE poems *Waldere*, *Widsith* and *Beowulf*, or the MHG *Kudrun* and *Hildebranslied*, among others.

The recurrent availability of formulas, exchanges, transfers and interferences derives from an original stage of "oralité primaire et immédiate" (Zumthor 1983: 36), or, using the label recently proposed by Doane, on a primary setting of genuine orality. At this stage the text "... calls attention to itself as language and is made up of more or less predetermined, more or less flexible ... elements that conform themselves to familiar and expected genres and contents" (1991: 79). However, Zumthor himself is adamant that the process

is not necessarily brought to an end when the oral tradition is fixed in writing; on the contrary, this type of intertextuality remains at the second stage of “oralité mixte” (1987: 172), when “chirographs” are created that descend from previous oral production. Furthermore, the mutual penetration and interpretation of the oral text and the technology of literacy result, according to Doane, in the formation of “interfaces” which, by definition, exploit this and other kinds of intertextual relations (1991: 86). Firstly, the dependence of primary orality on the aesthetics of identity, when the text is merely one manifestation of discursive practices common to all members of the community, results in a generated relationship between the orally produced text - *hic et nunc* - and the precedent material. The latter, therefore, actuates as a global “infratext”, “... an invisible structuration that organizes any actual manifestation of speech ... always recursive, unified within the flow of the voice” (Doane 1991: 102-103). However, when the products of oral tradition interact with written techniques and the text becomes an “interface”, the sources are consciously referred to by poets, and audiences are drawn to them critically, with an understanding of the meanings and functions of traditional language, formulas and themes (Doane 1991: 81).

If the idea that “interfaces” started to appear in England from the eighth century onwards is accepted, then the extant chirographic copy of *Deor* must be regarded as a typical instance of mixed orality, as a text produced in writing when the oral tradition was still alive. In this sense, the puzzling allusive technique used throughout the poem and the necessity to fill in the ambiguous gaps by reference to Germanic history and legend are just surface manifestations of the discursive space of intertextual modulation proposed by Zumthor. This was unconsciously actuated at the stage of primary orality, but was consciously and critically retained when the text interfered with written literary practices. A consideration of the textual relations of *Deor* with other medieval works may support the status of the poem as an “interface” and complete the analysis of intertextual transference and interferences. The connections which function exclusively within the third space distinguished by Zumthor, that of the written textual surface, are specially illuminating in this enterprise. Recent scholarship has explored the relationship between the written copy of *Deor* and the transmission in England of Boethius’s *De*

*Consolatione Philosophiae* (c. 524), either in the original Latin version, or in the Anglo-Saxon translation encouraged by King Alfred.<sup>1</sup>

This perspective is supported in the striking structural parallelism between Boethius's *De Consolatione* and the poem. The whole situation of the speaker in *Deor* can be placed on the same level with the remembrance of past joys in present sorrow on which the former author insists. As Boren has stated, both works begin with a concern for the sorrows of misfortune, and it is only after the grief has been expelled that the process of recovery starts. In both cases this is represented as "... a movement of the intellect from obsessive concern with the particularities of private experience to a comprehension of those philosophical generalizations which offer the only opportunity for understanding and thus enduring the misfortunes of this world" (1975: 270). Similarly, Boethius's remarks on the wisdom of nature's established plan (Book 1, Prose 6; Book 4, Prose 5; Book 5, Metre 1, etc) could have been echoed - dressed up in Christian garments - in the general reflections on adversity of the Anglo-Saxon text (ll. 28-34). Parallels of greater detail can be observed when the overall message of the poem, particularly as the self-contained refrain summarizes it - ? *æs ofereode; pisses swa mæg* - is compared to the arguments produced by Boethius in Book 2, Prose 3 of his work:

Si numerum modumque laetorum tristiumque consideres, adhunc te felicen negare non possis. Quod si ideirco te fortunatum esse non aestimas, quoniam quae tunc laeta uidebantur abierunt, non est quod te miserum putes, quoniam quae nunc creduntur maesta praeterunt (quoted from Bolton 1972: 222).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> As early as 1911, Lawrence had qualified the poem as "a consolatio philosophiae of minstrelsy", obviously leaning on the title of Boethius's work (1911: 23). Nevertheless, the connections between both texts have not been explored until the last decades of this century, when Markland (1968) and Kiernan (1978) have proposed that the structure of *Deor* derives from King Alfred's version of *De Consolatione*. Bolton agrees that the five *exempla* of the poem correspond to the false gifts of fortune in the Latin text, but does not see the necessity of relating it to the Anglo-Saxon enterprise (1972). Whitbread, finally, assumes a relationship with the consolatory tradition inaugurated by Boethius, but obviates both the intermediacy of King Alfred and the direct knowledge of the Latin version, proposing instead that a non-identified sermon inspired the composition of the poem (1970).

<sup>4</sup> "If you thought of all the things that have happened to you, what kind of things they were, and whether they were happy or unhappy things, you would not be able

The comparison between the Latin lines and King Alfred's translation might also be of interest from the standpoint of the intertextual connections of the medieval poem:

Áif pu nu forpam cwist pæt pu gesælig ne sie pæt pu nu næfst pa hwilendlican arwyrpnessa pa blipnessa pe pu ær hæfdest penne ne eart pu peah unƳesælig forpam pe pa unrotnessa pe pu nu en eart swa ilce ofergap swa pu cwist pæt pa blissa ær dydon (quoted from Markland 1968: 2)

[If you now say that you are not happy because you do not have temporary honours and the joys which you formerly had; then you are not, however, unhappy, because the sorrows that you are now in, will likely pass away, just as you say that the enjoyments formerly did].

Markland (1968: 2-3) and Kiernan (1978: 335-336) have noticed that the original Latin verb *praeterire* is rendered as the Old English *ofergan* in King Alfred's version, and conclude that the use of the preterit of this verbal form - *ofereode* - in the refrain of the poem may allow one to consider the early West Saxon text as the "hypotext" which ultimately promoted the written composition of *Deor*. If this is so, the intimate connection between the three "chirographs" confirms the unfolding of a proper hypertextual relation which projected the soothing message conveyed by Boethius into a new circuit of meaning adapted to the Germanic *Weltanschauung* (Genette 1982; Clayton and Rothstein 1991: 22-23). In the Latin original (Book 1, Prose 3), Philosophy had urged Boethius to replace the classical examples of misfortune - Anaxagoras, Socrates or Zeno - with others who were still remembered and celebrated by the author's contemporaries: Seneca or Soranus. The translators of King Alfred's circle seem to have followed this advice when they replaced the reference to Fabricius (Book 2, Metre 7) with that of Welund (Whitbread 1970: 171). This practice - together with Boethius's hint - may have encouraged the compositors of *Deor* to rely on *exempla* from Germanic antiquity, better known to the intended audience. In this sense, in addition to the story of Welund and Beadohild, the passage on Geat and Mælhild (ll. 14-17) - the

---

to say you have not been fortunate up to now. On the other hand, if you do not consider that you have been lucky because your one time reasons for rejoicing have passed away, you cannot now think of yourself as in misery, because the very things that seem miserable are also passing away" (Watts trans. 1969: 60).

---

Scandinavian lovers - may have been stirred by the classical legend of Orpheus and Eurydice in Boethius's original (Book 3, Metre 11), as a further attempt to adapt the latter's examples to a new Germanic milieu.

Structural, thematic and textual parallelisms between the three works may contribute to sort out other ambiguities raised by brief allusions in the lines of the poem. The relationship between *Deor* and Boethius sanctions the explanations of *Îeodric* and the *Mæringas* in lines 18-19a as references to Theodoric the Ostrogoth and the inhabitants of his kingdom respectively. The preface to King Alfred's translation clearly mentioned that the former was a cruel king who punished Boethius to death (Tuggle 1977: 236). Thus, the possibility that the composers of *Deor* knew the preceding Old English version and therefore drew several examples and topics from it reinforces the establishment of a hypertextual relationship between the three texts and confers the side utility of clearing up obscure passages to the analysis of intertextual transference.

In summary, the definition of *Deor* as a typically medieval "interface" between oral production and writing helps to explore the diverse intertextual spaces which lie under the surface of the poem's composition. These can be related to the different stages of orality which have coexisted in the extant written copy. Rather than ascribing the references of its ambiguous allusions singularly to either an early stage of primary orality or a later one of purely written composition, this standpoint permits us to define the text as a visible palimpsest (Doane 1991: 104), in which reverberating voices from the past - the global oral "infratext" common to all members of the community - are consciously referred to under the pressure of a written "hypotext". Eventually, this analysis supports the idea that part of the aesthetic appeal of medieval texts lies in their intertextuality, so that most literary expectations created by these puzzling documents can be sorted out only by stepping from text to text (Jauss 1979). This methodological tenet should be borne in mind when dealing both with written "interfaces" and with their possible dependence on earlier stages of pure primary orality.

Juan Camilo Conde Silvestre  
University of Murcia

REFERENCES

- Bloomfield, H. W. 1964: The form of *Deor*. *PMLA* 79: 534-541.
- Bolton, W. F. 1972: Boethius, Alfred and *Deor* again. *Mod. Philology* 69: 222-227.
- Boren, J. L. 1975: The design of the Old English *Deor*. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry. Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard* (Eds L.E. Nicholson & D. Warwick Frese). University of Notre-Dame Press, 264-276.
- Clayton, J. & Rothstein, E. 1991: Figures in the corpus: theories of influence and intertextuality. *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Eds J. Clayton & E. Rothstein). Madison: The U. of Wisconsin Press, 3-36.
- Condren, E. I. 1981: *Deor's* artistic triumph. *Studies in Philology* 78: 62-76.
- Conybeare, J. J. 1826: *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London: Harding & Lepard.
- Doane, A. N. 1991: Oral texts, intertexts and intratexts: editing Old English. *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Eds J. Clayton & E. Rothstein). Madison: The U. of Wisconsin P., 75-113.
- Eliasson, N. E. 1965: The story of Geat and Mælhild in *Deor*. *Studies in Philology* 62: 494-509.
- Eliasson, N. E. 1966: Two Old English scop poems. *PMLA* 81: 185-192.
- Eliasson, N. E. 1969: *Deor*: a begging poem? *Medieval Literature and Civilization. Studies in Memory of G.N. Garmonsway* (Eds D.A. Pearsall & R.A. Waldron). London, 55-61.
- Forster, L. 1937: Die Assoziation in *Deor's* Klage. *Anglia* 61: 117-121.
- Frank, R. 1991: Germanic legend in Old English literature. *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Eds M. Godden & M. Lapidge). Cambridge: CUP, 88-106.
- Génette, G. 1982: *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*. Paris: Seuil.
- Hill, J. ed 1983: *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*. Durham: Durham & St. Andrews Medieval Texts.

- Isaacs, N. D. 1968: Structure and excellence: *Deor* and the critics. *Structural Principles of Old English Poetry*. Knoxville: U. of Tennessee Press, 107-114.
- Jauss, H. R. 1979: The alterity and modernity of medieval literature. *New Literary History* 10: 181-230.
- Kiernan, K. 1978: *Deor*: The consolation of an Anglo-Saxon Boethius. *Neu-philologische Mitteilungen* 79: 333-340.
- Lawrence, W. W. 1911: The song of *Deor*. *Modern Philology* 9: 23-45.
- Lotman, I. M. 1970. *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Cont (1977).
- Magoun, F. P. Jr. 1942: *Deors* Klage und *Guðrúnarkviða*. *Englische Studien* 75: 1-5.
- Malone, K. 1934: The Theodoric of the Rök inscription. *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 9: 76-84.
- Malone, K. 1937: The tale of Geat and Mæþhill. *English Studies* 19: 193-199.
- Malone, K. ed 1933: *Deor*. Exeter: U. of Exeter P. (1977, 4th ed.).
- Mandel, J. 1977: Exemplum and refrain: the meaning of *Deor*. *The Yearbook of English Studies* 7: 1-9.
- Markland, M. F. 1968: Boethius, Alfred and *Deor*. *Modern Philology* 66: 1-4.
- Norman, F. 1937: *Deor*: a criticism and an interpretation. *Modern Language Review* 32: 374-381.
- Norman, F. 1965: Problems in the dating of *Deor* and its allusions. *Franci-plegius. Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of F. Peabody Magoun Jr* (Eds J.B. Bessinger & R.P. Creed). London: Allen and Unwin, 205-213.
- Ong, W. J. 1982: *Orality and Literacy*. London: Methuen.
- Pearsall, D. 1977: *Old English and Middle English Poetry*. London: R&KP.
- Shippey, T. A. 1972: *Old English Verse*. London: Hutchison.
- Swanton, M. 1987: *English Literature before Chaucer*. London: Longman.

- Thorpe, B. 1842: *Codex Exoniensis. A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London: Society of Antiquaries. [New York: AMS Press, 1975]
- Tuggle, T. T. 1977: The structure of *Deor*. *Studies in Philology* 74: 229-242.
- Watts, V. E. trans. 1969: *Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Whitbread, L. 1970: The pattern of misfortune in *Deor* and other Old English poems. *Neophilologus* 54: 167-183.
- Wrenn, C. L. 1967: *A Study of Old English Literature*. London: Harrap.
- Zumthor, P. 1983: *Introduction à la poésie orale*. Paris: Seuil.
- Zumthor, P. 1987: *La lettre et la voix. De la littérature médiévale*. Paris: Seuil.

\* † \*