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The "Deor" Legends: Their Dissemination in Germanic Literature

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THE "DROR" LEGENDS,

THEIR DISSEMINATION IN GERMANIC LITERATURE
(TITLE)

BY

Doris Lorraine Mabry

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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"Deer" is an Old English poem found in the Exeter Book. It follows "Soul and Body II" and precedes "Wulf and Eadwacer." Dating of the poem has proved difficult, opinions varying from the year 700 to 950. Most scholars, though, seem to agree that "Deer" was probably written during the eighth century. The poem has a stanzaic structure like "Wulf and Eadwacer" and a lyric and elegiac mood similar to "Widsith." It is unique in its use of a refrain. Its 42 lines are divided into six stanzas. In each of the stanzas, the poet refers to a different historical legend which presents a sorrow or difficulty and ends with the statement "That passed, so may this!" He concludes with a description of his own situation and, again, restates the refrain. This refrain shows his hope for the future in spite of the despair of the present.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest the specific legends to which the "Deer" poet alludes by comparing the poem to some of the most famous Germanic legends existing. These legends are the Elder Edda, the Younger Edda, the Volsunga Saga, the Nibelungenlied, and the Kudrun, which all seem to be related.

The Elder Edda is the oldest of the tales mentioned above. It has been and is still called the Poetic Edda, the Saemundar Edda, and the British Edda. Opinions as to the date of its writing vary from approximately 1050 to 1240. However, Saemund "the Learned" (approximately 1055 to 1135), an Icelandic farmer who studied in Paris, may well have collected the songs and lays of the Edda and written them down. This seems to be the most prevalent opinion and would date the poem sometime during his lifetime. The many lays within the Edda seem to depict a series of unconnected stories, probably of Scandinavian origin. Waddell, however, disagrees. He feels that the stories concern British heroes whose legends were carried into Iceland. Once the lays have been rearranged into a more coherent order, they describe the attempts of a king to establish civilization and reform Eden. He places the actual action of the story in Asia Minor, especially at Troy.¹ The truth of his theory has yet to be determined, but the Edda remains a collection of lays concerning the actions of various heroes. It also seems to be a source of the Younger Edda, the Volsunga Saga, the Nibelungenlied, and the Kudrun, for each of these books expands on stories told in the Elder Edda.

¹L. A. Waddell, The British Edda (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1930), passim, intro.

The Younger Edda has also been called the Prose Edda and the Snorra Edda. It follows the Elder Edda in time. This book is written in Old Norse, like the Elder Edda, but in prose instead of poetry. The author of the Younger Edda is an Icelandic named Snorri Sturluson, who lived from 1178 to 1241. It contains a great deal of the material mentioned in the Elder Edda. In some respects, it appears to be a summary of the Elder Edda.

A third Old Norse story takes the form of the Volsunga Saga. It is a prose saga, sometimes called a prose epic, which is based on the two Eddas, particularly the latter half of the Elder Edda. It depicts the story of Sigurd and the Volsungs with extraordinary detail. I have seen only one theoretical dating, that of approximately 1250;² however, it may easily have been written earlier.

The Nibelungenlied (or Niebelungenlied) is a German epic poem which treats the same material as that described in the Volsunga Saga. The names, quite naturally, are slightly different and some of the events differ somewhat. This material is, again, from the latter half of the Elder Edda. The author of this poem is unknown, although he apparently knows well the region on the Rhine about Worms.

²William Haneen Lettsom, trans., The Nibelungenlied (New York: The Colonial Press, 1901), p. vii.

The city of Worms, itself, is the center of much of the action. Scholarly opinions as to the date of this poem range from the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the thirteenth. This poem has been called "the Germanic tale of Troy."³

The Kudrun, or Gudrun, is probably the most modern of the five stories mentioned. Margaret Armour, in her translation of the tale, states that "German scholarship places the date of the Gudrun somewhere in the last decade of the twelfth century, a period bounded on one side by the Nibelungenlied, by which it was influenced."⁴ Obviously, the dates of these two poems are open for speculation; however, the fact that the Nibelungenlied is earlier than the Kudrun and influenced the Kudrun is fairly well established. The Kudrun is based on a legend that is still preserved in Scandinavian folk-lore and is briefly mentioned in the Younger Edda. Once again, the author is unknown.

As can be seen, these five stories are interrelated, though one may tell a tale that is only briefly mentioned in a second and ignored in a third. In addition, they are all written at a later date than the short poem "Deor." In

³Ibid., p. v.

⁴Margaret Armour, trans., Gudrun (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1932), p. vii.

my opinion, the "Deer" poet made allusions to legends that were well known in his time. They were popular enough to have been repeated by word of mouth for several centuries before they were written down in any expanded form, although many of the characters to which "Deer" refers were also mentioned in other early works such as "Beowulf" and "Widsith." If these men and women were so well known that their names and a brief account of their problem could call to the mind of the reader or listener their entire story, then the stories probably survived in some form and were written in one of these five famous books. This idea seems to be supported by the fact that scholars are sure that two of the "Deer" allusions (Welund and Beadohilde) have definitely been described in these five stories, and three more (Theodric, Bermanric, and Heorrenda) have been tentatively ascribed to them.

WELUND AND BEADOHILDE -- lines 1-13

The legend of Welund and Beadohilde alluded to in the first two stanzas of "Deer" has been fully described in several stories and in slightly varying versions. One of these versions, the one that seems to be the most frequently quoted, occurs in the Elder Edda in a lay entitled the

"Volundarkvitha." This lay may be summarized as follows:

Volundr, a leader (or prince) of the elves, noted for his skill as a smith, and his two brothers Egill and Slagfithr, lived in the Wolf Dales, at Wolf Lake. They had caught three swan-maidens there, and had made them their wives, but after seven years these had escaped. Volund's brothers went in pursuit, but Volundr stayed in the Wolf Dales, hoping for his wife's return. King Nithuthr of the Niarar learned that Volundr was alone, and determined to take him captive. Volundr was out hunting when the Niarar came to his house. The Niarar found 700 rings strung up in the house; they took one of these and left. When Volundr returned, he discovered the loss of the ring, but thought his wife had taken it and concluded that she had come back to him. While waiting for her appearance he fell asleep, and woke up to find himself in the hands of Nithuthr. The king had Volundr bound, took for himself Volund's sword, and gave to his daughter, the princess Bothvildr, the ring which he had earlier stolen from Volund's string of 700. Moreover, at the instance of the queen, the king had Volundr hamstrung and forced him to serve as the royal smith. The elf in revenge enticed to his smithy the two sons of Nithuthr, slew them, and made bowls out of their skulls, gems out of their eyeballs, and breeches out of their teeth; he presented these works of art to the royal family as products of his smithy. Later he got the ring from Bothvildr and ravished her. Finally he flew off, revealing the whole to Nithuthr as he left.⁵

The carving on the Franks Casket illustrates that this version is similar to a very early form of the story. The Franks Casket is probably a Northumbrian work made between

⁵Kemp Malone, ed., Deer (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), p. 5.

the sixth and eighth centuries. It depicts the headless body of one of Nithhad's sons and Welund holding up a bowl that he had made from the skull. "Deor" was probably written during the eighth century, so the versions known by the "Deor" poet and the artist who created the Franks Casket were very likely closely akin. Yet, the Elder Edda contains minute details identical to those in the Franks Casket. Consequently, even if the story told in the Elder Edda is not identical to that known by the "Deor" audience, the resemblance is very close.

In "Deor" then, Welund is the Volundr of the "Volundarkvitha," Nithhad is Nithuthr, and Beadohilde is Nithuthr's daughter, Bothvildr. The woes and miseries Welund suffers are due to his imprisonment by Nithhad and the supple sinew-bonds with which he is bound are equivalent to the hamstringing. Welund's problems ultimately pass away because he is able to revenge himself and escape. The fact that Beadohilde's trouble also passes indicates that the "Deor" poet knew of the story of the birth of her son, Widia, who became a hero. Furthermore, other tales of Welund describe the love that eventually grew between him and Beadohilde.

In addition to the detailed description of Welund's story in the Elder Edda, Welund is at least mentioned in each of the other four legends discussed above.

To some extent, the actions of the Nibelungenlied, the Volsunga Saga, the Younger Edda, and the Elder Edda

involve a ring. In the latter three stories, the ring is called the "Ring of Andvare." This ring has significance in the stories because of its curse which controls the fates of its owners. In the Nibelungenlied, the "Ring of the Nibelungs" has lesser importance because the reasons for the given actions are attributed to more human motives. However, the ring still forms a portion of the story.

In each of these four stories, the ring originally belonged to a dwarf who maintained a hoard of gold. Perhaps part of Welund's story was used when the legend of the dwarf was developing. If this assumption is true, then Welund's smithy and 700 rings became the dwarf's hoard, and the ring that was stolen from Welund became the "Ring of Andvare" and the "Ring of the Nibelungs." A very small portion of Welund's story would, then, have developed into part of the introduction of both the Volsunga Saga and the Nibelungenlied.

MAETHHILDE AND GEAT -- lines 14-17

The story of Maethhilde and Geat offers the greatest problem to scholars when trying to determine the tale that the "Deer" poet refers to. The translation of the passage itself offers a tremendous problem. For example, the names themselves have proved difficult to translate. Although Maethhilde is now generally accepted as the name of the woman in the passage, her name may be Hilde. Geat may be

the name of the man involved, or the word may refer to the nation. A translation of the critical Beadohilde lines printed ~~anonymously~~ in The Atlantic Monthly in 1891 illustrates some of these difficulties:

We have heard enough of Hild's disgrace;
 heroes of Geat were homeless made,⁶
 and sorrow stole their sleep away.

The author even footnotes the first line in order to offer a second reading, "We have heard of many a household war." In addition, some critics have suggested that several lines have been lost at this point in the poem. They believe that Beadohilde and Geat actually belong in separate and distinct stories. The result of these diverse opinions is that the tales offered by critics as descriptions of the Maethhilde/Geat affair are widely varied and are very indefinite.

Kemp Malone has made a new suggestion as to the full story. He feels the allusion made by the "Deer" poet is only known to us now through two ballads, the first Scandinavian and the second Icelandic. In each version Gaute (or Gauti) discovers his wife, Magnild (or Magnhild), in tears. He asks why she cries, and is told that she fears her impending death in the river. In spite of his consoling

⁶"The Oldest English Lyric." The Atlantic Monthly, LXVII (February, 1891), 287.

words explaining that the event will not occur, she remains sad. She feels that it is impossible to escape one's fate. When the time comes to cross the bridge, she falls into the water. Gaute then plays upon his harp. In the first version, his wife rises and the two are happily reunited. In the second, her body rises to the surface. He kisses and then buries it.⁷ If Malone's suggested translation of the passage is correct (see my literal translation), then these two Scandinavian ballads could well apply to the "Deor" allusion to Maethhilde and Goat.

F. Norman has argued against Malone's suggestion. His argument appears very cogent. For example, he points out that Malone admits "Deor" could not have been composed much later than 950. Norman goes on to say that Malone "...ends up with the statement that a Scandinavian ballad reached England by the middle of the tenth century. It is this last statement which is most disturbing. Terms like 'epic', 'lay', and 'ballad' have been tolerably well clarified, and if we are now to assume ballads in the tenth century this is a matter of some concern to all European vernacular literatures. Even Prof. Malone seems somewhat alarmed, and his alarm is given as one of the reasons why he favours as late a date as possible for the composition of Deor."⁸

⁷Kemp Malone, "On Deor 14-17," Modern Philology, XL (August, 1942), 16.

⁸F. Norman, " 'Deor': A Criticism and an Interpretation," Modern Language Review, XXXII (1937), 374.

After continuing his arguments at some length, Norman concludes with his own interpretation of the stanza, based on a different translation. His translation reads as follows: "We heard the following concerning Maethhild's affair: Geat was completely overmastered by his love passion so that this troublesome (and unrequited) affection caused great grief to her."⁹ He concludes that Maethhilde unwillingly runs away with Geat, and suffers great hardships while with him. Her father pursues them and is killed by Geat. Finally someone from Maethhilde's clan comes to her aid. She escapes and returns home. Norman's postulation is based on two slightly differing renderings of the same basic story. One of these renderings comes from the Middle High German Alexanderlied and the second is found in the Kudrun. These two stories are almost identical except for the relationships of the people involved. For example, in the Kudrun, Hild is the mother of Kudrun and Hettel is the father. Kudrun is abducted. In the Alexanderlied, Hild is abducted and pursued by her father, Hagena. The concept that the "Deer" poet probably alludes to the story later written in the Kudrun seems to be the most generally accepted by scholars, but the question is

⁹Ibid., 380-381.

by no means concluded. There is still a wide range of opinions.

A third example of a completely different explanation of the Maethhilde problem may be found in Frederick Tupper's suggestion. In an essay written in 1911, he concluded that Hild was the lady referred to in the third stanza of the poem. Hild was simply a shortened form of Beadohild. Nithhad, Beadohild's father, was the Geat. The Geat was grieving over the loss of his children. The poet was, therefore, using the first three stanzas of the poem to explain the story of Welund and his foes.¹⁰

To these and many other suggestions concerning the question of Maethhilde, I would like to present a further possibility. The Snorra Edda offers a very concise version of the story that developed into the Volsunga Saga and the Nibelungenlied. A portion of this story is translated as follows:

Sigurd rode until he found a house upon the fell. Within it slept a woman who had on a helmet and a coat of mail. He drew his sword and cut her coat of mail off her. Then she awoke and named herself Hild. She is called Brynhild.... Sigurd rode thence and came to the King who is named Gjuki...their children were Gunnar, Hogni, Gudrun, Gudny.... There Sigurd dwelt for long time and he took to wife Gudrun... Afterward, Sigurd and the sons of Gjuki went to

¹⁰ Frederick Tupper, Jr., "The Song of Deor," Modern Philology, IX (October, 1911), 266.

Atli...to ask as a wife for Gunnar Brynhild, his sister. She dwelt upon Hind Fell, and about her hall was a flaming fire, and she had made a vow to have as a husband that man, ¹¹only, who dared to ride through the flame.

The story continues, telling how Sigurd and Gunnar changed shapes and Sigurd rode through the flames and plighted troth with Brynhild. Later, after she has married Gunnar, she discovers that she has been fooled. She revenges herself upon Sigurd and kills herself. Perhaps, then, Maethhilde or Hilde is the Brynhild or Hild of the Snorra Edda, and Geat is Gunnar, the son of Gjuki. Geat could also represent the Gjukiing nation. I am not familiar enough with the formation of names to trace the possible development of the word Geat into Gjuki or Gjukiing. However, if this transformation could have occurred, then the story the "Deer" poet alluded to may have developed into the Brynhild stories of the Younger Edda, the Volsunga Saga, and the Nibelungenlied. The fact that the Maethhilde story may have been told in one of these famous books seems highly possible because each of the other "Deer" allusions may be and has been plausibly placed within them. In addition, Brynhild's problem fits very well with any of the translations of the third stanza that I have seen. I feel,

¹¹ Lettson, Nibelungenlied, p. x.

consequently, that a Brynhild allusion is much more likely than even a Kudrun allusion, where the translation of the lines themselves must be manipulated as well as the relationships of the people.

THEODRIC -- lines 18-20

Again, the lines of the "Deor" poet have been the subject of much discussion. In this case, the problem is of a dual nature, concerning the identification of Theodric and the question of why the situation should be an unhappy one.

Critics have agreed that Theodric may be one of two men. He may be Theodric the Frank (Wolfdietrich) or he may be Theodric the Great, ruler of the Ostrogoths (Dietrich von Bern). Wolfdietrich suffered exile at one time in his life. He is probably the Theodric mentioned on the Rökstone, a runic stone (possibly from the early tenth century) found in East Gothland, Sweden. The inscription on the Rök reads: "Theodrich the daring in mood, the lord of seamen, ruled Redmere's strand. He, the Prince of the Maerings, sitteth now in full war-gear on his steed, shield-girt."¹² He once ruled in Hreithmar which may be Geatland. These are the Geats of "Beowulf." Theodric's forces defeated the Geatish

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Stopford A. Brooke, The History of Early English Literature (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 463.

army in 520. Hygelac was the leader of the Geats in this battle. Only one Geat survived, Beowulf. Snorri Sturluson told the story in the thirteenth century in a slightly different version. In his story, the battle takes place at home, not abroad as it does in "Beowulf." Also, Hygelac's rival is named Haki, not Theodric.¹³ Dietrich von Bern lived from approximately 455 to 526. He suffered exile for many years at the hands of Ermanaric, and lived during this time at the court of Attila. He united the Gothic tribes in the Balkans and ruled for thirty-three years in Ravenna as the king of Italy. Finally he returned with a Hunnish army and defeated Ermanaric. Dietrich enters the Nibelungenlied probably through his relationship to Attila and his leadership of a Hunnish army. As avenger in the Nibelungenlied, he finally vanquishes Hagen, but in doing so he loses his entire army. His victory is, then, a rather sad one. This story is also told in an older form in the Elder Edda in the "Atlakvida." In the battle over which of the two Theodric's is involved in "Deor," critics seem to be fairly evenly divided.

The second part of the problem concerns the unhappiness of the situation stated in "Deor." If Wulfdietrich is the Theodric in question, then he ruled as a conqueror

¹³Kemp Malone, ed., Deor (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1933), p. 10.

and his subjects would be unhappy. When his rule was over, then the unhappiness would have "passed away." Many of the critics who support Dietrich as Theodric have felt that Dietrich himself was unhappy. His rule would represent the time of his exile, and his happiness would return after his defeat of Ermanaric. As Ekwall points out, however, Dietrich's rule may have been considered unjustified by many of his subjects. In this case, again the subjects would be the unhappy people.¹⁴

There seems to be considerable confusion of the two Theodrics throughout history, as even the legends of their deeds vary widely. Perhaps this confusion actually began very early. For example, a Theodric is mentioned twice in "Widsith." In line 24, he is said to be king of the Franks, while in line 115, he is king of the East Goths. Malone feels that both of these references are to Wulfdietrich.¹⁵ Even if Malone's assumption is true, the fact that Theodric is called a ruler of both the East Goths and the Franks in one poem indicates some kind of merger in the identities of the two men. Therefore, there may have been some confusion in the minds of the "Deor" poet and his audience which resulted in the many and diverse legends about the two

¹⁴ Eilert Ekwall, "Reviews," Review of *Deor*, ed. Kemp Malone, in the Modern Language Review, XXIX, 1934, p. 81.

¹⁵ Malone, *Deor* (1933), p. 12.

Theodric's in later literature. This fact may be the reason for the terse and somewhat inadequate statement about Theodric in "Deor." It would have been necessary for the poet to use a fairly loose comment so that the members of his audience could apply those versions of the stories that they knew.

BORMANRIC -- lines 21-27

Bormanric has a dual reputation. In "Widsith," for example, he is described as being very wicked in the opening section while he is reputed to be a good, just ruler in the remainder of the poem. He appears very cruel when he is briefly mentioned in "Beowulf." The "Deor" poet chose to depict his evil nature and his subjects' reactions.

Bormanric was a king of the Ostrogoths and ruler of an empire in the Ukraine who died in approximately 370. He was a strong king, famed for his deeds, and feared by the surrounding peoples. When the Huns invaded his kingdom (lead by Dietrich), he felt he would be defeated and so committed suicide.

Since many stories have flourished concerning Bormanric, critics have merely indicated where some of these stories may be found, and have made no attempt to pin point the specific tale to which the "Deor" poet refers. They

would be justified in doing so for there is even less reference to a legend about Bormanric in "Deer" than there is about Theodric. Again, the poet may be allowing his audience to call to mind whatever story they knew, even that of Theodric which the poet had previously mentioned.

There is one story, however, which seems to have profoundly effected literature and may well have been the one usually called to mind by this passage. It is frequently cited as an example of Bormanric's cruelty. This story was first told by Jordanes in Getica sometime during the sixth century. Bormanaricus (Bormanric) killed a woman named Sunilda because her husband had deserted him. He had her tied to two wild horses and had them driven apart. Her brothers slew him in revenge. There are in existence stories telling how Bormanric was killed by his own subjects. They may have developed from Jordanes' account. One of the most famous renderings of Jordanes' tale of the Sunilda incident was that developed into a portion of the Volsunga Saga. In this saga, Bormanric is Jormunrek and Sunilda is Swanhild. Jormunrek orders Swanhild to be trampled to death by horses because she gave her love to his son after she had been plighted to Jormunrek, himself. Her two brothers then set out to avenge her death by killing Jormunrek. The version differs here, though, for they only succeed in cutting off his hands and feet. Although this

or a similar version of the story is not specifically indicated by the scop in "Deor," its fame may have caused the readers of the poem to recall it.

HEODEN AND HEORRENDRA -- lines 35-42.

Heoden and Heorrendra are, respectively, the lord and the usurping scop of the last stanza of "Deor." Many scholars have stated that they represent Heden, who falls in love with Hild, and his minstrel, Horant. Their story is told in the Kudrun. It is also told in differing versions in both the Elder Edda and the Younger Edda. In the Kudrun, Horant woos Hild for Heoden by his wonderful music and she finally agrees to run away with Heden. The tale ends happily with the lovers escaping. The older versions depict an endless battle resulting between Hild's father and Heden. Each night Hild heals the slain and the battle continues each day. When the Kudrun version is applied to "Deor," Heorrendra becomes the recipient of Deor's lands because of his aid to Heoden.

Belief in the Heden/Horant application has become quite widespread. For example, P. J. Frankis uses it freely in developing his theory of Deor's biography. He believes that each incident mentioned in the poem includes some detail of the poet's life. He continues his essay with a

fascinating comparison of Deor to Wulf of "Wulf and Eadwacer."¹⁶

William Lawrence, writing as early as 1911, and Kemp Malone, writing as late as 1966, have disputed the Heden/Horant theory. Lawrence states that although Deor may have been a slighted minstrel, his concluding story is still fictional.¹⁷ Malone expands Lawrence's idea further:

He [the poet] had a brilliant inspiration when he represented himself as the defeated rival of Heorrenda, the most famous minstrel of Old-Germanic story. A poet who was Heorrenda's predecessor and rival must indeed be worth hearing! The author drew on English oral tradition, one may suppose, for his knowledge of Heoden and Heorrenda; if he had written sources they have not come down to us. No allusion to the tragic love of Heoden and Hild can be found in our passage, though it does not follow, of course, that the Old English poet was unacquainted with the story.¹⁸

I tend to agree with Malone when he says that the "Deor" poet was merely using a poetic device in these final lines. Perhaps he was preparing us for a purely fictional account when he gradually made his allusions less specific. In addition, lines 28 through 34, which refer to God in His wisdom seem to further set the final portion of the poem

¹⁶P. J. Frankis, "Deor and Wulf and Eadwacer: Some Conjectures," Medium Aevum, XXXI (1962), 161-175.

¹⁷William W. Lawrence, "The Song of Deor," Modern Philology, IX (July, 1911), 44.

¹⁸Malone, Deor (1966), p. 16.

apart. However, due to the prevalence of the Kudrun theory, it must definitely be taken into consideration when analyzing the final lines of "Deor."

As can be seen, the oldest English lyric offers a wealth of allusions to ancient legends. Most of these allusions have proven difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy. The Elder Edda, the Younger Edda, the Volunga Saga, the Nibelungenlied, and the Kudrun have served as constant references for critics when analyzing "Deor." For each allusion made by the "Deor" poet, scholars have turned to one or more of these five books for the detailed story. Also, the tales in the poem must have been extremely famous to evoke the detailed account in the minds of the audience. They could readily have later been written in one or more of these books. For these two reasons, I believe that each story in "Deor" (with the possible exception of Heoden/Heorrenda) has its later equivalent in these books.

If the Heoden and Heorrenda tale is a fictional account invented by the poet, then the Kudrun might be slashed from the list. The other books include brief accounts of its stories. In addition, it is the youngest of these books and the furthest removed from the time of the "Deor" poet. However, until scholars can be more conclusive about the Geat and Maethhilde passage and the Heoden and Heorrenda

passage, I feel that the Kudrun should remain listed with the Elder Edda, the Younger Edda, the Volsunga Saga, and the Nibelungenlied.

Weland, the resolute warrior, had knowledge of exile; he suffered hardships; sorrow and longing he had for companions, wintry cold exile. Often he found woes after Nithhad put compulsion upon him, supple bonds of sinew upon a more excellent man.

That passed away, so may this.

Her brothers' death was not so sere upon Beadohild's mind as her own state, when she had clearly seen that she was with child. She could never think with a light heart of what must come of that.

That passed away, so may this.

Many of us have heard that the Geat's love for Maethhild grew boundless, that his grievous passion wholly reft him of sleep.

That passed away, so may this.

Theodric ruled for thirty years the stronghold of the Merovingians; that was known by many.

That passed away, so may this.

We have heard of the wolfish mind of Bormanric; he held wide sway in the kingdom of the Goths; he was a savage king. Many a warrior sat, bound by sorrow, expecting woe, often wishing his kingdom should be overcome.

That passed away, so may this.

The sad-minded man sits bereft of joys; there is gloom in his mind; it seems to him that his portion of sufferings is endless. Then he may think that throughout this world the wise Lord brings many changes; to many a man He grants honour, certain fame; to some a sorrowful portion.

I will say this of myself, that once I was a minstrel of the Heodeningas, dear to my lord. Deor was my name. For many years I had a good office, a gracious lord,

¹⁹This translation of the poem "Deor" is found in R. K. Gordon's book, Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 1967.

until new Heorrenda, a man skilled in song, has
received my land that the protector of warriors
formerly gave me.

That passed away, so may this.

The following interlinear translation of "Deor" is my
own. I have consulted Kemp Malone's discussions in his
book, Deor, 1966, and R. K. Gordon's prose translation
(see the above quotation) in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 1967. The
Old English text of the poem is from the Exeter Book,
edited by Krapp and Dobbie, 1936. In the typing process,
I have changed þ and ð to th. In addition, the digraphs
are not joined.

Welund him be wurman wraeces cunnade,
Welund by his own sword had knowledge of misery,
anhydig eorl earfotha dreag,
strong-minded man, endured troubles,
3 haefde him to gesiththe sorge ond longath,
had for a companion sorrow and longing,
wintercealde wraece; wean oft onfond,
winter-cold exile; often (he) found woes,
siththan hine Nithhad on nede legde,
after Nithhad on him had laid fetters,

6 swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.
 supple sinew-bonds, on a better man.
 Thaes ofereode, thisses swa maeg!
 That passed, so may this!

Beadohilde ne waes hyre brethra death
 (To) Beadohilde (it) was not her brothers' death
 9 on sefan swa sar swa hyre sylfre thing,
 in her mind as sore as her own trouble,
 thaet heo gearolice ongieten haefde
 when she clearly had realized
 thaet heo eacen waes; aefre ne meahte
 that she was pregnant; (she) could not over
 12 thriste gethencan, hu ymb thaet sceolde.
 boldly think how she should (act) about that.
 Thaes ofereode, thisses swa maeg!
 That passed, so may this!

We thaet Maethhilde monge gefrugnon
 We that Maethhilde's lamentations have heard
 15 wurdon grundlease Geates frige,
 became boundless (the moans) of the Geat's lady,
 thaet hi seo sorglufu slæp ealle binom.
 that her sorrowful love her deprived of all sleep.
 Thaes ofereode, thisses swa maeg!
 That passed, so may this!

18 Theodric ahte thritig wintra
 Theodric possessed (for) thirty winters
 Maeringa burg; thaet waes monegum outh.
 the stronghold of the Maeringas; that was known by many.
 Thaes ofereode, thisses swa maeg!
 That passed, so may this!

21 We geascodan Eormanrices
 We have learned of Eormanric's
 wylfenne gethoht; ahte wide folc
 welfish thought; (he) owned wide nations
 Gotena rices. Thaet waes grim cyning.
 in the Goth's kingdom. That was a grim king.

24 Saet secg monig sorgum gebunden,
 Many a warrior sat bound with sorrow,
 wean on wenan, wyscte geneahhe
 misery in (his) expectations, (he) wished constantly
 thaet thaes cynerices ofercumen waere.
 that his rule were overcome.

27 Thaes ofereode, thisses swa maeg!
 That passed, so may this!

Siteth sorgcearig, saelum bidaeled,
 Sits the sorrowful one, parted from joys,
 on sefan sweorceth, sylfum thinceth
 in (his) mind (he) is gloomy, to (him)self (it) seems

- 30 thaet sy endeleas earfoetha dæl.
 that is endless the number of troubles.
 Maeg thenne gethencan, thaet geond thas woruld
 (He) may then think that throughout this world
 witig dryhten wendeth geneahhe,
 God in His wisdom brings enough.
- 33 eorle monegum are gesceawath,
 to many a man honor shews,
 wisliene blaed, sumum weana dæl.
 certain fame, to some a number of miseries.
 Thaet ic bi me sylfum secgan wille,
 This I about myself will say.
- 36 thaet ic hwile waes Heodeninga scop,
 that for a time I was the Heodenings' scop,
 dryhtne dyre. He waes Deor noma.
 dear to (my) lord. My name was Deor.
 Ahte ic fela wintra folgath tilne,
 I possessed (for) lots of winters a good office,
 39 holdne hlaford, oththaet Heorrenda nu,
 a gracious lord, until now Heorrenda,
 leothcraeftig menn londryht gethah,
 a man skilled in song received (my) estate
 thaet me eorla hleo aer gesealde.
 that the protector of men to me gave before.
- 42 Thaes efereode, thisses swa maeg!
 That passed, so may this!

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