

BOETHIAN SIMILITUDE IN *DEOR* AND *THE WANDERER*

Abstract

None of the many claims that either *Deor* or *The Wanderer* has received formative influence from Boethius's *De consolatioe Philosophiae* is without problems. In an analysis of concepts like fate and Providence as used in *The Wanderer* and the Latin and Old English redactions of the *Consolatio*, it becomes clear that Boethian thought and medieval Western Christianity shared a number of axioms that predict their agreement in such matters. However, there are also differences between the two by which their respective adherents may be told apart. When such differences are sought out in *The Wanderer* and *Deor*, it is found that both these poems convey messages essentially incompatible with the Boethian world-view. While the possibility of fragmentary borrowing cannot be excluded, neither poet reflects in his work the message at the heart of the Boethian *Consolatio*.

Introduction

The opinion is widespread that both *The Wanderer* and *Deor* fit the description "Boethian consolation," although it is not always explicated whether the Boethian resemblance in this genre is accidental or the result of formative influence.¹ Attempts to distill a Boethian voice from *Deor* or *The Wanderer* have thus far been unconvincing. Moreover, a comparison of the world-views expressed in *De consolatioe Philosophiae* and the two Old English poems reveals significant differences between their respective philosophical traditions. Neither of the poems can therefore be considered Boethian at heart, while fragmentary influence has yet to be convincingly argued.

Since the mid-twentieth century, *Deor* has repeatedly been claimed to betray a Boethian influence; but the majority of such claims lack force. Kiernan claimed parallels between individual characters when he associated the Geat-Mæðhild episode of *Deor* 14-16 with the classical legend of Orpheus, which gained a familiarity in the early medieval period due to its presence in the *Consolatio* (3.12m).² However, the *Deor* episode is notoriously obscure, and Kiernan's connection between these three lines and the legend of Orpheus depends on the one

¹ Such loose comparisons between the *Consolatio* and *Deor* occur in Lawrence 1912: 23; Frankis 1962: 169; and Condren 1981: 74. A casual comparison between the *Consolatio* and *The Wanderer* has been made in Doubleday 1969: 190; see also Mittner 1955: 94. Formative influence of the *Consolatio* on *Deor* is argued in Markland 1968: 1-4; Whitbread 1970: 167-72; Bolton 1972: 222-7; Kiernan 1978: 333-40; and Klinck 1992: 45, 234; see also Harris 1987: 23-4. Direct or indirect Boethian influence on *The Wanderer* is suggested in Erzgräber 1961: 77-85; Leslie 1966: 66, note to line 5; Lumiansky 1969: 104-11; Whitbread 1970: 173-4; Diekstra 1971: 73-88; Horgan 1987: 40-6; Klinck 1992: 33-4, 234; North 1995: 76-92; cf. Griffith 1996: 138, 149.

² References to Boethius's *De consolatioe Philosophiae* are by book and chapter, and where applicable to prose (p) or meter (m) and numbered sentence to Moreschini 2005. References to *Deor* are by verse line to Krapp and Dobbie 1936.

hand on the identification of the episode with two modern Scandinavian parallels to the story, and on the other hand on the identification of those Scandinavian ballads with the classical narrative.³ Even if *Deor* is related to the Scandinavian ballads and the common tradition draws on the story of Orpheus, it is not certain that the *Deor* poet⁴ has borrowed the passage from the Boethian tradition, let alone that he has borrowed an understanding of fortune into the bargain. Furthermore, the *Deor* passage is intelligible without reference to analogues, although the plot is then quite different, namely that Mæðhild suffered a lack of sleep as a consequence of (the) Geat's nocturnal activity:

We þæt Mæðhilde monge gefrugnon
 wurdon grundlease Geates frige,
 þæt hi seo sorglufu slæp ealle binom. (*Deor* 14-16)⁵

Malone objected to this reading on grounds of style, but since he did not elaborate, he seems to have been guilty of anachronism through the application of twentieth-century notions of style (Malone 1937: 11-13). Despite these problems, Kiernan nonetheless went on to identify the character of Deor with Boethius, and he took the presence in the poem of Weland, Theodoric, and Eormanric as evidence that the *Deor* poet had been influenced by the Alfredian *Consolation* (Kiernan 1978: 337-9). However, the co-occurrence of these three characters in both *Deor* and Alfred's *Consolation* proves nothing: they are all members of the stock of ancient Germanic heroes often referred to in Old Germanic literature. In the Old English corpus alone, a combination of at least two of these characters occurs not only in *Deor* and the *Consolation*, but also in *Waldere* and *Widsith*, poems that are not believed to bear a Boethian imprint; and the latter mentions all three of them, as does, for instance, the Old Norse *Þiðreks saga*.⁶ Cosmological, narrative, and verbal parallels were claimed by Markland, who believed that *Deor* contains distinct elements from book two, prose two of the *Consolatio* as well as elements that are peculiar to Alfred's translation of that passage; but the correspondences he noted are of too general a nature to warrant influence. His first parallel is the pattern of the shift in fortune: in Boethius's brief reference to Croesus, it is said that he was to be burnt alive but that a shower saved him; thus, like the characters in *Deor*, he has undergone a difficult

³ Kiernan used Malone's work on the Geat-Mæðhild episode to arrive at the connection with Orpheus, and he translated *Deor* 16 as "so that that grieving love (of his) took her from death entirely" (Kiernan 1978: 334; Malone 1936, 1937).

⁴ I am aware of the assumptions suggested by the term "poet." I use the word in a loose sense to refer to any individual or number of individuals responsible for the conscious creation or adoption of the elements under discussion.

⁵ "We have all heard of Mæðhild; (the) Geat's love became boundless, so that sorrowful love robbed her of all sleep."

⁶ For a fuller list of occurrences, see the entries "Dietrich (I) von Berne," "Ermenrích," and "Wielant" in Gillespie 1973. For an edition of *Þiðreks saga*, see Bertelsen 1911.

period but he has come through it. Secondly, Boethius's reference to Jupiter's jars of good and evil conveys the same idea as the abstract lines 28-34 of *Deor*: God distributes both good and ill fortune. The third parallel lies in the fact that both Alfred and the *Deor* poet use the verb *ofergan* to express the passing away of bad fortune. Finally, *Deor* is a character in a painful situation thinking back to a time of happiness, just as the character of Boethius does in the beginning of the *Consolatio* (Markland 1968: 2). All four of these congruences strike me as natural elements of any text dealing with the fleeting nature of fortune; all they show, therefore, is that the two works share a common theme, not that the one is dependent on the other. Klinck repeated Markland's observation on the Alfredian use of *ofergan*, and asserted that this verb in the sense "pass away" is almost exclusively attested in texts of the Alfredian circle (1992: 18-19). However, the verb in *Deor* lacks an explicit subject and has been widely recognized as distinct from its Alfredian usage (e.g. Bosworth and Toller 1898: 733; Condren 1981: 65; Niles 2003: 28-30). There is thus no reason to assume that it is an Alfredian borrowing.⁷ Whitbread held that *Deor* was only one of several Exeter poems written as compositional exercises using Boethian themes (Whitbread 170: 172-3). In the case of *Deor*, the focus is on a number of paradoxes related to misfortune; their solution lies in "that traditional, heroic courage never to submit or yield" also urged at Maldon (Whitbread 1970: 170). This, however, is a far cry from Boethius's counsel to seek independence of temporal goods. It seems that Whitbread's connection between *Deor* and Boethius consists solely in the poem's theme of adversity, which is too general an analogue to prove a genetic relationship. Bolton was more specific: she believed that *Deor* illustrates the fallibility of the five worldly goods discussed in book three of the *Consolatio*. Thus Weland learns about the limits of wealth, Beadohild is robbed of her honour, Mæðhild and (the) Geat are confronted with the shortcomings of pleasure, the subjects of Eormanric learn that power may be abused, and Theodoric is left to exemplify the fallibility of fame (Bolton 1972: 224-5). While a maximum of four of these themes might be considered applicable to *Deor*, it is unlikely that more than two of them would be recognized as themes by an audience unaware that the poem is intended to evoke Boethian considerations, let alone that the connection with Boethius would be inferred. The narratives concerning Mæðhild and Eormanric may without too much difficulty be held to represent bodily pleasure and power respectively; but the connections between Weland and wealth, Beadohild and honour, and Theodoric and fame are hardly inescapable as themes.

Like *Deor*, *The Wanderer* has also received its share of Boethian allegations. Lumiansky noted a number of general correspondences between the *Consolatio* and *The Wanderer*, such as the emphasis in both works on the virtue of moderation: the practical virtues advertised in *The Wanderer* 65b-72 can, if one overlooks

⁷ Cf. Harris 1987, who believed that the refrain may draw on a wisdom tradition concerning Solomon.

their apparent martial character, be compared with the abstinence from worldly goods as recommended in book three of the *Consolatio* (Lumiansky 1969: 110-11).⁸ While such similarities do indeed merit consideration, their general nature and their typical inclusion in works of consolation render the case for formative influence a difficult one. Diekstra believed that the catalogue of virtues in *The Wanderer* 65b-72 was inspired by Christian ideas about the cardinal virtues, and, like Lumiansky, he pointed to the *Consolatio* as its most likely source.⁹ Ignoring the question whether Christian considerations lay at the foundation of the *Consolatio*,¹⁰ Diekstra categorized the work as part of “Latin-Christian culture” and referred loosely to Ogilvy’s *Books Known to the English, 597-1066* to show the Anglo-Saxons’ familiarity with this tradition (Diekstra 1971: 75).¹¹ In that same volume, however, Ogilvy is cautious as to the dissemination of the *Consolatio* specifically as he writes, “it seems likely that the book was unknown before the ninth century, since the English would almost certainly have used it extensively if they had had it” (Ogilvy 1967: 101; see also Godden 1981: 419). While this observation does not disprove Boethian influence on *The Wanderer*, since the poem may be post-Alfredian,¹² Ogilvy’s prudence as to the dissemination of the *Consolatio*, combined with the recognition that the treatise does not discuss virtue in a Christian setting, renders Diekstra’s theory unlikely. As Kiernan did for *Deor*, Richard North likewise applied a strategy of identification to *The Wanderer*, arguing that the *snottor on mode sitting sundor at rune* (111) represents Boethius consulting Philosophia (North 1995: 84-7). However, neither the protagonist of *Deor*, nor any character in *The Wanderer* should be expected to represent Boethius unless an Anglo-Saxon audience would have been able to identify him as such; and both poems lack definite clues to favour such readings. Whitbread based his Boethian interpretation of *The Wanderer* partly on general correspondences in theme and expression between the poem and the *Consolatio*, and partly on similarities between *The Wanderer* and *Deor*, after he concluded that the latter constitutes a response to the *Consolatio*. Of these forms of argumentation, it is only the first that is of direct relevance, since the second type depends on the Boethian character of *Deor*. Whitbread found the following correspondences between *The Wanderer* and the *Consolatio*: in both,

⁸ References to *The Wanderer* are by verse line to Krapp and Dobbie 1936. I have here and there innovated in punctuation.

⁹ Alternative interpretations of *The Wanderer* lines 65b-72 are listed in Klinck 1992: 119-20, note to lines 65b-72.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Barrett 1940: 160-2; Chadwick 1990: 248-9.

¹¹ Boethius certainly stood in the tradition of Latin-Christian learning, but the Anglo-Saxons’ familiarity with this tradition tells us little about the dissemination of this particular work, especially since it seems to have been largely unknown during the sixth and seventh centuries (see, e.g., Bolton 1986: 160).

¹² Dunning and Bliss (1969) date *The Wanderer* to the tenth century; Leslie (1966) thinks the eighth century the most likely period for its composition. See also Lumiansky 1969: 109.

the narrator turns to language for consolation; he expresses his need for a cure in medical terms; and he speaks of a dark, stormy world until he comes to realize that God presents a reliable alternative (Whitbread 1970: 173-4). While all of these elements are witnesses to the similarity of expression between late antique and early medieval consolation poetry, they are rather too general to prove a connection beyond genre. Finally, Erzgräber and Horgan have drawn comparisons on a more cosmic level, arguing that *The Wanderer* discusses the relationship between fate and Providence as explained in *Consolatio* book four, prose six. This comparison deserves a fuller analysis.

Foresceawung and wyrd

An important ingredient in Boethian cosmology is the relationship between fate and Providence. Boethius held that God's unchanging plan for all events is called *providentia* when considered with respect to God's thought, but when considered relative to the things controlled it is labelled *fatum*:

Omnium generatio rerum cunctusque mutabilium naturarum progressus et quicquid aliquo movetur modo causas, ordinem, formas ex divinae mentis stabilitate sortitur. Haec in suae simplicitatis arce composita multiplicem regendis modum statuit. Qui modus cum in ipsa divinae intellegentiae puritate conspicitur, providentia nominatur; cum vero ad ea quae movet atque disponit refertur, fatum a veteribus appellatum est. Quae diversa esse facile liquebit, si quis utriusque vim mente conspexerit; nam providentia est ipsa illa divina ratio in summo omnium principe constituta, quae cuncta disponit, fatum vero inhaerens rebus mobilibus dispositio, per quam providentia suis quaeque nectit ordinibus. (*Consolatio* 4.6p: 7-9).¹³

Alfred in his translation renders *fatum* as "wyrd" and *providentia* as "Godes foreþonc & his foresceawung" (39.5: 128.7-14).¹⁴ His usage of the concepts differs

¹³ "The creation of all things, and the entire flow of mutable substances, and everything that is moved anywhere, derives its causes, order, and forms from the stability of the divine mind. This mind, positioned in the citadel of its simplicity, has determined its complex form of government. This form is called *providentia* when considered in the pure state of its divine thought; but when reference is made to the things it moves and orders, the ancients have called it *fatum*. It will be evident to anyone who considers their essence that these are different. For *providentia* is divine reason itself, placed at the head of all things, governing everything; but *fatum* is the structure residing in things that move, by which *providentia* binds all things in their places."

¹⁴ References to the Old English prose *Consolation of Philosophy* are by chapter and paragraph, but also by page and line number to Sedgefield 1899. I have omitted only Sedgefield's italics and brackets. Outside the passage here quoted, Alfred is not entirely consistent in his renderings of *fatum* and *providentia* (Frakes 1988: 96-7; Bolton 1986: 154; cf. Payne 1968: 31-40).

only in his introduction of a temporal distinction. To him, the defining difference lay in the completion or otherwise of God's plan:

Se God wunað symle on þære hean ceastre his anfaldnesse & bilewitness; þonan he dælð manega & misleca gemetgunga eallum his gesceaftum, & þonan he welt eallra. Ac ðæt ðætte we hatað Godes foreþonc & his foresceawung, þæt bið þa hwile þe hit ðær mid him bið on his mode, ærðæm þe hit gefremed weorðe, þa hwile ðe hit geþoht bið; ac siððan hit fullfremed bið, þonne hatað we hit wyrd. Be þy mæg ælc mon witan þæt hit sint ægþer ge twegen naman ge twa þincg, foreþonc & wyrd. Se foreþonc is sio godcunde gesceadwisnes; sio is fæst on þæm hean sceppende þe eall fore wat hu hit geweorðan sceall ær ær hit geweorðe. Ac þæt þæt we wyrd hatað, þæt bið Godes weorc þæt he ælce dæg wyrcð, ægþer ge þæs ðe we gesioð ge þæs þe us ungesewenlic bið. Ac se godcunda foreþonc heaðerað ealle gesceafta, þæt hi ne moton toslupan of hiora endebyrdnesse. Sio wyrd þonne dælð eallum gesceaftum anwlitan & stowa & tida & gemetgunga; ac sio wyrd cymð of ðæm gewitte & of ðæm foreþonce þæs ælmehtigan Godes. Se wyrcð æfter his unasegendlicum foreþonce <þonne> swa hwæt swa he wile. (Alfred's *Consolation* 39.5: 128.7-26)¹⁵

This difference is not substantial in its consequences: Providence remains in the abstract realm, whereas *wyrd* is its delegate controlling temporal things. Boethius's hierarchy is thus also preserved: *wyrd* is the material servant of Providence, so that it is *wyrd* with which humanity is directly confronted.¹⁶

A striking resemblance between *The Wanderer* and the two redactions of the *Consolatio* is the apparently corresponding co-occurrence in the three works of these two cosmic forces, *fatum* (arguably corresponding to *wyrd* not only in

¹⁵ "God resides always in the high city of his simplicity and purity; from there he deals out many and diverse instructions to all his creatures, and from there he rules them all. But that which we call God's Providence and his foresight is such while it is with him in his mind before it is accomplished, while it is thought; but when it is completed we call it *wyrd*. By this anyone may know that Providence and *wyrd* are both two names and two things. Providence is divine reason; it is securely located in the high Creator who foresees everything as it will be before it is formed. But that which we call *wyrd* is God's work as he performs it every day, both what we see and what is invisible to us. But heavenly Providence controls all creatures, so that they cannot slip away from their natural order. *Wyrd* then accords to all creatures forms and places and times and instructions; and *wyrd* testifies to the knowledge and Providence of almighty God. He performs whatever he wants according to his unspeakable Providence."

¹⁶ For further comparisons between the Latin *Consolatio* and the Old English *Consolation* as well as sources for Alfredian innovations, see Otten 1964; Donaghey 1964: 23-57; Payne 1968; Proppe 1974: 635-48; Fischer 1979: 622-39; Wittig 1983: 157-98; Bolton 1986; Frakes 1988: 81-122; Batley 1990: 45-78; Irvine 1996: 387-401; Brinegar 2003; Godden 2003; Godden 2004: 11-16.

Alfred's *Consolation* but also in *The Wanderer* 5b, 15b, 100b, 107a) and *providentia* (represented in *The Wanderer* by *metud*, 2a; *fæder on heofonum*, 115a; cf. Erzgräber 1961: 78). This congruence led Erzgräber and Horgan to believe that *The Wanderer*, or its understanding of the relationship between these forces, is based on *Consolatio* book four, prose six (Erzgräber 1961: 77-80; see also Leslie 1966: 66, note to line 5). In Horgan's reading, the opening lines of the poem introduce the paradox between the fixed state of *wyrd* and the interference of God; it is the function of the rest of the poem either to resolve or to illustrate this paradox. The list of virtues in lines 65b-72 serves to describe what characteristics are ideal for man to have, so that he will have no need of correction by divine intervention; for Philosophia explains in *Consolatio* book four, prose six that all of man's fortunes are such interventions, directed at the good of the soul. In this process, the individual's character traits are taken into account: prosperity is given to one who might fall prey to sin when in adversity, while misfortune may be bestowed in order to strengthen a man's patience (*Consolatio* 4.6p: 35-42; Horgan 1987: 41-6; Erzgräber 1961: 77-80). Horgan's conclusion is that the poet expected his audience to be familiar with this prose section of the *Consolatio* (Horgan 1987: 40).

While the virtues listed in *The Wanderer* are a good match to those discussed in the putatively corresponding chapter of the *Consolatio*, Horgan's position places high demands on the Anglo-Saxon audience. For his proposed message to have reached them, they must have read the Latin work, as he pointed out (Horgan 1987: 40). However, they must also have remembered the contents of the particular passage in considerable detail, and they must either have accepted its doctrine into their personal cosmologies or have expected the poem to bear on the *Consolatio*; otherwise, the reference would not have been understood. What is more, a connection must all the while have been borne in mind between the Boethian understanding of virtues and the cosmic conflict between Providence and fate. Since *The Wanderer*'s manuscript context in the Exeter Book contains no explication on the poem's theme, no argumentation can be built upon a medieval expectation that it dealt with Boethian matter. Again, although Gneuss believed the *Consolatio* to have been one of the most widely-available works in tenth-century England (Gneuss 1992: 128), Ogilvy maintained that if entire audiences had embraced its teachings, we should have expected more references in literature than have in fact come down to us (Ogilvy 1967: 101). The audience, then, cannot be expected to have understood a Boethian reference of such implicit revelation that scholars familiar with the Boethian tradition fail to agree on its existence. Moreover, several scholars have accounted for the index of virtues in *The Wanderer* by reference to the homiletic rather than the Boethian tradition (see above, note 9).

These objections, however, relate only to the recognition by the poem's audience of references to the Boethian system of virtues. If, instead, one confines oneself to the relationship between God and *wyrd* without reference to the audience, a Boethian cosmology may indeed be distilled from *The Wanderer*, since the poem

appears to present *wyrd* as subordinate to God but governing worldly processes. Such a reading, in fact, was proposed by Erzgräber before Horgan conceived of his more demanding analysis (Erzgräber 1961: 77-80).¹⁷ In verse 5b, we learn that *wyrd bið ful aræd*:¹⁸

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
 metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig
 geond lagulade longe sceolde
 hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,
 wadan wræclastas. *Wyrd bið ful aræd.* (*The Wanderer* 1-5)¹⁹

The poem seems to open with a paradox, namely that God touches the solitary, but even so, his lot is fixed. God's intervention in the life of the solitary appears to contradict the determined state of his lot, implying that the latter is not in fact absolutely fixed (see also Erzgräber 1961: 78). The next occurrence of *wyrd* is in line 15, which asserts that "ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstandan."²⁰ Again, this seems a startling statement: unless the poet considers all minds weary, the implication is that a strong-willed man does have the power to resist fate. Here too, the immovable nature of *wyrd* appears to have been compromised (see also Erzgräber 1961: 60). However, as Dunning and Bliss have pointed out, *wyrde wiðstandan* and *wyrd forstandan* are set collocations, occurring, for instance, in *Beowulf* 1056-7a: "nefne him witig God wyrd forstode ond ðæs mannes mod."²¹ As they argue, the expression refers to man's influence on events; it is used when an individual undertakes an action whereby he alters their course (Dunning and Bliss 1969: 72-3; cf. Timmer 1941: 222). *Wyrd* appears again towards the end of *The Wanderer*. Its function here seems very close to that of *fatum* in the *Consolatio*, as it is singled out as the cause, be it active or instrumental, of warriors' demise, thus ruling over concrete events: "eorlas fornoman asca þryþe, wæpen wælgifru,

¹⁷ It would appear that Horgan has overlooked Erzgräber's article, for its similarity of argument certainly made it worth citing. Lumiansky, writing after Erzgräber but before Horgan, designed an argument somewhat similar to that of both other critics, relating *wyrd* to Fortune instead (Lumiansky 1969: 110-11); like Horgan, he has not mentioned Erzgräber, and he himself is not mentioned by Horgan.

¹⁸ Traditionally, "wyrd is inexorable" (e.g. Bradley 1982: 322); my translation, following the reading if not the wording of Timmer 1941: "one's lot cannot be altered" (cf. Griffith 1996).

¹⁹ "The solitary often experiences mercy, the Creator's favour, though sad-hearted he must long stir the icy sea with his hands, across the waterway, traverse the paths of exile. One's lot cannot be altered."

²⁰ "The weary mind cannot withstand *wyrd*." Leslie (1966) has *werigmod*, "the weary at heart"; the difference has no consequences for present purposes.

²¹ "Had not wise God and the man's courage resisted *wyrd*." The reference to *Beowulf* is by line number to Dobbie 1953.

wyrd seo mære” (99-100).²² The final occurrence is in line 107, where it is said that “onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.”²³ If it may be supposed that the poet was making precise use of his language here, this line may be the key to the interpretation of *wyrd* in the poem: it is then said to control the sublunar world, which explains why it kills warriors, since battles are sublunar events (see also Weber 1969: 72). This reading also explains how *wyrd* may be withstood even if *wyrde wiðstandan* is to be taken in a more literal sense than “to alter the course of events”: by an appeal to God, who is ruler over both celestial immutability and earthly mutability, *wyrd* may simply be overruled. And finally, it is in spite of the regular workings of *wyrd*, which he once set into motion, that God often reaches out to comfort the solitary wanderer by means of specific, personal intervention. In this reading, a contrast is drawn between the vast impersonal system of *wyrd*, spoken into existence by God but independent in its workings since, and God’s personal, intratemporal interaction with creation (cf. Erzgräber 1961: 78). As such, the traditional interpretation of *wyrd* as a dark force²⁴ may not have been far off the mark regarding its reference in *The Wanderer*: there is indeed an impersonal power in play, hostile in the sense that it is a machine, deaf to appeal; to man, God and this machine do indeed appear to be at variance; but like everything else, *wyrd* is a creation of God and as such subordinate to him.

The above reading of *wyrd* is strongly concordant with the workings of *fatum* as described by Boethius and translated by Alfred. All three of these works recognize the superiority of God or Providence over fate; and all three seem to interpret fate as a means by which sublunar events are influenced. Is this cosmology sufficiently idiosyncratic to warrant formative influence?

Certain theories are bound to undergo polygenesis, simply because their development can hardly be avoided. Thus in a world-view in which a creator stands at the root of all that is, all positive concepts must be part of creation and therefore his or her subordinates. In the tradition of Augustine, it is only negative concepts, such as evil, that may be said to take no part in creation (*De civitate Dei* 12.2; *Consolatio* 3.12p).²⁵ As long as *fatum* or *wyrd* is understood as an instrument or agent that is not purely evil, and that influences tangible matters, it must be seen as part of creation and therefore as God’s servant. This conception, which seems to have been shared by Boethius, Alfred, and the *Wanderer* poet, is the most likely view to have evolved in their time and context, and certainly no cause for surprise. That *wyrd* was elsewhere thought of as subordinate to God may be seen from the divine epithet *wyrda waldend*, “controller of (the) *wyrds*.” This phrase, occurring in

²² “The might of spears has carried off the warriors, the murderous weapon, sublime fate.”

²³ “The workings of fate alter the world below the heavens.”

²⁴ See Mittner 1955: 85-8; cf. Timmer 1941: 25-6; Griffith 1996: 138.

²⁵ References to *De civitate Dei* are by book and paragraph to Dombart and Kalb 1955.

Exodus 127, *Andreas* 328, and *Resignation* 14, renders explicit God's superiority over *wyrd* (Timmer 1941: 215).²⁶ Thus either all these poems were inspired by Boethius, or, more likely, a knowledge of Boethius was not required for an Anglo-Saxon to conclude that God controls *wyrd*.

The dividing line

At this point, it is important to recognize that there are essential similarities between early Christian thought and Boethius's branch of Platonism that were bound to give rise to parallels between Boethian and Christian works (see also Griffith 1996: 149-50). The foremost of these is the ideal of man's independence of worldly fortunes. The New Testament has frequent reference to this ideal. One of many such passages occurs in the sermon on the mount, where Jesus admonishes his followers to serve God not mammon (Matthew 6.24-34).²⁷ Boethius was equally insistent on the issue: he spent most of the second book of his *Consolatio* explaining the fickleness of Fortuna, while book three spells out why the separate worldly goods do not lead to happiness; and at least two of his metres idealize the man unmoved by fortune (*Consolatio* 1.4m, 2.4m). A related point is the postulation of a supernatural power to which to adhere as a force of more security than worldly fortune. The Bible makes this opposition clear in passages such as Matthew 6.24 mentioned above; Boethius visualized it in his image of the concentric circles, the outer few of which represent worldly men, subject to a great deal of movement and change, while the innermost circle represents those closest to God, escaping both movement and fate (*Consolatio* 4.6p: 15). It is such correspondences between the Christian and the Platonic tradition that enabled Augustine to write so appreciatively about the latter in his *De civitate Dei* (8.1-12). Finally, as Cross has pointed out, a knowledge of the *Consolatio* was not needed for an Anglo-Saxon to be familiar with the rhetorical traditions underlying the widespread genre of the *consolatio*: "a Christian or a late pagan writer who had received a normal education was amply equipped with arguments to console for death, exile, or any other misfortune of this world" (Cross 1961: 64).

There are, however, also differences between Boethian and early Christian thought, so that the two traditions may be told apart on doctrinal grounds. Significantly, Boethius claims that happiness is to be had in the present world, whereas the New Testament places it in the world to come. Boethius was a Catholic, and there is no reason to assume that he had lost his faith when he wrote his *Consolatio*; in fact, as has been convincingly argued by several critics, the work itself contains ample evidence to the contrary, although Boethius was careful not to include explicit Christian references (Fortescue 1976: xlvii-xlviii, 204-206; Bieler 1957: 109;

²⁶ The references to *Exodus*, *Andreas*, and *Resignation* are by line number to Krapp and Dobbie 1936.

²⁷ Biblical references are to Weber 1994.

Chadwick 1990: 248-9). For his aim with the *Consolatio* precluded his inclusion in the work of a confession of faith: he intended to write a victory song of reason and, being a logician, he appears to have felt that he must do so without appeal to faith or authority (Fortescue 1976: xxxi, xxxix-xlii; Barrett 1940: 160-1; Vogel 1984: 287; Chadwick 1990: 248-9).²⁸ Thus when Boethius asks Philosophia whether she believes in punishment of the soul after man's corporeal death, she replies: "et magna quidem, . . . quorum alia poenali acerbitate, alia vero purgatoria clementia exerceri puto; *sed nunc de his disserere consilium non est*" (*Consolatio* 4.4p: 23, my emphasis).²⁹ This is the only reference in the *Consolatio* to an afterlife.³⁰ Christ, by contrast, tells his followers to gather their treasures in heaven, where they are permanent (Matthew 6.20-1);³¹ and it is in this tradition that Alfred's reference to *ece gefea* must be seen (Alfred's *Consolation* 3.2: 9.9-14). A second difference between Boethian and early Christian thought, only partly related to the previous, is the absence from the *Consolatio* of hope. The Bible discusses at least two kinds of hope. The first is aimed at the present life and occurs in many a Psalm for deliverance; the second crosses the boundary of temporality and is expressed in 1 Corinthians 13.13: "nunc autem manet fides, spes, caritas, tria haec."³² Boethius's *Consolatio*, however, positively encourages one to do away with hope: "gaudia pelle, / pelle timorem / spemque fugato / nec dolor adsit" (1.7m: 25-8).³³ Alfred, conceivably aware of 1 Corinthians 13.13, did not follow Boethius as he translated: "afyr fram þe ða yfelan sælþa & þa unnettan, & eac ða unnettan ungesælþa & þone yflan ege þisse worulde" (6.1: 14.19-21).³⁴ Moreover, Alfred has added hope where the Latin text has none: in his expanded translation of *Consolatio* book two, metre four, which twenty-two lines of Latin verse have as their message only that a wise man builds his house on secure ground, Alfred points out that "se wisa mon eall his lif læt on gefean nonwendendlice & orsorg, þonne he forsihþ ægðer ge þas eorðlican god ge eac þa

²⁸ I read the *Consolatio*'s frequent references to classical legend as illustrations, not arguments to authority.

²⁹ "Certainly, and great punishments; I believe that some of these will be carried out with penal severity, but others with a cleansing mildness. *But it is not my intention to discuss these things now.*"

³⁰ The reference need not in fact be Christian: it appears to echo Plato's *Gorgias* 525b-e. See Gruber 1978: 344-5, note to 4,4,23; cf. Fortescue 1976: 116, note to § 17. The reference to the *Gorgias* is to Lamb 1975.

³¹ "Thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in caelo, ubi neque erugo neque tinea demolitur, et ubi fures non effodiunt nec furantur; ubi enim est thesaurus tuus ibi est et cor tuum," i.e., "but gather your treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moths destroy them, and where thieves neither dig them up nor steal them; for where your treasure is, there your heart is also." See also Luke 12.33.

³² "Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love."

³³ "Dispel joys, dispel fear, and put hope to flight; and may grief not accompany you."

³⁴ "Abandon evil joys and vanities, and also vain sorrow and the malignant fear of this world." See also Otten 1964: 14-16.

yflu, & hopað to þam toweardan; þæt sint ða ecan” (12.1: 27.8-10).³⁵ Thus Alfred can be identified as a Christian rather than a Boethian Platonist on purely doctrinal grounds; and the same test may be applied to other authors.

The Wanderer

Returning now to *The Wanderer*, it becomes clear that the poem bears out a Christian rather than a Boethian world-view. The narrator spends a great deal of space mourning the mutability of worldly things, on which evidence *The Wanderer* may still be judged to belong to either tradition. In both traditions, one expects such lamentation to be followed by a turnabout bringing true insight: thus the narrator of the *Consolatio* laments his loss of worldly fortunes until Fortuna teaches him the true value of things, and many Psalms open with an emphasis on worldly misery but end on a note of faith in the Lord (e.g. Psalm 22). But when the didactic climax of *The Wanderer* takes place, it proves incompatible with the teachings of the *Consolatio*:

Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ. Ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene,
 beorn of his breostum acyþan nemþe he ær þa bote cunne,
 eorl mid elne gefremman. Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
 frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð. (112-15)³⁶

In locating the true good in heaven, the concluding voice of *The Wanderer* professes a belief that is essentially incompatible with the message at the heart of the *Consolatio*. Whether or not the poet has borrowed Boethian concepts, then, he has not adopted the central message of Boethius’s treatise.

Deor

Before applying the same test to *Deor*, it is first necessary to survey the poem’s structure. Although many scholars disagree, I hold the poem’s abstract sixth section (as I will call lines 28-34) to carry central emphasis, without the intention thereby to question the key function of the refrain (Harris 1987: 24). It has been argued more than once that it is instead the final, personal passage that is the poem’s focal point. Condren believed that *Deor*’s personal story is the teleological focus of the poem: the narrative movements preceding it introduce the two parties of the final clash, namely the creative protagonist and the ruler-as-antagonist (Condren 1981: 63-4, 73, 74-5). In a similar vein, Tuggle argued that the final section is of critical

³⁵ “The wise man lives all his life in constant joy and without concern, when he despises both these worldly goods and evils, and hopes for the future goods, which are eternal.”

³⁶ “He is good who remains faithful. A warrior must never too quickly release his anger from his breast, a nobleman must not advance in boldness, unless he already understands its compensation. It will be well for him who seeks mercy, help from the Father in heaven, where resides all that is lasting for us.”

importance because it contains lessons learned from all the earlier sections (Tuggle 1977: 241-2). The significance of the contemplative sixth section, by contrast, has been played down by voices that considered lines 31-4 an interpolation (Pearsall 1977: 5; Banerjee 1984: 4) or that suggested that the *dryhten* (32) who directs the many changes in this world might be a temporal lord (Biggs 1997: 311-12). If the poem is understood as a single unit, however, there are considerations that speak for the central position of the contemplative passage. Significantly, the poem has a structure of induction. Five narratives are listed in which miserable conditions are known to have been overcome (1-27); from these instances, the generalization is made that the unfortunate may find comfort in the thought that such conditions, too, are subject to change, and that statistics favour a change for the better (28-34). Thus the sixth section stands on a higher plane for its status as a logical conclusion (see also Mandel 1977: 6-7). The final passage, however, does not match the other narrative episodes. It can form no part of the inductive process, since it occurs after the conclusion; although it does refer to an unhappy circumstance, its outcome is as yet uncertain; and it adds the awareness that good fortune, like bad fortune, is of passing nature. I would therefore argue that the added value of this section to the whole is twofold: first, it provides an illustration of the conclusion drawn in the sixth, which illustration involves a different kind of authority than the premises of induction because the protagonist has first-hand knowledge of it; second, it makes more prominent the warning implied in lines 31-4 that good fortune, like bad fortune, is also transitory.

Siteð sorgcearig, sælum bidæled,
 on sefan sweorceð, sylfum þinceð
 þæt sy endeleas earfoða dæl.
 Mæg þonne geþencan, þæt geond þas woruld
 witig dryhten wendeþ geneahhe,
 eorle monegum are gesceawað,
 wislicne blæd, sumum weana dæl. (28-34)³⁷

The message of the contemplative passage is that in this world, both pleasant and unpleasant things are subject to change; that fortunes are divided unequally, there being a greater grand total of prosperity than of misery; that it is a wise Lord who directs its distribution and redistribution; and that hope is to be sought in these considerations. Of these elements, the transience of prosperity is implied in lines 31-4 and cause for hope in lines 31-2; the other two are explicit. It is sometimes

³⁷ “The sorrowful person sits bereft of joy: his mind grows troubled, it seems to him that his share of tribulations is endless. Then he may think that, throughout this world, a wise Lord frequently brings about change; to many men he grants honour, true prosperity; a share of griefs to a few.”

claimed that the passage refers to an indiscriminate dealing out of fortune, good and bad, so that the poem receives a “Boethian cast” (Condren 1981: 74; cf. Norman 1937: 379). However, such ways cannot be reconciled with the agency of a *witig dryhten* (*Deor* 32; Tuggle 1977: 240). On the evidence of this sixth section and indeed most of the poem, one might expect that the poet intends to recommend his audience patience in case of bad fortune; but the first stanza does not bear out this reading. One might argue that Weland required patience when he “wean oft onfond” (“often came to grieve,” 4b) until the circumstances allowed him to take his revenge; but in such a reading it would surely be a vengeance-fed patience that gave him the strength to endure. In any case it was not patience alone that made him escape his predicament.³⁸

Deor, or at least its protagonist, focusses on the present world. Although it has been claimed that *geond þas woruld* (31b) suggests a contrast between this world and the next (Kiernan 1978: 335; Leslie 1966: 4), it is unlikely to have such chronological reference. Admittedly, there is no logical inconsistency in the contrast between this world, in which God works change (*wendeþ*, 32b), and the next, which is immutable. However, the canonical opposition of change and constancy is that between the sublunar and the celestial. In the absence of explicit references to the afterlife, therefore, it should be assumed that this reference to change is to be regarded in the same context. Moreover, if the afterlife were a central theme in the poem, one would expect its celebration to take place after the contemplative passage, forming a structural climax and an object that could remain on the minds of the audience after the poem had been recited. However, the poet fails to rise to any conclusion contrasting this world with another, or even to offer explicit counsel on how to deal with worldly fortunes; instead, he returns to another illustration. Like the illustrations, the refrain also fastens the attention of the audience on worldly goods by focussing on a future redemption from adversity (cf. Pearsall 1977: 5); and the sum of exempla and refrain stresses man’s dependence on the outcome of worldly events. Boethius, by contrast, diminishes the significance of worldly goods by gaining independence of them. The final occurrence of *Deor*’s refrain is unclear in its references of *þæs* and *þisses*, and the latter may extend beyond this world; but no certainty is to be had here. What evidence the poem offers remains firmly fixed on the present world.

Deor’s emphasis on worldly fortunes demonstrates that the protagonist, and possibly the poet, is caught in what may be called the “prisoner’s fallacy” as it occurs in the first book of the *Consolatio*. *Deor* longs for worldly goods he once possessed and he bewails their loss, just as Boethius’s protagonist mourns the loss of his worldly possessions in the opening song of the *Consolatio*. In *Deor*, however, no long-robed patroness arrives to uplift the protagonist’s thoughts beyond the

³⁸ See the accounts of the legend in *Vǫlundarkviða* (Neckel and Kuhn 1983) and *Þiðriks saga* (Bertelsen 1911).

reach of Fortuna's grasp, for which reason the difference between the *Consolatio* and *Deor* is this, that while both seek redemption in the here and now, *Deor* fails to distinguish between the lasting and the fleeting, and hence does not gain true independence (cf. Harris 1987: 37-47). This is why in the poem's final line the protagonist still waits for fortune to alter the course of his life whereas Boethius would have him abandon this dependence. Out at sea in a small boat taking in wave after wave, *Deor*'s sole comfort and his only fear lie in the knowledge that the next wave may be either smaller or bigger, and, if God wills it, the sea may come to rest so that land may be discerned on the horizon.

Conclusion

Despite a century of comparisons between *De consolacione Philosophiae* and Old English poetry, no firm link has been established between the Latin treatise on the one hand and either *Deor* or *The Wanderer* on the other. Indeed, there is an essential discrepancy between the respective world-views of the works: while *The Wanderer* departs from the *Consolatio* in gathering its treasures in heaven, *Deor* betrays its dependence on fortune in its failure to gain independence of worldly goods, thus demonstrating that it subscribes to a tradition essentially at odds with that of the Latin work. While piecemeal borrowing cannot be disproved, there is no reason to favour it over the possibility of polygenesis. Since neither of the Anglo-Saxon poets has worked the essence of Boethius's message into his poem, polygenesis is the most natural explanation of the views of fortune expressed in *Deor* and *The Wanderer*.

University of Groningen

PAUL S. LANGESLAG

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