ARTICLE

Intertextual quanta in formula and translation

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Abstract

Halldóra B. Björnsson's Icelandic translation of *Beowulf* (Björnsson 1983) shares with other examples of textual transmission between closely related languages a tendency to transcend the exigencies of formal cognation by exploiting non-cognate correspondences which echo the forms of the original (cf. Knútsson 1995). This article examines examples of this phenomenon in Björnsson's translation, treating them as intertextual connections between source and translation which cannot be adequately defined without invoking known formulaic relationships with other Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse poems. Björnsson was widely read in Old Norse but was not familiar with Old English texts other than *Beowulf*. This article suggests that the formulaic links between the Old English corpus and Björnsson's translation cannot be adequately explained by the Old Norse connection. A more promising approach is to treat them as autonomous echoic phenomena occurring as discrete and quantifiable surface strings which become activated as intertextualities when they are invoked as such.

Keywords: Beowulf; Björnsson, Halldóra B.; echoism; formulaic theory; Icelandic; interference fields; intertextual quanta; manuscript transmission; translation

1 Introduction

Halldóra B. Björnsson's translation, in 1968, of the Old English epic *Beowulf* into modern Icelandic (Björnsson 1983) shows several characteristics typical of medieval manuscript transmission across dialectal boundaries (cf. Knútsson 1995). In this article I shall propose a conceptual framework within which to discuss these characteristics, and examine their relevance for two apparently unrelated areas of textuality: formulaic theory (see 2.2) and translation theory. I shall argue that the distinct formal intertextuality of closely related texts is fundamental to our perception of textual identity; and also that our understanding of the inseparable nature of form and meaning does not mean that we can turn a blind eye to the independent role of form in the translation process, and its regulating effect on the conscious and unconscious choices of the translator.

2 Background

2.1 Halldóra B. Björnsson

Shortly before her death in 1968, the Icelandic poet Halldóra B. Björnsson

finished her Icelandic translation of the Old English *Beowulf*, which she called *Bjólfskviða* ('The Lay of Bjólfur').[1] She had published two books of poetry, a book of translations of Greenlandic and African poetry, and several prose works before embarking on *Beowulf*; two further volumes of poetry and a collection of essays were published shortly after her death.[2] She was well-versed in medieval Icelandic literature and some of her published poems were in the Icelandic *ríma* ('ballad') tradition which has survived from late medieval times.

Bjólfskviða is an instance of translation between languages which are so closely related that occasional passages are hardly more than transliterations of the original (Knútsson 1984: 226). Here is an example from line 656 (OE original in the first line, Icelandic translation in the second):

[1] *siþðan ic hond ond rond hebban mihte*
     síðan eg hönd og rönd hefja mátti
          since I hand and shield might lift
               (i.e. since I achieved manhood)

This example is however by no means typical: most such transliterations are short, rarely filling a whole line and usually consisting of single words or collocations interspersed with longer stretches of what Catford (1965: 22) calls 'total translation', where the syntax and lexis of the original are reorganised. Note however that these short stretches of exact correspondence with the original are not distinguished by unnatural wording or syntax in the translation. The following extract is fairly typical, with cognate correspondences between source and translation underlined:

[2]   *Him Béowulf þanan*
     gúðrinc goldwlanc græsmoldan træd
     since hrémig; sægenga bád
     ágendfréan, sé þe on ancre rád.
          Himself Beowulf thence
     – warrior gold-proud – grass-soil trod
     in treasure exulting; sea-walker [i.e. ship] waited
     [its] owner-lord, which at anchor rode.
          Bjólfur þaðan
     gumi gullauðugur grasmoldu trað,
     silfri gladdur. Sægandur beið
     eiganda síns, akkerum bundinn.
          Beowulf thence
     – man gold-wealthy – grass-soil trod,
     by silver gladdened. Sea-steed waited
     its owner, by anchors bound.
                         (lines 1880–1883)

In this extract almost 50 per cent of the lexical items in the translation are cognate with the original. Many of them are, of course, inevitable: words such as 'gold', 'sea', 'owner', 'anchor' can hardly be translated otherwise, whether in Icelandic or modern English. In several respects, however, Björnsson's Icelandic is better equipped than English to follow the original wording. One example will have to suffice: Björnsson renders the phrase *græsmoldan træd* ['strode over the grassy ground'] as *grasmoldu trað*, using the same transliterative technique as in example [1]. Of course this option is also open to a modern English translator; but a rendering such as 'trod the grass-mould' would constitute a stylistic device of a different order from that of the original, since the compounding process in Old English was far more productive than it is in modern English, and was also common in non-poetic language. In other words, although *græsmoldan træd* is an example of Old English poetic diction, its distance from the non-poetic language is decidedly less than 'trod the grass-mould' would be from a prosaic translation such as 'strode over the grassy ground'. Most translators today would probably opt for a less explicit communication of the poetic diction of the original, manipulating the wider conditions of discourse to distance the reader in a more subtle way from the register of prose narrative.

However Björnsson's choice of archaic diction, and her coinage *grasmold*, does not involve this stylistic shift. Instead it invokes a poetic tradition which flourished in Iceland until well into the present century; Björnsson's youngest brother Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson (1924–93) was recognised as one of the chief exponents of this traditional school, and some of Björnsson's poetry was also composed in this tradition.

2.2 Bjólfskviða and the Germanic corpus

It has long been an established view that the relative homogeneity of language and poetic style throughout the Germanic world in the pre-literate and early literate Middle Ages created a medium in which themes and stories, and even whole poetic structures, moved easily across geographical and linguistic boundaries. F. P. Magoun's extension of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory to Old English poetry (Magoun 1963: 190) maintains that the inherited word-hoard of the Old English poet consisted, to a large extent, of formulae which could be re-used by singers during rapid extempore oral composition. Given the antiquity of this mode of composition (Magoun 1963: 193) and the close similarity of the early Germanic languages, later writers have followed Magoun in assuming that oral re-creation of a poem would occur in much the same way in any of the Germanic dialects. Thus Niles (1983: 142) claims that 'a hypothetical Old Icelandic or Norwegian poet setting out to retell the Old English story of Beowulf could probably have done so without overwhelming difficulty.'

This claim is couched in surprisingly unconditional terms, given the litotes; Niles seems to be overestimating the similarities between Old Icelandic and the continental Germanic dialects. The classical poetic texts of medieval Iceland are

written in a language which has undergone a radical process of syncope resulting in widespread loss of syllables, and complete loss of prefixes. In Old English and other West Germanic dialects similar losses occurred, but they were on the whole less spectacular, and many prefixes were spared. Thus although the basic pattern of Germanic alliterative metre is still observed in Old Icelandic (and is, in fact, preserved intact until the middle of the twentieth century) the verse is denser and more highly syncopated.[3]

Thus although medieval Icelandic does share elements of a distinctive poetic diction and some measure of a common poetic lexicon with other Germanic languages, a decisive bifurcation has occurred between the time of *Beowulf* and that of classical Icelandic poetry. Halldóra Björnsson's 20th century Icelandic is close enough to Old Icelandic for her to fill the role of the hypothetical Icelandic poet that Niles suggests; yet she encounters quite considerable difficulties in her task of translation, contending with radical differences in style and diction.

2.2 Lexical gaps and quasi-cognation

As we have seen, word-for-word transliteration as in [1] can rarely be sustained for more than short stretches in the translation. However, Björnsson shows a decided tendency to transcend the exigencies of formal cognation by employing a distinctive admixture of non-cognate correspondence which nevertheless retains a degree of formal similarity – in other words the non-cognate reflex in the translation 'echoes' the original. Knútsson (1995) examines this same tendency in examples of medieval manuscript transmission such as the Old English recension[4] of the Old Saxon *Genesis*, and in a modern translation from Icelandic to the closely-related Faroese. In these texts non-cognate echoes typically occur when the language varieties of the source and the recension are close enough to enable the recensor to transfer almost mechanically as in [1] above: here and there the recensor will encounter a 'lexical gap', a word in the source that has no formal correspondence in the language of the recension: perhaps because it has been replaced by a non-cognate form, or its meaning or usage has evolved to make it unsuitable in the context. When this happens the recensor will normally supply a non-cognate form and retain the metaphrastic mode. The interesting point however is that the new form frequently bears a clear formal resemblance to the source. In this article I shall refer to this phenomenon as 'quasi-cognation'.

If we turn to *Bjólfskviða* we find frequent occurrences of quasi-cognation, although they can often be missed by a cursory investigation: at least two examples occur in [2], in spite of the fact that I was at pains to find an extract which demonstrated only straightforward cognate resonances. It was not until I was reviewing the first draft of this article that I noticed them: in line 3 of [2] there is echoic correspondence between *since* ['treasure'] and *silfri* ['silver'], to some extent prompted by the demands of alliteration, and between *-genga* ['walker'] and *-gandur* ['steed'], where there is no alliterative requirement.

Neither of these corresponding pairs are cognates; and there are other examples to be found in this short passage, which I leave to the reader.

In the following sections I shall examine some typical examples of quasi-cognation in Björnsson's translation, and discuss their relevance as intertextualities.

3 Some echoic phenomena in *Bjólfskviða*

3.1 The term hláford

Björnsson's technique is well illustrated by her treatment of the noun *hláford* ['king, lord'], which occurs nine times in *Beowulf*. The word is the ancestor of the modern English 'lord'. An earlier form *hláfweard* is recorded in the Old English *Paris Psalter* (civ.17), revealing the original meaning *hláf* ['loaf'] + *weard* ['ward'], that is 'keeper of the bread, head of the household'. The compound is not apparently native to other Germanic languages. The Modern Icelandic word *lávarð*,[5] usually considered a loan from the Middle English *laverd* (see below), refers in Modern Icelandic almost exclusively to the British peerage, and so can hardly double as a reflex of *hláford* in *Bjólfskviða*.

The word first occurs in line 267, where Björnsson's original typescript is closely metaphrastic:

> [3] *Wé þurh holdne hige hláford þinne*
> *sunu Healfdenes sécean cwómon*
>>   We with sincere heart your lord
>>   the son of Healfdene come to seek (i.e. come to visit)
> *Vér því heils hugar hleifvörð þinn,*
> *son Hálfdanar sækjum heim*
>>   We therefore with sincere heart your lord
>>   the son of Hálfdan seek at his home (i.e. come to visit)

The translation here is smooth, idiomatic and free of archaisms except for the rather awkward compound *hleifvörð* ['keeper of the bread'], the exact cognate reflex of the underlying OE form *hláfweard* (which Björnsson would have found in Klaeber's glossary[6]). This compound is an unfamiliar coinage; although modern Icelandic readers would recognise the two elements 'loaf' and 'ward', they would hardly associate them with the concept of lord or king, any more than modern English readers would.

However the coinage did not survive the first draft. It was altered in the typescript, in Björnsson's hand, to *hlévörð*, another coinage which at first sight seems to mean 'protector, shelterer'. The first element *hlé* ['lee, shelter'] is a non-cognate reflection of the first three letters of *hláford*, while the second element *vörð* ['warden, guardian'] remains as the cognate reflection of the

underlying OE *weard*. Although just as unfamiliar, this form is decidedly less stilted. A pencilled note in the margin in Professor Stefán Einarsson's hand reads *fer vel* ['fits nicely'], and although we cannot be sure that this does not refer to the original reading it seems more likely to be a comment on the emendation, among other things for reasons that should become clear later in this discussion. Björnsson goes on to use the new word *hlévörð* for nine of the remaining ten occurrences of *hláford*, only once preferring the form *herra* ['lord'], itself a weak reflection of *hlévörð*.

The term 'quasi-cognate' which I used earlier forces a pragmatic assessment of the phenomenon. It has of course a structural dimension in that it typically occurs embedded in a high density of cognate reflection; but its functional role appears in the translator's impulse to create a quasi-cognate term to fill a lexical gap in the language of the translation. In the case of *hláford* = *hlévörð* the impulse may be said to be the ambient bias towards cognation in the translation, but this does not seem to be a necessary condition, since we find the same process occurring outside the context of translation. According to 14th-century sources the early 11th-century Icelandic poet Óttar svarti spent time at the English court in the early 1020's, when the word *hláford* was a regular form of royal address in English. Óttar later addresses the Norwegian king Ólafr helgi, who had been instrumental in restoring the English Ethelred to his throne, in the following words:

[4]   *Comtu í land ok lendir,*
        láðvörðr , Aðalráði
        You brought to land and landed, lord, Ethelred
            (ie. you brought Ethelred to his land and established him
            there, lord.)
                Óttar svarti. *Höfuðlausn* v.8 (Jónsson 1912: 292)

Óttar's term of address *láðörð(r)* ['guardian of the land'], is a compound not found elsewhere in Icelandic poetry. The term is used here as a form of royal address in the syntactic position where a retainer would have used *hláford* in Old English. The verse is first recorded in 14th-century manuscripts, and we have scant means of checking its historicity; but the echoic form of the word with its compounded stems *láð* ['land'] and *vörð* ['guardian'] is decidedly different from the established loanword *lávarð* which is no longer a compound but a single disyllabic morpheme (cf. Knútsson 1993: 100–103). Although Eiríksson (1977: 77) dates *lávarð* as '13th century or even 1200', that is earlier than the manuscripts containing Óttar svarti's verse, the echoic quality of Óttar's *láðvörð* lends credence to its authenticity.[7] That Óttar's use of the word is innovatory is supported by its apparent unfamiliarity: the verse exists in a number of manuscripts, and two variant readings occur, indicating uncertainty as to the original word. The variants are *landvarð*, of which the first element means 'land' while *varð* is anomalous in the same way as the later established form

lávarð, lacking the mutated vowel of the native Icelandic *vörð* and echoing the open vowel of the OE *weard*; and *lávörð*, which again seems to anticipate *lávarð*. That the form *láðvörð* is Óttar's original reading can be adduced from the internal assonance of skaldic metre which requires *láðvörðr* to rhyme with *Aðalráði*.[8] This 11th-century coinage is, then, an exact parallel to Björnsson's *hlévörð*.

But this is not the end of the story. Björnsson's *hlévörð* also calls to mind the appellation *hléföðr* or *hlæföðr*, which occurs as one of Odin's names in Snorri Sturluson's 13th-century *Skáldskaparmál* (Jónsson 1912: 681). At first sight this term means 'lee-father', that is 'sheltering father', with the same first element *hlé* ['lee'] as in Björnsson's coinage. However, Björnsson probably also had another meaning in mind: the element *hlé/hlæ* in *hléföðr* is considered by Magnússon (1989: 338 under *Hléfreyr*) not to be the modern Icelandic word *hlé* ['shelter'], but either the obsolete *hléð* ['famous'] or *hlæ* ['burial mound']. Snorri's *hléföðr/hlæföðr* thus means either 'famous king/father' or 'lord of the dead'.

The formal similarity between Snorri's *hléföðr/hlæföðr* and the OE *hláford* might be discounted as a coincidence were it not for the remarkable variant reading *hleifruðr* given by Jónsson (1912: 681), which Björnsson may well have had in mind. This strange term appears to be formed from *hleif* ['loaf'] and either *röðr* ['boar'] or *friðr, freðr* ['peace, protection']; its meaning is therefore 'boar/peace/protection of the loaf'. This incongruous name for the god Odin may, however, make a little better sense if we connect it with the Old English *hláfweard* ['guardian of the loaf'], the underlying form of *hláford* which prompted Björnsson's original translation *hleifvörð*.

Whether or not Björnsson had these forms consciously in mind when she progressed from *hleifvörð* to *hlévörð* is of course an open question; however it is clear that medieval Icelandic poetic diction is an essential ingredient in her choice of terms in *Bjólfskviða* and the critical justification for Stefán Einarsson's laconic 'fits nicely' in Björnsson's typescript.

3.2 Poetic formulae

3.2.1 Poetic formulae as intertextual quanta   Magoun's assumption that the formulaic nature of Old English verse was an unequivocal indication of its oral origin was criticised by Benson (1966) on the grounds that formulaic diction was also characteristic of undeniably 'lettered' compositions such as the metrical versions of Boethius. My position is that since the only data we have access to is textual, we have no other option than to treat the poetic formulae as intertextualities in a process of literary textual transmission. I shall use the term 'quanta' to refer to the discrete surface form of these intertextualities; the term which will receive further definition as the discussion progresses, but for the moment we can think of quanta as being strings of surface form which migrate between texts, and whose presence I signal in this discussion with the parity sign in formulations such as *weard = vörð* and *hláford = hleifruðr*.

In the following examples from *Bjólfskviða* another feature intrudes: that of
fidelity to the source text, which I can hardly avoid addressing even though it is
not central to the argument. In several places in the translation a cursory reading
would suggest mistranslation prompted by misassociation of lexis – the dreaded
'false friends' of the translator. Knowing as we do that Björnsson died before
preparing her translation for print, it is easy to draw the conclusion that some of
these apparently glaring instances reflect a lack of revision.

However, the bent of her technique was towards the conscious use of surface
reflection, and we can therefore expect her awareness of the dangers to be
sharply tuned. Of those places in the translation where the charge of
mistranslation may at first sight seem appropriate, most can be clearly shown to
be intentional. The charge can, of course, be effectively dismissed simply by
appealing to the wider context of Björnsson's technique and her evident
command of the language of *Beowulf* as a whole; more often than not, however,
there is also ample evidence to be drawn from the isolated examples themselves
that the 'mistranslation' is neither unconscious nor inept. For present purposes I
shall limit the discussion to two examples, the OE words *ellor* 'elsewhither' and
ellen 'deeds of valour'.

3.2.2 *ellor*   The OE adverb *ellor*, glossed by Klaeber as 'elsewhither', occurs
twice in *Beowulf*, on both occasions with the meaning 'to another unmentionable
place', that is man's abode after death. On both occasions Björnsson appears to
misassociate. Here is the first:

[5]   *fæder ellor hwearf / aldor of earde*
        [his] father [had] elsewhither departed,
        the elder from [his] estate
      faðir aldinn hvarf, / höfðingi úr heimi
        [his] aged father [had] departed,
        the chieftain from [this] world
                                                    lines 55–56

The correspondence *ellor* ['elsewhither'] = *aldinn* ['aged'] is striking, and it is
easy to assume that Björnsson had mistakenly associated the OE *ellor*
['elsewhither'] with Icelandic *elli* ['age']. The environment would appear to be
conducive to misassociation, since the echo is embedded in the cognate quanta
fæder . . . hwearf = faðir . . . hvarf ['the father . . . departed'] where the
two texts are in verbatim correspondence.

Of course, it is likely that the similarity of *ellor* and *elli* played its part; but
the suggestion that Björnsson took *ellor* to mean 'aged' without a second
thought is rather facile. We should note that the form *aldinn* in the recension is
actually a reflection of two forms in the source: *ellor* ['elsewhither'] in the
corresponding position and *aldor* ['lord, elder'] in the following half-line – with
which it also has a semantic connection. Even if this were not so, however, the

correspondence *ellor = aldinn*, so forcibly suggested by the correspondence of position, is fully compatible with the narrative equivalence of the two texts: the king *was* aged.

The second occurrence is even more striking:

[6]   *duguð ellor sceóc*
         retainers elsewhither [had] departed
       dáð öll skekin
         deeds all shaken

<div align="right">line 2254</div>

The original OE text here is terse and powerful: the poet is describing the grief and loss of the sole survivor of a body of retainers who have fallen in battle with their lord. The verb *sceóc* is the past tense of *sceacan* ['to shake'], used in *Beowulf* to signify either irrevocable, often violent, departure (death, lines 2727, 2742, the end of the day, line 2306 or the end of winter, line 1136), or sudden 'flashing' arrival (of arrows over the shield-wall, line 3118, of daybreak, line 1802). The dark undertow of violence and finality carried jointly by the adverb *ellor* and the verb *sceóc* would present difficulties to any translator; a flat literal translation such as 'the retainers had suddenly departed to another place' is well-nigh meaningless in this context.

Björnsson again solves the problem by allowing surface association to work for her. All three words of the translated phrase are formal reflections of the corresponding words in the source. *Duguð* ['body of retainers'] = *dáð* ['deeds of valour'] are not demonstrably cognate, in spite of their similarity; nor are *ellor* ['elsewhither'] = *öll* ['all'], to which we shall return in greater detail shortly. Only *sceóc* (literally 'shook') = *skekin* (literally 'shaken') are cognate, although they are not syntactically equivalent. Nor do they have any solid semantic correspondence in this translation, for the Icelandic verb *skaka* ['shake'] does not carry the connotations of departure and directional movement of its OE counterpart.[9] It belongs to a rather literary register in modern Icelandic, although the past participle *skekin*(n) ['shaken'] is current with the meaning 'shocked, disturbed', similar to modern English. Its use in this passage to mean 'broken, annulled', although evident to the reader, is unusual. Interestingly, this is the only time that Björnsson uses the verb *skaka* to echo the OE *sceacan*, which occurs eight times in the poem.

This is an audacious rendering, reflecting the terse, dark power of the original. The reflection is concrete, quantifiable as a string of quasi-cognate echoic correspondences; and herein also lies its audacity, since Björnsson again lays herself open to the charge of misassociation. However felicitous a 'free' rendering of this sort may be, it becomes suspect as soon as echoism is detected. In this case, however, any such charge would miss a crucial point: in striking up a relationship between *ellor* ['elsewhither'] and *öll* ['all'] Björnsson is invoking – intentionally or not – formulaic patterns which were already established in the

Old English corpus. Consider the following from *Beowulf*:

[7] *wíg ealle fornam*   war destroyed [them] all   line 1080
     ealle híe déað fornam   death destroyed them all   line 2236
     ealle wyrd forswéop   fate swept all away   line 2814

As echoic formulae, these are not strongly articulated: their formal affinities are
the non-alliterating element *ealle* and the verbal prefix *for-*; they are also all
second halves of the double alliterative line. Thematically, they all refer to the
death of a body of retainers, as does *duguð ellor sceóc* in example [6], but this
in itself is hardly enough to connect *ellor* with *ealle* or Björnsson's *öll*.
However, elsewhere in *Beowulf*, *eal* is formulaically associated with *duguð*

[8] *duguð eal árás*   retainers all arose   line 1790

although this time the thematic affinity is missing. And looking further afield
within the OE corpus we can find *duguð eal* associated with the death-theme as
in example [6]:

[9] *duguð eal gecrong*
     the retainers <u>all</u> perished
                    (*Wanderer,* line 79)

The question must surely arise as to whether we can justify a terminological
distinction between these two intertextualities, treating *ellor = öll* [6] as a
'translation' but *ellor = eal* [9] as 'formulaic variation'. It would be helpful,
perhaps, if we could show that Björnsson does this more often.

3.2.3 ellen   The first 3 lines of *Beowulf* refer briefly to the glorious past history
of the Danes 'in days of yore'. Björnsson responds to the formulaic character of
the text by employing an established formula from the Old Icelandic *Edda*:

[10] *hú þá æþelingas ellen fremedon*
      how those princes deeds of valour performed   (line 3)
      hversu öðlingar örlög drýgðu
      how the princes [their] fate performed/fulfilled

taking *örlög drýgja* ['perpetrate fate/doom/war'] from the Eddic poem
Völundarkviða (3.10).
    At first sight we might hesitate to characterise *ellen = örlög* as echoic quanta;
they have the same consonant-vowel profile VCCVC with phonological
affinities between the medial clusters *ll* and *rl*,[10] but this is hardly distinctive.
However, if we examine the formulaic sets to which these phrases belong we
find channels of much closer formal correspondence. The formula *örlög drygja*

of the Icelandic *Völundarkviða* 3.10 occurs in Old English as *orleg dréogan*
(*Judgement Day I 29*). The following are examples of this formulaic set in Old
English:

[11] *ellen fremman*   enact deeds of valour   *Beowulf*, line 4
      ellen dugan   accomplish deeds of valour   *Andreas*, line 460, and
                                                        Genesis, line 1288
      ellen dréogan   perpetrate deeds of valour   *Riddle 58*, line 1
      orleg dréogan   perpetrate deeds of war   *Judgement Day* I, line 29
                                                        (Bessinger and Smith 1978)

Here we have the same relationships as those we found between *ellor* and *öll/eal*
[6], [9]. Again, we must conclude that Björnsson's OE/Icelandic reflection *ellen*
= *örlög* also occurs within the OE corpus in the OE/OE form *ellen* = *orleg*.

3.2.4 Some implications   These correspondences raise interesting questions
regarding the recensor's own relationship to her text, her own textuality. For
although we have no clear evidence of the extent of Björnsson's knowledge of
original Old English poetry, there is some evidence that she had little time for
further reading;[11] thus there is a strong likelihood that she was unaware of the
formulaic resonances she invokes within the OE corpus. This does not
necessarily mean that we are faced with spontaneous occurrences of formulaic
variation within the terms of the tradition and yet without direct access to it
(although we should perhaps be prepared to examine this possibility), since
Björnsson's intimate knowledge of medieval Icelandic poetry goes some way
towards explaining her involvement with Old English intertextuality. And yet we
need to do more than simply point out these correspondences if we are fully to
account for the migration of formulaic components over a decisive linguistic
barrier and an enormous discontinuity of time and culture.

4 Discussion

4.1 'A text must have an edge.'

Not so many decades ago a linguist or literary critic arriving at this point in the
argument would have started looking for underlying structures and compiling
algorithms to generate acceptable surface formulae from them. Conceivably such
structures would have emerged. But for some time now the classical structuralist
solutions have seemed inadequate, and the structures of textuality have assumed
more dynamic and less tangible forms.

   The post-structuralist re-examination of the differential nature of (textual)
identity has provided us with a conceptual matrix against which the phenomena
we have been examining can perhaps be charted. I wish to focus on one
particular aspect of this matrix, one which is however by no means a

post-structuralist innovation, since it re-occurs in the same distinctive form from Plato to Derrida: the interfacial nature of being, the importance of edges. Thus Plotinus quotes Parmenides: eon gar eonti pelazei ['being borders on being'] (*Enneads* VI, 4, 4, 25); and we can trace this same taoist-like emptiness of the middle through the Heideggerian *Dasein* – 'Was er ist und wie er ist, das ist niemand' (1992: 8) – to post-structuralism. 'If we are to approach a text,' says Derrida (1979: 83), 'it must have an edge.'

But Derrida is not simply thinking of the chronological termini of text or *récit*, nor even of the 'invaginated' folds of the narrative which he explores in Living on: border lines (1979). He is building on the classic structuralist view of the entities themselves as empty nodes in a web of relationships, having existence only at their multidimensional 'edges' where they interact with other such entities. Barthes (1964: 216) establishes this point of view in clear-cut terms: 'Toutes ces unités', all the entities with which classical structuralism is concerned, 'n'ont d'existence que dans leurs frontières' – betray their existence only at their frontiers, the interfaces at which perceivable interaction with other such entities takes place.

The implication is that the boundaries of a single text cannot be charted with integral contours. The text is 'no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces' (Derrida 1979: 84). However, if we disregard for the moment the implications of the adverb 'endlessly' in this formulation (for which we have Derrida's permission, as we shall see shortly), it is clearly possible to locate, as I have been doing in this article, local small-scale manifestations of these 'edges' – discrete and quantifiable components of surface structure where textual interaction is actually taking place. An almost organic symbiosis emerges: not only are the identities of the texts articulated by the intertextual quanta we have been examining, but the quanta themselves assume their formulaic character only by virtue of their intertextuality. Without the inter- and intra-textual connections there are no formulae.

Of course this is a truism. It says no more nor less than that by calling *Bjólfskviða* a translation we are in fact suggesting that *Bjólfskviða* is not the only text in the world. The concept of *intertextuality* can indeed carry this commonplace meaning, referring simply to the explicit (or even implicit) references a text makes to other texts. But seen as a constituting principle of the whole text, *intertextuality* takes on further dimensions. 'The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the "sources", the "influences" of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation . . .' (Barthes 1977b: 160). Thus the relationships between the poetic formulae of *Bjólfskviða* and the formulae of other texts, the relationships which establish them as formulae, are essentially no different from the processes which establish the language of *Bjólfskviða* as meaningful language.

With this in mind, let us re-examine my use of the parity sign '=' to signal the link between intertextual quanta. The parity sign expressly rules out progression and expresses the non-sequential character of this link. My definition at the beginning of section 3.2.1 of 'quanta' as 'strings of surface form which migrate between texts' was inadequate insofar as the term 'migration' implies a progression. This is inappropriate for the largely non-sequential or peer texts of the OE corpus, where it is seldom practical to trace any direction of formulaic movement between texts. And even in the case of a clearly derived text such as Björnsson's translation, the formulaic connections do not mark out paths of migration; instead they resonate in a dynamic, differential mosaic akin to Derridean 'dissemination'. The intertextual conditions which identify the formulae in the Old English *Beowulf* have no intrinsic priority over the identifying conditions of Björnsson's translation. Instead of indicating a flow, or translation of material from one to the other, the link '=' represents the mechanism by which the quanta exist as intertextualities. As Gayatri Spivak (1976: lxxv) puts it, 'the relationship between the reinscribed text and the so-called original text is not that of patency and latency, but rather the relationship between two palimpsests'.

The Derridean metaphor of the palimpsest has its limitations, of course. In this case it does not indicate that the erased texts beneath these two linked texts also already include echoes of each other. The relationship between the 'reinscribed text and the so-called original text' is not one of mere neighbourliness; it actually constitutes – together with a host of other such relationships – their very existence as texts. *Bjólfskviða* is a field of non-sequential interaction fuelled from a very large number of sources, of which the Old English *Beowulf* is dominant but not supreme. And for the modern Icelandic reader who turns to the original OE text after reading Björnsson's translation, the reverse is also true.

4.2 Fields of interference

The concept of single, *discussable* reading brings us briefly back to Derrida's formulation of the text as 'a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself'. If we are at all to word the discussion, we must halt this *endlessness* by marking out with a stern, if arbitrary, gesture the horizon of our text, and with a process that Derrida, following Nietzsche, calls 'active forgetfulness' (Spivak 1976: passim; for example lxxvii), ignore for the moment the slippery nature of the post-structuralist vision and maintain that in spite of its complexity our field of interaction is stable enough for systematic examination, and that definitive statements concerning limited areas of the field can be made in a consistent metalanguage.

Barthes (1977a: 148) maintains that the reader 'is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.' Here again, the dimensionless totality of 'all' is the elusive focus of

the concept; to pin it down we need some *ad hoc* limitation such as taking it to mean the personal 'all' of the individual reader. But this is hardly enough, since there are necessarily readers who know their own 'alls' to be fragmentary: in the case of Old English poetry, the text itself signals to modern readers their incompetence in staking out a satisfactory field. And in fact, whatever the text, each reader generates a new and always limited field as they read. The field constructed by the literary critic looking for formulae is not the same as that of the original audience of the poetry, although in both cases the field is composed of other texts, or other parts of the same text folded back as it were upon itself, superimposed in a single field of interference.

But as far as the burden of translation is concerned, the normal intercourse of interlinguistic administration, and also the greater part of literary translation, the source text is not a component of this field of interference. In most cases the translation is done for the very reason that readers have no access to the source. The field of interference which includes both source text and translation is the privileged province of the analyst, the literary critic. As I pointed out earlier in this discussion (2.1) the stretches in Björnsson's translation of exact correspondence with the original are not marked off in any way in the translation, and the colourful field of echoic correspondences I have been discussing is not available to the average reader for whom the translation was presumably made. Toury (1980: 37) examines the possibility of regarding the literary translation as 'first and foremost a given *empirical phenomenon*, acquiring its identity by virtue of its position within the target literary system'. This approach necessarily sees the relationships between the source and translation as 'not only *secondary* to [the translation's] classification as a literary translation, but also *objects for study*, rather than basic assumptions' (original emphasis). This purposely limiting view of textual identity calls for a strictly pragmatic model of translation which ignores, as the target reader must ignore, some of the more spectacular phenomena thrown up by the translation process. An example of such a model is Nida and Taber's (1969: 484) classical paradigm of transfer between texts at some underlying level, with transformations linking the level of transfer with the surface level of the text. This is a paradigm designed to eliminate transfer at the level of surface structure, the 'false friends' of the unwary translator, and while it may serve as an interim model of textual transfer for the hardworking translator whose concern is for those readers who have no access to the source text, it does not cater for readers who perceive the echoic phenomena discussed here, readers who have access to both source and recension. These readers activate fields of interference which we might call 'source = recension' fields. Nor does the Nida-Taber model accommodate the field of interference activated by the translator at the time of translation, a field which, while not identical with the field of the critical reader, may often be commensurate in several respects. And although 'source = recension' fields of interference are typically limited to critical readings they are nevertheless members of a large set of fields some of which are clearly integral to the

reader/audience reception of a translation. The correspondences examined in this article between expressions in Björnsson's *Bjólfskviða* and other medieval Icelandic poems are indicative of a rich field of interference patterns which delineate the appreciation of informed Icelandic readers, and are, thus far at least, relevant to our ideas of audience appreciation of formulaic resonances in the original poem.

5 Conclusion

'The lesson of recent critical history,' says Roberta Frank (1991: 101) 'that no text is an island, that every work is a response to a conversation or a dialogue that it presupposes but need not mention, was learned long ago by students of Germanic legend.' In this article I have sought to extend this pan-textual concept of discourse to include the surface form of the text, where responses to more or less distant echoes they 'need not mention' can be seen as quantifiable units of intertextuality. This approach treats echoic intertextual phenomena as properly relating to translation theory, and calls for a model of transmission between texts which does not need to accommodate transmission of semantically charged graphological-phonological material by reference to underlying structure, and does not need to characterise echoic correspondences as transformation or sequential transfer of material. Instead, it requires a model which seeks to delineate a synchronic, non-hierarchic matrix of interacting quanta, accounting for the phenomena involved as interference patterns elicited by the reading.[12]

Notes

1   The name *Bjólfskviða* was already in use by Icelandic scholars to refer to the poem. In the preface to his Icelandic translation of the OE poem *Widsíð* Stefán Einarsson remarks that it is high time an Icelandic poet attempt a translation of *Beowulf* (*Ekki efast ég um, að hagyrðingar og skáld muni gera hér betur, enda ættu þeir að taka sig til og snara öllum ensku hetjukvæðunum og fyrst og fremst Bjólfskviðu á íslenzku (Einarsson 1936: 184)*. Osborn (1968: 21) states that in an undated letter to herself Einarsson had mentioned his intention to introduce *Béowulf* to Halldóra Björnsson and to suggest that she translate it. Einarsson's own translation of the first 63 lines of the poem are kept in Einarsson's papers (uncatalogued) in the National Archives, National Library of Iceland.
2   Björnsson's life and works are summarised in Einars *et al.* 1968.
3   This simplified account of the differences between Old Icelandic and continental Germanic poetry ignores a further Icelandic development whereby the metre became stanzaic and developed complex internal assonance and a sophisticated metaphorical and periphrastic diction. In her translation Björnsson frequently has recourse to the vocabulary, though not the metre, of this further tradition, which thus figures in many of the intertextual relationships explored in Section 3 of this article.
4   I use the term 'recension' to refer to the second of any two adjacent texts in a chain of transmission, and 'recensor' to mean the person producing the recension, whether as amanuensis or creative translator.
5   Icelandic strong masculine nouns are cited in this article in their inflection-free accusative

singular form, contrary to usual practice, which is to give their nominative singular form which has the inflection *-r* in Old Icelandic and *-ur* in Modern Icelandic. This is to bring out the echoic similarity with corresponding Old English nouns, which have no inflection in the nominative singular form.

6 The text used by Björnsson was Stefán Einarsson's copy of Klaeber's *Béowulf* (Klaeber 1950). She did not consult any translations at any time (Björnsson, private communication).

7 Eiríksson's dating is based on the fact that since modern Icelandic still retains *hl-* as an initial cluster this would have been retained in the loanword if it had come from Old English (Eiríksson 1977: 76); the *Oxford English Dictionary* makes the same supposition (OED under 'lord'). This would seem to mitigate against the authenticity of Óttar's *láðvörð*, which does not echo the initial *hl-* of the OE *hláford*. In fact, however, OE at the turn of the millenium had acquired a fairly standard and rather archaic orthography while the pronunciation of the word had almost certainly lost the initial *h* and was probably approaching a form much better represented by the later spelling *laverd*. Late OE forms such as *laford* (*Instructions to Christians 235*) support statements such as Brunner's (1965: 42) that 'Before consonants (*hr*, *hn*, *hl*) it [h] had already been lost in OE, except in Kentish, where it remained until the 14th century.'

8 Árnason (1987: 47) points out that the syllable final consonant (here ð) does not necessarily partake in internal assonance. This opens up the minor possibility that Óttar's original form was *lávörð*, later amended to *láðvörð* under the influence of the assonance.

9 Except with the secondary meaning 'to fish with a handline from a small open motorboat'.

10 The clusters *ll* and *rl* are both typically pronounced [dl] in modern Icelandic; thus in reading the OE text aloud Björnsson might well have said [edlen] for *ellen*. This would not however be so in *örlög* where a morpheme boundary divides the cluster (*ör+lög*). However the cross-morpheme constraint was apparently weaker in the past and the [dl] pronunciation does occur in certain words today over original morpheme boundaries (e.g. *fal+legur* ['beautiful'], *þor+lákur* [personal name]). These correspondences contribute to the echoism of *ellen* = *örlög*.

11 Björnsson told me that she was learning Old English from her work on the poem which, as the marginal dates in her typescript show, occupied most of her time towards the end of her life.

12 I am indebted to Mick Short, Katie Wales and anonymous reviewers of this journal for valuable comments and suggestions; since I did not always follow their advice they are absolved from any remaining infelicities. I would also like to thank Marijane Osborn, Ástráður Eysteinsson, Rory McTurk, and Guðrún Guðsteins, who read and commented on earlier versions of this article.

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