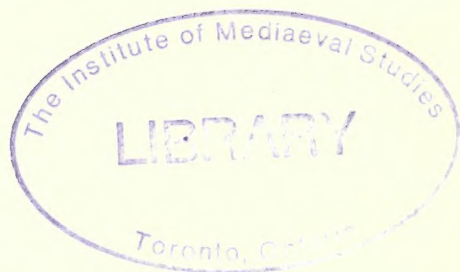


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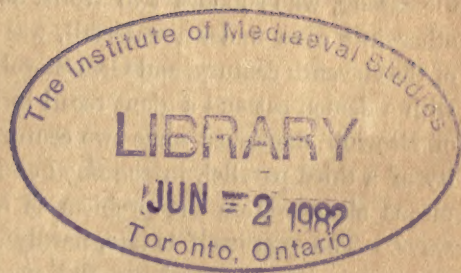
SOME DISPUTED QUESTIONS IN
BEOWULF-CRITICISM

BY
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[Reprinted from the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XXIV, 2.]

THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

1909



SOME DISPUTED QUESTIONS IN BEOWULF-CRITICISM.¹

The Scandinavian analogues to the adventures of Beowulf are of considerable interest to students of the Anglo-Saxon epic. Stories of this type, occasionally affording striking resemblances in detail, appear in distant countries,—among the Japanese and the North American Indians, for example,—but these are clearly of little significance for the evolution of the tale on Germanic soil. And we need hardly attach more weight to the feats of the Celtic hero Cuchulinn, nearer neighbor though he be, than to those of Tsuna in Japan.² The case is different with parallels in *märchen* and saga found among the very peoples by whose kinsfolk the deeds in the epic must have been celebrated. In two instances the story is told of heroes of later times. Grettir the Strong, who subdues two trolls, one in a hall and the other in a cave under a waterfall, was a historical character of the eleventh century, and Orm Storolfsson, whose struggles with a demon cat and a giant recall in many ways the deeds of Beowulf, flourished some two centuries later. The validity of a third parallel, in the *Saga of Hrolf Kraki*, is by no means clear. Here the problem is complicated in various ways. The saga itself is late, hardly older than the time of Chaucer in its present shape, and possibly dating from the early part of the fifteenth century. But Böðvar Bjarki, the hero whose exploits have suggested those of Beowulf, while probably historical, is a figure of considerable antiquity, not

¹ Certain problems considered in the following pages were discussed very briefly in a paper read at the meeting of the Modern Language Association at Princeton University, in December, 1908.

² Cf. Kittredge, *Harvard Studies and Notes*, vol. VIII, pp. 227 ff.

like Grettir and Orm, a person of the later saga-period. He was in the service of Hrolf Kraki, the Hrothulf of *Beowulf*, who reigned, like Hrothgar, at Leire in Zealand. These, and other considerations, have led to the conjecture that the relation between the story of Bjarki and *Beowulf* may date from very early times, and that such discrepancies as appear may be due to independent developments in the saga itself. Elaborate theories of the early history of the material in *Beowulf* have even been constructed on this foundation, and the whole matter has been frequently discussed, ever since the full importance of Scandinavian tradition in the evolution of the poem has been generally recognized. It is the aim of the present paper to review this problem, in regard to which there seems to be little agreement among scholars, and attempt to place it in a somewhat clearer light.

The subject is important quite as much because it brings up other unsolved questions as for its own sake. The criticism of *Beowulf* is a tangled thicket, and whoever would make a clearing at a given point, and try to gain a wider view into the distance, must expect to find that there are more trees to be felled than he had supposed, and that the only path which lies open to him may be blocked by a monarch of the forest. The enormous amount of critical literature, too, offers fresh obstacles, by reason of its very bulk, to a clear comprehension of the epic, and everyone knows how tenacious parasitic growths may be. Beginning with the more specialized investigation, then, we shall find that questions of greater weight will demand a hearing, the most important one being how far the material may rest on a mythological basis, and how far the determination of these mythological elements is possible.

I.

Similarities of incident between the Anglo-Saxon epic and the *Hrólfs saga Kraka* were first observed, apparently, by Gisli Brynjulfson in 1857.¹ Until very recently, the opinion that these are not the result of chance has been almost universal, although there has been little agreement as to their exact significance.² It is hardly possible to classify critical opinion satisfactorily; it is too much complicated by other theories. Bugge and Sarrazin have been the chief champions of a common early source, and ten Brink was perhaps the most distinguished advocate of the hypothesis of late influence of the developed Beowulf-story upon the Scandinavian saga. Earlier discussions of the matter are of less importance, since they did not take into account the evidence of the *Bjarkarímur*. This material, first published by Finnur Jónsson in 1904, gives most important testimony for the adventures of Hrolf and his heroes. Any investigation which neglects it can carry but little weight. Partly on this evidence, and partly on other grounds, Axel Olrik, in the most distinguished contribution to Germanic saga which has appeared for many years, has

¹ *Antiq. Tidsk.*, 1852-3, p. 130, cf. Bugge, below.

² Consult Müllenhoff, *Beowulf*, Berl., 1889, pp. 55 ff.; ten Brink, *Beowulf*, Strassburg, 1888, pp. 185 ff.; Symons, *Germ. Heldensage*, Strassburg, 1889, p. 44, and Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. III, p. 649; Symons' views have been taken from the later work, "Züge aus dem englischen mythus von Béaw-Biar . . . wurden auf den dänischen sagenhelden (Böðvarr-)Bjarki, durch Ähnlichkeit der Namen veranlasst, übertragen"; Boer, *Die Beowulf-sage*, *Arkiv f. nord. Filol.*, vol. XIX, pp. 45 ff., cf. esp. pp. 47 ff.; Kluge, *Eng. Studien*, vol. XXII, p. 144; Bugge, Paul-Braune *Beiträge*, vol. XII, pp. 55 ff., cf. note in Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, III, p. 801; Sarrazin, *Anglia*, vol. IX, pp. 195 ff., *Eng. Studien*, vol. XVI, pp. 71 ff., vol. XXIII, pp. 242 ff., and vol. XXXV, pp. 19 ff., also his *Beowulf-Studien*, Berl., 1888, pp. 13 ff. References to Paul's *Grundriss* in the present paper are always to the second edition.

recently denied¹ that the fight with the monster at the court of Hrolf Kraki really affords a parallel to *Beowulf*—“neither *Beowulf*’s wrestling match in the hall, nor in the fen, nor his contest with the fire-drake have any real identity [*i. e.*, with the passage in the saga]; but when one take a little of all of them, one can get a sort of similarity to the latest and poorest form of the *Bjarki-saga*.” One might be inclined to accept the verdict of so learned an authority without question, were it not that Finnur Jónsson, in his edition of the saga and the *rímur*, has reaffirmed his belief in this connection, observing that “the hall-attacking monster is nothing else than a reminiscence of Grendel in *Beowulf*, though altered and faded.”² Heusler, too, while recognizing fully the value of Olrik’s contribution to the question, thinks that even admitting some of his contentions, one may disagree with his conclusion, and that the similarity of the motive to that in *Beowulf* is probably not the result of chance.³

¹ *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, Köb., 1903, vol. I, p. 135.

² *Hrólf’s saga kraka og Bjarkarímur*, udgivne for samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, Köb., 1904. Cf. p. xxii. In his *Oldnorske og Oldislandske Litteraturs Historie* (1898) he called it “en rigtignok svag afglans af det fra Bjovulf bekendte Grendelsagn,” vol. II, p. 832.

³ Heusler’s reviews of Olrik are to be found in *Anz. für deutsches Altertum*, vol. xxx, pp. 26–36; *Zts. für deutsches Altertum*, vol. xxxvi (NF), pp. 57–87. It is perhaps worth while to give Heusler’s comment in full: “Die frage nach dem zusammenhang von Béowulf-Biár-Biarki behandelt O. s. 134 ff., 244. 248 behutsam und einleuchtend. Nur wenn, nach ausweis der Biarkarímur, der bär an die stelle des geflügelten ungeheuers tritt, und wenn man das bluttrinken Hialtis als die spitze der erzählung gelten lässt, bleibt ein zusammengesetztes motiv übrig: ‘ein held kommt von Schweden (Gautland) an den Dänenhof und tötet ein ungetüm, das durch sein nächtliches erscheinen die hofmannen in schrecken hält’—ein motiv, dessen ähnlichkeit mit dem von Béowulf doch wol über den zufall hinausgeht. Und dann wird man es nicht ganz abweisen, dass der name Biarki (= Bericho) den etymologisch unverwanten, aber ähnlich klingenden namen Biár (= Béaw) angezogen habe, und dass dadurch der Rolfskämpe Biarki inhaber jenes fabulosen abenteuers wurde.”—*Anz.*, *loc. cit.*, p. 32.

Apart from these important expressions of opinion, the reviews of Olrik's book which have thus far appeared do not indicate the attitude taken by scholars towards this sweeping denial of what had been considered a well-established relationship between Beowulf and Bōðvar. Reviews by Ranisch¹ and Mogk² do not discuss it. Mogk had expressed himself, in the same year that Olrik's book was published, as believing that the *Bōðvarsðáttir* in the saga might be considered "a werewolf-myth, into which the Grendel-motive of Beowulf is woven."³ Various authorities have continued to treat the connection between the two stories as an established or probable fact. Sarrazin, in a recently published monograph in *Englische Studien*, holds to his earlier view, which Mr. Chadwick, in the new *Cambridge History of English Literature*, seems inclined to accept.⁴ Brandl does not express a very decided opinion, although he seems to regard the relationship as doubtful.⁵ Gering, in his translation of *Beowulf* (1906), speaks of the "unverkennbare Ähnlichkeit" between the Grendel story and the saga of Bōðvar Bjarki.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the unprejudiced investigator to make up his mind, and there is nothing left for him to do but to go to the sources, and work the problem out for himself. The subject is not an easy one, and a careful study of its complications and due allowance for them are necessary if the results are to be of any value. We cannot judge of the relations of these different narratives by looking at them as they stand; their history and transmutations must be taken carefully into account. Whatever position one assumes, he must be deeply

¹ *Arkiv*, vol. XXI, p. 276.

² *Zts. für Volkskunde*, vol. XIV, p. 250.

³ Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. II, p. 842.

⁴ Vol. I (1907), p. 29.

⁵ Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. II, p. 993.

indebted to the researches of Olrik, as the present paper sufficiently shows. Grasp of a multitude of complicated details and rare psychological insight make his book a very noteworthy contribution to Germanic saga. As regards the study which follows, the writer feels that its chief value is not so much to prove a series of theses as to restate and criticise certain debatable matters, giving important passages in the texts and indicating bibliography and the general trend of scholarly opinion in such a way that the reader may form an intelligent judgment of his own.

II.

Let us first consider the passage in the *Hrólfs saga* in which the resemblances to *Beowulf* have been thought to lie.¹ It will be recalled that Bjarki is the son of Bjorn, and the grandson of king Hring of Uppdalir. He has just come to the court of king Hrolf Kraki at Hleidargard, or Lethra, in Denmark. On his way he has taken refuge for the night in the house of a peasant. The good-wife has told him that her son Hött is made the sport of the men at court, and begged that Bjarki will be kind to him. Arrived at the hall, Bjarki takes Hött, an abject coward, under his protection. During the evening meal the champions of Hrolf amuse themselves by throwing bones at Bjarki and Hött.

¹The *Hrólfs saga* has been edited by Rafn, *Fornaldarsögur*, Cop., 1829, vol. 1; by V. A'smundarson, F. A. S., Reykjavik, 1891, vol. 1; by Finnur Jónsson, Cop., 1904. Danish translation by Rafn, *Nordiske Kæmpe-Historier*, Cop., 1821, vol. 1. There is an excellent German translation by P. Herrmann, *Die Geschichte von Hrolf Kraki*, Torgau, 1905. This contains much useful supplementary material; parallel passages from related sources, etc. For further bibliography consult Herrmann, p. 4. The above rendering is based on Jónsson's text; but I have followed Herrmann's example in not keeping the present tenses, which interchange with the preterits in a way disturbing to narrative in modern English.

Bjarki hurls back a bone, and kills one of the king's men. The affair is ultimately settled, and Böðvar Bjarki becomes a retainer of the king.

And as the Yule-feast approached, the men grew depressed. Böðvar asked Hött the reason; he told him that a beast had already come two successive winters, a great and terrible one,—“and it has wings on its back and flies about continually; two autumns it has already sought us here, and it does great damage; no weapon wounds it, but the king's champions, the best warriors of all, don't come home at this time.” Böðvar said, “The hall isn't so well defended as I thought, if a beast can destroy the domain and property of the king.” Hött answered, “That is no beast, it is rather the greatest of monsters.” (*þat er ekki dýr, heldr er þat hit mesta troll*). Now came the Yule-even; and the king said, “Now I desire that the men be still and quiet in the night, and I forbid them all to run any risk on account of the beast; let the cattle fare as fate wills (*sem auðnar*); my men I do not wish to lose.” All promised to act as the king commanded. But Böðvar crept secretly out in the night; he made Hött go with him, but Hött only went because he was forced to, crying out that it would surely be the death of him. Böðvar told him it would turn out better. They went out of the hall, and Böðvar had to carry him, so full of fear was he. Now they saw the beast, and Hött shrieked as loud as he could, and cried that the beast was going to swallow him. Böðvar commanded the dog (*bikkjuna hans*, i. e. Hött) to keep still, and threw him down in the moss, and there he lay in unspeakable terror, and didn't even dare to run home. Then Böðvar attacked the beast, but it chanced that the sword stuck in the sheath when he wanted to draw it; then he pulled so hard at the sword that it flew out of the sheath, and he plunged (*leggr*) it immediately with such force under the shoulder of the beast, that it penetrated the heart, and hard and heavily fell the beast down on the ground dead. Then Böðvar went over to where Hött was lying. He took him up and carried him over to the place where the beast lay dead. Hött trembled frightfully. Böðvar said, “Now you must drink the blood of the beast.” For a long time he was loth to do this, but he finally didn't dare to do otherwise. Böðvar made him drink two big gulps, and eat some of the beast's heart; then Böðvar grappled with him, and they struggled long with each other. Böðvar said, “Now you have become very strong, and I don't believe that you will be afraid of the troop of King Hrolf any longer.” Hött answered, “I shall not fear them any more, nor shall I be afraid of you henceforth.” “That is well, comrade Hött,” [said Böðvar] “and now will we set up the beast, and arrange it so that the others will think it alive.” They did so. Then they went in and were quiet; no one knew what they had done.

The king asked in the morning whether they knew anything of the beast ; whether it had showed itself anywhere in the night ; they told him the cattle were all safe and sound in the folds. The king bade his men see if they couldn't find any indication that it had come thither. The warders obeyed, came quickly back again and told the king that the beast was advancing rapidly to attack the town (borginn). The king bade his men be courageous, [and said] each one should help, according as he had courage for it, and proceed against this monster. It was done as the king commanded ; they made themselves ready for it. The king looked at the beast and said, " I don't see that the beast moves ; but who will undertake the task and attack it ? " Böðvar answered, " A brave man might be able to satisfy his curiosity about this ! (þat væri næsta hrausts manns forvitnisbót.) Comrade Hött, destroy this evil talk about you,—men say that there is neither strength nor courage in you ; go up and kill the beast !—you see nobody else wants to." " Yes," said Hött, " I will undertake it." The king said, " I don't know whence this courage has come to you, Hött, you have changed marvellously in a short time." Hött said, " Give me your sword Gullinhjalti, which you are bearing, and I will kill the beast or die in the attempt." King Hrolf said, " This sword can only be borne by a man who is both brave and daring." Hött answered, " You shall be convinced that I am such a man." The king said, " Who knows whether your character hasn't changed more than appearances show ? Take the sword and may you have good fortune ! " Then Hött attacked the beast and struck at it as soon as he was near enough so that he could hit it, and the beast fell down dead. Böðvar said, " Look, lord, what he has done ! " The king replied, " Truly he has changed much, but Hött alone didn't kill the beast, you were the man who did it." Böðvar said, " It may be so." The king said, " I knew as soon as you came here that only few men could compare with you, but this seems to me your most illustrious deed, that you have made a warrior out of Hött, who appeared little born to great good fortune. And now I wish him called Hött no longer, he shall from this day be named Hjalti,—thou shalt be called after the sword Gullinhjalti." ¹

Truly, a strange mingling of comedy and mock-heroics ! The *Hrólfs saga* indeed bears its character and history written large upon it. Incongruous and inharmonious elements have been added to a good old heroic story, and not always well worked into the narrative, so that contradictions and inconsistencies often appear. The tendency to exaggeration,

¹ Jónsson, *Hrólfs saga*, pp. 68 ff. ; Herrmann, pp. 73 ff.

the love of the fantastic, so characteristic of later saga-literature, are frequently visible. According to the most recent editor, the present form of the work can hardly be older than the first half of the fifteenth century.¹ Consequently, conclusions in regard to the history of Hrolf and his men can be drawn from this source only when strongly supported by earlier evidence. The propping-up and killing of the dead beast, a motive not found elsewhere in the story at this point, is a good instance of the bungling insertions of the redactor or redactors. Of course it destroys the whole effect of the scene, reducing the courage-motive to mere farce. So, too, the exaggerated low-comedy element in the character of Hjalti. There can be little doubt that he was in the beginning a heroic figure,—Olrik believes him to have been created by the poet of the *Bjarkamöl*, as an incarnation of the fidelity of the warriors of Hrolf.² Bjarki's visit to the peasant's house and the defence of Hött-Hjalti in the hall are the work of later times. It might not be necessary to emphasize this, were it not for the fact that much criticism does not take it sufficiently into account. The strength and prowess of Hjalti, rendering him able to stand beside Bjarki in heroism, were explained by the blood-drinking episode, probably pretty early in the history of the tale, but this does not mean that in the previous form of the story Hjalti was necessarily conceived as a coward before the blood-drinking took place. Mighty heroes did not disdain to increase their courage and strength by such draughts. In this very saga and in the *rímur*, Bjarki gains fresh vigor by his own brother's blood. Elgfrodi is half beast, half man. Hadding, at the direction of Odin, got renewed might by

¹ Cf. Jónsson's Introduction, esp. pp. xxvi ff. See also his *Oldnorske og Oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, vol. II, pp. 829 ff., and Mogk, Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. II (2nd ed.), pp. 841 ff.

² *Helteedigtning*, p. 69.

drinking the blood of a lion, as Saxo relates in his first book. Neither Bjarki nor Hadding was a coward before this occurrence, of course; on the contrary, it is expressly stated that both were valiant from their youth up. The saga has gone furthest in degrading and trivializing the character of Hjalti in these earlier scenes, just as it alone has mistaken his nickname Hött for his true name, and made his real name Hjalti a mere appellation bestowed as a reward for bravery.

For an earlier form of the narrative in the saga we must look at the *rímur* and Saxo. A comparison with the *rímur* is of particular significance, since it shows pretty clearly the nature of some of the additions made by the saga. Only recently, as has already been said, have these verses been placed at the disposal of scholars, through Jónsson's edition. He dates them "in round figures" at 1400, if indications of style and language are to be trusted. They belong to the earliest group of *rímur*, and in content are close to the *Skjöldungasaga* in the Arngrim form. The two passages which are of especial interest in the present discussion are here given.¹

Most of the men insulted Hjalti; he was not clever in speech. One day they (Bjarki and Hjalti) went out of the hall, so that the king's men did not know of it. Hjalti was afraid, and cried, "Let us not go near this wood; there is a she-wolf here, which eats men; she will soon kill us both." The she-wolf burst out of a thicket, frightful, with gaping jaws. Hjalti thought this terrible; his legs and all his limbs trembled. Undaunted Bjarki advanced upon her, struck deep with his axe; fearful blood streamed from the she-wolf. "Between two things," said Böðvar, "shall you choose, Hjalti,—drink this blood, or I will kill you, no courage seems to be in you." Angrily answered Hjalti, "I don't dare to drink blood; (but) it is best to do it if I must; now I have no better choice." He lay down to drink the blood; then he drank three swallows,—enough for fighting with one man! His courage increased, his strength waxed, he became

¹ Jónsson, *Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur*, esp. pp. xxviii ff.

very strong, mighty as a troll, all his clothes burst open. So he became courageous at heart, he feared not the flight of steel, the name of coward he feared no more, he was equal to Böðvar in courage. (IV, 58-66.)¹

He (Hjalti) has gained a brave heart and a courageous disposition; he has got strength and valor from the blood of the she-wolf. The folds at Hleidargard were attacked by a gray bear; many such beasts were there far and wide thereabout. Bjarki was told that it had killed the herdsmen's dogs; it was not much used to contending with men. (?) Hrolf and all his men prepared to hunt the bear—"he shall be greatest in my hall, who faces the beast!" Roaring the bear ran from its lair and shook its baleful paws, so that the men fled. Hjalti looked on when the combat began; he had nothing in his hands. Hrolf tossed to Hjalti his sword; the warrior stretched forth his hand and grasped it. Then he plunged it into the bear's right shoulder, and the bear fell down dead. That was his first heroic deed, many others followed; his heart was ever brave in the battle. From this exploit he got the name of Hjalti the brave, and was the equal of Bjarki. (V, 4-13.)²

In commenting on this episode, Jónsson says: "If we inquire what is most original here, there is really, as the evidence stands (i og for sig), scarcely any doubt that the *rímur* have made two beasts (the she-wolf and the gray bear) out of one, so that the saga may be held to have better preserved the original in this regard. This is strongly supported by the consideration that the monster which attacks the hall is nothing else than a reminiscence of Grendel in Beowulf, though altered and faded. But this shows the saga's superiority over the *rímur* in this regard."³ We can agree with Jónsson that the *rímur* represent a further development of the story in that they present two beasts where the other sources have one, but not that the

¹ Jónsson, pp. 139-140, Herrmann, p. 73.

² Jónsson, pp. 141-142, Herrmann, p. 75. These two passages are paraphrased by Olrik, *Helledigtning*, pp. 116-117. Indeed, it is best not to attempt to render the elaborate rhymes and repetitions of the original too literally, cf. Herrmann's note, p. 2. The sense is occasionally obscure, and the ms. defective.

³ *Hrólfssaga*, etc., p. xxii.

saga shows the monster in an earlier form than the *rímur*. It looks as though the fight with the gray bear, given in the *rímur* to Hjalti, had originally belonged to Bjarki, and as though this shift had given rise to a second combat, the one with the she-wolf, introduced for the purpose of motivating the courage of Hjalti. That the bear-fight is the original one, and that it was fought by Bjarki, is shown by the account in Saxo.

After relating Bjarki's defence of Hjalti (Hialto) in the hall of Rolf, at the bridal banquet of Agnar and Rute, Rolf's sister, and the duel between Biarco and Agnar, resulting in the latter's death, Saxo continues: "Talibus operum meritis exultanti nouam de se siluestris fera victoriam prebuit. Ursum quippe eximie magnitudinis obuium sibi inter dumeta factum iaculo confecit, comitemque suum Ialtonem, quo uiribus maior euaderet, applicato ore egestum belue cruorem haurire iussit. Creditum namque erat, hoc pocionis genere corporei roboris incrementa prestari."¹ By these valorous achievements Biarco gained intimacy with the chief men of the court, and himself received Rute as a bride.

When Jónsson says that the monster in the saga represents a more original form of the story, it is impossible to agree with him. Olrik has shown beyond question, it seems to me, that the winged troll is a special late elaboration peculiar to the *Hrólfs saga*. For the details of this argument the reader is referred to Olrik's pages.² But the probabilities are so overwhelmingly in its favor that it really needs little proof. The troll is only found in "the latest and poorest form of the Bjarki-story," while the earlier and more archaic versions represent the contest as with a

¹Saxo, ed. Holder, Strassburg, 1886, p. 56.

²*Helltedigtning*, pp. 116 ff., pp. 134 ff.

bear or wolf. There seems to be no reason to dissent from the general theory of the priority of this material in Danish. Olrik has, to be sure, been criticised for attaching undue importance to Saxo and the Danish versions of the Hrolf-story in contradistinction to those in Icelandic.¹ There is no need of raising this issue here; it seems altogether likely that the version in Saxo, as far as it goes, embodies the earlier form. But I see no reason to conclude that this was all of the episode as it was known to the Danes. There has been a good deal of discussion as to whether the blood-drinking is the "point" of the incident or not, whether it was an original feature or a secondary development.² Olrik holds the former view, believing that "the Danish saga is solely and only built up on the motive of drinking the blood of a wild beast." This was doubtless the part of the story which interested Saxo most, and I believe that there is no doubt that it had its origin in the common superstition that one gets the characteristics of an animal by drinking its blood or eating its flesh, but there seems to be evidence that the bear-fight existed as a saga-episode before the blood-drinking motive was added, that we may have here an old adventure of Bjarki's, originally not connected with the fortunes of Hjalti, which has been utilized to motivate the latter's courage.

Saxo expressly states that this incident gave Biarco fresh renown: "novam . . . uictoriam prebuit," and continues, after relating it, "His facinorum uirtutibus clarissimas optimatum familiaritates adeptus," etc. Although he gives no

¹ Cf. Jónsson, *Hrólfs saga*, etc., p. xxvii.

² Cf. Boer, *Archiv*, vol. xix, p. 52, "Ganz willkürlich ist schliesslich die annahme, der zug, dass Bjarki Hötr-Hjalti das blut des bären trinken lasst, sei in der dänischen sage die pointe der erzählung. . . . Mit gleichem rechte kann man solchen behauptungen gegenüber vollständig entgegengesetzte axiomata aufstellen."

details, his narrative is, as far as one can see, quite as much designed to illustrate the valor of Bjarki as to explain the courage of Hjalti. We must surely be careful to avoid concluding that Saxo necessarily gives the whole of the story. Heusler has noted, in another connection, that little reliance can be placed in the argument that because material is not fully given in Saxo it presumably did not exist in Danish. "Schlüsse ex silentio sind überhaupt bei Saxo gefährlicher als bei den meisten andern sagendenkmälern : wie der sammler der Þidrekssaga, so steht Saxo ausserhalb des stromes der vertrauten heimischen sagenkunde und sammelt emsig, was ihm der strom an sein ufer treibt. *Vollständigkeit darf man bei ihm nirgends von vornherein erwarten.*"¹ Saxo is of course often allusive where Icelandic versions are detailed. Jónsson points out that Icelandic tradition is much richer and without doubt more representative of early forms (alderdomsagtig) and more genuine in regard to its whole constitution than Saxo's. We may, then, have to infer the fuller form of the story by observing the Icelandic monuments, making of course all due allowances. Olrik calls attention to the fact that Müllenhoff decided for the same interpretation which he favors. It is worth observing, however, that Müllenhoff admitted that the blood-drinking motive might be secondary, "dies könnte ja allerdings eine spätere veränderung einer alten fabel sein."² It is impossible to do Müllenhoff's discussion justice without reading it in full; and it is too much complicated by other theories to make a review advisable here.

A further piece of evidence tends to confirm the view that the bear-killing was an older exploit of Bjarki's, originally

¹ *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, vol. xxxvi, (NF), p. 62. Italics are mine.

² *Beowulf*, Berlin, 1889, p. 55.

unconnected with the blood-drinking. Dr. Max Deutschein has recently pointed out what he thinks to be an early form of this in the Hereward-saga.¹ It may be worth while to examine this parallel somewhat in detail. The *Gesta Herwardi* deserves more careful attention from the student of early Germanic saga than it has hitherto received. The statement of the writer that he had seen some of the companions of Hereward, which there seems no good reason to doubt, places its composition in the early twelfth century.² The presence of Scandinavian elements in the story is unmistakable,—indeed, we have in this very passage a direct reference, “ad fabulam Danorum.” Hereward, an exile from his home, comes to the court of a Northumbrian potentate, where he gains renown by killing an enormous bear.

QUALITER MAXIMUM URSUM HERWARDUS INTERFECIT, UNDE LOCUM
CUM MILITIBUS UBI MANEBAT PROMERUIT.

Quod ubi quidam Gisebritus de Gant comperit, scilicet expulsionem ejus, pro illo misit, filiulus enim erat divitis illius; et profectus ultra Northumberland ad eum pervenit, solus ex propria provincia et paterna hereditate, cum solo servo Martino, cui cognomen erat Levipes, ubi non multis commoranti diebus quiddam laudabile contingit. Mos autem illi diviti fuit in Pascha, in Pentecosten, et in Natale Domini, ex claustris eductis saevis feris juvenum vires et animos temptare, qui militare cingulum expectabant et arma. Cum quibus Herwardus in primordio sui adventus, videlicet in Natale Domini, associatus, rogavit sibi unum e feris aggredi licere, aut saltem illum maximum ursum qui aderat, quem inclyti ursi Norweyæ fuisse filium, ac formatum secundum pedes illius et caput ad fabulam Danorum affirmabant sensum humanum habentem, et loquelam hominis intelligentem et doctum ad bellum; ejus igitur pater in silvis fertur puellam rapuisse, et ex ea Biernum regem Norweyæ genuisse; nec

¹ *Studien zur Sagengeschichte Englands*, I, pp. 249 ff. Cöthen, 1906.

² Printed in Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles*, ed. Hardy and Martin, London, 1888, vol. I, pp. 339 ff. This is a more accurate text than those of Bright and Michel, (cf. *Introd.*, p. xlvi). For general criticism, cf. *Introd.*, p. lii f. The passage here reproduced will be found on pp. 343-4.

obtinere potuit, domino illius magnanimitatem juvenis percipiente, et pubertatem ejus pertimescente. Altera autem die bestia ruptis vinculis ex obseratis claustris prorupit, omne dilanians et interficiens vivum quod consequi potuit. Mox autem, ut dominus rem comperit, milites præparare se et illum cum lanceis aggredi jubet, nisi mortuum capi non posse adjungens. Interim Herwardus feram cruentatam ad thalamum domini sui propter voces trepidantium revertentem, ubi uxor illius et filiæ ac mulieres timide confugerant, obvium habuit, ac in illum confestim irruere voluit; ipsum iste prævenit, gladium per caput et ad scapulas usque configens, atque ibi spatam relinquens, bestiam in ulnis accepit, et ad insequentes tetendit. Quo viso plurimum mirati sunt. Unde non minimam gratiam apud dominum et dominam suam promeruit, et grave odium et invidiam cum militibus et pueris domus. Hujus ergo rei gratia locum et honorem cum militibus obtinuit; licet tunc militem fieri distulerit, dicens melius se virtutem et animum suum probare debere.¹

We have here, as Deutschbein notes, a form of the widespread story of the maiden who meets a bear in the forest, and bears him a son, who later becomes a hero with bear-characteristics. This turns up early in the story of Siward, told in a Latin chronicle of the twelfth century; is found in Saxo, Book X, where it is narrated of Thrugillus Sprageleg, whose grandson was Sven Estrithson; and finally, it got into Icelandic, and was made to explain the parentage of Bjarki. The whole development has been brilliantly investigated by Olrik, who sums up the result of his more detailed researches in a page or two of the *Heltedigtning*. In Saxo the bear's amour ends tragically; the shepherds find their flocks plundered, and then a bear-hunt is instituted. They surround him with nets, and dispatch him with spears. So in the *Hrólfssaga* (Cap. 20) and the *rímur* (II, 27 ff.), the father of Bjarki, forced to assume bear-shape by evil magic arts, is hunted down and killed by the warriors of the court,

¹It is interesting to note, in passing, that the women and girls made songs in his honor, "mulieres ac puellæ de eo in choris canebant,"—an incident for the attention of students of the development of popular poetry.

which is a little like the scene in the Hereward-saga. There the motivation is different. The nobleman of Northumbria has kept this beast, along with a select menagerie of others, in order to test the valor of the youth of his company; the gigantic animal breaks out accidentally, and is overcome by Hereward. The general situation is much like that in the Bjarki-story at this point; the young hero gets renown and a distinguished place at court by killing an enormous bear. Note that this takes place at Yule-tide (in Natale Domini), as in the *Hrólfssaga*. There is no mention of any blood-test. The hero has a servant Martin or Lightfoot, who may possibly be an adumbration of Hjalti.¹

Deutschbein points out further correspondences between the Hereward-story and the saga of Bjarki, especially in connection with the latter's fight with Agnar and marriage with Rute. He concludes: "In den Hauptzügen kommen sich also Hereward- und Bjarki-Sage sehr nahe. . . . Wir dürfen daher wohl annehmen, dass uns in der Herewardsage noch die ältere Bjarkisage erhalten ist, deren von A. Olrik angesetzte ursprüngliche Form also tatsächlich belegt ist." Shall we assume that the killing of this man-bear in the *Gesta Herwardi* is a form of the same exploit which we are considering in the Bjarki-story? Deutschbein appears to think so; he calls attention to its similarity to the second passage in the *rímur*, which, as we have seen, probably belonged originally to Bjarki. The confusion of the material

¹Cf., on this general subject, Deutschbein, *loc. cit.*, Olrik, *Arkiv*, vol. XIX, (1903) pp. 199 ff; and *Helledigtning*, pp. 215 ff; for the Sivard-saga, Langebek, *Scriptores rerum danicarum mediæ ævi*, Hafniae 1774. vol. III, pp. 288 ff; for the account in Saxo, Holder, p. 345, cf. Herrmann, *Gesch. von Hrolf Kraki*, p. 52. The bear-father episode may be well seen in Cosquin, *Contes Pop. de la Lorraine*, vol. I, (Jean de l'Ours, etc.). The reference in Olrik's *Archiv* article to the bear's ears in the son, (shown in Hartland, *Legend of Perseus*, to be very wide-spread), should read *Legend of Perseus*, III, 24.

here, the fact that we are drawing conclusions from another story, the frequency of the were-wolf motive and of bear-fights in general, should make us cautious about drawing conclusions too confidently. There are many discrepancies between the story in the *Gesta* and the account in the *rímur*. But it seems undeniable that we have here evidence of an earlier form of the Bjarki-story before the blood-test was introduced, although we cannot depend upon it to show the original form of the tale in its purity.

It is certain that the blood-drinking must later have been regarded as an important part of the episode. The passages in Saxo and the Icelandic accounts are sufficient evidence of this. This was due, no doubt, to the growing interest in the fortunes of Hjalti. Just as Bjarki overshadowed the figure of his sovereign Hrolf, so Hjalti came in time to rival the popularity of his comrade in arms. Hence the tendency to give a personal history to a hero who was in the beginning a mere incarnation of heroic devotion.

Let us now return to the account in the *Hrólfs saga*. What is to be said of the confused resemblances to *Beowulf*, which have arrested the attention of so many scholars? These are not observable in the *rímur* or Saxo. Nor can the passage in the *Gesta Herwardi* be regarded as a parallel to *Beowulf*. If the Grendel-story were the foundation of the whole episode in the history of Bjarki, we should expect that early monuments would show this, and show it more plainly than the late and reworked *Hrólfs saga*. The most simple solution seems to be that we may have to do with late influence of *Beowulf* upon the *Hrólfs saga* alone. We know that the saga has gathered to itself much material from sources outside the heroic stories which it treats, and that its general tendency is towards elaboration, even at the expense of logic and propriety. We know that other Norse

material, dealing with Grettir and Orm Storolfsson, was affected by *Beowulf*, and consequently that *Beowulf* was known in Iceland in this later period, whatever its provenience may have been. It is easy to see how, in the present case, the situation in the *Hrólfssaga* might well have recalled that in the epic. Beowulf killed a troll which attacked the court of Hrothgar at Leire. Bjarki, also a visiting hero from another people, killed an enormous bear at the same place, the royal residence at Leire,¹ thereby winning honor at the hands of Hrothgar's nephew and successor Hrolf. It is hardly necessary to point out how closely Hrolf, or Hrothulf, and Hrothgar were associated in saga, the former assuming in the north a most prominent position, and falling heir to much of the glory of his predecessor. Evidence of their friendly relations in peace and war, before their later estrangement, is given in *Widsith* and *Beowulf*.² In this passage the saga is clearly expanding the simpler story of a bear-fight which we have seen in the earlier sources representing a more original form of the tale. A floating incident found in later saga-literature, the propping up and killing of the dead beast, has been inserted here, for example. So the redactor has been influenced by reminiscences of *Beowulf*, being careful, however, to keep the blood-drinking episode prominently before the reader. This affords a simple explanation for the main divergences in the saga from the story as we have elsewhere observed it. The beast has become a supernatural monster, menacing

¹ It is perhaps unnecessary to give references to the location of the hall Heorot, and its identity with the residence of Hrolf. Cf. Olrik, *Helteedigtning*, p. 16, where the fate of the hall foreshadowed in *Beowulf* ll. 81-85 is explained by the events at Hrolf's death; and O.'s general discussion, pp. 188 ff.

² Müllenhoff, *Beowulf*, p. 46, "Der ruhm Hrothgars (Hroars) ist in der nordischen sage auf seinen neffen Hrothulf (Hrolf Kraki) übergegangen."

the lives of the warriors in the hall, so terrible that the king forbids his men to attack it; the fight takes place at night; it is a deliberately planned encounter, not a chance meeting. From *Beowulf*, apparently, the saga has derived the sword-name Gullinhjalti, as Kluge suggested. With this we shall deal in detail presently. Certain discrepancies here, in which the saga corresponds neither to the *rímur* accounts or to the Grendel incident or to Saxo, have been counted against the theory of influence of *Beowulf* on this passage. Why do we have a winged monster killed by a sword in an episode otherwise recalling the Grendel-contest? The reason for this departure seems plain. The wrestling-match with Grendel, who, though vanquished, escapes to his lair, would give no opportunity for Hjalti to drink his blood, and such a wrestling-match does not afford so good a motivation for this method of increasing a man's courage as does a fight with weapons. So the facile redactor has here worked in the dragon, which appears as a troll, with wings on its back, flying about in the air. It must always be kept in mind that we are dealing with a late, conscious, and on the whole bungling and inartistic attempt to fix over an old story. It does not matter to the redactor that the qualities of a troll are perhaps not so desirable to acquire as those of a bear, any more than it matters that the beast-propping episode spoils the courage-scene. The whole passage is so inconsequent and absurd that it is hard to judge its changes in the same way as in most instances of literary influence. Minor differences, such as that the monster has ravaged two winters, at Yule-tide, instead of "twelf wintra tid," are common enough in the passage of a story like this from one source to another, especially when the whole is complicated by confusion with another tale. It will be remembered that in the Hereward-saga, the bear-fight took place at Yule-tide. We cannot even be sure that the form of the Beowulf-story

which affected the *Grettissaga* and the *Flateyjarbók* and probably this tale as well was the same in all respects as the form with which we are familiar. It is reasonable enough to suppose that *Beowulf* may have lived on in Scandinavian territory, and that the Anglo-Saxon version may have developed differences, especially since the condition of the proper names indicates that it must have been in the possession of the Anglo-Saxons for a considerable time. Even on English soil, there may well have been variant versions. The old theory of ten Brink,¹ while a failure in accounting for the stylistic peculiarities of Anglo-Saxon narrative, was reasonable enough in some other ways. Incidentally it may be remarked that ten Brink's view of the relations of *Beowulf* and the *Hrólfssaga* was something like that proposed here.

There is no way, surely, of proving that there are reminiscences of *Beowulf* in the *Hrólfssaga* at this point. Certain resemblances there undeniably are. If one believes, with Olrik, that these are merely fortuitous, there is nothing more to be said. If one believes, with almost all other scholars, that this is not the case, it will be found, I believe, that the hypothesis advanced above offers a reasonable explanation of them.²

¹For a criticism of ten Brink, cf. Boer, *Arkiv*, vol. XIX, pp. 50 ff. Boer's views seems too much affected by his theory of a dragon-myth to be impartial; cf. p. 58, "auch in Saxo's quelle war das ungetüm schon aller wahrscheinlichkeit nach ein fliegender drache; ein dem Grendel ähnlicher unhold wäre bei ihm unmöglich zu einem bären geworden," etc. Skeat, it will be remembered, advanced the theory that there was so much in the figure of Grendel to suggest a bear that this might explain his origin. (*Journal of Philology*, vol. XV, pp. 120 ff.)

²On this general subject, see Brandl's review of Olrik's destructive criticism of the parallel to the dragon fight in *Beowulf* afforded by an adventure of Frotho I, as related in Saxo's second book. This parallel, elaborated by Sievers, (*Ber. der Gesells. der Wiss. zu Leipzig*, vol. XLVII, pp. 175 ff.) has been generally accepted. Brandl defends it, in part, . . . "das Vorhand-

The development of this episode as it appears in the *Hrólfs saga* is, perhaps, of less moment in itself, but its bearings on the history of the material in *Beowulf* are important. It has been seen that while the contention of those who maintain that the blood-test is secondary may very likely be correct, it is, on the other hand, impossible to subscribe to such a theory as Bugge's. This was very explicitly stated, though not worked out in detail. Bugge held "that the similarity of the saga (i. e., to *Beowulf*), the scene of which is laid in virtually the same place, is not accidental, on the contrary I explain it on the ground that saga-incidents are attributed to Bǫðvar, which were earlier related in a Danish version out of which the English *Beowulf*-saga developed, and about a hero corresponding to the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*."¹ Heusler seems to hold a somewhat similar view, which we shall consider in a moment. If, however, while finding that the evidence does not support the hypothesis of an early connection, we recognize in the *Hrólfs saga* reminiscences taken from *Beowulf*, we have rather an interesting instance of familiarity with this material in Iceland in the later period in addition to the stories of Orm and Grettir. Possibly it was not in circulation in popular form at all. The *Hrólfs saga* certainly suggests bookish rather than oral sources at this point.²

ensein von Verschiedenheiten hebt die Beweiskraft der Übereinstimmungen nicht auf, gibt nur dem Nachahmer etwas von Originalität." (Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. II, p. 997). Note changes in the visualization of Grendel and his mother in the stories of Grettir and Orm. Or consider the variations in the shape and attributes of the monster in the Chapaluc or Cath Paluc legends (E. Freymond, *Artus' Kampf mit dem Katzenungetüm*, Halle, 1899, esp. pp. 45 ff.). There is much about the methods of the author of *Tristram de Nanteuil*, who worked over the old Chapalu motive, with such changes and elaborations as he saw fit, to remind one of the processes in the reshaping of the *Hrólfs saga*. (Freymond, pp. 26 ff.).

¹ Paul-Braune, *Beiträge*, vol. XII, p. 56.

² Boer, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, vol. XXX, p. 65, ascribes the *Beowulf* passage in the *Grettissaga* to a bookish person of the late thirteenth

III.

The sword Gullinhjalti used by Hött in the saga in sticking the dead troll, from which he gets the name Hjalti (according to the saga only) deserves some attention. Kluge was the first to call attention to the parallel between this sword and the old demonic weapon "gylden-hilt" which Beowulf found in the cave.¹ "Vielleicht war gyldenhilt eben der name jenes schwertes in besitz der Grendel, und der von Beowulf entführte rest des schwertes könnte dann ebensogut Gyldenhilt wie gylden hilt genannt sein. Natürlich müsste dann angenommen werden, dass der neue besitzer des Gyldenhilts die werthvolle hilze wieder zu einem schwerte vervollständigt hätte." Much has since been made of this by Sarrazin,² who argued that the dual character of Hött-Hjalti had developed out of swords in *Beowulf*. Personification of weapons, he thought, would lead naturally to the creation of a concrete figure in human form. The two swords are Hrunting, which fails Beowulf in the fight with the mother (= Hött), and the old sword found in the cave (= Hjalti). It is hardly necessary to repeat that the testimony of the *rímur*, which had probably not been accessible to Sarrazin, as well as that of Saxo, leaves no doubt as to the late development of the name Hött, and the fact that he was called Hjalti or Hialto *before* the blood-drinking.³ The

century, denying any proof here that the story was displaying an "unbewusste neigung" to attach itself to popular heroes. He admits the probability of its having been familiar in the north, however. He can see no force in the parallel in the Orm story. His arguments do not seem to have proved convincing,—both Olrik and Brandl speak of the latter as an analogue.

¹*Englische Studien*, vol. xxii, p. 145.

²*Neue Beowulf-Studien*, *ibid.*, vol. xxxv, pp. 19 ff. The article is dated Oct., 1904.

³It may be observed that Hrunting is expressly stated to be a good sword, *nǣfre hit æt hilde ne-swāc*, 1461, which does not suggest the charac-

naming of him Hjalti in the saga is, as Olrik points out, "only an invention of the saga-man." The *rímur* mention the incident thus: "Hér með fekk hann Hjalta nafn *hins hjartaprúða*, and as he is consistently called Hjalti before this, the adjective is clearly the important part of the name. In the *rímur*, the mother tells Bjarki that Hjalti is the name of her much-abused son, and mentions Hött as a name given him in derision (the hat) along with "horned pig" and "good-for nothing," (IV, 33 ff., cf. Jónsson, p. 136).¹ So Hött has been taken in the saga, which so often represents a further stage of development than the *rímur*, as his real

ter of Hött. It is no reproach to a sword if it cannot survive an attack on a supernatural creature when wielded by a mighty hand,—Beowulf's sword Naegling breaks in the dragon fight, (2680 ff.). The bone-throwing contest is not much like the flying with Hunferth. Sarrazin further equates Hjalti with Wiglaf, and says that the speeches of Wiglaf recall those of Hialto in Saxo Grammaticus, to which attention had been called by Bugge. Wiglaf's sword, too, has, according to Sarrazin, "gewissermassen" the function of the old demonic sword, which we have seen is, on his theory, to be equated with Hjalti. All these correspondences I confess myself unable to follow. The resemblance between these speeches has been admirably criticised by ten Brink as due to the formal character of Germanic poetry in a given situation, "Ähnlichkeit der Situation ruft Ähnlichkeit der Ausführung von selbst hervor. . . . Es muss in der germanischen Poesie eine Art Typus für die Fassung derartiger Reden gegeben haben, der trotz aller Variationen immer durchschimmerte." (*Beow.*, pp. 191-2). It will be shown presently that there does not appear to be any connection between the dragon-fight at the end of *Beowulf* and the fight at the end of the saga, in which a porcupine-troll plays a minor role.

¹ Jónsson seems to have misunderstood this point, cf. p. xxii, "Hertil skal föjtes, at i rimerne (v, 5-14), er der endnu tale om en 'graabjorn,' der kommer og dræber Rolvs faar og kvæg i foldene; denne dræbes af Hjalte med et sværd, hvorved hann ogsaa fik sit tilnavn: Hjalte, og bliver nu hirdmand." This cannot be the case; the name which the king gives him is not Hjalti, but *hinn hjartaprúði*, a poetical variation of his appellation *hinn hugprúði* in other Icelandic monuments, cf. *Snorra Edda*, ed. Jónsson, Cop. 1900, p. 108. If the king were the first to bestow this name on him, his mother could not say "Átta eg son er Hjalti hét," etc. before the bear-killing.

name, and Hjalti merely as an appellation, just as in the course of time it was forgotten that Bjarki was the hero's true name and Böðvar an appellation referring to his warlike disposition. The *Hrólfs saga* makes Bjarki a nickname,¹ as do Icelandic sources generally.²

In these etymological strivings of the saga-man we may very likely have a further instance of borrowing from *Beowulf* in this passage. Finding the sword *gylden-hilt* in the possession of Hrothgar, to whom it was given by Beowulf (properly only the hilt,—as Kluge says, we must assume that it was furnished with a new blade), he identified it with the sword of Hrolf, and on this basis explained what he supposed to be the secondary name Hjalti. It is possible, of course, that the occurrence of the same name "gold-hilt" in these two stories, a very appropriate epithet for a king's weapon, is due to mere chance.

Sarrazin has laid considerable stress on a later passage in the *Hrólfs saga*, considering it identical with the dragon-episode in *Beowulf*. "Böðvar falls with his trusty companion Hött in a contest with a troll, from whose bristles arrows fly; Beowulf falls in a fight with a fire-spewing dragon, supported and avenged by his trusty companion Wiglaf."³ Since the publication of his first series of *Beowulf-Studien* he has since insisted on the validity of this parallel,⁴ which he thinks important for the structure of the story and for its mythical significance,—“the Beowulf-saga would lose its mythical character if the dragon-fight were not originally a part of it,” a view which is no longer accepted, as we shall see presently. But the passage in the saga reveals nothing significant for the last adventure in *Beowulf*.

¹ Cf. Herrmann, note 12, p. 131.

² On the general subject of names cf. Olrik, pp. 137 ff.

³ *Beowulf-Studien*, 1888, p. 47.

⁴ *Englische Studien*, vol. XVI, p. 82; *ibid.*, XXIII, pp. 245 ff.

Böðvar, in bear-shape, has been aiding Hrolf in the struggle against Hjorvard. Hjalti exhorts him, not understanding the situation, to take part in the combat. The narrative continues :

After this exhortation of Hjalti's Böðvar arose and went into the battle, but the bear had vanished from King Hrolf's army, and now things began to go badly for them. For Queen Skulde, who was sitting in her black tent on a magic seat, could accomplish naught with her arts, so long as the bear was in King Hrolf's army. Now there came a change, like dark night after a clear day, and King Hrolf's men saw advancing from King Hjorvard's army a fearful boar not smaller in size than a heifer three years old. It was wolf-gray in color, and arrows flew from its bristles, and it killed in multitudes, in this strange fashion, King Hrolf's men. Böðvar Bjarki now struck out madly, and hewed both right and left, and thought of nothing else than to overcome as many men as possible before he should fall. One fell down right on top of another before him. Bloody were his arms up to the shoulders, and he piled up a heap of dead corpses round about him.¹

Nothing further is said of this porcupine-troll. Neither Böðvar nor Bjarki are said to fight it, nor that it kills either of them. It is in no way a fundamental part of the story ; on the contrary it has all the appearance of a late addition. It is merely an enchantment of Queen Skulde,—for a similar episode see the account of the boar-troll sent by the wizard-king Athils against Hrolf and his men earlier in the story. The whole setting of the incident is different from the situation in *Beowulf*.

IV.

The effort has frequently been made to establish a connection between Bēowulf and Böðvar Bjarki at an early period by means of Bēowa, the semi-divine figure to whom, according to time-honored scholarly tradition, the adventures of

¹ *Hrólfs saga*, Cap. XXXIII, Jónsson, p. 102.

Bēowulf earlier belonged. Etymological equations between Biár, the Scandinavian form of the name Bēowa, and Bjarki, are now rejected by the best authorities,—Brandl, Olrik, and Heusler, for example. The name Bjár occurs in an explanatory translation of Anglo-Saxon names in the *Langfeðgatál*. “Skjaldin er vér kǫllum Skjöld, hans son Béaf er vér kǫllum Bjár.” This is no proof of popular acquaintance with Biár as a Scandinavian figure; it is a bookish explanation of material derived from Anglo-Saxon sources. Nor can any important conclusion be drawn from the occurrence of the name in a list of warriors in the *Snorra Edda*, “Björn reið Blakki en Bjár Kerti.” Bēowa has no place in any northern version of the saga of the Scyldings, nor is there any evidence of his early presence there as a mythico-heroic figure.¹ Yet Symons has attached great weight to the quotation from the *Langfeðgatál*, which he says “builds the bridge” between Bēowa and Böðvar Bjarki.² The efforts of Boer to connect Bēowa with a hypothetical O. N. form *Beawr are not very convincing; one can do much with processes of this sort.³ Sarrazin’s equation Böðvar : Bēowa need not be dwelt on.⁴ Added to the other weaknesses in the equation Biár = Bjarki is the fact, which does not seem to have been sufficiently considered, that the name of the saga-hero always appears with the diminutive suffix *-ki*.

¹ For a general discussion of this matter, cf. Brandl, Paul’s *Grundriss*, vol. II, pp. 992 f., Olrik, p. 137 note, and p. 244 note; and Heusler, *Anzeiger*, vol. XXX, pp. 26 ff. The quantities of the vowels have been marked in this passage, in order to make the linguistic discussion perfectly clear; elsewhere the marks of length have been purposely omitted, save in some titles in Scandinavian.

² *Grundriss*, vol. III, p. 649.

³ *Arkiv*, vol. XIX, pp. 19 ff.

⁴ Cf. *Beowulf-Studien*, 1888, p. 47, and Holthausen’s review, *Literaturblatt*, 1890, No. 1, p. 15.

Heusler suggests that the similarity in sound between Bjarki and Biár might have been sufficient to effect a transference of the story, even though the names are not etymologically connected,—“und dann wird man es nicht ganz abweisen, dass der name Biarki (= Bericho) den etymologisch unverwanten, aber ähnlich klingenden namen Biár (= Béaw) angezogen habe, und dass dadurch der Rolfskämpe Biarki inhaber jenes fabulosen abenteuers wurde.” This brings us to a question of considerable importance,—whether we are to accept the old theory that the main adventures of the epic were earlier told of Beowa, and secondarily transferred to Beowulf. The bearings of this matter on other lines of investigation than the one at present under consideration are obvious,—mythology, for example, has rested much of its case on the activities of the old “god” Beowa, supposedly reflected in the epic in its present form, where the exploits are told as those of a mortal man. Careful discussion of all this, then, is well worth while.

This theory, proposed by Kemble, and accepted and elaborated by Müllenhoff,¹ has gained almost universal acceptance. The majority of scholars seem to regard it almost as a statement of fact, to be taken for granted in investigating the history of the poem. Sievers says, for example, “I may, I suppose, regard it as admitted that Beowulf the Geat was not originally the hero of the dragon-saga, but Beowulf the Scylding, the father of Healfdene, or rather the Scylding Beow or Beowa of the genealogies and place-names, whose name was secondarily supplanted in our epic by the name Beowulf.”² Brandl thinks that the original

¹ *Beowulf*, Berl., 1889, pp. 8 ff

² *Sitzungsberichte*, loc. cit., p. 181. Cf. the statements of Koegel, *Zeit. für deutsches Alt.*, xxxvii, pp. 268 ff.; Binz, Paul and Braune, *Beiträge*, vol. xx, pp. 153 ff.; Symons, *Grundriss*, III, pp. 648 ff.

saga probably belonged to the mythical Beowa, whom he regards as a protecting agricultural hero.¹ Olrik puts the matter similarly, "for there is little doubt that the troll-fights of the Geat champion Beowulf, which stand in so foreign a relation to the historical saga-cycle of Hygelac and Hrothgar, originally belonged to the older Beov (Beowulf)."² A few scholars, Boer for instance,³ insist on a modification of Müllenhoff's hypothesis, while not dethroning Beowa from his important place in the development of the story. Expressions of disbelief, on the other hand, are rare. Gering states his position with great frankness, maintaining "that an old myth of a 'divine hero' Beowa, supposedly identical with Freyr, underlies the two narratives (in the epic), is an unproved hypothesis."⁴ Sarrazin has opposed the theory stoutly, but his criticisms have perhaps had less weight because the details of his general argument have so often failed to carry conviction. It is well to remember that "the artificial and improbable hypothesis of an early Anglo-Saxon Beowa-myth,"⁵ as he calls it, is hard to reconcile with the view, which has been more and more generally accepted in recent years, that the material in *Beowulf* is largely Scandinavian in its origin and development. Many scholars take a cautious attitude, and while not denying the validity of the theory that the tale was earlier told of Beowa, are hardly ready to accept it. Mr. Chadwick, writing for the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, believes it "of somewhat doubtful value."⁶ Professor C. G. Child puts the case with some vagueness. "It is perhaps safe to assume," he says, "that a god Beowa, whose existence in myth is certain, became confused

¹ *Grundriss*, II, p. 999.

² *Heltedigtning*, p. 246.

³ *Archiv*, XIX, pp. 23 ff.

⁴ *Beowulf*, Heidelberg, 1906, p. vii.

⁵ Cf. *Englische Studien*, vol. XVI, pp. 73 ff.

⁶ Vol. I, p. 31.

or blended with Beowulf.”¹ Nowhere, however, as far as I am aware, has the negative side of the case been plainly and fully stated.

It seems better to take recent discussions, especially those of Olrik, Brandl, Heusler, and Chadwick, as the starting-point for an examination of this theory, rather than earlier investigations. Müllenhoff was the chief apostle of this doctrine, but since his day the general situation in regard to the relationship and significance of the earlier figures in the genealogies of Danish and English monarchs has been placed in a much clearer light. Scaef and Beow or Beowa (Beowulf) who appear in the genealogies on English soil and in the epic as father and son of Scyld respectively,² apparently owe their position to the desire of the Anglo-Saxons to refer their monarchs to mighty heroes of poetry. In northern sources these relationships do not exist. Scaef has nothing to do with the Scylding genealogy,³ nor does Beowa have any place there. Beowulf, who appears in the epic as son of Scyld and father of Healfdene, is found in no other source as a Danish king. There is no evidence, then, of any original connection between Beowa and Scyld. Beowa is probably only a “guest” in the Scylding genealogy, having been put there by English singers. “They have included a popular hero in the most distinguished family they knew.”⁴

As has just been said, Olrik agrees with the majority of

¹ *Beowulf*, Cambridge, Mass., 1904, p. ix.

² Beowulf : Scyld Scefing—Beowulf—Healfdene.

A.S. Chronicle : Scaef . . . Sceldwa—Beaw.

Aethelweard : Scef—Scyld—Beo.

Wm. of Malmesbury : Scaef—Sceldius—Beowius.

³ Olrik makes Scaef originally Sceafa, king of the Lombards in *Widsith*. This is denied by Chadwick and Heusler. See below, p. 259.

⁴ Cf. Olrik, pp. 239 ff., esp. p. 246.

other scholars in assigning Beowulf's troll-fights to Beowa, in the earlier stages of the story. "In England his [the older hero's] fight with Grendel plays a larger part than any other poetic motive: it furnishes a theme for the people's mightiest epic, and allusions in place-names are unusually clear. The contest with Grendel seems to have played as prominent a rôle in the English imagination as Sigurd Fafnisbane's dragon fight in Norway and Sweden." Olrik appears to forget that if *Beowulf* is the English people's mightiest epic, it is practically the only one extant. The "epics" of the Caedmon-Cynewulf schools are obviously not to be considered here. Since so little of heroic epic literature has survived, it is saying little to assert that the fight with Grendel looms larger than any other motive. The allusions in place-names, which Olrik considers "unusually clear," must be considered somewhat more in detail. It will be seen, I think, that they afford the slenderest of slender support for the hypothesis that Beowa once fought against the monster Grendel.

Many examples of the occurrence of the name Beowa have been collected from the Anglo-Saxon charters. They have been most fully set forth, perhaps, by Binz.¹ Manifestly they prove nothing as to Beowa's connection with the adventures of the poem, unless some relation can be established between them and figures of the Beowulf-saga. But, strangely enough, far-reaching conclusions have been drawn from isolated place-names compounded with the word Beowa in one of its shorter forms. Binz says, for example, "That the main part of the myth of Beowa, the fight with Grendel, uninfluenced by the figure of the historical Geat hero Beowulf, was current (geläufig) among the Anglo-Saxons at the time of the settlement in Britain, is shown

¹ Paul-Braune, *Beiträge*, vol. xx, pp. 155 ff.

by various place-names," *Beas broc*, *Beasfeld*, *Beuesfel*, *Beoshelle*, etc. But how do these prove any connection with the Grendel-fight? They prove nothing of the sort—only in one instance, the Wiltshire charter of the year 931, is there any case for a connection with the *Beowulf*-story.¹

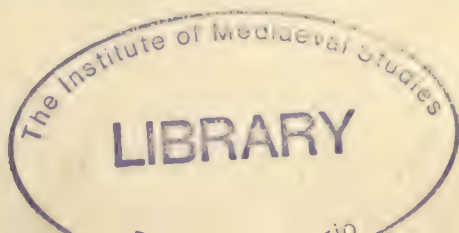
This celebrated passage in the Wiltshire charter, in which the two names *Grendel* and *Beowa* occur in descriptions of localities at no great distance apart, certainly deserves careful attention. It has been more often discussed and referred to than quoted in full, and so the section which is of significance is here given. It does not seem worth while to reproduce the charter entire; the boundaries of the piece of land in question are in part as follows:

. ðonne norð ofer dune. ón meos h́line weste weardne; ðonne á dune on ða yfre. on beowan hammes hecgan. on bremeles sceagan easte weardne; ðonne on ða blacan græfan. ðonne norð be ðem 7 heafdan. to ðære scortan dic. butan anan æcre; ðonne to fugel mere to ðan wege; ondlong weges. to ottes forda; ðonon to wudumere; ðonne to ðære ruwan hecgan; ðæt on langan hangran; ðonne on grendles mere; ðonon on dyrnan geat; ðonne eft on lin leage geat.,²

The combination *beowan hamm* and *grendles mere*, we are told, supports the theory that the Grendel story was narrated in England with *Beowa* as the hero. But does the appearance of two familiar figures in place-names in the

¹ Brandl points out that place-names are only of significance "wenn sie erst in einer zur sage stimmenden Relation auftreten" (*Archiv*, p. 152), and Symons, *Grundriss*, III, p. 650) recognizes that the testimony of the place-names, apart from the present passage, is "weniger entscheidend." For full reference to Brandl's article, cf. note, p. 263.

² Gray-Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, London, 1887, vol. II, p. 364. I have modernized the A.S. character for *w*.



same locality necessarily mean a connection between them? It will be observed that this is the only instance in the charters of the combination of these two names, as far as has hitherto been shown. But Binz reaches what he considers a sure conclusion. "This leads indisputably (mit Sicherheit) to the localization of the myth in Wiltshire, and makes it probable for the other localities,"—that is, those in which the above-mentioned place-names occur. The two figures do not occur in the same region by chance, he thinks, they are combined "in einer gewiss nicht zufälligen weise." Surely, this is reading a good deal into the passage. Why assume direct connection between the two? All that this proves is that an Anglo-Saxon hero familiar as having been elevated into the royal genealogies, has given his name to a locality not far from one bearing the name of Grendel. If there were several cases of such a connection we might begin to speak of relationship, but how do we know this is not the merest chance? In the same charter there is mention of a boar,¹—does that mean that an adventure with such a beast is to be attributed to the hero? Suppose one were to set up a theory that there is a saga-relation between Scyld and Bikki, and offered as proof the passage in the charter for the year 917,² in which there are mentioned, as in the same district, *scyldes treow*, and *bican setl*,² which Binz enumerates under the allusions to Bikki. How much weight would this carry?

There is more to be said in regard to this passage in the Wiltshire charter. Hitherto I have assumed, for the sake of argument, that the two places under discussion were named for the monster in the poem and the hero of the genealogies respectively. But it is quite possible that neither of these things is true. Miller's argument that the

¹ *to bares anstigon.*

² Gray-Birch, III, p. 84.

word *grendel* here is not a proper name at all, that it means "drain," has never, to my knowledge, been refuted.¹ Binz objected that this point is "nicht stichhaltig, da eben die genetivische bildung *grendles mere* im gegensatz zu den übrigen beispielen von composition den character als eigen-namen deutlich erkennen lässt," but this is contradicted in an editorial note by Sievers, and even by one of Binz's own examples. Sievers says: "Auch nicht-eigennamen erscheinen ganz gewöhnlich im genetiv," *earnes hricg, of focgan igeðum, egesan treow*, etc.²

Again, *Beowan ham(m)* may have been a spot named, not for the hero Beowa, but for an ordinary mortal called after him. Heinzel made this suggestion in regard to *Beas broc*, and another entry in the charters mentioned by Müllenhoff, which has since been shown to rest on a textual misreading.³ Is it unreasonable to suppose that the name Beowa was borne by some individual who lived in this locality, which was called, from this fact, *Beowan ham(m)*?

¹ "There is an interesting approximation of the expressions *beowan hammes* and *grendles mere* in Cart. Sax., No. 677. The conjunction has been used as an argument to prove the local distribution of the Beowulf legend, and to found an historical generalisation.

I am induced by a recent reappearance of this argument to point out that *grendles* is not a proper name. The Charter has *fugel mere*, *wudu mere*, *grendles mere*. The word *grendel* stands alone in C. S. 1103, and *gryndeles sylle* occurs in C. S. 996. In the former it is the 'grindle,' i. e., drain—see note *ad loc.* and Halliwell. In the latter the sense is 'the grindle dirt-pond' (see Grein s. vv., *sol*, *sylian*) i. e., the dirty pond into which the drain runs (*fram gryndeles sylle to russemere*). Hence in C. S. we have a series *fugel mere* 'the bird-pool,' *wudu mere* 'the wood-pool,' *grendles mere* 'the cess-pool.' " (*Academy*, May, 1894, p. 396.)

² Binz, *loc. cit.*, p. 157, note 3.

³ Cf. Heinzel, *Anzeiger*, vol. XVI, p. 267; ten Brink, *Beowulf*, p. 217, Anm. 2; Binz, p. 155. Binz objects to Heinzel's criticism of *Beas broc* on the ground that the strong inflectional form indicates a divine or mythic being. He refers to Kögel, *Zs für deutsches Alt.*, XXXVII, p. 272, who says "mannesnamen nach göttlichen wesen pflegen in schwacher form, aus kompositis verkürzt, aufzutreten."

The word *hām* is of course one which would be expected in such a connection. In the Northumbrian *Liber Vitae* there appears a certain Boduwar Berki among the benefactors of the church at Durham. He was clearly named after the Scandinavian hero. Why should not a similar thing have happened in Wiltshire? And in the north historical personages were named Sigurd.

So much for the evidence of place-names in the charters. It seems clear enough that they afford no proof that the Grendel-fight was originally attached to Beowa, or indeed that there was ever any connection between the old hero of the genealogies and the monster. We now come to the question why the name Beowulf occurs in the line of Danish kings in the poem in the place where Beowa might be expected.

The first thing to note is that this is found nowhere else than in the single extant ms. of the epic, and that there is no valid reason to suppose that this conception of a Beowulf as son of Scyld ever existed elsewhere than here. As far as the evidence goes, it points clearly to the conclusion that this introduction of a Beowulf here had no further circulation than that given it by the poem, and that it was never accepted extensively by learned or popular sources, if indeed it was ever accepted at all. This has been emphasized by Brandl. "Lediglich auf unser Epos beschränkt ist die Benennung Beowulf für den Beowa der Sage, und zwar in dessen beiden Rollen: als Sohn des Scild und als Bezwinger des Grendel. . . . Auch hat diese ganze Weiterbildung der Beowagestalt weder auf die Aufzeichnungen der Beowasage bei den ags. Chronisten des 10-12 Jahrhs. . . . einen Einfluss geübt, noch in den späteren Abschriften der wests. Königsgenealogie ein einziges Beowulf statt Beowa hervorgerufen. Sie kann daher, — lediglich vom Standpunkt der Ueberlieferung aus zu reden — erst vom

Dichter des Epos ersonnen und von den Lesern als seine individuelle Darstellung behandelt worden sein."¹ Scholars have been inclined to attach too much weight to this passage in *Beowulf* as revealing an early and widely accepted conception of this genealogy. The father of Healfdene (Halfdan) in northern sources is Frodi, and there is no Beowulf in the Danish Scylding line, while such a loophole out of the difficulty as to assert "it is conceivable that Frodi and Beowulf are different names for the same person"² need hardly receive serious consideration.

The second point to be noted is that it is easy to account for the substitution of Beowulf for Beowa at this point without assuming that troll-fights were ever attributed to the latter. If we follow this hypothesis, we are asked to believe that the Beowulf-poet, or the persons to whom his activity is to be credited, made over a single demon-killer and genealogical hero into two separate figures, when the material received a new setting in Scandinavian scenery, and that this poet, in order to be entirely consistent, gave the new name Beowulf both to the Geat hero of the troll-fights and to the genealogical figure, now the grandfather of the king whose hall is purified. This is not very convincing. Under such circumstances, it would be more natural for the poet to endeavor to keep two such heroes, who had developed out of a single figure, distinctly separate from each other, by giving them different names.³ It is much more reasonable to suppose that such a similarity in the names of two different personages would have been

¹ *Grundriss, loc. cit.*, p. 993.

² Chadwick, p. 146. Mr. Chadwick does not propose this as a solution, but merely as a possibility.

³ Brandl (p. 993) admits, "Für die Verständlichkeit der Erzählung war sie kein Vorteil; Sagen zeigen daher in der Regel das entgegengesetzte Bestreben, namensverwandte Gestalten zu vereinigen."

allowed to stand in the poem if there had been no early identity between the two heroes. One can see that the poet might then have been misled by the likeness of Beowa to Beowulf in sound,—perhaps, as Brandl says, mistaking one for a shorter form of the other, as Alda for Aldburg, Eada for Eadburg,—and, not fearing any confusion between two characters as different as these, and otherwise entirely unconnected, might have given what he supposed to be the fuller form Beowulf to the hero Beowa. The situation as it stands points to this as the simplest solution. Let us arrange the matter schematically.

1. We know that Beowa was an Anglo-Saxon hero, who was elevated into the royal genealogies as the son of Scyld.

2. We do not know that he was ever the hero of troll-fights, save as far as the charters, etc., may show, and this evidence has been found inconclusive.

3. We have no indication that a Beowulf had a place in the royal line, save the testimony of the epic alone.

4. We do know that a Beowulf was the hero of the troll-fights.

In the face of these facts, it is arguing directly against the simplest conclusion to assert that Beowa probably was the original hero of the Grendel-episode, or that a Beowulf is to be accounted an early genealogical figure, except by confusion with the hero of the poem.

There is another possibility, which relieves the "Beowulf-poet" of the charge of introducing this rather confusing situation into the poem. The word Beowulf in ll. 18 and 53, the only places where it occurs as the name of the Danish king, may be a substitution by a redactor or scribe for Beowa, which stood, perhaps, in the earlier version of the epic. We know that the poem must have passed through various changes between the time of its composition in the early eighth century and its present MS. form in the

tenth. It is unintelligently written, and so full of blunders and inaccuracies that it has always afforded endless opportunities for conjectural emendations. It would not be unreasonable, then, to regard Beowa as the correct reading here, and the word Beowulf as the stupid substitution of some perpetuator of the poem, who was led astray by the similarity of the names, aided by the fact that Beowulf the Dane plays so small a rôle in the action.

I can see little support for Olrik's view¹ of the connection between Beowa and Danish troll-fights, or for Heusler's elaborate alternative theory that a saga-figure Sceldwa—not the same as the Danish royal ancestor Scyld (*Skelduz < *Skeldungōz)—was known to the Anglo-Saxons, Beow-Beowulf being considered his son, and that this son was inserted in the Danish royal line by the Beowulf-poet instead of Frodi or Fridlef, confusing Sceldwa and Scyld.² The identity of this son of Sceldwa with the dragon and Grendel-slayer, continues Heusler, must be assumed as unknown to this poet.—Such explanations as these seem the result of attempting to force the situation to fit the old Müllenhoffian theory, instead of constructing a theory to accord in the most unforced way with the evidence. Of course Beowulf was not the original hero of the tale; it was probably old and gray by the time it was attached to him. Just how the transference to his figure was brought about I think the available testimony insufficient to determine. It is surely exceedingly hazardous to suppose that from the single extant version of the epic, and the very doubtful testimony of the place-names, which reduces itself,

¹ *Heltedigtning*, p. 247. "Kampen med Grendel i Danernes kongehal har formodentlig faaet sin skikkelse ud fra forestillingen om hans danske byrd." I am not sure that I fully understand Olrik's argument at this point.

² *Anzeiger*, p. 32.

on the most liberal interpretation possible, to a dubious entry in a charter, the whole development of the story can be inferred. It seems antecedently unlikely that a tale which indications show to have been of Scandinavian origin should be referred to an Anglo-Saxon hero Beowa in order to explain its attachment to a Scandinavian hero Beowulf, and not wholly convincing to suppose that the English should plunder one of their favorite native champions to enrich a little-known stranger from a foreign people.

Upon such slight evidence as this, then, does the theory that Beowa was earlier the hero of the Grendel-episode depend. Even if the old Müllenhoffian hypothesis, as altered and restated by later scholars, be accepted, it must still remain only an hypothesis. When we build an argument for a connection between Beowulf and the Bjarki-saga on this foundation, we must remember how insecure an edifice we are raising. A touch, and the whole may fall like a house of cards.

V.

Mythological interpretations of Beowulf have hitherto, perhaps without exception, taken the figure of Beowa as a point of departure. If we conclude, however, that the evidence does not warrant regarding him as the "divine hero" of the Grendel-story, we shall be obliged to proceed in a very different way from previous investigators in determining how far the underlying framework of the story is mythical, and what the explanation of these myths really is. Müllenhoff's hypothesis, simple, symmetrical, and comprehensive, and bearing the prestige of a great scholar's maturest thought, has suffered some rude shocks in recent years. Yet it must always occupy a prominent place in this particular field, since it was the first attempt of any

consequence to account for the non-historical events in the poem by appealing to mythology, and since it pointed the way for other interpretations which were worked out along somewhat similar lines. But even those who believe in the validity of the methods followed by Müllenhoff have been forced to modify his original conclusions a good deal. For example, he made Beowa a manifestation of the activity of the "old god" Sceaf, and endeavored to show that a far-reaching mythical conception appearing in the life of the Lombard hero Lamissio might underly the situation in *Beowulf*. Scholars are not agreed as to the origin of the figure of Sceaf or its precise relationship to Scyld, but on neither of the two theories which are most prominent to-day is there any support for the god Sceaf as Müllenhoff conceived him. That the graceful story of the boy sailing in an open boat to the land of his future people was told originally of Sceaf, or that Sceaf's three successors in the genealogy were mythic fictions embodying his different characteristics needs no detailed refutation at the present day. The attachment of the motive to Sceaf must be, as an examination of the sources shows, a later development. Hermann Möller's "son of the sheaf" theory, which makes the proper name Sceaf a mere development of the epithet "Scefing," taken as a patronymic, is still in many ways the most convincing one. Olrik agrees that Scyld was the hero of the boat-story before Sceaf was. He believes that Sceaf was originally Sceafa, the ruler of the Lombards mentioned in *Widsith*, and that his connection with Scyld was due to the Anglo-Saxon passion for genealogising. The sheaf, which comes into the tale in the version of William of Malmesbury, was, he thinks, a development out of the patronymic, and not vice versa. Both Heusler and Chadwick refuse to admit the identity of the names Sceaf and Sceafa. Chadwick argues that the sheaf is an original and

fundamental element, for which he finds support in popular tradition, and sees in Scyld the husband of Gefion, the goddess of agriculture. The transference of the story from Scyld to Scaef is, he says, accounted for by the desire to get rid of the inconsistency in telling a foundling-story of a child whose epithet Sceafing is taken to mean "son of Scaef."—We will not attempt to decide this problem. Whatever the conclusion, the theory that Beowa is an "hypostasis" of Scaef must be decisively rejected. And that Beowa had originally any relation to Scyld, that this was an "uralter Mythenbestand," as Brandl says, appears in the light of these recent researches, exceedingly doubtful.¹

The scope of the present paper precludes any detailed criticism of Müllenhoff and his followers and imitators. It is an exceedingly difficult task to summarize the opinions of scholars on mythology; they are frequently inconsistent and complicated by other theories.² Even among those who accept much of Müllenhoff's interpretation of Beowulf, there are expressions of distrust, of inquiry whether his reconstructions may not have been too daring.³ Criticism of Müllenhoff is really superfluous in view of the acute and searching analysis by Boer, who shows most convincingly the weakness of certain fundamental arguments of this system.⁴ Boer attacks with justice the idea that the order of the adventures in the present form of the epic must

¹ On this general subject, see Olrik, *Helteedigtning*, pp. 223 ff.; Chadwick, *Origin of the Eng. Nation*, pp. 269 ff.; Binz, Paul-Braune, *Beiträge*, vol. xx, pp. 147 ff.; Möller, *Altengl. Volksepos*, pp. 43 ff.; Müllenhoff, *Beowulf*, p. 9.

² For a discussion of this, see G. Schütte, *Oldsagn om Godtjod*, pp. 13-33, Cop., 1907. See esp. his summary, p. 31 f. "Kun hos enkelte Forskere finder vi fuld Udprægning af de hinanden modsatte Standpunkter: yderst paa Mytesiden staar Scherer og Kögel, yderst paa den 'flade Euhemerismes' Side staar Wilhelm Müller."

³ Mogk, Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. III, p. 244.

⁴ *Archiv*, loc. cit.

represent the old mythical sequence of summer and winter,—a fundamental necessity for the interpretation of the story as a “seasons-myth.” He has much to say, too, of the conclusions which were drawn from a comparison of Beowa and Sceaf-Scyld. With the constructive part of his monograph I am entirely unable to agree. The dragon and Grendel, he thinks, developed out of an earlier monster, whose mythical function it was to represent “the horrors of the long winter night.” The dragon-fight is now generally thought to be a later addition to the story, to have no organic connection with the earlier adventures. (Cf. Brandl, p. 996.) Even if comparison of the different versions of the saga did not lead to this conclusion, Boer’s theory could hardly maintain itself. One scarcely sees why a flying dragon which spews out fire, or a bone-cracking, vampire-like troll suggests the horror of winter nights, nor does Boer anywhere make this plain. Perhaps it is as reasonable as to equate a fire-drake in the air with the wintry sea, as Müllenhoff did. It looks, however, as though Boer had fallen into an error similar to that in which he has detected others, and laid himself open to the danger of being hoist with his own petar. His more detailed arguments are so little likely to command assent that it seems doubtful whether a mythical hypothesis based on them could prove convincing to anyone. On the other hand, he rightly lays great stress on certain changes in methods of investigation. Scholars have been slow to perceive that the mythology in Beowulf is the ultimate goal of criticism, and in no wise its starting-point. For the solution of so difficult a matter all the aid which other lines of investigation can give is needed.

One of the most recent, cautious, and authoritative statements of the present view in regard to mythology in the poem is to be found in Professor Brandl’s contribution to the *Grundriss* replacing ten Brink’s history of Anglo-

Saxon literature, left incomplete in consequence of his early death. Brandl makes the mythical elements the point of departure, as did earlier critics generally. It is impossible to do full justice to his statements, since lack of space has forced upon them a condensation which sometimes leaves doubt as to his exact meaning. His general position is clear, however. The swimming match with Breca he believes to be a nature-myth, resting upon observation of local conditions in the waters about the Scandinavian peninsula. Breca is "the breaker." "Das Motiv beruht auf der menschenartigen Ausmalung eines Naturvorganges: aufgebrochen und offen gehalten wird das südkandinavische Meer im Winter durch den Wind, im westlichen Norwegen aber sorgt der Golfstrom für freies Fahrwasser. Es ist offenbar eine Lokalbeobachtung aus der Nähe der alten Angelnheimat, die von den Eroberern mit nach England gebracht wurde." It is not clear just how the wind and the gulf-stream fit into the story. Where is the contest? Is Breca the wind and his companion the gulf-stream? That the peoples among whom such conceptions may be supposed to have arisen knew enough about ocean currents to personify them in this way seems highly doubtful, just as it does in the case of Müllenhoff's "polar current," which he equated with Breca. We shall inquire presently whether it is really necessary to assume any mythical basis in this episode at all. The identification of Breca with Breoca, the ruler of the Brondings mentioned by Widsith, seems reasonable enough, but gives us little assistance. There seems to be no real evidence that the Brondings were a sea-people. Brandl inclines to believe the slayer of Grendel a protecting agricultural hero—apparently by virtue of his race and name—while Grendel himself may stand for "corn-grinding, the work of slaves, the sign of the conquered foe." Yet, as Brandl admits, the name

“Grinder” is sufficiently accounted for by the crunching of the monster’s victims in his powerful teeth. The myth appears to be, on Brandl’s interpretation, a culture-myth, not a seasons-myth. This is more convincing,—seasons-myths are generally recognizable as such, as Lang says, which is not true of *Beowulf*,—and the separation of the dragon-incident destroys the cyclic character indispensable for such an interpretation. Yet one feels that the evidence is entirely insufficient to support Brandl’s reconstruction, cautious as it is, and inclines to accept rather his earlier statement that the separation of the old mythical kernel in the epic, in the Breca and the Grendel episodes, is an impossibility.¹

There is a certain inconsistency, too, in Brandl’s hypothesis, taken as a whole. He thinks the Grendel-story originated in the Scandinavian highlands, that it was taken by the Anglo-Saxons to Britain, and that its attachment to the figure of Beowa-Beowulf was due to them (p. 995). Beowa was a “Schutzheros des Ackerbaues,” (p. 992). But if the Grendel-motive was of Scandinavian origin, and later attached to Beowa, it cannot be a development of a myth of Beowa, and there is little propriety in assuming that Grendel represents corn-grinding, etc., unless one supposes that this foreign material was made over to fit abstract ideas, instead of growing out of them, as is usually held by the mythologists. In other words, the tale cannot have the organic connection with the Beowa-myth which is generally credited to it, if its attachment to Beowa was late and secondary.

¹ “Müllenhoff hat Grendel für die Nordsee, Mogk für einen Walfisch, Laistner für einen Nebel erklärt; Breca gilt bei Müllenhoff für den Sturm, bei Möller für den Golfstrom, bei Sarrazin für die untergehende Sonne, bei Heinzel nur für einen berühmten Schwimmer. Daraus ersieht man, wie wenig es möglich ist, den alten mythischen Kern noch herauszuschälen.” *Sitzungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 12-26 Feb., 1901. *Archiv*, vol. 108, p. 153.

In the last thirty years or so methods of mythological analysis have been subjected to a pretty searching criticism, with the result that much which was once thought canonical has since been rejected. In *Middlemarch* the mighty work upon which Mr. Casaubon was engaged was, we are told, "A Key to All Mythologies." There seems an even greater appropriateness to-day in this as a symbol of the fruitless efforts of scholarship to accomplish the impossible. The notion that one key or one kind of key would unlock the mysteries of all myths, even those of a single people or age, has been given up, and it has been more generally perceived that different systems of investigation may throw light on the matter in different ways. The philological method, to which a whole army of mythologists have pinned their faith, has been much narrowed in its application. On the other hand, the "anthropological" method, of which Mr. Andrew Lang has been the most ardent defender, has been found to explain far more convincingly the silly, brutal, and obscene elements in the myths of civilized people. *Beowulf* needs no such service as this. But the assaults of Lang and others at the philological fortress of Max Müller and those of his faith reveal the weaknesses in the entrenchments of the Müllenhoffian party. Much of the mythologising of *Beowulf* still rests upon etymologies, in regard to which there is little unanimity of opinion. History repeats itself; the same lack of agreement was characteristic of the deliberations of those who attempted to establish a system of comparative Indo-Germanic mythology in this way. And there has been increasing scepticism in regard to results so reached. Mannhardt's criticism of the methods to which he had once given allegiance is a familiar example. But there are modes in scholarship, as there are in dress. Perhaps, were Müllenhoff living to-day, he would hardly defend some of the linguistic explanations advanced in his book on *Beowulf*.

Consider the famous etymology of *Beaw*,—"das wort gehört zur wurzel bhû 'sein, wohnen, werden, wachsen,' . . und *Beaw* repräsentiert das ruhige wohnen und wirtschaften." Kögel sees in *Beowa* a waving wheat-field. Laistner connected the word with the Gothic *baugjan*, and made *Beowa* "der Feger," and a mist-hero. Brandl derives it from *búan*, "bauen." It cannot be said that any more real light is thrown upon *Beowa's* activities by these etymologies than by the charters and genealogies.

The same lack of agreement appears in explanations of the poem when considered as a whole. The older investigators were inclined to regard it as a seasons-myth, the more recent ones frequently see in it a culture-myth. Sijmons believes it a combination of the two,— "durch den Kulturmythus bricht der ältere Naturmythus durch, woraus er erwachsen ist." And so, partly on an imaginative and partly on a philological basis,—using the word in its broader sense—have these elaborate mythological structures been raised. Their champions endeavor to disarm suspicion by assuring us that their interpretations are "ungezwungen" or "nicht schwer." But they cannot all be right. Was the precursor of the present hero a wind-god, or a light-god, or a summer-god, or only a culture-hero? Was *Breca* the storm, or the gulf stream, or the setting sun? Was *Grendel* the sea, or a pestilential mist, or a werewolf, or the *Lernæan Hydra*? Is the dragon the "mists of the heights," or the stormy sea, or winter, or the terrors of the winter nights? One is reminded of Mr. Lang's sceptical comments on the myth of *Kronos*, "He may be Time, or perhaps he is the Summer Heat, and a horned god, or he is the harvest god, or the god of storm and darkness, or the midnight sky,—the choice is wide; or he is the lord of dark and light, and his children are the stars, the clouds, the summer-months, the light-powers, or

what you will. The mythologist has only to make his selection."¹

Much of the mythologising about *Beowulf* has been a purely imaginative process, carried on by scrutiny of the poem alone. Grendel has characteristics which connect him with the sea, others which connect him with mists, and it is distinctly said that he dwells in darkness. So a fairly good case can be made out for him as a sea-demon or a mist-demon or a darkness-demon. He has traits which remind one of Balder and Thor and Freyr. Some of his adventures bear a more or less striking resemblance to deeds done by those divinities, and his figure may possibly have been adorned with traits borrowed from one of them. But this does not warrant making him a humanized deity. There is little to check the riot of the investigator's fancy, even in connecting the events of the poem with incidents in Scandinavian or Indian mythology. It is not, indeed, wholly a false procedure to endeavor to get at the imaginative processes of early peoples by placing oneself as far as possible in sympathy with their ideas and ideals, and then letting imaginative speculation serve as a guide. It breaks down in the present case, at least, because the material with which we have to work has preserved so little of whatever mythological basis it may have had originally that no sure deductions or trustworthy imaginative reactions are possible, and because we have not yet gained a sufficient insight into early literature and story to speak with entire confidence of their transmutations. The case is precisely analogous to that of the "liedertheorie," the supporters of which attempted to reconstruct *Beowulf* on the basis of an ideal and modern conception of Anglo-Saxon style in its best epic estate. Or consider the mythological elements in the older

¹ *Custom and Myth*, p. 62.

tales in the *Mabinogion*. Professor Rhys has attempted to show in detail the nature of these elements, but his arguments have failed to carry conviction to conservative scholars. Mr. Alfred Nutt, for example, states his position as follows: "Thus, whilst I fully accept the mythological character of the Four Branches, I greatly doubt the possibility of a satisfactory mythological interpretation. The alterations have been too far-reaching, nor is it possible to say how far they may not be either deliberate or due to sheer caprice. . . . Professor Rhys' fascinating and ingenious 'solar' explanations may be read in his books . . . I cannot profess to be convinced by them."¹

In a sense, then, mythical interpretations of *Beowulf* cannot be refuted. A theory built upon imagination, rather than upon facts, can no more be disproved than established. If the parallels to mythical conceptions elsewhere than in Germanic literature are slight, the mythologist does not regard this as necessarily prejudicial to his case. And he is right; such resemblances must in the nature of things be slight, obscured by the lapse of time and differences of environment. The recurrence of typical motives does not necessarily constitute connection. The possibility that incidents, originally mythical, may have been transferred to a hero after their specifically mythical quality has faded out must also be considered. Fortuitous resemblances, too, there may well be. When Sarrazin, for instance, unites a large number of heroic stories into one great class of Balder-Frey myths, there is really no way of refuting the theory. The resemblances, had the development been actually as he conceives it, would probably have been no more striking than they are. The question is merely whether one believes

¹ *The Mabinogion*, translated by Lady Guest, with notes by Alfred Nutt, London, 1902, p. 332.

in the possibility of applying such criteria and getting definite results. To many the conclusions will seem as shadowy as the arguments. And, in the same way, no absolute refutation of the mythological reconstructions of Müllenhoff or Laistner appears possible.

There is a strong allurement about such methods. The man who would fathom the imaginative literature of early days must be something of a poet as well as a scholar. "Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muss in Dichters Lande gehen." So Uhland interpreted myth and saga. And great subtlety and learning have been devoted to fathoming the secret of *Beowulf*. Moreover, the task has the fascination of any puzzle, the same charm which sets men to studying anew the career of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, or the Man of the Iron Mask, or finding new subtleties in *Hamlet*. It is probably a safe assertion that nine-tenths of all that critics have discerned in *Hamlet* was never dreamed of by Shakspeare. And so with our epic. It has been a fashion in criticism to see allegory hidden beneath the surface of a seemingly straightforward narrative. There has been a whole school of investigators, who, to borrow a phrase from Rajna, cannot see a cat chase a mouse without imagining therein the eternal struggle of day and night, or of summer and winter. It is well to be cautious about plundering, for the sake of a fancied scholarly completeness, an antiquity of which we no longer possess the secret.

It only remains for scepticism to take one step more to make incredulity complete. Why assume a mythical framework in *Beowulf* at all?

This is heresy of the first degree. Müllenhoff laid it down as an axiom at the beginning of his studies that "every epic saga and the substance of every popular epic consists of two elements, myth and history." Later investigators proceed on essentially the same principle. Sievers, for

example, speaks of "die beiden in unserem epos verquickten Überlieferungsgeschichten, die ich kurzweg 'mythus' und 'sage' nennen will."¹ But what is there in the story of *Beowulf* which justifies us in explaining it as a broken-down nature or culture myth? It can hardly have retained any such significance for those who heard it in its present form. No one will dispute that a study of primitive society shows a strong tendency among primitive peoples to personify abstract ideas or natural forces, and to present these in the concrete narrative dress which we call myth. On the other hand, it is equally certain that they must have had other narratives, some based on imaginary events, others historical, though sometimes only in the sense that they actually happened, and not deserving all the dignity that the term "historical" implies. Such stories would be elaborated by imaginative accretions of popular fancy, but would have no connection with operations of nature, states of culture, abstract ideas, or divinities, except in so far as the natural tendency to exalt a hero may have led to giving him god-like attributes. The story of *Beowulf* and *Breca*, to take a concrete illustration, may well be no more than an exaggerated swimming-match between two mortal men, an event which made itself remembered by the endurance of the contestants. Or it may have been purely imaginary in its origin, having no connection with gods or meteorological observations. Elaborations come easily to an early people; hence the seven days in the water, and the fights with the sea-monsters. So *Roland*, who is no more mythical than *Roosevelt*, blows his horn with such vigor that it is heard miles away, performs prodigies of valor impossible for a mortal, while the very sun in the heavens stops in its course to aid in avenging him. The swimming-match, it is impor-

¹ *Sitzungsber. der Gesell. der Wiss. zu Leipzig*, vol. XLVII, p. 175.

tant to observe, was a friendly contest of strength between two youths, and in no way suggests the defeat of a baleful power by a beneficent one.

Wit þæt gecwædon cniht-wesende
 ond gebēotedon (wæron bēgen þā gīt
 on geogoð-fēore) þæt wit on gār-secg ūt
 aldrum nēðdon ; ond þæt geæfndon swā.¹

Yet how this simple situation has been distorted by the mythologists !

Nor is there any need of assuming a mythical² origin for the contest with Grendel, unless one believes that every spook is traceable to such an origin. There can be little doubt that Grendel is the product of the imagination of many men, and that if in the beginning he did have a clearly defined character, whether mythical or realistic, this has been much obscured by later conceptions. How shall we determine the first stage in the growth of his figure? Skeat, going to the opposite extreme from the mythologists, conjectured that the story was originally that of a fight with a gigantic bear. This is possible, but there is no way to prove it. It is quite as likely that the various bear-characteristics which Grendel displays are due to the tendency of simple people to make their demons vivid by giving them

¹ Ll. 535 ff.

² It is hardly necessary to explain that the word "myth," as used in the present paper, does not mean merely an invented story, something having no existence in fact, but "a traditional story in which the operations of natural forces and occurrences in human history are represented as the actions of individual living beings, especially of men, or of imaginary extra-human beings acting like men." See the full definition in the *Century Dictionary* under *myth*. It will be observed that a mere folk-tale, even one to the hero of which divine attributes have been given, does not belong under this definition, unless it can be shown that the adventures narrated were conceived at some time as explaining abstract ideas or natural phenomena.

the attributes of their enemies in the beast-world. Nobody knows how a fiend looks; he has to be visualized, like the mediæval devil, by imagining in him the terrible and repulsive traits of beasts. The descent from Cain is only a more easily separable and recognizable example of this tendency to elaborate Grendel's figure. Could we follow the shifting shapes of the monster back through the years, we should probably be astonished at the variety of his transformations. But we must be careful not to attach undue importance to any one set of characteristics, however prominent they may be. An uncanny creature of evil, Grendel abides in darkness, fog, and desolation, because the mystery and terror that surround him are thus heightened, but this is no reason for regarding him as a personification of any one of them. There is really no evidence of myth beyond the supernatural in the story, and that is of course no evidence at all. No explanatory quality makes itself felt; there are no clear signs that the central figure of the epic was once a deity. Never once, so far as I can see, is one justified in assuming that the deeds of Beowulf are not those of a mortal hero, with such exaggerations as have been added to the exploits of heroes of all ages, from Alexander to Richard the Lion-Hearted.

I feel that it may well be doubted, then, that the adventures of Beowulf have the sort of origin commonly assigned to them, and even if they have such an origin, I question whether it is possible, with the evidence now at command, to arrive at any safe conclusions in regard to these early developments. The determination of how far mythical beginnings may be assumed for the epic in general is too large a subject to be discussed here. But that this element in epic has been vastly exaggerated seems beyond dispute. One cannot do better than to read the brilliant criticism by Pio Rajna, in the opening chapter of his *Origini dell' Epopea*

Francesca, first published in 1884. He may well be selected as a representative of the opponents of the Müllenhoffian school because of his learning and impartiality, and because he has stated his case with great vigor and clearness. He says: "The opinion most in favor among scholars who have thus far occupied themselves with this subject is undoubtedly this: that the origins of epic are mythical, or that the deeds upon which the epic in its primitive state is based may be reduced, in the last analysis, to mere symbolical expressions of the phenomena of nature." . . . The conclusion of his criticism he sums up as follows: "Therefore, before it could have been furnished by the heavens, epic material already existed upon earth, not only in actual facts, but also as an object of thought and imagination. The myth is, then, itself a reflection of conceptions adapted to produce the epic, which have in reality, independently of any celestial intervention, produced poems and songs without number. Nay, more, it is necessary to go farther; there is not, at bottom, any other material than this in the epic. The smallest deduction which may be drawn from this is that the hypothesis of mythical origin is at least superfluous. But whoever considers that this hypothesis forces us to argue in a vicious circle, and makes us leap through the clouds only to find ourselves ultimately at the very place from which we started, will be inclined to go a little farther, and to pronounce it contrary to the natural order of things."¹

The poem loses nothing of its picturesqueness in being denied its mythology. The fire-drake and Grendel and the she-demon are more terrible when conceived as uncanny and abominable beings whose activities in the world can only be dimly imagined by men than they are when made mere per-

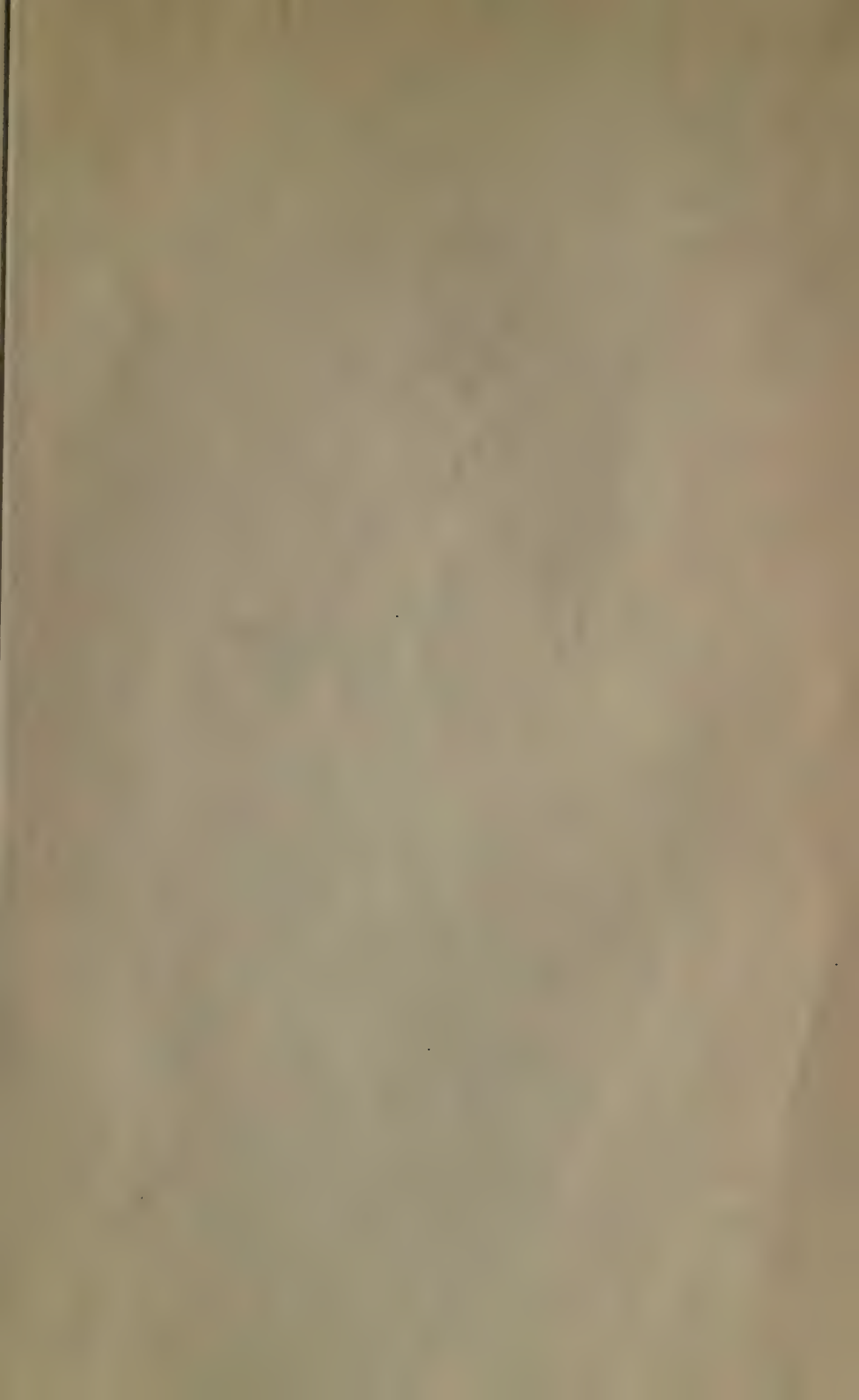
¹ P. 10.

sonifications of the forces of nature. Beowulf is no less heroic as a mortal facing with undaunted courage these grisly phantoms of the moor and mere than as a god subduing the sea or the darkness. And the proud words that he utters in his dying hour are more impressive from the lips of a man than from those of a being who still retains some of the glory of a god about him,—“In my home I awaited what time might bring me, held well mine own, sought no treacherous feuds, swore no false oaths. In all this I can rejoice, though sick unto death with my wounds.”

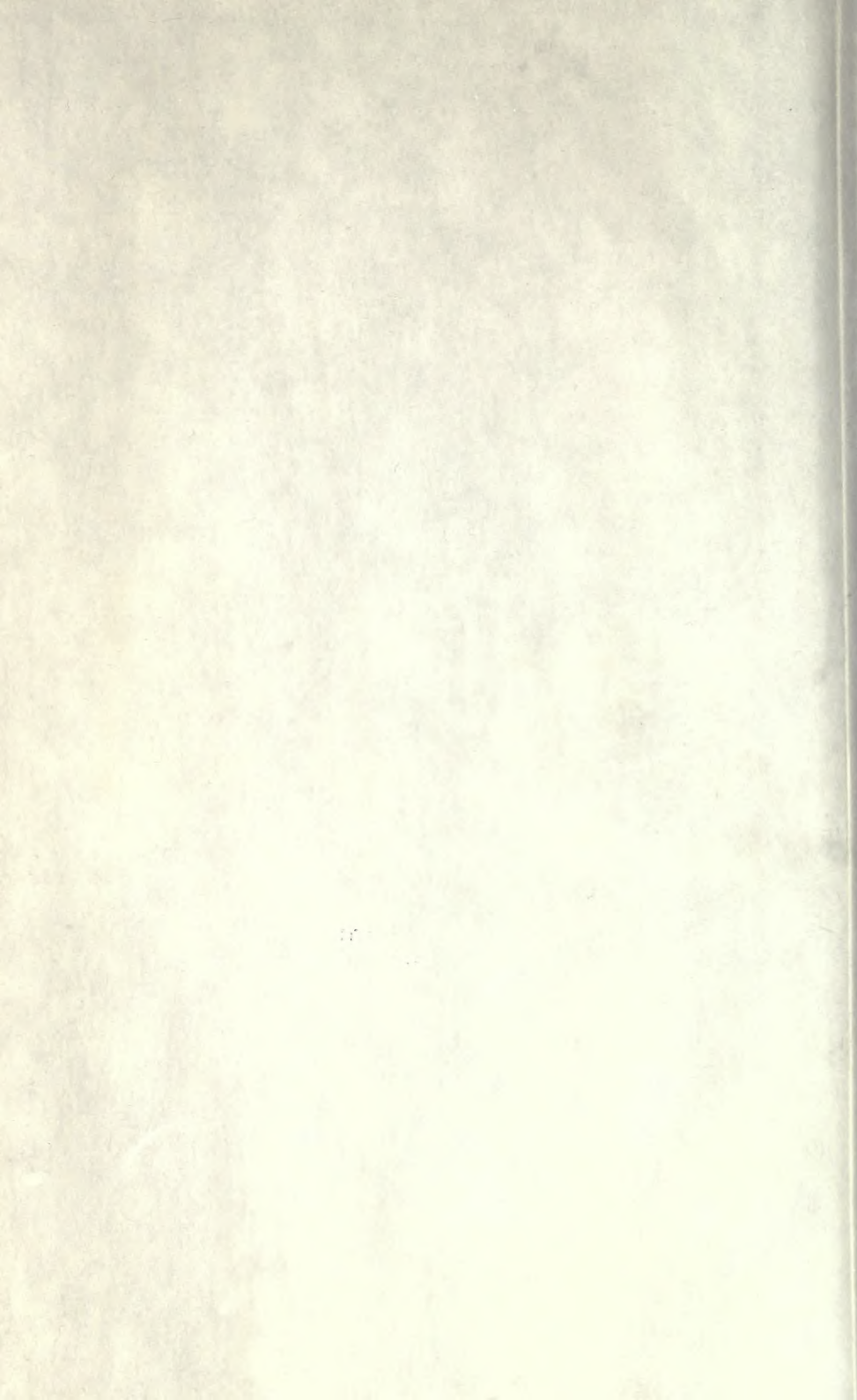
WILLIAM WITHERLE LAWRENCE.

NOTE :—Since the above was sent to the printer, Professor Gummere has expressed his opinion in regard to mythological elements in *Beowulf* in no uncertain way. “Undoubtedly one is here on the border-land of myth. But in the actual poem the border is not crossed. Whatever the remote connection of Beowulf the hero with Beowa the god, whatever this god may have in him of the old Ingævonian deity whom men worshipped by North Sea and Baltic as god of fertility and peace and trade, whatever echo of myths about a destroying monster of invading ocean tides and storms may linger in the story of Grendel and his horrible mother, nothing of the sort comes out of the shadow of conjecture into the light of fact. To the poet of the epic its hero is a man, and the monsters are such as folk then believed to haunt sea and lake and moor. Hrothgar’s people who say they have seen the uncanny pair speak just as real rustics would speak about ghosts and strange monsters which they had actually encountered. In both cases one is dealing with folk-lore and not with mythology. When these crude superstitions are developed by priest and poet along polytheistic lines, and in large relations of time and space, myth is the result. But the actual epic of Beowulf knows nothing of this process; and there is no need to regard Grendel or his mother as backed by the artillery of doom, to regard Beowulf as the embodiment of heaven’s extreme power and goodwill.” (*The Oldest English Epic*, N. Y., 1900, pp. 5f.) A statement more completely in accord with the point of view in the present article could scarcely be desired.—W. W. L.









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Some disputed questions in
Beowulf-criticism. --

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