

Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar and the Originality of *Beowulf*

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ABSTRACT

For over a century and a half, scholars have worked to establish links between medieval Scandinavian saga material and the Old English alliterative epic *Beowulf*. The present article investigates connections between the Anglo-Saxon poem and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*—an Old Norse saga unique for preserving a story about a Geatish monster-killer who, like *Beowulf*, is active in Denmark and then returns to rule his homeland as king. This investigation is first situated within the broader currents of the research field and some key assumptions about the relationship between *Beowulf* and its Old Norse analogues are set out. The parallels between the monster-fights of *Beowulf* and *Hrólfr Gautreksson* are then considered in detail. *Hrólfr's* slaying of *Grímarr* in Denmark, and of his vengeful relative *Grímnir* further afield, are compared in turn with *Beowulf's* fateful encounters with *Grendel* and his mother. Consideration is then given to the links between the careers and movements of these two heroes. It is demonstrated that intriguing parallels exist between the early life, fosterage and accession of these figures. The narrative links established in this article between *Beowulf* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* shed new light upon the shape of the folktale from which both texts may ultimately derive. It is argued that the political and geographical connections between these narratives tentatively point to a more significant conclusion: that both *Beowulf* and *Hrólfs saga* perhaps draw upon an older narrative concerning a Geatish monster-killer. This allows for a new insight into the relative originality of the Old English epic.

It is now beyond doubt that the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* shares important links with Old Norse saga material. Since *Guðbrandur Vigfússon's* landmark discovery in 1873 of connections between the monster-fights in *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, the identification and discussion of Scandinavian analogues to the poem has constituted a field in its own right within *Beowulf* studies: books and articles treating the subject run into the hundreds.¹ These analogues continue to be

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1 *Sturlunga Saga Including the Islendinga Saga of Law-man Sturla Thordsson and Other Works*, vol. 1 (Oxford 1878), xlix, n. 1.

discussed in contemporary literature on *Beowulf*.² Texts bearing similarities to *Beowulf* are also still being unearthed in the Old Norse corpus, with an episode from the chivalric *Þiðreks saga af Bern* being added to the mix as recently as 2019.³ A century and a half of research on *Beowulf* analogues has yielded an insight into the relationship between the Old English epic and earlier tradition—a matter pertinent to the question of *Beowulf*'s relative originality.

The present article contributes another Scandinavian analogue to the already expansive collection. The text in question is *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (hereafter *HsG*), a *fornaldarsaga* or 'saga of an ancient time'. This saga, which survives in two recensions, was likely written in the thirteenth century, making it one of the earliest attested sagas of its type in the Old Norse corpus.⁴ Scholarship on this saga is sparse, and chiefly focuses on the maiden-king Þornbjörg.⁵ Resemblances between *Beowulf* and *HsG* have received no more than a passing mention to date.⁶ This is surprising given that the protagonist of this text is, besides *Beowulf*, the only extant example of a Gautish, or Geatish, monster-killer active in Denmark.⁷ The monster-fights in which Hrólfur engages also display some important similarities to *Beowulf*'s combats with Grendel and his mother. In what follows, the plot of the two monster-fight episodes in *HsG* which correspond to *Beowulf* will be outlined, and the extent of their connection to the poem's narrative will be assessed. The significance of Hrólfur's status as a Gautish prince and his interactions with the Danish court will then be considered. These will allow for new reflections on the development and relative originality of the *Beowulf* narrative.

- 2 Francis Leneghan, *The Dynastic Drama of Beowulf*, Anglo-Saxon Studies, 39 (Woodbridge, 2020), passim; see especially 111–18; Michael Fox, *Following the Formula in Beowulf, Örvar-Odds saga and Tolkien* (London, 2020), especially 30–5; 157–93.
- 3 Jacob Hobson, 'An Old Norse Courtly Analogue to *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus*, 103/3 (2019), 577–89.
- 4 The earliest manuscript containing the saga, AM 567 XIV β 4to, is fragmentary, and dates from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (Jonathan Y. H. Hui, 'The Matter of Gautland', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2018, 159; see 162–3 on the textual transmission of *HsG*).
- 5 Lise Præstgaard Andersen, *Skjoldmoer: En kvindemyte* (Copenhagen, 1982); Carol J. Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', *JEGP*, 85 (1986), 35–49; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Hygginn ok forsjál: Wisdom and Women's Counsel in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*', in Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (eds), *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur* (London, 2010), 69–84; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'From Heroic Legend to "Medieval Screwball Comedy": The Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Maiden-King Narrative', in Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (eds), *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development* (Reykjavík, 2012), 229–49; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Misogamous Maiden Kings of Icelandic Romance', *Scripta Islandica*, 37 (1986), 47–71; Sif Ríkhardsdóttir, 'Meykóngahæðin í riddarsögum: Hugmyndafræðileg átök um kynhlutverk og þjóðfélagsstöðu', *Skírning*, 184 (2010), 410–33; Erik Wahlgren, 'The Maiden King in Iceland', PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1938.
- 6 Lee Hollander, 'The Gautland Cycle of Sagas. I. The Source of the Polyphemos Episode of the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*', *JEGP*, 11 (1912), 61–81 (at 71); Mathias Kruse, *Literatur als Spektakel: Hyperbolische und komische Inszenierung des Körpers in isländischen Ritter- und Abenteuersagas* (Munich, 2016), 594, n. 1641; *Beowulf. The Fight at Finnsburh*, tr. Kevin Crossley-Holland and ed. Heather O'Donoghue (Oxford, 1999), 117, n. 52.
- 7 Hrólfur Gautreksson is not the only Gautish monster-killer in the saga corpus, however. Herraudr of *Bósa saga ok Herrauds* is the son of King Hringr of Eystra-Gautland (modern-day Östergötland) and also slays monsters abroad. However, there is little that invites comparison between Herraudr's exploits and those of *Beowulf* (J. Michael Stitt, *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition* (New York, NY, 1992), 108). For a recent reconsideration of the location of *Beowulf*'s Geats, see Bo Gräslund, *Beowulfkvædet: den nordiska bakgrunden* (Uppsala, 2018), 59–74, 123–33.

I. SCHOLARLY HISTORY

First, however, it is necessary to provide a brief account of the state of the research field in order to introduce several key concepts for the forthcoming discussion and to situate *HsG* within the current debate. Research into Scandinavian analogues to date can be grouped into two areas. First, scholars have explored narrative or folkloric connections between *Beowulf* and an ever-growing collection of Old Norse texts, especially prose sagas. Second, scholars have considered the degree to which *Beowulf* shares historical or legendary connections with medieval Scandinavian literature.

Interest in narrative links between *Beowulf* and Scandinavian texts began following Guðbrandur Vigfússon's exposition of the similarity between Beowulf's monster-killings and those of Grettir Ásmundarson. Of the analogues identified to date, Grettir's combats with the trolls at Sandhaugar and his defeat of Glámr at Þórhallssta-ir have received the lion's share of attention.⁸ The former episode is particularly well-known for preserving the famous compound *heptisax* (hafted dagger), a *hapax legomenon* in Old Norse which is perennially compared with its Old English near-cognate *hæftmēce* (hafted sword).⁹ Other episodes in *Grettis saga* have been compared with Beowulf's monster-fights, but these have not found such wide acceptance.¹⁰

Interest in narrative analogues beyond *Grettis saga* developed in the wake of Friedrich Panzer's seminal work of 1910.¹¹ Panzer linked Beowulf's monster-killings to the international 'Bear's Son' folktale, otherwise known as AT301 'The Three Stolen Princesses', which is well-represented in Old Norse saga material. This folktale includes many elements present in *Beowulf*, such as the hero's bear-like qualities; descent into a monstrous dwelling; and abandonment by his companions. In the early twentieth century Panzer's exposition of the folktale foundation of Beowulf's monster-fights was generally accepted—in some cases with caution—but it undeniably revolutionized the study of narrative analogues to the Old English epic.¹²

Panzer's work encouraged scholars to search more widely for connections between Old Norse material and *Beowulf*, and search they did: as a number of handbooks indicate, a great many texts have been identified as *Beowulf* analogues to date.¹³ The majority of these were discovered and discussed in the period following

8 Theodore Andersson, 'Sources and Analogues', in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds), *A Beowulf Handbook* (Lincoln, NE, 1998), 125–48 (at 129–31).

9 Anatoly Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir', in Bela Brogyanyi and Thomas Krömmelbein (eds), *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations* (Amsterdam, 1986), 353–401 (at 367–83).

10 For these analogues see Andy Orchard, 'Grettir and Grendel Again', in his *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Toronto, 1995), 143–52; 164–8 and Magnús Fjalldal, *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection Between Beowulf and Grettis saga* (Toronto, 1998), 10–16.

11 *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte, Vol. I: Beowulf* (Munich, 1910).

12 William Witherle Lawrence, 'The Haunted Mere in *Beowulf*', *PMLA*, 2 (1912), 208–45 and *Beowulf and Epic Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1928), 171, though compare Carl W. von Sydow, *Beowulf och Bjarke, Studier i nordisk filologi*, 14/3 (Helsingfors, 1923), 28 and Richard C. Boer, *Die altenglische Heldendichtung. I: Beowulf*, Germanistische Handbibliothek, 11 (Halle, 1912), 167. R. W. Chambers seemingly accepted Panzer's ideas with reservation; see his *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, 1959), 62–3, 68, 380.

13 Klaeber's *Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, 4th edn (Toronto, 2008), xxxvi–xliii, 291–315 (hereafter *K4*); Stitt, *Bear's Son; Beowulf and its Analogues*, tr. G. N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson (London, 1968).

Panzer's work.¹⁴ Much of the present corpus of Old Norse 'Bear's Son' analogues was assembled and analysed by Peter Jorgensen in the 1970s and 80s.¹⁵ Jorgensen established a new Scandinavian *oikotype* of the 'Bear's Son' folktale known as the 'Two-Troll' type, which bears particularly close similarities to the first half of the *Beowulf* narrative. 'Two-Troll' narratives feature a conflict between a warrior and two related monsters, usually a parent-child or husband-wife couple. Grettir's encounter with the trolls at Sandhaugar adheres to this type, as do the troll-fights in important analogues such as *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*.

Grettis saga and other 'Bear's Son' tales contain parallels to the first half of the *Beowulf* narrative, but are admittedly remote from the heroic world of Scyldings, Scylfings and Hreðlings which is so central to the Old English epic. The second strand in *Beowulf* analogue scholarship has explored links between the 'dynastic drama' of *Beowulf* (to borrow a phrase from Leneghan) and medieval Scandinavian material. The *Beowulf* poet's Scyldings and Scylfings, or Skjöldungar and Skilfingar/Ynglingar in Old Norse, are abundantly attested in medieval Scandinavian texts such as *Hrólfs saga kraka*; *Snorra Edda*; the now-lost *Skjöldunga saga* and Saxo Grammaticus' Latin *Gesta Danorum*.¹⁶

Hrólfs saga kraka (hereafter *HsK*), a fourteenth-century *fornaldarsaga*, has received the majority of attention in this strand of *Beowulf* studies because it preserves what many believe to be the same basic narrative and roster of characters as the Old English work. One of the protagonists of the saga is a certain Böðvarr *bjarki* ('little bear'), a Scandinavian prince who has frequently been connected with *Beowulf*. The action of the relevant episode takes place at Hleiðargarðr, which, like Heorot, is Denmark's principal royal hall and seat of the Skjöldungar.¹⁷ The king whom Böðvarr serves is a certain Hrólfur *kraki*, *Beowulf's* Hroðulf, who is the nephew of Hróarr or Hroðgar. Analogues exist in the saga to many of *Beowulf's* minor characters, including Eadgils, Onela, Heorowearð, Froða and even Hondscio.¹⁸ *HsK* also features a monster-fight which has been frequently compared to *Beowulf's* own. In this episode, Böðvarr travels from Gautland to Hleiðargarðr and slays a winged beast which has been attacking the king's hall.

Although this episode bears some similarities with *Beowulf's* struggle with Grendel, it has not enjoyed the same celebrated status as Grettir's combat with

14 Lawrence, *Epic Tradition*, 172–203; Chambers, *Introduction*, 48–68; 451–78 and 'Beowulf's Fight with Grendel and Its Scandinavian Parallels', *English Studies*, 11 (1929), 81–100; Nora K. Chadwick, 'The Monsters and Beowulf', in Peter Clemons (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins* (London, 1959), 171–203; G. V. Smithers, *The Making of Beowulf* (Durham, 1961).

15 'The Two-Troll Variant of the Bear's Son Folktale in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*', *Arv*, 31 (1975), 35–43; 'Beowulf's Swimming Contest with Breca: Old Norse Parallels', *Folklore*, 89 (1978), 52–9; 'The Gift of the Useless Weapon in *Beowulf* and the Icelandic Sagas', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 94 (1979), 82–90; 'Additional Icelandic Analogues to *Beowulf*', in Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (eds), *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 65th Birthday, 26th May 1986* (Vienna, 1986), 201–8.

16 For selections see K4, 294–315 and Tom Shippey, 'Hrólfs saga kraka and the Legend of Lejre', in Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (eds), *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur* (London, 2010), 24–5.

17 John D. Niles, 'On the Danish Origins of the *Beowulf* Story', in Hans Sauer and Joanna Story (eds), *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent* (Tempe, AZ, 2011), 41–62 (at 41–5).

18 Richard North, *The Origins of Beowulf: From Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2007), 51–2.

Glámr or the Sandhaugar trolls. Axel Olrik famously claimed that only by combining elements of all of Beowulf's monster-fights would anything resembling Böðvarr's feat be produced.¹⁹ It is also significant that Böðvarr is not in any meaningful sense 'from Gautland', as has occasionally been assumed, but is instead a scion of a Norwegian royal house.²⁰ Accordingly the value of *HsK* as a *Beowulf* analogue has been a matter of contention over the last century, with some commentators rejecting it²¹ and others—especially in recent years—considering it a window into the heroic universe out of which *Beowulf* arose.²² The importance of *HsK* in *Beowulf*-analogue studies will be returned to in due course.

The impact of the work on Scandinavian *Beowulf* analogues over the last century and a half cannot be doubted: there are some twenty-five medieval Scandinavian texts identified as bearing similarities to *Beowulf* in Stitt's 1992 study alone.²³ Few scholars now dispute the claim that the first half of *Beowulf* was constructed from the same oral folktale complex which gave rise to this corpus of texts.²⁴ Further, it is widely acknowledged that *Beowulf* drew upon heroic and dynastic traditions which prevailed in Scandinavia. The looming collection of Old Norse analogues occupies an important position in the debate about the originality of the *Beowulf* narrative. This is in spite of the significant chronological and geographical gulf between the Old English epic and the related Scandinavian material.²⁵ Armed with the necessary context, it is now appropriate to consider *HsG*'s relationship to *Beowulf* and to ask how this text contributes to the aged debate concerning the originality of the Old English epic.

- 19 *Danmarks heltedigtning: En oldtidsstudie, vol. 1: Rolf Krake og den ældre skjoldningsrække* (Copenhagen, 1903), 135–6.
- 20 See, for example, Chambers, *Introduction*, 59 and Niles, 'Danish Origins', 57, n. 41. Böðvarr succeeds his grandfather, Hringr, who was king of Uppdalir (modern-day Oppdal) in Norway. The misconception that Böðvarr was from Gautland presumably developed from the fact that, like Beowulf, he sets out from there to Denmark. Böðvarr's stay in Gautland is brief, however, and is the subject of only a few lines in chapter 32 of *HsK*.
- 21 Oscar L. Olson, *The Relation of the Hrólf's saga kraka and the Bjarkarímur to Beowulf* (Chicago, IL, 1916), 13–20; Larry D. Benson, 'The Originality of *Beowulf*', in Morton W. Bloomfield (ed.), *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 15–19; Andersson, 'Sources and Analogues', 131–3.
- 22 John D. Niles, 'Beowulf and Lejre', in John D. Niles (ed.), *Beowulf and Lejre, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 22 (Turnhout, 2007), 169–234; 'Danish Origins', 56–61; North, *Origins*, 45–57; Leneghan, *Dynastic Drama*, passim.
- 23 *Bear's Son*.
- 24 Compare, however, Magnús Fjalldal, *Coincidence and 'Beowulf' and the Old Norse Two-Troll Analogues*, *Neophilologus*, 97 (2013), 541–53. While an oral folktale source can be adduced with relative security for *Beowulf* and its saga analogues, the position of these texts themselves on the oral-literary continuum is a more controversial question which is beyond the scope of the present article. On the oral-formulaic character of *Beowulf* see Fox, *Following the Formula*, 1–42 and the references there; on orality in Icelandic saga literature see Gísli Sigurðsson, tr. Nicholas Jones, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2 (Boston, MA, 2004); on wider questions of medieval orality see Karl Reichl (ed.), *Medieval Oral Literature* (Berlin, 2012).
- 25 The controversial question of the age of *Beowulf* has not entered significantly into discussion of the poem's Scandinavian analogues, as it is generally maintained that the epic shares an oral prehistory with Scandinavian versions of the 'Bear's Son' folktale whether its date of composition is taken to be early or late. Such a view may raise questions of its own, but there is not sufficient scope to consider the date of *Beowulf* in the present discussion. This topic is fully addressed in a recent collection of essays, Leonard Neidorf (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Woodbridge, 2014); see especially Neidorf, 'Introduction', 1–18.

II. HRÓLFR'S FIGHT WITH GRÍMARR

The first episode which is relevant to this discussion concerns Hrólfr Gautreksson's conflict with the monstrous Grímarr in Denmark. A summary follows, with significant points numbered for discussion:

At the request the Danish prince Ingjaldr, Hrólfr Gautreksson travels from Gautland to Denmark (1) with his companions to attend the funeral of the former king, Hringr. As Hrólfr reaches the shore of Zealand, he spies some magnificent ships. Hrólfr's companion Ásmundr informs him that they are owned by Grímarr Grímólfsson, a *víkingr* and a *tröll* (2) who drinks blood (3) and whom iron does not bite (4). Ásmundr tells Hrólfr of a disastrous encounter between Grímarr and himself on a previous occasion (5). Grímarr is attended by eleven companions, who are similarly described (6). Hrólfr instructs his men to procure clubs from the forest (7), and they attack Grímarr's ships. After some heated naval combat, he offers Hrólfr and his men quarter, which Hrólfr refuses. The battle restarts, and Hrólfr's forces gain the upper hand over Grímarr and his men. Grímarr leaps overboard (8), and both Ásmundr and Hrólfr dive into the ocean after him. Once Grímarr arrives at the shore, Hrólfr slays him with a club. Hrólfr's men travel to the Danish court and a lavish feast is held (9). The slaying of Grímarr is celebrated (10). After the festivities, the heir to the Danish throne, Ingjaldr, is made king (11). Hrólfr and his men sail away from Denmark with many gifts (12).

As points 2 to 4 in the above summary indicate, Grímarr exhibits similarities to Grendel. The saga has it that 'hann bíta eigi járn' ('iron does not harm him'), 'hann er mikill ok illiligr' ('he is huge and hideous'), and he and his men 'eta allir hrátt ok drekka blóð' ('all eat raw flesh and drink blood').²⁶ The reader will be reminded of Grendel who, while in Heorot, 'bāt bānlocan, blōd ēdrum dranc, | synsædum swealh' ('bit into muscle, drank blood from the veins, swallowed sinful chunks [of flesh]').²⁷ As the motif of monsters drinking blood is highly unusual in the saga corpus, this parallel is notable. Grendel's specific invulnerability to iron is also stressed in *Beowulf*: 'þone synscaðan | ænig ofer eorþan irenna cyst, | gūðbilla nān, grētan nolde' ('no war-blade, not the best iron on earth, would strike the evildoer').²⁸

Grímarr, like Grendel, straddles the boundary between man and monster. On the one hand he and his companions are clearly demarcated from ordinary humans. Ásmundr tells Hrólfr that 'er þat sannkallat, at þeir sé heldr tröll en menn' ('it is true to say that they are monsters rather than men'), and the saga author distinguishes between Grímarr and his retainers and the *mannsbörn* ('children of man') who are

26 *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, vol. 4 (Reykjavík, 1950), 99 (hereafter FS4). This edition contains the longer redaction of the saga, which is quoted throughout the present article. For the shorter redaction, see *Zwei Fornaldarsögur: Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar und Ásmundarsaga kappabana nach Cod. Holm.* 7, 4¹⁰, ed. Ferdinand Detter (Halle, 1891), 1–78. Translations in this article are my own.

27 K4, 743a–744b.

28 K4, 801b–803b.

pitted against him.²⁹ Grímarr himself is also described as a *fjándi mikill* ('great fiend'). On the other hand, Grímarr is able to converse with Hrólfr, and is also described as a *maðr* ('man'). In much the same way, Grendel is at once a *helle gæst* ('spirit of hell'), *eoten* ('giant'), *þyr* ('monster'), and, like Grímarr, a *fēond*, but also a *wer*, *secg* ('man') and *healdēgn* ('hall-thane'). This is an unusual departure from many Old Norse 'Two-Troll' stories, in which the antagonists are characterized by their total inhumanity.³⁰

Grímarr's status as 'inn mesti víkingr' ('the greatest raider') as well as a *tröll* (2) is typical of Old Norse 'Two-Troll' tales, and also matches Grendel in his capacity as a marauding demon.³¹ It should be noted, however, that the first adversary in most *Beowulf* analogues assails men in their halls in the same manner as Grendel. Grímarr's nature as a seagoing *víkingr* who raids year-round is a clear departure from the *Beowulf* narrative, but is conceivably a development of the 'trollish raider' figure usually encountered in the initial monster-fight. Other examples of this development exist in the Old Norse corpus.³²

That Grímarr is attended by a troop of seemingly identical companions (6) is another departure from Beowulf's fight with Grendel. However, the multiplication of enemies for dramatic effect—particularly in the initial monster-fight—is not unique to *HsG* among Scandinavian analogues. In *Sörla saga sterka*, Sörla is attacked by a group of twelve monstrous warriors who turn out to be the sons of two cave-dwelling trolls encountered later in the text. In these cases, it is probable that the 'trollish raider' figure has been influenced by the motif of the 'twelve berserks' which is widespread in Old Norse saga material.³³

Other elements in the above summary point to possible narrative and contextual links between Hrólfr's conflict with Grímarr and Beowulf's fight with Grendel. Like Beowulf, Hrólfr arrives from Gautland after hearing tidings from Denmark (1). Hrólfr also learns of Grímarr's terrible depredations before he meets him in combat. Ásmundr informs Hrólfr that he and Grímarr had met in a sea-battle the previous summer, and that Grímarr had killed all of his men (5). Beowulf similarly hears of Grendel's depredations in Denmark before confronting him: 'þæt fram hām gefrægn Higelāces þegn | gōd mid Ġeatum, Grendles dæda' ('Hygelac's thane, good among the Geats, heard of Grendel's deeds from home').³⁴

The configuration of Grímarr as a seagoing *víkingr* had a predictable impact on the narrative shape of his battle with Hrólfr, and this accounts for the most

29 FS4, 99. The Old Norse term *tröll* is broader in meaning than its Modern English descendant and could refer to a wide variety of monstrous beings; see Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of *Troll* and *Ergi* in Medieval Iceland', *Saga-Book*, 32 (2008), 44–55.

30 Magnús Fjalldal, *Coincidence*, 22–3.

31 FS4, 99.

32 *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* features a coastal raider, Faxi, who is described as a *jötunn* and *víkingr*. Faxi's conflict with the saga's protagonist includes motifs such as gore on the water and an underwater struggle recognizable from Beowulf's conflict with Grendel's mother and the second encounter in many 'Two-Troll' stories. This suggests that the seagoing nature of Faxi, and indeed of Grímarr, may reflect influence from the 'nearby water' motif common in second monster fight (see Jørgensen, 'Additional Icelandic Analogues', 205). On *Þorsteins saga* as an analogue see Stitt, *Bear's Son*, 100–3 and Jørgensen, 'Swimming', 55.

33 See motif F610.3.3 in Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana, 27 (Copenhagen, 1966).

34 *K4*, 194a–195b.

noticeable departures from the *Beowulf* narrative. As Hrólfr's fight with Grímarr could not occur in a hall setting, the hero's typical wrestling match with the monster is configured as a naval conflict, and familiar motifs such as removal of the monster's arm are absent entirely. Hrólfr and his companions' acquisition of clubs (7) is likely a later addition designed to respond to Grímarr's invulnerability to iron (4), which is the more traditional motif. Other similarities to the *Beowulf* narrative appear to survive in a modified form. The saga has Grímarr dive overboard after realizing that he had lost his battle with Hrólfr (8): 'er Grímarr sá, at þeir mundu sigraðir verða, stökk hann fyrir borð ok á kaf' ('when Grímarr saw that they would be overcome, he leapt overboard and into the sea').³⁵ This appears to be related to Grendel's own escape following his fatal bout with Beowulf: 'scolde Grendel þonan | feorhsēoc flēon under fenhleoðu' ('Grendel had to flee, mortally wounded, under the fen-banks').³⁶

Once the battle is concluded and the land has been cleansed, ceremony and feasting follow (9–12). Just as Grendel's slaying is celebrated in Heorot, Hrólfr's defeat of Grímarr is lauded in the hall of the Danish king: 'var þar ekki jafnmargt hjalat sem um dráp þeira Grímars, því at öllum þótti þat it mesta hreystiverk' ('there was nothing so much talked about as the slaying of Grímarr and his men, because it seemed to everyone the greatest deed of valour').³⁷ Like Beowulf, Hrólfr receives both *sæmd* ('honour') and *stórgjafar* ('valuable gifts') in recognition of his deed.

There are both similarities and differences between Hrólfr's fight with Grímarr and Beowulf's combat with Grendel. Many features of this episode correspond to the 'Two-Troll' *oikotype* of the 'Bear's Son' folktale which is closely related to the first part of *Beowulf*, and others appear to be the result of elaboration by the saga author(s). A closer parallel to the *Beowulf* narrative is found in Hrólfr Gautreksson's subsequent fight with Grímarr's brother, Grímnir.

III. HRÓLFR'S FIGHT WITH GRÍMNIR

This episode is more complex than Hrólfr's encounter with Grímarr and requires a lengthier summary:

Shortly after his conflict with Grímarr, Hrólfr is asked by his brother Ketill to support his marriage to the daughter of the king of Garðaríki, or Russia. Hrólfr assembles a fleet and heads eastwards with the assistance of Ingjaldr, the king of Denmark (1). The fleet is engulfed in a storm, and Hrólfr is blown off-course. His ship is swamped by waves, and he and his men are nearly drowned (2). He makes land on an island (3). Hrólfr sets out to explore the land with eleven companions and tells the rest of his crew to wait for his return until three o'clock the following day (4). Hrólfr and his men come across a woodland hall which the king surmises must be owned by a giant (5). They enter, and see a fire burning there (6). The hall is full of provisions (7). Hrólfr spots a gigantic sword hanging on a pillar (8) in front of a large bed (9). He instructs four men to return to the ship so that, should he die, men will know what

35 FS4, 104.

36 K4, 819b—820b.

37 FS4, 105.

befell him (10). Hrólfr remains with five men. Just as he and Ásmundr attempt to take the sword from the wall-pillar, a giant enters the hall. The giant cooks and eats a meal, and then sets a lavish table for Hrólfr and his men (11). Hrólfr refuses the giant's offer of food. The giant identifies himself as Grímnir, the brother of Grímarr and the son of Grímólfr (12). He tells Hrólfr that he had created the storm which brought him to the island (13). Grímnir vows to take harsh revenge for the death of his relative (14). Hrólfr offers compensation, but Grímnir responds by thrusting a great fork through two pairs of Hrólfr's men and casting them on the fire (15). Grímnir promises the king worse revenge in the morning, and closes the enormous door to the hall, blocking his exit. They go to sleep. Hrólfr checks three times that Grímnir is asleep by striking a log against a wall. Hrólfr supposes that the enormous sword hanging from the wall-pillar will be able to harm the giant (16). He and Ásmundr manage to procure it (17). Hrólfr thrusts the sword through Grímnir (18) as Ásmundr drives the red-hot fork into Grímnir's eyes (19). They cut up Grímnir's body before they are able to remove it from the hall (20). Hrólfr and Ásmundr leave the hall and see the rest of their companions approaching. The warriors delight in seeing their king alive, and have their weapons brandished in preparation to avenge him (21). They take much treasure from the hall. Hrólfr keeps the sword, which is so heavy that only he can lift it (22).

As shall be discussed shortly, the basic narrative of Hrólfr's visit to Grímnir's hall resembles both Beowulf's conflict with Grendel's mother and the second fight in many related 'Two-Troll' narratives. However, the above summary also contains details which are absent from these episodes, and it is worth addressing these first. These departures are largely narrative accretions from the story of the cyclops Polyphemus related in Book Nine of Homer's *Odyssey*, or from the widespread 'Blinded Ogre' folktale of which it is an early example.³⁸ The Polyphemus tradition exerted much influence on Old Norse *fornaldarsögur* and medieval European literature more widely.³⁹ It is worth offering a brief summary of the Polyphemus narrative here in order to facilitate discussion of the related episode in *HsG*:

Odysseus and his companions enter the cave-hall of Polyphemus, which is located on a wooded island. The hall is full of provisions, but the cyclops is away. He returns in the evening and blocks the entrance to his hall. He discovers Odysseus and his men. After an exchange of words, he eats two of Odysseus' companions, and then goes to sleep. In the morning, he wakes and eats two more, before heading out to tend his flock. When he returns that evening, he eats two more men, and Odysseus offers him some wine. Polyphemus promises Odysseus a guest-gift should he tell him his name, and

38 It is unclear whether later European witnesses to the Polyphemus narrative, such as in *HsG*, are independently derived from folktale or can be traced directly to the *Odyssey*. There is not space here to address this complex topic. This debate is treated in Justin Glenn, 'The Polyphemus Folktale and Homer's *Kyklōpeia*', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 102 (1971), 133–81 (at 135–6); see further Oskar Hackman, *Die Polyphemsage in der Volksüberlieferung* (Helsingfors, 1904) and Martin L. West, *The Making of the Odyssey* (Oxford, 2014), 18–21.

39 Hollander, 'Polyphemos'; Stitt, *Bear's Son*, 200–1.

he provides a pseudonym. The inebriated Polyphemus falls asleep. Odysseus thrusts a hot stake into Polyphemus' eye, blinding him. Odysseus and his companions escape the following morning.

The points at which the second monster-fight episode in *HsG* intersects with the Polyphemus story are clear. Grímnir's presence in a large, woodland hall on an island (5) bears resemblance to this narrative. Grímnir's hall contains *varningr* ('provisions') (7), just as Polyphemus' hall contains goods such as cheese and livestock. This departs from the typical 'Two-Troll' pattern, where the monster's hall is filled with treasure. That the episode in *HsG* includes an enormous bed (9) and an overnight episode may also be linked to the prominence of the sleeping motif in the Polyphemus story.⁴⁰ Hrólfr's journey to Grímnir's hall with a party of men also parallels that of Odysseus, and Grímnir's killing Hrólfr's men in batches of two (15) is likely drawn from the Polyphemus tradition. Grímnir's unusual provision of food to his doomed guests (11) appears to be in parodic dialogue with the theme of hospitality which is central to the Polyphemus story. The starkest parallel between the two narratives is that both Polyphemus and Grímnir (19) sustain a stab wound to the eye while asleep which facilitates the hero's escape.

These elements exert great influence over the shape of the second monster fight in *HsG*, but it is probable that they are later additions to the episode. Nora Chadwick has suggested that though many Old Norse sagas bear similarities to *Beowulf*, it is frequently the case that 'such similarity has become obscured by the introduction of a romantic element'; nevertheless 'such changes and modifications . . . ought not to be allowed to obscure our perception of their underlying unity'.⁴¹ The elements borrowed from the Polyphemus tradition represent just such modifications. The introduction of such features ought not surprise, as Icelandic authors were highly receptive to influences from other European literatures, both Latin and otherwise.⁴² This was especially true of medieval Icelandic romance, of which *HsG* is an early example.⁴³ Having accounted for many of the incongruous details between *Beowulf*'s fight with Grendel's mother and Hrólfr's conflict with Grímnir, it is now appropriate to consider the parallels between these episodes.

First, the settings of the second monster-fight in *Beowulf* and *HsG* exhibit interesting similarities. In *HsG*, the action takes place on an unfamiliar island in the ocean (3). In 'Two-Troll' narratives, the presence of nearby water, whether in the form of a waterfall, stream or ocean, is an almost ubiquitous feature of the second monster-fight.⁴⁴ This is often expressed in the form of an island setting, as is the case in

40 On giants' beds and their connection to the Polyphemus tradition, see Stitt, *Bear's Son*, 201.

41 'Monsters', 178.

42 See Shami Ghosh, *King's Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives* (Leiden, 2011), especially 111–76 and Orchard, 'Hereward and Grettir: Brothers from Another Mother?', in Jeffrey Turco (ed.), *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia*, *Islandica*, 58 (Ithaca, NY, 2015), 7–59.

43 See Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 44–90; Marianne E. Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words: The Evolution of Medieval Romance in Iceland* (Cardiff, 2017) and Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Mediaeval Iceland*, *The Viking Collection*, 21 (Odense, 2014).

44 See n. 32. For relevant examples, see Chambers, *Introduction*, 452–5 and Lawrence, *Epic Tradition*, 188–93.

Grettir's defence of Drangey and Ormr's fight with the island-dwelling Brúni in *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar*. In *Beowulf*, the mere of Grendel's mother might similarly be understood as a location by the sea. Characteristically marine features accompany the description of the mere, such as *yðgeblond* ('tossing waves') and *windige næssas* ('windy headlands').⁴⁵

To accompany the 'nearby water' motif which is present in the second monster-fight in *Beowulf* and *HsG*, both texts contain an episode in which the protagonist is in danger of drowning at the hands of his enemy. This is configured differently in both texts: whereas *Beowulf* is dragged to the bottom of the mere, Hrólfr is brought into a perilous storm by his trollish adversary which almost drowns him (2, 13).⁴⁶

Grímnir's residence in a wooded hall (5) represents a departure from *Beowulf*, but this is a regular feature of 'Two-Troll' analogues.⁴⁷ Panzer referred to this frequent trope as 'Der Dämon im Waldhaus'.⁴⁸ Trolls in Scandinavian *Beowulf* analogues typically inhabit a hall in a forest; a cave; or, more rarely, an underwater lair, but these spaces are marked in any case by their domestic character. Grendel's mother likewise inhabits not simply a subaquatic cave, but a *nīðsele* ('hateful hall') or *hrōfsele* ('roofed hall').

The arrangement of Grímnir's hall also parallels that of Grendel's mother. As Hrólfr and his men enter, they see a fire burning (6): 'þeir gengu síðan inn ok lituðust um ok fundu eld' ('they went in, looked around, and found a fire').⁴⁹ This is an almost ubiquitous feature of 'Two-Troll' narratives, and is also found in *Beowulf*. As *Beowulf* is taken into the watery hall of Grendel's mother, the poet suggests that 'fyrleoht geseah, blācne lēoman bēorhte scīnan' ('he saw firelight, a pale light shining brightly').⁵⁰ Particular attention is also given in *HsG* to a large sword hanging from a wall pillar (8), much as *Beowulf* finds a gigantic sword variously 'on searwum' ('among treasures') and 'on wāge . . . hangian' ('hanging on the wall').⁵¹ The only marked divergence between *Beowulf* and *HsG* in terms of the arrangement of the second adversary's hall is the presence of an enormous bed in the latter (9)—a widespread motif in Scandinavian 'Bear's Son' narratives.⁵²

From its outset, Hrólfr's adventure eastwards also bears narrative similarities to *Beowulf*'s journey to the mere of Grendel's mother. Although Hrólfr's motivation and point of departure differ from *Beowulf*'s, it is notable that both episodes begin

45 Discussion of the landscape of the mere has been extensive. For the most significant contributions see Lawrence, 'Mere'; William S. Mackie, 'The Demons' Home in *Beowulf*', *JEGP*, 37 (1938), 455–61 and Kemp Malone, 'Grendel and His Abode', in Anna G. Hatcher and K. L. Selig (eds), *Studia Philologica et Litteraria in Honorem L. Spitzer* (Bern, 1958), 297–308. The history of this debate is treated in Andersson, 'Sources and Analogues', 130–1 and Magnús Fjalldal, *Coincidence*, 67–78.

46 Aquatic conflict is a common element in Scandinavian *Beowulf* analogues, although its configuration varies from text to text: while some narratives feature only a storm, others contain, as in *Beowulf*, a fight in the water or in a watery lair.

47 Compare *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts* and *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*. It is also possible that the situation of Grímnir's hall on a wooded island is a direct borrowing from the Polyphemus tradition, perhaps under the influence of the 'Bear's Son' folktale. See above, p. 9.

48 *Sagengeschichte I*, 74–95.

49 *FS4*, 111.

50 *K4*, 1516b–1517b.

51 *K4*, 1557a; 1662a–b.

52 See above, p. 10.

with a coalition of Geats and Danes setting out on a dangerous journey to an unknown and dangerous locale (1).

Both Hrólfr and Beowulf refer fatalistically to their own death and legacy before facing their foe. Beowulf addresses an elaborate speech to Hroðgar (1474a–1491b) concerning his inheritance and the treatment of his Geatish company ‘gif meç hild nime’ (‘if battle should take me’).⁵³ In an uncharacteristically grand register, Hrólfr instructs some of his company to return to their ship so that men might know ‘hvát orðit er af Hrólfi Gautrekssyni ok hans félögum’ (‘what has become of Hrólfr Gautreksson and his companions’)—a clear reference to the likelihood of his own demise (10).⁵⁴

In Grímnir’s initial interaction with Hrólfr, he identifies himself as the brother of Grímarr, whom Hrólfr had slain previously (12): ‘ek heiti Grímnir ok em ek Grímólfsson ok bróðir Grímars þess, er þú drapt’ (‘I am called Grímnir, and I am the son of Grímólf and the brother of that Grímarr whom you killed’), and vows revenge (14): ‘skal ek . . . greypiliga hefna bróður míns’ (‘I will avenge my brother fiercely’).⁵⁵ The familial relationship between monsters is the defining characteristic of Scandinavian ‘Two-Troll’ narratives, but the motif of intentional revenge is decidedly rarer. Grímnir’s desire to exact revenge for the death of Grímarr is of course paralleled by Grendel’s mother, the *wrecend* (‘avenger’), who ‘wolde . . . sunu deoð wrecan’ (‘wished to avenge the death of her son’).⁵⁶

The manner in which Hrólfr dispatches his foe bears similarities to Beowulf’s slaying of Grendel’s mother, as was pointed out by Hollander over a century ago.⁵⁷ In both scenes, this is accomplished using a gigantic sword in the enemy’s possession. Both Grendel’s mother and Grímnir are impervious to other kinds of weapons but can be harmed by swords mounted in their halls. Hrólfr suggests ‘vilda ek fyrst geta nát sverðinu, ok þætti mér líkligt, at þat mundi bíta risann’ (‘I first want to get hold of the sword as it seems likely to me that it will harm the giant’) (16).⁵⁸ Hrólfr’s implication is that other swords will not harm Grímnir. In *Beowulf*, similarly, the sword Hrunting *bítan nolde*—would not bite—whereas the blade of giant-make was able to cut through the body of Grendel’s mother: ‘bil eal ðurhwod | fægne flæschoman’ (‘the blade passed entirely through the doomed body’).⁵⁹

After Grímnir’s death, the saga has it that ‘urðu þeir at lima hann í sundr, áðr þeir kómu honum út’ (‘they had to cut his body apart before they could bring him out’).⁶⁰ It is not explained why Hrólfr and Ásmundr need to butcher Grímnir and take his body from the hall (20), but this is likely a ‘blind motif’ related to Beowulf’s

53 *K4*, 1481b.

54 *FS4*, 112.

55 *FS4*, 114. It is possible, but by no means provable, that the names Grímarr, Grímnir and Grímólf bear some relationship with the name Grendel. The stems *grend-* and *grím-* are not etymologically related, as has been suggested for the names Grettir and Grendel (see Liberman, ‘Beowulf-Grettir’, 387–90 and the references there). However, the pattern of a *gr-* cluster followed by a nasal consonant could have survived independently in both *Beowulf* and *HsG*.

56 *K4*, 1277b–1278b.

57 ‘Polyphemos’, 71.

58 *FS4*, 116.

59 *K4*, 1567b–1568a.

60 *FS4*, 117.

decapitation of Grendel and removal of his head from the mere. The *Beowulf* poet similarly notes that Grendel's body, like Grímnir's, comes apart after his death: 'hrā wīde sprong | syþðan hē æfter dēaðe drepe þrōwade' ('the body burst wide apart when he suffered a blow after death').⁶¹ This peculiar detail is similarly configured across the two texts in question.

After Hrólfr and Ásmundr exit Grímnir's hall, the king's retainers meet his survival with great joy (21): 'sá þeir lið sitt koma í móti sér með miklu vápnabraki, ok urðu þeir fegnir, er þeir sá konung heilan' ('they saw their troop come towards them with a great clashing of weapons, and they became joyful when they saw their king healthy').⁶² This resembles Beowulf's reception by his own men: 'ðryðlic þegna hēap, þeodnes gefēgon, | þæs þe hī hyne ġesundne sēon mōston' ('the noble troop of thanes rejoiced in their lord when they could see him healthy').⁶³ The similarity between the heroes' receptions is especially evident in the parallels between the words *fegnir/ġefēgon* and *heilan/ġesundne*.

Two particular links between these episodes warrant closer consideration. It has already been suggested that Hrólfr's sword bears similarities with the gigantic blade which Beowulf finds in the mere, both in terms of its narrative function and as a feature of the hall-scene. Of greater significance is the fact that both swords are described as being so heavy that only the protagonist can lift them. The *Beowulf* poet has it that the sword used to slay Grendel's mother 'wæs mære ðonne ænig mon oðer | tō beadulāce ætberan meahte' ('was greater than any other man could carry into battle').⁶⁴ At the conclusion of the giant-killing episode in *HsG*, similarly, it is said that Hrólfr's sword 'var svá mikít, at þat var engum manni vápnhæft nema Hrólfi konungi' ('was so large that it was not able to be wielded by any man except King Hrólfr') (22).⁶⁵ This specific detail is shared exclusively by *HsG* and *Beowulf*, and suggests a unique link between these two narratives.

A further intriguing parallel between *Beowulf* and *HsG* is found in Hrólfr's instructions to his men before he sets off to explore the island. As he departs, he tells his companions to wait 'til nóns annan dag' ('until the ninth hour the following day') before departing (4).⁶⁶ In *Beowulf*, the hero's companions wait until this same time before leaving the headland: 'ðā cōm nōn dægēs. Næs ofġēafon | hwate Scyldingas' ('then came the ninth hour of the day. The keen Scyldings abandoned the headland').⁶⁷ The nouns *nón/nōn* derive from the phrase *nona (hora)*, the ninth hour of the day in classical Latin and, later, a time of prayer in the Divine Office.⁶⁸ In Old English and Old Norse this word is largely restricted to religious texts: translations of saints' lives; biblical or doctrinal material; or sermons. Unlike the words *hæftmēce* and *heptisax*, the words *nón/nōn* are not *hapax legomena* in their respective languages. However, they are otherwise unattested in their respective corpora. The use

61 *K4*, 1588b–1589b.

62 *FS4*, 117.

63 *K4*, 1627a–1628b.

64 *K4*, 1560a–1561b.

65 *FS4*, 117.

66 *FS4*, 110.

67 *K4*, 1600a–1601a.

68 Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1957), 'nón'; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989), 'noon, n.'

of *nón* in *HsG* is the only instance of this word in the whole corpus of some thirty-one Old Norse *fornaldarsögur*, and the instance of *nōn* in *Beowulf* is the only case of this word in all Old English narrative poetry. Given the uniqueness of these terms in their respective corpora, the appearance of *nón/nōn* at precisely the same point in these cognate episodes points to a potentially illuminating link between them.

Hrólfr's slaying of Grímnir constitutes the second of the two monster-fights which complete the 'Two-Troll' pattern. This fight also exhibits closer similarities to the *Beowulf* narrative than was the case with Hrólfr's combat with Grímarr, and furnishes parallels which are exhibited by no other Scandinavian text identified to date. The implications of these findings will be considered following the next section.

IV. HRÓLFR THE GAUTISH PRINCE

As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, *HsG* differs from other *Beowulf* analogues in that it is the only Old Norse text concerning a royal Gautish monster-killer who travels to the Danish court. Parallels between the movements of the protagonists in *HsG* and *Beowulf* invite the possibility that there may exist a connection between these texts which runs deeper than a shared basis in folktale. A summary of Hrólfr's life and movements as a Gautish prince follows:

The king of Gautland, Gautrekr, marries Ingibjörg, the daughter of the Norwegian king Þórir. A king named Óláfr attacks Gautrekr in an attempt to wrest his queen but is defeated and killed. Gautrekr returns to Gautland and has two sons, the elder named Ketill and the younger Hrólfr (1). Gautrekr and the king of Denmark, Hringr, suffer a disagreement, and are on the brink of war (2). On the resolution of this conflict, Hringr offers to foster Hrólfr, which Gautrekr accepts. Hrólfr remains in Denmark as Hringr's foster-son (3) alongside the king's own son Ingjaldr (4). Gautrekr dies of sickness. Ingibjörg, Gautrekr's widow, requests Hrólfr to return from Denmark to rule over Gautland (5), even though he is not the natural heir to the throne (6). Hringr travels to Gautland with Hrólfr to tutor him in kingship (7). Afterwards, Hrólfr ascends the throne (8).

The above summary provides a number of points of correspondence between the Danish-Gautish relations in *HsG* and the interactions between the Scyldings and Hreðlings in *Beowulf*. One of the more intriguing similarities is that in both texts, the Geatish prince is fostered by the Danish king (3). In *HsG*, it is said that 'fór Hrólfr til Danmerkr með Hringi konungi. Veitti konungr honum it ágætasta fóstur' ('Hrólfr went to Denmark with King Hringr. The king granted him the most illustrious fosterage').⁶⁹ In *Beowulf*, Hroðgar's offer to foster Beowulf is stressed no fewer than four times and is a key event in the poem's dynastic drama. Following Beowulf's slaying of Grendel, Hroðgar offers the warrior a formal pledge of fosterage: 'nū ic, Beowulf, þeç, | secg bet[e]sta, mē for sunu wylle | frēoġan on ferhþe' ('now Beowulf, best of men, I will love you as a son in [my] heart'), and refers to their 'niwe sibbe' ('new kinship').⁷⁰ This exchange is spoken of shortly afterwards by Wealhþeow, and

⁶⁹ FS4, 62.

⁷⁰ K4, 946b–948a; 949a.

again by Beowulf.⁷¹ Later in the poem, Beowulf suggests that Hroðgar allotted him a seat ‘wið his sylfes sunu’ (‘with his own sons’), just as Hrólfr the Gautish prince is fostered alongside Hringr’s son Ingjaldr (4).⁷²

It may also be significant that in both *Beowulf* and *HsG*, the arrival of the Geatish prince ends certain former hostilities between the Danes and Geats. Hroðgar tells Beowulf that he has ensured ‘þæt þām folcum sceal, | Ġēata lēodum ond Ġār-Denum | sib ġemāenu, ond sacu restan, | inwitniþas þe hie ær drugon’ (‘that there shall be shared peace between the peoples—the Geatish folk and the Spear-Danes—and strife be put to rest, the enmities which they formerly endured’).⁷³ Hrólfr’s fosterage to Denmark was an intentional act of peace-making, but similarly secured amicable relations between the Danes and Gautar (2): ‘endrnýjuðu þeir af upphafi sína vináttu með því upphafi, at Hringr konungr býðr Hrólfi Gautrekssyni til fóstrs’ (‘they [Hringr and Gautrekr] rebuilt their friendship from the ground up with King Hringr offering to foster Hrólfr Gautreksson’).⁷⁴

The heroes’ succession to the Geatish throne is also configured in much the same way in both texts. In *HsG*, the Gautish king’s widow requests that Hrólfr return to his homeland and take up the kingship (5). As Hrólfr is young at this point in the narrative, this request is made of Hringr: ‘bið ek, herra, at þér farið í Gautland at váru boði með Hrólfi, fóstra þínum, ok gerist hann þar konungr með þinni umsjá’ (‘I ask, lord, that you come to Gautland at my invitation with Hrólfr, your foster-son, and make him king under your supervision’).⁷⁵ In *Beowulf*, it is Hygd, the wife of the late Hygelac, who requests that Beowulf take up the Geatish throne. Beowulf initially declines to rule, and instead acts as regent for Hygd’s son Heardred until he is old enough to rule the Geats personally. After an undisclosed period Heardred is slain by the Swedish king Onela, whereupon Beowulf succeeds to the throne. This series of events is treated as a single sequence in the poem, with only nine lines (2379b–2388b) separating Beowulf’s offer to counsel Heardred and his own accession.

These accounts share four key similarities. First, both successions are instigated at the behest of the widow of the former king of the Geats. Secondly, both Hrólfr and Beowulf succeed after having been fostered in Denmark and are invited to take the throne from abroad. Thirdly, succession in both accounts is preceded by the counseling of a young prince whose father, the king of Gautland, has died. In *HsG*, Hringr arrives in Gautland to offer *umsjá* (supervision) to Hrólfr (7) much as Beowulf offers *frēondlār* (affectionate counsel) to Heardred. The configuration of this regency differs between *HsG* and *Beowulf*, but there are nevertheless structural similarities between them. Fourthly, both Geatish princes were not the heir apparent at the time of their accession. Hrólfr is second in line to his older brother Ketill but is nevertheless selected on account of his aptitude for the throne (6). Beowulf, similarly, only has a

71 See lines 1175a–1176a and 1478b–1479b respectively.

72 *K4*, 2013a.

73 *K4*, 1855b–1858b.

74 *FS4*, 61.

75 *FS4*, 66.

weak claim to the throne as the son of Hygelac's sister, but is favoured above Heardred for his age and ability.⁷⁶

V. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented above permits two chief conclusions. The first is that *HsG* draws from the same folkloric archetype as *Beowulf* and can therefore be counted as one of the poem's many Scandinavian analogues. Hrólfr's battle with the *tröll* Grimarr and subsequent slaying of his vengeful relative Grímnir resemble the configuration of Beowulf's own monster-fights and also those related in many Scandinavian *Beowulf* analogues. *HsG* also contains other pertinent details within this 'Two-Troll' frame which may link it to the Old English epic. Among these are Hrólfr's slaying Grímnir with his own mounted sword; his dismemberment of Grímnir after the conclusion of their conflict; and his men's joyous reunion with the lord they had feared dead.

Two parallels between *Beowulf* and *HsG* may be of particular significance, as they are not found in any other analogue identified to date. The remark that Hrólfr's blade was so heavy that only he could lift it parallels Beowulf's giant-made sword closely. Beowulf and Hrólfr are the only two monster-killers in Germanic tradition whose swords are so great that only they can bear them, and both, curiously, also happen to be Geatish princes. That this peculiar detail survives only in *Beowulf* and *HsG* suggests that it was present in the version of the 'Two-Troll' complex which gave rise to both narratives. As a feature likely sourced from a Scandinavian archetype and therefore not the invention of the *Beowulf* poet, this has implications for the perceived originality of the poem.

In addition, Hrólfr's instruction to his men to wait until *nón* before departing the monster's lair mirrors the Danish warriors in *Beowulf*, who do precisely this. This parallel is more difficult to account for, but three possibilities present themselves. First, it could represent a verbal relic inherited from a common archetype, much like the famous pairing of *heptisax/hæftmēce*. It is not possible to say with any certainty when *nón/nōn* entered Old English and Old Norse, but their etymon could have been borrowed orally into Germanic vernaculars early enough for it to be employed in this common source.⁷⁷ Second, this term may have entered Old Norse directly from Old English in the context of Anglo-Saxon missionary activity, in which case the departure of warriors at *nón/nōn* could either point to the division of the archetype at a late stage or to direct influence between the English and Scandinavian narratives thereafter.⁷⁸ Third, it is possible that *nón/nōn* arose in both narratives by coincidence. There is not sufficient evidence to commit to any one of these possibilities. However, in view of the other links espoused between the second monster-fights in

76 Leneghan, *Dynastic Drama*, 15, 57.

77 The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that this term was already present in Proto-Germanic ('noon, n.'). The similarity of this term across Old English (*nōn*), Old Norse (*nón*) and Old Saxon (*non/nuon*) may support this hypothesis. The instance of *nōn* in *Beowulf* perhaps suggests that this word accrued a secular sense relatively early, if this was not already the case when the term was borrowed from Latin.

78 Peder Gammeltoft and Jakob Povl Holck, 'Gemsten and Other Old English Pearls: A Survey of Early Old English Loanwords in Scandinavian', *Nowele*, 50/51 (2007), 144–5.

Beowulf and *HsG*, it is not impossible that the shared motif of the Geatish kings' warriors departing at *nón/nōn* represents a further connection which points to the common ancestry of the two narratives.

The second conclusion is the more complex: namely, that as the only Scandinavian 'Two-Troll' tale to concern a Gautish monster-killer who interacts with the Danish royal house, *HsG* may shed new light on the development of the *Beowulf* narrative. As outlined at the beginning of this discussion, the most significant Scandinavian text adduced to date that bears more than a folkloric connection to *Beowulf* is *HsK*. The prevailing view in contemporary scholarship is that, on account of its Scylding cast and tale of a monster-killer who dispatches a threat to the Danish court, *HsK* preserves a version of the same narrative which underpins *Beowulf*.⁷⁹ In the most recent detailed treatment of the saga's Beowulfian connections, John Niles has suggested that the common narrative which formed the basis of *Beowulf* and *HsK* included 'a coherent setting and cast of characters . . . as well as the basic plot with which readers of the first part of *Beowulf* are familiar. These elements had fused with some well-known dynastic history regarding the Skjöldungs'.⁸⁰ This stemmatic view of the development of the *Beowulf* narrative is broadly convincing. However, because the origins and careers of Böðvarr and Beowulf differ so markedly, Niles supposes that the career of Beowulf had little basis in earlier tradition save that he was originally a 'hero who comes from overseas'.⁸¹ Like Benson and Liberman before him, Niles suggests that the movements and dynastic connections of Beowulf are a later addition by the poet, grafted onto the story once it had arrived in England. Certain attributes of Beowulf, such as his name and his abilities as an exceptional swimmer, have been convincingly traced to Anglo-Saxon heroic-legendary tradition.⁸² However, the current scholarly consensus holds that Beowulf's career as a Geatish warrior-king is essentially the poet's invention.

This point is where I part company with Niles. The analogical material adduced from *HsG* may attribute Beowulf's career and dynastic connections not to an imaginative Anglo-Saxon poet, but to the same kind of Scandinavian tradition which furnished the heroic world and narrative outline of *Beowulf*. While *HsK* offers little precedent for the career of Beowulf, *HsG* presents a figure who is born of the line of Gautish kings; who is fostered to the Danish court and then returns as the unlikely ruler of his homeland at the urging of the late king's widow; and who travels to Denmark, kills a ravaging foe, and then encounters and slays this foe's monstrous relative further afield.

79 See above, pp. 5–6.

80 'Danish Origins', 59.

81 'Danish Origins', 57; see also Leneghan, *Dynastic Drama*, 117.

82 'Beowulf' is now generally thought to be a theophoric name, the first element of which pertains to the god Beow (Robert D. Fulk, 'The Etymology and Significance of Beowulf's Name', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1 (2007), 109–136; Stefan Jurasinski, 'Wealthæow and the Problem of Beowulfian Anthroponymy', *Neophilologus*, 91 (2007), 701–15 (at 707). Leonard Neidorf advances an excellent argument that the name was established in Anglo-Saxon heroic tradition from an early date ('Beowulf Before *Beowulf*: Anglo-Saxon Anthroponymy and Heroic Legend', *RES*, 64 (2013), 553–73). Following Benson ('Originality', 48–50), he suggests that this Beowulf, who eventually became the subject of the Old English epic, may have originally been a hero renowned for his feats of swimming ('Beowulf Before *Beowulf*', 565–6; see also Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir', 365 and Leneghan, *Dynastic Drama*, 120).

I suggest that *HsG* may point to the existence of an early Gautish monster-killer tradition that inspired those aspects of the *Beowulf* narrative which find no analogue in *HsK*. On this basis, I propose a modified and condensed version of the conceptual model for the development of *Beowulf* provided by Niles, with additional thoughts concerning *HsK* and *HsG*.⁸³ Points 4, 5 and 6 in the following schema largely agree with Niles' model; the reader is referred there for detailed commentary. As these points are likely unique English innovations it is not possible to say with any certainty in which order they occurred. Some fluidity in the proposed chronology must therefore be allowed for. I echo Niles' caveat that, since very little concrete information concerning the origin, development and date of the *Beowulf* narrative is known, the following model must remain theoretical.⁸⁴

1. Traditions involving the Scylding/Skjöldungr kings develop in Scandinavia. This included stories about Scyld/Skjöldr, Healfdene/Hálfdan, Hroðgar/Hróarr and Hroðulf/Hrólfr.
2. This Scylding tradition merges in Scandinavia with a separate 'Two-Troll' story about a monster-killer from Gautland. This tale featured a royal Gautish monster-slayer who travels to Denmark, slays two related foes, and takes up the throne of Gautland at the request of the king's widow. This separate narrative is preserved independently in *HsG*, where it forms part of the biography of Hrólf Gautreksson. The original 'Two-Troll' story may have included monster-fights more closely resembling those in *Beowulf* such as a hall-fight in Denmark and an underwater episode further afield. However, the inherent fluidity of folktale complexes means that the specific manifestation of these monster-fights may have shifted at an early stage. As the names of Geatish rulers differ so markedly across *HsG*, *HsK* and *Beowulf*, it seems unlikely that this 'Two-Troll' narrative featured kings who were well-established in legendary tradition.
3. This bipartite narrative reaches England, perhaps in the wake of Anglo-Danish contact, where it is developed into the first part of *Beowulf*. At this stage, it is possible that the figure of the Geatish monster-slayer merged with local traditions concerning a legendary swimmer named Beowulf. In Scandinavia, this narrative develops into *HsK*, where the 'Two-Troll' monster-fights and the movements of the Gautish monster-killer deteriorate.
4. In England, the dragon fight and the hero's death are attached to the first part of the narrative.
5. This narrative is shaped into an alliterative epic poem. Supporting characters are added, and a variety of legendary and genealogical material is integrated into the work. At this stage it is possible that a Geatish royal pedigree is invented which centres around the historical Hygelac.⁸⁵
6. The poem is endowed with religious meaning.

83 'Danish Origins', 57–60.

84 'Danish Origins', 57.

85 See point 2 in the schema. This contention is based on the fact that, among Hreðel and his descendants, only Hygelac survives in other sources (*K4*, lxi; North, *Origins*, 42–5). Herebeald and Hædcyn share their identity with the Scandinavian gods Baldr and Höðr respectively. It is possible that a prefix was added to

The above model addresses directly the originality of *Beowulf*—a topic with which the present discussion has been occupied in a roundabout way. Following the strategy of other scholars who boil *Beowulf* and *HsK* down to their common roots, this schema and the discussion which precedes it cautiously set out how a tradition concerning a Gautish monster-killer, now half-buried in a thirteenth-century *fornaldarsaga*, might have inspired the figure of the epic hero. They add to the debate the possibility that Scandinavian tradition may have provided more of the ingredients for the *Beowulf* narrative than previously thought; that the story of Hrólfr Gautreksson may contain previously unseen glimpses of the narrative underlying *Beowulf*; and, tentatively, that Hrólfr Gautreksson may bear an old and now much-obscured kinship with Beowulf himself.

It is precisely because of *Beowulf*'s originality—its lack of obvious precedent or parallel—that the search for analogues remains both important and challenging. This effort has advanced by slow degrees, because it is easy to find connections where one looks for them, and just as easy to dismiss such connections as implausible. The approach taken here has therefore been a cautious one: as should always be the policy in scholarship on *Beowulf*'s analogues, the foregoing discussion does not purport to provide answers, but merely possibilities.

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