

Kap. 5; dort zeige die Fehde zwischen Þórðr gellir und Tungu-Oddr einen grundlegenden Mangel im Rechtssystem auf und führt zu einer Gesetzesreform.

Da weder weibliche Personen (traditionell die Hetzerinnen zur Rache) noch die Götterfeinde, die Riesen, in Verbindung mit der neuen, nach Ragnarøk entstehenden Welt in den Texten erwähnt werden, zieht Lindow den Schluß, daß die alten, letztlich zur Zerstörung der Welt führenden Gegensätze im neuen Zeitalter nicht mehr bestehen. Das einträchtige Zusammenleben von Töter (Höðr) und Opfer (Balder) zeige, daß die Fehde keine Rolle mehr spiele.

Lindow's Buch hat das Verdienst, nicht nur eine brauchbare Zusammenfassung des Forschungsstandes zum Balder-Mythos samt den zugehörigen Textquellen zu bieten, sondern darüber hinaus eine eingehende Analyse und Deutung der Texte selbst.

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**M**agnús Fjalldal. *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between Beowulf and Grettis saga*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. 186 pages.

The title of this book gives away its goal: Fjalldal sets out to prove that the numerous similarities posited between the Old English epic and the Old Icelandic saga are accidental and that, consequently, one hundred and twenty years spent on reconstructing their common source (the initial hypothesis proposing such a source was formulated by Guðbrandur Vigfússon in 1878) have been wasted, even worse than wasted, for the countless works written on this subject have obscured the truth obvious to any impartial scholar, namely that the two texts are independent of each other, with all the alleged convergences being the result of coincidence — a monster with an extremely long arm. Its picture (or perhaps it is Grendel) embellishes the cover of the book. Only Fjalldal's final conclusion, not his analysis of previous scholarship, is new, for in 1986 I brought out a survey of the relevant literature ("Beowulf-Grettir," in *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations*, ed. Bela Brogyanyi and Thomas Krömmelbein [Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1986], 353–401), and Fjalldal has little to add to it, except that his discussion is, naturally, more detailed. He first examines the characters involved (Beowulf, Grettir, Grendel, Grendel's mother, Glámr, the troll woman and the giant of the Sandhaugar episode, Kárr the Old, and the bear), the constituent elements of all battles, the names of the swords (OI *heptisax*, OE *hæftmēce*), and the scenery described in the episodes under discussion. This is followed by an examination of the theories that have been advanced to explain the relationship between the poem and the saga. In Fjalldal's estimation, there are four of them worthy of destruction: *Grettis saga* reached Iceland from England; both tales go back to The Bear's Son Tale investigated by Panzer; the tales are offshoots of some ancient legend; and there was some folktale whose "bits and pieces" can now be detected

in numerous sagas and in *Beowulf*. He is convinced that *Beowulf* has no analogues in Icelandic literature and that all the convergences at the motif level between the two corpora are due to chance. The argument takes up 130 pages. The rest is notes, indexes, and bibliography.

Fjalldal is quite successful in pointing out weaknesses in the reasoning of his predecessors. Actually, he does not even have to exercise his analytic skills, for most arguments put forward by older scholars have been refuted or called into question by somebody else, and Fjalldal invariably sides with the refuters and the questioners. But it often seems that he attacks an army of straw men. Both *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* employ elements of what we now call folklore. The Tale of the Bear's Son existed; even though we have late recordings, it can hardly be recent. The plots known as The Devil and His Dam and The Child and the Hand were also widespread. Heroes regularly went to the otherworld to fight monsters and to acquire mantic wisdom. Motifs clustering around these tales or these "types" (in the sense of Aarne-Thompson) easily attached themselves to various stories, as Fjalldal himself recognizes, and we find them in myths, heroic poetry, romances, and fairy tales. Formulaic themes were also part of common heritage. We may not be able to show which "bits and pieces" went where and how they originated, but of course both the sagaman and the *Beowulf* poet drew on these, largely the same, fragments. The only question is whether *specific* ties between the saga and the poem can be shown to have existed. I believe that without the fact that the two works use the words *heptisax* and *hæftmēce* under somewhat similar circumstances, each word being a hapax legomenon in its respective language, the theme Beowulf-Grettir would have been trivial and uninteresting. In my article, I concentrated only on the Sandhaugar episode in the saga, because this is where the fateful word occurs. If the *heptisax/hæftmēce* coincidence is worthless, the rest of the argument does not deserve a minute of our time: comparing the design of two patchwork quilts is a rather unexciting enterprise, even if they stem from related workshops. The greatest drawback of Fjalldal's book is that he examines the names of the weapons casually, among many other problems, not realizing that the entire discussion hinges on it. Everything he says about the weapons has been said long ago. Indeed, *heptisax* and *hæftmēce* are only partly similar, and, although they never recur anywhere else as wholes, their elements do. It is also true that the meaning of *hepti-* is not quite clear. But I made a rather strong case for both words' nonaccidental presence in their respective lines; it appears that the sagamen (in the *vísa*) and the *Beowulf* poet made an extraordinary effort to preserve *heptisax* and *hæftmēce*. Although Fjalldal scrutinizes every scrap of evidence that has accumulated over the years, he makes no mention of this argument. I am not saying this because I was eager to find one more reference to my article, but because, if I am right, my conclusion supports the idea of a common ancient tale in a very serious way, and if I am wrong, it has to be demolished.

Regardless of the Beowulf-Grettir dilemma, I find Fjalldal's principles of reconstruction somewhat odd. In his opinion, two or more stories can be looked upon as related only if all the details in them coincide. For example, in *Beowulf* it is the hero who wields the *hæftmēce*, while in the saga the *heptisax* is the monster's weapon. In similar fashion, Beowulf's tearing off of Grendel's arm makes sense, but there is no motivation in Grettir's cutting off the troll woman's arm. Fjalldal notices all such discrepancies and every time states that, given dissimilarities in the plot line, a common source is out of the question. One more example (and there are dozens of them) will suffice. Fjalldal sneers at those scholars who believed that in the Sandhaugar episode the roles of the male and female monsters have been reversed: Grettir first disposes of the giantess (the troll woman) and then kills the giant, while in the poem the hero first fights Grendel and then his mother. There is no reason to sneer. In the Tale of the Devil and His Dam, the order of events is almost universally the same as in *Beowulf*, so most probably the sagaman did indeed change the traditional sequence. If there were no differences, there would have been nothing to reconstruct! We would simply have several versions, or ideally

several copies, of the same tale. For instance, we have the story of Baldr's death as it was known to Snorri, Saxo, and the *Beowulf* poet. The stories are vastly different, and, but for the identity of names (and in *Beowulf*, even the names — *Herebeald* and *Hæðcyn* — do not quite coincide with those of Baldr and his murderer), it may not have occurred to anyone to compare them. But once our attention has been drawn to the names, we begin to see some similarities in the tales and attempt to reconstruct the old myth, which is, of necessity, poorer in content and very much unlike the three components that have been thrown into the pot. Historical linguistics operates with more secure correspondences, but etymology, too, begins not with sound laws but with meaning. Who would have compared Russian *сто* (*sto*) and English *hund*(*red*) if they did not refer to the same entity in the real world! Fjalldal cannot admit that there once was a tale "emended," to use his favorite word, in both the saga and the poem. Yet nothing is easier to imagine. To be sure, in the absence of recurring correspondences like so-called sound laws, literary scholars can seldom prove the validity of their reconstruction, but Fjalldal presents his opponents' views as improbable and illogical, and here he is certainly wrong.

It is also wrong to assume a pose of absolute superiority in dealing with a host of honest, if misguided, scholars like Lawrence, Chambers, Klaeber, and their ilk. All people daring to reconstruct a prototale or a protoform inhabit houses made of very thin glass, and it is imprudent to throw stones at every neighbor in view. We are told that the "[c]ritics who have the imagination to see Grendel and his mother 'in all their monstrosity and superhuman powers' in the giant and the troll-woman of Sandhaugar are only testifying to the might of Glámr's eyes" (29–30); "To find in the brown bear episode of the saga essentially the same story line as in *Beowulf* can obviously be done, but only if we are prepared to emend both texts in the manner that Procrustes employed to make his visitors fit his infamous bed" (33); "In the course of [Richard] Harris's discussion these seemingly unrelated items are stitched together with literary exegesis of the kind that Isidore of Seville practised to perfection in

the seventh century" (35); "There is no small amount of arrogance implicit in this [W. W. Lawrence's] analysis" (72, on the appearance of light in the caves); "What is perhaps most striking about this comparison is the lack of sensitivity that parallel-hunting critics have shown for the nature of the texts that are being compared" (77). These are only a few examples. Utterly dismayed by human stupidity, the author feels like the child in Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Emperor's New Clothes" (66). The blurb informs us that the book is "passionately and engagingly written, occasionally forceful" and that Magnús Fjalldal has produced "a lively challenge" to the notions that *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* are related. Lively Fjalldal may be, but he is not infallible. Thus on p. 42 we are told that "[i]n *Beowulf* the hero's victory over Grendel is a career move and no climax," but on p. 53 we read: "To *Beowulf*, the victory over Grendel's mother is, strangely enough, not the zenith of his career; the contest with Grendel is." Even the best of us may nod occasionally, but no one will mistake taunts for force and peevishness for passion. Fjalldal shows, chiefly through reiteration, on what a flimsy foundation many of the arguments of his predecessors rest. He has also emphasized the lack of unity among scholars investigating the genesis of *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga*, but he has failed utterly to show that the two tales are genetically unrelated. Perhaps they are not related, but more probably they are. He expected to close the famous subject opened in 1878 by his illustrious countryman, but alas, it will keep haunting us like so many other immortal revenants of Icelandic tradition.

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