"Patchwork theory Unproved"

Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg edited, with introduction, bibliography notes, glossary, and appendices by Fr. Klaeber. 3rd edition with first and second supplements. D. C. Heath and Co., Boston. Copyright, 1922, 1928, 1936, 1941, and 1950.

p. cii It has been the fate of Beowulf to be subjected to the theory of multiple authorship, the number of its conjectural 'makers' ranging up to six or more. At the outset, in this line of investigation, the wish was no doubt father to the thought.[3] Viewing the poem in the light of a 'folk epic' based on long continued oral tradition, scholars labored hard to trace it back to its earliest and purest form or forms and to establish the various processes such as contamination, agglutination, interpolation, modernization by which it was gradually transformed into an epic of supposedly self-contradictory, heterogeneous elements. While Ett- müller, who first sounded this note, contented himself, at least in his translation (1840), with characterizing the Beowulf as a union of a number of originally separate lays and marking off in his text the lines added by clerical editors, daring dissectors like Mullenhoff, Möller, ten Brink, Boer undertook to unravel in detail the 'inner history' of the poem, rigorously distinguishing successive stages, strata, or hands of authors and editors. With Möller this searching analysis was reinforced

p.ciii by the endeavor to reconstruct the primitive stanzaic form. Ten Brink emphasized the use of variants, that is, parallel versions of ancient lays which were eclectically combined for better or worse and became the basis of parts of the final epic poem. To instance some of the results arrived at, there existed, according to Müllenhoff, two short poems by different authors recounting the Grendel fight (I) and the Dragon fight (IV) respectively. To the first of these certain additions were made by two other men, namely a continuation (fight with Grendel's mother, II) and the Introduction. Then a fifth contributor (interpolator A) added the Home-Coming part (III) and in- terpolated parts I and II to make them harmonize with his continuation. A sixth man, the chief interpolator (B) and final editor, joined the Dragon fight (IV) to the Grendel part thus augmented (I,II,III) and also introduced numerous episodes from other legends and a great deal of moralizing and theological matter.[1] Schücking elaborated a special thesis concerning Beowulf's Return. This middle portion, he endeavored to show, was composed and inserted as a connecting link between the expanded Grendel part (Beowulf in Denmark) and the Dragon fight, by a man who like- wise wrote the Introduction and interpolated various episodes of a historical character. Still more recently Boer thought he could recognize several authors by their peculiarity of manner,[2] e.g. the so-called 'episode poet' who added most of the episodic material; a combiner of two versions of the Grendel part; another com- biner who connected the combined Grendel part with the Dragon part, composed Beowulf's Return and two or three episodes, remodeled the last part by substituting the Geats for the original Danes, and placed the introduction of the old Dragon poem at the head of the entire epic. Truly, an ingeoniously complicated, perplexing procedure.

There is little trustworthy evidence to support positive claims of this sort.

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3. Müllenhoff was decisively influenced by the criticism of the Nibelungenlied by K. Lachmann, who in his turn had followed in the footsteps of F. A. Wolf, the famous defender of the 'Liedertheorie'(ballad theory) in relation to the Homeric poems.

1. Even the exact number of lines credited to each one of the six contributors was announced by Mullenhoff; thus A was held responsible for 226 lines of interpolation (32 in i, 194 in ii), B for 1169 lines(67 in the Introduction, 121 in i, 265 in ii, 172 in iii, 544 in iv). Ettmuller in his edition (1875) pared the poem in its pre- Christian form down to 2896 lines, Möller condensed the text into 344 four-line stanzas.

2. Similarly Berendsohn would discriminate three different strata of poetical transmission on the basis of broad, general stylistic criteria.

1818-1884