

"Generally speaking, however, the theories of the 'dissecting school' are not in themselves faulty, if we admit the assumptions on which they rest. They fail however in two ways. An examination of the short lay and the long epic, so far as these are represented in extant documents, does not bear out well the assumptions of the theorizers. Secondly, the minute scrutiny to which the poem has been subjected in matters of syntax, metre, dialect and tradition has failed to show any difference between the parts attributed to the different authors, such as we must certainly have expected to find, had the theories of the 'dissecting school' been correct." (pp. 114, 115)

"That behind our extant Beowulf, and connecting it with the events of the sixth century, there must have been a number of older lays, may indeed well be admitted: also that to these lays our poem owes its plot, its traditions of metre and its phraseology, and perhaps (but this is a perilous assumption) continuous passages of its text. But what Mullenhoff and ten Brink go on to assume is that these original oral lays were simple in outline and treated a single well-defined episode in a straightforward manner; that later redactors and scribes corrupted this primitive simplicity; but that the modern critic, by demanding it, and using its presence or absence as a criterion, can still disentangle from the complex composite poem the simpler elements out of which it was built up.

"Here are rather large assumptions. What right have we to postulate that this primitive 'literature without letters', these short oral ballads and ~~lays~~ lays, dealt with a single episode without digression or confusion: whilst the later age, - the civilized, Christianized age of written literature during which Beowulf in the form in which we now have it was produced, - is assumed to have been tolerant of both? (p. 115)

"No doubt, here and there, indifferent literatures, groups of short lays can be found which one can imagine might be combined into an orderly narrative poem, without much hacking about. But on the other hand a short lay will often tell, in less than a hundred lines, a story more complex than that of the Iliad or the Odyssey. Its shortness may be due, not to any limitation in the scope of the plot, but rather to the passionate haste with which it rushes through a long story. It is one thing to admit that there must have been short lays on the story of ~~Beowulf~~ Beowulf: it is another to assume that these lays were of such a character that nothing was needed but compilers with a taste for arrangement and interpolation in order to turn them into the extant epic of Beowulf. (p. 115, 116)

"And subsequent investigations into the history and folk-lore of our poem have not confirmed Mullenhoff's theory: in some cases indeed they have hit it very hard. When a new light was thrown upon the story by the discovery of the parallels between Beowulf and the Grettis saga, it became clear that passages which Mullenhoff had condemned as otiose interpolations were likely to be genuine elements in the tale. Dor Olrik's simple investigations into the history of the Danish kinds have shown from yet another point of view how allusions, which were rashly condemned by Mullenhoff and ten Brink as idle amplifications, are, in fact, essential. . . . it seems clear that, had Mullenhoff's theories been accurate, we might reasonably have expected to have been able to differentiate between the earlier and the later strata in so composite a poem." (p. 117)