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Epic and Romance Essays on Medieval Literature, W. P. Kerr. Dover Publications, Inc., N. Y., N. Y. 1957 (unaltered and unabridged republication of the last edition - postscript, 1908.)

p. 91

The Teutonic poetry shows that epic may be developed out of short lays through a gradual increase of ambition and of eloquence in the poets who deal with common themes. There is no question here of the process of agglutination and contamination whereby a number of short lays are supposed to be compounded into an epic poem. Of that process it may be possible to find traces in Beowulf and elsewhere. . . . The difference between Hildebrand and Waldere is the difference between an archaic and an accomplished mode of narrative, and this difference is made by a change in spirit and imagination, not by a process of agglutination. To make the epic of Waldere it was not necessary to cobble together a number of older lays on separate episodes

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If it should be asked why there is so little evidence of any Teutonic attempt to weave together separate lays into an epic work, the answer might be, first, that the separate lays we know are too much separate and individual, too strong in themselves, to be satisfactorily cobbled into a more expansive fabric; and, secondly, that it has not yet been proved that epic poems can be made by process of cobbling. The need of a comprehensive epic of the Niblungs was not imperative . . . . The old lays, Northern and Western, whatever their value, have all strong individual characters of their own, and do not easily submit to be regarded as merely the unused materials, waiting for an epic composer who never was born.

p. 145

Beowulf has been regarded by some as a composite epic poem made out of older and shorter poems. Codex Regius shows that this hypothesis is dealing with an undoubted vera causa when it talks of short lays on heroic subjects, and of the variations of treatment to be found in different lays on one and the same theme, and of the possibilities of contamination.

Thus, in considering the story of Beowulf's descent under water, and the difficulties and contradictions of that story as it stands, Ten Brink has been led to suppose that the present text is made up of two independent versions, run together by an editor in a hazardous way without regard to the differences in points of detail, which still remain to the annoyance of the careful reader.

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There is no great risk in the assumption that there were different versions of the fight with Grendel's mother, which may have been carelessly put together into one version in spite of their contradictions. In the Codex Regius there are three different versions of the death of the Niblungs, the Atlakviða, Atlamál, and the Lament of Oddrun. The Lament of Oddrun is vitally different from the other two poems, and these differ from one another, with regard to the motive of Atli's feud with Gunnar. It is possible for the human mind to imagine an editor, a literary man, capable of blending the poems in order to make a larger book. This would be something like the process which Ten Brink has suspected in the composition of this part of Beowulf. It is one thing, however, to detect the possibility of such misdemeanours; and quite another thing to suppose that it is by methods such as these that the bulk of the larger epic is swollen beyond the size of common lays or ballads. It is impossible, at any rate, by any reduction or analysis of Beowulf, to get rid of its stateliness of narrative; it would be impossible by any fusion or aggregation of the Eddic lays to get rid of their essential brevity. No accumulation of lays can alter the style from its trick of detached and abrupt suggestions to the slower and more equable mode.