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Monster-Episodes in Grettis saga: a case of  
Reoralization?<sup>1</sup>

As orality research has shown, the boundary between oral and written literature is a fluid one.<sup>2</sup> It is well known that originally oral works may be taken over as written literature; the cases where the reverse takes place are somewhat less well documented. In most cases of a transfer from the oral to the written medium an adaptation takes place; only in the case of conscientious recording and transcription by tale collectors can we expect no concessions to be made to the written medium. On the other hand, written sources can be memorized and repeated by rote; here no concession need be made to the new medium. Reoralizations, on the other hand, are works transferred from a written to an oral medium and adapted to the purpose. The term is borrowed from the realms of the folk-tale, to denote oral material adopted in a literary work, adapted to the written genre, disseminated by reading aloud, and

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<sup>1</sup> From June 23rd.-25th. an interdisciplinary symposium on orally transmitted texts derived from written material is to be held in Freiburg. Significant contributions in the Scandinavian field are to be expected from M.J. Driscoll (saga-material in the context of the *kvöldvaka*) and Jürg Glauser (change of medium-change of genre). This present submission is based on material I intend to present as a basis for discussion at that symposium; and should be regarded as a preliminary version, to be modified in the light of subsequent discussion, the main trends of which I hope to be able to outline when I present this paper.

My acknowledgements are due to members of my seminar class of 1993-4, for being patient while I tried out some of my ideas on them, to my undergraduate students Bernd Schirmer and Sabine Schultze for bibliographical work, to Gisli Sigurðsson for drawing my attention to and providing a copy of Óskar Halldórsson 1981 and to those who have assisted me by their contributions to Oldnorsenet and Ansax-L

<sup>2</sup> A useful short summary of developments relevant to the present article is to be found in the introductory chapter to K. O'Brien O'Keefe, Visible Song, Transitional Literacy in Old English verse, Cambridge 1990, pp.1-14.

further transmitted among the recipients. Thus a folk-tale might be adopted as an exemplum in the written form of a sermon, read aloud from the pulpit, and this literary, elaborated form then take over the place of the original folk-tale in oral transmission. In the field of mediaeval studies, the term reoralization is somewhat problematical, because of its implication that the written text which takes on the characteristics of the oral medium is itself based on material which has its genesis in an oral stage of culture; that the text is not merely transferred to the oral medium, but returned to it. This is something which we may perhaps assume, but which is hardly susceptible of proof.

As an example of the applicability of the reoralization model, we can follow the development of the long Irish prose saga The Cattle Raid of Cooley and associated tales. The first manuscript of the Cattle Raid is dated to around 1100; it appears to represent a society considerably older, and one may assume that the material had been transmitted orally in some form for a number of generations before being committed to writing. This first version is followed by three distinct manuscript reworkings, each of which in a different way represents an elaboration of the text; motivations become clearer, style becomes more homogeneous, rhetorical figures are added, the tale becomes increasingly the province of the written and, in its evaluative sense, the literate.

With the effective enforcement of English colonial rule from the end of the sixteenth century, the picture changes. The saga is no longer re-worked on the literate plane; there is no longer a native aristocracy to uphold the literate tradition. Instead, it becomes the province of a group of society who are denied literacy by the colonial power; during the following centuries it was an offence to teach the Gaelic-speaking Catholic Irish to read or write. The text of the Cattle Raid was transmitted orally in a number of

ways. In some rare cases, single episodes became ballads.<sup>23</sup> In other cases, they became the nucleus of stories to be passed on as folk-tales. In yet other cases, it appears that written adaptations of episodes were made by scribes, and that these were then learned by rote. The three methods have at least one feature in common; they isolate specific high-key scenes of the written text and develop them as autonomous narrative units; the total context of the narrative remains, as a general framework within the cultural memory of the group to whom the oral versions are disseminated.<sup>24</sup> This reliance for structure on the weighting of episodes in the pre-existing written version makes it clear that the reoralizations cannot be regarded as reversions to a pre-writing oral original; the period of written transmission has left an indelible mark on the material transmitted.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Celticists tend to call them lays, a term which I avoid here because of its occasional use (eg. by Dronke) in the Eddic context. Cf. the 6 sets of Cú Chulainn "ballads" (poems in end-rhyming syllabic metre of varying kinds), collected by J.F. Campbell in: Leabhar na Feinne: Heroic Gaelic Ballads Collected in Scotland Chiefly from 1512 to 1871. London, 1872, facsimile reprint with an introduction by D.S. Thompson, Shannon, 1972, pp. 1-19 The extent to which these can be said to represent a continuous oral tradition is investigated in a paper in progress by Annette Peht of Freiburg, to whom my thanks for preliminary results which suggest that Campbell's information is to be handled with extreme caution.

In the case of the Irish tradition, cultural memory was not the only factor. The written text, in the latest, so-called Stowe, version, was reproduced in manuscript form in much the same way as Icelandic sagas are preserved in late paper copies, and for similar reasons; the colonial power had a monopoly of the press, but literate Gaelic speaking Irish of some social standing, who had managed by virtue of their position to circumvent the restrictions on education, had sufficient wealth and interest to commission scribes. The Stowe version survives in some 60 paper copies; there must therefore have been considerable control exerted on the reoralized versions by the underlying written tradition.

<sup>25</sup> The above account of transmission is based on findings of the Freiburg project, to be published in H.L.C. Tristram, Der Rinderraub von Cuailnge-ein Handbuch, (forthcoming). For a discussion of the oral component in modern Irish story telling see J. F. Nagy, "The Sign of the Outlaw, Multiforimity

Reoralizations can occur for a variety of reasons. In the case of Ireland, colonial repression was a significant factor. In other cases, the motivation might be socio-economic; texts are transferred to economically less privileged sections of a population than the original target-audience/readership, one for whom the expense of dissemination by writing, or in print, appears for some reason unprofitable. A classic case of reoralization in this form is the dissemination of courtly Arthurian Romance material in ballad form<sup>6</sup> during the later Middle English period. Characteristically, the romances are drastically adapted to conform with the requirements of an oral medium. Discursive structure gives way to the dramatic alternation of key scenes, lengthy monologue to swiftly alternating dialogue, so that each key point can be encompassed within the structure of the single quatrain which, for the ballad singer with his stock of recurring scenes and floating verses forms the counterpart of the alliterating formulae of earlier oral poetry. Reoralization can also be a product of *Machtpolitik*, as in Ireland, in a period during which the means of dissemination are controlled by a colonial power promulgating a non-indigenous language.

In suggesting that the presence of certain episodes in Grettis saga may be accounted for by reoralization, I will be suggesting a third reason for the process; a written text has to be transferred to the language of a people who have no adequate means of written dissemination. This is what one might refer to as the Caedmon-pattern,<sup>7</sup> following Bede's account of the composition of the first religious verse in

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in Fenian Narrative" in: John Miles Foley, ed., *Comparative research on Oral Traditions: a Memorial for Milman Parry*, Columbus 1987, pp.465-492.

<sup>6</sup> In this case "ballad" in the strict sense; narrative poems in end-rhymed quatrains.

<sup>7</sup> cf. K. O'Brien O'Keefe 1990, ch. 2, "Orality and the developing text of Caedmon's *Hymn*", pp.32-41

Old English<sup>9</sup>. If we take this account<sup>9</sup> to have any basis on observed or recorded practice, we must assume that it represents an attempt to fix Latin texts within an Old English narrative system at period in which the means of recording by writing had not as yet developed sufficiently for the purpose. Stripped of the miraculous overtones, the process is the following: an initiate in the written culture, (in Bede's account an angel) paraphrases a selected episode of the Latin text (in this case the Bible) in the vernacular. The initiate in the oral culture (the twist in the Caedmon story is that he is not an initiate, but is enabled by the angel to act as one) then reformulates a text in a manner enabling it to become part of the vernacular oral tradition. As the variations in the Old English translations of Bede's paraphrase of the poem seem to suggest, such a fixing of the text would be as oral-formulaic alliterative verse.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica, iv. 22/4; Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, transl. and ed. by B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors. Oxford 1969. 416. The Leningrad MS (Leningrad Lat Q v I 18), dated 747 ad quem (ed. cit. xlv), contains a translation of Bede's Latin paraphrase into Old Northumbrian. (Facsimile in Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile (EEMF) vol. 23, Copenhagen 1991, plate 2.3)

Caedmon slips out of the hall every night when it is his turn to sing, because he is unable to do so. One night, while he is sleeping in the cowshed, an angel commands him to sing and, when he points out that if he could he would be enjoying the feasting and not sleeping in the cowshed, the angel commands him to sing the story of creation, which he is able to do. From then on, night after night, the angel tells him stories from the Bible, and he sings them in verse to the rest of the community.

<sup>10</sup> The textual variants function as oral-formulaic substitutions of the type demonstrated by Creed in English Literary History 26, 1959, pp.445-54. (Thanks to Ed Hames and Abbot Conway for supplying this reference via Ansax-L.) Eg. the variations weorc wuldorgodes, wera wuldorfader for 1.3a in Cambridge UL KK3,18 and Cambridge Corpus Christi College 42 respectively. (Facsimile in EEMF, plates 2.5 and 2.6) EEMF gives a total of 21 manuscript versions. The most significant variants are also listed in E. van K. Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems = Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records VI, New York 1942, p.106; the format of the apparatus tends to

A similar situation can be postulated for Iceland in the generation immediately following the introduction of Christianity. Here the position is presumably further complicated by the polyglot nature of a multinational missionary force, each member of which was presumably literate not only in Latin but also in his vernacular, to the extent that scribes versed in Old English script introduced those Old English graphemes which are now a distinctive feature of the Modern Icelandic orthography.

In postulating reoralization as a factor in the transmission of certain episodes in Grettis saga I am returning to a subject which has enjoyed frequent expert attention in the past; as no definitive conclusions have been reached, it is possibly not superfluous to suggest yet another line of approach.<sup>11</sup> In doing so I will restrict my attention for the moment to the so-called Sandhaugar Episode, the significant elements of which are the following:<sup>12</sup>

1. Gestr/Grettir fights with a she-troll in the hall
2. The she-troll makes her escape mortally wounded
3. Grettir climbs down into her lair behind a waterfall
4. He is confronted by a male troll
5. He finds an efficacious weapon and kills the troll.

The equivalent episode in *Beowulf*, stripped of certain digressions, runs as follows:

1. Beowulf fights with Grendel in the hall
2. Grendel escapes mortally wounded to the mere
- 1a. The hall is attacked by Grendel's mother
3. Beowulf dives down to her underwater home

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mask the formulaic nature of the substitutions.

<sup>11</sup> An excellent survey of research with an exhaustive bibliography is provided by Anatoly Libermann: "Beowulf - Grettir" in: Bela Brogyanyi, Thomas Krömmelbein, ed., Germanic Dialects = Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science Series IV vol. 38, Amsterdam 1986, pp.353-401.

<sup>12</sup> A more detailed summary of the main events in the two tales compared in the light of Propp's theory of folktale morphology is to be found in Óskar Halldórsson: "Tröllasaga Bárðdæla", in Skirnir 156, 1982, pp.5-36. My thanks to Gísli Sigurðsson for drawing my attention to this article and for supplying a copy of it.

4. She defends herself fiercely, Beowulf is hard pressed
5. Beowulf finds an ancient sword by divine revelation, kills Grendel's mother and decapitates Grendel.

The episode in Grettis saga occupies two chapters, just under six pages of the Fornrit edition. The equivalent passage in Beowulf, interspersed with lengthy speeches and allusions, spreads itself over more than a thousand lines of verse.

The most common explanation for the resemblances between these two is that they are both descendants of a common folk-tale, commonly known, since Panzer's work on the subject,<sup>13</sup> as the Bear's Son tale; an alternative designation is that of the Three Stolen Princesses;<sup>14</sup> a further tale, the Hand and Child,<sup>15</sup> is regarded by some as being related.<sup>16</sup> The Bear's Son tale is extremely widely distributed and exists in correspondingly widely divergent versions.

The thematic closeness of the versions of the tale in Beowulf and Grettis saga has led certain scholars to question whether the resemblance between the two is not possibly too close to be explained merely by their being derivatives of the same Indo-European folk-tale motif.<sup>17</sup>

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- 13 F. Panzer, Studien zur germanischen Sagen Geschichte 1, München 1910.
  - 14 Antti Aarne, transl. and enlarged Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folktale, Helsinki 1964, lemma 301.
  - 15 Stith Thompson, Motif Index of Folk Literature, Copenhagen, Vol vol 3, 1956, lemma G.369.5.
  - 16 This tale is of greatest interest to supporters of a Celtic origin for Beowulf, notably James Carney, Studies in Irish Literature and History, Dublin 1955. It is probably most familiar as the antecedent of the episode of Rhiannon's child in Pwyll Pendevic Dyvet (cf. Ifor Williams, Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogil, Caerdydd 1930, pp.21-27).
  - 17 Cf. Peter A. Jörgensen, "Icelandic Analogues to Beowulf" in Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, ed., Sagnaskemmtun, Wien 1986, pp.201-208, in which Jörgensen

Of these, one line of argument postulates a specifically Scandinavian tale used by the Beowulf-poet and in Grettis saga.<sup>10</sup> the second suggests that Grettis saga borrowed indirectly from Beowulf or from an English saga from which Beowulf derived.<sup>11</sup>

The versions of the Bear's Son Tale found in Iceland<sup>20</sup> show such diversity that it appears impossible for them all to be considered direct borrowings from a single literary source. Nonetheless, I believe that there is a case to be made for assuming indications that a literary source, by which I mean Beowulf in something approaching the form we know it in today, could have played a part in shaping the manner in which the tale was used in a complex of narratives of which Grettis saga is the longest and best known. This complex would consist of Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts and Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar, together with the Sandhaugar episode of Grettis saga and a hypothetical early version of the episode as found in the folk-tale Gullbrá og Skegqi.<sup>21</sup>

It is this last tale which is the key to the argument. As it

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refers to the relationship between Ála flekks saga and Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra, concluding "These sagas offer an excellent demonstration of how unlike two directly related recensions of a folktale can be."(pp.207-8). That they are related is evident from the fact that five lines from Hæð are quoted verbatim in Áfs; this does not prevent significant variations occurring at other points.

<sup>10</sup> Following W.W. Lawrence "The Haunted Mere in Beowulf", in: PMLA 27, 1912, pp.208-245, the description of landscape shows specifically Scandinavian features that make little sense in an English context. The view gained wider currency by being taken up by R.W. Chambers in Beowulf, and Introduction to the Study of the Poem, Cambridge 1959.

<sup>11</sup> Liberman's survey of eminent scholars from earlier generations subscribing to this theory, first formulated by Sophus Bugge, includes such names as Hugo Gering, R.C. Boer, B. Sijmons and Andreas Heusler (Liberman 1981 p.356).

<sup>20</sup> cf. Jørgensen 1986 pp. 201-2.

<sup>21</sup> As yet I have been unable to locate the original of this tale; the following account is therefore based on the summary in Garmonsway/Simpson 1968, pp.328-331.

stands, the tale is extremely late, having been collected in the mid-nineteenth century; it can, however, be linked very tenuously with Kristni saga; the eponymous protagonist Skeggi of Hvammr was one of the most virulent antagonists of the Conversion and is mentioned by name as such in Kristni saga.<sup>22</sup> Skeggi is portrayed in the tale as a heathen whose farm is frequently ravaged by the female draugr Gullbrá, provoking him to seek her out at her underwater lair. At a first attempt he prays in his moment of need to Þórr, who falls him. A second attempt, during which his vows are directed to the Christian God, is more successful; he escapes and returns with a hoard of gold which, according to his vow, he spends on the endowment of the church at Hvammr.

The striking point in this tale is the explicit manner in which it links success in the adventure to divine intervention and to the protagonist's willingness to provide funds for the endowment of a church. The moral is not dissimilar to that propounded by Chaucer's Pardoner, though less cynically promulgated; it would certainly not be out of place on the lips of a cleric seeking funds with which to consolidate the spiritual conquests made in the first generation after the Conversion.<sup>23</sup>

The two other þættir which I regard as possibly belonging to the same complex, Þorsteins þættir uxaföts and Orms þættir Stórolfssonar, fulfil a similar purpose. Divine assistance is obtained this time through the mediation of the saints; St. Óláfr and St. Peter respectively ensure deliverance from a fearsome supernatural adversary. This assistance is not

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<sup>22</sup> B. Kahle, ed., Kristni saga, Halle 1902, ch. 2. I treat this as a separate saga following the general convention; it is not attested as a separate work in manuscript, being found embedded in the Hauksbók version of Landnámabók.

<sup>23</sup> One would, of course, have to assume that a missionary sermon of this nature would link the story with a protagonist not immediately identifiable by the audience; the link with Skeggi would then occur at a later stage of transmission.

directly and pragmatically linked to material gain for the established Church; the story seems in each case to be more concerned to demonstrate the efficacy of prayer to the Christian God and his Saints, and to be appropriate within a missionary context. The presence of these two earlier analogues, dated in their present form to the period around 1300, suggests that the folk-tale Gullbrá og Skegqi might have antecedents dating to the period immediately before the final composition of Grettis saga and that the nucleus of this and the two þattir mentioned above might have originated within the general context of the Conversion.

The three analogues mentioned above could all have served usefully as exempla in sermons, and it is this that leads me to consider them as possible elements in a chain of reoralization dependent on Beowulf.

To explain this, I have to assume that Beowulf, in the form familiar from modern standard editions, was available for oral reception at the time of the Conversion, AD 999/1000. In that form, both victories are also ascribed to divine intervention. In the fight against Grendel's mother Beowulf is seen as a passive agent to whom God grants victory;

	ond hállig God
geweold wigsigor;	witig Drihten
rodera rædend	hit on ryht gesced
yðelice	syððan he eft astod.
Geseah ða on searwum	sigeeadig bil... (1553-7)⇒

whereas in the Grendel episode he commits himself actively to God's protection:

þær him aglaeca	ætgræpe wearð;
hwæðre he gemunde	mægemes strenge
gimfæste gife	þe him God sealde
ond him to Alwaldan	are gelyfde

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⇒ ed. Klaeber, Boston, 1950. In the prose translation by E. Talbot Donaldson (London 1967):

and holy God brought about victory in war; the wise Lord, Ruler of the Heavens, decided it with right, easily, when Beowulf had stood up again. Then he saw among the armour a victory-blessed blade...

frofre ond fultum; by he þone feond overcwom  
(1269-74)<sup>25</sup>

The assumption that English missionaries to Iceland might have been familiar with a text of Beowulf in this form raises the thorny question of the dating of Beowulf and the even thornier question of the ideological motivation underlying its committal to parchment at a date generally accepted as 1000 +/- 25yrs.<sup>26</sup> I would however assume that the act of writing the manuscript implies an interest in the poem in certain, probably clerical, circles, around the turn of the century; that is, at the time that efforts were being made to convert Iceland to Christianity.

I would then suggest a process of reoralization as follows:

An extremely abbreviated version of Beowulf, containing or even concentrating on the Grendel/Grendel's mother episode, was used either formally, as an exemplum in a sermon, or informally, as a camp-fire story with a suitably Christian interpretation, by a missionary or one of the foreign clergy sent to consolidate the newly introduced faith. The value of the episode as an exemplum lies in its emphasis on the efficacy of the power of the Deity in adventures likely to appeal to the spirit of the target audience. This version of the Grendel story entered the stock of orally transmitted narrative, being as prone as any folk-tale to adaptation to a given audience or to blending with other folk-tale motifs. Where appropriate, the Christian exemplary overtones were retained, as in Þorsteins þáttur and Orms þáttur, or even made

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<sup>25</sup> There the monster had laid hold upon him, but he was mindful of the great strength, the large gift God had given him, and relied on the Almighty for favour, comfort and help. By that he overcame the foe...(Talbot Donaldson p.23)

<sup>26</sup> Early research assumes a Northumbrian provenance and a date around 700. More recent research suggests a date closer to that of the manuscript; useful summaries are to be found in Colin Chase, ed., The Dating of Beowulf, Toronto 1981, esp. pp.3-8, and Claus-Dieter Wenzel, "Die Datierung des Beowulf, Bemerkungen zur jüngsten Forschungsentwicklung" in Anglia 103, 1985, p.371-400.

more explicit, as in the hypothetical precursor of Gullbrá og Skeggi. In other instances the Christian overtones are discarded as inappropriate, or supernatural figures of non-Christian origin, as found in other versions of the tale, are permitted to remain; in Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, for example, it is a dwarf who provides the sword. Conceivably, the survival of the text was aided by its proximity to an indigenous version of the Bear's Son/Stolen Princesses tale; this indigenous version appears to have left its traces in Samsons saga fagra.<sup>27</sup>

A reoralized Beowulf would have lost its "epic"<sup>28</sup> dimensions; its narrative strategy, though not its form, would be closer to that of the ballad or the eddic poem, concentrating on high moments of action and omitting passages of transition, digression or comment. The most conspicuous highlights of the first part of the poem, from its beginning to the end of Beowulf's successful landhreinsun, are arguably Beowulf's arrival, Unferth's challenge and the subsequent flyting,<sup>29</sup> Grendel's attack, his mother's revenge and the final episode at the mere. We could imagine these to form the skeleton for a reoralized narrative.

A saga-man, setting out to give flesh and bones to an

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<sup>27</sup> This saga corresponds more closely than any other I know to the pattern of Arne-Thompson 301 and is at the same time the least Icelandic in overall atmosphere; typically, the contest takes place after a plunge into a mill-pond, a means of power-supply characteristic of the European mainland.

<sup>28</sup> Users of Ansax-L will be aware of the degree of controversy at present attached to the use of this term in respect of Beowulf; I use it as in "epic simile" as a convenient shorthand term to denote a narrative technique characterized by discursiveness and a certain ponderousness of diction.

<sup>29</sup> This episode, (ll.499--589) establishes Beowulf's reputation for endurance in water; as a defence against Unferth's imputation of cowardice he is able to tell of a swimming match of five days' duration, during the course of which he kills nine sea-monsters.

equally skeletal narrative built up on existing traditions concerning Grettir Ásmundsson, is faced with one overriding problem; his hero's main claim to fame is the purely passive one of having survived.<sup>20</sup> For the length of survival time to seem remarkable, it has to be filled with events, for although the mere fact of having survived may be a claim to fame in a chronicle, standing on its own it is poor saga material. On the other hand, by filling in the elapsed time with a tenuously connected string of events, the sagaman runs the risk of producing a mere episodic fragmentation.

The saga's portrayal of Grettir's abnormal prowess emphasizes two attributes in particular; he is possessed of a high degree of sheer brute strength, and he has unequalled powers of endurance in water. Both attributes turn out to be ambivalent and both are crucial to the thematic unity of the saga. The beginning of his downfall is marked by a trial of strength to the utmost in the fight with Glámr;<sup>21</sup> the catastrophe is precipitated by the consequences of his volunteering to swim to the mainland to fetch fire. The saga's structure is held together by the recurrence of these two themes; tests of strength and deeds of benign or excessive violence on the one hand, contests in water on the other.

Within this context it is easy to see the attraction that our hypothetical reorIALIZED Beowulf might have had for our

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<sup>20</sup> Or, as Kathryn Hume puts it in her study "Thematic Design of Grettis Saga (JEGP 73, 1974, pp.469-86) "His fame rests more on his endurance than on his deeds.

<sup>21</sup> Óskar Halldórsson (1982, p.7) points out that after the Glámr episode Grettir is reported as not daring to travel alone after dark and that his behaviour in the Sandhaugar episode seems inconsistent with this. The sagaman seems to be aware of this problem; in ch. 64 (IF 7 p.211) it is expressly stated that a light was left burning in the hall while Grettir kept watch; whilst subsequently it is pointed out that Grettir tried to ensure that he had company for the fight under the waterfall; he insisted that the priest accompany him and assumed that he would wait until after nightfall to see him safely back. (ch.65 p.214, ch.66 p.216)

hypothetical sagaman. In it, he finds a figure possessing the same attributes of great physical strength and extreme endurance in water for which his protagonist is legendary. This means that he can adopt episodes from this source without doing violence to his overall conception of the character of his central protagonist. He therefore adopts as much of the *Beowulf* material as is consistent with his overall design, reshaping where necessary and above all removing all overtly Christian overtones. This material is distributed through the text in such a way as to add depth and homogeneity to his portrayal of the outlaw as survivor; the theme of extraordinary strength culminates in the fight at Sandhaugar, while the portrayal of Grettir's endurance in water reaches its climax shortly afterwards in the swim from Drangey.

Obviously, the reoralization model, like any model involving oral transmission, is unlikely to be susceptible of absolute proof, and I am not proposing it as any sort of final answer. Among points which need clarification, or perhaps they have been clarified and I am unaware of the fact, are:

The extent to which the narrative content of Beowulf was familiar in England during the period of the Conversion of Iceland or at any subsequent period during which the necessary sorts of contacts occurred,

The degree of overlap between vernacular homily, Islendingasaga and folk-tale in Iceland between ca. 1000 and 1300,

The extent to which Insular missionaries were involved in the Conversion of Iceland, their ideological motivation and their relationship to the Benedictine Reform Movement,

Nonetheless, the model can possibly be considered valid if it opens up additional lines of enquiry into the nature of saga composition and the transmission of saga material.