

Sisam, Kenneth, The Structure of Beowulf (Oxford at the Clarendon Press) 1965

p. 20 In 1936 Professor Tolkien delivered his lecture on Beowulf; the Monsters and the Critics,<sup>3</sup> which brought fresh ideas and has influenced all later writers on the poem. . . . As an account of what the poem means to Professor Tolkien, or of the way in which he, as a storyteller, would treat the plot, I have no criticism of it; and on many issues on which he differs from other critics I agree. But I dissent on two matters which especially concern the structure of the poem. The one is his explanation of the architecture of Beowulf as an artistic balance between the first two-thirds (1-2199) and the last part (2200-3182) . . .; the other, his view that the central theme is the battle, hopeless in this world, of man against evil.

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p. 22 Professor Tolkien avowedly favours the mythological school, and follows the method of interpretation by pairs of opposites, which tend to be vague. It is not clear what beginnings in the earlier part and what ends in the last part are opposed, or why Beowulf's rise to the throne should come in the last part.

#### Some Problems

p. 30 The Return From the Mere (Lines 837-927)

When dissection was in fashion, this was explained by interpolation. ((Mullenhoff, Beowulf, pp. 119 ff.)) The poem would be more shapely, if less interesting, without the expedition; and the explanation seemed more likely because the way that the horsemen found easy and pleasant was difficult and eerie for the party who set out next morning to find Grendel's Mother.

p. 31 The explanation is better found in a well-known characteristic of primitive narrative: two things happening at the same time are described one after the other with no technical device to show that they were contemporaneous.