
Missing Links: *Beowulf*, *Grettis saga* and the Late Romances of William Morris

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For over a century, scholarly theories have surrounded the relationship between the Old English poem *Beowulf* and the Old Norse *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. The hypotheses connecting these two works still find favour with a number of modern scholars, and have become part of an established framework for critical discussion of the literature of both languages.¹ ‘No one now disputes’, announced Professor G. Smithers of Durham University in his inaugural lecture in May of 1961, ‘that the first part of *Beowulf* is ultimately identical with a story told about one or another hero in several Old Norse sagas’.² Smithers’s argument highlighted the extent to which two national literary traditions could be productively aligned. *Grettla*’s recent translators also connect its narrative with that of *Beowulf*, although they have generally adopted a more cautious tone.³ Whether or not one subscribes to the theory, it provides an arresting idea of late-Victorian scholarship. It also highlights the hopes and opinions of Britain’s Norse philologists and translators, and William Morris was among the most prominent of these.

The purpose of this article is not to contribute to the substantial extant body of scholarship on the correspondences between Old Norse and Old English. Rather, it is to examine this particular theory in terms of its academic origins, implications for Victorian concepts of the nation and influence on late nineteenth-century medievalism – namely that of William Morris. This article will look at both the personal correspondence of Eiríkr Magnússon and Morris, and their later works, and will argue that the concept of northern society as demonstrated in their translations of Old Norse sagas and Morris’s later works of fiction was heavily influenced by the notions of Anglo-Icelandic cultural interaction from the *Beowulf-Grettla* hypotheses. Specifically, the paper will argue that Morris’s late romance *The Wood Beyond the World* can be read as a double ‘missing link’: between Eiríkr’s political writings and Morris’s fantasy, and between Morris’s own work on *Grettla* and *Beowulf*.

Credit for the origin of the *Beowulf-Grettla* theory is generally given to the Oxford-based Icelander Guðbrandur Vigfússon, who noted the connection in the introduction to his 1878 *Sturlunga saga* edition. Guðbrandur was the first to compare the Sandhaugar episode from *Grettla* with events in *Beowulf*, and was first to outline the *hapax legomena* argument – the similarity between the sole surviving instances of the Old English word *hæft-mēce* (hilted sword) and the Old Norse *hefti-sax*. Guðbrandur's analysis contained two pertinent points: firstly, that *Grettis saga* was based on an historical narrative of the real-life outlaw Grettir; and secondly, that the '[m]ythical portion (chaps. 32-36, 64-67)' of the saga was 'most interesting to us as containing a late version of the famous Beowulf Legend'.⁴ Guðbrandur claimed to have noticed this parallel 'in the spring of 1873, when he first read *Beowulf* in the original', and argued that the link demonstrated a clear cultural influence: '[t]he old legend shot forth from its ancient Scandinavian home in two branches, one to England, where it was turned into an epic, and one to Iceland, where it was domesticated and embodied in a popular Saga, tacked to the name of an outlaw and hero'.⁵ As a final point of interest, Guðbrandur highlighted that in each text 'one word still remains as a memorial of its origin, viz. in the English epic *hæft-mēce* and in the Icelandic saga *hefti-sax*, both occurring in the same place of the legend, and both ἄπαξ λεγόμενα in their respective literatures'.⁶ The philological evidence suggested common roots: 'Gretti's fight with Glam, and afterwards with the troll-wife and the monster below the waterfall, is thus the Icelandic version of the Gothic hero's struggle with Grendel and his witch-mother'.⁷ Contemporary scholars were content to take Guðbrandur on his word regarding the novelty of his discovery, and modern scholars have followed suit. Nineteenth-century philologists cited the *Sturlunga saga* footnote as a revolutionary concept in the reception of Old Norse and Old English literature.⁸ Such writers as Hugo Gering (1880) and C. S. Smith (1881) rushed to support it.

Comparison of the two texts quickly became a popular framework for criticism.⁹ In 1880, Frederick Metcalfe posited that the Old Norse name '*Glámr*' had etymological links to the Scottish word 'glamour', evidence that the tale was 'common to Iceland and our neighbours beyond the Tweed'.¹⁰ Elizabeth Jane Oswald, writing of her third trip to Iceland in 1879, mentioned the link between *Beowulf* and *Grettla* and suggested a lost Old Norse original which inspired both tales. 'Grettir the Strong was an historical character', Oswald wrote, 'but his history is decorated by some legends which were a sort of common property in the north'.¹¹ The terminology implied that the *Íslendingasögur* comprised a shared corpus, and that Britain had a substantial stake. As Magnús Fjalldal notes, while the reasons behind Victorians' support for Guðbrandur's theory varied widely, a common factor was the use of philological data to demonstrate a biological relationship between Britain and

Iceland.¹² This ‘genetic’ argument existed in a number of different manifestations. There was the ‘Common Origin’ theory, the model favoured by Guðbrandur, which suggested that there had been a common shared source narrative on which both texts were based. Alternatively, one could opt for the ‘English Hypothesis’, which supported the notion that *Grettis saga* had its roots in an earlier Old English work.¹³ According to this theory, *Beowulf*, or possibly an older version of that tale, made its way to Iceland where it influenced the story of Grettir.

A peculiar aspect of Guðbrandur’s 1878 announcement was the insistence that he had already noted the connection five years previous to publication, surely something of a moot point considering his was the first (publicly) published account of the theory. This insistence becomes even more intriguing when one considers that Eiríkr Magnússon, the Cambridge-based arch-rival to Guðbrandur, and William Morris’s long-term friend and co-translator, acknowledged the connection between the texts in a lecture entitled ‘On Early Points of Contact, Chiefly Literary, Between Britain & Iceland’, the notes to which are now held at the National University of Iceland, and which was potentially given as early as 1875 following the devastating eruption of Askja.¹⁴

In this lecture, Eiríkr provided a brief overview of the initial settlement of Iceland followed by the hypothesis that the chief literary treasures of the Scandinavian-influenced regions of Anglo-Saxon England made their way to Iceland and developed into the current models of the Icelandic sagas: ‘[n]ow it is a fact frequently forgotten or overlooked that the most important, the wealthiest & most civilised part of the settlers of Iceland came from Great Britain. [...] Nearly all the settlers of the west of Iceland & a large portion of those of the North came from North Britain.’¹⁵ Furthermore, these men, ‘the noblest by birth & mightiest by position’, were Christians and thus knew ‘refined methods of life’.¹⁶ The Anglo-Saxon church thus provided a civilising aspect to the pioneering settlers of northern Iceland, and many other settlers around the country. Eiríkr named Ketill Flatnose as one such forefather who moved from Norway to Scotland, was baptised, and whose children then settled in Iceland:

It so happened, that of the mighty race of Ketil Flatnose Christian representatives had settled from the beginning, one or more, in each quarter of the land. Queen Aud the deep-minded & her nephew Örlyg in the West, Helgi the lean in the North, Ketil the foolish in the East, & Helgi bjölan in the South. The descendants of these settlers had multiplied considerably by the time Christianity was adopted as a state religion in the country AD 1000, & formed in each quarter a very influential family combination.¹⁷

British Christianity, in Eiríkr's view, thus became a 'superior stamp of civilisation', a 'moral heirloom' of Ketil's descendants.¹⁸

Into this individual contextual understanding, Eiríkr introduced the topic which would intrigue scholars up to the present day: 'an unsolved problem of mystery in Icelandic literature', namely the 'palpable resemblance between the most striking incidents in the poem of *Beowulf* & the *Saga of Grettir*'.¹⁹ Eiríkr believed that the answer to this question was that the Old English *Beowulf* narrative had existed in Iceland from the end of the ninth century. This was not a gradual transferral of cultural aspects; rather 'the story of Beowulf's great deeds migrated, in the character of tradition, directly from the north of England to the north of Iceland'.²⁰ Eiríkr compared numerous passages of the two texts, and concluded that *Grettis saga* was indisputably dependent on *Beowulf*: '[c]an it be shown on the evidence of historic probability that the story of Beowulf migrated in a natural manner from England to Iceland & there was woven into the life of Grettir? It can.'²¹

Eiríkr pointed to Auðunn Skökull, Grettir's great-grandfather via his father Ásmundr and grandfather Þorgrím, as the most likely candidate for bringing the text northwards, and provided his audience with a family tree which included King Olaf the Holy, Ragnar Lodbrok, and the entire Hanoverian dynasty.²² The timeline thus joined Old English and Old Norse literature, the founding fathers of the Icelandic Settlement period and the major Royal Houses of Northern Europe. With the tale definitively charted from Northumbria to the northern coasts of Iceland, Eiríkr's lecture ended on a mystery of his own: 'I will wind up by a last instance, which is, perhaps, the most remarkable of all, but, unfortunately as fatal to the destinies of Iceland, as it is importantly illustrative of the connexions between the two countries'.²³ There, dramatically (and frustratingly), Eiríkr's account broke off in both drafts. We will potentially never know what Eiríkr's terminal argument was, nor when, where, or even *if* the lecture was actually delivered.²⁴

The uncertain dating of these papers, and the fact that there is only Guðbrandur's word for the fact that he thought of the theory five years previous to publishing it, leaves an intriguing theoretical question: who came up with the theory first?²⁵ It is entirely plausible that both scholars could have stumbled upon the textual similarities at roughly the same time. While they were not on amicable terms with one another, in various colleagues they had mutual friends who could easily have passed on information.²⁶ This then begs the further question, regardless of who came up with the idea first: how early in Victorian reception literature should one look for theoretical links between *Grettis saga* and *Beowulf*? Were they already in Eiríkr's mind when he and Morris began their 1869 translation?

If Eiríkr Magnússon's theories on *Grettla* were known during the 1870s there is

little to no reference to them. Hugo Gering, writing in 1880, noted how astounding it was that Eiríkr and Morris had not noticed the connection in their 1869 translation: ‘[d]ass der Zusammenhang zwischen dem Beowulf und der Grettla nicht schon früher aufgedeckt ist, ist sehr wunderbar’ (‘[t]hat the connection between Beowulf and Grettla was not discovered earlier is very extraordinary’).²⁷ Gering effectively blamed Morris and Eiríkr for not picking up on the issue. Despite a common acceptance of Eiríkr’s familiarity with this theory in modern scholarship, little has been done to investigate the possible ramifications regarding his later work on Old Norse literature or that of his colleague Morris. Considering Morris’s enthusiastic involvement in all things Icelandic, one would expect him to exhibit an equal involvement in the academic discussion surrounding the *Beowulf-Grettla* theories, particularly since he produced translations of both texts. Yet nowhere in the collections of Morris’s extant letters, diaries and literary works does one find the two texts mentioned side by side.

This absence cannot be ascribed to a lack of knowledge. From the autumn of 1868, Morris complemented his keen study of northern literary culture with in-depth personal tutorials in the language and literature of Old Norse. ‘At last’, wrote May Morris, ‘he comes into touch with the life of the North which hitherto he had had to interpret for himself from somewhat languid or old-fashioned recensions’.²⁸ The first translation to be published from these sessions, ‘Gunnlaug Wormtongue’, completed in partnership with Eiríkr, appeared as early as January 1869 in the *Fortnightly Review*. In April of the same year, the pair published *The Story of Grettir the Strong*, followed in June by the third part of Morris’s *The Earthly Paradise*, which contained the poem ‘The Lovers of Gudrun’ – based on the story of *Laxdæla saga*. Of these works, *The Grettis saga* translation was notable for being the first of the pair’s translations to be published in book format, as well as the first full translation of the saga into English. Morris and Eiríkr continued to collaborate on Old Norse projects of a pedagogical significance for Victorian readers up until the former’s death, yet Morris was also working on the tales of Beowulf and Grettir in some capacity for the majority of his career as a writer. In 1868 (presumably December) Morris wrote to a student in Marburg on his artistic impressions of medieval literature and his current writing projects:

I may say that I am fairly steeped in medievalism generally; but the Icelandic Sagas, or our own Border Ballads, and Froissart [...] have had as much influence over me as (or more than) anything else. I have translated a great deal from the Icelandic, a little from old French; and of late have translated *Beowulf*, for which I have a very great admiration.²⁹

Beowulf and the *Íslendingasögur* thus formed two parts of Morris's extensive pool of source material, and he was engaged in translating both the Old English and Old Norse from the start of his literary career.

Nor can we ascribe the absence to a lack of interest. In Morris's poem 'To the Muse of the North', originally intended as a preface to the *Saga of Grettir the Strong*, one senses the intense personal engagement of the British poet with his Icelandic subject matter.³⁰ Although eventually discarded in favour of a shorter poem, it excellently captures Morris's attachment to Old Norse literature at this time of his life. The language is both tragic and touching; Morris asks the northern spirit to 'wrap me in the grief of long ago', and addresses her as mother, lover and sister in one being.³¹ This was literature in which high tragedy was inseparable from familial kinship. The bonds of Anglo-Icelandic familiarity were further stressed in the preface, where Morris and Eiríkr introduced their translation as 'an old story founded on facts, full of dramatic interest, and setting before people's eyes pictures of the life and manners of an interesting race of men near to ourselves'.³² While their introductory material was brief (the pair were more concerned with getting their translations into publication than producing scholarly essays as introductory material) Morris would later comment further on the saga in his 1887 lecture on 'The Early Literature of the North – Iceland'.³³ He described the Icelanders as the 'representatives, a little mingled with Irish blood, of the Gothic family of the great Germanic race' and spoke of the *Íslendingasögur* as being the fossil record of this familial bond.³⁴ The land itself was to Morris 'a Holy Land' and its people 'cognate to our own dominant race'.³⁵ *Grettis saga*, Morris explained, was key to understanding this dynamic as it was a classic example of the spirit of the Icelanders themselves – an 'intensely Icelandic' work, which alongside *Njáls saga*, formed the core of a body of Britain's Northern antiquity.³⁶ The ideological prerequisites for picturing the two narratives as a shared heritage were in Morris's writings.

It seems even less likely that Eiríkr simply did not share his theories with Morris. Across his wide-ranging and often eccentric body of scholarship on the Old Norse sagas, Eiríkr Magnússon steered attention towards Icelandic literature – whether through public lectures or private tutorials – as part of a wider effort to marry Victorian predilections with the *Íslendingasögur* and other works of his own nation. If taking Morris under his wing was initially an unplanned aspect of this long-term project, Eiríkr quickly realised that through the Englishman's talents (and fame) translations such as *Grettir the Strong* would reach a far wider readership. With Morris's help, Eiríkr imagined that the cultural, familial and ultimately national links demonstrated by *Grettla's* journey from the north of England to the shores of Iceland could be revitalised. *Beowulf* and *Grettir* could be studied as long-lost siblings, and

Britain's improved public interest in Iceland could open the door for the latter's separation from Danish sovereignty.³⁷

Indeed, Morris's and Eiríkr's later works on Old Norse displayed an increasing interest in possible ties between the two nations which suggests an unacknowledged awareness of Eiríkr's 'English Hypothesis'. Their ambitious multi-volume 'Saga Library' was introduced to British readers as an ancestral treasure chest. In the introduction to the first volume, the pair set out their theoretical approach in terms of viewing the Icelanders as part of a great 'Gothic branch of the Teutonic race', and accordingly the imputed genetic links between Iceland and Britain.³⁸ The misunderstood Icelanders, the co-translators wrote, were key to an understanding of the constitution of northern Europe:

Although Iceland is a barren northern island, of savagely wild, though to the eye that sees, beautiful scenery, the inhabitants of it neither are nor were savages cut off from the spirit and energy of the great progressive races. They are, rather, a specially intellectual family of one of the most active of those races, to whom fate, which has deprived them of so much, has allotted the honourable task of preserving the record of the thoughts, the aspirations, and the imaginations of their earliest ancestors.³⁹

Morris and Eiríkr proceeded to explicitly link the literature and the lineage of Iceland with those of Britain. The introduction approached the subject of saga translation with the view held in many of Morris's and Eiríkr's other works, that the British poet and Icelandic scholar shared a common past, repeatedly referring to 'our race'. The sagas, they argued, were Britain's own literature in a different tongue.

Even more strikingly, this concept of a shared Anglo-Icelandic heritage found expression in many of Morris's later romances, which employed imagery of imagined communities composed of shared Norse and Anglo-Saxon elements.⁴⁰ In *The House of the Wolfings* and in *The Roots of the Mountains*, May Morris writes, 'my father seems to have got back to the atmosphere of the Sagas'.⁴¹ Yet the texts in question are describing intermingled societies, where Old Norse atmosphere clothes more familiar terrain. Thus the character of Thiodolf (an English rendition of Old Norse *Þjóð-úlfr* – 'folk/nation-wolf') of the former text embodies many heroic traits of both literatures.⁴² Thiodolf is a formidable and resolute protector of the land. Leading a band of Gothic warriors against the encroaching Roman armies, he elicits fear in his enemies and loyalty in his allies. Thiodolf refers to the Roman forces as 'aliens' in his battle speeches and summons up reserves of courage in the face of defeat in a manner particularly reminiscent of the Old English poem 'The Battle of Malden': '[...] and

lo the company of the Markmen standing stoutly together, though sorely minished; and sure it was that they had not fled or been scattered, but were ready to fall one over another in one band'.⁴³

Along with the more gothic-derived community depicted in *The Roots of the Mountains*, the Wolfings and their neighbouring tribes complemented a vision of Morris's later Anglo-Scandinavian conceptions of 'nation' and 'folk'.⁴⁴ These late romances arguably demonstrate Morris's continuing interest in the shared cultural elements of the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians; here he could inventively depict an alternative European pre-history in which the tenets of Old Norse philology dictated the plot. Tom Shippey has noted the ominous quality to Morris's biologically incompatible ethnic communities in these later romances.⁴⁵ Had Eiríkr written poetry, one might have read of similar pre-histories of the European nations from an Icelandic perspective. The works surrounding Morris's *Beowulf* translation, alongside his lectures on the international significance of the *Íslendingasögur*, thus constitute a peculiar combination of ideas of ethnic race-division, anti-nationalist societies and northern escapism which together suggest knowledge of Eiríkr's hypothesis.

Perhaps the clearest argument for Morris's knowledge of Eiríkr's 'English Hypothesis' connecting *Grettis saga* and the Old English *Beowulf* and its influence on his thought from this period comes from a prose romance on which Morris was working at the same time as his 1895 translation. *The Wood Beyond the World* was a late fantasy begun by Morris in 1892 and published in 1894; of all Morris's later works it stands out for its unexpectedly sinister tone, its peculiar mixture of northern and southern imagery, and its wealth of potential readings.⁴⁶ The tale tells of a young man who finds himself married to an unfaithful wife and travels abroad to seek solace. After seeing a chilling trio of figures who appear to vanish into thin air, he begins a hazardous journey which leads him to a fantastical mansion in a wooded valley. Here he falls in love with a serving maiden and eventually escapes with her from her sinister and magical mistress. Perhaps the most unnerving feature of this altogether rather disturbing work is the figure of the mistress's servant – a savage dwarf-like creature who appears to possess traits of both *Beowulf*'s and *Grettir*'s enemies.⁴⁷

Much overlooked by Morris's early biographers, and dismissed as a simplistic socialist allegory by contemporary reviewers, this late romance nonetheless offers a wealth of saga parallels which would seem to imply that Morris was very much thinking about his earlier efforts in Old Norse translation at the start of the 1890s.⁴⁸ Several reviewers have courted such a contextual reading – Faulkner remarks that the work's 'diction is remarkable for the purity of its Old English emphasis', as has also been said of Morris's saga translations, while scholars such as Phillippa Bennett have persuasively championed the late romances as crucial to any understanding of

Morris's entire artistic process – but the reception from Morris's early critics was largely negative.⁴⁹

A glance at the plot reveals numerous elements potentially derived from Morris's ongoing work on both Old Norse and Old English literature. While watching a ship being loaded in the harbour, one bearing a banner of a 'grim wolf ramping up against a maiden', the protagonist Walter is struck by the apparition of three bizarre figures, the foremost being the most unworldly: '[t]hese were three; first came a dwarf, dark-brown of hue and hideous, with long arms and ears exceedingly great and dog-teeth that stuck out like the fangs of a wild beast. He was clad in a rich coat of yellow silk, and bare in his hand a crooked bow, and was girt with a broad sax.'⁵⁰ Whether the 'sax' as a weapon had merely struck Morris's fancy from his work on *Grettis saga* or *Beowulf*, or whether he was also aware of the wider implications of the word for Guðbrandur's hypothesis, the dwarf in *The Wood Beyond the World* carried one. Walter sees the three mysterious apparitions again, apparently coming from his father's lodgings, and once more on hearing of the violent death of his father at the hands of his ex-wife's kinsmen – a passage bearing more than a passing resemblance to saga-style blood feud.⁵¹ In the latter case the apparition of the three figures halts Walter in the midst of his mourning, and interrupts his thoughts of vengeance:

But Walter's visage from wrathful red had become pale, and he pointed up street, and cried out:

Look! dost thou see?

See what, master? quod Arnold:

What! here cometh an ape in gay raiment; belike the beast of some jongleur.

Nay, by God's wounds! 'tis a man, though he be exceeding mis-shapen like a very devil.⁵²

The devilish nature of the dwarf is further confirmed by the realisation that only Walter and his companion are aware of the figures; the being is both corporeal and ghostly.

With his thoughts shaken off vengeance, Walter sets sail for no particular heading whatsoever and ends up in a distant land, not entirely unrecognisable as a literary version of the North:

When it was broad daylight, they opened a land, a long shore of rocks and mountains, and nought else could they see at first. Nevertheless as day wore and they drew nigher, first they saw the mountains fall away from the sea, and were behind the long wall of a sheer cliff; and coming nigher yet, they beheld

a green plain going up after a little in green bents and slopes to the feet of the said cliff-wall.⁵³

The landscape could conceivably be compared to the land first seen by Victorian travellers coming by steamer to Iceland. Approaching the southern coastline, they would at first be presented by fearsome cliffs off the south-east, before heading westward past Vík and the Vestmannæyar where the mountains would appear to fall back somewhat, revealing the broad slopes and plains inhabited by the characters of *Njáls saga*. Morris's own accounts follow this self-same pattern of discovery. In a letter written from Reykjavik in 1871, Morris commented on the strange feeling of sailing along Iceland's coastline, and watching 'the end of the world rising out of the sea'.⁵⁴ Mackail notes that Morris's diary entry for 29 July 1871 demonstrates the unsettling effect that the landscape of northern Iceland had on him, writing that it 'impressed Morris's imagination with a sense of terror of the land which never quite left him, and which reappears vividly in his descriptions of the mountain journeys in *The Glittering Plain* and *The Well at the World's End*'.⁵⁵ To these one can usefully add *The Wood Beyond the World*.

Walter and his shipmates meet the land's sole human inhabitant, an old man who tells them of the race of Bears who live over the cliff-wall. According to the old man these people are 'bears only in name; they be a nation of half wild men'.⁵⁶ Many of the features of this race appear to be taken from Victorian northern antiquity: the importance of the democratic assembly ring (or 'Doom-ring') to which all are summoned for judgement; the believed common nature of cannibalism in the Old North; and notions of the gullibility of Old Norse faith. Despite severe warnings from the old man, Walter is keen to explore the lands beyond the cliff wall. He discovers a gap in the cliff – 'a downright shard' in the middle of 'that northern-looking bight' – and journeys through it into a secret valley on the other side.⁵⁷

Filled with typical northern fauna – the hare, the fox, the crow, the hawk – the valley is reminiscent of that discovered by Grettir during his period of outlawry and sought by numerous Victorian travellers in Morris's own lifetime. It is also home to the previously met dwarf:

[Walter] turned around towards the noise, his knees shook and he trembled: this way and that he looked, and then gave a great cry and tumbled down in a swoon; for close before him, at his very feet, was the dwarf whose image he had seen before, clad in his yellow coat, and grinning up at him from his hideous hairy countenance.⁵⁸

Walter faints, and wakes to find the dwarf sitting by him, and questioning him on his intentions – a scene which when taken with the dwarf’s choice of weaponry seems to parallel Beowulf’s encounter with Grendel’s mother: ‘Then she sat on the hall-guest and tugged out her sax,/ The broad and brown edged, to wreak her son,/ Her offspring her own’.⁵⁹ There is a disturbing breach of personal space in both episodes. For the time being, Morris’s villain merely provides Walter with food, but remarks that he detests the bread of the ‘aliens’ and will only consume raw flesh and uncooked food.⁶⁰ The creature himself is indicative of the land he was forged in – a product of guile and ‘perilous for anyone that love the [sic] aught of good’.⁶¹

Walter is later told by the Lady – the ruler of the hidden woodland, who appears to have sinister designs on the protagonist – that the creature is the Dwarf-King, and throughout the tale it is unclear whether there is one or a multitude of creatures following in his shadow.⁶² The dwarf, or one like it, continually appears at moments when Walter suspects that all is not as it seems, or conversely the appearance highlights a subterfuge on the part of the Lady.⁶³ The imagery connected with the dwarf, particularly the yellow hue and creeping posture, is echoed in the image of the lion (a construct of the Lady’s sorcery) which Walter is called upon to defeat: ‘a great yellow creature crouching flat to the earth and slowly drawing nigher’.⁶⁴ The defeat of this beast and the subsequent disappearance of the corpse strengthen Walter’s reservations about the substance of the woodland realm: ‘this is a land of mere lies’ he comments to himself, with ‘nought real and alive therein save me’.⁶⁵

Morris’s dwarf was not an entirely original creation. Although clearly separated in both appearance and demeanour from the similarly villainous Regin of Morris’s *Sigurd the Volsung*, the dwarf had literary predecessors both within and without Morris’s own artistic corpus.⁶⁶ The concept of a dwarfish tormentor which appears at times of uncertainty Morris took from De La Motte Fouqué’s 1814 novel *Sintram and His Companions*.⁶⁷ Here the protagonist is hounded by a mental construction, a being of his own imagining which appears to embody the very worst aspects of his persona and advises him to act wickedly in all situations. Yet Morris’s dwarf was a considerably more corporeal creature, both capable of tactile unpleasantries and of being seen by others aside from the protagonist alone. This fiend is something altogether more potent than *Sintram*’s monster of the mind.

This physicality Morris imposed on his source was distinctly Norse in nature. In chapter twenty-two, when the dwarf is finally bested by Walter, its defeat is notably characteristic of that of an Icelandic ghost, or more accurately of a *draugr*. Walter’s initial assault seems to fail on account of the dwarf’s unnatural resilience to weapons, a feature shared with many a saga *berserkr* and grave-walker; his arrow hits the dwarf straight in the chest, but it ‘fell down from him as if he were made of stone’.⁶⁸ Once

Walter overcomes his foe, the Maiden (his lover) comments on the proper mortuary practices: ‘[b]ut first tell me one thing: Hast thou buried this horror and hidden him in the earth? [...] first must thou smite off his head, and lay it by his buttocks when he is in the earth; or evil things will happen else. This of the burying is no idle matter, I bid thee believe.’⁶⁹ While beheading is a common feature across heroic literature, it is specifically a noted similarity in the *Beowulf-Grettla* discussion. Grendel and his mother are of course beheaded in *Beowulf*, and both Glámr and Grettir are beheaded in *Grettla*. The placing of the disembodied head by the buttocks (*við hjó*, literally ‘between/against the thighs’) of the deceased is a unique feature of Old Norse literature, and the most likely episode of inspiration for Morris occurs in *Grettis saga*.

The fact that the dwarf’s head is cut from its body with its own sax is yet another indication of the writer’s preoccupation with *Grettis saga*:

So they went both together to where the creature lay. The Maid durst not look on the dead monster, but Walter noted that he was girt with a big ungainly sax; so he drew it from the sheath, and there smote off the hideous head of the fiend with his own weapon. Then they twain together laboured the earth, she with Walter’s sword, he with the ugly sax, till they had made a grave deep and wide enough; and therein they thrust the creature, and covered him up, weapons and all together.⁷⁰

If they had not noticed already, readers familiar with the plot of Morris’s *Grettir the Strong* may at this point have seen the adaption of the saga. Karl Anderson comments on the passage in his 1940 three-volume thesis on *Scandinavian Elements in the Works of William Morris*, positing two main points: firstly, that the action was ‘one of the common methods in early Scandinavia of “laying a ghost”’; and secondly, that outside of this one scene there was ‘nothing in this tale which can be traced to Morris’s Scandinavian studies’.⁷¹ The second point of Anderson’s analysis has hopefully already been disproven, but on the first point it should be noted that the significance of the scene is that it can only realistically be a reference to *Grettis saga*.

The chief grounds for this are the range and availability of possible sources. Firstly, despite what scholars may have written on the subject, cutting off the head and burying it by the buttocks is not the most frequent method of disposal of an Icelandic ghost; they are usually dealt with through a combination of beheading and cremation.⁷² In fact, a review of the entire *Íslendingasögur* corpus demonstrates that amidst a multitude of broken backs, burnings, reburials, drownings and legal procedures, only a select few sagas contain an example of a revenant being beheaded and the head placed next to the buttocks.⁷³ To be exact, there are three potential

candidates aside from *Grettis saga*, namely: *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Fljótsdæla saga* and *Svarfdæla saga*.

Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss is a saga involving many supernatural beings. Its protagonist Bárðr wrestles and breaks the backs of numerous trolls (chapters 4, 5, 9, and 15). In chapter 20, his son Gestr enters the mound of the mound-dweller Raknarr, having been given a sax by the local king: ‘[s]ax gaf konungr Gesti ok sagði þat bita mundu, ef til þyrfti at taka’.⁷⁴ He beheads all of Raknarr’s guards: ‘[g]estri hjó af þeim öllum höfuð með saxinu konungsnauð’.⁷⁵ He then fights Raknarr himself, and eventually bests him: ‘[þ]á hjó Gestr höfuð af Raknari ok lagði þat við hjó honum’.⁷⁶ *Fljótsdæla saga* uses a similar formula to describe the death of a supernatural being. Þorvaldr, son of Þiðrandi, kills a giant with its own sword, cuts off its head, and then places the head between the giant’s thighs: ‘[...] höggr á hálsinn, svó at af tók höfuðit, ok stakk höfðinu milli þjóanna’.⁷⁷ The giant is later cremated and thrown into the sea, just to be on the safe side. In *Svarfdæla saga* the willful Yngvildr has her husband Klaufi murdered, but frustratingly for her he comes back to life: ‘[y]ngvildr fór þá í rekkju sína, en þeir bjuggust brott. Þegar kom Klaufi til sængr Yngvildar, er þeir váru brottu. Hon lét þá kalla á þá bræþr, ok hjuggu þeir þá af honum höfuð ok lögðu neðan við iljarnar’.⁷⁸ This method does very little to stop Klaufi’s undead activities: he sits astride the roof, recites poetry and carries his own severed head. Later Klaufi reappears as a large creature who battles Ljotolfi’s men, materialises around the battlefield at will and wields his bloody head as a weapon. Karl inn rauði wisely has him disinterred and cremated.⁷⁹ Yet even these sagas had major difficulties which made them unlikely as sources for Morris’s *Beowulf-Grettla* fantasy: they were each either unavailable to Morris during the late nineteenth century or differed substantially from the format represented by *The Wood Beyond the World*.

All of this may appear an unwieldy diversion from the topic at hand: what do the particulars of a barrow-dwelling king, a maiden-stealing giant and a headless ex-Icelander have to do with Morris and the translation of the Old Norse sagas? As noted above, there are several other features of the work which could potentially derive from Morris’s wider interest in Scandinavia, but that *Grettis saga* continued to be the *Íslendingasaga* of choice for Morris, and that he chose to use it in a text alongside Old English elements at the same time as he was preparing *Beowulf* for publication, has important connotations for our understanding of the position of the sagas in Morris’s understanding of the northern nations. Furthermore, the fact that *Grettis saga* seemingly remained dormant in his repertoire for all the years in between, only to reappear at this late stage of his corpus, demonstrates that Morris may have been aware of the implications of Eiríkr’s and Guðbrandur’s theories after all. This late reappearance also suggests that rather than *Grettis saga* being an early work, quickly forgotten, it continued to play an important role in Morris’s Old Norse medievalism

until the end of his life. Read in this way, *The Wood Beyond the World* can also be seen as an artistic experiment in cultural assimilation in response to the *Beowulf-Grettla* theories.

There is a post-script to Morris's tale of beheadings and buttocks. In the most substantial scholarly review of *The Wood Beyond the World* included in Morris's biographies, Roderick Marshall pointed out that the poem 'Goldilocks and Goldilocks', written in 1890 and initially published in the 1891 *Poems by the Way*, was essentially a trial run for a number of factors from the later fantasy, including the beheading scene.⁸⁰ In this poem it is the wicked Queen who turns into a troll whom the protagonist then beheads.

The parallels with Morris's later fantasy are obvious. A young man, Goldilocks, is struck by a wave of adventurousness, and sets out from home.⁸¹ He travels to a nearby forest of sinister character, 'the wild-wood dark and drear [...] the mirk, mirk wood', where he meets an attractive maid, also called Goldilocks; the pair fall in together and are thereafter separately identified as Goldilocks the Swain and Goldilocks the Maid.⁸² Further into the forest, the pair catch sight of a Queen in the guise of a beautiful woman.⁸³ Her appearance quickly changes for the worse ('Then was there hubbub wild and strange,/ And swiftly all things there 'gan change'):

The fair Queen into a troll was grown,
A one-eyed, bow-backed, haggard crone.
Out flashed the blade therewith. He saw
The foul thing sidelong toward them draw,
Holding within her hand a cup
Wherein some dreadful drink seethed up
Then Goldilocks cried out and smote,
And the sharp blade sheared the evil throat.
The head fell noseling to the floor.⁸⁴

After the defeat of the troll woman, the Goldilockses must overcome a series of challenges in order to escape from the woods. Enduring a polar bear from the North (which is also beheaded), a southern dragon (stabbed), a pool of poison, a forest fire and several images of women in peril by the side of the path, they come to safety and live happily ever after. The difference both in tone and complexity of this tale compared to its later, darker variant goes hand in hand with the lack of Old Norse elements. In between this text and the publication of *The Wood Beyond the World* Morris had started his *Beowulf* translation and was giving frequent lectures on the significance of Iceland to the British people. Grettir was once more on his mind.

The artistic process on display in the development of Morris's 'overnight' tale very much fits with the wider model of his approach both to medieval sources and to translation itself, as discussed by Ashurst, in which 'the act of literary creation was primarily and unabashedly one of re-creation, of refashioning received material'.⁸⁵ The re-creation at work in Morris's late works of fantasy was in response to what he perceived as a missed opportunity for the British nation, which, as he argued in his lecture on 'Feudal England' (1887), had taken a drastic wrong-turn in 1066:

The development of the country as a Teutonic people was checked and turned aside by this event [the battle of Hastings]. Duke William brought, in fact, his Normandy into England, which was thereby changed from a Teutonic people (Old Norse *theod*), with the tribal customary law still in use among them, into a province of Romanized Feudal Europe, a piece of France, in short; and though in time she did grow into another England again, she missed for ever in her laws, and still more in her language and her literature, the chance of developing into a great homogenous Teutonic people infused usefully with a mixture of Celtic blood.⁸⁶

In *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains* and most notably in *The Wood Beyond the World*, Morris could envision alternate histories for the northern nations where no such interruptions of the ancestral line could occur. In his 'Early England' lecture of 1886, Morris clearly laid out his views regarding the early Anglo-Saxon settlers in Britain. The incoming men were undoubtedly in his opinion 'rough, predatory, cruel, or at least of ungovernable passions which led them into cruelty' but were saved by the virtue of their literature – and specifically that of *Beowulf*.⁸⁷ This literary inheritance breathed 'the very spirit of courageous freedom: to live is good and to die is good if you die valiant and faithful and if you reckon great deeds and the fair fame that comes of them of more account than a few years of a trembler's life upon the earth. This is the simple ethic of our forefathers.'⁸⁸ As in the introductions to Morris's and Eiríkr's translations, medieval literature encompassed a transferable international cultural heritage.

The hard evidence for the extent to which Morris and Eiríkr styled their interaction with the Old Norse sagas on an Anglo-Scandinavian model was in abundance in such individual projects, even if the links between their joint translation of *Grettis saga* and Morris's and Wyatt's *Beowulf* are a little harder to discern.⁸⁹ Morris's late prose romances, which have proven to be a productive source of research in recent decades, offer one such missing link. Magnus Fjalldal's research, mentioned at the start of this article, cautions against accepting such simplistic lineal understandings

of intercultural transmission, but it also demonstrates the lasting appeal of a tale well told. In *The Wood Beyond the World* one sees not a simple stepping stone but minute glimpses of a much larger debate gripping Old Norse philology. It is tempting to view Morris's dark woodland fantasy as a far more complex entity, a product, in part, of both his avid deliberations with Eiríkr on the nature of *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* and his tireless work on those very two texts.

NOTES

1. *The Long Arm of Coincidence* by Magnús Fjalldal provides both a summary of and opposition to the theoretical link. See Magnús Fjalldal, *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between Beowulf and Grettis Saga* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998). (Afterwards Fjalldal). See also Anatoly Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir', in *German Dialects, Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science*, ed. by Bela Brogyani and Thomas Krömmelbein (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986), pp. 353-401. (Afterwards Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir'). See also Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Beowulf Manuscript*, 2nd edn (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), ch. 6, 'Grettir and Grendel Again', pp. 140-68.
2. G.V. Smithers, *The Making of Beowulf: The Inaugural Lecture of the Professor of English Language delivered in the Appleby Lecture Theatre on 18th May, 1961* (Durham: University of Durham, 1961), p. 6. Smithers's enthusiasm for the link between the two texts can be seen in pp. 11-12.
3. See *Grettir's Saga*, trans. by Jesse Byock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. xxiii, 260; *Grettis Saga*, trans. by Denton Fox & Hermann Pálsson (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. vii; Peter Foote in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, trans. by George Ainslie Hight (London: J. M. Dent, 1965), p. ix; *Beowulf*, trans. by J. R. R. Tolkien, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2015), pp. 303-4; and *The Saga of Grettir*, in *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, trans. by Anthony Faulkes and George Johnston (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2004), pp. xxiv-xxv.
4. *Sturlunga Saga, including the Islendinga Saga of Lawman Sturla Thordsson and other Works*, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 2 vols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press; and London: Macmillan and Co., 1878), I, pp. xlvi-xlix.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir', p. 353; Hugo Gering, 'Der Beowulf und die isländische Grettissaga', *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, 3 (1880), 74-87 (75). (Afterwards Gering). C. S. Smith, 'Beowulf Gretti', *The New Englander*, 4 (1880), 49-67. Others who accredit the theory to Guðbrandur include Margaret A. Arent, 'The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, Beowulf, and Grettis saga', in *Old Norse Literature and Society: A Symposium*, ed. by Edgar C. Polomé (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 130-99 (184); Richard L. Harris, 'The Deaths of Grettir and Grendel: A New Parallel', *Scripta Islandica*, 24 (1973), 25-53 (25-26) (Harris notes that Gísli Brynjólfsson had identified similarities between *Beowulf* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* in 1852[-54]); Kirsten Hastrup, 'Tracing Tradition: An Anthropological Perspective on Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, & Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 281-313 (288); Peter Jorgensen, 'Grendel, Grettir and Two Scaldic Stanzas', *Scripta Islandica*, 24 (1973), 54-61 (54); and J. Wight Duff, 'Homer and Beowulf: A Literary Parallel', *Saga Book*, 4 (1905), 382-406 (389). It was not just *Grettis* which received the *Beowulf* treatment. Numerous Old Norse sagas were compared with the Old English epic in bids to prove cultural similarities. See Gísli Brynjólfsson,

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- 'Oldengelsk og Oldnordisk', *Antikvarisk Tidsskrift, Udgivet af det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab, 1852-54* (Kjøbenhavn [Copenhagen]: Thirles Bogtrykkeri, 1854), pp. 81-143; A. Hoffmann, 'Der bildliche Ausdruck im Beowulf und in der Edda', *Englische Studien*, 6 (1883), 163-216; and Gregor Sarrazin's articles 'Die Beowulfsage in Dänemark', *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, 9 (1886), 195-99, and 'Neue Beowulf-studien', *Englische Studien*, 23 (1897), 221-67. (Afterwards Sarrazin, 'Die Beowulfsage in Dänemark').
9. See, for example, Sophus Bugge, 'Studien über das Beowulfepos', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 12 (1887), 1-112.
 10. Frederick Metcalfe, *The Englishman and the Scandinavian; or, A Comparison of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Literature* (London: Trübner & Co., 1880), p. 199. Metcalfe also cited Guðbrandur as the discoverer of the link (see pp. 118-21) despite the fact he himself had published the theory four years earlier (see note 25 below).
 11. Elizabeth Jane Oswald, *By Fell and Fjord; or, Scenes and Studies in Iceland* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1882), p. 266. Not all scholars were as generous as Oswald in describing the texts as 'common property'. Gregor Sarrazin argued that *Beowulf* was a Saxon construction comparable to *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and posited that it had arrived in Britain fully formed, ready for Old English translation: '[d]ie Beowulfsage muss schon vollständig ausgebildet nach England übertragen sein' ('[t]he Beowulf poem must have reached England fully formed'). See Sarrazin, 'Die Beowulfsage in Dänemark', p. 199.
 12. Fjalldal, p. 6.
 13. Sophus Bugge was the first credited supporter of this theory. See Fjalldal, pp. 81-87; Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir', p. 355; and *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Tom A. Shippey & Andreas Haarder (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 441-45. (Afterwards Shippey and Haarder). See also Boer's comments on the influence of *Beowulf* on *Grettis saga*, R. C. Boer, 'Zur Grettissaga', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 30 (1898), 53-71.
 14. Liberman, 'Beowulf-Grettir', p. 356; Andrew Wawn, 'Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar and Hunger-Response Criticism', in *Strengleikar slegnir Robert Cook*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 1994), pp. 76-78; and Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old Norse in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, rev. edn (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), p. 12.
 15. Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík (hereafter Lbs.), 1860, 4to, pp. 2-3; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 2.
 16. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 3; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 2.
 17. Lbs. 1860, 4to, pp. 6-7; Lbs. 2196, 4to, pp. 5-6.
 18. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 7; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 6. Elsewhere Eiríkr wrote that Iceland had Christian settlers some 170 years before the Norse settlement. See Eiríkr Magnússon, 'The Conversion of Iceland to Christianity, A.D. 1000', *Saga Book*, 2 (1901), 348-74 (351).
 19. Lbs. 1860, 4to, pp. 7-8; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 6.
 20. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 8; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 7. Eiríkr adds that 'the most priceless portion of the cargo that each emigrant took over to the new abode was, after all, the memory of the past'. Lbs. 2196, 4to.
 21. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 16; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 14.
 22. In the original preface to their *Grettis saga* translation, the pair introduced Grettir as 'a man of high birth and connected with bonds of kin or affinity with all the best families in the land' (Lbs. 405 fol.).
 23. Lbs. 1860, 4to, p. 40; Lbs. 2196, 4to, p. 36.
 24. In a lecture given in 1909 Eiríkr himself referred to work on the *Grettir-Beowulf* connection which he had 'printed out before', but as yet there is no evidence of this work outside of his own lecture notes (Lbs. 2196, 4to).
 25. In fact, Peter Erasmus Müller first proposed a link between the two back in 1815. See Shippey & Haarder, pp. 98-107. The similarity between the sole surviving instances of the *hæft-mece* and *heftisax* had already been outlined by the Reverend Frederick Metcalfe in his *The Saxon and the Norseman*;

- or, *A Plea for the Study of Icelandic conjointly with Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: [printed for private circulation], 1876), pp. 32-36. An undated letter to Eiríkr from Alfred E. C. Gomme, who was in the process of translating *Beowulf*, suggests a strikingly similar theory and may have been the Icelander's inspiration: 'I imagine I have found (i) the origin of *Beowulf* – (ii) a new page in the history of North England, which will necessitate rewriting the history of the 9th and 10th centuries in England', writes Gomme (Lbs. 2187a 4to).
26. The hostility between Eiríkr Magnússon and Guðbrandur Vigfússon is well documented. See B. S. Benedikz, 'Guðbrandur Vigfússon: A Biographical Sketch', in *Úr Döllum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. by Rory McTurk & Andrew Wawn (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, University of Leeds, 1989), pp. 11-33 (23-24). In a letter to Edmund Gosse on 17 July 1875, Guðbrandur accused Morris and Eiríkr of plagiarising his own work. See *Sir Edmund Gosse's Correspondence with Scandinavian Writers*, ed. by Elias Bredsdorff (London: William Heinemann, 1960), pp. 305-6. This appears to have been a genuine mistake, as earlier drafts correctly referenced Guðbrandur's work (Lbs. 405 fol.). In 1882, while the Mansion House Relief Fund was in full swing, Guðbrandur published an unprovoked attack on the operation, calling into question the need for foreign aid. Eiríkr was furious (see Lbs. 404 fol., Lbs. 1705 4to, and Lbs. 2188 4to).
 27. Gering, p. 87.
 28. *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. by May Morris, 24 vols (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1910-15), VII, p. i. (Afterwards CW).
 29. Quoted in J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1920), I, p. 198. (Afterwards Mackail).
 30. CW, IX, p. xxxv.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
 32. *Ibid.*, VII, p. xxxvii.
 33. *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. by Eugene D. LeMire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), pp. 179-98. (Afterwards LeMire).
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
 37. For examples of Eiríkr's international intentions, see Andrew Wawn, '*fast er drukkið og fátt lært*': *Eiríkur Magnússon, Old Northern Philology, and Victorian Cambridge* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), and the Icelander's extensive correspondence held at the Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík.
 38. *The Saga Library, I, The Story of Howard the Halt, The Story of the Banded Men, The Story of Hen Thorir*, trans. by William Morris & Eiríkr Magnússon (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1891), pp. vi, vii-viii.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. v.
 40. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 1977), p. 674.
 41. CW, XIV, p. xxv.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 10. See *A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and All the Kindreds of the Mark* (first published in 1888), *ibid.*, pp. 1-208. Many instances of medievalism here pre-empt Tolkien: the Rohirrim are particularly reminiscent of Morris's 'men of the mark' and this is also one of the first manifestations of the Norse-derived 'Mirkwood' in a work of fantasy (*ibid.*, p. 4); Morris also uses the name in his poem 'Goldilocks and Goldilocks', see below.
 43. *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 147.
 44. *The Roots of the Mountains, wherein is told somewhat of the Lives of the Men of Burgdale, their Friends their Neighbours their Foemen and their Fellows in Arms*, first published 1889; see *ibid.*, XV, pp. 1-411. Shippey notes that Morris may well have 'welcomed the possible confusion, for an ordinary reader of 1889, between the Burgdalers as Goths and the Burgdalers as Englishmen'. Tom A. Shippey, 'Goths and Huns: The Rediscovery of the Northern Cultures in the 19th Century', in *The Medieval Legacy: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al., (Odense: Odense University Press, 1982), pp. 51-69 (56).

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45. *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 67-68. See also Anna Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
46. William Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, 3rd printing (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1900). (Afterwards Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*). See also *CW*, XVII, pp. 1-130. The first edition was published by the Kelmscott Press in October 1894, with a second printing by Lawrence and Bullen in May 1895, and a third by Longmans, Green & Co. in October 1900.
47. Tolkien may have taken some elements from the Dwarf-King for his fiends of Middle-Earth. The character Gollum not only moves in a similar fashion to Morris's dwarf but also shares its love of raw meat and aversion to man-made bread. See J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (London: Harper Collins, 2007), p. 855.
48. Nordby writes of Morris's romances in general that they are: 'none of them distinctly Old Norse in geography or in story, but they all have the flavour of the saga translations'. Conrad Hjalmar Nordby, *The Influence of Old Norse Literature on English Literature* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1901), p. 69. Morris personally protested against the 'Socialist Allegory of Capital and Labour' reading, presented by *The Spectator*. In a letter to the paper dated July 1895, he writes: 'I had not the least intention of thrusting an allegory into *The Wood Beyond the World*; it is meant for a tale pure and simple, with nothing didactic about it. If I have to write or speak on social problems, I always try to be as direct as I possibly can.' Quoted in Peter Faulkner, *Against the Age: An Introduction to William Morris* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 168; see also Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 177; and Jack Lindsay, *William Morris: His Life and Work* (London: Constable, 1975), p. 366. (Afterwards Lindsay).
49. Faulkner, *Against the Age*, p. 167. Faulkner and Stephene Coote both characterised *The Wood Beyond the World* as an exercise in escapism, *ibid.*, p. 166; Stephen Coote, *William Morris: His Life and Work* (London: Garamond, 1990), p. 182. Of all Morris's biographers, Jack Lindsay gives *The Wood Beyond the World* the most time (Lindsay, p. 367). His largely-dismissed Freudian reading was taken up by Roderick Marshall, who believed the Maid of *The Wood Beyond the World* was Georgiana Burne-Jones; see Roderick Marshall, *William Morris and his Earthly Paradises* (Tisbury: The Compton Press, 1979), p. 301. (Afterwards Marshall). Scholarly fans of Morris's later works include Peter Stansky, *William Morris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 81-82; Gabriel Schenk, 'The Living Past of William Morris's Late Romances', *JWMS*, 19: 2 (Winter 2011), 20-30; Nicholas Salmon, 'A Study in Victorian Historiography: William Morris's Germanic Romances', *JWMS*, 14: 2 (Spring 2001), 59-89; and Phillippa Bennett, *Wonderlands: The Last Romances of William Morris* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015).
50. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, pp. 7-8. The dwarf's yellow coat is made of samite, a costly heavy silk material which was popular in the middle ages (see *ibid.*, p. 154).
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 16-17.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
54. *CW*, XXIII, p. xvi.
55. Mackail, I, p. 258; Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 300-2; Lloyd Eric Grey, *William Morris: Prophet of England's New Order* (London: Cassell, 1949), pp. 116-17.
56. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, p. 28. Grettir and Beowulf are both bear-heroes, the latter's name ('bee-wolf') is even a poetic term for bear.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
59. *The Story of Beowulf*, trans. by William Morris & A. J. Wyatt (Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1895), p. 55.
60. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, p. 54.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
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62. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 134; see also p. 98.
66. See Kathleen Ullal, "And my deeds shall be remembered, and my name that once was nought": Regin's Role in *Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*', *JWMS*, 19: 4 (Summer 2013), 63-76. Although Regin shares the same demise as the Dwarf-King in *The Wood Beyond the World*, the link between the two villains is not as significant as the latter's links to *Grettis saga* or *Beowulf*.
67. Hilary Newman, 'The Influence of De La Motte Fouqué's *Sintram and His Companions* on William Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World*', *JWMS*, 14: 2 (Spring 2001), 47-53 (48). (Afterwards Newman).
68. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, p. 154. Newman is dismissive of the Dwarf-King's potency ('the dwarf is no match for Walter who easily slays him'), but Morris's text contains more tension than she allows. See Newman, p. 51.
69. Morris, *The Wood Beyond the World*, p. 158. Morris's protagonist Walter – known as 'Golden Walter' – is clearly modelled on the classic heroes of the *Íslendingasögur*; the opening chapter of the story adopts classic saga elements, including the alternating focus on physical and mental prowess, and peaceful and unyielding countenance. The similarity to George Webbe Dasent's introduction of Gunnarr Hámundarson in *Burnt Njal* (1861) is notable.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
71. On the first point, Anderson noted that 'Morris had long been acquainted with this custom, for in the *Grettis saga*, one of the first Icelandic stories he translated, Grettir follows this procedure in putting a definite end both to Karr the Old and to the fiend Glamr'. See Karl O. E. Anderson, *Scandinavian Elements in the Works of William Morris*, unpublished PhD thesis, 3 vols, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1940, II, p. 368.
72. Einar Ól. Sveinsson comments: '[r]evenants (zombies) were mostly in bodily form, and they had to stop playing their tricks if their bodies were burned or their heads were placed by their buttocks and so on'. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *The Folk-Stories of Iceland*, revised by Einar G. Pétursson, trans. by Benedikt Benedikt, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2003), p. 184; see also pp. 183-88.
73. A list of near misses includes: *Eiríks saga rauða*, in *Eyrbyggja saga*; *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslenzk fornrit IV, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson & Matthías Þorðarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), pp. 195-237 (214-17); *Eyrbyggja saga*, in *Eyrbyggja saga*; *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslenzk fornrit IV, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson & Matthías Þorðarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), pp. 1-186 (91-92, 93-95, 169-76); *Flóamanna saga*, in *Harðar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XIII, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1991), pp. 229-327 (255, 284-87); *Grœnlendinga saga*, in *Eyrbyggja saga*; *Eiríks saga rauða*, Íslenzk fornrit IV, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson & Matthías Þorðarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), pp. 239-69 (257-60); *Harðar saga Grímkelssonar eða Hólmverja saga*, in *Harðar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XIII, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1991), pp. 1-97 (40-43); *Hávarðar saga Ísfríðings*, in *Vestfirðinga sögur*, Íslenzk fornrit VI, ed. by Björn K. Þórolfsson & Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1943), pp. 289-358 (298-99, 300-2) (translated by Morris and Eiríkr in 1891 in volume one of the Saga Library); and *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit V, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934), pp. 1-229 (39-40, 66-69, 186-93). To this list Garmonsway and Simpson would add *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar*, *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, *Samsons saga fagra*, *Gull-Þóris saga*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi*. See *Beowulf and its Analogues*, ed. and trans. by G. N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1968), pp. 302-31; and Ármann Jakobsson, 'Íslenskir draugar frá landnámi til Íúterstrúar', *Skírnir*, 184 (Spring 2010), 187-210 (190). None of these episodes involve the head being removed and placed by the buttocks, and in many cases the fiend in question is a troll or other human-like monster as opposed to a

revenant.

74. *Barðar saga Snæfellsáss*, in *Harðar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XIII, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), pp. 99-172 (162).
75. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 168. In a manuscript variant in AM 158 fol., I. 486, the saga specifically mentions that it is the sax *konungsbraut* with which Gestr kills Raknarr; see *ibid.*, p. 168, footnote.
77. *Fljótsdæla saga*, in *Austfjðinga sögur*, Íslenzk fornrit XI, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), pp. 215-97 (229).
78. *Svarfdæla saga*, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, Íslenzk fornrit IX, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1956), pp. 129-208 (174).
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-80, 207.
80. Marshall, pp. 284-89. *Poems by the Way* was a Kelmscott Press publication, and was published on 24 September 1891. 'Goldilocks and Goldilocks' was described as a 'last-minute' addition, supposedly 'written to fill out the book' the night before it went to press (*CW*, IX, p. xxxvii). This has since been disproven by Peter Faulkner, 'The Male as Lover, Fool, and Hero: "Goldilocks" and the Late Prose Romances', *Victorian Poetry*, 34: 3 (Autumn 1996), 411-24 (413). On the collection in general, see Ken L. Goodwin, 'The Summation of a Poetic Career: "Poems by the Way"', *Victorian Poetry*, 34: 3 (Autumn 1996), 396-410.
81. 'The morn is fair and the world is wide,/ And here no more will I abide' (*CW*, IX, p. 225).
82. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 237-38.
85. David Ashurst, 'William Morris and the Volsungs', in *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Clark & Carl Phelpstead (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2007), pp. 43-62 (43).
86. *CW*, XXIII, pp. 40-41.
87. LeMire, p. 162.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
89. Out of some 2,400 extant letters of Morris's correspondence, the present writer has yet to come across a mention of the two texts side by side; see *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. by Norman Kelvin, 4 vols in 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, p. xi. Ian Felce's *William Morris and the Icelandic Sagas* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018) was published after this article was written, but see chapters three and six; *The Wood Beyond the World* is only mentioned in passing (p. 164).