

Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*: Story of Amleth

King Rorik of the Danes appoints two brothers, Orvendil and Feng, to rule over Jutland. Orvendil weds the king's beautiful daughter, Gerutha, and they have a son named Amleth. Feng, lusting after Orvendil's bride and longing to become the sole ruler of Jutland, kills his brother, marries Gerutha, and declares himself the king.

The murder is not secret but Feng gets away with it by claiming he killed his brother for mistreating Gerutha. Amleth, who realizes the truth, is desperately afraid for his life, and feigns madness to keep from getting murdered. He spends time fashioning sharp wooden hooks and, when asked about them, says they are for avenging his father's death. Because of the skill it takes to craft the hooks, not everyone is convinced that he has gone mad, and experiments are devised to test Amleth's sanity.

It's decided that if Amleth is unable to resist the sexual temptation of a beautiful woman, then he is feigning madness. He is brought to a secluded part of the woods to see how he will react, but his childhood friend warns him of the test. When Amleth meets the woman, he takes her to another private place and sleeps with her, but swears her to secrecy. When he gets back to the court he tells everyone he slept with her, but his purposely confused manner of speech and the fact that she denies it, confirms for many that Amleth is crazy.

A friend of Feng's suggests secretly listening in on Amleth and his mother and hides in a pile of straw in Gerutha's room. Amleth, already suspicious of Feng's tests, discovers the eavesdropper and stabs him while he hides beneath the straw. He then dismembers the body, boils the parts, and feeds them to the pigs. Amleth then returns to his mother and berates her for forgetting her husband and marrying Feng.

Suspecting that Amleth killed his friend, Feng sends Amleth to Britain with two servants who secretly carry a letter to the King of Britain requesting Amleth be killed. Amleth gets ahold of the letter, substitutes the servants' names for his own, and adds the suggestion that the king's daughter should marry Amleth. After the servants are killed and Amleth has married the king's daughter, he stays in Britain for a full year before returning home.

When he arrives home, he finds that everyone believes he has died and is carrying out his funeral. After a night of heavy drinking, Amleth ties up the court servants with the wooden hooks he made a year ago and sets fire to the palace. He then goes to Feng's bed and kills him.

Amleth, unsure of how the public will respond to his actions, hides out until he learns that the populace has mixed opinions about the death of the king and the destruction of the palace. He makes a bold public speech that explains the reasons for his actions. Immediately after his speech Amleth is made king. Amleth has a

shield made for him that depicts his story – showing everything from his childhood to his quest for vengeance.

Upon learning that Feng has been killed, the King of Britain decides that he should avenge his death. Deciding that he should kill Amleth secretly, he devises a plan. His wife having recently died, he asks Amleth to help him court Hermutrude, the Queen of Scotland, who was notorious for her refusal of suitors.

Amleth agrees and sets off for Scotland with his servants. The Queen learns of his arrival and Scotland sends her guards out to investigate Amleth. While Amleth is sleeping, one of Hermutrude's guards steals his shield and a letter from the King of Britain detailing his intentions for the Queen. She learns who Amleth is by his shield and changes the letter from the King of Britain to say that she should marry Amleth. Amleth catches Hermutrude's servant when he tries to return the shield and letter where he found them. Amleth then goes to Hermutrude and presents her with the letter she doctored.

Hermutrude commends Amleth for killing Feng and becoming the new king, but criticizes his choice of a wife, saying that he made a poor match. She tells Amleth that she wants to marry him and that they would make a better match, being of similar backgrounds. Amleth agrees and they are married right away.

When Amleth returns home with Hermutrude, his first wife is upset but promises to still love him as the father of her son. Her father, the King of Britain, attempts to kill Amleth. Amleth is prepared, though, and ends up killing his father-in-law in battle.

Later, Fialler, the governor of Skanne and Zealand, challenges Amleth to a war. Despite knowing that he is endangering his life, he agrees to war, not wanting to be disgraced as a soldier. In the end, Amleth is killed in battle and Hermutrude becomes the new wife of the victor.