# The Origins of Evil in Beowulf and Milton's Paradise Lost

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Double Major MA University Study Programme in English Language and Literature (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and Hungarian Language and Literature (Communications Studies)

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Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (nastavnički smjer) i mađarskog jezika i književnosti (komunikološki smjer)

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Diplomski rad

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ABSTRACT

As one of the oldest phenomena in the universe, the concept of *evil* has always been the subject of interest of many nations around the world. Some of them have used it throughout history as a source of inspiration in order to create numerous literary works. Precisely this the *Beowulf* poet and John Milton have done by creating *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost,* the epic poems written in completely different periods of time, but still sharing the same theme: the battle of good and evil. Interestingly enough, the characters of both poems are incredibly similar; and this especially applies to the main antagonists. The monsters of *Beowulf*, Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon, can be compared to Satan, Beelzebub and Moloch, the fallen angels of *Paradise Lost*. Their evil nature is defined by three motifs used by both authors: the concept of the *uncanny*, the idea of *dualism*, and the blend of *Christian* and *pagan* cultural tradition. Moreover, the villains of an individual epic poem together form the "Triad of Evil", the perversion of the Holy Trinity. In this way, the antagonists of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* are of rather ambivalent quality: they have a dual identity and dual origins because both authors invoke the Old English tradition of combining Christian and pagan elements within a single literary work. Therefore, *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* are outstanding poetic achievements because they successfully guard not only the old literary tradition, but also the ancient concept of *evil*.

KEYWORDS

Evil, *Beowulf*, *Paradise Lost*, monsters, fallen angels

# INTRODUCTION

The term *evil* traces its origins to the Old English word *yfel*, meaning "bad", "vicious", "ill" or "wicked", and to the Proto-Germanic word *ubilaz*, used to label something as "bad" or "evil" ("evil," adj.). Additionally, *ubilaz* is "cognate with *up* or *over*", which thereby connects *evil* "with the concepts of *too much*, *exceeding due measure*, *over limits*" (Forsyth 19). In the light of its etymological background, the word *evil* may cover many different aspects. The major concern of this paper is to explore the concept of *evil* within the context of two epic poems, *Beowulf* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, since both of them share a common theme, the battle of good and evil, despite being written in completely different periods of time. Moreover, the nature of their characters is incredibly similar, especially that of the main antagonists. Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon are the monsters of *Beowulf* comparable to Satan, Beelzebub and Moloch, the fallen angels of *Paradise Lost*. The exploration of their evil nature begins by consulting the Bible, as it provides a partial explanation on the origins. Further course of the research points out three motifs used both by the *Beowulf* poet and Milton, and which completely define the aforementioned villains: the concept of the *uncanny*, the idea of *dualism*, and the blend of *Christian* and *pagan* cultural tradition. Moreover, the monsters of *Beowulf* (Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon) and Milton's fallen angels (Satan, Beelzebub and Moloch) together form a hierarchical structure that underlies these motifs, the "Triad of Evil", whose purpose is to mimic all the good in the universe, but in a rather twisted manner, and mock the Holy Trinity. Both authors use the concept of *evil* as a source of inspiration in an interesting way, thus creating the literary works which demonstrate the issue of ambivalence within their characters: they have a dual identity as well as dual origins because the authors skilfully incorporate Christian and pagan elements into their epic poems. Thereby they aim to invoke the old literary tradition invented by their ancestors. Hence, *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* are significant works of epic poetry which preserve not only the Old English literary tradition, but also one of the oldest phenomena in the universe – the *evil* – and its omnipresence.

# 1. THE MONSTERS OF *BEOWULF*

## 1. 1. GRENDEL

The one who lurks in the dark, aiming to plague the Danes and whom Beowulf first confronts, the *Beowulf* poet describes in the following way: "Grendel was that grim creature called, the ill-famed haunter of the marches of the land, who kept the moors, the fastness of the fens, and, unhappy one, inhabited long while the troll-kind's home; for the Maker had prescribed him with the race of Cain" (*Beowulf* 16). First and foremost, the name Grendel requires a proper etymological study, since the author's reasons for calling the creature by that name are, generally speaking, insufficiently researched and therefore unclear. However, simply by browsing through *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, several interesting suggestions can be found, and which indeed might have prompted the author to name the first Beowulf's opponent Grendel: the Anglo-Saxon word *grindan*, meaning "to grate, gnash, or grind", may describe the character's destructive power and constant need to feed on human flesh; *grynde*, standing for "abyss", may depict his soul as a dark, bottomless chasm, deprived of emotions akin to men; and *grindel*, "bar, bolt, or hurdle", which may demonstrate his highly developed skills in seizing and capturing human prey (Clark Hall 301-3).

As far as Grendel's origins are concerned, the author is very specific, stating that he descends from the race of Cain (*Beowulf* 16). To briefly remember the well-known Biblical story: Cain kills his younger brother Abel because of jealousy, since Yahweh prefers Abel's offerings to those of Cain's. As a consequence, Yahweh punishes Cain with restless wandering on earth, and whoever kills him "will suffer a sevenfold vengeance" (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, Gen. 4:3-15). Consequently, of Cain "all evil broods were born, ogres and goblins and haunting shapes of hell, and the giants too, that long time warred with God – for that he gave them their reward" (*Beowulf* 16). It could be said that Cain is, aside from his parents Adam and Eve who taste the sin first by eating from the tree of knowledge (Gen. 3:6), the originator of evil and therefore responsible for all malicious deeds and their perpetrators in the history of mankind. The only difference between Cain and his parents is that Cain's sin is against another human being, whilst theirs is against God. Similarly to his ancestor Cain, Grendel also roams the earth – more precisely, the area around

Heorot – and the figure of Satan in the Book of Job and the Book of Jubilees is a roamer as well (Forsyth 28-9), supposedly sent to earth by God himself in order to tempt or provoke humans. Furthermore, one could associate Grendel with Satan on the basis of etymology (Forsyth 27), since Grendel is also the enemy figure with a significant personal name which might have been derived from certain Anglo-Saxon words: it could refer to "the creature that destroys", "the one with dark, bottomless soul", or "the skilful ensnarer". Hence, "it is enmity itself which is signalled" (Forsyth 27) by the name of Grendel.

He is "constantly referred to in language which is meant to recall the powers of darkness with which Christian men felt themselves to be encompassed" (Tolkien 8), since the poet addresses him with fear: "the wrath of God was on him" (*Beowulf* 33), "he had a feud with God" (*Beowulf* 36), "the enemy of God" (*Beowulf* 62), "Grendel, ancient enemy (*Beowulf* 65). As a consequence, the monstrous story of Beowulf is "not so far removed from common mediaeval experience as it seems to us to be from our own (. . .) Grendel hardly differs from the fiends of the pit who were always in ambush to waylay a righteous man"; and thus Beowulf, regardless of his moving "in the world of the primitive Heroic Age of the Germans", resembles a Christian knight (Tolkien 8). Despite his physical strength, he is like his ancestors "a mortal hemmed in a hostile world" in which monsters are the enemies of man and therefore God himself (Tolkien 9). God is "the Arbiter (. . .) above the mortal world", who himself predicts and designs the end of the world; beyond this idea emerges "a possibility of eternal victory (or eternal defeat), whilst the actual battle occurs "between the soul and its adversaries" (Tolkien 9). In this way, the monsters become "images of the evil spirit or spirits", or rather they enter into the monsters, thus taking "visible shape in the hideous bodies" (Tolkien 9). In this case, it is Grendel who "inhabits the visible world and eats the flesh and blood of men; he enters their houses by the doors" (Tolkien 10). But since Grendel is the first and therefore weakest monster that Beowulf confronts, he may function "as the necessary testing of the hero before the main encounter with the enemy in the combat myth" and this feature also foreshadows the earliest Christian expectation: God will reveal "his power by defeating Satan" and bring in the "age of boundless fertility and plenty" (Forsyth 31-2). Hrothgar expects Beowulf to deliver the Danes from evil, and Beowulf could also be perceived as a divine hero able to dispel any kind of evil that threatens mankind. Moreover, Grendel "cannot be dissociated from the creatures of northern myth"; the passages about the giants and their war with God, as well as those regarding Cain, are especially important (Tolkien 11). "Cain is connected with *eotenas* and *ylfe*,

which are the *jötnar* and *álfar* of Norse", and this indicates "the precise point at which an imagination, pondering old and new, was kindled"; more precisely, "new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited" (Tolkien 11). Hence, the *Beowulf* poet is a learned man who skilfully incorporates Christian and pagan elements in a single poem, and Grendel is depicted as an enemy who descends both from Christian and pagan giants or monsters.

If one is to study *Beowulf* in terms of the close identification of man and monster, the poem could be associated with a Norse narrative named *Grettir's saga*: there is "a curious sense of identity between the hero and his adversary, between the man and the monster" (Dragland 607). In this respect, Grendel and Grettir might share their origins because "in the Norse story the monster has been transferred into the hero" (Dragland 607). Therefore arises the "conception of a monstrous double" which encourages the audience to "look for resemblance, rather than assuming basic difference," between Beowulf and his adversaries (Draglan 607). For instance, when Grendel first enters Heorot he seizes thirty men, whilst "Beowulf is introduced as a man who has the strength of thirty men in his handgrip"; this fact clearly alludes to the similarity between the two characters who have completely opposite roles in the poem (Dragland 607). An interesting fact is also that the author "specifically associates Beowulf's state of mind with that of Grendel in the encounter between the two": "Beowulf seems to work himself into a furious mood before Grendel's arrival so that he is as ready to fight as Grendel himself" (Dragland 608-9). This indicates that Beowulf has a monstrous side as well. This might seem as a paradox to contemporary audience – "that he is as weak in some respects as he is strong in others" – and this symbolic identifying of Beowulf with monsters, despite his valour, "makes him appear more fully human than is usually thought" (Dragland 609). Moreover, Grendel indeed qualifies for the role of Beowulf's alter-ego because the two actually share "human characteristics" (Dragland 610). Although some scholars have admitted "the use of human terms" in order to define the nature of Grendel and his mother, including "their placement in human situations", this idea often leads to labelling these beings "as monsters or devils" (Dragland 610). In fact, most of the references to Grendel describe the character as "monstrous or devilish": "*fēond, fēond on helle, fēond mancynnes, wiht unhælo, ellorgæst, manscaða*" and so on (Dragland 610). Apparently, the majority of scholars is interested only in the devilish side of the Grendel kin; but it would be worth emphasising that "the fact that the monsters primarily are evil spirits does not mean that their human attributes need be forgotten" (Dragland 610). That being said, if the reader is not

“overwhelmed by the imagery of monsters and devils which partly defines Grendel there is ample encouragement to regard him as a man” because he acts just like an ordinary exile of the time (Dragland 612).

There is more to the nature of monsters in *Beowulf*: “if one is to fully understand the significance of these so-called monsters, we must look beyond this quality” (Gills 1). In fact, they pose a threat to the Danes because their monstrosity lies in their appearance and physical power, and this corresponds with the pre-modern view of a monster: “a thing that ‘is part animal and part human (. . .) and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance’” (Gills 1). The treatment of these monsters as literal *monstrous* entities “is somewhat due to a convenience of translation”; so it is unclear whether the antagonists in *Beowulf* are “monsters or wretches or miscreants” (Gills 1). The Anglo-Saxon word *aglæca* is responsible for this ambiguity, since Seamus Heaney translates it as “monster”, but in fact it “equally encompasses the English terms ‘wretch’, ‘miscreant’, and ‘fierce combatant’”, with “wretch” being particularly interesting entry because it means “one driven out of or away from his native country; a banished person; an exile” (Gills 1). This definition suggests that the monsters of *Beowulf* actually participate in the social order of the Danes and the Geats, “albeit in a perverted fashion” (Gills 2). In other words, the monsters represent “the perversion of human society” in the same way they exemplify “a distorted human form”, and therefore they are “intrinsically and by definition tied to Danish society, regardless of how abhorrent the Danes perceive them to be” (Gills 2). In order to understand their monstrosity, the monsters’ roots in Danish society have to be exploited: “they are monstrous because they participate in a slightly twisted form of Danish cultural custom, not because they are radically other to it” (Gills 2).

## 1. 2. GRENDEL'S MOTHER

The second adversary whom Beowulf encounters, Grendel's mother, the author describes as an "ogress, fierce destroyer in the form of woman" and further continues: "Misery was in her heart, she who must abide in the dreadful waters and the cold streams, since Cain with the sword became the slayer of his only brother, his kinsman by his father's blood. Thereafter he departed an outlaw branded with murder, shunning the mirth of men, abiding in the wilderness. From thence sprang many creatures doomed of old" who were outlawed by the hate of God, as are the deadly wolves (*Beowulf* 49). Apparently, Grendel's mother and her son share the same social history: they are the direct descendants of Cain cast out not only by Danish society, but by God as well. Consequently, they are ill-willed, monstrous creatures deliberately aiming to plague the Danes and their social code. As soon as she learns that Grendel has been maimed by Beowulf, Grendel's mother becomes extremely grim-hearted and ravenous, so she imminently sets off to avenge her beloved son (*Beowulf* 50), regardless of the final outcome of her vengeful venture; and that action sufficiently illustrates how far Cain's offspring can go.

But there is something more to this mere act of revenge – as *Beowulf* progresses, the adherence of the antagonists to Scandinavian cultural practices becomes magnified, as well as their physical monstrosity: "Apart from the cultural similitude implicit within the term *aglæca,* an increasing resemblance of the monsters to the Danes and Geats is also expressed" (Gills 2). This is evident in the attack on Heorot by Grendel's mother, which is preconditioned by the desire to avenge her son, and that is far more sophisticated than the attacks made by Grendel (Gills 2). She evidently comprehends "the same familiar justice that is so integral to Danish culture" very well, which is present in "her efforts to single out Beowulf" (Gills 2). When Beowulf seeks out her lair, it can be seen that "she lives a distinctly human lifestyle" (Gills 2): "A light of fire he saw with gleaming flames there shining bright" (*Beowulf* 57); and that her hall has an arsenal of ancient weapons: "(. . .) among the war-gear there he beheld a sword endowed with charms of victory, a blade gigantic, old, with edges stern, the pride of men of arms: the choicest of weapons (. . .), albeit greater than any other man might have borne (. . .), a good and costly thing, the work of giants" (*Beowulf* 58). These passages suggest that Grendel's mother indeed shares Danish cultural values (Gills 2) and that her underground lair is in fact very similar to Hrothgar's mead hall. She is

therefore an inevitable part of Scandinavian culture, since she mimics its customs so skilfully, but in a rather twisted manner.

Therefore, one should not be concerned primarily with the evil side of monsters, but with their human attributes as well because they actually represent exiles (Dragland 610-12). The word *exile* is of utmost importance in this context, since the humanity of monsters in *Beowulf* derives from their status as exiles (Dragland 610). The concept of an "exile-trope", as called by Frank Bessai, which occurs in many Anglo-Saxon poems such as "The Seafarer", "The Wanderer", "The Wife's Lament" and "Deor", including the ones with religious themes like "Genesis", "The Life of Guthlac", "Christ and Satan" and "Resignation" (Dragland 611) would be worth mentioning in this context. These poems give the reader an insight into "the exile's tortured state of mind, a psychology the *Beowulf* poet would have known well enough to make use of it in his creation of the Grendel kin" (Dragland 611). So it seems that the poet draws inspiration from his contemporaries whilst aiming to create the antagonists which may evoke completely legitimate human compassion, especially in a situation where a mother wants to avenge her son's slaying. That being said, the poet really "provides at least some basis for understanding and sympathy for the bereaved mother of Grendel" (Dragland 613). However, as the Grendel kin possess human values, Beowulf possesses the monstrous ones as well. This interconnection between them occurs, again, due to the words *aglac*, meaning "misery", and *aglæca*, describing "monster", but also "hero" (Dragland 613). The fundamental meaning of Old English *ag-* as "pursuing", "stalking" explains the "two-fold use" of *aglæca* – as "monster" and "hero" – because "a pursuer could be either detested or admired" (Dragland 613). There is also another ambiguous Anglo-Saxon word present in various contexts in *Beowulf*: *wræc* and *wracu*, meaning both "vengeance" and "misery", which may also describe monsters and exiles, i.e. illustrate the states of both pursuer and the pursued; the same applies to *wræcca*, meaning "adventuring hero" and "one driven out" (Dragland 613-14). This evident etymological dualism may serve as a basis for the *Beowulf* poet's ambivalent attitude towards his heroic theme and the close identification of the Grendel kin as human beings and Beowulf with the monsters (Dragland 613-14).

Furthermore, there exists "a puzzling paradox" posed by "the figure and role of Grendel's mother" in the epic (Puhvel 81). Due to "a rather dubious nature" of her revenge-attack on Heorot, in which "she fails to stand and fight with the Danes (. . .), but flees in all haste back to her mere-

retreat", Grendel's mother is "a fighter vastly inferior" to her son (Puhvel 81). This notion can be clearly read in the text itself: "Less indeed was the terror, even by so much as is the might of women, the terror of a woman in battle compared with arméd man, when the sword with wire-bound hilt, hammer-forged, its blade stained with dripping blood, trusty of edge, cleaves the opposing boar-crest high upon the helm" (*Beowulf* 50). On the other hand, "when Beowulf invades her domain, she faces him fiercely and aggressively and drags him by main force to her 'hall'" (Puhvel 81). There the hero, who overcomes Grendel completely unarmed, fails to overcome his mother even with the sword. As the scene unfolds, for a moment it seems that Beowulf is condemned to his own destruction, but he "is finally victorious only through the miraculous intervention of God" (Puhvel 81-2). The evident "discrepancy" regarding the character of Grendel's mother suggests that she is less dangerous than her son "in as much as she is a woman" and it is "to be explained as an endeavour to discredit the unbiblical notion of a woman's superiority" (Puhvel 82). This notion of female physical inferiority is unmistakably woven into the fabric of *Beowulf*; but there is nothing surprising about it, "least of all to the modern reader" (Puhvel 82). In fact, "it is logically consistent with the heroic tenor of *Beowulf*, where the female function is to be 'peaceweaver' rather than fighter" (Puhvel 82). Rather, it is the menacing powers of Grendel's mother applied during Beowulf's struggle with her that are "surprising to the modern reader" and such women qualities may "provide the key to an explanation of the puzzle" regarding the character (Puhvel 82).

The suggestion that the author's moral sensibility, his "sense of fairness", is a significant factor in the creation of Grendel's mother should not be taken seriously (Puhvel 82). Rather, her actions may be ascribed to "the standard Germanic code of blood-revenge": "(. . .) her own domain is invaded; for these reasons a measure of sympathy on the author's part is due to her and hence Beowulf's revenge of revenge is made out to be difficult and hazardous undertaking" (Puhvel 82). But such a proposition is rather insufficient "in the light of mythical realism discernible throughout the epic" (Puhvel 83). It is clear that the author from time to time "applies standards consisting of a curious mixture of elements of Christian religio-morality and heathen or semi-Christian sociology", which indeed accounts for "the puzzles" and "inconsistencies" in *Beowulf* (Puhvel 83). However, it is fairly unbelievable "that a measure of what must be rather forced sympathy" would lead the poet or "the moulders of the tradition" "to tarnish the glory of the great Beowulf by representing him as thwarted, in fact overmatched – save for the grace of God – by the monstrous

hag, with all the loss in heroic stature this does entail" (Puhvel 83). A more plausible solution would be that Beowulf's difficulties in his struggle with Grendel's mother "are due to the writer's desire to create suspense and prevent this encounter from being a mere carbon copy of the struggle with Grendel" (Puhvel 83). This theory opens another investigation of possible mythical background "to the puzzle at hand", especially since the difficulties the hero faces "introduce a rather jarring note into the heroic theme of the epic" and pose another thought-provoking question: "Could it be that some tradition of supernatural female creatures of superior might has influenced the story of Beowulf's struggle with Grendel's mother?" (Puhvel 83).

An echo of ancient Indo-European tradition is present in the poem: Grendel's mother could be compared to "mighty female devils in Persian mythology, who were regarded as original demons, alluring men to sin and thus turning some of them into devils" (Puhvel 83-84). It is also important to note that "Persephone was initially regarded as the ruler of the Underworld", whilst Hades was her mere subordinate – "a corpse-eating demon" – "who only in Homeric times was by masculine pride elevated to the dignity of lord of the nether kingdom"; another example is "an appellative of Thor, 'Slayer of Giantesses', indicative of the power and dignity that, presumably at an early stage, must have been attributed to females in Scandinavian demonology"; and last but not least, "a striking example of the gradual lowering of the status of the female demon in Indo-European mythology is (. . .) the masculinisation of the originally female demon Gron in Celtic myth" (Puhvel 84). Thus, the roles of Grendel and his mother reflect "a transitional stage, embodying the concept of duality, within the process of development in question, a stage marked by lack of uniformity in the relative attribution of powers to demons along lines of sex" (Puhvel 84).

There is also a possibility that Grendel's mother is "derived from the old woman the hero meets in the demon's underground lair" in "Bear's Son Tale", although the two ladies do not share many common features (Puhvel 84). Hence, "to accept the claim that the fierce 'she-wolf of the water' of *Beowulf* is derived from the rather pathetic hag of the folktale one would have to indulge in an act of faith rather than a logical conclusion" (Puhvel 85). The hag in "Bear's Son Tale" significantly differs from Grendel's mother in terms of personality: she never puts up a serious fight – "in the few variants where she makes a menacing gesture, she is easily slain"; "she is far from always killed" – the hero merely threatens or beats her in order to find out the whereabouts

of the tiny demon or of the captive princesses; she is at times "feignedly or genuinely friendly towards the hero"; and ultimately, she does not "venture out of her lair on a revenge expedition or any other sort of mission" (Puhvel 84).

The figure of "the demonic hag more dangerous in fight than her similarly evil son or sons, not manifest in Germanic tradition and literature (outside of *Beowulf*), turns up in a number of instances in Celtic lore" (Puhvel 85): a twelfth-century Irish tale *Acallam na Senórach* "tells of Feonn MacCumhail's successful battle against a hag and her three sons living 'on the eastern side of the world', in defence of a king's castle, burned down each night by the youngest son" (Puhvel 85). The hero, with the help of his hound Bran, succeeds in overcoming "the three sons in rugged battles, each more severe than the preceding one"; yet the fight with their mother "who comes to heal and restore to life, as well as avenge" is described as unimaginably hard and perilous (Puhvel 85). Furthermore, the *Book of Leinster* tells a story of a subterranean encounter with a hag with the strength of nine men and her son Slechtaire – deprived of any extraordinary powers – as well as another hag Criblach, also with the strength of nine men, and her son Crimthand (Puhvel 86). Then, in a Scottish folktale *Feonn MacCumhail in the Kingdom of the Big Men,* the hero encounters a gigantic race where, "in defence of the daughter of the king of the land, demanded by a 'Big Monster', he fights, in turn, the monster, his father, and the 'Big Hag', his mother" (Puhvel 86). Again, the combat with the hag is the most dangerous one: "only when 'she had nearly done for Feonn' with her 'tooth', does Feonn's trusty hound Bran slay her, as he had the others, with his venomous 'shoe' (claw)" (Puhvel 86). In an Irish folktale *Wishing Gold*, "son of the King of Erin comes to an island where he slays, in succession, three five-headed giants" and, as expected, soon their mother in the form of a "dreadful hag" turns up (86). The battle with her lasts three days and nights, with the hag being convincingly dominant, until the moment when the mother of the hero, "who seems to have been a fay or perhaps a magician, turns up and advises him that the hag is invulnerable as long as she 'has the long net on her'" (Puhvel 86-7). Then he cuts off the net, the hag loses her strength and is ultimately slain. Unlike in previously mentioned, similar stories, here the hag's powers are credited to a magic object, rather than being conceived of as an inherent quality, and "this presumably represents a latter-day explanation of the tremendous strength of the hag, the original motif having apparently been lost sight of in the modern folktale" (Puhvel 87). It is also interesting that "in modern Celtic folktale it is not always her male offspring that the mighty demonic hag tries to avenge": in *The Fisherman of Kinsale* "a monstrously ugly hag lives with her

three daughters", again in the underground (Puhvel 87). The hero first kills her similarly foul daughters one by one and then confronts their mother in the underwater castle, being "in mortal danger from her seven inches long steel nails, and prevails only by transforming himself into a bear and breaking her back-bone" (Puhvel 87).

Finally, the figure of demonic hag "mightier than her offspring" undoubtedly is a well-established motif in Celtic tradition, thanks to myriads of instances of this kind of superiority clearly presented in the folktales and, of course, the proposition that this motif is "very possibly related to the early Indo-European tradition" (Puhvel 87). In this way, the motif, "in the absence of such in the larger Germanic tradition, stands out as a likely influence on *Beowulf* or its source material" (Puhvel 87). It is still fairly speculative "why the motif of the superlatively mighty hag turns up only in connection with Grendel's mother's second appearance on the scene of action and not the first", since there is no definite knowledge about the process of genesis of the poem, "even if recent scholarly opinion tends to credit one single poet with composing the epic" (Puhvel 87-8). Nevertheless, the author is "a free agent" and thus "may at times purposely deviate from the original tradition or motif or even independently create new elements – where it suits his artistic purpose of creating a lengthy poem with an elaborate plot, possibly out of a great number of isolated stories and traditions" (Puhvel 88), and the *Beowulf* poet verily is one of a kind.

## 1. 3. THE DRAGON

The final and most perilous encounter is the one between Beowulf and the dragon, who is throughout the poem commonly referred to as "the serpent". He is described as a winged creature avidly devoted to "watching his hoard" of gold in a "steep stone-barrow" (*Beowulf* 77), seemingly uninterested in human beings; until "some nameless man, creeping in nigh to the pagan treasure" steals a golden goblet studded with gems from the pile of treasure that the dragon "for three hundred winters kept beneath the earth" (*Beowulf* 78-9). First, it is necessary to point at the origins of the gold itself, since it originally does not belong to the dragon, but to an unknown human tribe: "There was in that house of earth many of such olden treasures, as someone, I know not who, among men in days of yore had there prudently concealed, jewels of price and mighty heirlooms of a noble race. All of them death had taken in times before (. . .)" (*Beowulf* 78). Only later the dragon finds, "wandering in gloom", the gold standing unprotected, and thereupon "it is ever his wont to seize, and there wise with many years he guards the heathen gold – no whit doth it profit him" (*Beowulf* 79). Here the *Beowulf* poet clearly states that the possession of this ancient treasure does not necessarily enrich the creature – the dragon himself cannot really dispose of the gold or share it with others – he can only watch over it. Still, the fact that the dragon freely appropriates something that is not initially made for him and later bears malice towards someone else who takes it away – "This the dragon did not after in silence bear, albeit he had been cheated in his sleep by thief's cunning" (*Beowulf* 78) – indicates a much larger issue: the presence of greed, i.e. the form of evil itself within the figure of dragon, which later escalates in much larger proportions than mere wrath.

"Whatever may be his origins, in fact or invention, the dragon in legend is a potent creation of men's imagination, richer in significance than his barrow is in gold" (Tolkien 6). Many poems in recent years have been inspired by the dragon of *Beowulf*, but this dragon is different (Tolkien 6-7). More specifically, he "is not to be blamed for being a dragon, but rather for not being dragon enough, plain pure fairy-story dragon" because the conception of him "approaches *draconitas* rather than *draco*: a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the undiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life)" (Tolkien 7). Nevertheless, it is "as it should be", since it brings the balance in the poem, which remains preserved though (Tolkien 7). The symbolism is evident, "near the surface, but it

does not break through, nor become allegory" because "something more significant than a standard hero, a man faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy of house or realm, is before us, and yet incarnate in time, walking in heroic history, and treading" the North (Tolkien 7). The poet uses the legends of his time "afresh in an original fashion, giving us not just one more, but something akin yet different: a measure and interpretation of them all" (Tolkien 7). The old things in *Beowulf* have such an appeal because "it is the poet himself who made antiquity so appealing. His poem has more value in consequence, and is a greater contribution to early mediaeval thought than the harsh and intolerant view that consigned all the heroes to the devil" and the reader should cherish "that the product of so noble a temper has been preserved by chance (if such it be) from the dragon of destruction" (Tolkien 12). It is necessary that Beowulf's final foe is not "some Swedish prince, or treacherous friend, but a dragon: a thing made by imagination for just such a purpose" (Tolkien 14). In fact, "Nowhere does a dragon come in so precisely where he should", like in *Beowulf*; but should the hero experience a fall before a dragon, "then certainly he should achieve his early glory by vanishing a foe of similar order" (Tolkien 14). Hence, the dragon is an enemy suitable for the ending of the poem, as Grendel suits the beginning: "They are creatures, *feond mancynnes*, of a similar order and kindred significance. Triumph over the lesser and more nearly human is cancelled by defeat before the older and more elemental" (Tolkien 14). The conquest of the ogres comes at the right moment, often coming in great lives, "when men look up in surprise and see that a hero has unawares leaped forth", so it could be concluded that the placing of the dragon in *Beowulf*" is inevitable: a man can but die upon his death day" (Tolkien 14).

As far as the dragon's motive for the attack on Beowulf's kingdom is concerned, he is bound by a code of honour similar to the Grendel kin (Gills 2). Although the motive is clear, the dragon represents "a danger beyond the threat of his physical presence" (Gills 2) – "the naked dragon of fell heart that flies wrapped about in flame: him do earth's dwellers greatly dread" (*Beowulf* 79) – he "is inimical to Geatish society not because he unleashes random attacks akin to Grendel's, but because he hoards gold and lets it amass in his lair" (Gills 2). As previously mentioned, the gold does not make the dragon himself literally rich, but his hoarding of gold is "a waste of resources and a squandering of history" because the Geats praise gold so highly that they "treat it more like an heirloom than a currency" (Gills 2). In this way, the figure of dragon represents "the absolute antithesis to the good gift-giving king, who bestows riches upon his followers to convey his respect and gratitude" (Gills 2). For this reason the dragon, and all the

antagonists of *Beowulf*, can be called "monstrous" – "not because they are physical perversions of the human form. Rather, it is because they are 'something extraordinary or unnatural' (. . .) lying within the framework of Scandinavian culture" (Gills 2). Moreover, "the monsters are dangerous not because they are alien to human values, nor because they are purely physical forces to be reckoned with, but because they approach humanity so closely that they pervert it profoundly" (Gills 2). The character of dragon in *Beowulf* is more dangerous and more frightening than Grendel because he is so skilled in perverting the familiar, not because he is physically larger or stronger; thus "the fear experienced by the Geats is not assuaged but rather exacerbated by the dragon's humanity" (Gills 3).

The fact that Beowulf acquires the dragon's treasure at the end of the poem is equally noteworthy, since it may signify "something less heroic than human" (Dragland 609). The dragon can be perceived as "a distant monstrous relation of Grendel and his mother", who is supposedly as damned as they are (Dragland 609). As previously established, "the Grendel kin are both damned by God and exiled by man", so "it is curious that the treasure of the dragon is both under God's prohibition and cursed by man" (Dragland 609). The author describes this notion as follows:

> (. . .) the heritage had been endowed with mighty power; the gold of bygone men was found about with spells, so that none among them might lay hand upon that hall of rings, unless God himself, true King of Victories, granted to the man he chose the enchanter's secret and the hoard to open, to even such among men as seemed meet to Him. (. . .) To this end had the mighty chieftains, those that there had laid it, set a deep curse upon it even until the Day of Doom, that that man should be for his crimes condemned, shut in the houses of devils, fast in the bonds of hell, tormented with clinging evil, who should that place despoil. (*Beowulf* 102)

Beowulf's relationship to this treasure is slightly problematic (Dragland 609), since he accepts it in a somewhat profuse manner: "Now go thou swiftly and survey the Hoard beneath the hoary rock, Wiglaf beloved, now that the serpent lieth dead, sleepeth wounded sore, robbed of his treasure" (*Beowulf* 93). The poet even capitalises the word "hoard" in this context, so it must be of utmost importance, especially to Beowulf, who "must somehow be involved in the curse of the gold" (Dragland 609). This could be tied to the instance after the defeat of Grendel's mother, when Hrothgar tells Beowulf a story about Heremod who "grew not" to the joy of the Scyldings, "but to

their bane and fall, to death and destruction of the chieftains of the Danes" (*Beowulf* 63): "Albeit the almighty God had advanced him beyond all in the glad gifts of prowess and in might, nonetheless the secret heart within his breast grew cruel and bloody. (. . .) Learn thou from this, and understand what generous virtue is!" (*Beowulf* 63). Also, it could be related to the statement made by the *Beowulf* poet after the defeat of the dragon: "Treasure, gold hidden in the earth, easily may overtake the heart of any of the race of men – let him beware who will!" (*Beowulf* 94), and later on: "Alas, Beowulf ere he went had not more carefully considered the old possessor's will that cursed the gold" (*Beowulf* 102). It seems that the author himself points at the curse of gold and the negative impact of possessing the same by man; in this case, Beowulf and the Geats. The matter remains unclear and therefore ambiguous to the present day, but it is usually understood that Beowulf indeed becomes involved in the curse of the treasure by acquiring it (Dragland 609-10). So far it has been proved that the curse of gold is irrefutable, "but from its effects Beowulf seems to be exempted", since it could be also understood that God allows him to open the hoard (Dragland 610). Not to forget his people, who are awarded with the treasure and they continue to cherish it (*Beowulf* 103-4), just like the dragon and the old chieftains before. Finally and most importantly, the poet "never makes it quite clear whether Beowulf is condemned or exonerated"; perhaps he purposefully inserts a certain dose of ambiguity into the poem (Dragland 610). Nevertheless, taken with other evidence, "the passage about Beowulf's relationship to the treasure" might sufficiently support the idea that he is as human as heroic – that might be defined as "a personal lapse" that leads Beowulf to the downfall (Dragland 610). In other words, he is (as well as his people) almost as greedy as the dragon because he values material goods above anything else.

# 2. THE FALLEN ANGELS OF MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

## 2. 1. SATAN

The one whom Milton holds responsible for the fall of man and therefore perceives as the source of primal evil is Satan. The author greatly bases the poem of *Paradise Lost* on the Book of Genesis, thus aiming to expose and examine the cause of man's first disobedience and its consequences that sealed mankind's fate (*PL* 1.1-10). However, Milton's version of the story considerably differs, since its (anti)hero is Satan himself, who is also adorned with many traits and skills previously unmentioned in the Bible. In fact, his name is not even mentioned in Genesis – it is the *snake* that seduced Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). Also, Satan of the Old Testament is one of the most glorious angels with no hint of his having fallen, and therefore certainly not evil; it is only in Christian and post-Biblical Jewish writings that he is turned into an evil spirit (Davidson 21). Hence, it appears that Milton finds the biblical sources insufficient to adequately explain the man's downfall, so he skilfully uses his own knowledge of cultural tradition and poetic imagination to explore the origins of evil in mankind. Ultimately, he creates versatile and charismatic Satan with his crew of fallen angels, perfectly ready and able to pervert the will of God.

From the etymological point of view, it is not uncommon to choose the figure of Satan as the chief of evil forces because the Hebrew meaning of his name is "adversary" (Davidson 261); that being said, *Satan* stands for "the greatest adversary of man and God himself". He "emerges from the ancient myth-language that had been taken up or revived by apocalyptic and sectarian movements within Judaism", similar to the one accountable for the recovery of Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940's, or the one which soon forms around the image of Jesus (Forsyth 26). Members of such movements adopt "the widespread combat myths" in order to "tell their story to themselves and make sense of the terrifying political events of the period" because they see "themselves as engaged in spiritual battles" that fight out not only at cosmic levels, but also at the earthly ones (Forsyth 26). Satan represents the leader of the enemy forces which function at the heavenly level, as angels, and at the earthly one, as the majority of the community who aims to reach "an accommodation with the foreign rulers" (Forsyth 26).

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is first addressed to as "Th' infernal Serpent" who deceives the mother of mankind (1.34-6). Before taking the final form, he tends to turn into different animal species, all in order to get to the inhabitants of Eden as close as possible and turn them against God (*PL* 4.397-408). This also implies that he is a single entity capable of shape-shifting if necessary. Later on, it is noted that Satan and his army once belonged to the first of the nine angelic orders, seraphim (*PL* 1.128-29), before being cast out of Heaven. Seraphim are described as the angels of love, light and fire, who have four faces and six wings (Davidson 267). Strangely enough, the singular form of *seraphim*, *seraph,* also interprets as "fiery serpent" in Hebrew (Davidson 267). If the latter two definitions are combined together, they give a description very similar to dragon-like creatures – "a winged snake that breaths fire" – whose form can be taken by Satan himself. Furthermore, this can be related to the specific verses from the Book of Revelation: "The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had led all the world astray, was hurled down to the earth and his angels were hurled down with him" (Rev. 12:9); "He overpowered the dragon, that primeval serpent which is the devil and Satan, and chained him up for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2). Milton evidently "adopts the traditional, partly scripturally based nomenclature of the angelic orders, descending from seraphim, cherubim, and thrones, through dominions, virtues, and powers to principles, archangels, and plain angels", but "does not apply them as fixed markers of status" (Raymond 262). Satan's complexity is further substantiated in the scene where Sin, speaking to him, refers to "all the Seraphim with thee combined" (*PL* 2.750), which also might suggest that the whole angelic order falls with him (Raymond 262).

The intricacy of Satan's character is most evident in his personality, as he can be observed both as a hero and antihero of the poem. He is "a vital part of a Manichaean universe, the *infinum malum* necessitated by a *summum bonum* which is God" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 452). The doctrine of early Church combats this theory, substantiating that evil has "no real being" but is "merely *privation boni*, a privation of good" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 452). However, Milton attempts to present "evil as real" and isolate it in a single, punishable being – Satan (Kaiter and Sandiuc 452). The success of his attempt depends on the interpretation of Satan's evident ambivalence, which is "a precondition of the poem's success and a major factor in the attention it has aroused" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 452-3). Satan is a "multifaceted" character who possesses a certain depth, created to convey the meanings hidden from the observers at first, whilst the other characters in the poem "all lead simpler existence, at least at the level of words they speak" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453).

Speaking skills are of utmost importance in this context – Satan's greatest weapon is undeniably his rhetorical device, as he uses it so cunningly:

> (. . .) Farewell, happy fields,
>
> Where joy forever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail,
>
> Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
>
> Receive thy new possessor – one who brings
>
> A mind not to be changed by place or time.
>
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
>
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
>
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
>
> And what should be, all but less than He
>
> Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
>
> We shall be free. Th' Almighty hath not built
>
> Here for His envy, will not drive us hence.
>
> Here we may reign secure and, in my choice,
>
> To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
>
> Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n! (*PL* 1.249-63)

His self-assurance and energy almost overstep the boundaries of fiction, thus leaving a lasting impression on the reader as well. It is difficult not to respond to Satan "with some admiration and sympathy" because "he is ultimately real", whilst "the inhabitants of Heaven are remote and strange" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453). He exhibits numerous attributes akin to human beings, primarily weaknesses and flaws that, in combination with courage and ignorance, lead to

punishment and downfall. Nothing can match Satan's early speeches and "the convincing eloquence"; it only further emphasises his (self-)glorification (Kaiter and Sandiuc 454). This can be supported by the statement that "the imitation in art of unpleasing objects may be a pleasing imitation" (Lewis 81), but the author might have done so for many reasons. The simplest one would probably be that his creation of Satan "is a magnificent poetical achievement" made to engage "the attention and excite the admiration of the reader" (Lewis 81). But it also may mean that "the real being (if any)" whom Milton depicts or "any real being like Satan if there were one (. . .) is or ought to be an object of admiration and sympathy, conscious or unconscious, on part of the poet or his readers or both" (Lewis 81). The development of Satan's character is clearly presented throughout the poem: first he ferociously rises as the leader of rebel angels, and then desperately falls as an incorrigible egoist. Milton deliberately belittles him "through the use of less favourable imagery, and by highlighting his flaws" because he is conscious of the fact that he is "in danger of portraying Satan as too much of a heroic figure" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 454). Such a harmonic development of the character reveals that the author intends "to control the reader's response to him", ensuring that they do not "respond to the magnificence of the poetry in a manner inappropriate to the willed intention in the doctrine" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 454).

In fact, Satan is a character far more inferior than it seems:

> (. . .) into what pit thou seest
>
> From what height fall'n, so much the stronger proved
>
> He with His thunder. And till then who knew
>
> The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,
>
> Nor what the potent victor in His rage
>
> Can else inflict, do I repent, or change
>
> (. . .) that fixed mind
>
> And high disdain from sense of injured merit. (*PL* 1.91-8)

He is amongst the first archangels great in power, in favour and pre-eminence, but neglected soon after the Son of God is proclaimed Messiah; this is unbearable to him and therefore he thinks himself "impaired" (*PL* 5.659-65). Again, this is a proof of Satan's enormous amount of arrogance, but also immaturity: "a well-known state of mind which we can all study in domestic animals, children, film-stars, politicians, or minor poets; and perhaps nearer home" (Lewis 82). His "original charisma, courage and confidence" diminish with Book Four (Kaiter and Sandiuc 454):

> Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
>
> Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
>
> Which way I fly is Hell. Myself am Hell,
>
> And in the lowest deep a lower deep
>
> Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
>
> To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
>
> O then, at last relent! Is there no place
>
> Left for repentance, none for pardon left? (*PL* 4.73-80)

At the same time, his entire "personage degenerates and gradually loses our sympathy" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 454). From that point of view, it would be slightly unfair "to label Satan as essentially evil"; instead, "he is the adversary" (Forsyth 26). He is perfectly aware of his flaws; but he still cannot escape his doom – "the unconquerable will" (*PL* 1.106). One could argue that Milton's Satan "deserves the tragic hero status" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453). He has "not only the stature of a tragic hero, but also his attributes": he stirs up "admiration, fear and pity", and displays "a tragic weakness or flaw in his character" which leads him to the downfall (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453). Hence, it seems that Satan's self-proclaimed superiority is rather questionable. Even one of his followers, Abdiel, points out that:

> (. . .) Unjust, thou say'st,
>
> Flatly unjust, to bind with laws the free,

And equal over equals to let reign,

One over all with unsucceeded power.

Shall thou give law to God? Shall thou dispute

With Him the points of liberty, who made

Thee what thou art, and formed the Powers of Heav'n

Such as He pleased, and circumscribed their being? (*PL* 5.818-25)

However, Satan offers a thought-provoking answer:

That we were formed then, say'st thou? And the work

Of secondary hands, by task transferred

From Father to His Son? Strange point and new!

Doctrine which we would know whence learned. Who saw

When this creation was? Remember'st thou

Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?

We know no time when we were not as now,

Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised

By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course

Had circled his full orb, the birth mature

Of this our native Heav'n, ethereal sons.

Our puissance is our own: our own right hand

Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try

Who is our equal (. . .) (*PL* 5.853-66)

He is extremely ignorant, absorbed in his own prestige and unwilling to think about anything else "in the midst of a world of light and love, of song and feast and dance" (Lewis 82), and his beliefs are so strong that he literally negates his very existence by claiming he does not remember the creation. He is a ridiculous contradiction of himself – a native of Heaven revolting against Heaven, "misery for the feelings and corruption for the will", which means nonsense for the intellect (Lewis 83). Satan's "main qualities" – "envy, pride, ambition, self-glorification" – are also his "tragic flaws" which "give the character his singularity and magnificence but also pass the rigorous sentence on him" (Kaiter and Sandiuc 453). As the answer to Abdiel suggests, "his argument assumes as axiomatic that in any world where there is any good to be envied, subjects will envy their sovereign. The only exception is Hell, for there, since there is no good to be had, the sovereign cannot have more of it, and therefore cannot be envied" (Lewis 84). That being said, Satan is a character who deliberately "impairs" himself with illogical ideas and becomes the embodiment of evil as a consequence. This is sufficiently sealed by the statement: "Evil, be thou my good" (*PL* 4.110).

Like other heroic figures, Satan "brings his boon, the corruption of mankind, in triumph back to his community, the rebel hosts", but it only produces chaos instead of order (Kaiter and Sandiuc 455): his evil deeds are rather symbolically welcomed by "A dismal universal hiss, the sound / Of public scorn (. . .)", instead of high applause (*PL* 10.508-9). Ultimately, he is, along his hellish comrades, punished for perverting God's will and tarnishing mankind's fate as it befits them – all of them are turned into serpents:

> (. . .) A greater power
>
> Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned,
>
> According to his doom. He would have spoke,
>
> But hiss for hiss returned with forkèd tongue
>
> To forkèd tongue, for now were all transformed
>
> Alike, to serpents all, as accessories
>
> To his bold riot (. . .) (*PL* 10.515-21)

Satan's ambivalent and therefore perplexing persona cannot be precisely labelled as heroic or antiheroic, since "Milton does not accept the standard interpretation of the heroic figure"; he reinvents it by creating a character who is at once someone the readers tend to appreciate as heroic, and someone they want to see defeated (Kaiter and Sandiuc 456). It is impossible to entirely understand Milton's intentions, but being aware of Satan's presented potential, as a character open to myriads of interpretations that go beyond cultural tradition and can even contradict each other, would suffice. In the same way, Satan may be considered as a reflection of how humans perceive themselves, as well as those they call "others" (Pagels xviii). The "otherness" denotes the qualities labelled as negative by humans and this cultural practice may be "as old as the humanity itself" (Pagels xviii). Consequently, one should not disregard the possibility that the author simply alludes to the inner, dormant Satan in each human being – the haughty creature filled with wrath, awakened when they face with certain dissatisfactions throughout the course of life. It is highly unexpected to be pleased with that self-revelation, but also highly logical because Milton is, like the rest of humans, damnable (Lewis 86).

## 2. 2. BEELZEBUB

The creature who awakens alongside Satan, "One next himself in power, and next in crime, / Long after known in Palestine", is Beelzebub (*PL* 1.79-81), whose name translates as "lord of the flies" from Hebrew (Davidson 72). The flies can be interpreted in two ways: as sacred animals, they symbolise the solar heat; or they are a source of nuisance ("Baal Zebub," def. 2). Hence, Beelzebub is presumably a god who can cause or cure diseases ("Baal Zebub," def. 2). Originally, he is a Syrian god (Davidson 72); in the Bible he is a god of Ekron in Philistia (2 Kings 1:2); whilst in the cabala he is the chief of the nine evil hierarchies of the underworld (Davidson 72). In *Paradise Lost* he is presented as Satan's second-in-command and therefore one of his most avid followers. Although some cultures identify Beelzebub with Satan (Carus 71), they in fact do not belong to the same angelic order. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan addresses him as a fallen cherub (1.157), which is a rank right below seraphim. Cherubim, in name as well as in concept, are of Akkadian or Assyrian origins (Davidson 86). The Akkadian word *karibu* means "one who prays" or "one who intercedes", and according to Dionysius it means "knowledge"; in ancient Assyrian art, cherubim are pictured as "huge, winged creatures with leonine or human faces, bodies of bulls or sphinxes, eagles (. . .) usually placed at entrances to palaces or temples as guardian spirits" (Davidson 86). However, in early Canaanitish lore they are not conceived of as angels, but rather "some horrible visions of Beasts" supposed to terrify Adam from the entrance of paradise (Davidson 86). Only later they are regarded as heavenly spirits, and so they are the first creatures to be construed as angels in the Old Testament (Davidson 86): Yahweh "banished the man, and in front of the garden of Eden he posted the great winged creatures and the fiery flashing sword, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). This perfectly illustrates the merging of Mesopotamian and Christian mythology into a new, conspicuous concept presented by Milton in his poem.

As previously suggested, Beelzebub has the role of Satan's *locum tenens*, but his intentions regarding the revenge on God are somewhat more subtle. He feels that, regardless of him and his comrades being physically absent from Heaven, "the mind and spirit remains / Invincible, and vigor soon returns", though all their glory is extinct and happy state swallowed up in endless misery (*PL* 1.139-42). Consequently, he wants to know if there is anything more to God's decision regarding their destiny: maybe he deliberately does not deprive the fallen angels of spirit and

strength because they would not be able to endure their punishment otherwise; or perhaps he assigns them new roles to be performed in such a dark place as Hell (*PL* 1.143-55). In this way, Beelzebub recognises God as the Almighty ruler, since no one else "could have o'erpowered such force" as theirs (*PL* 1.145) and basically admits that the entire crew of fallen angels is still under God's control as his thralls – and nothing more.

Milton's Beelzebub is a sage (2.305) with a certain dose of common sense necessary to balance out Satan's unconquerable will. He recalls the fallen angels to reality – "they cannot at all escape from Hell nor in any way injure their enemy"; but they have a chance of injuring someone else (Lewis 90). During the great council at Pandemonium, he cunningly suggests to "find / Some easier enterprise" (*PL* 2.344-5) in order to satisfy their hunger for vengeance – the siege of Paradise "By sudden onset" (*PL* 2.364). Thus Beelzebub pleads his devilish counsel, "first devised / By Satan, and in part proposed, for whence / But from the author of all ill" (*PL* 2.378-81). His public image amongst the fellow demi-gods is almost as powerful as Satan's, since his "bold design / Pleased highly those infernal States, and joy / Sparkled in all their eyes" (*PL* 2.386-8).

The language of Hell is evidently "duplicitous": "the speech is Beelzebub's but the idea is Satan's"; "but it is also resourceful, elaborate, resonant, inventive" (Forsyth 23). On the contrary, Heaven is "rather flat, making simple statements without elaborate dressing" (Forsyth 23): "my glory", "Thy glory", "His glory" – not "Satan's transcendent glory" (Forsyth 23). In this way, Milton's Heaven could be perceived as "a parody of Hell" (Forsyth 23), since he tirelessly adorns the image of Hell and its inhabitants with numerous epithets. Also, the council chamber of Pandemonium could be regarded as a parliament building where evil itself resides and plots malicious conspiracies against the man and God. In this respect, Satan has the role of leader, whilst Beelzebub is his wise counsellor and a master of propaganda who carefully and rationally examines every evil plot, acquaints the infernal assembly with it, and ultimately enables this plot to be carried out without further ado about it. The great consult at Pandemonium is probably inspired by "the democratic politics" of Milton's time because he "shows a sympathetic fascination with it, more than with the autocratic politics of Heaven" (Forsyth 111); and Beelzebub and Satan both have "a standard parliamentary manoeuver" – they are quick-witted and their plot is rather "diabolical" (Forsyth 111). The author succeeds to manipulate the very reader through the speeches of Beelzebub and Satan, which "are set up in such a way that the plan is immediately

seen to have the kind of intellectual brilliance" the public admires: "it comes in at the appropriate moment to solve an apparently insoluble problem – how to continue the struggle without open war" (Forsyth 111). Finally, Beelzebub is a diplomat who successfully solves all the dilemmas of Hell using the persuasive rhetoric, just as Satan, but in a much more subtle and therefore smarter way.

## 2. 3. MOLOCH

The most dreadfully described fallen angel whose role is equally important is Moloch. In *Paradise Lost* he is a "horrid king, besmeared with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears" (1.392-3). He is worshipped by the Ammonite in Rabba "and her wat'ry plain, / In Argob and in Basan, to the stream / Of utmost Arnon" (*PL* 1.396-9). According to the Bible, Solomon builds a temple to him (1 Kings 11:7) "right against the temple of God, / On that opprobrious hill", and makes his grove "The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence / And black Gehenna called, the type of Hell" (*PL* 1.402-5). Moloch is a cult deity fond of receiving young, innocent souls as sacrifices; no one can hear their suffering, for their cries are silenced by "the noise of drums and timbrels loud" (*PL* 1.394). His name is formed from the Hebrew word for "king" (*mlch*) by giving it the vowels of the word "shame" (*boshet*), to show Israel's horror of the hideous practice of the heathen Semites (Klein 350). Due to his powerful influence on cultural tradition, he is easily associated with Satan and Beelzebub; in the cabbalistic lore Moloch is, together with them, one of the archdemons (Guiley 139). However, Milton's Moloch is characteristically somewhere in-between the two demons because he is neither imperious as Satan nor tactful as Beelzebub.

He is still convinced that he is as strong as God despite him, alongside his maleficent comrades, being defeated and cast out from the heavenly court (*PL* 2.46-8). Moloch is "the strongest and the fiercest Spirit / That fought in Heav'n, now fiercer by despair" (*PL* 2.44-5). Consequently, he proposes open war against God, elaborating that he cannot "Accept this dark opprobrious den of shame, / The prison of His tyranny" who reigns by the delay of the fallen angels (*PL* 2.58-60). By invading God's kingdom they have nothing to lose – apparently, there is nothing worse that dwelling in Hell (*PL* 2.85-6) – and even if they do not achieve victory, they will achieve revenge (*PL* 2.105). This insatiable desire for revenge is Moloch's primary motive as he loses his dignity by being "condemned in this abhorrèd deep to utter woe" (*PL* 2.86-7). Although he is aware of the fact that "the will / And high permission of all-ruling Heav'n" leave the crew of the fallen at large" (*PL* 1.211-13), the demon scarcely verbalises his true feelings during the speech at Pandemonium and rather hides behind the mask of illusion. However, the following statement unmasks him quite well: "Th' ascent is easy, then; / Th' event is feared!" (*PL* 2.81-2).

On this basis, one might conclude that the character of Milton's Moloch differs considerably from the one defined by various cultural traditions. Instead of a bloodthirsty demon,

in *Paradise Lost* he embodies a warrior without arms who lives off his old glory. All he can offer is flimsy rhetoric complemented by an enormous amount of vengefulness and hidden bitterness. Therefore, it is not unusual for him to be outspoken by other fallen angels during the great council, for "he is not taken altogether seriously" (Forsyth 108). Moloch undoubtedly lacks Satan's speaking skills and Beelzebub's diplomatic approach, which are the traits necessary for planning such a serious venture as an invasion of God's kingdom. If he had them, paired with the present, immense amount of hatred and viciousness, he would probably be the most dangerous fallen angel in the poem. So far, he remains only a latent candidate for the greatest enemy of God and mankind, purposefully belittled by the author. In this context, Moloch is the most tragic deity of *Paradise Lost*, whose culturally determined identity is drastically altered in order to please Milton's imagination and astonish the reader.

# 3. THE CONFLUENCE OF EVIL: *BEOWULF* VERSUS *PARADISE LOST*

So far the research has pointed out certain salient motifs common to *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*: the concept of the *uncanny*, the idea of *dualism*, and an astounding blend of *Christian* and *pagan* cultural tradition. The structure that underlies all these motifs is the "Triad of Evil" or the hierarchy consisting of the main antagonists of both epic poems. In *Beowulf*, the dragon as the greatest adversary of the Danes and the Geats stands on the top of the triad, thus symbolising his own supremacy; below follows Grendel's mother as the second challenging obstacle that requires the knowledge of specific warfare techniques in order to be overcome; and finally Grendel as the weakest enemy who serves as testing of the main hero before engaging in the greatest fight of the epic. Similarly, in *Paradise Lost*, on the top of the triad is Satan, who with his skills and zeal dominates over the rest of fallen angels; next follows Beelzebub as his second-in-command, who is equally skilled in terms of rhetoric, but far more subtle and wiser; and at last Moloch, who shares Satan's and Beelzebub's desire for revenge, but his strongest skills are only hatred and viciousness. This structure can be associated with the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), for it mimics all the good in the universe, but in a completely opposite way. Therefore, the "Triad of Evil" simply might be interpreted as the ultimate perversion of "Eternal Providence" and "the ways of God" (*PL* 1.25-6), an issue which conditions the well-known situation present in both epics – the battle of good and evil.

The term *uncanny* indicates the opposite of something naturally occurring or common, which is clearly evident by observing the German version of the term, *unheimlich*, the opposite of which is the word *heimlich,* meaning "familiar", "native", "belonging to the home" (Freud 2). Hence, the *uncanny* could be defined as "that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud 1-2). It is also observable that the relationship between the two aforementioned concepts is pervaded by ambivalence, as is the conflict between good and evil or light and darkness. This matter further suggests that the monsters of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* "are not feared by man because of their radical otherness, but rather because they are a reflection of the human experience, perverted and twisted enough to shake man's own conception of reality" (Gills 1). Thus, Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon are inseparable members of Danish and Geatish society, for they reflect not only physical anomalies of the

community, but also all its flaws and sins hidden behind the curtain of Scandinavian conventions. For instance, the monsters equally praise the material wealth (gold), but do not share it with others, thus showing their avarice and greed; they are also fond of having a hearty meal, but have an uncontrollable appetite for human flesh; and as true social outcasts, they are courageous and willing to fight their enemies until they reach the ultimate goal – the dominion over Scandinavian society. "They are perversions of human society just as much as they are examples of a distorted human form" and they should not be treated as alien to human values (Gills 2). Rather, they have to be rooted in the framework of the society in order to be more accurately understood as monsters (Gills 2) or more precisely, uncanny characters.

This idea is complemented by the term the *doppelgänger* or *double*, used to describe "a creature that unnerves others with mimicry" and "through their appropriation of the afflicted individual's knowledge, emotions, and experience, threaten to dissolve the self-identity of that individual" (Gills 2). Apart from its logical connection with shadows and reflected images (Rank 82-3), the concept of the dual personality initially serves as "an insurance against destruction to the ego" or a strong rejection of the power of death; thus the first "double" of the body is probably the "immortal" soul (Freud 9). Such reflections arise "from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man" (Freud 9). Later on, the *double* takes on a different meaning – "from having been an assurance of immortality", it "becomes the ghastly harbinger of death" (Freud 9). The most prominent example of a *doppelgänger* in *Beowulf* is the dragon, who "threatens to pervert" social values by mimicking them (Gills 3). Since the concept of the *uncanny* "is rooted in the mind of the observer, who perceives a thing as frightening" because it reminds them of something familiar in their own consciousness, the dragon is undeniably the most perilous and terrifying antagonist of the epic; not because of his physical size or strength, but because he is so successful in perverting the familiar to man (Gills 3).

The fallen angels of *Paradise Lost* are also characterised by elements of uncanniness and double personality. As the complete opposite of the world of good, they are a negative reflection of human values and represent every possible form of sinfulness. They aim to reach the human soul by the means of mimicry, ultimately leading it to sin. These facts especially pertain to the character of Satan (Gills 3), between whom and the dragon of *Beowulf* a clear parallel can be

drawn. Both creatures resemble the dark side of humanity by twisting its social customs and behaviour, as well as they succeed to evoke the primal fear of the *uncanny* in human beings. For this reason, they can be considered perfect examples of the archetype of *doppelgängers* in literature. Moreover, Satan's "persuasive rhetoric" (Gills 3) makes way into the heart of Eve (*PL* 9.550), which makes him similar to Albrecht Schaeffer's *Gettatore,* a figure of Roman superstition characterised by his poetic attractiveness (Gills 3): a living person known as uncanny must not exclusively be credited with bad intentions; rather, these intentions must be attributed a certain "capacity to achieve their aim in virtue of special powers" (Freud 14). With regard to the mentioned matter, Milton's Satan certainly fulfils the criteria thanks to his inexhaustible dose of self-awareness, charisma, and the art of speaking – even the reader "becomes persuaded by Satan's rhetoric" by observing the fall of Eve (Gills 3). Thanks to his power to deceive, Satan "appeals to man because he is simultaneously attractive and repulsive" (Gills 3), which again points to the issue of ambivalence. This matter can be observed at the level of an individual as well as at the level of the universe: the antagonists of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* participate in the battle of psychological nature (Kaiter and Sandiuc 455) not only against themselves, but against the very God because their ultimate goal is to diverge from the human world (Gills 3), but also approach it by perverting everything sacred to man.

The emergence of ambivalence is the basis for exploring the idea of *dualism* and even *Manichaeism* within the context of both epic poems. The scholarly term of *dualism* is first coined by the English Orientalist Thomas Hyde in 1700 "with regard to the Zoroastrian doctrine of two primordial and co-eternal entities: the one good, causing light and life (Ahura Mazda), the other bad, causing darkness and death (Ahriman)" (Frey 271). Therefore, it characterises numerous "philosophical and religious thought systems shaped by a fundamental physical or metaphysical duality, a teaching of two powers, principles or states of being which cannot be explained as originating in or leading to an overall unity" (Frey 271). Similarly, *Manichaeism*, a religion founded by the Mesopotamian prophet Mani in the third century, traditionally describes "a cosmic war between two co-eternal powers of Light and Darkness" (Baker-Brian 1), thus bearing an irrefutable relation to the doctrine of *dualism*. What is common to both concepts is that they are unacceptable within the framework of Christian cultural tradition or more precisely, "biblical monotheism and creation thought" (Frey 271). As a consequence, opponents of the eponymous beliefs treat them as aberrant forms of Christianity, as well as their followers whom they perceive

as “heretical Christians of a particularly opportunistic kind” (Baker-Brian 1). Therefore, in Christian context, “’dualistic’ worldviews are at least modified by the biblical view of the one creator, so that evil (or Satan) is never thought to be coeternal with one God” (Frey 271).

Interestingly enough, dualistic worldviews have been modified even further throughout the history with an aim “to be applicable to various fundamental dichotomies” (Frey 271): “The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has brought to knowledge various examples of a dualistic worldview within early Judaism, most prominently the Treatise on the Two Spirits (. . .) and the War Scroll (. . .), but the development of these patterns goes back to pre-Qumranic apocalyptic and sapiential thought” (Frey 272). On the basis of these discoveries, *dualism* undoubtedly is “a characteristic feature of apocalyptic thought”, which evolves into many different taxonomies discerned as follows: *metaphysical dualism* (God – Satan/Belial etc.), *cosmic dualism* (Michael – Belial or light – darkness, along with the world divided into two opposing groups, camps or forces), *ethical dualism* (good – evil; the good – the wicked), *psychological dualism* (good inclination – evil inclination, including the contrast or struggle between good and evil within the human heart or mind) etc. (Frey 272).

The impact of dualistic ideology can be observed within the context of *Beowulf*, since the plot is based on the polarity of the two sides – the Scandinavian people (the Danes and the Geats) versus monsters (Grendel, Grendel’s mother and the dragon). The Danes and the Geats are led by Beowulf and Hrothgar, who represent the forces of good, i.e. God himself; opposite them stand the enemy forces in the form of monsters, which in turn represent the ultimate evil or Cain’s offspring (*Beowulf* 16), or even Satan’s followers. The nature of this matter can be explored in different ways by applying the previously discussed taxonomies of *dualism* (Frey 272): probably the simplest definition of conflicting relationships in *Beowulf* would be that they symbolise a type of *cosmic dualism*, according to which Beowulf has the role of saviour who is to deliver the Scandinavian people from evil in the shape of monstrous entities; another interpretation could be an issue of *ethical dualism*, in which the Danes and the Geats represent morally acceptable social norms and culture, whilst their opponents aim to pervert their values and disrupt the social balance, thus embodying the wicked and abhorrent to human world.

In quite a similar fashion, the plot of *Paradise Lost* also revolves around the conflict between the two opposing currents and its consequences. Milton portrays the almighty God as the

leader of the forces of good accompanied by the heavenly army of archangels; the opposite are the forces of evil led by Satan and his crew of fallen angels. It is easy to establish the fact that Satan can never outmatch God, i.e. his creator (*PL* 5.836-7), regardless of his remarkable (God-given) skills and power; and in this respect the author follows the tradition of biblical monotheism, according to which only God is eternal (Frey 271). But one cannot reject the possibility that Milton boldly attempts to illustrate the concept of the Manichaean universe in which two co-eternal powers of Light and Darkness participate in a cosmic war (Baker-Brian 1), thus diverging from the classical Christian belief. This idea accounts for an issue of *metaphysical dualism* in the epic, which depicts the final showdown between God and Satan or good and evil and its aftermath – the turning of Satan and his followers into serpents (*PL* 10.515-21). The matter can further be observed in the light of *psychological dualism*: God with the army of archangels, alongside his human descendants Adam and Eve, represents positive inclinations, whilst Satan and fallen angels represent the negative ones that are an inseparable part of any self-conscious living being. As there exists the contrast between light and darkness, there exists the struggle between good and evil as well, residing in the heart or mind of an individual or group (Frey 272). By providing an insight into such astounding reflections and revelations regarding the ubiquity of evil, the authors of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* have succeeded to create the unique epic poems that convincingly transcend the notion of generally accepted Christian belief.

The way in which the *Beowulf* poet incorporates pagan elements into his work is particularly interesting because Christianity has already become a fairly widespread religion at the time. In the section describing Grendel's terror over Hrothgar's people, the author clearly states that the Danes have a history of pagan origins:

> Many a mighty one sat oft communing, counsel they took what it were best for stouthearted men to do against these dire terrors. At times they vowed sacrifices to idols in their heathen tabernacles, in prayers implored the slayer of souls to afford them help against the sufferings of the people. Such was their hope, the hope of the heathens; they were mindful in their hearts of hell (. . .). (*Beowulf* 18)

In fact, they share it with Grendel: "Therein doomed to die he plunged, and bereft of joys in his retreat amid the fens yielded up his life and heathen soul" (*Beowulf* 37). On the other hand, it is also stated that the Grendel kin descends from the race of Cain, along with all evil broods (*Beowulf*

16), which points to the origins related to the Scripture. Moreover, the Scandinavian people constantly invoke God and refer to him as the supreme being: "God was lord then of all the race of men, even as He yet is" (*Beowulf* 43); "Then did the aged king leap up, and God, the Mighty Lord, he thanked (. . .)" (*Beowulf* 53); "(. . .) there Holy God did rule the victory in battle. The allseeing Lord who governeth the heavens on high with ease did give decision to the right (. . .)" (*Beowulf* 58). This points to the fact that the Scandinavian community not only has a dual identity, but also shares it with its enemies – monsters. Furthermore, it is evident that the merging of pagan and Christian cultural tradition creates a divided worldview that the *Beowulf* poet himself has – he creates the characters who worship many different deities, whilst they also believe in one God. Consequently, an important question arises as to why the author would choose such a controversial combination of motifs for his work.

It is important to note that the shift from Christian to pagan tradition in *Beowulf* is not complete because "its author is still concerned primarily with *man on earth*, rehandling in a new perspective an ancient theme: that man, each man and all men, and all their works shall die" (Tolkien 9). His tendency to employ pagan elements is due to "the nearness" of that time and "the shadows of its despair" (Tolkien 9). The poet "looks back into the past, surveying the history of the kings and warriors in the old traditions" and "sees that all glory (or as we might say 'culture' or 'civilization') ends in one night" (Tolkien 9), which inspires him to write the story of *Beowulf*: "He could view from without, but still feel immediately and from within, the old dogma: despair of the event, combined with faith in the value of doomed resistance" (Tolkien 9-10). Therefore, it could be concluded that the cause of the dual tradition in *Beowulf* is a sentimental attachment to the times of old whose spirit still lives, regardless of the age to come.

Hundreds of years later and at a time when Christianity becomes the dominant world religion, John Milton applies a very similar method of merging Christian and pagan elements in *Paradise Lost*. At the very beginning of the epic, he invokes the "Heavenly Muse", to sing the song "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste / Brought Death into the world (. . .)" (*PL* 1.1-6). Her name is Urania (*PL* 7.1) and the author addresses her throughout the whole poem; he seeks her help to successfully deliver the story to the audience. The motif of invoking a muse as a source of inspiration is more characteristic of poets such as Homer or Virgil, who belong to classical literature. The very fact that Milton uses it

suggests a departure from the Christian narrative. An account of fallen angels "Chained on the burning lake" (*PL* 1.210) follows next, as well as naming myriads of them: Satan, Beelzebub, Moloch, Chemos, Astoreth, Thammuz, Dagon and many others. They are all pagan deities who have had their own worship cults around the world, which is another indication of diverging from biblical monotheism. However, it cannot be denied that the main plot of Milton's story bears a striking resemblance to that of the Book of Genesis – it revolves around the fall of man and its consequences. Moreover, the author addresses God as the supreme ruler of the universe: "Hail, universal Lord" (*PL* 5.205), "So spoke the Universal Lord" (*PL* 8.376). In this respect, it could be said that the connection between the two completely opposite cultural traditions in *Paradise Lost* is quite strong. This is complemented by the choice of Satan as the main character of the epic, who is the complete opposite of God; but in such a position he can be observed both as a hero and anti-hero. He is undoubtedly a pagan deity, but since he is also a Biblical figure, one could argue that he is of dual origins as well. Nevertheless, Satan's role of a rebel is of great importance, especially to the author himself.

Milton invokes "a deep-rooted tradition in English literature" by portraying Satan and his army of fallen angels as "pagan warriors" (Hong 532). More importantly, he successfully presents the concept which is "a unique phenomenon" in the history of English literature (Hong 533). The reinvention of Satan and his followers as social outcasts is reminiscent of the monsters in *Beowulf*, who are also pagan warriors aiming to plague the Scandinavian society and thus mock God himself. As his predecessor the *Beowulf* poet, Milton skilfully combines and integrates pagan and Christian motifs within a single work. This can be compared to Old English religious poetry, such as *Guthlac A* and *Andreas*, in which "the biblical myth is adapted in a unique manner to fit into the mode of Germanic heroic poetry", the result of which is "a hybrid version of full-scale warfare between two enemy tribes in which the devils are made to put on armor as pagan warriors" (Hong 533-4). Thanks to "a tactful approach" of the early Christian mission towards the conversion of faith, "the old pagan tradition and customs" are not destroyed and replaced with "the orthodox Christian system and services"; rather, they are instilled "new meanings into the old concepts to make them serve Christian purposes" (Hong 535). Both the *Beowulf* poet and Milton follow and apply the same method in their works, thereby ensuring that the old and valuable literary tradition is permanently preserved and not forgotten. This act does not enrich them only as writers; instead, they are the heirs to the cultural treasures of their ancestors.

# CONCLUSION

By exploring the concept of *evil* and its origins within the context of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*, it can be concluded that it is as old as the universe itself. That being said, *evil* is one of the oldest phenomena which at the same time has served as a source of inspiration to myriads of nations around the world. Those who have recorded its occurrence undoubtedly have a perfect understanding of *evil*: it is the *double* of the term *good*. More precisely, it is an indispensable part of every living being, the shadow patiently waiting for the right moment to fulfil its sole purpose – to single out its better half. *Evil* has the ability to manifest itself in various forms: from ordinary mortals who worship it, through mentally and physically distorted human beings, to astounding and terrifying creatures such as monsters or demons. Thanks to the diversity of the cultural and historical heritage of many people, and ultimately to the writers who have recorded it, the narratives describing the battle of good and evil have not been forgotten in oral tradition. Rather, they have been preserved and reinvented in order to survive in the form of many literary works. Precisely these are the stories of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*, whose authors raise the notion of *evil* to a whole new level: they create the "Triad of Evil", a hierarchical structure consisting of the main antagonists of their poems, whose purpose is to pervert the Holy Trinity and thereby disrupt the harmony of the universe. Their villains are incarnations of evil in the form of monsters (Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon) and demons (Satan, Beelzebub and Moloch) who share their characteristics, but also their origins: they are the *uncanny* characters residing in the *Manichaean* universe who have both *Christian* and *pagan* origins. Ultimately, in the context of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* it all comes down to the issue of *dualism*. Regardless of the time they live in, the authors intentionally incorporate this concept into their works because they are still sentimentally attached to the cultural tradition of their ancestors who themselves have introduced the blend of Christian and pagan elements to the world of literature. *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* deserve to be recognised as one of the most unique literary works in history for they not only cherish the literary customs of their people, but also the ancient concept of *evil* and its omnipresence in every single corner of the universe.

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