

**FROM THE EPIC TO THE NOVEL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
*BEOWULF* AND *GRENDEL***

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OF  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

**BY**

**EMİNE DALBAK**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

**JULY 2003**

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Bahattin Akşit  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of  
Master of Arts.

Prof. Dr. Wolf König  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully  
adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. Dr. Sevda Çalışkan  
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Sevda Çalışkan

Prof. Dr. Nursel İçöz

Dr. Birtane Karanakçı

## ABSTRACT

### FROM THE EPIC TO THE NOVEL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF

#### *BEOWULF AND GRENDEL*

Dalbak, Emine

M.A., English Literature

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Sevda Çalışkan

July 2003, 85 pages

This thesis compares the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* and John Gardner's novel *Grendel* in terms of their generic relations within a framework of Bakhtin's genre theory. The analysis restricts its theoretical framework to basically two essays by Mikhail M. Bakhtin, namely "Epic and Novel" and "Discourse in the Novel" included in Michael Holquist's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (1981).

This study argues that *Beowulf* represents a monologic world, which is hierarchically distanced from the present. As Bakhtin puts it, the epic presents an already completed world placed in an absolute past, which demands a pious attitude as it is hierarchically above the

reader. Gardner's *Grendel*, on the other hand, is a retelling of the *Beowulf* story through the monster's eye in the contemporary world. It suggests a dialogue between the elevated world of the epic hero Beowulf and the novelistic world of Grendel to achieve multiplicity in a truly Bakhtinian sense. For Gardner's version enables the monstrous "other," which is Grendel, to raise its voice. By changing the temporal order and narrative perspective, Gardner succeeds in re-writing an epic story in the novelistic zone of maximal proximity to the present. This thesis, however, argues that although Gardner's *Grendel* displays all the novelistic features, basically multiplicity and contemporaneity, as put forward by Bakhtin, it still celebrates the ideal world of the epic.

Keywords: Absolute Past, The Zone of Maximal Proximity, Contemporaneity, Hierarchical Positioning, Monologism, Multiplicity, Dialogue.

## ÖZ

### DESTANDAN ROMANA: *BEOWULF* İLE *GRENDEL* KARŞILAŞTIRMASI

Dalbak, Emine

Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Edebiyatı

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Sevda Çalışkan

Temmuz 2003, 85 sayfa

Bu çalışma, Anglosakson destanı *Beowulf* ile John Gardner'ın romanı *Grendel*'i, Bakhtin'in tür kuramını temel alarak (destan ve roman türleri) ikisi arasındaki türsel ilişki bakımından incelemekte ve karşılaştırmaktadır. Bu incelemenin kuramsal çerçevesini Bakhtin'in iki makalesi oluşturmaktadır: "Epic and Novel" ve "Discourse in the Novel". Her iki makale de Michael Holquist'in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (1981) başlıklı derlemesinde yer almaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, Anglosakson destanı *Beowulf*'un, şimdiki zamanın üzerinde olan çok uzak bir geçmişi temsil ettiği savunulmaktadır. Bu dünya, günümüz dünyasının tersine, teksesli bir dünyadır: burada sadece iyi olanın sesi vardır. Dolayısıyla, okuyucunun, kendi dünyasının derece olarak çok üstünde ve zaman olarak çok uzağında olan bu yitik dünyanın kahramanlarına büyük bir saygı duyması beklenmektedir. Gardner'ın *Grendel* romanı ise *Beowulf* hikayesinin yeniden, bu kez canavarın gözünden, anlatımıdır. Roman, destan

kahramanı Beowulf'un yüce dünyası ile canavar Grendel'in romansı dünyası arasında bir diyalog sergilemektedir. Dolayısıyla da, Gardner'ın romanında tam anlamıyla Bakhtinsel denebilecek bir çok seslilik vardır. Bunun nedeni, Gardner'ın versiyonunun, destanda "öteki" konumunda bulunan ve tamamiyle sessiz kalan canavar Grendel'in bakış açısını vermesidir. Nitekim hikaye burada Grendel'in ağzından verilmektedir. Gardner, *Beowulf* destanını, hikayenin zamanını –yitik geçmişten günümüze- ve anlatıcısını değiştirmek yoluyla, roman formunda yeniden yazmayı başarabilmektedir. Bunun sonucunda, romanda temsil edilen dünya ile okuyucu arasında, destanın yaratmış olduğu hiyerarşik uzaklığın tersine, bir denklik kurulmaktadır. Bu denklik, Bakhtin'in deyimiyile, romanın şimdiki zamana "sıfır uzaklık bölgesi"nde yer almasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Ancak bu inceleme, Gardner'ın *Grendel* romanının, Bakhtin tarafından öne sürülen bütün romansı özellikleri –ki bunlar esas olarak 'çokseslilik' ve 'çağdaş bakış açısı'dır- taşıdığını savunmakla birlikte, aslında destan dünyasının değerlerini savunduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mutlak (yitik) Geçmiş, Sıfır Uzaklık Bölgesi, Çağdaş Bakış Açısı, Hiyerarşik Konumlanma, Tekseslilik, Çokseslilik, Diyalog.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to Prof. Dr. Sevda alıřkan, firstly, for introducing me to such a fascinating and provocative topic, and secondly, for providing me with invaluable guidance and profound insight throughout. Her consciousness-raising guidance has played a vital part in this study. Without her intriguing questions, this study would not have been successful. I also extend my sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Nursel İöz and Dr. Birtane Karanakçı for their positive and encouraging attitude and feedback, which have been a valuable source of motivation.

My thanks are also forwarded to Fırat Karadař, Selen Aktari, Nil Korkut, and Göksev etinkaya for being good friends and for being ready to help and to give moral support whenever I needed it.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all my family, who have always been a source of comfort and encouragement with their unshakable faith in me.

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Date: 10. 07. 2003

Signature:



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ÖZ.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. BAKHTIN’S THEORY OF GENRE: A COMPARISON OF THE EPIC AND THE NOVEL.....	7
2.1 Genre.....	7
2.2 Style.....	11
2.3 Temporality.....	14
2.4 Structure.....	17
2.5 Epic Hero versus Novelistic Hero.....	19
3. A BAKHTINIAN COMPARISON OF <i>BEOWULF</i> AND <i>GREDEL</i>	
3.1 Genre.....	22
3.2 Style.....	32
3.3 Temporality.....	46
3.4 Structure.....	54
3.5 Epic Hero versus Novelistic Hero.....	65
4. CONCLUSION.....	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	84

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This study compares the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* and John Gardner's novel *Grendel* in terms of their generic relations. It contends that Gardner, making use of the *Beowulf* story, salutes the ideal epic world to condemn the prevalent philosophical notions of his age. *Grendel* is an attempt to remind our age of the moral values of the lost epic world.

A study of this kind, which aims to analyse how an epic story is transformed into a novel, inevitably requires a certain theoretical basis. And the Russian philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin's theory of genre may well answer this need. The comparison of these two works is largely based on Bakhtin's two essays, namely, "Epic and Novel," and "Discourse in the Novel" included in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin contrasts the two genres throughout this work arguing that the world of the epic is a single-voiced, unitary one; there is no room in this world for any voice other than that of the epic poet. On the other hand, there is lots of room for 'other' voices –not for the sake of mere plurality but in the sense of having a dialogue among these voices- in the world of the novel, a quality which ensures multiplicity. According to Bakhtin, then, the act of voicing the 'other' in a literary work marks a great departure from the realm of all 'poetic' genres including the epic and an arrival at the realm of the novel with all its multiplicity. And this became possible, Bakhtin further argues, with a shift in the European civilisation from

“monoglossia” to “polyglossia”<sup>1</sup> at that point in its history when the novel emerged and developed (*DI* 12). However, it should be noted here that the term ‘poetic’ gains quite a different meaning in Bakhtin. For it suggests having a single worldview rather than the kind of multiplicity that one finds in the novel.

On the other hand, because the world portrayed in the epic story is revealed as a simply ideal one inhabited by gods and heroic men, there is no room for the ‘other’ in it. The novel version of the story, however, voicing the monstrous ‘other,’ achieves multiplicity and thereby brings the latter closer to the contemporary world. So, the main concern of this study is to show how and why an epic story is turned into a novel. That is, it aims to compare *Beowulf* and Gardner’s *Grendel* on the basis of the Bakhtinian theory of genre to show how the former lends itself to a generic transformation from an epic story with one worldview into a novel with a multiplicity of worldviews. The Bakhtinian view of the epic and the novel leads one to the conclusion that the idea that the latter genre is superior to the former because of its capacity for reflecting real-life multiplicity.

However, it should be noted that there is double-voicedness, and therefore, dialogism in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* itself, a property which blurs even its generic quality. It is dialogic in the sense that it reflects both pagan and Christian worldviews. It is assumed that the original pagan manuscript of *Beowulf* was elaborated upon by Christian monks during its translation. The double-voicedness in *Beowulf*, however, is not of the same nature as the multiplicity that one finds in the novel. For both pagan and Christian voices in *Beowulf* legitimise a single worldview, which is ‘heroism’. The double-voicedness in *Beowulf* aims to celebrate the same

---

<sup>1</sup> Two Bakhtinian terms used in opposition to each other. The former means the singleness of a national language within a particular culture while the latter is ‘the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system’ (*DI* 430-431).

worldview, and therefore, it displays one of the most fundamental characteristics of the epic from the Bakhtinian perspective. The one in *Grendel*, however, is of a completely different kind in that the two voices here clash at the end of which one of them gains a moral victory. In other words, Gardner's novel clearly draws a line between the two voices, the sinister voice represented by Grendel and the ideal one represented by Beowulf, so as to undermine the former while exalting the latter. So, *Beowulf* can be viewed as an epic text from the Bakhtinian perspective largely because it reflects a single vision: the world and our existence guided by a spiritual being, whether Christian or pagan, is far from being meaningless. Therefore, although some critics consider *Beowulf* not a genuinely epic story, this study contends that it displays all the generic epic features defined by Bakhtin, mainly, the glorification of a monoglot world and the preservation of an epic distance.

Another question that needs to be answered is why a twentieth century writer should make use of the *Beowulf* story to write a novel, which he calls, during an interview, "a modern equivalent" (Chavkin 188). In the same interview conducted by Ed Christian, Gardner explains that he wrote *Grendel* in order to "understand things about the modern world in the light of the history of human consciousness . . . more deeply" (188). Gardner further clarifies the term "modern world" when he declares during the same interview that it is characterised by "perverse rationality," particularly that of Sartre (193). However, although Gardner laments to be witnessing the perversity of his age, he can reveal his dissatisfaction with it only in the present<sup>2</sup> world of the novel, and particularly in *Grendel*. This apparently paradoxical case can be best explained only through Bakhtin's theory of genre, for

---

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study, the term 'present world' or 'contemporary world' is used predominantly in Bakhtinian sense to signify the multiplicity of the novelistic age.

Gardner's novel ends up being the renunciation of the contemporary view through the contemporary world of the novel characterised by multiplicity.

Dean McWilliams makes this point clearer in *John Gardner*:

The surviving epic elements in the novel make us aware, by contrast, of the poverty -the loneliness and self-absorption- of the modern absurdist perspective. Setting the two sets of values side by side, then, results in a dialogue between them. This is particularly remarkable, for dialogue of this kind was, as Bakhtin has shown, what the epic world lacked. (McWilliams 40)

It is clear that the first "set of values" mentioned above is found "in the angelic mode (perfect order)" of the epic world while the second "in the human mode (imperfect order)"<sup>3</sup> of which Gardner's novel is a part (Winther 167). What is more, there is a dialogic relationship between *Beowulf* and *Grendel* as illustrations of these two orders. This idea brings one to the Bakhtinian concept of 'dialogism'<sup>4</sup> in the world of 'heteroglossia'<sup>5</sup>. So, on a textual level, it can be argued that Gardner's *Grendel* is a response to the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* from the stance of the present world; a response to "the rich, gilded texture of *Beowulf*," in Gardner's words, which finally confirms Bakhtin's idea of 'dialogism' (Chavkin 188). It is so to such an extent that any reader of literature with a medium knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* would detect the parallelism between the two texts, which

---

<sup>3</sup>Here the 'perfect' and 'imperfect' orders should be taken as the 'perfectly' unified, single-voicedness of the epic world and the presence of 'other' voices -multiplicity- of the novelistic world, which suggests a sense of being 'imperfect'.

<sup>4</sup>This is a key Bakhtinian term to define the nature of both language and literary works, especially the novel as a genre. Every utterance, according to this, assumes a response through which it enters into a dialogic relationship.

<sup>5</sup> Every utterance assumes a different meaning when uttered in a different place and at a different time because there will be different sets of values in each different place and at each different time in the world.

may be defined, in a truly Bakhtinian sense, as “a dialogue between the book [*Grendel*] and the literary tradition of which it is part” (McWilliams 38).

Yet, it is important to note that one would miss the irony, thinking that Gardner’s novel poses a reaction a la Bakhtin to the world depicted in *Beowulf*. On the contrary, as noted before, Gardner aims to celebrate the ideal epic world. Rewriting the epic story from the monster’s point of view, he responds to the absurdism of the contemporary world. In other words, Gardner laments that the ideal epic world one finds in *Beowulf* is no longer available but should be sought as a future ideal. A careful reading of the Gardner text reveals that it is actually a glorification of the ‘perfect order’ of the epic world:

This novel [*Grendel*], then, allows us to join the Shaper [the poet-singer in the novel] in his celebration of epic order. But, before it permits us to join the circle around the campfire, it demands that we first step over the bloody corpse of Grendel. (McWilliams 41)

Thus, as this introduction shows, the voicing of the ‘other’ in *Grendel* allows one to analyse the novel in Bakhtinian terms, that is, as a novel with multiple voices. This thesis contends that Gardner’s *Grendel* is an attempt to condemn the moral sterility of the twentieth century. To achieve his aim, Gardner rewrites *Beowulf* by changing its style, character, structure and temporality, that is by writing it in the novel form. But while doing this, he reverses the process Bakhtin talks about by poeticising the prosaic world of the novel. In this study, Bakhtinian terms and concepts will be used to show how the Bakhtinian axiology is turned upside down by re-placing the epic in its original privileged position –albeit, only within the framework of the novel. So, after providing a brief summary of the theoretical framework of this study, that is, the Bakhtinian theory of genre, in terms of such categories as style, temporality, structure, epic hero versus novelistic hero and

ideology in the following chapter, this study will continue with a Bakhtinian comparison of the two texts on the basis of these criteria.

## CHAPTER 2

### BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF GENRE: A COMPARISON OF THE EPIC AND THE NOVEL

#### 2.1 Genre

*The Dialogic Imagination* starts with Bakhtin's analysis of the epic and the novel, in the first essay bearing that very name. Bakhtin sets the two genres against each other in terms of their various aspects. His main argument is that the novel as a genre is superior to the epic largely because it is the only "ever-developing genre" (DI 6). It is precisely because of this fact that the novel has an organic contact with the 'present'<sup>6</sup> in all its open-endedness and incompleteness. Just like the present, the novel, too, is engaged in an endless process of evolving into the future, and, therefore, it never ceases to develop as long as the present continues to evolve into the future. The novel, Bakhtin argues, is the only genre whose development never comes to an end. And it is precisely this incompleteness that does not allow the novel to set up its own canon. When the novel is concerned, there can only be "individual examples" which come to the foreground from time to time throughout its evolution (3).

More significantly, once individual examples of the novel "attempt to become models for the genre," they run the risk of being parodied by some other examples (6). So, the authentic examples of the novel are unable to become canonic as the term suggests completedness, which is something incongruous with the nature of the

---

<sup>6</sup> This issue is discussed in detail later in this chapter under the subtitle 'temporality'.



novel. This trait should be taken as an aptness for self-criticism, which, again, is peculiar only to the novel. In another sense, the state of being non-canonical strongly suggests that the novel has a very “flexible” generic skeleton (3).

The epic, on the other hand, is a genre “that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated” (3). So, it is completely cut off from the present; it has nothing new to offer. It is “closed as a circle” (19). It is “already completely finished, a congealed and half-moribund genre” (14). This state of completedness stems from the fact that the epic world is distanced from the present with an “epic distance,” and it has come down to us as an already completed form (3). As a result of this feature, the generic boundaries of the epic are very strict and untouchable; it is “a hardened and no longer flexible” genre with an already set up canon of its own (3). So, Bakhtin’s analogy to sum up this situation is justifiable: “Studying other genres is analogous to studying dead languages; studying the novel, on the other hand, is like studying languages that are not only alive, but still young” (3).

Furthermore, the fact that the novel is an incomplete genre without a canon results in a certain theoretical difficulty. The novel, by its very nature, is far from having an established generic boundary, so it is very difficult to set up theoretical rules to define the novel. Therefore, it is “a complicated genre” as Bakhtin calls it, even though there are quite a lot of “generic characteristics” for the novel is hard to define (9). Although there are certain characteristics to define a literary work as ‘novel,’ there may emerge different ones since the novel is the only ever-developing genre. The task of literary criticism is quite easy, however, when one considers the epic. For the epic is a long-established genre; there are no loopholes,

no surprises, so to speak, in the epic. There is nothing new that the epic might come up with. The novel, on the other hand, challenges genre theory itself:

The utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel. In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear. [. . .] Faced with the problem of the novel, genre theory must submit to a radical re-structuring. (8)

Another aspect Bakhtin emphasizes when he distinguishes the two genres is related to the attitude they assume toward the reader. The novel, being on the same plane with the contemporary reader, takes him into consideration. The reader's possible response is taken into account in the novel whereas, being on a hierarchically higher plane, the epic is a mere statement to be accepted with piety. Bakhtin points at this difference in the hierarchical position as follows:

Both the singer and the listener, immanent in the epic as a genre, are located in the same time and on the same evaluative (hierarchical) plane, but the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance. [. . .] To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one's contemporaries [. . .] is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of epic into the world of the novel. (14)

It is worth mentioning that the epic is a part of 'high' literature, that is, the literature about the nobility, so it is located in an absolute ideal past when everything was good (15). The inviolability of the epic world demands "a pious attitude toward itself" (16). As opposed to the sacredness that the epic assumes, the novel is "the common people's creative culture of laughter," in other words, it

is the 'low' genre of common people (20). For it deals with the incomplete, imperfect present located "on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity" (21). Thus, the epic is a hierarchical category belonging to the noble class whereas the novel is the genre of common people, and therefore, a more democratic genre associated with "profanation" (20).

More significantly, novelistic discourse is most akin to real-life discourse which is considered to be an arena of battle going on among different groups in society. It should be viewed as a distinguishing feature of the novel. The multi-voicedness and multi-languedness inevitably result in a dialogic kind of relationship among different voices in every novel. Dialogue is, then, one of the prerequisite features of the novel, giving rise to a clash between different voices, styles, and languages. So, different voices, languages representing equally different worldviews can but enter into a dialogic relationship which often turns out to be a battle among languages as well as ideologies:

Bakhtin's approach to dialogism is central to his concept of the novel. The failure of traditional stylistics to deal with language is matched by its failure to deal with the novel; both have been seen as self-contained systems that cannot 'stand in a dialogic interrelationship with other languages'. [. . .] as Kristeva points out, 'For Bakhtin, dialogue can be monological, and what is called monologue can be dialogical'. (Vice 73)

Therefore, dialogue in a truly Bakhtinian sense does not need to be compositionally marked in its traditional sense. On the contrary, "the internal dialogisation of the discourse," the one which takes place within a single utterance

itself without requiring the literal presence of others, is particularly significant in terms of its contribution to social heteroglossia (*DI* 283).

The epic, on the other hand, is monologic by its very nature. Apparently, the single-voiced, single-langaged, single-worldviewed epic lacks the appropriate soil for dialogue to flourish. Unlike novelistic discourse, which is pluralistic, poetic discourse in general and epic discourse in particular is limited by the individual linguistic consciousness of the poet. It is completely closed to any alien discourse other than the poet's itself. The poet would "oppose his own poetic consciousness" otherwise: "The unity and singularity of language are the indispensable prerequisites for a realization of the direct [. . .] intentional individuality of poetic style and of its monologic steadfastness" (286).

## **2.2 Style**

Style is another criterion that Bakhtin makes use of in order to further support his argument that the novel is a genre superior to the epic. Before going into different aspects of the issue, one needs to elucidate the Bakhtinian concept of style. For what Bakhtin comes to define as 'style' is something quite different from its 'traditional' meaning: Bakhtin views 'style' as "a social phenomenon" so that stylistics mustn't "ignore the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs" (259). Departing from the tenets of traditional stylistics which clearly differentiates between 'form' and 'content' in a literary work, Bakhtin argues that the two are inseparable. Form and content, according to

Bakhtin, are rather “one,” being a social product, an “organic unity,” which is bound to undergo socio-historical changes (259). Traditional stylistics, on the other hand, regards style as a mere reflection of the individual talent, the “private craftsmanship” of the artist (259). The failure of traditional stylistics, Bakhtin argues, stems from its rather “arbitrary” way of dealing with works of art, depending solely on “abstract examination” of such categories as “expressiveness,” “imagery,” “force,” “clarity” and so on (260). So, traditional stylistics lacks a systematic method used to deal with the concrete problems of stylistics since it is concerned only with a rather subjective evaluation of language. What is more, it can be argued that the very categories of traditional stylistics are completely inapplicable to novelistic discourse, which, according to Bakhtin, cannot be reduced to a single, unitary language and a single style. It is not possible to examine ‘the language’ and/or ‘the style’ of a particular novel simply because the novel is the only genre, which is “multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” (261). When the novel is concerned, then, one can see its multiplicity of languages and styles as a reflection of different worldviews. Bakhtin argues that this multiplicity “is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel” (263). It is worth noting that this is how Bakhtin conceives language itself, too. According to Bakhtin, language in real life is multi-layered; there is multiplicity in real-life discourse. For him language is “a world view,” and, therefore, it gains an ideological aspect (271). Bakhtin’s word to describe the multiplicity of real-life discourse is ‘heteroglossia,’ which finds its most profound expression in the novel.

The epic, however, is characterised by a single, unitary language and worldview. Assuming a monoglot world, the epic can convey this sense of unitariness only

through a single language. Everybody in the epic world speaks the same language, which suggests its 'single-languagedness' as well as 'single-voicedness'<sup>7</sup>. It is the language of the poet –authorial language- and, therefore, it must be as unitarian as the individual poet himself. The inhabitants of the epic world must speak through this language. They do not have a language of their own: “the unity of the language system and the unity (and uniqueness) of the poet’s individuality as reflected in his language and speech, which is directly realized in this unity, are indispensable prerequisites of poetic [‘poetic’ in the narrow sense<sup>8</sup>] style” (264).

Furthermore, being located in an absolute past, the world of the epic is the world of the dead, which certainly demands a decent language and style: “Language about the dead is stylistically quite distinct from language about the living” (20). There is no place for the joyfulness and vulgarity of everyday forms in such a language: “In its style, tone and manner of expression, epic discourse is infinitely far removed from discourse of a contemporary about a contemporary addressed to contemporaries” (13-14). Instead, it is an absolutely serious and official language of a lofty world. So, it is prone to be “authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative” (287).

The novel, on the other hand, is literally on the same plane with contemporary life, which means that the world it presents is brought to a familiar contact with contemporaneity, and therefore, the novel is akin to the living language of common people: “The novel, however, is associated with the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought” (20). It is the very

---

<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin does not use these two terms interchangeably. They are different in meaning.

<sup>8</sup> The term refers to all single-languaged and single-styled genres, particularly to the epic. So, it is used to define all non-novelistic genres in the Bakhtinian terminology.

<sup>9</sup> This issue is discussed in more detail under the subtitle ‘temporality’ later in this chapter.

destruction of the ‘epic distance’ that brings the novel to “the plane of laughter,”<sup>9</sup> which has significant implications in terms of style (23). For, once an object of representation is brought closer, it ceases to be ‘mysterious’ because it becomes familiar, and therefore, it no longer demands a pious attitude toward itself. The tone in the novel, therefore, is far from the awesome, pious one that is found in the epic. On the contrary, it reveals a sense of humour and laughter, which “demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact” (23).

Lastly, there is a dialogic relationship between different voices and, sometimes, different languages in the novel. ‘Dialogism’ is another key term in Bakhtin to define the kind of relation between each utterance in the novel. It should be emphasised that this is not a mere exchange of words in dialogue form in its broad sense. Instead, it suggests a sense of clash between ‘different’ worldviews. Bakhtin argues that dialogism is “a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view, not an intra-language struggle between individual wills or logical contradictions” (273). Traditional stylistics once again fails to deal with the novel, then, because the dialogic nature of novelistic discourse escapes its eye. “Stylistics has been,” Bakhtin argues, “completely deaf to dialogue” (273).

### **2.3 Temporality**

Temporality is the central category where nearly all the others intersect. Each criterion used to distinguish the novel from the epic is related to ‘temporality’ in varying degrees. One of the fundamental distinctions to be made between the epic

---

and the novel is that the former is located in an absolute past, without any contact with the present. It is 'absolute' because "it is not relative to the present or to the future; it contains within itself, as it were, the entire fullness of time" (19). Neither the poet nor his audience can participate in this world. It is presented as a 'distant image,' which cannot be probed into. It is inaccessible for both the poet and the listener. It is located much above the poet and his contemporaries. Thus, there can be no identification with the world presented in the epic. Epic distance is, then, a hierarchical and, of course, axiological category rather than a merely temporal one. It elicits the onlooker's respect: "it is rather a temporally valorized hierarchical category" (18).

Another aspect of epic distance is that it suggests completeness and conclusiveness. Therefore, as stated before, epic is a fully completed genre. Its generic skeleton is, in Bakhtinian terms, "ossified"; epic as a genre has long completed its development. Also, the epic hero is depicted as a fully developed being. There is no life for the epic hero outside the text; there is no future for him. So, the epic hero realises his whole potential. He is already mature from the outset of the story and, therefore, he does not need to undergo any spiritual development.

The novel, on the other hand, has a living contact with the contemporary world, in what Bakhtin calls "a zone of maximal proximity," or, novelistic zone (23). The novel never ceases to evolve into the future simultaneously with contemporaneity. This contact with the present enhances the indeterminacy of the novel, resulting in a flexible generic skeleton. The state of being incomplete also infects, so to speak, the novelistic hero. Unlike the epic hero, the novelistic hero has to go through some experiences in order to reach maturity. Only towards the end of the story can the hero achieve spiritual development if he can. As the novel is located on an



equal plane with the present, the hero's evolution takes place simultaneously with the unfolding present. So, the novelistic hero, especially at the beginning of the story, is as imperfect as an ordinary human being. Thus, it becomes possible for the contemporary reader to identify with the novelistic hero.

Of particular interest is the fact that the destruction of epic distance in the novel renders the latter a non-hierarchical genre. The world represented in the novel is now on the same temporal plane with the present reader. Apparently, there is no need to be awed by such a world. The novel also tends to be three dimensional, like a real object, as it is located in this 'maximal proximity', and, therefore, one can look at it, examine it more closely, "fearlessly and freely" (25).

It is noteworthy that the epic world, being the only source of good, is represented as a utopian past. However, this is what makes the epic unfavourable for Bakhtin: the epic world as the only source of good is not capable of allowing any alien, or low forms, so it is deceitful and hierarchical. However, Bakhtin finds the seeds of a utopian future in the ideal pastness of the epic and sees it as an indispensable model for the human race to look up to. The epic is characterised by its potential of reflecting itself into an unknown future. Herein lies the unshakable power of the epic as a future ideal indeed. Bakhtin calls it 'historical inversion,' a very important epic feature which he explains as follows:

This distinctive feature manifests itself preeminently in what might be called a *historical inversion*. The essence of this inversion is found in the fact that mythological and artistic thinking locates such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society and the like in the *past*. Myths about paradise, a Golden Age, a heroic age, an ancient truth, as well as the later concepts of a "state of nature," of natural, innate rights and so

on, are all expressions of this historical inversion. To put it in somewhat simplified terms, we might say that a thing that could and in fact must only be realized exclusively in the *future* is here portrayed as something out of the *past*, a thing that is in no sense part of the past's reality, but a thing that is in its essence a purpose, an obligation. (*DI* 147)

Thus, the epic order, supposed to have been realised in an unknown past, is supposed to be restored in an unknown future providing a golden age for humanity. The ideal past is represented as a future ideal to be sought for. So, the essence of the epic lies in the fact that it establishes a living bond between our mythical ancestors and our, equally mythical, descendants both of whom are supposed to be the inhabitants of a golden age, or, paradise.

## **2.4 Structure**

The structure of the two genres under consideration is indivisibly interwoven with the previous category, which is temporality. It is clear by now that there is in the epic a sense of profound completeness and conclusiveness in accordance with its temporal positioning in the absolute past: "There is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy" (16). This quality, however, is just observed on the semantic level. In the epic, the audience is provided with "the whole event" from the beginning, therefore, there is a semantic completeness (32). It presents a whole, a frozen picture so to speak. There is nothing more to see beyond what is presented. It is precisely because of its distanced zone that the epic object of representation comes down to the reader/audience as an already finished

'distant image'. Therefore, provided with the 'whole' from the beginning, the reader loses his interest in the plot of an epic story. So, there is no "impulse to continue" (32). Because the whole meaning is established at the beginning, there is no need to reach the end to get the essence of the epic story: "the structure of the whole is repeated in each part, and each part is complete and circular like the whole" (31). So, there is a semantic, or, "internal" completeness which does not require a structural wholeness to be conveyed in the epic (31). Thus, any part of an epic story can be treated as a whole to get at the meaning. For, it is mainly episodic in structure, and each episode can be treated as a whole.

By contrast, the entire case needs to be reversed in the novel in that the destruction of epic distance brings the novel to the same plane with the present with all its inconclusiveness. Just as the future into which the present evolves is unknown so are the events in a novel. There can be no internal conclusiveness in the novel; one has to reach the very end of the story to get the whole idea, for the events in the novel continue to evolve into the future at the same time with the present. Therefore, there is a sense of interest in the process of events being unfolded simultaneously with the present:

The present, [. . .] is in essence and in principle inconclusive; by its very nature it demands continuation, it moves into the future, [. . .] Therefore, when the present becomes the center of human orientation in time and in the world, time and world lose their completedness as a whole as well as in each of their parts. [. . .]the final word has not yet been spoken. [. . .] Every event, every phenomenon, every thing, every object of artistic representation loses its completedness, its hopelessly finished quality [. . .] Through contact with the present, an object is attracted to the incomplete process of a world-in-the-making, and is stamped with the seal of inconclusiveness. (30)

Despite this internal inconclusiveness, however, there is a remarkably conclusive external structure in every novel. The semantic level is perceived only after the whole text is read. In other words, there is a strong need for a structural wholeness in the novel. It is vital, then, to have a plot to convey the whole meaning. Therefore, it can be said that there is internal inconclusiveness versus external completeness in every novel. So, the novel is concerned with the issue of plot, unlike the epic, which, Bakhtin notes, “is indifferent to formal beginnings and can remain incomplete” (31).

## **2.5 Epic Hero versus Novelistic Hero**

The epic hero, to begin with, is presented as an almost semi-god with extraordinary powers and talents. In the absolute past, which is walled off from the present world with an epic distance, the epic hero is represented as an almost superior human endowed with prowess and wisdom transcending the limits of an ordinary man.

Obviously, there can be no identification with such a perfect being, so the contemporary reader –even the contemporaries of the epic poet himself- fails to do so. More importantly, identification becomes possible when the inner world of a particular character is revealed to the reader. Only then can the reader feel sympathy for the hero. The epic hero, on the other hand, is fully externalised; he has no psychological depth; no inner world. He is one and the same within and outside himself. There is no nucleus in him to be discovered. Unlike the novelistic hero, the epic hero lacks inner consciousness:

The individual in the high distanced genres is an individual of the absolute past and of the distanced image. As such he is a fully finished and completed being. [. . .] he is absolutely equal to himself. He is, furthermore, completely externalized. There is not the slightest gap between his authentic essence and its external manifestation. [. . .] He has already become everything that he could become. He is entirely externalized in the most elementary, almost literal sense: everything in him is exposed and loudly expressed: his internal world and all his external characteristics, his appearance and his actions all lie on a single plane. His view of himself coincides completely with others' views of him (*DI* 34).

Therefore, it is impossible to identify with the epic hero, who, being in complete harmony with the way he is presented, is far from mental agonies taking place in one's inner depths. So, our essential attitude to the epic hero is characterised by awe and piety. Representing a mythical age in the past, the epic hero is located on a hierarchically higher plane compared to the reader. The epic distance between his world and the present is too big for the reader to overcome. The two-dimensional depiction of the epic hero from a distance urges the audience to hear about this privileged world in veneration. Being a noble and dignified member of this world, the epic hero is completely bereft of any sense of humour and mockery, which is considered to be an element of 'low' genres like parody, satire and so forth in the novelistic age. The epic hero is characterised by the official and dignified language of a sacred world.

The epic hero realises all his potential within the boundaries of the text. There is no future for the epic hero beyond the limits of the text, again, because of the temporal peculiarity of the epic, which presents human experience as a whole, for it is all-inclusive. There is a fullness of time, so time seems to be congealed in the epic world; it depicts a completed world just like a frozen picture on the wall.

The hero of the novel, on the other hand, is as flawed as the present reader. His development proceeds together with the present. The maximal proximity to the present allows him to occupy the same plane with the contemporary reader. So, the piety and sacredness of the epic world is shattered in the zone of maximal proximity, which enables the reader to identify with the hero. Just like the reader, the novelistic hero has an inner world to be conveyed, so there is a three-dimensional representation of the hero most of the time. Also, he is endowed with a sense of humour, which contributes to the reader-hero identification.

The novelistic hero needs to go through some experiences to achieve maturity. There is a future for him even after the story ends. The reader in no way assumes that the novelistic hero will cease to exist with the closure of the text. In other words, the hero of a novel does not exhaust all of his potential within the scope of the text. So, he is more flesh-and-blood, more true to life. It is exactly this feature of the novelistic hero that makes him easy for the present reader to identify with.

## CHAPTER 3

### A BAKHTINIAN COMPARISON OF *BEOWULF* AND *GREDEL*

#### 3.1 Genre

The comparison of the two texts in terms of genre is to be based on the criteria as delineated in the preceding chapter. And, it is most likely to yield some provocative results in relation with the genesis of such transformation: how and why an epic story is rewritten in the novel form should be of major concern for a Bakhtinian analysis of the two works.

One of the fundamental distinctions Bakhtin makes between the epic and the novel, as we have already noted in the previous chapter, is that the former poses an insurmountable epic distance between the world it presents and that of the reader. It should be noted that this ostensibly temporal category means a great deal, going beyond its literal meaning, with regard to the Bakhtinian genre theory. For it is the one from which many other criteria are yet to be derived. In other words, the distinguishing features of the two genres are to be explained through their temporal positioning.

To begin with, Bakhtin argues that the epic world is located in an absolute past, and therefore, it is delivered to the reader as an already completed genre. He argues that this is what makes the epic a “half-moribund” genre, which has long since completed its development. And, as a distinguishing feature of the epic, the world it presents is walled off

with an epic distance from the present. The novel, on the other hand, is the only ever-developing genre precisely because of its organic relation with the still evolving present. What does all this mean in relation to the two texts then? It simply means that the epic world does not lend itself to any further improvement. It is all about an ideal past and the people of the present time are too far from this world. Likewise, in *Beowulf*, the reader immediately notices that he is in the presence of a lofty world. It is so to such an extent that the reader is never welcomed to take part in this world. For it is located within a “closed circle,” distanced from the present: it is an entirely perfected world in an ideal past, suggesting the inviolability of this world. The reader is not allowed to probe into this world of kings, princes, heroes and so forth. The epic, then, appears to be a hierarchical category belonging to the nobility. Thus, the very first utterance of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* confirms its inviolability, demanding a pious attitude from the reader: “Hear! We know of the bygone glory of the Danish kings, and the heroic exploits of those princes” (*Beowulf* 27). The novel, on the other hand, is defined as “the common people’s laughter,” being located on the same temporal plane with the present. There is a sense of humour and laughter in the novel as opposed to the dignified and serious tone of the epic<sup>10</sup>. There is, certainly, a sense of humour in the monster-hero in Gardner’s version, who “politely” knocks on the door of Heorot before devouring some inhabitants (*Grendel* 7).

The epic, on the other hand, presents a serious and dignified world. The epic hero, Beowulf, coming to the aid of the Danes as a fully mature young man, rescues them from the attacks of the monster, Grendel, and later on from Grendel’s mother as well as rescuing his own nation from the dragon at the end. The perfection of this world lies in the “bygone glory,” and “heroic exploits” of princes, kings, heroes; the noble inhabitants of this

---

<sup>10</sup> This issue is discussed in more detail under the subtitle ‘style’ later in this chapter.



undeniably lofty world (*Beowulf* 27). The kind of diction and style used to express this heroism clearly suggests the fact that the epic world is distanced from the present reality. Whatever has taken place in this ideal past is completely over and too far to reach. The progeny is only informed, so to speak, about the heroic deeds of some great ancestors. *Beowulf* thus begins by recounting the heroic exploits of some heroic Danish king called Scyld Scefing, who, “in the face of hostile armies, used often to bring nations into subjection, and strike terror in the hearts of their leaders. [. . .] He was an excellent king” (27).

The reader is always made to feel the epic distance between the world depicted and his own world. Heroism, as the only ideology of the epic world, is embodied in the exploits of the epic hero. Beowulf is throughout acknowledged by his environment as an almost superhuman hero having “the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand” (35).

The absolute pastness of the ideal epic world proves to be a hierarchical category also in *Beowulf*, where, Queen Wealtheow notes, “every man is true to one another, good-hearted and loyal to his king; the chieftains are trustworthy, the people alert, and the carousing soldiers obedient to [my] commands” (56). Undeniably, the reader feels himself in the presence of a past world which is hierarchically above his own temporal plane.

What Gardner does in *Grendel* is to bring *one* part of this epic world to a maximal proximity to the present, which is, in Bakhtin’s terms, ‘the novelistic zone’ while keeping the other part at its previous hierarchical distance. The part which is brought closer to the present is the monster Grendel, and the one which is even further distanced from the present is the epic world ultimately represented by Beowulf. The former epic distance seems to have been shattered in Gardner’s novel when he brings the monster of the epic story under close

scrutiny of the reader. The events are now recounted from the monster's point of view without recourse to an epic poet.

Grendel's first person narration facilitates reader identification with him and actually positions the reader *outside* the grandeur of epic life. Just as the evil monster Grendel is excluded from this ideal world, so is the modern reader, signifying the meaninglessness of Gardner's own time. The novelist, therefore, covertly intrigues the reader when the latter finds himself on the same plane with the monster, who is utterly isolated from the privileged world of Beowulf, the hero. Therefore, the part that Gardner keeps at its formerly distanced position is the one represented by the epic hero Beowulf. It is still distanced from the present, the only difference being the fact that now it is perceived through the monster's eye reflecting the absurdity of the modern age. Actually, the epic world in Gardner's novel is represented by a blind epic bard created by the novelist: the Shaper. Bitterly rejected as a brutal creature in the poetry of the Shaper, Grendel gradually denies any meaning to existence, representing the reader's denial of such values as well. This also explains why the epic hero Beowulf is never named throughout the novel: the nihilistic monster fails to recognise his spiritual opponent and so does the reader, who now perceives everything from the monster's point of view. Grendel's mockery of 'the Stranger' –Beowulf- and his retainers, however, ironically causes his own destruction at the end: "I am mad with joy. –At least I think it's joy. Strangers have come, and it's a whole new game. [. . .] Fifteen glorious heroes, proud in their battle dress, fat as cows!" (*Grendel* 133).

Yet, the existence of the epic world in Gardner's novel is too strong to deny. It is all there from the beginning with all its grandeur. It becomes obvious also to the monster, in a very tragic way, only at the end of the story where 'the Stranger' dashes his head against the wall. The epic world is revealed to have always been there as strong and real as the wall itself. Grendel is defeated when he feels the hardness of the wall, or better, that of the epic world: "*Feel the wall: is it not hard? He [Beowulf] smashes me against it, breaks open my forehead. Hard, yes! Observe the hardness, write it down in careful runes. Now sing of walls! Sing!*" (150).

Admittedly, then, there is a multiplicity of worldviews in Gardner's novel, represented basically by the monster Grendel and the epic bard; the Shaper. This multiplicity inevitably results in a dialogue, or rather a clash, between the two as a distinguishing feature of the novel. For, dialogue in a truly Bakhtinian sense suggests the idea of a clash between opposing views rather than just poliphony. Interestingly, however, the actual struggle is taking place within the mind of Grendel, who throughout, oscillates between the meaningful vision of the Shaper and the absurdist one suggested by the Gardnerian version of the dragon, who, it is argued, "is in fact Grendel's own dark –or evil- self" (Howell 69).

It can be argued that dialogue which is put forward as the most distinguishing element of the novel in the Bakhtinian genre theory is observed in Gardner's novel on two levels: on one level, it is the dialogue of Gardner's text with the text of *Beowulf*, the ancient epic, for these two texts are in an obvious intertextual relationship; yet, on another level, which is intratextual, the two worlds representing epic values and modern nihilism are actually represented in the book. This internal dialogism will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters. Here it will suffice to point out that it informs Gardner's text as a generic characteristic:

Meaning in Gardner's novels, as in the greatest fiction, does not emerge from a single voice but from a dialogue between voices. The meaning is that dialogue –not the victory of one voice over another, but the tension between them, the texture of a world where competing visions of the world must coexist. (McWilliams 8)

The very fact that *Grendel* is a re-writing of *Beowulf* establishes the dialogism, which is the essential characteristic of a novelistic text. However, this dialogue should not be viewed as a response to the world presented in *Beowulf*. On the contrary, as will be discussed in the following sections, it is a celebration of the ideal epic world. The two levels of dialogue are explained by McWilliams as follows:

But there is another level of dialogue in this book. In addition to the internal debate within Grendel's consciousness, there is a level of discourse of which he is totally ignorant: a dialogue between the book and the literary tradition of which it is part. Grendel's story derives from and comments upon *Beowulf* (38).

On the other hand, the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* is completely alien to the idea of dialogism. Despite its often double-voiced nature, *Beowulf* celebrates a single worldview, so it is by its very nature monologic. Pagan and Christian worldviews in *Beowulf* exalt the epic world while rejecting all sources of ugliness, and evil including the monster Grendel. Defined as a mere symbol of evil and darkness, Grendel and all the other monsters in *Beowulf* are presented from two points of view –pagan and Christian- both of which are reverberating the same vision:

There seems to be a double perspective maintained in such characterization: to the pagan Germanic characters in the poem, Grendel is a monster out of pagan Germanic mythology; to the Christian poet and his Christian audience, the creature is known to be in truth a manifestation of evil as it is rightly understood by Christians. (Robinson 149)

Likewise, the epic hero Beowulf is presented either as an almost Christ-like figure sent by God “to the help of the Danes against the terror of Grendel,” (*Beowulf* 35) or as a truly pagan hero looking for immortality through fame, “because that is a dead man’s best memorial” (60). The only ideology preserved throughout the epic story is heroism, which is embodied in the heroic actions of Beowulf. Everybody in this world, with the exception of Hrothgar’s retainer Unferth, who is obviously jealous, recognises the heroic nature in Beowulf even at first sight. The guard of the Danish coast, for instance, immediately understands that Beowulf is “certainly no mere retainer carrying weapons, unless his heroic bearing and appearance belie him” (32). Again, Wulfgar, the herald of Hrothgar, introduces the visitor as “without doubt a man of prowess” (35). The epic poet joins in exalting the hero by confirming his great features suggesting maturity and completeness:

Through noble actions Beowulf showed his quality. He behaved honourably and with discretion. Nor, in his cups, did he ever kill his drinking-companions; for he was not bloody-minded, but kept for its proper use in battle the precious gift that God had given him –greater skill than any other man. (*Beowulf* 78)

It is important to note that even the monster realises the extraordinary strength of the epic hero, raising the latter to the rank of “the strongest man alive” (45). So, literally everybody in the epic world, even Grendel as an ‘outsider’, ultimately acknowledges the heroism embodied in the figure of Beowulf, which clearly testifies to the monoglot, unified world of the epic:

The arch-beast soon realized that nowhere in the world had he ever met a man with such might in the grip of his hand. Although terror-struck, he could get away none the faster. He had never met anything like this in his life before (44).

It should be of particular interest that the monster, too, is made to recognise the supremacy of the epic world. For there is no room for the 'outsider' in the unified and unique world of the epic. Any attempt at remaining outside of this world is bound to be suffocated, even destroyed, by the power of the centripetal forces which are at work in the epic. For these forces strive for centralisation; they try to pull everything toward the centre. The centripetal forces are at work in the epic because they "*serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world*" (DI 270). So, Grendel as the representative of evil is bound to yield to the power of the epic world at its very centre, which is the meadhall Heorot. Gardner's version, too, gets the monster defeated, though in a different way (spiritually), by the epic hero at the end of the story. Despite the fact that the inhabitants of the epic world do need the monster as 'brutal existence' by which they define themselves as 'good,' the latter still has to be destroyed so that the unique nature of the epic life will be preserved. The Gardnerian dragon is well aware of the fact that Grendel is 'the other' by which Hrothgar's people establish their privileged status as the only representative of good: "You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves" (*Grendel* 62).

However, the monster is not free to stay outside this world in the Gardner text, either. For the novelist preserves the epic world at its former privileged position, which means that the monster is to be exterminated so as to keep the uniqueness of this world. The novelistic Grendel's struggle is to remain outside the Shaper's story, to protect his outsider status, while the epic world struggles to make him a part of itself. The epic world recognises no outside, because it is unified and all-inclusive. So, the monster is neither admitted to Heorot –the

'heart' of the epic world- nor allowed to stay outside of it. At first, Grendel naively wishes to be a part of this lofty world during the moments of spying on the meadhall from a distance. However, no sooner is he disappointed with the way he is defined by man than he decides to keep his position as an hostile intruder.

The epic order is presented as the perfect order belonging to the 'angelic mode,' which is set up and ruled by the ultimate ruler –God- and therefore, it is considered to be blasphemy to allow the evil to raise its wicked voice. So, it is the epic poet only, having the right to portray this mythical world as the representative of truth, or, in Bakhtin's words, as the "ancient truth" (*DI* 147). While doing so, the epic bard sometimes has recourse to the judgement of the ultimate ruler to get the epic grandeur further confirmed: "For God brought about the victory. Once Beowulf had struggled to his feet, the holy and omniscient ruler of the sky easily settled the issue in favour of the right" (*Beowulf* 63).

Apparently, the epic is a hierarchical category representing a heroic age in an absolute past to be yearned after and, in Gardner's view, to be sought as a future ideal. The good are always the winners, and the evil never go without retribution in this world. The only voice is the voice of the good. Profanation is completely cut off from this 'closed circle'. What Gardner does in his version of the *Beowulf* story is to create a refraction to foreground the world of the monster and to further distance the world of the epic hero. The two worlds clash as a result of which the latter gains a moral victory. Gardner, by making Beowulf remain unnamed throughout and the winning side at the end, tries to demonstrate that it is actually modern man, in the figure of the monster, who refuses to acknowledge this ideal world, and who finally suffers a bitter defeat. Gardner, as a novelist with moral concerns, argues that we

must endeavour to regain these values represented by the epic as the only source of meaning for existence:

True art is *by its nature* moral. We recognize true art by its careful, thoroughly honest search for and analysis of values. It is not didactic because, instead of teaching by authority and force, it explores, open-mindedly, to learn what it should teach. (Gardner: 1978, 19)

Significantly, however, Gardner has been able to render the epic values 'victorious' at the end of a clash with the prevalent values of the modern age only in the world of the novel, which is capable of reflecting an alien discourse. This ostensibly paradoxical case should be viewed as the confirmation of the Bakhtinian theory. For Gardner was able to clash the two sets of beliefs to make one of them triumphant solely through the multiplicity of the novelistic world. As a novelist, Gardner tries to show that the values of this 'bygone' age are not only forgotten but also rejected as fictional. It is not a coincidence that the monster, too, views epic life as an 'illusion'. The novelist takes great pains to highlight, and also restore, the former privileged status of the epic to be striven for as an ideal. Thus, the epic establishes a bond between a distant past and a distant (and maybe not so distant) future of humanity.



### 3.2 Style

In Bakhtinian genre theory, the novel is characterised by a multiplicity of worldviews, which is necessarily matched by a multiplicity of languages and styles. By the same token, however, there has to be a single language and style in the epic so as to reflect its single, unitary worldview. The epic by convention is completely deaf to dialogism. It should be taken as an important criterion when comparing the individual examples of the two genres, particularly, *Beowulf* and *Grendel* in terms of ‘style’.

As it has been noted before, the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* is actually characterised by double-voicedness, displaying both pagan and Christian worldviews throughout. However, it was also noted that the two apparently different worldviews in *Beowulf* ultimately legitimise the same vision of the world: both pagan and Christian voices in the text portray a meaningful world in which everything is connected with each other under the guidance of a spiritual being. Heroism is the only prevalent notion of this ideal world. Despite its double-voicedness, then, *Beowulf* does maintain a unified worldview, epitomised in its hero Beowulf. As A. G. Brodeur has noted:

In the figure of Beowulf the heroic ideals of Germanic paganism and of Anglo-Saxon Christendom have been reconciled and fused, so that the hero exemplifies the best of both. [. . .] The pagan and the Christian elements that combine in the person of Beowulf complement, rather than oppose, one another. (qtd. in Stanley 47)

Likewise, the first opponent that Beowulf has to deal with –Grendel– as well as all the other forces of darkness are depicted as the representatives of evil from both pagan and

Christian perspectives. So, the double characterisation based on the two different systems of belief is far from being incongruous with each other. On the contrary, it proves to be in complete harmony with both perspectives:

In reading *Beowulf* it is important to notice that the monsters are presented from two points of view. To the pagan characters in the poem, these creatures are [giants], [monster race], [phantoms], [demonic foes], [evil spirits], and [goblins] –all terms from pagan Germanic demonology [. . .] But the [Christian] poet in his own voice tells his [Christian] audience much more about these preternatural creatures, including the true genealogy of the Grendelkin: they are monstrous descendants of Cain, whose progeny was banished by God and punished with the flood. (Robinson 83)

Hence, both pagan and Christian beliefs glorify the ideal epic world represented by *Beowulf* while condemning the evil forces represented by the Grendelkin. The double-voicedness in *Beowulf*, therefore, does not result in a multiplicity of worldviews, for the two basically different perspectives both celebrate ‘heroism’.

This unification inevitably requires a unified language and style of a lofty kind peculiar to the epic world, where everybody speaks an equally dignified language regardless of their position. So, the characters in this world all speak the same language. Even the coastguard in *Beowulf*, for instance, speaks such a language when he stops the hero and his retainers on their arrival in Danish land. Despite the fact that he is no more than a guard, the man is wise enough to detect the heroic core in the figure of *Beowulf*, revealing his view through quite a respectful language as follows:

‘What sort of people may you be who have come in arms from across the ocean in that great ship? For years I have been coastguard, and kept watch over the sea so that no pirate fleet might raid the Danish coast. [. . .] But I have never anywhere seen a more formidable champion than that armed man [Beowulf] in your midst, who is certainly no mere retainer carrying weapons, unless his heroic bearing and appearance belie him. [. . .]’ (*Beowulf* 32)

The modern reader would not normally expect a coastguard to make such remarks suggesting his wisdom, prudence, and even nobility, harmonised with an elevated style. It is far beyond his position but the epic world is so unique that it endows even a coastguard with this kind of language. This elevated style is preserved throughout the story. Actually the epic by definition has to preserve this elevated style, because it is composed as a poem, while Gardner’s version is largely prose representing the prosaic world of the novel.

It is a recurring theme in *Beowulf*, as well as in most epic stories, that the hero is in search of winning fame through daring acts. This yearning for heroism is immediately recognised and praised by the other inhabitants of the epic world. Wulfgar, one of Hrothgar’s retainers, recognises the heroic nature in Beowulf when he recounts the hero’s arrival to his king in the epic style:

Wulfgar addressed his lord: ‘A party of Geats, whose leader is named Beowulf, has arrived from overseas. They beg audience of you, Sir. Do not refuse to speak with them, gracious Hrothgar! By their equipment they would seem to deserve respect, and the chieftain who led these soldiers here is without doubt a man of prowess.’ (35)

Another aspect of the epic style is that there is a lot of restraint, which attests to the sublimity of this world even when the content reveals strong sentiments like boasting, threat, and betrayal. The concept of boasting, for instance, is displayed through such a lofty language that is peculiar to the epic style, when Unferth, another retainer of Hrothgar’s, tries

to belittle Beowulf's prowess by relating a distorted version of the hero's youth race with Breca. Just as it is expected from an epic hero, Beowulf replies quite prudently. The nobility of his style matches the nobility of his youthful exploit. While boasting about his early achievement, Beowulf never has recourse to any kind of vulgarity or profanation so as to avenge Unferth's offence:

'[. . .] I will not now boast too much about this, but up to the present neither you nor Breca with your shining swords have performed so bold a feat of arms, though indeed you, Unferth, were the killer of your brothers: for which, clever as you are, you will certainly be damned in hell. Listen to me, Unferth! It is a fact that Grendel would never have done such damage to your king, nor wreaked such havoc in Heorot, if you had the fighting spirit with which you credit yourself. [. . .]' (40)

The epic hero, here, is boasting in the face of evil while threatening his enemy. However, he again expresses these strong sentiments through an elevated style without recourse to profanity. Beowulf threatens the monster Grendel, for instance, through the epic style characterised by loftiness as follows:

'[. . .] But I mean to show him very shortly the strength, courage, and fighting skill of the Geats. By the time tomorrow's sun has risen and stands blazing in the south, any man who wishes will be able to go fearlessly into Heorot.'  
(*Beowulf* 41)

Epic discourse is so different from everyday forms that it evokes in the reader a sense of veneration. The seeds of the sublimity of this world are laid bare to the reader even when the content is emotionally charged and the sentiments expressed are very strong as is the case when Beowulf threatens to fight Grendel without weapons:

‘They tell me that in his vainglory the monster is contemptuous of weapons. Therefore, as I wish to keep the good opinion of my lord Hygelac, I propose to dispense with any kind of sword or shield during the combat. Foe against foe, I shall fight the fiend to the death with my bare hands. [. . .]’ (37)

Similarly, the sublimity of the epic world determines the way the concept of betrayal is conveyed. Despite being emotionally charged, the concept of ‘betrayal’ is still depicted through the same lofty style of the epic discourse without having recourse to any forms of vulgarity. In the last part of the epic story, Beowulf, now an aged king, is still enthusiastic about fighting evil to rescue his nation. Enraged by the theft of a poor man, a gigantic dragon begins to trouble the Geats towards the end of the story. Beowulf immediately decides to fight the dragon, so he orders an iron shield to be made. During the most dangerous moment of the fight, however, Beowulf’s retainers choose to flee. One retainer called Wiglaf stays to support his king, though. It is noteworthy that even the discourse about betrayal has nothing to do with profanation:

His comrades-in-arms, who were sons of princes, utterly failed to support him in strength like good fighting-men, but fled into a wood to save their lives. Yet one among them was pricked by conscience. *To a right-thinking man, blood must always be thicker than water.* (*Beowulf* 88, my emphasis)

Beowulf is tragically betrayed by his retainers during his fight with the dragon. Although the sense of betrayal is perhaps the worst thing possible in the heroic world of the epic, the narrator, when relating this event, never departs from the lofty epic style. The runaway warriors are criticised and condemned as follows:

Soon the deserters came out of the wood: all ten of the cowardly runaways who had not had the courage to lift a spear when their leader was in difficulties. In shame they carried their shields to the place where the old hero lay, and looked at Wiglaf. (*Beowulf* 94)

So, another quality of the epic style becomes clear through the example quoted above: it is not only the characters but also the narrator who speaks this lofty language. When relating events, the epic poet uses an equally elevated style, which is also characterised by its dogmatism and authoritativeness.

The last sentence in the extract above (“To a right-thinking man, blood must always be thicker than water.”) reveals the dogmatic and authoritarian nature of the epic discourse. The epic poet imposes his own value system, which is inspired by epic life, on the reader at the cost of interrupting the flow of the narrative. It is a declaration whose truthfulness is beyond question. The holiness of epic life sealed with a dogmatic and authoritarian discourse is exemplified in the extract below, too. It is the aftermath of the monster’s death for which the hero is rewarded by the Danish king. It is another example of the authoritarian discourse in the epic:

The king of the Danes now delivered the horses and weapons into the keeping of Beowulf, and told him to use them well. Thus the renowned prince, guardian of the soldiers’ treasury, repaid Beowulf for his combat with Grendel in horses and gold, *with a generosity of which every honest man must approve.* (*Beowulf* 51, my emphasis)

This didactic and dogmatic discourse is observed throughout *Beowulf*. It is something which further distances the world portrayed from the contemporary life of the reader. The epic poet does not hesitate to remind the listener, rather assertively, to look up to the epic grandeur. It is the depiction of an ideal life through such an authoritarian discourse that it does not accept any rebuttal. Nothing can touch the gilded text of the epic. Its hierarchical

tone is detected quite easily. Here is another example: “He trusted to his strength and to the might of his hands. *This is how a man who hopes to win lasting fame on the field of battle should behave, and not care for his life*” (63, my emphasis). Obviously, the narrator goes to great pains to provide the reader with an ideal to be sought for:

Following close upon the armour came four swift bay horses exactly alike. Beowulf presented Hygelac with the horses and armour. *This is the way in which kinsmen ought to behave*, instead of weaving dark and subtle conspiracies against one another, or plotting each other’s death. (*Beowulf* 78, my emphasis)

In contrast to the epic version of the story, *Grendel* appears to be a manifestation of multiplicity. Unlike the two voices in *Beowulf*, both of which celebrating, through a single style, the same worldview, the issue of style in *Grendel* is of a truly Bakhtinian nature, displaying a clash between two distinct views of existence: the absurdist and existentialist vision of the world bereft of meaning and connectedness *and* the one which seeks meaning in existence. The difference between these two views is reflected in two distinct languages and styles. One is the unofficial language of common people connected with profanation and humour represented primarily by the Gardnerian version of the monster Grendel. And the other is the poetic language of the epic world represented predominantly by the Shaper. The two basically different worlds clash in Grendel’s narrative. As Howell points out, this is actually a fight which is going on internally in the mind of Grendel, but it is externalised on the level of plot:

The central conflict in the novel is within the mind of Grendel, who must choose between the spiritual “connectedness” of the ordered world envisioned by the “Shaper,” Hrothgar’s poet-singer; and the spiritual disconnectedness of the mechanistic world envisioned by Grendel’s nihilistic “dragon”. (Howell 62-63)

Significantly, then, the tone, or, style of Grendel’s narrative oscillates between the vulgarity, and of course laughter, of the novelistic world *and* the sacredness of the epic world.

There should be frequent refractions, then, where the two voices, and styles echoing the two worldviews interact by shooting through one another. Gardner turns the consciousness of the monster into a battlefield in which the two alien views, and consequently two different styles fight for supremacy. Terribly impressed by the beauty of the Shaper’s poetry, Grendel cannot help frequenting the meadhall at Heorot. His spiritual dilemma is between the ideal world manifested in the Shaper’s verse and a mechanical, meaningless one to which he is prone to yield especially after his encounter with the dragon. In his interior dialogues, the two sides of Grendel are voiced differently:

Two nights later I went back. I was addicted. The Shaper was singing the glorious deeds of the dead men, praising war. He sang how they’d fought me. It was all lies. [. . .] “Woe to the man,” the Shaper sang, “who shall through wicked hostilities shove his soul down into the fire’s hug! Let him hope for no change: he can never turn away! But lucky the man who, after his deathday, shall seek the Prince, find peace in his father’s embrace!”

“Bullshit!” I whispered through clenched teeth. How was it that he could enrage me so?

*Why not?* The darkness hissed around me. *Why not? Why not?* Teasing, tormenting, as cold as a dead hand closing on my wrist.

Imagination, I knew. Some evil inside myself pushed out into the trees. I knew what I knew, the mindless, mechanical bruteness of things, and when the harper’s lure drew my mind away to hopeful dreams, the dark of what was and always was reached out and snatched my feet.



And yet I'd be surprised, I had to admit, if anything in myself could be as cold, as dark, as centuries old as the presence I felt around me. (*Grendel* 45-46)

This internal polemic highlights the difference between the two styles; the Shaper's lofty language framed by the vulgarity of Grendel's. But even here, which talks about Grendel's early exposition to the heroic world, his style is already coming under the spell of the Shaper's. The first cryptic sentences become more complex and mature towards the end.

There always arises a dialogue between different voices and worldviews in any novel, sometimes peacefully and sometimes not, which is the case in *Grendel*. Despite his growing tendency towards nihilism, Grendel often falls under the spell of the Shaper's vision of the world, which strives for a meaningful existence. When he is under the influence of the Shaper, Grendel's narrative tends to be rather poetic reflecting the sublimity of the epic world. Here is an example of his poetic style resisting the monstrous self within himself:

What was he? The man [the Shaper] had changed the world, had torn up the past by its thick, gnarled roots and had transmuted it, and they, who knew the truth, remembered it his way –and so did I.

[. . .]

Thus I fled, ridiculous hairy creature torn apart by poetry –crawling, whimpering, streaming tears, across the world like a *two-headed beast*, like mixed-up lamb and kid at the tail of a baffled, indifferent ewe –and I gnashed my teeth and clutched the sides of my head *as if to heal the split, but I couldn't*. (36-37, my emphases )

Even Grendel himself is aware of the stylistic changes in his discourse, which was becoming “[a] little poetic, I would readily admit. *His [the Shaper's] manner of speaking was infecting me, making me pompous*” (41, my emphasis).

However, he easily returns to his former profane style in the face of human attacks or violence. His former approval of the Shaper's vision is replaced by blasphemy accompanied by a total rejection of such a world soon after he is molested by humans. It goes without saying that the monster's language is immediately characterised by profanation:

Drunken men rushed me with battle-axes. [. . .] I understood, as shocked as I'd been the first time, that they could kill me –eventually *would* if I gave them a chance. [. . .]

I ran to the center of the forest and fell down panting. My mind was wild. "Pity," I moaned, "O pity! pity!" I wept –strong monster with teeth like a shark's –and I slammed the earth with such force that a seam split open twelve feet long. "Bastards!" I roared. "Sons of bitches! Fuckers!" (44)

The co-existence of the two opposing styles in Gardner's version is also reflected in his use of imagery. In *Grendel*, the Christ-like status of Beowulf is preserved along with all the other epic elements. Gardner, when he introduces Beowulf, uses the 'fish' image, which is associated with Christ in Christian belief: "Christ himself is often depicted as a fisherman, Christians being fish since the waters of Baptism are their natural element, and he himself is symbolized by a fish" (Brown 383). It needs to be emphasised that Beowulf comes to Danish land "by water" in both versions (*Grendel* 133). The epic hero is also associated with 'fish' in Grendel's narrative, strongly suggesting his Christ-like status, but the way Grendel depicts him reveals the monster's ignorance of such symbolic imagery: "He had no more beard than a fish" (135). It can also be viewed as one of the refractions in the text where two worldviews are detected at the same time. The reader, in the fish imagery, observes not only the monster's point of view which is unaware of its symbolic significance, but also the epic poet's (or rather Gardner's) which certainly finds meaning in it derived from the Biblical portrait of Christ as fish.

Similarly, though unnamed in Gardner's version, 'the Stranger,' that is Beowulf, is explicitly associated with the dragon image again with Biblical implications. He is described as a dragon with wings, spitting fire: "his hand still closed like a dragon's jaws [. . .] He has wings. Is it possible? And yet it's true: out of his shoulders come terrible fiery wings" (148). Grendel, again, is unaware of the significance of the dragon imagery. 'Dragon' is symbolic of Christ, the saviour, in ancient Christian iconography. Yet, Gardner's vicious dragon to whose nihilist vision of a world Grendel succumbs is represented as an instrument of evil. There is a double use of the dragon image, which Gardner explains as follows:

I didn't mean it to be a change [from the poem]. As a medievalist, one knows there are two great dragons in medieval art. There's Christ the dragon, and there's Satan the dragon. There's always a war between those two great dragons. In modern Christian symbolism a sweeter image of Jesus with the sheep in his arms has evolved, but I like the old image of the warring dragon. That's not to say that Beowulf is Christ, but that he's Christ-like. (qtd in Winther 172-173)

Lastly, it should also be noted that the narrative perspective changes from the third-person to the first-person in the novel, which has important implications with regard to 'style'. The Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* could only afford a third-person perspective along with external characterisation. For it depicts the world of some heroic ancestors; the world of the dead. An epic poet sings of this world from a distance, and nobody is allowed to come closer. Thus, it inevitably demands a pious attitude and tone. *Grendel*, however, is the first-person narration of a monster who finally yields to a dark vision of the world inspiring no awe but pity in the reader. Brought closer to the familiar zone of laughter, the novel version

of the story displays the living discourse of ordinary people characterised by vulgarity and profanation. This is, so to speak, the listener's perspective of the epic story, who objects to his own delineation within that world.

Thus, there is a sense of humour and laughter in the novel, which is particularly important in terms of novelistic discourse. The zone of familiarity shatters the awesome attitude to the object of representation. Instead, a sense of laughter and humour emerges on account of the breakdown of the hierarchical distance between the world presented and the reader. Thus, the novelistic hero, who is not even human, is described as being capable of humour and self-mockery: "In *Grendel*, Gardner creates a fully realized character –a monster with a sense of humor and gift for language" (Howell 61). The monster is humourous enough to define himself as "a shadow-shooter, earth-rim-roamer, walker of the world's weird wall" (*Grendel* 2-3) without being fully aware of the implications of his imitative and alliterative style. For it is typical of old English to make use of alliteration and compound words as Grendel himself has done. While making fun of this style, however, Grendel is not aware of the fact that he himself is making use of it. It is precisely this element of humour and laughter that renders the monster rather amiable to the reader initially: it is springtime, when all living things copulate and regeneration is enhanced while Grendel's status as a lonely outsider is foregrounded. Being ignored by an indifferent universe, the monster is still capable of mockery, which elicits the reader's sympathy:

"Why can't these creatures discover a little dignity?" I ask the sky. The sky says nothing, predictably. I make a face, uplift a defiant middle finger, and give an obscene little kick. The sky ignores me, forever unimpressed. Him too

I hate, the same as I hate these brainless budding trees, these brattling birds.  
(*Grendel* 2)

Thus, Grendel's wry sense of humour, characterised by sarcasm, enables him to have some kind of fun despite his loneliness and isolation. Hrothgar's men, on the other hand, live in a world which is entirely devoid of any sense of humour. There is certainly a sense of joy of a 'heroic' kind in the epic world represented by the meadhall Heorot but no humour at all. Even the monster's depiction of this world reveals this sentiment. It is the harvest season and Hrothgar's people are celebrating their riches. But joyfulness of this kind never gives way to humour and vulgarity:

He [the Shaper] spoke of God's great generosity in sending them so wise a king. They all raised their cups to God and Hrothgar, and Hrothgar smiled, *bits of food in his beard*. The Shaper talked of how God had vanquished their enemies and filled up their houses with precious treasure, how they were the richest, most powerful people on earth, how here and here alone in all the world men were free and heroes were brave and *virgins were virgins*. He ended his song, and people clapped and shouted their praise and filled their golden cups. He ended the song, and people clapped and shouted their praise and filled their golden cups. *All around their bubble of stupidity I could feel the brume of the dragon*. (*Grendel* 67, my emphases)

A more careful reading, however, reveals that the monster's mockery is incorporated into the depiction of the heroic joy mentioned above. It is against this background that the epic world is perceived. Grendel notices the incongruity of bits of food in the king's beard, which is a close-up that shatters the seriousness of the object of representation in the Bakhtinian sense. And his boredom is implicit in his recounting of the Shaper's enumeration of the good things. The extract above, then, also exemplifies the refraction where the serious and humorous co-exist. After reading the last sentence of the extract quoted above, the

reader realises that the monster's subtle mockery of the Shaper's world is under the influence of the dragon's nihilist vision. However, there are some other instances in the novel where the Shaper's rather solemn discourse is presented directly without having recourse to the monster-narrator. Needless to say, such discourse is in no way associated with humour:

*Lo, we have heard the honor of the Speardanes,  
nation-kings, in days now gone,  
how those battle-lords brought themselves glory.  
Oft Scyld Shefing shattered the forces  
of kinsman-marauders, dragged away their  
meadhall-benches, terrified earls –after first men found  
him castaway. (He got recompense for that!)  
He grew up under the clouds, won glory of men  
till all his enemies sitting around him  
heard across the whaleroads his demands and gave  
him tribute. That was a good king! (Grendel 35)*

Gardner's *Grendel* seems to be more lively, democratic and truthful to real-life discourse precisely because it allows others' discourse. It should be noted that the novel is characterised by the decentralising power of the centrifugal forces, which try to pull language toward the periphery away from the centre. This property is what makes the novel a democratic genre. The multiplicity of voices in the novel in general, and in *Grendel*, in particular, has been "historically shaped by the current of decentralizing, centrifugal forces" (*DI* 273). However, it should be emphasised that, turning the Bakhtinian axiology upside down, Gardner comes to unfold the vulgarity of the novelistic world where the once alien discourse –the monster's- is foregrounded. Once profanation of the contemporary world is allowed in works of art, Gardner seems to believe, there will be no 'epic' grandeur left. Art, according to Gardner, should stand by what is good and beautiful. True art yearns for "Truth, Goodness, and Beauty," which is to be found only in the great works of art. Gardner's monster is defeated by the representative of good in the end simply because he is devoted to

the ultimate good depicted in the epic version of the story. The sense of disconnectedness is conquered by the sense of connectedness through the moral victory of Beowulf over Grendel. Despite the fact that Gardner is realistic enough to know that evil is never destroyed completely, he asserts his moralistic stance as an artist who believes that

art builds; it never stands pat; it destroys only evil. If art destroys good, mistaking it for evil, then that art is false, an error; it requires denunciation. This, I have claimed, is what true art is about –preservation of the world of gods and men. (Gardner: 1978, 15-16)

This is true also on the stylistic level, where the blasphemous and profane language of Grendel finally gives way to an elevated style, as he is forced to compose poetry and sing “of the wall”.

### **3.3 Temporality**

Needless to say, in accordance with the Bakhtinian understanding of the term, temporality should be viewed as a hierarchical category, going much beyond its virtually temporal significance. So, rewriting the Old English epic story in the novel form, or, in Gardner’s own words, creating “a modern equivalent,” Gardner actually transported the struggle between good and evil –between Beowulf and Grendel- from the ‘angelic mode’ to the ‘human mode’. It is therefore much more than a simply temporal change.

By transporting *one* part of the epic story to the contemporary world, or in Bakhtinian terms to the ‘novelistic zone,’ Gardner has been able to shatter the epic distance between the reader and that part of the story, i.e. the world of the monster. The epic world represented by Beowulf is still cut off with an epic distance from the contemporary world. It is still there with all its grandeur, being even further distanced simply because it is now perceived from the monster’s perspective rather than the epic bard’s. Thus, Gardner has managed to place the modern reader onto the same temporal plane with the monster-hero while preserving the world of Beowulf at its formerly privileged position as a distant image.

In his version of the monster Grendel, Gardner “found a perfect vehicle for what he considers to be one of the most predominant phenomena on the contemporary intellectual scene: cheerful (and sometimes not so cheerful) nihilism” (Winther 163).

It would be much better, then, to first look at the epic version of the story to better understand how it once established its hierarchically distanced position, not allowing the reader to probe into the world it portrays. The role of the narrative perspective is remarkable in the sense that the third-person narrative in the epic would not possibly allow the reader to identify himself with the world represented. The epic world is to be told about solely by the epic poet and to be heard about from a distance with utmost piety. It should be emphasised that the third-person narration in *Beowulf* distances the object of representation from the reader. There is a two-dimensional representation of reality in the epic, which enhances the epic distance. Characters lack interiority. This is a point which will be dealt with under “character”.



The hierarchical positioning of *Beowulf* is so manifest that the very first sentence demands the reader's respectful attitude toward the world it presents. It starts with an imperative expression, establishing itself on a higher value plane as a distinguishing feature of the epic:

*Hear! We know of the bygone glory of the Danish kings, and the heroic exploits of those princes. Scyld Scefing, in the face of hostile armies, used often to bring nations into subjection, and strike terror in the hearts of their leaders. [. . .] his power and fame increased until each of his overseas neighbours was forced to submit and pay him tribute. He was an excellent king. (Beowulf 27, my emphases)*

The extent of the pastness corresponds to that of heroism, sealing the remoteness of this world: "a world far removed from our own, boasting values and customs we have left behind or else seriously modified" (Hill 1995: 152). The past by convention reveals the world of the dead, which, Bakhtin argues, in itself is considered to be a reason for the reader's pious attitude. The same idea can be traced in John M. Hill's account of 'the temporal world in *Beowulf*' in his second chapter bearing that very name:

Malinowski states that 'myth' comes from the past; it is what illustrious forbears have done, not what immediate ancestors have achieved [. . .]. He notes that in the live relation of myth to a people, the past is inherently more important than the present and carries enormous social weight. (Hill: 1995, 38)

Epic distance is also, and of course, naturally, affected by the use of the past tense in the narrative. The pastness of the past in the epic is emphasised through the extensive use of the past tense. It gives the impression to the reader that the events took place long ago. So, the completedness of the action is strongly emphasised.

The awesome attitude toward the ideal epic world being distanced from the present gives way to a sense of familiarity with the world depicted in the novel. The reader is now located on the same temporal plane in the maximum proximity of the novelistic zone. Gardner minimises the distance with *one* part of the famous epic story: Grendel the monster. By making the outcast monster the narrator of his own story, the novelist shatters the distance from the reader. So, the first-person narrative in *Grendel* is bound to result in the reader-monster identification suggesting important ironic implications with regard to the novelist's philosophical concerns:

[. . .] the novel is held in the first person; the narrative is controlled by Grendel's perspective, and an inside view tends generally to create sympathy and reduce the distance between the reader and the narrator. All in all, *Gardner teases us toward an identification with Grendel* on a number of levels. (Winther 85, my emphasis).

Inevitably, then, the first-person narrative of the Gardnerian version of the evil monster "elicits sympathy" (Howell 61). Interrelated with the first-person narration, Gardner's internal characterisation, revealing the innermost feelings of the monster, allows the reader to freely wander through the monster's consciousness.

Once this distance is closed, objects become familiar and familiarity destroys their sacredness:

It is precisely laughter that destroys the epic, and in general destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance. As a distanced image a subject cannot be comical; to be made comical, it must be brought close. [. . .] Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact (*DI* 23).

What is brought closer to be ridiculed in the Gardner text is the monster himself. Grendel's own attempts, however, to bring the epic world down to his level fail. His representation of Hrothgar with food crumbs in his beard, for instance, does not really harm the overall portrait of the good king, nor his intention to rape and kill Wealtheow vulgarises her beauty. On the contrary, the more they are degraded in Grendel's mind and narrative, the better they seem. They function as foils against which the banality of Grendel's world is revealed.

So, in this sense, Gardner does preserve the epic distance between this world and the reader. The epic world is now perceived from the contemporary point of view, which finds its expression in the prevalent notions of absurdism, and which is embodied in the monster. It can be argued, then, that Gardner, subtly teasing the reader toward an identification with the monster, merges the two in their failure to recognise the epic values. The episode where Grendel laments the fact that he is excluded from the grandeur of the epic world depicted in the Shaper's poetry announces the reader's exclusion from this world as well. Gardner aims to remind contemporary people that they will remain as excluded as the monster himself unless they try to retrieve the epic values as a future ideal. The monster's lament, albeit unconsciously, for being left out of this ideal world actually reflects the reader's remoteness from this world as well:

I was so filled with sorrow and tenderness I could hardly have found it in my heart to snatch a pig!

Thus I fled, *ridiculous hairy creature torn apart by poetry* –crawling, whimpering, streaming tears, across the world like a two-headed beast (*Grendel* 37, my emphasis).

Ignored by an indifferent universe, and rejected by Hrothgar's people, Grendel bitterly suffers from his status as outsider, which attracts the reader to a sentiment of sympathy. Actually, it mirrors the reader's position as outsider on a larger scale: " 'Why can't I have someone to talk to?' I said. The stars said nothing, but I pretended to ignore the rudeness. 'The Shaper has people to talk to,' I said. I wrung my fingers. 'Hrothgar has people to talk to'" (45).

It is also important to analyse the issue of temporality in terms of 'epic time' versus 'novelistic time'. As Bakhtin has argued, the epic presents a fully-developed world, where everything has completed its evolution as well as the epic hero himself. Likewise, the Anglo-Saxon epic hero Beowulf is introduced from the beginning as "a man of prowess" (*Beowulf* 35) and "the strongest man alive" (45). The epic presents time in its entire fullness. So, there is no need to go beyond the limits of this world precisely because it is all-inclusive. The temporal movement of the epic assumes that there is no linearity but cyclicity, which means that there can be nothing new in the epic world: it is all about the same repetition of the heroic exploits of some great ancestors within a closed circle. The epic world assumes that there have always been and will be heroes to fight evil; a predetermined struggle in favour of good. The reader never suspects that good will conquer evil in the ideal epic world. Therefore, the reader does not worry at all about the result of this primordial struggle between good and evil. Nor do the inhabitants of the epic world, where everybody believes that "the fiend [Grendel] could not drag people into the lower shades against the will of God" (*Beowulf* 43). Thus, neither the characters nor the plot in the epic develops. It operates, then, on the paradigmatic axis rather than the syntagmatic one, which suggests linearity. It is depicted as an inviolable, 'closed circle'.

Interestingly, this quality of the epic time along with everything else about the epic is preserved in Gardner's version. Time seems to be the same in Heorot; there is no change at all. Life repeats itself with no token of change simply because it is not real time. Human experience is presented as an all-inclusive, never-changing whole, repeating itself through a cyclical pattern. Despite its internal linearity, which allows Beowulf to appear as a young prince; to gain fame through saving the Danes as well as his own people; to age and, finally, die in the end, the epic version proves ultimately to be cyclical and repetitive. It assumes that there will emerge new forces of darkness, and heroes like Beowulf will destroy them. It could be Wiglaf, who has proved his heroic nature through his act of loyalty to Beowulf, now an old king in his fatal fight against the dragon, who should replace the hero. The epic world remains the same in Gardner's version; what is observed throughout is a web of rituals and rites of homage to either God or to kings and heroes. The blind Shaper, as Grendel observes enviously, sings of the heroic exploits throughout. The monster is enraged because he realises that the Shaper, or somebody else, will continue to sing as long as this divine order exists: "He *would* sing the glory of Hrothgar's line and gild his wisdom and stir up his men to more daring deeds, *for a price*" (*Grendel* 35, my emphases). He knows, even while he deliberately degrades it by calling it a paid activity, that it is an important function and people's need for it will be eternal. Time seems to be congealed in Beowulf's world, which is to be perceived two-dimensionally as opposed to the three-dimensional representation of time in the novel. There is no sense of depth in the epic. Everything is presented as it is; clear, unique and predetermined.

The novelistic time of the monster, on the other hand, presents the realistic representation of the flow of time through seasons and months. Time is perceived just the way the present is perceived by the reader. It is not frozen. The monster reminds the reader at

the very beginning that it is “the twelfth year of [my] idiotic war” (*Grendel* 1). This precise timing gives the impression that Grendel himself is keenly aware of the passage of time despite the boredom which characterises his life. The narrative of this last year of his life begins with spring. As the narrative of the monster unfolds, the seasons change as is the case in real-life time.

The novelistic hero inevitably goes through a process of development as a result of the realistic representation of time. Grendel appears as a nihilistic monster at the beginning of his narrative and ends up submitting to the power and glory of Beowulf.

As a novelistic hero, and seen from his own perspective, unlike Beowulf, Grendel is far from having a too ossified and stable identity. It signifies the culmination of Grendel’s development as a novelistic character when, at the very end of the story, he is made to acknowledge the supremacy of the epic world. Grendel admits that “[I] have no choice” other than giving in to the power of ‘the stranger’ (*Grendel* 151). Thus, the novelistic hero undergoes a series of experiences. Only then does he reach a state of maturity. He learns, and therefore, changes at the end. However, at the end of the story, as well as Grendel’s narrative, epic time is superimposed on novelistic time, as he is defeated by Beowulf. Grendel is thus re-placed in the timeless story of the fight between good and evil.

### 3.4 Structure

It has been argued in the previous chapter that the epic is characterised by internal wholeness versus external incompleteness. On account of its temporal quality, the epic presents human experience as a whole, already completed in an absolute past where time is perceived as being congealed. The epic presents an ideal, monoglot world where any conflict is resolved in favour of good. The reader, therefore, does not really wonder about the outcome of the epic story mainly because he is provided with the “whole event” from the beginning (*DI* 32). For example, the narrator does not refrain from informing the reader beforehand that Beowulf will die in his last battle against the dragon: “For the first time Beowulf *had to* fight without success, because fate *refused* to grant it to him” (Beowulf 87, my emphases). So, there is a semantic wholeness in the epic, which does not require, at least in the Aristotelian sense, a plot. The epic, as Bakhtin has pointed out, is “indifferent to formal beginnings and can remain incomplete” (31).

The Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, too, displays this feature delineated by Bakhtin. It is a poem consisting of three episodes each of which describes the hero’s fight with a monster – Grendel, Grendel’s mother and the dragon. It is a predetermined, primordial struggle between good and evil, of which the reader is never suspicious, with the result that victory is always denied to the latter. The gap between good and evil is too big for the reader to overcome. The presence of evil is required only to foreground that of good, and the annihilation of the former is inevitable so as to preserve the uniqueness of this world. From the beginning of the epic story, the reader is convinced thoroughly about the evil nature of Grendel whereas the epic hero Beowulf is presented as a Christ-like figure deserving eternal glory on account of

his heroic exploits. So, the essence of the story is actually established from the beginning, which is

the conflict of good and evil. It is an expression of the fear of the dark, an examination of the nature and purpose of heroism, and the great statement of the Anglo-Saxon outlook and imagination. (Wright 9)

The battle between good and evil –between the hero and the monster- is presented to the reader right away suggesting the fact that the hero as the force of light will beat the monster, who is portrayed as the force of darkness. Beowulf, a Geatish prince in search of fame, dashes to the aid of the Danes, who are distressed by the nocturnal attacks of the monster Grendel, who is sure to have been damned, the narrator says, “along with the children of Cain” (*Beowulf* 29). Portrayed as a descendant of Cain, Grendel, then, is certain to perish in the face of a fight with the hero. It would be blasphemous to think otherwise simply because the monster is directly identified as “the enemy of God” (45) that has to be destroyed. Beowulf, on the other hand, is depicted as “[W]ell-born, stalwart, and the strongest of living men, [. . .] a hero among the Geats” (31). So, the conflict is clear; there is no indeterminacy on the semantic level. It also stems from the fact that the hierarchical status of the epic requires an authoritarian discourse which is as immune to any suspicion or objection as the holy scripture itself.

The Danish king Hrothgar assures his people about the outcome of this struggle soon after he is informed about the arrival of the Geatish prince: “I am sure that God has sent him to the help of the Danes against the terror of Grendel!” (35). Beowulf himself sounds equally confident when he declares: “Foe against foe, I shall fight the fiend to the death with my bare



hands” (37). Therefore, it comes as no surprise to the reader when Beowulf’s victory is declared after his fight with Grendel.

There are no clear connections among different episodes, particularly between the last two, of the epic story *Beowulf*. In other words, there is hardly a cause-and-effect relationship between the events. This is because of the fact that each episode in the epic is complete in itself, being only a reverberation of the whole. The epic lacks linearity, precisely because it is not supposed to progress steadily like a narrative. For the epic is composed as a poem, which is characterised by associative relations. This quality of the epic *Beowulf* is explicated by Tolkien as follows:

We must dismiss, of course, from mind the notion that *Beowulf* is a “narrative poem,” that it tells a tale or intends to tell a tale sequentially. The poem “lacks steady advance”: so Klaeber heads a critical section in his edition. But the poem was not meant to advance, steadily or unsteadily. It is essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death. (Tolkien 108)

There are also frequent digressions from the main story line. Although these digressions contribute to the overall significance of the poem, where there is no need for causal links, they seem to hamper the flow of the story as a narrative. So, for purely technical purposes, those parts where the narrator mentions some apparently irrelevant issues should be viewed as digressions from the main story line. They are mainly about familial matters, particularly those of the Danish dynasty. One particular example in the text occurs during the celebration in Heorot following Grendel’s death. The court poet begins to recite songs telling of an old Danish leader called Hnaef. The emergence of a quarrel between the Danes and the Frisians results tragically in the holocaust of kinsfolk on both sides. The most apparent victim of this feud, however, is a woman who is dear to both sides. It is Hnaef’s sister

Hildeburh, the wife of Finn (the leader of the Frisians). When the harp of the court poet begins to recite lays telling of this old conflict in the midst of a joyful atmosphere, it appears to be a digression:

Then, by way of entertainment, Hrothgar's poet sang in the hall of how Hnaef, the leader of a small Danish clan, fell by the hands of Finn's men in a Frisian quarrel, when sudden disaster overtook the Danes. Hnaef's sister Hildeburh, the wife of Finn, had little reason to speak well of the good faith of the Jutes. Through no fault of her own, that skirmish deprived her of those she loved: her son and her brother. (*Beowulf* 52)

It should be emphasised, however, that the event quoted above has a connection to the main idea in *Beowulf*, considering the grand values of the epic world. For the Hildeburh story proves to be consistent with the values of a heroic life, when the lady makes her son be burnt together with his uncle (Hnaef) in his funeral pyre. It testifies to the heroism of epic life: "Hildeburh gave orders that her own son should be committed to the flames upon Hnaef's pyre and that his body was to be burnt beside his uncle's" (53). For the lady's act of sacrificing her son as retribution for her husband's killing her brother should be viewed as a sign of these heroic values. And still, it poses a digression from the *Beowulf* story.

In the second episode, the hero has to fight the monster's mother, who launches a violent attack to avenge her son's death. The ensuing battle is exactly the same as the previous one: the force of light against that of dark and evil. Again, it is a predetermined battle in favour of the former for "the holy and omniscient ruler of the sky easily settled the issue in favour of the right" (*Beowulf* 63). Once again peace and order is established in Hrothgar's kingdom with the destruction of the monster's dam –Grendel's mother. Apparently, the basic theme of the epic story repeats itself in each episode in a cyclical

pattern. The reader would have already got at the essence of the *Beowulf* story by then even without continuing to read the rest of it.

Because there is no linearity and a sequential advance in *Beowulf*, there is hardly a logical relationship especially between the first two episodes and the last one, where the hero has to kill a certain dragon to save his own nation. Gardner himself points to this fact as follows:

Authoritarian literature tends to work by the allegorical method, or at least gets its profluence from abstract logic [. . .]. Take the greatest work of this type in English (or, rather ancient English), *Beowulf*. The narrative is presented in three large sections. In the first, a monster called Grendel persecutes the Danish people until a heroic friend from another tribe, Beowulf, kills the monster; in the second section, the monster's mother attacks the Danes, hoping to avenge her monstrous son's death, and Beowulf kills her too; and in the third section, Beowulf, now an old, old man and king of the Geatish nation, fights a dragon and dies himself in the act of killing it. The second section –Beowulf and Grendel's mother- proceeds causally from the first, but only by accident; and the third section –Beowulf and the dragon- has no causal roots in the first and second sections. It is not because Beowulf killed Grendel and his dam that he must now kill the dragon. (Gardner: 1985, 83)

However, it is not something that the epic poet should be criticised for. On the contrary, as Tolkien has pointed out explicitly, it is something necessary considering the mechanism by which poetry operates: associative relations. When the theme is eternal fight between good and evil, these associations become clear. The same idea is emphasised in the reading of John Leyerle, too, who makes the following comment on the “interlace structure of *Beowulf*” in his article bearing that very name:

The term interlace may be taken in a larger sense; it is an organizing principle closer to the workings of the human imagination proceeding in its atemporal way from one associative idea to the next than to the Aristotelian order of parts belonging to a temporal sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. If internal human experience of the imagination is taken as the basis, the Aristotelian canon of natural order as moving in chronological progression is really *ordo artificialis*, not the other way around as the rhetoricians taught. The human imagination moves in atemporal, associative patterns. (Leyerle 170)

As the quotations above clearly suggest, there is cyclicity rather than linearity in the epic. Therefore, there is internal wholeness but not structural integrity. Instead, every episode can be treated as a whole. The epic world presents human experience as a whole in a cyclical pattern. There is a fullness of time with the result that there can be no progress in the plot of an epic story. The reader never thinks of questioning, or suspecting, the prowess of Beowulf the hero on the one hand, and the evil nature in any of the three monsters on the other. So, there is a strong need for an internal conclusiveness in the epic, while such completeness is not found in its structure simply because 'the meaning' is conveyed as a whole right at the beginning. The third and last episode, therefore, comes up with nothing new; there is nothing new under the sun so to speak. The hero, despite his rather old age, fights the dragon bravely. And he himself dies when killing it. The smoke of his funeral pyre ascending to the sky announces, to the Christian audience, the place of the hero among martyrs in the other world, and of course, confirms the immortality of the pagan hero, who has always yearned for glory.

The novel, on the other hand, is characterised by structural, or, external, wholeness versus internal inconclusiveness. On account of this indeterminacy on the semantic level, the novel urges the reader to reach the end of the story to resolve uncertainties. So, there is an element of suspense in the plot of the novel. The reader throughout observes the epic world

through the eye of the monster just as the way the monster perceives his own present. The events seem to take place simultaneously with the narration; an element of 'steady advance' is observed despite a few flashbacks. One has to follow Grendel's narrative till the very end so as to see what will happen to the monster though the readers of the Anglo-Saxon epic do know how the story ends. So, the novel cannot remain "indifferent to formal beginnings" and formal endings.

Grendel's narrative is divided into twelve chapters each of which corresponds to a zodiacal sign. So, the narrative begins with Aries in the spring and continues to Pisces in the winter at the end. Grendel features as a nihilistic monster at the beginning of his narrative in the twelfth and last year of his "idiotic war" with Hrothgar. The reader knows from the *Beowulf* story that the monster is killed in the twelfth year of his attacks on Hrothgar's people. The second chapter, which corresponds to Taurus, provides a flashback to inform the reader about the genesis of Grendel's nihilism. Interest is aroused in the reader to read the monster's narrative unfolding at the same time with the present, a novelistic feature which Bakhtin calls an "impulse to continue" (*DI* 32). Thus, the reader throughout wonders what the monster will turn into. It remains unknown till the very end how the story will end up and what will happen to the novelistic hero.

The reader's interest in the narrative is aroused mainly because it is told by Grendel himself. This presents interesting problems of plot, because readers already know that Grendel dies at the end of the original story. In Gardner's version, then, with the shift in narrative perspective, the reader is promptly made curious as to how a narrator, whose death is certain at the end, can close the gap between the end of the story and the beginning of the narrative so that he can come back and tell us about events that led to his own death.

At the beginning of Grendel's narrative the use of the present tense, instead of the traditional past tense of telling stories, partly solves this problem. It creates the illusion that events are unfolding at the same time as they are told. This is a story telling device which creates a sense of immediacy. But later on Grendel slowly reverts to the past tense with flashbacks. When his narrative finally comes back to the present, i.e. his final and fatal encounter with Beowulf, both he and the reader are already steeped in the pastness of the story. The present and past overlap and the former is inevitably subsumed by the latter. This attests to the allegorical nature of Grendel himself, who stands for evil, despite his own belief in his uniqueness, for Grendel represents darkness of all times. He has symbolic significance with respect to the eternal fight between good and evil.

Although this careful plan, which organises events through intricate movements back and forth in time functions as a novelistic plot, which helps to advance Grendel's narrative, it can also be seen as a cycle because of each chapter's correspondence to a zodiacal sign. It echoes the cyclicity and order in the universe. This order and meaningful pattern, however, becomes clear only at the very end while it remains quite unbeknownst to both the reader and the monster-narrator until then. Considering the reader identification with the monster itself, this is no surprise. It is the reflection of the vision of the novelist who certainly finds meaning in existence unlike the nihilistic monster. There are one or two very implicit references to the Zodiac in each chapter characterised the animal names of its signs. The monster comes across that particular animal in each of the chapters without knowing the significance of it. It is "the old ram" in the first chapter (*Grendel* 1); "a bull" in the second chapter (14) and so on. Only under closer scrutiny does it become evident that the novel's structure reverberates the perfect order of cycles in the universe, in general, and in the

monster's narrative, in particular, as a rebuttal of his nihilism. So, Grendel's narrative, despite himself, proves there is meaning in existence:

It [the Zodiac] is not a conscious design imposed on his narrative by Grendel himself; he neither knows, nor recognizes this complex structure. If it were pointed out to him, he would probably think it an accident, for Grendel the existentialist denies any meaning to the motion of the stars. Grendel does not know the significance of numbers, either. In a meaningful universe, they are not just expressions of quantities but "idea forces" and number twelve is symbolic of cosmic order and salvation, of the circle and the idea of totality. (Çalışkan 118)

Likewise, neither the reader nor the monster knows the outcome of the latter's encounter with Beowulf, who is known to the monster as 'the stranger'. Even though *Grendel* is a retelling of the *Beowulf* story and therefore is expected to embrace, so to speak, the end of the latter, the reader is still enthusiastic about reaching the end of the monster's narrative. This is because the emphasis has now shifted from "what will happen to the monster", which is obviously known by the reader, to "when will Grendel understand", or rather, "will he ever understand?".

There arises a dialogue between the two texts, *Beowulf* and *Grendel*, revealing the fact that the novelist aims to salute the former in veneration as the response of a twentieth century writer with a moralistic stance. To do so, Gardner, ironically, reverses the whole case in favour of the *Beowulf* story, which has been kept in the background from the beginning, suggesting that it is modern thought which prefers to ignore the values of the epic world. Only at the end of the novel does the epic world come to the foreground and conquer the novelistic world in the final encounter of the opponents about which the monster grows

‘eager,’ and so does the reader. Presenting Grendel with an increasing fear of ‘the stranger,’ coupled with an irresistible desire to meet him, Gardner explicitly hints at the oncoming doom of the monster:

The stranger smiled on, but closed his eyes. He knew a doomed house when he saw it. I had a feeling; but for one reason or another he kept his peace. I grew more and more afraid of him and at the same time –who can explain it? –more and more eager for the hour of our meeting. (*Grendel* 144)

Now comes the crucial question: why did the novelist choose to highlight the Grendel part of the epic story? First of all, Grendel appears to be the most evil of the three monsters. The other two –Grendel’s mother and the dragon- both have reasons for attacking humans. The former wants to avenge her son’s death while the latter tries to protect his treasure from the Geatish people. “She [Grendel’s mother] is not a symbol for evil nor is she described as God’s enemy,” notes George Clark (Clark 125). Grendel, on the other hand, is depicted as a pure force of darkness and evil in the epic both from Christian and pagan perspectives. Secondly, Grendel is also portrayed in the epic version “as a symbol of unreason, one who wars against all order and loves chaos” (Gardner: 1985, 83). It is explicitly pointed out in the poem that Grendel “fought against right, alone against everyone” (*Beowulf* 30), which is a quality that the novelist associates with Sartre’s ‘perverse rationality’ in a lecture on Anglo-Saxon literature, which he later recounts as the genesis of the novel:



*Grendel* came about because I was teaching an Anglo-Saxon class, and I told the kids that the three monsters in *Beowulf* are very symbolic, and Grendel is symbolic of the rational soul gone perverse. Somebody asked me in class if that was just old-fashioned Christian talk, or was it possible in the modern world for the rational soul to go perverse. And I said “Sure, Sartre’s Existentialism is perverse rationality.” As soon as I said it I realized what I was going to do, and I began planning *Grendel*. (qtd in Winther 83-84)

Thus, Gardner discovered a great device in the figure of the Anglo-Saxon monster Grendel to war against the pervasive notions of Western societies, namely, existentialism, nihilism and absurdism. According to Gardner’s philosophy, however, “nihilism pure and simple is impossible” (Çalışkan 118), so he deliberately makes a nihilistic monster the narrator of the story which, despite the monster’s nihilism, proves to be telling of a meaningful world with delicate patterns. The monster unconsciously turns into the poet of his own version of the story: Grendel himself is the poet of his own narrative, which is identified as the craftsmanship of the artist (Grendel) on account of its structure, confirming the cycles in a meaningful universe. As McWilliams points out:

The elaborative circularity of the novel’s design seems to deny Grendel’s absurdist vision of a world without significant pattern and to confirm Beowulf’s regenerative vision of a world constantly renewing itself. (41)

It should be reiterated once again that the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* consists of three episodes each of which is dedicated to the hero’s struggle against a monster. Furthermore, it is composed as a poem, which is by convention characterised by associative relations. So, there can be no chronological order, or linear advance in poetry. It is not supposed to be a tale on the basis of causality. The theme of the epic text, which is the brevity of life and the quest for immortality through heroic deeds, is presented in a cyclical

pattern in each episode. Gardner identifies the nature of these fights as the eternal fight between good and evil by foregrounding only one part of the epic story. Gardner's version has a very strong external structure consisting of twelve chapters representing the zodiacal signs. As opposed to this external completeness, however, there is a semantic indeterminacy in the novel, arousing interest in the plot which is properly perceived only after the whole text is read. Kept in the background deliberately, the undeniable existence of the epic world, represented by 'the stranger' as well as by the Shaper throughout, is brought to the foreground to salute its former privileged position, though only at the very end. The structure of the novel is, then, determined to a great extent by the former epic version. Grendel still resides in the *Beowulf* text despite his completely outsider status in Gardner's version. So, the monster has to be defeated by the epic hero at the end of the novel in accordance with the structural constraints imposed by the original version. And, once again, this time the epic structure, conquers the novelistic structure. The delicate pattern of cyclicity in Grendel's narrative through its division into twelve chapters representing twelve months becomes evident at the end of the story.

### **3.5 Epic Hero versus Novelistic Hero**

As discussed in the previous sections, these two kinds of heroes are characterised to a great extent by the temporal features of the two genres. The epic hero belongs to a higher world in an absolute past, so he has completed his evolution, and, therefore, appears as an already developed being. This stems from the fact that the epic world is represented as a distanced image from a bygone era as the only source of goodness. Being the core of this

ideal world, the epic hero is the embodiment of goodness. So, the epic hero occupies a plane much higher than the reader's. It is impossible to identify with the epic hero precisely because he is hierarchically above the reader. It is the same with the Anglo-Saxon epic hero Beowulf, who emerges as a young, but already mature and strong man with prowess:

The hero comes to the Danes as the greatest of mankind in strength, noble and huge. Giant-like, his hand-strength is that of thirty men [. . .] He has been well initiated into warrior manhood and now he appears among the Danes out of heroic philanthropy, offering to settle this thing against Grendel. (Hill 124)

Beowulf's extraordinary strength and heroic nature is revealed early in the story when he depicts his youthful race with Breca at sea. The reader is convinced from the beginning about the hero's both spiritual and physical maturity at such an early age. The Breca episode presents the epic hero as an already developed character who cannot be matched by anybody else with respect to his mental and physical capacity as well as devotion to the values of his heroic world. For the hero defends Breca during the swimming contest against whales and creatures at the bottom of the sea day and night at the cost of risking his own life, pointing to the fact that the hero has a strong sense of friendship and loyalty and a capacity for daring acts. Before this episode, Beowulf introduces his heroic disposition to the Danish king in a way that arouses veneration in the reader:

In my youth I have undertaken many notable exploits. I heard about the Grendel affair in my native country; for seamen relate that this great hall stands empty and useless to all once the sun sets below the horizon. So the best and wisest among my countrymen urged me to visit you, King Hrothgar,

because they knew of my vast strength. They were eye-witnesses of it when, stained with the blood of my adversaries, I emerged from a fight in which I destroyed an entire family of giants –capturing five of them- besides killing, by night, a number of sea-monsters. (*Beowulf* 36)

The episode quoted above makes it evident to the reader that Beowulf is no ordinary man: “In epic, the achievements of the hero reap glory and honor to which [. . .] our essential response is awe” (Greenfield 15). Apparently, the reader cannot identify with Beowulf, who “is leagues beyond them [his people] and beyond us [. . .] in possessing the grip of thirty men” (Greenfield 13). The only attitude toward the hero, therefore, is awe:

The admiration we feel for the hero of drama should not be confused with the awe the epic hero inspires. Admiration arises when we can identify with the hero and his actions; awe, when we regard the exploits of a superior being. [. . .] Beowulf is solidly entrenched in the ethical codes of the heroic worlds they inhabit. We view with awe, more than with admiration, (Greenfield 16).

Another quality of the epic hero is the fact that he is fully externalised mainly because he has no inner world. The delineation of the epic hero and his essence perfectly coincide with each other. There is no gap at all between how he is presented and his reality, being one and the same throughout the story from youth to old age. So, the epic hero realises all his potential despite the brevity of life. It is no surprise when, towards the end of the story, Beowulf, now an old king, prepares to fight a dragon to save his people. The same fire for glory and heroism is still burning in the hero even in the wake of his death for he also receives a fatal wound when killing the dragon. The dragon episode is a profound evidence of this quality of the epic hero, whose achievements are still indispensable to the well-being of his people. Therefore, there is no future for the epic hero beyond the limits of the text. He

is not meant to experience more since he has already experienced everything that he could by the end of the story. Of course, he is immortalised in art as well as in the memory of his people.

Lastly, it should be noted that the epic hero by nature is totally devoid of any sense of humour and mockery. For nothing in the epic world is a matter of laughter. There is, of course, a sense of joy at heroic achievements, however, it has nothing to do with the element of humour, which is peculiar only to the novelistic genres being identified with the laughter of the common people. So, Beowulf's discourse is quite a dignified and serious one, which enhances the sacredness of this world.

The novelistic hero, on the other hand, is brought onto the same temporal plane with the present reader, which renders him no more than an ordinary man. The novelistic Grendel is the representative of modern philosophy characterised by absurdism. The monster and the contemporary reader occupy the same value plane, which inevitably enables an identification between the two. Gardner deliberately allows the reader to identify with the novelistic monster so as to show the low abode of existentialism in which the two find themselves. The novelistic hero, therefore, resides on the same low level of the present reader.

One direct result of this living contact with the present is that the novelistic hero has to develop through experience in the course of time. So, the novelistic Grendel is caught in an unceasing oscillation between two opposing worldviews throughout. One is represented by the ideal world of the Shaper while the other by the mechanical one of the dragon. Yet, even after his encounter with the notorious dragon, Grendel still yields to the former vision of the world from time to time. The virginal beauty of Queen Wealtheow effects the same

emotions as the Shaper's poetry in Grendel, who is once again tormented by the possibility that the universe might be worth living in and existence might be meaningful. Grendel, however, calls such moments "monstrous trick[s] against reason" (86), or, against his 'perverse rationality' which keeps telling him that there is no point in the budding trees, copulating animals, and "the shadows [which] lengthen and shorten as if by plan" (*Grendel* 121). And still he does not refrain from admitting that the beautiful and innocent lady "tore [me] apart as once the Shaper's song had done" (87). He learns, suffers, becomes enlightened only within the still evolving present; he experiences his own present. For instance, Grendel has never thought of his identity as the 'evil brother' until the Shaper delineates him so. To his surprise and disappointment he finds out his identity defined by man, pointing to the fact that the novelistic hero goes through experiences to achieve maturity:

He told of an ancient feud between two brothers which split all the world between darkness and light. And I, Grendel, was the dark side, he said in effect. The terrible race God cursed.

I believed him. Such was the power of the Shaper's harp! I stood wriggling my face, letting tears down my nose, grinding my fists into my streaming eyes, (*Grendel* 43).

Grendel has a capacity for mental agony, then, which renders him more flesh-and-blood, and even amiable at times. Unlike the epic hero Beowulf, who is in complete harmony with his external characterisation in accordance with the uniqueness of his heroic world, the novelistic Grendel has an inner consciousness, which is even characterised by a spiritual dilemma. The monster has an intellect suffering from duality: "I hung balanced, a creature of

two minds” (*Grendel* 95). Just as the solitary consciousness of Raskolnikov<sup>11</sup> “becomes a field of battle for others’ voices,” so does that of Grendel by becoming an arena where the ideal world of the Shaper and the mechanical one of the dragon clash (Bakhtin: 1984, 88). The novelistic hero, therefore, has psychological depth, which requires a three-dimensional representation. The reader frequently wanders through the inner world of the monster who is caught in an interior dialogue as would be expected from a truly novelistic hero in the Bakhtinian sense. The inner depth of *Grendel* inevitably results in a dialogue within his mind. The two conflicting value systems set side by side in the monster’s mind result in a remarkable example of interior dialogue:

It was a cold-blooded lie that a god had lovingly made the world and set out the sun and moon as lights to land-dwellers, that brothers had fought, that one of the races was saved, the other cursed. Yet he, the old Shaper, might make it true, by the sweetness of his harp, his cunning trickery. It came to me with a fierce jolt that I wanted it. As they did too, though vicious animals, cunning, cracked with theories. I wanted it, yes! Even if I must be the outcast, cursed by the rules of his hideous fable. (*Grendel* 47)

What renders the monster easy to identify with is also his undeniable capacity for humour and self-mockery, which turns the monster into an almost likable character. *Grendel* seems to enjoy himself despite his isolation from the epic grandeur. *Grendel*’s mockery of epic values is also implicit in his actions. His ridicule of Unferth’s attempt at heroism is particularly interesting in the sense that it reveals the spiritual failure of the contemporary reader, too, who cannot help joining in the monster’s rather vicious laughter. *Grendel* deliberately refrains from killing Unferth in order not to raise him to the rank of heroes, a

---

<sup>11</sup>He is one of Dostoevskian characters who are favoured by Bakhtin for their mental duality. *Grendel*’s interior dialogues revealing his spiritual conflict are identical with those of Raskolnikov.

tactic which results in a sense of humour that tempts the reader, quite intriguingly, into feeling sympathy for the monster's blasphemy:

He [Unferth] lives on, bitter, feebly challenging my midnight raids [. . .], crazy with shame that he alone is always spared, and furiously jealous of the dead. I laugh when I see him. He throws himself at me, or he cunningly sneaks up behind, sometimes in disguise –a goat, a dog, a sickly old woman- and I roll on the floor with laughter. So much for heroism. (*Grendel* 78)

As opposed to the seriousness of Hrothgar's men, Grendel is endowed with a wry sense of humour, mocking both himself and the representatives of the epic world as well as the animate things around him which stupidly seek meaning in existence in an essentially hostile and indifferent universe:

Grendel, a giant, bearlike monster, is doomed to wander the earth alone, eternally alienated from human connection. In *Beowulf*, he is merely a symbol of darkness, chaos, and death. In *Grendel*, Gardner creates a fully realized character –a monster with a sense of humor and gift for language. He narrates his own version of the events recorded in *Beowulf* and reveals himself not only as a grotesque figure, but as a tragicomic poet whose suffering elicits sympathy, despite the often horrible nature of his actions. (Howell 61)

Grendel is actually sickened by the “brainless budding trees,” “brattling birds,” as it is springtime when there is a general sense of joy and regeneration (*Grendel* 2). Copulating animals, budding trees, joyful humans and a vigorous earth anger the monster with their ceaseless effort to insert meaning into an essentially meaningless universe. According to the existentialist monster it is only the mechanical repetition of the same pattern over and over again, which impresses only the stupid creatures around himself.



Despite his insistence on the blind mechanism of the universe, however, Grendel cannot help noticing “the old lake hissing and gurgling behind [me], whispering patterns of words [my] sanity resists” (4), and he fears that the chasms might call upon him to jump “in a lunatic fit of religion,” all trying to convert him from disbelief into belief (5). The Shaper’s poetry effects the same feelings in the monster, whose ‘perverse rationality,’ however, keeps telling him that it is all illusion. Even though Grendel is bitterly wounded by his delineation in this heroic world, he is profoundly impressed by heroism, and sacredness depicted in the Shaper’s lays. The power of his poetry, as his name (Shaper) explicitly suggests, evokes veneration even in the monster, whose spiritual oscillation creates a sense of suspense and interest in the plot related to the evolution of the novelistic hero:

When he finished, the hall was quiet as a mound. I too was silent, my ear pressed tight against the timbers. Even to me, incredibly, he had made it all seem true and very fine. [. . .] They would seize the oceans, the farthest stars, the deepest secret rivers in Hrothgar’s name! Men wept like children: children sat stunned. It went on and on, a fire more dread than any visible fire. (*Grendel* 36)

Similarly, Grendel is touched to the core by the virginal beauty and self-sacrifice of Queen Wealtheow. Lamenting his negative identity as a permanent outsider, Grendel begs for mercy, as he admits that the lady “tore [me] apart as once the Shaper’s song had done” (87). So, the reader tends to pity the monster particularly in his predicament. The sight of a monster having his foot caught in a crack while wandering in the forest, helplessly bellowing in pain is sure to evoke a sense of pity in the reader, who cannot help sympathising with him:

“I’m going to die,” I wailed. “Poor Grendel! Poor old Mama!” I wept and sobbed. “Poor Grendel will hang here and starve to death,” I told myself, “and no one will ever even miss him!” [. . .] I thought of the cool, indifferent eyes of the others. I shrieked in fear; still no one came. (14)

However, desperately deprived of any dialogue and connection with the rest of the universe, Grendel decides to yield to the nihilistic vision of the dragon, growing more and more hostile to the human race toward the end of the novel. His complete lack of philanthropy and unrelenting disbelief in love and order is reflected in his intention of killing Wealtheow at one point in the novel. Grendel appears to be conquered by nihilism so much so that there is no point in either killing the queen or letting her live: “I changed my mind. It would be meaningless, killing her. As meaningless as letting her live. It would be, for me, mere pointless pleasure, an illusion of order for this one frail, foolish flicher-flash” (*Grendel* 94). The reader, therefore, ceases to feel sympathy for Grendel mainly because this is the culmination of the monster’s nihilistic philosophy. So, it should be noted that the novelistic hero is not a cartoon character but rather a living one that goes through various experiences. Grendel, too, is a round character who changes and develops throughout the story. Having introduced the novelistic Grendel as a rather amiable character to tease the reader into an identification with the monster, Gardner gradually unfolds the ugly essence of the hero on account of the latter’s voluntary lapse into nihilism:

As the novel progresses, Gardner begins to undermine the reader’s sympathy for Grendel in a number of ways. For one thing, his nihilism becomes more and more frenetic, shown, for instance, in his impulse to destroy Wealtheow, one unquestioned source of good in the novel. In Gardner’s own description, Grendel starts out as “a cheerful nihilist,” but after a while he “begins to *dance* on his lack of faith, and play games,” and then he becomes more and more a real monster. (Winther 87)

The novelistic hero, then, displays a rather complicated nature with an inner consciousness. The monster ultimately acknowledges the power of the epic world when he composes a song about the walls. At the end, he is made to admit that the wall exists too, apart from himself, though he has insisted so far saying: "I alone exist" (16). Grendel now feels the hardness of the wall as well when Beowulf dashes his head against it, an event which he chooses to call "accident": " 'Poor Grendel's had an accident,' I whisper. '*So may you all*'" (152). Therefore, the monster's final curse turns into a blessing because this 'accident' becomes his spiritual salvation; his soul is saved by his final act of faith in Beowulf's values, pointing to the fact that the novelistic hero becomes enlightened, and therefore, reaches maturity at the end of the story.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

John Gardner's *Grendel* is a re-writing of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* in the novel form. There arises a dialogue between the two texts which can be scrutinised on the basis of the Bakhtinian genre theory as examples of the epic and the novel. As the previous chapters have attempted to show, the two texts display all the generic characteristics put forward by Bakhtin.

It should be noted that *Beowulf* represents a purely monologic world where there is a conflict between good and evil which is resolved in favour of the former. The purified world of the epic cannot stand any outsider as the representative of evil. So, there is no chance for Grendelkin to survive in the peaceful atmosphere of the epic community. They have to be destroyed by the epic hero, who is the representative of his heroic world because the centralising power of the centripetal forces pulls everything to the centre, where the inhabitants of this privileged world happily live while the forces of evil are destroyed. Likewise, the outsider status of the monster Grendel, associated with death and darkness, is established from the beginning through such epithets as "a black shadow of death," "the malign outcast," "the enemy of man" and so forth (30). It should come as no surprise to the reader that the wicked monster is killed by the hero in the heart (Heorot) of the epic world. Peace and order is re-established until another evil-doer launches attacks on Hrothgar's people. It is of particular interest that the epic poet, too, rejoices over the moral victory of the hero, announcing the death of the monster after a long period of war against mankind:

It was now that Grendel, the enemy of God who had wantonly committed numberless atrocities against the human race, discovered that his bodily strength was of no use when the valiant kinsman of Hygelac [Beowulf] had got hold of him by the claw. (*Beowulf* 46)

The sacredness of this ideal world can be depicted only through a dignified language. So, epic discourse is cut off from the vulgarity and profanation of everyday discourse. It must be the venerated language of the nobility. Since it reflects a hierarchically higher, and unified world, epic discourse appears to be quite authoritarian and dogmatic. It is supposed to teach moral lessons to the reader, so the tone is serious and devoid of any sense of humour. The inhabitants of this world never resort to humour or mockery since nothing in the solemn atmosphere of the epic is a matter of laughter.

According to Bakhtin, the epic covers up real-life multiplicity which he calls heteroglossia; a term he coined to refer to this feature of real-life discourse. The epic world is deceitfully unified and monologic. Despite its two voices, i.e. Christian and pagan, *Beowulf* is purely monologic. For both of the perspectives in *Beowulf* celebrate a single worldview which finds its meaning in a heroic life. Therefore, the preservation of a monoglot world is successfully achieved in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*.

The novel, on the other hand, is most favoured by Bakhtin on account of its multiplicity contributing to heteroglossia in everyday discourse. Gardner's *Grendel* exemplifies all those novelistic features discussed by Bakhtin. First of all, it presents a dialogic relationship between the two opposing worlds created by the novelist: the epic world represented by Beowulf and the Shaper versus the novelistic world of Grendel. The monster

narrates his own version of the *Beowulf* story, so the novelistic world is foregrounded. Despite the monster's scornful attitude at times, the epic world presented primarily by the Shaper is always there with all its grandeur.

The hierarchical status of this mythical world is reflected also in its authoritative and didactic discourse. It is supposed to be the only future model for humanity to seek. Therefore, the moral lessons to be given to the audience are in abundance in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. Being cut off from others' discourse, epic discourse, reflecting the monologic and sacred epic world, imposes its belief system on the reader, who is not in a position to reply. It is just before the fatal fight between Beowulf and Grendel that the epic poet makes this comment revealing the hierarchical stance the epic world assumes:

But God gave the luck of battle to the Geats. He furnished them with help, so that they all overcame their enemy through the skill and strength of one man. *It is sure that almighty God has always ruled over the human race.* (*Beowulf* 43, my emphasis)

The major theme of the epic, which is a yearning for immortality through heroic exploits to overcome the brevity of life is observed in the other episodes of the *Beowulf* story as well. The whole text underlines the fact that the sacredness and purity of the epic world is sealed with its inviolability. The epic is characterised by an internal wholeness, which does not require external conclusiveness. Each part of *Beowulf*, therefore, can be treated as a whole.

Gardner's *Grendel*, on the other hand, proves to be a genuine example of multiplicity in the novel as described by Bakhtin. With the change in the temporal order and the narrative

perspective of the epic story, the reader begins to see the events from the nihilistic monster's perspective. Gardner teases the reader toward an identification with Grendel, who is presented as a humorous character. In spite of his status as an outsider, Grendel seems to be capable of laughter and humour, which renders him an almost amiable character. His novelistic discourse is characterised by profanation and vulgarity in the prosaic world of the novel. So, Grendel is observed often to have a language characterised by profanity and obscenity.

Being transported to the zone of maximal proximity to the present, *Grendel* ceases to evoke awe and piety. For the novel is identified with the laughter of common people. Zero distance is what shatters the sacredness and fear which is found in the epic. Having inner consciousness, the novelistic Grendel is presented as a three-dimensional figure. The reader is admitted into the mind of the monster, which is frequently caught in an interior dialogue. For the monster suffers from a spiritual dilemma between the Shaper's vision of a world where existence in a meaningful universe is possible and the dragon's vision of a mechanical world. His oscillation is reflected in the multiplicity of worldviews, languages and styles, pointing to the fact that the novel is characterised by the decentralising power of the centrifugal forces.

As opposed to the epic hero, who is presented as an already mature and developed character, the novelistic Grendel is as incomplete as the reader himself. His process of maturation takes place gradually only after he goes through some experiences. So, he starts out as a "cheerful nihilist," grows more and more frenetically nihilistic under the spell of the dragon, and finally he is made to acknowledge the existence of the wall, when Beowulf bangs his head against it, realising that there is something apart from his solitary being.

Grendel's final act of faith in the world of *Beowulf* marks the point of Grendel's awareness and enlightenment, "a conversion," in Gardner's words, as the culmination of the monster's spiritual progress (qtd in Winther 174).

The novel in general, and *Grendel* in particular, is also characterised by semantic indeterminacy versus structural wholeness; just the opposite of what is observed in the epic. The *Grendel* story unfolds in a still evolving present. There is linearity; a steady advance of the narrative requiring a plot. So, Grendel's narrative is divided into twelve chapters each of which refers to a zodiacal sign. The reader, then, has to reach the end of the narrative to understand the story because of its incompleteness on the semantic level. Thus, in *Grendel*, there is a realistic representation of the flow of time. Time seems to be frozen, however, in both *Beowulf* and the meadhall, Heorot, as the representative of the epic world in Gardner's version. The cyclicity in Grendel's narrative, however, remains quite unbeknownst to the monster himself, who throughout denies any meaning to the motion of stars and seasonal change. "The sun walks mindlessly overhead, the shadows lengthen and shorten as if by plan," says Grendel (*Grendel* 121). However, it is the novelist's vision of connectedness, his belief in a meaningful universe, which turns the monster into the poet of his own narrative. For the monster's narrative reveals a delicate cyclicity of the zodiac consistent with the order and pattern in the universe itself: "Gardner disagrees with Grendel; the pattern of cyclical change *is* a meaningful pattern" (Winther 173). The kind of fiction the novelist offers is the one which contributes to the preservation of high values that humanity should endeavour to establish. *Grendel* should be viewed as a part of this endeavour by the artist:



Thus the value of great fiction, we begin to suspect, is not just that it entertains us or distracts us from our troubles, not just that it broadens our knowledge of people and places, but also that it helps us to know what we believe, reinforces those qualities that are noblest in us, leads us to feel uneasy about our faults and limitations. [. . .] the ultimate value of fiction is its morality. (Gardner: 1985, 31)

The novel version of the story is characterised by two different worldviews; belief in a meaningful world represented predominantly by the Shaper, a blind court poet, (and Gardner the priest-poet outside the text) and disbelief in order and meaning represented by the Dragon (and Sartre's existentialism). The result confirms the Bakhtinian understanding of the two genres: a novel with multiple voices caught in a truly Bakhtinian dialogue. Grendel throughout enters into a dialogic relationship both with the Shaper as a character independent of his consciousness and with the Shaper as his 'good-self' inside his mind. It should be emphasised that there are some critics who argue that the Shaper has only symbolic existence as Grendel's good self.

Gardner makes use of modern thought in the figure of the monster to reply to the Beowulf story, however, it turns out that the latter's power is reinforced through the defeat of the former. Gardner restores the epic world to its original privileged position at the end of the novel, when the unrelenting nihilism of the monster gives way to the acknowledgement of the hero's ideal world:

Ultimately Grendel is defeated by Beowulf, who kills him in the name of the positive values that Grendel has scorned: [. . .] "I alone exist," Grendel claims. "Feel the wall," says Beowulf, and the pain in Grendel's head forces him to recognise that maybe the wall exists also. (Winther 87)

Bearing in mind the Gardnerian vision of the world, one which finds meaning in the high values of humanity like Goodness, Beauty, Truth, Faith, Order, and Art, the reader observes the monster's final conversion: he realises that the wall exists, too, apart from his solitary being, at the end. So, Gardner's version is far from being a parody of *Beowulf*, as the subtlety of the former's irony has misled many. On the contrary, it wholly agrees with the epic version as a confirmation of its heroic values. In this sense, therefore, Gardner's novel turns the Bakhtinian axiology upside down by exalting the epic world with all its uniqueness, single worldviewedness and its unifying, centralising, connecting power. The idea of connectedness can be also traced in Gardner's commitment to the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead's theory of organicism:

Adopting Alfred North Whitehead's vision of the universe as an indivisible, evolving, and organic process, Gardner affirmed –as an act of faith- that all life is ordered by its essential “connectedness.” And he repeatedly affirmed humanity's need for connectedness in reaction to the ideas of Sartre, who argued that the self was always self-conscious, and therefore irrevocably “alienated” (or disconnected) from all reality. As Gardner told the novelist Charles Johnson, in explaining the ideas behind *Grendel* and other novels, “connectedness is something you feel or don't feel,” and not to feel connectedness is the “ultimate tragedy.” (Howell 11)

Gardner's *Grendel* is actually saved from this ‘ultimate tragedy’ in his final act of faith in the existence of the walls, which is of symbolic significance. The ultimate meaning of the novel, therefore, lies in its confirmation of the epic values in the novelistic world, which, despite its ostensibly paradoxical nature, actually agrees with the Bakhtinian genre theory. For the novelist has been able to create two worlds to exalt one (the epic world of *Beowulf*) while condemning the other (the novelistic world of *Grendel*) only in the world of the novel with its multiplicity. *Grendel* represents the prevalent ills of twentieth century

philosophy, namely existentialism. Gardner actually condemns the absurdism of his age through the monster's defeat, which is, therefore, "the defeat of Sartre's existentialism by Whitehead's organicism, of solipsism by connectedness, of sterility by creativity, of cold intellectualism by artistic imagination" (Çalışkan 118).

Gardner reminds modern people of the real capacity of humanity, which finds its roots in a utopian past; a golden age. Art is an instrument to realise this capacity, since "the value of art lies not in its ability to describe things as they are but in its capacity for celebrating man's possibilities" (Winther 21). So, the artist in his very act of writing contributes to the celebration of "man's possibilities," and therefore, he himself is 'saved' as well.

The driving force underlying the motive of the novelist can be best explained through the irony of the novel. Why does Gardner make the monster narrator of his own version of the *Beowulf* story revealing a perfect structure at the very end? The answer lies in Gardner's declaration of war, in his novels, against the prevalent notions of modern thought: existentialism, and nihilism. Gardner recreates the monster of the epic story as a nihilistic though humorous character recounting the events of the *Beowulf* story from a contemporary perspective. Identifying with the humorous, and essentially suffering, monster on different levels, the reader is actually reduced to the level of the creature. *Grendel* is a celebration of epic values, which show humanity the (ideal) future direction to march towards: "For Gardner, then, *Beowulf* is a poem about the validity of a heroic ethic, faith, and mutability" (Winther 177). The novelistic Grendel's defeat, at the end, turns into his salvation from meaninglessness. His final act of faith announces his renunciation of the dragon's vision of

absurdism, which has kept telling the monster that it is all 'illusion'. However, Grendel finally acknowledges that it is not; on the contrary, it is as hard as the wall itself.

In the contemporary world, however, the celebration of the lost epic order becomes possible only in the world of the novel characterised by multiplicity. Gardner is enabled to salute the ideal world of the epic only on the regenerative soil of the novel, which is appropriate for any alien discourse. Gardner's *Grendel*, therefore, is a confirmation of the Bakhtinian genre theory even though it celebrates epic values. The novelist creates two distinctly different worlds: the epic world in the background re-establishing itself only at the end, and the novelistic world in the foreground being defeated by the former, representing the defeat of Sartre's existentialism by belief in moral truth. The eternal struggle between good and evil –regardless of the representatives who can be Hrothgar's people and Grendel, or, moral values and Sartre's existentialism- urges the novelist to stand by the former through his act of writing. *Grendel* is an attempt to remind twentieth century people that they should support the former in this struggle. For *Grendel* is *literally* a re-writing of *Beowulf*: it is actually an epic poem masquerading as a novel. Thus, Gardner reverses the Bakhtinian process by poeticising the prosaic world of the novel, for the monster's narrative proves to be a poem of a cyclical pattern.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Beowulf*. Trans. David Wright. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1969.

Bakhtin, Michail M. "Epic and Novel," and "Discourse in the Novel". In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Chavkin, Allan. Ed. *Conversations with John Gardner*. U.S.A.: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.

Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. Trans. John Buchanan-Brown. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. U.S.A.: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.

Clark, George. *Beowulf*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990.

Çalışkan, Sevda. "Is this *the* Grendel?". In *22nd All-Turkey English Literature Conference Proceedings: Rewriting in/and English Literature*. Konya: The British Council and Selçuk University Press, 2002, 108-119.

Gardner, John. *Grendel*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. *On Moral Fiction*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1985.

Godden, Malcolm and Michael Lapidge. Eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Greenfield, Stanley B. *Hero and Exile: The Art of Old English Poetry*. George H. Brown. Ed. London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1989.

Hill, John M. *The Cultural World in Beowulf*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1995.

Howell, John M. *Understanding John Gardner*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.

Leyerle, John. "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*". In *Beowulf: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Joseph F. Tuso. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975, 158-171.

McWilliams, Dean. *John Gardner*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.

Robinson, Fred C. "Apposed Word Meanings and Religious Perspectives". In *Modern Critical Interpretations: Beowulf*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, 81-109.

Stanley, E. G. *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1975 and repr. 2000.

Tolkien, J.R.R. "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics". In *Beowulf: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Joseph F. Tuso. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975, 105-113.

Vice, Sue. *Introducing Bakhtin*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Winther, Per. *The Art of John Gardner: Instruction and Exploration*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Wrenn, C. L. Ed. *Beowulf*. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1953.

Wright, David. "Introduction". In *Beowulf*. Trans. David Wright. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1969, 9-19.