Beowulf in the Light of Bakhtinian Genre Theory

MERVE AYDOĞDU
Middle East Technical University, Ankara
Turkey

Abstract:

    The aim of this paper is to examine the generic qualities of the eighth century Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf within the framework of Bakhtin's genre theory. The analysis limits the theoretical basis to the seminal essay "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel" penned by him. As Bakhtin states, the epic represents a closed world system located in the absolute past, which calls for a respectful attitude since, in the hierarchical relationship between the reader and the epic world, the distanced ideal world of the epic holds the privileged position. Within this framework, this paper argues that Beowulf, as the portrayal of a monologic world hierarchically placed in the absolute past distanced from the present time, displays all the generic features proposed by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.

Key words: Bakhtin, genre theory, epic, Beowulf

Bakhtin, one of the most prominent literary theorists of the 20th century, in his essay "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel" discusses the generic features of the epic as a genre at length. In his view, the epic is a genre "that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated" (3). It is totally cut off from the present; it does not have the capacity to offer new ideas; there is nothing new that the epic can come up with. It is "closed as a circle" (19); it is an "already completely finished, a congealed and half-

moribund genre" (14). The reason why it is qualified a *completed* genre originates from the fact that the epic world is distanced from the present with an epic distance and has been bequeathed to us as an already finished form. As a consequence, the generic borders of the epic are rather strict and unmodifiable; it is "a hardened and no longer flexible" (3) genre with an already established canon of its own. In order words, studying it is "analogous to studying dead languages" (3) which renders it relatively easier when compared to the study of novel. As regards to the epic, the task of the literary critic becomes easier because the epic as a long-constituted genre does not contain any loopholes; "it suffices unto itself" (16). Besides, considering the relationship between the reader and the epic, the latter is on a higher level; the epic statement requires piety from the reader. Bakhtin emphasizes the hierarchical difference between two planes 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. (14)

At this point, what needs to be underlined is the fact that the epic belongs to *high* literature, which is about people of noble origin, so it is located in an absolute ideal past when everything was good: "all the really good things (i.e., the "first" things) occur *only* in this past. The epic absolute past is the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times as well" (15). Thus, because the epic time was the time of "the founders, of beginnings and peak times" (15), it demands "a pious attitude toward itself" (16).

In the same vein, due to its sacred structure, the epic does not welcome multiple voices. The epic world is monoglot in which there is no voice but that of the epic poet; that is, the epic narration presents single worldview. Such single-voiced nature of the epic discourse does not allow for plurality of voices nor

does it enable dialogue, which is found in the novel, to flourish. It only accepts the poet's voice while closing itself for *foreign* discourses. The epic is characterized by a unitary language because, having adopted a monoglot world, it can only deliver its monologic nature through single language. That is, in the epic world everybody speaks the same language. The inhabitants of the epic world also have to employ the language of the poet himself because such a unitary system is compulsory for the poetical style which is of vital importance for the epic: "the unity of the language system and the unity (uniqueness) of the poet's individuality as reflected in his language and speech . . . are indispensable prerequisites of poetic style" (264). By the same token, as the epic world is located in the remote past, it does not allow for the joyful laughable everyday language: "[i]n its style, tone and manner of expression, epic discourse is infinitely far removed from discourse of a contemporary about a contemporary addressed to contemporaries" (13-4). Instead, the epic discourse is the lofty language of a serious distanced enclosed world.

In this context, the idea of temporality turns out to be one of the defining features of the epic: it is situated in an 'absolute' past without any connections with the present time. It is absolute for "it is not relative to the present or to the future; it contains within itself, as it were, the entire fullness of time" (19). It is because of this self-sufficiency that neither the poet nor the audience can find a place in the epic world for himself; it is portrayed as an insurmountable cloistered distant picture to which none of the aforesaid figures have access. Neither the poet nor the audience can associate himself with the characters or situations depicted in the epic world since it is located on a higher plane than theirs. In other words, the epic distance is created as "a temporally valorised hierarchical category" (18). As the epic distance is indicative of completeness, Bakhtin continuously stresses its "ossified generic skeleton" (8). Furthermore, due to the profound certitude of the absolute epic distance, "[t]here is no place in the

epic world for any open-endedness, indecision, indeterminacy" (16). From the beginning, the audience is given insight into the events and characters; thus, there is nothing more to interpret beyond what is already provided. What is included in the epic world is displayed as a distant image which, therefore, lacks the "impulse to continue" (32) from the point of view of the audience. It also stems from the fact that "the structure of the whole is repeated in each part, and each part is complete and circular like the whole" (31); that is, the epic is episodic in its constitution.

The hardened entity of the epic world illustrates the condition of the characters in the epic as well. Just like the epic world is complete in itself, the epic hero is represented as a fully developed character. He does not undergo any spiritual development throughout the epic because he has already been mature from the beginning. Therefore, the hero cannot live outside the text as he is unable to adapt himself to the circumstances of "a zone of maximal proximity" (23) prevalent in the novel. In the absolute past, the epic hero is endowed with superhuman godlike traits so he is situated on a higher level than an ordinary human being rendering it impossible for the audience to identify himself with the hero. The epic hero is also completely externalized devoid of psychological depth: how he is seen is equal to what he has within; he does not suffer from mental breakdowns; he lives in harmony with his environment. He uses serious and noble language appropriate for the sacrosanct nature of the epic world. As Bakhtin states,

> [t]he 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 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. (34)

Within the boundaries of the epic world, the epic hero becomes everything that he can become; that is, he uses his potential to the fullest and realizes himself.

Within the theoretical framework elucidated so far, it is safe to claim that the features of the epic genre proposed by Bakhtin fit in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. To begin with, Bakhtin repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the epic world is located in an absolute past, and thus it has come down to the reader as a completed genre. It is this quality that makes the epic a "half-moribund" (14) genre; the epic world is represented as secluded from the present with the epic distance, and this is the reason why the epic world cannot be developed further or commented upon. Its subject matter is the ideal past and it is not concerned with the people of the present world. "The epic was never a poem about its own time" (13). Similarly, *Beowulf* is located in an enclosed circle distanced from the present world and populated by kings, queens and warriors to which the ordinary humans are not invited. The epic world, situated on a greater level than the world of the common men, is inviolable and it seeks the courteous attitude of the reader:

> So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
> and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
> We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns. (1-3)

The epic exhibits a solemn and royal world. In *Beowulf*, the epic hero Beowulf arrives at the Danish land with the aim of helping the Danish people as a fully mature man; he saves them from the attacks of the monster Grendel and of Grendel's mother, and finally rescuing his own people from the assaults of the dragon. The epic world is laden with bygone glory and great heroic deeds and the diction employed to express heroism suggests the fact that the epic world is walled off from the present reality for "greatness always makes itself known only to

descendants" (Bakhtin 18). Whatever has occurred in the epic world is entirely over and unreachable anymore. The world of epic "is a world of "beginnings" and "peak times" in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of "firsts" and "bests" (13). *Beowulf*, similarly, begins with the heroic actions of a triumphant Danish king Shield Sheafson:

> There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
> a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.
> This terror of the hall-troops had come far.
> A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
> as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.
> In the end each clan on the outlying coasts
> beyond the whale-road had to yield to him
> and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king. (4-11)

In Beowulf, even from the initial stages, the reader feels the epic distance between the world depicted and the one he dwells in. Heroism is celebrated in the deeds of the epic hero. Similarly, Beowulf is acknowledged by his environment as a superhuman hero; how he views himself and how he is considered by kinsmen coincide, which turns out to be the reason why he is sent to fight with Grendel:

> So every elder and experienced councilman
> among my people supported my resolve
> to come here to you, King Hrothgar,
> because all knew of my awesome strength. (415-8)

Considering the fact that the epic world is the world of peak times and of bests, it is expected of Beowulf to praise himself. He is esteemed and recommended by the others as well. By emphasizing the heroism of Beowulf, the narrative creates a "*valorised* temporal category" (Bakhtin 15) distanced from the everyday reality of the present time. The epic represents a fully-developed and "congealed" (14) world in which the epic hero has also finalized his maturation. The hero comes to the stage in its entire fullness. For instance, Beowulf is depicted as

"highborn and powerful" (*Beowulf* 198), as "the mightiest man on earth" (197).

As stated earlier, the epic world does not welcome the plurality of voices. The epic world is monoglot and, similarly, *Beowulf* is completely deaf to dialogism. It celebrates a single worldview, so it is monologic. However, what should be emphasized is that, contrary the single-voiced feature of the epic, *Beowulf* deviates from it due to its double-voicedness at one point. The epic is dialogic only in the sense that it reflects the commingling of the pagan and Christian worldviews as the original manuscript of the epic is thought to have been translated by the Christian clergymen. Still, however, such double-voicedness codifies a single worldview -heroism-, and both pagan and Christian system of thought exalt the epic world declining beastliness embodied in the monster Grendel. The pagan and Christian perspectives converge and create a single worldview in the sense that they refuse all kinds of evil. As Robinson puts forth,

> 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. (149)

Likewise, the epic hero Beowulf is portrayed either as an almost Christ-like figure appointed by God "to sail the swan's road and seek out that king [who is] the famous prince who needed defenders" (*Beowulf* 200-1) to "proffer [his] wholehearted help and counsel" (277-78) or as a genuinely pagan hero seeking immortality via fame and glory that he will gain through his heroic deeds because "[w]hen a warrior is gone, that [immortality] will be his best and only bulwark" (1388-9). Thus, much as it includes double voices of paganism and Christianity, *Beowulf* celebrates a single worldview of heroism, thereby exhibiting one of the fundamental

characteristics of the epic from a Bakhtinian perspective. And, indeed, the only ideology kept from the beginning till the end is heroism embodied by Beowulf. Everybody in the epic world, except for the jealous Unferth, recognizes and celebrates Beowulf's heroic nature. The guard at the Danish coast, for example, instantly realizes that Beowulf is an extraordinary man:

> Never before has a force under arms
> disembarked so openly -not bothering to ask
> if the sentries allowed them safe passage
> or the clan had consented. Nor have I seen
> a mightier man-at-arms on this earth
> than the one standing here: unless I am mistaken,
> he is truly noble. This is no mere
> hanger-on in a hero's armour. (244-51)

Wulfgar, the herald of Hrothgar, introduces him as a man "well born and worthy of respect" (368-9) as well, and, similarly, the epic poet joins in praising Beowulf with an emphasis on his mature nature:

> 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. (78)

It is noteworthy that even Grendel, though it is an outcast, appreciates Beowulf's extraordinary power as "foremost and strongest in the days of this life" (789):

> The captain of evil discovered himself
> in a handgrip harder than anything
> he had ever encountered in any man
> on the face of the earth. Every bone in his body
> quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape.
> He was desperate to flee to his den and hide
> with the devil's litter, for in all his days
> he had never been clamped or cornered like this. (749-56)

In other words, each character in the epic world acknowledges the heroism represented by Beowulf, which is the reflection of the monoglot worldview to be found in the epic. Even though *Beowulf* demonstrates both pagan and Christian points of view, and it might seem to be double-voiced, eventually, both sides defend a unified worldview -heroism- epitomized in the character of Beowulf:

> 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)

Such a unified worldview immediately asks for a unified language and style in compliance with the nature of the epic world in which each character is expected to speak the same dignified, lofty language. For instance, in *Beowulf*, even the coast guard, uses such a solemn language when he questions Beowulf and his warriors. Although he is merely a guard, the man is capable of detecting Beowulf's heroic disposition and employs rhetorical language. The following excerpt is illustrative of how he expresses what he thinks of him in a quite serious and respectful manner:

> What kind of men are you who arrive
> rigged out for combat in your coats of mail,
> sailing here over the sea-lanes
> in your steep-hulled boat? I have been stationed
> as lookout on this coast for a long time
> . . .
> Nor have a seen a mightier man-at-arms on this earth
> . . .
> So now, before you fare inland
> as interlopers, I have to be informed
> about who you are and where you hail from. (237-54)

An elevated and lofty linguistic style exemplified by the coastguard extends throughout the whole epic. When showing strong emotions such as threat and betrayal, the characters still employ lofty but refined and restrained language. For instance, even when Beowulf is replying to the verbal attacks of the jealous Unferth who tries to humiliate him, he makes use of a noble discreet language without vulgar vocabulary:

> Now I cannot recall
> any fight you entered, Unferth,
> that bears comparison. I don't boast when I say
> that neither you nor Breca were ever much
> celebrated for swordsmanship
> or for facing danger on the field of battle.
> You killed your own kith and kin,
> so for all your cleverness and quick tongue,
> You will suffer damnation in the depths of hell.
> The fact is, Unferth, if you were truly
> as keen or courageous as you claim to be,
> Grendel would never have got away with
> such unchecked atrocity, attacks on your king,
> havoc in Heorot and horrors everywhere. (582-94)

Beowulf displays a similar elevated manner when relating his plans about how to face with Grendel to the people at the feast hall. He does not abandon using sublime style while he directly challenges the monster and boasts of himself:

> He knows he can trample down you Danes
> to his heart's content, humiliate and murder
> without fear of reprisal. But he will find me different.
> I will show him how Geats shape to kill
> in the heat of battle. Then whoever wants to
> may go bravely to mead, when morning light,
> scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south
> and bring another daybreak to the world. (599-606)

Another instance where Beowulf uses lofty language is when he is betrayed by his warriors (except for Wiglaf) during the fight with the dragon. While Beowulf's men do the most unacceptable

deed in the heroic world -treachery-, the narrator, when recounting the event, does not leave using elevated language. Then, in the epic world in which vulgarity is frowned upon, it is not only characters but the narrator uses lofty language as well:

> No help or backing was to be had then
> from his high-born comrades; that hand-picked troop
> broke ranks and ran for their lives
> to the safety of the wood. (2596-99)

Besides, the final assertion that 'blood must always be thicker than water' creates an epic distance between the epic world and the audience. Such a stance is not concerned with the contemporary reality; on the contrary, it epitomizes the grandeur of the epic world which is located on "a temporally valorised hierarchical category" (Bakhtin 18). Besides, the role of the narrator is important in the sense that he creates an epic distance by using the third-person narrative which makes it impossible for the reader to find himself a place within the represented epic world.

The fact that the epic world is positioned on a superior level is manifested from the very beginning when the narrator demands pious attitude from the reader towards the world he will represent regarding the heroic deeds of the ancestors. The heroic world "a world far removed from our own, boasting values and customs we have left behind or seriously modified" (Hill 152) and the remote past are in harmony with each other because heroism can only be found in the distant past. The epic distance is also illustrated through the extensive use of the past tense form, which is suggestive of the fact that the events the poet relates took place long time ago. Likewise, in fact, "[a]lthough the poem [*Beowulf*] itself is English in language and origin, it deals not with native Englishmen but with their Germanic forebears . . . [thus] the historical period the poem concerns . . . is some centuries before it was written" (Abrams et

al 29)[1]. The assertion verifies the finished nature of the epic world. In the epic, "the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance" (Bakhtin 14). By the same token, within the boundaries of the epic world, there is no linearity but a cyclical movement; thus, newness is not expected of an epic world, the characters repeat the similar heroic deeds all the time within a closed circle. Due to this internal completeness, the reader does not necessarily wonder about the end of the story as he has already been provided with the "whole event" (32) from the beginning. For instance, in *Beowulf*, the narrator does not hesitate to inform the reader that Beowulf will die in his last battle against the dragon. The example suggests that in the epic "plot interest (that is, the condition of not knowing) is impossible" (32).

> Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing
> and racing towards its fate. Yet his shield defended
> the renowned leader's life and limb
> for a shorter time than he meant it to:
> that final day was the first time
> when Beowulf fought and fate denied him
> glory in battle. (2569-75)

The epic is also "indifferent to formal beginnings and can remain incomplete" (Bakhtin 31). *Beowulf* fits in this assertion too. It consists of three episodes each of which recounts Beowulf's fight with Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon, respectively. It is a predetermined struggle between the good and the evil -devoid of the psychological drives of the hero- of which the reader is never suspicious regarding who will be bestowed upon triumph. From the beginning, Grendel is associated with evil while Beowulf stands for goodness

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[1] "The epic, as the specific genre known to us today, has been from the beginning a poem about the past, and the authorial position immanent in the epic and constitutive for it (that is, the position of the one who utters the epic word) is the environment of a man speaking about a past that is to him inaccessible, the reverent point of view of a descendent" (Bakhtin 13)

deserving glory and fame. Thus, "[t]here is no place in the epic world for any open-endedness, indecision, indeterminacy" (Bakhtin 16). While Grendel is listed "among the banished monsters, Cain's clan" (*Beowulf* 105-6) as God's enemy that has to be destroyed, Beowulf is drawn as a well-born and stalwart hero. The conflict between evil vs. goodness is clear in which there is no room for indeterminacy. Even before the battle takes place, indeed, both Hrothgar and Beowulf declare that Beowulf will be triumphant over Grendel, which cancels out 'surprise' on the part of the audience. Hrothgar is sure that God has sent Beowulf to save his people from the horrors of Grendel while Beowulf states that

> I hereby renounce sword and the shelter of the broad shield,
> the heavy war-board: hand-to-hand
> is how it will be, a life-and-death
> fight with the fiend. (436-9)

Indeed, Beowulf soon proves victorious when he kills Grendel and restores the purity of the land at the same time eliminating the evil force that is not suitable for the pure and good epic atmosphere of the best times:

> Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men
> with pain and affliction in former times
> and had given offence also to God
> found that his bodily powers failed him.
> . . .
> The monster's whole
> body was in pain, a tremendous wound
> appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split
> and the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted
> the gory of winning; Grendel was driven
> under the fen-banks, fatally hurt,
> to his desolate lair. His days were numbered,
> the end of his life was coming over him,
> he knew it for certain; and one bloody clash
> had fulfilled the dearest wish of the Danes. (808-23)

Besides, just as Bakhtin contends, the epic world is episodic in nature and there are no definite connections between different episodes in *Beowulf*. Tolkien also puts forth that "[t]he poem lacks steady advance" (108). It should be noted that the episodic structure of the poem renders it cyclical as well. Even though the fight with Grendel in the first episode is not directly related to the battle between Grendel's mother and Beowulf in the second part, the fact that we witness the conflict between good vs. evil shows the cyclical pattern in the epic. Similarly, in the final episode in which Grendel fights with the dragon, the war between good and evil is manifested. In this context, it is impossible to observe cause-effect relationship between the events since each episode is complete in itself and the epic as a whole lacks linearity. As Gardner observes,

> 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. (83)

In this sense, it is safe to assert that in the epic world there is no cause and effect relationship and linearity but internal wholeness in which each episode can be perceived as a whole. What connects three different stories is the fact that the epic hero struggles against the evil forces. Finally, since all these happen in an absolute "monochromic" (Bakhtin 15) past, the reader cannot question the epic hero or the other characters.

The epic hero is the member of a supreme world in the absolute past who has already completed his maturation

process. It is because of the fact that the epic world is represented as a distanced image of the best ages in which pure goodness can be found, and the epic hero indubitably is the symbol of benevolence. Hence, the hero takes up a place much higher than the reader's. The same rule is applicable to Beowulf the young, strong and mature hero of the glorified times:

> 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 man . . . 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)

Indeed, Beowulf's superhuman competency is illustrated in the story when he describes his youthful race with Breca at sea. It clarifies the spiritual and physical maturity he has achieved at a stage earlier than the one the epic story takes place convincing the reader of his unquestionable valour. Beowulf defends Breca during a swimming contest against the sea creatures at the bottom of the sea day and night at the cost of his life, which is indicative of his commitment to friendship and capacity for formidable acts. Indeed, even before he relays the aforesaid account, Beowulf arouses reverence both in the reader and in the King Hrothgar thanks to his courage and power:

> Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac's kinsman,
> one of his hall-troop. When I was younger,
> I had great triumphs. Then the news of Grendel,
> hard to ignore, reached me at home:
> . . .
> They [his kinsmen] had seen me bolstered in the blood of enemies
> when I battled and bound five beasts,
> raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea
> slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes
> and avenged the Gets (their enemies brought it
> upon themselves; I devastated them).
> Now I mean to be a match for Grendel,
> settle to the outcome in single combat. (407-26)

The quotation above makes it evident that Beowulf is not an ordinary man who arouses respect of all: "[i]n epic, the achievements of the hero reap glory and honour to which . . . our essential response is awe" (Greenfield 15). It seems that the reader cannot identify himself with Beowulf who "is leagues beyond [his people] and beyond us . . . in possessing the grip of thirty men" (13). Thus, the hero can only be perceived as the statue of veneration and awe. As Greenfield remarks,

> 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. (16)

Another feature of the epic hero is the fact that he is a totally externalized figure as he has no inner world. Thus, there is no discrepancy between how he is represented and how he is in reality; so, his character never changes from the youth to the senility. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in spite of his old age, Beowulf still wants to fight with the dragon and to save his people from its dangers. The same heroic motive still drives him. As a final remark as to the characterization of the epic hero it should be noted that the epic hero is bereft of mockery and the sense of humour because the epic world is a serious dignified world in which there is no room for laughter but only for heroic accomplishments.

In the light of the evidence stated in this paper, it is possible to conclude that *Beowulf* carries the generic characteristics proposed by Bakhtin. The epic represents a monologic world where there is only one conflict -good vs. evil- to be solved in favour of the former. In this respect, it is not surprising that all the evil figures have to be defeated in the epic since there is no room for the plurality of voices within the framework of the monoglot epic world. Despite its two voices -

the pagan and the Christian- *Beowulf* is purely monologic since it appreciates a single worldview which is embodied in the heroic ideal. What is more, the epic world is sacrosanct and its sacred nature can only be depicted and celebrated through a solemn, lofty and dignified language. In the epic discourse, thus, neither the characters nor the narrator is allowed to use vulgar everyday language which would be against the grain of the epic world. The epic has to employ pious language since it describes a royal and dignified world. Now that the epic is about the time of the bests, it is supposed to be a model for the humankind to seek. "One can only accept the epic world with reverence" (Bakhtin 17). Therefore, the epic world provides moral lessons for the reader. For instance, before the fight between Grendel and Beowulf occurs, the narrator comments upon the event, thereby making a reference to the *didactic* quality of the epic which places it on a higher hierarchical position again:

> But the Lord was weaving
> a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats.
> Through the strength of one they all prevailed;
> they would crush their enemy and come through
> in triumph and gladness. The truth is clear:
> Almighty God rules over mankind
> and always has. (696-702)

Besides, the whole text underlines the sacred and pure nature of the epic world which is inviolable by the reader in the present time. The epic world is all-inclusive, self-sufficient and contained in itself; it has semantic completeness and conclusiveness that does not welcome external re-evaluation or re-thinking by the reader. In such a half-moribund world, there is no room for the description of the spiritual development or psychological maturation process of the epic hero. He gets on the stage as a fully developed and externalized character who has neither internal nor external conflicts. He is "hopelessly ready-made; he is all there, from beginning to end he coincides

with himself, he is absolutely equal to himself" (Bakhtin 34). Indeed, there is no chance for him to change because he repetitively undergoes similar experiences striving for the achievement of one heroic ideal: immortality.

The world of the epic "is a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'" (Bakhtin 13) and *Beowulf* deserves an esteemed place in the gallery of epic poems worldwide thanks to its perfect portrayal of the great men and their great deeds lingering in memories.

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