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RESUMEN

En este ensayo vamos a hacer un recorrido por los diferentes campos de estudio que rodean el poema anglosajón *Beowulf*, desde su contexto histórico hasta un comentario sobre dos traducciones contemporáneas por parte de Seamus Heaney y J.R.R. Tolkien, respectivamente. A lo largo del análisis, realizaremos un estudio detallado sobre el lenguaje anglosajón en el poema, los mensajes ocultos en los personajes y la historia y su importancia como elemento de la tradición oral anglosajona.

ABSTRACT

In this essay we are going to explore the different fields of study that surround the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, from its historical context to a commentary about two contemporary translations by Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien, respectively. Throughout the analysis, we will conduct a research into the Anglo-Saxon language in the poem, the hidden messages in the character, the historical background, and its significance as an element of the Anglo-Saxon oral tradition.

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BEOWULF: THE MESSAGE THAT HAS CROSSED THE WORLD AND AGES IN ANGLO-SAXON

María Dolores López Fuentes

1. Introduction

The Anglo-Saxon period in the history of England is, probably, the most important stage in the conformation of the English language. After the Romanization of the British Islands, the Anglo-Saxon invasion was a great treasure for the British people, both in culture and in life-style. It is true that the Roman Empire gave the basic principles of administration and law to Britannia (the name used for the Roman province) and provided a great influence in the English language through the invasion, the Christianization, and the Benedictine Reform. However, the Anglo-Saxon influence was even greater, because the Anglo-Saxon language brought into English most of the pronunciation and vocabulary that this language preserves nowadays.

The most mysterious aspect of the Anglo-Saxon period in England is the little knowledge that we have about its literature. Anglo-Saxon literature seems to have been truly productive in the history of English literature, and its value would be even bigger because of its oral-transmitted origin. One of the most important figures in the Old English literature is the *scop*, a poet that sings for the court or the lower people in cities and villages to tell the stories that he had learnt along his travels or well-known legends about ancient heroes, mythological enemies, and fights between good and evil.

This aspect is the one that is going to attract our attention. Between all the Old English poems, the most important one is *Beowulf*, the only poem that has survived almost complete from the time when it was put down in words. This poem consists of 3182 lines written in Old English and recounts the story of the hero called “Beowulf”. The poem could be divided into many different sections (episodes, battles, enemies, Beowulf’s stages of life, etc.), and it has many different (and deep) fields of study that create a perfect atmosphere to convey a sound analysis.

In order to fulfill this analysis, this essay will include the impressions and opinions of many authors with the aim of reaching a complete new vision and further conclusions on the poem. There are some aspects that are more relevant than others in the analysis of *Beowulf*, as the role of the hero, the eternal fight between good and evil, the characteristics of the oral transmission are presented, or the major features of the type of Old English used in the poem.

Among all the authors to proclaim, the theories of J.R.R. Tolkien, Seamus Heaney (with their respective translations), Lisa M. Horton, and John Niles will appear during this research, as we bear in mind they belong to the first-rate elite of scholars of Anglo-Saxon language and literature.

About the structure of this essay, the historical context of the poem and the message have reached us after so many centuries. The language will be studied from a corpus devoted to vocabulary and different examples of the main rhetorical devices, as well as an in-depth exposition and exemplification of the alliteration in the poem. In addition to this, our essay will also deal with the role of the characters in the poem and with the message that the poet tried to proclaim.

2. The England of *Beowulf*

In order to understand the different aspects of the poem *Beowulf*, it is needed to explain how was England at the time in which the story of Beowulf takes place. England is a land that has suffered many invasions from many different points of Europe: Roman, Normans, Vikings, and so on. By the time in which Beowulf arrives to the Danish coast, England wasn't occupied by the Germanic tribes yet.

Firstly, it is important to explain how Germans arrived to the British Islands, and this event began with the end of the Roman power in Britain.

During the 4th century, Britain was a high-valued part of the Roman Empire and was strongly defended. The importance of the natural resources and raw materials that could be used for many purposes increased its value and turned Britain into one of the most important provinces of the Roman Empire. However, from the 5th century, as we will see later, native rulers would take the control of the island from an independent way, outside the Roman authority, although they were going to lose their power to barbarians at last.

It is quite surprising the fast development that economy experimented in Britain by the 4th century. The Roman province was full of richness because of the birth of a strong pottery manufacture and its commerce, not only inside the borders of the island, but also in the continent. Britain was completely self-sufficient within the Roman Empire, a referent for other provinces. The abundance of manufactured goods provided the creation of a commercial and urban network for their distribution, which implied that Roman Britain had better roads than the medieval England.

Why do we talk about medieval England? Because Roman Britain and medieval England share some characteristics that we don't usually relate with Ancient civilizations. Population in towns was quite similar during the Roman period and the medieval one. In fact, there was more population in London, for example, when Roman Empire ruled the British Island than in the Middle Ages. This amount of population was another reason to improve the quality of the communication ways between towns and cities. Another fact that explains the growth of population by this time is the need to maintain the different public services that Roman cities had to offer. Public baths, water supply by pipes, and many other services required the attention and maintenance of many people to work

efficiently. Thus, people went to cities also to find work in this field. The progressive coming of people changed the society. Roman Britain was a very diverse country with a very diverse society, in some ways not unlike British India in the colonial era.

By the end of the 4th century, the pressure to Britain was constant. Picts, Scots, and Saxons started to move and attack Britain. The Picts were the inhabitants of modern Scotland. They were sea-raiders and were called by Romans as *Caledonii*. They never gave up, and continued being a menace even 450 years later, when Anglo-Saxon people ruled the island and the Picts made many attacks to Northumbria. Scots were the inhabitants of Ireland but it is believed that they may have had some settlements in Wales before Romans left. They started to raid Britain at the end of the 3rd century. Saxons, coming from the German plain and the Danish peninsula, started also their pirate attacks to Britain in the 3rd century, but they were more reminded by Britons than the rest because of their savagery during the attacks (it is supposed that they used to crucify an enemy before leaving the island as a sacrifice).

Sea-raiders could assault easily the island because of the proximity of every important and rich place to the sea. All the island was full of rivers and estuaries, so it was a kids' game to enter in Britain by sea. Although Romans had built great and magnificent defenses and had the most powerful army of the world, it was quite obvious that the Roman Empire in Britain had a dead-line.

In 407, Constantinus III (the third usurper of the Roman army in Britain) led the most of the army out of Britain to Gaul, leaving the island practically without any defense. While they weren't in Britain, obviously, barbarians took advantage of their absence and carried out the biggest wave of attacks in the history of the island. In fact, the major incursion was the one done by the Saxons in 408. Britons left the protection of the Roman Empire and defended themselves the cities against the barbarian invaders, putting an end to the Roman rule.

About the year 449, the invasion of Britain by some Germanic tribes started. Although we know that this period of conquest lasted for a century more or less, the events and the way they completed the total settlement in the Roman Britain have remained obscure. We don't have much information about this dark period of the history of England, but it is sure that some data was recollected in Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica de Gentis Anglorum*. In this document, it was found that the tribes that

arrived to England were the Jutes, the Saxons, and the Angles. These tribes came from the Danish peninsula (Jutes and Angles) and between the Elbe and Ems rivers (Saxons).

Just one thing is completely proved: a Celtic leader made an agreement with the Jutes in order to leave the weakened Roman protection and drive out the Picts and Scots together with the Germanic tribes. However, the Jutes still wanted to establish their new home in Britain, so, after the defeat of the Roman Empire in the island, they occupied the land of the Celtic people, and they tried to resist and keep their homes. Saxons made their settlement in Sussex and Wessex. Angles migrated to East Anglia by the end of the fifth century, and then the progressive conquest took place. We can conclude from it that the beginning of the Germanic tribes in the British Islands was related to some kind of mercenary forces, a group of well-paid warriors that took advantage of the help they offered in order to get the basis for a future invasion.

But now, let's change the scenario. When the poem *Beowulf* was written, England was very different from the one at Beowulf's time. At that time, between the 7th and the 10th centuries, England was part of the Christendom. The pagan traditions of the Anglo-Saxon people had been relegated to a secondary level without losing their oral literature tradition. This part was of special interest to the Christian monks that were sent to recollect the ancient stories of the Germanic tribes in order to create a new version of all of them to make easier the indoctrinating mission they had.

Traditional stories of the pagan cultures were taken and rewritten in order to add Christian elements to evangelize the people of towns and cities. Anglo-Saxon power was still there, but the kings embraced the new religion attracted by the idea of an eternal salvation because of their good deeds with their subjects. This could be considered a good change if we don't take into account the fact that all that stories that went to Christian hands probably lost part of their essence in order to seem more 'religious accurate'.

However, the Christian poet who wrote the final version of *Beowulf* didn't change many of the pagan features of the Germanic tribes, as it could be proved later. Then, in this sense, the apparition of Christendom in England was something greatly advantageous for *Beowulf*, a poem that could have disappeared if this Christian monk and all his mates hadn't appeared in England to share the Lord's Word. According to Patrick Wormald, this poem could belong to the age of Offa, the last era in which Anglo-Saxon heroic poems were written, and he says:

The assimilation of the new Christian dispensation with the old aristocratic values was not after all acceptable, as Wulfred's campaign against secularized monasteries also showed (...) the Age of Offa was perhaps the end of England's heroic age. And if a poem which begins by singing 'the bygone glory of Danish kings' was indeed composed then, it is a striking irony that the Anglo-Saxons already had reasons to think very differently about Danes. (Campbell et al. 1991: 128)

In this sense, it is quite important to remark that one of the possible reasons for the disappearance of the traditional Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry was the need of the Christendom to preserve the pagan world outside the limits of the religion.

3. The function of oral literature: the role of the *scop*

Beowulf, as I have said before, is a poem that was created with the base of an old Anglo-Saxon legend that the poet received thanks to the oral transmission of literature. This is the true origin of literature *per se*. Literature was born in conditions that provided the perfect scenario to create a written record of the stories that went from mouth to mouth in the different civilizations and societies. The origin of literature remains in the beliefs of the people. When human beings started to think about the world, about the laws that rule the world, about the existence of different substances or beings, which would be more powerful than them, the oral literature started too. The stories about the spirits of nature, about gods, devils, and fantastic creatures were extended among the different focuses of population, where the few ones who knew the art of writing decided to pour them onto paper (or papyrus, it depends of the culture). And then, literature began.

Once this has been explained, it is quite easy to find out which is the origin of *Beowulf*. The Christian poet that wrote it probably heard the story of the Geat hero from the performance of a *scop*, minstrel or bard. This kind of stories were very usual at the court and were sung to the wealthy people in a more sophisticated way than to the poor citizens. There are many signs that prove the influence of oral literature in the poetic style of *Beowulf*. Different expressions related to the sources taken by the poet to tell the story make the reader think that the events could have been told before in an oral way.

For example, in the translation undertaken by J.R.R. Tolkien (2015), a very beautiful prose-style translation, right in the opening scene we read:

'Lo! The glory of the kings of the people (...) we have heard tell...'
(Tolkien 2015: 13)

These expressions are repeated throughout the poem and are combined with the figure of another poet within the poem, the *scop* that sings for Hrothgar in Heorot. In fact, this character will be key in order to discover the possible origin of the songs about *Beowulf*. This *scop*, who is the “*principle incitement for Grendel's wrath*”, according to Lisa M. Horton (Horton 2010:47), creates a song to tell the court of Heorot the great battle

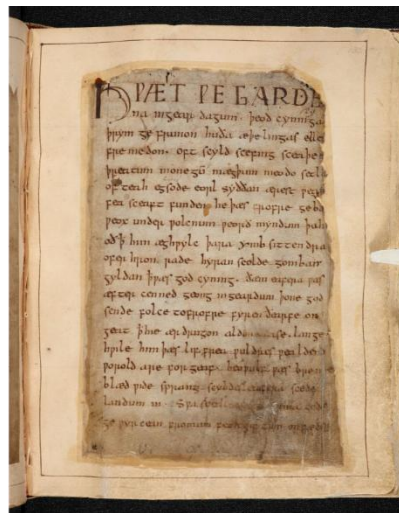
against the monster that Beowulf has won. These oral compositions were accompanied by the harp, usually. Hrothgar's *scop* has his own interests of course. Showmen like him need to have a good patron, a good place to perform and sing, in order to survive. This is one of the most important features of the *scop* in *Beowulf*: he is always ready to sing or create a song in order to keep the sympathy of his king. This survival instinct is crucial for a *scop*, because it will provide the poet the real inspiration and intelligence to be useful and important for the entertainment of the court where he lives.

Returning to supervising the role of the *scop* in *Beowulf*, it is quite important to see beyond the performances of the poet in Heorot and understand the meaning that his presence implies. It is quite obvious that the first Danish song composed honoring Beowulf was created after Grendel's death by the Geat warrior. The Christian poet who wrote the final poem could have taken some information from the songs provided by this *scop*, songs that could have been suffered modifications through time by adding elements or supernatural elements like Grendel's mother or the final battle of Beowulf against the dragon. Anyway, the role of the *scop* in the body of the poem could have been an attempt of the author to explain the origin of his sources and the ancient nature of the history, because this story is supposed to have happened before the arrival of the Germanic tribes to the British islands. In that sense, the oral tradition of the poem is revealed as an evidence and not as a supposition.

4. The manuscript

The only manuscript of *Beowulf* that has been preserved from the Anglo-Saxon period dates from the 11th-12th centuries, the date is not exact because of the diverse deterioration processes that the codex in which it is contained has suffered. In fact, some experts consider that the manuscript in which *Beowulf* appeared for the first time could have been written in the 10th century, two centuries before than the rest of the volume.

The manuscript of *Beowulf* belongs to the Nowell Codex, the second manuscript found in the Cotton Vitellius A.xv, which is one of the most important volumes in Old English literatures, mainly because of its good state of conservation in spite of all the accidents that has suffered in the past.



Lam. I. Original first page of *Beowulf* in the Nowell Codex.

Font: British Library's webpage

The Cotton Vitellius A.xv is formed by two manuscripts that conform the whole volume. The first manuscript contains four prose works and is known as the Southwick Codex. This contains the following items: *Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, a fragment of *Gospel of Nicodemus*; *Debate of Solomon and Saturn*; and a St. Quintin's *Homily* fragment. However, the manuscript where *Beowulf* has survived is the Nowell Codex and it contains five works of the Old English literature: a fragment of *Life of St. Christopher*;

Wonders of the East (illustrated); *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*; *Beowulf*; and a fragment of *Judith*.

The part devoted to *Beowulf* is formed by 3182 lines, but it is thought that some parts of the texts of the codex could have been destroyed by the fire in 1731. The Cottonian collection suffered the effects of the fire and the edges of the Cotton Vitellius A.xv. were terribly damaged. Since the 19th century, many tries of restauration and preservation have been done in order to keep the Cottonian collection safe. The special effort in the conservation of the manuscript of *Beowulf*, because it is the only poem of the Anglo-Saxon period that is almost full, has provided much material to study the poem and its history.

5. The Anglo-Saxon language in *Beowulf*

Beowulf was written in English, concretely in the Anglo-Saxon dialect or Old English, as it is commonly known. According to Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson “Professor Campbell defines Old English as ‘the vernacular Germanic language of Great Britain as it is recorded in manuscripts and inscriptions dating from before about 1100’” (Mitchell and Robinson 1992:11). Anglo-Saxon or Old English belongs to the branch of the Germanic group in the Indo-European tree of languages. This means that shares the branch with the first Germanic languages of the European continent, despite of being a language that was born from a mixture between the old Celtic and Briton languages and the new Germanic languages that arrived to the island.

After Germanic invasion, there were four main dialects of Old English in the British Islands: Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish, and West-Saxon. It is quite important to see the differences between a dialect nowadays and at that time. There were variations not only in pronunciation, but also in spelling and, sometimes, the vocabulary could be some different from one dialect to another.

West-Saxon turned into the most extended dialect about 900. It was the most common dialect in the written Old English and its characteristics are the ones that we study nowadays when we introduce ourselves into the Anglo-Saxon world and its language. *Beowulf* was written in West-Saxon dialect and it is quite important to remark how the Old English was a language that allowed a constant creation of new terms. In fact, it is thought that the Christian poet who wrote *Beowulf* created a huge amount of words to improve the quality of his verse.

Anglo-Saxon language in *Beowulf* is, probably, the most interesting part to analyze this poem. As I have said in the previous section, this is the only poem that has survived almost full and that can provide a huge information about the Old English poetry. In the next sub-sections, we are going to make a deep immersion in the vocabulary of the poem, the different resources used during its creation (*kennings*, *heitis*, variations, and the well-known caesura), and the alliteration, the main characteristic of the poems in all the genres of the Anglo-Saxon literature.

5.1. Corpus from many semantic fields¹

This section will be devoted to make a basic glossary with the main terms that appear in the first hundred verses of the poem *Beowulf*. It is quite important to remark that most of the vocabulary used in this poem is related with the nature and with the tradition of war and nobility, very important in the Anglo-Saxon culture. In order to make easier the task of finding these words in the original text, I have made the analysis explaining the case or the tense in which each word appears, followed by a comparison between the original meaning of the word *per se* and the translation provided by two of the most important scholars about *Beowulf*: Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Byrnum → Noun (Dative Plural) → *byrne* (original noun form)

- Meaning if masculine: A burning fire flame heat/A burning incendiurn (Strong noun)
- Meaning if feminine: A corselet (Weak noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'coats of mail'
- Tolkien's translation: 'harness of battle'

Cwén → Noun (Nominative Singular) → *cwén* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Woman, wife, consort, queen. (Strong feminine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'queen'
- Tolkien's translation: 'queen'

Cyning → Noun (Nominative and Accusative Singular) → *cyning* (original noun form)

- Meaning: King, ruler, God, Christ. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'king'
- Tolkien's translation: 'king'

¹ This selection of samples has been conveyed by myself in order to provide a better and reasonable understanding of the process of evolution from Anglo-Saxon to Modern English.

Dógora → Noun (Genitive Plural) → *dógor* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Day (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'day'
- Tolkien's translation: 'day'

Drugon → Verb (Preterit tense Plural) → *dréogan* (original verb form)

- Meaning: To experience, bear, suffer, endure, sustain, tolerate (Strong verb)
- Heaney's translation: 'they'd come through (troubles)'
- Tolkien's translation: 'endured'

Fæder → Noun (Nominative and Accusative Singular) → *fæder* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Father, ancestor. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'father'
- Tolkien's translation: 'father'

Faroðe → Noun (Dative Singular) → *faroþ* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Shore, stream (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'flood'
- Tolkien's translation: 'flowing sea'

Feorwegum → Noun (Dative Plural) → *feorweg* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Remote part, a far or long way. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'far-fetched (treasures)'
- Tolkien's translation: 'from regions far away'

Gamol → Adjective (Masculine Nominative Singular) → *gamol* (original adjective form)

- Meaning: Old, aged, hoary, ancient. (Strong adjective)
- Heaney's translation: 'elder'
- Tolkien's translation: 'aged'

Géardagum → Adverb

- Meaning: In days of yore, formerly.
- Heaney's translation: 'in days gone by'
- Tolkien's translation: 'in days of old'

Grimma → Adjective (Feminine Nominative Plural) → *grimm* (original adjective form)

- Meaning: Fierce, savage, dire, severe, bitter, painful (Strong adjective)
- Heaney's translation: 'grim'
- Tolkien's translation: 'grim'

Gúðcræft → Noun (Nominative and Accusative Singular) → *gúðcræft* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Warlike power or skill. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'powers of destruction'
- Tolkien's translation: 'strength in battle'

Healærna → Noun (Genitive Plural) → *healærn* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Hall-building. (Strong neuter noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'hall'
- Tolkien's translation: 'houses and halls'

Hearpan → Noun (Genitive Singular) → *hearpe* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Harp. (Weak feminine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'harp'
- Tolkien's translation: 'harp'

Micel → Adjective (Masculine Nominative Singular) → *micel* (original adjective form)

- Meaning: Great, famous, intense, long. (Strong adjective)
- Heaney's translation: 'great'
- Tolkien's translation: 'mightier'

Middangeard → Noun (Nominative and Accusative Singular) → *middangeard* (original noun form)

- Meaning: The globe, world, earth, mankind. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'the world'
- Tolkien's translation: 'this middle-earth'

Mónan → Noun (Accusative Singular) → *móna* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Moon. (Weak masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'the moon'
- Tolkien's translation: 'moon'

Sceaþena → Noun (Genitive Plural) → *sceaða* (original noun form)

- Meaning: One who does harm, injurious person, a criminal, an enemy (Weak masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'scourge'
- Tolkien's translation: 'foemen'

Scedelandum → Noun (Dative Plural) → *Scedeland* (original noun form)

- Meaning: All Danish or Scandinavian lands. (Strong neuter noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'the north'
- Tolkien's translation: 'Scedeland'

Sunnan → Noun (Accusative Singular) → *sunna* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Sun. (Weak masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'the sun'
- Tolkien's translation: 'the sun'

Þéodcyninga → Noun (Genitive Plural) → *Þéodcyning* (original noun form)

- Meaning: The king of a whole nation, a monarch, an independent sovereign (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'the kings who ruled them (the Spear-Danes)'
- Tolkien's translation: 'the kings of the people'

Þéoden → Noun (Nominative and Accusative Singular) → *þéoden* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Prince, king, chief of a tribe. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'lord'
- Tolkien's translation: 'king'

Þréatum → Noun (Dative Plural) → *þréat* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Crowd, host, troop, band. (Strong masculine noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'many tribes'
- Tolkien's translation: 'the hosts'

Weorðmynd → Noun (Nominative Singular) → *weorþmynd* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Honor, dignity, glory, mark of distinction. (Strong noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'fortunes of war'
- Tolkien's translation: 'glory'

Wíg → Noun (Nominative and Accusative Singular and Plural) → *wíg* (original noun form)

- Meaning: Strife, contest, war, battle, valor, military force, army. (Strong neuter noun)
- Heaney's translation: 'fighting'
- Tolkien's translation: 'war'

5.2. Some considerations about the rhetorical devices in the poem²

One of the most important aspects about Old English literature is the flexibility of the Anglo-Saxon language to create new words and to make use of rhetorical sources than Germanic languages usually don't take into account at that time. These sources have been the basis of many posterior rhetorical devices that appeared in many languages apart from the English one. For example, the figure named *heiti* could be compared as well with modern metonymy and hyponymy. Variations are also common in the Medieval production of many cultures, especially in texts in which the religion or the monarchy have an important role in the structure of the composition.

In this sense, we are going to make an analysis of the main rhetorical devices that we can find in the poem *Beowulf*, mainly the following ones: kennings, heitis, and variations. It is quite important to see how in the different translations provided by many modern translators and scholars, some specific resources have not suffered any change and have preserved the original compounding form, or the original semantics. However, we are going to make a deep explanation about these rhetorical devices (an explanation that will

² The tables included in this section are also developed by myself in order to provide a sound and clarifying approach to the rhetorical devices in the poem.

be based in the original form of the words, their translation into Modern English, and the meanings that these Anglo-Saxon words have nowadays) in order to make the new readers of *Beowulf* easier to find them and to recognize them.

Kennings

First of all, it is vital to define each of the different devices, so we will see a detailed definition at the beginning of their correspondent sections.

This first device, the *kenning*, is a very poetic resource that implies the creation of a compound word, usually formed by two terms, in order to make reference to a specific idea. This source was quite usual in the Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon verse, because of the taste of poetic style and alliteration that their people had.

In *Beowulf*, this device is used throughout all the poem. We are going to see some examples in order to see the ability of the poet to create words from nothing to substitute others.

Old English	Modern English Trans.	Meaning
hron-ráde	Whale-road	Sea
béaga bryttan	Ring-giver	King, leader
léoman tó léohte	Earth's lamplight	Sun and Moon
gástbona	Soul-slayer	The Devil
Kyning-wuldor	The King of Glory	God

Table 1. Examples of kennings in *Beowulf*

Heitis

This second device, the *heiti*, is a very simplistic way of add different words to refer the same object. In this case, the words must be simpler than the original one. This source is quite used in scenes of battle in order to describe the different weapons or armors that the warriors wear or in the descriptive scenes of a serious event, as a funeral.

Old English	Modern English Trans.	Meaning
ísen	Iron	Sword
æðeling	Hero	Beowulf
démon	Demon	Grendel/Grendel's mother
draca	Serpent	Dragon
finger	Fingers	Hands

Table 2. Examples of heitis in *Beowulf*

Variations

The third and last device we are going to explain and exemplify is the variation. This rhetorical figure is the most commonly used in Old English literature, but we can also find it in many later texts (especially religious ones). Variation consists in the appealing to someone with different names in the same sentence. That is, to give different titles to the same person in a chain of noun phrases separated usually by commas. This device has the function of improve the image of the appealed character, to make reader (or listener) think that he/she is someone important because of the many titles he/she has. However, this resource will be quite important to explain the familiar origin of a character.

To this effect, variation is used mainly when we talk about a prince, a king, a brave warrior, a hero, a graceful queen, a monster, an enemy, and so forth. We have to keep in mind that this kind of poetry was written to be recited in front of an audience, so the tone and the movement of the scop was fundamental in the performance to keep the desired impact. In the next table, we will see five examples in order to understand this device and the impression that it provokes in the reader or in the audience.

Old English	Modern English Translation
Hróðgár, helm Scyldinga	Hrothgar, protector of the Scyldings
god sylfa, sigora sóðcyning	God Himself, True King of Triumphs
Béowulf, bearn Ecgþéowe	Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow
sé ðe byrnende biorgas séceð nacod níðdraca•	The burning one who hunts out barrows, the slick-skinned dragon
ðe eorla hléo (...) bonan Ongenþéoes (...) geongne gúðcyning	The young king, Ongentheow's killer and his people's protector

Table 3. Examples of variations in *Beowulf*

5.3. The use of alliteration in *Beowulf*

Anglo-Saxon poetry has a very wide range of features that make it a unique style of composing and writing poetry. From the rhetorical devices that we have explained in the previous section to the deep messages that the different told stories hide, the poetry of the Old English period is one of the most powerful, impressive and mysterious of the history of literature.

However, one feature rises over the rest: the alliteration. The usual definition for alliteration is, according to the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language, “the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words”. This is obvious. Alliteration in modern poetry is the recurrence to the use of the same sound or letter to provoke a specific feeling in the reader.

Despite of this clear intention, alliteration in Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) poetry was something more. The feelings that a line could provoke are secondary in order to supply other things. First of all, Old English poetry don't make use of final rhyme, because the alliteration implies some kind of ‘internal’ rhyme. In this sense, alliteration has two main purposes: the impact of the content and the impact of the form.

These two purposes are easily seen if we take into account the important role of the caesura. The division of each line into two different parts provided the best form for

the poet to memorize the poem. It is important to notice that, in *Beowulf*, the first part of each line has the semantic importance, it is the part that is relevant for the history. However, the last line of each stanza changes it and makes the last part of the line the most important one.

What is the role of caesura in this sense? Caesura establishes a separation between both parts of the lines and also divides the alliterative elements in order to make the memorizing process easier and the impact of the poem stronger. Alliteration is the constant device of *Beowulf*, the most important part of its composition, even more than the creation of terms or the continuous use of variations. In fact, this poem probably was performed with many changes by different bards before the final written version we preserve nowadays. But this is the magic of oral literature. We don't know how the original story of *Beowulf* was like, but we know that, at least, the only element that never changed was the alliterative style.

At the very beginning of the poem, in fact, there is a beautiful example of alliteration in which we can observe all the features that we have just explained:

Oft Scyld Scéþing sceapena þréatum
monegum maéþpum meodosetla oftéah

The alliterative use of the sibilant sounds in the first line makes a soft contrast with the use of the occlusive sounds in the second one. However, it is quite easy to read it and memorize it because of its musicality. It follows a rhythm without making any use of rhyme. We are going now to compare the translations provided by Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien in order to see how they have preserved this alliterative style.

*There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.*

(Heaney 2000:3)

*Oft Scyld Scefing robbed the hosts of foemen, many
peoples, of the seats where they drank their mead, laid
fear upon men, (...)*

(Tolkien 2015:13)

Heaney's translation has tried to preserve mainly the alliteration of the first line, the introductory line to Shield, the first important Danish king. The repetition of the sound in the word 'scourge' confers a special meaning to the word: Shield was not just a king, was a king that causes fear to his enemies in an extreme way.

Tolkien's translation provides a different tone. The suppression of the verse-style provided a whole empty field to play with the alliterative impact of the words. Then, he orders the phrases in the way he thinks they will impact the most and preserves the alliteration in a subtler way, creating an atmosphere of continuity and easy-reading that is also quite light to memorize.

Alliteration in Old English poetry is the base of one of the most important styles in the history of English literature. In fact, after the arrival of the Normand people and their influence upon the English language and its literature, this style practically disappeared. English language was relegated to a second position in favor of the French one. The models of literary production that were dominant in the continent arrived to the British Islands, setting the start of a new English literature based on these models: romances, fabliau, and allegorical and lyrical poetry.

However, a movement of getting back the origins of English literature started to rise by the 14th century, when Normans were being repelled during the Hundred Years War and the English was established again as the official language in literature and in the country. This movement wanted to make use once more of the features of Old English poetry, the national way of writing poetry. In this sense, they returned to the use of the alliteration, instead of final rhyme, to the use of the caesura, and so forth.

After the last known poem in Old English poetic style (Layamon's *Brut* in c.1190) any poem of this characteristics was written. However, many author will take part of the Alliterative Revival movement and will create wonderful works, such as *Piers Plowman*, *Morte D'Artur* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

6. The message: Good versus Evil

Although *Beowulf* has become the Anglo-Saxon poem per excellence, there are many issues about its origin that have the Ancient Literature experts on pins and needles. Firstly, the apparition of the Christian religion in a poem with a theme purely Anglo-Saxon, that is, the history of a hero belonging to their ancestors (the Germanic tribes from the European continent). Why do Beowulf and Hrothgar so many references to a Christian God that they wouldn't even have met? In this sense, we have to appeal to the indoctrinating need of the first texts from Christendom in England.

The first incursions with the purpose of evangelization that took place in the British islands provided a deep change in the way of thinking that the Anglo-Saxons that inhabited them had. Got used to their pagan traditions, the fact that the Christian monks tried to make them change their creed (or even to embrace one) supposed a new era in the history of England. The introduction of Latin as a language for religious texts again, as well as the progressive Christianization of the country, had as consequence the emerging of an indoctrinating character in the texts that came from the previous pagan Anglo-Saxon culture.

One of the main basis of Christianity is the eternal fight between Good and Evil, between God and the Devil. If we take a look upon Beowulf, the different episodes (or battles) that the hero faces have as background that eternal battle. Beowulf, supported by God (according to the poet that expressed the text by hand) could defeat Grendel, Grendel's mother, and threatening dragon. Without the help of such deity, this hero wouldn't had reached the victories that made him so famous. However, can we believe that the original history also attributes Beowulf's great deeds to a monotheistic god? Definitely no. Probably, the original poem of Beowulf attributed the victories of the character, not only to his physical attributes, but also to the intervention of the pagan gods to which German tribes adored, gods with a polytheistic character and related with natural forces.

For all these reasons, we can claim that *Beowulf* was a poem that was used as a model of ritualized discourse. This means that, by the behavior of Beowulf, it is expected to prove how generous, benevolent and miracle-maker God is (and, therefore, the

Christian religion) faced to the darkness, the terror, and the horror that the adoration to Devil and pagan rituals imply.

On the episode in which Grendel attacks Heorot, Grendel is described as a Cain's descendant, the first man punished by God forever and ever. Nothing could be worse for a creature on earth than to be a descendant of a traitor to his family and to God. Here, the poet paves the way for supposing how the personality of the monster will be. Grendel is a creature blood-thirsty, irascible, that lives only to make the inhabitants of Heorot suffer in order to complete his vengeance. Beowulf, on the other hand, is presented as the other side of the coin: a hero with the intention of leaving his people in order to help another king to stop the torments granted by the Evil. Could we attribute to Beowulf any feature of the Christian Messiah? Of course. In fact, in the final battle against the terrible dragon, Beowulf gives his life in exchange for the salvation of his people: a personal sacrifice for a common good. The center around Christian religion twists is that feeling of sacrifice for the rest.

Although it would be not necessary to add more examples about how Beowulf is presented as a sacrificed martyr for mankind, the essence of possessing in some aspects the features proper of an almost liturgical text can lead us to think about a different kind of ritual, one different from the religious one. The performance of a bard itself can be considered as a liturgical act, a ritual *per se*. John Niles claims in *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* the next:

If we look upon the performance of oral narrative in a public setting as a type of ritualistic behavior, we can then inquire how the tradition that finds expression on such occasions, issuing in works of the imagination that we call by the names of various genres, serves as a means by which culture defines itself, validates itself, and maintains its equilibrium during both normal times and periods of social stress.
(Niles 2010:122)

Getting back to the fight between Good and Evil in *Beowulf*, we can claim that, although every religious believes have a very clear idea about which elements belongs to each sphere, the presence of the Christian element provided by the poet that decided to put the poem into written words is the differentiating element, the element that makes this

battle, not only a mere entertainment, but also an authentic message in favor of embracing Christian religion and the safety and calm that, for the new poets of that age, had become a promise of eternal salvation. In this sense, that Almighty God that helps Beowulf is, at the same time, a personification of the recurrent topic from ancient literature related to fate. With the entrance of Christianity in England, the fate goes over God's hands, He is that superior force that controls the fortune of mankind.

Thus, we can conclude that, with Christendom in England, the ancient pagan traditions and the Anglo-Saxon epic poems were mixed with the new ideas brought from the continent, providing an almost perfect symbiosis between the Christian element and the pagan roots.

7. The message through its characters

Beowulf is a work that, thanks to the deep epic background that the poem presents, has won the privilege of being one of the more contemporary epic poems of all the history of literature. Its actualization can be observed, especially, in its characters. Each and every one of them have defined the stereotypes that have survived the passage of time and they are easily recognizable in many works of our days, not only in literature but also in cinema and television.

The figure of the hero fighting against the monsters is something that we constantly see and that, throughout the history, has been a recurrent patron when creating literary works. Likewise, the idea of the betrayer, the evil, the antihero per excellence, has been also stereotyped from the very first epopees and has provided that eternal fight between the Good and the Evil that we find in the written word. Even from the religious texts we can observe the recurrence to these figures, figures that already existed by the time of Homer's great epopees, *The Iliad* and *The Odissey*.

7.1. Beowulf: the role of a hero

What is needed to be a hero? Which are the features of those great warriors that fight against dragons, rescue dames, and win epic battles? The elements that traditionally have been related to heroism come from a very old topic in literature. In fact, the topic of heroism is as old as literature.

For this reasons, heroism is a topic with a growing importance in literature from its birth. The secular heroism that we find everywhere nowadays is quite different from the other tendency that appeared in the Old English literature. According to Mark C. Amodio:

“The Anglo-Saxon theme of heroism is familiar to contemporary audiences, both because many of its features continue to be reflected in its modern instantiations and because it looms large in Beowulf, perhaps the most-studied and most widely known text to survive from the Anglo-Saxon England.” (Amodio 2014: 365)

Beowulf is a poem in which heroism is completely related to blood, fights, honor, and deeds. This means that it presents a very strong description of a society based in this kind of things. A warrior is strong and powerful because he has a good blood inheritance, he has taken part of many battle, he has won with honor those battles and is a clear image of honorable and good deeds. In this sense, a hero is similar in many literatures, because these features are not only present in Anglo-Saxon culture. Greek and Latin mythologies also attributed these characteristics to heroes like Heracles, Theseus, Perseus, and so forth. They share the common path of bravery and honor that will lead them to success and fame. In the case of *Beowulf*, the Christian poet also added the salvation of *Beowulf*'s soul and his entrance in Heaven.

The role of a hero is to show the audience, the whole society, how a good man must be. In this sense, we can appeal again to the indoctrinating purpose of the poem. One of messages is the way in which a great warrior shall behave. *Beowulf* is a strong Geat warrior that goes in help of Hrothgar, although he doesn't know him, just to keep the Good stronger than the Evil. There is a fragment in which *Beowulf* explains why the old wise men of the Geat tribe have allowed him to go and help the Danish king. In this excerpt, we can see that a great warrior gains honor thanks to his victories:

*“They had seen me boltered 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 Geats (their enemies brought it
upon themselves, I devastated them).”* (Heaney 2000: 29 lines 419-424)

It is quite obvious which is the presentation that *Beowulf* makes of himself to get Hrothgar's favor and friendship. He, as a hero, feels the duty of helping anyone who needs it. This is a doctrine that was very important during the Old and Middle Ages in the education of young men to be good warriors and soldiers. However, the message could be softer nowadays.

7.1.2. A medieval hero with a contemporary sense

The message that the society in which we live could extract from *Beowulf* is quite different to the one that the medieval society interpreted. We don't have the same kind of battles that they medieval warriors faced and this is an aspect to take into account. Our contemporary wars are worse than the wars they had, because of the dehumanization of the society. The military forces we are used to didn't exist when Beowulf fought against Grendel or his mother. In this sense, we cannot base the message of the perfect behavior on the personality of a hero who knew the actual valor of life and the implications of honor and kindness during a battle.

However, many attempts have been made in order to reach other reference characters based on these ancient heroes in our days. In fact, we can find many similarities between the superhero (if we can consider a god in that way) Thor, created by Marvel from the Nordic mythology, and Beowulf. The physical strength, the ancient look, and the deep personality based on loyalty, honor, kindness, and humility, are exactly the same in both characters, because even Beowulf is compared with some kind of divine savior of the Danes.

Not only Thor is a superhero based in these features, all the actual culture of the comic (and graphic novels) is full of the actualizations of this profile of hero. But we can also find it in the new literary tendencies. For example, a new kind of hero has arisen from the fantasy literature: a hero with a dark past, a hero that has not been always a hero.

This renewal of the aspects related to heroism has created a wide range of interpretations of the notion of 'hero'. Nowadays, this perception has changed and everyone could be a hero, in a try of make these characters more human and accessible to normal people. However, the question could be if this actualization has made harm or not to the original idea or image of heroism. As everything in literature, a constant actualization of the ancient topics could lead to a misunderstanding and even a degradation of them. Thus, if we talk about the contemporary sense of heroism in *Beowulf* we have to attach our opinions to the most human aspects, those that make someone different from the rest, and not only strength or valor in battle

7.2. The role of the monsters in *Beowulf*

The role of the monsters in *Beowulf* can be analyzed from very different perspectives. From a merely religious reading, all the monsters against which the great hero of the Geats fights are clear representations of the Evil, spirits sent by the Devil to disturb the peace and happiness of the Christian peoples.

This reading is perfectly acceptable, but just if we set as base that the poet who put *Beowulf* in words modified the original poem to make that eternal fight clear enough for the readers, as an indoctrinating message. However, another interpretation could be possible, a vision more related with art *per se* and not only with the content of the poem.

According to the opinion of many experts, *Beowulf* is an epic poem in which supernatural elements were 'introduced' within a real historical context in order to make the narration more attractive to the audience to which it was directed. Nevertheless, since the publication of "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*", by J.R.R. Tolkien in 1936, the monsters of *Beowulf* has arisen to the surface as tangible elements by themselves and not only as beings belonging to an immaterial or unreal level.

It is fair to defend that, above all, *Beowulf* can be considered as a poem framed in the origin of fairy-tales that would be developed later. In this sense, the tangible and intangible worlds combine in just one world to give reality to those creatures that usually don't have it in literature and to take it from another characters which are excessive 'real'. As we have said before, if we consider the diverse descriptions provided about Grendel and his mother in the poem, for example, we notice that they have humanoid physiognomies although they are supernatural creatures. How can be explained this without admitting that they have an imbued reality so obvious as the human physical aspect? According to Paul Acker, "*one approach to the monsters would then be to examine them as projections of Anglo-Saxon anxieties*" (2006: 703). In fact, we could confirm that one of the major works from the Alliterative Revival movement, *Piers Plowman*, has as base not only the alliteration throughout the poem, but also the personification of the worries and defects, as well as virtues, of human beings.

From this perspective, maybe the role of the monsters is not so allegorical, but simpler, an artistic creation to unify two totally differentiated levels, but very present in the society of that ages: the reality and the myth.

7.2.2. Grendel and his mother: two contemporary anti-heroes.

The apparition of Grendel and Grendel's mother in the poem of *Beowulf* establishes the apparition of two archetypes that will be present in the history of literature until nowadays. In this section, we are going to analyze briefly the personalities of both characters and to make a comparison with an actual version of them, with a final comment about another couple of mother-son with the role of anti-heroes in their history.

Firstly, we have to explain the reasons that make Grendel take the decision of attacking Heorot. The continuous feast celebrated in the hall, with laughter, music, joy, and so forth, provoked that the wrath living in his demon heart grew until dominating him completely. The fierce, the savagery of this character is based on his yearning of vengeance. This frame is quite usual in literature. An anti-hero looking for revenge and fighting against the hero to get it.

Although with the passing of the ages the archetype has evolved, it still preserves the main features that make him unique. In this sense, we can find examples of this archetype in works like *The Lord of the Rings* (J.R.R. Tolkien, 1954) or *The Queen of the Damned* (Anne Rice, 1988). In the first example, the character named Sméagol (or Gollum, as he is better known), seeks the revenge against the hobbit that took his treasure (the Sauron's ring) away from his cave. However, his revenge is focused on another hobbit, Frodo, the one who now is the porter of the ring to destroy it in Mordor. Sméagol tries by any means to get the ring from Frodo and kill him. However, Frodo finally kills him and the ring is destroyed with him. This is a very clear example of the archetypical anti-hero looking for revenge. The other example is the figure of Akasha, Queen of the Vampires in the second work we have mentioned. She is looking for revenge against those ones who confined her inside a stone prison. She is liberated accidentally by Lestat, a young vampire, and started to kill all the vampires that faced her in the past. However, she will also be defeated by them again.

The other archetypal character is present in Grendel's mother. She has lost her son and wants to kill the ones who killed him. This figure is less recurrent in the history of literature. However, the figure of the evil mother is quite present. We can find the evil stepmothers in many fairy tales from the Romanticism and in many movies of our time. For example, the evil stepmother in *Cinderella* is probably one of the best knowns, as well as the stepmother of *Snow-white*. They are trying to destroy her stepdaughters' lives, and even to kill them (as in the case of the Evil Queen). However, they are always defeated or abandoned and the Good wins once more.

Nevertheless, there is an example in which both archetypes appear together again. After the recompilation of all the legends about King Arthur, Sir Thomas Malory wrote *Morte D'Artur*, in which he told the complete legend of the Celtic king and his court in Camelot. However, this king had a half-sister, Morgana Le Fay, who seduces him with magic and a disguise and gets pregnant. His son, Mordred, will be one of the Knights of the Round Table and, together with his mother, will try to destroy King Arthur.

Thus, we can conclude that both archetypal characters, Grendel and his mother, have developed and established two main bases for the anti-heroes that we know in the present age. The apparition of the anti-heroes of literature provide a full schema about what kind of anti-hero usually correspond to every kind of hero. In this sense, the anti-hero is not only a character to be defeated, but a complete field of study about relationships in literature and the different implications of the archetypes on it.

8. The *miracle* of translation: Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien

Since the discovery of the manuscript where *Beowulf* appeared for the first time, many scholars have done different translations in order to make it accessible to other students and, even, to the whole society.

These translations were probably done also to keep, in some way, the oral tradition of the poem, to allow the oral transmission of it in Middle and Modern English as well. However, until the 20th century, the translations of the Anglo-Saxon poem were not so much exhaustive and accurate as the ones provided by Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien, whose translations we are going to see now in detail. Both experts made their translations with a more solid base than their antecessors, not only in a philological sense, but also in a modernist sense. What does it mean? This means that Heaney and Tolkien studied when many things about the Anglo-Saxon world were being discovered, things that in the previous centuries were impossible to study because of the lack of technology that we have nowadays. The techniques of restauration and conservation were improved and the text of *Beowulf* were more accessible to the scholars who wanted to study it.

All this provided that these two genius created the two best translations until today. However, both translations are completely different in what is referred to form. In order to make the differences and similarities a little clearer, we are going to write it in the next table:

Seamus Heaney's Translation	J.R.R. Tolkien's Translation
Communicative	Communicative
Verse	Prose
Accessible language	Literary language
Some loss of alliteration	Alliteration preserved
Translation of the names	Original names preserved
Translation of the songs with different format	Translation of the songs included as a part of narration in prose
As long as the original	Because of prose style, shorter than the original

Table 4. Comparison between translations by Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien

8.1. Seamus Heaney and the most accurate translation of *Beowulf* in verse

As we have mentioned in the introductory part to this section, one of the best translations of *Beowulf* provided in the 20th century is the one that Seamus Heaney produced. It is quite important to take into account that many experts don't agree with this opinion, because they consider that the kind of translation that Heaney presents is not a 'correct' translation.

We have to understand that Seamus Heaney is a poet, an Irish poet, and he didn't follow many of the rules that the modern translators established in order to create something like a patron in the production of translations. In this sense, he allowed his instinct, his 'poetic vocation' to take over him while translating the poem of *Beowulf*. However, his opinion about the Anglo-Saxon poetry had not been always good. He was born in Ireland and he felt himself Irish, so the English culture seemed to him like something strange or less pure because of the mixtures that England suffered throughout its history. The Celtic inheritance that Heaney felt was an impediment to approach to English literature. Nevertheless, thanks to his professor, Gerald Manley Hopkins, he decided to give an opportunity to Old English poetry because of the sharing that Irish Celtic culture and Old English culture had in the maternal womb of their birth. In words of Jose Carlos Redondo Olmedilla:

Es bien cierto que cuando dos culturas entran en confrontación, en el caso de Heaney la inglesa y la irlandesa, surgen sentimientos contradictorios: por un lado, la defensa/no defensa de lo propio, por otro, la aceptación/no aceptación de lo ajeno. (Redondo Olmedilla 2007: 618)

In this sense, it is obvious that Heaney tried to find the impulse to translate *Beowulf* in his own origins. He translated the poem not as a piece of historical relevance, but as a piece of literary relevance, because the poem 'deserves' to be translated and preserved as part of the origin of a culture. This is the reason why he allows some licenses during the translation, as a different meter or the loss in some parts of the alliterative element. The duality he found made him free to explore the poem and translate it from his own perspective and preserving the original sense that only someone with a deep

cultural Celtic or Saxon roots could make. He claims the next in the introduction to the translation:

The Irish/English duality, the Celtic/Saxon antithesis were momentarily collapse, and in the resulting etymological eddy a gleam of recognition flashed through the synapses and I glimpsed an elsewhere of potential which seemed at the same time to be a somewhere being remembered. (Heaney 2000: XXV)

Heaney's bilingual edition of *Beowulf* has become one of the most known best-sellers in recent ages. His translation has improved its public consideration and it is seen as one of the most accessible and natural translations of all the times. His spontaneous style makes the reading of the poem easy and provides the original text in order to compare simultaneously both versions. He also includes notes on the margins to follow the episodes of the poem without losing the rhythm and to explain the different scenes that appear in the poem. This is a great point in Heaney's translation. Although he considers himself as a poet, he has philological studies and knows how a translation must be done and what kind of rules can be broken in order to preserve the original spirit of the translation.

Then, if he broke with the rules when translating *Beowulf*, why could we consider his translation the most accurate one to the original poem? We can conclude from all the previous comments that Seamus Heaney translated *Beowulf* to preserve the original spirit and the original intentionality of the poem. He breaks rules, it's true, but even the *scop* did it while performing without noticing it. He has preserved the most important aspects of the Old English literature, the stresses in foote, the alliteration, the caesura, and so forth. However, he has added something more with his translation: the ancient Celtic spirit of the legends that the Britons and Celts shared once, so he has gone straight to the point, to the roots of the poem, to show it as it originally was.

8.2. Tolkien and the treasure of a prose translation

The other translation that we are going to comment is the one provided by J.R.R. Tolkien, one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. This translation has been controversial because of its shape. Tolkien didn't make the translation of *Beowulf* in verse as many people before and after him did. He decided to preserve the essence of the poem with a version written in prose.

Although Tolkien is better known as the author of one of the most important sagas of fantasy literature, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), he was also one of the most brilliant philologists of all times. His studies were his addiction and he learnt many ancient languages, as Old Norse, Icelandic, and, of course, Old English or Anglo-Saxon. This kind of formation allowed him to create the most perfect imaginary world ever seen in literature: the Middle Earth. The Middle Earth conjoins all the fields in which Tolkien participated during his life: linguistics, history, literature, and even philosophy.

However, is this wide formation what led him to know the existence of *Beowulf*, the Anglo-Saxon poem per excellence. Many of his mentors cheered him up to study this poem while he was studying Anglo-Saxon. Then, when he agreed and took a look upon the poem, his mind started to work in a way without precedents.

Tolkien was a great defender of the literature as a way of art, and not a thing that it is needed to dissect and study. Literature could not be related with history, could not need a critical commentary, but just admiration and the writer's pleasure of creating. In this sense, his translation of *Beowulf* would be completely different from the rest. In fact, in the prologue to the translation re-published in 2015, Christopher Tolkien claims:

There is here, amid the huge library of Beowulf criticism, a very evident individuality of conception and insight; and in these characteristically expressed observations and arguments there can be seen the closeness of his attention to the text, his knowledge of the ancient diction and idiom, and his visualization of scenes thus derived. There emerges, as it seems to me, his vivid personal evocation of a long-vanished world – as it was perceived by the author of Beowulf; the philological detail exists to clarify the meaning and intention of that poet. (Tolkien 2015: ix)

The publication of the translation of *Beowulf* by Tolkien was in 2015. Previously, his sons and daughter, decided to not publish it until all the notes about the translation and the different conferences about *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon world were collected. In fact, Christopher Tolkien explains that his father wrote until three different versions of the translated poem, in which the translation varied in different points. However, he decided to publish the last translation his father made with all the entire work of investigation that lies beyond the text.

Tolkien's translation breaks with the verse structure and presents a prosaic poem in which the main elements of the poem are perfectly integrated. The alliteration, the most important part and the basis of all the Anglo-Saxon poetry, is preserved and the punctuation marks throughout the translation point the pauses and the stresses in order to keep the rhythm of the original poem. The vocabulary employed is also quite loyal to the original one. He preserved the solemnity of the changing order of the elements in the narration, without losing the perfect control of the history, without forgetting the importance of the poem itself. But maybe the most important aspect to take into account about his translation is that he has maintained the original spirit of the composition with a very simple thing: the conservation of the original names untranslated.

Furthermore, it is very important to remark that, for Tolkien, *Beowulf* was an inspiration and we are going to find many elements of the Anglo-Saxon poem in his literary production about the Middle Earth.

To conclude, we are going to see in the next section how Tolkien changed the way of approaching to *Beowulf* with one of his most famous essays: "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*" (1936).

8.2.1. Tolkien's "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics".

As we have mentioned before, the publication of this essay, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics", in 1936, supposed a radical change in the way of approaching to the poem of *Beowulf*. Until Tolkien, the only perspective from which the poem was studied was merely practical, based in the historical background of the poem and not in the poem itself.

Tolkien started this essay expressing the necessity of studying *Beowulf* as a poem, as a literary work, and not as a historical text. He rejects the opinions of the critics that are centered in the historical elements that appear in the poem and the comparisons between the conditions of the epic production in England and in the rest of the continent. This is not the correct way of criticizing a poem, not even an Anglo-Saxon poem about which we can only make speculations related with the authorship and the context in which it was created.

Tolkien proposes a literary vision of the poem in which the monsters are its center. In fact, he claims that the apparition of the dragon could be a sort of comparison between Beowulf, prince of the Geats, and Waelsing, prince of the heroes of the North. Many critics said that *Beowulf* is a failed selection of hero put into verse, and Tolkien replies with a question of deep impact: "*Where then resides the special virtue of Beowulf, if the common element (which belongs largely to the language itself, and to a literary tradition) is deducted?*" (Tolkien 1936: 111).

There is a sentence in the essay that summarizes all the critic to the critics according to his opinion: "*The comparison of skeleton 'plots' is simply not a critical literary process at all*" (Tolkien 1936: 111). What does it mean? Throughout the history of literature, many plots have been written and rewritten, and versioned, and interpreted, and changed, but there are a series of common patrons that every plot shares. In this sense, we cannot claim that *Beowulf* is not special because of its plot, but that *Beowulf* is special because of the 'treatment' of its plot.

The author defends that the treatment of a myth takes importance in the moment in which the poet presents the myth feeling it, and not trying to show what is the portent of

the theme. In this sense, the poet who wrote *Beowulf* could have wanted to transmit the emotion of the epic battles between Beowulf and the monsters rather than create a whole subplot surrounding the hero. Thus, the monsters acquire a major role in the poem as a necessary part to present the myth, because in them the interest of the readers is born, not in Beowulf. The slaying of the monsters will be the deed that will turn Beowulf into a hero and not simply a brave warrior. In fact, Tolkien says that “*there are in any case many heroes but very few good dragons*” (Tolkien 1936: 114). The monsters give the seriousness that the theme requires. In fact, we can consider *Beowulf* as a sort of interpretation of all its heroic tradition. Monsters have been always the enemies of the gods and, in this poem, written by a Christian poet, they could become images of evil incarnations.

Then, we can conclude that Tolkien’s vision of the monsters in *Beowulf* was not similar to the rest of his contemporaries. He started a full line of study about the role of the monsters as a part of the heroic tradition in order to give seriousness, realism, and symbolism to the epic genre, and literature in general.

9. *Beowulf*: An Anglo-Saxon metaphor of humanity

Another great dilemma that surrounds *Beowulf* is the metaphorical and allegorical sense that, it is supposed, its lines may contain. Since the moment in which the first lines appear in front of us, we are witness of a great metaphor about how the humanity has been forged, in many occasions, with a violent base, by the hand of the history of the Scyldings.

Suddenly, within this warlike context, it emerges the figure of a hero that will have as his purpose to restore what had been lost from long ago: the peace. Here we have an allegory with a hopeful character that cheers the society to follow the values that rule *Beowulf*'s moral, the moral of the prince of the Geats. The good attitude, the bravery, the humility, and the honor that this hero represents must be above every personal pleasure or benefit, it is a direct message about the role of the hero as a savior of the humanity.

In the poem *Beowulf* all the aspects of the Germanic society are collected, a society in which the leaders are fair and equal with all their subjects and their warriors swear loyalty to them knowing that the relation of respect is mutual and not unidirectional. Kings in this society are not the tyrants in which the major part will become in the later absolutist monarchies. The king is the ring-giver, who must give rewards to his warrior to thank their bravery and support showing that he is not rich only in the material sense, but also in the spiritual one.

From this point of view, we could suppose that the exemplified metaphor is the image of the ideal ruler. Through the character named Hrothgar, King of the Danes, we can see the notion of good king that Anglo-Saxons had and that they wanted to maintain even when Christianity entered in the British islands.

On the other hand, it is important to point the great metaphor represented by the monsters (Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon). Supernatural creatures that appear in the poem and that are so assimilated in a realistic level could be considered as personifications of the difficulties that may appear during lifetime, as well as a lesson about how must the human beings react and face the problem with bravery, courage, without forgetting the good disposition and will.

Through this moralist perspective, the poem could be presented, even, as a great metaphor about the problems that we have to face in the different stages of our lives that could put our own integrity into risk and ask for a total sacrifice as a payment to solve the problem. However, the strong figure of Beowulf is personified as the way in which the humanity can carry on without being stopped in the path.

We can conclude, then, that the great Anglo-Saxon metaphor about humanity has a moralist purpose of indoctrinating in the strict sense of the word. It is impossible avoid a relation between this interpretation and the religious sphere. Many people consider that the poem of *Beowulf* is an elegy about the fleeting nature of life. However, until the final episode there is no elegiac features, until Beowulf, now King of the Geats, tells the story of an old king that have to face the death of two of his sons, being one of the deaths provoked by one of them.

Therefore, in *Beowulf* the message can be interpreted in so many ways as possibilities exist in this world. However, despite of everything, it will keep on being a literary work of an incalculable value that set the basis, together with the few Anglo-Saxon texts that have also survived, of the medieval literature from the movement called 'Alliterative Revival'.

10. Conclusions

As we have seen throughout all this analysis and commentary about the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, the fields of study that it provides are numerous and all of them equally interesting by their own. The poem presents such a variety of aspects to study that to make an in-depth analysis of all of them in just one essay is quite difficult. However, in this essay we have tried to make a global vision of almost all the elements that conform, not only *Beowulf*, but the Anglo-Saxon literature as a whole.

The historical context in which *Beowulf* is dated could provide us some information about the life of the Germanic tribes in the centuries before the invasion of the British islands. We have seen how the Germans entered in the islands thanks to the Britons, taking advantage of their position as mercenaries to fight against the Jutes and how they started that progressive occupation of Britain. However, we have also commented briefly how was England after the arrival of Christian religion, with the compilation of the pagan stories to turn them into indoctrinating sources.

Of course, it is important to keep in mind that this legends, poems, and stories were part of the Anglo-Saxon oral tradition that had been represented in the figure of the *scop*, the poet that used to sing this kind of compositions for the Anglo-Saxons rulers, even before their arrival to the British islands. The element of the orality has been preserved in the poem by the use of expressions that make references to things that have been heard by the poet and the audience. This interaction with the audience, the direct style in the dialogues, maintain the oral sense of the composition.

Unfortunately, we don't preserve much more material, because few texts have survived until today. For example, the volume in which the manuscript that contains *Beowulf* is included, the Cotton Vitellius A.xv. was burned during a fire in 1731 and, surprisingly, wasn't destroyed completely. However, many lines and annotations in the margins of the manuscript of *Beowulf* were lost with the fire and the posterior translations couldn't include that information.

The Anglo-Saxon language in *Beowulf* is one of the most interesting fields to study because of the richness in vocabulary and rhetorical devices that the text presents. Thanks to the corpus that we have done in one of the sections of this essay, we have seen

some words belonging to semantics fields as war, family, or religion. The translations from the Old English language to the Modern one are quite difficult and sometimes could be quite different. In fact, the two translations that we have compared present many differences between them, especially when the terms are related to creation of new *kennings*.

The alliteration is the basis of the poetic style in Anglo-Saxon language. This device provides a good element to play with emotions and impacts during the narration, because of the different tones that could provide to the composition. Thus, a solemn discourse would use different sounds than a comic one in order to establish differences in the narration and to keep the audience in the mood the poet looks for. One of the elements that took part in the alliteration is the caesura, an internal separation in the lines that divides the information provided, leaving the most important meaning in the first half and the rest in the second one.

Nevertheless, in *Beowulf* another important issue to talk about is the messages that the poem tries to send to the audience and the reader. The eternal battle between Good and Evil is present in each battle and Beowulf is presented as the hero, the savior, that must defeat the evil menaces in order to restore the peace in the world. In this sense, *Beowulf* could have been modified to add Christian attributes to Beowulf that originally would belong to the Christian Messiah. The monsters are also porters of messages because they are, according to Tolkien, the center of the plot. Without them, Beowulf didn't become a hero. In fact, Beowulf himself is a message, an example of how a good warrior, a good Christian warrior, should be, as well as a referent in the education of the new generations.

In fact, the stereotypes that we find in *Beowulf* have developed and have been the basis for many of the characters of later literature and, nowadays, in movies and TV shows. Superheroes are the evolution of the traditional epic hero, and the anti-heroes have evolved as well.

The translations of the poem provided during the 20th century have been a new field of study that has involved many experts. Among them we can remark the translations made by Seamus Heaney and J.R.R. Tolkien. Both translations are loyal to the original text but in very different ways. As we have seen, Heaney decided to let his poet's instinct flourish and to break rules in order to preserve the original spirit and essence of the poem.

Tolkien, on the other hand, studied *Beowulf* during all his life and his translation, published after his death by his son Christopher, leaves the verse style and the translation of Anglo-Saxon names in favor of the prose and the original names. However, Tolkien had a very different opinion about how the poem must be approached by students and critics. He claimed that the poem shouldn't be seen as a piece of historical text, but as a literary work with a brilliant quality in the treatment of the theme and the content. His approach was based in the role of the monsters as the element that gives sense to the heroic theme: evil enemies that create a hero as Beowulf.

The large amount of messages in the poem have also been increased with the interpretation of a great metaphor about humanity beyond the text. The society that is presented is actually loyal to the one that had existed before the Germanic invasion of Britain. However, the notion of the ideal king and the rules that should guide the humanity are there, as a hidden element waiting to arise.

Thus, the final conclusion that we could extract about this essay is that the Anglo-Saxon poetry has in *Beowulf* its major exponent and the best example of how epic was in that ages. The Christian element provided by the poet and the brilliant style in which it is composed make of it one of the most important treasures of the history of literature. Many interpretations about its background will be welcome but, in essence, every reader and critic of the poem will possibly be waiting for a dragon to appear in their windows.

Conclusiones

Tal y como hemos visto a través de este análisis y comentario acerca del poema anglosajón *Beowulf*, los campos de estudio que proporciona son numerosos y todos ellos igual de interesantes por sí mismo. El poema presenta tal variedad de aspectos a estudiar que hacer un análisis profundo de cada uno de ellos en un solo ensayo es bastante difícil. Sin embargo, en este ensayo hemos intentado elaborar una visión global de casi todos los elementos que conforman, no solo *Beowulf*, sino toda la literatura anglosajona en su conjunto.

El contexto histórico en el cual se sitúa *Beowulf* puede proporcionarnos información acerca de la vida en las tribus germanas en los siglos previos a la invasión de las islas británicas. Hemos visto cómo los germanos entraron en las islas gracias a los bretones, aprovechándose de su posición como mercenarios para luchar contra los jutos y cómo comenzaron esa ocupación progresiva de Bretaña. Sin embargo, también hemos comentado brevemente cómo era Inglaterra tras la llegada de la religión cristiana, con la recopilación de las historias paganas para convertirlas en recursos adoctrinadores.

Por supuesto, es importante recordar que estas leyendas, poemas e historias eran parte de la tradición oral anglosajona que había sido representada en la figura del *scop*, el poeta que solía cantar este tipo de composiciones para los líderes anglosajones, incluso antes de su llegada a las islas británicas. El elemento de la oralidad ha sido preservado en el poema mediante el uso de expresiones que hacen referencia a cosas que han sido oídas por el poeta y la audiencia. La interacción con el público, el estilo directo en los diálogos, mantienen el sentido oral de la composición.

Desafortunadamente, no conservamos mucho material, porque pocos fueron los textos que han sobrevivido hasta hoy. Por ejemplo, el volumen en el cual el manuscrito que contiene *Beowulf* está incluido, el Cotton Vitellius A.xv., fue quemado durante un incendio en 1731 y, sorprendentemente, no fue destruido por completo. Sin embargo, muchas líneas y anotaciones en los márgenes del manuscrito de *Beowulf* se perdieron con el fuego y las traducciones posteriores no pudieron incluir esa información.

El lenguaje anglosajón en *Beowulf* es uno de los campos de estudios más interesantes debido a la riqueza del vocabulario y los recursos retóricos que el texto

presenta. Gracias al corpus que hemos realizado en una de las secciones de este ensayo, hemos visto algunas palabras pertenecientes a campos semánticos como la guerra, la familia o la religión. Las traducciones desde el inglés antiguo al moderno son bastante difíciles y a veces pueden ser muy diferentes. De hecho, las dos traducciones que hemos comparado presentan muchas diferencias entre ellas, especialmente cuando los términos están relacionados con la creación de nuevos *kennings*.

La aliteración es la base del estilo poético del lenguaje anglosajón. Este recurso proporciona un buen elemento para jugar con las emociones y los impactos durante la narración, debido a los diferentes tonos que puede dar a la composición. Así, un discurso solemne utiliza sonidos diferentes a los de uno cómico para establecer diferencias en la narración y mantener a la audiencia en el estado de ánimo que el poeta busca. Uno de los elementos que toma parte en la aliteración es la cesura, una separación interna en los versos que divide la información proporcionada, dejando el significado más importante en la primera mitad y el resto en la segunda.

Sin embargo, en *Beowulf* otro asunto importante a tratar son los mensajes que el poema intenta enviar a la audiencia y al lector. La batalla eterna entre el bien y el mal está presente en cada batalla y Beowulf es presentado como el héroe, el salvador, que debe derrotar las amenazas malignas para restaurar la paz en el mundo. En este sentido, *Beowulf* podría haber sido modificado para añadirle atributos cristianos a Beowulf que originalmente habrían pertenecido al Mesías cristiano. Los monstruos son también portadores de mensajes por sí mismos, de acuerdo con Tolkien, el centro de la trama. Sin ellos, Beowulf no se habría convertido en un héroe. De hecho, Beowulf por sí mismo es un mensaje, un ejemplo de cómo debería ser un buen guerrero, un buen guerrero cristiano, así como un referente en la educación de las nuevas generaciones.

De hecho, los estereotipos que encontramos en *Beowulf* se han desarrollado y han sido la base de mucho de los personajes de la literatura posterior y, hoy día, de películas y series de televisión. Los superhéroes son la evolución del héroe épico tradicional, y los antihéroes han evolucionado del mismo modo.

Las traducciones del poema proporcionadas durante el siglo XX han sido un nuevo campo de estudio que ha involucrado a muchos expertos. Entre ellas podemos destacar las traducciones realizadas por Seamus Heaney y J.R.R. Tolkien. Ambas traducciones son leales al texto original, pero de maneras muy diferentes. Como hemos visto, Heaney

decidió dejar que su instinto de poeta floreciera y romper las reglas para preservar el espíritu y la esencia originales del poema. Tolkien, por otro lado, estudió *Beowulf* durante toda su vida y su traducción, publicada tras su muerte por su hijo Christopher, abandona el verso y la traducción de los nombres anglosajones a favor de la prosa y los nombres originales. Sin embargo, Tolkien tenía una opinión muy diferente acerca de cómo debía ser abordado el poema por estudiantes y críticos. Afirmaba que el poema no debería ser visto como una pieza de un texto histórico, sino como una obra literaria con una calidad brillante en el tratamiento del tema y del contenido. Su acercamiento estaba basado en el papel de los monstruos como el elemento que da sentido al tema heroico: los enemigos malignos que crean un héroe como Beowulf.

El gran número de mensajes que el poema tiene ha sido incrementado con la interpretación de una gran metáfora acerca de la humanidad más allá del texto. La sociedad que es presentada es realmente leal a la que había existido antes de la invasión germana de Bretaña. Sin embargo, la notición del rey ideas y las normal que deberían guiar a la humanidad están ahí, como un elemento escondido esperando para alzarse.

Así, la conclusión final que podríamos extraer acerca de este ensayo es que la poesía anglosajona tiene en *Beowulf* su mayor exponente y el mejor ejemplo de cómo era la épica en aquellos años. El elemento cristiano proporcionado por el poeta y el brillante estilo en el que ha sido compuesto hacen de él uno de los tesoros más importantes de la historia de la literatura universal. Muchas interpretaciones acerca de su trasfondo podrán ser bienvenidas, pero, en esencia, cada lector y crítico del poema tal vez llegue a esperar que un dragón aparezca en sus ventanas.

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