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Understanding Beowulf as a Didactic Material and Defence of Pagan Pre-Christian Past

Diploma Thesis

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně a uvedl v ní všechnu použitou literaturu.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the diploma thesis is my own work and that I only used sources listed in the list of references.

Brno, 20.3. 2016

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Abstract

Diploma thesis 'Understanding Beowulf as a Didactic Material and Defence of Pagan Pre-Christian Past' attempts to present new way of understanding Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf. The thesis argues that the poem is a pedagogical document, a course book and a didactic material through which its author, the Beowulf poet, educated his audience. The thesis further argues that the Beowulf poet was a rebellious figure, and that he was attempting to synthesise old pagan past with the new Christian doctrine. The issue is examined and presented in the theoretical part after which follows the analysis of the poem itself in the analytical part.

Key words: Anglo-Saxon Literature, Beowulf, Beowulf Poet, Christianity, Fairy Tales, Old English Literature, Pagan Praise, Pedagogy

Anotace

Diplomová práce 'Čtení Beowulfa jako didaktického materiálu a básníkova obhajoba pohanské předkřesťanské minulosti' se snaží předložit nový způsob porozumění anglosaské básně. Práce argumentuje, že Beowulf je dílem pedagogického charakteru, které mělo sloužit k výchově a vzdělávání. Práce dále předkládá argument, že básník Beowulfa působil jako pedagog rebelující proti konvencím křesťanské církve, který se snažil o syntézu pohanské anglosaské minulosti s novou křesťanskou ideologií. V teoretické části je tato problematica zkoumána a představována; po ní následuje část analytická, která zkoumá z pedagogického hlediska báseň samotnou.

Klíčová slova: Anglo-Saská literatura, Beowulf, básník Beowulfa, křesťanství, pohádky, staroanglická literatura, pohanství, pedagogika
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis studies an old Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf and will chiefly revolve around two major claims: Firstly the poem was created with an educational purpose of its author, the Beowulf Poet, with mind, thus the narrative was supposed to serve as a medium of education. Second claim advocates that the Beowulf poet was a revolutionary force that rebelled against traditions of his time. Both claims are studied predominantly from the pedagogical perspective. In doing so delving into what has been already said and written on the subject as well as on the poem itself. The focus thus lies on the pedagogical messages sent through the poem and the pedagogical intention of the poet. I base this assumption of author's intent on three points: The first reason is that the narrative is abounding in pedagogical lessons, rhetorical devices and remarks that imply learning (some examples and sermons from the first half of the poem would include lines 20-25, 92, 287-289, 701-702, 1059-1061, or lines 1384-1385, many of which I return later in the thesis). Second reason is based on a fact that poetry was a major art form of that time and it would make a significant degree of sense to use it for education. Lastly I follow the general understanding of the Beowulf poet as a writer, likely a member of Christian clergy - whose task was among others to preach and educate.

Beowulf poem has been during the past one hundred years studied, dissected and examined repeatedly from multitude of angles and perspectives. It has been understood as a well made epic (Watson), not very well made up epic (Ker), no epic at all (Chambers), silly folk-tale (Girvan), Christian allegory (Klaeber), a great poem with majestic theme but nothing more (Tolkien), a great poem but with a silly theme (Girvan), a poem of unprecedented mythic potency (Heaney), an incomplete fusion of Pagan and Christian (Kennedy), an allegory of complementary politics (Earle), an allegory of salvation (McNamee), Christian-made defence of pagan past (Benson), a fairly interesting story (Strong), a story featuring pagan elements presented in a Christian light (Benson), a Christian poem infused with pagan colouring (Chadwick, Blackburn), mainly a work of art (Sherman), a picture of pre-Christian Germanic society (Nerman), an important historical document (Strong), not a precise historical account (Watson), a Nordic legend (Hoop), a portrayal of Swedish, Danish and Geat genealogy (Frank, Wormald), a mixture of shorter lays put together by later redactors.
(Müllenhoff), an archaic story saturated with mistakes (Whitelock), a biblical allusion (Girvan), first pre-humanistic writing (Hill) and as other, potentially less voiced concepts. This thesis will propose yet another understanding of the old Anglo-Saxon epic and that is seeing Beowulf as a didactic material. It will argue that the poem could and indeed most likely was understood and employed as a didactic material, going as far as to propose the labelling course book of 10th century Christian Europe. Such didactic material would contain wisdom and lectures for common people that would hear the story as well as those of more educated background. A course book that would serve as a reminder of the old ways that are not to be entirely discarded and condemned. I will argue that the author taught through such didactic material lessons on behaviour, life opinions and indeed, even living a life of a good Christian.

It is however a work of such a grant scale and that much controversy that no amount of academic discourse can, or at least is yet to, fully cover it. The poem, and its writer – or writers – have been scrutinized under the microscope of literary, archaeological, historical, linguistic, poetic and many other studies, yet it is clear that there are still sides of this Old English metaphorical chiliagon that could have been examined further. As such we could consider delving deeper into gender studies of pre-medieval Europe, an insight and comparison of the aristocratic chain of leadership, environment and the state of land during the age of Bede and after, religious conflicts and their impact of education of new generations, among others.

Within the scope of this work I will lay out my prognosis and voice the possible notion that Beowulf, as a secular poem, is a work of great educational, pedagogical value. Not only how it would be customarily described, such as a historical source, a picture of pre-Christian Germanic society, an national or heroic epic, primitive pagan Teutonic, a political or mythical allegory etc. I will examine the work from the perspective of an educator, being a teacher myself, and attempt to establish the considerable variances and deviations between the major characters of Beowulf and Hrothgar as well as the general teaching and lectures given by the poet. Some of the mentor-pupil relationships differ from the traditional expectations and thus the way in which young less experienced characters tutor wise old sages will be drawn special attention to due to its significance for teaching and role models. For it has been said by

1 A historical period of England centred around the end of seventh century and the beginning of eight century; eg. during the lifetime of monk, scholar and writer Saint Bede (673-735).
scores of theoreticians that Beowulf is full of contradictions (Dorolez, Gwara, Overing) – some of which in the scope of pedagogy and teaching that I deem most worthy of further examination. The reason for this is that if we perceive the poem as a didactic material and recognize the Beowulf poet’s pedagogical intend, we can not omit the apparent discrepancies and deviations from the norm that the poet exhibits. The reason for this is that such disparities impact greatly how the poem was and is perceived. Thus the secondary claim presented here is that the Beowulf poet was a rebellious author of his time - rebelling by intentionally putting said deviations and discrepancies to the poem. I will argue that he attempted to help people remember the old ways of long-ago and in doing so he was going against the traditions expressed by new Judeo-Christian doctrine. An argument will be made that he was a force of new and different erudition and to make his point he would alter much connected to teaching and education that would be considered normal at his time. Thus he found himself praising old warrior codes, teaching on combining old and new religions, reminding of pagan praise in general, interchanging the role of mentors, preaching on humanistic approach to pagan past, suggesting that wisdom accumulated throughout long life is not satisfactory etc.

To summarize, the two claims present here will be that a) the Beowulf poet meant his poem to be of pedagogical value and b) he was rebelling against traditional Christian doctrines. My reasons for defending the second claim are as follows: the teaching done by the Beowulf poet varies in its contradictions and deviations greatly from the traditional Alcuin-esque tradition of Christian church, these contradictions

2 Scott Gwara introduces his argument in *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf* (2008) by saying that Beowulf: “straddles every conceivable generic classification, as folktale, heroic verse, epic, elegy, saga, and the like” and further adds that “because of this inherent historical and cultural ambiguity, Beowulf criticism has been marked by persistent contradictions” (pp 2).

3 Gillian R. Overing in his *Language, Sign, And Gender In Beowulf* (1990) in a resentful voice comments on the inability of scholars to: “decide whether Beowulf is right or wrong, whether Hrothgar is weak or strong, whether either is Christian or pagan, whether Wealthow is pathetic or dignified, whether Unferth is a fool or a smart coward, whether Grendel and his mother are totally detestable or really quite poignant characters, whether or when they should feel uplifted or devastated by the events of this poem, and so on”.

4 A doctrine that would rather erase stories of heathen Germanic past from its historical annals.

5 Alcuin of York, Latin Alcuinus (c. 735 - 804) was an English poet, teacher and scholar that was an author of famous *Alcuin’s letter to Lindisfarne: Quid enim Hinieldus cum Christo? - What has Ingeld to do with Christ?* In this letter as well as in other significant writings Alcuin criticized pagan praise and the way Christians should observe and remember Germanic pagan customs. He was one of the leading figures standing for the strict Latin doctrine that would, rather than remembering the past and finding the ways of incorporating it to the new religion, have it forgotten. The topic is further discussed in the poet's section of the analytical part.
encompassed in the poem could have had a great impact on the understanding of old, partially pagan, heroic era. Based on the study of what has been already said and written on the topic, its comparison, the literary and historical environment as well as the poem, its environment and the author himself, I will not only lay out my theory but attempt to draw attention to those pedagogical themes and deviations already proclaimed to be present, focusing on the purpose and message that the poet was achieving though the work as well as its characters.

The thesis will be organized into three parts. Firstly in this introductory part the general concepts and issues concerning the topic and the claims of this work are introduced. The second, theoretical part, consists of arguments and examination of theoretical concepts and in the analysis of relevant secondary sources. In the analytical part those concepts and the lines from the poem will be observed with the information from the theoretical part put into practice. The analysis of teaching in the poem will be observed mostly from the perspective of the poet, the protagonist of the poem - Beowulf, and to some extend king Hrothgar.
SOURCES AND CRITICISM

This study will be working almost exclusively, from the extensive selection of potent translations and editions, with the much praised\(^6\) Beowulf's translation of Seamus Heaney, with occasional references and comparisons to the version translated by J. R. R. Tolkien between 1920-1926 and published in 2014. The act of limiting the selection of translations is conscious in order to allow for more in depth analysis and understanding\(^7\). Both translations have been deliberately chosen with the other one in mind. Heaney's translation is generally praised for his poetic nature, fitting alliterative patterns and the masterful way in which he translates the flow and feel of the poem (Havens), while at places adopting different expressions or rhythm, feeling that the message and soul of the poem is more relevant than the direct translation\(^8\). Whereas the translation by Tolkien is considered opposite in practically every aspect. It sticks “as closely as possible to the meaning and clause-order of the original. It has great accuracy and a sense of rhythm” (Alexander, 2014\(^9\)). Tolkien also forwent any attempt at an alliterative version using modern vocabulary expressions, and employs vocabulary, to paraphrase Havens; more closely resembling the medieval voice associated with King James than the modern English (which is what we find the case with Heaney)\(^10\). Another strong point of Heaney's Beowulf is, as noted by several critics\(^11\), the way in which he used modern language to foreignize his translation “for most inhabitants of the global

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6 After its first publishing Heaney's Beowulf won 1999 Whitbread Book of the Year Award, H. Chickering writes in his review Beowulf and 'Heaneywulf': “Heaney achieved mastery in translating heroic speeches, which make up for about forty percent of the poem. (...) Heaney captures their (the characters) verbal gestures just about perfectly” (pp 162). Tom Shippey writes in his review for the Times Literary Supplement: “Heaney's Beowulf is the poem now”(pp 10). Bruce Murphy explains in his review that Heaney's Beowulf is superior to others thanks to Heaney's willingness to “push against the envelope”. He says: “He takes risks, and produces the best translation of the poem as a poem that has yet been made.”

7 G. Steiner fittingly noted that the proper, indeed, the only way of dealing with translational work and different versions of a same text, is these days to “work with selected few authors as to that the treatment of the areas which are covered is deliberately selective”. He further stated the reason for this necessity of selection to be a huge growth in the departure of translation studies since 1975.

8 Havens suggests this translation to be used in studies and goes as far as to say that “Seamus Heaney's translation is now considered The Beowulf” (pp 8).

9 Alexander further writes: “Its style is, like that of the original, archaic, and often has striking inversions of word-order. It has its own spell, though its movement is more crabbed than that of the equally accurate version made by GN Garmonsway in 1968”. And finally adds: “Short extracts do not fairly represent translations of long works, but Tolkien will have taken much care with the last lines of the poem: “Thus bemourned the Geatish folk their master's fall, comrades of his hearth, crying that he was ever of the kings of earth of men the most generous and to men most gracious, to his people most tender and for praise most eager””.

10 For further comparison of the two see Havens, pp 8.

11 Translating 'Beowulf': Modern Versions in English Verse. By Hugh Magennis (pp 105).
village” (Mageniss, pp 105). At the same time, both translations have been criticized for different missteps, for instance Tolkien's being in mere “long-winded prose" and Heaney's work being blamed for not following the original in multiple ways and for 'domestication'. Major excoriating of these two translations is however uncommon and thus the major sources for this work will provide this study with, arguably, the best of what Beowulf in translation to modern English has to offer in terms of both poetic structure and the direct, vocabulary-based translation.

12 George Steiner in Translation and Literature writes: “The first disappointment, then, of Tolkien's Beowulf is that it is in prose - and long-winded prose at that. This literal rendering is faithful to the formulaic circumlocutions, inversions and amplifications of Old English poetry - a heroic style that evolved to while away a winter's night, but which loses something when locked into the frigid grammar of a legal document: “Thereafter not far to seek was the man who elsewhere more remote sought him his couch and a bed among the lesser chambers, since now was manifested and declared thus truly to him”” (pp 227-231).

13 See in particular H. Mageniss, Translating 'Beowulf': Modern Versions in English Verse (2011).
1. THEORETICAL PART

In this chapter I discuss the poet's audience, his intent as it can be derived from his work and what the lessons within are about. Further discussion is devoted to the major lessons prevalent in the poem, such as Christian teaching and it standing in opposition to heathen past and others.

In the past the readers and listeners of the poem were traditionally understood as educated single-minded group of scholars that would comprehend the allusions and historical references the poet uses at will. However, this picture of homogeneous cultivated reader base of the Beowulf poet is, no matter the persistence with which authors would suppose so, of course false; and although it may not be entirely clear as to who his audience consisted of, it was very probably containing a grain, if not a considerable amount of common people. Regular English men and women that could and should be taught and educated by the likes of the poet. As we will see later, the poet saturates his poem with lessons and lectures for the audience. Consequently, the readers and listeners themselves would benefit from the general wisdom and lessons but also from the guideline of how to deal with religious struggle prevalent at that era (see chapter 2.1). This kind of perception of the Beowulf reader base as a diverse group is important if we are to examine the narrative as a teaching material, a medium through which the Beowulf poet would pass wisdom to others.

When discussing the potential implications and impact of the lessons contained in the poem it will be presumed that a) the poem was supposed to be read silently as well as recited and sang aloud and that b) the reader base was divergent and the lessons would be aimed at different portions of the listeners and readers.

I we were to embrace the notion that Beowulf is a course-book, as advocated above, some of the chapters in such pedagogical material would include: do not forfeit our ancestry, how to combine and tolerate old and new side by side, trust in the

14 For more of this argument see for instance Klaeber's introduction to the poem (1922) or Čermák's introduction to the Czech translation of Beowulf (2003).
15 This notion is, among others, heavily criticized by B. Mitchell in A Guide to Old English (1965). He assaults the common assumption that “the audience of Beowulf was homogeneous; that all its members reacted in the same way, had all heard – or not heard – the story before hearing the poem (…); were all equally intelligent and equally knowledgable about theology or the Church Fathers or scriptural exegesis or whatever; were all equally sensitive and capable – or insensitive and incapable – of making such connections”.
16 I refer to common folk of the 8th-10th century with limited education opportunities and background as opposed to generally better educated clergy and gentry.
protection of God as well as in your own strength, honour your ancestors, wisdom does not rely solely on old age, loyalty and honour above all else, the reward for heroism is death, never underestimate heritage and reputation, be always on your guard and others. And consequently, if we look closely at the amount of lectures woven into the tapestry of the poem that the poet took pains to show and present to his audience, we can not doubt the rhetorical and educational value and purpose of the poem. Let us now observe some of the more prominent examples of education, taken from Heaney's Beowulf.

Perhaps the most prominent is the Christian praise to God and His powers, which is contrasted and connected to the warrior code and heathen customs of pagan past (see subchapters 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). In these examples both the Beowulf poet as well as his characters - mostly Beowulf and Hrothgar - preach on the almighty power and grace of the all encompassing Christian Deity:

“In His splendour He set the sun and the moon” (line 94)
“Oh, cursed is he who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help; he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he who after death can approach the Lord and find friendship in the Father's embrace” (lines 183-188)
“whichever one death fells must deem it a just judgement by God” (lines 440-441)
“God can easily halt these raids and harrowing attacks!” (lines 479-480)
“Often, for undaunted courage, fate spares the man it has not already marked” (lines 572-573)
“The truth is clear: Almighty God rules over mankind and always has” (lines 700-702)
“But the Heavenly Shepherd can work His wonders always and everywhere” (lines 929-930)
“Past and present, God's will prevails” (line 1057)
“holy God decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord, the Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance” (lines 1553-1554)

17 For more discussion on lessons that can be taken from Beowulf and are implied by the poet see in particular Tolkien (1936) and Caillout (2008). These lessons mentioned above can be chiefly found in chapters 2.1 and 2.2 in this thesis.
“But the Lord of Men allowed me to behold an ancient sword shining on the wall - for he often helps the unbefriended” (lines 1661-1663)

“Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part, eternal rewards” (lines 1759-1760)

“So may a man not marked by fate easily escape exile and woe by the grace of God” (lines 2291-2293)

“What God judged right would rule what happened to every man, as it does to this day” (lines 2858-2859)

Only slightly less prominent would be lessons and teachings on topics not directly connected to Christian teachings, such as those on proper life, loyalty, murder of kinsmen and heroic-code. Those would be uttered mostly by the protagonists of the poem, with a few remarks by the poet:

“Fate goes ever as fate must” (line 455)

“You killed your own kith and kin (...), you will suffer damnation in the depths of hell” (lines 587-589)

“It is always better to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning” (lines 1384-1385)\(^{18}\)

“Foreign places yield more to one who is himself worth meeting” (lines 1838-1839)

“But generally the spear is prompt to retaliate when a prince is killed, no matter how admirable the bride may be” (lines 2029-2031)

“A warrior will sooner die than live a life of shame” (2891-2892)

Finally the poem would contain a number of minor general lessons given by different characters as well as the poet. The purpose and topics of these would vary greatly but the way they preach to the audience, even though they are perhaps mentioned on only one occasion, connect them together:

“He would dispense his God-given goods to young and old - but not the common land or people's lives” (lines 72-74)

“Anyone with gumption and a sharp mind will take the measure of two people without a heart”\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) These lines uttered by Beowulf to king Hrothgar are often considered one of the strongest messages that Beowulf sends. The meaning of this lesson is also identical in other translations, for instance Tolkien's lines 1155-1159: “Grieve not, o wise one! Better it is for every man that he should avenge his friend than he should much lament. To each one of us shall come in time the end of life in the world; let him who may earn glory ere his death”.
things: what's said and what's done” (lines 287-289)
“But Death is not easily escaped from by anyone: all of us with souls (...), must make our way to a destination already ordained” (lines 1001-1005)
“Whoever remains for long in this earthly life will enjoy and endure more than enough” (lines 1059-1061)
“he would have to rely on the might of his arm. So must a man do who intends to gain enduring glory in combat” (lines 1533-1536)
“A queen should weave peace, not punish the innocent with loss of life” (lines 1942-1943)
“Beowulf bestowed four bay steeds (...) So ought a kinsman act, instead of plotting and planning in secret to bring people to grief, or conspiring to arrange the death of comrades” (lines 2164-2169)
“Heartsore, wearied, he turned away from life's joys, chose God's light and departed, leaving buildings and lands to his sons, as a man of substance will” (lines 2468-2471)
“it was no easy thing (...) and go unwillingly to inhibit another home in a place beyond: so every man must yield the leasehold of his days” (lines 2587-2591)
“So every man should act, be at hand when needed” (lines 2708-2709)
“Famous for his deeds a warrior may be, but it remains a mystery where his life will end” (lines 3062-3064)
“Often when one man follows his own will many are hurt” (lines 3077-3078)

As we can see, the piece is so abundantly imbued with teaching be it via the words or deeds of the characters or the commentary and lessons given by the poet, the narrator, himself, that it is worthy examining as a didactic material. Within the scope of this work I however will not be able to touch on all the lessons and topics being taught but will instead focus on those connected to my claims introduced above in the introduction. Furthermore, the poem deviates from norm, as has been said, in multiple aspects many of which deal with mentor and pupil roles and the passing of wisdom (see chapter 2.2).
When it comes to the characters of the piece, towering above all other are the figures of Beowulf and Hrothgar\(^19\), as well as the author's at places almost physical commentary and lessons; those will be examined to greater detail for it is through them that the education and passing of knowledge done by the Beowulf poet, takes place most prominently (see chapter 2.1, 2.2 and in for the contrast between the two characters subchapter 2.2.1). Furthermore the teacher and student roles in the core plot arc of the poem often seem reversed or altered which is uncommon with such an epic. Such deviations I feel have been described and examined to sufficient extend however have not perhaps been looked from the educational perspective and will be delved into conjointly. It will be later argued, in connection to the second claim of the thesis, that the Beowulf poet is painstakingly going against the traditional doctrine of a Judeo-Christian faith. As such his poem would naturally deviate with some relationships and educational topics altered or even reversed - those should be looked into as well in the analytical part.

1.1 HISTORY AND ORIGINS

The setting of the poem is generally agreed to be within the Age of Bede\(^20\), dating in the core of it near 7-8\(^{th}\) century and the time during which the poem was written to lay within the Anglo-Saxon period, usually dated within 6-10\(^{th}\) century. The poem survived to this day in a single manuscript, located in the British library, thus making the sources of the poem rather limited. The manuscript, however, although perhaps originally created during the Age of Bede, was not written down by a Christian author several centuries later. Thus several possibilities emerge when dealing with the time gap between the settings of the poem and the time of its writing\(^21\).

What is more, the issue of authorship of the poem was and to some extend still is

\(^{19}\) Whose speeches, although he is not the main characters of the story, constitute more than a quarter of the total pedagogical discourse. Those two are also the most relevant for the religious discussions and conflicts since, according to Irving: “together they express thirty percent of the religious allusions in the poem” (pp 18).

\(^{20}\) Among others R. D. Fulk and M. Lapidge both supported heavily this dating. Fulk wrote in 1992: “Beowulf almost certainly was not composed after ca. 725”. Neidorf concluded in his *Scribal errors of proper names in the Beowulf manuscript*: “a convergence of evidence now indicates a poem written no later than ca. 800”. I mention this for should Beowulf be considered of later dating the lectures contained in it concerning old pagan past in contrast to new Christian religion would be differently perceived. Tolkien in his essay on monsters in Beowulf likewise acknowledges dating of the poem to the Age of Bede during which the conflict between Christian and pagan was still prevalent.

\(^{21}\) Such as that the story was dictated to Latin scribe or that the translator merely combined old stories together.
subject to much controversy. Not only were modern sciences and studies unable to pinpoint the dating of the poem, they have also been unable to decide on the number of authors, rewritings, ongoing alterations and the original theme and intent of the poet himself. The argument of a number of authors that is within academic discourse voices most prominently along with many discrepancies contained within. Such inconsistent elements would hint at that there were more than one scribe composing or writing the poem (Chance, Diller\textsuperscript{22}, Kiernan).

A considerable number of other topics and issues are in circulation concerning the writing, origins and background all of it being made more difficult by the lack of background knowledge and information available within the discourse. Some of these, such as its meaning and the possible impact it had at the time of writing for example, are of special interest to us since they are connected to the pedagogical values linked to the poem. It would, for example, greatly impact the claims and structure in this thesis if there were multiple authors, each with their own aim and agenda\textsuperscript{23}. For the purpose of this work however a single author will be understood as the sole creator of the piece due to the sufficient evidence for the single author discussed deeper in chapter 1.2.2.

Similarly, the dating of the poem, and the manuscript from which it originates, would impact the assumptions and arguments made within this thesis. Having however established that the time during which the poem was written was during the age of Bede (around the life of Saint Bede, eg. 673-735), is relevant for this discussion just for the aforementioned reason of clarity and consistency. Through out this thesis the strict contrast between old and new religion and the struggles of the poet will thus be observed. This conflict, in which the Beowulf poet takes the stand for the pagan past, comes back to the second claim of this thesis - I will argue that he could have been an important revolutionary author, rebelling against the traditional Christian doctrines that would, rather than preserve, almost exclusively condemn heathen past in which old Anglo-Saxon warrior kings of the days of yore dwelt\textsuperscript{24}. The description of the time in

\textsuperscript{22} H. J. Diller argues that: “the last textual unit which (Scribe A) copied (…) betrays symptoms of being unfinished, of being (to say the least) less than fully integrated into its text” and assures the reality of two-scribe authorship (pp 78)

\textsuperscript{23} If it was the case that there were multiple authors or scribes altering the narration on their own it would prove virtually pointless to try to establish one common pedagogical intent. The poet of Beowulf, or in such case Beowulf poets, could then for instance aim at supporting bloodthirsty pagan rituals and concept of kin-based justice (see subchapter 2.1.6 for the discussion of kin-based justice in Beowulf) or other lessons that would be otherwise unlikely.

\textsuperscript{24} For further study of such anti-heathen sentiments see for example collection of academic work: Shifts
which the narrative is set will be here referred to as “days of yore” or “days gone by” (S. Heaney). And although the translations differ slightly (for example Morris: “of yore days”, Tolkien: “in days of old”), the distinction is not overly relevant for our discussion since the message is invariable.

1.2 CHIEF ARGUMENTS

1.2.1 RELEVANCE OF THE POEM

Beowulf has been introduced as one of the chief controversial pieces of early Christian literature. Over the past decades distinguished authors commented on the issues of theme, Christianity or deviations and discrepancies of Beowulf, scholars such as Watson, Ker, Chambers, Girvan, Klaeber, Tolkien, Girvan, Kennedy, Earle, Strong, Hill and others, whose thoughts or exact words are referred to in this thesis, put work of the Beowulf poet through much scrutiny. In addition, Beowulf could prove as a source of further academic arguments besides authorship and dating, that we already touched upon, especially those concerning its plot, settings and theme. Although the geographical settings of the plot itself is definite and agreed upon, being set in Scandinavia despite the fact that the manuscript was written in England, various scholars put forward multiple arguments for and against the poet's aims and theme.

It would seem that even after decades of academic discourse the opinions vary violently, being unable to having recognized among themselves definitive answers. Consequently, some academics would argue that the plot and message of this secular poem is weak, placing irrelevant in the centre of the poem and leaving the important on the edges (Ker 1904, Chambers 1912) while others would naturally hold contrary beliefs. For example Tolkien in his essay on Monsters and the Critics disagreed on this topic argues the opposite, that the poem exhibits 'having important in the middle, leaving unimportant on the edges'. As to what are the relevant and significant parts, whether monsters, Beowulf's feats or the story of Sigemund should stay within the core or on the periphery, is where the opinions differ yet again.

Another common accusation against the poem is based on having the important
being the same as in heroic epic (such as Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*), hence marking the poem as a member of epic genre. Other authors discarded the labelling of the poem as one of an epic piece of literature and rather understood it as a historical testimony (Chambers, Nerman27). Regardless, the issue of what is and what is not the relevant core in the poem and whether or not is the plot “feeble” (Klaeber 1922) stays perhaps not of much importance, for, as argued below, the story was originally aimed to be an educational fairy tale meant to teach through partially imaginary world in days of yore, thus not requiring particularly strong, original or convoluted plot28.

The similarities of Beowulf poem to the traditional understanding of fairy tales are numerous and are fully attended to in the chapter 1.4. For now let us presume that the poem be considered, at least partially, of a fairy tale origin or consisting of fairy tale elements29. Original versions were likely to be told orally to old and young listeners alike. It is set in a land far away in a time long ago which has a magical feel about it30. The magic itself and the supernatural is prevalent in almost every portion of the narrative. And perhaps most importantly; it contains great deal of lessons for the listeners - as a fairy tale story would have.

Prior to the time of the creation of the Beowulf manuscript, is the time during which the core plot of the poem takes place; during the days of yore. The poet's choice of such a long time ago is arguably conscious and possibly exhibits his attitude towards the story and the message it carries. Tolkien writes about the times in which the poet set his story that they were, at least in the poet's mind, “heathen – heathen, noble, and hopeless” (pp 118). This heathen past long ago goes in conjunction with both arguments mentioned previously: That we count Beowulf among fairy tale stories, that are

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27 Although Birger Nerman, unlike Chambers, mentions in his *A History of the Vikings* that Beowulf is “more than a tale of who killed whom, and why” (pp 35), he still perceives the poem mostly as a literary historical evidence through out his work.

28 Chambers famously wrote that the main story of Beowulf is a wild folk tale - which was criticized by later authors such as Tolkien. It was almost certainly uttered as a biting critique and not meant as a praise but Chambers' contrast to fairy tales is similar in message as to what is presented in this thesis. For other reading see for instance Klaeber, Friedrich: *Beowulf and The fight at Finnsburg* (1922).

29 Klaeber calls those elements “Folk tale fancies” (pp 12) and discusses them in second chapter. Another scholar who examines this component at length is Tolkien who does so in the essay Beowulf: *The Monsters and the Critics* (1936) and to a lesser extend in essay *On Fairy-Stories* (1939).

30 As Tolkien argued in *The Monsters and the Critics*, the setting of the poem is long ago in an ancient, half-forgotten time. Some of the magical description of the world of Beowulf and the landscape would include the swamp where Grendel and his mother reside (lines 1357-1376), the description of the dragon's lair (lines 2545-2549), the fabulous treasure that Wiglaf finds after the dragon fight (lines 2724-2777) or the vivid description of the eerie dragon himself (lines 2570-2580, 2293-2297, 2312-2323 and in particular dragon as he fights Beowulf; 2556-2562, 2580-2583).
traditionally set in a time long ago, in a forgotten past and that we claim that the Beowulf poet advocates noble ancestral warrior kings in said time\textsuperscript{31}. On the contrary, the poet could have opted to chose a recent past, which would both resemble the real world, hence making the story more realistic and less like a fairy tale story, and would be less prone to pagan praise.

1.2.2 AUTHORSHIP

With such strong claims concerning the rebellious nature of the Beowulf poet and his strong intent to teach and educate his audience\textsuperscript{32}, one more argument should be touched upon. It is the discussion of a number of Beowulf authors, introduced above in subchapter 1.1. As already stated, this thesis will work in agreement with the existence of a single author even though the arguments against the sole authorship have been potent in the past (Diller, Chance), and to some extend still are (Kiernan). Such disagreements generally argue that the first part of the piece (lines 1-1939) is to be attributed to one scribe whereas the authorship of the second part (lines 1940-3182) would differ. However, in defence of the sole author, Tolkien writes that: “(the discrepancies) are no proof of composite authorship, not even an incompetent authorship” and proceeds on defence of single author in saying that such controversies and defects are not easily avoided, especially when dealing with works of such grand scheme as Beowulf. Similar arguments can be found in the work of D. Hill, among others.

As introduced above, the Beowulf poet was likely to compose the poem sometime in the age of Bede with his own feelings, skills and agenda in mind, basing the plot on the old Anglo-Saxon, pre-Christian, Scandinavian-Germanic legends or stories (although, as mentioned, some scholars would date the poem much later). Regardless, the exact dating does not impact the issue I propose to discuss to a sufficient extent. This thesis will also not study the issue of dating and settings and stay instead with the single, during the age of Bede writing, author.

\textsuperscript{31} Frank in particular focuses on the nature of the poet's defence towards past kings. He suggests that one of the reasons for the Beowulf poet's delving into the heathen 6th century: “may have had something to do with the fact that, by the 890s at least, Heremod, Scyld, Healfdene, and the rest, were taken to be the common ancestors both of the Anglo-Saxon royal family and of the ninth-century Danish immigrants” (pp 179).

\textsuperscript{32} See the introduction on page 6 for my argument behind this assumption that the Beowulf poet could be perceived as a teacher.
Heaney in his *Introduction to Old English Language and Poetics* reminds us that poetry was a primary art form of their culture (pp 12), as has been proven in the past and voiced by others before him. It would arguably make a certain degree of sense to believe that the author aimed to enlighten and tutor others through such a chief endeavour of his time. Ergo it would seem logical for the poet to teach through poetry since its prominent place of that time period. And as stories aimed at educating, such as fairy tales for children and the stories of bravery and loyalty for young adults, so would Beowulf pass knowledge to readers and listeners. The only difference being, as described earlier, that his audience would not be homogeneous and consisting of readers and listeners of all age and social groups.

1.3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE POEM

The emphasis in the theoretical part is put on the following: The aim and teacher-status of the Beowulf poet, his intentions and beliefs concerning struggles between old and new, pagan and Christian and the ways he chooses to present those to his readers and listeners. Furthermore, his reasons and ways of educating said audience will be discussed, observing the past discourse and the historical environment of that time. The author's remarks will be paid special attention to regarding the concept of feuds and feuding. It has been stated among the core claims of this thesis that the poet was a rebel figure, a revolutionary author going against the traditional church doctrine of his time. It will be argued however that the poet partially preaches both - the old heathen ways as well as the traditional Christian. Consequently he reminds his readers and listeners of the relevance and importance of ways and habits of the time long-ago. This emphasis of the past is interwoven with the fey elements (examined in the following chapter) with the aspiration to lecture the readers. Further I cover the education concerning rage and anger management and the possible reasons for following the code of vengeance, again connected to the pagan, lost ways in contrast to the generally accepted doctrine of meek Christians. Finally, the concept of wyrd, fate, 

33 Jack Zipes, an established author in the field, analyses fairy tale features in faery tales and in old stories and writes that what “the folk tale taught humankind in older times, and teaches children to this day is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and high spirits”. Examining Beowulf it is clear that both of these teachings are present in the old story of Beowulf. For instance in description of how Beowulf waits for Grendel in ambush (lines 708-709 and 736-749), Beowulf's high spirits and unyielding bravery and in the cunning foresight Beowulf exhibits in preparing an iron shield when fighting against a fire-breathing dragon (lines 2337-2340 and 2672-2677).

34 Wyrd is in an Anglo-Saxon culture corresponding to fate. The are multiple different definitions and
in Beowulf is discussed in relation to what the poet's teachings are.

1.4 BEOWULF WITH FAIRY TALE ELEMENTS

Earlier in connection to the claim about the author of Beowulf being in fact a course book I made a bold statement that Beowulf could be considered not the epic, poem, historical document which as it is most often studied, but a fairy tale. Within the following pages I will attempt to exhibit why I perceive as such and provide evidence. Perhaps the most obvious place to start with would be to consider the kind of creatures playing part in the story that the name itself is derived from – fairies.

First let us make clear that a fairy tale does not necessarily include fairies or hobgoblins, there are many other elements that connote with a fairy tale stories - a stance advised by Tolkien among others. And although there are no fairies, elves or gnomes present in the Anglo-Saxon poem and as such the claim of Beowulf fairy tale nature should be suppressed, Tolkien, in his discussion of fairy tale elements and its characterization, understands that the exact definition of “a fairy tale” is not a) easily achieved and b) not necessarily containing such creatures. He writes: “The definition of a fairy-story - what it is, or what it should be - does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country”.

Let us thus presume that the absence of fairies (although not fey creatures - those, including Grendel and his mother, fabulous sea monsters and the dragon play a crucial role in the narrative) does not automatically mark Beowulf as a non-fairy tale story. What is however present in the poem is the whole haunting magical nature of the land, the setting in days of yore as described by the poet; from boiling waters and magnificent hall to the stunning darkness of the underground lair and the mead-hall aching from the combat within it. The poem easily fulfils Tolkien's description.

ways of understanding the term and how it is used in Beowulf, which is described in the chapter 2.1.4

36 The kind of description Tolkien refers to (as opposed to its historical context or the occurrence or absence of fairies); “upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country” I will attempt to draw special attention to. Tolkien further ponders the concept and definition of such a story and writes that: “‘fairy-story’ is one which touches on or uses Faerie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faerie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. There is one proviso : if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away.” What he is saying is that in order for a story
Although the language changes with translation, the magical nature of the poem is
definite:

**Heorot, hall of king Hrothgar** (lines 68-79)

So his mind turned
to hall-building: he handed down orders
for men to work on a great mead-hall
meant to be a wonder of the world forever37;
It would be his throne-room and there he would dispense
his God-given goods to young and old---
but not the common land or people’s lives.
Far and wide through the world, I have heard,
orders for work to adorn that wall stead
were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,
finished and ready, in full view,
the hall of halls. Heorot was the name

**Heorot during the fight between Beowulf and monster Grendel** (lines 766-774)

And now the timber trembled and sang,38
a hall-session that harrowed every Dane
inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,
the two contenders crashed through the building.
The hall clattered and hammered, but somehow
survived the onslaught and kept standing:
it was handsomely structured, a sturdy frame
braced with the best of blacksmith’s work
inside and out.

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37 Compare to Tolkien’s translation: “a mightier house for their mead-drinking than the children of men had ever known” (lines 55-56)
38 Tolkien’s translation: “The royal hall rang. (...) The hall was full of noise. Great wonder was it (...) but stout was it smithied within and without with bonds of iron cunningly contrived” (lines 626-632)
Boiling waters of the dark mere (lines 1361-1366)

A few miles from here\(^{39}\)
a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch
above a mere; the overhanging bank
is a maze of tree roots mirrored in its surface.
At night there, something uncanny happens:
the water burns.

Beowulf entering the lair of the Dragon (lines 2545-2558)

Saw a stone arch and a gushing stream\(^{40}\)
that burst from the barrow, blazing and wafting
a deadly heat. It would be hard to survive
(...)
Heat was ignited. The hoard-guard recognized
a human voice, the time was over
for peace and parleying. Pouring forth
in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster
burst from the rock. There was a rumble underground.

It is thus clear that, even if the author did not put his story in the Faërie itself, it would have been set on its outskirts for sure. Other than that, several other concepts and features of a fairy tale story, that I feel can be easily agreed upon, could be identified:

A) A fairytale is a story for children.
B) Is set in a time long ago.
C) Regularly in a world far away.
D) It provides hope that good can conquer evil.
E) It is supposed to teach us something and is used to 'convey cultural information that

\(^{39}\) Compare to eerie description of Tolkien: “In a hidden land they dwell upon highlands wolfhaunted, and windy cliffs, and the perilous passes of the fens, where the mountain-stream goes down beneath the shadows of the cliffs, a river beneath the earth. It is not far hence in measurement of miles that that mere lies, over which there hang rimy thickets, and a wood clinging by its roots overshadows the water. There may each night be seen a wonder grim, fire upon the flood” (lines 1133-1140)

\(^{40}\) Tolkien: “at the mound's side a stone-arch standing from whence a stream came hurrying from the hill. The boiling water of that spring was hot with deadly fires; no man could long while endure unscorched that deep place night the hoard by reason of the dragon's flame” (lines 2138-2143)
influences behaviour).
F) Does often contain magic and supernatural.
G) Employs repetition, and numerals 3, 6 or 7.
H) There is generally a journey or a quest of a hero in its core.
I) The main protagonist is frequently aided by supernatural powers or helpers.
J) And, of course, contains monsters and magical weapons.

After examining Beowulf with these fairy tale elements in mind, there is a considerable amount of evidence to support the possibility of marking this secular poem as one of the fairy stories of the past and in doing so supporting the claim of perceiving Beowulf as a course book meant to educate. If that be considered the case we would be dealing with the oldest written fairy tale in English.

With the close connection between fairy tales, stories for education and the course book of Beowulf in mind, let us now briefly turn our attention to the features of fairy tale stories highlighted above, purposefully avoiding the first element (A) fairytale is a story for children.) which will be returned to later in this introduction:

B) The Beowulf poet makes sure we understand the settings of his story in the very first line of the poem: in days of yore, or, in Heaney's translation in days gone by (line 1). This is of a considerable since this time of narration is one of the most prominent features of the fairy tale narratives introduced above. Should the poem be set in a time closer to the time of writing, as opposed to the almost forgotten heathen past, the fairy tale element would be repressed. By commencing the poem in such a way the poet seems to be sending a signal: listen, sit down and learn - I am going to tell you a story.

C) Although the poem was most likely composed in Mercia (Donaldson, 1966), located in the Western Midlands of England, the entire story is set in a kingdom far away, e.g. in Scandinavia.

41 Also described by Tolkien: “remnants of the oldest recorded English tales of Faerie” (On Fairy-Stories, 1966)
42 By his I within this thesis refer to this particular retelling of the poem which has been written down by the Beowulf poet. I have no wish to propose that the poet was the original inventor of the core story - for that discussion would be well over the extend of this thesis. The poem in fact consist of many episodes and minor stories that have all, as it has been argued in the past, preceded the writing by the Beowulf poet by perhaps several centuries. See Davidson (1890), Bonjour (1950) or Bjork (1997), for further reference.
D) Next is the way in which fairy tale stories provide its readers with hope for a future or life where good vanquishes evil. Although this feature could be considered stereotypical from the point of view of contemporary European audience, it is far from universal, especially when looking closely fairy tales of older or different origins. On the topic of hope and good versus evil in connection to juvenile audience, G. K. Chesterton formulated this feature of fairy tale saying: “Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed”. Although Chesterson would hardly have major poem of the 8th century author in mind it translates directly into it's story.

E) Examples of educational lessons, teaching and conveying cultural information influencing behaviour are numerous in the poem as we will see in the analytical part but for now merely a brief mentioning of the poet's strong emphasis on various lessons concerning grand topics such as Christianity, behaviour, fate and additional minor ones, such as dishonesty or anger management is required. Indeed, Beowulf is a prime example of what Andrew Lang wrote in the preface to his Lilac Fairy Book; he said that fairy tales in general attempt to be funny and fail or try to preach and succeed - which is what can be observed within Beowulf at almost every opportunity. Arguably the preaching is where it is at its best.

F) The poem does, from the perspective of contemporary as well as the original reader, employ magic and supernatural throughout the whole journey: starting with the man eating eoten\(^\text{43}\) (line 86 and onwards) and the mythical waters of the eacne eardas\(^\text{44}\) where water boils (lines 1361-1366) to miracles (for example lines 1605-1607), magical beasts (lines 1426-1430, 2211 and onwards) and magical blades hammerer during the age of giants as well as those of dragon's treasure not neglecting the already mentioned Beowulf's mythical gift from God, examples are inherently abound.

G) What is more, the poet, arguably on purpose, links the story with Biblical repetition, e.g. recurrence of numbers 3 and 6 - another common feature of fairy tales. This kind of

\(^{43}\) Anglo-Saxon word for giant, man-eater or cannibal - meaning Grendel.

\(^{44}\) Evil lake that in Heaney's translation is introduced in lines 1361-1372.
repetition is typical of fairy tale stories and serves, among other reasons, to highlight the lesson that is being taught and the repetitious elements benefit easier remembering. In Beowulf, there are three lethal battles of the hero, three celebratory feasts, three Beowulf's strivings in combat with fiendish hag before she perishes and six boasts of his, during the heroic events of the story. Three lethal encounters are tied directly to the case of why number three is as common in fairy tales as it is. And although more reasons could be tracked down, the one often voiced is that the number three creates the atmosphere of symbolism in the story. In fairy tales when three entities, be it pigs, jewels or tries it takes for a hero to succeed, stand for the unspecified general nature of such thing. Three brothers would thus represent any relatively small group of siblings; which in turn serves educational purpose and helps the reader project the wisdom gained from the story to his or her life. Consequently, three duels of the Geat arch-warrior stand for any recurrent struggle or, in similar way, any member of the poet's audience that would feel to have something in common with the lofgeornost\textsuperscript{45} hero.

H) As for the remaining features, the relevance of the heroic quest is indeed imperative in the poem and ought to be apparent without additional debate. The concept of journey and questing is however discussed in more depth later within the analytical part, in relation to Campbell's monomyth (see chapter 2.2). Both Hrothgar and Beowulf are understood as the protagonists of their own heroes' journeys when examining their mentor-pupil roles (see chapter 2.2).

I) Another link connecting the poem with fairy tales lies within the protagonist relying on supernatural powers and his Godly benefactor. The Eternal Lord being explicitly stated as the source and authority of Beowulf's strength (see for examples lines 1270-1271 or lines 2181-2183). Beowulf may thus be courageous and may exhibit a multitude of heroic qualities but “the power of thirty man in grip of each hand” (lines 380-381) is certain to be a gift from the Lord of mankind and although the description of powers coming from God as magic is controversial, it is for certain that the unnatural abnormal and incredible power of Beowulf is not ordinary.

\textsuperscript{45} “and keenest to win fame” (Heaney 1999) or “for praise most eager” (Tolkien 2014) - meaning Beowulf.
And finally, the Beowulf poet does employ the way of describing the monsters (lines 2111-2112, 2270-2273) and magical heirlooms (lines 1557-1559) in such a way that there is little doubt they possess mythical capabilities, the same would apply for the translation done by Tolkien: “a sword endowed with charms of victory, a blade gigantic, old, with edges stern” (lines 1304-1306). Such items are presented in manner not indistinct from the descriptions found in fairy tales (such as that of the Vorpal Sword used to slay manxome⁴⁶ Jabberwock in Lewis Carroll's poem, the Ruby Sword from The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde or several descriptions of magic swords in the The Chronicles of Prydain by Lloyd Alexander or those of Narnia.

Having touched here on the discussion of the other fairy-tale like elements, the focus can return to the initial feature from the preceding paragraph.

A) After the full circle, the focus shifts back to the first element attributed to fairy tales, the initial aspect; that they are aimed at children. Not even after an extensive discussion it can not be easily recognized within Beowulf, since the poem would hardly be expected to be aimed at juvenile. Multiple authors however, such as several times mentioned Tolkien or Maria Tatar, argue against the notion that fairy tales would be aimed solely at children. If it is so, Beowulf then would be suitable and educational for adult audience, indeed, that would be where the majority of the lectures is aimed at.

As has been mentioned in the introduction, Beowulf is a narrative inherently followed by much controversy and it would seem that there is not a single topic the academic personnel would agree upon. Thus, naturally, more concrete evidence would be required prior to assessing the poem as a fairy tale. However even if one rejects the arguments presented above and the reasons discussed later, the presence of strong fairy tale features in Beowulf is undeniable. This fact comes back to the first major claim of this thesis: Beowulf is a pedagogical poem with substantial fairy tale elements and was created for (not only) young listeners and young adults to learn from.

On a final note let me presume this: the purpose of the poem may very well have been what has been described in the past; eg. being an elegy, an epic, a testament to heathen past, a memory of Germanic kings, a parallel to Bible and Christianity in medieval Europe or anything else from the myriad of usages and meanings that Beowulf

⁴⁶ Fearsome, horrible. From Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass (1871).
has had assigned, but at the same time it is a story that was to learn from, a course book that was and possibly still is to be learned from and taught through. It is a didactic material that combines fairy tale elements with those of educational stories created for a wide range of audience in spite of traditional doctrines. And as argued, it exhibits similar educational values as fairy tale stories; Beowulf exhibiting the fey features described by Tolkien then serves as an important didactic medium. Having partially established all of this, in connection to our pedagogical claim, we will look in the second part of this thesis into the specific lessons and issues contained in the work and analyse individual lines and speeches.
2. ANALYTICAL PART

In this part of the thesis several particular topics that are relevant to the two claims from the theoretical part (e.g., Beowulf was intended to be a course book and the author was rebelling against Christian doctrine that would oppress pagan past) will be discussed. Those lessons will be divided into those delivered through the poet and his comments as a narrator in the story (chapter 2.1) and those communicated by the character of Beowulf and to lesser extend Hrothgar (chapter 2.2). After limited background discussion to the topics, the chief focus within this part lays on the actual lessons taught in the poem.

2.1 POET'S TEACHINGS

2.1.1 RECONCILING PAGAN WITH CHRISTIAN

The chief argument within this thesis concerning the personnel of the Beowulf poet has been that of dual nature. Firstly it has been laid out that the poet was creating an educational poem with fairy tale elements in order to educate and teach through it—he was writing a course book. Secondly he was claimed to be distinguished as a revolutionary author that was combining old pagan customs and religion with the new Latin Christian. And consequently, through his poem he would exhibit how both apparent opposites could be combined whereas traditionally the old customs of Germanic ancestry would be scorned upon.

Back in 1993 Niles described the Beowulf poet as a “master of the aristocratic oral tradition” (pp 104) and acknowledged him well fit for telling a story that would shake common beliefs and traditions. And as such he would be well fitted for the aim that he set to achieve - education. Whether is was because of his fondness for the past, customs or humanistic feelings, the author was preaching on behalf of both religions, heroic pagan past and the new Christianity alike. In his work he seems to synthesise both of them, as opposed to men like Alcuin who would hold that the house it too narrow to hold both. The poet then, for one reason or another, sets to help understand

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47 This view is among others partially advocated by Thomas D. Hill who in *The Christian Language and Theme in Beowulf* asserts that the author of Beowulf was trying to write outside the boundaries of strict Latin doctrine.

48 Fred C. Robinson notes on the topic of the conflict of pagan and Christian that the Beowulf poet wanted to write about noble pagans but had to submit to what must have been a majority of his time.

49 In reference to Alcuin's letter, who wrote that “house is too narrow, it can not house both”, meaning both Ingeld, standing for old Anglo-Saxon pagan history, and Christ, standing for the Latin rhetoric. The general perception of that time was that the need for discarding the pagan heathen customs in
and not forget the past of days of yore in a new light. It might be worthwhile at this point to quote at full the much cited speech by Old English scholar, Alcuin of York (Epistola 124, Duemmler, 1895:183):

Let the words of God be read at the meal of the clergy. There it is proper to listen to the lector, not a harp-player; the sermons of the Fathers not to songs of the people. For what has Ingeld\(^50\) to do with Christ? Narrow is the house; it cannot hold both. The King of Heaven wants nothing to do with so-called kings who are pagan and damned. For the eternal King reigns in heaven; the damned pagan laments in hell.

Although this famous critique of the study of pre-Christian stories was not directed at Beowulf, but instead specifically aimed at different narrative\(^51\) the issue is identified is exactly the same. Beowulf, being the most prominent example (and indeed, in some aspects the only secular poetic example) of the combination of Christian and pre-Christian beliefs, is defending, explaining and presenting Anglo-Saxon Germanic culture, beliefs and customs. This is especially apparent at the non-anachronistic Biblical references and passages concerning man eating eoten Grendel\(^52\). Such parts are, according to Tolkien: “directly connected with Scripture, yet they cannot be dissociated from the creatures of northern myth. The argument here thus is that the poet was supporting old heroic pagans side by side with the Christian beliefs. He was preaching to the readers and listeners of his poem the truths that historically preceded those of Christianity - house of God can hold both Ingeld and Christ. He was thus a rebellious author going against strict Latin doctrine and although he might not have been alone, his is the sole surviving manuscript of that time\(^53\). Evidence for this claim is provided below, distinguishing between pagan praise, Christian teaching and combining the two.

\(^{50}\) Ingeld was a legendary pre-Christian hero and king of the Heaðobards that stood against Hrothgar and his Danes. He appears in both early English literature as well as in Norse legends. See also footnote 53.

\(^{51}\) The series of stories about pagan warrior Ingeld, Heaðobard ruler. The conflict between the two kings end when Ingeld puts Hrothgar's hall, Heorot, to torch (to which there are allusions in the Beowulf poem itself, lines 777-781). Both stories - of Ingeld and Beowulf depict similar features such as praise of pagan past, history and ancestors and are commonly compared.

\(^{52}\) There are other, non-anachronistic references, especially to the Old Testament, such as the race of giants that was destroyed by the Almighty by the flood (lines 1687-1693) or the story of how Cain killed Abel and was punished by the Lord (lines 106-114).

\(^{53}\) For further reading on the Beowulf poet's depiction and praise of pagan customs see for example Roberta Frank’s essay *The Beowulf Poet's Sense of History* (1982).
Earlier some possibilities were laid out yet no proof could be supplied for them. The topic of the poet's reasoning behind the combination of Ingeld and Christ has been prevailing at the past; for instance Thomas D. Hill in his *The Christian Language and Theme in Beowulf* ponders on this subject. In the essay he discusses at length possible inclinations and reasons of the writer to produce such, rather unchristian-like, piece of literature:

I would submit that a young Anglo-Saxon warrior who was schooled in Germanic heroic legend, whose claim to aristocratic status extended far into the pagan past, whose law was the old law confirmed by his people since time immemorial, whose homeland had been won by pagan warriors, who bore on his person ancient pagan ornaments, who defended himself with an old sword purportedly made by Weland and certainly made by pagan craftsmen, and whose landscape was dominated by magnificent burial mounds in which the great men (and women) of his race were buried in pagan splendour, had much reason to respect the pagan heritage of his people no matter how pious he was and no matter how deeply he venerated the Church and the priests, the monks, and the nuns who served it. Such a young (or old) aristocrat faced a deep cultural conflict since the dominant authorities in the Church in this period would not, or to put the case more accurately, could not accept the claim that the paganism was a legitimate mode of religious and cultural self-understanding. If paganism was legitimate, if pagans too could be saved what was the point of Christian faith and Christian ascesis? (pp 200)

Although Hill has much to say on the subject of reconciling the who religious directions and it would take far too long to explore all his thoughts on the subject, I feel two parts of this lengthy quotation are in particular worthy of further examination.

Firstly he mentions “a deep cultural conflict” of the Beowulf poet. It would be hard to provide evidence for such a claim for it is unknown what his exact feelings towards this religious conflict would be however it may be safe to assume that he solved it in a way that is singular only to him (at least within the scope of what we have

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54 Weland (or Wayland) the Smith is a legendary pagan smith and creator of most venerable artefacts and weapons of the pre-Christian era. He is referred to in both Old Norse sources and those of old Anglo-Saxons. In Heaney's Beowulf he is mentioned in lines 450-455 and stays as a prime example of pagan praise in the poem.
available today): he combined the two. Thus through the whole poem a clever and pervasive merging of the old and new is abundant - the already mentioned attempt to house both Ingeld and Christ in the same hall.

The way the pagan praise and Christian praise are interconnected in the most diplomatic of ways. There seems to be a connection between what Hill says and the second claim of this work – that the rebellious figure of the Beowulf poet was indeed a force of new and arguably humanistic approach to the twin religions of his time. Secondly he writes that the clergy could not accept pagan past as a legitimate alternative to Latin Christianity, which might be the case with the larger part of the educated society however for the poet of Beowulf this would mean an exemplary way of teaching something new. For, as already argued, he was creating a course book that seek to assist readers and listeners in understanding how to deal with their religious lives, the deep cultural conflict, this would only help stay apart of traditional views and highlight what he had to say. After all, the poet probably did hold Weland's arms and the tombstones of his ancestry in the highest esteem and would aim at convincing others to do similarly.

At this point short comparison of Beowulf and to some extend briefly touched stories of Ingeld might be beneficial. Similar issue is present within the Vatnsdœla saga, a Germanic legend which is a part of Icelandic literature of 12-13th century. The comparison here is proper for it displays that what was started by the Beowulf poet could very well be followed by similar notions. It has been argued that the trend of humanistic understanding of the past and its combinations with Christian doctrines that was likely started by the Beowulf poet was followed by younger authors. In The Christian Language and Theme in Beowulf Hill compares the author of Vatnsdœla saga with the author of Beowulf. In his words, both authors were:

attempting to reconcile pious antiquarian sympathy for the Germanic past and the claims of Christian truth. The kind of dogmatic hostility to the Germanic past reflected in Alcuin's letter (…), but it did not prevent the author of Vatnsdœla saga from depicting noble monotheistic pre-Christian Germanic heroes just as the Beowulf-poet had done before him.

55 See in particular Thomas D. Hill, The Christian Language and Theme of Beowulf.
“Dogmatic hostility” that Hill describes was likely one of the more prominent reasons for the Beowulf poet's rebellion. It could be safely argued that in creating his course book he put forward an opinion that was not voiced anywhere else at his time. Hill then clearly recognizes the rebellious character of both texts (Beowulf and Vatnsdeela saga) yet he does not mention anything on the subject of actually teaching the opinions to others.

2.1.2 BEOWULF - FULL OF OPPOSITES AND INCONSISTENCIES

The poet of Beowulf, although a rather consistent in his own right, following the literary patterns of his time and his own that he laid out, can be observed to exhibit certain inconsistencies which were subject of much debate. It was already argued in the introduction that the poem is to be perceived as a course book with fairy tale elements, placing the major focus on educating and enlightening as opposed to providing strict cultural or historical account. And although it could be argued that disparities in the poem go against the idea of a clear didactic material that is to be understood and learnt from the place of such disparities should be observed in relation to the rest of the poem. A proposal could thus be made that the Beowulf poet purposefully created the inconsistent elements within his work with his own pedagogical agenda, exhibiting new ways of understanding the past, in mind.

The often scrutinized focal point of these disparities is the character of the main protagonist – Beowulf and the way the poet depicts him. Beowulf himself is, to cite from Understanding Beowulf as an Indo-European Epic: A Study in Comparative Mythology by E. R. Anderson: “greedy or generous, foolhardy or prudent, proud or selfless”. Anderson provides multiple examples of inconsistency in Beowulf's character noting this to be the chief reason for critics being ambivalent about Beowulf's role in the story. In examining the way in which the author presents and describes paganism, his considerable respect towards unchristian ways is apparent.

In accordance to his position as a Christian writer and likely a monk of a Latin

56 Vatnsdeela saga is younger (most probably from 13th century), thus there is around three to four hundred years between them.
57 For more on those see for example Gillian R. Overing, Language, Sign, And Gender In Beowulf.
58 Although this notion of discrepancy is disagreed with and criticized by Colin Chase (The Dating of Beowulf, 1981), he remarks on Anderson's words: “These points of view are not logically compatible. Man or society cannot be both perfect and imperfect in respect to the same attitude, decision, or action” (pp 7).
scribe the poet mentions pagan errors that happen prior to Germanic tribes discovering true god. He does so however only briefly in lines 175-180 where he describes offerings to pagan shrines as heathenish hope. The poet then follows this error by proclaiming that: “Oh, cursed is he who in time of trouble has to trust his soul in the fire’s embrace, forfeiting help; he has nowhere to run” (lines 183-186). These lines appear to be in their strength and structure one of the major lessons given in the context of the poem. Thus the lines, as well as the condemnation of heathens preceding it, happen within the first 200 lines of the poem would hint that the rest of the poem will follow. A Christian monk following his monotheism ways is bound to at least criticize the ways of heathens. However opposite is the truth – after the first two hundred lines there are scarcely any criticism of warrior culture present. Beowulf’s poet spends only those few lines with scorn before, to borrow words by Roberta Frank’s essay on The Beowulf Poet’s Sense of History (pp 14): “depicting noble pagan monotheists for some three thousand lines”.  

We found that Frank is correct, after the initial 200 lines briefly touching on the heathenish hope of pre-Christian pagans the entirety of poem revolves around praising the pagan heroism and noble ways of warrior culture.

Frank is not the only scholar devoting extensive passages in his books to the Beowulf poet's anomalies. Hill in The Christian Language and Theme of Beowulf comments: “Indeed, forty-five lines or so after the flat assertion that the pagan Danes do not know how to worship the Lord, the Beowulf-poet speaks of how the equally pagan Geats gave thanks to God after their successful sea voyage” (lines 227-228).

Where is then this inconsistent tendency exhibited especially clearly in connection to two religions coming from? A possible answer may lie within the pedagogical aim of the poem and the impulse to focus on education rather than anything else: the poet was not concerned with balance or entirely accurate depiction of pagan past, nor the present. He cared for the pedagogical goal he set to achieve – that he would preach on combining the old and new. And since in his time the majority vote would favour the Christian ways and condemnation of Germanic past, he would reflect this in his work. Hence the condemnation of heathens is, in Beowulf, suppressed, limited mostly to the first to hundred lines, whereas the pagan praise is woven into the whole of the poem.

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59 Roberta Frank is not the only author employing the term 'noble pagan'. Tolkien speaks of the poem as dealing with ‘the noble pagan of old days’. See also Klaeber's introduction for discourse on the nature of noble pagans and thoughts of Tolkien.
the narrative. The argument here is that the poet on purpose pursued the apparent discrepancy between the praise and condemnation of heathen ways so as to provide his readers and listeners with an alternative to perceiving this conflict. In this view the Beowulf poet is the rebellious element that enriches understanding of the people, as asserted in the second claim of this paper.

The author of Beowulf was already introduced as a force of new that goes against traditional views at every opportunity. He briefly condemns pre-Christian pagan ways that lead to the praise of gastbona\textsuperscript{60} in mere 14 lines out of more than three thousand, whereas other Christian writers of his time might devote the whole poem to the judgement of the heathens. He depicts noble pagan warrior kings as those who understood, drew strength from and were ultimately saved by Lord, whereas such heathens would be traditionally depicted as bowing to idols.

Furthermore, it would seem that pagan praise is not the only factor in which the Beowulf poet stands alone. He presents his young hero, Beowulf, as a teacher and mentor of even wise, older kings, whereas traditionally wisdom would be found in old age as opposed to the youth that is to learn from the elderly. This lesson, although not especially strongly voice within the narrative is nevertheless present\textsuperscript{61}.

All of the concerns therefore, especially those related to the puzzling nature, behaviour, depiction and religious practises of Beowulf, only aggravate critics for only as long as they persist in understanding him as a living, realistic character. Perhaps a valid way of understanding puzzling, unrealistic Beowulf, would be to perceive him as a fictional character created to teach through and serve as an example and a focal point for the lessons the poet wanted to share? In such view the discrepancies and irritatingly unanswerable mixtures of apparent opposites would perhaps seem less vexing. A similar opinion was voiced by Kemp Malone, who in his discussion of Beowulf and the level of reality versus fantasy said that: “the poet was not striving after realism; he was concerned to make a champion in terms of his own monkish ideas” (pp 21-23). The point I am trying to make is that the Beowulf poet had goals other than historical accuracy, believability and consistency\textsuperscript{62}.

\textsuperscript{60} Anglo-Saxon word for soul-murderer, a kenning for the Devil. Referring to lines 175-188.

\textsuperscript{61} On multiple occasions the author of Beowulf depicts youth as as wise as those in old age or even goes as far as to suggest that the wisdom of old age is worthless (see for example lines 2446-2449). This argument of the source of wisdom, whether it should be accumulated by deeds and strength or time alone is further discussed in the subchapter 2.2.2 of Beowulf's teachings.

\textsuperscript{62} See in particular Kennedy and Tolkien who discourse on the Beowulf poet's aims and goals.
2.1.3 PAGAN PRAISE

Let us, at least for now, give the author benefit of the doubt and assume that he had a reason for depicting the protagonist of the poem as well as the work itself in such divergent light. It was argued that discrepancies and divergent elements were probably not of primary concern to him. We argued that the aim of the poet was to write poetic story to teach through - even if at the cost of some consistency and realism.

It has also been said that, on the whole Beowulf is not siding with or against pagan or Christian but he is instead offering a combination of both. Despite this merging it would seem that the rebellious nature of his poem leads to him valuing pagan past more than would be regular\(^6\). Indeed, praising Anglo-Saxon ancestry and Germanic past is what we find the poet and his character doing throughout the majority of the poem. At the time of writing he was arguably not chiefly concerned with the support of New Christian doctrines that were spreading to the Isles during the conversion, instead, he might have felt keenly the dismissal of ancestral customs and hence opted to focus on endorsing the past. This supposed defence of heathen past leads back to the second claim introduced in the opening of this thesis - that the Beowulf poet was rebelling against the Church in dedicating his poem to the ancestral praise. Let us look at the segments of the narrative that affirm the pagan past, before we proceed:

“So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness” (lines 2-3). The very beginning of the poem sets the time to long ago, proclaiming the greatness for the pagan kings\(^6\).

“So his mind\(^6\) turned to hall-building: he handed down orders for men to work on a great mead-hall meant to be a wonder of the world forever” (lines 68-71). The poet's focus on the majestic hall ought to be considered pagan praise, considering its potent connections to the pagan customs that take place within the hall\(^6\).

“If the battle takes me, send back this breast-webbing that Weland fashioned and Hrethel gave me, to Hygelac” (lines 452-454). The poet repeatedly comes back to the

\(^6\) See the comparison between critique of heathen habits and the pagan praise in chapter 2.1.2
\(^6\) See also line 11, praising the pagan king Shield.
\(^6\) Referring to King Hrothgar, ruler of the Danes, whose hall is later attacked by monstrous Grendel.
\(^6\) Such as mead sharing rituals, boasting, story telling, heroic promises and the act of dispensing treasure by the ring givers - kings. Those are some of the more prominent examples of pagan customs and praise in the poem. In the narrative we also find the descriptions of the seating arrangements (lines 1188-1191) or the ceremonial exchange of gifts (lines 1019-1023, 2172-2176, 2194-2195) that is done according to the customs of pagan ancestry (Hyams).
ancestral heirlooms, weapons and tools of the old pre-Christian smith Weland. This fascination and devotion to the items of old is typical of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic tribes prior to the conversion. See also lines 1450-1453, 1557-1559, 1900-1903\textsuperscript{67}, 2609-2612.

“Finally I healed the feud by paying: I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings” (lines 470-471). Lines 470 and 471 are a miniscule example of constant reminder of feuds and feuding. The system of law which was typical of pre-Christian (and to some extend far into the conversion to Christianity), Anglo-Saxon, Nordic and Germanic lands (Hymans, Wormald). This system was also connected to the heroic code, which is present throughout the narration but will be only touched upon within the scope of this thesis, despite it adding to the pagan praise of the poem\textsuperscript{68}. Beowulf poet exhibits divergent thoughts on the topic of feuding, as is discussed in chapter 2.1.5. However his aim in doing so is clear, that the reader or listener has not an opportunity to forget that the ancestral laws are based on the system. Perhaps most prominent example in the poem is the story of Hrethel and his sons\textsuperscript{69}, particularly line 2466. There are other examples of the code of vengeance and the importance of feuding, mostly voiced by poet's or Beowulf's words as well as his deeds (lines 1577-1583 and 1590, also lines 1668-1670). As mentioned above, feuding is one of the crucial and constant lessons given by the poet and is attended to later in the thesis. Such as in lines 499-606\textsuperscript{70} where Unferth, on of king Hrothgar's thanes, challenges Beowulf and his past victories. The conflict is also an example of pagan praise on the part of the Beowulf poet since such challenges, followed by heroic speeches and shows of boasting were a common feature of life in warrior-king's hall (Olexová, pp 23-24\textsuperscript{71}).

Other segments of the poem that exhibit pagan praise include for instance lines 623-624 which are one of the descriptions of mead sharing ritual, in which the Beowulf

\textsuperscript{67} A particularly fine example of how ancestral items alone change the role of an owner and his social status. See also L. Webster, \textit{Archeology and Beowulf}.

\textsuperscript{68} For more on paganism and heroic code in Beowulf see for example: Hill, John M.; \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic: reconstructing lordship in Early English literature}, chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{69} The story of king Hrethel is a tragic history recalled by Beowulf (lines 2425-1471). He, as a king of the Geats and a grandfather to Beowulf, found himself in an agonizing situation when one of his sons accidentally kills his other son. The feasible remedy normally found kin kin-based justice however would not work in such a case, due to the royal blood of the siblings and Hrethel's love for both. The incident causes much sorrow to the old king and ultimately causes his death.

\textsuperscript{70} Appendix 1

\textsuperscript{71} For more on boasting and challenges in a mead hall see also Hyams (2001).
poets appears to cherish instead of condemnation as one might expect. Lines 884-912\(^\text{72}\) are of equal importance from the standpoint of defence of ancestral pagans. The stories of Ingeld were as to the pagan praise similar in importance to those of Sigemund\(^\text{73}\) (see footnote 53). Finally we should keep in mind the fact that Beowulf begins and ends with pagan funerals\(^\text{74}\) and that the poet includes two more burial rituals during the narrative. The attention these heathen customs receive is well against the Christian prosecution of pagan funeral rites of the Age of Bede and later\(^\text{75}\).

Although there could be identified other, perhaps less evident, examples of pagan praise, those above mentioned ought to cover the majority of the relevant ones. If compared to the way in which the poet's pagans praise the Christian God throughout the poem, we perceive sufficient evidence of the aforementioned merging of the past and present. Unlike men like Alcuin then the author of Beowulf was intervening heathen and Christian and in doing so laying out the possibility of co-existence. Consequently, if there was one lesson to be singled out as the most persistent in his work, it would be pagan praise and the subsequent combination with new religion\(^\text{76}\).

2.1.4 FATE

As introduced earlier, within the course book of Beowulf the poet appears to be siding with pagan heroic past as opposed to solely praising Christian ways and condemnation of old Germanic heathen ways (as would be expected from a Christian author of the Age of Bede). The following subchapter will explore one of the major lectures arguably defended by the poet: That the fate in Beowulf is to be understood as an adversary of God\(^\text{77}\). I will argue that the poet understood, or at least depicted fate in

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\(^\text{72}\) Appendix 2
\(^\text{73}\) All the pagan praise concerning Shield, Ingeld and Sigemund is comprised in lines 4-53, 874-903, 2022-2034 and 2063-2066.
\(^\text{74}\) Shield's funeral (lines 26-53), Beowulf's funeral (lines 3110-3182, Appendix 3).
\(^\text{76}\) Within the scope of this thesis it would be impossible to discuss all of the Christian elements to a sufficient extend. I believe however that its presence, even despite the poet's obvious avoidance of anachronisms, is clear enough to make a point on combining the two by the poet and consequently his teachings of humanistic coexistence. From the vast range of Christian praise in Beowulf see in particular lines 106-114, 587-589, 1687-1693 and 2858-2859. Thomas D. Hill and Fred C. Robinson in particular studied those vigorously. Also in *The Religious Principle in Beowulf* M. P. Hamilton talks at length on the poet's views of the religion and says that the poet: “delighted to observe that the Christian deity always had ruled mankind”.
\(^\text{77}\) Anderson in his *Understanding Beowulf as an Indo-European Epic* likewise distinguishes as such; he
such a way as to suggest it opposes the will of one God. I claimed in the introduction that the Beowulf poet is preaching through his work - in this case on the conflict between the religious courses of events is the lesson at hand. Consequently, this way of understanding fate, as opposed to something that is subject to God, should surprise us not since the author's rebellious nature and strive to teach and present new opinions has been already established. Before delving into the depiction of wyrd, however, a closer look on the segments of the poem dealing with wyrd specifically is in order as well as an introduction to how the concept of wyrd in the poem has been perceived in the past.

Anderson, one of the more prominent authors dealing with the nature of fate and God's will in Beowulf, distinguishes between five most common understandings of wyrd in Beowulf (pp 410-411):

The first would be seeing wyrd as “mythological personification”; though several other critics understood Beowulf's wyrd as such, Anderson puts it perhaps in the most simple terms: “that wyrd in Beowulf has been used as in place of Germanic goddess of Fate” (pp 409).

Secondly, wyrd has been identified as pagan abstraction, an inevitable result of prior events (Anderson, pp 410). In this sense it was partially identified with God's will that was predestined by the past deeps of men.

Chickering (pp 269-73) on the other hand argued that fate in Beowulf plays simply a role of a chain of events. He, after close analysis of the poem, did not deem it to have particularly strong connotation or impact on the story. Anderson describes this approach as “minimalist wyrd” (pp 411). Another description of fate favoured by Blackburn (pp 13) among others was based on an assumption that the poet did in fact not go against traditional church doctrine and instead opted to understand and depict fate as a synonym to Christian God. In this sense the usage of wyrd instead of Almighty or Lord would be simply a way of pagan colouring that he tried to achieve.

Finally there has been a theory that wyrd in Beowulf is syncretic, combining the concept of pagan Fate Goddess with the will of one God. Despite the relatively small number of scholars that would explore this “syncretic wyrd” this concept is the closest also contrasts God and his powers from the fate and notes on the subject that “God and wyrd are not synonymous, for wyrd is impersonal, and cannot “know” anything” (pp 407).

78 See Blanche Williams Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon (1914), in particular pages 42-58.
79 See also Augustyn 2002 and Winterbourn 2004 as well as Tolkien (1936).
80 Only two major personnel speak of Beowulf's fate in such terms: Rosteutscher 1938, pp 4-6 and Timmer 1941, pp 226-228.
to the claim presented here – that the Beowulf poet was synthesising old and new, preaching for Christianity and old pagan ways at the same time. This rationale is partially favoured by Anderson, who however maintains the necessity of bridging the gap between Christian and pagan elements as the reason for the poet's creation of “syncretic wyrd” (as opposed to the poet's aim of combining the two in a humanistic sense).

There are other concepts that have been laid our for wyrd in Beowulf but those noted above count among the more prominent. Others are either less voiced in academic discourse or exhibit some level of similarity to those already discussed. From the aforementioned definitions of fate the last is the closest to the argument present here – thus in this part it is claimed that wyrd be understood as an entity opposed to Christian God, a malevolent force hindering good Christian-pagan heroes. This message entrenched within the poets teaching was perhaps one of the chief arguments he advised for. Based on the analysis of the exact lines from the poem it will be argued that the Beowulf poet indeed used the depiction of fate as evil, to balance the scales of religious struggle highly tipped towards the favour of pagan praise.

2.1.5 TEACHING ON FATE

In this subchapter I will examples of fate in the poem and pay close attention to its depiction and context. Preaching on the nature of fate has been argued to be one of the major pedagogical themes and as such the thoughts of both the poet as well as the characters will be weighted in context to my claim.

Beowulf is explaining what happens should he fall in the fight with Grendel (lines 450-455):

“No need then to lament for long or lay out my body: if the battle takes me send back this breast-webbing that Weland fashioned and Hrethel gave me to Lord Hygelac. Fate goes ever as fate must.”

The last sentence of the paragraph is the first mentioning of fate, or wyrd, in the poem. From Beowulf's words a certain degree of fatalistic approach can be seen – he knows that once on the outcome the decision is made, the fallen combatant

81 Tolkien in his essay On Fairy-Stories notes, that this distinction, the question that the audience asks - who is good and who is bad - is of an utmost importance for it is a conflict between this good and evil that helps to carry something from the story. The Beowulf poet appears to make this distinction between good God and malevolent power of wyrd clear in the thoughts and speeches of his characters.
will move to Dryhtnes dome\textsuperscript{82}. In this speech he partially implies his defeat although he is probably confident enough that He can best the monster. Nevertheless Beowulf does connect the act of him dying and the fate or the will of fate which puts the wyrd into negative light, opposing the forces of good that Beowulf stand for, for the first time. In Tolkien's translation the choice of words and the message stays the same, with the only difference in that Tolkien translates references to Fate as to feminine she, thus having: “Fate goeth ever as she must!” (line 367)\textsuperscript{83}. Thus his translation resembles the concept of Fate in Beowulf as Germanic goddess\textsuperscript{84}.

King Hrothgar describing the situation in his hall (lines 476-480):

“...My household-guard are on the wane, fate sweeps them away into Grendel's clutches – but God can easily halt these raids and harrowing attacks!”

In line 477 the second protagonist of the novel King Hrothgar both calls wyrd as a source of the harrowing and deaths of the Danes as well as names God as a force opposing it. In his mind it is “The Fate that sweeps his thanes away”, whether is fate understood as a force of nature, female goddess or simple malevolent course of action. God, standing presumably for Christian Lord can however stop the evil – caused by wyrd and Grendel alike. Tolkien's translation exhibits the same choice of vocabulary, structure and meaning\textsuperscript{85} - Fate in contrast to God and men.

The Beowulf poet describes what Grendel's feelings are prior to his attack (lines 730-735):

“And his glee was demonic, picturing the mayhem: before morning he would rip life from limb and devour them, feed on their flesh; but his fate that night was due to change, his days of ravening had come to an end.”

If the hypothesis in this chapter is correct, eg. that the Beowulf poet preaches on

\textsuperscript{82} In modern English usually translated as lords hall.
\textsuperscript{83} For the different ways of understanding fate, such as fate as pagan goddess, see above, chapter 1.2.4
\textsuperscript{84} Also see Williams (1914).
\textsuperscript{85} “Fate hath swept into the dire clutch of Grendel. God (alone) may easily hinder from his deeds that savage foe!” (lines 385-387)
the nature of wyrd staying in opposition to God, with fate hampering the hero's actions and Lord protecting and helping them, then lines 733-734 describe Grendel as the harrowing force whose fate is to murder and slaughter. That will change however, possibly thanks to the Lord of Mankind (as mentioned by King Hrothgar in lines 479-480), and Grendel perishes. From his perspective though, his death in the mere caused by Beowulf ripping his arm off, is fate's doing. Tolkien does not provide a word wyrd, translating the line 480 (in his translation lines 599-600) as: “It was no longer doomed that he yet more might of the race of men devour beyond that night.” His implication that in the past it was fated (doomed) that Grendel ought to slaughter Danes upholds the notion that later God will change this way of things. Thus even in Tolkien's version Wyrd is still behind the evil wickedness befalling the heroes of the poem.

The poet commenting on the Beowulf's victory over Grendel (lines 827-832):

“The Geat captain had boldly fulfilled his boast to the Danes: he had healed and relieved a huge distress, unremitting humiliations, the hard fate they'd been forced to undergo, no small affliction.”

The Beowulf poet proposes the Wyrd as the source of Danish hardships, fate here being connoted with evil. Although there is no mentioning of the opposing force of good God, and in the translation by Tolkien there is no direct mentioning of fate at all, the poet's ideology of Wyrd staying being the hardships of heroes stand.

Another contrast of good God's will with the forces of darkness presents itself in lines 1055-1057 where the poet remembers the Geat slain during the Grendel's attack:

“as he would have killed more, had not mindful God and one man's daring prevented that doom”

Here although Wyrd is not specifically mentioned it is clear that God's will is that of defence and good to mankind. As with the previous points 1-4 Christian Lord is the power that helps, as opposed to Grendel and antagonistic fate.

86 “all the woe and the tormenting sorrow that they had erewhile suffered and must of necessity endure, no little bitterness” (lines 676-678)
Anderson, who translates the lines differently\(^87\) but with the similar mentioning of wise God, argues: “Wyrd is not an extension of God. Quite the opposite, wyrd is independent of God, but at critical moments, God and man sometimes can stand against it, and alter its course” (pp 408). Anderson's expertise then support the claim that the Beowulf poet is portraying Wyrd as an antagonistic force staying against heroes and the God.

The poet giving account on both Danish and Geat warriors resting prior to the assault of Grendel mother's (lines 1234-1235):

> “how could they know fate, the grim shape of things to come, the threat looming over many thanes as night approached”

Wyrd is depicted synonymously with grim shape of the future exhibiting the dark nature of it in its entirety. The poet will follow on this implication in lines 1241-1242. Tolkien's translation and the description of Wyrd is essentially identical\(^88\).

The Beowulf poet foreshadowing the second attack of the mere-monster\(^89\) (lines 1241-1242):

> “and one man lay down to his rest, already marked for death”

In this example the author does not mention fate as the force that marked the man (Hrothgar's counsellor Aeshere) for death although an assumption could be made that these two lines are interconnected with the preceding lines 1234-1235. The fact is nevertheless that Aeshere is later killed, arguably due to the evil force – here proposed to be wyrd. The poet's lesson is likewise consistent in Tolkien, who writes that “ill fate hung above the warriors” (see lines 1029-1030).

The Beowulf poet giving account on what will happen to King Hygelac, Beowulf's father, in the future (lines 1206-1208):

> “Fate swept him away because of his proud need to provoke a feud with the Frisians.”

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\(^87\) “had not wise God stood against stood against wyrd and the man's (Beowulf's) spirit”

\(^88\) “fate they knew not grim, appointed of old, as it had gone already forth for many of those good men, so soon as evening came” (lines 1022-1024)

\(^89\) The attack Grendel's mother, lines 1280-1309).
Although in this foreshadowing quote the poet states Hygelac's pride as the reason for his death, it is conceivable wyrd that ultimately destroys him. And although the exact clauses and reasons are unclear – it might have been that the fate's death to Hygelac was a punishment for king's disdain, the negative role of wyrd, he that takes the life of good king, is present. Tolkien translates: “Fate took him, for that he in his pride had challenged his own ruin and the enmity of the Frisian folk” (line 996 - 997) likewise denouncing Wyrd for the death.

Beowulf remembers how one of thanes - Handscio - perished, when giving account of his journey to king Hygelac (lines 2076-2080):

“There deadly violence came down on Handscio and he fell as fate ordained, the first to perish, rigged out for the combat. A comrade from our ranks had come to grief in Grendel's maw: he ate up the entire body.”

Here the Beowulf poet attributes Wyrd a similar role as in lines 476-480: fate is the one wishing for hero's death, as opposed to God who would in the vast majority of cases with victory to the man. The poets lesson seems definite and consistent: Christian God is in opposition to pagan Wyrd.

The Beowulf poet on the future of Beowulf prior to the dragon fight (lines 2421-2424):

“His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain: it would soon claim his coffered soul, part life from limb. Before long the prince's spirit would spin free from his body.”

The poet reminds his audience that although one's wyrd can not be understood, it can not be avoided either. The role fate will play in Beowulf's life is that it causes his death. The portrayal of Wyrd in Tolkien's translation exhibits similar feelings; fate is what assaults Beowulf⁹⁰.

There are other instances of wyrd inflicting casualties on people of Beowulf⁹¹

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⁹⁰ “fate very night indeed that was to assail that aged one (Beowulf), to attack the guarded soul within and sunder life from body” (lines 2037-2039)

⁹¹ For example in lines 2573-2575 Wyrd stops Beowulf from winning the dragon fight: “that final day was the first time when Beowulf fought and fate denied him glory in battle.”; In lines 2813-2816 dying Beowulf addresses Wiglaf, after the dragon encounter: “You are the last of us, the only one left, of the Waegmundings. Fate swept us away, sent my whole brave high-born clan to their final doom.”; Also lines 3085-3086 when Wiglaf ponders the end of Beowulf: “it was too cruel a fate that forced the king to that encounter.”
and as can be recognized from the not insignificant number of occurrences in the poem, Fate indeed appears to be accountable for most, if not all, hardships that the Danish and Geat heroes encounter; a lesson presented by the Beowulf poet to his audience. If we take into account the pervasive inclination of the Beowulf poet for pagan praise (from line 189 till the end) this depiction of wyrd similar to pagan female deity that hampers hero's journey balances the unchristian praise for Germanic past. Although the contribution of fate is not as prominent in Tolkien's translation, there are still several strong links to the theory introduced here. These lines above thus exhibit how the Beowulf poet's pedagogical aim concerning fate and God could be understood. Indeed, Wyrd in Beowulf has been perceived as an adversary to God and Beowulf with such persistence that some scholars touched on the notion even when primarily focusing on other topics. For instance Hamilton in her *Religious Principles in Beowulf* writes in chapter three when discussing how the poet portrayed the concept of fate and its role: “(Fate) also appears to have had a hand in the death of Beowulf. Wyrd did not grant him victory in the battle with the Dragon” (lines 2574-75)\(^92\) (pp 324).

To summarize, I have asserted that the Beowulf poet's view of wyrd and its relationship to Christian deity was different and that the message he preaches through his poem varies from what would be traditionally expected from a Christian author. This labelling of fate as evil that stands opposing the good Lord is one of they pieces of Christian praise that weight the otherwise pagan fondness of the poem\(^93\). So although the poet's lessons lie in combining the old and new and not forfeiting past of the ancestry, the Christian view of good God replacing the past is powerful.

2.1.6 FEUDS

Feuds and feuding is one of the most reoccurring elements that the Beowulf poet comes back to repeatedly and as such has in the past drew a considerable amount of discussion. In this part I will present feuds and feuding as one of the lessons in the supposed course book of Beowulf. A lecture given by the poet against the nature of kin-based justice; I will claim that the Beowulf poet portrayed feuds and examples kin-based justice as evil and barbaric. This Christian teaching, the poem advising against pre-Christian ways of the law, will lay in contrast to his otherwise pagan praise. I will


\(^93\) For more on this see for instance *Revenge and Superego Mastery in Beowulf* by J. M. Hill (1989).
attempt to exhibit why such condemnation of feuding is apparent and discuss what has been said on the subject. I naturally do not wish to impose that I am the first to notice the vast significance of feuds in Beowulf. Nor the way Beowulf poet preaches against the nature of vendettas and kin-slaughters of Anglo-Saxon Germanic past; the stand of this thesis will be however connected to the pedagogical theme of the poem and the message the poet is preaching to his audience. Many scholars and critics agree, even though their points vary mildly on this particular question of the author of Beowulf standing for or against the kin based justice.

Hyams (2001) studies the state of law and feuding in Anglo-Saxon England in some 150 years prior to the Norman conquest. He notes that “vendetta was not only acceptable but also unavoidable way of dealing with crimes in Anglo-Saxon world”. He further recognizes the concept of feuding as a prime target for legislative changes (pp 2). Which is, as I will argue, what also the Beowulf poet attempted in his portrayal of feuds.

Wormland (2009) reminds us that the process of change from law based on feuds to that of Christians was happening over a long period of time. This era of turmoil concerning state and individual law was also likely the time during the Beowulf poem was written, established to be around 10th century. The Beowulf poet, most likely a highly educated author, likely a member of aristocracy or clergy would be expected to support in his writing the new Christian, social and cultural, changes. He thus, contrary to the other topics in which the poet's stance seems outside the norm, supports this change of a kin-based justice that Wormland describes. He sets his story in the days of yore, in times long ago which certainly held feudal law at high esteem; a superiority of feud based law that likely did not change towards the Age of Bede (Wormland). The poet, taking the role of the teacher, while creating the educational Beowulf poem, then appears to be siding against feuds and feuding and portraits the suffering and negativity

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94 See for example Friedrich Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (1941), in the introduction the author notes that: “In Beowulf, the sole surviving long poem from the era, the prima facie importance of feud fairly leaps out. The great poem contains references to more than a dozen feuds.”

95 A term otherwise most strongly put forward by P. Wormald in his *Anglo-Saxon Law and Scots Law*. Wormald, an established author in the field of Anglo-Saxon law and its history, writes on page 193, that: “system of “wer, bót and wite”, that is, of feud and compensation with only a marginal “take” for the king - in PC parlance “kin-based” justice - Anglo-Saxon law has been represented as essentially unchanged over the four and a half centuries from the code of “Ethelberht to the Conquest and beyond.”” He further discusses the consequences of kin-based justice as well as the reasons for it staying in its prime long after most Anglo-Saxon converted to Christianity.
connoted with it. He provides numerous commentaries, some of which will be examined below, on the topic while contrasting it with the words of his characters. Before proceeding further however, let us examine the specific parts of the poem that deal with feuds and vendetta.

Lines 152-154

“The vicious raids of Grendel,

his long and unrelenting feud,

nothing but war”

The depiction of a man eating eoten, Grendel, and his feud against Hrothgar of the Danes. He is plaguing the Danish land for twelve years without giving them an opportunity for reprisal. Throughout the beginning of the poem the suffering caused by this (albeit so far one sided) feud apparent. It would seem from the narrative that Grendel assaults within the first few hundred lines are unprovoked, the only reason likely being Grende's anger, malice and the hatred for the songs of Almighty (lines 87-114).

Lines 423-424

“And avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it

upon themselves, I devastated them)”

Beowulf describing how he avenged enemies of his land, he did so however with a rather Christian rationale. The author makes sure his hero's fights are always for good reason, this is connected to one of the less prevalent lessons of Beowulf - when the slaughter and combat is proper (for more discourse on these lessons see chapter 2.2.1).

Lines 1206-1208

“Fate swept him away

because of his proud need to provoke

a feud with the Frisians”

An insight given by the poet into what will happen to King Hygelac, who will die wearing the gifts from Beowulf. There the two concepts of this thesis connect; fate as the force behind his death and the reason being the bloody feud with his enemies -
Frisians.

**Lines 1338-1340**

“and now this powerful
other one arrives, this force for evil

 driven to avenge her kinsman’s death”

Continuous feud between Danes and the monsters spawned from Cain can not seem to bring peace. After the first attack there is another and consequently others, from both sides, take place. This vicious circle is well portrayed in the narrative; and even after the monster is finally slain, his mother (according to the kin-based law) returns to cause yet more suffering - on the figure of Aeshere. See also lines 1277-1279.

**Lines 1668-1670**

“I have wrested the hilt
from the enemies’ hand, avenged the evil
done to the Danes; it is what was due”

Last five words of Heaney's translation here are of a particular interest. The poet's specification that is was proper, almost required, that the feud for Aeshere is settled once more. This message, although in different wording, is prevalent in translations of Tolkien and others. The bloody feud described up to the point when Grendel's mother perishes does however only make room for further killings in the future.

**Lines 2027-2029**

The guardian of the kingdom sees good in it

and hoped this woman will heal old wounds

and grievous feuds.

Beowulf's hopes that the marriage between Ingeld and Freawaru will heal the vicious feud of the past (although he does exhibit certain scepticism for he understands how deep rooted feuding is). We learn from the rest of the poem and other sources that the act of using king's daughter as a way of stopping the long feuding does not help this
time. The concept of peace weavers (eg. understanding of women in Anglo-Saxon society as those who should weave peace and settle feuds) is well beyond the scope of this thesis. For more on the subject however see major thesis of P. Procházková, *Female Characters in Beowulf* (2007) who gives much thought the concept of feud-based law and women in the poem.

**Lines 2999-3001**

So this bad blood between us and the Swedes,

this vicious feud, I am convinced,

is bound to revive

Ominous future for the Geats as prophesied by the messenger by the end of the poem. As exhibited before, in connection to feud and the system of vengeance that has been operating between Geats and their neighbours for long time, to bring grievous consequences.

As can be seen from the above examples and other occurrences, the poet employs multiple examples of individual feuds to create the final picture of criticism. In total, there can be distinguished thirteen instances of kin-based justice (Klaeber, 1941). Consequently, the evidence for this criticism done by the author, aimed at the heathen ways of law is pervasive. Thus arguably the legal system of heathen ancestors is the only major criticism from the poem who otherwise exhibits humanistic approaches of combining the old with new.

As for the lecture of the poet, it would seem that the vast majority of the situations that have only remotely something to do with past or present feuds, carry dire consequences and sorrow for all actors. Arguably there is little good to be taken from the examples of kin-based justice present in the poem that the poet is so vividly and

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96 For other allusions and mentions of feuds and their negative depiction see in particular lines 459-461, 875-879, 1379-1381, 1384-1385, 1545-1547, 2002-2005, 2117-2119, 2391-2392, 2441-2443, 2479-2480, 2486-2489, 2618-2619 (all lines correspond to Heaney's translation).

97 The feuds he describes, most of which are referenced to in this chapter, are: God versus Cain for killing of Abel (lines 106-14), Grendel and Grendel's mother versus Hrothgar and his Danes (lines 151-58), Beowulf versus the enemies of the Geats (lines 422-24), Ecgtheow versus Wulfings (459-79), Unferth versus his brother whom he murders (lines 587-89), Sigemund versus various enemies (lines 877-79), Finn and Frisians versus Hengest the Danes, Geats versus Frisians (lines 1206-14), Heathobards versus Danes, Dragon versus Hrothgar and Geats (lines 2280), Onela versus his brother Othure for the Swedish throne (lines 2379-2400), Haethcyn versus Herebealdl (lines 2435), Swedes versus Geats (lines 2946-98).
emotionally describing; consequently, the only feasible lesson to be taken by the Beowulf poet's audience is to leave feuds, as the thing of the past.

In this part of the thesis an argument was made that the Beowulf poet is preaching against feuds and the kin-based justice that must have been prevalent in his time. Furthermore he used this condemnation of pre-Christian custom to promote new religion. The analysis of examples of feuding in the poem brought clear outcomes: the author went in this case along with the strict doctrine of church, much like men like Alcuin would. By doing so arguably achieving partial synthesis between old and new, pagan and Christian which he set to achieve.

2.2 BEOWULF'S TEACHINGS

We have established that the theme of education is prevalent in the Beowulf poem. I have discussed how fairy tales serve as an important medium of teaching and that Beowulf showcases many fairy tale elements, thus resembling a tale with fey elements more than a historical account or simply a poem. In the previous chapter I also attempted to demonstrate how the Beowulf poet passes wisdom on his audience through his commentaries and narration. That, however, would be only a portion of the teaching intent in the course book of Beowulf. Perhaps even stronger are the lessons directed by the protagonist of the poem - Beowulf himself, and to a lesser extend king Hrothgar. These lessons and educational sentiments are examined in this chapter. Following the first claim of this thesis - by investigating other ways that the passing of wisdom takes place within the narration as well as the second claim - that the Beowulf poet depicts wisdom differently than his audience would perhaps expect.

This unconventional depiction is based mostly in the seemingly reversed roles of mentor-teacher figures with those of pupil-students. Generally a reader or listener would presume that the wisdom of old, wise sage is to be bestowed upon the young inexperienced warrior; in Beowulf however we find the opposite. Similarly, an expectation that prudence and knowledge come with age would be logical, yet in the

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98 Hyams in *Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England* says: “Through the emotional discourse of vengeance and enmity, the Beowulf poet derives much of the work's passion. He uses vengeance language even for confrontations between whole peoples where we should choose the language of warfare.” (pp 17)

99 According to Klaeber Beowulf was no more than 20 years old when he arrived to Hrothgar's hall (*Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Boston 1950)
poem the author shows the contrary. As we will see below, the Beowulf poet's course book contains much unconventional connected to learning and knowledge that originates from the characters themselves.

The main protagonist of the poem, young Geat warrior Beowulf, early in the poem encounters old and wise king Hrothgar. Those two characters create in their heroic speeches and in the relationship between them a considerable portion of the lessons. However, they seldom express same opinions. Indeed, we find Hrothgar to for instance trusts and advises to rely on the power of God almost exclusively (see for example lines 478-479, 938-941), whereas Beowulf claims that one has to rely also on his own strength as opposed to mere prayer, which he so often does (see for instance lines 669-670). This difference between their beliefs is also apparent in their attitudes towards God. It is clear that king Hrothgar is by far the most monotheistic of the characters in Beowulf, as opposed to Beowulf refers to God and thanks him occasionally. As an old man, he serves as the wise counter-point to the young Beowulf who clearly puts more faith in his strength and prowess than in the blessings of Providence (see also lines 572-573). King Hrothgar, however, always credits good fortune and success to the good will of the Lord (such as in lines 1397-1398 or 1778-1781).

Due to the fact that Hrothgar's and Beowulf's lessons and opinions differ, the reader or listener of the poem can feel confused as to what lesson he should take from the story. In this chapter I propose that Beowulf, although less experienced and much younger in years than Hrothgar (or any other character described within the first half of the narrative) is the arch-warrior possessing supreme wisdom and that his lessons and teachings are those to be listened to. This sentiment shifts slightly in the second part of the poem; whereas during the first 2000 lines Beowulf is depicted as a young warrior, in the final 1000 lines we learn that Beowulf is well over fifty years old, a venerable king of the Geats.

The Geat hero thus leads by example, gives wisdom and in the narrative

100 In addition see some of the poet's remarks on the Beowulf's eagerness to trust in himself and his capabilities as opposed to mere faith and the help of the Lord (lines 1533-1536).
101 Irving in his Christian and Pagan Elements on pages 4-5 discusses the monotheism of the king at length. He further adds that Hrothgar is ultimately the mos pious character within the narrative, followed by Beowulf who however often falters in his faith and opts to rely on the strength of his arm.
102 Beowulf here explains that a man can escape grim death and defeat if his inner strength and courage is good enough: “Often, for undaunted courage, fate spares fate spares the man it has not already marked.”
“indoctrinates young Danish warriors.” To assess Beowulf as an arch-teacher however, we must first discuss his superiority and wisdom that he arguably held even in his youth - prior to the time when the main Beowulf story happens, as well as during the first 2000 lines. In order to assess Beowulf as the chief mentor of the poem, especially in contrast to the second protagonist, king Hrothgar, we could borrow the concept of monomyth of Joseph Campbell and observe how both characters deal with their heroic journeys.

During such journey a hero learns and evolves, which is what the Beowulf poet's readers and listeners do - being taught lessons on wisdom, religion and other discussed here. As I mentioned, the audience of the poet would presumably project themselves into the hero undergoing the journey - learning in the process, the journey of Beowulf however is very different from that of the wise king Hrothgar, who does not shy away from lecturing and teaching either. Undoubtedly we could use Beowulf as the major heroic characters and thus count him as the one going through the journey Campbell laid out, focusing on Beowulf's campaign in Danish territory and his grudge with first two monsters:

I. Beowulf living in Geatland (an ordinary world with no man-eating giants),
II. is called to action (based on years long attacks of Grendel on Heorot),
III. doesn't refuse the call in accordance to his warrior culture and his code of honour,
IV. crosses the “Threshold to the “Special World”” (Christopher Vogler) of Danish kingdom where monsters lurks,
V. is helped by supernatural aid – his inhuman strength and God’s grace that lies upon him (possessing such inhuman power is how Beowulf poet describes him on multiple occasions, inhuman strength mentioned by king Hrothgar at their

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103 For further discussion of these topics see for example An Education in the Mead-Hall: Beowulf's Lessons for Young Warriors by Alexander M. Bruce (2001).
104 Campbell gives various reasons for hero to refuse the call: from a sense of duty or obligation, fear, insecurity, a sense of inadequacy and others. Beowulf however has a sense of obligation to assist the Danes, knowing no fear; more hypothesis were voiced by various authors addressing the reasons for Beowulf's voyage, see for example K. Malone who understands young Beowulf in three stages which he discusses in relation to his decisions and deeds.
105 See for example lines 196-198: “There was no one else like him alive. In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth, high-born and powerful”. Also 788-789, 788-789 and more explicitly lines 1271-1272: “Beowulf was mindful of his mighty strength, the wondrous gifts God had showered on him”.

first meeting\textsuperscript{106},

VI. does not meet the mentor since Beowulf is the one of most wisdom and skill (even though Hrothgar does address Beowulf on some issues (such as contrasting Beowulf with king Heremod, followed by: So learn from this and understand true worth. I who am telling you have wintered into wisdom (lines 1723-1725) and the whole next section, ended with: “O flower of warriors, beware of that trap. Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part, eternal rewards” (lines 1791-1793); it is the young warrior who takes the parental teacher role vast majority of the time, apart of Hrothgar's Sermon (as are the lines 1687-1784 called by Tolkien),

VII. deals with the first monster, deals with enemies (drunk Unferth, coast guard, Wulfgar) and allies (sober Unferth, Wealhtheow, king Hrothgar),

VIII. enters the belly of the whale, undergoing final transformation into the Dane-saviour by plunging into the dark lake where he slays Grendel's mothers\textsuperscript{107},

IX. Beowulf appears to have died, goes past the magic gate: at night there “(describing the mere) something uncanny happens: the water burns“ (lines 1365-1366),

X. gets rewarded by gold, riches and more importantly, fame - “his own and only bulwark” (line 1389),

XI. undergoes the land of trials (Campbell describes three trials some of which the hero fails; in Beowulf's combat we could distinguish between exactly three trials of combat: he 1) is not shred to bits immediately thanks to his chainmail after Grendel's mother and the ghastly onslaught of tusks and beasts gets the hold of him (lines 1504-1512), 2) fails to hurt the tarn-hag with his weapon (lines 1523-1524), 3) in fury finally slays the opponent with the magical sword (lines 1565-1567),

XII. goes back to Geatland,

\textsuperscript{106} Hrothgar says of Beowulf something which could hardly be true for a common man not helped by supernatural powers: “a thane (…), with the strength of thirty in the grip of each hand” (lines 380-381).

\textsuperscript{107} Campbell describes this as “The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died.”, indeed the resemblance here is absolute – with Campbell even mentioning “entrances to temples flanked by colossal gargoyles: dragons, lions, devil-slayers”, or in this case – sea monsters\textsuperscript{11}.
XIII. atones with a father figure, Hygelac,
XIV. is resurrected as a king (after the death of Heardred, Hygelac's heir),
XV. masters the two words, that is; a) the Christian life, departing from a mortal life to the kingdom of heaven after the fatal combat with dragon and; b) pagan, succeeding in winning immortal fame, accepting his final day and receiving pagan warrior-king funeral.

On the defence of Hrothgar as the teacher in the poem however, we must remember that he himself is undertaking a journey within the narration, indeed, second in importance only to the Beowulf. It is sometimes asserted that king Hrothgar is the character that within the first part of the poem helps Beowulf reach maturity, this claim, often not explicitly voiced seems nevertheless often silently agreed on. Even so though, Beowulf is mightier, more famous and wiser than most rulers even prior to him reaching king Hrothgar's hall and slaying of Grendel.108 It could be said that mature thanks to the Danish ruler may he, the maturity itself however does not change his status as the indomitable, wisest warrior around. Thus it can be concluded that his are the lessons that the listener or reader of the poem takes and learns from.

As mentioned earlier, Hrothgar is in a way the hero that needs to go through the struggle and while doing so arguably learning from the superiors to achieve peace and wisdom of his own. Thus according with the claim presented earlier, that Beowulf is in fact the teacher of both Hrothgar and the reader, let us attempt to present him in place of Beowulf in the monomyth to demonstrate this unconventional mentor-pupil status of the two:

I. Hrothgar rules his nation in an ordinary world without monsters, he combats only human opponents that he can defeat,
II. is called to adventure after his hall is ravaged by a brute,
III. refuses the call to action, feeling struck and helpless after 30 men perishes in fiend's clutches (“Their mighty prince, the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless, humiliated by the loss of his guard, bewildered and stunned, staring aghast at the demon's trail, in deep distress”) (lines 129-133),

108 This theme of heroic Beowulf with supreme wisdom and might is voiced repeatedly through out the beginning of the poem; even before the poem starts, Beowulf was “the mightiest man on earth” (line 197), he is instantly recognized as such (line 248), he is “formidable and worthy of respect” (lines 369-370, has already unprecedented stories about him and his might (380-381), all knew of his awesome strength (line 418) and other examples. Also see chapter 2.2.1
IV. meets his second mentor, Beowulf, a superior warrior and arguably a wiser man (first was the mentor-sage Aeshere (line 1325)), Beowulf being the supernatural help of king Hrothgar,  

V. meets his enemy, Grendel and his mother as woman temptress figure (Grendel's mother tempts king Hrothgar to abandon hope and capitulate even after his first victory over the Cain's clan. After the battle is won and fiend's bloodied grasp is hung within Heorot, king Hrothgar is laid low by Grendel's mother persuading him to surrender; “king Hrothgar was suddenly heartsore and weary” (line 307), found himself for a moment dumbstruck as he had been after Grendel's first assault),  

VI. journeys to avenge his friend, as a true hero, riding undaunted in front of the troops (line 1412), crosses the threshold as he waits for the outcome of the combat between Beowulf and monsters, thus the king ventures into this new territory where he may be lost should the combat end badly. He deals with allies and enemies (queen Wealhtheow, the monsters, comparison of himself (as well as Beowulf) to evil king Heremod),  

VII. Experiences the road of trials: he receives the victory over Grendel, loses his sage Aeshere and Grendel's claw, journeys into the haunted mere, waits in anguish for the outcome of the underwater combat,

VIII. “Meets with the Goddess”, in king Hrothgar's case, with Beowulf. Campbell compares this with an: “all encompassing, unconditional love that a fortunate infant may experience with his or her mother” (from the poem: “And so the good and grey-haired Dane, that high-born king, kissed Beowulf and embraced his neck, then broke down in sudden tears” (lines 1870-1873),  

IX. is atoned after he pays Beowulf handsomely, twice, before sending him back to Geatland.

But perhaps such way of perceiving the Danish king would be overdoing it. Yet it would appear from the context of the story that the perception of king Hrothgar as a pupil to Beowulf may not be far from truth. What is clear however is that Beowulf poem can be understood as a mixture of more or less strict opposites and

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109 As referred to Grendel, his mother and other monsters that originate from the biblical figure of Cain. See line 106 and in particular lines 1266-1267.
unconventional links - which corresponds to the second claim introduced here: the Beowulf poet is depicting what he can in opposition to the standard of Alcuin represented Judeo-Christian church. As for the understanding of Beowulf as an course book it is safe to assume that the reader can learn from the wisdom and lessons of both Hrothgar and Beowulf. Although as has been discussed above, when the lessons seem inconsistent and Hrothgar's education contrasts with that of the Geat hero, it is presumed that Beowulf ought to be preferred.

Let us now return for a brief moment to the part when the prince of the Bright-Danes, being potentially otherwise understood as the student of Beowulf, lectures the hero himself. In 50 lines (1723-1793) he passes on his wisdom concerning the need of staying righteous and just and not forgetting what lurks in dark and old age, not losing vigilance besieged by glory and fame. King Hrothgar even goes that far to say that he, telling the story, has “wintered into wisdom” (1724-1725) implying, that what he says is truth and ought to be listen to whereas the rest of the poem would suggest that the wisdom does not depend on the old age. We know from the story and history of Danish king and Grendel, that the king in fact failed at that what he preaches to Beowulf, he even admits it in lines 1772-1773. It is thus safe to conclude that king Hrothgar, although claiming he grew wise with old age and aims to teach his bellowed stepson, is proven subpar even in this contest of wisdom. For unlike him we know from the rest of the poem that Beowulf does not succumb into the trap of lowering his prudent guard and when the dragon comes in the final part of the poem and slays the hero, it is not because Beowulf the king stopped being watchful or because he grew ignorant to enemies, no “arrow flies beneath his defences”, as Hrothar warns from in 1746. Beowulf sacrifices himself for his nation in an quest to rid the land of the fire-beast and even though there is a certain aspect of rashness and pride that ends Beowulf's journey in a partially ambiguous way, one can not say that Beowulf would depart due to lowering his guard or ceasing to be ever-vigilant. Thus, the reason for his death, although they may vary from fate to God’s will and the pure bestial strength of his opponent, can hardly be tracked to be of Beowulf’s fault. Consequently, it may be safely concluded that Beowulf is in the parental, teacher, mentor role towards the Danish ruler, as well as the reader/listener in this story. Even despite this confusion between the two

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110 Which is one of the notions that is Hrothgar preaching upon to Geat hero (lines 1743-1746 and 1758-1768).
chief characters, Beowulf poet is hardly to blame since the contradictory elements, discussed already in connection to author's rebellious nature, are apparent throughout the whole narrative.

2.2.1 BEOWULF AS THE ARCH-TEACHER

Let us now examine the support for the statement that it is young Beowulf in the first part of the poem that is teaching elders and wise old kings, and not the other way around. For that we may look at several pieces of the poem and examine them further to better establish Beowulf's status at the start of the narration:

- Beowulf “was mightiest man on earth” (line 197)
- When planning the sailing to besieged king Hrothgar, “no elder that he was dear to would try to deny his plans” (lines 202-203)
- Beowulf “was already a leader at that time” (206)
- Beowulf “was a canny pilot, a captain” (lines 208-209)
- Beowulf “was known for courage” (line 340)

In addition, this is further supported by reading the beginning of the poem, when Beowulf announces his plan to sail the swan's road and go help famous king Hrothgar, none of the wise Geat elders attempts to give him advice let alone stop him (“Nobody tried to keep him from going, no elder denied him, dear as he was to them” (lines 235-236)), for, as Beowulf proclaims to king Hrothgar later: “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” (lines 419-422). Although they have all wintered into wisdom, using Hrothgar's own words, they understand that the young warrior is wiser and stronger than any of them, although less experienced. Beowulf is understood and portrayed as a true leader-teacher figure even in his homeland and is also to be perceived as such by the poet's audience. Later in the first encounter between Beowulf and the Danish king Beowulf refers to his departure in these words; “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” (lines 415-418). Here not the poet but Beowulf himself distinguishes between experience and might and wisdom that comes with old age. Although as discussed earlier traditionally wisdom would come with old age and young warriors would have a seat reserved for those...
learning before they achieve said age of wisdom themselves.

2.2.2 BEOWULF'S OTHER TEACHINGS

Finally it ought to be noted that there are other lessons of Beowulf are woven into the tapestry of the poem, although perhaps less relevant and visible. Delving into all of them however would prove impossible within the scope of this thesis. At least a brief mention then, I feel, is in order;

Beowulf poet and Beowulf himself appear to be preaching on the origins of wisdom. Whereas king Hrothgar and to some extend perhaps traditional wisdom, would expect wisdom and knowledge to come with old age and life experience, Beowulf implies otherwise. Indeed, it is possible to locate some evidence for the poet's portrayal of old age not equal to wisdom and in fact him hinting at that perhaps in youth the best judgement is to be found. Especially in lines 131 (Hrothgar hopeless, even in his wisdom of age), line 203 (Geat elders recognizing the correct decision making of young Beowulf), lines 1591-1599 (Danish counsellors and sages abandoning Beowulf, whereas young youth in their loyalty stay), line 1842 (king Hrothgar acknowledging Beowulf's wisdom, despite his young age), lines 2041-2062 (old warrior exhibiting the opposite of wisdom and prudence of mind as opposed to his young companions), line 2449 (the wisdom of age being useless to venerable king Hrethel), the facts that Beowulf is depicted as superior to older wiser Hrothgar (see previous pages) and the ending to the poem when the youngest warrior Wiglaf overshadows and preaches to elder warriors. On further examination, a significant amount of evidence can be supplied that old age indeed does not equal wisdom and that in youth perhaps the best judgement is found.

Further lessons of the hero could encompass rage and the need of a good warrior for it. The notion of beneficial rage and anger is also one of the lessons within the narrative, its management and use is exhibited multiple times - through Beowulf who uses it well and Heremod who stays as an example of harmful fury. Wymer and

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111 These are comprised mostly in lines 2596-2601, 2625-2627 and 2860-2861.
112 What is more, the depiction of wisdom and bravery in Beowulf clearly favours young warriors as opposed to old sages and kings. Venerable Hrothgar can not defeat Grendel, Danish sages bow their grey heads and go home without hope, whereas young thanes wait loyalty for Beowulf, Wiglaf is the only companion of Beowulf who does not retreat from combat in the dragon fight - whereas the more experienced, older warriors do. And on a final note - it is old Beowulf who perishes in dragon's clutches, as opposed to young hero who did overcome sea monsters, survived multiple ongoing wars and slaughtered demons of Cain's clan.
Labbie devoted a significant portion of their Beowulf connected work to the depiction and teachings of rage and anger. While discussing Beowulf and his ability to harness this, otherwise controversial force, they write: “in the right context, in battle, rage is almost always presented as a positive force”. They further come to a conclusion that Beowulf poet depicts anger in his poem in such a way as to show that “Rage is a tool used by the Good to maintain the social order”. This is however contrasted by the poet's commentaries on the aforementioned evil king Heremod, who killed in rage his kinsmen in his hall (lines 1709-1715) - a deed of precedent only by the deeds of Grendel\(^{113}\).

Finally there are Beowulf's perhaps less visible, yet consistent, lessons, concerning telling a lie versus offending a friend (lines 1810-1812), his chivalrous ways of combat (forfeiting armour versus unarmoured adversary etc.), the notion that one ought not to be overly fearful of death (lines 1441-1444 and 3066-3068 for example) or his own commentaries on when and whether killing a man or kin-based justice is proper ass opposed to the gruesome murders of Grendel, Grethel or ruthless Shilfings who slay Geat king Heardred\(^{114}\) (lines 422-424). Consequently, Beowulf exhibits more examples of pedagogical intent and minor teaching for the reader/listener, than the poet or king Hrothgar in his commentaries. His lessons are thus the most numerous, most visible and arguably most true to learn from.

\(^{113}\) For more on the lessons of rage in Beowulf see *Civilized Rage in 'Beowulf'* by Thomas L. Wymer and Erin F. Labbie, 2004.

\(^{114}\) Although there are multiple references of their unprovoked and ruthless killings, the death of Hygelac's son Heardred is depicted in lines 2201-2206.
CONCLUSIONS

This diploma thesis proposes one more possible way of understanding Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf. It argues that the poem be perceived as a pedagogical document, a course book and a didactic material through which its author, the Beowulf poet, educated his audience.

Two claims are put forward, the already mentioned understanding of Beowulf as a course book, a work in which the poet aimed mainly to teach the ways of a good Christian as well as those of a member of a long-past pagan warrior-king culture. This diploma thesis argues that the Beowulf poet would do so by employing elements of fairy tale stories to make it easier for his audience to learn from his work. The ultimate goal of his being the fusion of old heathen pagan past with its heroic deeds, noble kings and ancestral tools of Weland with the new doctrine of Judeo-Christian religion.

The second major claim of this thesis revolves around seeing the Beowulf poet as a rebellious, revolutionary author of his time. The thesis argues and presents proofs that the poet strived to help people remember the old ways of noble past and in doing so going against the traditions expressed by new Christian doctrine whereas the conventional view of his time was to forget the heathen past. Finally the he thesis delves into the poem and presents ways in which various lessons and teachings of both the poet as well as his characters, Beowulf and Hrothgar, could be perceived and understood.

I would like to express the hope that Beowulf be understood not only as a majestic poem or a historical document but also as a work of great pedagogical value. I believe that the poet's intentions in that matter can be recognized from his work and that perhaps the further study of the poem should take these pedagogical intentions into account.
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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1 - Lines 499-606

From where he crouched at the king’s feet,
Unferth, a son of Ecglaf’s, spoke
contrary words. Beowulf’s coming,
his sea-braving, made him sick with envy:
he could not brook or abide the fact
that anyone else alive under heaven
might enjoy greater regard than he did:
“Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca
in a swimming match on the open sea,
risking the water just to prove you could win?
It was sheer vanity made you venture out
on the main deep. And no matter who tried,
friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,
neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed you.
You waded in, embracing water,
taking its measure, mastering currents,
riding on the swell. The ocean swayed,
winter went wild in the waves, but you vied
for seven nights; and then he outswam you,
came ashore the stronger contender.
He was cast up safe and sound one morning
among the Heathoreams, then made his way
to where he belonged in Bronding country,
home again, sure of his ground
in strong room and bawn. So Breca made good
his boast upon you and was proved right.
no matter, therefore, how you may have fared
in every bout and battle until now,
this time you’ll be worsted; no one has ever
outlasted an entire night against Grendel.”

Beowulf, Ecgtheow’s son, replied:

“Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say
about Breca and me. But it was mostly beer
that was doing the talking. The truth is this:
when the going was heavy in those high waves,
I was the strongest swimmer of all.
We’d been children together and we grew up
daring ourselves to outdo each other,
boasting and urging each other to risk
our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.
Each of us swam holding a sword,
a naked, hard-proofed blade for protection
against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never
move out farther or faster from me
than I could manage to move from him.
Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on
for five nights, until the long flow
and pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,
night falling and winds from the North
drove us apart. The deep boiled up
and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.
My armor held me to hold out;
my hard-ringd chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,
a fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,
kept me safe when some ocean creature
pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast
and swathed in its grip, I was granted one
final chance: my sword plunged
and the ordeal was over. Through my own hands
the fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.

“Time and again, foul things attacked me,
lurking and stalking, but I lashed out,
gave as good as I got with my sword.

My flesh was not for feasting on,

there would be no monsters gnawing and gloating

over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.

Instead, in the morning, mangled and sleeping

the sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated

like the ocean’s leavings. From now on

sailors would the safe, the deep-sea raids

were over for good. Light came from the East,

bright guarantee of God, and the waves

went quiet; I could see the headlands

and buffeted cliffs. Often, for undaunted courage,

fate spares the man it has not already marked.

However it had occurred, my sword had killed

nine sea monsters. Such night-dangers

and hard ordeals I have never heard of

nor of a man so desolate in surging waves.

But worn out as I was, I survived,

came through with my life. The ocean lifted

and laid me ashore, I landed safe

on the coast of Finland.

Now, I cannot recall
any fight you entered, Unferth,
that bears comparison. I don’t boast when I say
that neither you nor Breca ever were much
celebrated for swordsmanship
or for facing danger in the battlefield.
You killed your own kith and kin,
so for all your cleverness and quick tongue,
you will suffer damnation in the pits of hell.
The fact it, 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.
But he knows he need never be in dread
of your blade making a mizzle of his blood
or of vengeance arriving ever from this quarter---
from the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the spear.
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 morning mead, when morning light,
scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south
and brings another daybreak to the world.”

APPENDIX 2 - Lines 884-912

After his death
Sigemund’s glory grew and grew
because of his courage when he killed the dragon,
the guardian of the hoard. Under gray stone
he had dared to enter all by himself
to face the worst without Fitela.
But nit came to pass that his sword plunged
right through those radiant scales
And drove into the wall. The dragon died of it.
His daring had given him total possession
of the treasure hoard, his to dispose of
however he liked. He loaded a boat:
Wael’s son weighted her hold
with dazzling spoils. The hot dragon melted.

Sigemund’s name was known everywhere.
He was utterly valiant and venturesome,
a fence round his fighters and flourished therefore
after King Heremond’s prowess declined
and his campaigns slowed down. The king was betrayed, ambushed in Jutland, overpowered and done away with. The waves of his grief had beaten him down, made him a burden, a source of anxiety to his own nobles: that expedition was often condemned to those earlier times by experienced men, men who relied on his lordship for redress, who presumed that the part of a prince was to thrive on his father’s throne and protect the nation, the Shielding land where they lived and belonged, its holdings and strongholds.

**APPENDIX 3 - Lines 3110-3182**

Then Weohstan’s son, stalwart to the end, had orders given to owners of dwellings, many people of importance in the land, to fetch wood from far and wide for the good man’s pyre.

“Now shall flame consume our leader in battle, the blaze darken round him who stood his ground in the steel-hail, when the arrow-storm shot from bowstrings
pelted from the shield-wall. The shaft hit home.

feather-fledged, it finned the barb in flight.”

Next the wise son of Weohstan
called from among the king’s thanes
a group of seven: he selected the best
and entered with them, the eighth of their number,
under the God-cursed roof; one raised
a lighted torch and led the way.
No lots were cast for who should loot the hoard
for it was obvious to them that every bit of it
lay unprotected within the vault,
there for the taking. It was no trouble
to hurry to work and haul out
the priceless store. They pitched the dragon
over the cliff top, let tide’s flow
and backwash take the treasure-minder.
Then coiled gold was loaded on a cart
in great abundance, and the gray-haired leader,
the prince of his bier, born to Hronesness.

The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,
stacked and decked it until it stood four-square,
hung with helmets, heavy war-shields
and shining armor, just as he had ordered.
Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,
mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.
On a height they kindled the hugest of all
funeral fires; fumes of wood smoke
bellowed darkly up, the blaze roared
and drowned out their weeping, wind died down
and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,
burning it to the core. They were disconsolate
and wailed aloud for their lord’s decease.
A Geat woman too sang out in grief:
with hair bound up, she unburdened herself
of her worst fears, a wild litany
of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,
slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Then the Geat people began to construct
a mound on a headland, high and imposing,
a marker that sailors could see from far away,
and in ten days they had done the work.

it was their hero’s memorial; what remained from fire
they housed inside it, behind a wall
as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it.

And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels
and a trove of such things as trespassing men
had once dared to drag from the hoard.

They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,
gold under gravel, gone to earth,
as useless to men now as it ever was.

Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,
chieftain’s sons, champions in battle,
al of them distraught, chanting in dirges,
mourning his loss as a man and a king.

They extolled his heroic exploits
and gave thanks for his greatness; which was the proper thing,
for a man should praise a prince whom he holds dear
and cherish his memory when that moment comes
when he has to be convoyed from his bodily home.

So the Geat people, his hearth companions,
sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.

They said that of all the kings upon the earth
he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,
kindest to his people and keenest to win fame.
Fate is a pagan belief that Beowulf follows; however, he always thanks God for safe voyage and things like that. The burial ceremony is always pagan. The Danes also use pagan ways such as human sacrifices and gifts to the gods when Grendel shows up. What is true of Beowulf? It contains pagan and Christian elements. Read More. share: How do you explain that Beowulf has many references to elements of Christianity yet the hero Beowulf is clearly pagan in his values? Beowulf is a pagan story transcribed by a christian. Read More. share: How do you explain why Beowulf contains many references to el To further understand the Christian and pagan elements that exist in Beowulf, we must first uncover why the author has merged Christian and pagan ideas. Once we discover why the two have been combined, then we may see how they work to induce Grendel's mother to take revenge on her son's death, and how they work to persuade Beowulf to take vengeance for his companion's death. The poem's fusion of Christian and pagan ideals is a reflection of the time in which it was written. It was a period in which the virtues of the heathen 'Heroic Age' were tempered by the gentleness.