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Textual Conventions and the Encoded Reader in J. R. R. Tolkien's Translation of *Beowulf*

(SMJER: ENGLESKA KNJIŽEVNOST I KULTURA)

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1. Introduction

This thesis will analyse J. R. R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, an Anglo-Saxon poem considered the highest achievement of Old English literature, having a great literary, historical and cultural significance.

Firstly, a brief outline of texts in literary criticism necessary for the analysis of J. R. R. Tolkien's rendition of *Beowulf* will be presented, the most important of which are Barthes' text on narrative codes and Brooke-Rose's text on the encoded reader. This will be followed by a survey of certain aspects of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, especially in comparison to Seamus Heaney's verse translation. The last part of the discussion will be dedicated to the analysis of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* using the theory introduced in Barthes' and Brooke-Rose's works, separated into five sections according to Barthes' five narrative codes: proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural (referential), semic (connotative) and symbolic. This will be completed with the evaluation of the encoded reader in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, followed by conclusion on the strength of the proposed argument regarding Tolkien's reproduction and adaptation of the original listener.

It will be argued that Tolkien's translation gets closer to emulating the authentic listener of the original Anglo-Saxon poem. In other words, it will be demonstrated how the implied author(s) in Tolkien's translation reproduces the implied reader of *Beowulf*.

2. Theoretical Framework for Analysis of *Beowulf*

In order to discuss the encoded reader in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, this thesis shall rely on certain critical devices used in narrative analysis. Firstly, Roland Barthes' five narrative codes that are used to convey the meaning of the text will be introduced. This will be followed by Brooke-Rose's notion of the encoded reader, the theory of which is derived from Barthes' work. Finally, there will be a short introduction of narratological terms and elements necessary for further analysis.

In his book *S/Z*, Roland Barthes compares the process of writing to the mechanism of braiding: "The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (text, fabric, braid: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing" (160). This writing consists of five codes, or conventions, that denote different classifications of elements that together constitute the entirety of a written text. The five codes are: proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural (or referential), semic (or connotative) and symbolic.

Concerning the proairetic code, Barthes explains that "[i]n Aristotelian terms, in which *praxis* is linked to proairesis, or the ability rationally to determine the result of an action, we shall name this code of actions and behavior proairetic (in narrative, however, the discourse, rather than the characters, determines the action)" (18). What will be analysed in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* are "the proairetic sequences, the series of actions, the cadence of familiar gestures" (Barthes 29), as well as other narratological specifics of the text. According to Barthes, "proiaretism is an artifice (or art) of reading that seeks out names, that tends toward them: an act of lexical transcendence, a labor of classification carried out on the basis of the classification of language" (82-3).

The second code that is examined is the hermeneutic code. According to Barthes, "the hermeneutic narrative is constructed according to our image of the sentence: an organism probably infinite in its expansions, but reducible to a diadic unity of subject and predicate" (76). In other words, hermeneutic code concerns the enigma (Barthes 31) present in the narrative and "*the avoided (or suspended) answer*" (Barthes 31). More precisely, Barthes claims that "[t]he proposition of truth is a 'well-made' sentence; it contains a subject (theme of the enigma), a statement of the question (formulation of the enigma), its question mark (proposal of the

enigma), various subordinate and interpolated clauses and catalyses (delays in the answer), all of which precede the ultimate predicate (disclosure)" (84).

The third code is the cultural or referential code. It is connected to "a gnomic code, and this code is one of the numerous codes of knowledge or wisdom to which the text continually refers; we shall call them in a very general way cultural codes (even though, of course, all codes are cultural), or rather, since they afford the discourse a basis in scientific or moral authority, we shall call them reference codes" (Barthes 18). According to Barthes, "[a]s a fragment of ideology, the cultural code inverts its class origin (scholastic and social) into a natural reference, into a proverbial statement" (97-8). More precisely,

> [t]he utterances of the cultural code are implicit proverbs: they are written in that obligative mode by which the discourse states a general will, the law of a society, making the proposition concerned ineluctable or indelible. Further still: it is because an utterance can be transformed into a proverb, a maxim, a postulate, that the supporting cultural code is discoverable: stylistic transformation 'proves' the code, bares its structure, reveals its ideological perspective. (100)

This notion will be examined in the analysis of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*.

The penultimate code is the semic or connotative code. This code is based on "seme", elementary unit of meaning. According to Barthes,

> The seme (or the signified of connotation, strictly speaking) is a connotator of persons, places, objects, of which the signified is a character. Character is an adjective, an attribute, a predicate […]. Even though the connotation may be clear, the nomination of its signified is uncertain, approximative, unstable: to fasten a name to this signified depends in large part on the critical pertinence to which we adhere: the seme is only a departure, an avenue of meaning. (190)

In *Beowulf*, there are numerous examples of "semes" important for the narrative, from the main characters and their names, the monsters, family, ancestry, kinship, as well as objects used and the descriptions of various important places, as will be discussed anon.

The final code that will be analysed with regard to *Beowulf* is the symbolic code. It concerns the "symbolic field, area" (Barthes 262) and is a place "for multivalence and for reversibility; the main task is always to demonstrate that this field can be entered from any number of points, thereby making depth and secrecy problematic" (Barthes 19). The symbolic

code is connected to lexemes (individual words) and their variations: "The lexia thus lays the groundwork, in introductory form, for a vast symbolic structure, since it can lend itself to many substitutions, variations" (17).

Building on Roland Barthes' theory of the five narrative codes, in her book *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Brooke-Rose develops the notion of the encoded reader, and further divides texts into three categories: "texts in which a code is over-determined, texts in which it is under-determined, and texts in which it is non-determined or so haphazardly determined as to be in effect non-determined" (105). Firstly, according to Brooke-Rose:

> A code is over-determined when its information (narrative, ironic, hermeneutic, symbolic, etc.) is too clear, over-encoded, recurring beyond purely informational need. The reader is then in one sense also over-encoded, […]. But in another sense he is treated as a kind of fool who has to be told everything, a subcritical (*hypo-crite*) reader. (105)

Moreover, "we can only conclude that whatever overdetermination may occur in any one work or genre, some underdetermination is necessary for it to retain its hold over us, its peculiar mixture of recognition-pleasure and mystery." (Brooke-Rose 112) In other words, "the function of the over-determined part of a text is to make things clear to the [reader] who is encoded as hypocritical, while the function of the under-determined part is to blur, to keep something back (and it may be much more in a complex text)" (112). This layout of overdetermination and underdetermination of narrative codes will be examined with regard to *Beowulf*.

Furthermore, Brooke-Rose maintains that:

> [an] 'apparent' non-determination of codes (i.e. an apparent unbalance, producing no metatextual tension) may in some instances turn out to be a mere contemporary blindness to an unfamiliar form of this necessary balance, the encoded reader being as it were invisible, for a while, to the actual reader, […]. (127)

This premise can be seen in the relationship between the encoded reader and the actual reader of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, which illustrates the problem of accurately portraying the dynamics of the relationship between the scop and the original audience.

The notion of the encoded reader is connected to the concepts of the implied reader and the implied author. In his work *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* Chatman claims that the implied author differs from the real author in that he is "reconstructed by the reader from the narrative" (148). He is also not the narrator, but in fact "the principle that

invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images" (148). In other words, the implied author is not a real, physical person that produced the narrative, but the reader's idea of how the narrative was constructed. Furthermore, Chatman claims that "[t]here is always an implied author, though there might not be a single real author in the ordinary sense: the narrative may have been composed by […] by a disparate group of people over a long period of time (many folk ballads)" (149). This is the case in *Beowulf* – although the author (or authors) of the original poem is not known, the implied author is always present and that is what Tolkien's translation demonstrates. In other words, "the implied author and implied reader are immanent to a narrative, the narrator and narratee are optional" (Chatman 151). Moreover, the motivations of the narrator and the implied author differ:

> [...] the narrator's rhetorical effort is to prove that his version of the story is 'true'; the implied author's rhetorical effort, on the other hand, is to make the whole package, story and discourse, including the narrator's performance, interesting, acceptable, self-consistent, and artful. (Chatman 227)

3. Aspects of Tolkien's Translation of *Beowulf*

Characterized as the highest achievement of Old English literature, the poem of *Beowulf* is considered as an important influence on literature, specifically with regard to its artistic and linguistic merit. Moreover, the poem is of great historical and cultural importance. There have been many attempts to translate *Beowulf* in modern English, resulting in two distinguished renditions. One is the more popular *A New Verse Translation* from 1999, written by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney. The other one is J. R. R. Tolkien's prose translation completed in 1926.

The story of *Beowulf* revolves around the titular character and his exploits as a warrior and a king. Beowulf, nephew of the king of the Geats, sails to Denmark to free that kingdom from the depredations of a cannibalistic monster called Grendel. After defeating him, he is confronted with the wrath of the monster's grieving mother, whom he also manages to slay. He returns to Geatland, where he proceeds to rule for fifty years. Then appears the third monster, a gold-hoarding dragon that menaces his homeland. Beowulf manages to slay the dragon but dies in combat. Finally, he receives a pagan burial, and is remembered by the Geatish folk as "ever of the kings of earth of men most generous and to men most gracious, to his people most tender

and for praise most eager" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2663-5). This story was originally conceived to be heard, and not read, which is recognized in Tolkien's translation.

Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* is specific in various ways. The first thing the reader notices is the use of prose instead of verse, as opposed to Seamus Heaney's translation. It might be seen as an unusual choice, considering that the original is a poem in alliterative verse. However, even though the original metre is omitted (in favour of a culturally more correct rendition), there are many uses of rhetorical devices associated with poetry, rather than prose, that retain the rhythm of the poem.

Firstly, the rhetoric device of alliteration is very common in the translation. Some examples of the repetition of sounds of initial consonants or consonant groups are: "[...] even as He hitherto hath done!" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 779), which corresponds to the original "swā hē nū gýt dyde!'" (Heaney, OE line 956); "Nonetheless he hath left behind upon his trail his hand and arm and shoulder." (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 790-1), which corresponds to the original "Hwæþere hē his folme forlēt / tö lifwraþe last weardian / earm ond eaxle" (Heaney, OE lines 970-2). Being one of the early Germanic metres, Old English verse had to be alliterative, and end rhyme did not have a structural role. The purpose of alliteration is to produce a sound effect that best illustrates the content of the utterance. According to Tolkien, "[t]he so-called 'alliteration' depends not on *letters* but on *sounds*" ("On Translating *Beowulf*" 66). Other than rhythm, it creates mood or tone, as well as having a mnemonic quality.

One other example of a rhetorical device is the use of anaphora, device commonly used in verse, where the beginning of two successive sentences is repeated: "To him was an heir afterwards born, a young child in his courts whom God sent for the comfort of the people: perceiving the dire need which they long while endured aforetime being without a prince. To him therefore the Lord of Life who rules in glory granted honour among men" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 10-14). Anaphora adds emphasis on the repeated sequence and creates rhythm. It has an effect of engaging the reader or the listener by making them remember and connect the emphasized phrases.

Besides rhetorical devices, Tolkien often uses inversion of words and phrases, which affects the rhythm of the text and adds to the seriousness of the story. Some of the examples are: "Lo! the glory of the kings of the people of the Spear-Danes in days of old we have heard tell, how those princes did deeds of valour" (*Beowulf* lines 1-3); "By worthy deeds in every folk is a man ennobled" (*Beowulf* line 20). On the other hand, Heaney uses the natural order of the

sentence: "So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by / and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness. / We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns" (MnE lines 1-3); "Behaviour that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere" (MnE lines 24-5).

Furthermore, Heaney focuses more on the form, i.e., the alliterative verse, and thus often has to sacrifice the content of the poem. On the other hand, Tolkien tries to be true to the original theme and context. The biggest discrepancy between the two translations is found in certain lexemes, the most important one being the Anglo-Saxon word *wyrd*. Heaney generally translates *wyrd* as "fate", which has a neutral meaning and does not connote negatively (or positively) to future, as in: "but his fate that night / was due to change, his days of ravening / had come to an end" (MnE lines 733-5). Conversely, Tolkien translates *wyrd* as "doom": "It was no longer doomed that he yet more might of the race of men devour beyond that night" (*Beowulf* lines 598-9). He chooses the word "doom", rather than "fate" because it better complements the one of the main themes of *Beowulf*, the imminence of death. According to Tietjen, "[...] the concept of *wyrd* in the poem is almost consistently connected with death" (162). This is also expressed by Tolkien himself in his essay "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics", in which he defends the poet of *Beowulf* against criticisms of structure of the original text: "[...] it is in *Beowulf* that a poet has devoted a whole poem to the theme, and has drawn the struggle in different proportions, so that we may see man at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time" (18).

Another key difference between Tolkien's and Heaney's rendition of the source text is the translation of terms the poet of *Beowulf* designates to god. The numerous references to god in the original text in Old English can be attributed to both pagan and Christian notion of god. This is substantiated by the fact that the estimated date of composition of the poem is, according to Niles, "[between] the late seventh century and the time that our manuscript copy was written down, about the year 1000" ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 45). This is a period in which Anglo-Saxons were still under the process of Christianization and not completely following the Christian religion, which explains the presence of both pagan and Christian elements in the text. As Niles claims, "Anglo-Saxon literature offers abundant evidence of a dynamic and sometimes contradictory accommodation of religious and temporal values during the period after the Conversion" ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 41-42). According to Tietjen, the poem effectively accommodates both the Christian and the pagan concepts: "The ideals, divine and human, of paganism and Christianity exist side by side in *Beowulf*" (161). Tolkien follows this notion and translates, for example, "wuldres Wealdend" (Heaney, OE line

17), which literally means 'glorious master' as "[the one who] rules in glory" (*Beowulf* line 14), while Heaney uses the Christian collocation: "glorious Almighty" (MnE line 17).

The key problem of Heaney's translation is that he cleared the poem of its pagan elements, the overlap of which with the Christian elements is crucial for the historical and cultural context of the poem, necessary for understanding its motifs and themes. His rendition of *Beowulf* thus creates an implied reader decidedly different than that of the original poem and misinterprets the implied author. æ

Furthermore, there are other lexemes that Tolkien translates more accurately than Heaney. For example, the very first word of the poem, "hwæt" (1), is an interjection that calls attention to a following statement and is translated as "what!" or "lo!" Consequently, Tolkien translates "hwæt" as *"Lo!"* (1), which is a stronger and more accurate translation that of Heaney's "So" (1). The use of 'so' instead of 'lo!' to translate the Old English word "hwæt" is inappropriate because, in the context of the performed version of *Beowulf*, an underwhelming 'so' does not effectively attract the attention of the audience the scop is trying to capture.

Additionally, when describing an unnamed daughter of Healfdene, who was Hrothgar's father, Tolkien describes her as "dear *consort* of the warrior Scylfing" (*Beowulf* line 49, emphasis mine), while in Heaney's translation she is referred to as "a *balm in bed* to the battle-scarred Swede" (63). Here also Tolkien is more accurate than Heaney, considering that the source uses the word *gebedda*, which translates as 'consort.' Moreover, Heaney's translation is overly and unnecessary euphemistic, which results in a patronizing view of the female character.

It is important to note that J. R. R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, which is more faithful to the original poem than Seamus Heaney's rendition, not only in meaning, but also in structure, acknowledges the oral tradition behind the creation of the text of *Beowulf*. According to Niles, "[*Beowulf*] is rooted in an oral culture and depicts one, in imaginary guise. If we look upon an oral culture as lacking something that it should have in order to be complete, we will not understand it as a working system with its own efficacy and equilibrium" ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 40). Tolkien's translation demonstrates an understanding of this notion: that the poem should be read as a transcript of a piece of oral tradition that adheres to rules different from the ones governing the modern written narratives.

Regarding oral tradition, the role of the *scop*, a storyteller who recited epic poetry to an audience, is significant. According to Niles, "An active tradition-bearer can only flourish when

a community of like-minded individuals shares a body of lore and supports particular forms of verbal expression. The singer or storyteller tends to be a spokesman for accepted wisdom" ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 41). Thus, oral literature has also a function of education and acculturation (Niles, "Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 41). Moreover, Tolkien notices that the poet, in order to deliver his recitation and spread knowledge had to be himself well-educated, as well as trained in art:

> [To] his task the poet brought a considerable learning in native lays and traditions: only by learning and training could such things be acquired, they were no more born naturally into an Englishman of the seventh or eighth centuries, by simple virtue of being an 'Anglo-Saxon', than ready-made knowledge of poetry and history is inherited at birth by modern children. ("The Monsters and the Critics" 26-7)

4. Application of Barthes' Codes to Tolkien's *Beowulf*

In this chapter, J. R. R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* will be examined using the devices introduced in the second chapter of the thesis: Barthes' five narrative codes and Brooke-Rose's encoded reader, at the same time considering the differences between the implied author(s)/listener of the original poem and the implied reader of Tolkien's translation.

4.1. The Proairetic Code in Tolkien's *Beowulf*

As stated by Barthes, the proairetic code concerns the "actions and "behavior" (18) of the characters in a story (as well as the discourse, which will be discussed later in this section). More specifically, this code is applied to any action that implies a further narrative action. This action then builds interest or suspense on the part of the reader (or listener). Finally, the cumulative actions constitute the plot events of the text, which the encoded reader consequently judges over-determined, under-determined, or non-determined (Brooke-Rose 106, 116, 124).

In *Beowulf*, the sequences of action are linked almost exclusively to the main character of Beowulf, as well as being rather straightforward. The hero of the story, after learning about Grendel's murders in Denmark (action), comes to Heorot and vows to defeat the monster (reaction). He decides to use no weapon and manages to tear off "his hand and arm and shoulder" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 791), thus inflicting mortal wounds on the fleeing Grendel (result of the action). A feast is held, and the Danish king Hrothgar rewards Beowulf with various treasures, showing his gratitude (reaction). However, in an act of revenge and grieving for her son, Grendel's mother now arrives to Heorot and kills Hrothgar's best friend and closest

advisor (reaction). Beowulf decides to help the despairing Hrothgar again and goes after Grendel's mother (reaction). He reaches the lake where she lives and kills her, in addition to cutting off her son Grendel's head (action). Beowulf returns to Heorot, where he is honoured again and proclaimed by Hrothgar to be fit to become the king of the Geats (reaction) He then sails home to Geatland, ruled by Hygelac, where he recounts his adventures in Denmark and where the Geatish king too rewards him with presents in an appreciation of his prowess (reaction). This is followed by an ellipsis, a gap in the narrative, of fifty years. Beowulf is now an old king and faced with a new threat – a dragon guarding its gold and wreaking havoc on the Geats. He fights the dragon, and with Wiglaf's help manages to defeat it, but dies of wounds received in the battle (action). Beowulf is burned on a pyre, and a barrow (a "tomb" / "mound" in Tolkien's translation (*Beowulf* lines 2646, 2650)) is constructed in his honour (reaction and the end of the story).

The described series of actions and reactions of characters that make up the plot of *Beowulf* are identical in Tolkien's rendition and the original poem. At this point, if Brooke-Rose's text on the encoded reader is consulted, it can be concluded that the proairetic code is over-determined.

Other than the actions and behaviours of characters, what is also important in determining the proairetic code in *Beowulf* is the way in which the discourse itself determines the action. This refers to the method of manipulating the text that presents the narrative. In *Beowulf*, there are various ways in which the narrator shapes the discourse. The alliteration of Tolkien's translation influenced by the alliterative verse of the original poem, as well as other rhythmic manipulations have been discussed in the previous chapter.

Another instance of narrator's intervention in the discourse are the episodes and digressions, as categorized by Bonjour: "[s]trictly speaking, an episode may be considered as a moment which forms a real whole and yet is merged in the main narrative, whereas a digression is more of an adjunction and generally entails a sudden break in the narrative" (xi). Moreover, these "embedded" stories can, according to Bal, "explain the primary story, or it may resemble the primary story" (53).

An example of an episode is the Finnsburg Tale. According to Bonjour, "that part of the legend recited by the scop at the royal court is complete in itself; as a specimen of what the king's gleeman used to sing on such occasions, it is part of the description of the festivities in

Heorot" (xii). An instance of digression is "the allusion to Modthrytho and Offa (introduced with reference to the young Geatish queen), which rather abruptly interrupts the narration of Beowulf's return" (Bonjour xii). Furthermore, Bonjour divides the digressions and the episodes into three groups: "[the] digressions [that] concern moments in Beowulf's life and Geatish history" (xvi), "the historical (or legendary) digressions which are not directly connected with Beowulf and the Geats" (xvi) and "digressions that are of a Biblical character" (xvi). In addition,

> [e]vents relating to early Danish history, to Geatish and Swedish history or to Germanic legends, as well as allusions to the hero's youthful adventures and references to Biblical passages, not to speak of moralizing or elegiac topics of a general character, all these form the substance from which the episodic matter has been drawn. (Bonjour xii)

This regards the cultural code as well and will be discussed in more detail later.

Broadly, these digressions and episodes are used to provide more insight into the characters (especially Beowulf), as well as to describe the historical and geographical context of the story. Moreover, the short digressions are often used to refer to religion, in an attempt to link the pagan and the biblical worldview. This is where Tolkien manages to faithfully represent the cultural and historical context to which the implied author belongs, which includes the dynamic accommodation of paganism and Christianity. As stated in the previous chapter, he translates the first mention of god "wuldres Wealdend" (Heaney, OE line 17) as "[the one who] rules in glory" (*Beowulf* line 14), while Heaney, glossing over the pagan elements, prefers to use the Christian term "glorious Almighty" (MnE line 17). There are other such examples which will be analysed in the chapters on the cultural and symbolic codes.

Furthermore, certain short digressions concern the narrator's effort to distance himself from the plot, in order to indicate that the events in the story as told by him may differ from the real course of events: "I have heard that [...]" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 1814), "I have heard too that [...]" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 1821), "Then have I heard that [...]" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 680), "as I have learned" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 1639). These lines correspond to the lines in the original poem: "Hyrde ic, þæt" (Heaney, OE line 2163), "Hyrde ic þæt" (Heaney, OE line 2172), "mine gefræge" (Heaney, OE line 837), which literally means "by my knowledge", "mine gefræge" (Heaney, OE line 1955). Moreover, these statements indicate a gap between the time of the story and the time of its composition. According to Niles, "[the story's] action

is set in fifth- and sixth-century Scandinavia" ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 55), while the text is thought to be composed sometime between the 8th and 11th centuries.

In addition, some digressions are stories told by other characters that serve to praise or warn Beowulf. According to Genette, "[a narrator can] transfer onto some of [his] characters the task of commentary and didactic discourse" (258).

For instance, Hrothgar, during his "sermon" (term meant to be jocular, according to Irving (135)) in the aftermath of Beowulf's triumph over Grendel's mother, compares Beowulf to Heremod, a king of Danes that was banished by his subjects and later betrayed to his death, emphasizing Beowulf's virtues:

> Thy glory is uplifted to pass down the distant ways, Beowulf my friend, thy glory over every folk. All which unmoved by pride thou dost possess, keeping thy valour with discerning heart.
>
> [...]
>
> Not such did Heremod prove to Ecgwela's sons, the Scyldings proud; he grew not to their joy, but to their bane and fall, to death and destruction of the chieftains of the Danes. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 1427-30, 1433-6)

Hrothgar then warns Beowulf:

> Too little now him seems what long he hath enjoyed, his grim heart fills with greed; in no wise doth he deal gold-plated rings to earn him praise, and the doom that cometh he forgets and heeds not, because God, the Lord of glory, hath before granted him a portion of honour high. Thereafter in the final end it cometh to pass that his fleshly garb being mortal faileth, falls in death ordained. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 1464-70)

This is considered by Irving to be "a valid warning that might be made by any Christian or any pagan" (135), which is also linked to the cultural and symbolic codes. This warning shapes Beowulf's behaviour and helps him avoid the same fate as Heremod. According to Brown, "[his later] account to Hygelac suggests he has indeed learned the lesson of [Hrothgar]'s sermon" (201). The warning also serves as a message to the reader, as well as to the audience listening to the recital of the poem, that "we should all remember that we are vulnerable to fate and death or we will suffer dire consequences" (Irving 135).

Another important characteristic of the discourse in *Beowulf* is the circularity of the plot. More specifically, the poem ends and begins with a funeral. In the beginning the story of Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar's ancestor, is told by the narrator. The story begins with the telling of his valorous deeds:

> Oft Scyld Scefing robbed the hosts of foemen, m any peoples, of the seats where they drank their mead, laid fear upon men, he who first was found forlorn; comfort for that he lived to know, mighty grew under heaven, throve in honour [...] a good king was he!" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 3-9),

and ends with the description of his funeral:

> and to the flowing sea his dear comrades bore him, even as he himself had bidden them, while yet, their prince, he ruled the Scyldings with his words [...]. There at the haven stood with ringed prow, ice-hung, eager to be gone, the prince's bark; they laid then their beloved king, giver of rings, in the bosom of the ship, in glory by the mast. There were many precious things and treasures brought from regions far away; nor have I heard tell that men ever in more seemly wise arrayed a boat with weapons of war and harness of battle; on his lap lay treasures heaped that now must go with him far into the dominion of the sea. With lesser gifts no whit did they adorn him, with treasures of that people, than did those that in the beginning sent him forth alone over the waves, a little child. Moreover, high above his head they set a golden standard and gave him to Ocean, let the sea bear him. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 22-37)

In this section the narrator describes the details of Scyld Scefing's funeral, which was organized according to his wishes (which is later also indicated of Beowulf). He was put to the sea in a boat after being adorned with treasures and weapons, as well as with "lesser gifts" procured by the common folk. In addition, a golden standard was set above his head.

Furthermore, the poem of *Beowulf* ends with the funeral of the titular hero (which is also related to the symbolic code that will be analysed later). As is described by Tolkien in his translation, it starts with a funeral pyre:

> For him then the Geatish lords a pyre prepared upon the earth, not niggardly, with helms o'erhung and shields of war and corslets shining, as his prayer had been. Now laid they amidmost their glorious king, mighty men lamenting their lord beloved. Then upon the

> hill warriors began the mightiest of funeral fires to waken. Woodsmoke mounted black above the burning, a roaring flame ringed with weeping, till the swirling wind sank quiet, and the body's bony house was crumbled in the blazing [?core]. Unhappy in heart they mourned their misery and their liege-lord slain. (*Beowulf* lines 2631-40)

First, Beowulf's weapons are laid down, then his body is joined to the pile and the fire is lit. The pyre is described as the greatest of funeral fires. The burning of the body is accompanied by the grieving women's dirge: "There too a lamentable lay many a Geatish maiden with braided tresses for Beowulf made, singing in sorrow, oft repeating that days of evil she sorely feared, many a slaying cruel- and terror armed, ruin and thraldom's bond" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2640-4). In addition, the Geats build Beowulf a funeral barrow, or, as Tolkien describes it, a tomb that is located on a mound and facing the sea:

> Then the lords of the windloving people upon a seaward slope a tomb wrought that was high and broad, to voyagers on the waves clear seen afar; and in ten days they builded the memorial of the brave in war, encompassed with a wall what the fires had left, in such most splendid wise as men of chief wisdom could contrive. In that mound they laid armlets and jewels and all such ornament as erewhile daring-hearted men had taken from the hoard, abandoning the treasure of mighty men to earth to keep, gold to the ground where yet it dwells as profitless to men as it proved of old. (*Beowulf* lines 2645-54)

Beowulf's barrow contains the weapons and treasures (as was done with Scyld's funeral before) deriving from the hoardings procured by the "daring-hearted men" with the goal of giving the material things back to Mother Earth, where it belongs according to their pagan belief.

Finally, to honour their leader, his twelve men rode around the barrow, lamenting his death and praising his life and deeds, thus proving their love and respect for Beowulf:

> Then about the tomb rode warriors valiant, sons of princes, twelve men in all, who would their woe bewail, their king lament, a dirge upraising, that man praising, honouring his prowess and his mighty deeds, his worth esteeming - even as is meet that a man should his lord beloved in words extol, in heart cherish, when forth he must from the raiment of flesh be taken far away. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2655-61)

Besides the funerals, there are other events that are first presented as digressions, and later in text followed by a similar story that is part of the main plot. This produces an anticipatory effect and prepares the reader for the events of the principal story.

For example, the digression about Sigemund, a hero from Germanic mythology, and his victory over the dragon foretells the story of Beowulf's fight with the same type of creature. Sigemund's story is described in the form of a lay performed by a court poet: "For Sigemund was noised afar after his dying day no little fame, since he, staunch in battle, had slain the serpent, the guardian of the Hoard. Yea, he, the son of noble house, beneath the hoar rock alone had dared a perilous deed" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 718-22). Sigemund was, as well as Beowulf, of noble descent, and is deemed by the poet to be an adequate reference to the prowess and nobility of the protagonist of *Beowulf*, who manages to slay his dragon: "His slayer, too, lay dead, the dire dragon of the cave bereft of life, whom torment had oppressed." (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2370-2), albeit with some amount of help from Wiglaf. However, Beowulf dies from a wound received in the combat with the dragon ("his wounded lord in combat stricken" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2311-2)).

In addition, the mentioned lament of "many a Geatish maiden" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 2642) at Beowulf's funeral is similar to the lament of Hildeburg grieving for her dead son in the Finn-episode (a digression recounting a conflict between Danes and Frisians), and there is the connection of both of episodes containing the burning of the bodies: "Then Hildeburg bade that her own son be committed to the flames upon the pyre of Hnaef, there to burn their bones, setting him upon the funeral pile at his uncle's side. The lady mourned bewailing them in song" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 910-4).

According to Klaeber, "different parts of a story are sometimes told in different places, or substantially the same incident is related several times from different points of view" (lvii–lviii). These multiple accounts and versions of the same story, as well as digressions, have a function devised by the original author(s) which will be discussed in relation to the symbolic code. However, the effect they produce, regarding the implied reader of Tolkien's translation, is the slowing down of the pace of the narrative and prolonging of the resolution of a fairly simple story. As Bal claims, "[w]hen the embedded text presents a complete story with an elaborate fabula, we gradually forget the fabula of the primary narrative" (53).

This contributes to the already established over-determination of the proairetic code raised earlier. Therefore, after comparing Brooke-Rose's analysis of the encoded reader to the analysis conducted in this section, the proairetic code of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* is assessed as over-determined.

4.2. The Hermeneutic Code in Tolkien's *Beowulf*

Barthes defines the hermeneutic code in relation to the "enigma" (31) present in the narrative and "*the avoided (or suspended) answer*" (31). Regarding the story of *Beowulf*, the enigma is decidedly absent from the narrative, considering that the narrator often uses digressions regarding future events of the story (a form of prolepsis). For example, the narrator predicts the fall of Grendel, who will go back to hell after being defeated by Beowulf: "On that day of this life on earth unhappy was fated to be the sending forth of his soul, and far was that alien spirit to fare into the realm of fiends" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 654-6). There are other digressions in the form of whole stories embedded in the narrative that serve the same purpose, which were analysed earlier in the context of the proairetic code.

Furthermore, Barthes analyses the hermeneutic code by breaking the discourse (as compared to a single sentence) into several segments: "[...] theme of the enigma, [...] formulation of the enigma, [...] proposal of the enigma, [...] delays in the answer, all of which precede the [...] disclosure" (84). In *Beowulf*, such sequence of events that should create suspense does not exist, as the (implied) reader has no questions regarding future events of the story. In fact, considering the circularity of the narrative that begins and ends with a funeral, the reader can predict the ending. Moreover, the "foreshadowing effect [, the effect of prolepsis,] is preserved at the expense of suspense" (Bal 58).

Other than the reader, the character of Beowulf is also aware of the fact that he will die in battle, or at least is appreciative of his own mortality. This is first evident in him accepting that he might die fighting Grendel: "[...] Nay, we two shall this night reject the blade, if he dare have recourse to warfare without weapons, and then let the foreseeing God, the Holy Lord, adjudge the glory to whichever side him seemeth meet" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 556-60), and putting his fate in the hand of a god/divine entity. Finally, he demonstrates the same attitude when confronted with the dragon, the final monster he must face: "[...] Yet I will not from the barrow's keeper flee one foot's pace, but to us twain hereafter shall it be done at the mound's side, even as Fate, the Portion of each man, decrees to us" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2118-21), which ultimately proves to be his ruin: "Now the wound that the dragon of the cave had wrought

on him began to burn and swell. Swiftly did he this perceive, that in his breast within the venom seethed with deadly malice" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2277-9).

Because of the absence of enigma as described by Barthes, and the fact that the aspect of suspense is subdued in the text, the implied reader has ample knowledge on how the plot will be carried out. Hermeneutic code is therefore deemed over-determined.

4.3. The Cultural (Referential) Code in Tolkien's *Beowulf*

Before analysing the textual aspect of the cultural code in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, the extratextual aspect should be examined. This regards the differences between the contexts (cultural, historical) of the implied reader (and author) of Tolkien's translation and of the authentic listener (and scop) of the poem of *Beowulf*.

Firstly, as *Beowulf* was a piece of oral tradition, a secondary source was used for translations. More precisely, Tolkien and other translators had to work with the manuscript that itself was a rendition decidedly different from the audio-visual experience of the authentic listener, as the story must have been changing and evolving during its many performances that preceded the time of the composition of the manuscript. Moreover, no text can completely emulate the unique experience of listening to the performance of a scop. There are some elements of the oral tradition that are, according to Foley, "beyond the reach of textualization" (7), due to their "plurality and multiformity" (7), which makes them "still points in the exchange of meaning between an always impinging tradition and the momentary and nominal fossilization of a text or version" (7). In other words, there will always exist a certain disparity between the (oral) tradition and its textual rendition.

According to Niles, there are three main possibilities of the mechanics of writing the poem:

> *intervention by an outsider*, or collection of the poem from a poet skilled in the oral tradition by someone who was not the author; *intervention by an insider*, or the writing down of the poem by a poet, skilled in oral composition, who was also trained in the technology of script; and *literary imitation*, or deliberate literary composition in a manner that invokes or replicates certain features of the oral, traditional style. ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary history" 51-2)

Therefore, the text is either a product of an intervention or an imitation, and not a direct transcript of a performance of the poem. Moreover, it is possible that there are other

intermediaries that participated in creating the text of *Beowulf*, making it even further removed from the original performance. For example, Niles discusses the existence of a "collector", who might "ask a singer to perform a work not in its natural context, but rather in some special setting in the presence of a scribe, a team of scribes, a tape recorder, or some other secondary audience" ("Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 53). The final result of this process is an entirely new product that represents the poet's definitive artistic achievement:

> If all goes well, the text that results from oral dictation will be a "best" text that showcases the poet's talents. It is often more complex, or more fully elaborated, or more clear and self-consistent in its narrative line, than a verbatim record of a primary oral performance would be, for it is the result of a purposive effort to obtain an impressive text that literate people will want to read. (Niles, "Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History" 53)

Because the manuscript of *Beowulf* is already different from the oral version, there is a significant onus on the implied (contemporary) reader when confronting Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*. The reader must be familiar with the context of the original poem and the oral tradition behind it. This is the information that Tolkien's text itself does not provide.

Regarding the textual aspect of the cultural code, Barthes defines it in reference to "a science or a body of knowledge" (20). Moreover, "[a]s a fragment of ideology, the cultural code inverts its class origin (scholastic and social) into a natural reference, into a proverbial statement" (97-8) and "because an utterance can be transformed into a proverb, a maxim, a postulate, that the supporting cultural code is discoverable: stylistic transformation 'proves' the code, bares its structure, reveals its ideological perspective" (100).

In Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf,* the cultural code is discernible the most in the representation of religion and god, as well as the concept of *wyrd* ("doom" / "fate").

Firstly, the religion in Tolkien's text is portrayed through a dynamic accommodation of paganism and Christianity, observing the transition from pagan beliefs to Christianity. This can be seen in the choice of words and expressions that shift between pagan and Christian terms used to denote god, as opposed to Heaney who uses Christian terms even when they do not correspond to the term in the original text. For example, Tolkien translates "wuldres Wealdend" (Heaney, OE line 17) as "[the one who] rules in glory" (*Beowulf* line 14), which is more in line with the pagan sentiment expressed in the original than Heaney's Christian term "glorious Almighty" (MnE line 17). However, when the original poem speaks of "Fæder alwalda"

(Heaney, OE line 316), Tolkien does translate it as “Almighty Father” (*Beowulf* line 256-7). Furthermore, while Heaney uses reverential capitalization (“He” (MnE line 114), “His kindness” (MnE line 317)), in accordance with Christianity, Tolkien does not (“he” (*Beowulf* line 92), “his grace” (*Beowulf* line 257)). Moreover, when referring to Grendel, Tolkien calls him “that accursed thing” (*Beowulf* line 97) and does not mention god, because the original poem does not either: “wiht unhælo” (Heaney, OE line 120). On the other hand, Heaney characterizes him as “the God-cursed brute” (MnE line 121).

Furthermore, the poet describes some of the characters as “heathens” practicing their pagan faith through ritual sacrifice, and

> At times they vowed sacrifices to idols in their heathen tabernacles, in prayers implored the slayer of souls to afford them help against the sufferings of the people. Such was their wont, the hope of heathens; they were mindful in their hearts of hell, (nor knew they the Creator, the Judge of deeds, nor had heard of the Lord God, nor verily had learned to praise the Guardian of the heavens and the King of glory. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 139-145)

Tolkien’s translating decisions regarding god and faith reflect his understanding of characters in *Beowulf* as “living in a noble but heathen past” (“Monsters and Critics” 42), where paganism and Christianity intersect. The original poem is neither an exclusively pagan tale: “the Christian elements are almost without exception so deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the poem that they cannot be explained away as the work of a reviser or later interpolator” (Klaeber l), nor “a statement of ultimate Christian meaning [that] some think *should be* in the poem, but in fact is not” (Irving 137). As Niles states, “[i]n *Beowulf* the pagan heroic virtues are tempered by the Christian virtues of selflessness and restraint” (*Beowulf*: The Poem and Its Tradition 251).

In addition to paganism and Christianity, the characters and the narrator express an unwavering and continued belief in a concept called *wyrd*. Tolkien generally translates *wyrd* as “doom” (“It was no longer doomed that he yet more might of the race of men devour beyond that night” (*Beowulf* lines 598-9)), because it is a concept deriving from “Germanic paganism” (Tietjen 166) that sets “the pessimistic tone of the poem” (Irving 126). Some of the examples of *wyrd* as “doom” are: “It was no longer doomed that he yet more might of the race of men devour beyond that night” (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 598-9), which refers to the prediction of Grendel’s defeat, and corresponds to the original: “Ne wæs þæt wyrd þá gēn, / þæt he mā möste

manna cynnes / ðicgean ofer þá niht" (Heaney, OE lines 734-6); "Therein doomed to die he plunged, and bereft of joys in his retreat amid the fens yielded up his life and heathen soul; there Hell received him" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 690-2), which describes Grendel's flight after being mortally wounded by Beowulf ("deað-fæge dēog, siððan drēama lēas / in fen freoðo feorh ālegde, / hæþene sāwle; þær him hei onfēng" (Heaney, OE lines 850-2)).

The concept of *wyrd* is also expressed through axioms. For example, Beowulf says in his speech: "Gǣð ā wyrd swā hīo scel!" (Heaney, OE line 455), which means: "Fate goeth ever as she must!" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 366), and corresponds to the proverb "Fortune favors the brave" (Klaeber 151). Later he claims that "[w]yrd oft nereð / unfǣgne eorl, þonne his ellen dēah." (Heaney, OE line 572-3), which means "[f]ate oft saveth a man not doomed to die, when his valour fails not" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 464-5). In the first axiom, according to Weil, "fate is unalterable" (95), while in the second "it plays favorites" (95). Moreover, "[fate] is subordinate to *both* 'wise God' *and* 'the man's courage.' Someone is confused here, and I would suggest that it is neither Beowulf nor the narrator: rather, it is the modern audience, tending to miss the point of these pronouncements" (Weil 95). If this reasoning is followed, and the implied reader is indeed "confused" about the concept of *wyrd* in *Beowulf*, then the part of the cultural code regarding *wyrd* is under-determined.

The message that the poet in fact wants to convey with the concept of *wyrd* is that "the future will be a mixture of satisfaction and suffering even though God (or fate) 'rule(s) all the race of men'" (Weil 96), and that your choice to act or not when faced with difficulty "determined whether you would be sung as a hero, a villain--or not at all" (Weil 96). Finally, as this was the belief of Anglo-Saxons, Weil suggests that "the power behind the words of shaping in Anglo-Saxon poetry was, in the sense that mattered most to them, the power of the individual" (96-7).

Because the concept of *wyrd* is so prevalent in the text and "almost consistently connected with death" (Tietjen 162), the necessary result is the presence of different funerals in the text. The poem's descriptions of burial and funerary customs reflect the pagan practices of the time. Tolkien's translation provides insight into how the Anglo-Saxons honored their deceased and the importance of funerary rituals. Irving notes "the three accounts of pagan funeral rites, of a kind known to be frequently condemned by Christian authorities" (122). First there is "an odd version of a ship burial (odd since the funeral ship is not buried in a mound but pushed out to sea) in the funeral of Scyld" (Irving 122), then there is "a ceremonial pyre for the casualties in the Finn Episode" (Irving 122), and finally "Beowulf's own cremation funeral at

the end" (Irving 122). Irving also adds that "all three rites accompanied by rich grave goods" (122), which is in accordance with their pagan belief that material things should be given back to earth.

The riches and the weaponry laid down by the deceased warrior have a significant cultural role in the world of *Beowulf*, set in the early Middle Ages. These objects are often passed down from one warrior to another. One example is Unferth's sword Hrunting:

> Nor yet was that thing to be misprized among his mighty aids which to him in his need Hrothgar's sage had lent. Hrunting was the name of that hafted blade; pre-eminent among old and precious things was that, of iron was the blade stained with a device of branching venom, made hard in the blood of battle. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 1212-17)

Another example is the armor that originally belonged to King Heorogar, passed from Hrothgar to Beowulf, and finally presented by Beowulf to Hygelac, his liege:

> To me did the wise prince Hrothgar give this raiment of war, and spake bidding me that I should first describe to thee his gracious gift. He said that King Heorogar, lord of the Scyldings, long while possessed it; and yet he would not for that the rather bestow it upon his son, the gallant Heoroweard, for the clothing of his breast, loyal to him though he was. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 1807-13)

Moreover, after being given Hrunting, Beowulf proclaims that "For myself glory will I earn with Hrunting, or death shall take me!" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 1243-4) According to Schrader, "[t]he celebration of glory has such emphasis because human praise is the highest goal of the pagan characters" (21). Furthermore, "[t]he nature of the glory and the means of its transmission [...] have important consequences in Danish history (as presented in the poem), and similar ideas attached to succession appear in the Geatish section as well." (21)

Other than the heirloom from the examples above, the lineage also has an important cultural value, not only within the poem, but within the early Middle Ages as well. This is already evident in the beginning of *Beowulf* when the "full Scylding line" (Schrader 21), from Scyld to Hrothgar and his building of Heorot, is described in more than sixty lines:

> Oft Scyld Scefing robbed the hosts of foemen, many peoples, of the seats where they drank their mead, laid fear upon men, he who first was found forlorn; comfort for that he lived to know, mighty grew under heaven, throve in honour, until all that dwelt nigh

> about, over the sea where the whale rides, must hearken to him and yield him tribute - a good king was he!
>
> [...]
>
> For it he devised the name of Heorot, even he whose word far and wide was law. His vow he belied not: the rings he dealt and treasure at the feast. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 3-9, 63-5)

Another example of the importance of lineage is the scene in which the coastguard requests to know the lineage of Beowulf and his followers: "Now must I learn of what people you are sprung, rather than ye should pass on hence, false spies, into the land of the Danes" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 204-6), after which Beowulf responds by disclosing the names of his father and uncle: We are by race men of the Geats and hearth-comrades of Hygelac. Famed among peoples was my father, a noble warrior in the forefront of battle; Ecgtheow was he called (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 210-3).

The heirloom and lineage in the early Middle Ages are closely connected to the notion of strength. This idea is also linked to the concept of the heroic code, a set of values and ways to act in a warrior society. The concept, that guides their lives, is expressed by Beowulf himself when he tries to bolster the grieving Hrothgar's courage: "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. No better thing can brave knight leave behind when he lies dead" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 1156-9). This concept of the heroic code is in line with the character of the epic.

Other than the strength of an individual warrior, the strength of a group of warriors is also chronicled in *Beowulf*. This regards the concept of comitatus, which is a body of men that has in its core "the bond between the warriors and their chosen chieftain" (Lindow 10). As well as the funerals, the comitatus is also present in both the beginning and the end of the poem. After the first monster Grendel's attacks, Beowulf travels to Denmark accompanied by fourteen warriors: "Champions of the people of the Geats that good man had chosen from the boldest that he could find, and fifteen in all they sought now their timbered ship, while that warrior, skilled in the ways of the sea, led them to the margins of the land" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 167-71). He is also accompanied in his final journey, that to the afterlife, by twelve grieving followers, expressing their love and admiration: "Then about the tomb rode warriors valiant, sons of princes, twelve men in all, who would their woe bewail, their king lament" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2655-7).

Regarding topography, Tolkien maintains the original text's references to the places and the peoples of *Beowulf*. For example, "Wedra lēode" (Heaney, OE line 3156) is translated as "the windloving people" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 2645), which is closer to the original than Heaney's "Geat people" (MnE line 3156), while "Weder-mearce" (Heaney, OE line 298) is translated as "Weather-mark" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 240), as opposed to Heaney's "Geatland" (OE line 298). Furthermore, Tolkien translates "Gēotena lēode" (Heaney, OE line 443) as "the Gothic knights" (*Beowulf* line 357), while Heaney translates it as "the Geats" (MnE line 443), and "Finna land" (Heaney, OE line 580) as "the land of the Finns" (*Beowulf* line 471), which for Heaney is "the coast of Finland" (MnE line 581). Tolkien's translations are more descriptive and evocative, emulating the aspects of the original poem.

Other geographical and cultural connections are expressed in the already discussed tale of Sigemund, which has Icelandic origins, as well as the descriptions of paganism, which is closely connected to Norse mythology.

After taking into consideration the various components of the cultural code analysed in this chapter (extratextual context of oral tradition; god and religion(s), *wyrd*, funeral customs, society, history, and geography), it can be concluded that the cultural code of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* is over-determined, as per Brooke-Rose's classification.

4.4. The Semic (Connotative) Code in Tolkien's *Beowulf*

According to Barthes, the semic code is based on "seme", elementary unit of meaning. "The seme [...] is a connotator of persons, places, objects, of which the signified is a character. Character is an adjective, an attribute [or] a predicate [...]" (190).

Firstly, the most noticeable occurrence of the semic code is found in proper names, more specifically in the names of characters. For example, the name of Breca, chief of the Brondingas who raced Beowulf in a swimming contest, derives from "rush" or "storm" (Klaeber 433). Beowulf's father's name is Ecgþéow and stands for "sword-servant" (Klaeber 434), and Heorot, a mead-hall and Hrothgar's seat of rule, is connected to the word "hearth", as well as "hart" ("stag") (Klaeber 436). According to Klaeber, the name of Grendel has several possible etymologies. These are: related to the Old English word *grindan*, which means "grind" and thus Grendel is thought to mean "destroyer" as well as to the Old Norse word *grand*, meaning "evil" or "injury"; related to the Old English word *grindel*, which means "bar" or "bolt"; related to the

Old Norse word *grindill*, one of the poetical terms for "storm", or *grenja* with the meaning "to bellow"; it could also come from the Old English word *grandil*, a derivation of *grand*, which is a noun denoting "sand" or a "bottom (ground) of a body of water" (Klaeber xxviii-xxix), and is linked to the description of his dwelling.

If compared to Heaney's translation, Tolkien's rendition tends to be more descriptive, while Heaney keeps the form of kennings (compound expressions) characteristic of Old English. Some examples are: "the seats where they drank their mead" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 4) and "mead-benches" (Heaney, MnE line 5), "giver of rings" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 27) and "ring-giver" (Heaney, MnE line 36), "figures of the boar" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 245) and "boar-shapes" (Heaney, MnE line 303). By choosing to describe the kennings (that were often used in Old English, but in Modern English sound artificial) instead of literally translating them, Tolkien's implied author better connects with the contemporary implied reader, who is supposed to react to Tolkien's text as naturally as the authentic listener would react to the scop's performance.

Another important instance of the semic code in *Beowulf* are expressions that Weil calls "hand-words" (97). Weil believes that "hand-words constitute an oral formula little remarked but crucial, for Beowulf, through the 'strength of thirty' in his hands, transforms himself from the son of an outcast to a great hero and king in a culture where ancestry determined one's role in society" (97), thus becoming an example of someone who "shaped their fate". According to Weil, "[h]ands shape: they reach, grasp, manipulate; in short, they are the physical means by which we control our world" (97). For example, "[w]hen [Grendel appears in the hall], he breaks the iron-fast door-hinges with his hand (722), not his arm or shoulder" (Weil 99). Tolkien's translation here is slightly different: "The door at once sprang back, barred with forged iron, when *claws* he laid on it" (*Beowulf* lines 588-9, emphasis mine). The use of "claws" instead of "hands" emphasizes Grendel's monstrous features.

Grendel then goes on to devour a warrior called "Hondscio," whose name means "hand-glove" or "hand-shoe". He is devoured "*foet and folma* (feet and hands, 745). *Foet and folma* seems to be a minor formula in Anglo-Saxon poetry [...] always in contexts in which it signifies complete helplessness" (Weil 99). Tolkien's translation maintains this formulaic expression: "Quickly he took all of that lifeless thing to be his food, even feet and hands" (*Beowulf* lines 605-606).

Furthermore, "When Hrothgar and the rest of the Scieldings come to view the evidence that Beowulf has mortally wounded their enemy, the poet refers only to the hand" (Weil 100). The word "hond" (Heaney, OE line 927) Tolkien translates as "hand" (*Beowulf* line 756) "hand" (Heaney, OE line 983) becomes "the hand and fingers" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 801), and "folme" (Heaney, OE line 1303) is translated as "arm" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 1086).

When depicting monsters, the poet demonstrates a certain admiration toward them. This can particularly be seen in the description of Grendel's mother. She is characterized as "mere-wif mihtig" (Heaney, OE line 1519), where "mere-wif" means "the woman of the sea" and "mihtig" means mighty. While Heaney fails to emulate the scop's positive description and uses a dehumanizing expression "that swamp-thing from hell" (MnE line 1518), Tolkien uses a better translation: "the monstrous woman of the sea" (*Beowulf* line 1268). Similarly, the expression "ides, aglæc-wif" (Heaney, OE line 1259) consists of the word "ides", meaning "noble woman", "aglæc", meaning "fierce combatant", and "wif", which means "wife or woman". Tolkien's translation is again closer to the original meaning: "ogress, fierce destroyer in the form of woman" (*Beowulf* line 1045) than Heaney's: "monstruous hell-bride" (MnE line 1259), even though in this case Tolkien's translation is also more derogatory than the original. Moreover, when Heaney uses the expression "savage talons" (MnE line 1504) to emphasize her supposed savageness and monstrosity, Tolkien gives her human aspects: "cruel fingers" (*Beowulf* line 1255). Finally, Heaney's "tarn-hag in all her terrible strength" (MnE line 1519) becomes "she-wolvish outlaw of the deep" (*Beowulf* lines 1268-9) in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*. Thus, Tolkien is more humanizing when illustrating the complex and tortured character of Grendel's mother.

Taking into consideration the examined aspects of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, the semic code is deemed over-determined.

4.5. The Symbolic Code in Tolkien's *Beowulf*

The symbolic code regards the "symbolic field" (Barthes 262) and is a place "for multivalence and for reversibility" (Barthes 19). It "can be entered from any number of points, thereby making depth and secrecy problematic" (Barthes 19). Because of this multivalence and volatility of the symbolic code, this chapter will focus primarily on the aspects of the code that overlap with the other codes and were touched upon in previous chapters.

Firstly, there is the circularity of the story examined in the context of the proairetic and the hermeneutic code. The poem starts and ends with a funeral, and moreover, those are not the only funerals in the story. This frequency of funeral events symbolises the ubiquity of death, while opening and closing the story with a funeral demonstrates its inevitability.

Moreover, if Beowulf's funeral is examined more closely, it can be seen that it illustrates one of the main motifs of the poem, and that is the blending of paganism and Christianity. The funeral is pagan (there is a pyre and a burrow, to which treasures and weapons are added), but then there are twelve warriors riding around the burrow: "Then about the tomb rode warriors valiant, sons of princes, twelve men in all, who would their woe bewail, their king lament" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2655-7), emulating the twelve apostles. Another example of an amalgamation of pagan and Christian elements are the final two lines of the poem: "manna mildust ond mon-ðwærust, / lēodum līðost ond lof-geornost" (Heaney, OE lines 3181-2). The first line is connected to the image of Jesus: "most generous and to men most gracious" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 2664), as well as the first half of the second line: "to his people most tender" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 2664-5), while the second half of the last line introduces the element of praise/glory corresponding to the notion of an Anglo-Saxon hero: "and for praise most eager" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* line 2665).

Another example of symbolic code regarding the connection between the pagan and the Christian worldviews is the poet's declaration that Grendel is descended from Cain ("for the Maker had proscribed him with the race of Cain" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 86-8)), who was punished by god for the sin of killing his brother: "That bloodshed, for that Cain slew Abel, the Eternal Lord avenged" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 87-8). This biblical reference is followed by the mention of creatures such as ogres and giants, concepts connected to various Icelandic sources, namely the *Poetic Edda*: "Of him all evil broods were born, ogres and goblins and haunting shapes of hell, and the giants too, that long time warred with God - for that he gave them their reward" (Tolkien, Beowulf lines 89-92).

With regard to the cultural code, the poet's "warnings of impending warfare and tribal dissolution" (Niles, "Myth and History" 144) can be connected to the "Norse concept of the end of the world in a final combat of gods and men against the hostile hosts of monsters" (Niles, "Myth and History" 144). According to Tolkien, "[a]t least in this vision of the final defeat of the humane (and of the divine made in its image), and in the essential hostility of the gods and heroes on the one hand and the monsters on the other, we may suppose that pagan English and Norse imagination agreed ("The Monsters and the Critics" 21).

Moreover, in *Beowulf* "*[s]ea* is a trope that indicates distance, not just water. *Headlands* denotes a political border or threshold, not just a range of promontories. Those utterly conventional geographical details are the only ones the poet chooses to give" (Niles, "Myth and History" 155), which connects the symbolic code to the Nordic elements within the cultural code.

Similarly, Heorot is depicted as "this shining hall where rings are dealt" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 969-70), connoting safe haven, in other words, the only safe place in the middle of darkness, while everything surrounding it represents hell, with places "[where] the waters boiled with blood, and the dread turmoil of the waves was all blended with hot gore, and seethed with battle's crimson" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* lines 688-90). In other words, the whole world of *Beowulf* is depicted as hell, the only exception being "the shining hall" of Heorot.

Regarding the connection to the semic code, the examined "hand-words" can be analysed in the context of the symbolic code as well. For example, Weil notices the symbolic meaning behind the transition of armour, already discussed within the cultural code and the importance of lineage and heirloom:

> Poets even endowed hand-worked objects with their own chronologies: for example, Unferth's sword Hrunting, or the armor of Heorogar. That armor comes down to Hrothgar, who gives it to Beowulf, who, when he returns to Gautland, presents it to Hygelac as a gesture of both munificence and good faith: with each transmission, the armor gains prestige. Hands shape these objects out of the raw material of the world and then pass them on to kinsmen to help cement the bonds of the comitatus. (97)

The handing down or gifting of armor is thus taken to indicate generosity and good faith, and the more the armor circulates, the stronger are the bonds between the individuals that constitute a comitatus.

In addition, the "hand-words" are important in the fight between Beowulf and Grendel: "The first hand is Grendel's, but, foreshadowing the outcome of the fight, the next two 'hands' are Beowulf's: his is the superior power" (Weil 99). Moreover, Weil concludes that "Beowulf, through the power of his hand, has fulfilled his vow and made his reputation as a protector of men" (100). On the other hand, "Grendel, through the loss of his hand, has lost the power to make men suffer for his outcast status: through the loss of his hand, he dies and is damned" (Weil 100).

These examples of the symbolic code can be easily detected by an implied reader, and therefore this code can be classified as over-determined, as per Brooke-Rose's analysis.

4.6. *Beowulf*'s Encoded and Implied Readers

After examining the five narrative codes that comprise the text of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* with the aid of Barthes' and Brooke-Rose's critical texts, it can be concluded that all the codes (proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural, semic and symbolic) in the text are clear and thus over-determined. Therefore, one can conclude that the encoded reader is over-determined (*hypocrite lecteur*) and that the text is easily grasped by an implied reader.

However, the absorption and understanding of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* is dependent on the implied reader's knowledge of the historical and cultural context of the poem, especially the oral tradition that was crucial for the transition of the poem from an audiovisual experience to a written text.

It can therefore be concluded that Tolkien successfully emulates the authentic listener of *Beowulf* as performed by a scop, with a requirement that the implied reader possess certain contextual knowledge of the source.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, J. R. R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* was analysed. Firstly, a brief outline of texts in literary criticism necessary for the analysis was presented, the most important of which were Barthes' text on narrative codes and Brooke-Rose's text on the encoded reader. This was followed by a survey of certain aspects of Tolkien's translation, with emphasis on the differences with Seamus Heaney's verse translation. The last part of the thesis is dedicated to the analysis of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, which was separated into five sections according to Barthes' five narrative codes: proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural (referential), semic (connotative) and symbolic. This was completed with the evaluation of the encoded reader in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*.

It can be concluded that Tolkien is successful in reproducing the original listener. Moreover, the implied reader of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, with a certain knowledge of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the original poem and its oral tradition, gets very close to emulating the authentic listener of the original Anglo-Saxon poem.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses J. R. R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, an Anglo-Saxon poem considered the highest achievement of Old English literature.

The theoretical framework of the paper consists of Barthes' text on narrative codes and Brooke-Rose's text on the encoded reader. A survey of certain aspects of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* is given, in addition to its comparison to Seamus Heaney's rendition. The last part of the discussion is dedicated to the analysis of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* using the theoretical framework introduced in the second chapter. This is completed with the evaluation of the encoded reader in Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, followed by conclusion on the strength of the proposed argument regarding Tolkien's reproduction and adaptation of the original listener.

KEY WORDS

Beowulf, J. R. R. Tolkien, five codes, Roland Barthes, Christine Brooke-Rose, encoded reader, implied reader, scop, Seamus Heaney