FATİH UNIVERSITY

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE EPIC *BEOWULF* IN JOHN GARDNER'S NOVEL *GRENDEL* AND THE FILM *BEOWULF AND GRENDEL*

Thesis submitted to the

Institute of Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

by

Yunus ÖZDEMİR

Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Barry Charles THARAUD

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Dedicated to Professor Barry Charles THARAUD:

The man "who labors in good faith."

APPROVAL PAGE

Student   : Yunus ÖZDEMİR

Institute   : Institute of Social Sciences

Department   : English Language and Literature

Thesis Subject : Deconstruction of the Epic *Beowulf* in John Gardner's Novel *Grendel* and the Film *Beowulf and Grendel*

Thesis Date   : June 2013

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

Prof. Dr. Barry Charles THARAUD
Head of Department

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

Prof. Dr. Barry Charles THARAUD
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Barry Charles THARAUD   ....

Assist. Prof. Dr. Rainer BRÖMER   ....

Assist. Prof. Dr. Vassil Hristov ANASTASSOV   ....

It is approved that this thesis has been written in compliance with the formatting rules laid down by the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet KARAKUYU
Director

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:

   I)   Research Methods course during the undergraduate study

   II) Examination of several thesis guides of particular universities both in Turkey and abroad as well as a professional book on this subject.

Yunus ÖZDEMİR

June, 2013

ABSTRACT

Yunus ÖZDEMİR **June 2013**

Deconstruction of the Epic *Beowulf* in John Gardner's Novel *Grendel* and the Film *Beowulf and Grendel*

This thesis presents an analysis of the epic *Beowulf*, the novel *Grendel,* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel* under the light of deconstruction theory. It also compares and contrasts the three works in terms of plot, characterization, and theme. The epic *Beowulf* is an influential text in English Literature and has been reinterpreted variously by different writers and filmmakers. John Gardner in his novel *Grendel* reinterprets the events taking place in the epic; Sturla Gunnarson also bases his film *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005) on the epic and interprets it in a different way. These novel and film adaptations of the epic, which display the contents of the epic from different points of view, reconstruct the epic. The reconstructions include crucial changes in the epic although the main events remain the same in all three works.

The term "deconstruction" gains importance at this point. It is a complex concept and is not defined by its initiator Jacques Derrida. However, when Derrida's works are analyzed closely, we see that he gives some signposts about how to "deconstruct" a literary work. The present thesis claims that although both the novel *Grendel* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel* deconstruct the epic *Beowulf,* the film deconstructs it better than the novel by giving a larger and more complete account of the events in the epic: First, my thesis examines the plot, background, and some different interpretations of

these works; second, it tries to define "deconstruction" in some works of Derrida and others. Finally, it shows how the novel and the film deconstruct the epic.

Key Words: *Beowulf*, *Grendel*, *Beowulf and Grendel*, deconstruction, epic, novel, film

KISA ÖZET

Yunus ÖZDEMİR   **June 2013**

Beowulf Destanı'nın John Gardner'ın *Grendel* Romanında ve *Beowulf ve Grendel* Filminde Yapı Sökümü

Bu tez *Beowulf* Destanı'nın *Grendel* romanında ve *Beowulf ve Grendel* filminde yapı söküm tekniği ile yapılan bir analizini sunmaktadır. Tez aynı zaman üç yapıtı konu, olay örgüsü ve karakterler açısından karşılaştırmaktadır. *Beowulf* destanı İngiliz Edebiyatında etkili bir eser olmuş ve farklı yazar ve film yapımcıları tarafından farklı şekillerde tekrar yorumlanmıştır. John Gardner *Grendel* romanında destandaki olayları yeniden yorumlar. Sturla Gunnerson'da *Beowulf ve Grendel* filminin destana dayandırır ve destanı farklı bir şekilde yorumlar. Destanın içeriğini farklı bir bakış açısıyla sunan bu uyarlamalar, destanı yeniden oluşturur. Bu yeni oluşumlar destandaki asıl olayları değiştirmese de bazı önemli değişiklikleri içermektedir. "Yapı söküm" terimi bu noktada önem kazanır.

"Yapı söküm" karmaşık bir tekniktir ve bu kavramın başlatıcısı olan Jacques Derrida tarafından tanımlanmamıştır. Fakat, Derrida'nın eserleri yakından incelendiğinde edebi bir eserin nasıl yapı söküme uğratılacağı hakkında bazı işaretler verdiği görülmektedir. Bu tez hem *Grendel* romanının hem de *Beowulf ve Grendel* filminin *Beowulf* destanını yapı söküme uğrattığını ve filmin destandaki olaylar hakkında daha iyi ve bütüncül bir anlatım sunduğunu iddia eder. İlk olarak, eserlerin olay örgülerini, arka planlarını ve farklı yorumlanmalarını ortaya koyar. Sonra, Derrida ve diğer yazarların eserlerinden faydalanarak "Yapı söküm" kavramını tanımlamaya

çalışır. Son olarak da roman ve filmin destanı nasıl yapı söküme uğrattığını her ikisini karşılaştırarak gösterir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Beowulf*, *Grendel*, *Beowulf and Grendel*, yapı söküm, destan, roman, film

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: TEXTS, CRICITISM, AND CONCEPTS

1.1 The Statement of the Problem

The oldest epic in English literature, *Beowulf* mainly narrates the deeds of an epic hero, Beowulf. Beowulf's struggles with the monster Grendel and later with the fire dragon form the main actions of the epic. These two parts have influenced other creative works in literature and film. The re-creation of the events in the new works of art changes the perspectives of readers and viewers as every new creation means a new interpretation of the original epic.

John Gardner's 1971 novel *Grendel* includes both Grendel and the fire dragon, and presents a new perspective on the epic. In *Grendel*, point of view and narration change along with the form of the text. In 2005, the director Sturla Gunnarson made the film *Beowulf and Grendel* based on the epic *Beowulf*. The film is mainly about Beowulf's journey to Daneland to help King Hrothgar, who has been troubled by the monster Grendel. Although both novel and film remain loyal to the original epic in many respects, changes have also been introduced into both works. These changes provide the audience with new insights and points of view from which to evaluate the epic. The term "deconstruction" gains importance at this point.

"Deconstruction" is a term introduced by French philosopher and critic Jacques Derrida. The term has been employed differently in different disciplines. In literary criticism, its usage has been adopted by some critics, while some others have despised it.

It is difficult to define the term and to apply it to literary works in an unproblematic way. Deconstruction leads readers to have new perspectives on literary texts. When the novel *Grendel* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel* are compared with the epic *Beowulf*, the novel and the film both deconstruct and reconstruct the original epic in many ways. The novel and film adaptation of the epic fill in some gaps that exist in the original story, and they also reflect a more complete interpretation of the characters, narration, and events in the epic.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

The influence of the epic *Beowulf* on English Literature and creative works is undeniable. The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the epic *Beowulf* with the novel *Grendel* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel* under the light of deconstruction theory. First, I will summarize the plots, characters, and themes of the texts, and then I will survey the different interpretations of various scholars, authors, and critics. Next, the study will scrutinize the epic closely by showing how it is deconstructed both in *Grendel* and *Beowulf and Grendel*. I will also show that the film *Beowulf and Grendel* presents a more complete deconstruction of the epic than the novel *Grendel*.

While deconstructing the epic, the study will also form a certain definition of the term deconstruction by limiting it to works of art and literature. Many definitions and applications or misapplications of the term have been expressed in different disciplines. The study aims to define the term by making use of Derrida's works although Derrida himself avoids giving a precise definition. To sum up, by comparing three different

works from different disciplines, the study aims to shed more light on the first epic poem in English Literature.

1.3 The Scope of the Study

Analyzing the oldest epic in English Literature with a complex philosophical and literary concept is a challenge. The comparison of different genres such as epic, novel, and film makes the study more challenging. The different applications and understandings of deconstruction make the term elusive and difficult to apply to literary texts. However, when Derrida's works are analyzed closely, it can be seen that it is possible to formulate a definition of deconstruction. The objectivity of the formula, however, will always be questionable since Derrida himself avoids giving a precise definition.

Comparing and contrasting three genres − epic, novel, and film − is challenging as they all have different ways of representing character, plot, and theme. The language and techniques used in epic, novel, and film are different, and therefore may mutually enrich each other. However, this textual enrichment may also cause misinterpretation or misunderstanding. While written texts such as epic and novel may transmit their messages in a more or less certain and clear way, the language of film can be interpreted differently as it uses audio and visual media which can lead to more subjective interpretation and possible loss of objectivity.

1.4 The Epic *Beowulf*: Story and Criticism

In each of the following sections of this chapter – on the epic, novel, and the film – I briefly review the basic story, with special attention to the parts that are changed or manipulated when the story is transformed into the novel and film genres. I also make a brief survey of criticism of each work, and finally I explain and comment upon Derrida's concept of deconstruction as it has generally been applied.

The oldest epic written in the English language, *Beowulf* belongs to the Old English or Anglo-Saxon period. It was probably written down around the tenth century and is anonymous. Since it comes from oral tradition, it was created before the tenth century. It is written in alliterative verse, and includes typical formulaic oral characteristics such as heroic epithets. The epic includes adventures of the Geat hero Beowulf, who goes to help the Danish king, Hrothgar. The poem begins with a prologue praising old Danish kings, especially Scyld Scefing, and then it mentions the building of Heorot, the great mead-hall where King Hrothgar and his warriors celebrate their victories. Their merrymaking and celebrations anger a monster called Grendel, who attacks Heorot and kills many of King Hrothgar's warriors for twelve years.

Beowulf, the powerful hero from Geatland, hears about Hrothgar's plight and sets off with fourteen men to help Hrothgar. Hrothgar welcomes Beowulf, who makes a speech and explains that he is going to end the trouble Grendel has caused. One of the Danish warriors, Unferth, taunts Beowulf by narrating a swimming contest between Beowulf and Breca, and he blames Beowulf for his boastful foolishness. Beowulf tells his version of the contest in which he killed sea monsters as he competed against Breca.

He also adds that he will show his strength by defeating Grendel without using any weapons. At night King Hrothgar and his retainers take their leave. Beowulf and his warriors wait for Grendel, who comes and gobbles up one of the Geats as all the warriors except Beowulf sleep. Then, Grendel stretches his arm toward Beowulf, who seizes it, and a struggle between Beowulf and Grendel ensues. Terrified by Beowulf's strength, Grendel tries to escape. Beowulf does not let him escape and tears off one of Grendel's arms. Grendel runs away and then dies in his lair at the bottom of the mere. Beowulf hangs Grendel's arm over the entrance of Heorot as a sign of triumph.

The next morning, people celebrate the victory and Hrothgar rewards both Beowulf and his men. After the celebrations Beowulf does not stay in Heorot, and another monster, Grendel's mother, attacks Heorot and kills King Hrothgar's advisor, Aeschere. Beowulf, King Hrothgar and his men find the mere where Grendel's mother lives. Unferth, who previously taunted Beowulf, regrets it and loans his sword, Hrunting, to Beowulf. When they arrive at the mere, Beowulf makes his boast to King Hrothgar, commends his men and spoils to King Hrothgar's protection, and dives into the water alone. A fierce fight begins between Beowulf and Grendel's mother. Beowulf manages to kill her with an ancient sword which he finds in the cave under the mere. Beowulf also sees the dead body of Grendel and cuts off the monster's head. The sword that Beowulf used melts after it severs Grendel's neck, and Beowulf swims up to the surface of the mere where his men meet him, and they all return to Heorot. King Hrothgar and the others celebrate the return of the hero, and Hrothgar rewards Beowulf generously a

second time. After long celebrations and speeches, Beowulf bids farewell to King Hrothgar and sets sail to Geatland where he is met joyfully by his uncle, King Hygelac.

After the death of Hygelac and his son, Beowulf becomes the king of the Geats and successfully rules over his people for fifty years. Then, a slave awakens the dragon, which burns the villages and the mead-hall where King Beowulf lives. King Beowulf prepares himself for his last stand, fights and kills the dragon with the help of Wiglaf, but he is also mortally wounded. Beowulf asks Wiglaf to build a high barrow after his death. After Beowulf dies, the epic ends with the funeral of Beowulf.

Being the only surviving epic in English Literature, *Beowulf* has an immense amount of criticism, which covers topics ranging from its manuscript, history, structure, linguistic characteristics, themes, and characters. Barry Tharaud in his introduction to *Beowulf* (1996) states, "English language and culture had been established through a rich mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norman French cultures. When we read Beowulf and other English poems, we encounter the foundations of Anglo-American culture, including ideas and traits of temperament that are still with us today" (xv).

Seamus Heaney counts the poem among the foundational works of English poetry (ix). He also writes that readers new to the epic will feel a certain "shock of the new" because of the mythic potency of the poem (xii). Heaney writes that the poem includes different parts, which create a sense of a poem within a poem (xiii). He also adds that the poem is about three different peoples: the Danes, the Geats, and the Swedes (xv). Heaney asserts the universality of the poem by pointing to the feelings it evokes when the Geat woman mourns for Beowulf: "her keen is a nightmare glimpse into the

minds of people who have survived traumatic, even monstrous events and who are now being exposed to a comfortless future" (xxi).

Harold Bloom writes that although the epic is based on Old Norse Folklore, it contains some historical facts such as the existence of a king named Hygelac. He explains that some names in the poem could be related to the Wuffingas dynasty in history. He states that the poem may have been written down during the first half of the tenth century or about the year 1000. He also writes that the poem "follows the conventions of oral poetic tradition" (7-10).

John R. Clark Hall writes that *Beowulf* does not have many differences as a work of literature from other Anglo-Saxon poetry. He writes that the poem is full of repetitions, explanations, and comments. He sees the style of the poem as abrupt and disconnected. He finds the poet's way of expressing his ideas as childish as they are disconnected, straightforward, and obscure. However, Hall also focuses on the complex ideas of the poem, emphasizing the deeper thought and contrasts between young and old, Beowulf and Hygelac, Beowulf and Hrothgar, Wiglaf and Beowulf, and the contrast between good and evil. He also states that like other Anglo-Saxon poems, *Beowulf* has a grim tone. Hall describes the narrator of the poem as a thoughtful story teller who attracts the attention of the reader: "The descriptions of fighting are in particular full of fire and go, that of the fight at the bottom of the lake being especially good" (xvii-xxi).

J.R.R. Tolkien draws the reader's attention to the epic by stating the importance of the poem as a work of literature rather than an historical text (qtd. in Donoghue 105). He claims that both the sea burial and funeral pyre in the poem were not accurate

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archeologically, but they show that the poet knew about a heathen and noble past (qtd. in Donoghue 118). He continues:

> *Beowulf* is not an actual picture of historic Denmark or Geatland or Sweden about A.D. 500. But it is (if with certain minor defects) on a general view a self-consistent picture, a construction bearing clearly the marks of design and thought. The whole must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but noble and fraught with a deep significance − a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow. This impression of depth is an effect and a justification of the use of episodes and allusions to old tales, mostly darker, more pagan, and desperate than the fore-ground. (qtd. in Donoghue 124)

Tolkien finds the structure of the poem impressive and writes that "In structure actually it is curiously strong, in a sense inevitable, though there are defects of detail. The general design of the poet is not only defensible, it is, I think, admirable" (qtd. in Donoghue 127). He concludes his article by stating that the poem is not a primitive one and it will appeal to the Northern people "until the dragon comes" (qtd. in Donoghue 130). He shows the immortality of the poem as a work of art.

The theme of religion and Christian elements in *Beowulf* also has been included in much criticism. Margaret E. Goldsmith states that it is neither an irreligious poem nor totally a secular poem. It is a heroic poem written down by a Christian poet after it had been composed orally, so that even if the setting is before Christianity, it cannot be

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totally separated from it (76). She also claims that clues in the poem show that it was written for a cultured audience who understood the rich Christian allusions (77). She concludes that the three different fights of Beowulf in the poem correspond to three medieval kinds of interpretations of biblical stories: "literal, tropological, anagogical" (90).

F.A. Blackburn also writes about the Christian elements in *Beowulf*. Blackburn states that *Beowulf* has been accepted as a heathen poem and suggests that there are three different hypotheses about the Christian elements in the poem:

1. The poem was composed by a Christian, who had heard the [pagan] stories and used them as the material for his work.

2. The poem was composed by a Christian, who used old lays as his material. (This differs from the first supposition in assuming that the tales had already been versified and were in poetical form before they were used by the author.)

3. The poem was composed by a heathen, either from old stories or from old lays. At a later date it was revised by a Christian poet, to whom we owe the Christian allusions found in it. (This hypothesis differs from the others in assuming the existence of a complete poem without the Christian coloring.) (205)

Blackburn evaluates these possibilities and reaches three conclusions: First, there are two interpolations in the poem, "which shows an unskillful insertion of marginal matter"; second, all allusions could be made easily by a copyist, which explains "the

colorless character of the allusions, which appear in the entire lack of reference to anything distinctively Christian as contrasted with heathenism." Finally, "from these two conclusions there naturally springs a third: that *Beowulf* once existed as a whole without the Christian allusions" (225).

Marijane Osborn focuses on the feuds mentioned in the epic and divides these feuds into two: "one heroic and one cosmic. The former aligns us, the audience, with the native Germanic world within the poem, while the latter aligns us with the Christian world of the poet" (973). She claims that there is no pagan-Christian problem in Beowulf as the heroic feud reflects the life of the pagans and the cosmic feud reflects the scriptural knowledge of the poet (979-80).

1.5 Gardner's *Grendel*: Story and Criticism

The events in the novel are told through the eyes of its main character, Grendel. Grendel tries to scare a ram, but the ram does not move. Animals in each chapter symbolize an astronomical sign. In chapter one, the ram symbolizes Aries. It is the twelfth year of the war between Grendel and Hrothgar. Grendel resents when a doe is scared of him. Grendel's resentment of the doe's action shows the reader that, like humans, Grendel is affected by the creatures around. This distinction of a human-like and conscious monster at the beginning of the novel shows that the Grendel in the novel is not the same as the Grendel in the epic. He attacks to King Hrothgar's hall and kills many warriors. His attacks on Heorot are similar to the one mentioned in *Beowulf*. As the novel continues, some flashbacks occur that reveal Grendel's past and give more

information about him and his environment. Grendel's first encounter with humans is recalled. One day, when Grendel is still young, he finds himself trapped in a tree. He screams and shouts for help from his mother, but no one comes. Grendel thinks about his existence at the moment and realizes that he alone exists. This existential realization of being a self is important because from this moment on Grendel separates himself from his mother. In this trap, Grendel encounters King Hrothgar and his men for the first time. When Grendel tries to speak to them, they become scared and defensive. While observing men, Grendel understands that people are the most dangerous creatures since they can plan and act. This might be the reason for the anger Grendel feels against King Hrothgar and his men. Grendel's mother appears and saves Grendel just before King Hrothgar and his men attack him.

The lack of verbal communication with his mother makes Grendel lonely so he observes people closely. He describes the social development of men, and he witnesses the growth of King Hrothgar's kingdom. One night, a blind old man enters with his assistant; he is a bard, called the Shaper. In *Beowulf*, the bard is a figure who sings different sagas in different parts. Therefore, Gardner's inclusion of the bard in the story parallels the epic. It is also important because through the Shaper he both questions the credibility of the bards in the epic, and he shows the effect of art and aesthetic beauty on Grendel. The Shaper sings the story of the Scyldings, and the Danes cheer him as he finishes his song. Grendel is extremely influenced by the Shaper's story although he knows that he lies about the history of the Danes, which Grendel has witnessed himself. He realizes that the Shaper is manipulating history, but he cannot keep himself from

believing it. As the Shaper plays his harp and sings the song of creation, Grendel is ashamed of his own bloody ways and runs toward the hall screaming that he is innocent and cries for mercy. The Danes attack him with spears and swords, and Grendel runs back to the forest. Grendel's need for acceptance and his rejection by humans cause Grendel to hate people.

Later, Grendel finds himself in front of a dragon in a cave, and the dragon seems to have expected Grendel. The dragon explains the way people think and their flaws in thinking. The dragon starts a philosophical discussion, which Grendel does not fully understand. He tells Grendel that the Shaper creates illusions through his imagination and art. After meeting the dragon, Grendel finds the world meaningless and becomes a kind of nihilist who does not believe in anything. He does not feel shame, loneliness, or doubt anymore: he feels anger and directs his anger against people.

King Hrothgar's warriors try to prevent Grendel's attacks after the initial attack. They boast and swagger but cannot do anything against Grendel. At this point, Unferth approaches Grendel and challenges him. He speaks heroically, but Grendel makes fun of him by throwing apples at him and mentions the burden of heroism. Unferth cannot do anything and begins to cry under Grendel's verbal attacks. Grendel leaves him alive after every attack on the mead hall, which drives Unferth crazy. Gardner's inclusion of this episode in the novel is instrumental as it reveals to us Grendel's attitude towards heroism. Unferth represents the concept of heroic ideals that the Shaper presents in his art. In the epic, Beowulf is the embodiment of heroism. However, since *Grendel* ends

after the arrival of Beowulf, Gardner uses Unferth to display Grendel's attitude toward heroism.

In the second year of Grendel's attacks, King Hrothgar's power diminishes and he gathers his men from all over his kingdom to fight a neighboring Helming king, Hygmod. Hygmod offers his sister Whealhtheow as a peace offering and Hrothgar accepts Wealhtheow's hand in marriage. Grendel is moved by Wealhtheow's appearance as he once was by the Shaper's song. Whealhtheow represents beauty, elegance, and love. After presenting the Shaper as the representation of art and aesthetic beauty, and Unferth as the representation of Heroism, Gardner uses Whealhtheow as an instrument to show the effect of love and beauty on Grendel. Grendel is deeply influenced by her. He does not attack the mead hall during the winter because of Wealhtheow's presence. One night, tortured by Wealhtheow's visions, Grendel attacks the mead hall and captures Wealhtheow. As he spreads her legs, he realizes that killing or leaving her alive will not make any difference. He releases her and returns to his mere. He is happy that he did not kill or rape her, as men expected.

Once, Grendel watches a religious ceremony of the Scyldings. The priests pray to their chief god, the Destroyer, to rid them of Grendel. At midnight, Grendel goes to the temple of the Scyldings. A blind old priest comes and Grendel tells him that he is the god, Destroyer. After that, Grendel asks questions about Ork's beliefs, which Ork tries to explain in details. Gardner uses Grendel's encounter with the priest Ork to reflect Grendel's cynical view of religion.

In the cave, Grendel's mother acts crazily and tries to prevent Grendel from leaving the cave. She feels the impending doom, but Grendel does not understand her. In the morning, Grendel sees fifteen men arrive from the sea, but their leader is never named. The narrator Grendel always defines Beowulf as the leader of the Geats as he tells the events.

At the mead hall, Grendel watches the quarrel between Unferth and the leader of the Geats, whom Grendel thinks is crazy. It is an important issue that Gardner lets the reader know what Grendel thinks about Beowulf when he sees him for the first time, since Grendel's views about Beowulf and other events are not mentioned in the epic. At night, Grendel attacks the mead hall and eats one of the sleeping men. As he stretches forth his arm, he realizes that the leader of the Geats who has been watching him devour the first man. Grendel tries to fight with him. However, he slips in the blood and the Geat gets the upper hand. Later, the Geat tears off Grendel's arm. At this point, Grendel understands that he is going to die. He escapes from the mead hall, calling for his mother. He reaches the edge of a cliff. All animals watch him. Grendel looks at them and says "Poor Grendel's had an accident… So may you all."

After its publication, *Grendel* received different reactions. Most of the criticism was positive and the mastery of John Gardner as a writer was recognized. Charles Johnson claims that the novel *Grendel* is "the book that cemented [Gardner's] reputation among critics" (619). Robert Merril writes that "Gardner is one of our more respected contemporary writers, and *Grendel* is his most popular work" (162). He also adds that Gardner's *Grendel* has caused different interpretations among critics as some of them

drastically misinterpreted the character Grendel (163). He compares Gardner's views about Grendel − as a character who is not an existentialist − with the views of some other critics who see Grendel as an absurd hero.

Joseph Milos states that works based upon medieval sources both enrich themselves and create new questions. He finds *Grendel* as a good example of this kind and adds that Gardner "restructure[es…] the Anglo-Saxon original, which strikingly alters the epic material" (Milosh 48). He compares the character Grendel in *Grendel* with the Grendel in *Beowulf* and claims that the latter is predictable and does not stir pity, while in *Grendel* he is a dynamic character who develops during the novel (Milosh 49). Milosh also compares the concept of war in the epic with that in *Grendel,* and claims that while war and heroism in the epic are idealized, both concepts are ridiculed by Grendel in the novel (51).

Michael Livingston and John William Sutton give special importance to *Grendel* among many works which are related to *Beowulf*. They claim that Gardner's *Grendel* has become the initiator of more sophisticated works about Beowulf and Grendel (Livingston and Sutton 2). They also assert that until *Grendel* was published, there had not been any works which tried to change the point view of the epic: "Gardner turns the original story upside down and inside out, retelling it from the perspective of the monster. Gardner humanizes Grendel, transforming him from an animalistic creature into a sentient being with human emotions" (Livingston and Sutton 3). Livingston and Sutton write that Gardner's *Grendel* has affected some music bands as well, and some songs have been composed about the Grendel from the novel (8).

Barry Fawcett and Elizabeth Jones focus on the number twelve and how twelve parts of the novel are associated with different astrological signs (635): "Gardner claimed that the twelve astrological signs give "nice easy clues" to his "twelve major ideas" (Fawcett and Jones 637). They give examples of the signs and what they represent. Fawcett and Jones also claim that Gardner achieves more by making use of these signs: "By associating heroic ideals with sun, moon, planets named after gods, and constellations, he gives them an archetypal, mythic, cosmic dimension. For Gardner wants us to apprehend these ideals as pertaining not just to a particular time and place but to all cycles of human life" (640).

1.6 The Film *Beowulf and Grendel*: The Story

The film starts with a five-line stanza that mentions the Spear Danes and writes that good tales swim through seas while others sink. Each main part of the film is given a title, and the first title is "Prologue: A Hate is Born". The scene shows a green landscape where a huge man-like creature is playing with his young son on a field. After a few minutes, they are chased by riding warriors and the father directs his son to climb down the cliff and hide from them. The warriors, who are Danes and led by middle-aged King Hrothgar, shoot the father with arrows, causing him to fall from the high cliff and die. As King Hrothgar moves toward the edge of the cliff, he sees the young boy, Grendel. He raises his sword to kill him, but then he changes his mind and spares young Grendel's life. The film starts with this prologue, which gives us information about

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Grendel's father − unlike the prologue in *Beowulf,* which is about King Hrothgar's ancestors.

After King Hrothgar and his men leave, young Grendel finds the corpse of his father on the shore and tries to carry the dead body, which is too heavy for him to move. Therefore, young Grendel cuts his father's head off and carries it to his cave. The director shows that young Grendel keeps his father's head as a sacred memory to remember him since he places the head on a high place that resembles a shrine in the cave.

Many years pass and Grendel is grown up now. He attacks the mead hall which was built by King Hrothgar, and he kills many warriors. The scene changes and a new title occurs: "From the Sea a Hero". A man, whom we later know as Beowulf, is in the middle of the sea and swims to the shore. The director chooses to introduce Beowulf to the audience just after his swimming competition with Breca mentioned in the epic. However, in the film, Beowulf does not talk about any competition or killing sea monsters boastfully, which shows us that Beowulf in the film is different. After a meeting with King Hygelac, Beowulf and a band of warriors travel to Denmark across the sea. In Daneland, Hrothgar goes out at night to find Grendel and fight with him. However, although Grendel keeps killing other warriors, he consistently spares Hrothgar's life.

Later, the camera shows a wrecked boat and a priest walking out of it. One of the new characters in the film is this Christian priest who comes to Daneland. The priest talks to sad and desperate Hrothgar and claims that he has the power of Christ to get rid

of the troll, Grendel. Queen Wealhtheow, on the other hand, goes to Selma the witch, who is also a new character in the film and allegedly can see Hrothgar's end. Meanwhile, Beowulf and his men reach Denmark. King Hrothgar celebrates Beowulf's arrival in the mead hall, and Beowulf makes his speech about how he is going to end the strife by killing Grendel. Unferth, a Danish warrior, despises Beowulf, but he is silenced by King Hrothgar. The quarrel between the two is different from the one in the epic in that Unferth does not narrate Beowulf's swimming contest with Breca, and Beowulf does not accuse Unferth of killing his own brothers.

Beowulf and his men stay in the mead hall at night. They are all awake and wait for Grendel's attack. The film presents a more realistic picture of the situation in this scene because Beowulf and his men expect an attack, so they do not sleep. Meanwhile, the Christian priest stays outside the mead hall and waits for Grendel, to prove to the Danes that his Christian faith will protect him against Grendel. Grendel comes and sniffs the priest. He mocks the priest's prayers and moves toward the mead hall. As Grendel gets closer to the gate of the mead hall, he does not attack, because he sniffs the smell of the newcomers inside. Instead, Grendel pees behind the gate and leaves the place. When Beowulf and his men make their move to attack Grendel, they see nothing outside. Grendel's mocking of the newcomers by peeing at the door of the mead hall shows that the film presents a different monster from the epic. Instead of attacking by instinct as he does in the epic, Grendel keeps delaying his attacks after the newcomers arrive.

The next day, Beowulf and King Hrothgar witness the conversion of the Danes to Christianity by the newly arrived priest. The Danes, who saw that the priest survived

the night staying outside when Grendel came, think that Christianity can protect them. In the mead hall, Beowulf asks questions about how everything started. Hrothgar hides the real reason from Beowulf, telling him that the mead hall might be the reason for Grendel's attacks. At night, Beowulf and his men wait for Grendel's attack once more. They hear the sound of some footsteps and rush outside, but they find nothing. Grendel, who has been watching them in hiding, leaves. Grendel's postponement of his attacks causes Beowulf to question Grendel's motives.

The next morning, after visiting Selma the witch, Beowulf encounters Grendel on a hill. Grendel overlooks Beowulf from above and makes fun of Beowulf's call for a fight. Grendel speaks in a different dialect and Selma the witch translates his speech to Beowulf. Beowulf learns that Grendel does not attack him because he is not a Dane and did not do any wrong to Grendel. This revelation increases the questions about Grendel in Beowulf's mind. Grendel's ability to talk is one of the main differences between the epic and the film.

Beowulf describes his encounter with Grendel to King Hrothgar. Later, King Hrothgar is converted to Christianity by the priest. King Hrothgar's conversion does not take place in the epic. It is another main difference in the film. One of the Danes who has become a Christian and therefore is not afraid of Grendel anymore, tells Beowulf that he can lead them to Grendel's cave. Beowulf, his men, and the Dane arrive at the place where Grendel lives. However, the cave is below them and it is unreachable without a rope. One of Beowulf's men pees from above into the cave as Grendel did at the mead hall. At night, Grendel kills the Dane who led Beowulf to Grendel's cave.

Enraged, Beowulf and his men descend to Grendel's cave with the help of a rope. Grendel is not there and one of Beowulf's men smashes the head of Grendel's father. After that, they leave the cave. When Grendel comes back to his cave and sees the broken skull of his father, he attacks the mead hall, beating everyone he comes across until he reaches the man who smashed his father's skull. He sniffs the man and then snaps his neck. As he tries to escape, Beowulf catches him and ties the rope around his hand. Grendel jumps down, hanging from the roof. He takes one of the spearheads and cuts his own arm to escape because he cannot cut the rope with the spearhead. After Grendel cuts his arm, he reaches the mere, where he dies and his mother takes his lifeless body. The gruesome fight between Beowulf and Grendel in the epic, takes yet another turn in the film because Grendel cuts off his own arm to free himself from the rope. Also, he kills the only Dane who wronged him, which motivates Beowulf to learn why Grendel attacks.

Beowulf speaks with King Hrothgar again and King Hrothgar tells him the whole story and how he could not kill the young Grendel when they killed his father. Later at night, Beowulf goes to the hut of Selma the witch. After a short time Selma and Beowulf make love. With this scene, the film shows the reason for Beowulf's absence in the mead hall on the night of Grendel's mother's attack.

The scene changes and a new title appears: "Blood of Kin". A huge, female-shaped sea monster goes toward the mead hall, snapping the priest's head with one hand on her way. She attacks the mead hall, killing Aeschere, the advisor of Hrothgar. She also takes Grendel's torn arm and disappears. The next morning, Beowulf, who spent the

night with Selma the witch, and Hrothgar get on their horses with their men and go to the swamp of the sea hag. Beowulf dives into the water and finds Grendel's corpse in a cave. Grendel's mother attacks him and Beowulf kills her with an ancient sword. This scene takes place the same as in the epic.

Finally, as Beowulf moves toward the dead body of Grendel, a young boy, whom Beowulf understands to be the son of Selma the witch and Grendel, appears to defend his father Grendel's body. Beowulf spares the boy and returns. He visits Selma for the last time and then builds a mound to honor Grendel. Beowulf sees Selma and her young son who apparently have come to the shore to see him off. Then, he sets off toward Geatland.

After the film *Beowulf and Grendel* was released in 2005, it received mixed criticism. Many critics criticized the film because it followed the epic loosely. However, it was praised for brutal action scenes and revisionist script. The changes made in the script can be understood better if they are analyzed under the light of deconstruction theory.

1.7 The Term Deconstruction

The term "deconstruction" has influenced many disciplines, from philosophy to literature and history, from film studies to law, architecture, political theory, and anthropology. M.A.R. Habib writes that deconstruction is "a way of reading, a mode of writing, and, above all, a way of challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, the external world, and of

language and meaning" (649). The term was introduced by Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher, after publication of his *Of Grammatology* in 1967. Although Derrida does not define the term explicitly in *Of Grammatology* or in his other works, he gives important clues about how to deconstruct a text, which can help critics define the term.

In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida claims that Western philosophy and thought have always had a "desire" to search for a center, a meaning, or a "transcendental signified" (49). Derrida calls this desire for a center "logocentrism" or "phonocentrism" (*Of* 11). According to Derrida, all Western thought from Plato to the present has tried to ground its basis on a meaning, "presence," or "existence" (*Writing* 353):

> We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as eidos, presence as substance / essence / existence [ousia], temporal presence as point [stigme] of the now or of the moment [nun] , the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth). Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence. (*Of* 12)

"Deconstruction" is the name that Derrida gives to the activity of "destruction" and "de-sedimentation of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos" (*Of* 10).

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In other words, deconstruction is an attempt to destruct this central "logos". However, this "destruction" does not mean to destroy. "Rather than destroying" writes Derrida, "it was also necessary to understand how a "whole" was constituted and to reconstruct it to this end" (*Psyche* 3). That is, deconstruction is an attempt to reconstruct and to "dismantle" logocentrism, which is "the most constantly dominant force" (Derrida, *Positions* 51). It is also the "destabilization […] on the move in the things themselves" (Derrida, *Limited* 147). However, this "destabilization" is not something negative since Derrida believes that "Destabilization is required for 'progress' as well" (*Limited* 147). Therefore, while deconstruction destabilizes the texts and logocentrism, it also leads to progress.

According to Derrida, "The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim…." Deconstruction should "necessarily" operate "from the inside" (*Of* 24). There are two ways to operate from inside the text. One is to point to the neglected parts in the texts and to question them and find their inconsistencies; the other is to deal with the binary oppositions that are included in texts. Derrida gives an analogy about the neglected parts of the texts and how to deconstruct them. He compares the text to architectonic structures and writes that in some texts there are "neglected" or "defective" corner stones which need to be levered in order to be deconstructed (*Memoires* 72). In other words, if someone wants to deconstruct a text, he should find some important "corner stones" or important parts that are neglected or ignored and question these parts from different perspectives to create alternative meanings.

Derrida also claims that in Western thought there has always been an opposition between two concepts, and one of these concepts always "governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (*Positions* 41). Theses binary oppositions have a certain tension between them. To deconstruct these oppositions one needs to overturn or reverse them so that they can be neutral, which gives both sides of the opposition the right to represent themselves. Jonathan Culler regards this reversion of the oppositions as one of the basic steps of deconstruction:

> Deconstruction is most simply defined as a critique of the hierarchical oppositions that have structured Western thought: inside-outside, mind-body, literal-metaphorical, speech-writing, presence-absence, nature-culture, form-meaning. To deconstruct an opposition is to show that it is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourses that rely on it, and to show that it is a construction in a work of deconstruction that seeks to dismantle it and reinscribe it – that is, not destroy it but give it a different structure and functioning. (120)

Derrida writes that this reversal of oppositions does not immediately pass to "neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply residing within the closed field of these oppositions" (*Positions* 41). Reversing the oppositions and giving superiority to the suppressed concept does not mean to deconstruct it because the suppressed concept would have the upper hand and thus it would mean to stay "within the closed field of these oppositions".

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In order to get out of the closed fields of the binary oppositions, Derrida adds that "it must, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing [reading] – put into practice a reversal of the classic opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of intervening in the field of oppositions it criticizes…" (*Limited* 21). This "displacement" and intervention creates a new text and context. That is why Derrida states that "deconstruction" is also a "recontextualization" (*Limited* 136). The recontextualization creates new meanings and interpretations of the original text by suggesting possibilities and alternatives inherent in the original text. Therefore, every text that repeats the original text in a new context creates a new text which is a new creation. This new creation is different from the original text in some points and shows the iteration of the text. Derrida claims that iteration, the characteristic of repetition of a text, alters the original text so that "something new takes place (*Limited* 40).

CHAPTER 2:

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF EPIC *BEOWULF* IN JOHN GARDNER'S

GRENDEL

John Gardner's *Grendel* was published in 1971 and is one of his most well-known novels. *Grendel* is the retelling of the events in *Beowulf* from the monster Grendel's viewpoint. However, the retelling is not just a repetition of the events in the epic, but the novel includes some basic qualities of deconstruction. Deconstruction, according to Gardner, is "the practice of taking language apart, or taking works of art apart, to discover their unacknowledged inner workings" (*The Art* 88). *Grendel* focuses on some of *Beowulf*'s unacknowledged parts.

Gardner also writes that "all great literature has a deconstructive impulse" (*The Art* 89). When we read the novel *Grendel*, we see that Gardner deliberately deconstructs *Beowulf*, the great work of English literature, because Gardner thinks that *Beowulf* is a constructive text which fuses "all that was best in the old pagan and the new Christian vision" (*The Art* 89). Gardner also believes that "the deconstruction" of literary works can "achieve greater emotional power" and adds that deconstructing the story of *Beowulf* by retelling it from Grendel's view point can provide readers information and insights about the personal tragedy of Grendel (*The Art* 90). Therefore, Gardner's deconstruction of *Beowulf* in *Grendel* fills in the gaps of the epic and presents a more complete picture of the narration, themes, characters, and plot.

John Gardner starts his deconstruction of *Beowulf* by changing the narrative mode. He writes that when one reads a great work of literature, one can see "the grand

old forms of Western civilization revealed as rather shoddy, certainly manipulative and tyrannical" (Gardner *The Art* 90). Gardner also classifies *Beowulf* among the authoritarian texts which try to shape its readers' or listeners' ideas and viewpoints in an authoritarian manner (*The Art* 83). Gardner's views of Western civilization and its literature seem to comply with Derridean "logocentrism," whereby Western civilization has always searched for a center to place itself in an authoritarian way. When the epic *Beowulf* is analyzed, its narration is authoritarian and manipulative against Grendel. By naming the epic "*Beowulf*" the author subordinates Grendel from the start. The epic is narrated from the third person omniscient point of view. The narrator favors Danish history, Beowulf, and at times Christianity by glorifying god. The narrator aligns himself with the hero of the epic, Beowulf. Grendel is silenced and the reader does not hear him in the epic. Therefore, the narration in *Beowulf* is not objective and all inclusive, and does not let the reader know the other side of the story.

Beowulf is a rich text with foreshadowings, flashbacks, flashforwards, allusions, and kennings. However, although there are interpolated tales, the narration of the main events in *Beowulf* is straightforward and chronological. The events start with the founding of a dynasty in the prologue (Tharaud 3) and finish with the death and funeral of Beowulf at the end (Tharaud 125). The language is highly elevated, rhetorical, and appropriate for an epic. There are different epithets and kennings like "the gray haired giver of treasure", "The ring adorned queen" (Tharaud 26, 27), and alliterations like "broad-beamed, bound" (Heaney 21, 23).

John Gardner deconstructs both the narration and diction of the epic in his novel because he believes that deconstruction is about the language we use, which can carry meanings and values we do not intend (*The Art* 88). Therefore, the language used in any text can have more than one meaning, and its narrative mode can reveal authoritarian aspects. To deconstruct the narration of *Beowulf*, Gardner first reverses the binary oppositions between the names Beowulf and Grendel. According to Derrida, Western thought is based on binary oppositions in which the first concept always governs the second (*Positions* 41). For example, in male-female opposition, the concept "male" is superior to "female" and it governs the "female" concept. To deconstruct such oppositions, one must reverse these traditional binary oppositions by giving superiority to the second concept over the first one (Derrida, *Limited* 21). Gardner chooses the name *Grendel* for his novel. By naming the novel *Grendel*, Gardner reverses the traditional binary opposition "Beowulf and Grendel" to "Grendel and Beowulf", giving superiority to Grendel.

The narrative mode in *Grendel* is also different as it is first person point of view rather than third person omniscient point of view. According to Gardner, deconstructive narration "tells the story from the other side or from some queer angle that casts doubt on the generally accepted values handed down by legend" (*The Art* 88). In *Grendel*, the reader sees everything through Grendel's eyes, which provides the reader another angle from which to look at the epic, and thus the novel gives a deeper understanding of the character Grendel. Gardner tells us that he made Grendel sympathetic so that readers can see the question of the novel from inside (*A Letter*). Robert Merril also claims that the

first person point of view narration in *Grendel* makes the reader associate himself with the character Grendel during the first 150 pages, even though he is the antagonist (178). By changing the narration from third person point of view to first person point of view, Gardner provides readers with new insights into the epic and "casts doubt" on the credibility of the narration of the epic.

The narration of the main events in the novel does not take place in a chronological order as they do in *Beowulf*. Although *Beowulf* also includes some flash-forwards and different stories, the main events do not change their order. We witness many flashbacks and experimental writing in the narration of *Grendel,* including play scripts, film scripts, and poetry. When Grendel tells us about his first encounter with Wealhtheow, he makes use of a writing style used in film scripts to separate the scenes (Gardner, *Grendel* 94). When Hrothulf presents his soliloquies in the yard and the woods, the prose narration of the novel changes into the style of a play (Gardner, *Grendel* 113-14). Grendel's narration from simple prose narrative into complex and non-linear narration shows us how Grendel's storytelling improves during the course of the novel. It also gives us an idea of what Grendel feels. It shows that Gardner prefers to alternate the relatively straightforward narrative style of the epic with a more complex narration from Grendel's point of view. In other words, Gardner deconstructs the epic mode of narration throughout the novel.

The language of the novel is also different from the language of the epic. *Grendel* is less elevated and rhetorical than *Beowulf*. Joseph Milosh and John Gardner write that *Grendel* is a "parody of rhetoric" (56). Gardner parodies the rhetorical

language of the epic with mock epic epithets and alliterative phrases (*Grendel* 167).

What is more, Gardner changes the ornamented language of the epic into foul language

in some parts of the novel. For example, he uses the word "fucking" in the novel

(Gardner, *Grendel* 171). This shows that although Gardner may include epic techniques,

he changes the language to serve his aim of deconstructing the narrative style of

Beowulf.

Apart from its narration, John Gardner also deconstructs the themes of *Beowulf*

in *Grendel*. Gardner thinks that introducing the great ideas of Western civilization such

as heroism, love, aesthetic beauty and religion to the skeptical monster Grendel can be

more interesting (*The Art* 166). When we read *Grendel*, we see that Gardner

deconstructs the themes of heroism, religion, and the role of aesthetic beauty and love.

For example, the theme of heroism is an important component of the epic *Beowulf:* the

epic mainly deals with the heroic deeds of its main character. Although the epic presents

the dangers of the heroic ethos, including greed and uncontrolled violence within the

Anglo-Saxon society, the representation of heroism in the epic is almost always positive.

The beginning of the epic, which mentions the founding of the Scylding Dynasty, is full

of the heroic actions of Scyld Scefing and his success as a warrior king (Tharaud 3). The

warfare and heroic actions of Scyld Scefing's grandson, King Hrothgar, are also

mentioned (Tharaud 9). Beowulf's heroic boasts before King Hrothgar (Tharaud 19), his

narration of his encounter with Breca and his slying of sea monsters (Tharaud 23, 25),

his victorious fight with Grendel and his mother (Tharaud 34, 65), and finally his last

heroic boast and fall before the dragon (Tharaud 102, 114) display the importance of

heroism as a theme. J.D.A. Ogilvy and Donald C. Baker state that all the heroic events that Beowulf experiences lead him to a heroic death at the end: "The young, successful prince becomes the king confronted with an enemy whom he did not seek and over whom he can win only a partial victory. It crowns a heroic life with a heroic death" (Ogilvy and Baker 85). Beowulf follows the heroic code from beginning to end of the epic.

The narrator of the epic also seems to give special importance to heroism and heroic deeds as he introduces different sagas throughout the epic that either glorify the heroic actions of the main characters or despise their non-heroic deeds. The Saga of Sigemund is an example that includes examples of both heroic and non-heroic actions. While the narrator praises Sigemund as he performs the heroic act of slaying a dragon alone, he disapproves of the non-heroic actions of King Heremod, who ignores his warriors and people (Tharaud 38).

John Gardner also includes the theme of heroism in his novel *Grendel*. However, his approach to heroism is quite different from that of *Beowulf*. By reversing the ideas about heroism, Gardner displays another perspective to evaluate the value of heroism. While heroism in *Beowulf* becomes one of the most important themes of the epic and is praised by the narrator, it is deconstructed, mocked, and questioned in different ways in *Grendel*. In the novel, Gardner's narrator, Grendel, presents the concept of heroism in different situations. First, he deconstructs the heroic boasts that are commonly included in the epic. Grendel finds the boastings of the thanes foolish and calls the boasting warriors "Damned pompous fools" (Gardner, *Grendel* 80). Grendel laughs at their heroic

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boasting since they die at Grendel's hands after they attack him (Gardner, *Grendel* 81).

Thus, the heroic boasts that are one of the basic components of the epic *Beowulf* become

a means of mockery in *Grendel*.

Gardner's depiction of Grendel's encounter with Unferth clearly reflects

Gardner's sarcastic and deconstructive approach to heroism. Grendel unmasks Unferth's

heroic ideals by mocking them throughout the novel. In one of his attacks on the mead

hall, Grendel speaks with Unferth and tells him that being a hero must be a terrible

burden as he must always maintain the heroic qualities; then he makes fun of Unferth

when he speaks and boasts heroically (Gardner, *Grendel* 84). Grendel's provocation

angers Unferth, who attacks Grendel. However, instead of starting a serious fight,

Grendel begins to throw apples at Unferth, who cannot protect himself from the apples

and is injured. Grendel sees Unferth's miserable situation and says, "He was crying,

only a boy, famous hero or not: a poor miserable virgin" (Gardner, *Grendel* 85). Grendel

mocks both heroic speeches and actions in this episode.

In addition, Grendel does not kill Unferth during his attacks and leaves him alive,

which makes Unferth more angry:

> He lives on, bitter, feebly challenging my midnight raids from time to
>
> time (three times this summer), crazy with shame that he alone is always
>
> spared, and furiously jealous of the dead. I laugh when I see him. He
>
> throws himself at me, or he cunningly sneaks up behind, sometimes in
>
> disguise – A goat, a dog, a sickly old woman and I roll on the floor with
>
> laughter. So much for heroism. So much for the harvest virgin. So much,

also, for the alternative visions of blind old poets and dragons. (Gardner,

Grendel 90)

Gardner's cynicism and choice of vocabulary to describe Unferth make Unferth and the concept of heroism ridiculous. Unferth's attacks on Grendel are hilarious rather than heroic. Grendel's speeches and actions devastate Unferth, who has based his life on the heroic code. Grendel sees that the merry mask of heroism that the Shaper has put on Unferth's face has been torn away, which makes Unferth "a thinking animal stripped naked of former illusions" (Gardner, *Grendel* 105). By displaying Unferth in this way, Gardner creates a mock hero and suggests an alternative vision of heroism which does not praise heroism, but deconstructs and mocks heroism.

Grendel's fight with Beowulf is another example which shows Gardner's cynical approach to heroism. Beowulf's fight with Grendel in *Beowulf,* in which Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm, forms one of the great action episodes of the epic. Beowulf's strength and heroic actions in beating Grendel without weapons is heroically described in the epic (Heaney 53-54). In *Grendel*, however, Gardner changes the narrative mode of this episode by retelling it from Grendel's mouth. Grendel tells that he slips on blood and falls, which provides Beowulf with an advantage (Gardner, *Grendel* 169). Therefore, Beowulf's victory is not the result of his heroic abilities, but an accident: "He was lucky. If I'd known he was awake, if I'd known there was blood on the floor when I gave him that kick..." (Gardner, *Grendel* 172). He later repeats that everything that happened was just an "accident" (Gardner, *Grendel* 173-74). By presenting all events taking place in Grendel's fight with Beowulf as an accident, Gardner strips Beowulf of his heroic status.

Thus, Gardner suggests that Beowulf's encounter with Grendel should be seen from another perspective in which chance rather than intention and courage play an important role in defining Beowulf's heroism.

The second theme that Gardner deconstructs in *Grendel* is religion and ritual. Religion is an important issue in both *Beowulf* and *Grendel*. However, John Gardner's approach to religion through his narrator Grendel is quite different from that of *Beowulf*. Religious ritual and concepts are widely made use of in *Beowulf*. The epic includes both Christian and pagan elements. Gardner writes that *Beowulf* has hints of Christianity (Gardner *A letter*). The Christian elements in the epic have caused some critics to name the epic as a Christian poem (Bloom vii). When we read the epic, we encounter some characteristics of Christianity: for example, Grendel is a descendant of Cain (Tharaud 10), there is a reference to the Great Flood (Tharaud 70), and in different parts of the epic the Christian god is referred to. After his fight with Grendel's mother, Beowulf retells the events in Heorot and says that he won the glory with the help of God (Tharaud 69-70). Later in the passage, Hrothgar tells Beowulf that even the status of king is achieved through the grace of God (Tharaud 72).

Apart from Christian elements, *Beowulf* also includes some pagan rituals. Scyld Scefing's funeral is described in the beginning of the epic, where Scyld Scefing is put into a ship and sent out to sea (Tharaud 4). Later in the epic, it is written that the Danes go to heathen temples and make sacrifices to get rid of Grendel (Tharaud 12). At the end of the epic, the narrator describes Beowulf's pagan funeral in which the Geats burn Beowulf and then build a huge mound that can be seen from far away (Tharaud 124).

When we analyze both Christian and pagan elements in *Beowulf*, we see that both belief systems are mentioned with high reverence. Although the narrator favors Christianity over paganism, he does not relate any negative thoughts or feelings against either form of religion. He favors Christian beliefs over pagan ones, but he does not insult or mock the pagan beliefs. In fact, in his descriptions of Scyld Scefing's and Beowulf's funerals the reader can witness the esteem the narrator feels for pagan rituals.

In *Grendel*, John Gardner does not make any distinction between Christianity and paganism. He does not mention any belief systems in particular. He reflects his views about religion and rituals in general through the character of Grendel, who does not understand religious rituals such as funerals. At one funeral he finds it meaningless to burn a dead body with the treasure around it: "And now, by some lunatic theory, they throw on golden rings, old swords, and braided helmets" (Gardner, *Grendel* 14). He sees this religious ceremony as a "lunatic theory". If we compare Grendel's approach to funeral rites in Gardner's novel with the narrator of *Beowulf*, it is clear that Grendel has a negative attitude toward funerals and religion. Gardner's Grendel does not believe in any religion and thinks that "religion is sick" (Gardner, *Grendel* 128). Grendel regards priests, who are supposed to be spiritual men, as "showman" rather than men of spirituality. Grendel ruins the temple and the statues of gods and reports that no one really cares about them, except the priests (Gardner, *Grendel* 129). Grendel implies that the priests care about religion because it is the only institution in which priests are valued and given respect and material gain. Grendel asserts that although the people do not really believe in the gods sincerely, religion is necessary for reasons of personal

interests (Gardner, *Grendel* 129). However, he does not explain why it is necessary for the community. He implies that religion is only an artificial way of controlling people as a community. Grendel mocks Ork, the blind priest, by telling him that Grendel is "The Destroyer", the chief god, and makes fun of him by asking some questions (Gardner, *Grendel* 130-33). After listening to Ork's theory of religion, Grendel understands that religion is not as heavenly as people think it is.

Grendel's approach to religion is destabilizing: Instead of approaching religion as a heavenly institution inspired by God, he presents religion as an institution formed by priests to sooth the anxieties of people living in a community. Deconstructing the role of religion in community life in this way, Gardner questions the credibility of religion as a source that gives meaning to life.

A third theme that Gardner deconstructs in *Grendel* is aesthetic beauty and art. The impact of art and aesthetic beauty on Grendel is widely mentioned in John Gardner's *Grendel*. In *Beowulf*, we do not have any special emphasis on these themes. However, Whealhtheow and the bard (scop) are presented as embodiments of beauty and art in both *Beowulf* and *Grendel*. The bard in *Beowulf* is a man "whose memory was well stored with songs" and who creates tales "in skillfully wrought words" (Tharaud 37). He plays his harp and sings songs to entertain people in the mead hall (Tharaud 44).

In *Grendel,* Gardner names his bard "the Shaper" and plays on his ability to create tales. The name "shaper" suggests someone who can shape things and events. The Shaper is a skillful story teller who influences Grendel. Grendel sees the shaper as a man he "cannot help but admire" (Gardner, *Grendel* 12). Grendel's admiration stems from

the Shaper's ability to change history and present an alternative version. Grendel witnesses the development of human kind and knows how they kill each other for gold or food; he always witnesses of man's greed and savagery. However, when the Shaper sings the same story, he changes everything by glorifying the Danes and Hrothgar (Gardner, *Grendel* 42). He has the ability to change the world and make everyone believe him, including Grendel. Grendel, who lived and experienced the truth, remembers things the way the Shaper describes them (Gardner, *Grendel* 43). Grendel even lets the shaper form Grendel's identity. He defines himself through the Shaper's terms: "I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings" (Gardner, *Grendel* 80). The Shaper has the power to make everyone believe his stories through his art (Gardner, *Grendel* 51).

Gardner's presentation of the Shaper as someone who changes history with his songs and stories implies that the things the Shaper sings may be untrue. This approach deconstructs the idea of the bard or scop in *Beowulf*. The reality of the stories sung in *Beowulf* and the bard who narrates them are not usually questioned by listeners. Gardner, on the other hand, questions the credibility of bards and shows the ability of art to create illusions to change reality. Hence Grendel says that everything the Shaper tells is an illusion and a lie (Gardner, *Grendel* 48, 108). Through *Grendel*, Gardner implies that the epic *Beowulf* might be the result of an illusion created by a bard, because Grendel hears the Shaper singing the original prologue of *Beowulf* in the novel (*Grendel* 41-42). Gardner clearly shows how the Shaper and poets in general lie about history in his letter to his students: he writes that poets always lie about history and adds that the

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Shaper lies about "Hrothgar's court, a foul, bestial, savage place" by glorifying it and Hrothgar's actions (Gardner, *A Letter*). This approach overturns the idea of an ideal bard who reliably mediates between reality and its presentation. It also deconstructs the approach of the *Beowulf* poet.

Queen Wealhtheow is presented as the embodiment of beauty and elegance in different parts of *Beowulf* (Tharaud 27, 49, 82). In *Grendel*, when Grendel first sees her, she is presented in the same manner as well. The arrival of Wealhtheow has a great influence on everyone in the mead hall including King Hrothgar, his thanes, and the Shaper (Gardner, *Grendel* 101-2). Grendel is also greatly influenced by Wealhtheow , and her beauty tears him apart (Gardner, *Grendel* 100). He cannot stand the idea of a beautiful queen because queenliness, love, and beauty are theories of humans, like the theory of heroism. Grendel, who became a nihilist after facing the dragon, cannot stand the idea that humans might be right in their theories of beauty and love. Therefore he decides to kill the queen in a brutal way (Gardner, *Grendel* 108-9). According to Grendel, killing the queen would be "the ultimate act of nihilism" (Gardner, *Grendel* 93). However, he gives up the idea at the last moment and states that he "had wrecked another theory" of people about him (Gardner, *Grendel* 110).

The idealization of Queen Wealhtheow as an ideal embodiment of beauty and love is deconstructed by Gardner through Grendel's character. Gardner transforms the idea of beauty from an ideal concept into something with physical existence in the material world. Wealhtheow's existence as an ideal queen creates an atmosphere in which everyone, even Grendel, believes in the ideal power of beauty. However, when

Grendel attacks the queen and grabs her in his hands physically, the idea of beauty as an ideal is shattered as Grendel now understands that Queen Wealhtheow is also a human being with blood, flesh, and an "ugly hole between her legs" (Gardner, *Grendel* 109). Perceiving the queen in this manner leads Grendel to plan a brutal death for the Queen. However, when he realizes that this is what people would expect from him because he is a monster, he changes his mind and spares the queen. Grendel's act wrecks people's theory that Grendel is a human-eating monster (Gardner, *Grendel* 110). After wrecking their theory of heroism, Grendel wrecks their theory of love and beauty as well. Thus John Gardner deconstructs basic themes of the epic and Western civilization by displaying them from Grendel's perspective.

The main characters − Beowulf, Grendel, and King Hrothgar − are also reinterpreted and deconstructed in *Grendel*. In *Beowulf*, Beowulf exemplifies the perfect hero. The poem shows his heroism through three separate difficult conflicts with Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. We can view these three encounters as expressions of the heroic code. When we analyze these encounters we see that Beowulf as a hero changes through the epic. In his youth, Beowulf is depicted as an ideal hero, whose basic characteristics are physical power, boastful expressions, loyalty, and courtesy. His retelling of his contest with Breca and his speeches about how he is going to fight Grendel are full of boastful expressions (Tharaud 26-29). After killing Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf establishes himself as a hero. When he goes back to Geatland, he loyally serves Hygelac and then Hygelac's son. Finally, when he becomes an aged king, we see a different Beowulf who has turned into a mature and wise man. In

the final episode, Beowulf encounters the dragon for the good of the people and not just for his own glory. After his death, his people build a mound as Beowulf requested, which shows that his people really love him. Through all his heroic deeds in *Beowulf*, Beowulf is depicted as a perfect hero who is faultless. His heroic deeds are flawless. The *Beowulf* poet confirms Beowulf's perfection by ending the epic with phrases such as "the mildest and most gentle, the kindest and most eager for fame" (Tharaud 125).

In *Grendel*, Gardner's depiction of Beowulf is quite different from the epic poet's depiction in *Beowulf*. First, Gardner never uses the name Beowulf in the novel. Instead, he uses phrases to describe him. This un-naming of Beowulf hints about Gardner's approach to Beowulf's heroism: a hero without a name cannot have a reputation; by leaving Beowulf nameless in *Grendel*, Gardner questions the heroic name of Beowulf in the epic.

Before Beowulf comes, an old woman tells that a warrior with the power of thirty thanes will come, which Grendel regards as a lie (Gardner, *Grendel* 140-41). Grendel does not believe that a man can be as powerful as thirty thanes. This approach suggests that the description of Beowulf as a man with the strength of thirty warriors in the epic is either a lie or an exaggeration. Grendel's undermining of Beowulf continues until his final encounter with him. When Grendel sees Beowulf for the first time, his impression is that he is as big as a mountain (Gardner, *Grendel* 153). As the novel continues, Grendel witnesses Beowulf's answer to Unferth's taunts. At this point, Grendel's description of Beowulf becomes negative. Grendel says, "I could see his mind working, stone-cold, grinding like a millwheel" (Gardner, *Grendel* 161). This

description implies that Beowulf is more like a machine than a human being. As Beowulf describes his defeating of nine sea monsters, Grendel thinks that Beowulf is "insane" (Gardner, *Grendel* 162). The negative description of Beowulf culminates in his battle with Grendel. Grendel depicts Beowulf as a sly character. When Beowulf finally confronts Grendel, he tricks the monster into thinking he is asleep with the other warriors in the mead hall (Gardner, *Grendel* 168). Beowulf even lets Grendel eat one of his warriors just to learn how Grendel acts. Grendel says Beowulf takes advantage of Grendel's fall when Grendel slips in the blood on the floor. What is more, he makes Grendel "sing of walls," which shows Beowulf is "crazy" (Gardner, *Grendel* 171). Beowulf's heroic characteristics are displayed from Grendel's point of view in the novel. However, instead of approving Beowulf as a heroic figure as in the epic, Gardner displays him as a machine-like creature that can be irrational or even crazy at times. This depiction discredits the epic hero Beowulf.

In *Beowulf*, Grendel is one of the three monsters that Beowulf encounters. Grendel is depicted negatively as a character who is evil and descended from Cain. Grendel does not have any depth and acts mechanically each time he attacks Heorot. Although the reason for Grendel's attacks is not clearly stated in the epic, the poet implies that he is jealous of people's rejoicing. Grendel's loneliness is also hinted by the poet as he describes Grendel as a creature walking alone (Tharaud 9, 10-11). The epic gives no information about Grendel's inner world which makes him a static character who does not develop throughout the epic.

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In *Grendel*, John Gardner deconstructs Grendel and recreates him as the main character of the novel, which presents a different perspective from the *Beowulf* poet. Gardner depicts Grendel as a character who thinks that "all life is brute mechanics, all poetic vision a cynical falsehood" and "optimism is cowardice" (*On Becoming* 58). Grendel is monstrous, cynical, and violent. However, he has human qualities such as feelings and human language. He is much more complex than the Grendel in *Beowulf,* and he develops throughout the novel. He is influenced by beauty and poetry (Gardner, *Grendel* 146). He wants to know the reason of his existence and searches for the meaning of life. When Grendel hears the story of good and evil from the Shaper, he wants to leave the "dark side" and join the good side. Gardner writes that Grendel "longs to be friends with" human beings (*On Becoming* 141). However, he is misunderstood and attacked by the people in the mead hall (Gardner, *Grendel* 51-52). His rejection by human beings makes him a vengeful creature who attacks human beings. Grendel is the perpetrator of many violent and cruel acts in the novel, but all his brutal actions seem to stem from his hatred toward people's greed and their rejection of him. By presenting Grendel's inner world in details, Gardner focuses on the neglected parts of the epic concerning Grendel since the narrator of *Beowulf* gives no information about Grendel's inner world. In this way, Gardner presents a view that changes the reader's perception of the epic.

King Hrothgar is also mentioned in different parts of *Beowulf* and *Grendel*. He is presented as an ideal king in the beginning of *Beowulf* (Tharaud 9). He is described with positive epithets such as "the mighty lord" (Tharaud 16), "protector of Scyldings" (18),

"the gray-haired giver of treasure" (26), and "protector of thanes" (43). In *Grendel*, Grendel describes King Hrothgar differently. In his first encounter with King Hrothgar, Grendel describes Hrothgar and his men as "crazy" people and "pattern makers" (Gardner, *Grendel* 27). Grendel says that King Hrothgar is "more to be feared than a tree or snake" (30). King Hrothgar is depicted as a cunning person who forms plans to maintain his absolute power. The idea of a perfect king that is presented in *Beowulf* is questioned, because King Hrothgar is depicted as someone greedy for power and treasure.

In conclusion, when we analyze John Gardner's deconstruction of *Beowulf* in *Grendel,* we see that Gardner especially focuses on narration, theme, and characterization to show another side of the story. Since deconstruction requires focusing on the other side of the story in its first step in order to reverse the binary oppositions, Gardner presents the themes and characters from an opposite point of view. In this way, he questions the credibility of the events and narration in the epic. This approach discredits the story told in *Beowulf* as "deconstructive fiction retells the story in such a way that the old version loses credit" (*The Art* 88). John Michael Howell focuses on the same point by stating that "Gardner deconstructs the original epic's characters and actions (and many of its lines) by placing them in an ironic context which implicitly questions the vision of the original work while saluting its literary power" (61-62). In *Grendel*, John Gardner reinterprets the actions of the epic from a new point of view that changes the reader's perception of the events and characters in the original epic, *Beowulf*.

CHAPTER 3

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF *BEOWULF* IN THE FILM *BEOWULF AND GRENDEL*

Film adaptations of literary works are common, and the deconstruction of literary works in films is an important element in film adaptation. Jack Boozer writes that deconstruction is more relevant to film adaptations than other theories (20). Filmmakers understand that a well-written literary text can turn into a popular film watched by millions, and therefore they try to deconstruct literary texts that are rich in content. The epic genre is an especially rich source for adaptation: Robert Burgoyne states that epic is "a major form in contemporary cinema, providing a striking example of the resiliency of genre forms, [and] their ability both to recall past usages and respond to the present in a new way" (2). In other words, although the epic genre is related to the past, its rich content also reflects a great deal about the present human condition.

The epic *Beowulf* is an example of a work with rich characterization, theme, and plot that can be adapted into a film. Icelandic director Sturla Gunnersson realized this fact and made a film, *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005) based on *Beowulf*. The film is based on the first two main parts of the epic including Beowulf's encounter with Grendel and his mother. Although the film *Beowulf and Grendel* is based on the epic, it makes changes to present a new perspective on the epic. The audience can better understand the plot, theme, characterization, and narration of the epic in a broader context because the film presents a more vivid and complete picture of the story in *Beowulf*. The deconstruction of the epic in the film *Beowulf and Grendel* takes place in two ways:

first, the film recontextualizes the events and characters and focuses on neglected parts of the epic; second, it reverses the binary oppositions between some concepts and themes that are included in *Beowulf*.

3.1 Recontextualization and Focus on Neglected Parts

Deconstruction shows the multiple meanings of a literary text by analyzing and destabilizing it. It demonstrates that interpretation is not confined to certain centers or endings in the text. One way to show how deconstruction works is to recontextualize the components of the text that form it. Derrida writes that deconstruction also means "an incessant movement of recontextualization," which he defines as taking the limitless context into account, "to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context." He also adds, "There is nothing outside of the text" in fact means, "There is nothing outside of the context" (*Limited* 136). In other words, every text can contain limitless contexts. Film adaptations can be an effective way to recontextualize literary works as they necessarily reinterpret and recontextualize. Film directors and scriptwriters reinterpret events and characters in a written text and introduce new events and contexts. When we watch the film *Beowulf and Grendel*, we see that the director closely focuses on every part of the story in the epic and alters or implements new events and characters to create a new context.

In the film *Beowulf and Grendel*, the director changes the context of the epic from the beginning of the film to the last scene. These changes do not take place in the context of the epic. However, the film suggests that those or similar events may have

taken place. These differences provide the audience with a broader perspective from which to view the epic. The film starts with a heroic stanza (*Beowulf and Grendel* 1:30). However, unlike the prologue of *Beowulf*, the first scene of the film does not show anything about the history of the Danes or the story of Scyld Scefing as it is written in *Beowulf* (Tharaud 4). Instead, the opening scene shows little Grendel playing with his father on the moors (*Beowulf and Grendel* 2:30). Soon after this scene Grendel's father is killed by Hrothgar and his men, while little Grendel is spared by Hrothgar (*Beowulf and Grendel* 4:25). This change in context shows that the director will not follow precisely the story of the epic. It also shows that the film will display possible alternative events behind the events taking place in *Beowulf*.

In the epic *Beowulf*, Grendel's attacks start after the mead hall is built (Tharaud 9); moreover, in the film *Beowulf and Grendel* the attacks start on the day the mead hall is opened (10:20). However, the film makes clear that almost twenty years have passed after King Hrothgar's encounter with little Grendel, who is now a grown up troll. This common point of Grendel's attacks in both epic and film shows that although the director creates new contexts, the film still follows the main story line of the epic.

The film also uses the names mentioned in the epic, but in a new context. The occurrence of Beowulf's name in the epic and film shows a parallelism. In *Beowulf*, the reader learns the name of Beowulf from the narrator when he mentions how the people in Geatland hear the horror of Grendel, and thus Beowulf prepares to sail for Denmark (Tharaud 13). Also, in the film Beowulf is in Geatland and first seen alone in the sea holding a piece of trunk that keeps him afloat. Later, he swims to the shore and

introduces himself to a fisherman as "Beowulf" (*Beowulf and Grendel* 12:16). In both the epic and the film, Beowulf's name is introduced to the reader/audience without making any important changes. However, some names written in the epic are used by the director to create a new context through which the audience can see the events from a broader perspective. For example, the name Breca is used in the epic when Unferth taunts Beowulf for losing a swimming contest against Breca (Tharaud 24). In the epic, Beowulf responds to Unferth by telling a wild story of the contest and how he kills sea monsters as he competes with Breca (Tharaud 25-26). In the film, we first hear Breca's name from Beowulf when he tells the fisherman that he was hunting walrus with Breca (*Beowulf and Grendel*). By introducing the name Breca and shifting its place in the film, the director of the film creates a background for the hero, Beowulf. In this context, Breca and Beowulf are not opponents who compete with each other, but two friends who hunt walrus together. The director deliberately excludes the swimming competition and killing of sea monsters to present the character Beowulf as someone who is more human, believable, and true to life rather than a superhuman hero as he is depicted in the poem.

The inclusion of a Christian priest in the film is a major difference between the film and the epic and creates a different context within which to evaluate the poem. In *Beowulf*, there are some allusions to Christian elements (Tharaud 10, 18, 39, 55), but there is no mention of a Christian priest. In *Beowulf and Grendel*, a priest named Brendan comes to Daneland and tries to convert the Danes to Christianity (23:03). The priest in the film becomes an answer to the allusions in the epic. The director wants to show that the Christian elements in the epic occur because of the priest who comes there

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in a time of transition when people are converting from paganism to Christianity. In this way the director creates a reason for the Christian elements in the poem. Gunnersson talks about this period in his commentary: "It is the moment when Christianity spread [to the] North; it is the change of an era" (*Beowulf and Grendel Commentaries* 39:50).

The arrival of Beowulf in the mead hall is very ceremonious in the epic. Beowulf is presented to King Hrothgar by the messenger Wulfgar (Tharaud 18), so that meeting with Hrothgar is depicted in a formal way. In the film, King Hrothgar meets Beowulf by himself in his night clothes and hugs him outside of the mead hall (*Beowulf and Grendel* 29:58). He also says that he remembers Beowulf as a child. The portrayal of the relationship between Hrothgar and Beowulf in this way reflects their close bond as kinsmen. It also creates a more informal atmosphere through the interpretations of the characters Beowulf and King Hrothgar.

In *Beowulf*, Grendel attacks on the night that Beowulf and his men arrive (Tharaud 32); in the film, Grendel understands that there are some newcomers in the mead hall and does not attack (*Beowulf and Grendel* 36:55). Furthermore, Grendel keeps delaying his attacks as the Geats stay in Denmark and do not leave. The director displays Grendel as a thinking creature rather than a savage monster. Therefore, he aims to change the perspectives of the audience and readers about Grendel.

In *Beowulf and Grendel*, some other events such as Beowulf's visits to Selma the witch, Beowulf's encounter with Grendel on a hill, Brendan's converting King Hrothgar to Christianity, Queen Wealhtheow's meeting with Selma the witch, Beowulf's sparing Grendel's young son present a different picture of the story behind *Beowulf*. These

events do not take place in the epic. However, by presenting the audience with a larger context, the director recontextualizes the events and characters in the epic. The film shows that by paying the sharpest attention to the smallest details in the epic, it can broaden the context of the poem to include parts that are not mentioned or not clarified in the epic.

Another way to deconstruct a literary text is to focus on its neglected parts. When we analyze the plot of the film, we see that the director focuses on unclear parts of the epic and adds new interpretations to the original epic to give a full account of the plot and characters in the story. Derrida writes that deconstruction deals with the neglected parts of the texts by locating "defective cornerstones," which threaten the coherence of the texts as they form a danger for the internal order of the construction (*Memoires* 72). When we read the epic *Beowulf*, we realize that it includes some important gaps or "defective cornerstones," which seem neglected parts of the main plot. These cornerstones threaten the coherence of *Beowulf* as they are incomplete or incoherent in the epic. They prevent readers from understanding the story completely. Some of these important events include the reason for Grendel's attacks, Grendel's sparing of Hrothgar in his attacks, the reason why Hrothgar is protected by God from Grendel's attacks, Unferth's response to Beowulf's insult, Grendel's murdering of the Geat warrior Hondscio, and Beowulf's disappearance on the night of Grendel's mother's attack. The film *Beowulf and Grendel* locates these neglected cornerstones in the epic and tries to create a meaningful whole by implementing some new events to fill in the gaps.

In *Beowulf*, the narrator does not state any specific reason for Grendel's attacks, but implies that he is jealous of people (Tharaud 10). Andrew Rai Berzins, the scriptwriter of the film *Beowulf and Grendel,* focuses on this point by creating a reason. In the DVD commentary of the film, Berzins states that he expands the role of Grendel by giving him more agenda. In the beginning of the film, young Grendel is shown playing with his father, who is a huge troll (*Beowulf and Grendel* 2:35). In *Beowulf*, Grendel's father is mentioned only once by Hrothgar, who states that no one knew who Grendel's father was (Tharaud 58). By including a father for Grendel in the beginning of the film, *Beowulf and Grendel* creates a reason for Grendel's attacks, because Grendel's father is soon killed by King Hrothgar and his warriors in the film (4:25). After many years when Grendel is a grown-up troll, he starts to attack Heorot and kills Danish warriors to avenge his father's death. By including the story of Grendel's father, the film creates the reason for Grendel's attacks. It attracts the reader's attention to the neglected part in the epic in which the reason for Grendel's attacks is hardly mentioned. It also tries to find an answer to the question of who Grendel's father might be. This new interpretation puts Grendel's attacks into a new context.

The second event in the epic which seems defective is the reason for Grendel's sparing King Hrothgar's life in his repeated attacks. In *Beowulf*, Grendel's attacks last for twelve years and the narrator claims that although Grendel can kill the warriors, he is not able to touch the throne, which might also mean that he cannot harm King Hrothgar. The narrator in the epic tells that God prohibits Grendel from touching the throne (Tharaud 11). However, the reason why God protects King Hrothgar and the throne is

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not mentioned. The reader does not know the reason behind this act. The film *Beowulf and Grendel* focuses on this neglected part as well. It shows that Grendel's sparing of Hrothgar is a result of kindness that King Hrothgar has shown to young Grendel by not killing him after King Hrothgar and his warriors killed Grendel's father (*Beowulf and Grendel* 4:28). Grendel recognizes King Hrothgar and does not harm him. In addition, the director includes a scene in which King Hrothgar and Grendel face each other. In the scene, King Hrothgar searches for Grendel to fight with him after Grendel's first attack. Grendel, on the other hand, kills the warrior who comes with Hrothgar and spares Hrothgar's life again, showing that he deliberately leaves the king alive (*Beowulf and Grendel* 21:00). King Hrothgar also recognizes Grendel and understands that he is deliberately spared by Grendel.

Third, the tension between Beowulf and Unferth is also mentioned in the epic when Unferth taunts Beowulf about his swimming contest with Breca (Tharaud 24). Beowulf answers Unferth with a long story of how the competition took place and how he killed sea monsters. Furthermore, Beowulf accuses Unferth of being a drunkard and murderer of his own brothers (Tharaud 26). The readers can feel the tension between Beowulf and Unferth, but they do not know how Unferth responds to such an insult, for the epic does not mention it. However, since Unferth is one of the closest people to King Hrothgar and is one of the leading warriors of the court, he is expected to challenge this insult. The film focuses on this incident. In *Beowulf and Grendel*, Unferth gets really angry because of Beowulf's words and begins to draw his sword to fight with Beowulf, but he is stopped by the threat of King Hrothgar: "Unferth! Sit or see your guts in a

dish" (33:55).The film shows that the tension between Unferth and Beowulf is stopped by King Hrothgar's harsh interference. It shows that without King Hrothgar's interference, there might have been a fight between Unferth and Beowulf.

Grendel's murder of the Geat warrior Hondscio is also mentioned in the epic. In *Beowulf*, when the hero narrates the death of Hondscio, he gives no reason why Grendel chooses him to kill. It seems that Hondscio is just unlucky since he lies close to the gate, which makes him an easy target for Grendel (Tharaud 32). Although his death seems coincidental in the epic, in the film Grendel's choice of Hondscio is not accidental. In *Beowulf and Grendel*, when Beowulf and his warriors, including Hondscio, go on an expedition to find Grendel, they find his cave where Grendel keeps his father's skull to commemorate the father whom the Danes killed. Grendel is not there, but since Hondscio is quite angry with Grendel, he smashes the skull into pieces with his sword (*Beowulf and Grendel* 69:15). Later, Grendel comes to his cave and sees what has happened. After sniffing Hondscio's smell out of his father's broken skull, the enraged Grendel attacks Heorot and kills only Hondscio (*Beowulf and Grendel* 74:15), which is therefore not an accidental event but a planned action.

Finally, one of the most apparent neglected parts of *Beowulf* is Beowulf's disappearance on the night of Grendel's mother's attack. The epic does not openly state where Beowulf is on the night of Grendel's mother's attack. It is only written that Beowulf was in an outbuilding when Grendel's mother attacked (Tharaud 56). However, it is not written where the outbuilding is and what Beowulf does there. It forms an important gap in the narrative as readers will really want to know where Beowulf spends

the night. As the main hero who saves the Danes by killing Grendel, Beowulf's absence when Grendel's mother attacks is a big gap. In *Beowulf and Grendel*, this gap is filled: Beowulf is not in the mead hall when Grendel's mother attacks because the film shows that Beowulf spends the night with Selma the witch, who lives far away from the mead hall (*Beowulf and Grendel* 80:30). That is why he cannot face Grendel's mother at Heorot. The inclusion of Selma the witch in the film provides the audience with the reason for Beowulf's disappearance in the epic.

When we analyze all these altered or new events in the film closely, we can see that they present us with an alternative story in which the readers of *Beowulf* can better understand the plot and characters of the epic. The film *Beowulf and Grendel* expands and develops minor parts of the epic and creates an alternative picture by implementing new events. The new context displays the events of the epic from a different angle and provides a larger perspective for both the audience of the film and the readers of *Beowulf*. It also shows that the epic is rich in context and can be interpreted differently from different perspectives and media.

3.2 The reversal of binary oppositions

The reversal of binary oppositions is one of the essential steps of deconstruction. Jonathan Culler writes that deconstruction is most simply defined as a critique of the hierarchical oppositions that have formed Western thought: inside/outside, mind/body, literal/metaphorical, speech/writing, presence/absence, nature/culture, form/meaning (126). According to Derrida, one of these concepts always "governs the other

(axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (*Positions* 41). To deconstruct these oppositions the priority should be given to the second concept which is governed by the dominant concept (Derrida, *Limited* 21). When importance is given to the second concept in the opposition, it becomes clear that the binary logic between the two concepts "is not natural and inevitable but a construction" (Culler 126). When we analyze *Beowulf* closely, we can see that it focuses on some certain issues while leaving some of them out of focus. The film *Beowulf and Grendel* discovers those suppressed parts and gives priority to them in theme, characterization, and narration. The binary oppositions in the poem such as hero/villain, Christianity/paganism, and culture/nature are deconstructed in the film.

In *Beowulf*, heroism as a theme covers a big part of the story. Heroism in the epic is personified in Beowulf, while his opponent Grendel is depicted as a threat to heroism, thus representing evil. The depictions of the characters Beowulf and Grendel can be seen as an example of binary opposition between hero and villain. Beowulf embodies all positive characteristics of a hero in the poem, while Grendel is depicted as the embodiment of all evil. From the beginning of the epic until its end, Beowulf is always depicted in a good way with ornamented kennings, positive adjectives, and epithets. The first time the reader is introduced to the character Beowulf in the poem is the moment when the narrator mentions a strong warrior in Geatland who hears of Grendel's attacks (Tharaud 13). When Beowulf arrives in Daneland, the messenger also describes Beowulf to Hrothgar with embellished words, showing his strength (Tharaud 18). Beowulf's heroic acts of killing Grendel and Grendel's mother are well depicted (Tharaud 34, 65).

Later, when Beowulf returns to Geatland he is described as a loyal warrior to both Hygelac and his son (Tharaud 97). His heroism culminates in the final fight with the dragon, which causes Beowulf's death (Tharaud 114). All of these heroic deeds mark Beowulf as the main character and hero of the epic.

In *Beowulf*, the reader learns Grendel's name when Grendel starts attacking Heorot (Tharaud 9). Apart from being a monster, Grendel is always described with negative kennings and adjectives such as "descended from Cain," "the accursed spirit," "the enemy of mankind," and "the evil creature" (Tharaud 10, 11). Grendel is portrayed as a one-dimensional character who lacks depth: he devours people and lacks any values whatsoever.

In *Beowulf and Grendel*, the depictions of Beowulf and Grendel are different from the epic poem. The hero versus villain opposition is replaced with villain versus hero. The director Gunnersson in one of his interviews focuses on this point of the film by saying that they were looking "to get away from that 'good' and 'evil' paradigm" by making Grendel more humane (*Raising*). We see that the director gives priority to Grendel in most cases, which lets the audience see the other side of the story told in the epic. First of all, Grendel becomes the victim of Hrothgar and his warriors in the very beginning of the film when they kill Grendel's father before his eyes (*Beowulf and Grendel* 4:24). As a son deprived of his father, Grendel starts attacking Hrothgar and his warriors to take his revenge (*Beowulf and Grendel* 10: 25). However, Beowulf tells us that Grendel does not kill women, children, or old people in his pursuit of vengeance (*Beowulf and Grendel* 49:01). This point is important because it reverses the idea that

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Grendel is the ultimate evil incarnate. Also, when Beowulf and his warriors come to Heorot to save the Danes from Grendel, Grendel keeps delaying his attacks. He does not harm any Geats until they wrong him. What is more, when he encounters Beowulf on a hill where Beowulf and Selma have followed him, Grendel through Selma's translation tells Beowulf that he does not kill Beowulf or his men because they are not Danes (*Beowulf and Grendel* 57:10). It means that Grendel attacks only the people who have wronged him. It also means that he has a system of values. By depicting Grendel in this way, the film suggests that the hero versus villain opposition is inadequate.

In the epic, Beowulf's fight with Grendel is one of the most important parts since it shows Beowulf's heroism and bravery. Beowulf's tearing off Grendel's arm is portrayed in the epic: After Beowulf grasps Grendel's arm, a wound opens. "The dread monster felt pain: a huge wound appeared in his shoulder and the sinews sprang apart. The muscles were torn apart: Beowulf was victorious in battle. Grendel, mortally wounded, fled to seek his joyless home in the fens" (Tharaud 34). The film deconstructs this part of the story by reversing the perpetrator of the action. While Beowulf tears Grendel's arm off at the end of their fight in the epic, in the film, Beowulf ties Grendel's arm with a rope, Grendel jumps down from the attic of the mead hall to escape and remains hanging by his arm; then Grendel cuts his arm by using a spear head he takes from one of the guards (*Beowulf and Grendel* 75:15). In this scene the heroic act of Beowulf's tearing Grendel's arm is recreated and deconstructed on behalf of Grendel, and Beowulf is deprived of his heroic act of tearing off Grendel's arm. Grendel is displayed as an evil character trying to escape from the mead hall in the epic, but in the

film he chooses to cut off his arm to escape from humans. Again, by cutting off his arm himself, Grendel deprives Beowulf of one more heroic accomplishment. Both events show that the heroism of Beowulf in the epic might be exaggerated and the villain Grendel may not be as evil as the narrator of the epic describes him.

Another apparent binary opposition in the epic is between Christianity and paganism. In the epic, the Christian tone is felt throughout the poem. From the prologue of the epic till the end, there are many examples of Christian elements that dominate the epic. In *Beowulf*, in the prologue Scyld Scefing is given a child by God: "the Lord of Life, the Ruler of Heaven, gives honor to the Danes" (Tharaud 3). In contrast, Grendel is descended from Cain (Tharaud 10). After Beowulf kills Grendel, Hrothgar states that Beowulf's killing of Grendel was achieved through the power of God and they should give thanks to the Almighty (Tharaud 39). King Hrothgar also reminds Beowulf that thanks should be given to "the Ruler, Eternal Lord" (Tharaud 73). Lastly, when Beowulf encounters the Dragon and is mortally wounded, he says that God, "The Lord of Mankind," will not charge him with slaying his kinsmen (Tharaud 11).

In the film *Beowulf and Grendel*, we see that the director reverses the pairs of Christianity and paganism by giving privilege to paganism. In *Beowulf*, the reader sees few direct references to the Norse mythology or gods; only Weland is mentioned openly in the epic (Heaney 31). However, since the epic deals with the adventures of a hero before Christianity, the reader expects mores references to paganism and Norse mythology. The film *Beowulf and Grendel* makes use of paganism by including the name of the chief Norse god Odin instead of the Christian god. When the mead hall is

opened, the pagan priest mentions Odin as he tells King Hrothgar, "Under Odin's eye I blood you lucky on all parts that leave this hall" (*Beowulf and Grendel* 8:32). The pagan priest includes Odin's name in the ceremony. Unferth and Beowulf's men also mention Odin in different parts of the film (*Beowulf and Grendel* 40:41). When Beowulf boasts how he is going to kill Grendel to King Hygelac, he uses another pagan word. He says that he will kill Grendel or see Valhalla, the pagan heaven for warriors (*Beowulf and Grendel* 17:21). These pagan references emphasize the pagan roots of the epic before it was heavily influenced by Christianity − whether in its oral phase or during its written transmission.

Apart from references to pagan beliefs and gods, the audience can also see the negative attitude of the film toward Christianity and its privileging of paganism. The director includes an overly ambitious, passionate Christian priest who overreacts to Grendel's attacks with irrational assumptions. He claims that if he remains outside the mead hall, God will protect him as he is a Christian believer (*Beowulf and Grendel* 24:28). Afterward, he misinterprets Grendel's sparing his life as a Christian miracle. However, we can see that Grendel spares him because he is not a Dane. In the commentary part of the DVD, the director Sturla Gunnersson points out this fact and says that it is a religious misinterpretation of history.

The film's cynical approach to Christianity is also seen in Beowulf's attitude toward the Christian priest. When Beowulf sees this overly passionate priest and his assumptions that the Christian god will protect him, he thinks that it is "madness" (*Beowulf and Grendel* 40:20). Furthermore, although king Hrothgar converts to

Christianity in the film, Beowulf does not accept Christianity. In fact, when Beowulf is told that Jesus Christ never sleeps, his comment to the statement shows how cynical and distant from Christianity he is: "Oh, that's all we need. A god gone mad from lack of sleep" (*Beowulf and Grendel* 53:01). When King Hrothgar asks him about whether he is worried about heaven or hell, Beowulf replies, "I'm thinking I'll likely go where I'm sent," which reflects his suspicion of the Christian concept of heaven (*Beowulf and Grendel* 95: 27). Finally, Beowulf's last words in the film confirm the privileging of paganism over Christianity: after he has killed Grendel and Grendel's mother and is returning to Geatland on his ship, Beowulf calls on the name of Odin for a safe trip home in the last scene (99:43). The negative stance of Beowulf toward Christianity in different parts of the film can be seen as confirmation of the film's privileging of paganism over Christianity.

Examples of the opposition between culture and nature can also be observed in *Beowulf*. Tharaud in his introduction to *Beowulf* writes that Grendel can represent "violent impulses" in human nature (xxiii). Apart from human nature, it is also clear in the epic that Grendel is an outsider who comes from the moors, so he also represents outer, physical nature as well. In contrast, King Hrothgar, his people, the bard, and Heorot represent culture in the epic. The culture that King Hrothgar and the Danes create is appraised by the narrator in the epic. In the film, the opposition between culture and nature is displayed through characters: King Hrothgar, Queen Whealhtheow, and the Danes represent culture, while Grendel, Selma the witch, and Grendel's mother represent nature.

The film gives priority to nature over culture by depicting the characters on nature's side more positively and sympathetically. For example, Grendel only attacks to avenge his father, not because he is innately evil. He only punishes people who have wronged him. Selma the witch, who is exiled from the Danish community, finds peace in nature and becomes a self-sufficient person like Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. When Queen Wealhtheow, who represents culture, asks Selma the witch to come back and join the circle of culture, Selma refuses to go and live with them as she feels more content in nature (*Beowulf and Grendel* 25:50). Grendel's mother only attacks after her son has been killed by Beowulf and his warriors. All these examples show that the characters who represent outer nature are depicted more positively than the characters who represent culture.

When we analyze the film closely, we recognize changes in theme and characterization as found in the epic, and also the narrative mode reverses the one-sided narration of *Beowulf,* in which the narrator is always on Beowulf's side. This reversal starts with the naming of the film. The epic, named *Beowulf,* always reminds us that the main character is Beowulf, although Grendel and his mother play a big part in the story. The film, on the other hand, is named *Beowulf and Grendel*, which gives us the first clue to the deconstruction of the epic *Beowulf*. By placing Grendel's name next to Beowulf's, the film shows that it will include both sides of the story. In other words, the title shows that the film is not only about Beowulf, who is the main character of the epic, but it is also about Grendel, who forms the other side of the story. By adding Grendel's name next to Beowulf's, the director presents the names on equal terms and neutralizes the

binary oppositions, as Derrida describes it (*Positions* 41). It shows that the director depicts a more objective picture of Beowulf and Grendel by including both names in the title.

The change made in the narrative mode of the film also displays how the director recognizes the problem of narrating the story truly and objectively. Before the film starts, a stanza similar to the opening lines of *Beowulf* occurs on the screen:

> Hwaet! Great are the tales of the Spear Danes
>
> How they broke and bloodied their foes
>
> How they tamed the Northern seas.
>
> Some tales sail, others sink
>
> Below the waves but no less true. (*Beowulf and Grendel* 1:33)

A narrator reads these lines in a heroic tone. The tone and the first word "Hwaet" remind the audience of the narrator of the epic *Beowulf*. As the film continues, the audience hears the voice of the same narrator only one more time, when he talks about Geatland and Beowulf's hearing of the trouble of the Danes (*Beowulf and Grendel* 15:50). At this point, the narrator's voice fades out and one of the Geat warriors, Thorkel, starts narrating the problem of Danes and lists the names of the warriors who will join Beowulf to go to Daneland.

The change of narrator from an outsider speaker into a warrior-poet who accompanies Beowulf on his journey to Daneland puts the credibility of the narration in the epic *Beowulf* into question, because the film implies that the story of *Beowulf* was created by someone who sided with Beowulf. This situation raises questions such as, Is

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the story of *Beowulf* true? Does the narrator tell the complete story in *Beowulf*? Is the narrator in the epic biased against Grendel? Does he change or manipulate the story? The film asks these questions and finally implies that the story told in the epic might be incomplete or untrue.

The film also implies that *Beowulf* was created by a narrator who was heavily influenced by Christianity and therefore might have kept the other side of the story off the record. Just before the last scene of the film, newly Christianized Thorkel is narrating the story by using some negative phrases about Grendel such as "the mark of Cain" which are similar to those used in *Beowulf* (*Beowulf and Grendel* 98:18). However, another warrior, Thorfinn, who has also witnessed the events and hears Thorkel's negative description of Grendel, disapproves of Thorkel's description:

> THORFINN: Cain... what's that?
>
> BRECA: Man who killed his brother in a Christian tale.
>
> THORFINN: What's Cain got to do with Grendel? Grendel kills his own brother too?
>
> BRECA: No, I think Thorkel's saying that Grendel's like Cain − a Killer.
>
> THORFINN: We all are.
>
> BRECA: Ya, well.
>
> THORFINN: Thorkel's tale is shit. (*Beowulf and Grendel* 98:38).

With these lines, the director presents an alternative narration. Instead of accepting the dominant Christian mode of narration in *Beowulf*, the film suggests a more neutral and sympathetic approach in which the warrior Thorfinn expresses the non-Christian point of

view. The director Sturla Gunnersson summarizes this point in his commentary about the narrative mode of the film. He says that the narrator of the epic gets into Christianity more and more and in the end writes the poem to reflect a Christian point of view. But he got it wrong (52:30). Therefore, Gunnersson continues, Thorkel is telling the official story, but Thorfinn doesn't buy it (98:20).

The language used in the film is not elevated and stylized as in *Beowulf*. The film does not include kennings or alliterative verse. It has many colloquial and foul expressions. These expressions do not comply with the elevated language of the epic. However, they make the movie more realistic and accessible to a present day audience. By the use of such language, the director brings the epic down to earth. The director Gunnersson and the scriptwriter Berzins in the commentary part of the DVD state that the old language doesn't mean that there shouldn't be any bad words such as fuck and cunt, etc. Berzins states that this sense of usage comes from the censorship of hundreds of years, which prevents foul language from being used in a work of art. He states that the poem might have been transcribed by a monk who kept the foul parts out of the poem so that "anything the poem does not openly say may be interpreted differently by another writer" (56:20).

To conclude, the reversal of binary oppositions in the film *Beowulf and Grendel* takes place through the changes made in theme, characterization, and narration. To be more neutral and to make the story more believable, the director tries to show the other side of the story, which is suppressed by the narrator of the original epic. The reversal of oppositions creates an alternative story in which both sides of the story are included. It

creates a larger context through which the audience can more fully evaluate the events, characters, and narrative mode of the epic *Beowulf*. By creating a third way − apart from the good versus evil paradigm − the film reflects a more complete perspective.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The epic *Beowulf* has influenced many creative minds since its discovery. It continues to influence modern people in different works of art with its rich content: in literature, John Gardner's influential *Grendel* recreates the epic; in cinema, Sturla Gunnersson's film *Beowulf and Grendel* presents a new reading of the epic. Both novel and film make some changes when they retell the events in *Beowulf*, and when we analyze these changes, we realize that both works deconstruct the epic. However, when the novel and the film are scrutinized, the film deconstructs the epic better than the novel by focusing on its plot, characters, themes, and narrative mode.

One of the basic characteristics of deconstruction is Derrida's critique of "logocentrism" or "the metaphysics of presence." According to Derrida, Western philosophy and thought have always searched for a center on which to base its assumptions, which he calls logocentrism (*Of* 11-12). Deconstruction, Derrida writes, is the effort to destabilize and change the center by showing its conflicting structure (*Of* 11). In *Beowulf*, heroism and its ideal depiction by the narrator form the logocentric attitude throughout the poem. Both the novel and the film deconstruct heroism by displaying its negative sides and criticizing it.

The second important characteristic of deconstruction is the reversal of the binary oppositions that constitute a text. According to Derrida, the binary oppositions that form a structure are not equal. One of the two concepts always governs or dominates the other one (Derrida, *Positions* 41). Deconstruction requires reversing these

concepts to displace and neutralize the system of oppositions (Derrida, *Limited* 21).

However, according to Derrida, when we reverse the binary oppositions by giving

privilege to the suppressed concept, we should not remain in the binary logic which we

criticize (*Positions* 41). Therefore, after the reversal of the oppositions a further step

should be taken. The step requires a second reading of the text after the reversal of

oppositions take place (Derrida, *Limited* 21, *Margins* 329). The second reading goes

beyond binary logic by presenting an alternative third option. The third option is beyond

either/or thinking. The second reading creates a third term to overcome the binary

either/or thinking of Western thought. Derrida names the term "undecidability". For

Derrida, undecidability "is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the

inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing" (*Positions* 43). In other words,

undecidability presents both sides of the opposition as they are without giving priority to

either concept.

When we analyze the novel *Grendel* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel*, we can

see that both works reverse the binary oppositions in *Beowulf*. However, the film

Beowulf and Grendel reverses these oppositions better than the novel *Grendel* because

the film does not remain in the binary logic it criticizes. It goes beyond. The novel

Grendel reverses the binary oppositions between hero and villain by giving privilege to

the second concept. The hero Beowulf is replaced by the villain Grendel in the novel,

and all events taking place are presented through Grendel's eyes. Thus the main

character Beowulf in the original epic is depicted negatively in *Grendel* (Gardner 162),

and the antagonist Grendel in the original epic is depicted sympathetically in the novel.

In this way, John Gardner realizes the first step of deconstructing the binary oppositions of hero versus villain. However, he does not go further. "Villain" becomes the first and superior concept, and "hero" is undermined. Therefore, he remains within the binary logic of hero/villain.

The film *Beowulf and Grendel* also reverses the opposition between hero and villain by giving privilege to Grendel in the beginning of the film. The film creates a reason for Grendel's attacks and depicts him more humanely. By depicting Grendel sympathetically and humanely, the film reverses the opposition between Beowulf and Grendel to Grendel and Beowulf, giving priority to Grendel. However, instead of showing Beowulf only as a negative character as the novel does, the film depicts him as a person who questions the concept of heroism. The Beowulf character in the film seems as boastful as he is in the epic and novel in the beginning of the film, before he goes to Daneland (*Beowulf and Grendel* 17:05). However, when he arrives in Heorot to help King Hrothgar, we see that the film presents a different Beowulf who becomes inquisitive because of Grendel's unexpected actions. When Grendel pees at the door of Heorot to make fun of them on Beowulf's arrival, and when Grendel refuses to fight Beowulf during their encounter on a hill, Beowulf understands that Grendel mocks the heroic ideal of fighting for a cause, and only attacks people who have wronged him (*Beowulf and Grendel* 57:47). Therefore, Beowulf starts to question the concept of heroism and feels sympathy for Grendel. This realization leads Beowulf to question his heroic ideals and he starts to change. As a result, instead of cutting off Grendel's head

after his fight with Grendel's mother in the cave, Beowulf leaves the dead body intact with Grendel's young child (*Beowulf and Grendel* 94:00).

Beowulf's sympathizing with the other side of the opposition culminates when he builds a memorial mound for Grendel at the end of film (*Beowulf and Grendel* 97:30). After he has killed both Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf honors Grendel by building the memorial mound just before he leaves Denmark, showing his respect for his opponent who has taught him to go beyond what is seen. In this way, the film reverses the binary oppositions between the hero and villain by giving importance to Grendel like the novel; but it does not remain in the binary logic by depicting Beowulf as a negative character. It goes beyond that by showing Beowulf as a hero who questions the values of heroism and who sympathizes with his opposition. Therefore, the film does not claim that only Beowulf or only Grendel is good, but both have positive and negative qualities. The director Gunnersson confirms it by stating that the film tries to go beyond a good versus evil paradigm (*Raising*).

The second reversal of oppositions in the novel and film can be seen between the concepts of insider and outsider. The narrative mode in the epic *Beowulf* is important in creating this opposition because the narrator or the bard seems to be an insider, someone who favors Beowulf and the Danes. Since the heroic ideals presented by the bard are important for the survival of Anglo-Saxon society, the bard favors them in the epic. In other words, the narrator sides with Beowulf and the Danes and depicts them positively, which creates an atmosphere where the concept "insider" is superior to the concept "outsider." Both the novel *Grendel* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel* reverse

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the narrative mode because they do not have to represent the heroic ideals positively for the survival of a community. The novel *Grendel* narrates all events from a first person point of view through the eyes of its main character Grendel, which gives superiority to the outsider Grendel against the insiders. However, the novel cannot go further since Grendel's first person point of view of Beowulf, the Danes, and their actions are also negative, like the narrator's one-sided depiction of Grendel in *Beowulf*. Therefore, the novel *Grendel* remains within the boundaries of binary logic.

The film's narrative mode, however, goes beyond insider and outsider opposition by showing the events taking place on both sides with the help of a camera that creates a third person omniscient point of view narration. The film starts with the heroic voice of a narrator just like the narrator in the epic (*Beowulf and Grendel* 1:34). It makes audience think that the film will also tell the events through an insider's point of view. However, the first scene shows how Grendel's father is killed (*Beowulf and Grendel* 4:23), which is an important event from the outsider's perspective. Instead of employing the one-sided heroic narration of *Beowulf* during the film, the director silences the narrator after the beginning of the film. He also does not show events only through Grendel's point of view, as the novel *Grendel* does. Unlike the narrative modes of the epic *Beowulf* and the novel *Grendel*, the film adopts a third narrative mode in which both insider's and outsider's views are displayed.

The third reversal of opposition takes place between Christianity and paganism. The Christian elements in *Beowulf* have been pointed out by many critics. The narrator privileges Christianity over paganism by mentioning the Christian God in different parts

of the epic. However, apart from pagan funerals, we can see few references to paganism, which is incomplete for an epic poem dealing with pagan heroic ideals. The novel *Grendel* does not make any separation between Christianity and paganism, and deconstructs the positive attitude of the narrator of the epic toward Christianity by displaying religion as a sickness (Gardner 128). The novel disapproves of religion, whether Christian or pagan.

In the film *Beowulf and Grendel*, the director privileges paganism over Christianity by including pagan rituals before the Christian priest comes to Daneland. Both pagan funerals and references are mentioned throughout the film. Beowulf also favors paganism over Christianity by remaining a pagan instead of becoming a Christian like the other Danes. However, the film also includes Christianity and shows that people convert to Christianity, which means that the film does not suppress the Christian elements occurring in the epic poem. Therefore, it neutralizes the opposition between Christianity and paganism after allowing the pagan elements to come out.

Apart from the criticism of logocentrism and the reversal of oppositions, deconstruction also requires a focus on the neglected parts of texts. Derrida writes that texts include "defective cornerstones" from the start of their constructions. They are important parts of the structure because they are cornerstones, but they are defective because they are incomplete and do not comply with the whole structure in some way (Derrida, *Memoires* 73-74). In *Beowulf*, there are some parts which do not comply with the plot structure of the story: either they create a gap or they stray from the main events and are incomplete. These parts include the reasons for Grendel's attacks, Grendel's

sparing of King Hrothgar, Grendel's killing of Hondscio, Beowulf's absence on the night of Grendel's Mother's attack, and Christian elements and references in the pagan epic.

The novel *Grendel* does not especially focus on these neglected parts or pay special attention to structural gaps in the epic. However, it gives the reason for Grendel's attacks. Grendel implies that he attacks because human beings are too greedy (Gardner, *Grendel* 44). Apart from that, the novel does not give any specific reasons for Grendel's sparing of King Hrothgar and his killing of Hondscio. In addition, since the novel finishes with Grendel's death, it cannot explain where Beowulf is on the night of Grendel's mother's attack. The Christian elements and references are also not given in the novel.

The film *Beowulf and Grendel* spots these neglected parts and fills in the gaps in the plot of the epic. In *Beowulf*, Grendel's jealousy of people is implied as the reason for his attacks (Tharaud 9). However, the reason is not stated explicitly. The film creates a reason in the beginning when King Hrothgar and his men kill Grendel's father (*Beowulf and Grendel* 4:23). As a result, the grown up Grendel attacks Danes to avenge his father's murder. Additionally, Grendel spares King Hrothgar because King Hrothgar spares Grendel's life when Grendel is a child (*Beowulf and Grendel* 4:58). Grendel especially kills the Geat warrior Hondscio because Hondscio mutilates Grendel's father's skull, which Grendel has kept as a memorial (*Beowulf and Grendel* 69:07). The disappearance of Beowulf on the night of Grendel's mother's attack is explained in the film because Beowulf spends the night with Selma the witch (*Beowulf and Grendel*

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83:03). Finally, the film *Beowulf and Grendel* includes a Christian priest who tries to spread Christianity, which explains the Christian elements in the epic.

To conclude, Derrida states that "Deconstruction is justice" (qtd. in Cornell 15) because it gives "free rein to existing forces" in a text (*Dissemination* 6). Both the novel *Grendel* and the film *Beowulf and Grendel* reveal existing forces in *Beowulf* that the narrator of the epic undermines. However, the film *Beowulf and Grendel* deconstructs the epic *Beowulf* better than the novel *Grendel* because it employs all of the deconstructive elements: it questions logocentrism, reverses the binary oppositions, and focuses on the neglected parts of the text. Finally, although the epic *Beowulf* was written centuries ago, it continues to influence modern humans because it speaks about the human condition. Its inclusion in different works of art in our modern age confirms its status as a classic.

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