

**Masaryk University  
Faculty of Arts**

**Department of English  
and American Studies**

English Language and Literature

Barbora Tabačková

**The Influence of Medieval Literature on the  
Contemporary Fantasy Novel: *Beowulf* and  
*Eragon***

Bachelor's Diploma Thesis

Supervisor: doc. Mgr. Milada Franková, CSc., M.A.

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,  
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Author's signature

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Backgrounds	7
2.1. <i>Beowulf</i> and Its Origins	7
2.2. <i>Eragon</i>	9
2.3. Form and Structure of <i>Beowulf</i> and <i>Eragon</i>	14
3. Constructed Worlds in <i>Beowulf</i> and <i>Eragon</i>	17
3.1. The Natural World and Its Population	18
3.2. Society	21
3.3. Culture	30
3.4. Literature, Lore and Language	37
4. Good v. Evil	42
4.1. Monsters	42
4.2. Main Hero	46
4.3. Dragon	50
5. Conclusion	56
Works Used and Cited	58

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A piece of literature can still inspire even after centuries pass. One such example are the old heroic poems and epics, which have influenced the first contemporary fantasy novels and continue to do so even today.

According to Douglas A. Anderson, the roots of fantasy could be traced back to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and various medieval texts among which are, for example the Arthurian legends, romances of Chrétien de Troyes, legends about Alexander the Great, Icelandic *Eddas* and sagas, as well as the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* (Anderson 13). It is the last one this thesis will concentrate on.

In my thesis, I would like to examine the reflection of this medieval heroic poem in another literary work, a contemporary fantasy novel *Eragon*, the first volume of the *Inheritance* cycle written by Christopher Paolini. It is interesting to observe, how many things these two texts have in common in spite of the gaps that separate them: over 1000 years in history, the cultures from which they originated, the genre in which they were written, the way in which they were meant to be experienced and distributed (while *Beowulf* was passed orally and therefore the text reflects this considerably, *Eragon*, a much longer novel, is meant to be read).

And yet, they have quite a few common features – which will be the main concern of this thesis. It is important to mention, however, that the influence of *Beowulf* on *Eragon* is not completely straightforward. On the other hand, it might be said that to a great degree, it comes *through* other fantasy works, most notably through J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Tolkien being considered by many scholars the 'father' of the contemporary fantasy fiction). In fact, the author of *Eragon*, Christopher Paolini, quite openly acknowledges this fact: "I wanted to write a story that I would

enjoy reading myself, using elements from fantasy books I had read growing up, plus ideas of my own. Stories are one of the most important things in my life, whether in music, movies, or books, so it was only natural that I ended up telling one of my own” (T. Paolini).

This means that quite a significant portion of *Beowulf* may have found its way into *Eragon* through this fantasy fiction as archetypes that Paolini adopted and built upon. However, there is also a direct influence: “Like Tolkien, I also drew inspiration from Nordic, Old English, and Icelandic sagas” (T. Paolini).

All in all, it can be said that the common features found in both books could be either a direct influence, an indirect influence (as an adopted archetype), or it can be only a mere parallel. This thesis will take into consideration all three types of these common elements, and will do so in the following areas: the structure of the two texts, the worlds constructed in the two stories and the principal theme of the fight between good and evil and their protagonists.

## 2. BACKGROUNDS

### 2.1. *Beowulf* and Its Origin

*Beowulf* is the longest surviving poem in Old English, and unlike many others, one that has survived in its complete form. It has been preserved as part of the manuscript known as Cotton Vitellius A. XV., now deposited in the British Museum. There is a lot of information concerning its origin that is unknown. Nevertheless, scholars have proposed numerous theories of its origin based on either the language or the content of the poem.

The manuscript contains altogether five works written in Old English: *The Passion of St. Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, *Beowulf*, and *Judith*. *Beowulf* takes up 70 leaves of the 116 contained in this manuscript codex. The copy of the manuscript was made around 1000A.D. by two scribes: one copied the first three texts plus up to verse 1,939 of *Beowulf*, the other one copied the rest of the manuscript (Gummere 1).

As to when, where and by whom the poem was composed, that is where the facts end and where the theories start. Even though the language of the manuscript is late West Saxon, the literary dialect of the period, there are traces of earlier non-West Saxon dialects in the poem. This reveals that the manuscript is the last one in a chain of copies, of which the original was written much earlier. It is difficult to date it, since dating based on the linguistic evidence (such as the use of archaisms and regionalisms) can be misleading, and there could be plausible evidence for placing it anywhere from 650 A.D. to 850 A.D (*Beowulf* 248).

The place of origin is also mysterious. The linguistic evidence is hinting to Northumbria or Mercia, but the problem here is the same as with dating – we cannot be sure to what extent archaic and regional expressions were used in the conventional poetic diction of the period. Again, plausible evidence could lead us to various places, such as the court of king Aldfrith of Northumbria, the court of Offa of Mercia, or the royal palace of the Wuffing dynasty in East Anglia, as well as to one of the monasteries (*Beowulf* 248-49).

The question of authorship is one which is also largely disputed. The theories suggest a range of possibilities from one single “Beowulf poet” to so much as six different authors. The poem has a long history and we can say that the question really is about who can be credited with being the author of *Beowulf*: the scop(s) who put together the old lays of Beowulf’s adventures, the final singer – the person who gave it the form in which we know it today, or all those who were somehow involved in its composition? We know the poem was probably sung and re-sung by scops over a long period of time and each one added something of his own to it, which is how the poem grew and developed. As Howell D. Chickering puts it, the poem “is not a product of a single mind”, but of a long tradition of oral poetry (*Beowulf* 251), and this is probably the best way we should think of it.

The last thing that we will deal with here is the historicity of the poem. It can be proved that many of the characters correspond to real people, and some of the events really happened, as we learn from various historical sources. The most notoriously known proof is probably king Hygelac of our poem, who is mentioned in Gregory of Tours’ *Historia Francorum* as Chochilaicus, king of the Danes. Many Germanic tribes are mentioned in the poem such as Franks, Frisians, Langobards, Danes, Geats, Swedes



and their involvement in various feuds. These are, however, not described in much detail, the story being centred on the character of Beowulf and his adventures.

The main hero is most likely the poet's own invention, as he does not appear (as a historical figure) elsewhere. His struggles with monsters probably come from some folk tales, which is the opinion held by many scholars. And this is how we will deal with him in this thesis – as with a fictitious hero of a tale.

## **2.2. *Eragon***

When it comes to *Eragon*, the answers to the questions of when, where and who wrote it are not such a big problem as we have seen was the case of *Beowulf*. What is more interesting is, however, its genesis and classification within the fantasy genre.

As we have seen in the previous subchapter, the poem *Beowulf* as we know it today is a result of a succession of re-telling and re-copying the story. The final version was put together by a bard who used the material that existed plus gave it his own vision and language skills. In a way, we may observe a similar pattern in the creation of *Eragon*. As we learned from the citation in the Introduction (to this thesis), Christopher Paolini drew on various sources when he wrote his first novel. It was largely inspired by other fantasy stories that he read and liked. This is the reason why he is sometimes accused of plagiarism and lack of originality. It must however be said that the story of *Eragon* is a unique one, further contributing to the genre and developing it. Both the *Beowulf* poet and Christopher Paolini worked with some pre-existing material to produce a story in its own right.

*Beowulf* is sometimes labelled as an early fantasy, because of the presence of 'marvellous' elements – the monsters and especially the dragon. In fact, Chickering says

that the whole manuscript could be seen in that way: “Perhaps we owe the initial preservation of the poem to someone who wanted to collect stories about monsters, or more generally about ‘the marvellous’” (*Beowulf* 246-47), since a certain portion of this ‘marvellous’ can be found in each of the five texts of the manuscript. But it is a fantasy of a different kind from *Eragon*.

*Eragon* was intended to be a fantasy story. It might be useful to classify it within the genre.

It is not very difficult to identify *Eragon* as high fantasy (also known as epic fantasy, or heroic fantasy). Here is a very rough definition of this subgenre: “Fantasy stories of heroes in imaginary lands, complicated, and focus on the battle between good and some enormous evil. The hero usually has unusual and perhaps unsuspected strength. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is the model” (Robinson). *Eragon* fulfils all the points of the definition. The “imaginary lands” is the land of Alagaësia, a thoroughly invented world – a ‘secondary world’ – with its own rules, laws, creatures, and completely believable in its own right.

The “enormous evil” is the evil king Galbatorix and all the beings and creatures at his command: the Shade Durza, the Ra’zac and Urgals. The Good which is fighting the Evil is represented by the Varden, the elves, the original Dragon Riders (who are long dead and mentioned only in stories and lore), and the main hero – a young Dragon Rider called Eragon.

Eragon, after he finds a dragon egg which hatches for him, becomes a Dragon Rider. Thanks to his connection with his dragon Saphira, Eragon gains the ability to use magic and other unusual skills. He travels with Brom, a storyteller from Carvahall, who used to be a Dragon Rider as well, but his dragon has been killed by Morzan, one of the Forsworn (Galbatorix’s loyal servants, also Dragon Riders, now all dead). Brom teaches

Eragon to perform and use magic, as well as fight with a sword and act wisely. The “coming of age” or “rite of passage” element including the mentor figure is very typical of the genre.

Another, although more debatable is the question if we can pass *Eragon* as animal fantasy. The chapter called “Talking beasts” in Ann Swinfen’s study *In Defence of Fantasy* is useful in trying to find the answer to this question. According to Swinfen, animal fantasy has one of the longest and strongest traditions of all types of fantasy. She gives an explanation: “Since the Fall, some might say, man has been trying to heal the rift between himself and his fellow animals, and to re-establish that mutual understanding and rapport which he senses must once have existed and which through the exercise of the literary imagination, if in no other way, might be re-created” (12). Later on, she continues:

The subject of animal intelligence continues to inspire the researches of scientists, and yet there remains the unsurmounted barrier: our baffling inability to understand the consciousness of animals, to speak their language from within. This urge to leap the gulf which divides men from the animals is shared by the writers of all animal tales, from the most naturalistic to the most symbolic, whatever may be the other motives behind their work. (13-14)

In *Eragon*, this barrier is removed when Eragon becomes a Dragon Rider. He gains the ability to feel and touch at his will the consciousness of animals. Brom explains the nature of this ability to Eragon:

As I said before, with the right instruction anyone can talk with their minds, but with differing amounts of success. Whether it’s magic, though, is hard to tell. Magical abilities will certainly trigger the talent – or becoming linked with a dragon – but I’ve known plenty who learned it on their own. Think about it: you

can communicate with any sentient being, though the contact may not be very clear. You could spend the entire day listening to a bird's thoughts or understanding how an earthworm feels during a rainstorm. But I've never found birds very interesting. I suggest starting with a cat; they have unusual personalities. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 156)

This communication is, however, limited to emotions, feelings and mental images only. Eragon is not able to actually talk to animals, or animals able to talk to him. Animals are portrayed in quite a naturalistic way. Intellectually, they are not equals to people. Eragon uses this skill mostly when he needs to calm down the horses when they are scared and refuse to obey the instructions.

There is however, a totally different type of animals (or rather "talking beasts") in the novel. Among these are Saphira – a dragon and Solembum – a werecat. What distinguishes them from the ordinary animals is their self-awareness and ability to speak to people. In addition, they are wise, noble, and possess magical powers.

Let us have a closer look at the werecat Solembum (the dragon will be discussed in more detail later). Eragon did not know werecats were real until he met Solembum: "A werecat! He was indeed fortunate. They were always flitting around the edges of stories, keeping to themselves and occasionally giving advice. If the legends were true, they had magical powers, lived longer than humans, and usually knew more than they told" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 200). Later, Eragon asks Brom to learn more about werecats: "During the Riders' years of glory, they were as renowned as the dragons. Kings and elves kept them as companions – yet the werecats were free to do what they chose. [...] They always seemed to know what was going on and somehow or another manage to get themselves involved" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 222).

Both Solembum and Saphira get offended when they are called “animals”. They are proud and noble; they possess special magical powers. They certainly are superior to ordinary animals, and are presented as equals, if not even as superiors to humans (at least in their knowledge and abilities).

They are heirs of the tradition of animals portrayed as ‘guardians of ancient wisdom’, which goes back to the Oldest Animals in the tale of *Culhwch and Olwen* in *The Mabinogion*, and even further. As Swinfen explains: “These are animals invested with power and majesty, a survival of the beast-deities of early religion, much earlier than *Mabinogion* itself” (Swinfen 14).

During the Middle Ages, a new type of animal tale began to be very popular and this was the animal fable. Some of the tales that the authors such as Aesop retold were of older date, their origin going back to possibly as late as the middle of the sixth century (Swinfen 14). In these fables, animals are symbols for human characteristics and each tale teaches people a lesson in human behaviour (Swinfen 15). One of the archetypal animal characters was a cunning animal; the most notorious is probably Reynard the Fox.

In Solembum and Saphira, Christopher Paolini combined the natural behaviour of the animals (or, in the case of dragons, presumably natural behaviour of animals) with human consciousness and something magical and ancient, in the spirit of these literary traditions, which produced very believable characters of animal fantasy.

To give the answer to the question posed, i.e. if *Eragon* could be labelled as animal fantasy, it is primarily not an animal fantasy, although as we have seen, it certainly does have some of its elements. Even though Eragon does have a potential to understand animals’ feelings, this ability of his is not central to the plot. But the characters of Saphira and Solembum could be seen as animal fantasy characters.

### 2.3. Form and Structure of *Beowulf* and *Eragon*

In this subchapter, we will have a closer look at the form and structure of the two texts. From the formal point of view, these two texts are as different as they can possibly be: *Beowulf* is a poem, *Eragon* a novel – the first volume of a cycle. *Beowulf* was composed to be heard aloud, *Eragon* to be read and reread (as books of fantasy cycles often are in search of hidden clues to their sequels). In spite of the fact that by their natures they are so different, there might be, quite surprisingly, similarities in the structure and inner logic of the narratives.

Let us firstly have a closer look at the forms of the two works. *Beowulf* is a poem which contains 3,182 lines. Roman numerals divide it into introduction plus 43 unequally long sections also called fitts. These often match logical breaks in the narrative, but it is unknown if they are the author's invention or were added later by the scribes (*Beowulf* 1).

*Beowulf* is a poem which, unlike modern poems, uses the alliterative verse. This means that there are no rhymes at the ends of the verses, and alliteration is used as a principal structuring device. The metrical features of an alliterative verse are the following: each line is separated into two half-lines by a caesura; each half-line has two strongly-stressed syllables – the first stressed syllable of the second half-line must alliterate with either or both stressed syllables of the first half-line, the fourth cannot alliterate with the first two. So a typical alliterative verse of *Beowulf* would be, for example: “fēonda fēorum, swilce Fin slægen, / Cyning on corþre, ond sēo cwēn numen” (*Beowulf* 114). Here is one in Modern English translation: “Then in the great hall hard blades were drawn, / swords above benches, many broad shields” (*Beowulf* 123).

*Eragon* is, on the other hand, in prose. It is a novel, the first tome of a cycle originally intended to be a trilogy, but which will end up by being a cycle. This is because Christopher Paolini made an outline for three books, two of which have been published already, and now, in the course of writing the third book, he found out that there was too much story yet to be told, and to do the characters justice, it would be better to split the last book into two volumes (“Inheritance Cycle - Now Four Books!”). This is typical for secondary world fantasies – they need a lot of space for a proper construction and establishment of the secondary world, and the development and closure of the story. But this will be discussed in the second chapter.

The story was planned as a trilogy, though, and I will keep with the original plan of the author. The first two books of *Inheritance* end with battles – the first one with the Battle of Farthen Dûr, the second one with the Battle of the Burning Plains. We can only guess that the third one will also end with a battle, and that the great evil (– King Galbatorix and his servants) will be destroyed for good, although the main hero will probably suffer some consequences, as is the convention in this genre.

Let us now have a look at the structure of the narrative of *Beowulf*. In *Beowulf*, this can be seen in more ways, although the majority of scholars are divided into two camps: in the first are the advocates of a binary structure, in the second of a tripartite structure.

The binary structure was supported strongly by J.R.R. Tolkien, claiming that the poem *Beowulf* could be divided into two parts, the first one describing the hero’s youth, the second one his old age. Or we could also say that his ‘rise and fall’, and thus the poem as a whole is “essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms, it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and

setting” (*Beowulf* 21). His vision is a structure which is static, since it is a juxtaposition of two states.

The second camp of critics, who do not see the poem as static but rather as dynamic, defend a tripartite structure. The book is thus divided into three parts, each describing a successive defeat by Beowulf of one of three evil monsters. The significance of the hero comes more to the fore in this one. The dynamic aspect presents Beowulf as “evolving, through three stages, from the ideal warrior to the ideal sovereign” (*Beowulf* 23).

It is difficult (if not impossible) to say, which theory is more correct, since each makes some good points, and at the same time has its flaws. But for our purposes, the latter structure is more convenient. In this way, we can see that the two works are structured in quite a similar way. The similarity here is in fact quite striking. What we have in the two texts is three parts, three fights, in which evil is three times defeated, although the last fight takes its toll on the main hero.

Beside the main plotline, *Beowulf* is full of brief digressions that refer to other characters and stories. These often foreshadow themes which will appear later on in the story. The so called “Sigemund-Heremod digression” is particularly important as Sigemund’s fight with the dragon foreshadows Beowulf’s final conflict. The character of stingy and murderous Heremod serves as a contrast to Beowulf. Another digression is the Finnsburh Episode which portrays the instability of the Danish people, a very important theme in *Beowulf*.

In *Eragon*, there are also references to other characters and stories, notably the stories about the old times of dragons and Dragon Riders. The story of the first Dragon Rider – Eragon – parallels Eragon’s reviving of this race and the possible return of the dragons to the land of Alagaësia.



### 3. CONSTRUCTED WORLDS IN *BEOWULF* AND *ERAGON*

It was mentioned before that the world created in *Eragon* – Alagaësia – is a secondary world. It does not exist in reality and was invented as a setting for Paolini's story. This 'otherworld' had to be constructed with precision in order to be believable and to produce in a reader a 'secondary belief'. This means that the reader will believe that what happens in the secondary world is true inside that world.

Secondary world construction includes various aspects which are analyzed in great detail in Ann Swinfen's study about the fantasy genre, in the chapter called simply 'Secondary Worlds'. I will draw on this analysis in the description of the nature of Alagaësia and its potential source in *Beowulf*.

The features of the secondary world that should be created are above all the natural world, society and cultural background of its people(s), which usually includes language and literature. All these together should make up a world which is self-consistent so that the reader can accept this fictional universe as true.

The author usually does not invent a completely strange world. If the otherworld is to catch the interest of the reader and provoke a feeling of sympathy in him, it "requires a firm basis in primary world reality" (Swinfen 76). It has to have a common ground with the primary world – our world, in the areas mentioned above, although not necessarily with the present world.

As Swinfen points out, the secondary world cultures are often based on those known to Western Europe between the Bronze and the Middle Ages: "There is a general desire for precise delineation of physical setting and civilization, and on the whole the societies depicted are pre-industrial, based on rural or village communities, and possess

a considerable heritage of bardic lore” (Swinfen 91). Many aspects of life in this period appeal to authors of fantasy.

We learn about this past human civilization (among other sources) from literature which dates back to these times, and one of the most significant is undoubtedly the poem *Beowulf*. That is why it is drawn upon for inspiration by the authors of fantasy when creating a culture similar to the one it depicts.

So the stories of *Beowulf* and *Eragon* are both set in worlds which share some common features. *Eragon*’s world was influenced by the world in which *Beowulf*’s adventures take place. Not all the aspects of life of the period are explicitly mentioned in the poem, some are only implied or not mentioned at all, the poem being centred on the warrior *Beowulf* and his heroic deeds. But they are present somewhere in the background. I will try to identify those which found their way to *Eragon*.

### **3.1. The Natural World and Its Population**

So far as the natural world is concerned, an unequal attention is given to it in the two works. While in *Beowulf*, it is described only marginally, the country through which *Eragon* travels is described in greater detail. Let us have a closer look at the physical settings of the two worlds.

*Beowulf* is set in a primary world, so we can use ‘our’ maps for orientation in it. Even though the ‘*Beowulf* poet’ does not give very detailed geographic information about the places, it is possible to locate most of them: “Geography is not very clearly visualized, but it was conceived. The Frisians, Franks, Finns, place themselves. The Heathobards are either the Langobards, or a small tribe on the Elbe” (Gummere 15).

The place where the actions of Beowulf's first two adventures take place is Denmark. The scholars were even able to determine the location of Hrothgar's hall, which "was probably at a place now called Leire, not far from the fiord of Roeskilde" (Gummere 3). Beowulf's last adventure – his fight with the dragon took place somewhere near his home, Geatland, the location of which is a little more obscure. There are numerous theories proposing its possible locations. Perhaps the most accepted one is that it is in the southern part of Sweden. But there are some who argue Jutland could work as well (Gummere 3).

Space is in *Beowulf* portrayed in a very specific way. Čermák uses the metaphor of an old map to describe it – that the country in *Beowulf* is reduced into several important places: there is the mead hall, the marches with the mere, the dragon's lair, and Beowulf's burial mound on the coast. The picture of the country that we have is a static one (Čermák 37).

*Eragon* is set in an imaginary world, Alagaësia. Readers are provided with a map on the cover of the book, so that they can better orientate themselves in this unknown environment. In its basic characteristics, Alagaësia (like other secondary worlds) does not differ much from our world:

The fundamental physical laws of gravity, heat and cold, dark and light, are the same. Plants grow, wither and die. Few, if any, creatures are immortal, though life-spans may differ radically. The seasons move in their regular cycle of spring, summer, autumn and winter. The sun, moon and stars have their appointed stations in the sky. Compass directions are preserved and, for these northern hemisphere writers, north implies cold lands and south warm ones. (Swinfen 77)

Even its topographic features, although invented, correspond to similar ones in the primary world. Mountain ranges, valleys, waterfalls, deserts, plains, rivers, sea, all

of these we can find in the primary world. Except that the dimensions can sometimes be slightly exaggerated. This is the case, for example, of the Beor Mountains:

What they had taken to be hills were actually the bases of gigantic mountains, scores of miles wide. Except for the dense forest along their lower regions, the mountains were entirely covered with snow and ice. It was this that had deceived Eragon into thinking the sky white. He craned back his neck, searching for the peaks, but they were not visible. The mountains stretched up into the sky until they faded from sight. Narrow, jagged valleys with ridges that nearly touched split the mountains like deep gorges. It was like a ragged, toothy wall linking Alagaësia with the heavens. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 335)

The perspective through which the land is described is mostly horizontal in both *Beowulf* and *Eragon*. Beowulf travels by land and by water. Eragon travels mostly by land – riding on horseback first with Brom and later with Murtagh. However, when he rides Saphira, his vision gains a vertical dimension. As they fly through the air and look from above, we see the land from a completely new perspective: “He clenched his arms around her neck as she turned on edge, banking. The river shrank to a wispy grey line beneath them. Clouds floated around them. When they levelled off high above the plains, the trees below were no more than specks. The air was thin, chilly, and perfectly clear” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 161).

The lands of the two worlds are inhabited by various peoples. The peoples mentioned in *Beowulf*, all of Germanic origin, are Franks, Frisians, Langobards, Danes, Geats, and Swedes. Like Beowulf’s world, Alagaësia is also inhabited by a variety of peoples: men, elves, dwarfs, dragons, Varden, Urgals and others.

### 3.2. Society

“The chief forces which governed the social system of that age were the bonds of kinship and allegiance,” (*Beowulf* 344) as Chadwick tells us, in his book called *The Heroic Age*, and it is indeed true that the importance of blood ties and loyalty to a lord are very important features of the society and period in which our hero Beowulf lived. Some of these we can find in *Eragon* as well. In this section, we shall examine some issues which are linked to these bonds and appear in the two texts.

We will deal with kinship first. Chadwick explains that the influence of kinship extended from “rights of succession and duties of guardianship over children and women”, to guaranteeing “the security of the property and person of each member of the community” (*Beowulf* 344). As for the rights of succession and the duty of guardianship, these are quite usual even in modern society. That is why it is not anything unusual that Eragon has been brought up by his relatives when his mother could not do it for some mysterious reason: “Everyone was shocked when Selena tearfully begged Garrow and Marian to raise him. When they asked why, she only wept and said, ‘I must.’ Her pleas had grown increasingly desperate until they finally agreed. She named him Eragon, then departed early the next morning and never returned.” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 19).

The role of kindred in keeping a person and his property safe is perhaps more specific for the heroic society. Chadwick gives an example of how this was performed: “If a man received injury or insult, his kindred were bound to assist him to obtain redress. If he were slain they had to exact vengeance or compensation from the slayer” (Chadwick 344-45). In this society, it was relatives’ duty to take care of such a redress. That is why it was considered very unfortunate if someone was slain by a family

member, since he could not be properly revenged. In *Beowulf*, we have an instance of this:

For the eldest brother a death-bed was strewn,  
undeservedly, by his kinsman's error:  
Haethcyn shot him, his brother, his leader,  
with an arrow from his bow curved and horn-tipped;  
missed his mark and struck his brother,  
one son's blood on the other's shaft.  
There was no way to pay for a death so wrong,  
blinding the heart, yet still the prince  
had lost his life, lay unavenged. (*Beowulf* 195)

In *Eragon*, revenge also plays an important role. Eragon, after his uncle Garrow is killed by the Ra'zac, sets out on a journey to revenge his death. He does not, however, take it as his duty (as it would be in *Beowulf*'s world). His reaction is rather emotional and quite spontaneous: "A terrible energy and strength began to grow in him. It grabbed his emotions and forged them into a solid bar of anger with one word stamped on it: revenge. His head pounded as he said with conviction, *I will do it*" (C. Palini, *Eragon* 93). It could perhaps be compared to the revenge of Grendel's mother for her son.

Some of the conflicts can sometimes grow into feuds, some of them of such an extent that the whole nations can become involved in a feud. The term 'feud' is interesting in itself. David Day in his essay called "*Hwanan sio fæhð aras: Defining the Feud in Beowulf*" examines the *Beowulf* poet's conception of feud and its usage and meaning in the poem. This essay helps us get a better insight into this aspect of the poem and its reflection in *Eragon*.

Day gives a definition of feud from *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*: “The term denotes actually or potentially homicidal relations of violent hostility between two of the component groups in a society, these relations being, none the less, subject to rule and terminable, at least ideally, by peaceful settlement” (Day). This basically means that it is a violent conflict between two social groups, different from other forms of organised violence such as raiding and warfare in that it follows certain specific rules (which specify when, how, by and against whom the vengeance can be carried out) and can be prevented or terminated by certain arrangements.

Among these are most importantly political marriages or paying a wergild. We have an instance of such an effort in the poem, for example the political marriage of Hildeburh and Freawaru. These mechanisms however not always work, and the poem often focuses on a failure of such efforts.

The *Beowulf* poet uses the word feud quite freely: “Besides an apparent recognition of the reciprocal nature of violence in a feud, few rules concerning the timing or scale of vengeance seem to be observed – feud is not clearly distinguished in the poem from other forms of organized violence, such as warfare or raiding (Day).”

Like in *Beowulf*'s world, the peoples of Alagaësia are, for various reasons, also involved in numerous ‘feuds’ or bloody conflicts. The most important conflict is an ongoing war between Galbatorix and the rebels in exile – the Varden, and their allies, dwarves and elves, in which Eragon becomes involved.

What is interesting is the way by which a feud can be prevented/terminated. As we have seen, in *Beowulf*'s world, there are two most usual ways: either by marriage, or by paying the wergild. In *Eragon*, one bloody feud was ended according to a similar pattern as the political marriage in *Beowulf*, and this was by the creation of the Dragon Riders. Brom explains to Eragon how the Dragon Riders came into being:

Thus, to greatly abbreviate a complicated series of occurrences, there was a very long and very bloody war, which both sides later regretted. [...] This lasted for five years and would have continued for much longer if an elf called Eragon hadn't found a dragon egg. [...] No one knows why the egg was abandoned. Some say the parents were killed in an elven attack. Others believe the dragons purposefully left it there. Either way, Eragon saw the value of raising a friendly dragon. He cared for it secretly and, in the custom of the ancient language, named him Bid'Daum. When Bid'Daum had grown to a good size, they travelled together among the dragons and convinced them to live in peace with the elves. Treaties were formed between the two races. To ensure that war would never break out again, they decided that it was necessary to establish the Riders. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 50)

The mechanisms for ending a feud failed in *Beowulf*, but did not do so in *Eragon*. These two races not only ceased to fight, as they found understanding, but became the major peacekeeping force in Alagaësia.

A very important issue that cannot be omitted in this section is that of origin and parentage. In societies where blood ties play such an important role, the origin of a person is, quite understandably, very significant. It determines the position of a person in society and the way they are treated. The Danish coast-guard asks Beowulf as he is disembarking on the land of the Danes: "I must know your lineage, / now, right away, before you go further" (*Beowulf* 63).

In *Eragon*, Murtagh, the son of Morzan – one of the Foresworn, is doomed in advance only because of what his father was:

It doesn't matter why I'm in this predicament, but I can tell you the Varden wouldn't welcome me even if I came bearing the king's head. Oh, they might



greet me nicely enough and let me into their councils, but trust me? Never. And if I were to arrive under less fortuitous circumstances, like the present ones, they'd likely clap me in irons." "Won't you tell me what this is about?" asked Eragon. "I've done things I'm not proud of, too, so it's not as if I'm going to pass judgement." Murtagh shook his head slowly, eyes glistening. "It isn't like that. I haven't *done* anything to deserve this treatment, though it would have been easier to atone for if I had. No... my only wrongdoing is existing in the first place." He stopped and took a shaky breath. "You see, my father –... (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 344)

And he was right – when they arrive in Farther Dûr, he is recognised and held prisoner. (He is later able to win the trust of the Varden in the Battle of Farther Dûr, in which he fights at their side.)

Eragon does not know who his father was, a fact which worries him much: Eragon still remembered how he had felt when Marian told him the story before she died. The realization that Garrow and Marian were not his real parents had disturbed him greatly. Things that had been permanent and unquestionable were suddenly thrown into doubt. [...] He wished that he knew who it [his father] was, if only to have a name. It would be nice to know his heritage. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 19-20)

With a name, a certain legacy is inherited. Chadwick claims that we sometimes hear "of royal or noble families which bore a common name derived from some ancestor, real or mythical, from whom their power or prerogatives were believed to be inherited," such as "the Scyldungas among the Danes" (Chadwick 345). The connection between Beowa the god and Beowulf the hero is sometimes suggested by the scholars (Gummere 5).

The importance of these family ties is in *Beowulf* stressed in the names of members of the royal houses. The names which are given to descendants are often in the same rhyme. We can see this in the royal house of Scyldings, with Healfdene, whose children's names are Hrothgar, Heorogar and Halga, and grandchildren called Heorowearð, Hrethric, Hrothmund, and Hrothulf. We can observe a similar pattern at the royal house of the Geats, Hrethel's children being named Herebeald, Haethcyn, Hygelac, and a grandson called Heardred.

The name as such can have a powerful meaning and can carry a certain predestination. Eragon has a powerful name:

It seemed like an incredible coincidence that he had been named after the first Rider. For some reason his name did not feel the same anymore. "What does Eragon mean?" "I don't know", said Brom. "It's very old. I doubt anyone remembers except the elves, and fortune would have to smile greatly before you talked with one. It is a good name to have, though; you should be proud of it. Not everyone has one so honourable. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 51)

His name predestines him to bring peace to the land (like his namesake did long time ago).

Allegiance to the lord was mentioned at the beginning of this section as another strong bond in the society. We will now have a look at the relationship between lord and his thane(s), which is a two-way one in which both sides were giving and receiving something.

On the part of the thane, a personal allegiance was expected: "The ties of loyalty were to the person of a lord, not to his station. There was no real concept of patriotism or loyalty to a cause. This explains why dynasties waxed and waned so quickly. A kingdom was only as strong as its war-leader king" (Ross).

Beowulf's lord is his uncle, king Hygelac: "With war-bold Hygelac / his nephew kept faith, his man ever loyal, / and each always worked for the other's welfare" (*Beowulf* 177). When he is asked by the Danish coast-guard to give his "lineage", he replies: "We are of the race of the Geatish nation, / sworn hearth-companions of Hygelac their king" (*Beowulf* 65). Beowulf does not hesitate and gives all the gifts that he had received from Hrothgar to his lord: "With good heart he gave / both treasure and horses. So ought a kinsman / always act" (*Beowulf* 177).

In spite of Eragon's effort to stay independent of various influences, he finds himself in a situation where he has to pledge his loyalty. Eragon chooses to give his fealty to Nasuada, after her father, the leader of the Varden, is killed in the Battle of Farthen Dûr and she is to be appointed a new leader: "Nasuada, Saphira and I have been here for only a short while. But in that time we came to respect Ajihad, and now, in turn, you. You fought under Farthen Dûr, when others fled, including the two women of the council, and have treated us openly instead of with deception. Therefore, I offer you my blade... and my fealty as a Rider" (C. Paolini, *Eldest* 23). His responsibilities connected with this pledge are not, however, yet clear, since in book two he leaves the Varden for the elves to complete his training as a Rider.

On part of the lord, his responsibility was to provide protection for his subjects: "In the Anglo-Saxon laws the lord shares with the kindred the duty of protecting his men" (Chadwick 348). Another very important characteristic of a lord was his generosity: "In the descriptions of kings which we meet with in the poems there is no characteristic – not even personal bravery – which receives more commendation than that of generosity to their followers" (Chadwick 349). The king gives various things to his thanes: land, armour, rings and other valuable treasures. His generosity is stressed in the poem by numerous kennings: "the giver of treasures" (*Beowulf* 161), "the ring-

giver” (*Beowulf* 51). When Beowulf returns from his successful expedition, he is rewarded with a great fortune from Hygelac:

Then the battle-bold Hygelac, protector of nobles,  
had them bring out the heirloom of Hrethel,  
covered with gold; at that time in Geatland  
there was no greater treasure in the form of a sword;  
he laid that blade on Beowulf’s lap  
and gave him lands, seven thousands hides,  
a hall, and gift throne. (*Beowulf* 179)

In Alagaësia, there are in fact four kings: Galbatorix – the evil king, Islanzadi – queen of the elves, Ajihad (later Nasuada) – leader of the Varden and Hrothgar – king of the dwarves. All of them, except Galbatorix, try to protect their subjects as best they can. Even though the kings in *Eragon* are not as excessively generous as the kings in *Beowulf*, the gift-giving tradition can nevertheless be found. Eragon is given a sword by Brom, a very valuable and precious weapon called Zar’roc, which used to belong to Morzan. In Tronjheim, he is later given armour for himself, as well as dragon armour for Saphira by king Hrothgar for protection in the Battle of Farthen Dûr: “‘A gift from Hrothgar,’ said Orik, looking pleased with himself. ‘It has lain so long among our other treasures that it was almost forgotten. It was forged in another age, before the fall of the Riders’” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 473).

The motif of ring-giving is present as well. The queen of the elves gave a very valuable ring to Brom. Arya explains to Eragon: “This is a token given only to the most valued elf-friends – so valued, in fact, it has not been used in centuries. Or so I thought. I never knew that Queen Islanzadi thought so highly of Brom” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 463). After Brom’s death, Eragon keeps the ring.

A lord lived on an estate which had a hall which was in a way the centre of social life of the nobility: “The richer lords lived on estates, with a main rectangular hall surrounded by outlying buildings for various living, working, and storage purposes. Inside the hall a lord might mark his prestige by expensive wall hangings or even paintings. The hall was the scene of feasts for the lord's followers, and a lord was expected to be a lavish host” (Ross). Hrothgar has such a hall built and calls it Heorot:

... It came to his mind  
that he would command a royal building,  
a gabled mead-hall fashioned by craftsmen,  
which the sons of men should hear of forever.” (*Beowulf* 53)

It was fortified against possible attacks, “The hall towered high, / cliff-like, horn-gabled, awaited the war-flames, / malicious burning” (*Beowulf* 53), but this did not help to protect the Scyldings against the monster Grendel.

The dwarf-king Hrothgar of Erangon’s story also has a hall, in the mountain-city Tronjheim (or rather under it): “A dark hall lay before them, a good bowshot long. The throne room was a natural cave; the walls were lined with stalagmites and stalactites, each thicker than a man. Sparsely hung lanterns cast a moody light. The brown floor was smooth and polished. At the far end of the hall was a black throne with a motionless figure upon it” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 440). Tronjheim has also been threatened by monsters, in fact the whole army of them. These Urgals, as they are called, were sent by Galbatorix to destroy the city and its inhabitants, but they did not succeed.

### 3.3. Culture

As was said at the beginning of this chapter, the societies in secondary world fantasies are often pre-scientific societies and their culture is often that of the early Dark Ages. *Beowulf* can be placed in this culture as well, although the poem itself does not provide a complex picture of the cultural background. It concentrates on the warriors of noble origin and their glorious deeds, and omits the “mundane details” (*Beowulf* 265). This is, however, not the true picture of the period: “Warfare was not a part of everyday life for many Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. Despite all the heroic deeds in tales and sagas, a grown man would have seen a major conflict about once every twenty years. And even then he would had to have been in the wrong place at the wrong time to become involved” (Williamson, “Warfare”). Therefore, it is necessary to draw from other sources to see how people lived. *Eragon*, on the other hand, gives a more complex picture, since at the beginning of the story Eragon is only a “farm boy”, whereas later on he is a Dragon Rider, so we see how all sorts of people live in Alagaësia. We will therefore now have a look at the way of life – dwellings, means of transport, crafts, weapons, and burial rites – in *Beowulf*’s and *Eragon*’s worlds.

The materials which Anglo-Saxons used to build their buildings were predominantly wood and sometimes stone. Not many Anglo-Saxon buildings survived, because of the flammability of wood and the frequent warfare (– Vikings’ invasions): “Most domestic structures in the Saxon period were built in wood. Even the halls of nobles were simple affairs, with a central fire and a hole in the roof to let the smoke escape. Even the largest buildings rarely had more than one floor, and one room” (Ross), “roofing materials varied, with thatch being the most common, though turf and even wooden shingles were also used” (Ross). The description of Carvahall gives a

similar picture: “The village was composed of stout log buildings with low roofs – some thatched, others shingled. Smoke billowed from the chimneys, giving the air a woody smell. The buildings had wide porches where people gathered to talk and conduct business. Occasionally a window brightened as a candle or lamp was lit” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 11).

In the countryside, the majority of people lived by farming: “The Anglo-Saxon community in England was basically a rural one, where primarily all classes of society lived on the land” (Williamson, “Anglo-Saxon Social Organisation”). Eragon comes from such a rural environment, where farming was an inevitable part of life:

When the last bites were finished, all three went to work in the fields. The sun was cold and pale, providing little comfort. Under its watchful eye, the last of the barley was stored in the barn. Next, they gathered prickly vined squash, then the rutabagas, beets, peas, turnips, and beans, which they packed into the root cellar. After hours of labor, they stretched their cramped muscles, pleased that the harvest was finished.

The following days were spent pickling, salting, shelling, and preparing the food for winter. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 21)

Apart from cultivating crops, they also breed animals, but usually to cover the family’s needs: “A hundred feet from the house, in a dull-colored barn, lived two horses – Birka and Brugh – with chickens and a cow. Sometimes there was also a pig, but they had been unable to afford one this year. A wagon sat wedged between the stalls. On the edge of their fields, a thick line of trees traced along the Anora River” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 16).

The main means of transport by land (for longer distances) is on horseback. Eragon and Brom travel across Alagaesia riding Cadoc and Snowfire (and later Murtagh is riding Tornac). In *Beowulf*, not much travelling is done across land. However, we

learn that the Danish coast-guard is “sitting on his horse” (*Beowulf* 65), when he is talking to the newcomers.

Along the coast, seafaring is of course the fastest and best means of transport. In both works there is quite a lot of seafaring going on. *Beowulf* and his companions come to Denmark by ship, from across the water. They seem to be quite skilled in this, and the ships seem to be quite elaborate, since their journey is without problems:

Across open seas, blown by the wind,  
the foamy-necked ship went like a bird,  
till in good time, the second day out,  
the curved prow-carving had gone so far  
that the seafaring men sighted land. (*Beowulf* 61)

Eragon and Brom get to visit Teirm, an important port of the Empire, one of the centres of the sea trade: “Eragon gaped as Teirm was suddenly revealed before them, nestled by the edge of the shimmering sea, where proud ships were docked with furled sails. The surf’s thunder could be heard in the distance” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 173).

Since these are pre-industrial societies, no manufacturing is done except of the traditional crafts, above all the most important is that of a traditional blacksmith and armourer, apparently present in both works. Horst, a relative of Eragon’s is famous for his craftsmanship. But the true masters of metal are the dwarfs, who live underground, dig mines, and work metal: Orrik “It is the symbol of my clan. We are the Ingietum, metalworkers and master smiths” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 425).

The weapons used in both works are all pre-gunpowder weapons: swords, shields, spears etc. Eragon is quite a skilful archer; in fact it was the only weapon he was using before he learnt to fight with a sword. *Beowulf*’s companions also use their bows and arrows to shoot at the water monsters in the mere.



The descriptions of weapons in both works are quite elaborate. In *Beowulf*, the bard describes in great detail the armour and weapon of the warriors:

... Bright their war-mail,  
hardened, hand-linked; glistening iron rings  
sang in their battle-shirts as they came marching  
straight to the hall, fearful in war-gear.  
The sea-weary men set their broad shields,  
spell-hardened rims, against the high wall,  
eased down on benches, their chain-mail clinking,  
fit dress for warriors. Their spears were stacked,  
the seafarers' weapons, bristling upright,  
straight ash, gray points. (*Beowulf* 67)

Eragon's armour (which he wears for protection during the Battle of Farthen Dûr) consists of similar pieces:

Over Eragon's head went a stiff shirt of leather-backed mail that fell to his knees like skirt. It rested heavily on his shoulders and clinked when he moved. He belted Zar'roc over it, which helped keep the mail from swinging. On his head went a leather cap, then a mail coif, and finally a gold-and-silver helm. Bracers were strapped to his forearms, and greaves to his lower legs. For his hands there were mail-backed gloves. Last, Orlik handed him a broad shield emblazoned with an oak tree. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 474)

Beowulf is protected by similar gear when he goes to Grendel's lair: "His broad mail-shirt was to explore the mere, / closely hand-linked, woven by craft [...] / His shining helmet protected his head [...] it magnificent head-band / inset with jewels, as in times long past / a master smith worked it with his wondrous skill" (*Beowulf* 133). The

armour of both heroes was made by master smiths, long time ago, and as such are fit for heroes that they are.

Of all the weapons, probably the most intriguing is the sword:

The old swords were better made, less likely to splinter in battle, and in a warrior culture they had virtually the status of cult objects. The complicated gold chasing on hilt, pommel, and scabbard of some of the remaining specimens shows the lavish care these weapons received. Kings usually retained their own goldsmiths and, as in *Beowulf*, the gift of a sword or helmet was an event for everyone in the hall to observe and marvel over. (*Beowulf* 265)

When we know this, it is no wonder the sword was so valued as to have name and pedigree (Gummere 16). Unferth gives Beowulf his sword for the fight with Grendel's mother: "the sword / with a long wooden hilt which Hrothgar's spokesman / now lent him in need, Hrunting by name" (*Beowulf* 133). This weapon, despite its undeniable quality failed him in the actual fight, so he had to use another weapon which he found in the lair:

Then he saw among the armor a victory-bright blade  
made by the giants, an uncracking edge,  
an honor for its bearer, the best of weapons,  
but longer and heavier than any other man  
could ever have carried in the play of war-strokes,  
ornamented, burnished, from Weland's smithy. (*Beowulf* 139)

The blade of this sword has melted because of the poisonous blood of the monster.

Brom gives Eragon a very precious sword called Zar'roc. It is a famous sword, and those who are old and have seen and remember things recognize it. It is also a very powerful weapon which provokes fear and respect. Its description is as follows:

The gold pommel was teardrop shaped with the sides cut away to reveal a ruby the size of a small egg. The hilt was wrapped in silver wire, burnished until it gleamed like starlight. The sheath was wine red and smooth as glass, adorned solely by a strange black symbol etched into it. [...] The flat blade was iridescent red and shimmered in the firelight. The keen edges curved gracefully to a sharp point. A duplicate of the black symbol was inscribed on the metal. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 101-2)

The symbol was the Rider's personal crest. Gummere points out that the Anglo-Saxon swords often had runes or letters inscribed on their hilts or blades too (Gummere 16).

Men were buried with their weapons, even ordinary people. Archaeological evidence shows that "around 47% of male burials from the pagan period contain weapons of some sort" (Williamson, "The Anglo-Saxon Fyrd c.400-878AD"). The most frequent items that were found were spears and shields; swords, helmets, armour and axes were not as common and were found only in the richest of burials (Williamson, "The Anglo-Saxon Fyrd c.400-878AD").

Burial ceremony of people of noble origin was usually impressive. In *Beowulf*, we have an instance of such a burial, in fact not only one. The poem opens and ends with a burial of a king: opens with Scyld's burial, ends with Beowulf's burial. Both are big ceremonies because of the importance of the two leaders. The corpses of the kings are surrounded by weapons and treasure:

Beowulf's burial:

The Geatish people, they built a pyre  
on that high ground, no mean thing,  
hung with helmets, strong battle-boards,  
bright coats of mail, as he had requested,

and then they laid high in the center  
their famous king, their beloved lord,  
the warriors weeping. (*Beowulf* 239)

Scyld's burial:

They laid down the king they had dearly loved,  
their tall ring-giver, in the center of the ship,  
the mighty by the mast. Great treasure was there,  
bright gold and silver, gems from far lands.

I have not heard of a ship so decked  
with better war-dress, weapons of battle,  
swords and mail-shirts. (*Beowulf* 51)

Despite the similarities of the two burials, Chickering suggests there is a difference between the two ceremonies: "Beowulf's burial follows the Germanic practices of cremation and barrow building, while Scyld's being set adrift in his boat is a poetic adaptation of a royal ship-burial like those found at Sutton Hoo and Oseburg, in southern Norway" (*Beowulf* 279). While Beowulf's burial is more realistic in that we can hear lamentations of people for the loss of their beloved king, Scyld's is slightly more mythical. Chickering suggests similarity with King Arthur's death (279).

In *Eragon*, we do not get to see a "proper" burial. Eragon was forced to flee before Uncle Garrow's burial to pursue the Ra'zac and avoid people questioning him about the attack and about Saphira's footsteps in the snow. We, however get to see Brom's burial, which is also not a "proper burial", because it is done in improvised conditions while Eragon and Murtagh are being chased by the Ra'zac. It is a very emotional scene because of the close relationship that Brom, Eragon and Saphira had: "Saphira raised her head behind him and roared mournfully at the sky, keening her

lamentation. Tears rolled down Eragon's cheeks as a sense of horrible loss bled through him" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 276). They buried him on the top of the sandstone hill (much like the burial mound in *Beowulf*), despite Murtagh's protests that they might be discovered. "They laid Brom inside the unfinished sandstone vault with his staff and sword. Stepping back, Eragon again shaped the stone with magic" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 276). When Eragon and Saphira paid their last respect to Brom, Saphira performed an extraordinary piece of magic: "The sculpted sandstone mausoleum of moments before had transformed into a sparkling gemstone vault – under which Brom's untouched face was visible" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 284). It was the last thing she could do for him – to make a diamond tomb worth a burial of a king which he deserved.

### **3.4. Literature, Lore and Language**

This subchapter could rather be viewed as a continuation of the previous subchapter since literature and language are essential elements in defining culture (Swinfen 85). We will have a look at the languages spoken by the characters in the two works, as well as literary tradition and heritage, both oral and written, defined in the two works.

The language spoken in *Beowulf* is Old English (or Anglo-Saxon). All the characters of the poem speak it, and have no problems understanding each other. Their talk is, however, (from our point of view) not natural: "Characters do not converse; they deliver formal speeches in the epic style" (*Beowulf* 15). Chickering talks of "dramatic audience" inside the poem, and it can be either individual or a group of men (*Beowulf* 16). Alliteration is the key element in the metrics of the language. This is, however, more a matter of style which has already been discussed before.

In Alagaësia, each race has its own language: people speak English (Modern English), dwarfs speak the dwarf language, urgals speak the urgals language, and elves speak the ancient language. English is the language which everyone understands and speaks. Christopher Paolini used various sources when creating these languages: “I invented three languages for *Eragon*, one of which – the ancient language – is based on Old Norse” (T. Paolini). The names of characters and places are often derived from languages such as Old Norse, German, Old English, or Russian (T. Paolini).

The most interesting from these invented languages is the ancient language. Not only because it is based on the Old Norse and therefore links *Eragon* with the old Nordic sagas, but mainly because of its function in the novel. The ancient language is the language of magic. This language calls all the things by their true names, and by learning these one gets a power over them. This is how it works as Brom explains to Eragon: “It [the language] is the basis for all power. The language describes the true nature of things, not the superficial aspects that everyone sees. For example, fire is called *brisingr*. Not only is that *a* name for fire, it is *the* name for fire. If you are strong enough, you can use *brisingr* to direct fire to do whatever you will” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 140). One’s power is therefore limited by their knowledge of the ancient language. Also, not everyone can do magic. People have to have a certain innate power, or, as is the case with the Dragon Riders, the magical power is supplied by the bond with the dragon – *the* magical creature.

This idea is not a new one: “The runes of the native Old English alphabet were originally the secret names for things, and a knowledge of them gave powers to men” (*Beowulf* 6). The Anglo-Saxons believed that the magic existed in the language itself that is why it is not surprising that the ability to read and write (literacy was very low among Anglo-Saxons) was considered as magical (“Anglo-Saxon Study Pack 2”).

Magic was thought to be tied to language and even its written form – runes: “Anglo-Saxons believed the actual runes themselves had power, not just the words they spelled out” (“Anglo-Saxon Study Pack 2”). The power of runes was used to protect and heal and to set down knowledge (“Anglo-Saxon Study Pack 2”). According to Gummere, even the author of *Beowulf* still believed in the magic effects of runes (Gummere 16).

In *Eragon*, we can find both: the usage of runes, and the notion of magic hidden inside the words of a language. But there is a difference as these two are not directly associated. While runes are used by ordinary people for making recordings, writing books etc., the ancient language in its written form looks like our cursive (flowing) writing.

Runes are present in *Beowulf* in several ways. As inscriptions on weapons:  
On its bright gold facings there were also runes  
set down in order, engraved, inlaid,  
which told for whom the sword was first worked,  
its hair-keen edges, twisted gold  
scrolled in the hilt, the woven snake-blade. (*Beowulf* 147)

The language of the poem itself is connected with runes, since the Old English still used some runic forms. They were especially the so called thorn (þ) and eth (ð).

We have already mentioned the low level of literacy among Anglo-Saxons. Few people could read and write. The poems were not written down when composed, but sung by scop, accompanied by musical instruments such as the harp or lyre. Not surprisingly, the first words of the poem are: “Listen! We have heard...” (*Beowulf* 49). We can see in the poem itself, the description of how it looked when these poems were sung, in the scene from the mead hall the evening of Beowulf’s arrival:

There was tumult and song, melodious noise,

in front of Healfdene's battle commander;  
the harp was plucked, good verses chanted  
when Hrothgar's scop in his place on the mead-bench  
came to tell over the famous hall-sport  
[about] Finn's sons when the attack came on them. (*Beowulf* 110-11)

This oral tradition is represented in *Eragon* as well. It of course differs slightly, but nevertheless there are some similarities. First of all, Eragon cannot read and write. He is later on thought to read and write by Brom during their stay in Teirm. Eragon, however, loves to listen to stories. When a group of traders arrives in Carvahall, there are a couple of "troubadours" among them: "Eragon was impatient for evening, when the troubadours would come out to tell stories and perform tricks. He loved hearing about magic, gods, and, if they were especially lucky, the Dragon Riders" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 27). "Carvahall had its own storyteller, Brom – a friend of Eragon's – but his tales grew old over the years, whereas the troubadours always had new ones that he listened to eagerly" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 27). Brom has been hiding his true identity because Galbatorix is after him. People of Carvahall think he is just an old storyteller, and no one knows that many of the stories he has been telling he lived through himself, once being a Dragon Rider.

Alexander M. Bruce suggests in his essay called *An Education in the Mead-Hall: Beowulf's Lessons for Young Warriors*, that the poem *Beowulf* can be seen as having a didactic purpose. According to him, it inspired young warriors to be as brave as the famous warriors and taught them how to act in fights and battles: "As the poem develops, the young warriors hear how Beowulf faced the sorts of challenges they would one day face; they could learn from his responses how to face their first battle,



how to respond when separated from help, and how to act when confronted by death”  
(Bruce). At the time when Eragon was listening to the stories about the Dragon Riders,  
he, however, had no idea that one day he would meet a similar destiny.

#### **4. GOOD v. EVIL**

The fight of good against evil is a theme which is present in both *Eragon* and *Beowulf*. It is a very strong theme which permeates both stories. Good and evil is a dualistic concept, where on the one side there is something morally positive and on the other side something morally negative. Good is usually linked to life, light, continuity, prosperity, and happiness, while evil is associated with the opposite qualities of death, darkness, chaos, misery, and unhappiness. Good and evil are always found in a mutual combat: “Evil is present and manifest, and must be fought if it is not to triumph” (Swinfen 91). Fighting on the good side is the main hero and his companions, and on the bad side various monsters and adversaries of the main hero. In this chapter, we will analyse the monsters in the two stories, the main heroes and the dragon as portrayed in both works.

##### **4.1. Monsters**

There are various supernatural creatures in both works. We can find the mention of elves, dragons, giants, and many others. Although, not always with the same connotations (while the elves mentioned in *Beowulf* are evil, those found in *Eragon* are not). In *Beowulf*, in fact all the supernatural (non-human) creatures are considered evil. In *Eragon*, not all magical creatures are evil, or they are at least not inherently evil, even though they of course can turn evil. In this subchapter, we will analyse the particular monsters which the main heroes fought. In the case of *Beowulf*, it was Grendel and his mother (the dragon will be discussed in a separate subchapter). In the case of *Eragon*, it

was Durza the Shade, the Ra'zac and king Galbatorix, who, even though is human, is so evil that he fits in this subchapter.

Even though Grendel is a monster, he is not a brainless beast. He plans his attacks. Chickering explains the meaning of the Old English word “*mynte*” meaning “thought, planned, intended” which is repeatedly used with his actions (*Beowulf* 307). Each night, he attacks Heorot and kills and eats Hrothgar's thanes.

Grendel was however, not always evil, he turned to evil:

Thus the brave warriors lived in hall-joys,  
blissfully prospering, until a certain one  
began to do evil, an enemy from Hell.  
That murderous spirit was named Grendel,  
huge moor-stalker who held the wasteland,  
fens, and marches; unblessed, unhappy,  
he dwelt for a time in the lair of the monsters  
after the Creator had outlawed, condemned them  
as kinsmen of Cain. (*Beowulf* 55)

The poet of *Beowulf* relates Grendel to the race of Cain, who was guilty of kin-slaughter: “Of Grendel he [the poet] made a hell-fiend outright, and assigned him by superfluous genealogy to the tribe of Cain” (Gummere 9-10). From Cain, “sprang every misbegotten thing, / monsters and elves and the walking dead, / and also those giants who fought against God / time and again” (*Beowulf* 55). We have seen in the previous chapter that to kill one of one's kin was considered to be the worst thing that could have happened, because it was impossible to avenge their death. Also, relating Grendel to the Creation story makes him seem somehow ancient, as if he had been there “forever”.

Grendel viciously attacked the sleeping Danes, and he did this during night, when his powers were at their strongest: “It was in the darkness, the cold before dawn, / that Grendel’s war-strength was made plain to men” (*Beowulf* 59). He was alone, “one against many” (*Beowulf* 57), but inhumanly strong and knew no mercy: “(he) grieved not at all / for his wicked deeds” (*Beowulf* 57).

There are some very strong parallels between Grendel and the “monsters” in *Eragon*. Perhaps the strongest are with the Ra’zac. Although no one really knows much about them, Brom does seem to have a little knowledge of them. He describes them to Eragon in detail:

They aren’t human. When I glimpsed one’s head, it appeared to have something resembling a beak and black eyes as large as my fist – though how they manage our speech is a mystery to me. Doubtless the rest of their bodies are just as twisted. [...] As for their powers, they are stronger than any man and can jump incredible heights, but they cannot use magic. [...] I also know they have a strong aversion to sunlight, though it won’t stop them if they’re determined. Don’t make the mistake of underestimating a Ra’zac, for they are cunning and full of guile. [...] A trail of death often follows them. (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 103-4)

The Ra’zac share quite a lot of characteristics with Grendel. They are not human, they prefer night to day, and they are incredibly strong. In the second volume of the *Inheritance cycle*, *Eldest*, we find out they feed on humans. They do not, however, go hunting like Grendel does. People from Dras-Leona, a city situated near their “lair”, bring them sacrifice rather than let them hunt on their own. Unlike Beowulf, Eragon is never able to defeat these enemies. They follow him on Glabatorix’s orders, and they attack him several times. One such attack proves to be fatal for Brom.

There are some similarities between Grendel and King Galbatorix too. Like Grendel, he was not always bad, he turned bad. This happened when his dragon was killed – he got mad. He demanded another dragon, which was denied him: “Denied his hope, Galbatorix, through the twisted mirror of his madness, came to believe it was the Riders’ fault his dragon had died. Night after night he brooded on that and formulated a plan to exact revenge” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 33). The places he was roaming also remind us of Grendel’s lair: “For years he hid in wastelands like a hunted animal,” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 33) or later was hiding “in an evil place where the Riders dared not venture” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 33). He managed to steal a dragon hatchling, Shruikan, who has been his dragon ever since. Because Dragon Riders do not age like ordinary people do: “They were immortal unless blade or poison took them” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 31), he had been living for a very long time, and appears to be almost ancient. He went against his own kind, and with his disciples, the Thirteen Forsworn, fought any Rider they met until they murdered almost all of them. He is very strong, but it is not physical strength, but rather his magic which makes him basically indestructible. Once he managed to murder almost all Dragon Riders, he anointed himself the king of all Alagaësia and has ruled over it ever since. *Eragon* has not met him in a fight yet, but all is leading up to that encounter.

Both *Eragon* and *Beowulf* become involved in a feud which was not theirs before. The feud between Grendel and the Danes lasted a very long time:

... Grendel had fought  
long against Hrothgar, driven by hate,  
had committed crimes for many seasons,  
a relentless feud. He wanted no peace  
with any of the men in the Danish host,  
to put off his killing, settle in payment. (*Beowulf* 57)

By killing Grendel, Beowulf became involved in this long-lasting feud between the Grendel family and the Danes. From the moment he killed Grendel, it became his feud as well: “We now see Beowulf directly implicated in the Danes’ feud by his slaying of Grendel. Hrothgar even speaks of Beowulf’s second combat as a ‘feud’ (1380)” (*Beowulf* 336). As of the day when the Ra’zac killed Eragon’s uncle, Eragon also became directly and personally involved. His driving force was not only a moral duty as a Rider, but also a personal quest for revenge.

We do not find a monster like Grendel’s mother in Eragon. In fact, there are no female monsters at all in this novel. Grendel’s mother is a special case, because her motifs for killing are different from Grendel’s – even justifiable. She is just a member of a feuding group so her attempt to revenge the death of her son should be nothing surprising.

Nevertheless, we find a strikingly similar scene like the one where Beowulf dives in the mere in *Eragon*. The evil creatures are attacking him and he is trying to reach the bottom of the mere, where Grendel’s lair is. Eragon finds himself in exactly the same kind of situation when he is trying to reach the Varden. Only the symbolism is the opposite. While the waters of the mere are dark and Beowulf is plunging basically into Hell, Eragon, on the other hand, seeks shelter and rescue provided by the Varden.

#### **4.2. Main Hero**

The good side of the conflict between good and evil is represented principally by the main heroes. While Eragon is a young man, we see Beowulf both as a young warrior and as an old king. Eragon, however, does undergo a development – from a farm boy to

a Dragon Rider. We will compare the two heroes as warriors, the relationship to their friends, their lords, dragons (in the next chapter), and their attitude towards their duty.

Both heroes had to go through training in order to become skilled warriors. While Beowulf's conditions were ideal, being of a noble origin and growing up at Hrethel's royal court: "I was seven years old when the treasure-giver, / gold-friend of Geats, took me from my father. / King Hrethel kept and fostered me well" (*Beowulf* 195), Eragon's training takes place in hasty, improvised, but perhaps more practical conditions while chasing the Ra'zac and later travelling to the Varden. Both are extraordinarily talented and have defeated powerful enemies in their youth. We hear about Beowulf's deeds from his own mouth: "Many times in my youth I faced battle-rushes, // saw many wars; I remember it all" (*Beowulf* 195).

And we follow Eragon's as they are happening.

The competition with fellow warriors could be considered as part of their training. This added experience and helped them in their future combats; such as the one in which Beowulf and his friend Breca swam into the open sea: "To each other we said, as boys will boast, / – we both were still young – that we two alone / would swim out to sea, to the open ocean, / dare risk our lives, and we did as we said" (*Beowulf* 81). Beowulf had to fight sea monsters attacking him: "Again and again the angry monsters / made fierce attacks. I served them well / with my noble blade, as was only fitting" (*Beowulf* 81). Eragon and Murtagh would spar every day: "Thus it became their custom to fight in the evening, which kept them lean and fit, like a pair of matched blades" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 288).

The heroes have to prove themselves in battle. Words are not enough, deeds are needed. Hrothgar, the king of the dwarves, says to Eragon: "If you wish the support of the dwarves within my realm, you must first prove yourself to them. We have long

memories and do not rush to hasty decisions. Words will decide nothing, only deeds” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 444). Beowulf is also challenged to fulfil his boasts: “A keen-witted shield-bearer / who thinks things out carefully must know the distinction / between words and deeds, keep the difference clear” (*Beowulf* 65).

Both heroes are very brave, their bravery perhaps often borders on recklessness or even foolishness. They do not hesitate to indulge in dangerous tasks and often risk their own lives. Their driving force is however different. While for Beowulf, it is for a great part the desire to gain name and fame, for Eragon it is a desire to help those who need it.

On the other hand, the heroes venture into these difficult tasks because in a way, they know they are the only ones that can help. With this belief Beowulf sets out to help king Hrothgar against Grendel:

he was the strongest of all living men  
at that time in this world,  
noble and huge. He ordered made ready  
a good wave-rider, announced he would seek  
the warrior-king, famous ruler,  
across the swan’s riding, since he needed men. (*Beowulf* 61)

Eragon shares this feeling as well: “That’s the sort of thing I could stop by fighting the Empire, he realized. With Saphira by my side I could free those slaves. I’ve been graced with special powers; it would be selfish of me not to use them for the benefit of others” (C. Paolini, *Eragon*, 256-57). They both feel a sense of duty to help: “And though the thought of building a home in the safety of isolation appealed to him, he had witnessed too many wrongs committed in Galbatorix’s name, from murder to slavery, to turn his back on the Empire. No longer was it just vengeance – for Brom’s death as well as



Garrow's – that drove him. As a Rider, it was his duty to assist those without strength to resist Galbatorix's oppression" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 337). "I have the strength to help, so I must" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 442).

Both heroes manage to defeat powerful enemies, ones that many tried to eradicate before them but none succeeded. Their great victories win them fame and recognition. Eragon kills the Shade: "You are greater than you know, Eragon. Think of what you have done and rejoice, for you have rid the land of a great evil. You have wrought a deed no one else could. Many are in your debt." (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 494) People start calling him Shadeslayer because of what he had done. Beowulf's fame is also far-known, even before he kills the first monster: "In fact, the merchants who used to carry / gifts of coins, our thanks to the Geats, / said he had war-fame, the strength of thirty / in his mighty hand-grip" (*Beowulf* 71).

The atmosphere into which our heroes come is one of instability and unrest. They are to bring peace and order to the country and the people. Beowulf brought peace to Hrothgar's kingdom after getting rid of Grendel and his mother, and later he ruled his own kingdom:

... after that dark time,  
the kingdom passed into Beowulf's hands.  
He ruled it well for fifty winters –  
by then an old king, aged guardian  
of the precious homeland. (*Beowulf* 179)

In *Eragon*, the country is also in a state of chaos: "Chaos seems to rule Alagaësia. We could not avoid illness, attacks, and the most cursed bad luck" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 25), "when he talked with the merchants, they conformed what Merlock had said about the instability in Alagaësia. Over and over the message was repeated: last year's security

has deserted us; new dangers have appeared, and nothing is safe” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 26). Eragon also comes into chaos and his vocation seems to be to bring peace to the land, establish order again.

### 4.3. Dragon

The presence of dragons is probably the most evident link between the two texts. The dragon has, however, a completely different meaning in *Eragon* than it has in *Beowulf*. While in *Beowulf*, the dragon is generally put in one group with Grendel, his mother and the sea-monsters, the dragons in *Eragon* are an entirely different case. We will have a look at a conventional dragon and compare it to the dragons in *Beowulf* and *Eragon* and dragons in the two works together.

Dragons can be traced back to the Middle East and ancient Greek myths and paintings. They had many forms and representations in paintings and literature. As far as later European dragons are concerned, they are often classified into the western dragon – *draco occidentalis* – and eastern Byzantine-Slavic dragon (Koutský 5). In early times, dragons did not have a stable form yet, however, they already had typical snake-like bodies, they were able to fly with their huge wings, and their actions were rather negative (could be compared to destructive natural forces). During the Middle Ages, a conventional dragon came to be established. He gained character features such as pride and stinginess. His image is often linked with a hero fighting with him, but also a treasure which he guards (Koutský 6-7).

Gilles Ragache describes this traditional dragon in more detail. The traditional dragon needs humidity so it usually lives in close proximity to water. They are often guardians. Medieval dragons live in places remote from people, deep in dark and damp

caves, or in marches. The western dragon eats and drinks a lot, and he never sleeps. He guards a treasure, and often does not even have eyelids, which is the reason why the Greek often associated him with the goddess of wisdom – Athena – because he has to be always vigilant. Dragons can kill/paralyze with their look and they breathe fire. They have an appearance of reptiles, that is why they are connected to the ground (but they do have feet!), but at the same time they belong to the air realm as well since they have wings. They have scales, often of green or grey colour, although eastern dragons tend to be more colourful (Ragache 45).

A dragon evokes the idea of unrest and chaos from which he has been born, and he needs to be fought. They are often described as beings which came to the earth before gods and humans. They represent evil forces which a lone good hero tries to conquer. Symbolically, they are the projection of one's own fear and imagination. Killing a dragon was considered as overcoming one's fear and becoming a full man. Evil dragons tend to be ugly and old (Ragache 50-53).

Two dragons appear in *Beowulf*. The first one features in a lay recited by Hrothgar's scop. Not much information is given about this dragon, but from those that are provided we can see that he can be considered as typical representative of its kind: he is a "treasure's keeper", described as a "slithering beast shining in scales" (*Beowulf* 99). Sigemund's motif for fighting the dragon was "to gain the ring-hoard, / take gold at will" (*Beowulf* 99). This short digression perhaps foreshadows Beowulf's fight with the dragon, which, however, did not go as smoothly as Sigemund's.

The second dragon is Beowulf's nemesis. He is also a typical representative of his kind (of the western/Anglo-Saxon dragon). Both in his physical appearance and in his characteristics. Here are some of the attributes the poet uses to describe him: smooth flame-snake, barrow-snake old dawn-scorcher, fierce-hearted, hateful burner etc. He

lives in “a cave, / a certain barrow, between cliff and beach, / near the crash of waves” (*Beowulf* 193). He is a night creature:

... The day was over  
and the dragon rejoiced, could no longer lie  
coiled within walls but flew out in fire,  
with shooting flames. The onset was horrible  
for the folk of the land, as was its ending  
soon to be hard for their ring-giving lord. (*Beowulf* 187)

His task is to seek out “[treasure] in the earth, where he guards for ages / heathen gold; gains nothing by it” (*Beowulf* 185). He was angered by a thief who stole a cup from his hoard and started causing great damage: “The visitor began to spew fire-flakes, / burn the bright halls; the glow rose high, / a horror everywhere. The fiery terror / left nothing alive wherever it flew” (*Beowulf* 189). The dragon in *Beowulf* possibly even comprehends human speech. We however do not know if he was able to speak since he did not utter a word. He seems to understand what Wiglaf is saying to Beowulf: “After those words the dragon charged / again, angry, a shimmering form / in malignant coils, surged out in flames / sought hated men” (*Beowulf* 209).

Let us now have a closer look at the relationship between Beowulf and the dragon. Interestingly enough, they are both described (in the same sentence even) as guardians: Beowulf as an “aged guardian of the precious homeland” (*Beowulf* 179), the dragon as “the guard of a hoard in a high barrow-hall” (*Beowulf* 179). But there is one fundamental difference between them being guardians: while Beowulf is generous with his gifts, dragon is stingy and keeps them all for himself:

Beowulf is now the king – the “ring-giver” who ideally distributes booty captured in battle to his thanes in accordance with their deserts. Good kings are ring-givers and

bad kings [...] are miserly. The dragon functions then as the opposite of a good king because it guards the treasure but can do nothing with it. It represents malice, destruction, and greed – the dark side of kingship. (Delahoyde)

Beowulf and the dragon meet each other at the end of their lives, when they are both old and have basically lived through their lives. They meet their end together by killing each other. In a way, they are both legendary personalities and it seems somehow right that they die by each other's hand.

Eragon and Saphira, on the other hand, meet when they are both young (in fact Eragon sees Saphira hatch). They grow and get wiser together. To characterise Paolini's dragons, we can use the same words that Ann Swinfen wrote about Tolkien's fantastic creatures: they "are drawn from traditional material, although his conception is considerably more detailed and enlarged than the original" (Swinfen 92). The physical appearance of Paolini's dragons is conventional: they have wings, scales, spikes, they breathe fire and have large fangs. It is their personalities that are much more developed: "Saphira was as real and complex as any person. Her personality was electric and at times completely alien, yet they understood each other on a profound level. Her actions and thoughts constantly revealed new aspects of her character" (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 61). Even though Saphira is a dragon, a completely different species which means she has to be inherently different from humans, Christopher explains:

I decided to go in a more human direction with Saphira, my dragon, because the more I thought about it, the more I realized that she is raised away from her species, away from her race, in close mental contact with a human. I considered making the dragon more dragon-like, if you will, in its own society, but I haven't had a chance to explore that. I went with a more human element with Saphira while still trying to get a bit of the magic, the alien, of her race. (Weich)

When Saphira hatches, she is cute like all hatchlings. Eragon considered killing her, because raising a dragon might put his family in danger: “The simplest solution was just to kill the dragon, but the idea was repugnant, and he rejected it. Dragons were too revered for him to even consider that.” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 40) He raised her, talked to her, and showed her everything. A mental connection between them developed. At first, they exchanged emotions and images only. Later, they talked together: “Soon she understood everything he said and and frequently commented on it” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 61). They became very close: “For the first time he did not think of the dragon as animal. It was something else, something... different. [...] *My dragon*” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 46), “Saphira was a balm for Eragon’s frustration. He could talk freely with her; his emotions were completely open to her mind, and she understood him better than anyone else” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 61). Their relationship developed to love. They shared their personalities completely, as if they were one being: ““Their connection grew stronger until there was no distinction between their identities. They clasped their wings together and dived straight down, like a spear thrown from on high” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 162). The connection between them is so strong that if Eragon died, Saphira would inevitably die as well (it is always the case with dragons and their Riders).

Saphira is (despite her age) very wise. She tries to settle the conflict between Murtagh and Eragon. She gives him advice and consolation when he needs it: “I may be younger than you in years, but I am ancient in my thoughts. Do not worry about these things. Find peace in what and where you are. People often know what must be done. All you need to do is show them the way – that is wisdom” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 429).

She loves water: “Saphira twisted and turned in fantastic shapes, slipping through the water like an eel. Eragon felt as if he were riding a sea serpent of a legend” (*Eragon*, 242). She even has a sense of humour: “She made the sound again, and Eragon turned

red as he realized that she was laughing” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 115). Dragons are not almighty, on the other hand, they have their weak spots too. Such as when Saphira gets caught and is dragged by a strong wind and is unable to land: “She sounded shaken. *Nothing’s broken – I couldn’t do anything. The wind wouldn’t let me go. I was helpless.* With a shudder, she fell silent” (C. Paolini, *Eragon* 127).

So far as the appearance is concerned, both the dragons in *Beowulf* and the dragons in *Eragon* are very similar. While the dragons in *Beowulf* have a rather symbolic meaning, they are the representations of evil and they have characteristics opposite to what is considered morally good, the dragons in *Eragon* are portrayed in a more naturalistic way and as a species are far more believable. The fundamental difference between the two works is that while the dragons in *Beowulf* are inherently evil, the dragons in *Eragon* are not. Eragon and Saphira complement each other while Beowulf and his dragon have contrasting personalities. Dragons and the main heroes are equals in many ways. Protagonists’ fates are tied closely to their dragons. Beowulf and his dragon died together, although by each other’s hand, like Saphira would die if Eragon did.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The influence of *Beowulf* on Christopher Paolini as he was writing *Eragon* was quite clear to us from the beginning, since he admitted in various interviews to studying these old heroic poems and sagas while creating the world of Alagaësia. He also admitted to having been influenced by other authors of the fantasy genre, which is quite understandable, since the archetypes particularly in this genre are very strong. *Beowulf* is a common root for all of these works. This thesis analyzed the particular instances of this influence of *Beowulf* in *Eragon* by comparing and contrasting various aspects of the two works.

The worlds that both works created have many features in common. The natural environments depicted in both are very similar. The way people live in these environments does not differ much, especially the practical and inevitable aspects of peoples' lives, such as building homes, farming for food, doing crafts to earn one's living and various customs and rites. The societies are based on similar principles and forces, above all the role of kinship is of particular importance and stands beside many things that happen in both works.

There are also conflicts (resulting in feuds and warfare) going on that need to be solved. That is when the main heroes become involved. Although their motifs do differ, both protagonists believe they can help. They fight on the good side, and they fight some great evils. Several combats are described, from which the heroes come out victorious (or at least alive), except Beowulf's last battle with the dragon.

These battles divide the books into different parts and always move us somewhere further. By each battle, the hero gains more praise, appreciation, fame, and



respect. Beowulf developed from a young boy on king's court to a king, Eragon from a farm boy to a Dragon Rider.

Even though the heroic code might seem exaggerated and impracticable in today's world, the ideals that *Beowulf* reflects, issues like honour and courage still appeal to people. Fantasy novels like *Eragon* which draw on this tradition bring back these old values in a new form in which they are still believable and can have a powerful effect on the heart.

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But its influence persists today in many contemporary fantasy works of which J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy and J. K. Rowling's wildly popular Harry Potter series are perhaps the most recognizable. One need only scan the shelves at a local bookstore or note the continued popularity of contemporary medievalist fantasy dramas to know that the old world of the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition, with its fire-breathing dragons and unique poetic form, continues as part of mainstream popular culture. As one of the first literary scholars to write seriously on the monsters of Beowulf in his seminal work "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," J. R. R. Tolkien understood well the effects of Anglo-Saxon literature on the modern imagination. In Medieval times, scholars developed what would become the literature tradition of Bestiaries or Books of Beasts and ever since, these masterpieces have influenced many other literary productions including contemporary pieces of literature such as the Harry Potter series, written by J.K.Rowling. What seemed to be the first novel of an unknown British writer called J.K.Rowling (who apparently wrote books for children), Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone, became very well known worldwide, having a massive impact on the lives of its readers, not only on the young ones, but also on the adult readership. The fourth chapter is concerned with the influences of medievalism in the Harry Potter The Influence of Medieval Literature on the Contemporary Fantasy Novel: Beowulf and Eragon Bachelor's Diploma Thesis. Supervisor: doc. Mgr. These are, however, not described in much detail, the story being centred on the character of Beowulf and his adventures. The main hero is most likely the poet's own invention, as he does not appear (as a historical figure) elsewhere. His struggles with monsters probably come from some folk tales, which is the opinion held by many scholars. And this is how we will deal with him in this thesis "as with a fictitious hero of a tale. 2.2. Eragon. When it comes to Eragon, the answers to the questions of when, where and who wrote it are not such a big problem as we have seen was the case of Beowulf.