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Universidade de Vigo

**Confronting Evil and the Monstrous *Other* in *Beowulf* and its
Filmic Adaptations:
Understanding Heroic Action and the Limits of Knowledge**



Miguel A. Gomes Gargamala
Doctoral Thesis

fft FACULTADE
DE FILOLOXÍA
E TRADUCCIÓN

Contents

Acknowledgement	1
Abstract	3
Contents	6
Abbreviations	8
Introduction – On Evil and Old English Poetry.....	9
Evagrius, Augustine and Alcuin: On Moral Evils and Vices	12
Evil, Literature and the Middle Ages: Approaching the Monstrous <i>Other</i>	19
The Devil in Old English Poetry: Finding a Scapegoat.....	28
Understanding the Double Nature of Evil as Wrongdoing and Suffering: <i>The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn</i>	33
Evil and Old English Heroic Poetry: Storytelling and Evil	45
Chapter One – Evil Agency and Monstrosity: Grendel and the Collapse of Language.....	53
Beowulf and the monsters.....	53
Grendel: The Seed of Cain.....	60
The Limits of Human knowledge: Recoiling from the Monstrous.....	74
Evil will and the Collapse of Language.....	81
The Exiled Monster and the Outsider Hero.	89
The Fight with Grendel: Overcoming Evil	97
Chapter Two – Landscapes of Evil: Grendel’s Mother, the Landscapes of the Mind and the Hero in the Labyrinth.	102
The Monsters’ Mere as Landscape of the Mind.	106

The Role of the Hero: Cleansing the Landscape and Fighting Evil	116
The Hilt and the Sermon.	121
Space and Structure: Beowulf's Journey Through the Labyrinth(s).	128
Chapter Three – Fighting the Dragon: <i>Beowulf</i> & the Hermeneutics of Action.	145
The Dragons Greed and the People's Enemy	149
Friendship and Loyalty in the Face of Evil.....	158
Damnation, Retribution and Poetical Justice: Moral Judgement by Poet and Audience	164
Chapter Four – 40 Years of <i>Beowulfian</i> Monsters on Screen: Fighting a Sexualised Evil.....	175
Introduction: Medieval Heroes, Cinema and Popular Culture.....	175
The Cinematic Childhood of <i>Beowulf</i>	183
1999: A Turning Point	190
The Post-LOTR Era	196
The Missed Opportunity: Zemeckis' <i>Beowulf</i>	199
Final Thoughts	210
Conclusions.....	214
Where this Road Leads: Future Directions	228
Bibliography.	231
Summary of the Doctoral Thesis in Galician /Resumo.	256

Abbreviations

<i>LOTR</i>	The Lord of the Rings
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>DOE</i>	<i>Dictionary of Old English (Web Corpus)</i>
<i>SolSat</i>	<i>The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn</i>
<i>SolSatI</i>	<i>Solomon and Saturn I</i>
<i>SolSatII</i>	<i>Solomon and Saturn II</i>
<i>TOE</i>	<i>Thesaurus of Old English</i>

Introduction: On Evil and Old English Poetry

But it remains true, and is the cause of my distress, that even though there is a ruler of the universe who is good, *there is nonetheless evil in the world*, even evil that passes unpunished. I beg you to address yourself to this knotty question, which causes so much wonder among men. (Emphasis mine), *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius (book IV: I)

Writing about Baudelaire's moral position, Jean-Paul Sartre claims that 'In order for liberty to be complete it has to be offered the choice of being infinitely wrong'. Sartre goes on to say that 'when poetry takes evil as its object, the two forms of creation, whose responsibility is essentially limited, meet and merge – we possess a flower of evil' (Sartre 1946, cited in Bataille 1985). In searching for those *fleurs du mal* in Old English poetry, we will have frequent opportunities to discuss the problematic dialectical cohabitation of creation, poetry and Evil. However, before any analysis can take place, an explanation of what is meant by Evil in this chapter, and by extension throughout this whole thesis, must be offered. The whole "enigma" of evil, as explained by R. Kearney (2003) and P. Ricoeur (2007), is that, at least in the tradition of the Judaeo-Christian West, we comprise a range of disparate phenomena, such as 'sin, suffering or death, under the same term' (2007: 35) 'Evil', with a capital E, will be used in this thesis for the concept or idea *per se*.

Before I offer a brief summary of some of the most relevant philosophical and literary treatises exploring the problem of Evil, I should clarify that my approach is in essence to examine the fruitful association of Evil with literature, and therefore the focus is on literary criticism of the narrative and cinematic texts selected as my case studies. This work does not attempt to explain in depth how the nature of Evil was

understood, chronologically, throughout the Anglo-Saxon period from a metaphysical point of view, although it does not disregard such a key aspect of the subject matter. Rather, it tries to account for the representations or embodiments of evil agency in the Old English heroic poetic corpus (that is, monsters and demons), for *the problem of Evil* (not) understood as suffering (for example in *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*), and finally and most importantly, for how heroic action attempts to overcome Evil in Anglo-Saxon poetry and in modern adaptations of the most celebrated of the Old English poems. Undertaking such a task without taking philosophy and theology into consideration would be naïve and irresponsible, but the scope of this thesis is limited and therefore they will feature prominently, but perhaps insufficiently for some readers. It is indeed impossible to discuss Evil *per se* without a narrative. Mine, like B. Sichère's (1996), is more an attempt to explore the idea of Evil in certain sequences of its history through the lenses of literary and filmic representations, than a simple analysis of Evil.

From the earliest thinkers of the western world, most philosophical discussions around the concept of Evil have focused on the reasons that an almighty and all benevolent God might permit Evil to occur. David Hume in 1779 (186), in his exploration of the problem of Evil in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, addresses the question, following Epicurus, with great insight and clarity: 'Is he (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then where does evil come from?'

In the classical world, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, early Sceptics and Gnostics, all tried to offer an explanation to a problem that has always tended to avoid an easy

and rational treatment, as did the early Christian fathers.¹ Irenaeus, for example, appealed to human moral development, spiritual growth, and ultimately, free will in order to explain why God allows natural and moral evils. As an almighty God he could well prevent those; nevertheless, argues Irenaeus, a natural world is the ideal stage for humanity to confront and face the results of our choices and actions.²

Pierre Gisel (2007: 26-27) reminds us of how

Evil is not a thing, an element of the world, a substance in any natural sense. The church fathers emphasized this, as did the medieval doctors, setting themselves against all Gnosticism. Evil necessarily comes under the problem of freedom: one can be responsible for it, confess it and fight it. Evil is inscribed on the heart of the human subject, on the heart of the extremely complex and deliberately historical reality which makes up the human subject.

There was no clear division in the early Middle Ages between philosophy, logic or theology, and so a modern treatment of the idea of Evil should not separate one of these aspects of thought from the others, but rather offer a multi-perspectival approach. John Marebon (1981: 3) stresses the importance of such a method. The achievements of the seventh and eighth centuries, he suggests, 'lay in fields other than philosophy' and what we now know as early medieval philosophy was born of the cohabitation and fusion of logic and theology.³

¹ See Plato's *The Republic*: 'Since a god is good, he is not – as most people claim – the cause of that happens to human beings but of only a few things, for good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives. He alone is responsible for the good things, but we must find some other cause for the bad ones, not a god' (Rep. II, 379c, tr. G. M. A. Grube, Re. C. D. C. Reeve, cited in Van Riel 2013: 39)

² See *The Blackwell Companion to The Problem of Evil* (2012: 78)

³ John Marebon (1981) discusses in depth the Categories and Universals in the work of early medieval philosophers, such as Candidus, Fredegisus and particularly John Scottus Eriugena.

Evagrius, Augustine and Alcuin: On Moral Evils and Vices

Evagrius Ponticus (c.345–399), one of the first monastic theologians, is a key figure if we want to understand fully the transmission of the concept of moral Evil into the early Middle Ages, as well as the lasting importance of patristic thought in all disciplines. A recent publication by G. Tsakiridis (2010) on the usefulness of the work of Evagrius, and the Christian thought of the late fourth century, for scholars in cognitive sciences, is evidence of this everlasting and 'discipline unbound' influence.

A prominent churchman, Evagrius of Pontus was involved in the Council of Constantinople alongside Gregory of Nyssa, but later retreated to the desert of Lower Egypt.⁴ Having spent his formative years under the influence and protection of the monastic circle of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, Evagrius became a respected member of the clergy and a great rhetorician. However, after falling in love with a married woman, and persuaded by the allegorical message of a dream vision, Evagrius left Jerusalem for the deserts of Nitria and Cellia.

A comprehensive account of Evagrius' retreat into the desert, the importance of the figures of Macarius, Rufinus of Aquileia and Melania the Elder and the group of thinkers known as the 'Tall Fathers', cannot be given here, despite its significance. The relevance of their teachings in opposition to Origen's doctrines, which would lead to the exile of the entire group, also deserves more attention than this thesis can offer. His greatest achievement, I believe, is his *Logismoi*, a treatise also known by its titles in different translations, *Of the Eight Evil Thoughts* or *On the Eight Spirits of*

⁴ For more on Evagrius and Gregory see (Corrigan: 2009)

Evil. His eight *Logismoi* are Gluttony (*gastrimargia*), Fornication (*porneia*), Love of Money (*philarguria*), Sadness (*lupē*), Anger (*orgē*), Sloth or Boredom (*acēdia*), Vainglory (*kenodoxia*) and Pride (*huperēphania*). In these works he explores in more depth the theory behind this categorization of human propensity to wrongdoing and sinful behaviour. The hundred-chapter *Practical Treatise* (*Praktikos*), arguably his most popular work, also contains an account of the eight evil thoughts (chapters 6-14) and offers a plan for fighting them.⁵ Similarly the *Antirrhetikos*, a sort of biblical battle manual, lists a great number of temptations, grouped together following the criteria applied to distinguish the eight evil thoughts, and suggests suitable texts from scripture for monks to use in order to counter-attack temptation.

If the list of evil thoughts looks familiar to modern readers, it is because it evolved into the much better known 'Seven Deadly Sins', after revision by Pope Gregory I in the sixth century, and would indirectly define the spiritual life of the Middle Ages. By thinking of them as thoughts, as opposed to sins, Evagrius admits that as such they exist beyond human will. He understands, even though he is himself an advocate of ascetic life, that body and matter are not *per se* Evil but subject to the contradictions and impulses of human desire. William S. Harmless quotes Evagrius on the subject of consent and responsibility:

It is not in our power to determine whether we are disturbed by these thoughts, but it is up to us to decide if they are to linger within us or not and whether or not they are to stir up our passions. (Harmless 2004: 323)⁶

Although the categories seem at first to be clearly identified, Evagrius refers to Vainglory as both a 'demon' and a 'thought', and Pride seems to appear as the result

⁵ For more on Early Monasticism and Evagrius Ponticus, see William (2004)

⁶ Harmless (2004) offers the following source and translation: Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6 (SC 171:508; trans. Bamberger, CS 4:17)

of Vainglory, or at least the latter as a herald of the former. His exploration of these two evils, or demons, as well as his original examination of *acēdia* as the most dangerous of a monk's opponents, provides a very valuable theological and philosophical background to an analysis of the problem of Evil, its representations in Anglo-Saxon England and crucially, the importance of acting against it. Evagrius characterizes *acēdia* as 'the commander of the demonic host arrayed against the monastic, which distracts the monastic with persistent thoughts' (Crislip, 2005: 143).

The demon of *acēdia* psychologically drains the monk through tedium, boredom and the lack of desire to do what a member of a monastic community should: read and pray. Those affected by *acēdia* might even leave their cell or the monastic life altogether. Evagrius writes that '[acedia] instills in him [the monk] also the idea that love has disappeared from among the brothers and there is no one to console him.'⁷ Thus the afflicted monastic, writes Crislip, 'worries about future illness and inevitable old age, and he fears that the brethren will lack the charity to care for him when he is in need' (Crislip 2005: 152).

The characterization of this demon is particularly interesting in relation to the problems caused by someone abandoning his responsibilities, and to the avoidance or subversion of the actions which are expected from the person as an individual and as a member of a social group. An Anglo-Saxon churchman writing a tale about heroes and monsters would have certainly been aware of such dangers.

The work of Evagrius, and his overall conception of a scheme of eight negative thoughts, alongside a list of remedies and instructions to confront them, did not reach the Latin West without difficulties and help. That came in the form of one of his most distinguished disciples, John Cassian (c. 360-435), who dealt with

⁷ All Translations of Evagrius from Sinkewicz (2003)

Evagrius' classification of the eight evil thoughts in *The Institutes* and *The Conferences* (c. 420-29). Of these two highly influential works, written in the South of France, *The Institutes* discusses one after another the eight vices, one vice to a book (Books 5-12), while in the first of *The Conferences* Cassian analyses the spiritual defences of anchorites against evil thoughts in *De Octo Vitiis Principalibus* (The eight principal vices) and *De Animae Mobilitate et Spiritualibus Nequitiis* (Evil spirits and the soul's changeability).

Cassian's account of the vices is more pedagogically-oriented than that found in his source, and his metaphors, such as the one that portrays the monk as an Olympic athlete, together with his entertaining digressions, perhaps make his exploration of Evil more accessible. Harmless (2004:384) notes how:

Cassian's exposition, when compared to Evagrius's dense and elliptical proverbs, seems spacious and lucid. Cassian has a knack for teasing out metaphors and illustrating abstract principles with commonsense examples that use the secular to illuminate the monastic.

If the work of Evagrius on the subject of identifying evil thoughts and ways to confront them had a great impact on the Middle Ages, through Cassian, then Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is a crucial figure for understanding the philosophical ethics and moral theology of the period.

In contrast to what he had believed as a young man, Augustine's answer to the problem of Evil opposes Manichaeism. The prophet Mani and his disciples believed in a dualistic religion that explained everything in the world as the result of a constant battle between two powerful primordial principles: Good and Evil, light (i.e. God) and darkness (i.e. Satan). The problem with such a theory for orthodox Christianity, which

otherwise successfully explained the presence of evil agency and suffering in the world, was that it questioned the omnipotence of God.

Augustine's rejection of gnostic dualism defends the concept that all beings are created good, but are subject to natural evils and the limitations of human "perfection", which is itself subordinated to their very own contingency as well as to time and deficiencies. Therefore things that fall short of the perfection to which their nature allows them to aspire, and with which they were created, experience a lack or *privatio*. Augustine explains those evils, which he considers "accidents", lucidly:

For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present – namely, the diseases and wounds – go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist.⁸

Gregory the Great's ontological optimism also claimed that Evil was finite while Good belonged to the order of God's perfection and was therefore infinite.⁹ Augustine's borrowing of Plotinus' notion that Evil is *Privatio Boni* does not imply, however, that humanity is not responsible for some of the Evil that takes place in the world:

Although natural defects cannot be blamed on anyone, *voluntary* defects *are* to be blamed on those agents who are able to choose between good and evil on account of their free will. Thus, moral evil, for which voluntary agents are duly held responsible, originates in a specific sort of defect, namely, the defective use, or rather abuse, of their

⁸ Translation of Augustine from Gyula Klima, Fritz Allhoff, and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya (2007) They use the following as source: *Enchiridion*, ed. P. Schaff. 2006 (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co) Augustine, chs. 10–13 (319–320)

⁹ See Silvas (2007)

God-given free will, when they deliberately subject themselves to some inordinate desire, choosing what they ought not to choose. (Klima 2007: 304)

One could argue then that mankind is, for Augustine, capable of 'have' or 'not have' moral control over free will, in other words, to do Good or to do Evil. The question, I believe, is rather more complex. In *De Libero Arbitrio* Augustine faces the problem of the existence of Evil through an analysis of the wrong choices made by humans and the misuse of free will. The Fall of mankind presents a problem for Augustine, who seems to suggest that, while humans have kept “a will” after the Fall, the extent to which this is free to choose to do good is hard to grasp and accept. The will is therefore limited and enslaved.

The freedom of the will, as the cause of moral Evil and moral goodness, is one of the most frequently discussed subjects in medieval literature and thought as it considers the interactions between divine providence and human responsibility.

Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* is also a pioneering work on the subject, and its importance for metaphysics, and the study of Grace and salvation exceeds the limits of this chapter. For Augustine, a Being could be absolutely corrupted in which case it would not *be* any longer: 'if it be wholly consumed by corruption, then the corruption itself must cease to exist, as there is no being left in which it can dwell'. The idea that the defection of the will is Evil and contrary to nature, which refuses to admit that evil things do exist (for example, for Augustine avarice is a fault that is not inherent in gold, but in the man who inordinately loves gold), will also throw some light on my analysis of the representations of Evil in the heroic poetry of the Anglo-Saxon period.

The last of the thinkers I want to deal with in this section, which briefly explores some of the most influential early discussions on the subject of Evil, is the

Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic and leading scholar of Charlemagne's court, Alcuin.

Alcuin of York (735-804), wrote *De Virtutibus et Vitiis*, a 35-chapter treatise on virtues and vices, around the year 800. In chapters 27 to 34, Alcuin classifies and deals with 'the eight vices'. He follows this with a final chapter that discusses the four cardinal virtues: courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. Long ago Luitpold Wallach noticed how the work was written with its recipient in mind: 'Wido, busily absorbed in *bellicis rebus*, receives a handbook (*manualis libellus*) which is to tell him what to do and what to avoid in his daily life' (Wallach 1955: 177).

This guide for a soldier presents a battle between the eight vices, the source of all evils, and the virtues, mirroring the structure and martial language of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. Alcuin was certainly familiar with the works of Prudentius, but also with those of Cassian, Aldhelm, Isidore and Gregory the Great.¹⁰ Their and imagery of a fight between moral adversaries is reproduced in the words of the Anglo-Saxon scholar. Alcuin follows Cassian's classification of the eight evil thoughts, although the order in which they appear is modified to place *Superbia* as the first and worst of all human vices, and ultimately, *Ira* is missing from Alcuin's *Confessio Peccatorum* in the *Officia per Fera*, turning eight into seven individual vices

Alcuin borrows heavily from *The Institutes* in *On Virtues and Vices*, a treatise which was to be widely copied and distributed from the ninth century onwards. A sense of continuity in the way moral Evil was understood, justified and represented can therefore be identified from the works of Evagrius, Cassian and Augustine

¹⁰ For possible sources of the sections on virtues and vices see (Wallach, 1955: 175-195). Wallach believes that 'The fundamental sources of Alcuin's catalogue of vices are Gregory, *Moralia* in Job XXXI,45,45 and Cassian, *Collatio* V,I and V,I6,5.46 The themes at the end of each chapter—the specific virtue overcoming its opposing vice – are supplied by Isidore, *Sententiae* II, 37.'

through to the texts of the Anglo-Saxon Alcuin. Humans, however, were not alone in God's inexplicable design of the world as understood in the Middle Ages. Monsters, some of them shared a common descent with the people whose lives they threatened, were inhabitants of the borders and liminal spaces. Literary encounters with the monstrous have always created fertile grounds for heroic figures facing Evil. Another key thinker of the early medieval period, Boethius, was well aware of the enigmatic nature of the problem of Evil and its association with the monstrous outsider. Thomas E. Hart points out that:

The Consolation and *Beowulf* share not only the concept of a shaping and measuring Designer-Creator, but also, crucially, the perennial problem of evil in what He created. In both poems evil is associated with monsters and monstrosity, in *Beowulf* notably the Grendel-kin as progeny of Cain and hence related to giants, in the *Consolatio* the mythological Gigantas traditionally described as warring against heaven (Hart 2010: 190).

Evil, Literature and the Middle Ages: Approaching the Monstrous *Other*

Among general studies dealing with Evil and literature, we must consider *La Littérature et le Mal*, by Georges Bataille, published in 1957, as a pioneer collection of essays on the subject. In this he reflects on the tight connection between Evil, literature and 'the sublime'. The book analyses a range of topics, such as violence, the erotic, or mythical and esoteric thinking, in the work of eight authors: Baudelaire, Emily Bronte, Kafka, Sade and Sartre among others. The last twenty-five years have witnessed a proliferation of numerous period-, author-, and aspect-specific articles and treatises on Evil and literature, while companions to 'the problem of Evil' seem to

belong to the domain of philosophy and religious studies.¹¹ Having said that, Gloria Cigman's *Exploring Evil: Through the Landscape of Literature* (2002) and *Villains and Villainy: Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media* (ed. Anna Fahraeus and Dikmen Yakah Çamoğlu: 2011), are just two good examples of the miscellaneous lucid works that have followed in the footsteps of Bataille.

Most of the literature that addresses the problem of Evil in early medieval texts does so through either the figure of the monster and the representational value of the non-human, or the demonic. The term 'Evil' is used broadly; sometimes as a synonym of 'everything bad', 'wrong doing' or 'wicked actions'; sometimes as an equivalent of natural, pure, radical or, 'banal' Evil. The problem of defining Evil is that, as pointed out earlier, it has become – or probably has always been - a protean concept. The fact that death, madness, illness, sorrow, villainy, viciousness, rivalry, harm, suffering, are used as near-synonyms, or instead of Evil, attests to its function as an umbrella term in literary studies, a discipline which seems to admit multiple semantic cognates.

A look at the definition of Evil in the OED, without even considering compounds, is quite telling in terms of the polyhedral nature of the concept.¹² If one

¹¹ It would be impossible to provide a comprehensive list here, but for an interesting selection of recent books dealing with evil and literature, see: *The darker world within: evil in the tragedies of Shakespeare and his successors* (Smith, M: 1991), *From chaos to enemy : encounters with monsters in early Irish texts : an investigation related to the process of Christianization and the concept of evil* (Borsje, J: 1996), *Evil and the Demonic: A New Theory of Monstrous Behavior* (Oppenheimer, P : 1996), *The devil and the sacred in English drama, 1350-1642* (Cox,J: 2000), *The apologetics of evil: the case of Iago* (Raatzsch, R: 2009), *Milton's good God: A study on literary theodicy* (Danielson, D.R: 2009) *On evil* (Eagleton, T: 2011), *The Structures of Law and Literature: Duty, Justice, and Evil in the Cultural Imagination* (Miller,J: 2013), *Evil: A History in Modern French Literature and Thought* (Catani, D: 2014)

¹² Simply for 'evil' n.1, the following definitions are given: **1a.** In the widest sense: that which is the reverse of good; whatever is censurable, mischievous, or undesirable. Also with adj.: moral evil, physical evil. **1b.** What is morally evil; sin, wickedness. **1c.** What is mischievous, painful, or disastrous. **2.** to do evil , †say evil. (In post-inflectional English hardly distinguishable from use of evil adv.) †with evil: with evil intention. †to take in, or to, evil : to take (a thing) ill; also, to be hurt by. **3.** With defining word: that which is evil in some particular case or relation; the evil portion or element of

searches for the word *Yfel* in the DOE, again without taking into account fragmentary hits or compounds, 1069 matches are found, 33 in the poetic corpus. Needless is to say that this is not the only word Anglo-Saxon poets used in order to convey the different senses of the word as we think of it today. A simple search of the word *nið*, just to provide a relevant example, produces 81 matches.¹³

As pointed out by Marilyn Michaud (2002: 187), ‘In some cases, the concept of evil (in literary criticism) is so tangential it is barely discernable’.¹⁴ In medieval texts early Christian writers found in the complex figure of the monster an opportunity for depicting *absolute Evil* and the contrast between the divine and the demonic. Grendel is a monster, but also a demon, and God and mankind’s archetypal enemy through his biblical lineage.

The subject of ‘medieval monstrosity’ has proved very popular in the last 25 years. B. Bildhauer and R. Mills (2003: 4) affirm confidently that ‘today medieval monsters are back in fashion, in academic contexts, at least’. The number of essays and studies on medieval monsters has increased substantially since the publication of

anything. Also quasi-*abstr.* as in *to see the evil of* (a course of action). **4.** *gen.* Anything that causes harm or mischief, physical or moral. *the social evil* : prostitution. †**5.** A wrong-doing, sin, crime. Usually *pl.* *Obs.* †**6.** A calamity, disaster, misfortune. *Obs.* **7a.** *gen.* A disease, malady. *Obs.* **7 b. the Aleppo evil** : ‘a disease, which first appears under the form of an eruption on the skin, and afterwards forms into a sort of boil’ (*Penny Cycl. XII. 12/2*). †*the foul evil* : the pox. †*the falling evil* : = ‘the falling sickness’, epilepsy. **7 c.** Short for king’s evil *n.*: scrofula. Also attrib. in †*evil gold*, the gold coin (see *angel n. 7*) given by the king to those touched by him for ‘the evil’.

¹³ Definitions of *nið* cited by Bosworth-Toller include (Emphasis mine):

- a) envy, hatred, enmity, rancor, spite, ill-will, jealousy
- b) action which arises from hatred, strife, war, hostility
- c) the effect of hatred, persecution, trouble, vexation, annoyance, affliction, tribulation, grief
- d) evil, wickedness, malice**

¹⁴ Evil in English Literature. 23rd All-Turkey English Literature Conference Proceedings. Istanbul University: Istanbul, 2002, 187)

J. B. Friedman's pioneering work *The Monstrous Races in Mediaeval Art and Thought* in 1981. A few revealing examples of such tendencies are: *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Cohen, J. J. : 1999), *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe* (ed. Olsen, K. E. and. Houwen, L. A. J. R. : 2001) *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (ed. Jones, T. S; Sprunger, D. A. : 2002) and *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (ed. Bildhauer, B. & Mills, R. : 2013)

These works are modern witnesses to the fascination felt by the Medieval European writer and artist for the grotesque and the marvellous. The existence of the monstrous races, however, was in many ways a “relative category”, an in-between experience which according to J. J. Cohen ‘became suspended between real and unreal, *bonus et malus*, (Good & Evil) grotesque and actual’ (Cohen, 1994: 29-30).

For Knapp (2010: 94), ‘Monsters are both absolutely unlike and remarkably like the human civilization they threaten, and this is true in both Germanic and Christian systems’. One could argue that early medieval society, confined by the memory of common pagan fears, was expressing individual and collective neurosis through the figure of the monster. However, has not every society throughout the history of humanity believed in monsters and the supernatural? And, if that is the case, should we not understand why and in what ways they are ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ the human in early medieval thought and collective imagination?

As we will see in the next chapter, it is true that the Anglo-Saxon scribes who wrote down the only surviving version of *Beowulf* used common adjectives for both hero and monsters, and provided motivation for each of the monsters’ attacks. It is also true, as R. M. Liuzza has pointed out, that in *Beowulf*:

The monsters outside the hall are projections of the evils within the hall. The battle against the inhuman forces of destruction outside the hall [...] do nothing to prevent the blossoming and flourishing of all-too-human evil within the hall (Liuzza 1999: 19).

Projections of very human evils they clearly are; however, monsters and heroes should not by any means be equated with one another, nor must they be identified or portrayed as virtually equal.

This is an issue that I will discuss in detail when analysing modern film adaptations of the Old English poem in the final chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, and however strongly I reject the aforementioned view on the poem, that which equates monsters and heroes, I must accept that our understanding of the monstrous for an early medieval audience is limited by time and by the very nature of what we have 'in front of us' to analyse, in this case, a story told in poetry. Seth Lerer's *Foucauldian* account of the appearance of the hilt in the hall of the monsters in *Beowulf* is worth quoting:

We can only live with monsters and their kin in writing: works that are as impotent as a bladeless sword or a bodiless head. Those monsters now are like the hilt itself. Both come as a written tale, able to enter the hall and hurt no one, to sit silently like a souvenir of an alien kingdom (Lerer 2006: 606).

From that alien kingdom we received creatures of mixed natures, which were frequently descended from Cain, and were occasionally depicted as close enough to mankind, physically and sometimes psychologically, for the possibility of human transformation into monsters to be plausible and believable. Monsters like Grendel are *unheimliche*, or uncanny, because they represent that which must be hidden but is suddenly revealed.

Alistair McLennan notes that if we think of:

the widespread medieval belief that posited that the monsters of the world shared a common descent with man through the biblical figure of Cain, [...] the difference between 'human' and 'monster' cannot be drawn entirely in terms of supposed racial difference (McLennan 2010: 7).

It seems to me, however, that there is an obsession in literary studies of the last decade - and please allow me some exaggeration here - to erase the line that differentiates between the human and the non-human. I will myself be arguing that this frontier is blurred in the Middle Ages, but will also be insisting on the importance of being able to recognise it. Richard Kearney, whose work on interpreting otherness I find remarkable and will therefore often quote in this thesis, explains the critical means that need to be deployed in order to 'explore modes of discerning between different kinds of self and different kinds of other'. (Kearney 2003: 5) Kearney wonders how we are to address otherness if it becomes indeterminate and unrecognizable to us, and so demands a critique of the *Other*:

Not all 'selves' are evil and not all 'others' are angelic. [...] Without such a double critique (of the *self* and the *other*) we can no longer speak of any relation between humans, or indeed between humans and non-humans (Kearney 2003: 10).

In other words, what Kearney is asking for is to discern critically between the *Other* that is simply different and needs our comprehension, and the *Other* that brings chaos and suffering and is in fact Evil. The second group is the one that interests me most in this thesis, particularly through the figure of the destructive monster, but the ambiguity of the first group will haunt the pages of my analysis.

Anglo-Saxons, like the Greeks and Romans before them, were familiar with the tales of unusual men and races who inhabited the East, in Friedman's terminology (1981: 5), 'the Plinian races'. Among those fabulous beings, Amazons, *Anthropophagi*, *Antipodes*, *Apple-Smellers*, *Blemyae*, *Cynocephali*, *Donestre*, *Giants*,

Sciopods or *Wife-Givers*, to mention just a few, featured prominently in Pliny's *Natural History* and in the legends of Alexander, making the marvels and wonders of the East popular in the West. The Alexander cycle was fed from the vast literature claiming to be the correspondence of Alexander with his supposed master, Aristotle, in which the former would describe to the latter the monstrous creatures encountered in his adventures.

Friedman notes how the 'the letter of Alexander to Aristotle on the wonders of India' belongs to the genre of fictitious-letter writing used in late imperial rhetorical training' together with 'the letter of Pharasmanes to the emperor Hadrian' (Friedman 1981: 7). It can be argued that some of the fabulous races depicted in the narratives about the Far East actually existed, and thus their classification as *monstrous* should be attributed to a misjudgement or error of perception by those travellers who first tried to narrate and account for their own visions of physical otherness.

As it is well known, the *Beowulf*-manuscript was bound together with four other texts written in the twelfth century: the incomplete *Judith* and *The passion of St. Christopher* plus *The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. Andy Orchard summarises the arguments put forward by numerous scholars during the last fifty years, who on the basis of linguistic and palaeographical evidence have concluded that the texts of *Judith* and *Christopher* are later additions and therefore no part of the original compilation (Orchard 1995: 2-4).

One could conclude, therefore, that if only *Beowulf*, *The Wonders* and *The Letter* were initially grouped together, the Nowell Codex was 'a book of/about monsters', as first pointed out by Kenneth Sisam (1953: 96). The several versions of *The Wonders* found in early medieval English manuscripts, the *Beowulf*- and

Tiberius-manuscripts and Oxford, Bodleian Library 614, derive ultimately, according to Orchard

from a text represented in mainly continental manuscripts in many different forms, almost all of which share a basic epistolary framework, in which either a character variously named Feramen, Feramus or Fermes writes to the Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-38), or a figure called Premo, Premonis, Perimenis or Parmoenis writes to Hadrian's predecessor, the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-116), to report on the many marvels he has witnessed on his travels (Orchard 1995: 23).

When it comes to *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, which precedes *Beowulf* in the manuscript, Orchard has tried to throw light on the text's reception in Anglo-Saxon England and its relevance for analysis of closely-related compositions such as the *Liber Monstrorum* and the remaining texts in the Nowell Codex. The abundance of materials on Alexander the Great in Anglo-Saxon England reflects a wide range of coexisting traditions, which portrayed Alexander either as a dangerous pagan tyrant or as a laudable discoverer and explorer. Orchard explains how the Old English translator of Orosius, who provided a negative depiction of Alexander, emphasized the leader's bloodthirsty, proud and monstrous attitude and his obsession with personal glory. However, and as in his role in *Wonders of the East*, in the *Liber Monstrorum*, which draws heavily on the Latin *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, Alexander is the enemy and slayer of monsters, which are always described as a continuing threat. The *Liber Monstrorum*, dated to c.650-c.750 by Michael Lapidge (Lapidge 1982: 164-5), follows in the steps of Augustine, Isidore and Pliny to deal with over a hundred monsters classified in three categories: monstrous men, beasts, and serpents.

Cohen notes that the composer of *Liber Monstrorum* was familiar with the *Beowulf* tradition, as the text opens 'with a nostalgic reflection on the dwelling space

of the monstrous in the modern world, then fills the gap opened by the triumph of the human over *monstra* by offering a long catalogue of unfailingly disturbing hybrid bodies' (1999: 28). Those forms, particularly that of the giant, are paradigmatic of the nature of the monstrous. This view shows which bodies, spaces and times society considers safe and rational, and which belong to spheres beyond humanity's control: the beast, the wilderness, the darkness of the night, all of them metaphors for Evil. These are the territories that heroes are forced to visit in order to prove their superiority over other mortals. And yet, if monsters stayed at the margins of either space or time, a medieval audience would have looked at them with curiosity and interest.

This is the case, I believe, with the creatures represented, through words or images, in the *Marvels* or the *Letter*, with the monsters of classical or Christian myth in the tolerant accounts of Pliny or Augustine through the lenses of the compiler, or those in the accounts of explorers cut off from the landscape of the Self.¹⁵ On the contrary, *Beowulf*, 'brings the monster(s) home'; they represent an Evil that inhabits the northern world of the poem as much as the audience of the poem does.

The monsters in *Beowulf* are not in the least like the monsters in *The Marvels of the East* or any other of the Mediterranean sources [...] these works have the fascination of the grotesque, like the two-headed calf at the fair; they depend upon their fantastic physical details for their appeal. In complete contrast, the adversaries in *Beowulf* are never visualized (Goldsmith, 1970: 99).

Goldsmith's appreciation of the monstrous in the poem is essential for the exploration of the representations of monsters in this thesis. My approach departs from other analysis of the monsters in *Beowulf* (such as Orchard's *Pride and Prodigies*), in that it

¹⁵ See Augustine's discussion of monsters and monstrous human births in *Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*. Bettenson (1984: 663-4)

discusses the confrontations of the heroic with Evil, and the type of otherness represented by Cain's kin and the dragon in the poem, while the remaining texts in the Nowell Codex are only referred to occasionally.

In *Beowulf*, I am as interested in the threat posed by the monstrous as I am in the heroic response to such danger, which I believe will cast light upon the judgement of the poem's hero. However, before I embark upon this task, I would like to discuss briefly another familiar figure in Anglo-Saxon poetry when Evil is the subject of discussion. It was during the first four centuries AD that both theologians and men of letters found a scapegoat, a fascinating literary character, who was easily identifiable by the time we reach the Anglo-Saxon period - the fiend in hell, the absolute embodiment of Evil in the western world: The Devil.

The Devil in Old English poetry: Finding a Scapegoat

Early Christian stories about martyrdom attest to the fact that Satan had become an instrument in order to explain the wicked actions of humanity. In the *Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James*, we read that:

They were assailed by the garrison soldiery with many cruel tortures, soldiers who are *murderers of the just and the good*, assisted in their viciousness by the centurion and the magistrates of Cirta, *priests indeed of the Devil*. And what tortures; how novel, and how cleverly *invented by the devil's poisoned mind* and by *the tricks with which he tries to overthrow*.¹⁶ (Emphasis mine)

The Devil, affirms Peter Dendle:

¹⁶ "The Devil's work? Human and diabolical evil in early Christian stories about martyrdom." Translated by Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe (Paper from the Conference: Evil: interdisciplinary explorations. Oxford: 2014)

is the most frequently appearing character in Old English poetry, and possibly in all Old English literature. Anglo-Saxon authors, poets, and translators evidently felt that reified representations of Evil formed an integral component of mythological narrative (2001: 3).

The literary character of the Devil represents a fluid and liminal figure that wanders through overlapping regions of time and space. The figure of Satan, which may have originated in some oriental cosmology, as Paul Ricoeur suggested in *Symbolique du Mal* (1960), provided an enemy for the Jewish god who acted as the villain of a celestial drama, a “game of thrones” outside time that anticipated the relationship between the deity and mankind.

The Devil is associated with the principle of Evil and evil agency in Anglo-Saxon poetry, characterized as a proud leader of a demonic *comitatus*, defined by a corrupted will, envy and pride, but described with heroic conventions and epic imagery.¹⁷ Lucifer is a rebel who has betrayed his loyalty and obedience towards God in the Old English *Genesis*. As Rosemary Wolf emphasized in her seminal essay ‘The Devil in Old English Poetry’, because of the characteristics already attributed to him by the Church Fathers ‘the Devil had natural affinities with characters in both northern mythology and northern literature’. He was a figure which would not have seemed foreign to ‘a people whose ancestors had worshipped boastful, quarrelling gods themselves doomed by fate to be destroyed’ (Wolf 1953:1-3). Moreover Satan, as a rebel who wanted to be as powerful and unique as the divinity, was portrayed as an imitator, an example of the figure of Evil trying to subvert the natural order. Joyce

¹⁷ Joyce M.Hill (1975: 7) notes regarding the mention of pride as the Devil’s main cause for rebellion that in Old English poetry, pride is mentioned in (for example) ‘*Christ and Satan* 50, 69, 226; *Guðlac* 663-65; *Juliana* 424; *Resignation* 56; and *Vainglory* 57-64.’

M. Hill (1975:5) explains how Anglo-Saxon poets followed Christian tradition in presenting not only Satan but also ‘Adam and Eve, and Cain in varying degrees as imitators’ to which ‘the Beowulf poet added a fifth in Grendel’.

The Devil, as noted above, is also held responsible for the ills of the community, becoming society’s scapegoat. Alaric Hall discusses how in a remedy found in Leechbook III, *Wið ælfcynne*, a salve is prepared for ‘those people whom the/a devil has sex with’.¹⁸ Hall notes that the ambiguity of the sentence (*þā menn þe dēofol mid hæmð*) could lead to an interpretation in which it would ‘denote the victims of rape by the Devil or devils, or it could denote people who, by willingly having sex with devils or the devil, gain powers to do harm’¹⁹ (Hall, 2007: 127). Either interpretation attests to the role of the Devil and his ‘demonic *comitatus*’ as scapegoats and therefore responsible for diabolical interaction or possession leading to human Evil, understood as either agency (the ability to harm) or suffering (hence, a cure is needed). Humans are not freed from responsibility over their own actions but their ‘fall(s)’ are understood within a frame of forgiveness and redemption denied to the demonic. Alcuin noted that ‘the more exalted the angel was in glory, the greater shall be his ruin; but the weaker man is in nature, the more easily shall he be pardoned’.²⁰ The gap between mankind and angelic representation, however, points at the flaws in humanity, so far removed from God’s perfection. Bildhauer and Mills (2003: 14) have joined Elliott (1999) in noticing how ‘medieval demonology created

¹⁸ See Leechbook III, section 61, f. 123: *Wið ælfcynne*. Text and translation as found in Hall (2007: 126-27)

¹⁹ A. Hall believes that the second interpretation, even if it would make us assume an extremely early attestation of such practice, ‘it could reflect popular ideas to some degree’ (Hall, 2007: 127)

²⁰ See Hill (1975: 7): [Quia] angelus sui sceleris inventor fuit; homo vero alterius fraude seductus [fuit]. Item, quanto sublimior angelus in gloria, tanto major in ruina: homo vero quanto fragilior in natura, tanto facilius ad veniam.

an explanatory resource for exploring the distinctions between impossible ideals and their flawed, human expressions'.²¹

The Devil of the first age of the world never appears in Old English verse like one of the ends of a dualistic or Manichean approach to the question of Evil, but wears the face of a figure which shows the influence of Patristic literature through the writings of Augustine, Gregory or Isidore among others. Evil is therefore presented, as explained in the previous section, as *Privatio Boni*, and Satan's responsibility for tempting Adam and Eve, and his role in Christ's crucifixion are nothing but a misuse of his corrupted power and will. If the Devil can also tempt humanity is because God allows so in order to test human will in the face of truth and sin. Having said that, I believe that a Germanic context in the Anglo-Saxon texts adds a different dimension to the character of Satan, providing a perfect landscape for the interactions between the Human and the Demonic at a time in which the physical and functional conceptualization of the mythical and literary character of the Devil was still not completely defined and determined.

In *Genesis B*, God is portrayed as the archetypal Anglo-Saxon King. Conde-Silvestre has observed that the vocabulary used by the poet points to the leader of a community to whom a group of followers owe loyalty: God is *heahcynning*, *ece dryhten*, and *þeoden* (Conde-Silvestre 2003: 58). The bright angels of radiant beauty are corrupted by their *oferhygd* and *gielp*, that is, by their excessive pride and vainglory. The very Miltonian Satan of the Anglo-Saxon *Genesis* refuses any act of repentance when defeated. If one is to admire the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, notes Eagleton (2010: 121), it is due to 'his more positive qualities (courage, resilience, resoluteness, and so on) rather than from anything specifically evil about him'. Bound

²¹ For further details and discussion see Elliot (1999: 2)

in hell, the Devil of the Old English poem still challenges the actions and power of God, and his feelings are guided by revenge, pride and the trust put in his own thanes. One of them is sent to tempt the first human beings and the evil agency of Satan is represented despite the contradictory fact of a Devil who is bound and active at the same time.

The demons' main weapon is their ability to corrupt humanity's soul and will through words, as the confrontation with God's 'replacement' for the fallen angels is spiritual rather than physical, and therefore the very concepts of time and space are blurred. Against such perverse words, humanity's best defence is to utter God's own words through the prayer of the Pater Noster, as we will see clearly described in the Old English *Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*.

However, useful as the Devil might be as a character in representing Evil, the enigma concerning responsibility for the very existence of Evil on earth was still unresolved. Patristic tradition influenced Anglo-Saxon works from Alfred's OE version of the *Pastoral Care* in the ninth century to the eleventh century *Penitential of Theodore*, in portraying human evil as an imitation of the demonic sins of pride and envy.²² Therefore, the concept of the Devil gave the opportunity to add a third agent to God and humanity in the search for an answer to the everlasting question: *Unde malum?* Others like the German philosopher Rüdiger Safranski would argue that 'there is no need to turn to the Devil in order to understand Evil. Evil belongs to the drama of human freedom'.²³

²² See J. M. Hill (1975:9)

²³ From *Das Böse oder das Drama der Freiheit* (1997). This is my own rendering of the Spanish translation of the text in *El Mal o el drama de la libertad* translation by Raúl Gabás (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2010), 13

Tertullian, one of the founders of western theology, affirmed that nothing could happen without God's will, and that in the matter of the Persecution, approval and rejection was the Lord's Judgement, and therefore could not be imputed to the Devil.²⁴ But why then, if there was an all-good ruler of the universe, as Boethius asks Wisdom, can we still see and experience Evil all around us? As pointed out before, this question has kept many great philosophers and theologians busy before, during, and after the Middle Ages, and the number and variety of responses to the problem defy classification: from Augustine to Ricoeur, Aquinas to Kant, Hegel to Marx, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Kristeva and an endless list of illustrious thinkers.

With that in mind, the questions I am trying to answer throughout the initial chapters of this thesis are the following: How did Anglo-Saxon poets portray and understand Evil in heroic literature, particularly in *Beowulf*, whether this might be moral or absolute/pure Evil? How could such evil(s) be overcome, if at all possible? Finally, in what way did such representations affect the heroic ethos and the treatment of time, and space in those poems?

Understanding the Double Nature of Evil as Wrongdoing and Suffering: *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*

The Solomon and Saturn dialogues in Old English (SolSat) have been described as obscure, enigmatic, complex, difficult to interpret, rare and peculiar within the Anglo-Saxon literary landscape, and also as a compendium of pagan and Christian superstition. They might be the work of a confused and confusing poet, texts, in the words of Mary Nelson (1984: 57-66) , 'full of wonders and full of wondering'.

²⁴ See Tertullian *On Flight in Time of Persecution 1*

Oriental mysticism and Irish influences might cast some light upon such wondering, but only to a certain extent. We should not forget that we have as many as four Old English texts in which Solomon and Saturn appear as interlocutors in a question-and-answer structure characterized by the wisdom of the first and the curiosity and eagerness for knowledge of the second. It is hard not to think of *Vafþrúðnismál*, in the poetic Edda, for a structural parallel in which pagan cosmology and ancient lore are discussed in a contest of wits. Unusual as the dialogues might be, I have to agree with C. D. Wright when he points out that ‘one Solomon and Saturn Debate might be a quirk, but four suggest a taste’ (1993: 233).

We find the first part of *SolSatI* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, a mid-eleventh century manuscript, while the two poetic dialogues, the prose *Pater Noster Dialogue* and a poetic fragment are also found in Cambridge, in Corpus Christi College 422, which dates from the mid-tenth Century. To those four separate texts we could add another dialogue presenting the same speakers, found in Cotton Vitellius A. xv. However according to most scholars who have analysed and edited the poem throughout the years, T. D. Hill (1988, 1992) and D. Anlezark (2009) for example, the text found in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript does not seem to come from the same tradition and close literary circle that produced the other texts. The Old English *SolSat* dialogues have been entirely or partially edited and translated into modern English at least six times. John Mitchell Kemble’s edition for the Aelfric Society was the first to be published, as early as 1848, with Daniel Anlezark’s 2009 edition, with a translation and insightful introduction, the most recent of the six.

Although this sub-section may seem something of a digression, the Old English *Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* are very useful poetic texts for the analysis of the double nature of Evil in Old English poetry, as both wrongdoing and suffering.

At the same time, I believe that a better understanding of the two poetic dialogues can be obtained through an exploration of the way Evil is described, represented and fought against in them.

Let me start then by reflecting on the fact that it is only in the Old English *SolSat* dialogues, as opposed to later “solomonic dialogues”, that the opponent of Solomon is Saturn. The fame and wisdom of Solomon is very well-known; wise ruler in the Old Testament, powerful magician, author of the *Song of Songs*, imagined and reimagined throughout the Middle Ages to the point of becoming a hero of courtly romance, an inspiration for Merlin, and possibly - I would argue - for Tolkien’s Gandalf. The vast literature about Solomon moved from the East to the West with the centuries, but traces of oriental elements remained in his depiction. The religious tradition representing him as the wise king was characterized by two recurrent episodes of the legend: firstly Solomon’s conversations with demons whom he defeats and from whom he acquires power and knowledge, and secondly tests of his wisdom by another powerful figure, whether that is the Queen of Sheba, Hiram (the King of Tyre) or more interestingly Marcolf/Morolf. Marcolf is the character mentioned as debating with Solomon in all later medieval dialogues.

Menner (1941:28) notices how the name of Marcolf ‘was still familiar in the sixteenth century to such different names as Luther and Rabelais’. These dialogues were popular for years and versions have been preserved in German, Danish, Norwegian, Portuguese and Italian, to mention just a few. Even more remarkable is the fact that in *Solomon and Saturn II* the poet mentions ‘Marculfes eard’, as one of the places visited by Saturn in his search for wisdom. It is almost impossible to know how the Anglo-Saxon dialogues, serious in tone, came to be transformed into the humorous versions, in which the grotesque Marcolf parodies Solomon’s wise sayings,

of later medieval sources. From the fourth-century Greek *Testament of Solomon* to the Old English dialogues, written about five to six centuries later,²⁵ it is hard to trace the evolution of the legend as no other text on the matter has been conserved, apart a reference in the Gelasian decretal lists to a prohibited work that received the name of *Contradictio Salomonis*. How the legend came to England is also difficult to know.

Latin versions could have come directly from the Continent, but I am tempted to believe together with Anlezark, A. Orchard and others that we should consider Ireland as the channel of transmission. Menner thought that

the Celtic Church, because of its isolation and independent tradition might have preserved apocryphal legends savouring of demonology which disappeared elsewhere when condemned by ecclesiastical authority (1941:30).

The question still remains, however, why do we have Saturn and not Marcolf as one of the speakers in the Old English dialogues which, after all, provide the earliest material evidence of the dialogues around the traditional figure of Solomon in Western Europe?

Most likely both names as they appear in the manuscripts are adaptations of Latin names for Roman Gods affected by Germanic morphology. Therefore the Marcol of the dialogues is, according to Anlezark, a borrowing from the Latin Mercurius through the Hebrew name 'Marcolis'. Although critics have supported this theory for the origin of the name, they remain unsure how to account for the duality of the Solomon-Saturn and Solomon-Marcol types of dialogue. Was Saturn the original interlocutor of the wise man in the dialogues, substituted by Marcol in later sources?

²⁵ Anlezark (2009: 49-57) believes that the *SolSat* poems were composed between the end of ninth C and first few decades of the tenth, before 930, by a speaker of West Saxon whose dialect had incorporated Mercian elements.

Was it the other way around? Were there two coexisting traditions from the classical world into the sixteenth century and beyond?

A satisfactory answer, I believe, is given by both Menner (1941) and Anlezark (2009). Both note that the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister, composed in the late eighth century, portrays the Turkish people worshipping a pile of stones that ‘they call Morcholon in their language, that is star of the Gods, which they call Saturn by a derived name’.²⁶ What the poet of the Old English text is doing is to use an alternative name for Solomon’s partner in the dialogues, Saturn instead of Marcol. This does, of course, raise questions about the audience of the texts and the learned nature of the poems, but these must be left aside. Rather, I want to turn to the concept of time as dealt with in the OE *SolSat* poems, in relation to how Evil is dealt with in those texts.

Ælfric in *De Falsis Diis* writes about ‘a man-giant dwelling on the island of Crete, called Saturn, violent and cruel, so that he ate his sons when they were born, and in an unfatherly way made their flesh his food’²⁷. This euhemerized monstrous treatment of Saturn is not shared by the Anglo-Saxon poet, although it is true that Saturn offers his twelve sons and gold to Solomon in exchange for knowledge. The *Saturnus* of our poet is a Chaldean and therefore, as Anlezark (2009: 32) underlines, ‘is associated with pagan philosophy and science, with astrology and with magic’. Also like in the OE Boethius and in Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, Saturn of the Chaldeans is identified with the builders of Babel. This throws some light on the Nimrod and the

²⁶ Anlezark mentions *Aethici Istric Cosmographia Vergilio Slisburgensi rectius adscriptia. Codex Leidensis Scaligeranus* 69, ed. T.A. M. Bishop, *Umbrae Codicum Occidentium* 10 (Amsterdam, 1969); and also *Die Kosmograhie des Aethicus*, ed. O. Prinz, *MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* 14 (Munich, 1993)

²⁷ See Pope (1967): II. 676-712, Lines 99-112.

Wulf episode in the second of the poetic dialogues. Nimrod was a giant, and the Philistines mentioned in the poem were the race of Goliath the Giant. Saturn was also believed to be a giant and perhaps Wulf himself, slayer of twenty-five dragons, was a hero of gigantic size. A. Orchard believes that the *SolSat* poet was familiar with the discussion of Babel and the Titans in *The Old English Boethius*, which would add support to this theory.

Moreover, Saturn is described in the tenth-century school text *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* as ‘wearing the face of a dragon, the gaping jaws of a lion, a crest made of the teeth of a boar, causing horror and destruction in his fury’ (Anlezark 2009: 33-34). If Solomon is clearly linked to the building of the Temple of Jerusalem, Saturn is a destroyer and one identified with those that try to build against the will of God, as in Babel, those full of pride and ultimately builders of empty spaces, and architects of nothing, a definition that matches the features of evil characters. Although Saturn is not explicitly described as Evil in the OE poems, the poet and the audience would not have been unaware of such connections. As the wisest and oldest of the classical Gods, Saturn/Chronos was undoubtedly tied to the very notion of time and transitoriness, something that ironically seems to worry him deeply in the OE dialogues. In *SolSatII*, Saturn asks (ll. 104-109):

What is that strange thing that travels throughout this world, sternly goes, beats the foundations, arouses tears, often forces its way here? Neither Star nor stone nor the broad gem, water nor wild beast can deceive it, but into its hand go hard and soft, the great and the small (Anlezark 2009: 85).

Yldo Beoth, Solomon replies, Old Age - in other words time. As we read in the Prose Edda book *Gylfaginning*, not even the Norse God Thor can defeat *Yldo Beoth's* equivalent, Elli, in a wrestling match.²⁸

Saturn is portrayed in the dialogues as an exile, a traveller, and if we add to that the cannibalistic nature of this figure in legend and myth, he would be judged as Evil and as an outsider *Other*, from both a Christian and a Germanic understanding of what an inhabitant of a public space should be, not unlike Grendel in *Beowulf*. *Chronos*, in a myth that originally discusses the nature of time and the idea of ageing, is portrayed as a kin-slayer, devouring his own children. Grendel has to be read as an assassin of his own kin, as he is a descendant of Cain and, very much like Chronos, is fed but never satisfied. The term *Kronos*, 'time or a lapse of time', symbolizes the very nature of transience in life, a great concern for Anglo-Saxon poets and their audiences.

SolSatII is challenging to the modern reader who tries to understand its obscure references. There are also challenges to Solomon himself, as he is asked not only about two other concepts related to time - fate and mutability - but also about the very nature of Good and Evil. We read in Bede's death song that

Before the inevitable journey no man shall grow more discerning of thought than his need is, by contemplating before his going hence what, good or evil, will be adjudged to his soul after his death-day (Bradley 1982: 6).

Saturn asks 'Why does the worse person lives longer? Why can't we all go into God's Kingdom? Why aren't all men good men even within the same family? Why can't we change fate? Is the human being Free to choose?' All these questions address the

²⁸ See Faulkes (1987)

problem of Evil more directly than any other text in the Old English poetic corpus. For Saturn the facts that the worse man, the wrong-doer, lives longer than the virtuous one and that not all men are naturally good human beings even if created by an all-powerful God, do not seem to make sense. According to Terry Eagleton (2010), when we discuss wickedness, the less sense it makes, and the more Evil it is, because Evil has no relations to anything beyond itself and therefore there is no cause for it.

The OE *Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, I would argue, are better understood when we analyse how the poet through the figure of Solomon addresses the features of Evil. The two poetic dialogues represent two different but closely intertwined ways of approaching the problematic enigma of Evil. A) the first dialogue (and the *Prose Pater Noster*, for that matter) deals with Evil understood as an external agent that needs to be fought against, that is, Evil as wrongdoing, as a personification of Evil that is bound to destruction. B) The second dialogue tries to account for Evil as suffering, as Evil explained or beyond explanation. In that way the definition that Eagleton gives for Evil is fully explored: 'Evil, is all about the death but about the death of the evildoer as much as that of those he annihilates' (2010: 18).

SolSatI presents to us the threat posed by the image that 'Evil would actually prefer that there was nothing at all' but since things actually exist, thanks to divine creation, 'the best Evil can do is try to annihilate them' (Eagleton, 2010: 60). Good Christians can and should therefore fight and confront Evil but, in order to do that, an external personified *Other* which in this case takes the form of the paradigmatic Christian enemy, Satan, is presented. The fall of the angels (alongside the doctrine of original sin) is frequently used in Christian exegesis to account for the roots of Evil (as explored briefly in the previous section) through the figure of the Devil. The poet of Solomon and Saturn, in order to foster an active response against Evil transforms

the *Pater Noster* into something more powerful than a prayer, one that ends with ‘*sed libera nos a malo*’ which was likely interpreted by early fathers as ‘The evil one’ rather than Evil in general.

The poet, perhaps in order to speak to those accustomed to the use of pagan incantations and charms against diseases such as the ones we can find today in the Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks or in *Lacnunga*, transforms the *Pater Noster* into a sort of *Lorica*, a breastplate. This is, at the same time, depicted as an actual leader in battle who uses the Latin alphabet and Germanic runes as his weapons to defeat armed warriors.²⁹ The permeable line between wisdom and heroic literature is definitely blurred in the poem. Those runic letters might reflect traces of the magician that Solomon appeared to be in Talmudic and Cabbalistic writings, of the Solomon of legend rather than the one we find in later religious tradition. The Jews, according to Menner (1941:47) used psalms for magical purposes (for example Psalm XCI, ‘Song against Demons’), making the texts into protective amulets.³⁰

SolSatI is a wisdom poem concerned with arcane lore, riddles, and the apotropaic powers of the letters and runes included in the personified *Pater Noster*. The poet finds a nice balance between the Christian Latin learned tradition and the native poetic lore and learning, represented here through the magic *stafas* or twigs once used for divination and undoubtedly related to the Germanic god Woden. Nevertheless, the text does not suggest that praying is enough on its own to conquer Evil but it is the individual praying, whether monk or warrior, who needs to act

²⁹ For further discussion on the sequence of letters of the Pater Noster in *SolSat* see Jonassen (1988: 1-9)

³⁰ See Menner Introduction pp. 21-26. Both Menner and Anlezark provide in depth accounts of the legend of Solomon, how it spread around the continent and how it is reflected on the poems, as well as an explanation of the character of Saturn and his possible origins.

rightly and bravely without forgetting that ultimately it is God who guarantees protection.

‘The evil one’, says the poem (ll. 161-167),

etches on the warrior’s weapon a multitude of fatal marks, harmful letters, curses the blade, the glory of the sword. Therefore no man must draw out the weapon’s edge without forethought but ever must he sing, when he draws his sword, the *Pater Noster* (Anlezark 2009: 71).

The *Beowulf*-poet would subscribe to such an affirmation, which not only addresses the ideal of *Sapientia et fortitudo*, but also warns believers about the ambivalence of runes and words. The poet, both through the figures of Solomon and Saturn, insists on the power of the written word, of books and knowledge in the two dialogues but he can also see how dangerous they can become when used for evil purposes. A creature equipped with language, and the ability to create from it is extremely powerful. The battle presented in *SolSatI* is somehow reminiscent of those in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*. in which virtues fight vices. To judge by the extravagance of expression, the tone, and the use of specific vocabulary on the field of metalwork, an Irish influence seems more than plausible, as suggested by Wright (1999), Menner (1941) or Anlezark (2009).

In the character of Solomon, who indirectly retains his power over demons, we can see how the poet has kept some of the features of the oriental legend. Letters, not unlike a celestial *comitatus*, fight and overcome the Devil and his demonic horde, injuring, piercing, scourging, smashing and twisting their bodies, tormenting Satan with boiling drops of blood.³¹ Whatever the sources for the text, what interests me

³¹ For an insightful discussion of this motif see Hill (1993: 157-166)

more here is not so much how Satan is made the scapegoat responsible for humanity's woes, as explained above, but rather the approach taken. This is not fatalistic, as it encourages the poem's readers or hearers to learn and use the *Pater Noster* in the first place, and to take an active role in the struggle against Evil following the example provided by the letters in the prayer itself. Menner found the use of the Lord's Prayer in the poems "superstitious", when compared with the teaching-oriented prose renderings by Ælfric or Wulfstan. Any laymen who understood that the *Pater Noster* could work as a protection against spiritual and physical evil as well as against the tempting power of the Devil, would have seen in the *Dialogues* a performative quality which would emphasize the need for both words and actions.

In *SolSatII*, through the questions asked by Saturn on the very nature of things, those which affect every man who has ever lived, the poet deals with Evil as suffering and loss. We might expect that a Christian view of life, against a background of universal questions, would aim to provide answers to themes typical of Germanic poetry: fate, loss, exile, *wyrd*. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe (1991) has suggested that the poem's exploration of light, shadow, being and nothing could be a reflection of philosophical speculations in the circle of Alcuin.

We know that Fredegisus, Alcuin's student, claimed that *nihil*, because it has a name, must actually exist. Fredegisus' letter *De nihilo et tenebris*, written around the year 800, examines, as the titles suggests, the nature of nothingness and darkness. John Marebon (1981: 63) notices Fredegisus' fascination with the techniques of logic 'for their own sake' and the use of 'a host of biblical references to *nihil* and *tenebrae* which are used to confirm the real existence of these concepts'. His analysis of Universals, like that of the more sophisticated John Scottus Eriugena, draws on passages from Augustine. Both of them tried to explain the nature of light and

shadow, as did Isidore. Eriugena would also defend the position that God could only be described as pure vacuity and only in terms of what *he is not*.

Whoever composed the poetic dialogues of Solomon and Saturn in Old English had the same questions in mind. The poet mentions death, darkness, the solitude of the exile, in short, the elements and ‘terrors’ that Lyotard has associated with the danger of impending destruction. To these, Richard Kearney has added the *privatio boni* or the terror of Evil, as will be explained in the next chapter, in connection with Beowulf. *Quae si non erant, qua consequentia dicitur quia erant*, argues Fredegisius about ‘darkness’. A very similar question could be asked about Evil: If evil did not exist, by what warrant is it said that it ‘was’.³²

Ac saege me hwaet naeren the waeron, says Solomon in the poem translated as ‘what is and is not’ by Menner (1941), or as ‘what things were not that were’ by Anlezark (l. 161) The answer, I suggest, could easily be ‘Evil’, or any other negative concept, although Saturn answers Solomon’s question with another very significant question, ‘But why can’t the sun shine brightly across the ample creation?’ In other words why do shadows exist? The poet goes back to the limits of human knowledge to try and answer all the questions posed by Saturn. For him reason, faith and human freedom are bound closely together. Fate according to Solomon is changed with difficulty. The second poem seems to suggest that humanity has to live with suffering and act cheerfully and do good in order to be rewarded after Doomsday. Possibly, I would add, the author is telling his audience that they need to accept the appalling unreality of Evil suffered, its (not) being and therefore the frustration derived from the impossibility of locating it and the irremediable need to confront it. It needs to be

³²I am following O’Keeffe’s translation as given in Anlezark’s commentary to his translation of the *SolSat* poems (2009:129)

accepted as God's plan and understood together with the notions of time and transitoriness of earthly life. Eagleton's exploration of Evil discusses how

there are certain negative features of the human species which cannot be greatly altered. As long as there is love and death, the tragedy of mourning those dear to us who perish will know no end (2010: 37).

The poem offers hope, however, through the figure of the wise Solomon to those Christians who share in God's lantern – even though they might feel tempted, as Saturn did, to ask the same old questions about why do wrongdoers prosper? Why does the innocent child die? And ultimately, why me, Lord? It is difficult not to think of Job's complaint to Yahvé (Ricoeur 2007: 43), confessing his anguish before the radical enigma of Evil, or to imagine indeed the desperate Anglo-Saxon who is encouraged to sing the *Pater Noster* of the first *SolSat* dialogue in a moment of loneliness, grief, or sorrow, a passenger embarking on an impossible journey in search for knowledge.

Evil and Old English Heroic Poetry: Storytelling and Evil

If the *SolSat* dialogues in Old English give us the opportunity to discuss the double nature of Evil from a mainly theoretical perspective, heroic poetry presents us with an elaborate staging of heroic efforts to overcome evil deeds and their perpetrators. In the introduction to his *Beowulf* translation, David Wright (1957: 9) points out that '*Beowulf*'s theme is the conflict of good and evil. It is an expression of the fear of the dark, an examination of the nature and purpose of heroism, and the great statement of the Anglo-Saxon outlook and imagination'. Anglo-Saxons showed a predilection for maxims and proverbs, and as Fulk and Cain (2003: 166) note, 'the aphoristic mode pervades Old English literature, and so there is hardly a work that does not in some

degree belong to the category “wisdom literature”.’ Heroic poetry, whether in the form of Christianised Germanic legend or Lay, or in the material found in Biblical literature and Saints’ lives, is no exception. Poetry of the gnomic type is not rare in Old English and collections such as *Maxims I* (30-34) deal with universals (particularly part A: 1-136) including discussions on natural and moral philosophy, for example:

New-born complements when disease first takes away; thus there are just as many of the human race in the world, nor would there be a limit to the progeny upon earth if he did not diminish it who established the universe (Bradley 1982: 346).

Ailments and afflictions, usually ‘sheltered’ under the umbrella term of Evil, are here explained as part of God’s design for the world.

However, diseases were also attributed to the arrows of supernatural beings, mainly elves but also smiths and witches, in Anglo-Saxon charms and miscellaneous medical texts. Alaric Hall (2004) has reassessed the evidence for the term *ælfe*, as against early twentieth-century scholarship, in order to show ‘what elves were thought to be and for what uses or effects those concepts had in Anglo-Saxon culture’ (2004:17). Hall sees in *Beowulf* (ll.102-114), in which *ylfe* are mentioned alongside *eotenas*, *orcneas* and *gigantas*, a description of the binary opposition between men and monsters, the later being excluded from the in- or self-group. Elves seem to appear here as evil creatures although early Old English and Old Norse seem to have portrayed them as fighting monsters, rather than as on their side.

The misfortunes of humanity are discussed in other poems such as *The Gifts of Men* and *The Fortunes of Men* in the Exeter book. The Old English elegies also deal with similar themes, many derived from patristic thought, such as the experience of

loss, exile, lament, desolation, anguish, and the transience of earthly joys.³³ However, these “evils” of the worldly life are also present in heroic verse, as such concepts inhabit the entire poetic corpus. I believe that visualising Evil through monstrous representations can provide a deeper understanding of an enigmatic concept which is better grasped when it takes on a recognisable shape, such as that of a giant, a dragon. Although in the following chapters I will focus on the most representative poem from those texts that inherited a Pre-Christian past to tell a story about the heroic confronting Evil, the varieties of narrative in Old English poetry could lead to further research into the concept and problem of Evil in a variety of texts.

For example, when one considers vernacular saints’ legends in verse and their treatment of the heroic and the struggle against Evil, Cynewulf’s *Elene* and *Juliana* both feature heroines who are in one way or another represented as active figures facing the demonic. As R. Andersson has put it, it is not only ‘the Anglo-Saxon fascination with devils, but also the saint’s (Juliana’s) transformation of a seemingly passive virtue of virginity into an active conquest of evil that makes the contest with the demon the dramatic centre of the poem’ (2005: Andersson, Fulc & Cain: 100). Similarly, *Andreas*, by an anonymous poet, features heroic contests and bloodthirsty enemies, including a devil that taunts and torments the holy man for days. The poem’s orality and literacy have been matters of intense debate for decades, especially regarding what appears to be direct borrowing from *Beowulf*. The similarities are many and have been studied thoroughly, but the way the saint fights Evil, whether demonic or human, owes much to its direct source, the apocryphal Acts of Andrew and Mathew, and Andreas acts and attacks on God’s advice undermining his heroic prowess.

³³ See Anne L. Klinck (1992)

Thus *Elene*, *Juliana* and *Andreas* are all versified saints' lives in which we find a stress on the contrast between heroes and adversaries. They portray the demonic and are highly influenced by the conventions of heroic Germanic verse, Nonetheless they are, after all, adaptations or renderings of classical sources, mainly Latin ones. Unlike vernacular prose hagiographies, the poems go beyond a summary of the source. They add to it, they adapt, remove and transform certain elements, but they also distinctly resemble texts written outside the cultural and literary boundaries of Anglo-Saxon England. These Christian poems are well suited to heroic treatment but, if one had to select, verses in which the Germanic element is more evident and the diction of the native verse form is given free rein (Fulk and Cain, 2005) would be better candidates for an exploration of the nature of Evil caused and experienced.

Judith is a more interesting text as the heroine is a hybrid character, neither a Saint nor a heroic warrior, and so seems to reconcile the sacred and secular powers denied to the other *eadhreðig* female figures, Elena and Juliana. Elena relies on Judas for the sacred authority that she lacks, Juliana can only defeat demons and the elements of nature through her armour of faith. Judith is closer to a Germanic noblewoman than to a virgin martyr, and yet the religious element permeates the entire poem. If Judith is not wholly Germanic or wholly Christian, one could equally argue that her actions present us with a character which is not fully feminine or masculine, at least as gender was understood within the historical and literary milieu of the time. However, others have seen much less ambiguity in the encounter between the heroine and Holofernes, and have approached the poem as a straightforward battle between the agents of God and Satan (Astell, 1999) Whatever one's point of view, a deeper exploration of how Evil, through the figure of the definitely monstrous Holofernes and his wicked infidel men, is fought against and defeated by the devices

of a heroic code which emphasises action - rather than the source's focus on seduction and explicit divine power - would be definitely worth conducting.

Guthlac was an English noble, monk and hermit, and apart from Ælfric, the poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* constitute the only account in the vernacular of the life of a native saint. *Guthlac A* is of particular interest for its portrayal of the contest between the saint and the demons, within a context where the attractions of the fleeting world and the promises of the hereafter are confronted. But even more important, demons here are not exactly intruders into the world of men as they claim possession over the land the saint comes to occupy. The attitude of the demons, and the reasons behind it, are problematic. This kind of evil is worthy of more analysis, and I will return to this point in the discussion of 'landscapes of Evil' in *Beowulf*.

Two more poems, *Christ and Satan* and *Genesis A*, both offer depictions of Satan that might make the curious reader wonder whether there is a certain degree of 'sympathy for the Devil' in Old English biblical narrative, when this character assumes responsibility for the Fall of humankind. Evil is very rarely two-dimensional in life and literature, and even archetypal representations of evil characters may retain a certain degree of humanity, unveiling shadows and traces of loss and sacrifice. The way that Germanic heroic values can be manifestly identified in the behaviour of evil figures, the narration taking the point of view of Satan and the depiction of the archetype of evil in Christian religion as a wandering Germanic exile, could also be critically examined in depth.

Finally, one could argue that Evil features more or less significantly in other Old English heroic poetry, besides *Beowulf*. Hugh Magennis (2011:78) points out that '*Beowulf* is unique in its scale and stance but we cannot tell for certain whether other poems like it once existed'. From those which have survived the passage of centuries,

The Finnsburh Fragment, *Waldere* and *The Battle of Maldon*,³⁴ only the last of them, due to the fragmentary nature of the other two, could be satisfactorily analysed from a perspective that would take Evil as the central aspect of research. The fact that *The Battle of Maldon* commemorates a historical event which took place in 991, could allow for an interesting exploration, on the one hand of doom and fate and the individual reactions to impending death from warriors identified with the 'self', and on the other hand, of the treatment of the enemy, the Vikings, the outsider *Others* who threaten and ultimately destroy the union of the martial, social and national group, not of a fictitious entity but of the audience's own world. The most celebrated passage in the poem, Byrhtwold's speech urging his fellow warriors to fight, shows the driving force of the Germanic heroic ethos; Byrhtnoth's desperate prayer, however, is loaded with obvious Christian values (ll. 176-80; trans. Crossley-Holland 1984: 15-16):

I need your grace, that my soul may set out
on its journey to you, O Prince of Angels,
that my soul may depart into your power in peace.

I pray that the devils may never destroy it.

Journeying in peace is opposed to the destructive power of devils, establishing a very interesting parallel with the battle itself in which travelling, crossing, and moving all represent a dangerous state in which earthly devils (that is, the heathen Vikings) are likely to disturb the group's peace and unity.

I have chosen *Beowulf* as the text through which to explore Evil in Old English heroic poetry for several reasons. First, because it is the 'obvious' choice, for its importance, length and anomalous position in the surviving Anglo-Saxon poetic

³⁴ Magennis adds *Widsith* and *Deor* to the list, but such classification is controversial, as others would categorize them as elegies.

Corpus. Hugh Magennis' observation that Beowulf is the only hero *per se* in Old English heroic poetry is very appropriate, as 'he is on a different level from other humans, capable of superhuman needs' (2011:81). Magennis reminds us that 'there are words for warrior and nobleman but no word, at least in the vernacular, to convey the sense of exceptionality understood in modern and indeed antique usages of *hero*' (2011: 81). Beowulf is exceptional in every sense of the word and his heroism, bordering on monstrosity, makes him an ideal character if one attempts to analyse how heroic narratives approach the problem of Evil and the active responses to it.

Secondly, Beowulf is a monster-slayer and, as we will see in the next chapter, monsters lurk behind the frames society artificially creates (such as a hall or a map). Monsters also show the strengths and the weaknesses of a heroic code in the face of evil agency and Evil experience. The human is not freed from responsibility in the poem, which puts its hero at the centre of a discussion which brings to mind Evagrius' *Logismoi* (considered above), about the evils that affect mankind as much as, if not more than, they affect the angry Grendel, the revengeful mother or the greedy dragon. Finally, *Beowulf* gives us the opportunity to see how the representations of Evil in the poem and the heroic actions aimed at confronting them have been transformed and reimagined in modern adaptations and versions of the poem. In this study, I have chosen films but other media have also, more or less successfully, attempted to 'translate' the poem from the manuscript to a variety of new formats, such as graphic novels, video games, and role games.

Beowulf is a work of poetic art, in which, behind the veil of aesthetic beauty that its own status confers, we are confronted with images that represent horror and nightmare. Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías (2006: 53) explained that behind 'the curtain of beauty' which art weaves around the primordial abyss, through

transformation and mediation of reality, 'there are images which cannot be endured, when before the dazed eye of the viewer, visions of castration, cannibalism, and death are brought together'.³⁵ That is the Evil we cannot cope with and can hardly understand, setting the limits of human reason. Storytelling is, I believe, one of those devices mankind has always relied on to face the unbearable abyss and emptiness of Evil, in order to create a narrative frame which provides an artist and an audience with a sense of safety and allows us to represent, often through the monstrous, what must be confronted through an (heroic) active response which resists falling prey to resignation and melancholy. As Bernard Sichère and Julia Kristeva (1996) observe literature names Evil, 'the heart of darkness', making it part of the complex dynamics of the speaking and thinking body. It creates stories about Evil in order not to succumb to it.