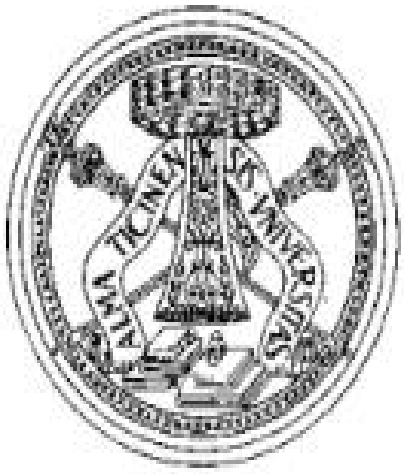

UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI PAVIA

Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Letterature Europee e Americane

THE FINN EPISODE IN *BEOWULF* AND THE *FINNSBURG FRAGMENT*: A COMPARISON

RELATORE

Prof.ssa Marusca Francini

CORRELATORE

Prof.ssa Silvia Granata

Tesi di Laurea Magistrale

Di Alessia Spina
Matricola n. 522291

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INDEX

Abstract

Nel presente lavoro di tesi è stata condotta un'analisi di tipo comparativo tra il testo dell'*Episodio di Finn* contenuto nel poema anglosassone *Beowulf* e quello del *Frammento di Finnsburg*.

I motivi per cui affrontare un'analisi di questo tipo possono essere molteplici, non da ultimo, il fatto che il poeta del *Beowulf* e quello del *Frammento di Finnsburg* raccontano la medesima storia. Sia nell'*Episodio di Finn* che nel *Frammento di Finnsburg*, infatti, i due poeti raccontano la battaglia avvenuta tra i Frisi e i Danesi nella fortezza di Finn.

L'Episodio di Finn è una delle numerose digressioni contenute all'interno del poema epico *Beowulf*. All'interno di esso, il poeta racconta la leggenda di Finn, che si presume dovesse essere ben nota in quanto per molti secoli è circolata in forma orale.

Il *Frammento di Finnsburg* è una porzione di un poema eroico breve, del quale solo 48 versi sono stati conservati. Il poeta del *Frammento di Finnsburg* racconta la stessa storia, ma con alcune differenze dal punto di vista delle dinamiche, le quali sono spiegate soprattutto dalle diverse ideologie dei due poeti.

Gli obiettivi di questo studio sono, da un lato, fare un'analisi dettagliata dell'*Episodio di Finn* contenuto nel poema *Beowulf* con lo scopo di capire quale funzione esso occupa in relazione al resto del poema e, dall'altro, mettere in evidenza quali sono gli aspetti che rendono il testo dell'*Episodio di Finn* e quello del *Frammento di Finnsburg* profondamente diversi, nonostante in essi vengano raccontati gli stessi fatti. Per mettere in evidenza questi elementi, è stata condotta una comparazione tra i due testi, con riferimenti precisi ai versi dell'*Episodio di Finn* e del *Frammento di Finnsburg*.

Il presente studio è suddiviso in tre capitoli, ognuno dei quali è stato consacrato alla presentazione degli elementi essenziali ai fini della comparazione tra i due testi. All'apice del secondo capitolo sono stati inseriti l'intero testo dell'*Episodio di Finn* in Old English e la relativa traduzione in italiano. Allo stesso modo, all'inizio del terzo capitolo è stato accluso il testo del *Frammento di Finnsburg* in Old English completo della relativa traduzione in italiano.

In particolare, nel primo capitolo è stata condotta una presentazione dettagliata del poema *Beowulf*, facendo particolare riferimento agli elementi stilistici più peculiari di esso: i composti, le kenning, l'uso della tecnica della variazione e del sistema formulare. Per ogni elemento stilistico sono stati analizzati degli esempi tratti direttamente dal poema. Inoltre, una parte del primo capitolo è stata dedicata all'analisi della struttura e della trama del poema.

Il secondo capitolo è stato interamente dedicato all'analisi dell'*Episodio di Finn* contenuto nel *Beowulf*, con particolare attenzione sui due personaggi principali, Hildeburh e Hnaef ma anche su un'analisi del ruolo che le donne assumono nel *Beowulf* e nell'*Episodio di Finn* in modo particolare. Una parte consistente del capitolo è stata, infine, consacrata all'analisi della funzione che la digressione su Finn assume all'interno del poema, soprattutto attraverso la considerazione del codice della vendetta che rappresenta la base della società germanica guerriera.

Infine, nel terzo capitolo l'*Episodio di Finn* e il *Frammento di Finnsburg* sono stati confrontati attraverso una comparazione dei due testi con lo scopo, da un lato, di rilevare eventuali punti di contatto tra di essi e, dall'altro, rilevare gli aspetti tematici e stilistici che li rendono diversi l'uno dall'altro. Con lo scopo di individuare similarità e differenze nel modo più preciso possibile, sono stati inseriti riferimenti a entrambi i testi.

In seguito all'analisi comparativa svolta nel presente studio è stato possibile concludere che l'*Episodio di Finn* e il *Frammento di Finnsburg* presentano delle differenze notevoli sia in relazione alle dinamiche della storia narrata sia in relazione alle scelte stilistiche adottate dai due poeti. Il fatto che l'*Episodio di Finn* e il *Frammento di Finnsburg* siano diversi nonostante appartengano alla stessa tradizione letteraria e trattino la stessa leggenda ha due spiegazioni. In primo luogo, l'*Episodio di Finn* è parte di un poema eroico lungo, il *Beowulf*, mentre il *Frammento di Finnsburg* è un lay e, di conseguenza, i due testi presentano delle caratteristiche stilistiche tipiche del genere al quale appartengono. In secondo luogo, il fatto che i due testi presentano delle differenze, soprattutto da un punto di vista tematico, è riconducibile alle diverse ideologie dei due poeti, in quanto il *Beowulf* è influenzato dall'ideologia cristiana che invece è del tutto assente nel *Frammento di Finnsburg*.

CHAPTER I

BEOWULF AND *THE FINNSBURG FRAGMENT*

"The only national [Anglo-Saxon] epic which has been preserved entire"[1]. This is just one of the numerous definitions that have been given to the poem that is now known by the title *Beowulf*. It is a poem belonging to the Old English tradition which has been at the centre of long debates on many aspects: composition date, composition area, authorship. The debates are still open and is not rare that new perspectives emerge in this regard. *Beowulf* is, therefore, a poem that has been studied and over the years since its discovery and the process has not yet ended.

The poem *Beowulf* is an epic poem composed in Old English consisting of 3,182 lines. It has a remarkable length especially when compared with other poems belonging to the same tradition. *Wisdith*, for example, an Old English poem, which survived only in the Exeter Book, consists of only 143 lines. In *Beowulf*, the poet tells of of duels with monstrous creatures, feuds and conflicts between peoples, of glory linked to warrior actions, of the obligation of revenge, of banquets and feasts, of kings and princes. Despite all the research that has been conducted over the years to understand who composed the *Beowulf* poem, it is still considered anonymous.

The title *Beowulf* was attributed to this work in the nineteenth century, from the name of the hero who is the protagonist of the poem: the *Beowulf* poem had in fact been transmitted in a manuscript, the *Cotton MS Vitellius A XV*[2], without any title. The manuscript is often referred to as the "Beowulf Manuscript" mainly due to the great fame the poem has received over the years. Sir Robert Cotton, in the seventeenth century, purchased the manuscript and placed it as volume XV in his large library. The *Beowulf Manuscript* is of fundamental importance as it is one of four major Old English poetic codices. The other codices, which are an important testimony to Old English tradition are the *Vercelli Book*[3], the *Junius Manuscript*[4] and the *Exeter Book*[5].

The *Cotton Vitellius* manuscript is made up of two different codices: the *Southwick codex* and the *Beowulf codex* or *Nowell codex*. The *Beowulf codex*, in addition to *Beowulf*, contains other literary texts, both in prose and poetry. As for the prose texts, the manuscript contains *A Life of Saint Christopher*, *The Wonders*

[1] James Albert Harrison, Robert Sharp, Moriz Heyne (eds.). *Beowulf, an Anglo Saxon Poem*. 1904 (Fourth edition), Boston, Ginn & Company, Publishers, p. 15.
[2] London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A XV.
[3] The Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, Codex CVII) was written at the end of the 10th century. It contains works of a religious nature, both in prose and poetry.
[4] The Junius Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11) was written in the 10th century. It contains poetry of a religious nature (Biblical subjects).
[5] The Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501) was believed to have been composed around the end of the 10th century AD. It is the largest and perhaps oldest known manuscript of Old English literature.

of the East, and the translation of *Letter from Alexander to Aristotle.* These texts are followed by the two poetic works *Beowulf* and *Judith*. The manuscript, however, suffered serious damage following a fire on the night of 29 October 1731 at Sir Cotton's library. This fire is remembered today as Ashburnham House fire. Following the fire, the manuscript was ruined and some parts of it are completely illegible. This is the reason why in the modern editions of the poem, especially in the final part, words are missing and replaced by dots.

No story corresponding to that of *Beowulf* has been handed down in Nordic sources; it is therefore possible that the author of the Old English poem independently reworked legendary material of Nordic origin, creating an original work on the basis of a heritage passed down orally for many years.

One of the many peculiarities of the poem is that it belongs to the Old English tradition but, at the same time, the setting and the characters are all Scandinavian. The events narrated take place in the first part in Denmark and in the second part in Sweden.

1.1.2. Date and Place of Composition

Regarding the date and place of composition of *Beowulf*, numerous hypotheses have been put forward over the centuries. As for the place where the poem was composed, scholars have not found an area on which everyone agrees. The hypotheses that scholars have presented to try to find a date of composition and a place of composition are numerous.

One of the approaches that scholars have followed trying to find a date and place of composition for *Beowulf* is the historical approach. Following it, scholars focus on finding historical elements in *Beowulf*. There are three main hypotheses which have been put forward: seventh century in East Anglia, Northumbria between the end of seventh century and the beginning of eighth century, and Mercia in the eighth century (during the reign of Offa)[6].

The reason why seventh century and East Anglia have been considered a plausible date and place of composition for the poem is, primarily, the connection between this area and this period with Sutton Hoo, the Anglo-Saxon cemetery in East Anglia of the seventh century. During the archeologists' excavations, a ship burial containing Anglo-Saxon artefacts was found[7]. From that moment on, hypotheses have been put forward according to which there would be analogies between this ship burial and the ship funeral described in the prologue of *Beowulf* (that is, the funeral of Scyld Scefing, ll. 26-52).

[6] Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.). *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, p. 20.

[7] Gabrielle L. McBath*, The English Cultural Significance of the Sutton Hoo Excavation linked to Beowulf,* Oxford*,* University of Oxford Press, 2021, p. 2.

Finally, the third hypothesis is that the poem would have been composed at the end of the ninth century in Mercia. John Earle, for example, argues that the poem is nothing more than a historical allegory of the reign of Offa of Mercia. Offa was king of Mercia from 757 until his death in 796. Similarly, Alois Brandl shares this hypothesis, finding evidence in favor of it in the presence of Wiglaf within the poem[8]. Wiglaf is a character in the poem, more precisely Beowulf's nephew, who will have a fundamental role in the moment of the fight told in the second part of the poem, that is, the fight between Beowulf and the dragon. Wiglaf is the only one among the twelve warriors who accompanied Beowulf to the place where the dragon lives, who did not abandon him when he needed help. Wiglaf's contribution will prove to be of fundamental importance for the success of the dragon-slaying undertaking. However, Wiglaf is not just a character of *Beowulf*: Wiglaf is also the name of a king of the kingdom of Mercia, who ruled from 827 to 829 and then from 830 until the year of his death, 839[9].

The historical approach, moreover, takes into consideration an element which appears to be fundamental in Anglo-Saxon history: the mixture between elements of Germanic and Christian culture, which occurred following the Christianization of the area. The mixture of Germanic and Christian elements is an element that characterizes *Beowulf*[10].

Levin Schücking proposes a composition date between 890 and 900 in a court of northern England[11]. Starting from 865, in fact, a large viking fleet arrived in England and spent the next thirteen years traversing the length and breadth of the country. Over the next decades, a substantial influx of Scandinavian immigrants arrived in an area now known as Danelaw[12]. According to him, the poem was written by an English poet but commissioned by a Scandinavian prince. The poem, according to Schücking, was a *speculum principis,* that is a model that the son of a prince should have read to have an education and become a good ruler.

[8] John Earle, 1892. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.). *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, p. 19.

[9] Norman E. Eliason, *Beowulf, Wiglaf and the Wægmundings*. "Anglo-Saxon England", Cambridge University Press, Vol. 7, No. 45, 1978, p. 97

[10] John. D. Niles, *Beowulf, The poem and its tradition.* London, Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 32.

[11] Levin Schucking, 1921. Cit. in: Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.). *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1971, p. 20.

[12] Ben Raffield, *The Danelaw Reconsidered: Colonization and Conflict in Viking-Age England*, "Viking and Medieval Scandinavia", Uppsala university, Vol. 16, No. 10, 2020, p. 183.

1.1.3. Authorship

Moving on to another fundamental element for the introduction of the poem, it is necessary to briefly focus on the hypotheses that have been put forward regarding the authorship of *Beowulf*. The issue of authorship has been debated for a long time too, and even in this case an unanimously agreed conclusion has not yet been reached. Various theories have been proposed.

One of the theories regarding the topic of authorship is the *Liedertheorie*[13]. At the basis of this theory there is the idea that the works belonging to the epic genre were composed by means of the union of different "lays" that circulated in oral form. According to this theory, the *Beowulf* poem was not composed by a single poet but, on the contrary, the various parts that make up *Beowulf* would have been created by different poets. A. Kohler, however, states that, although the poem is the result of the contribution of several poets, the final version that we know today in the Cotton Vitellius manuscript was written by a single gifted poet[14].

Other scolars reject the *Liedertheorie* and argue that the poem is the work of one author. The *Liedertheorie*, in fact, has now been superseded: scholars agree that the poem is too coherent in structure and themes to be the result of various lays put together.

Many scholars have also focused on the type of poet who wrote the poem and have tried to understand if the *Beowulf* poet is a churchman or a layman. In recent years there has been a tendency to regard Old English literary works as products created and written exclusively by literate monastic men[15]. In the specific case of the poem *Beowulf*, over the years, scholars have wondered if the poem is the result of the work of one or more monastic men and their tendency to model their literary texts working on themes that derive from the Latin models. The answer to this question appears to be both, since the strength and effectiveness of the poem derive from the mix between elements of Germanic and Christian culture. Niles, in fact, argues that to better understand the poem it is necessary to "reconstruct both the traditional verse making technique of the Anglo-Saxon *scop* and the nature of the monastic culture"[16].

Proponents of the *Liedertheorie* believe that a group of secular poets composed the different lays that will be put together by a Christian poet. Those who support the theory that the poem was written by a single poet, on the other

[13] *Liedertheorie* will be better defined in paragraph 1.5, in which the structure of *Beowulf* will be analysed.
[14] A. Köhler, 1870. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.). *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1971, p. 28.
[15] John. D. Niles, *Beowulf, The poem and its tradition.* London: Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 32.
[16] *Ibid*.

hand, maintain that the latter is Christian. In favor of the theory that the poet is Christian we can cite the presence of religious elements in the poem.

1.3. Diction and Style

Diction is defined as the choice and use of words and phrases in speech or writing that the poet or author in general makes in the composition of his work. When analyzing a poem's diction it is fundamental to try to understand the main characteristics of the language and vocabulary used by the poet. In the case of *Beowulf*, the vocabulary used is mainly made up of nouns. In his analysis of the poem's language, Brodeur counts a total of 903 nouns[17]. In second place are the adjectives, which are also very numerous in the poem, and finally the verbs. The most important data, however, is that more than half of the nouns used within *Beowulf* are not used in any other poem and, as if that were not enough, most of them are found only once in the entire long text. In other words, numerous *hapax legomena* appear within *Beowulf*. From the point of view of vocabulary, therefore, the poem turns out to be original and innovative. The way in which the poet writes shows that he is a poet well trained in the use of poetic techniques typical of Germanic poetry.

1.3.1 Compounds

Analyzing the diction of the poem is not a complete analysis if it does not also focus on the compounds present within it. The use of compounds is one of the main characteristics of the poem's diction. The compounds are numerous, for a total of 1070 compounds in the entire poem. This is about a third of the words in the poem[18]. They occupy an important role within the poem as a solid structure.
From the number of compounds found within the poem and the way in which the poet uses them, according to Niles it can be deduced that the poet of *Beowulf* knew the old oral tradition well and that "he was a living part of it"[19]. To demonstrate his idea, Niles makes a comparison between some verses of *Beowulf* and some verses of another work belonging to the Old English tradition, that is is the Old

[17] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 7.
[18] FR. Klaeber (ed.), *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*. Third edition. USA, D.C. Heath and Company. 1936, p. 138.
[19] John. D. Niles, *Beowulf, The poem and its tradition.* London: Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 31.

English translation of *De consolatione philosophiae*. What Niles intuits from this comparison is that the poet of *Beowulf* makes a much wider use of compounds than does the other poet taken into consideration: in the first case the poet uses nine compounds in eighteen lines while in the second case the Beowulf poet uses only two compounds on seventeen lines[20]. The difference is enormous. However, these data do not limit to showing the great difference between the two texts. If the compounds are analyzed in detail, it is possible to note that by creating them the poet is very original. In some cases, in fact, the words that generally are not used for the creation of compounds in other works, are instead used for the creation of them in *Beowulf*, even in unexpected ways. This shows the originality of the poem. Some examples are the *hwīl* compounds[21]. In *Beowulf*, there are four compounds based on the word *hwīl.* The word means "an indefinite space of time"[22]. One of the compounds created witht the word *hwīl* is *orleg-hwīl (*l. 2911*)*, "battle time or time of war"[23]. Another compound created with the word *hwīl* which appears in *Beowulf* is *gescæphwile* (l. 26), "the time appointed by fate for dying"[24]. These compounds appears only in *Beowulf:* none of them appears elsewhere[25].

1.3.2. Kennings

An important role in the diction of the poem is played by the use of kennings. A kenning is a phrase, or to be more precise a periphrasis, which is used to replace the simple name of the designated thing or person the poet is referring to. Therefore, instead of the name of the referent, a longer periphrasis is used which makes the meaning a little more difficult to decipher. The kenning consists of two parts: a base word and a limiting word. The function of the base word is to identify the referent "with something which it is not, except in a specially conceived relation which the poet imagines between it and the sense of the limiting element"[26]. Kenning works in a similar way to metaphor, but is different it in one fundamental aspect: in metaphor the association between the expression and the

[20] *Ivi*, p. 32.
[21] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971 p. 261.
[22] Bosworth, Joseph. "orleg-hwīl." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1971, p. 261.
[26] *Ivi*, p. 18.

thing is immediate, while in the case of kenning the association is not at all simple. The recipient, in this sense, must make an effort to understand what the poet wanted to refer to when he used a certain kenning.To understand better we can give an example. The *Beowulf* poet uses a kenning for body, *banhus* (l. 2508), literally "the house of bones". The association between "body" and "house" is not immediate for the simple reason that the body is not a house. However, if we take into consideration the first part of the kenning, that is "of the bones", we can understand the idea oft he poet, since the house for bones is the body. Brodeur correctly states about kenning that "it depends upon the hearer's ability and willingness to see likeness within unlikeness"[27]. In a kenning there is always an association between a base word and a thing or person that the poet wants to designate.

1.3.3. Alliterative Verse Style

The poem is written in the alliterative verse, which is common for Old English poetry as well as other poems written in languages such as Old High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse. This means that Old English poetry has a double level of metrical organization: the half-line (or hemistich) and the line. Two hemistichs constitute a long verse. What links the first and second half verse is alliteration[28]. Allitteration is defined as the repetition of consonant sounds in a stressed syllable (usually at the beginning of words) in the same line. The first foot of the on-line must alliterate with the first foot of the off-line.

The need to maintain alliteration between one half-line and another has effects on the choice of words that the poet uses. The obligation to create alliteration, therefore, translates into a reduction of the poet's freedom in the choice of words.

The two half-lines are divided by what is called caesura. It can be defined as a significant rhythmic pause within a sufficiently long verse. This pause thus divides the verse into two half lines. From a graphic point of view, in the modern editions of *Beowulf*, the two half-lines are divided by an empty space.

[27] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California. 1971, p. 250.
[28] G. Brunetti (ed.), *Beowul*f. Roma: Carocci editore. 2003, p. 51.

1.3.4. Variation

The use of the allitteration and compounds, however, is not the only element that stands out in the poem. A fundamental position from a stylistic point of view, in fact, is occupied by variation. The techinque of variation is undoubtedly a very useful device for the poet as it allows him to emphasize a concept or idea through the use of different words and expressions. Variation can be simply defined as "a double or multiple statement of the same basic concept in different words"[29].

The variation can also be created with the use of words with different meanings, but through which it is possible to add different shades of meaning to the concept they refer to. With the variation, therefore, a sequence is created "which serves as a kind of total characterization of the referent"[30]. An example is in the lines from 1492 to 1512: *Weder-Geata leod (*l. 1492*),* "the man of the Geats" and *hilderinc (*l. 1495*),* "*warrior*"*, guðrinc (*l. 1501*),* "*warrior*"*, eorl (*l. 1512*),* "*hero*". Each of these expressions are used to refer to Beowulf and, in particular, *Hilderinc* and *guðrinc* are exact synonyms, but the rest of the terms have different meanings and "they characterize their common referent in very different terms"[31]

There should be no confusion between variation and enumeration. The confusion could arise from the fact that the purpose with which they are used is the same: to emphasize a concept and to underline it more clearly. Enumeration is a rhetorical figure, sometimes also defined as list or *enumeratio*, used for the purpose of clarification (in other words, used to make a concept clearer). It consists in the joining of several words or phrases through asyndeton or polysyndeton. Brodeur, in his work *The art of Beowulf* states that it is possible to distinguish the two figures of speech as follows: "unless each member of the sequence has the same referent, we have not a variation, but an enumeration"[32]. An essential and necessary condition to be sure we are facing a variation in all respects, therefore, is co-referentiality: the terms used through the variation must all refer to the same referent. If this were not the case, then it is possible to speak of enumeration. To understand the difference between variation and enumeration it is useful analyzing the lines of the poem (ll. 333-335) :

[29] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, 1959:40. Cit in Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.). Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 118.

[30] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles. 1971, p. 19.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid*.

Hwanon ferigeaðge fætte scyldas,
græge syrcan ond grimhelmas,
heresceafta heap?[33].

"Whence bear ye your plated shields, your grey shirts of mail, your masked helms and throng of warlike shafts?"[34].

This is an enumeration of different objects: the poet is referring to *scyldas*, "shields", *syrcan,* "corselets", *grimhelmas*, "helmets", *heresceafta,* "spears". The several referents, the different objects, are different things: "there is unity of effect but complete diversity of detail"[35].

The variation has been defined by Giuseppe Brunetti as "l'insieme di parole o frasi che sono coreferenziali tra loro"[36], "the set of words or phrases that are coreferential to each other".

Another definition of variation has been given by Brodeur: "I should prefere to define variation as a double or multiple statement of the same concept or idea in different words"[37].

In ll. 871-874, the poet refers to the technique of variation :

secg eft ongan
sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian,
ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
wordum wrixlan·[38]

[33] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[34] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 22.

[35] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 40.

[36] G. Brunetti (ed.), *Beowulf*. Roma, Carocci editore, 2003, p. 62.

[37] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 40.

[38] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

At whiles a servant of the king, a man laden with proud memories who had lays in mind and recalled a host and multitude of tales of old – word followed word, each truly linked to each – this man in his turn began with skill to treat the quest of Beowulf and in flowing verse to utter his ready tale, interweaving words[39].

The words that refer to the technique of variation are *wordum wrixlan*. *Wrixlan*, in fact, is a verb that means to change, "to vary"[40]: the reference is therefore to the words that are varied.

The use of variation gives a very slow rhythm to the poem since the same concept is repeated in subsequent verses rather than in a single verse. The result of using this technique, thus, is a narrative made up of stop-and-go. This is the reason why Bjork and Niles state that "this is not a narrative style for the impatient"[41].

As Brunetti states, variations can be aligned[42] : this means that the variations follow one another without any interruption. An example (ll. 221-223):

land gesawon,
brimclifu blican, beorgas steape
side sænæssas·[43]

that those sailors saw the land, the cliffs beside the ocean gleaming, and sheer headlands and capes thrust far to sea[44].

In ll. 222-223, in particular, different words are used to indicate the concept of "land". *Beorgas steape* and *side sænæssas* are aligned because there is no element that is interposed between them.

[39] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 37.

[40] Bosworth, Joseph. "wrixlan." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[41] Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1971. P. 95.

[42] G. Brunetti (ed.), *Beowul*f. Roma: Carocci editore. 2003, p. 57.

[43] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[44] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 19.

Variations can also be alternated: this means that the variations are presented within close verses but that, between them, there are other additional elements. An example: (ll. 18-19)

Beowulf wæs breme – blæd wide sprang –
Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in[45].

Beow was renowned – far and wide his glory sprang – the heir of Scyld in Scedeland[46].

The two elements that constitute variations, in these lines, are *Beowulf* and *Scyldes eafera*, "son of Scyld". The two variations, in this case, do not follow one another without any interruption: *Beowulf* is placed at the beginning of l. 18 and the variation *Scyldes eafera* is placed at the beginning of l. 19.

A fundamental aspect of the way in which the *Beowulf* poet uses variation is the organization of the terms according to a climax structure. The climax is a figure of speech that consists in the arrangement of the terms of a sentence in ascending order of value until the maximum is reached. This choice is made by the poet especially in moments of maximum tension within the story narrated. There is an example that can be useful to better understand what has just been stated (ll. 1380-1382):

ic þe þa fæhðe feo leanige,
ealdgestreonum swa ic ær dyde,
wundnum golde gyf þu on weg cymest'[47].

For that assault I will with riches reward thee, with old and precious things, even as I did ere now, yea with twisted gold, if thou comest safe away'[48].

This is Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf shortly before the latter heads towards Grendel's mother. She has begun to torment the life and peace of the Danes. In this

[45] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[46] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 13.

[47] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[48] J J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 52.

part of the speech, Hrothgar promises him a great reward if this time too he manages to save his people by guaranteeing them protection through the killing of Grendel's mother. The terms arranged according to a climactic structure are *feo*, "money", *ealdgestreonum,* "treasure" and *golde*, "gold". The three words refers to the same concept, but "the first term is the most abstract, the last the most specific and vivid"[49].

1.3.5. Formula and Formulaic System

Beowulf's style is characterized by formularity. Formulas, and formularity in general, are characteristics shared by the poems of the Old English tradition. This is a stylistic aspect present both in the classical tradition of ancient Greece and in the epic tradition of the Middle Ages. One of the reasons why formulas are used by singers is to facilitate the audience's recognition of the characters as they are characterized through the use of the same formulas in different parts of the same poem. Over the years, different definitions of formula have been put forward by various scholars. Parry, in particular, who is the founder of the theory of pure orality in the formation of Homeric poems, defines formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea"[50].

Donald K. Fry defines formulaic system as "a group of half lines, usually loosely related metrically and semantically, which are related in form by the identical relative placement of two elements with approximately the same distribution of non-stressed elements"[51].

Formulas help the audience recognize the characters more easily. But the same formula can also be used for different referents. In this way the poet manages to create parallels between the different characters of the poem, in some cases in unexpected ways.

We can take as an example a formula that is found three times within *Beowulf*: the first time it appears at l. 11, the second at l. 863 and the third at l. 2391. The formula is *Þæt wæs god cyning*. To understand the above-mentioned mechanism it is useful to analyze the parts of the poem in which it appears. In the first case (l. 11) the formula refers to Scyld Scefing, the first Danish king of the Scylding dynasty. He is, as already explained in the initial part of the chapter, a king much appreciated by the Danish people for all the prosperity he ensured them. In the second case (l. 863) the poet refers to Hrothgar, also a king belonging to the

[49] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 43.

[50] Milman Parry, 1959, cit in: Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 99.

[51] Donald K. Fry, 1967, cit. in: John. D. Niles, *Beowulf, The poem and its tradition.* London,Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 124.

Scyldng dynasty and also a king much appreciated and respected by the Danes. Finally, in the last case in which it appears, it refers to the now king Beowulf. This is the second part of the poem and the poet summarizes Beowulf's entire reign of over fifty years with this formula. These are therefore, in all three cases, kings considered very capable by their followers. But the same formula can also appear in different poems. There is a formula found in both *Beowulf* and *Finnsburg Fragment*: *waðol under wolcnum*, "he waxed under the clouds" (l. 8, *Beowulf*) and *weox under wolcnum,* "wandering under the clouds" (l. 8, *Finnsburg Fragment*). In this regard, however, we need a further clarification. Observing the two formulas of the two different texts it is possible to notice that the initial part changes: *waðol* e *weox* are different verbs.

The two formulas have different verbs but in both cases it is still the same formula. Citing Giuseppe Brunetti can be helpful, since he defines formulas as "gruppi di semiversi dallo stesso sistema metrico e sintattico", "groups of half-lines of the same metrical and syntactic system". They have a constant and a variable part[52]. At this moment we are more interested in the second part of the definition. What Brunetti emphasizes is that the formula has a part that does not change (constant part) and one that can change (variable part). In the example we considered, the constant part is *under wolcnum*, and the variable parts are *wod* and *waðol.* However, it is important that the variable part of the formula alliterates with the constant one.

The same example as before can be considered to investigate how the same formula can appear in the same poem. The formula *weox under wolcnum* is also found in another part of the poem (l. 714): *wod under wolcnum,* "under the clouds he walked". The same formula, therefore, appears in three different parts of *Beowulf* and although there is a change in the first part of it, it is still the same formula. The "w" alliteration has been maintained in all three cases.

1.2. The Plot of the Poem

The story told in the poem proceeds through the interweaving of themes. *Beowulf* has been defined by Tolkien as a poem with a bipartite structure[53]. Tolkien defines the *Beowulf* poem as "an heroic elegiac poem"[54] because "it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting"[55]. The scholar, therefore, argues that the poem is bipartite rather than tripartite: the poem describes

[52] G. Brunetti (ed.), *Beowul*f. Roma: Carocci editore. 2003, p. 58.

[53] J. R. R. Tolkien, 1936. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles., (eds), 1998. *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, p. 163.

[54] *Ibid*.

[55] J. R. R. Tolkien*, Beowulf, the monsters and the critics*, *and Other Essays*. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1936, p. 14.

the life of the main hero starting from the moment of maximum power, typical of youth, until the moment of vulnerability characterizing old age. The two parts identified by Tolkien, therefore, materialize in the two different phases of Beowulf's life, which are described in the poem.

Tolkien defined the tone of the poem as elegiac because it expresses the transitoryness that characterizes the life of every human being. This means that the earthly glory obtained thanks to the achievements in war has no importance when earthly life ends. To better understand this aspect of the poem, it can be useful to read the speech that Hrothgar makes to Beowulf after the killing of the two monsters, Grendel and his mother, with the aim of warning him against the pride that could derive from the glory recognized to him. He wants to remind him that earthly glory is only something transitory that will lose importance when old age or death arrives (ll. 1761-1768):

Nu is þines mægnes blæd
ane hwile· eft sona bið
þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafoþes getwæfeð
oððe fyres feng oððe flodes wylm
oððe gripe meces oððe gares fliht
oððe atol yldo· oððe eagena bearhtm
forsiteð ond forsworceð· semninga bið
þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð[56].

countenance no pride, O champion in thy renown! Now for a little while thy valour is 1480 in flower; but soon shall it be that sickness or the sword rob thee of thy might, or fire's embrace, or water's wave, or bite of blade, or flight of spear, or dreadful age; or the flashing of thine eyes shall fail and fade; very soon 'twill come that thee, proud knight, shall death lay low[57].

The Danish king is underlining the transience of the glory obtained during earthly life as there is a force that is superior to everything: death. It can come at any time and no human being can do anything to stop its strength and power.

In addition, the elegiac tone can be seen in the first part of the poem when the poet tells of the death of Scyld (ll. 50-53):

[56] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[57] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 64.

men ne cunnon
secgan to soðe selerædende
hæleð under heofenum hwa þæm hlæste onfeng[58].

None can report with truth, nor lords in their halls, nor mighty men beneath the 40 sky, who received that load[59].

Through the reading of this passage of the poem it is easy to understand how the poet is referring to the uncertainty that characterizes life, especially for the fact that no one knows with certainty what happens to the soul after death. The fame of King Scyld Scefing and all the good deeds he did for his people allowing them to recover from a difficult situation. After death, the fate of all human beings is the same, no matter what one accomplished during earthly life.

From a structural point of view, the *Beowulf* poem appears divided into two large parts which are marked by a temporal ellipse of over fifty years. Consequently, for the description of the plot of *Beowulf*, it is convenient to focus on the two parts separately.

1.2.1 Part I of the Poem

The first part of the story opens with a beautiful prologue in which the poet briefly recounts the origins of the Scylding dynasty, a dynasty that takes its name from King Scyld Scefing. Scyld had been a fundamental king for the Danish people because, as can be immediately understood from the first lines of the poem, he brought so much prosperity, allowing the Danes to recover from a situation of decadence.

The poem, then, continues with the rite of his funeral, which is celebrated through a ship burial. When the narrated events begin, the king of the Danes is Hrothgar and, after a long period of prosperity and goodwill for his people, a very dangerous threat arrived: it is the monster Grendel. For twelve long years, Grendel has continued to raid Heorot, the hall that King Hrothgar had built. The cause of his anger is the celebrations that take place every evening in the hall. It seems to

[58] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.
[59] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 14.

annoy him, since he, due to his condition of monster, is forced to live in isolation away from human beings.

In these twelve years some of the bravest men have tried to do something to stop Grendel, but without success: they have all lost their lives. And it is at this point that the hero of the poem appears for the first time: the news of this monster who torments the lives of the Danes reaches all the way to Geatland. As soon as he becomes aware of the events that are happening in Denmark, Beowulf decides to leave Geatland with a retinue of Geatish warriors to fight against Grendel.

After a journey across the sea, the group of Geats arrive in Denmark. They first present themselves to the guard, who will then lead them to King Hrothgar. Hrothgar welcomes him with great enthusiasm, hoping that finally someone could put an end to the pain caused to his people. That same night, like all nights for twelve years until then, Grendel arrives. Everyone was sleeping, except Beowulf: he was waiting for the monster. A tough fight will follow, in which, at the end, Grendel loses an arm and runs away. But it is clear to everyone that the wound would be fatal for him. In fact, Grendel died shortly after. It follows an immense happiness for the Danes and obviously a great feast in the hall.

The Danes do not know, however, that after that moment of joy, a new despair would follow. The same night of the feast, in fact, another threat arrives to Heorot: it is Grendel's mother. She is enraged for the killing of the son. During her incursion to Heorot, Grendel’s mother snatches and brings away one of the most faithful followers of Hrothgar, Aeschere. In addition to being a faithful follower, Aeschere was also Hrothgar‘s adviser; it is a serious blow and a strong pain for the Danish king.

But Beowulf at this point does not stop showing his great altruism and decides, once again, to volunteer to face the new threat. And he does it: he goes to the swamp in which the two monsters live and, during the journey, he finds the head of Hrothgar's adviser. It is now clear that Aeschere has been killed and this increase the anger of Beowulf. Once he has arrived, he plunges into the mere and the second fight begins: the winner will be Beowulf.

After the killing of Grendel’s mother, Beowulf returns to Heorot and tells all the details of the fight. Hrothgar is amazed at Beowulf's courage and strength: the hero, without any hesitation, has restored the peace of the Danish people. Therefore, great thanks and great gifts follow. By now Hrothgar considers Beowulf as if he were his son.

But now Beowulf can return to his country. The time of the leaving came and the king makes a speech to the hero to warn him from the risks that can derive from glory and pride.

Beowulf begins his return journey and once he arrived he tells all his adventures to his king. Even in this situation, Beowulf demonstrates his altruism and nobility of soul: he decides to give all the gifts that he had received to his king.

1.2.2. Part II of the Poem

At this point the poet inserts a temporal ellipsis: fifty long years have passed and Beowulf is now old. He has ruled the Geats for more than fifty years when a private feud between a servant and his lord arises. The servant manages to steal a cup from the treasure guarded by a dragon, with the aim of receiving the annulment of the punishment he received.

The dragon is awakened by the theft and unleashes his wrath against the Geats. Beowulf, at this point, decides to face the dragon, and, with the help of his nephew Wiglaf and to the help of a sword and a large shield (necessary to have protection against the flames spit by the dragon), Beowulf manages to defeat the beast but only at the cost of his own life. Again, youth and old age are opposed: at this point in the poem, Beowulf is no longer at the maximum of his physical strength and this is why he needs weapons and protection, while in the first fight against Grendel he decided to fight with his bare hands, relying only on his strength. Despite the protections and weapons, however, the hero loses his life in the fight. After his death, Beowulf's funeral and the prediction of an unhappy future for the Geats follow.

1.4. The Structure of the Poem

The structure of the poem and its unity have been the subject of long debates. Grundtvig defined the poem as a "work of art, half miscarried"[60] for three reasons: the mix between folkloric and historical elements, the lack of unity between the parts partially achieved only by the constant presence of the hero, and the presence of episodes or digressions[61]. He therefore recognizes the beauty of the poem and its greatness in poetic terms but at the same time considers it incomplete. According to Grundtvig, the fact that all the events covered in the poem are held together only by the presence of the same hero makes the structure of *Beowulf* a little too weak. Grundtvig claims that another element which increases the weakness of the poem is the presence of too many digressions.

There is another important theory regarding the structure of the poem: the *Liedertheorie*. Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, it began to be very widespread among commentators on the poem. This theory sees the poem as a collection of lays that were at some point unified into a single poem giving

[60] Nikolaj F. S. Grundtvig, 1820. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 53.
[61] *Ibid*.

birth to *Beowulf*. More precisely, according to Müllenhoff originally there had been two "old lays" written by different authors: the first one on the fight with Grendel and the second one on the fight with the dragon. At a later time, the description of the battle with Grendel's mother and the introduction would have been added to the two already existing lays. At this point, the part about Beowulf's homecoming is added by the one Müllenhoff calls author A, who also works on the already existing parts. Finally, an author B would have inserted the part about the dragon[62]. However, many argue that Müllenhoff's hypothesis is not correct (or at least not entirely correct). An example is W.P. Ker, who states that "an epic poem should not be held together just by its events happening to the same person"[63]. According to Ker, therefore, the events of the poem are held together only by the fact that, in all the events, the protagonist is always the same. But, Ker continues, this is not a sufficient element to state that the poem has a well-defined structure. He also argues that the poem is characterized by a weakness: the poet puts monstrous figures at the core of the poem, making the mistake of minimizing what is really important, that is, the stories about the heroes contained in the episodes[64].

A turning point in the framework of opinions occurs with the scholar J. R. R. Tolkien, who is strongly against the ideas put forward by his predecessor Ker. Tolkien claims that the poem consists of the description of two different moments in a heroic life[65]. The interpretation of the poem should not be carried on by trying to find a progression. What the poet intended to do, according to Tolkien, was to create a story that highlighted the two great phases that characterize the life of human beings[66]. The first is youth, in which man finds himself at the maximum of his strength, and the second is old age, in which man begins to feel the loss of the power and strength that had characterized him during the previous phase. In the poem, the phase of youth and strength of the protagonist Beowulf is demonstrated by the fact that he faces Grendel without the use of any armor and, indeed, when he discovers that Grendel is used to fighting only using his body, Beowulf decides to do the same. This is proof of the confidence he himself has in his strength. In the second part of the poem, however, when Beowulf has to face the dragon, he has protection built for the occasion, demonstrating in this case that he has doubts about his physical strength and is afraid that the lack of it could be a risk for him. Loosing strenght is a path that all men have in common and from which no one can escape. Tolkien criticizes Ker's view, claiming that the presence of monsters is not a defect of the poem but rather a positive element[67].

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[62] Müllenhoff, 1869. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 155.
[63] W. P. Ker, 1897. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 159.
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, the monsters and the critics*, *and Other Essays*. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1936, p. 12.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] *Ivi*, p. 14.

At the end of part I, the hero is still young and has returned to his country following the killing of the two monsters, Grendel and his mother. In Part II, however, the hero is now old and has been king of the Geats for fifty years. Later the poet gives informations about what happened to the hero in that period of time, through the stories told by Beowulf himself.

In his work *The art of Beowulf,* Brodeur claims that the poet's choice to insert the fifty-year temporal ellipse is conscious and the purpose would have been to highlight the contrast between youth and old age within the life of a hero.

This is how the events of fifty years before the second part begins are treated by the poet (ll. 2200-2208):

Eft þæt geiode ufaran dogrum,
hildehlæmmum· syððan Hygelac læg,
ond Heardrede hildemeceas,
under bordhreoðan to bonan wurdon,
ða hyne gesohtan on sigeþeode,
hearde hildfrecan Heaðo-Scilfingas·,
niða genægdan nefan Hererices·,
syððan Beowulfe brade rice,
on hand gehwearf· he geheold tela,
fiftig wintra – wæs ða frod cyning[68].

This after came to pass in later days in the clash of wars, when Hygelac was fallen, and swords of battle had been Heardred's bane amid the shielded ranks, what time the 1855 warlike Scyldings, dauntless men of arms, sought him out amid his glorious people, and came upon him, nephew of Hereric, with fell assault, then into Beowulf's hands came that broad realm. Well he ruled it for fifty winters– now was he a king of many years[69].

The expression *fiftig wintra* allows us to deduce that Beowulf is now old: *fiftig* means "fifty" and *wintra* "winter". The expression *frod cyning*, however, is not necessarily a sign of Beowulf's old age. The term *frod*, in fact, has a double meaning: "wise, prudent, sage, skilful" and "aged, old, ancient"[70]. The idea of wisdom was assimilated to the figure of the older man, as wisdom is a quality that

[68] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[69] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 77.

[70] Bosworth, Joseph. "frōd." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

is acquired above all through experience and years. Beowulf, therefore, is no longer the powerful man in strength who is presented at the beginning of the poem (ll. 194-198):

Þæt fram ham gefrægn Higelaces þegn,
god mid Geatum, Grendles dæda·,
se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest,
on þæm dæge þysses lifes,
æþele ond eacen[71].

Of this, of Grendel's deeds, the knight of Hygelac, esteemed among the Geats, heard in his home afar; in that day of man's life here in might the strongest of mankind was 160 he, noble and of stature beyond man's measure[72].

These are the lines in which the poet introduces Beowulf for the first time. Even before saying his name, the poet underlines from the beginning his physical prowess and his strength which goes beyond the strength of any other human being. The term which indicates his strenght is *eacen*, which means "increased, powerful"[73]. Only when he arrives in Denmark and introduces himself to the Danish king Hrothgar the audience will be informed of his name (l. 343): *Beowulf is min nama*, "Beowulf is my name". There is therefore a very specific scheme that marks the two parts, the initial and the final one, since in the first part the poet underlines the conditions of strength of the hero in the first phase of youth while in the second, immediately, he he is keen to underline that Beowulf is no longer in the same conditions in which he was at the end of the first part: he is now an old king. In other words, the *Beowulf* poet creates a contrast between the strenght which is typical of the youth and the wisdom which usually characterizes the old age phase in a man's life.

To conclude with the topic of the poem's structure, it is possible to state that it is not linear. In this regard, however, Gillian Overing in her article criticizes "the urge to find one singular structural overview, and the tendency to see the poem's structure as a problem to be solved"[74].

[71] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[72] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, ed. by Cristopher Tolkien, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 18.

[73] Bosworth, Joseph. "eácen." *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, edited by Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014.

[74] Gillian Overing, 1987. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.). 1998. *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, p. 173.

1.4.1. Digressions and Episodes

The poem is characterized by a large number of digressions and episodes that are additional to the main plot. A digression is defined as a deviation from the main events, in which stories unrelated to the facts in the main plot are narrated.

Behind the poet's choice to insert a digression in a specific part of the poem there is always a precise reason, as thanks to them the poet manages to add a new nuance of meaning to the events in the poem. In other words, the stories of the characters in the digressions are linked to the stories of the poem, in some parts more evidently and in others in a more hidden way. The stories contained in the digressions derive from different sources, above all heroic legend and historical tradition[75]. As regards the heroic legend, for instance, it is possible to mention *The Finn episode* (ll. 1063-1160), the digression on Sigemund (ll. 874-902) and the one on Heremod (ll. 1709-1720). As regards the historical tradition, it can be identified above all in the second part of the poem. The historical elements that can be identified in the second part concern for example the history of the wars of the Geats and Svear[76].

To try to understand why the poet inserts digressions into *Beowulf*, it can be useful making reference to Ludvig Schröder: he claims that the reason why the poet inserts the digressions is to better emphasize Beowulf's heroism[77]. To support this hypothesis he refers to the episode of the swimming competition with Breca (ll. 530 - 586), which allows to the poet to emphasize Beowulf's swimming skills but, most important, his great skills in terms of combat and survival. In fact, during the story of the swimming contest told by Beowulf, it emerges that the young hero was able to fight against dangerous sea creatures and survive. In the digression on swimming it actually appears that Beowulf lived really dangerous experiences and that in that case he has been able to demonstrate great abilities of strength and resistance. He was able to survive in the middle of the sea for five days and five nights (ll 544-545):

ða wit ætsomne on sæ wæron
fif nihta fyrst oþ þæt unc flod todraf[78].

[75] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, fourth edition. London, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 132.
[76] Ivi, p. 133.
[77] Schröder, 1875. Cit. in: Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. University of Exeter Press, Lincoln, 1998, p. 198.
[78] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

Then we two were together in the sea five nights' space, until the tide drove us asunder, and 445 the boiling waters[79].

Some of the adversities he was able to overcome are described at ll. 546-549. *Wedera cealdost* is one of the expression used by the poet : *wedera* means "weather, condition of the atmosphere"[80] and *cealdost* means "coldest"[81], therefore the entire expression can be translated as "the coldest of weather"[82]. Beowulf also had to deal with *nipende niht*: *nipan* is a verb meaning "to grow dark"[83], and *niht* is the word for "night". Another of the adversities faced by Beowulf is the *norþanwind*, "a wind from the north"[84].

But digressions also have the task of anticipating what will happen in the poem. This function can be better understood by analyzing the digression regarding the story of Sigemund (ll. 874-915), since it has the function of anticipating what will happen at the end of the story, that ist he fight between Beowulf and the dragon.

It is important to mention the contribution of Adrien Bonjour who studied the digressions in *Beowulf* in detail. According to him, digressions have the dual function of making the background of the poem come alive and enriching the main plot[85].

Among the digressions of the poem, the longest and most studied is that of *The Finn episode*. One of the reason for the interest in this digression lies in the fact that the same story is told also in another literary work, the *Finnsburg Fragment*.

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[79] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 28.

[80] Bosworth, Joseph. "weder." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[81] Bosworth, Joseph. "ceald." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[82] Bosworth, Joseph. "ceald." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[83] Bosworth, Joseph. "nīpan." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[84] Bosworth, Joseph. "norþan-wind." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[85] Adrien Bonjour, 1950. Cit. in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds.), *A Beowulf handbook*. Lincoln, University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 199.

1.4.2. Principle of Anticipation and Principle of Contrast

The principles of anticipation and contrast play a fundamental role in the *Beowulf*'s structure. Anticipation is a narrative technique with which the author suggests or anticipates what will happen later within a work. Through the use of anticipation the poet rejects any possibility of creating suspenseful effects, as he anticipates from the beginning the outcome of the events he is about to narrate. Lawrence, however, argues that the use of anticipation does not have a notable effect on suspense since the audience knows well the facts that are narrated within the poem: he states that "there was no need for this sort of suspense in the first place, since the three encounters were well known to the poet's audience"[86]. According to Charles Moorman the reason why the *Beowulf* poet uses anticipation is to emphasize the role that fate has on the characters: "the epic poet uses foreshadowing statements to establish and keep before his audience the idea of an operative and benevolent Fate which controls the actions and destiny of the hero"[87]. In the epic genre, in fact, a fundamental role is played by Fate and the attention of the poet is directed precisely towards the control function that the force of Fate operates on human beings. The *Beowulf* poet makes extensive use of anticipations, especially in the most salient and most tense parts. An example can be found in ll. 2337-2340:

heht him þa gewyrcean wigendra hleo
eallirenne, eorla dryhten,
wigbord wrætlic· wisse he gearwe
þæt him holtwudu helpan ne meahte[88].

He then, protector of warriors, lord of good men, 1970 bade fashion for him a shield for battle curiously wrought, all made of iron: full well he knew that no wood of the forest, no linden shield, would avail him against the flame[89].

This is the moment in which Beowulf is preparing to fight against the dragon. It is explicitly said that a *wigbord*, "shield" was made especially for the occasion. The expression that best explains the way in which anticipations work is

[86] W. W. Lawrence, *Beowulf and the Epic Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1930, p. 28.
[87] Charles Moorman, *Suspense and Foreknowledge in "Beowulf"*. "College English", Vol. 15, No. 7, 1954, p. 382.
[88] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[89] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A translation and commentary*, ed. by Cristopher Tolkien, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 81.

wisse he gearwe / þæt him holtwudu helpan ne meahte, "he certainly knew that the wooden plaque couldn't help him". This is already a clue to the final outcome of the battle.

The anticipations of the poem are at the center of Adrien Bonjour's analysis. He dedicates an entire study to the topic : *The use of anticipation in Beowulf.* Bonjour states that the use of anticipations is fundamental to the structure of the poem: the anticipations "contribute to the group of qualities which make *Beowulf* a work of art"[90]. The anticipation of ll. 2237-2240 has the function of predicting the hero's death. The poet, in fact, states that Beowulf knew that wooden armor could not defend him. It is as if Beowulf was already aware of how the fight would end. Regarding this type of anticipation, Bonjour states that "they serve as a necessary justification for the tragic close"[91].

Other anticipations with the same purpose are present in the poem, for example at l. 2516 : *Gegrette ða gumena gehwylcne,* "Then hailed he the helmeted heroes all". This could also be interpreted as a foreshadowing, in the sense that the hero hailed all his companions shortly before heading towards the place where the dragon lives as if he already had the feeling that he would not be able to survive the fight. To give another example, it is possible to analyze the l. 2517, *hwate helmberend hindeman siðe*, "for the last time greeting his liegemen dear". Here the element that anticipates Beowulf's fate is *hindeman*, "last" : the use of this word already indicates that this would probably have been the last time Beowulf would see his companions.

To give a last example we can analyze the words spoken by Beowulf himself (ll. 2518-2525) :

> *'Nolde ic sweord beran,*
> *wæpen to wyrme gif ic wiste hu,*
> *wið ðam aglæcean elles meahte,*
> *gylpe wiðgripan swa ic gio wið Grendle dyde,*
> *ac ic ðær heaðufyres hates wene,*
> *oreðes ond attres· forðon ic me on hafu,*
> *bord ond byrnan·*[92].

[90] Adrien Bonjour, *The Use of Anticipation in Beowulf*. The Review of English Studies, Vol. 16, No. 63, 1940, p. 299.
[91] *Ivi*, p. 300.
[92] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

'I would not bear sword or weapon against the serpent, if I knew how else I might grapple with the fierce destroyer to mine honour, as aforetime I did with Grendel. But here do I look for fell fire's heat, for blast and venom; wherefore I have upon me shield and corslet.[93].

In this speech the hero is explicitly referring to the imminent fight with the dragon and he is saying that he is not sure he can defeat the dragon. For this reason, Beowulf decides to bring with him *bord* and *byrnan*, "shield and corslet".

The principle of contrast is a technique that the poet uses obtaining an effect which is similar to that created through the use of the principle of anticipation, since in both cases the poet foresees what will happen in the poem. The principle of contrast can be found in different parts of the poem. An example is the moment in which everyone inside the Heorot hall is celebrating following the long-awaited death of the monster Grendel. The Danes but also the Geatish warriors, first of all Beowulf, are in the midst of celebrations and at the height of their happiness. The Danes, especially King Hrothgar, feel relieved of a burden they had carried for twelve long years. However, they are not aware of the imminent catastrophe that would happen soon, that is the arrival of Grendel's mother. The principle of contrast thus creates an effect of tragic irony towards the characters of the poem. There is also another example that can be taken into consideration to better understand how the principle of contrast works: the moment in which Beowulf prepares to face the dragon.

These are some of the words spoken by the hero in the speech made to his Geatish warriors (ll. 2532-2533) :

nis þæt eower sið,
ne gemet mannes nefne min anes[94].

This is not an errand for you, nor is it within the measure of any man save me alone[95].

The contrast is to be found in the confidence shown by Beowulf through his words and the outcome of the fight with the dragon. Bonjour, in fact, points out that "the poet carefully contrasts the confidence with which Beowulf sets out to

[93] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 86.

[94] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[95] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, p. 87.

meet the dragon with his unavailing struggle to resist its attacks until Wiglaf comes to his support"[96].

1.5.2 Christian Elements and Pagan Elements in *Beowulf*

The *Beowulf* poem is based on the merger of elements of pagan Germanic culture and Christian elements. Treating the question of authorship, the fact that the poem could have been written in the pagan era and that it could have been composed from a pagan poet was also mentioned. According to this vision, therefore, the poem would then have been modified through additional parts with references to Christianity that would have made the poem as it is now known. In this regard, however, Klaeber states that the Christian elements are too well inserted within the structure and the plot of the poem. According to him, it is not possible that the poem is the result of the intervention of a Christian poet who would have operated to give it a "Christian coloring". Klaeber continues by claiming that "the main story has been thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christianity"[97]. It is a shared idea that the original matter of the poem was pagan but that the poet was Christian. What was happening in the Anglo-Saxon area was really peculiar: "a picture of a period in which the virtues of the heathen 'Heroic Age' were tempered by the gentleness of the new belief; an age warlike, yet Christian"[98]. The poet therefore knows well that the audience of the poem is made up of people who, on the one hand, love and appreciate the heroic legends typical of the Germanic pagan culture made up of struggles and conflicts but, on the other, following the conversion and following the arrival of the Christian faith, also expects that what is narrated within the poem is always in harmony with the values of the new faith.

In fact, the element of the poem through which this fusion between Christian and pagan elements can best be seen is undoubtedly the protagonist, the hero Beowulf. Beowulf is a character who in some ways can be considered the perfect symbol of the Germanic hero but who, at the same time, has something of the Christian savior. In fact, he is always ready to help people: the Danes in the first moment and the Geats, in the second part. And he always does it without any hesitation. The other characteristics of the hero obviously derive from the warrior code at the basis of pagan society. But his moral characteristics, his refinement,

[96] Adrien Bonjour, *The Use of Anticipation in Beowulf*. The Review of English Studies, Vol. 16, No. 63, 1940, p. 230.

[97] Oliver Farrar Emerson, *Grendel's Motive in Attacking Heorot***.** The Modern Language Review, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1921, p. 8.

[98] R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf. An Introduction to the Study of the Poem*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1932, p. 134.

his loyalty, are mostly attributable to the new Christian faith that had spread among the Anglo-Saxons. The character of Beowulf, therefore, has both pagan and Christian aspects.

Starting with the analysis of the pagan elements, first of all it is important to note that in *Beowulf* there are rites that are typical of the pagan culture. First of all the funerals: the poem opens and closes with a funeral. The funeral that is celebrated in the initial part of the poem is that of Scyld Scefing. In the case of Scyld Scefing's funeral, his body is placed on a ship, since he had arrived, it is not known from where, from the sea. On the ship precious objects are placed next to the king's body as symbol of all the prosperity that he had guaranteed to his people during his kingdom. Precious objects, as already mentioned, are an important symbol of gratitude and respect towards the person who receives them as a gift, but they also represent a pagan custom if placed next to a corpse.

The rite that closes the poem is instead the funeral of King Beowulf, who died during the fight in which he had faced the dragon. This is a cremation funeral. Between the two rites just described there is another one that is located within *The Finn episode*: it is the funeral of Hnaef and Hildeburh's son.

As for the pagan elements, we can take as an example the testimony written by Ibn Fadlan[99]: he was an Arab writer and traveler who wrote, among other things, an account of a Germanic funeral in pre-Christian times. It is the funeral of a leader. Ibn Fadlan says that on the pyre intended for the corpse, men placed precious objects as homage to him. After sacrifices and rites typical of the funerary rite, the moment in which the body is cremated is also told: the cremation takes place through a lit torch with which the entire pyre catches fire. The description of the cremation is also present in the *Beowulf* poem, when the poet tells of Beowulf's funeral: the dynamics are very similar to those of the two funerals present in the poem.

Another typically Germanic custom is the "Potlac system". It regulates the exchange of gifts between kings and warriors and vice versa. The Potlac system is a typical practice of pagan Germanic societies. The Potlac system is based on the offering of gifts by a person who occupies a position of particular prestige in society (usually the king) to the members of his group. The abundance of gifts and their prestige are commensurate with the social position held by the person receiving the gift. According to this system, the person who receives a gift can reciprocate by giving another precious object to the person from whom he received it. In *Beowulf* this practice is described very clearly, for example after Beowulf has killed Grendel and Grendel's mother, the king gives him gifts of very high value. The "Potlac system" is the basis of the relationship between king and warrior: the king, for example, shows gratitude to the warrior for loyalty and respect he showed him through gifts. At the same time, a gift received can be given to someone else, often important people who hold a prestigious position in society, such as a lord or a king.

An example of the practice through which the king shows gratitude to a warrior by giving him gifts is Hrothgar's thanks to Beowulf. Hrothgar, in fact, after

[99] Gro Steinsland, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *People and Powers in the Viking World*, Stockholm, Ordfront, 1998, p. 88.

Grendel's death, gives to Beowulf many precious things (ll. 1020-1022; 1035-1037). Giving gifts is therefore a sign of great recognition and gratitude.

Another typically Germanic element that stands out within the poem is the obligation of revenge. At the basis of Germanic society there is the obligation to avenge those who lose their lives during a conflict. The obligation, in particular, exists for people who belong to the same tribe but becomes stronger if the person killed is a relative or a person who holds a prestigious position such as a prince, a lord or a king[100].

Among the pagan elements, the wish to obtain earthly glory can also be mentioned. It is obtained through the *ellen* which is mentioned in the prologue. The term means "strength, power, vigour, valour, courage, fortitude"[101], and it can therefore be translated as "glorious actions". It is through glorious actions and the courage shown in war but also through the moral finesse that a warrior can obtain the recognition of earthly glory from his king and from the other warriors and members of society in general.

Thes pagan elements are in contrast but coexist with all the references to Christianity which are contained in the poem, especially in the first part.

One of the Christian elements in the poem is the story of Cain and Abel (ll. 107-114) : Grendel and his mother, in fact, descend directly from Cain, who represents the origin of evil in the world and is the incarnation of Satanic evil. The place where Grendel and the mother live is also very similar to Hell: it is a dark and humid swamp.

The dragon is another creature that has been associated with a monster of the Old Testament: the dragon was interpreted by some scholars as an association to Leviathan. It is a monster that has the shape of marine snake. In Christianity it is associated with the devil. It is a demonic entity that threatens both the world and its inhabitants, both considered as creations of God.

Moreover, during the events treated in the poem, especially in reference to the successes and victories in war, the characters are used to thank God or refer to him, for example in ll. 1057-1058; l. 1397; l. 1626.

[100] This theme will be analyzed in detail in Chapter II, in which at the center of attention there will be Finn's episode with reference to the position of Hengest following the killing of King Hnaef.

[101] Bosworth, Joseph. "ellen." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

1.5. The *Finnsburg Fragment*

The *Finnesburg Fragment* is a very short text since it is a portion of an Old English heroic poem. The text that makes up the *Finnsburg Fragment*, in fact, is not complete: only a part has been handed down, since the rest of the original manuscript has numerous damages that were caused by a fire. It describes a fight between two peoples (the Frisians and the Danes), but at a first reading of the text that constitutes the fragment, it is not easy to understand who they are. In fact, no tribe name is identifiable within the fragment. The reconstruction has been done above all thanks to the presence of proper names of princes and kings. Furthermore, through the presence of the word *Finnsburh* (l. 36 of the *Finnsburg Fragment*), "Finn's stronghold", it is possible to understand that the other people involved in the struggle is led by a king whose name is Finn. Finn was a legendary king of the Frisians, whose name appears in other works such as *Wisdith*, *Beowulf* and the *Historia Brittonum*. In this regard, the names of the warriors that are mentioned are important evidences to understand who these two tribes are: Gūþlāf and Ordlāf. These are two names that are also found within the *Skjöldunga saga*: Gunnleifus, Oddleifus. They are two people belonging to the Danish royal dynasty[102].

If the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment* is compared with that of *The Finn Episode*, it clearly appears that the two tribes involved are the Frisians and the Danes.

Furthermore, Klaeber, in his *Observations on The Finn Episode,* underlines how the point of view is characteristically Danish: all the direct speeches found in the *Finnsburg Fragment* are pronounced by the Danish warriors, while those of the Frisians are always reported through the technique of indirect speech[103]. Here is an example: (ll. 23-24):

> *ac hē frægn ofer eal undearninga*
> *dēormōd hæleþ hwā ðā duru hēolde*[104].
>
> but he asked over all, openly,
> the daring-hearted hero, who held the door[105].

[102] Friedrich. Klaeber, *Observations on the Finn Episode*. "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology", Vol. 14, No. 4, 1915, p. 544.
[103] *Ivi*, p. 545.
[104] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[105] Francis Barton Gummere, *Beowulf*. The Harvard Classics, Vol. 49. P.F. Collier & Son., 1910.

The surviving text is brief and allusive, but comparison with other texts in Old English poetry makes it possible to, at least partially, reconstruct the plot. The text that is known today derives from a lost manuscript transcribed by George Hickes[106]. Hickes' transcription was published in 1705, in his *Linguarum Septentrionalium Thesaurus*. The language of the *Finnsburg Fragment* is, as well as *Beowulf*'s language, the late West Saxon dialect, with some admixture of Anglian, Northumbrian and Kentish.

As regards the date of composition of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, also in this case there is no irrefutable evidence but scholars maintain that the *Finnsburg Fragment* and *Beowulf* were written in the same period. The metre is the same as *Beowulf*: the long alliterative verse.

Due to the speed of the narrative, the *Finnsburg Fragment* was defined as a lay (*Lied*). The narrative of the fight between Frisians and Danes that lasted five long days is extremely rapid and the speeches contained in it are really short, especially when compared to those contained in *Beowulf* or in other contemporary works such as the *Waldhere* fragment. But the hypothesis according to which the fragment is a lay is not the only one. Another hypothesis has been put forward: the fragment has also been interpreted as a "synthesis" of a longer and older epic poem[107].

The origin of the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, however, can not be understood with certainty since the work we know today is only a part of the full text that was originally composed.

1.5.1 Plot of the *Finnsburg Fragment*

One of the biggest difficulties when discussing the *Finnsburg Fragment* is reconstructing the plot. The main reason for this difficulty is linked above all to the fragmentary nature of the text as it is known today, which is in fact made up of only 48 lines.

While recreating the plot of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, a distinction must be made between what can only be deduced on the basis of reading the text of the *Finnsburh Fragment* and that which can be reconstructed through reading the same story from another source, i.e. *The Finn Episode* which appears in the *Beowulf* poem.

It is therefore convenient, for reasons of clarity, to first tell the plot which is limited to what can be read in the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment* and then insert

[106] Hickes, *Linguarum. Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archaeologicus*, vol 2, Oxford, 1705.

[107] W. S. Mackie, *The Fight at Finnsburg*. The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Vol. 16, No. 2. pp. 250-273. University of Illinois Press, 1917, p. 272.

the additional elements of *The Finn Episode* with the aim of having a clearer and more precise overall vision.

The beginning of the fragment can be defined as direct: there are no preliminary descriptions, the reader finds himself directly immersed in the story. The first lines, in particular, consist in the observation of Hnaef, leader of the Danes, who realizes that what they are seeing, the reflected lights, are not the dawn in the East or the flight of a dragon, nor are the gables burning. Those lights that are getting closer and closer are nothing else than the torches of the men who are about to attack them. The poet does not tell us what causes led to the struggle between the two groups. it is an element that cannot be deduced from the words that were transcribed and which have survived to this day. There have been hypotheses put forward about this over the years by scholars who have been particularly interested in the topic. One of these is Möller who claims that the cause of this conflict may be the killing of Finn's father by Hnaef (or perhaps by Hnaef's father). The marriage between Hildeburh and Finn would be, according to his vision, a compromise to reduce the tension that had been created between the two groups or, to put it in Möller's words, "the giving of Hildeburh to Finn would be an atonement for the killing of Finn's father, Folcwalda, by Hnaef or Hnaef's father, Hoc"[108].

At this point the fight begins: it is a hard struggle between the two peoples involved. The fight goes on for five days, in which no warrior loses his life. At a certain point, however, just before the fragment ends, a hero is wounded. It is not clear who the hero is and since the fragment ends it is not possible to have an answer. However, especially on the basis of what was told in the episode, scholars have tried to reconstruct the dynamics more clearly.

The most accepted version by scholars is the one proposed and elaborated by E. V. K. Dobbie[109], who in 1953 reconstructed the plot, bringing together the information contained in the *Finnsburg Fragment* and *The Finn Episode*, in the following way.

Hildeburh, a Danish princess, is married to the Frisian king Finn and lives in her husband's court. Their marriage was agreed upon by the two families they belonged to, with the aim of putting an end to the tensions that had arisen between the Frisians and the Danes. Hildeburh's brother, Hnaef, is at Finn's court together with sixty other Danes and during this visit a fight breaks out between them and the Frisians. The reason for the fight is unclear but it could be a pre-existing feud which has been put to an end through the marriage of Hildeburh and Finn (but, evidently, it was only a temporary truce)[110]. During the fight, Hnaef and Hilderburh's son die along with other Danish warriors. At this point Hengest takes over from Hnaef as leader of the Danes. Finn and Hengest conclude a truce, a truce that obviously "was clearly nothing more than a temporary expedient, intended to

[108] Hermann Möller, cit. in Donald K. Fry, *Finnburh Fragment and Episode*. London, Methuen's Old English library, 1974, p. 6.
[109] E. V. K. Dobbie, 1953. Cit in Donald K. Fry, *Finnburh Fragment and Episode*. London, Methuen's Old English library, 1974, pp. 11-12.
[110] For more information on the topic, see paragraph 2.4

serve until the winter was over and the Danes could return"[111]. Despite the truce and despite the desire to return home, Hengest, once spring arrives, decides to avenge Hnaef and the rest of his companions killed in the fight. The Danes kill Finn and the rest of the frisians warriors and takes both Finn's treasure and the Danish princess with him to Denmark. As already said, therefore, this is the plot that scholars have reconstructed not so much based on the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment* (task impossible to complete due to the lack of elements necessary for reconstruction) but rather on what is told in The *Finn episode* contained in *Beowulf*. Hengest's revenge is a fundamental moment in the story as it testifies to the basis of the relationship between lord and warrior. The code of revenge provides for those who remain alive after a fight the mandatory obligation to avenge the lord who is killed[112].

[111] These are not the only differences between the two texts: there are notable differences between them, differences that will be discussed in Chapter III.

CHAPTER II

THE FINN EPISODE IN BEOWULF

2.1. *The Finn Episode* (ll. 1068-1159)

þær wæs sang ond sweg samod ætgædere
fore Healfdenes hildewisan,
gomenwudu greted, gid oft wrecen,
ðonne healgamen Hroþgares scop
æfter medobence mænan scolde
be Finnes eaferum, ða hie se fær begeat,
hæleð Healfdena, Hnæf Scyldinga,
in Freswæle feallan scolde.
Ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte
Eotena treowe; unsynnum wearð
beloren leofum æt þam lindplegan,
bearnum ond broðrum; hie on gebyrd hruron,
gare wunde. þæt wæs geomuru ides.
Nalles holinga Hoces dohtor
meotodsceaft bemearn, syþðan morgen com,
ða heo under swegle geseon meahte
morþorbealo maga, þær heo ær mæste heold
worolde wynne. Wig ealle fornam
Finnes þegnas nemne feaum anum,
þæt he ne mehte on þæm meðelstede
wig Hengeste wiht gefeohtan,
ne þa wealafe wige forþringan
þeodnes ðegna. ac hig him geþingo budon,

þæt hie him oðer flet eal gerymdon,
healle ond heahsetl, þæt hie healfre geweald
wið Eotena bearn agan moston,
ond æt feohgyftum Folcwaldan sunu
dogra gehwylce Dene weorþode,
Hengestes heap hringum wenede
efne swa swiðe sincgestreonum
fættan goldes, swa he Fresena cyn
on beorsele byldan wolde.
ða hie getruwedon on twa healfa
fæste frioðuwære. Fin Hengeste
elne, unflitme aðum benemde
þæt he þa wealafe weotena dome
arum heolde, þæt ðær ænig mon
wordum ne worcum wære ne bræce,
ne þurh inwitsearo æfre gemænden
ðeah hie hira beaggyfan banan folgedon
ðeodenlease, þa him swa geþearfod wæs.
gyf þonne Frysna hwylc frecnan spræce
ðæs morþorhetes myndgiend wære,
þonne hit sweordes ecg seðan scolde.
Ad wæs geæfned ond icge gold
ahæfen of horde. Herescyldinga
betst beadorinca wæs on bæl gearu.
æt þæm ade wæs eþgesyne
swatfah syrce, swyn ealgylden,
eofer irenheard, æþeling manig
wundum awyrded; sume on wæle crungon.
Het ða Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade

hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan,
banfatu bærnan ond on bæl don
eame on eaxle. Ides gnornode,
geomrode giddum. Guðrinc astah.
Wand to wolcnum wælfyra mæst,
hlynode for hlawe; hafelan multon,
bengeato burston, ðonne blod ætspranc,
laðbite lices. Lig ealle forswealg,
gæsta gifrost, þara ðe þær guð fornam
bega folces; wæs hira blæd scacen.
Gewiton him ða wigend wica neosian,
freondum befeallen, Frysland geseon,
hamas ond heaburh. Hengest ða gyt
wælfagne winter wunode mid Finne
eal unhlitme. Eard gemunde,
þeah þe he ne meahte on mere drifan
hringedstefnan; holm storme weol,
won wið winde, winter yþe beleac
isgebinde, oþðæt oþer com
gear in geardas, swa nu gyt deð,
þa ðe syngales sele bewitiað,
wuldortorhtan weder. ða wæs winter scacen,
fæger foldan bearm. Fundode wrecca,
gist of geardum; he to gyrnwræce
swiðor þohte þonne to sælade,
gif he torngemot þurhteon mihte
þæt he Eotena bearn inne gemunde.
Swa he ne forwyrnde woroldrædenne,
þonne him Hunlafing hildeleoman,

billa selest, on bearm dyde,
þæs wæron mid Eotenum ecge cuðe.
Swylce ferhðfrecan Fin eft begeat
sweordbealo sliðen æt his selfes ham,
siþðan grimne gripe Guðlaf ond Oslaf
æfter sæsiðe, sorge, mændon,
ætwiton weana dæl; ne meahte wæfre mod
forhabban in hreþre. ða wæs heal roden
feonda feorum, swilce Fin slægen,
cyning on corþre, ond seo cwen numen.
Sceotend Scyldinga to scypon feredon
eal ingestealdeorðcyninges,
swylce hie æt Finnes ham findan meahton
sigla, searogimma. Hie on sælade
drihtlice wif to Denum feredon,
læddon to leodum.[113]

[113] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

2.2. Translation

There was song, and the voices of men gathered together before the leader of the host of Healfdene, there the harp was touched to mirth, and many a lay recalled. Then according 870 to his office Hrothgar's minstrel touched upon a tale to the liking of those upon the benches drinking their mead within the hall. He told of the sons of Finn. When the sudden onslaught came upon them the hero of the Half-Danes, Hnæf of the Scyldings, fell by fate in the Frisian slaughter. 875 Of a truth Hildeburg had little cause to praise the loyalty of the Jutes; by no fault of hers she was robbed of her loved ones in the clash of shields, of brothers and of sons. They fell according to their doom slain by the spear. A woeful lady she! Not without cause did that daughter of Hoc lament the 880 decree of fate, when that morning came, whereon she might behold beneath the light of day the cruel slaying of her kin. Where he aforetime had possessed the greatest earthly joy, there had war taken all Finn's champions, save few alone; so that he might by no means on that field of meeting wage 885 to an end the fight with Hengest, nor in battle wrest the sad remnant from the captain of the prince. Nay, they offered terms to him, that he would make all free for them another court, both hall and throne; that they should have possession of the half thereof, sharing with the sons of the Jutes, and at 890 the giving of treasure the son of Folcwalda should each day honour the Danes, should with the rings and hoarded jewels of plated gold rejoice the company of Hengest no whit less than he was wont in the drinking-hall to enhearten the men of Frisian race. 895 Thus on both sides they confirmed a binding treaty of peace. To Hengest Finn in full and without reserve declared with solemn oaths that he would with the advice of his counsellors honourably entreat the sad remnant (of the fight); and that there should no man ever recall it to mind, not though 900 they served the slayer of him who before had given them rings, being now without a lord; for such was their necessity. If moreover any of the men of Frisia should with grievous words recall to memory that deadly feud, then should it be expiated by the edge of sword. 905 A pyre was made ready, and the gleaming gold brought forth from the treasury. That best of the heroes in battle of the warrior Scyldings was arrayed upon the funeral pile. Upon that pyre was plain to see blood-drenched corslet, swine-crest all made of gold, boar hard as iron, many a lord 910 by wounds destroyed – one and all they had fallen in that slaughter! Then Hildeburg bade that her own son be com- mitted to the flames upon the pyre of Hnæf, there to burn their bones, setting him upon the funeral pile at his uncle's side. The lady mourned bewailing them in song. The warrior was mounted upon high. Up to the clouds swirled that mightiest of destroying fires, roaring before the burial mound. Consumed were their heads, their gaping wounds burst open, the cruel hurts of the body, and the blood sprang forth. Flame devoured them all, hungriest of spirits, all that 920 in that place war had taken of either people: their

glory had passed away. Then the warriors bereft of their friends departed to look upon their dwellings, to see the Frisian land, their homes and mighty town. Still Hengest abode with Finn that blood- 925 stained winter, keeping fully to his word. He thought of his own land, even though he could not speed upon the sea his ship with curving beak. The deep was tossed in storm and battled with the wind; winter locked the waves in icy bond, until another year came to the dwellings of men, even as it 930 doth yet, those weathers gloriously fair that unchangingly observe the seasons. Now past was winter, and fair the bosom of the earth. The exile, the guest of Finn, was eager to be gone from those courts. Therein more thought did he give to vengeance for his sorrow than to the passage of the 935 sea, pondering if he might again achieve a clash of wrath, wherein he would in his heart remember the children of the Jutes. Wherefore he did not refuse the homage (that binds all men), when Hunlaf's son laid the Light of Battle, that best of swords, upon his lap. The edges thereof the Jutes knew full 940 well! And so too in turn cruel destruction by the sword came upon Finn in his very hall, when Guthlaf and Oslaf after their journey over the sea had recounted their sorrow and that deadly onslaught, and complained their woeful lot; the restless spirit within the breast might not be restrained. Then 945 was that hall reddened with the life-blood of their foes, and Finn, too, slain, the king amid his company, and the queen was taken. The bowmen of the Scyldings bore to their ships all the wealth of the house of that king of earth, all such as they could find of jewels and cunning gems. Over the ways 950 of the sea they bore that royal lady to the land of the Danes, and brought her to her people. The lay was sung, the minstrel's tale at an end[114].

[114] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A Translation and Commentary*, Cristopher Tolkien (ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, pp. 43-46.

2.3. Introduction to *The Finn Episode*

As already mentioned in Chapter I, the poem *Beowulf* contains episodes and digressions from the main story. Within them the poet tells the stories of characters who are external to the main plot. The stories narrated are always about warrior leaders and their exploits on the battlefield. Often the poet tells digressions about feuds between different tribes. Here are some examples of the various digressions contained in *Beowulf* (following the order in which they appear in the poem): the digression on Scyld Scefing (ll. 4-52), the one on Creation (ll. 90-107), the one on Beowulf and his fight against the giants (ll. 419-424), the one on the swimming competition with Breca (ll. 500-575), the one on Heremod (ll. 1709-1720) and the on the last survivor and the treasure he found (ll. 2247-2260).

The Finn Episode is the digression in which the scop tells the story of a fight between Frisians and Danes. The *Beowulf* poet does not tell a story: it would perhaps be more appropriate to say that the poet is alluding to elements of a story, which is the legend of Finn. The legend of Finn had been circulating for years in the oral tradition and, although it is a story set in Friesland and in which the protagonists are all Frisians and Danes, it was also known in the Anglo-Saxon area. The oral circulation can be acknowledged with some certainty through an analysis of the way in which the poet tells the story of *The Finn Episode*, almost alluding only to some elements of it. This means that the *Beowulf* poet chooses only a few elements of the Finn legend on which to focus his attention, such as the death of Hnaef, mentioned at the beginning of the episode but only for a moment. The poet, in fact, mentions Hnaef's death only to start the original story that he intends to tell within the rest of *The Finn Episode*, that is, the story of Hildeburh and that of Hengest. The poet's way of operating will be discussed better and more precisely later in this chapter, through the analysis of the lines that can be said to constitute the opening of *The Finn Episode*.

The Finn Episode is the longest digression of the poem. It occupies folios 156a-158b of British Museum Manuscript Cotton Vitellius A, XV, which is the *Beowulf* Manuscript. In *The Finn Episode* the *Beowulf* poet does not describe the dynamics of the fights. For example, we are told that Hnaef died during the first battle but we are not told how, at what time, or by whom he was killed.

The beginning of *The Finn Episode* is the cause of debate. This comes from the fact that it is possible to consider the beginning of *The Finn Episode* both at l. 1063 or l. 1068, where there is actually mention of Finn. Since from l. 1063 to l. 1067, informations about the setting are provided, line 1063 can be considered the beginning of *The Finn Episode,* since the poet, from this line onwards, is already introducing the story that will be told:

Þær wæs sang ond sweg samod ætgædere
fore Healfdenes hildewisan,
gomenwudu greted, gid oft wrecen
ðonne healgamen Hroþgares scop
æfter medobence mænan scolde.

"There was song, and the voices of men gathered together before the leader of the host of Healfdene, there the harp was touched to mirth, and many a lay recalled. Then according 870 to his office Hrothgar's minstrel touched upon a tale to the liking of those upon the benches drinking their mead within the hall".

The story the scop is about to tell to is well known to the Danes in Heorot. The knowledge of the story is an important element since it is the proof that the it already circulated in oral form and that it was well known.

But to consider the beginning of *The Finn Episode* at l. 1068 is not unreasonable, since it is in that line that, for the first time, the scop mentions the name of Finn, refers to the attack to the Danes and tells of Hnaef's killing in the massacre of Friesland:

Finnes eaferum ða hie se fær begeat
hæleð Healf-Dena· Hnæf Scyldinga
in Freswæle feallan scolde. (ll. 1068-1070).

He told of the sons of Finn. When the sudden onslaught came upon them the hero of the Half-Danes, Hnæf of the Scyldings, fell by fate in the Frisian slaughter.

The two tribes involved in the fight are the Danes and the Frisians. In fact the scop, at line 1069, defines one of the two peoples as *Healf-Dena,* "Half Danes" or again at lines 1090 and 1158 as *Dene*, "Danes" or, finally, at lines 1069, 1108 and 1154 as *Scyldinga* "Scyldingas". The people against whom they fight are instead defined at lines 1093 and 1104 as *Frysna* "Frisians" or at lines 1072 and 1088 as *Eotena* "Eotan".

Since it is a very long episode, especially when compared with the other digressions narrated in the rest of the poem, it is more convenient to analyse the plot in detail as a completely self-contained story. There are evidences that allow us to state with certainty that Finn is the king of the Frisians. These evidences are contained in other literary works belonging tot he Old English tradition. Finn's name appears, for example, in *Widsith*, an Old English poem of 143 lines which only survived in the *Exeter Book* manuscript. In particular, in *Wisdith* it is told that

Fin Folcwalding Fresna cynne[115] *(*ll.26-27)*:*

[115] Scott Gwara, *The Foreign Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. *"*Traditio*",* Vol. 63, 2008, p. 187.

Finn son of Folcwalda ruled the Frisians ".[116]

2.4. The Structure of *The Finn Episode*

Kemp Malone, in *The Finn Episode in* Beowulf[117], proposes a division of the entire Episode into five sections: the first section includes lines from 1068 to 1080a, the second from 1080b to 1106, the third from 1107 to 1124, the fourth from 1125 to 1145 and the fifth and last from 1146 to 1159b[118].

The structure is well calibrated as each section corresponds to the development of a specific moment of the fight described by the poet: Malone sees in the structure a slow movement that reminds him of the movement of a symphony[119]. This vision is justified by the way in which the poet organizes the presentation of the themes within the almost 100 lines which constitute *The Finn Episode*. The sections are arranged according to a precise pattern: the first and third sections focus on Hildeburh, the second and fourth on Hengest and the fifth on the conclusion of the events. The peculiarity of this structure consists in the fact that, if for the first four sections the poet treats the two main themes, Hildeburh's and Hengest's tragedies, separately from each other, in the fifth section, which constitutes the conclusion of *The Finn Episode*, the two themes are unified.

Malone argues that the two main themes of The *Finn Episode* are the representation of two human tragedies: the first being Hildeburh's tragedy and the second being Hengest's tragedy. The two characters who can be considered the true protagonists, therefore, are Hildeburh and Hengest.

We are told that Hildeburh has lost everything, from her brother to her son to her husband and her title as queen of the Frisians. Hengest, on the other hand, was guilty of a crime considered serious by the society of the time: he betrayed his leader by concluding a truce with the person responsible for the attack and therefore for his killing and he did not avenge him immediately.

After the introduction of the story he is about to tell, the first section begins (l. 1071). The poet mentions Hnaef's death. But he adds another element: some of the Finn's warriors died together with Hnaef. Hnaef dies but, at the same time, the Danes have already killed many of the Frisian warriors.

The poet does not give any contextual information: he begins directly to tell the story of the fight between the two tribes, without adding information on the

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[116] *Ibid*.

[117] Kemp Malone, *"The Finn Episode in Beowulf. "*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*"*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1926, p. 157.

[118] *Ivi*, p. 158.

[119] *Ivi*, p. 160.

reasons that led to the outbreak of the conflict. The poet decides to start telling the story without preliminary informations because he knows with certainty that the audience was well acquainted with the legend of Finn. In this regard, in fact, Malone states that "no story-telling was necessary"[120]. The way in which the poet manipulates the elements of the Finn legend is interesting: he only chooses some elements of it to focus on. The poet, in particular, focuses on the most negative aspects of the Germanic heroic society, bringing out Hildeburh's story in particular. The negative aspects of heroic Germanic society are those linked to war: fighting battles against other men and all the consequences which derive from the warrior actions. Ten Brink, in this regard, manages to explain exhaustively the way in which the *Beowulf* poet works while creating *The Finn Episode*: "he creates the picture of a rhapsodist, a complete master of the material in hand, dwelling on those points to which he wishes to give prominence, merely suggesting or alluding to other"[121].

The *Beowulf* poet wants, through the telling of a story which was familiar to the audience, to focus on aspects that go beyond simple warrior actions and the dynamics of battle. He wants to focus on the aspects that are most closely linked to the interiority of the protagonists. The poet manages to do so through the inclusion of elements of the already known legend but presented in a new light and through a new point of view. The new point of view that emerges is that of Hildeburh. The fact that the poet dedicates only two lines to mention Hnaef's death already allows us to understand that the main theme is another. Hnaef's death is certainly an important event but, in *The Finn Episode,* it is relevant for the effects it will have on the development of the story and in particular for the tragedy of the two main characters, Hildeburh and Hengest.

The second section begins at line 1080. In this section, the poet focus shifts from Hildeburh to Hengest. The poet says that during the battle Finn lost most of his warriors and also in this case the focus is not on warrior actions: the dynamics in which many of the Frisian warriors lose their lives are not described. The *Beowulf* poet does not communicate the names of the warriors who lose their lives (while the poet of the *Fragment* inserts them) nor the ways in which they are killed. The focus is instead on the truce proposed by the Frisians to the Danes. The poet describes the conditions of the pact in detail and says that the truce is concluded.

The third section begins with reference to Hildeburh's pain : after the truce is concluded, the poet focuses on the funeral of Hildeburh's brother and son. The poet manages to create a strong contrast between Hengest's betrayal and Hildeburh's total innocence, since she has done nothing to deserve the pain

[120] Kemp Malone, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf. "*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*"*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1926, p. 160.

[121] Bernhard ten Brink, cit. in Glen Levin Swiggett. *"Notes on the Finnsburg Fragment"*, *"*Modern Language notes*"*, Vol. 20, No. 6, 1905, p. 169.

inflicted on her[122]. During the funeral the woman expresses her grief publicly. She laments in songs, a lament through which her pain is perceived by all those present at the funeral rite.

The fourth section contains the description of the facts ranging from the celebration of the funeral of Hnaef and Hildeburh's son to the implementation of the revenge (contained in the conclusion). This section is unclear. Understanding the dynamics of what happens from this point on is not at all simple.

Hengest remains in Friesland for the duration of the winter, but his thoughts are still directed to revenge. According to what the poet tells us, Hengest never stopped thinking, not even for a moment, about the killing of Hnaef and the need to take revenge for his death never abondened him. And the poet underlines this aspect through the description of the landscape : everything that is told in this part of *The Finn Episode*, up to the implementation of revenge, concerns Hengest's state of mind. He is in a state of homesickness *: fundode wrecca* (l. 1137). *Wrecca* is defined as "one driven from his own country or a wanderer in foreign lands"[123]. *Fundian* is a verb which can be defined as "to aspire, to desire"[124].

The expressions used by the *Beowulf* poet (ll. 1131-1133) are the following*: holm storme weol,* "now waves rolled fierce"*, won wið winde,* "lashed by the winds", *winter yþe beleac sgebinde,* "winter locked them in icy fetters". Th poet also mentions the *yþe*, "the waves" of the ocean.

Malone does not hesitate to identify only one feeling at the center of his malaise: remorse[125]. Hengest's state of malaise therefore could not derive from the desire to finally return to his own country. Hengest could be assailed by a sense of repentance, since he realizes that he made a mistake by accepting the truce, even if his intentions were right when considered within the dynamics of the plan he had in mind from the beginning. The storm the poet speaks of seems to represent the storm of emotions that was occurring within Hengest's mind. The ocean struggling with the wind seems to be symbolic of Hengest's struggle with his own conscience[126].

But finally the long winter has come to an end and spring arrives. The metaphor of season and the hero's state of mind is continued in this case too. When spring arrives, in fact, his mood changes along with the change of season. With the arrival of spring, Hengest recovers all those qualities that he seemed to have lost

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[122] Kemp Malone, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf*. "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology", Vol. 25, No. 2, 1926, p. 161.

[123] Bosworth, Joseph. "wrecca." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[124] Bosworth, Joseph. "fundian.." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[125] Kemp Malone, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf*. "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology", Vol. 25, No. 2, 1926, p. 166.

[126] *Ibid*.

during the winter. He finally found the strength to act to ensure that the situation was at least partially remedied. Hengest has a plan: to return to Denmark but not permanently. His objective is to gather as many men as possible for the definitive defeat of the Frisians. Finally, after the hard winter just passed and after Hengest's internal crisis, "his skin-saving days were over"[127]. His thoughts are still fixed on the need to avenge his lord Hnaef: he to *gyrnwræce*, *swiðor þohte þonne to sælade* (ll. 1138-1139)[128], "though more gladly he pondered on wreaking his vengeance than roaming the deep" (ll. 1138-1139).

There is a passage of *The Finn Episode* that seems to anticipate the actual realization of the Danes' revenge:

> þonne him Hunlafing hildeleoman
> billa selest on bearm dyde·
> þæs wæron mid Eotenum ecge cuðe. (ll. 1143-1145)

when Hunlaf's son laid the Light of Battle, that best of swords, upon his lap. The edges thereof the Jutes knew full well!

This is a fundamental moment within the dynamic of the revenge. Through the gesture of Hunlafing who provides him the sword and due to Hengest's acceptance of the sword, the obligation of revenge has now become public[129]. But this is only one of the many interpretations and translations that have been made of this passage over time. There are also other interpretations, some less probable: Bugge claims that *Hunlafing* is a compound made up of "*Hun*" and "*Lafing*"[130]. According to the scholar, therefore, Hun would be another character in the story and Lafing would instead be the word for "sword". The translation proposed by Bugge[131] is therefore "Hun laid the sword upon Hengest's lap".

There is still something to add regarding line 1145: the poet describes the *hildeleoman,* "flash of war" (kenning for sword) given by Hunlafing to Hengest that as "the edges thereof the Jutes knew full well!". The Jutes are the Frisians, so

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[127] *Ivi*, p. 167.

[128] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[129] Kemp Malone, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf*. "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology", Vol. 25, No. 2, 1926, p. 167.

[130] Sophus Bugge, cit. in William Witherle Lawrence, *Beowulf and the Tragedy of Finnsburg*. "Publications of the Modern Language Association", Vol. 30, No 2, 1915, p. 426.

[131] *Ibid*.

the poet is probably referring to the fact that the same sword had played a decisive role in the first battle between the Danes and the Frisians, the one in which Hnaef had been killed. It is at this point that the fifth section, and the concluding one, of *The Finn Episode* begins. In this last section the revenge of the Danes is finally narrated (ll. 1146-1152).

In this last fight between the tw sides, Finn is killed. Revenge has finally been accomplished and the Danes have no reason to stay any longer. The poet's words in this regard are as follows: *ne meahte wæfre mod forhabban in hreþre* (ll. 1150-1151).

After the revenge was finally accomplished, the Danes take whatever valuables they can find and return to Denmark, taking Hildeburh with them.

2.5. Hildeburh as the Protagonist

Within the story of *Finn* several characters are mentioned and make their appearance, such as Hnaef and Hengest. Most of the studies on the poem that have been conducted over the years have focused with particular attention on the role of Hengest, on his tragedy and on his choices during the events narrated. Considering Hengest as the protagonist of *The Finn Episode*, however, is not the only path that has been followed. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the poet's focus is also on Hildeburh and this has also been demonstrated by analyzing the structure of *The Finn Episode*. It begins by almost immediately referring to the woman and ends by telling of the way in which Hildeburh is brought away from Friesland and towards her home, Denmark. As regards Hildeburh's role within *The Finn Episode*, however, there is no doubt that the poet already had a plan on the structure of the poem: he wants to make Hildeburh, a character who is not present in the story told in the *Finnsburg Fragment*, the protagonist, by making emerge in a particular way everything that the woman had to suffer during the events covered.

It is possible to agree that Hengest and Finn can be defined as the main agents in terms of actions, but the effects of their actions all pour on Hildeburh. More precisely, the responsible for what will happen to Hildeburh are Hengest with the Danish warriors and Finn with the retinue of Frisian men.

Hildeburh, from what is told by the poet, does not act much in terms of concrete actions. The only moment in which she acts is during the funeral rite in which the body of Hnaef and her son were cremated: in this scene Hildeburh took on a role of no small importance. She took on the function of directing the ways in which the two bodies were to be arranged on the funeral pyre.

The entire structure of the *Finn episode* is centered on the woman: in the initial, central and final parts the poet refers to her. The poet introduces the theme of the episode through the description of Hildeburh’s pain for the loss of his brother and his son in ll. 1071-1080. In these lines, the *Beowulf* poet describes Hildeburh's pain through the use of a series of specific words. First of all, the poet says that Hildeburh is *beloren leofum (l. 1073)*. *Beloren*, in particular, is the participle of *be-*

leōsan. Beloren means "deprived"[132]. *Leōf* means "beloved, loved one". When the poet says that Hildeburh is *beloren leofum*, therefore, he is saying that she has been deprived of her loved ones. Then the poet says that she is *geomuru ides* (l. 1075). *Ides* is the word used for woman; it is a word little used except in poetry[133]. The word that best expresses the pain Hildeburh felt is *geomuru: geomur* means "sad, sorrowful"[134]. Finally, the poet uses the verb *be-mearn* (l. 1077), "to mourn"[135].

The description of Hildeburh's pain is strongly contrasted with the joy she had enjoyed up to that moment in that same place. The word used by the poet to refer to the joy Hildeburh felt in the past is *wynne*, that can be defined as "a delight which causes a pleasure"[136]. Her joy is in contrast with the term *morþorbealo*, a compound made up of *morþor* and *bealu*. *Morþor* is "murder"[137], while *bealu* is "baleful"[138]. In other words, the joy she felt in the hall is completely erased by the murder of her son and her brother. In the room where she found the two corpses she presumably spent time with her family and with the men of the highest position within Frisian society who were part of the the king's usual circle. All this joy that Hildeburh experienced is swept away in a single instant, that is, the moment she sees the tragic scene. Even the creation of this contrast is intended to the aim that the poet has in mind for the creation of *The Finn Episode*: to paint Hildeburh's situation in the most pitiful way possible. The poet is trying to push the reader to feel empathy and compassion for Hildeburh.

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[132] Bosworth, Joseph. "be-loren." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[133] Bosworth, Joseph. "ides." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[134] Bosworth, Joseph. "geōmur." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[135] Bosworth, Joseph. "be-mearn." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[136] B Bosworth, Joseph. "wyn." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[137] Bosworth, Joseph. " morþor." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[138] Bosworth, Joseph. "bealu." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

The Finn Episode opens with a direct description of the result of the conflict: the massacre in which Hildeburh's son and brother lost their lives. Hildeburh is immediately defined as *unsynnum* "not guilty". Hildeburh, in other words, is a victim of the consequences of the fight between Frisians and Danes and the poet is keen to underline this from the beginning of *The Finn* E*pisode.* Hildeburh finds the result of the fight: entering the hall, she discovers that her son and brother had lost their lives during the fight between the Frisians and the Danes. The dynamics of the fight are not narrated, but the poet is keen to point out that Hildeburh is not guilty. She has no responsibility for what happened, since the deaths of his brother and of his son are the consequences of the ethical code of the warrior society and she does not belong to it. Hildeburh found the result of the fight and she had no chance to prevent the events from happening.

Reading these lines it is possible to find a new information about Hildeburh: she is *Hoces dohtor* (l. 1076*)*, "Hoc's daughter" and, therefore, she belongs to the Hocings. It is an important reference to the family she belongs to.

Even in the following lines, when the poet narrates the funeral of her brother and son, the poet's focus is on Hildeburh (ll. 1114-1118)[139]. In these lines, Hildeburh is *ides gnornode*. The term *ides* has already been analyzed: it means woman. *Gnornan* is the verb meaning "to grieve, to mourn or to lament"[140]. The poet says that Hildeburh, during the funeral, lamented in song. The words that indicate her lament are *geomrode giddum: geōmor* means "expressing sadness or melancholy"[141] and *gidd* is a song[142].

Moreover, the poet also talks about Hildeburh at the end of *The Finn Episode*, referring to the fact that after having avenged their leader, the Danes brought the noble woman back to Denmark:

> *hie on sælade*
> *drihtlice wif to Denum feredon·*
> *læddon to leodum.* (ll. 1157-1159).

[139] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[140] Bosworth, Joseph. "gnornan." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[141] Bosworth, Joseph. "geōmor." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[142] Bosworth, Joseph. "gid." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

Over the ways of the sea they bore that royal lady to the land of the Danes, and brought her to her people.

The verb used by the poet referring to the action of carrying away Hildeburh from Friesland is *feredon*. *Feredon* is also found earlier in the text, in l. 1154 referred to the *ingensteald,* a word used to indicate all the household goods[143]. The verb *feredon, therefore,* is used to refer to the valuable objects that the Danes found inside Finn's house and which they decided to take and bring with them to Denmark. In fact, the verb, which in the base form is *ferian*, is defined as "to carry, to move or to convey". The verb *ferian* is used with reference to an "object not moving itself"[144]. This definition, then, is evidence that Hildeburh has a totally passive role: she is taken from Friesland to Denmark in the same way that Finn's treasure is taken away.

The division of *The Finn Episode* into five sections that was proposed by Kemp Malone is appropriate, but this division of the text is not the only path that can be followed. The text can also be analyzed according to a tripartite division: the initial part (ll. 1063-1084), which contains the introduction of the *Episode*, the presentation of Hildeburh and the losses she suffered, the central part (ll. 1085-1124), which contains the description of the pact offered and the conditions to be followed by both sides, as well as the narrative of the funeral of Hnaef and Hildeburh's son and the final part (ll. 1025-1159), in which the poet tells of Hengest's state of mind during the winter and of the revenge of the Danes who, once Finn was killed, take the treasure possessed by him and bring it, together with Hildeburh, to Denmark. What holds this structure together is the poet's reference to Hildeburh.

Hildeburh has suffered a series of losses. Martin Camargo even states that the noblewoman has lost everything and has no one left to share her pain with[145]. At first she lost her brother and son and then her husband too.

Regarding the two losses she suffered first, there is no doubt that they make the woman a victim, someone who suffers pain without having any guilt in relation to the fact. And Hildeburh is not guilty and has no responsibility.

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[143] Bosworth, Joseph. "in-gesteald." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[144] Bosworth, Joseph. "ferian." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[145] Martin Camargo, *The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in 'Beowulf.*

"Studies in Philology", Vol. 78, No. 5, 1981, p. 126.

2.6. Women in *Beowulf* and in *The Finn Episode*

An interesting theme to explore is that of the role played by women both within *Beowulf* and within *The Finn Episode*. The consideration of the role of Hildeburh's character in the episode has evolved over the years: if at first Hildeburh's role was neglected, little by little critics began to show great interest in her. The evolution of the consideration of Hildeburh's role in the poem is probably due to the development of what is defined as "feminist literary criticism". This is a new approach followed by scholars of literary works which, especially in contemporary times, has seen a remarkable increase and development. The central objective that scholars seek to achieve through the adoption of this new approach is to reevaluate female characters within literary works, often well-known works that enjoy great fame, guaranteeing women the attention they deserved. It is thanks to the adoption of this new approach that for the first time female characters, who have always been overshadowed by male characters, receive a new light that allows them to be considered in a completely new way.

The real turning point comes when for the first time critics and scholars start trying to analyze female characters on the basis of linguistic codification. This means that scholars begin to focus their attention on the words and speeches uttered by female figures. Marina Buzzoni[146], after an analysis of the role women play in the poem, states that *"*le figure femminili in *Beowulf* mostrano le loro voci più che i loro volti"[147], "the female figures in *Beowulf* show their voices more than their faces".

On the basis of the speech acts performed by the female characters within the poem, Buzzoni introduces five fundamental functions: ceremonial function, function of weaver of peace, function of ritual mourner, function of inciter, function of advisor. In relation to *The Finn Episode*, the two functions that emerge more clearly after an analysis of Hildeburh's role, and which therefore are of interest to us, are that of weaver of peace and that of ritual mourner. The inciting function does not emerge from the text of the poem.

The function of peace weaver is fundamental within the poem. The role that the woman assumes when she holds the function of peace-weaver is to marry a man belonging to a dynasty different from hers, following a feud between the two dynasties to which the man and the woman belong, with the aim of interrupting the conflicts and tensions between the two tribes. The Old English term used to indicate this function is *freoðu-webbe*. It is a compound consisting of two words: *freoðu*, which means "peace, security, protection"[148] and *webbe*, which means "a

[146] Marina Buzzoni*, I volti delle parole: le rappresentazioni cinematografiche di Beowulf*. Cit. in Maria Grazia Saibene e Marusca Francini (a cura di), *Eroi di carta e celluloide*, Viareggio, Mauro Baroni editore, 2002, p. 198.

[148] Bosworth, Joseph. "freoðu." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

female weaver"[149]. The compound *freoðu-webbe*, therefore, is used to indicate the peace-weaver function. This function, in particular, unites Hildeburh's story with that of two other female characters present in the poem: they are Wealtheow and Freawaru. More precisely, Wealtheow is Hrothgar's wife and Freawaru is his daughter. The king and queen have other children, whose names are Hreðric and Hroðmund. What is of particular interest is that the story of Hildeburh and that of Wealtheow are profoundly similar and their connection also emerges thanks to the structure of *The Finn Episode* in the poem. In fact, *The Finn Episode* is immediately followed by the appearance of Queen Wealtheow and by a speech given by her. As already mentioned, *The Finn Episode* ends at l. 1160. And immediately after the end of *The Finn Episode*, in the echo of what happened to the Danish princess Hildeburh, the poet refers to King Hrothgar's wife. At l. 1063 the poet describes her entry in Heorot, where Beowulf's victory over Grendel was being celebrated:

Þa cwom Wealhþeo forð,
gan under gyldnum beage þær þa godan twegen,
sæton suhtergefæderan· þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere,
æghwylc oðrum trywe. (ll. 1162-1165).

Now came Wealhtheow forth, and wearing many a golden ring she went to where those proud men sat, both uncle and brother's son. Still was their kin- ship's love between them, and each to the other true.

Both women married a foreign man with the aim of putting an end to a dispute that arose between two opposing tribes. Hildeburh, in particular, married Finn to resolve an old dispute that arose between Danes and Frisians. Probably, Wealtheow, in a similar way, married the Danish king to establish the alliance between Wulfingas and Scyldingas. In fact, Wealtheow is not a Danish woman. She belongs to the Wulfing clan. The function of peace-weaver is realized through the marriage between two members belonging to different peoples who are enemies. It can be therefore carried out by the women with the aim of putting an end to feuds, but is not unusual at all that these marriages end in tragedy. Hildeburh has another important function, which is to grieve over the the ones killed[150]. And this duty is respected by Hildeburh. Hildeburh has another important function, the ritual weeper. This function, in particular, emerges in *The Finn Episode* on the occasion of the celebration of the funeral of Hnaef and Hildeburh's son. Hildeburh, in fact, when the funeral is described, is defined (l. 1075) as *geomoru ides,*

[149] Bosworth, Joseph. "webbe." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[150] Carol Parrish Jamison, *Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchange.* "Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture", Vol, 20, 2004, p. 23.

"mournful lady". The action that responds to the function is expressed by the expression *geomrode giddum*, which means "she lamented in songs".

Hildeburh, however, is not the only mournful lady present in the poem. The poet refers to another lament expressed by a woman, more precisely at the very end of the poem, on the occasion of Beowulf's funeral. And this too is a moment of fundamental importance because it allows us to understand how the ritual weeping function has another function that is profoundly linked to it. The role of women in exercising the peace-weaver function is often defined by critics as "passive role". In other words, the only purpose with which the poet inserts the reference to the peace-weaver and the ritual weeper functions would be to show the passive role of women. Marina Buzzoni[151], for instance, does not share this idea: "il lamento trascolora nella predizione di un futuro segnatamente tragico ed è dunque legato ad una dimensione visionaria e di preveggenza", "the lament transcolour into the prediction of a markedly tragic future and is thereforelinked to a visionary or prescient dimension". According to her, therefore, the lament is not only intended to show the woman's pain in an absolute passive way. This can be better understood by reading ll. 3150-3155 in which the crying of the Geatish woman, on the occasion of Beowulf's funeral, is a prediction of a future attack:

swylce giomorgyd Geatisc meowl
bundenheorde
song sorgcearig swiðe geneahhe
þæt hio hyre heofungdagas hearde ondrede,
wælfylla worn, werudes egesan,
hynðo ond hæftnyd. Heofon rece swealg[152] (ll. 3150-3155).

There too a lamentable lay many a Geatish maiden with braided tresses for Beowulf made, singing in sorrow, oft repeating that days of evil she sorely feared, many a slaying cruel and terror armed, ruin and thraldom's bond[153].

The Geatish woman seems to have a visionary role: she can perceive the imminent tragedy and therefore foresees a painful future. She, then, foresees that something terrible will happen to the Geatish people now that Beowulf is no longer their king and cannot protect the nation anymore. The elements that are felt by the woman are the most terrible one can imagine. The word used by the poet are, for

[151] Marina Buzzoni*, I volti delle parole: le rappresentazioni cinematografiche di Beowulf*. Cit. in Maria Grazia Saibene e Marusca Francini (a cura di), *Eroi di carta e celluloide*, Viareggio, Mauro Baroni editore, 2002, p. 200.

[152] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[153] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf, A translation and commentary*, ed. by Cristopher Tolkien, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

instance, *wæl-fill*, "slaughter, carnage" [154], *egesan*, "a possessor" [155]. The Geatish woman, therefore, fears war and the deprivation of freedom following the arrival of a new coquering foreign army.

Hildeburh's lament at the funeral has also been associated with the lament of the protagonist of another poem from the Old English tradition, *The Wife's lament*[156]. This, unlike *Beowulf*, is a much shorter poem consisting of only 53 lines. *The Wife's lament* is part of the *Exeter book* manuscript. It contains the lament of a woman who expresses her state of desperation due to separation from her husband. The situations of Hildeburh and the Wife, therefore, are not the same. What makes the two poems similar in some respects is precisely the presence of a lament. The association between the two texts was first made by Anne L. Klinck[157], a scholar who focuses her attention on l. 1118 of *The Finn Episode*: *geomrode giddum*[158]. *Gid* means "a song, a speech"[159], and Klinck, about Hildeburh's *gid*, underlines that "it it consists of narratives (giedd also means a story) rather than merely of wordless or incoherent wailing. The phrase suggests something like The Wife's Lament"[160]. Referring to Hildeburh's lament in verse at the funeral rite of Hnaef and his son, therefore, Klinck makes an association between Hildeburh and the protagonist of *The Wife's Lament*. Klinck, however, does not go beyond this association. The hypothesis of a possible similarity between the situation of Hildeburh and the protagonist of *The Wife's Lament* was explored in depth by Neidorf. Neidorf, in fact, finds other elements that the two women have in common. First of all, the condition of exile: both find themselves in a country that is not their country. In Hildeburh's case, the reason why she leaves her country and goes to live in Friesland is also known: she left her country, Denmark, to go to her husband Finn's country. But in the case of the protagonist of the poem *The Wife's*

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[154] Bosworth, Joseph. "wæl-fill." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[155] Bosworth, Joseph. "ēgesa." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[156] 'The Wife's Lament', trans. by R. M. Liuzza, cit in: The Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 1: The Medieval Period, ed. by Joseph Black and others (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006.

[157] Anne L. Klinck, 2010. Cit in Leonard Neidorf, 2017. *Hildeburh's Mourning and The Wife's Lament,* StudiaNeophilologica, 2017, p. 199.

[158] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles. Toronto, Old English series, 21. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[159] Bosworth, Joseph. "gid." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[160] Anne L. Klinck, 2010. Cit in Leonard Neidorf, "*Hildeburh's Mourning and The Wife's Lament*", "Studia Neophilologica", Vol. 89, No. 2, 2017, p. 199.

lament, the reasons for her leaving are unclear[161]. Another element that unites Hildeburh and the wife is the fact that both are experiencing pain[162]. If one focuses on these elements it is undeniable that, although the situations are different in many respects, they are at the same time made very similar by others.

To support the thesis of the activity rather than the passivity of Hildeburh's role in the moment of the funerary rite it can be useful to analyse the lines ranging from 1114 to 1117. In these lines, in fact, it is explicitly said by the poet that it is Hildeburh who gives the directives on the ways in which the bodies of Hnaef and her son must be placed:

het ða Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade
hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan
banfatu bærnan ond on bæl don
eame on eaxle.

Then Hildeburg bade that her own son be com- mitted to the flames upon the pyre of Hnæf, there to burn their bones, setting him upon the funeral pile at his uncle's side.

During the funerary rite it seems that Hildeburh has a certain authority in its celebration, since the directions on the position of the two bodies on the pyre are given by Hildeburh herself.

The only female figure in the poem who acts in an unexpected way, if her actions are compared with the behaviors imposed by the Germanic society, is Grendel's mother. When his son, Grendel, is killed, she acts personally to avenge the loss suffered. However, it must be specified that Grendel's mother is not a member of society and, since she is a monstrous creature, she is not obliged to behave in a way that others may consider acceptable.

2.7. The function of *The Finn Episode*

To understand the function covered by *The Finn Episode* in the structure of the poem, it is necessary to focus on some elements. The first thing to try to

[161] Leonard Neidorf, *Hildeburh's Mourning and The Wife's Lament,* "Studia Neophilologica", Vol. 89, No. 2, 2017, p. 199.
[162] *Ivi*, p. 203.

understand is why the poet decided to insert *The Finn Episode* in the position it occupies. And, above all, it is important to try to understand the reason why he decided to insert it into the poem. In other words, what is the function of the episode in relation to the position it occupies and, from a wider point of view, what is the function of *the Finn Episode* in relation to the entire poem. The episode connects to the rest of the *Beowulf* poem in various ways.

First of all it is interesting to analyze the context in which the poet tells the Finn's story. The context in which the poet decides to insert the digression is a moment of great happiness for the Danish people: they are in Heorot, where a feast is being celebrated after the killing of Grendel, who has tormented the peace and tranquility of the Danes for too long. The context in which the digression is set, therefore, is a festive one: the royal family, Beowulf with the thirteen Geatish warriors and the Danish warriors are gathered in the hall to celebrate the killing of Grendel accomplished by the hero Beowulf. Martin Camargo, in this regard, claims that "a burden of twelve years' duration has just been lifted from the shoulders of the Danes, and they are celebrating as if there were no tomorrow"[163]. To put it in simpler words, it is a state of happiness and relief that cannot be compared to any other moment of their story described within the poem.

The poet manages to narrate a story that is appropriate to the context – appropriate because these are stories that Danes are used to hearing at banquets - but he does so by manipulating the story in order to communicate something different: the poet purpose is not to praise the greatness of the Danes but to criticize the heroic society by highlighting all the worst sides that characterize it. Consequently, the poet "opens the external audience to the possibility of interpreting stories that typically glorify warrior culture from a different perspective"[164]. The perspective from which the *Beowulf* poet tells the story is a perspective attentive to the female character, Hildeburh. The poet takes into consideration the woman's situation and all the consequences that fall on her due to the actions carried out by the Danish and Frisian men. This is a novelty, since Germanic society is a male-dominated warrior society. The fact that the poet takes Hildeburh into consideration in this way, allowing her to emerge as the protagonist of *The Finn Episode* and underlining her suffering resulting from the actions of the representatives of Germanic society can only be explained by the influence of Christianity. In other words, the warrior society that is glorified in the *Finnsburg Fragment* is criticized in *Beowulf* through the focus on the negative consequences that warrior events have had on Hildeburh, which is one of the numerous evidences of the influence of Christian ideology[165].

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[163] Martin Camargo, *The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in Beowulf.* "Studies in Philology", Vol. 78, No. 5, 1981, p. 126.

[164] Melissa J Venables, *What's the point ?: Comparing the 'Finn story' in Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburh*. "SELIM: Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature", Vol. 22, 2017, p. 4.

[165] The negative consequences are presented in detail in paragraph 2.2.

In addition, the introduction of a story of suffering and pain also has the effect of creating contrast with the situation in which the narration begins (Heorot in the peak of the celebrations). In this way the poet highlights the transitory character of the joy of the Danes, a joy that is temporary. As already mentioned in Chapter I, the poem is characterized by an elegiac tone and this characteristic can also be seen in this aspect: the joy that human beings feel during their life is always only temporary, as it is immediately after followed by a tragic event that upsets the situation of happiness that had only been created shortly before.

The answer to the question we asked ourselves, that is why *The Finn Episode* occupies this position, seems to have been found. The first reason is because the moment in which it is inserted is the one of greater happiness for the Danes and the second one is because in *The Finn Episode* the poet tells a story in which the courage and the glory of the Danes occupies a central position. The second reason is because the poet wants to create a contrast between the happiness of the Danes and the sadness of the events experienced by Hildeburh.

2.8. The Revenge Code

The characters of *The Finn Episode* belong to two different Germanic tribes: the Danes and the Frisians. As already said within this thesis, the principle of revenge is a principle that underlies Germanic society.

After an initial part in which the poet refers to Hildeburh's pain and anguish, he starts focusing on the revenge of the Danes on the Frisians: ll. 1080-1083.

The Finn Episode can be related to the digression dedicated to Hrethel and his unhappy situation. Hrethel‘s story is told by Beowulf to the eleven Geatish warriors who accompany him in his quest to slay the dragon in the II part of the poem (ll.2435-43, 2462-71). Hrethel was a king of the Geats, the father of Hygelac and grandfather of Beowulf. He dies of grief when his eldest son, Herebeald, is killed by his other son, Hæþcyn. This is an accidental killing, which occurred in a hunting accident. Hrethel will never have revenge, since to avenge Herebald’s death, he should kill Hæþcyn. It is a situation that does not allow the man to obtain revenge for the loss of his son. And here is the element that links the two parts of the poem. *The Finn Episode* and the digression on Hrethel share an element that is fundamental for understanding the aim of the poet, that is, to criticize the most negative aspects of the warrior society. From a structural point of view, in fact, the two episodes present an element that makes them extremely similar: in both cases in which the poet inserts the digression into the main plot, the protagonist hero Beowulf is about to perform his most valiant deeds. To be more precise, the story of *The Finn Episode* is told at a moment in the main story that precedes the imminent attack by Grendel's mother and the subsequent defeat of the monstrous creature. In a similar way, the digression on Hrethel is inserted by the poet shortly before Beowulf faces the fight against the dragon. Therefore, even in this case the hero would have faced a fight immediately afterwards. It is, in particular, the struggle that will lead to the end of the poem and the sad death of the protagonist hero. These are, therefore, moments in which the hero is about to show the best of his heroic virtues.

Every single choice made by the poet, even the smallest, has a logical explanation. The structure of the poem, its themes, the choice of certain words rather than others, is all chosen by the poet with a specific purpose. The poem contains many elements belonging to the Christian religion. And if one observes the warrior dynamics through a Christian eye, he realizes how the principle of revenge is based on ideologies that are clearly in contrast with Christian ones. From a Christian point of view all conflicts can be considered as fights between relatives since all men, if one thinks about the values and beliefs of the Christian religion, are brothers.

Then, perhaps among the many functions of the poem there is also that of highlighting the need for man to reflect on the code of revenge that is at the basis of Germanic society and to ask to what extent revenge (or war in general) can be considered as acceptable. Among other things, what makes the situation even more serious is the fact that the "system" on which the principle of revenge is based is endless: nobody will ever be really satisfied until a person loses his life. Camargo[166] also claims that one of the functions of the poem is to criticize (or at least question) the revenge code of the heroic society. In fact, in relation to this, the scholar claims that the real source of the tragedy in the Finn episode as in the entire poem is the whole cycle of revenge leading to further revenge. He defines it as a cycle, since for the reasons mentioned above, the revenge dynamics will never really end.

2.9. Hengest

The topic of the revenge code is closely linked to the whole Hengest story within *The Finn Episode*. What Hengest had done, that is the conclusion of the truce with his enemy, is considered a sin in the Germanic society. First of all because Hengest did not avenge the death of Hnaef, his lord, since he concluded a truce with Finn. As his follower and, even worse, as his first thane, the responsibility of vengeance weighs even more heavily on his shoulders than on all the other Danish warriors. Being someone's thane is a serious and very important task. The thane is a trusted man of the leader as well as his advisor. Usually a king's thane is a man who lives in close contact with him: a relative, a trusted friend, a kin. The task of a thane is above all to protect his lord. To be considered a good thane one must be willing to die in the king's place to save his life. Hengest did not complete his task, that is to revenge Hnaef, or at least he did not immediately after his killing. But what makes the situation and his offence even more serious is the

[166] Martin Camargo, *The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in Beowulf.* "Studies in Philology", Vol. 78, No. 5, 1981, p. 122.

fact that he has concluded the truce with the one who is responsible for the killing of his lord.

Regarding the analysis of Hengest's behavior and, in particular, of the breaking of the agreement concluded with Finn, however, scholars have adopted different points of view putting forward different hypothesis. Some have approached the topic by trying to understand why Hengest had concluded the truce with Finn despite the urgency of avenging the killing of his leader. Another interesting point of view is the one that tries to understand the reasons why Hengest broke the oath.

Proceeding in order, it is possible to start by focusing on why Hengest decided to accept the truce. It is impossible to deny that Hengest finds himself in a difficult situation: he is in a foreign land and has just taken the place of his leader who was killed during an attack launched by the Frisians in a completely unexpected way. Furthermore, the Danes are in a foreign land and they know well that, if the already few warriors had been killed by the Frisians, they would have had no way of finding new forces that could help them in the defense. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned above, Finn is in his own country and he enjoys greater power than the Danes. This is the context in which Hengest, together with the Danes, finds himself.

The second question - why Hengest decided to break the pact - cannot be separated from the third question: in fact, it is interesting trying to understand whether Hengest had any right to break the pact concluded with Finn.

Zocco claims that "Hengest is bound to the word he gave to Finn, but not to the person of Finn, who does not become the dryhten of Hengest; this relationship does not imply absolute loyalty"[167]. Hengest has violated his word and this is considered dishonorable, but killing Finn is not a crime, since killing him is necessary to avenge Hnaef. As already mentioned, Hengest and Finn do not have a relationship that can in any way be compared to that between a follower and a king. This is equivalent to saying that the pact sealed does not impose absolute loyalty as the relationship between leader and follower would[168]. The obligation to avenge the lord killed by enemies, on the contrary, is an obligation that is inherent in the bond between Hengest and Hnaef. It can be defined as a "natural right" and it is this that in some way gives justification to the act committed by Hengest. Avenging Hnaef was the priority, it does not matter whether fulfilling this obligation involves breaking an oath or breaking one's word.

But to find the answer to the question as to whether Hengest had any right to break the oath or not, it may be useful to refer to the relationship that links the text of *The Finn Episode* to that of Alfred's law code[169]. It is a code, often also referred to as the "Doom Code", in which King Alfred listed a series of laws and the punishments that result from breaking them. The code was written between

[167] Nicola Zocco, *The Episode of Finn in Beowulf. Discharging Hengest.*

"Linguistica e Filologia", Vol. 24, 2007, p.73.

[168] *Ivi*, p. 74.

[169] Milton Haight Turk, *The legal Code of Ælfred The Great*. USA, Boston, Ginn and Company, 1973.

880 and 899 and is one of the most ambitious legal codes written in medieval society. Regarding the reasons why King Alfred felt the need to collect the laws and the punishments linked to any violation of them, however, it must be specified that his is not an attempt to collect all the laws valid in that precise historical moment. Rather, the code of Alfred springs from the ambition to protect lordship. Among other things, King Alfred was truly interested in justice and had a desire to be seen as a just king. The king's attention is particularly directed towards the consequences that could have arisen from carelessness towards the respect due to a king. According to the code, lack of respect and loyalty towards a king is the worst offence that can be committed by a follower (it is assumed that he should always show gratitude and loyalty to his king). King Alfred writes a law dedicated precisely to the topic of breaking an oath. This is the first law provided within the code: "If anyone is wrongfully constrained to promise either of these: to betray his lord or to render aid in an unlawful undertaking, then it is better to be false [to the promise] than to perform it."[170]

King Alfred, therefore, foresees situations in which breaking an oath is more convenient than keeping it. In some cases, breaking the oath made in a situation of obvious difficulty is considered a lawful possibility. There are, therefore, some conditions in which not keeping the oath made may not be considered as dishonorable. Among the situations cited by the code, the one in which the hero of *The Finn Episode*, Hengest, finds himself, is fully included. Hengest concluded a pact and pronounced an oath that is undoubtedly against the ethics of the Germanic heroic society, but respecting the pact would have implied a betrayal towards Hnaef and therefore an offense to the king-follower relationship. If Hengest had continued to honor the agreement concluded with Finn he would have committed the crime of acting against the principle of lordship. The only real obligation Hengest has is granting Hnaef the respect he deserved.

Hengest's situation can be defined as a real tragedy in all respects. Once he became the leader of the Danes after Hnaef's death, all the responsibility for his revenge began to weigh on his shoulders. But having concluded the pact with Finn Hengest still feels that he owes him loyalty.

2.10. Difficulty in the Translation of Some Words

In the text of *The Finn Episode* there are some elements whose interpretation is complicated due to the allusive style of the Germanic poetry. This means that some elements are only mentioned and no details are included.

For example, a problem of the interpretation of the text arises due to the use of the word *Eotena*, used for the first time in l. 1072 and for the second time in l. 1088. The poet uses the expression *Eotena treowe* (l. 1072) *: treōw* is "loyalty to

[170] Frederick Levi Attenborough, *The Laws of Alfred*, 1922, p. 1.

a person“[171], so the poet says that Hildeburh can not praise the loyalty of the “Jutes“. And then the poets defines the Frisians as *Eotena* (l. 1088).

The word *Eotena* also appears outside *The Finn Episode* at l. 112:

þanon untydras ealle onwocon
*eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnea. (*ll. 111-112).

Of him all evil broods were born, ogres and goblins and haunting shapes of hell.

In the latter case *eotenas* refers to the monstrous creatures which, according to what the poet says, originated from Cain.

The translation of the term *Eotena* has created problems from the beginning of the studies of *The Finn Episode* and continues to create divisions and contrasts between experts, giving rise to debates that are not yet closed. First of all it is of fundamental importance the analysis of the word. The form *Eotena* (ll. 1072-1088) is the genitive plural form; the nominative form is *Eoten.*

Eotena can be translated as “giant or monster”[172]. or “Jutes”, Jutlanders, the ancient inhabitants of Jutland in the north of Denmark[173]. There are two possible forms in Old English that can be the basis of the genitive plural *Eotena*[174]: the two forms are *Eoten* and *Eote*. *Eoten* is the form for “giants” while *Eote* is the Old English form for the Jute tribe. The word *Eoten*, “giants”, has a derogatory meaning, since the giants “rappresentano le forze potenti e difficili da dominare della natura e dell’inconscio”[175], “represent powerful forces of nature and unconscious which are difficult to dominate”. In Germanic mithology giants are the first inhabitants of the world and they are dangerous creatures because they “simboleggiano la manifestazione delle forze della terra e della materia, le quali, se prive della potenza ordinatrice dello spirito, sconfinano in eccesso”[176], “symbolize the manifestation of the forces of the earth and matter, which, if deprived of the ordering power of the spirit, border on excess”. Furthermore, one of the names used to refer to giants in Old Norse is jötunn, from the verb *oet*, “to

[171] Bosworth, Joseph. “trēow.” An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[172] Bosworth, Joseph. “eōten.” An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[173] *Ibid*.

[174] John Gray, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf: Line 108S(b) ac hig him gepingo budon*. “Sydney Studies in Society and Culture”, Vol. 6, 1990, p. 34.

[175] Gianna Chiesa Isnardi, *I miti nordici*. Milano, Longanesi & C, Vol. 219, 1991, p. 317.

[176] *Ibid*.

eat". In this sense, therefore, they are also a symbol of destruction. The term "giant" could therefore used with a derogatory sense which fits very precisely as the Frisian people at the beginning of the *Finnsburg Fragment* attack the Danes in an unexpected way and above all in a moment of established peace between the two groups. Furthermore, it is a peace sanctioned thanks to the the marriage between Hildeburh and Finn.

A third possibility is put forward by Kaske[177]: the form *eoten* can also indicate "enemy", whereas Malone associates the *Eotan* with the Frisians.

It is sufficient for us to know that Hildeburh could not praise the Jutes' loyalty because of the way in which they break the peace established by mutual agreement and because they killed her son and her brother. Regarding the killing of Hnaef and the son of Hildeburh and Finn, however, it is important to specify that the son of Hildeburh and Finn could also have been killed by the Danes. In fact, being the son of Finn, he was a Frisian prince. Consequently, the idea that the Frisian warriors killed their king's son is quite unlikely.

Another problem of interpretation of what is narrated in the Episode concerns the part dedicated to the proposal for a truce between the Frisians and the Danes. The poet, in fact, uses the pronoun *hig,* "they", and the use of pronouns is another element that creates the many ambiguities present within the *Episode*. The problem arises from the fact that, due to the use of the pronoun to refer to the person proposing the pact, it cannot be clearly deduced whether the person proposing it is Finn or Hengest : *ac hig him geþingo budon* (l. 1085), "a pact they offered". The poet, therefore, communicates that a pact is proposed, but it is not specified which of the two tribes decided to propose it. There are two possible explications of the dynamics : it is possible either that the Danes proposed the truce or the opposite. The Danes, in fact, although they have a clear advantage in the clash against the Frisians, are still in a disadvantageous condition compared to them, since the Danes are in the land of the Frisians and not in Denmark. He finds himself in a difficult position in reference to the number of warriors he has lost but he still enjoys greater power since he is in his home and in his country. A proposal from Finn and an acceptance from Hengest is therefore credible and cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, however, the fact that it was the Danes who proposed the truce also makes sense: as already mentioned, the Danes have a clear advantage in terms of warriors left alive. The possibility that the Danes, threatening to kill them all, proposed a truce, cannot be completely rejected. The agreement requires compliance with certain conditions. First of all, the Danes will live in an area of the fortress for the entire duration of the winter. The Danes would have been honored by the Frisians, since the king of the Frisians must honor them as he would honor his own men. King Finn was supposed to bestow gifts on the Danes in equal measure to those given to the Frisians. Finn gives his word and in return the Danes must swear that no man will act with the intention of breaking the pact made. If any Frisian man even allowed himself to refer to the hatred that had characterized

[177] R. E. Kaske, *The Eotenas in Beowulf*. "*Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*", R. P. Creed (ed.), Providence, Rhode Island, 1967, p. 616.

the relations between the two peoples, Finn swore to kill him himself (ll. 1104-1106).

A final problem of interpretation concerns Hengest and his participation in Hnaef's revenge process. A question might arise from reading this part of the *Episode*: did Hengest take an active part in killing Finn? The poet does not say this explicitly. The two warriors who are explicitly mentioned are the Danish leaders Guthlaf and Oslaf[178]. Hengest had planned to go back to Denmark and then return to Friesland for the last time with sufficient forces. However, it is never said by the poet that Hengest leaves for Denmark: the two Danish warriors who leave are Guthlaf and Oslaf[179].

[178] Kemp Malone, *The Finn Episode in Beowulf*. "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology" , Apr., 1926, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1926, p. 168.
[179] *Ibid*.

CHAPTER III

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE *FINNSBURG FRAGMENT* AND *THE FINN EPISODE*

3.1 *Finnsburg Fragment* in Old English

hornas byrnað nǣfre.'
Hlēoþrode ðā heaþoġeong cyning:
'Ne ðis ne dagað ēastan ne hēr draca ne flēogeð
ne hēr ðisse healle hornas ne byrnað,
ac hēr forþ berað, fugelas singað,
ġylleð grǣġhama, gūðwudu hlynneð,
scyld scefte oncwyð. Nū scȳneð þes mōna
wāðol under wolcnum; nū ārīsað wēadǣda
ðe ðisne folces nīð fremman willað.
Ac onwacniġeað nū, wīgend mīne,
habbað ēowre linda, hicgeaþ on ellen,
winnað on orde, wesað ānmōde!'
Đā ārās mæniġ goldhladen ðeġn, ġyrde hine his swurde.
Đā tō dura ēodon drihtliċe cempan,
Siġeferð and Ēaha, hyra sword ġetugon,
and æt ōþrum durum Ordlāf and Gūþlāf,
and Henġest sylf hwearf him on lāste.
Đā ġȳt Gārulf Gūðere styrode
ðæt hē swā frēolic feorh forman sīþe
tō ðǣre healle durum hyrsta ne bǣre
nū hyt nīþa heard ānyman wolde,
ac hē fræġn ofer eal undearninga,
dēormōd hæleþ, hwā ðā duru hēolde.
'Siġeferþ is mīn nama', cweþ hē, 'iċ eom Secgena lēod,
wreċċea wīde cūð; fæla iċ wēana ġebād
heardra hilda. Đē is ġȳt hēr witod
swæþer ðū sylf tō mē sēċean wylle.'
Đā wæs on healle wælslihta ġehlyn;
sceolde cellod bord cēnum on handa,
bānhelm berstan (buruhðelu dynede)
oð æt ðǣre gūðe Gārulf ġecrang
ealra ǣrest eorðbūendra
Gūðlāfes sunu, ymbe hyne gōdra fæla,
hwearflicra hrǣw. Hræfen wandrode
sweart and sealobrūn. Swurdlēoma stōd

swylċe eal Finnsburuh fȳrenu wǣre.
Ne ġefrægn iċ nǣfre wurþlicor æt wera hilde
sixtiġ siġebeorna sēl ġebǣran,
ne nēfre swētne medo sēl forġyldan
ðonne Hnæfe guldan his hæġstealdas.
Hiġ fuhton fīf dagas swā hyra nān ne fēol
drihtġesīða, ac hiġ ðā duru hēoldon.
Đā ġewāt him wund hæleð onwæġ gangan,
sǣde þæt his byrne ābrocen wǣre,
heresceorp unhrōr, and ēac wæs his helm ðyrel.
Đā hine sōna frægn folces hyrde
hū ðā wīgend hyra wunda genǣson,
oððe hwæþer ðǣra hyssa[180].

3.2. Translation

Then clattered the king, battle-young:

“This is no easterly dawning, no dragon flies out there,
nor here upon this hall will these horns ever burn,
yet they shall be borne aloft, while birds bicker,
grey-hamed guldering, the woods of war warbling,
the shield shall meet its shaft. Now shines the moon
a wanderer under the welkin. Now wax the deeds of woefare,
that mean to wreak this malice against our people.
So shake yourselves awake at once, yo,
loft your linden — hearken to heart,
flame up at the flame-point, make pride come true!”

Then many a gold-drenched thegn rose up,
strapped up with swords,
when the stolid soldiers ran to the door,
Sigeferth and Eaha both, tugging out the trenchant,
and at the opposite door, Ordlaf and Guthlaf
and even Hengest, turned themselves in their tracks.

Still Garulf kept Guthere back,
so that he so noble should not bear his living,
his fretments on his first foray to the hall doors —
when those hard with hatred yearned to snatch it away.

Yet he disingenuous inquired after them all
those beast-minded braves, how he could hold the doors.

[180] Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles (eds.), Toronto, Old English series, University of Toronto Press, 2008.

“The name’s Sigeferth,” he was heard to say, “I’m of the Secgan,
an exile known widely — I’ve endured endless woes,
many savage battles — let it be known
what you seek from me can easily be yours!”

Then there erupted a shattering of slaughters
in the hall, there the bossy boards must burst,
keenly in clutches, the bone-guards as well —
drumming drumming on floor-boards —
until Garulf cringed in death, at the hand of war,
first of everyone folded up in earth,
Guthlaf’s son, about him many of the good ones,
corpses slow to turn tail. The raven hovered,
a darkness of many colors. Sword-beams slashed,
as if all of Finnsburh were blazing now.

I’ve never heard tell of a battle between men,
of sixty triumphant warriors bearing
themselves best, more praiseworthily,
nor ever swains better repaid with shining mead,
than Hnæf showered upon the boys in his band.
They fought five days long, and none of them were felled,
those brothers in battle, but they held that door.

Then the wounded warrior departed to death,
went his very own way —
he said that his breast-web might be broken,
what was sword-pointed now flaccid,
and also his helmet was shot through.

Then the watcher of his tribe learned at once
how those warriors wielded their wounds,
or whether those young stalwarts…[181].

3.3. *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment*

Now that both poems have been presented and that part of this study has been entirely dedicated to *The Finn Episode*, to the explanation of the function it occupies within the poem, to the presentation of its characters and to the analysis of the most relevant elements of it, it is possible to proceed with a comparative analysis of *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* with the aim of highlighting the elements for which they can be considered similar and those which, on the contrary, make them profoundly different one from each other. The starting assumption, therefore, is that the two texts are extremely different but, at the same time, have elements that make them similar from both a textual and a thematic point of view.

The Finn Episode and the *Finnsburg Fragment* have elements that unite them, since in *The Finn Episode,* the poet tells the same story that is told in the *Finnsburg Fragment*. The legend of Finn, in fact, circulated through the oral tradition and this means that the *Beowulf* poet knew it. However, it is not certain that the *Beowulf* poet read the *Finnsburg Fragment*.

The *Beowulf* poet tells the story in a different way than the *Finnsburg Fragment* poet. This does not mean that the central event presented in the two texts is not the same: in both texts the poets tell about the fight between the Danes and Frisians, that began due to the will of the Frisians, who launched an attack suddenly on the Danes that they were hosting at Finnsburg. The Old English literary tradition can be defined as the complex of artistic-literary models of a people, a region or an era. The artistic-literary models of a tradition share a series of stylistic and textual elements. Already by definition, therefore, to be considered belonging to a specific literary tradition, two or more literary texts must share a series of common elements. Since in this case both texts taken into consideration belong to the poetic genre, the elements in common are, for instance, metric elements (type of verse, literary devices, rhetorical figures).

[181] Benjamin Slade, *The Battle of Finnsburh Fragment*, 2002 (Finnsburh Fragment (heorot.dk).

3.1. Similarities of *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment*

The first common element between *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* is the metre. In *Beowulf* and in the *Finnsburg Fragment* the type of verse used by the poets is the Germanic alliterative verse. Alliteration has already been defined in Chapter I, so it will not be further defined here.

Moreover, both texts are characterized by the use of compounds. *Beowulf*, in this case, contains many more but they, although in smaller numbers, can also be found in *The Finnsburg Fragment*. The fact that *Beowulf* contains more compounds, however, is not directly related to the length of the poem. The possibility of stating that there are more compounds in *Beowulf* than those present in the *Finnsburg Fragment* derives from a proportional analysis. In order to understand how compounds are used in *Beowulf*, it is useful to provide some examples: *weā-dǣd* (l. 8), a compound made up of *weā*, "woe, misery, evil, affliction, trouble"[182] and *dǣd*, "deed, action"[183]. The poet, more specifically, is referring to the "woe deeds" that the Frisians intend to carry out against the Danes. Another example of a compound can be found in l. 13, in which the poet uses the term *goldhladen*. The compound is made up of *gold* and *hladen* and it can be translated as "adorned with gold"[184]

Another important similarity that can be identified lies in the description of the settings, the places and the characters of the story. In both cases, in fact, the poet does not dedicate a great number of lines to describing the settings or characters.

In *The Finn Episode*, no type of description regarding settings or characters is included. This is a typical feature of *Beowulf* as a poem. It is possible to just think, for *Beowulf*, of the poem's description of the great building which is the centre of most of the events narrated in the first part of the poem, Heorot. It is defined as *healærna mæst*, "the greatest of the hall" (l. 78) but the poet does not add any other elements in this regard.

And this observation can also be made regarding the setting in which the facts narrated in *The Finn Episode* take place: the poet describes nothing of Frisia. From this point of view, therefore, the two texts are very similar. The poet limits himself

[182] Bosworth, Joseph. "weā." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[183] Bosworth, Joseph. "dǣd." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[184] Bosworth, Joseph. "gold-hladen." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

to telling a series of events that happen inside a room. This element in common between *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* can be explained by the stylistic characteristics of the respective genres to which they belong. *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* both belong to the heroic tradition but the *Beowulf* is a long poem and the *Finnsburg Fragment* is a lay.

Another similarity is the absence of characterization of the Danes and of the Frisians. Even if the characters of *The Finn Episode* are not described from a physical point of view, however, the poet takes care to give the reader some details about them. These are elements that may seem of small importance at first reading but which in reality, although small, provide important informations. For example, regarding Hildeburh the poet says that she is the daughter of Hoc and this element has a fundamental importance because it allows us to understand which dynasty she belongs to (and this is fundamental information for the function of ”peace-weaver” she assumes). Referring to the *Finnsburg Fragment*, the poet simply says the names of the warriors who take part in the battle but no other elements concerning them. The absence of details is explained by the fact that the *Finnsburg Fragment* is a lay and the style of it is very quick and never too detailed.

3.1. Thematic Differences

The first great thematic difference that emerges through the comparative analysis of the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment* and that of *The Finn Episode* regards the point of view of the two different poets. To be clearer, in the *Finnsburg Fragment*, the poet's attention is focused on the participation of the warriors in the fight; while in *Beowulf* it is focused on the effects that the actions of the fight have on human beings. Consequently, the *Beowulf* poet changes not only the dynamic of the events narrated but also the central focus and the ideology of the two stories. The protagonists in *The Finn Episode* contained in *Beowulf* are not the warriors nor even the actions of war: the protagonists are Hildeburh and Hengest, who face a tragic situation.

A fundamental difference between the text of *The Finn Episode* and that of the *Finnsburg Fragment* is the *Beowulf* poet's decision to give space to characters who are not mentioned in the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment:* Hildeburh is not present in the *Finnsburg Fragment,* yet she becomes the main character in *The Finn Episode*.

In the *Finnsburg Fragment* the narration of the war actions is very detailed. The beginning of the *Finnsburg Fragment,* for instance, is entirely focused on the imminent attack that is about to be launched. The Danes inside the hall, where they are staying during their visit to Friesland, notice a light in the distance: at first they believe it may be the light of the dawn that is about to arrive (*dagað éastan*, l. 3), then they think it may be a dragon (*draca ne fléogeð*, l. 3) and finally they think it could be the hall's gables that are burning (*hornas*, l. 4). They realize, however, that it is a group of armed men who are about to arrive and attack them.

And immediately, the leader of the Danes, Hnaef, gives a speech to encourage his men to defend themselves and not to be discouraged. The leader refers to *linda*, 'shields', tells his men to grab them, but he also refers to *ellen*, *"*strength, power, vigour, valour, courage, fortitude*"*[185]. He then tells his warriors to be *on mōde* (l. …), *"*high spirited*"*: he is advising his followers not to be frightened or discouraged but to remain resolute and show themselves strong. The poet says which of the warriors stands as guard at the entrance: *Sigeferð and Ēaha Ordlāf and Gūþlāf, Hengest* (ll. 15-17).

To give another example, the poet also tells which warrior is the first to lose his life: *Gārulf* (ll. 29-30).

In *The Finn Episode*, on the contrary, the two battles are never described. The *Beowulf* poet, at the beginning of *The Finn Episode* (ll. 1069-1070) refers to Hnaef's death but says nothing more about how the death occurred or at whose hands the hero died. At the end of *The Finn Episode*, then, the poet states that Finn and the other Frisians were killed but again without saying anything about the dynamics of the conflict. The language used to describe these moments is also not detailed.

There is another important difference between the narration of the two stories. The poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* is not interested in the psychological dimension of the characters, while, on the contrary, the *Beowulf* poet describes the repercussions that the actions have on the characters. To better understand this aspect, we can take the same example proposed previously, that of the moment of Garulf's death. In the *Finnsburg Fragment* the narration of the events is a simple description, no character-related emotions or reactions are mentioned. Garulf loses his life but there is no reference to any reaction on the part of the other warriors on the Frisian side. Moreover, Garulf's father, most likely, saw the whole scene and was witnessing his son's death with his own eyes. In fact, the poet says that Garulf is Guthlaf's son and Guthlaf himself is actively participating in the battle, but nothing is said about the father's reaction following his son's death. The poet communicates his death and explicitly says that Guthlaf is actively participating to the conflict (ll. 16-17).

[185] Bosworth, Joseph. "ellen." An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

Again, therefore, this is proof of the total absence of references to the emotional state of the characters. However, regarding this passage, some clarifications must be made as the case becomes complicated following the appearance of the name Guthlaf at two different points. The name Guthlaf appears first in l. 16: the poet tells us that Guthlaf is placed as guard of the door of the hall together with the other Danish warriors Sigeferth, Eaha, Ordlaf and Hengest. According to what we are told in these lines, therefore, Guthlaf is without a doubt a Danish warrior. However, in l. 33 we are told by the poet that Garulf is the son of Guthlaf. The element that is not very clear is that Guthlaf is a Danish warrior, but his son Garulf fights for Finn. This last element can be deduced with certainty from the fact that Garulf is presented as the one who instigated the attack on Hnaef[186]. Several theories have been proposed to try to explain this contradiction. R. W. Chambers, for example, claims that there is only one Guthlaf within the story and that father and son, consequently, fight on two opposing sides: Guthlaf for Hnaef and Garulf for Finn[187]. Tolkien supports another theory according to which the presence of a man named Guthlaf as Garulf's father is an error: according to him the name of Garulf's father is actually Guthullf, a very similar name.

The poet announces that Garulf is the first to lose his life among the Frisian warriors but does not add any other element in this regard. The absence of references to the psychological dimension was presented here as a difference between the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment* and that of *The Finn Episode*. The connection between that moment, Garulf's death, and *The Finn Episode* is that the death of a son is something which is also narrated in it. The reaction of the mother, in this case, is completely different: Hildeburh is the victim of suffering due to this event resulting from the conflict. She suffers and she shows her feelings through a lament. The *Beowulf* poet dedicates some words to the state of mind that derives from that tragic event. Her grief is not treated the same as that of Garulf's father. The presence of the description of a similar situation, which is the loss of a son, is an element that brings out the difference between the way of approaching the psychological dimension in the *Finnsburg Fragment* and in *The Finn Episode* even more clearly.

It can be stated with certainty that the poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* praises the secular heroic code and the glories obtained thanks to warrior exploits. And the most evident difference between the two texts lies precisely in this aspect: while the poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* is praising the Germanic heroic society with all its characteristics, the *Beowulf* poet wants to make people reflect on what can be considered as the cruellest element of this type of society. The cruelest element is war and everything that comes with it, since the warriors of Germanic society kill others. Indeed, only glory comes from killing warriors belonging to the enemy side. It is possible to state that the *Finnsburg Fragment* praises the Germanic heroic society, first of all, because from the reading of it emerges the idea that being a valiant warrior and having a good reputation is the highest aspiration for a member of the Germanic society and is also a reason of pride on his part. To understand this statement, it is sufficient to analyze the lines taken from the *Finnsburg Fragment:*

[186] Leonard Neidorf, *Garulf and Guthlaf in the Finnsburg Fragment*. "Notes and Queries", Vol. 66 No. 4, 2019, p. 489.

[187] R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, Cambridge, 1959, p. 247.

'Sigeferþ is mīn nama.' --cweþ hē-- 'Ic eom Secgena lēod
wrec{c}e{a} wíde cúð, fæla ic wē{a}na gebād heordra hilda.
Đē is gýt hēr witod. (ll. 24-26).

'Sigeferth is my name.' -said he-- 'I am a man of the Sedgean,
an adventurer widely known, I have endured many misfortunes,
fierce battles.

These are the words spoken by Sigeferth, a Danish warrior who, as soon as he is asked who he is, presents himself as a warrior who has endured many misfortunes and who has had the merit of fighting ferocious battles. These are the actions that make a warrior proud to be called one. Or again, to understand the way in which the *Finnsburg Fragment*'s poet praises the warrior society it is useful to observe this short passage:

Ne gefrægn ic nāefre wurþlīcor æt wera hilde,
sixtig sigebeorna sēl gebāeran. (ll. 37-38).

I have never heard that more worthily in battle of men
of sixty victory-warriors bearing themselves better.

The poet takes very seriously the warriors' attitude to endurance, their dignity in completing their warrior actions, their ability in war which allows them to end the conflict as winners. Those described are the most aspired qualities of warriors. The importance that the *Finnsburg Fragment* poet gives to the moments in which the fights occur is also demonstrated by another element that characterizes the text: the focusing on the sounds produced during the fight. The atmosphere that reigns in the room where the Frisians and the Danes are fighting is well described by the poet, who focuses on the sounds that are perceived in that moment and therefore on the auditory sphere. The poet speaks of *wælslihta gehlyn* (l. 28). *Wælslihta* is defined as "murderer"[188] and *gehlyn* is defined as "a noise"[189]. The poet, therefore, is referring to the noise produced during the fight. The poet also uses the expression *buruhðelu dynede* (l. 30). *Buruhðelu* means "a castle floor"[190] and *dyned* is a verb which can be defined as "to make a noise, to resound"[191]. Through the description, it is possible to almost hear the sounds that warriors heard at that moment. It is a very suggestive description that allows the reader to identify with the warriors and to better imagine what they themselves experienced during the conflict. It goes without saying that in *The Finn Episode* contained in *Beowulf* this whole dimension is not present at all.

But the auditory sphere is not the only one described by the poet of the *Fragment*. In fact, he also focuses on the visual aspects, starting from the beginning of the *Finnsburg Fragment* until almost the end:

[188] Bosworth, Joseph. “wæl-slihta.” An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[189] Bosworth, Joseph. “ge-hlyn.” An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[190] Bosworth, Joseph. “ buruh-þelu.” An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

[191] Bosworth, Joseph. “dynian.” An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014, https://bosworthtoller.com/

ymbe hyne gōdra fæla,
hwearflícra hrāe{w}. Hræfen wandrode,
sweart and sealobrūn. Swurdlēoma stōd,
swylce eal Finn{i}sburh fýrenu wāere. (ll. 33-36)

around him many good
mortals' carcases. The raven hovered
dusky and shimmering-dark. Sword-light stood
as if all of Finnesburh were in flames.

The poet therefore also focuses on the description of the effects that the light reflected on the warriors' swords creates but also on the scene in the hall, which is filled with a mass of corpses.

What has just been said cannot be applied to the lines of *The Finn Episode,* in which a completely different atmosphere prevails. The *Beowulf* poet does not provide details on the dynamics of the conflict between Frisians and Danes which is mentioned in *The Finn Episode*.

The next difference concerns the duration of the actions and, in particular, of the central fight which is narrated both in *The Finn Episode* and in the *Finnsburg Fragment*: the fight in which Hnaef loses his life. The reason why the duration of the actions is an element that can be considered a difference between *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* is because while the poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* explicitly communicates the duration of the fight, the *Beowulf* poet does not give a precise time reference. The *Finnsburg Fragment* poet, in fact, affirms that the fight lasted five days: *Hig fuhton fíf dagas*, "They fought for five days". *The Finn Episode*, however, tells of a battle that presumably lasted only one night, since the *Beowulf* poet says that Hildeburh sees what happened *syþðan morgen com*, "when the morning came" (ll. 1076-1078). If the fight had lasted for five days, it would have been very unlikely that Hildeburh would not have realized it immediately, especially since the poet states that she used to spend her time in that hall. The two durations supported by the two different poets therefore do not match. The reason why these two elements differ is to be found in the intention of the poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment*. The purpose with which the poet tells the story contained in the *Finnsburg Fragment* is to praise the warriors and their courageous and valiant deeds. The poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* highlights that the Danes were able to defend themselves for five days and, as if that was not enough, without losing any warriors. The description of long-lasting fights is a *topos* of the Germanic heroic poetry.

The thematic element that is perhaps the cause of the most incisive difference between the two texts is the fact that in the *Finnsburg Fragment* there is no mention of the death of any Dane:

Hig fuhton fíf dagas, swá hyra nān ne fēol,
drihtgesīða, ac hig ðā duru hēoldon. (ll. l. 41-42)

They fought for five days, as none of them fell,
the troop-companions, but they held the doors.

However, in the last lines of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, the poet mentions the death of a warrior:

Ðā gewāt him wund hæleð on wæg gangan. (l. 43)

Then the hero went wounded, passing away.

Since the *Finnsburg Fragment* ends in an abrut way, the story is not complete and it is not possible to know with certainty which hero the poet is referring to. It could be a reference to Hnaef but there is no certainty about it.

Moreover, in the *Finnsburg Fragmen*t, when the attack is described, it is explicitly said that the Danes who are defending the door are Sigeferth and Eaha, Ordlaf, Guthlaf and Hengest, but "Hnaef is not mentioned at all"[192] :

Sigeferð and Ēaha, hyra sword getugon,
and æt ōþrum durum Ordlāf and Gūþlāf
and Hengest sylf hwearf him on lāst. (ll. 15-17)

Sigeferth and Eaha, drew their swords,
and at the other door, Ordlaf and Guthlaf
and Hengest himself came just behind them.

There is another difference between the two texts, that is the Christian perspective of *The Finn Episode* and the absence of religious elements in the *Finnsburg Fragment*. The *Beowulf* poet is deeply influenced from Christianity and, it is possible to perceive that the perspective of *The Finn Episode* is deeply influenced by Christian ideology. For instance, as has already been said, the *Beowulf* poet criticizes the principles of the warrior society or, again, he also includes the perspective of a woman within *The Finn Episode*. Another element that shows how *The Finn Episode* is influenced by Christian ideology is that one of the functions recognized to *The Finn Episode* is the questioning of the system

[192] Hugo Schilling, *The Finnsburg Fragment and the Finn Episode.* "Modern language notes", No 6. Wittenberg College, 1887, p. 148.

of revenge. Killing another man, even if a stranger, still coincides with killing one's own brother, since according to the Christian vision all men are brothers.

In the *Finnsburg Fragment,* on the other hand, no religious element is ever mentioned. And the perspective of the poet of *the Finnsburg Fragment* is not influenced by the Christian one in any way, since the poet praises the warrior society and does not criticize it.

3.2 Differences From a Stylistic Point of View

The stylistic elements of a literary text are a very interesting topic to research when one is studying and analyzing it. The stylistic elements, in fact, allow to better understand what the author's attitude is towards his text and, consequently, what reason there could be behind each of his choices. The stylistic elements considered (as elements that allow the differences between the two texts to emerge) are the length of the texts, the genre to which each of them belongs, the presence or absence of direct speeches or indirect speeches, the author's ironic attitude, the rhythm of the two texts, the author's point of view, the tone and the presence or absence of symbolic tendencies.

The first dissimilarity that emerges through the comparison of the two texts is obviously the length difference between *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment*. Although it is a digression, *The Finn Episode* is still of considerable length compared to the other digressions present within the poem and, most important, compared to the entire text of the *Finnsburg Fragment*. *The Finn Episode*, in fact, consists of approximately 100 verses. On the other hand, of the *Finnsburg Fragment* only 45 lines have survived and have been handed down. *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* belong to different genres. The *Finnsburg Fragment*, in fact, is a "lay", while *Beowulf* is a heroic poem of considerable length and with a complex structure. What distinguishes a lay from a long poem is not the length of the work in question, but rather the way in which the subject is treated and presented within it. What characterizes a lay, speaking in terms of narration, is speed from the point of view of the description of places, characters, scenes but also from the point of view of the dialogues which are extremely rapid. As has been argued by Donald K. Fry, only the *Finnsburg Fragment* seems to fit the definition of lay[193].

Among the stylistic elements analyzed there is also the presence or absence of direct and indirect speeches. *The Finn Episode* does not contain any direct speech and, on the contrary, in the *Finnsburg Fragment* speeches are well attested. Within the rest of the *Beowulf* poem the art of words plays a fundamental role. In the moments of maximum tension in the story of *The Finn Episode* the *Beowulf*

[193] Donald K. Fry (ed.), *Finnsburh Fagment and Episode*. Butler, Great Britain, 1974, p. 25.

poet leaves no room for direct speeches uttered by the characters but relies on gestures made by them.

If, on the one hand, in *Beowulf* oratory plays an important role, on the other, *The Finn Episode* is more based on facts and actions. If *The Finn Episode* is characterized by a total absence of direct speeches, on the other hand, the *Finnsburg Fragment* is characterized by the presence of many of them. More than half of the fragment, in its brevity, is dedicated to speeches.[194] The text of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, for example, opens immediately with a direct speech. This is a sentence that is known only partially because the original manuscript was damaged in a fire. It is probably the end of a speech given by the whatchman who was standing guard inside the room where the Danish warriors were guest:

'...*hornas byrnað naefre'* (l.1)

'… gables burning'.

Immediately afterwards, moreover, the *Finnsburg Fragment* proceeds with a direct speech by Hnaef stating that the lights they see from afar are not caused by the dawn or by a dragon, but that it is a group of men who are about to attack them. Then, Hnaef tries to encourage his men to face the battle as best as they can.
But direct speeches are not the only type of speech present in *the Finnsburg Fragment*, as there are also cases of indirect speech within the text, for example:

Đā hine sōna frægn folces hyrde,
hú ðā wīgend hyra wunda genāeson h
oððe hwæþer ðāera hyssa.... (ll. 46-48).

Then immediately asked him the protector of the people
how well the warriors their wounds survived
or which of the young men…

Another stylistic element that represents a difference between *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* is the rhythm of the two works. Rhythm is the element that regulates the narration of the events. In the case of the two works taken into consideration, undoubtedly the faster pace is that which characterizes the narration of *The Finn Episode*. In it, in fact, the events narrated by the poet follow each other rapidly. Of the first fight, for example, the poet only communicates the outcome but not the actual dynamics: we are told that Hnaef loses his life but we are told nothing else about what actually happened at Finnsburg. And after the mention of the death of Hnaef, the poet focuses on another theme which is the story of Hildeburh and her situation. The first battle, on the contrary, is told in detail in the *Finnsburg Fragment*. The *Finnsburg Fragment* is short but due to the nature of the work: it is only a Fragment of which we have not

[194] Ivi, p. 28.

been given the opportunity to know the full version. However, although we have only received a reduced version of the story, through a comparison between the lines that constitute it and the lines of *The Finn Episode* it is possible to understand that the *Finnsburg Fragment* is more detailed than the other. In other words, even though the *Finnsburg Fragment* is shorter than *The Finn Episode*, the rhythm of the Finnsburg Fragment is slower, since the poet provides more details about the dynamics of the facts narrated.

An element to take into consideration when analyzing the text of *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* is that of symbolism. This means that it is possible to understand if something is hidden behind a statement. Using symbols really means telling something with the aim of representing something else. This is a process that can be identified within the *Beowulf* poet's way of operating and a process identifiable in *The Finn Episode*. For example, when the poet tells of Hildeburh's pain following the discovery of the death of her brother and her son, he is not limiting himself to telling the facts, but behind his words it is possible to read something that goes beyond: the poet is probably denouncing the consequences of the warrior actions. Symbolism, however, is not a characterizing element in the text of the *Finnsburg Fragment*. The poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, in fact, does not go beyond the simple narration of the facts. When he talks about Garulf's death, for example, he is not alluding to the evil inherent within warrior society and its practices. This can simply be understood from the fact that no reaction is linked to such a tragic event.

Conclusions

The topic addressed in this study, that is, the comparison between the text of *The Finn Episode* and that of the *Finnsburg Fragment,* has been analyzed by many scholars over the years. The text of *The Finn Episode* and that of the *Finnsburg Fragment* are often analyzed together, since in the two texts the same story is told, the story which is about the fight between Danes and Frisians at Finnsburg. The main objective of this study was to make a comparison between the text of *The Finn Episode* and that of the *Finnsburg Fragment*, with the aim of highlighting the most notable differences between them.

The starting assumption is that the two texts, although belonging to the same literary tradition, the Old English one, belong to two genres which are profoundly different from each other. *The Finn Episode*, being part of the poem *Beowulf*, which belongs to the genre of the long epic poem, presents characteristics that are typical of that genre. The *Finnsburg Fragment*, on the other hand, is a lay. On the basis of these assumptions, therefore, in this study an analysis of the two texts was carried out through a literary comparison, which allowed us to understand that the two texts are deeply different and to highlight a series of evidences on different aspects.

In the first chapter it emerged, first of all, that, despite the numerous studies that have been conducted on the *Beowulf* poem and despite the various hypotheses that have been advanced on who the author is, on when and where the poem was composed, even today no certain answer has been reached and many of the debates are still open. Similarly to *Beowulf*, the *Finnsburg Fragment* is also anonymous and in this case too there is no certainty about the place and date of composition of the text.

Since one of the main aim of this study was to investigate the function of *The Finn Episode* in the poem, through the analysis of the text, of the position it occupies within the poem and the relationship it has with the other digressions, it has been possible to understand why the *Beowulf* poet decided to include *The Finn Episode* in the main plot, that is, to criticize the warrior society and the principles that characterize it, first of all the principle of revenge. The criticism of the warrior society and its principles is inserted in *The Finn Episode* by the poet through the particular attention he reserves towards the character of Hildeburh, who becomes the real protagonist of the entire digression. Moreover, Hengest occupies a fundamental role for the criticism of the Germanic warrior society, as it is through the character of Hengest that the difficulties linked to the respect of the obligation of revenge are highlighted.

A second purpose of this study was to highlight the main differences between *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment* through a comparison between the two texts and what emerged following the analysis conducted is that the two different poets, during the composition of their works, maintained two opposite points of view. If on the one hand the poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* praises the warrior society and actions, on the other hand the poet of *Beowulf* criticizes the most atrocious aspects of this type of society. The two points of

view are thus in opposition to each other, as the *Beowulf* poet observes the warrior society from a new point of view, namely the Christian one. The fact that in *The Finn Episode* a female character occupies such an important role is also explained by the influence of the Christian ideology. However, the poet of the *Finnsburg Fragment* tells the story of the fight between Danes and Frisians as a man who is part of Germanic culture, who shares all its principles and whose values he praises.

In conclusion, from the results that emerged following the analysis of *The Finn Episode* and the *Finnsburg Fragment*, it is possible to state that the two texts are extremely different, especially from a thematic and ideological point of view.

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