Charles University in Prague
Faculty of Education
Department of English Language and Literature

BACHELOR THESIS

Literary Comparison of *Beowulf* and R.E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian*

Literární srovnání *Beowulfa* a *Barbara Conana* od R.E. Howarda

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Study programme:	Specialisation in Education
Branch of study:	AJ-IT

2024

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, “A Literary Comparison of *Beowulf* and R.E. Howard’s *Conan the Barbarian*” is an original work, written by the author of this thesis under the supervision of PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, Ph.D., using the works cited on the “Sources” page. This thesis has not been used to attain any other degree.

Prague, 11 July 2024

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, Ph.D. for invaluable feedback, helpful guidance with the formal structure and content, and the willingness to answer questions and provide solutions.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis compares the literary works describing the stories of a popular fantasy character Conan the Barbarian, created by Robert Erwin Howard, with a traditional Anglo-Saxon heroic poem, *Beowulf*, featuring an eponymous hero. The goal is to explore the key differences and similarities between the texts while also answering the question of whether R.E. Howard was inspired by the poem and to what extent. Emphasis is placed on the main heroes of these works. In the Theoretical Part, the thesis focuses on the historical and social context, cultures, the conception of heroism, and the archetypes of the main protagonists in both works. The practical part uses the acquired knowledge and, together with textual analysis, highlights the similarities in themes and motifs, showing cultural differences and correlations in the traits of the main characters. The research will mainly draw from the original series of Conan books by R.E. Howard, featuring stories like *The Phoenix on the Sword* (1932), and incorporate other works related to the topic. Namely, *The Collected Letters of Robert E. Howard* (1933-1936) edited by Rob Roehm and John Bullard, *Renegades and Rogues* (2021) by Tod B. Vick, *Beowulf* (1999) translated and written by Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (2020) translated into Czech by Jan Čermák, as well as research papers on *Beowulf* such as *The Monsters and the Critics* (1936) by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.

KEYWORDS

Beowulf, *Conan*, Robert E. Howard, heroism, fantasy, Anglo-Saxons

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce srovnává literární díla popisující příběh populární fantasy postavy barbara Conana vytvořené Robertem Erwinem Howardem s tradiční anglosaskou epickou basní *Beowulf*, ve které vystupuje stejnojmenný hrdina. Cílem práce je prozkoumat rozdíly a podobnosti mezi texty a zároveň odpovědět na otázku, zda se R.E. Howard básní inspiroval a do jaké míry. Důraz je kladen na hlavní hrdiny těchto děl. V teoretické části se práce zaměřuje na historický a společenský kontext, kultury, hrdinství a archetypy hlavních protagonistů obou děl. Praktická část využívá nashromážděných poznatků a spolu s textovou analýzou upozorňuje na podobnosti v tématech a motivech, ukazuje kulturní rozdíly a korelace v rysech hlavních postav. Výzkum bude čerpat především z původní série knih o Conanovi od R.E. Howarda obsahující příběhy jako *The Phoenix on the Sword* (1932). Mezi další relativní zdroje pro toto téma patří *The Collected Letters of Robert E. Howard* (1933-1936) editované Robem Roehm and Johnem Bullardem, *Renegades and Rogues* (2021) napsáne Tod B. Vickem, *Beowulf* (1999) od Seamuse Heaneyho, kniha *Beowulf* (2020) napsaná Janem Čermákem, a prace obsahuje také studie rozebírající Beowulfa, jako *The Monsters and the Critics* (1936) napsané John Ronald Reuel Tolkienem.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Beowulf, Conan, Robert E. Howard, heroismus, fantasy, Anglo-Sasové

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Introduction

Conan the Barbarian is a fantasy character created at the beginning of the 20th century by the writer Robert Erwin Howard. Conan is known as the embodiment of a true barbarian, and his stories are known to be full of violence, chaos, monsters, and savagery. Throughout its existence, the character has gained popularity and has been featured in books, video games, films with Arnold Schwarzenegger, comics, and even sold as toys (Finn M. 203). The epic poem *Beowulf*, on the contrary, falls into the category of Old English literature, and it is perceived as a canonical work of literature featuring a prototypical Anglo-Saxon hero dealing with monsters (Alexander 27-29).

Although the heroes may seem rather distant from each other, the fantasy authors of the 20th century were often inspired by older works of literature, incorporating similar devices, cultures, and literary construction (Alexander 354-356). This is also the case in the genre of Conan: Sword and Sorcery. As Lyon Sprague de Camp states, "The prototypes of swordly-and-sorcerous swashbuckling can be clearly traced back to the voyagings of Odysseus, the adventures of Jason, …the exploits of Beowulf, …"(5). The author mentions *Beowulf*. However, he does not link the poem to R.E. Howard directly, nor does he comment on the mention. As a result, such a situation offers a chance for research. To further elaborate upon the choice of the topic, I consider myself to be a fan of fantasy, and having read Conan and also having been introduced to the character of Beowulf during my studies at university, I began to see correlations between the two protagonists and wanted to discover the reasons behind their resemblance. I later confirmed such a possibility by gathering information and studying *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers* (2014) by de Camp.

As for the structure of the thesis, the culture, historical context, and the heroes of the texts are introduced in the Theoretical Part. This section is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on *Beowulf*, and the second part deals with *Conan*. Beginning with the first part, due to the broad extent of studies on *Beowulf*, one of the main sources is *Beowulf* (2003), a translation by Jan Čermák, as it gathers the information in a compact form, and the additional studies by, for instance, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and Frederick Klaeber are added to the chapters concerning phenomena which are not elaborated upon in Čermák's book. The information tied to Conan in the Theoretical Part is based on research from multiple scholars,

for instance, Lyon Sprague de Camp, together with the authors of publications analysing R.E. Howard's life and work, such as *Renegades and Rogues* (2021) by Todd B. Vick and multidisciplinary essays from the monograph *Conan Meets the Academy* (2012) edited by Jonas Prida. The above-mentioned literature was also chosen based on the accessibility of the works, as it was complicated to gather some publications in the Czech Republic, or else the publications were not fit for the research. Additionally, most of the core texts about *Beowulf* are relatively old due to the fact that the new publications mostly draw from these works.

The main hypothesis is that R.E. Howard's works featuring the character of Conan the Barbarian develop topics, characters, and a code of honour similar to those in *Beowulf.* Subsequently, the thesis endeavours to answer the question of to what degree the features are identical and in which ways they differ. This is achieved by focusing on the context, themes, motifs, and formal properties of both works. The research is built around the information gathered in the Theoretical Part and also draws on *The Collected Letters of Robert E. Howard, Volume 3: 1933-1936* (2022), in which R.E. Howard explains some of its ideas regarding society and the *Conan texts*. As one cannot analyse only one text to achieve a full understanding of the character and his world, and one also cannot analyse all of the works depicting Conan's adventures, the texts used for the analysis are those written by R.E. Howard himself. Due to the fact that each work contains some information which is unique to the character or best fits the argument, a greater variety of texts was chosen, although only certain passages or situations were analysed or used as examples. Consequently, novelletes *The Phoenix on the Sword* (1932)*, The Scarlet Citadel* (1933), *The Tower of the Elephant* (1933), *Black Colossus* (1933*), Xuthal of the Dusk* (1933), *The Pool of the Black One* (1933), *Queen of the Black Coast* (1934), *The Devil in Iron* (1934), *A Witch Shall Be Born* (1934), *The Black Stranger* (1953), *The Man-Eaters of Zamboula* (1935), *The Frost-Giant's Daughter* (1953), *The Vale of Lost Women* (1967), *the* novella *Red Nails* (1936) and a novel *The Hour of the Dragon* (1936) were chosen. In the case of the poem, *Beowulf, A New Verse Translation* (1999) by Seamus Heaney will be used for the analysis as it is one of the relatively recent translations, and the language is more comprehensible, unlike the early translations used in R.E. Howard's time.

1 THEORETICAL PART

1.1 *Beowulf*

1.1.1 Historical-Literary Context

As this bachelor thesis strives to develop parallels between the original works featuring Conan by R.E. Howard and *Beowulf*, it is necessary to introduce this epic poem. Based on its historical development and the way it reflects both the Christian ethos and pagan aspects of Germanic culture, we may discuss the possible reasons why R.E. Howard could have used some of these aspects as the inspiration behind his own texts.

In his *Introduction to Beowulf* (1969), Edward Burroughs Irving, Jr. underlines the fact that *Beowulf* is one of the few surviving Anglo-Saxon poems that dates back to the pagan period in England and was neither lost nor forgotten. Due to the lack of detailed historical evidence caused by cultural collapse in Europe, the poem's origin is unknown (3). The mystery behind the origin is also noted by Robert Fletcher A. Huntington, who mentioned the idea that the story appeared for the first time somewhere in continental Europe and also noted the high likelihood of the poem having been brought to England in an era called the Dark Ages by Anglo-Saxons or the Vikings during their voyages (43).

The Dark Ages dates back to the withdrawal of the last Roman legion from the British Isles in the year 410 A.D. and extends to the end of the 10th century. During this period, the remaining inhabitants of the Isles were constantly at war with Picts, Scots, and Germanic tribes over nearly 200 years, which, on the one hand, caused a collapse of the former cultures and, on the other hand, gave rise to the establishment of new ones (Irving, Introduction to Beowulf 3). The invading tribes, such as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes intermarried with the native British population and coexisted with them, but predominantly fought and drove them into the hilly western regions of England (4).

North of the Thames, where the Angles settled in the two kingdoms called Mercia and Northumbria, the language Englisc and the nation Englaland were created, initiating the Anglo-Saxon period, also known in the literary field as the era of Old English Literature. Besides the language, the Anglo-Saxons also worshipped their own pagan gods and viewed the world differently. Thus, the transition to Christianity proved to be difficult. Moreover,

the Christians on the British Isles did not endeavour to contribute to the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity. The first attempts to convert the tribes were initiated by Rome in the year 597 and continued throughout the 7th century (4).

The fusion of different civilisations and ideas sparked a cultural flowering in the North called the Northumbrian Renaissance, named after the kingdom of Northumbria and characterised by a blend of Germanic, Celtic and Roman-Christian cultures in art. *The Dream of the Rood* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels* are known as some of the extraordinary works created during this period. Though the exact date of creation is unknown, some scholars consider the Northumbrian Renaissance to have been the birthplace of *Beowulf* in its written form as it is an example of the mixture of both Germanic and Christian values which this period was most likely to produce (5). Considering the merging of two different worlds during the slow Christianization of the 7th and 8th centuries, the author of the written form incorporated Christian elements and, to some degree, changed some of the original aspects, making them more Christian (Alexander 29).

The Cotton Vitellius manuscript, discovered around the year 1000, is recognised as the only remaining copy of the epic poem *Beowulf*. The text was part of Robert Cotton's library, which existed between 1571 and 1631 and was catalogued under the name Vitellius. When 16th-century England under the rule of Henry VIII underwent a reformation, the manuscript was most likely rescued by an unknown collector; otherwise, the text would have been confiscated and destroyed during the dissolution of monasteries. In 1731, the poem survived a library fire and was finally published in printed form in 1815 (Irving, Introduction to Beowulf 5).

1.1.2 Germanic Culture and Life in Connection to *Beowulf*

The poem is set in the lands of the Germans (Goetland, Sweden and Denmark), and thus, the Teutonic culture is reflected in it (Čermák 14). To be more specific, the story was built upon the old Germanic folk myths and uses the key motifs from this area (10). This section of the thesis will serve as a guide to understanding the Anglo-Saxon world, summarising some key Germanic themes and motifs which might be identified in *Beowulf*, some of which might also be found in the works of R.E. Howard. Due to the complexity of the Germanic culture

and the clarity with which professor Jan Čermák approaches its elements and singles them out, I determined Čermák's research on *Beowulf* as the chief source of the following chapter.

Čermák views the relationship between a lord and a member of his company as the basic building block of Germanic society and also of Anglo-Saxon society (25). The individual's status also depended on their kinsmen, and disloyalty deprived one of his rights in society, forcing him to live a solitary life in exile (Green 49). Additionally, such an individual was perceived as an outcast and betrayer and was believed to be influenced by the evil and darkness that dwelt outside the settlement (Čermák 34-35). In contrast, if a warrior remained loyal, the leader provided him with generous gifts, protection, and allegiance in exchange for his courage and willingness to fight (25-26).

The gifts, usually in the form of armour, horses, weapons, and jewellery - mostly rings - not only worked as a reward but also as a pact, meaning the tribe members would follow the lord in the future and remain faithful. Due to the high symbolic value of a gift, the leaders are referred to as the ring-givers and followers as the ring-friends or ring-receivers, where the word ring also connotes precious metal, a war-horse, or a spear. Gift-giving required the leader to follow the ideology of warfare. In other words, to keep the flow of gifts and, consequently, the loyalty of one's men, one had to wage war on the outside economies while enriching oneself. This was usually done by raiding and plundering (Green 68).

As for protection, by accepting the tribesman, the leader vouched to safeguard the person from outside threats as well as to be responsible for the wrongdoings of the tribe member, both present and past, which, in the case of conflict, meant resolving the conflict, enforcing the law, and avenging his people (Čermák 27). Vengeance was viewed as the duty of the kinsmen and their king. However, although vengeance symbolised loyalty, it also often led to a long and vicious cycle of murder and revenge and so Teutonic society, realising the problem of such a code, created an alternative to blood vengeance (32). In the *Laws of Ine*, the Anglo-Saxon laws enacted between 688 and 694, one may notice the law consisting of the word wergild. "If a thief is caught [in the act], he is to die the death, or his life is to be redeemed by his wergild" (Whitelock 367). In the Germanic world, wergild represents an individual's value based on his social rank. Thus, if a murderer or a thief does not want to pay with his own life, he pays that person's wergild or, in the case of the above-mentioned

law, his own wergild, as compensation. Despite the code of vengeance being abolished by Alfred the Great, it remained one of the popular topics of old Germanic heroic poetry (Čermák 33).

As already indicated in this chapter, Anglo-Saxons perceived the world outside their settlements as hostile, magical, mysterious, and evil. The opposite of the outside is logically the safety of the settlement and, at its heart, the mead-hall. As Čermák points out, it was the centre of celebrations, of heroic tales, and the place where the gifts were distributed to the tribesmen (33). Due to its importance to the tribe's members, the mead-hall also reflected the hierarchy in Anglo-Saxon culture. The status of an individual was defined by the seating arrangement and was strongly acknowledged by all the members of their society (Hume, "The Concept of the Hall" 65). Besides that, as reflected in poetry, the destruction of a Hall was not only a temporary loss but usually also a condemnation to a life in exile with no roof over one's head for many years and possibly for the rest of one's life, though, in reality, it was usually a temporary loss. Additionally, the concept of an anti-hall also arises in poems the moment an antagonist appears. In the case of *Beowulf*, this means the appearance of Grendel and his home (68).

The central theme of the Germanic tales is the ephemerality of the good times linked to the mead-hall, chaos versus order, the reaffirmation of heroic values and glorious death in the name of heroic values. These themes are also reflected in the philosophy of the warriors, whose goal was to have their name remembered even after their death, to earn glory by facing danger, to be loyal and courageous, and to be renowned as combatants who fought a good fight (28-29).

As for the Anglo-Saxon pagan religion, most information has been lost due to the knowledge not having been written down in a compact form. One may thus only infer some of the pagan practices and beliefs from the surviving literature and put together the individual pieces to get a glimpse of their religious world (Čermák 42-43). Stenton mentions Bede as one of the most prominent sources of such knowledge. One may notice the names of the ancient Gods, e.g. "They were the sons of Wihtgisl, son of Witta, son of Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock the royal families of many kingdoms claimed their descent (Colgrave 51)", the references to various temples where the sacrifices were carried out e.g. "in the same temple

he had one altar for the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer victims to devils (Colgrave 191)", and the language of the text also suggests different ranks of heathen priesthood. Additionally, Stenton also highlights the fact that Anglo-Saxons believed in fantastic creatures such as goblins, elves, giants, dragons, and various monsters. Pantheism, in the form of feeling the presence of dimly apprehended powers in particular springs, stones and trees, was also viewed as an integral part of their cultural beliefs (Stenton 4).

Later Anglo-Saxon culture underwent gradual changes influenced by Christianity, which reshaped their perception and even impacted their works (Čermák 29). Consequently, the heroic code was very often, for example in the poem *Wanderer*, mixed or exchanged with the code of the Christian world (39). Though Christianity later became the dominant religion, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons was a slow process, and the successors of newly-baptised kings usually forsook new values and the laws of their fathers (40). Instead of a rapid change, the conversion took the form of a slow reinterpretation of the old values, making them more Christian. These minor shifts are reflected in contemporary English, such as in the word *bless*, which is originally from the Anglo-Saxon word "blétsian" and was derived from the word *blood*, which was used during the sacrificial rituals. Christian priests began to use this term in their rituals, causing the abandonment of its original pagan connotation (41).

1.1.3 Beowulf as a Hero

As already mentioned in the previous chapters, the epic poem *Beowulf* was brought to England during the Dark Ages by the Teutonic people, who were known for their own distinctive portrayal of heroism and the poem was also later influenced by Christian dogma. As a result, the poem and the main hero display a unique mixture of elements from both worlds. This section will gather knowledge about the character in order to achieve one of the main goals of this work, which is to correctly analyse the correlations between the character of Beowulf from the Old English poem and that of Conan from the original *Conan series* of R.E. Howard. Despite some of his traits being acknowledged by most scholars, the character of Beowulf is understood in various different ways, and one cannot define it precisely and

completely. Consequently, this first section will cover Germanic heroism, seeing Beowulf as one of its representatives, and the following chapter will attempt to summarise the research on *Beowulf*, gathering and evaluating different theories regarding the meaning and symbolism linked to the character (Dixon 49; Irving, Introduction to Beowulf 10).

1.1.3.1 Beowulf as an Epic Hero in Germanic Culture

The main protagonists of Teutonic literature were the products of narratives told and shared among the tribesmen, which suggests that most of the heroes once existed and were, due to their achievements, celebrated, and as they achieved popularity, the stories of their mighty deeds were restructured into a more artistic form (Haymes and Samples, "The Hero, the Heroic Poetry, and the Heroic Age"). The storytellers usually enhanced the story, incorporating supernatural elements and thus made the hero seem supernatural (J. Clark 3-4). The main protagonist was consequently portrayed as the definition of perfection and worked as a role model for others (Goldberg 1).

This notion of excellence was attributed to the kings and tribal chiefs of the Germanic culture. Following this formula, an epic hero in the story usually takes on the role of a king or becomes a king after fulfilling their heroic quest. Additionally, such a king endeavours to be a role model, overcome any obstacle, and care for his companions, displaying his qualities both as a mighty warrior and a generous king (1).

In addition to generosity and might, fearlessness and inhuman strength belong to the group of the most frequent characteristics of the heroes in Teutonic literature and are considered the basic building blocks of a Germanic epic hero (1). One may also come across them in *Beowulf*. To be more specific, King Hrothghar says, "a thane, they declared, with the strength of thirty/ in the grip of each hand" (Heaney, lines 380-381), which points to the hero's extraordinary strength that is later proved directly after the hero tears off Grendel's hand. The second point, which is the focus on courage, can be seen on multiple occasions. One may notice, for instance, the moment Beowulf returns from his quest. „In he came then, the thane's commander,/ the arch-warrior, to address Hrothgar:/ his courage was proven, his glory was secure" (lines 1644-1646).

Last but not least, the hero's actions are motivated by their thirst for fame and glory both during and after their life. In other words, the hero's ambition is to have his glory celebrated everywhere and for all time, which works as the driving force behind his decision-making. Such a mindset can be observed during critical situations, where his glory motivates him to overcome or die battling the obstacle and portrays him as fearless among his companions (Chadwick 325-326). In the poem, young Beowulf faces mortal battles in his pursuit of fame, and his determination is later reaffirmed when he faces the dragon (G. Clark 271). The pinnacle of a hero's ambition is therefore to be praised and celebrated for all time. One may notice the author's commentary on Beowulf's success in following this formula in the consequent reaction of Halfdane. "Beowulf, my friend, /your fame has gone far and wide,/ you are known everywhere" (Heaney, lines 1704-1706). Another commentary is found at the end of the poem, "he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,/ kindest to his people and keenest to win fame./" (lines 3181-1382). These lines attest to the fact that the protagonist represents the embodiment of the values of his society, proving that the hero promoted the Germanic heroic ideals and achieved them due to his determination and belief in them.

1.1.3.2 The Research on the Character of Beowulf

In relation to the research on Beowulf's character, George Clark talks about the difficulty of perceiving Beowulf as a person and highlights the blending of the character and the poem's themes. He mentions scholars such as Peter Clemoes, who supported this idea, agreeing that writing about Beowulf means writing about everything in the poem and also notes scholars with a contradictory idea, e.g. Kathryn Hume, who analysed the theme and the hero separately. The different approaches of the scholars were caused by the lack of any personal thoughts, hopes, misgivings, descriptions of Beowulf's inner life, or detailed psychological features in the text, leaving space for multiple interpretations (G. Clark 275-276). This section will attempt to gather various opinions and perceptions of the protagonist, trying to outline the character of Beowulf as a whole.

Though the hero's traits are hard to infer, Kathryn Hume and many other scholars managed to identify some of Beowulf's qualities and analyse the hero separately. Based on G. Clark's

research evaluating their works, Beowulf can be characterised as mild, gentle, kind, humorous, excessively honourable, interested in poetry, empathetic towards suffering, an admirer of old heroes, and a hero who tends to fulfil his obligations at all costs (G. Clark 276-283). Despite the above-mentioned findings, Hume disagrees with the idea of a hero-centred design while mentioning the already-noted lack of detailed description and also adds that if the characteristics are present, they are not very prominent or interesting. For instance, Beowulf wears a helmet just like his fellow warriors, his relationships with others are public and formal, and we do not know if he ever married. Hume comes to the conclusion that Beowulf is his actions and little else besides and the gist of the story lies, in her opinion, in the main theme of the poem, threats to social order, which is reflected in the monsters (Hume, "The Theme and Structure" 1-6).

From another point of view, Frederick Klaeber and Margaret E. Goldsmith see Beowulf as the reflection of the Christian hero and Christian values. Klaeber even compares him to a Christlike figure (G. Clark 279-280). Goldsmith disagrees with such comparisons, posing more sceptically. She sees the poem as the author's attempt to write about human tragedy while incorporating the ideas of pride, hatred, envy, and covetousness. She also does not accept the idea of Beowulf being an allegory (Goldsmith 71-72). Beowulf is thus a man fighting his personal devil. In relation to Beowulf as a king, he is found to be stubborn, strong, courageous, generous, beloved, spiritually unguarded due to his pride, and one may share his agony of spirit. (83-84).

Despite the interesting findings of other studies, most of them were overshadowed by J.R.R. Tolkien's theory, which agrees that the theme of monsters posing a threat to the human order is central, but adds that Beowulf represents an Everyman, and although without any personal qualities, human context, and being characterless, the hero plays a significant role in the poem (G. Clark 280). Tolkien agrees with the theories written before his time, stating that Beowulf is similar to Hercules or Theseus, noting that there is not much in the story about him, and the hero is occupied mainly with killing, unlike the mentioned heroes (Tolkien 10). The hero, from his point of view, is not the hero of heroic lay due to the lack of any enmeshed loyalties and hapless love, but the gist of the hero lies in Beowulf's humanity (18-19). Additionally, the fusion of old and new is reflected in the Northern courage and unyielding

will of the hero, who will inevitably die as well as all his works (20-21). The character itself can also be seen as the young knight who uses his mægen (strength) to earn dom (judgement) and lof (praise) among posterity and his men (27). Tolkien also points to lines 1386-1389, which encapsulate the heroes' philosophy (36).

> Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better
> to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.
> For every one of us, living in this world
> means waiting for our end. Let whoever can
> win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,
> that will be his best and only bulwark. (Heaney)

1.1.4 Religion and Culture Linked to *Beowulf*

1.1.4.1 Christianity in *Beowulf*

The poem *Beowulf* features a story set in pre-Christian times in the land of the Danes, who were considered pagans at that time. Irving supports the argument that although we are presented with a seemingly pagan story, Christian themes are part and parcel of the text and he further supports this by referencing the many studies evaluating its Christian elements which have tried to infer the meaning and possible reason for the appearance of Christianity in the poem (Irving, Christian and Pagan 175).

Based on Irving's analysis of the research on Beowulf, and despite references to God's creation of the universe, Noah's flood, the last judgement, etc., early scholars of the 19th century did not see much relevance to Christianity in the text and initially did not study it. It was between the years 1911 and 1912 that Klaeber demonstrated for the first time the importance of the Christian elements, stipulating their key role in the poem. Consequently, the 20th century was packed with theories regarding the importance of both Christianity and paganism in the poem. Some scholars, such as J. R. R. Tolkien, supported the idea of the

poem being created mainly for a Christian audience, and others, e.g., Ernst Leisi, maintained the idea that the poem talks about the Germanic measure of honour and cannot be associated with the Christian ideas of avarice (Irving, Christian and Pagan175-176).

In 1951, a monograph called *The Audience of Beowulf* by Dorothy Whitelock appeared, suggesting that the author of the manuscript was Christian and was writing for a Christian audience. Though this theory was widely accepted by the public, the illogical blending of Christianity and paganism still represent a complicated puzzle, and theories will most likely continue to be created (Irving, Christian and Pagan 177).

1.1.4.2 Christian Elements in the Poem

Due to the broad extent of the studies on Christianity in *Beowulf*, this chapter is limited and focuses on only some of the Christian motifs which appear in the work. Irving states that one of the most influential early scholars, who, as he mentions, "documented the Christian elements in the poem responsibly and in great detail", was Friedrich Klaeber (Irving, Christian and Pagan 181). Among the Christian motifs which Klaeber mentions during his analysis belong God, sin, the devil, Cain, the giants, the flood, hell, heaven, and life and death (Klaeber, ch. content). These individual terms will thus be further discussed and worked with.

Kleaber views the God presented in *Beowulf* as the lord of all things who is ever-present in the poem (Klaeber 3). To further elaborate upon Kleaber's perspective, God is the giver of all good gifts, the dispenser of treasure, the giver of life (e.g., the birth of Scyld's heir), the guide of humankind and of its destiny, the one who turns sorrow into consolation, the one who lends aid to those in distress (e.g. sends *Beowulf* to Denmark), and the guardian of the people. Additionally, God also represents fate, the good, and is the judge who punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous (3-9). One may also see God in nature and light or notice God is called upon in a time of need and thanked after overcoming an obstacle (10). From another perspective, the Christian God is often juxtaposed with the pagan customs and their worship of idols, being seen as the right God. In *Beowulf*, those who follow the pagan customs are described by Tolkien as turning from God to the Devil and consequently his

alluring evil. Such characters are, for example, the Danes mentioned in lines 175-188. King Hrothgar, on the other hand, represents the opposite (Tolkien 42-44).

Sin, according to Klaeber, "appears as a terrible, hostile force which seizes human beings, invades their hearts, and enchains them." (12). The poem mentions the idea of the devil casting pernicious missiles into one's heart if one does not stay watchful (14). To be more specific, pride is underlined by Hrothgar as something that lulls the guardians and allows the devil's attacks to succeed, creating avarice. Other mentions are, for example, of fratricide, when Beowulf talks to Unferth, or idolatry in connection to the Danes, which, if ignored, may cause the appearance of the devil in one's heart (15-16). Besides that, sin is also linked to the monsters, whose parody of the human form reflects their sinful nature (Tolkien 34).

The motif of the devil is often associated with murder, darkness, and Grendel (Klaeber 18-19). Klaeber sees the characteristics of Grendel, such as the persecution of humans, assaults during sleep, reign through terror, etc., as very similar to the doings of the devil and his ilk in the bible and compares Grendel to a demon (Klaeber 23). Another motif linked to Grendel and also to his mother concerns the allusions to Cain: the murder of Cain's brother, Cain's banishment into the wilderness and the consequent descent of evil monsters from Cain and the mother of Grendel (25-27). Such allusion can be seen in lines 1258-1268:

> grimly biding time. Grendel's mother,
> monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs.
> She had been forced down into fearful waters,
> the cold depths, after Cain had killed
> his father's son, felled his own
> brother with a sword. Branded an outlaw,
> marked by having murdered, he moved into the wilds,
> shunned company and joy. And from Cain there sprang
> misbegotten spirits, among them Grendel (Heaney)

Moreover, a relic, the sword from the age of giants owned by Grendel, also points to the biblical flood and connects the monsters to the biblical giants and their wicked deeds from the Book of Enoch (Klaeber 25-27). To exemplify, "It was engraved/…the flood destroyed the tribe of giants/…" (Heaney, lines 1688-1690). In relation to the monsters, Tolkien also highlights the way in which they are referred to, e.g.. "inmates of Hell, adversaries of God, offspring of Cain or enemies of mankind", and underlines their connection to the Christian way of referring to the darkness. Tolkien also links Christianity with the Northern imagination and statets they both depict gods and heroes on the one side and the monsters on the other (20-21).

The motif of Hell symbolises heathendom, a place for pagan gods, and a place for "evil-doers like Grendel, Unferð, Heremod, and those who refuse to acknowledge the true God" (Klaeber 29). Heaven, on the other hand, is reserved for the righteous, where they are under the protection of the lord. Klaeber sees e.g. "God's light" (Heaney, line 2469) as a periphrasis for heaven. Other mentions of heaven may be found in line 1190 (Heaney), where the allusions to the life of Hama are viewed as the way to becoming a good Christian, in other words, entering the Lord's protection in heaven (Klaeber 34). On the other hand, Tolkien is more sceptical about such remarks and assumes there are no clear references in the text either about heaven as eternal bliss in the presence of God or as a state of reward. Though the text contains collocations that seem to refer to heaven, they may also be interpreted from the pagan perspective. What is more, the characters themselves do not understand or have hope of heaven (Tolkien 38).

1.1.4.3 Pagan Elements in *Beowulf*

Irving divides the term *pagan* into three areas in regard to the text of *Beowulf*: the literal, the vestigial and the ethical. To begin with, the literal area refers to the clearly defined and historically well-known pre-Christian Germanic processes which appear in the text. In *Beowulf*, readers are presented with pagan rituals (Christian and Pagan 177). To be more specific, Gale R. Owen-Crocker talks about four pagan funeral rites in the manuscript: the ship burial at the funeral of Scyld; the ceremonial pyre in the Finn Episode; "The Lay of the Last Survivor"; and Beowulf's own cremation (1-3).

The funeral of Scyld can be found at the beginning of the poem and is almost treated as a preface by some scholars. Owen-Crocker considers this part prefatory, nostalgic, and as an introduction to genealogy and the world of Anglo-Saxons (11-17). The Finn episode, or the cremation of Hildeburg's kin, works as a subject of the celebration of Beowulf's victory in Heorot (43). Though the Christian reader may notice a fruitless dependence on the talismans of the pagans as well as the failure of heroic ideals, the audience is encouraged not to condemn the characters but rather to sympathise with them (56). The third funeral rite is linked to the origin of the treasure guarded by the dragon (61). One may notice the references to armour, weapons, vessels, animals, and even musical instruments, which are considered symbols of pagan aristocracy (76). The last funeral in the poem describes the cremation of Beowulf himself. It is the only funeral rite containing the actual labour behind the pyre, such as the bringing of wood, the outline of the whole construction and the time of the construction (85). In this section, one may notice the author's focus on Beowulf and the way in which the main character is found to be a good person by Christian standards and achieves posthumous fame, considered to be one of the most heroic of ambitions in the world of the Geats (105). Another example of paganism, in its literal sense, is the worship of heathen gods, where one is not presented with an actual act of worshipping in the poem, nor any names of the heathen gods, but the poet condemns the Danes for worshipping pagan gods, causing the evil to appear (Irving, Christian and Pagan 178).

The vestigial, also known as fossil paganism, is defined as: "An expression we can now identify as originally pagan has been preserved in a poetic formula that may well have lost any such specific meaning" (178). An example of fossil paganism can be spotted in the description of the helmets with a boar insignia worn by the warriors. The Germanic god Freyr was associated with a boar, and the animal was believed to work as a powerful protection against foes. Despite its former pagan meaning, the later Anglo-Saxons inherited the idea of boar insignia being associated with a hero, but the boar did not carry the reference to the god Freyr anymore. Consequently, if the pagan element can be recovered based on the history of the expression or an item, the term matches the vestigial area. Among other examples of the vestigial area are the brief references to magic spells and battle runes, the phrases containing Wyrd (fate) or the relation between the fertility myth and the account of the arrival by boat of the child Scyld Scefing and his departure after death (179).

Finally, the ethical and moral areas concerning the mentions of Germanic, non-Christian, heroic and secular pagans in the text. Irving sees the ethical code of the main hero as an example of such a mention. The warrior code of the aristocracy, celebration of bravery, generosity, taking pride in strength and glory, loyalty, and fame function as the driving force behind Beowulf's decision-making and are visible throughout the whole poem. Although many of the characteristics are considered positive in Christianity too, pride in strength and glory is not. The positive connotation of this term can be traced back to Scandinavian and Germanic heroic ideals, and thus, they belong in the area mentioned above (Christian and Pagan 180).

1.1.5 Form and Style of *Beowulf*

To begin with, Čermák highlights the fact that, unlike Nordic poetry, the Anglo-Saxon rules regarding aesthetics and form have not been preserved in any compact form and are to be inferred from the texts with the aid of the known history tied to the Anglo-Saxons' literature and their culture. The poem is known to have been sung by the scops, who were considered the storytellers and preservers of poetry in Anglo-Saxon society. The aim of their works was not only to celebrate and praise but also to preserve important personalities. Due to the lack of any written form of the texts, the scops often added improvisations during their oral performance (54).

Despite the freedom in the delivery of the poem, during their performance, scops followed strict rules and structure while implementing the specific literary devices, metaphors, and figurative language used by their culture. These characteristics are also present in poems' written forms, proving their importance (55). One of the often-used literary devices was alliteration. It is "The repetition of the same sounds— usually initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables— in any sequence of neighbouring words. …Such poetry, in which alliteration rather than rhyme is the chief principle of repetition, is known as alliterative verse ;" (Baldick 72). In the translation of *Beowulf* by Heaney, one may notice phrases like "the dark death-shadow (deorc dēaþ-scūa)" or the "misty moors (mistige mōras)" (13).

The poem also features the employment of formulae. These are the group of words used regularly and under the same metrical conditions to express an idea (Čermák 56). These old

collocations were shared and remembered by the scops. For instance, the king is also referred to and known as "the giver of rings (bēaga bryttan)" (Heaney 25). Kenning, which is "A stock phrase of the kind used in Old Norse and Old English verse as a poetic circumlocution in place of a more familiar noun." (Baldick 209); is a special type of formula (Čermák 63). Additionally, the poem employs figurative language to describe reality. Čermák distinguishes three basic types. The first type involves living beings being described based on their relation to something or someone. The second type characterises people based on their deeds and behaviour, and the last type uses a condensed simile (63-64). The examples from the text would thus be "son of Halfdane" (Heaney 19), "the killer of souls" (13), and the "whale-road" (3), respectively.

As for the structure of the poem, the basic metric unit is a half-verse containing four syllables, two of which are stressed and two unstressed. Two half-verses create a line and are connected by the previously-mentioned alliteration and stress. Aaab, abab, abac, abbc, and abba are the most frequent alliteration schemas in *Beowulf* (Čermák 57-58). Last but not least, there is variation, which is considered the most distinctive characteristic of the text (O'Brien O'Keeffe 94). O'Keeffe talks about it in the sense in which "variation as a stylistic device gives texture to the narrative; as the story moves forward, the elements in variation give us information often at odd angles to the main line of the narrative." (95). These different levels or angles of description can be seen, for instance, in the description of Beowulf's helmet. "To guard his head he had a glittering helmet/ that was due to be muddied on the mere bottom/ and blurred in the upswirl. It was of beaten gold,/ ... /by a weapon-smith who had worked wonders/ (Heaney 101)". Here, the look of the helmet as well as the history of the object indicates the difficulty of Beowulf's quest, (O'Brien O'Keeffe 94).

1.2 *Conan the Barbarian*

To perform the analysis properly, it is necessary to study both works in detail as they may seem very alike in some respects, although R.E. Howard may have had different intentions for the incorporation of the same traits. To illustrate, despite the muscular strength or the striving for success present in both works, the perception of such traits as a part of the codex of a Germanic hero, as in Beowulf, may not be the case for *Conan. S*uch remarks could be a mere coincidence caused by the assignment of stereotypical traits to the main protagonist, as a proper hero should promote those values, and they may have no connection with Germanic philosophy. The upcoming section will gather information regarding the original *Conan saga* and its author so as to clearly resolve such problems or at least make an informed guess at the reasoning behind R.E. Howard's decision to incorporate certain traits.

1.2.1 R.E. Howard's Biography within the Historical-Literary Context

The author's life will help us to understand R. E. Howard as well as to establish the network of already known influences on the character and his world, helping this thesis correctly assess the potential for inspiration by *Beowulf*.

To begin with, R.E. Howard was born on January 26, 1906, in Paester, Texas. His father worked as a doctor, and his mother, with whom he had a very strong connection throughout his whole life, was the daughter of a rich farmer, which allowed her access to poetry and famous stories, instilling a passion for reading and writing in R.E. Howard from an early age (Vick 14-25). As for the character of the young author, de Camp describes the young R.E. Howard as puny, bookish, introverted, and the victim of bullying (106).

Despite R.E. Howard's career starting much later, his childhood played a decisive role in the building of his character and its influence is reflected in the author's future works. To be more specific, a nomadic lifestyle, being a child prodigy, boxing, being in contact with the African American community, witnessing supernatural events, and studies in early British history are aspects which epitomise the author's early childhood and one may, though without direct proof, spot connections between such life events and the author's works (Vick 35-56).

The period between 1919 and 1923 is known as the juvenile years of the author and was marked by the author trying to establish himself as a writer. Being an amateur in the field of writing, R.E. Howard attempted to publish his works in various magazines, such as *Weird Tales*, while trying to discover his own narrative style and pace by often changing the direction of his works. As a result, the author produced both humorous and serious history, adventure tales, and mystery (216). Among the most prominent works of this era is *Spear and Fang* (1925) (de Camp 108). Besides discovering his own place as a writer, it was also the time when R.E. Howard initiated his correspondence with Harold Richard Preece and Howard Phillips Lovecraft, both of whom he admired and drew inspiration from (Vick 216).

R.E. Howard's professional writing career started around the year 1924 and lasted for 12 years. This period could be divided into three sub-periods based on the genre the author focused on. Namely, early fiction, historical fiction, and adventure fantasy fiction (216). To begin with, the early fiction period started with the release of *Spear and Fang* in 1924 and ended in 1928, after completing his courses at Howard Payne College. Although R.E. Howard had already found his own voice, he continued to experiment and, as a result, wrote in various genres, namely, history, horror, and fantasy. One of the key aspects of these stories was R.E. Howard's desire to incorporate historical characters and elements, merging those with adventurous elements (217). His works *The Lost Race* (1927), describing a conflict between Celts and Picts in Britain, and *Wolfshead* (1926), a story concerning African lycanthropy, are some of the distinctive representatives of this era. Besides that, R.E. Howard also initiated cooperation with the magazine *Junto* and continued posting in *Weird Tales*, later becoming a full-time writer (de Camp 109).

Due to R.E. Howard's fascination with history, the next period, starting in 1928 and lasting for four years, was packed with stories inspired by historical events. Though also partly created during the first period, Solomon Kane and Kull of Atlantis were the most distinctive characters of this era (Vick 217). Besides narrative fiction, R.E. Howard also showed a great interest in poetry, some of which, for example *To A Woman* (1933) and *One Who Comes At Eventide* (1933) were published in *Modern American Poetry* in 1933. The production of both narratives and poetry caused the author's increase in popularity, resulting in his stories appearing in other popular magazines like *Argosy* and *Fight Stories* (de Camp 109-110).

The final epoch is called the adventurous fantasy fiction era, during which the author introduced stories set in the fictional world of Hyboria about a character called Conan the Cimmerian. Not only did these stories achieve success, but the distinctive narrative style, mixed with fantasy elements, produced a new fantasy subgenre, Sword and Sorcery (Vick 218). The first literary piece depicting the story of Conan was released in 1932 under the name *The Phoenix on the Sword* and was heavily inspired by an unsold story about King Kull, one of R.E. Howard's previous characters. The years 1932-1936 featured many notable Conan stories. The major ones were the description of Conan's world called *The Hyborian Age*, short stories such as *Queen of the Black Coast,* and the only novel written by R.E. Howard about Conan called *The Hour of the Dragon*, all of which will become part of the research of this thesis together with the other original stories created by Howard during this time frame (Finn M. 203-243).

Due to the other magazines not paying their debts to him and the author being dissatisfied with his writing, R.E. Howard faced a crisis. The writer sought a solution in changing his genre and decided to produce Westerns and boxing stories. The Westerns made R.E. Howard one of the richest men in Cross Plains, the town where he lived (de Camp 125). Though unsubstantiated, there is a high likelihood he would have continued producing in this genre, probably establishing a fourth period, most likely Western fiction. Unfortunately, R.E. Howard started to feel burnt out and together with the fact that his mother had a very severe illness and doctors indicated she would soon die, the author committed suicide in the year 1936. Thus, it is uncertain whether he would have continued to write in the genre or expand the *Conan* universe, possibly changing the course of the character. After R.E. Howard's death, many authors used Conan in their own stories, making the character and author even more popular (Vick 182-185).

1.2.2 The Known Influences on R.E. Howard's Work

When uncovering the similarities between the works, it is necessary to evaluate previous findings in regard to the authors' inspiration in order to better understand some of the potential similarities and correctly assess the likelihood of the author truly drawing

inspiration from Beowulf. These chapters will thus attempt to mention such knowledge and eventually aid the research in this area.

1.2.2.1 The Archetype of Conan

As John D. Finn states when discussing the archetype and history of Conan, "… Conan the Cimmerian would, of course, go on to become one of the most widely known characters in 20th century literature, and one of the most misunderstood" (4). J. Finn further supports this statement by mentioning the first reviews vaguely comparing Conan to Tarzan, Superman on a Psychotic Bender or a character in an action story in a prehistoric costume. Though one may find these comparisons to some degree valid, based on Coffman it is only the simplification of a much deeper character (44). Coffman finds the hero to be an amalgam of various sources of inspiration. Among such sources belong the previous characters and works of R.E. Howard (e.g. Kull of Atlantis, Bran Mak Morn, Dubh O'Brien), the characters of other writers (e.g., Tarzan, Mowgli), and the author's own life (44-45).

To further discuss Coffman's approach, based on the information given about the author (mainly correspondence), one cannot trace the origin and development of the character precisely and completely (46). The core themes Coffman links to the world of Conan are "Barbarism as the natural human condition" and "futile attempts to establish order in chaos". To be more specific, despite the similarities, the hero does not fully follow the notion of a noble savage. Instead, he is a dark barbarian, epitomising the pessimistic view of society being unable to suppress its dark side and being overcome and controlled by chaos (46). Additionally, based on R.E. Howard's correspondence, Coffman infers that Conan is slowly revealed to be a barbarian who is childish and terrible in his wrath, bloody, treacherous, strong, lithe, worships awful and abominable gods, and is bound to his clan (50-52).

R.E. Howard talks about the character as something that one day came to him and which is constructed from the people in his surroundings, such as "gunmen, prizefighters, bootleggers, oil field bullies, gamblers, and honest workers." (Roehm and Bullard 338). Although explained thus by R.E. Howard himself, Coffman instead highlights R.E. Howard's previous works, such as the unfinished poem *Am-ra the Ta-an* (2002), which is the story of a lion-hearted pirate, *The Gladiator and the Lady* (1930), describing the story of

a romanticised barbarian, *An Echo from the Iron Harp* (1932), describing the Battle of Vercellae from the barbaric point of view, *The Cells of the Coliseum* (2002) where a barbarian enters the arena, and his seven poems about Vikings, which he regards as proof of the author's interest in barbaric history, and he also sees the inspiration for Conan arising from this amalgam of works (Cofman 56-58).

Moreover, to further support the author's inspiration from his previous works, Jeffrey Shanks points at the commonly known fact of R.E. Howard's direct inspiration by his previous character, the Kull of Atlantis, who is also a barbaric king and is placed 100,000 years in the past in Atlantis. Though Kull's stories were considered mostly unsuccessful, R.E. Howard reconstructed the story *By This Ax I Rule!!* by incorporating Conan and the Hyborian Age, and renaming it *Phoenix on the Sword* in the year 1932 (23). After the release of this work, R.E. Howard decided to write more stories about Conan and wanted to focus on world-building. Consequently, the pseudo-historical essay, *The Hyborian Age,* was created, in which one may find direct historical references based on the theories of renowned scholars of R.E. Howard's time (24-25).

1.2.2.2 The World

Conan's world is the same as Kull's, the Atlantean, and Bran Mak Morn's, a character from R.E. Howard's poem *Men of the Shadows* (1926). It is our world, set in an unrecorded time period (Shanks 23). For R.E. Howard, the opportunity to create an imaginary history of the Picts was the main reason for choosing such a period and world. R.E. Howard's history begins with three great races, namely the Picts, the Atlanteans and the Lemurians, who are forced to abandon their island kingdoms and spread across the world after the great cataclysm. These nations occupy various lands, such as today's America, the British Isles, continental Europe, etc. The cultural variety is even more reinforced after the arrival of the Celts, who displaced the Picts, bringing the bronze age to the continent (24-28).

Conan is considered to be a descendant of the Atlanteans who escaped to the mainland after the destruction of Atlantis (28). His story is set some 12,000 years ago, before recorded history, in a period called "The Hyborian Age" (de Camp 120). R.E. Howard drew two maps showing the state of the world in which geological changes had caused rapid differences in

its geography. Some places, for instance, the English Channel, the Northern Sea, and the Mediterranean, are replaced by dry land and others, like North Africa, are under the Atlantic Ocean. Besides the geological changes, in an attempt to depict that time period credibly, some lands are not even mentioned, due to R.E. Howard's opinion that the ignorance of Western people towards distant lands was similar to attitudes during medieval times and was thus not relevant to the cartographers and historians of the Conan's world (Shanks 34-35). The most dominant kingdoms in the Western world of the Hyborian Age are Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Koth, Ophir, Argos, Corinthia, and the Border Kingdom. At the same time, the east is controlled by Zamora, the southwest by Zingara, the north of Aquilonia by Cimmeria and the far south by Stygia (Howard, "The Hyborian Age").

During the creation of this world, R.E. Howard followed and accepted the theory of Lewis Spencer regarding the Cro-Magnon people and also closely linked the Picts to Spencer's Azilian culture, which spread through the Mediterranean and eventually entered the British Isles and Norway (Shanks 28-29). Additionally, R.E. Howard also studied and incorporated the Celts, which Shanks sees as a direct replacement of the Aryan race from Scott Elliot's *The Story of Atlantis* (1896). Among some of the major literary influences on the world-building of Conan are considered G.F. Scott Elliot's works such as *The Story of Atlantis* and *The Romance of the Early British Life* (1900), *The Prehistoric World* and *Vanished Races* (1885) by E.A. Allen and *The Outline of History* (1919) by H.G. Wells (Shanks 30-31).

1.2.3 Sword and Sorcery Genre

One of the main goals of this thesis is to analyse the main protagonists. The works of *Conan* are the chief representatives of Sword and Sorcery literature, making it a necessity to study this genre and find its key characteristics to achieve a better understanding of both protagonists (Vick 225). In practice, such knowledge will aid us in spotting the reasons for some of the similarities and will extend the repertoire of the various perspectives from which one may look at the character. Moreover, knowing Conan's compeers allows one to compare the similar ways other authors have used them during their creations, making it possible to track identical thinking.

Sword and Sorcery is a term closely related to many of R.E. Howard's characters, one of whom is also Conan. Though R. E. Howard most likely did not seek to create a new subgenre of fantasy, as one cannot find any evidence stating that the group of R.E. Howard's fans, called the Hyborian Legion, established and linked the term to R.E. Howard's works, making him an iconic author, as they attempted to analyse his fantasy fiction in the 50s and 60s (219-220).

At the beginning of the research into classifying the new genre, George R. Heap introduced the term fantasy-adventure and used three criteria to characterise it. To be specific, the texts contain a strong element of the supernatural (such as spells, wizardry, etc.), there is a single strong hero in an era before the creation of gunpowder, and the world background of the story is both unnatural but still human (Heap 3-4). These basic criteria were perceived only as a tool to further simplify studies in the matter. It was in the year 1961 when Fritz Leiber coined the term Sword and Sorcery and started actively using it, although without an exact definition. A month later, after Leiber's proclamation, Michael Moorcock wrote an article suggesting a basic formula consisting of 5 criteria describing epic fantasy. Namely, "the hero must get or do something, villains disapprove, the protagonist sets out to get what he wants anyway, villains thwart him one or more times, and in the face of all odds, the protagonist does what the reader expects" (qt. in Vick 222). Moorcock also provided a list of literary works following the formula and remarked that all these works followed the pattern of Old Heroic Sagas and Epic Romances while consisting of mythological and folk themes. Despite the similarities, the works written by R.E. Howard fulfilled the individual points in a different manner than, for instance, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), and due to these distinctive ways in which they fit the criteria, the term Sword and Sorcery was used for works similar to R.E. Howard's and the term Epic Fantasy covered the others (Vick 221-223).

There are many similarities between heroic fantasy and Sword and Sorcery fiction. The difference lies in the emphasis on adventurous elements and generous hospitality to picaresque elements. To be more specific, the Sword and Sorcery stories are mainly about swordplay and swashbuckling, featuring a highly skilled warrior living in a prehistoric era. A proper Sword and Sorcery story should also contain black magic and demons (Stableford

393-394). Additional differences may be found in Joseph A. V. McCullough's research, which compares the stories about King Kull, who is characterised as Sword and Sorcery, and Bran Mak Morn, which is seen as heroic fantasy. The main differences are found to be in the character and scope. Protagonists of Sword and Sorcery are usually muscular barbarians who are stronger than other men; they distance themselves from society, are unbound by any societal sense of right and wrong, and are self-motivated. Due to such traits, the story usually lacks deeper religious powers such as God, fate or destiny, and these elements thus do not play a big role in the story (McCullough).

As Old English heroic poetry also tells the story of mighty warriors and R.E. Howard drew inspiration from early British history and literature, it is highly likely the Sword and Sorcery genre was partly inspired by the heroes of this genre and could possibly be understood as the evolution of heroic poetry. The question remains as to what degree and which aspects to consider as totally different, and which follow similar patterns. Such questions will be answered in the Practical Part of this work.

2 PRACTICAL PART

2.1 *Beowulf* and *Conan the Barbarian*: Form and Style Comparison

The epic poem *Beowulf* represents an example of Anglo-Saxon literature written more than 1000 years before *Conan the Barbarian*. This literary piece thus appears distant from R.E. Howard's fantasy stories at first sight[1]. R.E. Howard's main intention was to create a thrilling fantasy universe which would describe the forgotten dark history of the world, projecting his ideas and perception of the universe into them, much to the great satisfaction of the readers of his era. To establish such an environment, R.E. Howard used some of the historical documents closest in time to that unknown historical period, attempting to recreate the world at that time[2]. As a result, although written in different time periods, there might be a chance of discovering certain formal similarities and patterns which could also be found in *Beowulf* due to the closeness of the poem to the already-known historical documents R.E. Howard was inspired by. In the upcoming section, the analysis will focus on the form and style. Even though the works may not bear many resemblances to each other in this sense, as they feature contrasting genres, it is necessary to examine these aspects to properly analyse and compare both literary pieces.

As already indicated, Conan stories are representatives of fantasy fiction, more specifically, the Sword and Sorcery genre, and usually written as novellas, whereas *Beowulf* is a heroic epic poem. Heroic poetry recounts the story of a mighty hero with often supernatural strength who follows his or her heroic ethos. The heroes are eventually exposed to a difficult choice or an obstacle, which determines whether they die and achieve posthumous fame or earn an honourable victory (Bremmer 76). Additionally, the texts are a product of narratives based on famous real-life figures who probably once existed. To further elevate the story, the poems also feature the supernatural[3].

Sword and Sorcery stories, in their essence, follow a very similar pattern of an individual living in a supernatural environment, facing danger and difficult choices while intending to

[1] See 1.1.1of the Theoretical Part.

[2] See 1.2.2.2 of the Theoretical Part.

[3] See 1.1.3.1 of the Theoretical Part.

wager their life to achieve their ambitions. However, the main protagonist displays certain traits that may seem incongruent with the hero in *Beowulf*. To be more specific, the hero is also described as a barbaric person distancing himself from others, lacking a sense of right and wrong and posing as self-motivated[4]. These contrasting features are due to R.E. Howard's intention of creating a work and a character that would resemble his time, whose stories would be accessible to the common reader, and which would encapsulate R.E. Howard's philosophy regarding barbarism and chaos[5].

Another visible difference is seen in the fact that novels are considered epic and poems lyric, which already indicates the lack of many of the qualities of *Beowulf* in the *Conan* series. However, although Sword and Sorcery stories lack the poetic qualities of *Beowulf*, R.E. Howard strived to incorporate at least some poetic elements in his works, by introducing some chapters with short poems. To be more specific, the original *Conan* series contains excerpts from imaginary poetry collections such as "An Old Ballad", "The Road of Kings", "The Song of Bêlit", or "Old Rime" (Louinet). These texts will thus become the key sources for the upcoming analysis, as there might be a chance of discovering some similarities between *Beowulf* and the *Conan* series.

To begin with, it needs to be said that none of the poems in the original Conan saga replicate the style and form of the epic poem *Beowulf*. Instead, the poems are rather short and complement the story, deepening the immersion and usually taking a subsidiary role in the texts. Nevertheless, in some stories, for instance, *The Queen of the Black Coast*, ballads are featured, which is a literary genre similar to that of heroic epic poetry. The ballad is "A folk song or orally transmitted poem telling in a direct and dramatic manner some popular story usually derived from a tragic incident in local history or legend. The story is told simply, impersonally, and often with vivid dialogue" (Baldick 91). Thus, one may notice that the author also intends to focus on heroes and famous personalities and wants to incorporate the idea of songs conveying their stories. This is also visible in the text, *The Phoenix on the Sword*, where Conan comments on the importance of songs: "I shall die and be forgotten, but Rinaldo's songs will live forever.", showing that even the main character realises the

[4] See 1.2.3 of the Theoretical Part.

[5] See 1.2.2.1 of the Theoretical Part.

importance of the songs that celebrate one's achievements. Not only does this approach promote the concept of becoming notorious, but it also helps to establish fame. This is a principle developed in *Beowulf* as well. Consequently, R.E. Howard intentionally promotes poetry, celebrating and retelling the story of an individual because he understands such literature was used by the old civilisations, and the incorporation of it is only for the better, as it makes the texts seem more connected to the world of the book. Though the text was not written in the same genre, and poetry does not play the main role, R.E. Howard's texts also promote the idea of celebrating one's achievements in songs. As a result, one may feel that the texts serve the same purpose or emit the same atmosphere: the celebration of heroism.

As for the literary devices, one of the prominent aspects of *Beowulf* is alliteration. In *Conan* texts, alliteration does not appear, and the rhythm is based mostly on end rhymes, following simple rhyme schemes, such as AABB in the excerpt called "The Road of the Kings" in *The Phoenix on the Sword* or ABCB used in The Song of Bêlit in *Queen of the Black Coast*. R.E. Howard's decision not to incorporate alliteration may be due to the intention of keeping the texts simple for his audience and using patterns typical for the given genres, such as the ABCB pattern in the ballads. As for the other typical aspects of *Beowulf,* such as formulae, kennings and variations, besides some occasional appearances in the stories such as "Sword of Heimdul" in *The Frost-Giant's Daughter*, the devices do not appear in the poetry or the stories frequently. Instead, the poems often contain similes, metaphors, and repetition. Similarly to the lack of use of alliteration, such a decision may be due to the author's intention of not putting much emphasis on poetry, which would, with its complexity, outshine the story and stand out too much in comparison to the straightforward storytelling. Moreover, the complexity of the devices would most likely not appeal to an average reader of R.E. Howard's fantasy. Thus, the absence of the devices and the differences in the form are understandable.

2.2 *Beowulf* and *Conan the Barbarian*: The Role of Religion

To begin with, *Beowulf* contains both pagan and Christian aspects. One may notice allusions to the Bible, for instance, the allusions to Cain, as well as to pagan philosophy, for instance, in the heroic code practiced by the protagonist. In *Beowulf*, the main reason for the

occurrence of the elements from both worlds is the historical background. More specifically, there was an urge to convert Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, which began in the 7th century, and among the major changes was the incorporation of Christian dogma into the original pagan narratives[6]. In *Conan*, religion does not play the same role as in *Beowulf,* as the author does not seek to spread Christianity. R.E. Howard's intentions were most likely to portray the world believably, convey an interesting story in an exotic world, and, consequently, associate different cultures with different religions and not show one as more prominent and right while calling others pagan practices. To further elaborate, one may come across Set, Krom, Ymir, etc., who are unique, god-like figures scattered around the world, none of whom is acknowledged as superior by the author. Moreover, despite the high number and variety of faiths, none of them corresponds fully with Christianity, nor do the texts contain any significant allusions to the Bible. On the other hand, the *Conan* texts present similar religious elements, such as god, the devil, sin, and heaven and hell, which leads to the question of whether such elements behave in the same way as those in Beowulf or not.

In *Beowulf*, God rules over everything and is always present, he lends aid to those in distress, embodies the guardianship of his people, is portrayed as nature and light, and is thanked after overcoming an obstacle[7]. One of the major similarities is the idea of appreciating god's aid or calling upon him or her. *Conan* also often swears by the names of various gods. These exclamations usually appear when witnessing something unnatural, facing danger, or wishing for something. As a result, the names of gods appear regularly throughout the text, almost as if the readers were to believe the gods support Conan and truly watch over him in times of need, giving the audience a feeling of sympathy for the hero. Can one consequently view the barbaric character of Conan similarly to that of Beowulf, namely, that they both represent warriors who seem to be chosen by God to fight against evil? Although one may see such a parallel due to R.E. Howard's need to portray Conan as the main character representing the author's notion of good, the author most likely did not intend to develop an allegory symbolising a deeper meaning, but rather an entertaining story expressing his idea

[6] See also 1.1.1 of the Theoretical Part.

[7] See also 1.1.4.2 of the Theoretical Part.

of a world filled with barbarism, featuring a protagonist with a barbaric nature; thus, such a theory is unlikely to be true.

As for the motif of the devil, the scholars analysing the Christian elements have linked the devil's doings in *Beowulf* with Grendel and his mother, also underlining the fact they are treated as being the devil's descendants, associated with Cain and the race of the ancient giants[8]. As already mentioned, Conan does not contain many direct, intentional, biblical allusions. Nevertheless, one may still find some references to Christian dogma. One of them represents the usage of similar terminology when talking about monsters. More specifically, the terms such as demon, hell, and underworld are frequently mentioned. For instance, Conan refers to the evil mummy in *Phoenix on the Sword* as "quickened with demoniac life", in *The Tower of the Elephant,* the monster is viewed as "a demon of the Elder World", the creatures in *Black Colossus* are described as "the demons of the air…the fiends of the underworld", and the Khosatral in *The Devil in Iron* upon whose death Conan comments, "Gone back to hell whence he crawled". Though such mentions regarding demons, hell or the underworld may as well be just coincidential, the incorporations and frequency of such terms may have a different explanation: more specifically, that the author is trying to highlight the evil nature of the characters using the philosophy and the language of the Christian world as they are closest to his audience.

Sin, in *Beowulf*, attracts creatures of evil and often functions as a trigger of conflicts. Consequently, one is presented with a world that acknowledges sin as one of the strong determiners of one's fate and the root of all conflicts[9]. R.E. Howard's texts often neglect to mention sin or view behaviour as sinful, as neither the hero nor his world understand sin from the Christian perspective, and the implementation of a similar logic, as in *Beowulf*, would not make sense. The main hero thus kills people, lives as a pirate, steals treasure, worships many gods, and is often oblivious to the lives of others. Though one would expect Conan to be at least somehow punished, the protagonist's actions often have a higher purpose, such as saving his kingdom or protecting those he loves, thus making one feel tolerant of such logic. As a result, though some stories follow the notion of punishing sinners,

[8] See 1.1.4.2 of the Theoretical Part.

[9] See 1.1.4.2 of the Theoretical Part.

for instance, the sad destiny of the inhabitants of Xuthal, in *Xuthal of the Dusk,* who are punished for their lavish behaviour by being eaten, the authors' intention may not be to portray sinners and their conflict with the devil, but to convey an intriguing story with relatable characters, some of whom get corrupted to a lesser or greater degree, while the monsters appear as something challenging, most likely not controlled or sent by the devil as a punishment, but an obstacle that Conan must deal with to gain glory, save others, or simply protect himself.

Last but not least, let us briefly discuss the motifs of Heaven and Hell. In *Beowulf*, hell symbolises the place for the monsters, pagans, and evil-doers. Heaven is reserved for the righteous like Beowulf and "good" Christians[10]. In *Conan*, such a clear distinction cannot be traced. Although Conan often associates monsters with hell, for instance, in *The Devil in Iron,* where Conan comments, "Gone back to hell whence he crawled", such notions may be only a way of showing Conan's perception of the creatures and the texts do not seem to use the idea of hell and heaven regularly. Moreover, various people follow various religions, and R.E. Howard does not provide any clear description of which one is the right one so that the reader should judge the world from its perspective. This might be due to his intention of showing how chaotic the world really is while embracing the ideal of a barbaric pagan who does not know the Christian philosophy but is able to some degree to distinguish between good and bad, saving others as well as having the past of a pirate who plunders to enrich himself.

2.3 *Beowulf* and *Conan the Barbarian*: Themes and Motifs Linked to Both Protagonists

2.3.1 Physical Strength

The physical strength of the protagonist plays the role of one of the key themes and motifs in both works, acknowledged as a symbol of power by the others[11]. Though Beowulf's

[10] See 1.1.4.2 of The Theoretical Part.

[11] See 1.1.3.1 and 1.2.3. of the Theoretical Part.

physique is never described in detail, his strength acts as a decisive factor on multiple occasions and might be understood as conditioning his success as a hero. For instance, in the fight with Grendel, Beowulf uses his bare arms to rip off the monster's arm, or in the fight with Grendel's mother, he wields a giant sword, which a normal person would not be able to lift, and runs it through her head. In R.E. Howard's universe, Conan's strength also often saves the hero or allows him to kill monsters or unnatural beings unmatched by common men. Though the hero is not viewed or described as inhuman, Conan kills many other foes which are either of godlike origin, such as Thog and Xaltotun, or else their characteristics are considered inhuman, for instance, Kosalan in *The Man-Eaters of Zamboula* described as "…strong beyond the belief of men" (ch. 3). While strength does assert an important role, one may also notice other skills and traits such as cat-like speed, enormous resilience, vitality, and a sharp-witted mind, which are mixed with strength or take over its role entirely, also becoming the main reason for Conan's success. This approach is visible, for instance, in the encounter with Yara in *The Tower of the Elephant*, where Conan follows the advice of Yag-kosha and the enemy, Yara, is trapped by a magical gem used by Conan. Despite these traits and different approaches having a decisive role in many stories, enormous physical strength is perhaps the most striking quality determining Conan's survival, as it is in *Beowulf.* This is due to the fact that Conan represents the embodiment of barbaric values and is a warrior who relies predominantly on his strength, which often proves to be the most efficient and quickest solution to the problem in the primitive world of Hyboria.

As strength makes both heroes unstoppable, the heroes seem to exceed all other characters as they overcome obstacles others are unable to. This concept is the most visible when dealing with monsters. Conan, for instance, defeats a presumed god, Thog in *Xuthal of the Dusk*, while the inhabitants of the city had been terrorised by the creature for centuries, succumbing to its strength and believing in its godlike origin. Another example is represented by the grey ape in the *Hour of the Dragon*, where the monster, known for killing other prisoners, lurks in the dungeons, seeking to also kill Conan, who slays it. Similarly, Beowulf is the sole being who is able to defeat Grendel and his mother, who are presumed to be almost unkillable demons. Owing to such treatment, the heroes are somehow destined to exterminate the twisted monsters, and, as a result, the strength of both Conan and Beowulf seems to act as something that is equally physical and metaphysical.

As for the perception and treatment of strength by the characters, Beowulf's strength is presented as a gift from God, but also embodies the earlier pagan preoccupation of Germanic tribes with strength as a means to gain fame, destroy evil outside of the settlement, and protect one's companions and allies[12]. Similarly to Beowulf, Conan is the embodiment of his people's spiritual preoccupations, more specifically, their belief in the god Krom, who gives strength, values action, and grants the Cimmerians the power to fight. To illustrate, as described in *Queen of the Black Coast*, chapter 2,

> Their chief is Crom. He dwells on a great mountain. What use to call on him? Little does he care if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune! He is grim and loveless, but at birth, he breathes power to strive and slay into a man's soul. What else shall men ask of the gods?" and also adds: "' There is no hope here or hereafter in the cult of my people,' answered Conan. 'In this world, men struggle and suffer vainly, finding pleasure only in the bright madness of battle; dying, their souls enter a grey, misty realm of cloudsand icy winds, to wander cheerlessly throughout eternity.'.

Despite following a certain philosophy, unlike Beowulf, Conan lacks a noble temperament and often exploits his strength to achieve his desires, or views physical strength as the first and only solution. To illustrate, in *The Pool of the Black One*, Conan uses his strength to kill Captain Zaporovo to gain respect and rise in position, later even becoming the new leader of the crew by such actions, and in *The Scarlet Citadel*, he stumbles upon a magical flower in the sewers and, not knowing whether it is vulnerable to steel or what the exact effects of his decision would be, he strikes the flower with his sword, and, as a consequence, frees Pelias who had been captured by the flower and without whom he would not be able to escape the sewers. The world thus seems more primitive, making physical strength the right answer to most of the problems, although such solutions may seem illogical or forcefully implemented by R.E. Howard. This may be the result of R.E. Howard's perception of barbarism reflected

[12] See 1.1.2 and 1.1.3.1 of the Theoretical Part.

in Conan and the world, the Hyborian Age, which the author wanted to depict as less civilised and more primitive (*The Hyborian Age*)[13].

The final point of this analysis deals with the theme of "loss of physical strength" and its significance for the stories. The second part of the poem shows King Beowulf, whose strength has diminished, but he still battles obstacles and strives to achieve his ideals. After 50 years of reign as King of the Gaets, Beowulf is faced with another problem, a dragon. Although he is now an important figure in society, bound by duties to his people and is not a young warrior anymore, Beowulf decides to face the dragon in pursuit of fame instead of gathering his army, as evidenced in line 2346 (Heaney). Consequently, the hero slays the dragon and also succumbs to him, gains riches for his people, achieves posthumous fame, and, before his death, announces Wiglaf as the new King of the Gaets as he is Beowulf's closest relative and also helped the hero during the fight. The decision to sacrifice himself for his people may seem like the right decision; however, Beowulf ignored the danger that his death would bring to his people as it was evident this would cause the Swedes to wage war on the Gaets due to the blood feud between the new King Wiglaf and the King of the Swedes, Eadgils, consequently causing suffering to his people and outweighing the riches Beowulf obtains. As a result, the hero is portrayed as a rather selfish king controlled by Germanic ideals and to some extent also by his own pride.

Although Conan also becomes a king, it is difficult to compare the two kings, as the stories describe different periods of rule and Conan keeps his strength. In the poem, one is presented with an old King Beowulf at the end of his life, whereas R.E. Howard's texts describe the story of a middle-aged King Conan defending his kingdom against other usurpers and evil forces. Ignoring the age gap and the different situations the characters get into, R.E. Howard's protagonist also faces the dilemma of becoming an important figure in society, retaining his strength, and following his lifestyle. In the stories, the character also often ignores the consequences that his actions would have on his kingdom and leads his armies into battles, as in *The Hour of the Dragon.* Though their actions are similar, Conan does not pursue the idea of proving he is still capable of heroic deeds but mostly seeks revenge and

[13] See 1.2.2.1 of the Theoretical Part.

to protect his kingdom while seeing himself as the only one able to lead his armies. As for the situations in which Conan loses his strength, the only mention is visible at the beginning of the novel *The Hour of the Dragon*, where the hero is corrupted by evil magic. Although Conan loses his powers, the hero is also unable to even move as he is paralysed by the dark magic and thus, one cannot tell whether he would have faced the danger anyway, seeking posthumous fame like Beowulf, or would have acted differently. Considering the temperament of Conan, the former is most likely. Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether R.E. Howard would want an end in which Conan would have to face his loss of strength. He comments on Conan's reign on page 393: "At first he fought on the defensive, but I am of the opinion that at last he was forced into wars of aggression as a matter of self-preservation. Whether he suceeded in conquering a world-wide empire, or perished in the attempt, I do not know" (Roehm and Bullard). Seeing R.E. Howard's uncertainty about Conan's destiny, it is highly probable the author did not place much importance on Conan's later life and rather wanted to retell the adventures of an undying, ageless hero.

2.3.2 Heroic Code

In general, the heroic ideals followed by Conan portray him in a more favourable light, which works as a counterbalance to the barbaric nature and savage actions of the character which make him seem almost antagonistic. In the texts, Conan does not use his code to elaborate on his decisions, nor does he underline the fact that it stems directly from his culture, as Beowulf often does, for example, in lines 1388-1389, where Beowulf directly promotes his idea about glory being an important part of a warrior's life "… *Let whoever can/ win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,/ that will be his best and only bulwark"(Heaney).* Consequently, though the hero shares many similar traits with Beowulf, noble values are rather passively reflected in Conan's behaviour and actions, which requires the readers to infer the hero's heroic values and thus lets one wonder whether the main protagonist is truly an honourable hero and to what degree. For instance, in *The Tower of the Elephant*, the hero intends to steal the gem, showing Conan as a selfish thief who wants to enrich himself. However, Conan himself believes that the people of Zamora, the city where the tower is located, are evil, and as the King of Zamora fears Yara, the evil priest in the tower, Conan

intends to battle the most dangerous and hostile creature in that land by robbing it of its treasure. As a result, another interpretation may be that the character wants to gain glory and respect among thieves while also robbing and weakening the evil lurking in the tower.

In conclusion, Beowulf represents the embodiment of the Germanic perception of heroic ideals, presenting as noble and heroic both via his actions and his words. The heroic code is thus something given, necessary to follow, and often referred to by the protagonist, almost as if written in a book. Conan follows his own warrior codex, which is an amalgamation of his own beliefs and those of different cultures. In the texts, the codex is often absent or only passively present due to the different nature of the hero. As both heroes share plenty of heroic ideals, though both handle them differently, it is necessary to analyse the same themes and motifs belonging to their respective heroic codes, highlighting the treatment of the codes by the heroes and thereby reaching an understanding of their meanings in the works.

2.3.3 Courage

Both *Beowulf* and *Conan* implement courage as a theme and motif. Courage is admired and perceived as a noble trait. In the poem, this concept is present before and during the battles with monsters. For instance, despite Hrothgar's monologue describing the dangerous nature of the monsters in lines 1345-1382, Beowulf accepts all the challenges as he strives to gain glory and fame, some of the key virtues of a warrior in his culture (Heaney)[14]. In the case of Conan, the hero's idea of bravery also stems from his place of upbringing, namely, Cimmeria. As the Cimmerians admire action, it is logical the character would not intend to hide from danger but seek it. Conan thus also does not listen to others and seeks glory, as in *The Tower of the Elephant*, where he ignores the rumours regarding the danger lurking in the tower. Another example can be found in the *Xuthal of the Dusk*, a story in which he is presented with the terrible lore of the ancient god Thog, but fights anyway when confronted with him. The reason for the need to expose himself to danger and show courage may also be due to Conan's approach to life, for instance, in an extract from *The Queen of the Black Coast*, he says: "Let me live deep while I live; let me know the rich juices of red meat and

[14] See 1.1.3.1 of the Theoretical Part.

stinging wine on my palate, the hot embrace of white arms, the mad exultation of battle when the blue blades flame and crimson, and I am content" (chapter 2). These lines indicate that the hero strives for a life full of sensory pleasures and action, which is intrinsically linked with being courageous, as what Conan desires often requires courage.

In *Beowulf*, though one would most likely link Beowulf's behaviour with this philosophy as well, the hero does not show Conan's hedonistic approach. Instead, the character emphasises the necessity of gaining as much glory as possible before it's too late[15]. Consequently, one may see a strong parallel between these two heroes in this sense, although Beowulf is predominantly motivated by the noble cause of gaining as much glory and fame as possible during his lifetime, and Conan presents as slightly more self-centred, seeking to live his life to the fullest. Consequently, both heroes seem to be motivated by the idea of self-enrichment, although Beowulf promotes long-term gratification, whereas Conan favours the short-term.

R.E. Howard's decision to make the character a courageous egoist may be due to his attempt to make the protagonist seem natural and animal-like. This idea may be seen in R.E. Howard's comment regarding cats in his letter to H.P. Lovecraft, where he notes that cats are self-centred cowards, but later also mentions the exception of a cat, Persia, whom he describes as an excellent fighter, courageous warrior and perceives him rather as a dog than a cat. This letter could be seen, in my opinion, as a metaphor for humanity being represented as cats, and Conan being Persia, an exceptional cat which, due to its courage, vitality and strength, surpasses others and is even admired by R.E. Howard (Roehm and Bullard 457-464).

2.3.4 Fame

As mentioned in the previous section, hunger for glory and fame plays an important role in both works. *Beowulf* celebrates these phenomena, promoting a concept in which the main reason for wagering one's life is to become a part of history through accomplishing mighty deeds and gaining fame and glory. The hero does not hide his motivations and openly comments on the necessity of taking action as he hungers for fame and to fulfil the code of

[15] See 1.1.3.2 of the Theoretical Part.

a warrior. Both *Beowulf* and and the *Conan* series develop the theme of the "quest for fame and glory". Focusing on the difference, Conan does not seem to proclaim his desire to become famous as openly as Beowulf. However, the hero acts as if he wants to reach fame and glory. To be more specific, due to Cimmerian philosophy being built on taking action and using one's strength, he achieves fame and glory as a side effect of his lifestyle. Consequently, the hero may not openly proclaim his thirst for fame but acts for similar reasons as *Beowulf* does.

To further elaborate, in the poem, fame and glory embody the ultimate goal of one's life, and the hero achieves the highest level of the goal. In R.E. Howard's stories, Conan takes on the roles of a thief, a pirate, and a king. One may notice that the hero in almost all the stories either becomes extremely renowned in his society or intends to become famous. As a king, Conan is known as the legendary barbarian who seized power in Aquilonia and protected it against many foes from other kingdoms. As a pirate, Conan is known as Amra the Lion, a mighty corsair praised among pirates for his successful career. In *The Tower of the Elephant*, Conan attempts to become rich and famous for stealing the Elephant's heart. Moreover, in the later published novella, *The Black Stranger*, there are even mentions of ballads being written to retell his adventures. Conan also believes in the idea of posthumous fame. In *The Phoenix on the Sword*, the hero comments: "I shall die and be forgotten, but Rinaldo's songs will live forever", supporting the idea of a character understanding the idea of glory and fame in a similar way to Beowulf. Thus, R.E. Howard is consciously showing the audience the story of a barbaric, often anti-heroic protagonist who desires to be famous and becomes renowned for his actions, and, in a way, follows the same pattern as *Beowulf*, though not praising heroic ideals as openly and with such determination as the poem does.

2.3.5 Altruism

Another inseparable theme illustrates "the yearning to protect others". Although one part of Beowulf desires glory, throughout the story, the protagonist defends Hrothgar and his people at times when facing danger seems hopeless and foolish in the eyes of those in distress, and the pattern is repeated when facing the dragon. This behaviour is based on the Anglo-Saxon idea of repaying one's aid, the idea of gaining fame through heroic deeds, and the necessity

to protect one's people as a king, which could also be considered as the themes linked to this area[16]. In R.E. Howard's stories, those in need are usually damsels in distress; nevertheless, the idea of seizing the opportunity is also important for Conan. The hero often overcomes any challenge in order to defend beautiful ladies in the grasp of monsters, such as in *Xuthal of the Dusk*, *The Men-Eaters of Zamboula*, and many other stories. This may be due to the character's natural emotional inhibition towards the opposite sex and his lust; however, as Conan notes in *The Vale of Lost Women*: "But I am not such a dog as to leave a white woman in the clutches of a black man; and though your kind call me a robber, I never forced a woman against her consent", showing Conan as a racist, but also showing how he values women and that a sense of injustice is the reason for his protectiveness. While the character does use a negative connotation in regards to people of colour, such a mention is most likely only a reflection of the era and place where R.E. Howard was raised influencing the author's way of thinking. Additionally, one cannot call Conan an obstinate racist, as such mentions are rare and not further elaborated upon by the protagonist.

Looking further at Conan's arguments regarding his behaviour towards women, in Conan's later stories the character seems to truly follow this noble notion. In *The Frost-Giant's Daughter*, a story depicting Conan's youth in Frostlands, one is a witness to Conan attempting a rape, thus making his words questionable. Nevertheless, the creature he wants to rape is an evil wisp, and, consequently, Conan may be true to his words as the wisp's magic had most likely seduced him. In general, R.E. Howard does not link sexual violence regularly to Conan. Instead, the character is often seen attracting women with his masculinity or charisma. Despite racism and sexual violence being part of our world, *Beowulf* neglects such aspects entirely, whereas *Conan* mentions them. This may be caused by R.E. Howard's intention of portraying evil in humans as well as monsters, which is unlike the approach of *Beowulf*, where monsters resemble the greatest evil in the story. Besides his protectiveness towards women, the hero also kills an evil king to help the people of Aquillonia in *The Hour of the Dragon*, becoming their new king. He is also offered the leadership of an army in *Black Colossus* and achieves a miraculous victory against an evil wizard, saving the kingdom

[16] See 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

of Khoraja from certain destruction. So, the character seizes opportunities while showing his protectiveness towards others, a behaviour similar to Beowulf.

The notion of protecting the weak against much more powerful opponents thus makes Conan seem more sympathetic to the reader even though one knows his dark past and is a witness to his savagery in many of his stories. As a result, Conan displays behaviour similar to Beowulf's. However, R.E. Howard most likely intended to show that even a barbarian may have some good innate traits which overshadow those of the civilised world, and in addition there is the fact that the era in which R.E. Howard was writing was accustomed to such heroes, and readers expected this type of chivalrous thinking in the main character. In *Beowulf*, the main reason for the presence of these traits is that the poem intends to underline the burdens which the role of a warrior carries, and the nobility of a warrior in the Anglo-Saxon culture who follows his codex.

2.3.6 Revenge

The idea of revenge was an important aspect of Germanic society and was even regulated to some degree, as it often sparked unending conflicts[17]. The world in *Beowulf* features the theme "revenge as one of the main reasons for conflicts" and is visible on multiple occasions. For instance, the attack of Grendel's mother. Beowulf comments on the revenge in lines 1384-1385: "It is always better to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning", showing his belief in revenge as the solution to conflicts, which is also reflected in his heroic quest to avenge the death of Hrothgar's men by killing the monsters (Heaney). Conan does not often share his idea of revenge directly nor does he proclaim it as the main reason for his actions. However, he does avenge himself, for instance, in *A Witch Shall Be Born* and avenges the army he loses in *The Hour of the Dragon,* and the concept of the blood feud is present in that world, as illustrated in the letter by R.E. Howard stating "…his grandfather (Conan's) was a member of a southern tribe who had fled…because of the blood-feud…" (Roehm and Bullard 392). Despite the appearance of revenge, R.E. Howard's texts present his actions as something automatic, and though Conan seeks revenge, the reasons are not as noble as those

[17] See 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

presented in *Beowulf*, but rather selfish, making it feel not like a heroic value but rather an emotional urge of the protagonist. As a result, the noble conception of revenge as a way of honouring loyal companions or the Germanic idea of Wergild does not apply to Conan, who rather follows his emotions and his own sense of justice. Again, such a change may be due to the author's understanding of barbarism and his intention of making the character seem more natural; thus, Conan is driven by his emotions and does not require any further elaboration of the reasons for such actions[18].

2.3.7 Death

One of the characteristic passages in *Beowulf* in which the concept of death is captured very eloquently is depicted in lines 450-455. …No need then/ to lament for long or lay out my body:/ if the battle takes me, …/ Fate goes ever as fate must (Heaney). One may notice the hero's dependence on fate or possibly even God. The Anglo-Saxon world understood death as inevitable, and therefore, one was not supposed to fear it. Instead, one should embrace life, which can also be seen in the theme "gain glory before it is too late" present in the text. In *Beowulf*, one may notice that the theme "death awaits all" is ever-present and can be seen in many important motifs in the text. To be more specific, the story begins as well as ends with the funeral of a king and throughout the poem, characters are constantly under the threat of losing their life, or else the reader is shown how temporary one's life is[19].

Conan views death also as an inevitable part of one's life which may take hold of one at any point. Consequently, the hero also wants to have as much of an impact as possible before he dies. Such a mindset can be seen in the extract where Conan, similarly to Beowulf, faces a stronger enemy. For instance, in chapter 5 of *The Phoenix on the Sword*, R.E. Howard describes Conan's struggle for survival as, "Any other man would have already died there, and Conan himself did not hope to survive, but he did ferociously wish to inflict as much damage as he could before he fell. His barbaric soul was ablaze, and the chants of old heroes were singing in his ears". Though not mentioned in *Beowulf* directly, the hero also follows the same paradigm when facing an enemy and tends not to give up but fights till the bitter

[18] See 1.2.2.1 and 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.
[19] See 1.1.4.3. of the Theoretical Part.

end. Such a mindset can be witnessed during Beowulf's fight with sea-beasts in lines 559-562. Time and again, foul things attacked me,/ lurking and stalking, but I lashed out,/ gave as good as I got with my sword./ My flesh was not for feasting on,/ (Heaney). As to finding the reasons for such similar behaviour, in one of R.E. Howard's letters, the author says: 'They loved to fight; the thing they dreaded most was a "straw death", in bed…', when commenting on the approach to death of Germanic society while explaining his idea of barbarism (Roehm and Bullard 68). This shows R.E. Howard had studied the Germanic world and most likely incorporated this philosophy, similar to the conception of Valhalla from Northern mythology, into his character as it describes his perception of barbarism, which Conan encapsulates.

Could the same theme, " the admiration of the death of an important personality", be seen in the Conan universe, as they both feature the Germanic conception of death? Conan does not pay much attention to mourning, status, and ceremonies, unlike the society in Beowulf. Funerals represent a rare sight in R.E. Howard's world and besides some minor events there is probably only one worth comparing with *Beowulf*, which is the funeral pyre of Bêlit in *The Queen of the Black of Coast*. Though unique to the Conan universe, the event shows how Conan treats the passing of a close person and how he values death. Similarly to the Anglo-Saxons, the protagonist creates a funeral pyre, comments on the person's value by comparing her to an empress, and even later refers to her as a queen as Bêlit sails away and is engulfed by the flames, which follows the same pattern of the funeral pyres associated with people of high status in the poem[20]. Despite funeral pyres not being regularly mentioned in the *Conan* stories, one may see the similarities and link them with those of Germanic culture and, consequently, with *Beowulf*. It is feasible that R.E. Howard intended to occupy himself with action rather than ceremonies, as the stories were created to entertain, and the inclusion of funerals and other Germanic ceremonies linked to death would only rob the stories of their fast-paced style. Thus, it seems appropriate to include such scenes sporadically in R.E. Howard's universe. To illustrate, at the beginning of *The Hour of the Dragon*, Conan loses most of his fellow warriors and is captured. Though he manages to escape imprisonment, he does not reflect back on the event and instead attempts to resolve

[20] See 1.1.4.3 of the Theoretical Part.

the problem, which keeps the reader engaged as one is always preoccupied with the main conflict. Were Conan to honour the dead and perform the ceremonies, the story would lose its drive, and the reader would be taken away from the action and possibly even become bored.

2.3.8 The Combat

In the poem, Beowulf challenges monsters to sorts of duels in which the hero overcomes his opponents and protects humans. Consequently, themes such as the "fight of good against evil" and "the struggle of humanity for survival" are present. Although Conan battles monsters, he fights with other people too. So *Beowulf* depicts a struggle between evil represented by monsters and good by humans, while Conan often fights with morally corrupted humans and monstrous creatures mainly for his own survival, profit, and to avenge someone and thus the conflict is often less black and white as in *Beowulf*. The main reason for such differences lies in the barbaric nature of Conan, which is based on putting one's desires over one's codex, following one's instincts, and being oblivious to the consequences; therefore, the hero achieves his goals no matter the obstacle or moral dilemma. To limit the negative impact of Conan's selfish and savage actions, R.E. Howard always uses more treacherous villains than Conan, for example a corrupted monster, or a noble quest, and that negates his barbaric nature and thus depicts Conan as a positive character. If compared to *Beowulf*, this features the same theme, "a conflict between good and evil", but a more authentic approach to storytelling. Considering R.E. Howard's position as a writer of fantasy literature for magazines, together with the fact that he wanted to tell an entertaining fantasy story in the real world in historic times, the choice of showing a realistic character instead of a glorified one resembling a role model or an exemplum is understandable[21].

Another point represents the handling of combat and the individual motifs linked to the area. Battles in *Beowulf* do not strike the reader as unexpected. The threat is well-defined and referred to numerous times by an almost heavy-handed foreshadowing. The original works of Conan follow a similar principle but contain both great battles and duels, and thus, the

[21] See 1.2.1 of the Theoretical Part.

reader is sometimes thrown right into the middle of an action or a conflict. The foreshadowing before the actual combat usually involves someone else describing the nature of monsters or dangerous places which may hide many treasures. This is an identical principle as in *Beowulf* and the person motivating and creating the tension before the combat represents, for instance, Hrothgar. Where the difference lies is in the timing. The combat in *Conan* usually comes suddenly, and the reader is thrown into a conflict as he is trying to reach the treasure or simply faces bad luck, for instance, in *Xuthal of the Dusk*, where the hero is ambushed by Thog while sneaking through the city. In *Beowulf*, such a scenario does not appear, and the hero always attacks first, seeking revenge and protecting his people. This may be due to R.E. Howard's desire to create suspense and surprise readers, for it keeps one interested in the story. In the case of the poem, though the tension is partially present, the main message is to inspire and tell the story of an important person who faces evil and claims the challenge as is right in the protagonist's eyes and in correspondence with Germanic warrior culture.

As for the exact course of action in the combat sequences, Beowulf prepares for the combat, challenges the monster, then faces a problem when battling the monster and finds a solution with the help of luck, courage, and unnatural strength. Conan often follows a similar pattern, although the fights offer much more detailed descriptions and more twists and turns. The hero also often relies on luck, as with the magical wine in *Xuthal of the Dusk,* dominates the monster with his strength, for instance in the vigorous slashing of Thog in the same novelette, and does not crumble or hide when in an unfavourable position, for instance during the ambush in *The Phoenix on the Sword*.

To properly analyse this area in both works, it is also necessary to examine the details of the individual fights, as they might reveal similar behaviour in the main protagonists or implement the same ideas. Beginning with the fight with Grendel, one of the similarities is the idea of commanding one's loyal men in combat. Conan often leads thieves, barbarians, or armies to defeat the evil. As the heroes precede their companions in all ways, both Beowulf and Conan are viewed as even more exceptional. Another point is the wit with which Beowulf tricks the monster, which Conan also often utilises and relies on. This is also acknowledged by the author, for instance, in the passage where R.E. Howard comments

"with no other possessions than his wits and his sword" in *The Devil in Iron*. Last but not least, the physical strength of the main hero has a decisive role in battle, which has already been discussed in the previous chapters. Upon closer examination of the individual combat scenes, one may also notice some principles and items being used in a similar way. For example, in the fight with Grendel's mother, one of the striking similarities is the ancient relic Beowulf finds in the cave, similarly to Conan being given an enchanted sword in *The Phoenix on the Sword* or magical wine in *Xuthal of the Dusk,* which are items that play a decisive role in the combat. In both cases, unlike other items, these are magical and are given to the heroes by coincidence, aiding them with the killing of the monsters. In the fight with the dragon, which at first sight may not bear much resemblance to R.E. Howard's action scenes, one may at least symbolically see the idea of a hero overcoming a dragon in Conan's past, regarding his ascension to the throne of Aquillonia after killing an evil monarch. In this narrative, the evil monarch represents the dragon, as it is the symbol of Aquillonia, and Conan's death is not literal as in Beowulf and can be seen as a metaphor, the act of the hero becoming part of civilisation (a new king) and abandoning his barbaric purity.

Though one may find such events very similar to those in the poem, one cannot prove the direct inspiration in *Beowulf*, as they appear to be scattered across the individual stories of Conan and not present in one compact story. Moreover, these aspects appear in many other heroic literary pieces. However, the incorporation of the same scenes shows a strong parallel between the two characters and indicates the author most likely did not come up with the ideas himself and intended to depict a character akin to those of the old heroic tales.

2.3.9 The King

Both Beowulf and Conan live in eras where kings are a symbol of the highest authority in their societies. Heroes both interact with kings and become the kings in their universes and themes like "kingship as a responsibility" and "the clash of roles of a warrior and king" represent an essential part of their stories. In the poem, one may see King Hrothgar as one of the most stereotypical motifs due to the fact he embodies most of the Anglo-Saxon ideals represented by kings in their society. One of the key characteristics of the kings is their ancestry, which is even described in detail in *Beowulf*, and the kings are known to be the

descendants of mighty heroes known for their honourable deeds. Being the embodiment of might and power, the kings are also portrayed as those who distribute gifts to others and lead their armies in conflicts. Though the Germanic kings were also known for their raids, the poem does not put much emphasis on this negative aspect and depicts the kings positively, often also ignoring other negatives qualities which such a role may bring, with the exception of King Beowulf[22].

Although R.E. Howard's texts treat kings in a similar manner, they are not considered the embodiment only of good, but rather are described realistically. To be more specific, though some kings possess strength and honour, they also plot against other kings, control and are controlled by others, betray to seize power, and are cunning, impatient and evil. For instance, King Tarascus's exploits of Xaltotun, a dark magician who was resurrected by Tarascus and used to dominate Aquillonia in *The Hour of the Dragon*. This difference may be due to R.E. Howard's intention of portraying a believable universe and showing how society and civilisation are corrupt in comparison to barbarians. R.E. Howard's embrace of barbarism may be one of the main reasons Conan belongs among the honourable kings and even seems to surpass other kings. Despite Conan keeping his barbaric nature, which often takes control of him at critical moments, the character becomes more sophisticated and civilised as a king. The protagonist thus develops strategies, values and protects his people, stops seeing violence as the only way, intends to follow and learn the ways of a true king, sees through plots, shows his educated side, and even does scholarly work, updating missing maps. R.E. Howard probably intended to create such a contrast as it truly underlines the idea that civilisation has an enormous effect on the individual. As for the fact that Conan represents one of the honourable kings in the Hyborian Age, it is feasible the author wanted to illustrate that a barbarian acts correctly in comparison to others as he does not plot and is straightforward, unlike the kings born into civilisation.

One of the chief similarities between King Conan and King Beowulf is their need to resolve problems in person. In the poem, Beowulf fights the dragon himself and leads his men into battle to selfishly gain glory and posthumous fame, wagering his own life and, consequently, the life of his people as the protagonist knows the new King Wiglaf would be forced into a

[22] See 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

conflict with the Swedes due to their blood-feud and also is too proud to call upon others, thus gathering only a small party of warriors instead of calling his whole army as illustrated in lines 2345-2348: Yet the prince of the rings was too proud/to line up with a large army/against the sky-plague (Heaney). Conan also resolves the conflicts by himself, although sometimes the protagonist does not openly proclaim his goals and thus, in the fight with the dragon, it is uncertain whether he intends to prove his strength and gain posthumous fame as Beowulf. The hero is often forced to act; for instance, he is imprisoned and must escape from the prison at all costs in the story *The Scarlet Citadel*, or else the character relies on his actions and muscles as they had proved to be most effective in the past, and because he sees no other option. Despite such situations, Conan also intends to lead his armies and combat others in person, as in the battles in *The Hour of the Dragon*, and his death also means the destruction of his people and his kingdom. This can be illustrated by the situation in which the hero is proclaimed dead, though still alive, and the kingdom of Aquiallonia faces immediate chaos. Although not stated directly, it is feasible that the hero may be as selfish and proud as Beowulf is, due to Conan's ignorance of consequences, the lust for battle and glory, and the way in which both protagonists cling to their former role of warrior. Besides that, one may also notice additional differences in Conan which distance him from the Anglo-Saxon kings and Beowulf: Conan seizes rule over Aquillonia, the protagonist neither distributes wealth nor holds feasts often, and does not surround himself with riches and expensive items.

In conclusion, while Conan and Beowulf may, to some degree, act as prototypical Anglo-Saxon kings, there are still many downsides to the characters, distancing them from an ideal king and which make them, in the end, seem alike. Though Conan is visibly one of the honourable kings of R.E. Howard's universe, the hero's personality and description as a king do not fully correspond to the ideals of the world of Beowulf, and the hero displays similar downsides to Beowulf. Both heroes intend to gain glory and fame, ignoring the fact that their people may be endangered and their kingdoms lost. In Beowulf, the roles of a king and a warrior clash, showing the impact such roles have in Anglo-Saxon society. Although the primary role of the king motif in Conan is to establish the conflict between the good, barbaric King Conan and the malicious kings and to show how society has been corrupted, the roles

in the two works are also in contrast to each other, indirectly showing the same situations but different outcomes, as at the end of *Beowulf*.

2.4 *Beowulf* and *Conan the Barbarian*: Other Themes and Motifs

2.4.1 The Monster

One of the key themes linked to the monsters in *Beowulf* is that "monsters desire to dominate humans as it is their natural state of being". In *Beowulf*, this aspect is reflected in their behaviour, where Grendel with his mother assault the inhabitants of Heorot during the night to feed upon them or, in the case of the dragon, it occupies an old burial mound of a once renowned warrior and attacks whoever dares to come any closer. In *Conan*, monsters display similar behaviour. Thog, for instance, is known as the god of Xuthal and is worshipped by the inhabitants, who follow the strange custom of making themselves fall asleep while experiencing vivid dreams. At some point, Thog grows hungry, and as the text mentions, "he steals through the secret corridors and the dim-lit chambers, seeking prey" (Xuthal of the Dusk chapter 1). As for the dragon, the flying ape creatures who attack Conan after he discovers treasure on a presumably abandoned island in the story *The Queen of the Black Coast* follow a similar pattern of attacking whoever dares to steal their treasure. Despite the similar behaviour, *Beowulf* always seems to elaborate precisely on the reason for the monster appearing and acting a certain way. Grendel is, for instance, a descendant of Cain, abandoned by God, and despises the happiness of Hrothgar's people; Grendel's mother wants to take revenge on the Gaets because they harmed her son; and the Dragon protects his treasure as the creature is naturally drawn to it and after a thief steals the goblet, the dragon wants it back, attacking whoever may have the stolen item. In *Conan*, the description of monsters varies. They often lack a detailed description, or it is not given to the reader immediately. Thus, in some cases, the creatures are to be assumed by the reader to be an obstacle a hero must deal with in order to survive. For instance, the flower in the *Scarlet Citadel*. In others, one learns a lot about the background of the monster. For instance, the above-mentioned Thog from the story *Xunthal of the Dusk*. I feel the author's emphasis is often on the action and tension rather than on a heroic quest in which the hero fights a well-defined and generally

acknowledged evil. Consequently, as the action is almost ever-present, a detailed description of every monster would only slow the story down.

Another common theme is the "being a monster means being an outcast". In *Conan* stories, monsters usually distance themselves from people; for instance, they hide under the cities or reside on abandoned islands, for example the ape creature in *Queen of the Black Coast* or Thog, who lives in a sunken dome. In R.E. Howard's world, the treatment of monsters as outsiders, in my opinion, works as a way of getting the hero to face something unknown, ancient, and threatening and increases the tension the reader experiences when witnessing the hero putting up a fight. In *Beowulf*, the author's intention is also most likely to put an emphasis on the feelings the audience should experience. However, the poem also chooses such a setting in order to highlight their sinful behaviour while following the Anglo-Saxon model of evil. R.E. Howard used the setting due to the traditional association of monsters with dark and ancient places, most likely not paying attention to the culture of the Anglo-Saxons, which linked settlement with safety and the outside of the settlement with danger[23].

As for the description and look of the monsters. In *Beowulf*, the physical qualities of the characters are mostly overshadowed by the symbolic ones. Nevertheless, some visual descriptions are present in the text. Evil beings have, for instance, enormous strength, poisonous blood, claws, and mutilated human looks, and they cannot be hurt by the common blade. All of the listed items may also be seen in some form in Conan, but not all in one creature. For instance, the dark mummy in *The Phoenix on the Sword* possesses an inhuman strength, a mutilated human look, is invulnerable to the common blade but does not have poisonous blood, as does for instance Thog in *Xuthal of the Dusk*. Regardless of the lack of any direct equivalent to the monsters in Beowulf, in Conan's world, the monsters' roles remain in many aspects similar to those in *Beowulf* and when trying to find some of these aspects in *Conan*, one may most of the time strike upon an equivalent, although such mentions in *Conan* may be caused by the similarities in the general characteristics of any monster, and thus it is uncertain whether the inspiration comes from *Beowulf*, or whether the author merely tended to use the general traits of monsters when creating his own.

[23] See chapter 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

2.4.2 The Treasure

The epic poem portrays treasure as a symbol of power connected to both kings and monsters. Kings distribute the gifts to their fellow warriors, showing them their gratitude and gaining their loyalty. Monsters guard riches and ancient relics and destroy whoever disturbs them[24]. In R.E. Howard's universe, the theme of "a quest for treasure" poses similarly, although upon closer examination, its exact effects differ.

Conan often views treasure as the reason for committing an action, as do many other characters in his world. This is most visible in Conan's career choices as he decides to become a thief, a mercenary, and a pirate, which are all occupations built upon seeking riches via action. Despite this lifestyle being similar to that of the Nordic raiders, who were part of Beowulf's culture, Beowulf does not directly display these material cravings in the poem, and his intentions are mostly based on the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of seeking riches to gain glory and live the life of a good warrior. To exemplify, in the scene after the defeat of the dragon, Beowulf knows he is dying, and that the treasure will be of no use to him. Nevertheless, he is proud of his accomplishments and the fact he has fulfilled his purpose as a warrior, gaining fame and glory, though failing as a king and dooming his people. Whether Conan shares the same idea of gaining treasure not for its value but for the status and reputation it brings is questionable. I believe the character understands the symbolic value of gold, but also desires it out of pure selfishness. To further clarify, in *The Queen of the Black Coast*, Conan voluntarily gives up the treasure to create a burial mound, showing his understanding of the symbolic value of gold. Additionally, in the *Tower of the Elephant*, one is also a witness to Conan trying to obtain a jewel, which the character sees as a proof of being the best thief rather than imagining himself selling it and getting rich. On the other hand, the character plunders for some time in *The Queen of the Black Coast*, an act of pure selfishness without a deeper purpose, and also works as a mercenary in *Black Colossus*, which could indeed be seen as a necessary path taken to survive in the cruel world of Conan, but also may indicate that the character desires the riches out of greed.

Besides that, in *Beowulf,* reward also comes as an appreciation of the hero's qualities by the community. This is visible, for instance, in the scene where King Hrothgar repays his

[24] See 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

gratitude by giving the hero horses, armour, etc. or at the end of the story where the main protagonist is dead, and a big funeral pyre is erected to praise his deeds. R.E. Howard's hero also receives many material goods. However, it does not seem that, by his acceptance of gifts, Conan intends to stay loyal, and the Anglo-Saxon symbolism of gift-giving does not apply to this character. Additionally, he also often comes out of the story without any reward, or the reward is not of a material character, for instance, he wins a heart of a woman or people praise him for saving them. This may be due to the fact that Conan is most of the time a free warrior leading his own men (until he becomes a king) or working for various people and is not part of any nation, as in the case of Beowulf. Thus, one cannot expect the same treatment and reward system to be regurarly present in *Conan*.

To conclude, R.E. Howard presents one with a seemingly free, barbaric character not reliant on a civilisation which would control him with its gifts, but counting on his own decisions, hard work, and his nature[25]. Though Conan seems to be independent, in the end, he often pledges himself to someone's service and deals with someone else's problems similarly as in Beowulf. Where the heroes differ in relation to treasure is in how they view it. Beowulf wants to reach his goals and obtain the status of an immortal warrior by achieving glorious deeds, while Conan not only follows this notion but also craves gold for its material value. For instance, he keeps the magical ring instead of giving it to a woman he promised to serve in *The Man-Eaters of Zamboula*. As a result, treasure plays a significant role in *Conan*. It motivates the main character, gives him power, and helps him to become renowned. In *Beowulf*, the symbolic value is more significant and the hero rather faces danger as it is a duty of a loyal warrior, while not putting much importance on the material value of treasure.

2.4.3 Civilisation

As regards civilisation, R.E. Howard often showed his negative opinion of it in his letters, where he comments on its unreliability, saying it is corrupted and the final effect of its actions is not very different from that of barbarians. As he notes in his letter," … I had rather have been a Goth than a Roman" (Roehm and Bullard 253), to which he adds, "You never

[25] See 1.2.2.1 of the Theoretical Part.

saw a Gothic chief getting gout from overeating while several millions of his people were dying from malnutrition" (68). Despite also defending civilisation in his letters to some degree, such remarks indicate that the author considered barbarians to have been morally above the Romans, an opinion which, if applied to the world of Conan, whose time period, the Hyborian Age, is relatively "close" to that of the Roman Empire, indicates that the author also wanted to incorporate such a perception of history into his world, showing barbarians to be more authentic and noble than the corrupted Roman civilisation, using the theme "civilisation as a cause of suffering".

In *Beowulf*, one is presented with a Germanic society. By today's standards, this society falls into the category of a barbaric civilisation. Despite the label, the poem tends to show mostly the positive aspects of the society, except for the blood feud, and the characters are not depicted as uncivilised savages. *Beowulf* functions rather as a mirror of Germanic societal ideals, traditions, and history. The reader learns about the importance of the mead hall as the place of celebrations, about the hierarchy of the culture, the heroic ideals, and their perception of good and bad[26]. One may stumble upon similar properties, for instance, in the *Queen of the Black Coast*, where Conan builds a funeral pyre and, consequently, shows how Cimmerians honour their dead. However, as the author depicts the world more believably and focuses on action and entertainment, barbaric tradition and culture do not appear in the texts very often and instead are replaced by brutal combat and simple decision-making based on the strength and inner desire of the main character. As a result, the world features many nations and being a Cimmerian means being a simple, strong, wild barbarian whose culture is not widely known. Though brutal and primitive, the contrast between the nations works as a device which pinpoints the negative aspects of civilised kingdoms rather than showing a barbarian savage fighting civilised and honourable nations and, in the end, chaotic barbarism seems to prevail over civilisation as the nations are even more corrupted than the barbarians. This is visible, for instance, in situations such as Aquillonia being corrupted because the people praise Conan, a random barbarian, for seizing power over the kingdom. Or in *Xuthal of the Dusk,* where the civilisation of Xuthal, which worships the twisted god Thog, is depicted as wrong, because Conan is able to kill their god, so showing how their

[26] See 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

sacrifical rites and suffering were nonsensical. This notion of society being evil may also be seen in the way in which the author allocates negative aspects to civilisation, e.g. the cities hide dark secrets, twisted monsters lurk in their dungeons, and they are in disarray or abandoned because the former cultures were corrupted. This portrayal adds to the idea that civilisation is rotten inside and its destruction is inevitable. This significantly shifts the reader's perception towards seeing danger in cities and villages instead of safety. Consequently, in comparison to *Beowulf,* the concept that a mead hall is a place of good - because everything inside the walls of settlements is good - does not function in *Conan*, where evil also often comes from the inside[27].

As a result, the barbaric society in *Beowulf* seems noble to the reader, civilised, and embodying the good, while the civilised world of Conan is chaotic, twisted, corrupted and even though one may see glimpses of a similar tradition and rules as in Beowulf, they are mostly superficial and do not overshadow the negatives. One of the reasons for such a difference lies in the fact that Beowulf depicts an almost idealistic society fighting evil, and the main purpose is to celebrate the ideals, glorify the hero, and incorporate Christian dogma. R.E. Howard intends to entertain while incorporating his philosophy and somewhat realistically filling the gaps in an unknown historical period. Additionally, as R.E. Howard's opinions of society also come from his life experience, one could infer that his era is projected onto the story itself, and that the author is attempting to show the readers how little difference there may be between the effects of barbarism and civilisation and that, if corrupted or imperfect, a civilised nation may cause as much if not more evil than a barbaric one[28].

[27] See 1.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.
[28] See 1.2.2.1 of the Theoretical Part.

3 CONCLUSION

The main goal of this thesis is to analyse, compare and contrast the epic poem *Beowulf* with the original works of Robert Erwin Howard featuring the character of Conan the Barbarian, focussing on their protagonists. Consequently, the thesis attempted to answer the question of to what extent the main protagonists and the works correlate in general. The theoretical part summarises information concerning the context and the main aspects such as religion, style, form, and culture of the poem and the original *Conan* saga by R.E. Howard.

The practical part compares and contrasts the works mainly from the perspective of their protagonists, but also from the perspective of the formal properties and important themes and motifs. Beginning with the form and style, the apparent dissimilarity between the texts, of which one is fiction and the other is a poem, proved to be less clear than it first appeared since there are some poetic elements to be found in Conan as it contains poetry, mostly ballads and Sword and Sorcery genre was found to be similar, in its essence, to the heroic poetry. Besides that, almost no other significant employment of similar characteristics was discovered within the context of form and style. The chapter regarding religion revealed that both texts contain and use religious themes and motifs - the heroes are portrayed almost as if they were chosen ones, and Christian imagery regarding the devil, hell, etc. also appears in both texts. Overall, the role of religion in Conan cannot be compared to its importance in *Beowulf.* Thus, it is unlikely that R.E. Howard was directly inspired by *Beowulf* when incorporating themes and motifs linked to religion, even though the author uses Christian concepts in a barbaric environment just as *Beowulf* does.

As for the comparison of the protagonists, the following aspects of their qualities, personalities and characterisations were chosen as the basis of analysis: the themes and motifs of physical strength, the heroic code, death, combat, and the king. In these chapters, it was discovered how the loss of one's strength, an admiration for courage, the fame of the characters, their glory, honourable deeds, altruistic behaviour, revenge, and death influence and establish the main heroes. Based on the analysis, the character of Conan can be interpreted as more barbaric, antagonistic, self-centred, oblivious, and authentic than Beowulf. Conan does not mindlessly follow the heroic ideals nor publicly promote them as Beowulf does; instead, he often exploits his strength and bends or breaks the rules. Despite

the differences, both protagonists could be seen as the representatives of good in their worlds, as they mostly protect the weak. Both *Beowulf* and the *Conan series* texts reflect their authors' preoccupations and their historical context. Both Conan and Beowulf embody warrior ideals, they motivate others and lead them, and achieve almost anything they desire. Consequently, both protagonists proved to be surprisingly alike in many aspects regarding their temperament.

Other themes and motifs present in the practical part are tied to the areas regarding monsters, civilisation, and treasure. In this part, it was discovered how monsters desire to dominate humans, they act as outcasts, the creatures tend to protect treasure, the treasure epitomizes the ultimate goal, and civilisation functions in both works. The monsters in *Conan* were found to both behave and look similar to creatures in *Beowulf*, and both texts show monsters who have a tendency to lurk in the darkness, protect their treasure, hide away from society, attack humans, often display supernatural strength, have poisonous blood, etc. It is nevertheless still to be determined whether the concept of monsters in *Beowulf* inspired the *Conan series* in anyway since the monsters display rather generic qualities. Thus, it is difficult to determine the likelihood of inspiration. What both works do view differently is civilisation. R.E. Howard seeks to convey the message that civilisation and organized society bring corruption. *Beowulf* connects civilisation with humans and organized society and depicts monsters as a threat, acting as chaotic elements which disrupt it. Lastly, the treatment of the treasure in *Beowulf* links it to the act of gaining one's loyalty and rewarding honourable deeds. In *Conan*, this idea is overshadowed by that of treasure-seeking to enrich oneself, achieve self-satisfaction, and gain glory. Consequently, the main protagonists, together with other characters of the Hyborian Age often seem to do both good and bad. Nevertheless, in the end, those supporting Conan embody the good and Conan's adversaries the evil.

To conclude, the Sword-and-Sorcery character Conan and the epic hero Beowulf share plenty of traits but also often contradict each other, mostly due to the different intentions of the creators of the works. As the similar traits are rather generic or do not correspond fully and R.E. Howard did not write or share any direct evidence proving his inspiration in *Beowulf*, it is almost impossible to determine whether R.E. Howard truly drew from *Beowulf*

and thus assign him to the authors who did use Anglo-Saxon literature and *Beowulf* as an inspiration for their works, for instance, J.R.R. Tolkien (Shippey 10). Due to the characters promoting similar values, the presence of many identical themes and motifs, the intentions, and known influences on R.E. Howard's *Conan*, the work proves there was some general inspiration from the old heroic tales and the Germanic world. More precisely, the texts, setting, and heroes do not correspond fully, but share many traits and behave often identically in similar situations. One can thus argue that *Beowulf* could have worked as a basic concept which was then twisted by R.E. Howard in order to fit his conception of the world and convey his desired message, which is to depict an entertaining, free, barbaric warrior showing via his actions the inadequacies of civilisation and the strength of an individual. One thing is for certain: were one to seek a character similar to Beowulf in literature, Conan would certainly deserve consideration.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment No. 1-The Story of Beowulf

The story of Beowulf opens in Denmark in a place where King Hrothgar built a princely hall called Heorot. Though the hall brings happiness and glory to the people of Denmark, it also awakens a monstrous creature, Grendel, referred to as a descendant of Cain. During the night, Grendel creeps into the Hall and murders the sleeping nobles, causing havoc among them and consequently driving them away from the feasting hall.

Beowulf, the nephew of the King of Goetland, Hygelac, upon hearing about Grendel's ravages, comes to Hrothgar's aid with some of Hygelac's warriors. They are well received by the King and begin to converse with him about the fiend. Though well-prepared and armed with spears and chainmail, they learn that the monster cannot be harmed by a stroke of steel. Beowulf thus decides to execute the beast with his bare hands after luring it into a trap.

The warriors celebrate with ale, boast about themselves, and listen to minstrels singing about great adventures. Night falls, and Beowulf and the other warriors pretend to have fallen asleep. Grendel arrives and laughs, seeing the warriors sleeping after their celebration. The monster tears one of the warriors to pieces and begins devouring him. At that moment, Beowulf grips the fiend's hand, and the combat commences. Other warriors try to harm the creature with the iron swords but to no avail. Finally, Beowulf rips its arm apart, causing the monster to flee into its lair in the haunted pool.

Heorot is filled with rejoice. A cup of gold, armour, and eight horses are among the most prominent gifts Beowulf receives as a reward from the King and his wife. Despite defeating the monster, Beowulf's story does not end here. Grendel's mother comes to avenge her son and assassinates one of the warriors. Beowulf is determined to win glory, and despite King Hrothgar's dark description of the monster's lair, he embarks on another quest.

Armed with a famous sword, Hrunting, and dressed in an armour made of iron, he vows to gain glory or perish and dives into the black water, where he is attacked by Grendel's mother. The fiend drags Beowulf out of the water and into her underwater cave. There, Beowulf tries to harm the creature with his sword, but to no avail. The warrior uses his bare hands once

again and battles the fiend who is trying to pierce his armour with a short sword. Finally, Beowulf picks up an ancient sword lying in the lair and kills Grendel's mother. The water turns red as the blood leaves the monster's body, and the warriors begin to mourn for Beowulf, thinking the blood belongs to Beowulf.

The victorious warrior abandons the cave and returns, bringing the heads of the fiend and the hilt of the sword, whose blade melted after coming into contact with the blood of Grendel's mother. The hall is once again filled with rejoicing. The King wonders about the hilt of the broken sword and makes a long speech regarding the goodness of God.

Beowulf departs home, where he becomes King after Hygelac and his son die in combat. The new king's last adventure is also the one where he perishes. In an ancient burial mound, an enormous treasure is found guarded by a dragon. The dragon is awakened, and Beowulf, together with a young prince, slays him. Unfortunately, the dragon's poisonous bite wounds Beowulf, causing him to suffocate. In his last words, he mentions his desire to be buried in a mound and proclaims Wiglaf his successor. Consequently, Beowulf's body is cremated on a funeral pyre and buried in a barrow near the sea. (Lang 9-10)