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BEOWULF AND TECHNOLOGY – FROM ORAL TRADITION TO COMPUTER ANIMATED SILVER SCREEN PRODUCTION

Apstrakt: *U radu se bavim različitim vidovima beleženja priče o jednom od najprominentnijih junaka anglosaksonskog herojskog kodeksa, "Beovulfa" – od usmene herojske poezije koja se prenosila s kolena na koleno od sredine 7. veka, preko pisane transkripcije teksta hrišćanskih monaha u 10. veku, koji su ovu sagu o heroju obogatili hrišćanskim elementima, do raznih modernih verzija "Beovulfa", npr. irskog pesnika Šejmusa Hinija i škotskog pesnika Edvina Morgana. Posebno mesto u radu zauzimaju dve filmske adaptacije istoimenog epa – naučnofantastična verzija Grejema Bejkera iz 1999. godine, kao i kompjuterski animirana verzija Roberta Zemekisa iz 2007. godine. U zaključku ističem činjenicu da će ova saga uskoro dobiti raznovrsnije oblike u skladu s razvojem najnovije tehnologije – pored kompjuterski animirane igrice, u izradi je i kompjuterski animirana verzija crtanog filma "Beovulf".*

Ključne reči: *usmena poezija, pisana transkripcija, kompjuterska animacija*

Key words: *oral tradition, written transcription, computer animation*

It has generally been agreed that the heroic epic *Beowulf* was composed between the middle of the seventh and the end of the tenth century. All the main features of the heroic narrative can be traced in this poem – it is told in an elevated language (originally Anglo-Saxon or Old English) which reflects the deeds

and adventures of a noble individual on whose actions the destiny of the whole tribe depends. Although the poem was composed in England, the events described take place in Scandinavia, where Beowulf, one of the greatest warriors in the land of the Geats (a territory situated in what is now southern Sweden), comes to the land of the Danes in order to help king Hrothgar kill a man-eating monster called Grendel and his monstrous mother Grendel's Dam. In a final climactic encounter, Beowulf slays another monster, the fire-breathing dragon, a threat to the security of his people, but he also meets his own death and enters the legend as a warrior of high renown. This is the crux of the original story of *Beowulf,* a part of the oral tradition that the Anglo-Saxon scops handed down from generation to generation, which reflects their system of values, the patriarchal world view which took firm roots after the arrival and settling of the Teutonic tribes on the British Isles starting with the fifth century.[1]

It is precisely this oral tradition of scops that ensured the first version of this heroic narrative, going back to the middle of the seventh century, as already suggested. However, the story of Beowulf developed a life of its own, when, probably during 10th century, it was transcribed by a Christian monk, who, in accord with his Christian point of view, furnished the story with Christian motifs which are clearly contrasted to its pagan content. Although the core of the story – the hero slaying monsters – remained the same, the change of the medium for telling the story – from the oral tradition to the first instance of the written (transcribed) version of the text – brought about new insights into the old story.

The passage most revealing of its Christian rhetoric in the epic is the one that deals with the description of an evil monster Grendel and his raids on Heorot:

Then an evil spirit who dwelt in the darkness
Endured it ill that he heard each day
The din of revelry ring through the hall,
The sound of the harp, and the scop's sweet song.

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[1] For the illustration of the main features of the Anglo-Saxon Heroic Code see Petrovic L., *Quest Myth in Medieval English Literature,* Univerzitet in Niš, 1999, pp.51-73, and Lopičić V., *British Studies Course Book*, Tibet, Niš, 2003, pp. 28-50.

A skillful bard sang the ancient story
Of man's creation; how the Maker wrought
The shining earth with its circling waters;
In splendor established the sun and moon
As lights to illumine the land of men;
….
So the lordly warriors lived in gladness,
At ease and happy, till a fiend from hell
Began a series of savage crimes.
They called him Grendel, a demon grim
Haunting the fen lands, holding the moors,
Ranging the wastes, where the wretched wight
Made his lair with the monster kin;
He bore the curse of the seed of Cain
Whereby God punished the grievous guilt
Of Abel's murder.[2]

This passage is structured round a major contrast, that of light and darkness, which indicates the crucial difference between the two realms – the realm of man and the realm of nature. This contrast existed in the original oral version of this story; however, in the Christianized version, it contains additional implications. The representative of the man-made world is the king with his thanes in the mead-hall. The atmosphere in the mead-hall is idyllic: the din of revelry ring and the singing of the scop are the elements that point to the idea of the mead-hall as the centre of communal life and the symbol of human success over nature. The threat to an idyllic life in the mead-hall is Grendel, the representative of nature. The creature is lonely and rejected by the humans. Every night he goes to the mead-hall and listens to the song of the bard – quite symbolically, the bard sings about the Creation, i.e. he expresses the Christian view of the Creation of the world, according to which, God has created the earth, sun, moon, man and "every creature that breathes and moves". Grendel, who in the Christianized version of the story becomes a "fiend from hell" and "demon grim", disrupts this festive mood, however, not before the reader becomes aware of the fact that the monster is not mentioned in the song of the Creation. The passage quoted contains a negative moral evaluation of the inhuman out-

[2] All quotations from *Beowulf* refer to the version of this epic in *Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, Vol.I, eds. Kermode F. and Hollander J., 1973, p.31.

sider and carries the moral condemnation of Grendel – he is also seen as an offspring of Cain, despised because of the sin of killing his own brother, Abel, which is an obvious Biblical allusion. That is why the mead-hall, Heorot, becomes, in the Christianized version of the epic, a moral fortress against the elemental forces of nature threatening from the outside. This is the way a Christian monk who transcribed the epic inserted into it Christian allusions which are in direct contrast to its pagan world view.[3] To modern readers, this passage can also contain an unconscious justification of Grendel's viciousness: the creature, envious of the bliss in the mead-hall, is enraged because of not being mentioned in the song of the Creation, and by raiding the mead-hall and slaying the warriors aggressively claims his right to be acknowledged by them.

This version of the *Beowulf* saga expands our previous knowledge about this warrior, but is, at the same time, indicative of the way the original story appeared to a scribal scholar. In her study *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (1993)*,* Elizabeth Eisenstein does not talk about *Beowulf;* however, her conclusion about the role of the scribal scholars is rather applicable to this epic. She writes about the difficulties the scribes encountered when transcribing texts and emphasizes that they "had only one version to consult and no certain guidance as to its place or date of composition, its title or author"[4]. Although it may seem that the scribe's view of this story is rather narrow and strictly defined within the boundaries of the Christian worldview, Eisenstein also pays her respect to the scribes by suggesting that "the more thoroughly we are trained to master the events and dates contained in modern history books, the less likely we are to appreciate the difficulties confronting scribal scholars who had access to assorted (oral or written)

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[3]   This analysis of the poem sums up the view held by Joseph Campbell. (See Campbell J., *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology,* Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 113-23). This view has been recently challenged by James W. Earl, who, in his study, *Thinking about Beowulf (1994)*, argues that the Christian version of the epic represents an original literary work, written by a Christian poet during or after the conversion period and reflecting a harmonious merging of the pagan and Christian world views.

[4]   Eisenstein E.L., *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 6

records, but lacked uniformed chronologies, maps, and all the other reference guides which are now in common use."[5]

The scribal culture was replaced by the print culture that took place in 15th century, nowadays known as the Age of Gutenberg. Eisenstein's standpoint coincides with the opinion of the majority of scholars who perceived the printing press to be the most revolutionary discovery in the development of mankind: "A new method for duplicating handwriting – an *ars artificialiter scribendi* – brought about the most radical transformation in the conditions of intellectual life in the history of Western civilization."[6]

However, in the case of *Beowulf*, the advantages of the printing revolution would not have been used if it had not been for a Christian monk who transcribed this narrative – he is to be given credit for preserving it, because the poem today exists in one manuscript only (the transcribed version) and our knowledge about it was attained more or less by chance – the unique copy is now to be found in the British Library, which barely survived a fire in the eighteenth century. This copy of the epic was then transcribed and titled, re-transcribed and edited, translated, adapted and printed, interpreted and taught, until it has become an acknowledged classic. For decades it has been a set book on English syllabuses at university level all over the world.

In the 1997 *Beowulf Handbook* edited by Robert Bjork and John Niles, Marijane Osborn lists some twenty full or partial English translations of *Beowulf*, and that is by no means a complete list. Some have been produced by distinguished scholars (J.R. Clark Hall and C.L. Wrenn, E.T. Donaldson, Constance Hieatt), some by rated poets (Edwin Morgan, Burton Raffel, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Michael Alexander)[7]. However, the translation that the scholars nowadays turn to for the appreciation of *Beowulf* is the one by Seamus Heaney. Heaney, a Nobel Prize winner, was offered to translate the epic for *The Norton Anthology of English*

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[5] Ibid., p.7

[6] Ibid., p. 106

[7] See Bjork R. and Niles J., eds., *Beowulf Handbook,* Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1997

Literature. "Like it or not, Heaney's *Beowulf* is the poem now, for probably two generations"[8], claims Tom Shippey, who wrote a review of Heaney's translation for *The Times Literary Supplement* (1999).

Here is the summary of Heaney's account of the translation:

> I have not followed the strict metrical rules that bound the Anglo-Saxon *scop*. I have been guided by the fundamental pattern of four stresses to the line, but I allow myself several transgressions. For, example, I don't always employ alliteration, and sometimes I alliterate only in one half line. When these breaches occur, it is because I prefer to let the natural 'sound of sense' prevail over the demands of the convention: I have been reluctant to force an artificial shape or an unusual word choice just for the sake of correctness… In the course of the translation, various deviations, distortions, syncopations and extensions do occur; what I was after first and foremost was a narrative line that sounded as if it meant business and I was prepared to sacrifice other things in pursuit of this directness of utterance.[9]

Heaney claims that for generations of undergraduates, the appreciation of the narrative presented basically just a matter of construing the meaning, getting a grip on the grammar and vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon, and being able to recognize, translate and comment upon random extracts that were presented in the examinations. On the other hand, the scholars' interest in the epic had been textual and philological; later, a research was conducted into analogues and sources of the story, this movement turned into a quest for stories and episodes in the folklore and legends of the Nordic peoples that would be analogous to the episodes in *Beowulf*. As already suggested, scholars were also preoccupied with the exact time and place of the poem's composition, paying special attention to linguistic, stylistic and scribal details. In

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8 Shippey T., "Beowulf for the Big-Voiced Scullions", *Times Literary Supplement*, October 1, 1999, p. 9

9 http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/beowulf/intro-beowulf.htm

addition, the attempts were made to have the history and genealogy of the dynasties of Swedes, Geats and Danes established; and they devoted themselves to a consideration of the world-view behind the poem, asking to what extent the newly established Christian religion influenced the narrative of the epic. However, when it comes to considering *Beowulf* as a work of literature, one publication stands out, claims Heaney:

> In 1936, the Oxford scholar and teacher J.R.R. Tolkien published an epoch-making paper entitled ʼ*Beowulf*: ʼThe Monsters and the Critics', which took for granted the poem's integrity and distinction as a work of art and proceeded to show in what this integrity and distinction inhered. Tolkien assumed that the poet had felt his way through the inherited material – the fabulous elements and the traditional accounts of a heroic past – and by a combination of creative intuition and conscious structuring had arrived at a unity of effect and a balanced order. He assumed in other words, that the *Beowulf* poet was an imaginative writer rather than some kind of back-formation derived from nineteenth--century folklore and philology. Tolkien's brilliant literary treatment changed the way the poem was valued and initiated a new era – and new terms – of appreciation. [10]

Among many contemporary scholars who showed their interest in this Anglo-Saxon epic, I was particularly drawn to Edwin Morgan's appreciation of it. As already suggested, Edwin Morgan, a Scottish poet, was engaged in the translation of *Beowulf*. However, it was not his translation of the epic, but the title of one of his poems that caught my attention – *Grendel*. The monster is the key protagonist and the whole

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[10] Ibid. *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* was a 1936 lecture given by J. R. R. Tolkien on literary criticism on the *Beowulf*. This paper is regarded as a formative work in modern *Beowulf* studies. In this talk, Tolkien speaks against critics who play down the fantastic elements of the poem (such as Grendel and the dragon) in favour of using *Beowulf* solely as a source for Anglo-Saxon history. Tolkien argues that rather than being merely extraneous, these elements are the key to the narrative and should be the focus of study. In doing so he drew attention to the previously neglected literary qualities of the poem and argued that it should be studied as a work of art, not just as a historical document. (See Tolkien J.R.R., *The Monsters and the Critics*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983).

story is retold from its point of view, which shows that Morgan, just like Heaney, was inspired by Tolkien's insight into the importance of monsters in *Beowulf*. Here is the beginning of the poem:

It is being nearly human
gives me this spectacular darkness.
The light does not know what to do with me.
I rise like mist and I go down like water.
I saw them soused with wine behind their windows.
I watched them making love, twisting like snakes.
I heard a blind man pick the strings and sing.
There are torches everywhere, there are faces
swimming in shine and sweat and beer and grins and greed.[11]

The reason I have decided to quote this poem is that it reflects the first set of binary oppositions in the original work already mentioned in this paper – light vs. dark, but with a difference. In Morgan's version of the story, darkness is not evil or terrifying; on the contrary, it is spectacular. Morgan's Grendel is relieved that it is partly human, since being a human implies a movement within man-made light, and it, a creature from nature, can move only in natural surroundings – within mist and water. All is light in Hrothgar's mead-hall, there are torches everywhere, the scop sings about the brave deeds of the heroes; however, there are also grins, greed, sweat, alluding to man's depravity. This is precisely the point that I find most interesting, and is definitely very useful for digesting and humanizing monsters, an approach completely contrasted to the oral tradition and Christianized version of the same story: the monster is being presented as more human than man himself. What I particularly like about this poem is that Morgan does not stop here – he continues criticizing the human:

There are candles in the sleazy bowers, the whores
sleep all day with mice across their feet.
The slung warhorn gleams in the drizzle,
the horses shift their hooves and shiver.
It is all a pestilence, life within life
and movement within movement, lips meeting,
grooming of mares, roofs plated with gold,
hunted pelts laid on kings,

[11] Quoted in Morgan E., *New Selected Poems,* Carcanet, Manchester, 2000, p. 123

> neck veins bursting from greasy torques,
> pouches of coins gamed off, slaves and outlaws
> eating hailstones under heaven.

This is obviously Morgan's way of describing the crisis in the Anglo-Saxon heroic outlook. At this point, I have to return to the matriarchal period in which there existed a sacred bond between man and nature, i.e. when man worshipped both the creative and destructive aspect of nature and perceived death, not as a terrifying event, but as a return to the bosom of the Great Mother. In the patriarchal period man stopped believing in the natural cycle of repetition, nature became demonized, horrifying and later, with the coming of Christianity, as already stated in this paper, even morally evil. So all that is evil was projected onto Grendel, Grendel's Dam and the Fire Dragon and banished from the community whose center became the mead-hall – man-made, created for the sake of protection from the liquid, chaotic, messy nature.

Morgan utterly disagrees with this point of view. The warriors' life – eating, drinking, fighting – is presented as futile and pointless (even a poor horse shivers at the sound of the warhorn), a mere pestilence, resulting in a climactic rhetorical question: "Who would be a man?" He not only reveals that patriarchal outlook is far from the ideal but also that harmony, order, balance and peace could be found exactly in nature that patriarchal man rejected and perceived as demonic. The following few lines of the poem allude to an excerpt from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of British People* called *The Parable of the Sparrow.*

In *The Parable of the Sparrow*, human life is seen, allegorically, as a brief moment of light resembling the sparrow's flight from the darkness into the bright mead-hall and flying out into another darkness. This parable emphasizes the reasons for accepting Christianity as an official religion by the British: since the heroic code could not give answers to the existential questions (Who created us? Where do we go to after we die?), king Edwin decided to accept the new religion that provided people with answers to these questions (for example, life-after-life became a certainty and not the Great Unknown as thought before) and, at the same time, made transcendental God omnipotent. However, Morgan's version of the parable is totally different:

> Who would be the winter sparrow
> that flies at night by mistake into a lighted hall
> and flutters the length of it in zig-zag panic,
> dazed and terrified by the heat and noise, and smoke,
> the drink fumes and the oaths, the guttering flames,
> feast-bones thrown to a snarl of wolfhounds,
> flash of swords in sodden sorry quarrels,
> till at last he sees the other door
> and skims out in relief and joy
> into the stormy dark?

According to him, it would have been better for the poor sparrow not to have entered the hall at all, because that is the only way to avoid the curse of being human. Therefore, Morgan takes his Grendel back to the black grove, black lake and black sky, the genuine source of life, where the initial rites in the glory of the Great Goddess originally took place, and concludes:

> Black grove, black lake, black sky,
> no shoe or keel or wing undoes your stillness
> as I plod through the fens and prowl
> in my own place and sometimes stand many hours, as now,
> above those unreflecting waters, reflecting as I can
> on men, and on their hideous clamorous brilliance
> that beats the raven's beaks into the ground
> and douses a million funeral pyres.

The reflections on man possessing 'clamorous brilliance' that is not properly put into action but whose end is 'a million funeral pyres' bring us to the question first formulated by Tolkien: who is the real monster in *Beowulf*?[12]

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[12] At this point, I find it very useful to quote the concluding stanza of the poem *Old Maps and New* by Norman MacCaig, another Scottish poet, that deals with the modern monsters and reflects the idea presented in Morgan's poem:

> There are spaces still to be filled
> Before the map is completed –
> Though these days it's only
> In the explored territories
> That men write, sadly,
> Here live monsters.

This poem is a sad comment on the failure of the dream of urban civilization. According to MacCaig, real monsters can be found in civilized cities, and not in almost vanished wilderness, which is exactly the point that Morgan makes in his *Grendel*, and, after all, the idea presented in this modern reading of the epic. (Quoted in Petrovic L., *Quest Myth in Medieval English Literature*, p. 44)

In order to portray the variety of modern presentations of the *Beowulf* saga, a shift should be made from the print culture to film culture, a medium rather popular nowadays, which leads the way to certain problematic issues. One of the burning questions that humanist scholars raise nowadays is whether books (or literature in general) will become obsolete in the age characterized with the advent of new technological developments. Concerning the film culture, it seems that every teacher of literature undergoes the same nightmare – the students refuse to read the original work and, instead of it, watch a filmed version of it, whose message is, in most cases, very different from the message conveyed in the original work. However, a teacher of literature should also bear on his mind that in the age in which the technologies of knowledge and communication flourish, the reading of the original literary text will have to be (and is) radically different in comparison to the period in which the literary canon was established. Therefore, the following part of the paper will deal with various filmed versions of *Beowulf*. Special attention will be paid to a shift from the original ideas in the epic and the new forms that these ideas take on film.

The film *Beowulf* (1999) was directed by Graham Baker, written by Mark Leahy and David Chappe and takes place in a post-apocalyptic, techno-feudal culture suggestive of the popular culture we are shaped by nowadays. This science fiction/fantasy film, starring Christopher Lambert, is fairly true to the story of the original poem, while other plot elements deviate from the original poem – Hrothgar, whose wife commits suicide, has an affair with Grendel's Dam and they have a child together, Grendel. Although this deviation from the original text remains unexplained in the filmed version, the viewers (the majority of whom is not even familiar with the original *Beowulf* story) are to be impressed by the special effects used in creating a post-industrial looking castle that defends the borders of an unnamed kingdom, and the hero itself who fights his way through a garrison that guards the castle because of the superstitious belief that anyone who comes out will spread darkness into the world and prevents them from coming out or going in. The last scene shows Beowulf who kills

Grendel by stabbing him and then kills his mother by stabbing her and cutting a fire vent placed in front of her, causing flames to engulf her and consume the castle. Beowulf escapes the falling castle with Kyra, Hrothgar's daughter. The castle is destroyed, with Beowulf and Kyra the only survivors.

Critical reactions to the film have been mixed, but most of them were quite unfavourable. Danél Griffin of *Film as Art* said the film "understands that liberties must be taken with the poem's characters to create a more cinematic experience, and there are moments that, even in its liberties, it reveals a deep appreciation for the poem, and a profound understanding of its ideas. There are other moments, however, that seem so absurd and outlandish that we wonder if the writers, Mark Leahy and David Chappe, have even read the poem." Griffin added that "Lambert is certainly effective," but concluded that "clever ideas aside, the film is unfortunately mediocre at best. The set design and some of the revised storyline are both stupendous, but the overall experience makes for poor cinema." Nathan Shumate of Cold Fusion Video Reviews stated in the similar manner: "Perhaps it's truly impossible to come up with a definitive film version of this epic. But I wouldn't want to make a judgment on that simply due to this attempt's mediocrity." [13]

Apart from this (rather unsatisfactory) filmed version of the epic, a new computer animated version appeared in 2007. Directed by Robert Zemeckis, this computer animated – performance capture fantasy film included some of the most popular actors in the world nowadays – Anthony Hopkins (king Hrothgar), Ray Winstone (Beowulf), Angelina Jolie (Grendel's Dam), Crispin Glover (Grendel) and John Malkovich playing a character who is not given enough space in the original version, Unferth, the King's most trusted advisor, similar to Shakespeare's Polonius, who challenges Beowulf's credibility.

The technology used for the film animation was motion capture in which the director uses virtual camera to choose camera angles from the footage. This technology is also used to create three-dimensional im-

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[13] The critical appreciation of the film is obtained from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf_(1999_film).

ages of characters.[14] Robert Zemeckis had an interesting view of the main hero. The director insisted that the character Beowulf should resemble depictions of Jesus Christ believing that a correlation could be made between Christ's face and a universally accepted idol, which is his way of alluding to the Christianized version of the epic.

Some of the changes made by the film as noted by scholars include: the style and tone of the dialogue – not presented in a dignified manner as in the original epic; the portrayal of Beowulf as a flawed man rather than a standard hero; the addition of Christian elements and the portrayal of Unferth in this context; the hedonism in Heorot; the vision in which Beowulf becomes the ruler of Denmark (instead of his native Geatland); the portrayal of Grendel's mother as a "seductress" and her seduction of Hrothgar, making him the father of Grendel, and making Beowulf the father of the dragon, as well as the elimination of the battle sequence between Grendel's mother and Beowulf which, in the poem, ends with her death; the portrayal of King Hrothgar as a "hedonistic lout," or "a drunk and womanizer".

In addition, similar to the versions of *Beowulf* already discussed in this paper, philosophy professor Stephen T. Asma argues that "Zemeckis's more tender-minded film version suggests that the people who cast out Grendel are the real monsters. The monster, according to this charity paradigm, is just misunderstood rather than evil. The blame for Grendel's violence is shifted to the humans, who sinned against him earlier and brought the vengeance upon themselves. The only real monsters, in this tradition, are pride and prejudice. In the film, Grendel is even visu-

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[14] Over 450 individual graphic designers created new animation tools for facial, body, and cloth design. The elements of keyframe animation were incorporated in the film to capture the facial expressions of the actors. To aid in the process of rendering the massive quantities of information, the development team used cached data. In the cases that using cached data was not possible, the scenes were rendered using foreground occlusion, which involves the blurring of different overlays of a single scene in an attempt to generate a single scene film. So much data was produced in the course of the creation of the film, that the studio was forced to upgrade all of its processors to multi-core versions, which run quicker and more efficiently. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf_(2007_film)

ally altered after his injury to look like an innocent, albeit scaly, little child. In the original *Beowulf*, the monsters are outcasts because they're bad (just as Cain, their progenitor, was outcast because he killed his brother), but in the film *Beowulf* the monsters are bad because they're outcasts. Contrary to the original *Beowulf*, the new film wants us to understand and humanize our *monsters.*"[15]

As for the critical reception of the film, this version appears to be much better rated than the 1999 version. Giving *Beowulf* three out of four stars, Roger Ebert argues that the film is a satire of the original poem. *Time* magazine critic Richard Corliss describes the film as one with "power and depth" and suggests that the "effects scenes look realer, more integrated into the visual fabric, because they meet the traced-over live-action elements halfway. It all suggests that this kind of a moviemaking is more than a stunt. By imagining the distant past so vividly, Zemeckis and his team prove that character capture has a future." *Rolling Stone* critic Peter Travers argues that "The eighth-century *Beowulf*, goosed into twenty-first century life by a screenplay from sci-fi guru Neil Gaiman and *Pulp Fiction's* Roger Avary, will have you jumping out of your skin and begging for more. I've never seen a 3-D movie pop with this kind of clarity. It's outrageously entertaining."

 There are some less favourable reviews, though. Although the special computer animated effects are praised, some performances of the actors are criticized as not being persuasive. Tom Ambrose of *Empire* gives the film four out of five stars. He argues that *Beowulf* is "the finest example to date of the mo-capabilities of this new technique. Previously, 3D movies were blurry, migraine-inducing affairs. *Beowulf* is a huge step forward. Although his Cockney accent initially seems incongruous, Winstone's turn ultimately reveals a burgeoning humanity and poignant humility." Justin Chang of *Variety* argues that "Zemeckis prioritizes spectacle over human engagement, in his reliance on a medium that allows for enormous range and fluidity in its visual effects yet reduces his characters to 3-D automatons. While the technology has improved since 2004's *Polar Express*

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[15] Ibid.

(particularly in the characters' more lifelike eyes), the actors still don't seem entirely there. *Beowulf* is more vocally than visually commanding."[16]

The latest instances of the *Beowulf* saga include *Beowulf: The Game*, a video game based on the film for PC and consoles. It was released on November 13, 2007 in the United States. The characters are voiced by the original actors who starred in the film directed by Zemeckis. On November 1, 2007, *Beowulf: The Game* was released for mobile phones. At the moment, a computer animated cartoon *Beowulf* is being worked on – full of mutating graphics and minatory sterophonics.

In conclusion, having presented the technological variety of the *Beowulf* saga – from the oral tradition to computer animated silver screen production – I would like to dwell on the question of the possibility of the existence of the literary canon in the world of electronic media. When asked about his perception of the canonical literature in the future, Andy Warhol claimed that every text would be canonical for fifteen minutes. In his essay *The Literary Canon in Technological Obsolescence*, William Paulson argues that "once all relevant sources have been placed in electronic storage media, and all students and teachers are fully connected via terminals in the electronic university, there will be little practical incentive to teach with (or against) standard anthologies, such as the *Norton Anthology of English Literature.*"[17] So what does the future hold for the teachers of literature and interpreters of the canon? I suggest that a critical look at connections between the canon and technology should be undertook in order to understand which aspects of canonical reading might be preserved and which rejected in the age in which the technologies of knowledge and communication are radically different from those that shaped the notion of a literary canon. Therefore, I would like to conclude this paper with Paulson's statement: "Obviously [the mode of print] is not an alternative into which language and literature people should nostalgi-

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Paulson W., "The Literary Canon in Technological Obsolescence", in *Reading Matters*, eds. Tabbi J. & Wutz M., Cornell University, 1997, p. 231

cally retreat, denying the reality of the changes in and around their libraries and campuses. Rather, as teachers of language, literature and culture, we should think critically about what printed, canonized literature has (or had) to say as a medium – what it has made possible and excluded, favored and hindered, in comparison with other media – so as to consider what of it should be preserved or cultivated, rather than allowed to disappear."[18]

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[18] Ibid., p. 246