

Two Epic Heroes: The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf And The Turkish Oghuz Khan A Comparative Study

Harun DOĞRUYOL^a

Abstract

The concept of World Literature was put forward by Goethe approximately more than two centuries ago. The rise of nationalism in the European continent in the 18th century accelerated the interest in the others' literary works among the European nations. This interest legitimizes the need for a scientific view in the field. The idea of Comparative Literature has been around since then. French school filled the gap first. It has an empiric and a positivist perspective and looks for evidence of cause-effect, source-receiver relation. Literariness is not a concern. In the 20th century, the centre of gravity for Comparative Literature moved to America. For the American school, the text is everything and searching for aesthetic values and literariness are the main goals of the Comparative Literature. The elitist point of view in the 18th century has been abandoned. There is no hierarchy between the texts and similarities and differences have the same value. In this sense, comparative studies try to analyse the texts belonging to different nations to disclose the universal components of literature.

Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf and Turkish epic Oguz Khan which are the focus of this study bear similarities and differences from the perspective of universal epic heritage. In this study, I analyse the literary aspects and historical values of these two epics from the perspectives of Comparative Literature.

Keywords

Oghuz Khan
Beowulf
Epic
Mythology
Middle Ages Epic

Cite as: Doğruyol, H. (2022). *Two Epic Heroes: The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and the Turkish Oghuz Khan, A comparative Study*. Manisa Celal Bayar University International Journal of English Language Studies. 1 (1); 52-63.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8183712>

^a Corresponding: Harun DOĞRUYOL, Instructor., Manisa Celal Bayar University, Manisa, Türkiye, harun.dogruiyol@cbu.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0002-7001-5844.

Introduction

Epic as a literary genre dominates the whole of ancient times. The societies organized as tribes created epics throughout the world no matter where they lived. These giant stories in verse narrate the stories of national mighty heroes who saved their communities. "Epic is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure whose actions depend on the fate of a tribe, a nation, or (in the instance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*) the human race" (Abrams, 1999:76). Anglo Saxon epic Beowulf and the Turkish epic *Oghuz Khan* have the universal characteristics of the epic. They are anonymous and formed by the society itself in due course.

The epic hero is the main agent in the narration. The epic revolves around the national hero and his heroic actions. He has some supernatural features and enormous physical power which are divine signs. The aim of the hero is to protect his community and to provide salvation to his people:

An epic is a long narration poem concerning events important to the history or mythology of a nation or race of a people, featuring a hero or heroes of high position within that society whose deeds represent characteristics viewed as beneficial by her his society. The action of the poems covers a large portion of the hero's world and includes his interaction with the supernatural forces, and deities. (McDonald, 2002: 232).

The appearance of a hero is the first part of the narration then there emerges tension such as natural disasters, war, invasion, and migration. At first glance, the hero does not seem suitable for the task. Beowulf is underestimated in his boyhood, Oghuz and Rama are outcasts for a while before they learn their societies' values. Achilles is a misfit. This hero must go through some phases, venturing into the underworld, a dark forest, or a cave. Aeneas, Beowulf, Gilgamesh, Rama, Oghuz, and other heroes go to the places alone, which signifies a kind of spiritual journey. They suffer for a while and reach a mental state. At this stage, they become heroes.

The epic hero must have a divine connection to legitimize his heroic and brutal action. The hero protects a citadel, stabilizes society, and exterminates the outer dangers that threaten the nation. But sometimes he is tempted to commit a sin of pride: *hybris* and his action is redemption from the sin and finally, these actions liberate him from these burdens. In this sense, he develops an ego consciousness. "Their special role suggests that the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego consciousness [...]" (Henderson, 1968: 101).

Before encountering the evil, which is symbolized by a monster, the hero must gain his own identity and develop awareness. This phase is called *initiation*. (Henderson, 1968: 120). The hero fluctuates between his own wish and that of society. He sacrifices himself for the society and gains eternal fame. "The hero's symbolic death becomes, as it were, the achievement of that maturity" (Henderson, 1968: 103). The lonely fight with the monster symbolizes the individual and spiritual struggle to reach an idealized state to serve his nation. Through this process, he has an epiphany and reaches the maturation.

The hero has two identities "[...] simultaneously, a powerful individual and a functionary of his society. These two roles are in constant tension until; at the end, they merge and become one in the person of the hero king." (Henderson, 120). The hero represents the values of a particular community at a certain time. All this narration has a practical aim: to teach the new

generation the behavioural codes of a certain society. The epics teach the members of a particular society the appropriate behaviour and values.

“They earn lasting fame –the only kind of immortality possible for human beings- by performing great deeds that help their community... (Henderson, 1968: 120). The epic hero struggling with evil, generally symbolized by a dragon, frees his people from the feeling of impotence and misery. Human beings’ primitive fears, instincts and expectations, primordial images shape a universal collective consciousness common to all humans. One can observe these components in the epics. “The hero figure is an archetype which has existed since time immemorial” (Jung, 1964: 60-61).

The tribal system is the cradle of the epics. In this community, people are vulnerable to outer dangers and are in constant fear of being wiped out. They long for a saviour with a suprahuman quality. They create epics about mighty national heroes and their heroic actions. Anglo-Saxons and Turks continued the tribal system throughout the Middle Ages. They were migrating and trying to survive in hostile lands. That’s why they kept this literary tradition for a long time. Epic as a literary genre belongs to ancient times. The Middle Ages is relatively a late period for its existence.

The Comparison of Beowulf and Oghuz Khan on Thematical and Structural Bases

We can call these two epics Middle Age Epics because their formation and emergence took place relatively late. *Beowulf* is supposed to have been written between the 7th and 10th centuries. The events in the epic are assumed to have taken place around the 6th century in Scandinavia. The Germanic tribes brought this epic to England during the migration, and monks recorded it. As the Anglo-Saxons lost their connection with their motherland this epic was forgotten for a long time. The only copy barely survived in the 18th century in a fire. “[It was] transcribed and titled, retyped and edited, translated, and adapted, interpreted, and reinterpreted, until it has become canonical. For decades it has been a set book on English syllabuses at university level all over the world.” (Heaney, 2001: VII). In the 19th century, an interest began to emerge in *Beowulf*. Today people seem to have rediscovered *Beowulf*.

“In 1936, the Oxford scholar and teacher J.R.R. Tolkien published an epoch-making paper entitled: *Beowulf: The 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. He 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 poet of *Beowulf* 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.” (Heaney, 2001: VIII-IX).

On the other hand, there are three versions of *Oghuz Khan*. The first version of *Oghuz Khan* was recorded in 14th A.C. The events in the epic are supposed to date back to 1st and 2nd B.C. This first text is free from Islamic effects. The pure pagan view is obvious. The two other versions denote the characteristics of the Islamic era. In Islamic versions mythological pagan

elements are eradicated. A transition from a mighty pagan hero to a prophet-type hero can be observed.

The epic *Oghuz Khan* has continued its legacy in a very wide geography for a long time. Some of the elements of *Oghuz Khan* could be encountered in Chinese and in Frisian records. "There is always a political bond among the Turkish states established in the world." (Öztürk, 2000:28). The first known Turkish epic *Yaratılış* is accepted as the beginning of the Turkish epic tradition and there are references to *Oghuz Khan*. The condition of *Beowulf* is different. It had been forgotten for a long time before it was rediscovered in the 18th century. There is only one version which is the mixture of pagan and Christian views.

Beowulf was formed in the pagan world and then was reinterpreted with Christian ideas. "It has often been observed that all the scriptural references in *Beowulf* are to the Old Testament." (Heaney, 2001: XV). Beowulf's divine connection and his holy mission are set in the beginning. "Holy God, out of kindness/has sent this man to us/to save us from Grendel's terror." (*Beowulf*, episode three, 406-408). The hero Beowulf should be a welfare provider in times of peace, and a warrior in times of war. "Shield had a son/child for his yard/sent by God/to comfort the people." (*Beowulf*, episode one, 13-19). Beowulf starts with the funeral of the legendary king of Danes: Shield Sheafson. In this part, there is a definition of an ideal chief. "Shield, the son of Sheaf/took many an enemy's chair/terrified many a warrior." (*Beowulf*, episode one, 1-3). Beowulf is invited by the Danish king to fight against the monster that bothers people. He is to pay the blood feud that his father owes the Danish King. The Geats and the Danes support each other. Beowulf kills the monster. After his successful journey, he returns to his homeland. People expect that he would claim the throne. He kills the monster; he fulfils the mission, and he has the right to be the king. As he is the strongest, no one can stop him. The Queen offers him the throne. Beowulf watches the convention which is a praised quality of a mighty hero. He does not want the crown as there is an heir. He accepts the throne when the only heir dies.

Hygelac's death is obviously an important event in *Beowulf* in that it eventually leads to the hero's accession to the Geatish throne, and it is one of the many occasions for Beowulf to show his heroism: it is who kills Degrhren presumably Hycleac's slayer and who performs one of his astounding swimming feats after the encounter. (Reichl, 2000:136).

The question of the epic is represented by monsters in *Beowulf*. The identities of the monsters are important. Each stands for different ideas. Grendel, the first monster, could be interpreted as a sign, a warning, or a mystery from God. The stable universe is threatened by this demonic figure (Grendel) descended from Cain's clan who kills his brother Abel, the first crime in the world. Grendel lives in marshes. Cain is a kind of outlaw who is condemned and cursed by God in the Bible. The monster has no father but has a mother to pursue his blood feud. The trouble that bothers society is caused by natural forces. As nature is always depicted as a mother, the monster must have a mother, not a father. This demon is described as insensible to human sorrow which means it does not know the extent of the damage, he gives to the people. It does its job routinely like any power of nature. "The evil creature, grim and hungry/grabbed thirty warriors/and went home laughing." (*Beowulf*, episode two, 127-129).

The methods the Danes use to get rid of Grendel are despised because the rituals are pagan not Christian. On the other hand, Beowulf struggles to overcome the monster relying on pagan heroic concepts and pagan traditions. This problematic situation continues until the end of the

Two Epic Heroes: The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and The Turkish Oghuz Khan A Comparative Study

epic. Beowulf must fight with Grendel's mother, the second monster. The monster is female because evil breeds from her. There is another pagan vision working here: vengeance. In Christianity, vengeance is not welcomed. Two parallel ideas lie side by side. The mother comes to take the revenge of her child.

Grendel's mother, a monster
woman, she who lived in
the terrible water,
the cold streams,
thought of her misery. (*Beowulf*, episode six, 1570,1574).

The third confrontation of Beowulf with a new monster takes place in his homeland when he is old. His first and second fight with the demonic monsters is an adventure and a challenge for Beowulf, but this third fight is an obligation, a debt to be paid to his nation. He has already proved himself to be the best warrior of his age. This unavoidable confrontation implies that this is his fate, and his end is not very far. He never thinks about his end when he is young nevertheless, he knows that this is his last battle.

The third monster is awakened by a careless man. In other words, the cycle of nature is disturbed. This fight is not started by the hero. The hero has to correct somebody's mistake. He suffers for the others which makes him the hero. "Often must a warrior suffer for another's mistake." (*Beowulf*, episode twelve, 3700-3701). The intruder enters the cave of the dragon and takes a cup from the treasure. Dragons always protect a mythological treasure, because they hinder the transfer of the richness. The hero must terminate the dragon to get the treasure and deliver it to his nation. He is a provider for his nation as well as a big warrior. The old wise Beowulf kills the monster at the cost of his life.

The listeners of that time must have been aware the fact of that the concept of the hero is beginning to change. Beowulf saves people with violent and heroic actions slaying the monster, but now there is a different hero: Jesus who saves his nation by blessing, teaching, and purification. "Christ's acts in redeeming the world, and the missions and martyrdoms of his saints could be interpreted according to suprabiblical concepts of hero." (Sander, 2000: 20). Two different cultures exist together contradicting each other.

In the Middle Ages, the hero concept began to change. Instead of a wild brutal hero, people longed for a saint-type hero. This new point of view is observed in the two other Islamic versions of *Oghuz Khan*. The earlier one was written by a famous Mongolian historian Residuddin in the 14th century in "Camui't-Tevarih", the other one "Secere-i Terakkime" was written by Ebulgazi Bahaddir Khan in the 17th century. Oghuz's life indicates similarities with the life of the Islamic prophet. Oghuz fights with his family and relatives instead of a mythological monster in these Islamic versions. In Residuddin's version of "Camui't-Tevarih" Oghuz Khan is said to be the descendant of the third son of Noah, *Yasef*, after the flood. He fights against his father, family, and relatives on the ground that they are pagans. In Secere-i Terakkime by Ebulgazi Bahaddir, Oghuz Khan utters his own name when he is one year old. He begins to say the name of God in Arabic: *Allah*. There are some supernatural elements in his birth, he does not suck milk from his mother. He gives his messages to his mother through dreams. His mother changes her beliefs, and then Oghuz starts to drink his mother's milk when he is two years old. He is handsome, mature, and dignified. On every occasion, he tries

to say his gratitude to God. He does not sleep with his first two wives on the ground that they are pagans. His third wife accepts his belief and becomes a Muslim. When his father learns that Oghuz becomes a Muslim, he wants to kill him. Oghuz is in the mid-region between the supernatural hero and the prophet. It is difficult to call the Islamic versions as epics because they lack the basic specialities of the epic genre: they are not in verse; they are in prose.

The pagan version puts forward this divine connection of Oghuz in the introduction starting with supernatural birth.

That day Moon Khan gave birth to a boy
Bluish, sky-blue was his face
Reddish was his mouth, like a fire was his colour of face
Crimson were his eyes, dark was his face
His eyebrows were more beautiful than fairies', how black!
He came to his mother's breast he took it and sucked milk
He did not want to suck milk anymore
He wanted raw meat, meal and, food
He wanted wine from his surroundings and, wanted to have fun
Immediately, he started to talk, utter and say
After forty days he started to walk and play (*Oghuz Khan*, 2-8).

In this pagan version, Oghuz's mother, who is the goddess of the Moon, has holy signs during the birth. "Their eyes brightened up, became colourful, filled in light/That day Ay Khan gave birth to a boy." (*Oghuz Khan*, 3-4). "Bluish, sky-blue was his face." (*Oghuz Khan*, 7). "When Oghuz is born, his face colour is a sign that he descends from the sky, and carries the colour of the God." (Ögel, 1971:49). Oghuz's birth and childhood are depicted in a heroic and mythological style in detail. The growth of a supernatural child is extraordinarily fast. He wants raw meat when he begins to talk. Oghuz gives up sucking milk at once because it is a sign of weakness. Eating raw meat indicates brutal strength and savagery which are praised and idealized qualities in the pagan world. Oghuz talks and walks immediately after he is born. According to Ögel. "In an old Altaic myth, a child speaks after he is born and would like to live with the wolves for seven days, then he grows immediately." (Ögel, 1971:49). There is not much information about the early life of Beowulf (It is implied that as a boy, he is lazy and good for nothing).

The identities of the monsters and the enemies have so many connotations in both epics Beowulf fights with three mythological monsters, whereas Oghuz Fights with a rhino. After the rhino, Oghuz fights against three men: Golden Khan, Urum Khan, and Uruz Khan. Oghuz tries to make them surrender and control their lands. Killing the monster is not the only aim for Oghuz, it is a step towards social acceptance. The identity of the monster is not important. Killing the rhino, he declares himself the khan of his nation.

In the forest did a big rhinoceros live
It ate and didn't let either animal or human live
It attacked herds and always ate horses

Two Epic Heroes: The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and The Turkish Oghuz Khan A Comparative Study

It troubled people, took their lives. (*Oghuz Khan*, 15-18).

Oghuz prays for God after finishing his knot job: killing the monster. God sends him two goddesses inside light as wives. Oghuz marries the daughter of the sky and the daughter of the ground. He becomes the ruler of the things between the sky and the ground. He reconciles the sky and the ground. Having their approval, he strengthens his position. The daughter of the ground is in the hollow of a trunk which is in the middle of an island in a lake. The tree is a common mythological element symbolizing the fertility of the ground with its roots deep in the ground. The figure of the light and tree and their combination is another figure. The light and the tree are archetypal motifs of humanity. "Jung believes that archetypes originated through the repeated experiences of our early ancestors" (Feist, 1990:163). The tree is a means for the divine messages because its roots are in the ground and its branches are towards the sky. It connects these two worlds.

Light is present whenever there is a divine message in the epic. The fear of darkness, night animals, risk of sudden attack finish when the sun comes out. It is a relief. The figure of light is a symbol of divinity in both epics. As soon as Beowulf terminates the monster, God's enemy, a light descends from heaven for approval of his holy, heroic action. "Suddenly light glittered/a light brightened within/as bright and clear as/the candle of the sky." (*Beowulf*, episode six, 2033-2036).

Oghuz has six sons. "Sun, Moon, Star go to the east" and "Sky, Mountain and Sea go to the west" (*Oghuz Khan*, 127). The sons of the sky go to the east where the sun rises, and the sons of the ground go to the west where it sets. This represents the connection with nature and the holiness attributed to it. Their expedition over a huge area in all directions signifies the wish of a nation to conquer vast lands. "The sun in the sky should become our nation's flag. The sky should become our tent" (*Oghuz Khan*, 59). In *Oghuz Khan*, the figure of a bow represents the sky, and it is the symbol of the ruling. Oghuz would have 24 grandsons that stand for 24 different Oghuz tribes.

The divine connection reveals itself in different ways in epics. Oghuz confronts the wolf while leading his army. When the morning was about to break, a light entered his tent. A male wolf appeared, breathing "O! Oghuz I will lead your army." (*Oghuz Khan*, 76-80). In his first confrontation, this sky blue, azure-coloured wolf which has a connection with the sky inspires and directs the army. This sacred animal comes to Oghuz's tent inside a light and guides him during his military expeditions. Oghuz is exposed to divine messages through this wolf. It's a revelation of God's purpose; moreover, this figure is the personification of the God of the sky. In the second confrontation, the wolf helps Oghuz when he is in trouble in a military march. "The holy wolf with blue hair and blue mane appeared. India, Tangut too became Oghuz land." (*Oghuz Khan*, 149-150). In the last confrontation, it ensures Oghuz's conquest of the land.

The epic hero has a superpower to come over difficulties. Beowulf is unequally strong when tearing apart the monster's arm. "Has the strength of thirty men /in his hand grip." (*Beowulf*, episode three, 404-405). He has extraordinary swimming ability. He tells his swimming contest that takes five days in an icy sea. Beowulf makes this speech while Unferth, the mock hero, is trying to insult his fame. As the pagans do not believe in the afterworld, life in this world is a goal itself and fame can make their name immortal, so it should be defended. "With naked swords in hand/to ward off whales." (*Beowulf*, episode three, 601-606). Oghuz suprahuman

power by birth. He is identified with the power of the wild animals which was praised and honoured.

His feet were as if they were ox's feet

His ankles were as if they were wolf's ankles

His shoulders were similar to that of sable's

His chest is identical to that of a big bear's

He was a human but full of hairs

His body was covered with hairs. (*Oghuz Khan*, 9-11).

The epic hero is not alone on his sacred mission. This young hero does not have the experience to fulfil his job. There is always a wise man to help the heroes in the narration. This old wise man is an archetype which symbolizes the source of universal mystic knowledge. "He appears in fairy tales as the king, the sage, or the magician who comes to the aid of the troubled hero and, through superior wisdom, helps him escape from his current misadventures." (Feist, 1990:168). The one who directs Beowulf is the old Danish king: Hrothgar. The old king is a role model for young Beowulf. Beowulf learns how to be a good and impartial king. He behaves in compliance with the advice of the wise king and sacrifices himself for the welfare of his nation. King Hrothgar is depicted as a grey-haired old and wise man who stands for the father figure and a role model for Beowulf.

The woman who bore you,

Beowulf, if she yet lives,

may say the Eternal Maker

was kind in her childbearing.

Now, Beowulf, best of warriors,

I love you as a son. (*Beowulf*, episode five, 1118-1123).

He wants to make sure that Beowulf would be a wise king when he gets older.

Now is your strength famous

.....

Bright eyes

do diminish and go dark. (*Beowulf*, 2354-2364).

The king rewards him and establishes a new connection: a kind of father-son relationship. The reward is the gold, the embodiment of worldly riches and success. Peace is provided even though they have some suspicions in their mind. At the banquet, the Queen gives her idea about the future of the kingdom and who will be the next king. The bard tells another story about a Danes princess who is used as a peace tool by marrying another tribe leader. Using women as peace providers is a common tradition in the pagan world which is criticized implicitly.

"The mighty one arose/surrounded by warriors/a mighty band of men." (*Beowulf*, episode three, 427-429). Unlike Beowulf, Oghuz has a huge army. The one who helped him is praised,

Two Epic Heroes: The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and The Turkish Oghuz Khan A Comparative Study

and their names and contributions are mentioned distinctively. One of his warriors brings his horse back from a very cold mountain. His name becomes Karluk which means snowy. One of his men invents an oxcart, one invents a raft, another opens the door of the golden house. They are strong and useful men. "There was a very brave very alp chief in the army/He was neither afraid of God nor Satan/He was not bothered with fatigue and cold." (*Oghuz Khan*, 121-122). Apart from Unferth, a mock hero and Wiglaf, the successor of Beowulf, we do not know any men around Beowulf, but they are worth to be the friends of Beowulf.

In his last lonely fight, it is implied that Beowulf has a fate, and he is moving towards it. He accepts the unavoidable.

That was sorrow
to the good man,
.....
His heart surged
with gloomy thoughts,
which was not
his usual way. (*Beowulf*, episode nine, 2604-2073).

Oghuz Khan's and other characters' emotional state is no big concern in the epic. This may be because of the optimistic atmosphere. Oghuz seems happy and satisfied with his actions. In other versions of *Oghuz Khan* (in "Camui't-Tevarih" by Residuddin and in "Secere-i Terakkime" by Ebulgazi Bahaddir Khan) Oghuz kills his father on the ground that Kara Khan does not watch the tradition. This may be the only tragic event. In the Islamic version, he fights against his father because his father is pagan. The theme of 'hybris' does not exist in *Oghuz Khan*. In mythological stories, the gods, goddesses and women provoke the heroes. They cause jealousy, hatred, and conflicts. There is no such theme in the narration of *Oghuz Khan*. Women are friends of the hero who help him with deeds. "The deities in Turkish epics are the protectors who make the epic hero more successful and stronger." (Öztürk, 2000: 27).

The fight is the most important scene for the epics. The hero must prove his worth during the struggle. Beowulf is reckless in his first two fights, but in his last fight, he is thoughtful, dignified, and careful as he is an old king. Beowulf and Oghuz are wise, and solemn in their old ages. In their last moments, the two heroes make a speech summarizing their life, and their heroic deeds, trying to prove the worth of their life, and how glorious it is to find meaning in it. In some parts of the narration, the mighty hero exalts his deeds with boastful speeches. *Beowulf* speaks and praises his past actions to ensure his future deeds. This speech implies the sacred mission and summarizes his life.

"I am Hygelac's kinsman and warrior.
I have undertaken many
glorious deeds. I learned
of Grendel in my native land.
.....
when I endured pain all night,

killing water monsters,
grinding them to bits,
to avenge for the Geats. (*Beowulf*, episode three, 441-458).

Oghuz makes almost the same speech.

“I have made happy most of my friends”

Thank God I have paid my debt

To the God of Sky

I give this country to you; this country is now yours.” (*Oghuz Khan*, 188-191).

Both heroes spend their entire lives for the benefit of their own people. They make their name known and finish their mission in this world. “I have traded/my old life for /the people's needs. (*Beowulf*, episode twelve, 3288-3289).

He said “O! my sons”

“So many wars have I been through, so many borders have I crossed”

“So many spears and arrows have I thrown”

“So long distances have I travelled on horse, so many enemies did I make cry”

“I have made happy most of my friends.” (*Oghuz Khan*, 183-185).

Beowulf starts with a funeral of a legendary heroic king Shield Sheafson and finishes with another funeral of the legendary heroic king Beowulf. *Oghuz Khan* starts with the birth of Oghuz and finishes with his last speech. When the heroes have their final years in the world, they leave their heirs.

Conclusion

Beowulf and *Oghuz Khan* are the narrations of national heroes in verse. They bear the well-established components of the epic tradition. These glamorous heroes having divine connections are entitled to solve an epic question that lies at the heart of the story to give salvation to their nation. They go through different and difficult phases. Some of the phases are portrayed as individual and emotional challenges.

Oghuz and Beowulf are purely pagan heroes, on the other hand, their stories are reinterpreted in the light of monotheist religions: Islam and Christianity. These two epic heroes represent different cultural codes simultaneously which make them unique pieces of epic tradition. *Beowulf* has only one version whereas *Oghuz Khan* has one pagan and two Islamic versions. (“Camui’t-Tevarih” by Residuddin and “Secere-i Terakkime” by Ebulgazi Bahaddir Khan)

The epic questions are usually portrayed as monsters in stories. Slaying that monster relieves the troubles of the people. Beowulf kills three mythological monsters to pay his father's debt to the King Hrothgar. The last encounter is a summary of his life. He fulfils his mission and God's purpose leaving a safe country to his nation. Oghuz after killing the monster starts a military campaign against the kings who deny his sovereignty.

These two epics denote the pictures of two nations at a certain time at a certain place. Through them, we can pursue the customs, lifestyles, beliefs, and even daily lives of the people of the age. *Oghuz Khan* and *Beowulf* are the outputs of oral literature. They were written down after

Two Epic Heroes: The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and The Turkish Oghuz Khan A Comparative Study

a period of circulation among the people. As they are the stories of real human conditions, they will continue to draw the attention of people and continue to become a source of inspiration for generations.

NOTES

¹ In the Middle Ages, epic is replaced by romance. Knights with noble lineages replace the mighty heroes. The myths turn into legends. The subject of the romances is about few people, not the whole nation. The knight tries to protect his honour while serving a noblewoman. There is universal tension between good and evil represented by a good knight and a bad knight. The supernatural elements still exist in the narration. The characters are stereotypes. The end of the stories is always the same: the good wins and love comes over every obstacle. Some adventures are adulterous; the goal is always worldly a materialistic one. The main concern is not the martial one but love and fantasies. "Unlike romance, epic does not divorce the hero from his court and society its historic or pseudohistorical deeds generally appear more realistic or credible than those of romance" (see Carolyn Craft, *Romance in Companion to Old English and Middle English Literature*, 335). *Beowulf* and *Oghuz Khan* are wild characters, not romantic ones. They belong to a certain social structure which praises heroic actions, not love stories.

² The life of the famous Huns leader, Mete (Mao-tun) resembles that of Oghuz's. They both revolted against their fathers and overthrew them and started a big military campaign on a vast area.

³ Zeki Velidi Togan transcribed the pagan version of Oghuz Khan into modern Turkish.

⁴ In *Genesis*, Karayhan is the God who creates the first human, Kişi, "The struggle between Oghuz and Karahan may represent the struggle between the God Karayhan and Kişi." (see Mustafa Aça, *Oğuznamecilik Geleneği ve Andalp Oğuznamesi*, 157)

⁵ Residuddin recorded the pagan version in his book too. It occupies a small place in his book, so thanks to him we have the pagan version.

⁶ The numbers in the epic: two, four, six, twelve, twenty-four is a constitution of a calendar. Ancient Turks have a year made up of twenty-four mouths. Each of his sons has four children constituting a total of twenty-four Turkish tribes. The similarities between the life of Oghuz and the legendary khan of Huns are striking: Mete (Mau-tun). "The army of the Mete (Mau-tun) is made up of twenty-four divisions bound to six edges. Like Oghuz's six sons. These six edges are divided into two. With the names left and right they divided the empire as east and west" (see Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi*, 71).

References

Abrams, M., H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston, Heinle & Heinle.

Aça, M. (2003). *Oğuznamecilik Geleneği ve Andalp Oğuznamesi*. Istanbul. IQ Kültür Sanat.

Beowulf, Translated by David Breeden. <http://www.lone-star.net/literature/beowulf/>, 2006.

Craft, C. (2002). *Romance in Companion to Old English and Middle English Literature*. USA: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Cuddon, J., A. (2013). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theories*. West Sussex:

- Wiley Blackwell Publishing Ltd,
- Feist, J. (1990). *The Theories of Personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill Company.
- Heaney, S. (2001). *Beowulf*. New York, London: W.W. Norton&Company,
- Henderson, J., L. (1968). *Ancient Myths and Modern Man in Man and His Symbol*. America: Dell Publishing.
- Jung, C., G. (1964). *Approaching he Unconscious in Man and His Symbol*. America: Dell Publishing.
- McDonald, R. (2002). *The Epic and Medieval Epics*. USA: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Ögel, B. (1971). *Türk Mitoloisi*. Istanbul: Mili Eğitim Basımevi.
- Oghuz Khan*, Translated by Harun Doğruyol. "Epic as a Literary Genre and the Turkish Epic Oghuz Khan" *Manisa Celal Bayar University Journal of Social Sciences*, 172-197. 10(1) March, 2012.
- Öztürk, A. (2000). *Çağlar İçinde Türk Destanları*. İstanbul: Tavaslı Matbacılık.
- Reichl, K. (2000). *Singing the Past Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry*. USA: Cornell University Press.
- Togan, Z., V. (1982). *Oğuz Destanı*. Second Edition. Istanbul: Enderun Kitapevi.
- Tolkien, J., R., R. (2006). *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: Harper-Collins.