

## **The Age-Old Conflict: Clash between Good and Evil in *Beowulf* and the *Book of Dede Korkut***

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**Abstract:** The struggle between good and evil is a perennial conflict that has been ongoing throughout human history. It has been unfolding from the time of the first man and woman. It is also one of the most common conventional themes in literature and is sometimes considered to be a universal part of the human condition. This paper attempts to discover and reveal the elements of the clash between good and evil in *Beowulf* and the *Book Dede Korkut*. The title character in *Beowulf*, as a representative of goodness, fearlessly and gallantly faces Grendel, his mother, and the dragon who are the embodiments of evil in this epic poem. On the other hand, in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, evil is represented by a goggle-eyed monster named Tepegoz and tyrant and cruel tekurs (feudal landlords) who oppress people and inflict them different sufferings. Heroes fight with these people to relieve people of their problems. One of the heroes, Basat avenges his brother's death and delivers people from the oppression of evil that goes by the name of Tepegoz (goggle-eyed monster), who terrorizes people and causes chaos among the people of the community. Other heroes, such as Salur Kazan, Segrek, and Yigenek, fight with evil tekurs to free their loved ones and to deliver their people from the dangers of these personifications of evil.

**Keywords:** clash, good, evil, epic, hero, fight, *Beowulf*, the *Book of Dede Korkut*

### INTRODUCTION

Good and evil have been in the hearts of men and women since the dawn of creation. It has been unfolding from the time of the first man and woman. The story of Cain and Abel, included in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, features two sons of Adam and Eve, the forefathers of humanity. Cain committed the first act of murder by slaying his brother Abel. The dispute between these two brothers

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demonstrates the prevalent opinion that this clash between good and evil is an integral part of human life. They expose two features staying hidden in the human soul: the ability to commit good and the ability to commit evil. The two brother's narrative was transformed, according to Florentino Martinez, "into a symbol of the perennial conflict between good and evil" (Martinez 2012, 114). This conflict between good and evil is also one of the most commonly studied themes and is also regarded to be a part of being human. Theodore Dreiser regards it as an "ever-present problem" and further states that "in fact, man's belief that he is free implies that he is endowed with a dual power; on the one hand, that he is capable of discerning good and evil and knows what he should do and what he should avoid (right and wrong), and, on the other, having made this distinction, that it lies within his power to conform his conduct to his choice" (Dreiser 1938, 67). Furthermore, Martin Buber makes the following comment: "good and evil are not, as they usually thought to be, two structurally-similar qualities situated at opposite poles, but two qualities of totally different structure" (Buber 1980, 64).

As mentioned briefly above, there are several varieties of this conflict: first being the clash between individuals and their beliefs or opinions in which one party representing good and the other evil, and the second being the internal conflict within people themselves often emerged in the form of struggle for the human soul to decide between good and evil. These concepts of good and evil have found their expression in the works of many distinguished literary figures such as John Milton, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Joseph Conrad. John Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, portrays the struggle between the good and evil angels in which the defeat of the latter causes their banishment from heaven. Goethe addresses a similar conflict in *Faust* when portraying the struggle between good and evil angels to gain control over Faust. Faust finds the evil angel, Mephisto, to be more persuasive and decides to strike a deal that allows him to acquire the services of Mephisto in exchange for his soul. Joseph Conrad describes human being's inner capacity to carry out good or evil in his novella *Heart of Darkness*. Through Marlow, Conrad exposes human beings' inherent capacity to do good or evil. Buber also addresses these facets of good and evil and states the following:

It is usual to think of good and evil as two poles, two opposite directions, the two arms of a signpost pointing to right and left; they are

understood as belonging to the same plane of being, as the same in nature, but the antithesis of one another. If we are to have in mind, not ethical abstractions, but existent states of human reality, we must begin by doing away with this convention and recognizing the fundamental dissimilarity between the two in nature, structure and dynamics within human reality (Buber 1980, 126).

Every individual has this inclination to go between good and evil. This is inherent in his or her nature. It is the existing human condition and is a quite challenging task for them to choose one over another.

In traditional folk literature, there is a clear-cut and well-defined difference between good and evil. This difference symbolizes the ethical morality of the people as well as their respective communities. No matter which party defeats the other, the moral lesson of the narrative aims to strengthen the unity, harmony, and values of that particular society. In classical literature, Aristotle outlined the characteristics of an ideal tragic hero. An Aristotelian tragic hero is a man who is characterized by good and evil and who possesses a mixture of good and bad characteristics. The tragic hero is not an ordinary man but a man with outstanding quality and greatness about him. He is good, though not perfect. Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, asserts his opinion on good and evil as such: “For it is our choice of good or evil that determines our character, not our opinion about good or evil” (Aristotle 1962, 133). The literature of divine religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) is concerned with the epitome of the fight between good and evil – the eternal conflict between God and Satan. On the other hand, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *Emile*, puts forward his views on these concepts of good and evil thus: “God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil... [a]ll wickedness comes from weakness. The child is only naughty because he is weak; make him strong and he will be good; if we could do anything we should never do wrong” (Rousseau 1986, 5, 33). Immanuel Kant notes that the good is acquired but the evil is brought upon us. He further makes the following comment: “Evil is possible only as a determination of free will, and since the will can be appraised as good or evil by means of its maxims, this propensity to evil must consist in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from moral law” (Kant 1960, 24).

This article attempts to discover the elements of the eternal clash between good and evil in *Beowulf* and the *Book of Dede Korkut*. These two epics come from oral traditions and are two significant literary

works of their respective nations. To deepen our understanding of the term epic as well as to gain comprehensive access to these two literary works, it will be a good idea to clarify the term ‘epic’ by providing clear and plain definitions and to understand the concepts of good and evil so that our discussion of these two legends can be established on the firm ground.

### EPIC DEFINED

Epic poetry has been enjoying literary status as the most effective and powerful writing of all times. Not many authors have been fortunate enough to create such unique and well-written masterpieces that reflect the cultural aspects of various societies. Communities, throughout the world, have been shaped to a great extent by inspiring narratives of gallant heroes, gods, and heroic battles that injected strong morals into the hearts of mankind in the works of epic poets like Homer and Dante. The epic poem narrates the stories from the ancient past filled with heroism and savagery, where the foundations of civilizations were laid. It is a long narrative poem that generally recounts the details of significant valiant acts and achievements of a legendary hero from a nation or community. No other literary figures relate the turbulent and clamorous rise and fall of civilizations effectively to the epic poets of ancient as well as contemporary times.

Epic, as a genre, is quite different from other genres of literature in terms of its content and style. The word ‘epic’ is originated from the Ancient Greek word *epos* which came to mean “word, poem or story” (*The American Heritage Abbreviations Dictionary*, 2007). Epic masterpieces manage to detain the underpinning characteristics of the entire community in themselves by including heroic battles, treasons, romance, extended journeys, and supernatural beings together with elevated language. John Miles Foley says the following: “epic is the master-genre of the ancient world. Wherever and whenever one looks, epics had major roles to play in ancient societies, functions that ranged from historical and political to cultural and didactic and beyond. As charters for group identity, ancient epics seem always to have been at the center of things” (Foley 2005, 1).

*Beowulf* is generally considered as one of the fundamental literary works of Anglo-Saxon literature. It is the oldest enduring sample of an epic poem composed in Old English and is also the primal source of vernacular English. It originally had no title but began to be associated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the name of its hero, Beowulf, whose heroic

journeys and legendary undertakings had been its main center of attraction. Although there are historical allusions throughout the work, the hero as well as the storyline are products of fictive imagination. *Beowulf* might have originally been written as a requiem after a heroic king who may have died in the seventh century, but there is not much proof to identify who that demised king could have been. However, the burial rites portrayed in the epic poem bear a great resemblance to the proof located at the burial site in Sutton Hoo, but there is no chance to establish a direct correlation between the poem and the graveyard since too much yet stays to be unknown. This work of epic was thought to be written between 700 and 1000 A.D. and underwent several changes until it was finally composed. Robert Fletcher states the following about the epic poem: “*Beowulf* presents an interesting though a very incomplete picture of the life of the upper, warrior, caste among the northern Germanic tribes during their later period of barbarism on the Continent and in England, a life more highly developed than that of the Anglo-Saxons before their conquest of the island” (Fletcher 2008, 22). Archibald Strong, who translated *Beowulf* into modern English verse, emphasizes its historical importance in such words: “*Beowulf* is the picture of a whole civilization, of the Germania...The main interest which the poem has for us is thus not purely literary. *Beowulf* is an important historical document” (as cited by Tolkien 2006, 6). On the other hand, Johannes Arend states that “of what time has spared of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the *Beowulf* poem is the most complete and at the same time the most important, as it presents not only a scene of the morals and customs, of the concepts and sentiments of those far remote centuries, but also because it is undoubtedly the oldest romance which now exists in any European vernacular, after the fall of the Roman Empire” (Arend 2005, 237).

On the other hand, the *Book of Dede Korkut* is the most significant epic masterpiece of the Oghuz clan of Turks. It is now considered the national epic of Turkey and is also acquired a reputation as the *Illiad* of Turks. There has been an ongoing debate about its date of composition. Geoffery Lewis, Cemal Kafadar, and Michael Meeker believe that it may have been composed at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, Stanford Shaw voices the following he says that it is “the greatest folk product of the 14th century was the prose collection of *Dede Korkut*, the oldest surviving examples of Oghuz Turkmen epic” (Shaw 1972, 141). Similar to *Beowulf*, the author of the *Book of Dede Korkut* is also unknown. Dede Korkut serves the function of a bard and

is more of a symbolical minstrel than an absolute author. The epic work contains twelve epic stories recited in prose and preserved in manuscripts that are considered to have emerged from a collection of songs and tales circulated among Turkic people. Michael Meeker puts on emphasis on the significance of this epic *dastan* and states that “*the Book of Dede Korkut* is an early record of oral Turkic folktales in Anatolia, and as such, one of the mythic charters of Turkish nationalist ideology” (Meeker 1992, 395). In other words, this epic storybook is about “the government and tribe organizations of the Oghuz, their friends, and enemies, joys and sorrows, traditions, economic and social lifestyles” (Ekici 2000, 123).

### CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL

The relationship between good and evil has always intrigued people, and it is one of the central principles upon which religious doctrines and belief systems are built. Religions, divine or non-divine, and moral values play a central role in shedding light on these abstract concepts. Therefore, the definitions of good and evil are closely connected with the religious beliefs of the individual. David R. Blumenthal defines these concepts as such: “evil is doing acts which inflict violence, physical or emotional, upon another; or which tolerate violent acts done to another. And good is doing acts which care for another and oneself, physically or emotionally; or which cultivate caring acts done to another or oneself” (Blumenthal 1999, 22).

Human beings are equipped with free-will. This free-will gives humans the ability to choose a course of action among many alternatives. People can exercise this power on good and evil deeds such as justice, despotism, impartiality, and wrong-doings. It is clear, for the most part, that these deeds are left to the free-will of the person. But, there are certain things over which man has no control over and cannot exercise his power, but is forced to endure them such as sleep, disasters, death, misfortunes, maladies, injuries, and tragedies. However, good and evil do not exist in an absolute form. The effects of events can only seem good or evil from the perspective of the observer. One effect may seem to be good when examined from the point of view of one individual observer, and evil when examined from the point of view of another. Paul Carus emphasizes this subjective nature of these concepts when he states:

Good and evil, however, are views taken from a certain given standpoint, and from this standpoint good and evil are features forming

a contrast...The question is only whether we have a right to regard our own standpoint as the positive one representing that which is good, and all powers that hinder human life as negative or evil (Carus 2004, 587).

The good and evil each of us perceives in the world around us will be determined by what we have learned to perceive as good and evil. Therefore, we can label a particular person or a thing as good or evil based on our perspectives and pass our judgment on them.

### GOOD AND EVIL IN *BEOWULF* AND *THE BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT*

The story of the never-ending conflict of good and evil has been told since the dawning of time. In *Beowulf*, the poet makes it clear that good and evil do not exist as only opposites, but that both qualities are present in everyone. Beowulf symbolizes the capacity to do the good or to selflessly carry out acts for the benefit of others. On the other hand, evil is represented by Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon, who are motivated by a desire to act against people, to destroy them. In the stories of the *Book of Dede Korkut*, Basat, the hero of the Oghuz people, wages war against Tepegöz, when he starts killing people and terrorizing them. In other stories, heroes fight against tyrant feudal landlords, called *tekurs*, who are personifications of evil and who use their power to oppress people.

The struggle between good and evil has a central importance in the epic poem. J.R.R. Tolkien highlighted the central importance of the monsters in *Beowulf* and portrayed Beowulf as a nobleman who was "at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time" (Tolkien 2006, 18). Tolkien further stated that "the monsters remained the enemies of mankind, the infantry of the old war, and became inevitably the enemies of the one God, ece Dryhten, the eternal Captain of the new" (Ibid, 22). However, Kenneth Sisam took a cheerful view and suggested that Beowulf deserved to be called a hero because "the monsters Beowulf kills are inevitably evil and hostile because a reputation for heroism is not made by killing creatures that are believed to be harmless or beneficent—sheep for instance" (Sisam 1965, 25). Beowulf engages in three fights. First, he fights with Grendel who terrorizes the Danes by launching attacks on the king's mead-hall called Heorot. His second encounter is with Grendel's mother, who tries to avenge her son's death. The epic hero's final battle is against the dragon, which mercilessly attacks and burns the homes and lands of the Geats.

Beowulf's fight with Grendel is significant because it shows Beowulf's physical strength. He was invited by King Hrothgar and he crossed the sea to the land of Danes to deliver their country of a demonic monster called Grendel. Grendel is a large monster who devours humans even though he somewhat resembles a man. He terrorizes Heorot, Hrothgar's mead hall, and kills anyone who spends the night there. Grendel's portrayal in the poem reveals a great deal about his character as well as physical power: "So times were pleasant for the people there / Until finally one, a fiend out of Hell, / Began to work his evil in the world / Grendel was the name of this grim demon" (*Beowulf*, 99-102). Being exiled to the swamplands and outside the boundaries of human society, Grendel is an outcast who seems to be lonely and be seeking companionship. The poet thinks Grendel's aggression is a result of his loneliness and jealousy. By lineage, he is a member of "Cain's clan, whom the creator had outlawed / and condemned as outcasts" (*Beowulf*, 106-107). Peter F. Fisher states the following on Grendel's descent and ancestry "Grendel might be considered the lineal descendant in the folklore of some kind of Germani Caliban, but the author of *Beowulf* gives him a much more sinister ancestry. He is not merely represented as coming from the earth, but from the underworld – the land of monsters descended from Cain" (Fisher 1958, 174). He is considered as one of the descendants of Cain. On other hand, Beowulf, a representative of good, proves himself worthy in his previous exploits with giants and sea-monsters. Beowulf's confrontation with Grendel demonstrates his great physical strength as well as highlights his sense of fair play because no weapon can harm Grendel and Beowulf desires to face the monster on equal footing. He utters the following:

When it comes to fighting, I count myself  
As dangerous any day as Grendel...  
though he does possess  
A wild strength. No weapons, therefore,  
For either this night: unarmed he shall face me  
If face me he dares (*Beowulf*, 677- 685).

Beowulf carefully observes the monster's method as Grendel attacks and devours a Geatish warrior when he enters Heorot. Even though it costs him to lose a friend, he gets an opportunity to notice Grendel's method. When Grendel reaches for his next victim, Beowulf grabs him "with the strength of thirty" men. This unexpected move by him leaves



Grendel in great shock. He, frightened like a wounded-animal, yearns to take refuge within the boundaries of his swamplands in excruciating pain and intense dismay. However, Beowulf administers even more physical strength and manages to rip off Grendel's arm. Being badly-wounded, Grendel returns to his swamp in pain only to die there in peace. Andy Orchard suggests that: "Grendel is certainly 'the wicked destroyer', but he is also both 'the destroyer of men' and 'the man-shaped destroyer'" (Orchard 2007, 93). Likewise, Peter Baker states that "the evil of Grendel is reflected not only in the rhetoric and damnation that is attached to him but also in his fighting style" (Baker 2013, 9). Therefore, Beowulf, by eliminating an enemy of God, proves that he is an agent of goodness because he liberates Denmark from the horrors of Grendel's evil presence.

On the other hand, the story of Basat is one of the most famous stories in the *Book of Dede Korkut*. Basat, the son of Uruz Koja, fights with a monster called Tepegoz who has only one eye on his forehead. Tepegoz, like Grendel, terrorizes people by robbing and killing them and similarly, he cannot be killed or harmed with swords or spears. He is evil and frightens people with evil acts. He was brought home by Uruz Koja and was raised together with his children. He began to display his monstrous nature even when he was a child. He ate the noses and ears of his playmates. Despite these unfortunate incidents, Uruz's family did not banish Tepegoz. Michael E. Meeker relates this tolerance and fortitude of the family thus: "the cannibalistic acts of Tepegoz are initially tolerated. The family of Basat makes every effort to nurture the monster and to include him as part of the family and the camp" (Meeker 1992, 404). He was banished from the village when he committed another act of evil by killing one village resident. Like Grendel, Tepegoz has a mother who became his mentor and counseled him on the ways of the world. She put a ring on her son's finger which made him invincible in his fight against people. He infested the roads and became a notorious outlaw. The Oghuz clan assembled a small group consisting of valiant warriors to face him, but they were all killed by Tepegoz. Dede Korkut intervenes and strikes a deal between the Oghuz people and Tepegoz. The Oghuz people agreed to give 2 men and 500 sheep a day in exchange for putting an end to his acts of terrorism. Tepegoz declared war against the Oghuz people when they ran out of sheep. Basat decided to go and face this monster after taking blessings from his parents. "Rolling up the skirt of his robe, he put his sword on crosswise and tied his bow to his wrist. Then he kissed his

mother's and father's hands and asked them to absolve him of his obligations to them before he said good-bye" (*The Book of Dede Korkut*, 128). Basat visits Tepegoz at the monster's dwelling place, confronts him there, blinds him with a hot skewer, and finally cuts off his head with a sword. Thus, Basat eliminates Tepegoz and finally delivers his people from the terrors and intimidations of this evil monster. Basat, like Beowulf, first wounds the monster and then beheads it with a sword. Thus, he ensures that the good prevails over the evil.

Furthermore, Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother constitutes his second encounter with evil. Grendel's mother, an unnamed monster and also known as 'dam', has completely a different purpose when she attacks the mead-hall. She does not intend to destroy everything unlike her son Grendel, but she seeks revenge on the person who killed him. She is guided by her motherly instincts and seems to display the human aspect of her character. Andy Orchard regards her as "the victim of an unprovoked attack" (Orchard 2007, 93). However, it should be kept in mind that despite her human qualities and our sympathies, she can be thought of as representing a more foundational or primordial evil than Grendel himself. She "had sallied forth on a savage journey, grief-racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge" (*Beowulf*, 1277-79). She attacked Heorot, took everyone by surprise, retrieved her son's claw, and murdered the King's adviser. Even though the *Beowulf* poet praises Grendel's mother for performing a brave deed, Keith Taylor succinctly summarizes her evil nature in the following words: "scholars of *Beowulf* tend to regard [her] as an inherently evil creature who like her son is condemned to a life of exile because she bears the mark of Cain" (Taylor 1994, 13). Beowulf takes the responsibility of eliminating Grendel's mother and ventures into her lair. Sensing Beowulf's arrival, she immediately attacks him and clutches him in her grip, but Beowulf's armor stops her from crushing him. She drags Beowulf to her lair. Beowulf strikes Grendel's mother with his sword but it fails to penetrate her skin. Although she is said to be weaker than her son, Grendel's mother was about to defeat Beowulf if he did not notice a sword hanging on the wall. Beowulf seizes the huge sword, swings it, and cuts her head off. His fight with her vividly described thus:

Then he saw a blade that boded well,  
A sword in her armory, an ancient heirloom...

Took a firm hold of the hilt and swung  
The blade in an arc, a resolute blow  
That bit into her neck bone  
And severed it entirely, toppling the doomed  
House of her flesh; she fell to the floor (*Beowulf*, 1557-68)

Beowulf also spots Grendel's corpse lying in a corner. He cuts Grendel's head off as a kind of payback for all the lives Grendel took. Scott Gwara utters the following about Beowulf's encounter with Grendel's mother: "We are led to speculate that Beowulf would have died fighting Grendel's mother if the giant sword had not been hanging within reach in her cave" (Gwara 2008, 29). Despite her valid reasons to avenge her son's death, Grendel's mother is inherently evil and should be eliminated by Beowulf, the champion of good.

However, the perennial conflict between the agents of good and evil in the *Book of Dede Korkut* persists between valiant heroes, such as Salur Kazan, Uruz, Yigenek, and Seghrek, and evil tyrants, such as Qara Tekur, Direk Tekur, Shokli Melik, and Bugajik Melik. In the story called "the Sack of the House of Salur Kazan", Salur Kazan, one of the noblest khans of the Oghuz, left the camp to go on a hunt. Infidels, under the leadership of Shokli Melik, attacked the camp, raided it, and took Kazan's son, wife, and others as hostages. Upon hearing this saddening news from the loyal shepherd Karajuk, Salur Kazan became very furious and sighed deeply. The evil Shokli Melik even went too far and wished to make Kazan's wife their cupbearer. The evil Melik's intention was described in the following words: "Now Shokli Melik was happily eating and drinking with the other infidels. He said: "Fellows, you know there is a way in which we can make Kazan suffer more. Let us have the tall Lady Burla Hatun pass around drinks" (*The Book of Dede Korkut*, 31). Accompanied by the heroic shepherd, Salur Kazan defeated and destroyed the infidels after receiving reinforcements from other Oghuz begs. In the end, Salur managed to take revenge on the evil Melik and infidels, rescued his family, and thus eliminated the forces of evil and led peace to prevail in his lands as an agent of good.

In "The Story of Seghrek, the Son of Ushun Koja" and in "The Story of Yigenek, the Son of Kazilik Koja," we witness young brave heroes fight to rescue their loved ones from the hands of evil tekurs. The first story involves Segrek, the son of Ushun Koja, and his rescue of his brother Egrek from captivity. Egrek decided to raid nearby lands to prove his worth as a warrior and was captured by the soldiers of evil

Qara Tekur. Segrek, when he grows up, discovers that his brother is love and held captive. Despite his parents' efforts to deter him by marrying him with a beautiful maiden, Segrek goes to rescue his brother from the land of Qara Tekur. He utters the following to his parents who tried to stop him from venturing into this mission: "Do not keep me from my mission. I shall not return to the country of the strong Oghuz before I reach the castle in which my brother is imprisoned and find out whether he is dead or alive. If he is dead, I shall take revenge for him" (*The Book of Dede Korkut*, 149). He defeats the enemy in good fashion and at length, they send out his brother Egrek to face the great warrior. During the fight, the two warriors discover that they are in fact brothers. They combine forces to destroy the enemy and reunite with their family and people.

In the next story, Yigenek, the son of Kazilik Koja, finds out that his father is being held captive by the evil Direk Tekur, and decides to liberate him with the help of heroes from the twenty-four Oghuz tribes. He and his companions arrive at Direk Tekur's castle. In the ensuing battle, the evil Direk Tekur successfully pushes the frontier party back. In the end, Yigenek rides his horse to the battleground to face the evil ruler. He manages to wound him in the shoulder with the very first strike. The evil tekur tries to get back to the castle, but Yigenek catches up with him at the entrance of the castle and cuts his head off. Yigenek's fight with Dirse Tekur was described in the following words:

He rode like the wind and stuck like glue. He struck the infidel's shoulder with his sword, tore through his armor, and gashed his flesh six fingers deep. The infidel's black boots were filled with blood. His ill-starred head was dizzy, and he was stunned. He turned and rode toward the castle with Yigenek in pursuit. As he was going through the castle gate, Yigenek dealt him such a blow on the neck with his sword that his head fell to the ground like a ball (*The Book of Dede Korkut*, 120).

Thus, he defeats the evil tekur and releases his father from captivity. The struggle of heroes, such as Yigenek, Salur Kazan, and Segrek, with the forces of evil such as Shokli Melik, Qara Tekur, and Direk Tekur, ensures and reinforces the victory of good over evil.

Moreover, the third monster that Beowulf encountered in the epic poem was the dragon. Beowulf ruled Geatland as its king peacefully for fifty years until an intruding slave provokes and offends the dragon

by stealing a gem-covered cup from the treasure trove. When the dragon awakens and realizes that a piece of his treasure is missing, he goes on a rampage to find it and mercilessly burns the Geats' homes and lands. Beowulf decides to kill the monster personally because, he, as the king of Geatland, has nothing left to dispense to the people in his kingdom whose homes and lands were destroyed by the dragon. Joseph E. Marshall sympathizes with Beowulf's decision to encounter the dragon and he asserts that "his decision to fight the dragon for his treasure is not motivated by greed because he does not desire the treasure for himself; rather his decision to fight stems once again from love for his people" (Marshall 2010, 5). Beowulf, dressed in full armor and accompanied by eleven of his thanes, set out for the dragon's cave with eleven of his thanes guided by the thief who had stolen the cup. When Beowulf arrived at the entrance of the dragon's lair and made his presence known, the dragon emerged breathing fire. Beowulf's armor saved him from the fire, but when he drove his sword into the dragon's thick scales, he only managed to hurt the dragon slightly. This move of Beowulf made the dragon rather angry and his anger was described in the following words:

The hoard-keeper  
Went into a spasm and spouted deadly flames:  
When he felt the stroke, battle-fire  
Billowed and spewed. Beowulf was foiled  
Of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,  
Infallible before that day,  
Failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should have (*Beowulf*, 2580-86)

The dragon charged again and breathes fire. Beowulf took refuge behind his shield together with Wiglaf since his other companions had already deserted him. Beowulf gathered all his strength and stroke the dragon, but his sword shattered on the beast's skull. In the meantime, the dragon renewed his charge, bit Beowulf on the neck, and burnt him with fire. Wiglaf proved to be resolute despite the flames and succeeded in striking the dragon. Wiglaf's charge took the dragon by surprise and made him divert his attention away from Beowulf. Then, Beowulf pulled out his knife and stabbed the dragon in his belly. The dragon did not survive from this wound and died. Beowulf, on the other hand, was fatally wounded because of the dragon's poisonous teeth. Wiglaf stood next to him and Beowulf, feeling that he would die

soon, asked Wiglaf to be the ruler, and died by giving his last breath. Tolkien suggests that the dragon is “a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good from bad (the evil aspect of life)” (Tolkien 2006, 114). Similarly, Herbert Wright states that “the dragon, like the giant Grendel, is an enemy of mankind, and the audience of *Beowulf* can have entertained no sympathy for either the one or the other” (Wright 1957, 4).

## CONCLUSION

The conflict between good and evil is a recurring theme throughout human history. Every individual, since the time of Adam and Eve and their children, Cain and Abel, has been tormented with the choice between good and evil. These two epic works, *Beowulf* and the *Book of Dede Korkut* were discovered to dramatize this perennial clash between good and evil in Anglo-Saxon communities and the Oghuz clans. In *Beowulf*, the epic hero Beowulf engages in three fights with the forces of evil: Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon, and in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, several heroes, including Salur Kazan, Segrek, and Yigenek, undertake the responsibility of encountering evil characters: Shokli Melik, Dirse Tekur, and Qara Tekur. Beowulf, being the champion of good, largely relies on his “great strength, the large gift of God had given him and relied on the Almighty for a favor, comfort and help” (Abrams 1999, 57). Beowulf proves himself to be the stereotypical warrior when he emerges victorious in his fights with evil monsters. He sets out alone in his quest to fight with the evil with the only exception of taking Wiglaf when he decides to encounter the dragon. He embarks on these battles not because of personal glory and fame, but because of helping others and serving his people.

On the other hand, the *Book of Dede Korkut* portrays the collective heroic deeds of gallant and noble characters. Since the line that distinguishes these heroes from the evil people is very thin, human beings have the potential to do both good and evil. Commenting on human beings’ inherent capacity to do good and evil, Hindy Najman states that “the types of Cain and Abel are presented as the two aspects of the human soul, representing the human capacity for good and the human capacity for evil. Consequently, reflection on these types can be a source of moral teaching” (Najman 2003, 107). Heroes, in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, display their compassion and benevolence when they encounter evil tekurs who oppress and torture people by inflicting pain

and suffering to people. Although their ventures also involve personal fame and glory, they mostly fight to help as well as to serve their people.

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