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**THE LINGUOPOETIC USE
OF THE METONYMIC PRINCIPLE
IN THE PRESENTATION OF BATTLE
SCENES IN *BEOWULF***

1. Introduction

The aspectual and thematic diversity of existing research works on *Beowulf* is well-known. This paper presents yet another distinctive trait of the poem's text. In Anglo-American scholarly literature, the area to which this research work belongs is generally known as *poetic diction*. The essence of this research area, however, is arguably better represented by the term *linguopoetics* used in Central and Eastern European works. Linguopoetics can be loosely defined as the features of the language of a literary work that reflect the world outlook and the aesthetic-philosophical conceptions and artistic vision pertaining to a particular author, a literary school or even a whole literary epoch. A stricter definition still continues to be a task of theoreticians. The current state of fundamental research in the field is still rather in the phase described by Akhmanova and Zadornova decades ago: "Linguopoetics

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as a separate linguistic discipline still presents a tangle of different strains whose natural relationship is often obscured by the variety of materials and incompatibility of approaches” (Akhmanova and Zadornova 1977: 250). The specific purpose of this study is to analyze the metonymic principle underlying the verbal presentation of a number of battle scenes in *Beowulf*. The term *metonymic principle* (not just *metonymy*) is deliberately used in this work to emphasize the most versatile and general approach to determining the parts of the text that can be regarded as containing a metonymic constituent.

The very fact of a special role that the metonymic principle plays in Old English poetry has been known for quite a long time: “...the controlling mode of language in Old English poetry is metonymic rather than metaphorical” (Overing 1990: 5). This fact is indicated by more than one feature of *Beowulf*'s text, the simplest one being the very small number of metaphors in the epic.

There is one more point that should be mentioned in the preambular part of this study. It is the question of the status of tropes in Old English poetry. The established opinion about the typical features of Old English poetry in the generally philological aspect are formulated, e.g., in the following thesis: “The organizing principles of the Old English poetic line are meter and alliteration; rhyme, wordplay, parallelism, formulae, and periphrasis are frequent but not obligatory features of Old English poetic diction” (Bolton 1978: 55). Tropes are not specifically mentioned as obligatory among the organizing principles of Old English poetry. Yet tropes, in whatever poetic text they are found, are always indicative of the world outlook reflected by the text they are used in. This is determined by the very nature of tropes as very powerful language mechanisms enabling humans to assimilate the world knowledge. Hence, the profound understanding of a poetic text as an artistically created reflection of the world requires “obligatory” trope research, however modest the presence of tropes in a particular text is. The above-said equally concerns both metaphor and metonymy, albeit in the case of *Beowulf* the research of metonymy is obviously more important due to this trope's significant predominance over metaphor in this epic poem.

In research literature, the notion of metonymy is represented by numerous definitions and quite a large number of semantic or structural classifications. The research aspect of this paper, however, allows to disregard differences between various semantic or structural types of metonymy used in *Beowulf* and focus on the application of the general metonymic principle in the building of battle-scene fragments of the poem's text. Nevertheless, this work requires a brief analysis of the general notion of metonymy and its components. The most general definition of metonymy is that of a trope in which the figurative meaning corresponds to an object that is spatially or

temporally contiguous, or psychologically associated with the object corresponding to the literal meaning. Any kind of figurative word use, as is known, is reducible to either metaphor or metonymy. Hence the necessity to see all possible differences between the two tropes.

One of the fundamental differences between metaphor and metonymy in terms of the text-building is the fact that the referent corresponding to metaphor's literal meaning is not in the referential space of the text's fragment built while that of metonymy is. This feature is recognized, yet termed differently in various works. Here is one of the typical definitions: "The important point of difference between a metaphor and a metonym is that the metaphor always mediates between the reader and a meaning that lies beyond the immediate reference" (Overing 1990: 16). This is true even in such cases as the one found in the following quotation from an early 17th century text: (1) "And ships through *Neptune* spread their wings" (G. Fletcher, "Christ's Triumph after Death") – the sea is where Neptune "is". This feature determines the radical difference in the functioning of the two basic tropes in any text production, the creation of poetical texts being the sphere where this difference reveals itself most. A very important factor in this respect is also the differences in the basic distinctive principle of functioning of both tropes in the representation of a text's referential space. With regard to the above-mentioned, a specific definition of metonymy should be cited here which demonstrates the functional nature of metonymy in a poetical text. The definition which is specifically relevant in this study is the following:

...the essence of metonymy used in a lyrical text resides, first of all, in explicit representation of a constituent of the text's referential space which, in the case of using a non-tropeic lexical unit (or phrase), would be implicated. At the same time, the constituent which, in the case of non-tropeic word use, would be represented explicitly becomes implicit ... It is well-known that any implicature is typically characterized by ambiguity of explication. Thus, metonymy, by explicating an implicitly represented constituent of a text, directs the reader's (listener's) perception of a certain fragment of the text to a particular point in the text's referential space. In fact, the latter process effectively foregrounds an intratextual connection of a constituent that participates in the creation of the system of supporting elements of the text's referential space (exactly such elements of the text's referential space would have to be represented explicitly if the text were to be constructed without using tropes). In fact, the above-defined feature of metonymy causes a fragment of a text's referential space to adopt a specific perspective in the 'picture' of the world presented by the text acting as a complex sign (Vasyutynska 1996: 28), *transl. from Russian, K. Gulyy*.

In view of the-above said, the overall purpose of this paper is defined as the establishing of distinctive linguopetic features of *Beowulf's* battle-scene fragments through analysis of preferences in metonymic explications.

This study also requires a definition of the terms corresponding to different semantic parts of metonymy. In the case of metaphor, the two semantic constituents of the trope are tenor (the contextual or figurative meaning) and vehicle (the dictionary or literal meaning). Even though they are rarely used with regard to metonymy, these same terms, for facility's sake, are used in this work to identify the literal and figurative meaning of this trope. It should also be noticed that the research aspect of this study allows to treat both single metonymies and metonymic paraphrases (complex metonymies) indiscriminately. The term *metonymic complex (MC)* used below is defined as a semantic combination of two particular referents in a metonymy, one corresponding to its tenor, the other one to its vehicle.

The tenors of all metonymies analyzed in this study invariably belong to the sphere of battle scenes. Semiotically speaking, it means that all these tenors relate to the same sphere of the referential space of *Beowulf's* text. This explains why, in this study, the presentation of material is based on the semantic characteristics of metonymic vehicles.

The specificity of the linguopoetic use of the metonymic principle in *Beowulf* will be considered in the following linguistic aspects: cultural; text-building; lexical/grammatical.

2. The cultural aspect: 'pagan' metonymies

The cultural aspect of the linguopoetic use of metonymy in a text reflects the necessity to foreground various social culturally-specific spheres which serve as a constituent of the megacontext contributing to the shaping of the text's world outlook. In comparison to other extant Western European medieval epic texts, the most distinctive feature of *Beowulf* in this respect is the use of metonymic vehicles associated with ancient Germanic pagan culture. This feature is obviously explainable by the temporal proximity of *Beowulf* to the pre-Christian Germanic culture. Whatever the outcome of the discussion on whether the culture of *Beowulf* is really Christian or whether it has its base in the pagan past, e.g., see the discussion in (Benson: 2000), it should be said that the use of metonymy in the epic definitely indicates that pagan culture continues to be a palpable constituent of the semiotics of the text. Below are examples of "pagan" metonymies in *Beowulf*:

MC *begin debate/unbind battle runes*:

(1) Unferð mapelode, Ecglafes bearn... *onband beadurune* (Beowulf, VIII, 499-501) – lit.: Unferth spoke, the son of Edgelaf...(he) *unbound battle-runes* – unbound the *battle runes*, i.e. began a debate, or hazing.

MC *fight in battle/dash helm boars*:

(2) ðonne we on orlege / hafelan weredon, þonne hniton feþan,/ *eoferas cnysedan* (Beowulf, XX, 1326–1328) – when we in war protected the head, when clashed with foot-soldiers, *dashed boars* (modern English translation by Benjamin Slade) – i.e. fought a war (participated in war); *dash* (or *hew*) boars (figures of boars on the crests of ancient Germanic warriors' helmets) – the associative cultural link to ancient Germanic deities Fro, Freyr and Freya and the boar viewed as a symbol of protection in battle; hence boar figurines on helmets as talismans of power and protection.

MC *be killed (executed)/go to gallows-tree*:

(3) sum *on galgtreowum fuglum to gamene* (Beowulf, XL, 2940–2941) – lit.: some (should) *go to the gallows-tree* for pleasure of birds.

Some researchers believe the last example to be an allusion to sacrifice to Woden. At the same time, it should be noted that this metonymic phrase is also found in *The Song of Roland* :

(4) Va, sis *pent tuz a l'arbre de mal fust!* (Chanson de Roland, CCLXXXVIII, 3953–3954) – *go hang* hem all *on the tree of cursed wood* (modern English translation by Charles Scott Moncrief).

Obviously, an intertextual connection or intercultural influence between the two texts is unlikely, and the similarity is most probably caused by the independent existence of the same kind of execution in both cultures, this assumption being indirectly confirmed by otherwise total absence of any pagan constituent in the referential space of the old French poem.

The text of *Beowulf* also contains metonymies that simultaneously function as symbols of ancient Germanic pagan culture. First of all, it concerns various battle accessories made of ash or linden, the two trees that had great cultural significance in the ancient Germanic world. E.g.: (2) “eald *æscwiga*” (Beowulf, XXVII–XXX, 2043) – old *ash-wielder*, i.e. ‘spear warrior’. For comparison’s sake: in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the spear is made of fir, Latin *abies*; in Dryden’s translation, however, it is rendered as (*mountain*)

ash (Book XI, 667), which may be a tribute to the early medieval Germanic cultural tradition and an example of cultural adaptation in translating realia of a different culture.

3. The text-building aspect: intertextuality of metonymic complexes

The text-building aspect treats the ways in which language can be used to shape a text as a semiotic unity. One of the fundamental features of any literary text in this respect is intertextuality, i.e., signalling a semantic link of a certain literary text to another chronologically preceding text or a number of texts, thus making the former a part of a literary tradition/discourse, or connecting it in various ways to another cultural or literary tradition/discourse. The specifics of intertextuality of a literary text significantly affect its world outlook character. In the text of *Beowulf*, identification of any metonymies that reflect the narrative tradition /discourse (and thus intertextual links) is, for obvious reasons, very difficult. Many research works of the recent two decades place a lot of emphasis on *Beowulf's* intertextuality, i.e. all kinds of semantic links to certain preceding ancient Germanic texts, oral or written. Cf. e.g.: “Anyone who reads *Beowulf* in the original accompanied by Klaeber and the older commentaries will realize that understanding the poem is, in large part, a matter of understanding its intertextuality. This explains the essential failure of the New Critical or *werkimmanent* approaches, so common since World War II, to make the poem historically meaningful for contemporary readers who have only their reading in modern literature to contextualize this strange survivor of lost textual worlds”(Harris 1994: 45). Actually, the tradition in this case, “best understood as the vast network of discourses behind the poem and ultimately constituting it”(Harris 1994: 45), may not only be purely Germanic. Cf.:

The materials of *Beowulf*, the story of the hall-haunting monster and of the fight at Finn’s stronghold alike, have their origins in the preliterate history of various Germanic peoples, in materials they shared with other cultures, and in materials older than the formation of the Germanic languages (Clark 1990: 37).

On the one hand, the very feasibility of establishing concrete intertextual links in *Beowulf*'s text is regarded as theoretically achievable:

[...] the reason we do not have an adequate picture of *Beowulf* in literary history is that we have ignored literary history within *Beowulf*. ...*Beowulf* has very extensive clues to its own prehistory (Harris 1991: 235).

On the other hand, however, the demonstration of such links through the language form of the text is extremely difficult, because we really have extremely little knowledge of clearly defined full poetical discourse that influenced the production of the text of *Beowulf*. In other words, many cases of intertextuality in *Beowulf* are “invisible” to us because we do not have enough text corpus to identify them. To illustrate this thesis, just for comparison's sake, let us look at ancient Roman literature. In fact, the diachronic megadiscourse of Roman poetry reaches well into the beginnings of the Greek poetical tradition (the influencing discourse can often be produced in a different ethnic language), thus covering a centuries-long historical period and comprising a great multitude of individual texts. This can be exemplified by Roman poets' numerous Latin reproductions of Greek authors' poetic diction. E.g.:

(5) iam Nox iungit equos, currumque sequuntur/Matris lascivo sidera fulva choro (Tibullus, Carmina, Lib.II, 1) – lit: Night (the deity) is now harnessing her horses, and the (reddish-yellow) shining stars follow their mother's chariot in a playful chorus; cf.: ‘astrōn t' aitherioi choroi (Euripides, Electra, 466) – lit.: and the heavenly choruses of the stars; cf. also: iō pyr pneionton chorag' astrōn (Sophocles, Antigone, 1146) – lit.: O Leader of the chorus of the fire-breathing stars (addressing Dionysus).

The classical texts, in their turn, serve as a discourse influencing the 16th–19th century European poetic discourse. E.g.:

(6) I watch... with calm regret/Yon slowly-sinking star – immortal Sire ('mother' in the above-cited Tibullus's text) ... of all the glittering choir (stars)! (William Wordsworth, 'I watch, and long have watched...') – [...]ночь нисходит,/ И [...] звезд ненужный хор/На небосклон она выводит!' (Баратынский, “Финляндия”).

A convincing demonstration of intertextual links of this character in *Beowulf*, particularly in the case of the use of the metonymic principle, is hardly possible because of the absence of a relatively large corpus of texts, chronologically prior to *Beowulf*, belonging to the same poetic discourse that could be reliably identified as a source of influence on the poetic diction of

Beowulf's author. Of course, certain semantic parallels in poetic diction between *Beowulf* and other medieval and antique epic poems can be found, e.g. between *Beowulf* and *Chanson de Roland*. These two epic texts are quite frequently compared, see for instance (Goldsmith: 1991). However, in view of the insignificant number of the texts that can be positively shown to have intertextual links with *Beowulf* (the way early modern European poetical texts can be shown to have intertextual links with classical texts) and the absence of any conclusive opinions as to exactly what poetic discourse the author of *Beowulf* modelled his poetic diction on (*ancient Germanic* is too general and too insufficient in terms of the extant pre-*Beowulf* texts), it is in most cases impossible to definitely determine whether a semantic parallel is the result of one text being influenced by another, or whether the source of similarity is in some third discourse that influenced both the texts, or if we deal with a mere coincidence. Cf. the following examples:

MC fighting (striking) sword/gleaming sword

(7) Ic him þa maðmas, þe he me sealed... leohtan sweorde(*Beowulf*, XXXV, 2490–2492) – lit.: I repaid him or what he gave me with my gleaming sword – cf.: ...von liechten swerten daz velt so lvote erdoz (*Nibelungen*, IV, 233) – lit.: the field resounded with the flashing swords.

In this case, the obvious similarity of metonymies can be explained by the influence of a common Germanic text source. Such an explanation is supported by the use of vocabulary containing the same Germanic roots in both texts. On the other hand, the same MC can be found in Roman poetical texts created in the 1st century BC:

(8) At Pallas [...] *fulgentem* deripit *ensem* (*Aeneis*, X, 474–475) – lit.: but Pallas draws out the shining sword.

In this case, the similarity between the classical Roman text and the two Germanic texts is, most probably, just a mere coincidence because the connection between the objects corresponding to a metonymy's vehicle and tenor are universal, i.e. they *always* occur together due to natural causes.

Thus, certain cases of metonymy that demonstrate semantic parallelism in different antique or medieval texts may not be the result of intertextual influence. Their similarity may simply be determined by universality and obligatoriness of connection between objects corresponding to metonymy's tenor and vehicle respectively. Below are examples of such a complex in different antique and medieval texts.

MC to kill in battle/leave the bodies of the killed without interment to be consumed by scavenger animals and birds :

(9) sum on galgtreowum *fuglum to gamene* (Beowulf, XL, 2940–2941) – lit.: some (should) go to the allows-tree *for pleasure of birds*.

(10) menin aeide thea Peleiadeo Achileos/oulomenen, he... pollas d' iphthimous *psuchas Aidi proiapsen/* heroon, autous de *heloria* teuche *kun-essin/oionoisi...*(Homer, *Illias*, I, 1-5) – ‘Sing, O goddess, the pernicious wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus, which... hurtled many valiant souls down to Hades, and made *their bodies a prey to dogs and bird*’.

(11) Nostre Franceis I descendrunt a pied,/Truverunt nos... morz ... Enfuerunt (nos) en aîtres de musters;/N'en mangerunt ne lu ne porc ne chen(*Chanson de Roland*, CXXXII, 132) – lit.: Our Franks will dismount from their horses and will find us dead... They will bury us within the grounds of a monastery; *no wolf, swine or dog will eat our bones*

(12) istic nunc [...] iace non te optima mater *condet humi* [...] *alibus* linquere *feris*, aut gurgite mersum/unda feret *piscesque* impasti vulnera *lambent* (Vergilius, *Aeneis*, X, 552–560) – lit.: Now lie here. Your good mother will not bury you [...] you will be left *for birds of prey* (to consume), or waves will carry you away, immersed in turbulent waters, and *hungry fish will feed off your wounds*.

However, in many of the instances of metonymic intensification, *Beowulf* displays similarities with various other ancient epic texts:

MC *large number of killed in battle/large red-coloured (covered with blood) area*:

(13) ða wæs *heal roden* feonda feorum (Beowulf, XVII, 1150) – the *burg* was *red-dened* with enemy's blood – a visual effect (explication of the colour of blood) plus hyperbole (a whole *burg* covered with blood); cf. also: *arva nova Neptunia caede rubescunt* (Vergilius, *Aeneis*, VIII, 695) – lit.: the *fields* of Neptune (i.e. the sea, a very large area) again *turn red* with the blood killed in a sea battle.

MC *being subject to an extremely violent attack in battle/having one's shield cloven or otherwise failing to protect*

(14) he *under rande gecranc* (Beowulf, XVIII, 1209) – lit.: he *died under the shield* (fighting in battle); cf., also: (Oliver) *Trenchet* [...] *cez ascuz buclers* (*Chanson de Roland*, CXLVII, 1970) – lit.: (Oliver) *splits* these buckled *shields* (fighting in battle).

MC *spear attack/spear flying* – the flight of spear is the most dramatic stage of a spear attack before the weapon hits the victim

(15) [...] Eft sona bið/þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð./oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,/oððe gripe meces, oððe *gares fliht* (Beowulf, XXV, 1762–1766)

– lit.: soon (afterwards) it shall be that sickness or a blade will put an end to your strength, or the fang of fire, or a surging billow, or a sword attack, or a spear's flight.

MC killing with an extremely violent sword blow/splitting of helmet:

(16) ac he him on heafde *helm* ær *gescer*, þæt he blode fah bugan sceolde, feoll on foldan (*Beowulf*, XLI, 2973–2975) – lit.: but soon he *clove* the *helmet* on his head, and he, covered with blood, had to bow and fell down to earth

(17) þær Ongenþeow Eofores niosað. *Guðhelm toglað* [...] (*Beowulf*, XXXV, 2486–2487) lit.: there Ongentheow met Eofor. (He) *split* his *war-helm*; cf. also: (oliver) Tient Haltecelre dunt li acer fur bruns./*Fiert* Marganices *sur l'elme* a or [...] *Trenchet la teste d'ici qu'as denz menuz* (*Chanson de Roland*, CXLVI, 1955) – lit.: (oliver) holds Halteclere (a sword), whose steel is rown, *strikes* Marganice on his golden helm [...] splits his head to the small teeth.

A conspicuous feature of *Beowulf*'s text is the absence of 'gruesome' metonymies, which abound in certain antique and certain medieval epic poems. 'Gruesome' metonymies can be defined as having vehicles causing a feeling of repugnance, or otherwise shocking because of their physically repulsive content. It should be noted that the other well-known old English epic poem, *The Battle of Malden*, does not contain gruesome metonymies either.

Below are examples of gruesome metonymies from Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Chanson de Roland Aeneid*:

MC killing in battle/description of injuries afflicted

(20) [...] volat Italia comus [...] sub altum pectus abit: *reddit specus atri vulneris undam spumantem*, et fixo *ferrum in pulmone tepescit* (*Aeneis*, IX, 696–701) – lit.: the dart (made of Italian cornel wood flies [...] and) pierces (Antiphates's) upper breast; a spuming wave (of blood) *gushes from the hole of the black wound*, and, becoming fixed, the *iron warms in the lung*.

(21) [...] uno deiectum comminus ictu/cum *galea longe iacuit caput*. (*Aeneis*, IX, 768–771) – lit.: 'cut off with one blow at close quarters, the *head with the helm gets thrown far* (from the body).

(22) [...] *vulnus calido rigat... cerebro* (*Aeneis*, XI, 698) – lit.: the *wound becomes wet with warm brains*.

Chanson de Roland:

MC killing in battle/description of injuries afflicted

(23) 'Sansun li dux, (il) vait ferir l'almaçur: *L'escut li freinst... Trenchet li le coer, le firie e le pulmun*' (*Roland*, XCVIII) – lit.: 'Sansun the Duke goes to strike the

almacour (provincial chief), he breaks his shield... *Slices his heart, his liver, and his lungs*'

(24) (Oliver, attacking Malsarun with the truncheon of his broken spear) *Fors de la teste li met les oilz ansdous,/E la cervele li chet as piez desuz*' (Chanson de Roland, CVI, 1355–1360) – lit.: '(Oliver, attacking Malsarun with the truncheon of his broken spear) makes his eyes burst out of his head, and his brain fall down to his feet'.

(25) *Li quens le fiert tant vertuusement/Tresqu'al nasel tut le elme li fent,/Trenchet le nes e la buche e es denz* (Roland, CXXIV, 1645–1650) – lit.: 'the count strikes him so with such virtue that he splits his helm to the nose-plate, slices through his nose and mouth and teeth'.

(26) *'Li quens Rollant veit l'ar(ce)vesque a tere: Defors sun cors veit gesir la buele; Desuz le frunt li buillit la cervele*' (Chanson de Roland, CLXVII, 2246–2248) – lit.: 'The count Rollant sees the archbishop (lying dead) on the ground, sees his bowels lying outside his body, sees his brains "boil" above his forehead'.

In *Beowulf*, there is only one instance of employing a metonymic principle which could be regarded as containing a gruesome metaphor:

MC killing in battle/description of injuries afflicted

(27) *Hyne yrringa/Wulf Wonreding wæpne geræhte,/þæt him for swenge swat ædrum sprong/forð under fexe* (Beowulf, XLI, 2964–2967) – lit.: 'in anger, Wulf Wonreding struck him with weapon and (then), because of that blow, blood spurted from his vessels and gushed in streams beneath his hair'.

The uniqueness of the above example indicates that, unlike *Aeneid* and *Chanson de Roland*, the text of *Beowulf* does not use this kind of metonymy as a linguopoetic feature.

4. The grammatical aspect: metonymic epithets

The text of *Beowulf*, as is usual in many ancient epic texts, contains quite a large number of epithets. Many of them can be theoretically considered a peculiar type of metonymy. In the most basic terms, an epithet is an explicit lexical denotation of a quality which is redundant from a logical point of view because this quality is normally implied whenever the object it characterizes is referred to, e.g., 'white milk'. An explicit reference to such a quality, however, expresses an "aesthetic charge" affecting the artistic value of the text it is used in. In fact, the production of an epithet in this case requires an explication of an implied feature. In this respect, epithet has a semantic affinity with metonymy. The difference between what we traditionally understand as metonymy and metonymic epithet lies in the sphere of grammar: the former is associated with the noun or noun combinations, the latter

is adjectival. Both, however, equally represent the use of metonymic principle.

Many of the epithets found in *Beowulf*'s text are applied to weapons and explicate their lethal features. Below are examples. Each of the epithets in bold type puts emphasis on the lethal characteristics of the weapon used:

(28) þæt him fela laf frecne ne meahton *scurheard* scepðan... (Beowulf, XV, 1032–1033) – lit.: ‘lest the relict-of-files (i.e. the sword)made *hard* by (*hammer*) blows should injure him’.

(29) [...] wrætlic wægsweord [...] *heardecg* (Beowulf, XXII, 1488–1490) – lit.: wondrous sword *ardedged*.

(30) Ofsæt þa þone selegyst ond hyre seax geteah, *brad* ond *brunecg*... (Beowulf, XXII, 1545–1546) – lit.: ‘(she) seized her short sword, *broad* and *brown-edged*.’

(31) ac hine *iremma ecga* fornamon, hearde, heaðosceard (Beowulf, XXXIX, 2828–2829) – lit.: ‘because iron edges afflicted it (the dragon) *hard* and *battle-dinted* (*bat-tle-sharp*)’; cf. also a similar use in *The Song of Nibelungs*: [...] do horte man von hvrte erdiezen manegen rant vnt ouch von *scaerpfen swerten* der man da vil geslvooch’ (Nibelungen, IV, 203) – one heard many a shield resounding from the hurtling and from the *sharp swords* as well, many of which were wielded there’, English translation by D.B.Shumway.

(32) *bongar* bugeð (Beowulf, XXVIII–XXX, 2031) – *murdering* spear sinks.

(33) [...] se *harda* helm hyrsted golde (XXXII, 2255) – lit.: this *hard* helmet decorated with gold; indirect indication of the lethality of weapons the helmet is to protect from.

(34) Nu sceall billes ecg,/ hond ond *heard sword*, ymb hord wigan (XXXV, 2505–2509) – lit.: now shall the edge of the sword, (my) hand and *hard blade* for the hoard fight.

The text of *Beowulf* especially abounds in such epithets, though instances of such word use can be found in many antique and medieval epic texts depicting battle scenes. Cf., e.g.:

(35) [...] Clausus/aduenit et *rigida* Dryopem ferit eminus *hasta* sub mentum’ (Vergilius, Aeneis, X, 345–349) – lit.: Clausus comes and hits Dryops’s throat with a *rigid spear* thrown from afar.

(36) Del *brant d’acer* la mure li presentet (Chanson de Roland, Laisse CCLXXXV, 3915) – ‘he presents he *point of the steel sword* (fighting in battle)’.

The primary function of the above epithets is obviously not decorative. First and foremost, they function as constituents of the form of the epic text that intensify the emotional (or dramatic) constituent of the text’s content (see more on emotional intensification produced by metonymy further below).

Another peculiar type of epithet is an adjectival epithet that denotes a permanent feature of an object naming it with lexemes denoting occasional instances of such a feature. In fact, it is a kind of adjectival synecdoche, a *pars pro toto* trope, e.g. *blood-covered sword* instead of *fighting sword*. Such epithets increase the emotionality of the presentation through concretizing of abstract notions. When portraying dramatic events, ancient epic authors resort to this type of epithet quite frequently (this type of epithet can also be found in European poetical texts of all epochs). Cf.: “[...] *telisque volatile ferrum*” (Vergilius, Aeneis, VIII, 694) – lit.: (and) the *volant iron* of spears.

Below are examples from the text of *Beowulf*:

MC *battle sword/bloody sword*:

(37) Breca næfre git æt heaðolace, ne gehwæþer incer, /swa deorlice dæd gefremede / *fagum sweordum*’ (IX, 583–586) – lit.: Breca, never yet, not one of you two, in the battle-play, such a daring deed has done with *variegated* (i.e. covered with blood stains, bloody) *sword*.

MC *fighting (killing) hand/bloody hand*:

(38) *blodge beadufolme* onberan (XIV, 990) – lit.: (to) cut away a *bloody battle-hand*

MC *fighting sword/gleaming (flashing) sword*:

(39) Ic him þa maðmas, þe he me sealed [...] *leohtan sweorde* (XXXV, 2490–2492) – lit.: I repaid him for what he gave me with my *gleaming sword*.

MC *fighting sword/fast sword*:

(40) *Sweord* ær gebræd/god guðcýning, gomele lafe/*ecgum unslaw* (Beowulf, XXXV, 2562–2564) – it.: the good warrior king had drawn his sword, old heirloom, *not slow with (its) edges* (i.e. very active).

5. Conclusion

As can be seen, *Beowulf*’s text basically uses the metonymic principle similarly to other ancient European epic poems. The linguopoetic function of metonymy (broadly understood) in this case is to foreground various dramatic details of the events presented and intensify the emotional response to

the text. As to the peculiarities of *Beowulf* in the aspect of using metonymy, it should be said that a conclusive explanation of the function of the 'pagan' component in *Beowulf's* metonymic system as well as the interpretation of the emotional perception of weapons and the search for the reason of the absence of the 'gruesome' metonymies require a broad comparative study of all available ancient Germanic epic texts.

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ABSTRACT

The linguopoetic use of the metonymic principle in the presentation of battle scenes in *Beowulf*

Key words: metonymy, poetics, epic

This paper presents an analysis of the poetic diction function of metonymy in the original text of the old English medieval epic poem *Beowulf*. The study is conducted on the basis of comparison of the *Beowulf* text with the original ancient classical (Greek and Roman) and medieval (Germanic and Romance) epic texts. Metonymy in the language form of the *Beowulf* text is shown to reflect the aesthetic values of an early Germanic medieval world outlook in an epic text viewed as a complex sign (a semiotic unity).