

The Anti-hero as a Critic in John Gardner's *Grendel*

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Abstract

This article aims to examine from a Menippean perspective John Gardner's novel *Grendel* (originally published in 1971), in which the anti-hero, here Grendel, acts as the author's critical voice that invites the reader to revise his own world. Besides the use of the Menippean satire, Bakhtinian approach of the carnival is present in the paper to highlight the role and the status of the anti-hero in the world he lives in. To endow authority upon the marginalized is a postmodern strategy that allows for the maximum degree of critical distance; hence, freshness of perception. Thus, the scope of the anti-hero's objective intelligence and ability to raise awareness is upgraded; so, he is the one who observes and criticizes, demystifying the illusions and the fake values that govern the life of the community, if not humanity at large; language, political "games" and power are the main phenomena that Grendel confronts. This paper is meant to incite the reader to have a new insight into the role of the anti-hero, a role that transcends the attributed status of the monster.

Keywords: anti-hero, Grendel, John Gardner, Menippean satire, postmodern novel

Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the character of the anti-hero and the role he/she performs in the literary work, a role which accentuates the critical spirit of the work and invites the reader to reconsider his own percepts upon his environment. This article revolves around the examination of John Gardner's novel *Grendel* from the perspective of menippean satire. To showcase the role of the anti-hero as critic, menippean satire is the most suitable approach that helps in highlighting the desired effects that the character of Grendel generates. The article seeks to project a certain face of the anti-hero, a figure that has the ability to observe and to comment. Language, political "games" and the questionable symptoms of power are the main phenomena that Grendel confronts. In his interrogative conduct, he demystifies the illusions and the fake values that govern the life of humans, which shows that the scope of his ability to raise awareness is upgraded, denoting an advanced degree of objective intelligence.

Grendel is an eponymic novel entitled after Grendel, the central character around whom the flow of events evolves. The community of the Danes considers him a monster that should be exterminated; while, on his part, Grendel attempts to be part of Hrothgar's people. The monster's discerning observation of the world of humans made of him a sharp critic of their way of life and way of thinking. At a given point, Grendel develops an admiration for the 'shaper' whom he considers a master in the art of words. The shaper is an old blind man who writes poetry in praise of the king; but, at the same time, Grendel despises the illusionary nature of his poetry. Grendel has a multitude of concerns for which he finds no answer;

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concerns relating to the mechanisms that rule the human world and the ambiguity of their truths. In his quest, he visits the dragon that exerts a great influence upon his development. Grendel's anti-heroic nature is a major issue in the novel, raising the question of the truth about heroism. He himself rejects any notion of heroism, especially the kind performed by Unferth, his antagonist and the figure that represents the conventional hero. Throughout the twelve years of Grendel's war against the Danes, he observes and exposes the defects that the humans are unaware of as their deceptive nature and the illusionary values they glorify.

Knowing that *Grendel* is a recount of sequence of events that are first presented in the epic poem *Beowulf* makes the work based on intertext. The fact that *Grendel* is a sort of writing of *Beowulf* from a different perspective goes with Linda Hutcheon's concept of intertextuality. Hutcheon argues in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) that " Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics is one mode of appropriating and reformulating – with significant change ...[that] reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it" (130). Gardner's work is a sort of incorporation of a textualized past in a postmodern text. In a sort of ironic parody, Gardner writes his work that is based on *Beowulf* in a new context, launching a process of revision.

Scholarship has so far discussed *Grendel* mainly from an existential nihilistic perspective. Barry Fawcett and Elizabeth Jones in *The Twelve Traps in John Gardner's Grendel* (1990), relate their analysis of the novel to the astrological signs that go along with the twelve chapters of the novel. They explain that "Gardner deploys the astrological significations in each chapter...by associating heroic ideals with sun, moon, planets and constellations, he gives them an archetypal, mythic and cosmic dimension" (640). In this analysis Grendel is pictured only as an existentialist through whom Gardner declaims "the impossibility of achieving Being-in-itself-for-itself" (644).

Far from the existential realm, Jennifer Page explains in "*Spinning a Skin: Speech and Monstrous Identity in John Gardner's Grendel*" that the juxtaposition that Grendel embodies makes of him an ambiguous creature. This "juxtaposition between physical horror (monstrosity) and verbal beauty (humanity) positions him as a chimerical figure" (145). The ability of Grendel to speak magnifies his monstrosity. To Page, "the monster's acquisition of human language does not allow him to join human society, but ironically distances him from humanity" (47); yet through language, Grendel understands better the mechanism of the human society and goes further in criticizing its deceitful nature through the shaper's poetry. In a further study of the novel, entitled *A Critical Look at John Gardner's Grendel* (1986), Michael Segedy attributes to Grendel the status of a nihilistic monster that has a pessimistic view of life. Segedy argues that Grendel "is a caricature of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical beliefs espoused by an appropriately anti-heroic figure" (110). The attribution of the Sartrean existentialism to Grendel makes him "engage in a game of hide and seek with the forces of darkness" (114). The essay demonstrates Gardner's attack on Sartre's philosophy that Grendel embodies. Such philosophy rejoices in the absurdity and ugliness of life, which for Gardner should be abandoned. Segedy declares that "Grendel is a satiric protest against Sartrean nihilism in contemporary literature and a declaration of the need of art to become, as in the past, a model art, an art that holds the ugly, evil and debased up to ridicule and praises the

beautiful good and just" (108). However, the limited space of this study does not allow for entering into a debate on Sartre's nihilism or his theory of "literature of engagement", though the latter actually fits in the scheme of the present discussion. The study seeks to manifest how Grendel's negativism is a sort of criticism of the human condition in the contemporary age and a call for an awakening.

By granting a voice, authoritative to some extent, to a monster that in the eyes of the community is illegitimate, a different outlook is allowed to surface. Marc Currie (1989) explains in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* that contemporary writers "particularly favor the identification of a particular, usually well-known intertext, in the form of a novel, often for the purpose of rewriting it, especially from a point of view that was marginalized in, or not represented by, the original" (3). Gardner, as a supporter of this tendency, gives the opportunity to the silenced and the marginalized to be voiced, understood and centralized. Through his anti-hero, the novel tackles crucial controversies. The story, narrated from Grendel's perspective, foregrounds a labyrinth of issues that are often neglected and repressed. It invites the reader to experience, along with Grendel, a different way of perceiving the 'essence' of things. Grendel's sensitivity exposes various questions and paradoxes in what can be described as deceptive, gloomy and pessimistic atmosphere. The latter is deceiving, for it has a positive role rather than a negative one. Such atmosphere aims at raising awareness and reconsidering the moral infra-structure of the already sealed communities.

Thus, the pick of the monster as first person point of view is a postmodern technique that Gardner utilizes as a metafictional artistic manipulation and a rejection of the realists' notion in their narratives of the all-knowing god voice. Gardner grants his anti-hero the gift of criticism, which makes of him a self-conscious creature that surpasses the consciousness of ordinary human beings. Metafiction and the anti-heroic status are deceptive in that they allude to negativity but in fact they aim at challenging the conventions held as unchangeable and flawless.

The choice of monster to inspect the human condition is a perfect case of menippean satire. Satire is an approach that aims at engendering a new and fresh perception of the mechanisms that surround the individual and the inadequacies of those mechanisms. Menippean satire, in particular, is a form of satire that tackles the ideas and the philosophies that control communities. Its attack is not on individuals but on their mental attitudes. The menippean satire focuses on rhetoric and the testing of philosophical ideas. Some critics describe classical menippean satire as "characterised by bombastic and often coarse attacks on the *philosophusgloriosus*, or learned crank" (Musgrave 2014, 2). They see that, it puts emphasis not only on literary and philosophical production, but also on the mind that produces them (Musgrave 2014, 4). By re-examining the established ideas, the individual is able to reconsider his values and principles. Menippean satire paves the way for the revision and reassessment of the codes which rule the people's lives and how individuals are mistaken and blinded by those values.

Menippean satire permeates various works of fiction to go beyond the conventional genre of realism. R.S. Dupree, in his forward to Eric McLuhan's *Cynic Satire* (2015) stresses the fact that various postmodern works of self-reflective fiction accord eminence to the menippean concern that concentrates on calling towards the re-examination of the foundations of the intellectual and historical milieu.

Metafictional texts are one type of these 'misfits' that depart from the realistic tradition. Such texts exemplify a serious self-reflexive art that attempts to disclose the illusion of the human world. Dupre explains further that awareness highlights the artificiality of the intellectual environment, which is employed to prevent any effort that tends to have access to the simplified understanding of humans and their world (xi). In this case, the world is made complex and chaotic due to the individual's intellectual artificiality that is philosophically useless and less beneficial to humans.

The instructive nature of satire encompasses an affinity with the anti-hero's cynicism for they question the human world, its institutions and culture. The role of the critic that the anti-hero performs requires from him to be detached from the common and conventional milieu. The menippist's will to awaken the somnambulist and the anti-hero's skeptical nature complete each other and generate a unified effect of enlightenment and revisionism. Grendel announces, "in the darkness, I alone see clear as day. While they squeal and screech and bump into each other" (Gardner 1971, 6). Unlike the Danes, he has the ability to observe and deconstruct the world of humans, spurred by his remoteness from the social realm.

In *Satire*, McLuhan (2015) makes clear that "the cynic spirit must attract the audience, engage it in the play and thus coerce it to retune itself" (208). His aim is to restore equilibrium to perception, a balance that can only be re-established by fighting illusion and intellectual artificiality. Satirists struggle to reinstate the individual's sense of proportion. The anti-hero and the cynic share the tendency to inspect and observe their entourage. I.G. Kidd defines the cynic in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as a "watchdog of mankind [that] barks at illusion, the 'surgeon' whose knife slices the cancer of cant from the minds of others. Cynics deliberately adopted shamelessly shocking extremes of speech and action to jolt the attention and illustrate their attack on convention" (1967, 285). The cynic spirit of the anti-hero is mainly what Gardner has endowed his monster's character with. The latter draws the attention of the reader and encourages him to distance himself from the world he lives in so he can perceive and scan it from an objective stand.

One of the well-known tactics of menippean satire is the inversion of scales. It allows the marginal to become centralized and enables the reader to have a fresh perception that is far from the familiar and accustomed. It corresponds with Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, which is the communal spirit of the carnival transformed into a literary form in order to parody official life, projecting a different façade of it. In Gardner's novel, Grendel is the cardinal aspect of subversion. He offers to the reader from an outside perspective an observation and a commentary on the humans and the world they are living in.

On the technical level, features that writers often manifest in their satirical work are humor, projection of contradictory elements, paradoxical scenes and conflicting presentation. Dorothy Coleman (1971) argues in *Rabelais: A Critical Study in Prose Fiction* that Cervantes and Rabelais use the element of parody in their respective works. Cervantes utilizes his characters to lead the reader towards the reality of the world, whereas Rabelais remodels the world so that it is entirely dissimilar from the reader's ordinary conception (229). The element of parody, abundant in self-reflective fiction, is a fundamental aspect that helps in identifying the traits of a given environment. Rita Grung (2010) asserts in *The Archetypal Antihero in Postmodern Fiction* that "the fictional pattern shows the antihero to be a child of

ironies, parodying man's quest for fulfillment and definition" (291). The menippists' mixture of various elements like verse and prose, sophisticated and low styles and subjects in literary works helps in creating a specific and a distinct decorum or form that is highly different from other works (McLuhan 2015,52). The fusion of such elements engages in defamiliarizing the ordinary and the usual so that the estranged individual would be able to perceive afresh his community.

The Exclusion of the Man-ape

Throughout the novel, Grendel demonstrates that he is a thoroughly menippean satirist who is defined as intellectually set at a higher level than the human mental workings in a Bakhtinian carnivalistic gesture. Bakhtin (1984) states that "menippean satire became one of the main carriers and channels for the carnival sense of the world in literature and remains so to the present day" (111). Grendel's unique quality is his ability to channel his thoughts and to comment on the world around him despite his anti-heroic conduct. In other words, Grendel's anti-heroic status is the aspect that enables him to produce insightful views that can be considered an "observation from an unusual perspective...which results in a radical change in the scale of the observed" (Bakhtin 1984, 116). Although he is excluded from being a member of the community of the Danes, he ironically becomes part of their heritage and part of their reality. Grendel declares, "the world resists me and I resist the world" (Gardner 1971, 18). The resistance that Grendel opts for is an interpretation of his will to stand against the fake universe of humans. For that, the process of inclusion in Grendel's case is not controlled by the Danes but imposed upon them since there is a violent and bloody coexistence between the two sides; he forces them to accept him as part of their reality through his resistance, which is a different sort of inclusion. Grendel states, "I come through trees and towns to the light of Hrothgar's meadhall. I am no stranger here. A respected guest. Eleven years now and going on twelve...sending the shock of my greetings inward...'Grendel' they squeak"(Gardner 1971, 5-6). He becomes the central burden that the community of Danes struggles to exclude from the realm of existence.

Grendel performs another reversal of human/animal hierarchy when he calls humans 'rats'. Such an act of renaming and classifying is one of the multiple significant ironies in the novel, throwing upon it a carnivalistic dimension; for Bakhtin asserts that in the carnivalistic scene, "what is suspended first of all is the hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror...everything resulting from the socio-hierarchical inequality or any other of inequality among people" (Bakhtin 1984, 123). Carnivalization can best be realized in a community with an obvious class division, social distances and restrictions, leading people to behave in animalistic ways masked by a dishonest rhetoric. The choice of rat is significant for the animal is a demonic archetype associated with disease and infection. This association with horror and disease reflects the community of the Danes that Grendel observes and through which we perceive the infrastructure of such a civilization; one based on violence, destruction and the urge for power and fame. Humans are rats infected with hypocrisy and the fake realities they have developed and adopted for themselves. The shaper's theorization of good and bad does not fuse with the Danes' aggressive nature. Such violence is a common feature that both the Danes and Grendel share, but what one needs to

highlight is that Grendel is honest and self-conscious about his nature as the “ridiculous monster crouched in the shadows, stinking of dead men” (Gardner 1971, 2), whereas the Danes pretend to be heroic, brave and civilized. This element of self-consciousness is a trait related to metafiction. *Grendel* as a novel and as character is highly metafictional for it projects in both cases a different outlook on life that is more conscious and more deeply scrutinized.

Another reason behind Grendel’s exclusion is his non-conformist nature when it comes to the socially constructed identity. The fact that Grendel has no intergroup belonging or social affiliation forces him to live in a state of isolation and extreme loneliness. The Danes reject him because they consider him a violent beast, but at the same time he rebuffs the non-questioning and naive nature of animals and disassociates himself from it by asking “I cannot bear to look. Why can’t these creatures discover a little dignity?” (Gardner1971, 1). Later on, Grendel mocks the human community rejecting the idea of belonging to it, since they are as naïve and delusional as animals. One more time he demonstrates his sharp consciousness about the world he is living in and the creatures that surround him. As an outsider, he observes and studies the human world and its constitutions without being involved. In this way, the anti-hero's isolation reinforces his mental activity and doubles his consciousness; so, he perceives beyond the superficiality that controls life around him.

A further argument that indicates the anti-hero's validity in the universe of humans is to visualize him as an incarnation of their buried and mystified sides. In the novel, the dragon describes Grendel as “mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain climber and the mountain” (Gardner 1971, 51). The expression of “man's condition” invokes the anti-heroic element that co-exists within our human nature. In other words, the dragon asserts the binary nature of man that embodies both goodness and evil. The monster of the Danes symbolizes the duality of the human being and the necessity of such duality in the persistence of existence; the anti-hero is the evil necessary for the continuity of human life. “Evil” here, refers mainly to what opposes the common notion of conformism and ordinariness; one which the Danes would probably apply because it captures their perception of the monster Grendel.

Grung (2010) maintains that the anti-hero tries “to mediate between bipolar claims” (291). If we go back to McLuhan’s argument that the cynic’s aim is to restore equilibrium to perception, one can further argue that the anti-hero’s presence constitutes balance between two opposites. He ruminates, “balance is everything...My enemies define themselves on me. As for myself I could finish them off in a single night...yet I hold back” (Gardner 1971, 65). Later on, he reverses the process of identity construction to attribute to himself the ability of constructing identities. He says about Hrothgar, “I made him what he is? What was he before? Nothing! A swollen headed raider, full of boasts and stupid jokes and mead. No more noble than Red Horse; ”and presumptuously he carries on “have I not the right to test my creation?” (Gardner 1971, 88). Grendel asserts his superiority over the heroic King Hrothgar by fully engaging in the process of creating his character. Without the anti-heroism of Grendel, Hrothgar and the Danes' reputation would have never existed or been heard of. This makes of Grendel an exceptional author in whom the identity of the Danes' community rests. Grendel and Hrothgar reverse this duality: “we are on our own again. Abandoned” (Gardner 1971, 107). Hrothgar and Grendel are left alone, facing each other, each

with his own thoughts and beliefs; like heroism and anti-heroism facing each other and demonstrating the mystical balance that contains and restrains the chaotic world of humans from the beginning of time: male and female, day and night, evil and good. Yet, what is crucial to their coexistence and what prevents complete degeneration is that fundamental principle of balance. This kind of balance enables Grendel to voice what has been marginalized about the principles and the laws that rule the Danes' community.

Grendel the Anti-heroic Satirist

Grendel's bravery rests in his mental ability to transgress the ordinariness of life and to put under scrutiny and to speak out against the system that rules the Danes' life. Through social exclusion and the process of investigation, Gardner's anti-hero succeeds in projecting this positive side, often overlooked: the strong mental capacity, through which certain types of anti-heroes mirror the incongruities that prevail in any given society. Loneliness in the case of Grendel is a sort of meditation on the human world. To push the argument further, one may say that Grendel is Gardner's avatar; he uses him to comment on the postmodern condition, through the miniature sample of the Danes community. Grendel's role of satirist dominates the novel for he comments on every aspect of the Danes' life and questions their values and principles.

In the following pages, the study investigates how Grendel revisits the concept of heroism and its various dimensions, directing it to be a carnivalistic move, and examines as well his critique of capitalism through the dragon's character. In addition to that, the section explores the dragon's symbolic capitalism through the advice that he suggests to Grendel. Bakhtin (1984) argues that "sometimes carnivalization lies buried at deeper levels and permits us to speak only of carnivalistic overtones to individual images and events" (134). Such carnivalistic hidden impulse presents the possibility for "a second world and a second life outside officialdom" (Bakhtin 1984, 6) to the reader, enabling him to have "an observation from some unusual point of view" (Bakhtin 1984, 116). It allows the contestation of the existing reality for it launches a process of examination of the prevailing ideas and the language through which they are transmitted. The inspection of language allows the exposure of its illusionary nature. It is the case concerning Grendel's reaction towards any heroic attempt or glorious titles that humans strive to acquire. He dismisses the idealistic notion of heroism that the shaper depicts in his elevated poetry and exposes the reality of political games.

Through Grendel, Gardner attempts to shed light on the heroic tradition and the invisible tissue that reveals its different motives. The unordinary behavior of Grendel and his depressing acts of killing elect him to be an anti-hero. McLuhan (2015) emphasizes that "cynics were called "dog-philosophers" because they snapped and snarled at folly and pretense, lived in the streets, emphasized the natural life, and so on, combining in various degrees bohemian indigence and antisocial individualism" (89). The cynic distances himself from the community to observe its deficiencies with an obsessive urge that makes his satire effectively objective: "Grendel the truth teacher, phantasm tester! It was what I would be from this day forward-my commitment, my character as long as I lived- and nothing alive or dead could change my mind!" (Gardner 1971, 78). By questioning every aspect of the Danes' life, the anti-hero calls the reader to

be cynical about his environment for there is a plethora of matters to be revisited. His mental power and his sharp critical mind demonstrate his superiority over humans who are mentally passive for they are only lazy consumers.

Though Grendel stands for the anti-heroic figure in the novel, he criticizes the concept of the hero and attempts to adjust it. The image that the anti-hero tries to paint is distant from the idealistic classical perception of the hero. The anti-hero of Gardner rejects the altruistic motives and the noble ends that heroes usually proclaim. Though Danes' monster exposes his disgust in a clear manner, he denies the possibility of any act of heroism in the real world but rather attributes it to the imaginary realm of poetry. He refers sarcastically to the fixed image portrayed of the hero "the joy of self-knowledge" stating that "being a hero [is to be a]-glory reaper, harvester of monsters (Gardner 1971, 59-60). The hero's image conforms to a tradition that the community applauds and values. Grendel dislocates this fixed image and deconstructs it so the reader can have a new stance upon its reality.

The strong desire and the will to murder the 'monster' Grendel is a manifestation of a deep natural thirst for bravery and heroism that resides in the inner side of humans. The need to kill Grendel is similar to Shelly's story, *Frankenstein* (1818), in which the creature is a target to be killed. Such thirst for killing is mingled with fear and horror of the monster, the abomination that threatens the authority of the leader and the reputation of the group. In the case of *Grendel*, the desire to kill the monster is not only meant to secure the community but to be heroic in a sense that history will retain the memory of those who achieve it. The act of killing would be turned into an epic story through which a certain community is glorified. To be more specific, Grendel perceives any heroic act as a pure selfish act that serves on a primary level the interest of the individual, namely to gain fame, wealth and the status of a warrior. The idea that consists of killing for the sake of being rewarded and respected has a dimension contradictory to the idealistic notion that humans uphold. It is one dimension because every individual act is not by necessity restricted to a sole motive but to various motives behind the central aim. Hence, securing the well-being of others is in fact an envelope that covers the other dimension of the act, the purely non-idealistic one, selfish and far from altruism. The best example that best portrays Grendel's inclination and the refutation of any heroic deed is Unferth, the humiliated hero.

The refusal of Grendel to fight against Unferth embodies a carnivalistic dimension that parodies the heroic status through granting the anti-hero superiority over the hero. McLuhan (2015) indicates that the aim of "menippean carnivalism is to refresh the reader's percepts and sensibilities" (44). By declining Unferth's fight, Grendel denies him the heroic attribute because from Grendel's perspective heroism is merely hallowed. Grendel, thus, as Bakhtin puts it, "debase[s] the hero and brings him down to earth, brings him close, humanizes him" (Bakhtin 1984, 133). The hero is no longer granted the majestic and noble treatment, and Grendel rebuffs the dreamy heroic notion of Unferth. In addition to that, the act of refusal is a rejection of the fake institution of heroism. Unferth's interest in reputation and fame preoccupies him "it will be sung, it will be sung year on year and age on age" (Gardner 1971, 61); however, such obsession makes his heroic actions invalid to Grendel, referring to the compensations that Unferth would receive: "the pleasant feeling of vast superiority, the easy success with women" (Gardner

1971, 59). In Grendel's dialogue with Unferth, he projects the inconsistency that individuals are often trapped in. The desire of Unferth to be famous in songs is rapidly refuted by Unferth himself when he states "no man above us will ever know whether Unferth died here or fled to the hills like a coward" (Gardner 1971, 62). Grendel highlights such contradictions that humans are unconscious and unaware of. Hutcheon (1988) explains that "what postmodern fiction does is to reverse that doubled process: it installs the power, but then contests it"(180). Gardner's anti-hero contests realities to highlight what has been un-criticized, and deconstruct the illusionary aspect of such reality.

The employment of paradoxical scenes also plays an important role in awakening the mind and granting a deep awareness, which coalesces with the fundamental aim of menippean satire. Paradox and menippean satire defy what can be called the 'accepted belief'. In Rosalie Collie's (1966) book *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, she highlights the importance of "oblique criticism of absolute judgment or absolute convention" (10). The choice of Unferth to kill himself rather than being insulted and defeated in front of his community mirrors the blindness that individuals suffer from. In this case, heroism becomes interlinked with suicide due to the fear of failure and dishonor. Such desperate act reveals the stupidity of human beings which is due to their blind conformity to the codes that the community legitimized. It turns out to be a quest with deadly connotations; Grendel's notification of the contradiction is an indirect call for reconsidering the codes that individuals over-burden themselves with. One of the least exposed illnesses in the novel, yet the most devastating in the contemporary age, is the lust for wealth embodied in capitalism. The later empowers certain individuals at the expense of whole factions of society. The reader is able to deduce this negative aspect from the observation that Grendel displays and the intriguing and illusive piece of advice that the Dragon offers him.

From a traditional perspective, dragons are legendary creatures that stand for horror, mystery and power. The dragon in the novel showcases the mental and physical strength that impresses Grendel and within the same time accentuates his worries. Gardner uses the dragon in the novel with the help of Grendel to portray the economic inadequacy of the materialistic spirit that is manifested in his hunger for gold. The dragon's relation to capitalism is deduced through the obsession with gold that surrounds him and his advice to Grendel, which is "to seek out gold and sit on it"(Gardner 1971, 52). Capitalists chase wealth in a selfish voracious manner; their sole interest is to have more successful deals that will enrich them more¹. Karl Marx (2007) in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* denounces this economic system by stating that "capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (163). The recommendation of the dragon goes along with the capitalist greed and hunger for the accumulation of wealth and the acquisition of profitable contracts. It is the case in the novel, King Hrothgar demonstrated during his rule, as reported by Grendel, a gigantic interest for wealth and prosperity at the expense of the other neighboring villages. The act of adopting tributes of treasure to be tributes of men proves the diminished value of the human being in an exploitative society as he becomes a servant, who is not far from the status of a slave, of a violent tyrant king. The tributes of men that Hrothgar collected from his neighbors were, according to Grendel "loaded like ants on a long march, pushed foot by foot and day by day around the march...pressing flat rocks into

soft ground...until...Hrothgar's whole realm was like a wobby, lopsided wheel with spokes of stone" (Gardner 1971, 26). In this case, servitude alludes to slavery that spares neither black nor white; it only revolves around acquiring power and wealth through the exploitation, not of animals but of the human beings themselves. Grendel illustrates how men grow to be intelligent creatures when matters revolve around wealth and prosperity, disregarding the violence and the destruction they cause.

The dragon invites Grendel to believe in his materialistic and capitalistic principle that centers on the individual's wealth and prosperity. According to the dragon, gold becomes the means through which the individual can define who he is. He states "know thyself, know how much you've got, and beware of strangers" (Gardner 1971, 51). Though Grendel is not concerned with wealth, he exhibits one of the major illnesses that the postmodern age has known that is the infectious materialistic spirit. The quote alludes to the changing perception of identity. The individual is not attributed an identity on the basis of who he is but on what he has. The dragon, a manipulative intelligent creature, uses words as means of deception when force is not required. The advice given by the dragon embodies a spirit of malice, greed and destruction. It is purely capitalistic for it promotes individualism and it links the identity of the individual to that capitalistic aspect which is money. Consequently, the identity of the postmodern man happens to be linked to an exterior factor that goes beyond the truth of being a human being. In relation to what the dragon selects to be his dictum, to be a human being who has opinions and true values is not sufficient to know who you are.

Besides the materialistic aspect that the identity of the individual is measured with, Grendel raises in a form of scenes the theme of treachery to comment on the fragility of blood ties and the hidden individual revolutionary instinct. These scenes that revolve around Hrothulf and the old man, in chapter eight, act as an analysis within Grendel's bigger analytical and descriptive frame of the human world and its violent mechanism. The anti-hero reveals the story of Hrothulf and the deceptive world of politics. He illustrates Hrothulf's discontent with the king's rule and the policies he undertakes. The intentions of Hrothulf and his political views may show him to be smart and self-aware, but at the same time, his consideration of plotting for an uprising against his uncle betrays his fierce desire for power that poisons the human mind. Grendel demonstrates the likeness of humans and the monster he is supposed to be in that both sides use violence. The dialogue that Grendel reports to the reader proves the violent nature of humans. In a descriptive method, Grendel highlights the theory of violence of human beings, summarizing it into one sentence by Hrothulf "men's violence was chained to good [i.e., the king]: legitimate force that chops the bread-thief's neck and wipes its ax" (Gardner 1971, 82). Hrothulf questions the fake justice that is performed by the king, stating: "why does the bread-thief die and the murdering thane escape by a sleight by the costliest of advocates?" (Gardner 1971, 82). By exposing the justice system that the Danes glorify, Grendel as a satirist gives to the reader the primary material for the inspection of the system's unfairness that is built on violence. Red Horse and Hrothulf tackle the nature of politics as extremely deceitful and immoral. When referring to revolution, Red Horse defines it as a new human wave that uprises violently against the old regime. He states:

What is the state in a time of domestic or foreign crisis? What is the state when the ships are down? The answer is obvious and clear! Oh yes! If a few men quit work, the police move in. If the borders are threatened, the army rolls out. Public force is the life and the soul of every state, not merely army and police but prisons, judges, tax collectors, every conceivable trick of coercive repression. The state is an organization of violence, a monopoly in what it is pleased to call *legitimate* violence. Revolution, my dear prince, is not the substitution of immoral for moral, or of illegitimate for legitimate violence; it is simply the pitting of power against power, where the issue is freedom for winners and enslavement for the rest. (Gardner 1971, 85-86)

In other words, revolution is only a new attempt for a new faction of humans to rule and prosper at the expense of others. It is a game that provides an alternative cover for the new leading faction, as Red Horse argues accurately. Through these scenes and dialogues, Grendel comments on the postmodern world in which powerful nations exterminate other nations under the pretext of purification from terrorism, the ultimate threat that humanity has come to fear. To put it schematically, Grendel announces to the reader the closest synonym of power that is, violence. The two are inseparable since they come together and complete each other; violence turns to be a fundamental aspect in the lives of humans, taking various forms and legitimized by numerous illusionary and fake pretexts. For instance, language constitutes one of the most important means through which people are bewitched and mistakenly oriented.

Illusion of Language

It is important to understand the status of Grendel who is attributed the character of the monster. In his case, the word "monster" is mainly related to his killings and violent behavior towards humans. Despite his massive urge for blood, he has qualities that enable his classification as human. The act of thinking and the act of conversing which are undeniably human traits make of him a creature not different from man on the mental level. Language acts as a fundamental bridge that escorts man from "animal kingdom to human kingdom". In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben (2004) states, "if [language] is taken away, the difference between man and animal vanishes" (36). This is how the anti-hero perceives himself, declaring: "I found I understand them: it was my own language, but spoken in a strange way" (Gardner 1971, 15). Besides that, language plays an important role in the transmission of the thoughtful views that Grendel often projects. According to Bakhtin (1984), conversation and dialogue in particular give the modern menippean text a polyphonic Socratic quality (122). Conversation and dialogues are fundamental elements that echo the multiplicity of opinions and views. Gardner grants Grendel the right to speak out and comment on his society through language. The fact that Gardner gives Grendel, the monster, the ability of speech, which is an aspect that serves the polyphonic tendency of the novel, paves the way for the emergence of a different voice with a particular outlook on life.

The mixture of verse and prose and low and high style is employed to demystify the nature of language. The pervasive play, which menippists prefer, aims at reinforcing the contravention of the steady traditional decorum. Concerning styles, the language and the style that the shaper opts for in his poetry is

considered to be sublime. The shaper is an elevated individual in the community of the Danes that Grendel despises and criticizes. Such well-arranged language and carefully selected words manipulate the audience, the Danes. To be more precise, the Danes are bewitched by the polished words of the shaper, words that are full of illusions and fake glorification. In spite of Grendel's feeling of bewilderment towards the shaper's art, he launches an attack on the ideology that these poems and songs embody. He exposes the power of words, when well attuned and selected, that bewitches men and masks the controversies in their world. Grendel as a menippean cynic satirist refutes the idealistic rhetoric of the shaper. The best example that proves the illusionary preaching of the shaper is Unferth's condition. Grendel analytically describes Unferth:

I knew, for one, that the brother-killer had put on the shaper's idea of the hero like a merry mask, had seen it torn away, and was now reduced to what he was: a thinking animal stripped naked of former illusions, stubbornly living on, ashamed and meaningless, because killing himself would be, like his life, unheroic. It was a paradox nothing could resolve but a murderous snicker. (Gardner 1971, 74)

He denounces the shaper's illusionary words, highlighting the effect of deception on the individual when he fails at conforming to certain codes that the community holds to and values. The shaper draws with his words a beautiful idealistic and artistic image of the hero. By painting such an image, the shaper succeeds in establishing a fixed definition of heroism along with its features of bravery, glory, and fame. This notion of heroism which is excessively glorified and praised becomes the emblem that the Danes celebrate and cling to. Through such kind of manipulation of words, people are fooled and mesmerized with beliefs and ideas that are constructed for them and not constructed and well inspected by them.

Grendel's denunciation of the shaper's art is an attack on the way media is manipulated as public deceptive machinery. The language used by such institutions is highly delusional for it prevents people from reaching the hidden ugly reality. Grendel goes further in the analysis that he has made of the poetic texts; he rejects the idea of helping people because it is a pure act of selfishness. The ideas that he preaches promote more the king's ideology and the stability of his regime. When the shaper brainwashes the Danes through his songs, the poet gains wealth and women's attraction by well selecting words that cast a spell on his audience. He produces this form of art only to secure his position among the king's closest men and gain his approval. These songs and poems glorify the powerful and help to maintain his authority. Both are believed to be a source of knowledge. However, they are means through which a certain faction secures wealth, power and stability.

The careful selection of the most emotionally charged words manifests the shaper's mastery of the verbal art, creating a charming musicality. Though the poetic language has its own magic and impact on Grendel, he overturns the idea of poetry as a fine form of art and attributes to it the traits of fakeness and illusion since it is far from being straightforward. Grendel confesses, "I too crept away my mind as whim in ringing phrases, magnificent, golden and all of them, incredibly, lies" (Gardner 1971, 29). He invalidates the superiority and the authority of poetry in the literary field because it is no more the age of poems that narrate epic stories. Grendel affirms his postmodern tendency in perceiving the world of humans by opposing the old tradition of epic poetry, bringing Bakhtin to the discussion. Bakhtin (1981)

explains in *Dialogic Imagination Four Essays* that " [the novel is] a world where there is no first word (no ideal word), and the final word has not yet been spoken" (30). Poetry becomes only a subgenre that writers employ to demonstrate the diversity that prose can embody and to break the pace and violate the ordinary decorum. That is to say, the implementation of poetry in the body of the novel creates a discontinuity that menippean satirists utilize so they would allow the reader to have a break up with the routine that life imposes; in the meantime, the discontinuity allows the reader, through the analysis that the anti-hero provides, to refresh that routine.

Language has been seen as a crucial manipulative factor that contributes tremendously in the game of power since Plato. People use language to assert their ideologies and mystify truths. It is no more simply a means of communication; it is a political ideological tool that guides people and imposes on them certain viewpoints. Gardner fuses poetry with prose in his narration to showcase and demystify the illusion that language creates, when manipulated by elevated people like the shaper. Such linguistic manipulation is the source of human enslavement to a certain set of mechanism. When perceived from an exterior perspective, language in use turns to be delusional and contradictory in terms of the preached values and principles. In other words, *Grendel* exposes the important role of language in terms of handling peoples' beliefs and ideologies.

Conclusion

The anti-hero alludes to various contradictory principles that human civilization embraces and praises. Both anti-hero and menippean satire share the element of insightful commentary, as they project to the reader a different outlook on the human world. Their projection is generated by an unusual point of view that is distant from the public consensus. For that, Gardner's anti-hero acts as a menippean satirist whose cynical and skeptical nature allows him to launch a process of inspection and revision to the human world with its constitutions and human relationships. This revisionism which satirists adopt goes in parallel with the postmodern anti-heroic dimension. It tends to reveal a different façade of reality that is far from illusions and fake values, through the employment of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. *Grendel* condemns the illusionary nature of language and the deceptive reality it generates. He hints at capitalism through the use of the dragon and his greed for wealth, perfectly encapsulating the materialistic spirit of capitalism. A further aspect that *Grendel* tackles is the violent mechanism of the modern world. Violence constitutes the fundamental tool for equally acquiring power and maintaining it. By exposing the fact that the principle of violence controls the human world, *Grendel* reverses the notion of idealism that human civilization hypocritically praises and supposedly adopts; meanwhile, he proves that the anti-hero is not simply a dark and evil figure that aims for destruction and bloodshed. In sum, the paper aims at highlighting an unusual image of the anti-hero, an image that is different from that of a monster. The anti-hero may have a didactic role that serves as an awakening call for humans to reconsider their condition.

اللابطل كناقذ في رواية (جرندل) لجون جاردرنر

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى النظر في رواية "جرندل" للكاتب الأميركي جون جاردرنر الصادرة عام ١٩٧١ من منظور النقد "المينيبي" الساخر، إذ تُوظف شخصية اللابطل جرندل المسخ، لتعبّر عن الصوت الناقد للمؤلف الذي يدعو القارئ إلى مراجعة عالمه. يشكّل منح مثل هذه السلطة إلى شخصية مهمشة استراتيجية ما بعد حدثية تهدف إلى إيجاد مسافة كافية يتحقّق للناقد من خلالها جِدّة الرؤية. وبذلك يتسع مدى الذكاء الموضوعي للابطل وقدرته على بثّ الوعي؛ فهو الذي يلاحظ وينتقد ويكشف الأوهام والقيم الزائفة التي تحكم حياة المجتمع، بل حياة الإنسانية عامة. وأهمّ الظواهر التي يقوم جرندل بمواجهتها هي في اللغة والأعيب السياسة والقوة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللابطل، الناقد المينيبي، جرندل، الرواية ما بعد الحدثية.

End Note:

*The idea of connecting dragons with Capitalism corresponds with a recent BBC program, The Dragon's Den (2005-), in which five rich capitalist 'Dragons' listen to entrepreneurs with business projects. The most important thing to be pinpointed is that the show comprises an enormous imbalance of power. The idea is that the rich capitalist invests a small amount of money in troubled or start-up companies, to help and breathe life into them, but within the same time he seizes as much percentage of the company as he can.

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