Good and evil in the Germanic Middle Ages
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Reflections on the existence and extent of evil trace their roots back to antiquity. It was the Platonists, in particular, who attempted to describe the nature of evil and to find its origin. Famous is the Platonic passage from the Theaetetetus in which Socrates states: «[m]a non è possibile, Teodoro, che i mali scompaiano – perché è necessario che ci sia sempre qualcosa di opposto al bene – e non è possibile che essi risiedano presso gli dèi; si aggirano invece necessariamente intorno alla natura mortale e a questo luogo».[1] In this and other passages Plato argues that all good can be traced back to God, whereas the evils in the world would depend on an original condition.[2] Observations around the concepts of good and evil continue well beyond Plato and the classical age, arousing the interest, in the Middle Ages, of figures such as Gregory the Great, Venerable Bede, and Alcuin. The idea of good and evil, however, was present not only in philosophical thought, but also in the everyday life of every individual.

Germanic vernacular texts are often steeped in good and evil, particularly those of a Christian nature. Indeed, the introduction of Christianity resulted in the confinement of pagan gods to 'idols'.[3] Here these two opposites are personified in demonic and divine figures that sometimes clash, often over the fate of a soul, or sins on the one hand and the fulfillment of God's will, as good Christians, on the other.

In religious texts (both in verse and prose) the fight between good and evil is often exemplified in the Genesis episode, in which the devil tempts Adam and Eve; here the reference is to the fall of the rebel angel Lucifer, an emblematic figure of the religious tradition, which often appears in Germanic literatures. In the ms Oxford Bodleian Library Junius 11, for example, the fight between God and Evil is illustrated through Germanic eyes, with the purpose to show that faith in God will be rewarded at the expense of those who, on the other hand, have betrayed him.[4]

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[1] Ferrari, Franco (ed). (2011). *Platone: Teeteto*, Milano, Rizzoli, 363.

[2] See ibid., p. 362-363, footnote 201.

[3] See Battista, Simonetta. (2006). "Blámenn, djöflar and Other Representations of Evil in Old Norse Translation Literature". In *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th–12th August, 2006*, 113-122.

[4] See Ramazzina, Elisa. (2016). "The Old English Genesis and Milton's Paradise Lost: The Characterisation of Satan." In *L'analisi linguistica e letteraria* Vol. 24/2, 89-118.

In the Germanic tradition, in particular in the Anglo-Saxon one, reified representations of evil formed an integral component of mythological narrative, [5] especially in hagiographical texts, but also in homiletic ones. The interest focuses on the fight between good and evil and on the coming of the Antichrist as a possible personification of Evil, which can have different denominations (Lucifer, Satan, etc.). In the German area, as well as in the Anglo-Saxon one, the opposition between good and evil finds one of its greatest expressions in eschatological texts, in the descriptions of the pains of hell and the joys of paradise, in the separation between those who will have access to the kingdom of heaven and those who, on the other hand, having not atoned for their sins, are destined to hell. Even Norse literature is not lacking in such examples: there are several stories, in hagiographic sagas, of apostles and saints who have to face evil spirits in order to attain holiness. Well-known is the story of King Óláfr, who finds himself facing the devil in the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.

In the legal texts of the Germanic tradition, the concept of evil often translates into moral damage, e.g., to the affected party's honour,[6] or physical damage, e.g., bodily harm and murder,[7] both compensated with a sum of money of varying degree depending on the crime committed.[8] On the other hand, the concept of good can be embodied by an esteemed person, considered reputable, distinguished, and/or of high rank.[9]

As for the medical field, the fight between good and evil takes a more tangible form, since both mental and physical disease and its counter-remedies are often personified by malicious entities on the one hand and benign entities on the other, more often than not of a religious nature,[10] in a true battle for the patient's survival. This genre includes blessings, amulets engraved with formulas and names of saints, charms, and remedies.

The concepts of good and evil are expressed, from a lexical point of view, in different ways in different Germanic languages and at the same time they are declined in different forms depending on linguistic and literary traditions. Moving from these theoretical backgrounds, we encourage prospective participants to submit proposals which deal with the theme from a literary, philological, linguistic and/or historical perspective.

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[5] See Dendle, Peter J. (2001). *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 4.

[6] See Gilbert, Kate, Stephen D. White (eds). (2018). *Emotion, Violence, Vengeance and Law in the Middle Ages*. Leiden/Boston/Köln, Brill.

[7] See Nijdam, Han. (2008). *Lichaam, eer en recht in middeleeuws Friesland: Een studie naar de Oudfriese boeteregisters*, Hilversum, Uitgeverij Verloren.

[8] See Bothe, Lukas, Stefan Esders, Han Nijdam. (2021). *Wergild, Compensation and Penance: The Monetary Logic of Early Medieval Conflict Resolution*, Leiden, Brill.

[9] See Keyser, Rudolph, Peter A. Munch. (1846-1895). *Norges Love seldre end Kong Magnus Håkonssons Regjerings Tiltrsedelse i 1262*, Vol. 1-4, Christiania, Gröndahl.

[10] See Olsan, Lea T. (2003). "Charms and prayers in Medieval medical theory and practice." In *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 6/3, 343-366. For the Old Norse area, see Larsen, Henning (ed). (1931). *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany: MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43 with Supplement from MS Trinity College (Dublin) L-2-27*. Oslo, Dybwad.

SUBMISSION RULES

The call is open to PhD students and PhDs (who obtained the title from 30th April 2022 onward) in Germanic Philology and Linguistics.

In order to apply, please send an abstract of maximum 1000 characters (including spaces), and a short bibliography to Giulia D'Agostino at the e-mail address giulia.dagostino@univr.it no later than January 30th, 2023 (23:59 CET).

The acceptance of the proposals will be notified via the official e-mail address of the event, i.e., phdconference.aifg2023@gmail.com no later than March 15th, 2023.

Each speaker will be granted 20 minutes for their talk, followed by 10 minutes for discussion.

Following the event, the publication of the proceedings will be discussed.

Working languages: Italian, English, German.

Scientific committee: Mariateresa Caggiano, Dario Capelli, Martina Giarda, Ruben Gavilli, Giuliano Marmora, Giovanni Nichetti, Alessandro Zironi.

Organizing committee: Laura Bruno, Giulia D'Agostino, Federica Di Giuseppe, Giulia Fabbris, Lorenzo Ferroni, Stefano Ghiroldi, Chiara Mulazzani, Lidia Francesca Oliva, Paola Peratello, Laura Poggesi.