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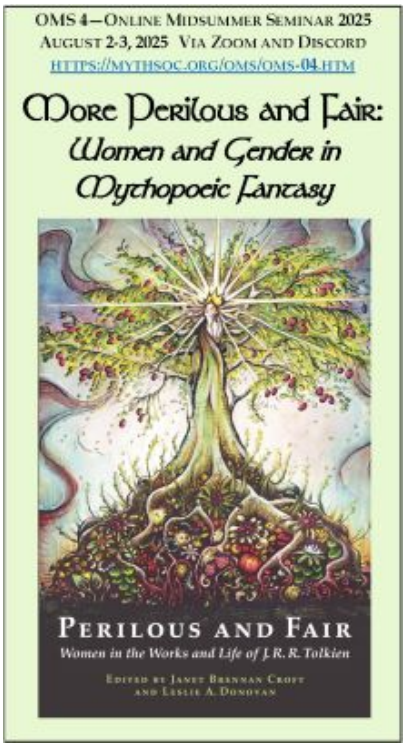

"The Evil Side of Heroic Life": Monsters and Heroes in *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*

Abstract

Tolkien scholars have long studied the many connections between *Beowulf* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. This essay explores the novel's representation of heroism and monstrousness and the ideal of kingship in relation to the Old English poem. Parallel descriptions between heroes and monsters illustrate that neither Beowulf nor Thorin is immune to monstrousness, but analyzing their actions in light of Hrothgar's advice to Beowulf illustrates that both characters distinguish themselves as great kings and heroes. Moreover, how these characters resist evil varies greatly and reveals a core distinction between the Beowulfian and Tolkienian hero, and even highlights the importance of hope in Tolkien's works and his emphasis on what he termed *eucatastrophe*, rather than the elegiac tone of *Beowulf*.

Additional Keywords

Monsters; Heroes

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J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, just like the Old English poem *Beowulf*, is ultimately a story concerned with good versus evil, but the blurring of the distinctions between monsters and heroes makes this claim infinitely more complex. Concerning the connection between the two texts, Bonniejean Christensen argues that *The Hobbit* is a retelling which "denies the Anglo-Saxon belief that within Time every man is destroyed by evil … [and] affirms the Christian belief that man can successfully withstand the dragon" (Christensen 4). While Christensen's argument is certainly a compelling one, much remains to be said, particularly concerning the distinctions between the Beowulfian and Tolkienian hero. Although the poem marks Beowulf as the hero, parallel descriptions bring him physically and psychologically closer to the monsters, thereby complicating concepts of heroism and monstrosity.

For Tolkien, the Beowulf dragon symbolizes exactly this concept, "the evil side of heroic life" (Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" ["Monsters"] 17). In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien adapts the parallels between Beowulf and the monsters, particularly the dragon, in the relationship between Thorin Oakenshield and the dragon Smaug. Using Hrothgar's advice to Beowulf as a central means of defining the concept of monstrosity in the poem, Beowulf appears as a good king but also as a hero because he is primarily motivated, not by pride, but by the need to protect his people. Thorin also embodies the Anglo-Saxon heroic ideal as presented in *Beowulf* as he strives to protect his people. The main difference between these two heroes is that while Beowulf never succumbs to the evils that mark his enemies as monsters, Thorin momentarily succumbs to 'dragon-sickness'[1] when he begins to value hoarding his treasure above protecting his people, thereby embodying the characteristics that define Smaug as a monster. Through Thorin, Tolkien delineates a new type of hero, one that is not defined by a supernatural ability to singlehandedly defeat his enemies but

[1] Although Tolkien uses the term "dragon-sickness" only once in *The Hobbit* to refer to the Master of Laketown, the term is highly useful and revealing since Thorin becomes blinded by dragon-like greed (*Hobbit* XIX.351).

by a capacity to triumph over an internal enemy.[2] What marks Thorin as a hero is not that he is strong enough to withstand the evils that seek to usurp him, but that he can eventually overcome them when it seems they defeated him, offering a *eucatastrophic*[3] moment. As Elrond declares at the Council of Elrond, "nothing is evil in the beginning," and nothing which is evil is doomed to remain as such (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* [*LotR*] II.2.267).

In *Beowulf*, a king's primary duty is to protect his people, and Hrothgar uses Heremod's tale to illustrate that a king abandoning his duties of protection is a genuine danger:

> brēat bolgenmōd bēodgenēatas
> eaxlgesteallan oþ þæt hē āna hwearf
> mǣre þēoden mondrēamum from (1713-15)
>
> [Enraged, he cut down his table-companions, comrades, until he turned away alone from the joys of men, that renowned prince][4]
>
> nallas bēagas geaf
> Denum æfter dōme, drēamlēas gebād
> þæt hē þæs gewinnes weorc þrōwade
> lēodbealo longsum. (1719-22)
>
> [he gave no rings to the Danes for their honor, he remained joyless so that he suffered the pain of that strife, a long-lasting harm to his people]

The mead-hall is a symbol of the mutual fulfillment of the duty between a lord and his retainers. John M. Hill determines that "fratricidal destruction and treachery within the hall, and lawless, evil feud between peoples" are the two crimes that constitute monstrousness in the poem (117). When Grendel and Grendel's mother attack Heorot, and subsequently, when the dragon burns down Beowulf's mead-hall, they threaten the order of society by disturbing a lord's protection. Hrothgar's advice encapsulates Hill's argument because it associates Heremod's crimes with Grendel's attacks. Lords are expected to reward their retainers.[5] Thus, when Heremod fails to give rings to his

[2] While Thorin is not the only character that can be defined as such a hero, Tolkien portrays various types of heroes. Therefore, to avoid generalizations, the conclusions drawn here are concerned with Thorin, not with the Tolkienian hero in general.

[3] The term *eucatastrophe* first appears in Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories," where he defines it as "the consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending; or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)" (153).

[4] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[5] This role is encapsulated in the term *bēaggyfa*, meaning ring-giver or lord.

"bēodgenēatas" and slaughters them, he neglects his role both as gift giver and as protector (1713-5). The poet's use of the word "bēodgenēatas" [*table*-companions] is highly significant because it reminds readers that Heremod commits his crimes within his mead-hall, which is supposed to stand as a symbol of his protection. Grendel's attacks are also committed inside a hall. Moreover, the poet describes Heremod turning from the joys of men, which recalls Grendel being "drēame bedǣled" [deprived of joy] (1275, 1715). If Grendel is a monster because of those actions, so too is Heremod. Kings are not immune to monstrosity.

The parallels between the monsters and Beowulf illustrate that he could potentially be in danger of a similar fate. When Tolkien asserts that the Beowulf dragon is a personification of "the evil side of heroic life," he echoes the purpose of Hrothgar's warning to Beowulf: that heroes are not immune to evil ("Monsters" 17). To illustrate this potential danger, the poet often deploys the same words to refer to Beowulf at one instant and Grendel at another. Although Grendel is a "mānscaða" [wicked ravager] as he approaches Heorot, he is also "rinc sīðian" [the warrior journeying] (712, 720). The sleeping thanes are referred to as warriors in the same scene, but it is Beowulf who is most strongly associated with such an attribute (703). From his first appearance, he is characterized as a warrior:

> se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest
> on þǣm dæge þysses līfes
> æþele ond ēacen. (196-98)
>
> [he was of mankind the strongest of might on that day of this life, noble and mighty.]

The superlative form of *strang* marks Beowulf as one whose abilities exceed those of his kin. He is not just any warrior; he is the hero of heroes. As the poem progresses, Beowulf comes to embody the ideals of his society, which is already suggested in the summarizing of his character as "æþele ond ēacen" [noble and mighty]. However, at this point in the poem, what makes him stand out is his exceptional physical strength, but this is also a characteristic that brings him closer to Grendel. Beowulf has the strength of thirty men, making him equal to Grendel so that the two become associated together in the reader's mind (122-3, 379-80). Converging attributes marking Beowulf as a hero with those marking his enemies as monsters complicate notions of heroism. As Andy Orchard asserts, of all the monsters in the poem, Grendel is the one who is "most consistently depicted in human terms" (30). Despite being a monster, Grendel is not entirely different from Beowulf and humans in general. Such a connection

is attested to in his status as a descendant of Cain.[6] He is also, as Tolkien notes, referred to using "names applicable to ordinary men, as *wer*, *rinc*, *guma*, *maga*" ("Monsters" 34). All of these parallels culminate in the fight between Beowulf and Grendel: "Yrre wæron bēgen / rēþe renweardas" [Angry were both the fierce hall-guardians] (769-70). Anger fuels Beowulf's heroism and Grendel's onslaught, as well as Heremod's kinslaying (lines 709, 1575, 1713). Here, the connection between the two adversaries is more apparent than ever before as they become syntactically united. Beowulf and Grendel have become indistinguishable.

During the fight with the dragon, the poet's use of the term *aglæca* further underlines Beowulf's connection to the realm of the monstrous. Klaeber glosses the term as 'monster,' 'wretch,' 'demon,' or 'fiend' when it applies to the monsters, but as 'warrior' or 'hero' when speaking of Beowulf (Klaeber 298). The word has also been translated as 'miserable being,' 'fierce combatant,' and 'adversary' (Toller 29; Mitchell and Robinson 241). Needless to say, the word is highly ambiguous.[7] The poet repeatedly deploys *aglæca* to describe the monsters, but significantly, the term is also used to refer to Beowulf. For example, during the fight with the dragon, *aglæca* unites Beowulf and the dragon: "Næs ðā long tō ðon / Þæt ðā āglæcean hȳ eft gemētton" [it was not long until the adversaries met each other again] (2591-2). Just as Beowulf and Grendel become indistinguishable during their combat, there is no distinction between Beowulf and the dragon. Thus, even if one chooses to translate *aglæca* as 'monster,' the term cannot be used to define a monster in opposition to a hero. As Melinda Menzer asserts, *aglæca* does not distinguish "man from monster, human from inhuman"; the word actually underlines the connection between monsters and heroes (Menzer 5). Significantly, Beowulf's stand against the dragon is, on one level, an act to ensure the protection of his people, which, as mentioned above, is his duty as king. In fulfilling that duty, Beowulf should prove himself as a good king and distinguish himself from monsters such as the dragon and Heremod. Instead, however, no matter the precise connotation of *aglæca*, the term underlines Beowulf's connection with the dragon, revealing the significance of Hrothgar's advice. That is, that Beowulf is not immune to monstrosity.

[6] Since Cain is the son of Adam and Eve, Grendel, as his descendant, is distantly connected to humans.

[7] Andy Orchard offers a useful overview of the etymology of aglæca, proposing that the term might derive in part from the "Gothic cognate *agis* ('terror,' 'fright'), the Old High German *egiso*, the Old English *ege* and *egesa* ('awe,' 'terror), and the Old English *lacan* ('to move quickly')." He suggests that the word could thus also be translated as 'the awe-inspiring one' or 'the formidable one,' pointing to even greater ambiguity inherent to the term (33).

Characteristics depicting Grendel's mother and the dragon as rulers emphasize the danger of kings becoming agents of evil and destruction rather than protection. Grendel's mother is introduced as "ides āglǣcwīf," which Mitchell and Robinson gloss as "warrior-woman" (1259). However, as several critics have pointed out, *ides* might also mean "lady" (Hennequin 515; Trilling 6). Following this suggestion, Grendel's mother is a ruler in her own right, a status that is also suggested by her ruling her mere for fifty years before suffering at the hands of an unwelcome guest, exactly like Beowulf and Hrothgar (1497-8). Even her dwelling, described as a "hrōfsele" [roofed hall], albeit a "nīðsele" [hostile hall], likens her to the two kings (1515, 1513). Moreover, like Heorot, it is decorated with weapons (1557). The dragon is also a ruler as his hoard is described as "eorðsele" [earth-hall], and even "dryhtsele" [splendid hall], which is also used to describe Heorot (2515, 2320, 485, 767). These parallels further liken the monsters to Hrothgar and Beowulf, underlining the danger Hrothgar warns Beowulf about. Hrothgar recognizes that Beowulf has the potential to be a great king, but he also understands that if Beowulf is not careful, he might fall prey to the evils that corrupted Heremod. Depicting the monsters as rulers only reinforces this danger. Beowulf is not just fighting against any monsters; he is fighting against the evil that kings can fall prey to, and that will undoubtedly corrupt him if he does not heed Hrothgar's advice.

Similarly, in *The Hobbit*, Thorin and Smaug are connected through their identities as kings under the mountain. When Smaug concludes that Bilbo received help from the people of Laketown, he rises to attack them and proclaims, "they shall see me and remember who is the real King under the Mountain" (*Hobbit* XII.270). Both Smaug and Thorin claim to be the King under the Mountain, a dispute which Smaug alludes to when he claims to be the "real" king. Such a connection between them is not merely one of the narrator's interjections; it is embedded in their respective understanding of their own identities. The title of King under the Mountain even leads to confusion. As the people of Laketown begin to perceive the glow of Smaug's fire, one man suggests it might be the work of the King under the Mountain, to which another man replies, "which king?" (*Hobbit* XIV.285-6). Like Beowulf and Grendel during their fight (769-70), Smaug and Thorin become indistinguishable. Moreover, Thorin and Smaug, like Beowulf and the dragon, occupy different, seemingly oppositional roles; one is a monster who disturbs the peace in the mead-hall or mountain whereas the other is meant to protect his people against said monster. Nevertheless, even as Beowulf and Thorin stand against their adversaries, the distinctions between them become increasingly blurred. As mentioned above, the term *aglæca*, which the poet once uses to simultaneously refer to Beowulf and the dragon, underlines the connection between the two adversaries even as they confront each other. Similarly, with the title of King

under the Mountain, Tolkien emphasizes the connection between Thorin and Smaug even though they are antagonists competing for the mountain.

Even the mountain itself becomes a symbol of Thorin and Smaug's connected identities. As mentioned above, the dragon's hoard in *Beowulf* is described as a hall, which likens it to Heorot and Beowulf's mead-hall (2515, 485, 767, 2320). In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien brings this connection one step further. Thorin's hall *is* Smaug's hoard. Erebor thus becomes a contested territory which the two kings claim for themselves. At one instant, the mountain is described as Smaug's "stolen hall," thereby implying that it is the rightful property of the Dwarves (*Hobbit* XII.250). However, it is also referred to simply as "[Smaug's] lair" (XII.269). The ownership of the treasure is just as disputed. Initially, the treasure is the property of the Dwarves, but Thorin's Company is also described as "thieves" after Bilbo takes a cup from the hoard (XII.250, 252).[8] The question of the treasure will be addressed in greater depth later in this essay. For now, suffice it to say that Tolkien depicts the theft of the cup from the dragon's perspective to present another point of connection between Smaug and Thorin. Both identify as the rightful owner of the mountain and the treasure and view the other as the thief. There are two kings under the mountain.

Beyond their shared title, Thorin and Smaug are both proud, a characteristic that is fatal for the dragon. Beowulf boasts of his monster-slaying skills in Heorot and then proves himself by defeating not one but two monsters no one else could defeat. Such accomplishments would surely incite "prideful thoughts," which would be perfectly acceptable from Beowulf the warrior, but not from Beowulf the king, as Hrothgar's advice reveals (1760). Similarly, Tolkien's narrator and various characters recognize that pride is a Dwarvish characteristic. Thorin, especially, is said to be "very haughty" and is the only one of his companions who does not offer his "service" to Bilbo (*Hobbit* I.14). It is clear, then, that Thorin assumes his position as a king and expects to be treated as such. While it is not inherently wrong that he expects to be treated according to his stature, it does bring him closer to Smaug, who also thinks quite highly of himself:

> The King under the Mountain is dead and where are his kin that dare seek revenge? Girion Lord of Dale is dead, and I have eaten his people like a wolf among sheep, and where are his sons' sons that dare approach me? I kill where I wish and none dare resist. Then I was but young and tender. Now I am old and strong, strong, Thief in the Shadows! (*Hobbit* XII.262)

[8] This passage is also strikingly similar to the theft of the cup occurring after the Lament of the Last Survivor in *Beowulf*. Christensen examines this particular connection, stating that Tolkien expands on this episode so that it becomes a whole chapter (Christensen 6).

Smaug boasts about eliminating his enemies and is proud of his ability to instill fear in the hearts of Dwarves and men. The repetition of "dare" suggests that he sees the Dwarves' hopes to reclaim their homeland and defeat him as utterly foolish. For Smaug, the possibility that Thorin's Company might be a threat to him is nonexistent. Even though he acknowledges that he is older than he was, he is not much wiser as he believes himself to be indestructible. Of course, Smaug probably is larger and stronger after feasting on Dwarves for so long, but that does not make him invincible. In fact, Bard fatally wounds Smaug in precisely the region Bilbo points out (*Hobbit* XII.262, XIV.290). His excessive pride thus makes him more susceptible to danger. Similarly, once welcomed by the Master of Laketown, Thorin acts "as if his kingdom was already regained and Smaug chopped up into little pieces" (X.231). His pride for what he has so far accomplished momentarily overshadows his cautiousness. In light of this, Hrothgar's advice can apply to Thorin. Like Beowulf, he must "have no regard for prideful thoughts" (1760). He must be cautious so as not to become excessively proud like Smaug, who describes himself in excess: he is not merely "strong," but "strong, strong" (*Hobbit* XII.262). Smaug's excessive pride marks him as a tyrannical ruler of the likes of Heremod, who destroys the peace of the mead-hall. Just as the parallels between Beowulf and the monsters illustrate that Hrothgar's advice emerges from a real threat to Beowulf's potential as a king, so, too, do the parallels between Smaug and Thorin suggest that there is a genuine possibility of Thorin succumbing to the evils that define his enemy.

This possibility becomes a reality when Thorin succumbs to 'dragon sickness,' going from respected king to greedy tyrant. As Tolkien notes about the *Beowulf* dragon, dragons have long been symbols of greed ("Monsters" 17). After being advised to seek peace with the people of Laketown, Thorin proclaims that none of his "gold shall thieves take or the violent carry off while [the Dwarves] are alive" (*Hobbit* XV.300). He desires to guard his treasure jealously like a dragon, which marks a radical change in his character. Indeed, the Dwarves and Smaug have a very different relationship to the treasure in the mountain, as Thorin himself asserts: "[dragons] guard their plunder as long as they live […] and never enjoy a brass ring of it. Indeed, they hardly know a good bit of work from a bad, though they usually have a good notion of the current market value [of their plunder]" (I.28). Dwarves are creators. They transformed the Lonely Mountain into a rich and vast kingdom, and from that seat, they created marvellous objects revered by all in Middle-earth (I.27-28; Loughlin 7). Even more important to the Dwarves' identity is the fact that they appreciate good craftsmanship. They love the creation and circulation of treasures, not just its "market value" (I.28; Loughlin 8). In other words, they associate the treasures

they create with a sense of community.[9] On the other hand, Smaug—like the *Beowulf* dragon—has no use for the treasure he hoards. When he attacks Erebor and steals the treasure, he disrupts their society by killing the Dwarves, ending and disrespecting their creation. The Dwarves enrich themselves not only financially but culturally through the treasures, whereas Smaug—to use the *Beowulf* poet's words—"ne byð him wihte ðȳ sēl" [is not at all better for it] (2277). When Thorin refers to the Elves and Men as "thieves," his understanding of the value of the treasure has drastically changed. He is no longer interested in sharing his love of "beautiful things" (*Hobbit* I.28). He is only interested in hoarding his gold in a manner that he initially characterized as depreciative. Such a radical change results from the fact that the gold which Smaug has hoarded for so long has taken a power of its own (XV.306). Smaug's obsessive hoarding has infused the treasure so that it overcomes Thorin. Tolkien describes Thorin's new desire for the treasure as "lust," which explicitly illustrates that he has succumbed to evil (XV.306). Thorin is not merely greedy; the trace of Smaug left on the treasure has infected him and completely altered his understanding of the value of the treasure.

The sickness that lies on the treasure drives Thorin to go to war against Elves and Men, abandoning his duty of protection to his people. When Bilbo admits that Thorin is "quite ready to sit on a heap of gold and starve" rather than give a part of his treasure away, readers are reminded of Smaug sleeping atop the pile of treasure, thereby underlining that dragon-like greed blinds Thorin (*Hobbit* XII.249, XVI.313). Thorin hopes that with the help of Dain, he might "recapture the Arkenstone and withhold the share of the reward" he promised to Bilbo (XVII.320). The spell on the treasure is so strong that Thorin refuses to give any gold to the people of Laketown, and he ponders breaking his promise to Bilbo, which goes against "normal dwarvish behaviour-patterns" (Shippey 88). Due to his pride and greed, Thorin becomes a ruler of the likes of Heremod, who harms his people instead of being a protector. Just as Smaug attacked the Lonely Mountain for the treasure that lies within, now Thorin is willing to sacrifice his kin to continue hoarding the treasure. He has come to embody all the characteristics that define Smaug as a monster.

The curse on the Dwarves' treasure is another element from *Beowulf* that Tolkien adapts, and it affects Thorin differently than it affects Beowulf. In the poem, the treasure is "galdre bewunden" [gripped in a spell], though what this implies about Beowulf's character and his final fight is unclear (3052). Tolkien translates this as a "deep curse," which underlines the suggestion that there is something evil about the gold which might ultimately affect Beowulf

[9] Similarly, the Lament of the Last Survivor emphasizes the treasure's association with the community and, therefore, its uselessness once that community is gone (2247-2266).

(Tolkien, *Beowulf* l.2576). Tolkien's translation also makes the connection between the treasure in *Beowulf* and the Dwarves' treasure even more significant since both hold a curse that potentially brings the kings to their deaths. In *Beowulf*, it seems that anyone who plunders the gold "would be guilty of crimes, imprisoned in pagan temples, firm in hell's bonds, punished with misfortunes" (3071-3).[10] When Beowulf learns of the dragon's attacks, he chooses to stand against him, in part because he is the warrior who defeated the Grendel kin, but more importantly, because he is determined to avenge and protect his people (Hill 134). Treasure symbolizes the reciprocal duties between a lord and his retainers; it symbolizes the protection Beowulf owes his people, and thus he believes his life is a fair price to pay in exchange. Therefore, unlike Thorin, Beowulf does not regard treasure with excessive greed.

Still, does the curse on the treasure affect Beowulf? The poem does not make this clear, but the fact that Beowulf's death leaves his people unprotected might imply that, regardless of Beowulf's selfless interest in the treasure, he is punished. Critics have long debated whether he was right to go against the dragon. Wiglaf's claims that "Oft sceall eorl monig ānes willan / wræc ādrēogan" [often shall many earls suffer misery through the will of one man] is somewhat ambiguous (3077-8). Is Wiglaf criticizing Beowulf's decision to stand against the dragon? Or is he merely acknowledging that Beowulf's death leaves the Geats unprotected? In the final part of the poem, the poet repeatedly underscores that Beowulf is a good king, suggesting that perhaps Wiglaf is primarily reflecting on what is to come (Hill 133). Beowulf's death leaves his people unprotected, but the dragon was already disrupting the peace and order of society, leaving Beowulf little choice but to fight it. Therefore, Beowulf chooses to fight the dragon, not because of pride, but because he must protect his people (2333-6). That is not to say that Beowulf is not at all motivated by pride—he does choose to stand against the dragon on his own, as mentioned above—but it does not appear to be his primary motive. For Tolkien, Beowulf's "defeat [is] inevitable yet unacknowledged" ("Monsters" 18). Perhaps the curse does punish Beowulf, but that does not change the fact that he does all he can within the time allotted to him, and so he at least has the comfort of knowing he showed courage until the end. Unlike Heremod, who gives no rings to his retainers and destroys the peace in the mead-hall, Beowulf fulfills his kingly duties, as Wiglaf reminds the cowardly retainers (2633-8). When he stands against the dragon, Beowulf demonstrates that he is a king who will do anything for his people, even perform his warrior duties. Beowulf is a hero until his last breath.

[10] Since this is a disputed passage, I have followed Mitchell and Robinson's translation here.

No discussion of heroism in respect to Tolkien's Dwarves would be complete without first addressing the narrator's interjection on the subject. The importance of treasure for the Dwarves' cultural identity is reasserted once they enter the mountain, and this love of gold seemingly marks them as non-heroic figures:

> There it is: dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots; some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect much. (*Hobbit* XII.247)

This most unsympathetic characterization might simply be Bilbo reacting at the moment as an unreliable narrator. However, it is important to remember that the Dwarves are set apart from the other races of Middle-earth because they were not created by Ilúvatar but by Aulë (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 37). Perhaps Dwarves indeed are not heroes according to the standards of the other peoples of Middle-earth, and since the events of the book are related from Bilbo's point of view, then that is the impression given to readers. Moreover, Thorin's primary motivation for setting out on his quest, namely, to recover the treasure stolen by Smaug, does not appear particularly heroic. However, as mentioned above, gold, and more importantly, the creation and circulation of treasures, is a fundamental aspect of the Dwarves' cultural identity. Thorin and his companions seeking to reclaim their treasures might not seem to Bilbo, and by extension, to the readers, as heroic, but to the Dwarves, this is a worthy cause. When the narrator notes that the Dwarves have "a great idea of the value of money," he recalls the notion that dragons "have a good notion of the current market value [of their plunder]," but the Dwarves' connection to the gold goes much deeper than that (*Hobbit* I.28). Tolkien reiterates this crucial distinction when Thorin apologizes to Bilbo on his deathbed:

> I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers until the world is renewed. Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate. (*Hobbit* XVIII.333)

Thorin realizes that his friendship with Bilbo is more important than the treasure. However, he is not speaking of any treasure but of "hoarded gold" (*Hobbit* XVIII.333). Tolkien thus emphasizes that it is the excessive greed infused in Smaug's hoarded gold that has caused so much grief. This is not to say that Thorin does not take responsibility for his actions—he apologizes to Bilbo, knowing he acted wrongly—but his words also illustrate that he once again understands the true value of the treasure. Thorin asserts that if people "valued

food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world" (XVIII.333). Just as he described at Bag End, for Dwarves, the treasure is a symbol of community, much like in *Beowulf*. In reasserting this statement, Thorin once and for all separates himself from what defines Smaug as a monster, that is, his willingness to kill people to hoard gold, and becomes a hero. As mentioned numerous times already, treasure in *Beowulf* is a symbol of the protection lords owe to their retainers. In *The Hobbit*, the treasure itself does not directly represent the protection Thorin owes his people. However, by reclaiming the mountain and regaining ownership of the treasure, he gives his people a chance to resume their trades. In prosperity, the Dwarves are better equipped to protect themselves against future dangers.

Thorin's redemption also ensures that even in his absence, the Dwarves are not forsaken; the curse does not bring war onto them, as happens to Beowulf's people after his death. It is unclear whether Thorin takes part in the battle to protect his people or his gold, and his death might be his punishment for his greediness. Still, there is hope for him in the afterlife, and even more importantly, there is hope for his people, for even after his death, Thorin continues to protect his people:

> Upon his tomb the Elvenking then laid Orcrist, the elvish sword that had been taken from Thorin in captivity. It is said in songs that it gleamed ever in the dark if foes approached, and the fortress of the dwarves could not be taken by surprise. (*Hobbit* XVIII.336).

Even if Thorin's primary motive to fight at the Battle of Five Armies was not to protect his people, he eventually reinstates himself as a good king by fulfilling his role of protector. This is very different from the elegiac tone that permeates the ending of *Beowulf*, encapsulated in the mournful song of the Geatish woman:

> giōmorgyd Gēatisc mēeowle
> æfter Bīowulfe bundenheorde
> song sorgcearig, sǣde geneahhe
> þæt hīo hyre hēofungdagas hearde ondrēde
> wælfylla worn werudes egesan
> hȳnðo ond hæftnȳd. (3150-55)
>
> [a Geatish woman sang a sorrowful mournful song for Beowulf with her hair bound up, she repeatedly said that she dreaded the hard days of lamentation, a great many violent deaths, the host's terror, affliction and captivity]

Beowulf kills the dragon, but in doing so, he dies and leaves his kingdom at the mercy of a multitude of other threats. He might have acted bravely and to protect his people, but the aftermath of his death does not represent that. In

other words, Beowulf did everything he could within his time to protect his people, while Thorin's protection extends beyond his own time and offers his people the hope that they will be prepared for any future threat. Thorin's death is his punishment for his transgressions, but he "achieves a reconciliation of himself to the world and to what lies beyond Time" (Christensen 9). To use the (translated) words of the *Beowulf* poet, Thorin is not "imprisoned in pagan temples, firm in hell's bonds, punished with misfortunes" (3071-3). Despite his transgressions, there is hope for him, and most important is that this hope presents itself at a moment where it seems that all is lost. A battle rages before the gates of Erebor, Bilbo is far from home and separated from all his friends, and it is at that moment that the Eagles arrive, and Bilbo is reunited with Thorin just when he overcomes his moral failures. Thorin dies, but *eucatastrophe* is still achieved, and thus is Tolkien's retelling of *Beowulf* fulfilled.

Though both connected to their enemies in numerous ways, Beowulf and Thorin find a way to distance themselves from the monsters and be remembered as great kings. The "evil side of heroic life" described by Tolkien is helpful to understand how monstrousness operates in the poem and how heroism is defined in opposition to it ("Monsters" 17). Destroying the peace of the mead-hall characterizes Heremod, the Grendel kin, and the dragon as monsters. Conversely, the poem defines Beowulf as a hero, in part, because he fights to protect the order of society. Beowulf puts the safety of others before his own, and in this sense, he never falls prey to the evils that define his enemies and Heremod. On the other hand, Thorin must win a battle with his own mind to become a hero. Smaug dies without ever having the strength to overcome his excessive greed, while Thorin eventually finds the strength to overcome the 'dragon-sickness,' and dies fighting to protect his people, not the gold, and therein lies his true heroism. He is not defined by supernatural strength but by his ability to recover from his moral failures and admit his transgressions even when he knows there is no hope for him to survive. Such resilience to evil connects him to numerous other Tolkienian characters, solidifying his status as a hero, despite his transgressions. More importantly, his rise to the status of hero comes as a surprise. Just as it seems unlikely that a hobbit could destroy the One Ring, it seems unlikely that Thorin, who, because of his excessive greed and selfishness, has become a monster, could ever overcome his failures, but he does. In *The Hobbit*, and indeed in all of Tolkien's works, the parallels between heroes and monsters underline, not that the heroes can become monsters—although they can—but that no matter the moral failures and the evils to which they may have succumbed, they are not doomed.

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