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*Beowulf* as a Source Text for Tolkien's Monsters

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## SUMMARY

In my thesis I will discuss the influence of the Old English poem *Beowulf* on J. R. R. Tolkien and his works. My focus will be on comparing the monsters of *Beowulf* to those of *The Lord of the Rings*, but I will also mention Tolkien's other works like *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit*. I will draw comparisons between Grendel and Gollum, Grendel's mother and Shelob, and the dragon of *Beowulf* and Sauron. As a special case, I will compare the dragon of *Beowulf* to that of *The Hobbit* because those two have the most in common. Tolkien's Smaug owes much to the dragon of *Beowulf*. I will use Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* as a theoretical background for a few interesting instances of a character playing two roles at once.

Furthermore, I will discuss Tolkien's essay *The Monsters and the Critics* in which he claims that monsters are the most important part of the epic poem as they demonstrate the protagonist's physical strength and wisdom. Here I will explain how the weakest monster is fit for the beginning of the protagonist's warrior life, and how the strongest one is fit for the end of that life. The emphasis will be on the fact that the first monster stands for physical sin and the last one for psychological sin. The weakest monster only seeks to satisfy its physical needs, such as hunger. The strongest one, on the other hand, seeks to satisfy psychological needs like greed and pride.

I will also mention how the monsters represent the evil side of heroic life, and how the fight against them is actually a fight which the hero leads against himself. There is good and bad in every hero and by defeating the monsters, he defeats the bad side of his own self which, in turn, makes him a well-respected warrior. Thus every fight described in *Beowulf* represents a psychological victory of the protagonist's good side, which makes him a better warrior and later king. Tolkien transferred that same inner fight into his stories.

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## INTRODUCTION

“[T]he monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste: they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which gave it its lofty tone and high seriousness” (*Monsters and the Critics* 19). This is the main idea of J.R.R. Tolkien’s lecture and essay on *Beowulf* entitled *The Monsters and the Critics*. He strongly believed that without the monsters there would be no heroes. Most *Beowulf* critics before Tolkien focused on the protagonist, Beowulf, and showed little interest in the monsters. Tolkien, however, claimed that Beowulf could not be a respected and honourable knight if there were no monsters for him to fight. The strength and courage of the hero could not be recognized without the strength and malice of the monsters which the hero confronts and defeats. If the hero cannot defend his community and comrades against the monsters, he is no hero at all.

According to Pavao Pavličić’s essay *Epic Poetry*, the community is a very important aspect of the epic. Pavličić classifies *Beowulf* as an epic poem which belongs to oral epic poetry. It is a heroic poem about the making of a community. That kind of epic usually speaks about a community before there were countries and because of that the emphasis is on the heroes and the relationships between them. It is characteristic of the heroic epic that it has existed in oral tradition for a long time and has been written down rather late in history. Oral epic needed a performer who transmitted the epic to the community by purely oral means. The community was illiterate and the only way to learn about a hero, who was important to them, was through a performer. The audience chose what they wanted to hear, and without the approval of the community the performer could not perform. On the other hand, the community is an essential part of the epic. Epic poetry speaks in the name of the whole community, *Beowulf* speaks in the name of both the Danes and the Geats. In the first part when he fights Grendel’s kin, he speaks in the name of the Danes as he is fighting for them; and in the second part when he fights the dragon, he speaks in the name of the Geats as he is

their king. Pavličić also claims that epic poetry speaks of the things which are important for the community. It is a struggle for the survival of the community. In *Beowulf* that struggle is shown through Beowulf fighting off monsters so that the community could abide in Heorot, and later so that his people could stay in Geatland. Epic poetry elaborates the world view which is essential for the community. For instance, Beowulf is shown as a man of superhuman strength in order to show the community that such people existed and to restore their faith in the fact that such people could appear again. When a community perceives an event as critical to their history, when it is aware that the celebrated hero defined the fate of those who create or receive the epic, only then can something truly become an epic. According to Pavličić, an epic will also appear when a community sees its own fate as something symbolical, as something which carries the meaning of the world in general. For instance, Beowulf is a symbol of the hero, a better man who will help the community in their time of need.

In the following sections of this thesis I will discuss the villains of *Beowulf* and Tolkien's works, the progression of evil through the plot and the way in which evil characters are defeated. I will focus on the comparison of *Beowulf's* Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon with *The Lord of the Rings's* Gollum, Shelob and Sauron. I will also devote some attention to comparing the dragon of *Beowulf* to that of *The Hobbit*. In his essay *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien argues that fairy tales are not for children only, in fact they should be read more by adults because in that way they will be fully understood and their purpose fulfilled. "Fairy-stories banished in this way, cut off from a full adult art, would in the end be ruined; indeed in so far as they have been so banished, they have been ruined" (*On Fairy Stories* 124). That is why he writes complex fairy tales for adults. The whole story of *The Lord of the Rings* "becomes, as has often been noted, not a quest but an anti-quest, whose goal is not to

find or regain something but to reject and destroy something” (Shippey, *Author of the Century* 114).

Tolkien was a major scholar and ardent devotee to the English language, specialising in Old and Middle English. A life-long dedication to Old English literature and, consequently, to studying and translating the poem *Beowulf*, made him incorporate Old English sources into his works. The *Beowulf* influence is recognizable mostly in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. A code of chivalry, great halls of kings, a fight between good and evil, the victory of good in the end, naming of weapons such as swords and axes, to list just a few motifs, appear both in *Beowulf* and Tolkien’s works.

In addition, he spent a lot of time studying, understanding and translating *Beowulf*. He was never quite satisfied with it, so it was published posthumously by his son Christopher. For Tolkien, monsters and villains play a big role, not just in the *Beowulf* narrative, but in other works of literature as well, especially his own: “Correct and sober taste may refuse to admit that there can be an interest for *us* – the proud *we* that includes all intelligent living people – in ogres and dragons; we then perceive its puzzlement in face of the fact that it has derived great pleasure from a poem that is actually about these unfashionable creatures” (*Monsters and the Critics* 16). In the same essay, he argued that critics have given too little attention to the monsters, which, in Tolkien’s opinion, are the fabric from which the poem is made. The monsters are the fundament of *Beowulf*, because without them the hero Beowulf would have no one to compare his strength and might to. Tolkien argued that heroism is a big part of Anglo-Saxon heritage, but a mere description of how powerful and respectable a hero is, simply does not convey the true message of heroism. It is necessary for “a man faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy of house or realm” (Ibid. 17) to fight and defeat these demonic monsters for his courage to become evident to his community.

Tolkien also believed that, in order for the hero to prove himself, the monsters should have different levels of strength and be of different types. The weakest monster should attack first, so that a young hero can easily overcome it and establish himself as a champion. At this point, the hero's life should begin. Consequently, the strongest monster should come last, and it should injure the hero, but the hero should kill the monster first, and so they should both die from the fight. The old, wise and experienced hero should still be strong enough to defeat the last monster, but at the same time the monster should mark the end of his life as a warrior. *Beowulf* is "essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death" (Ibid. 28). There is also a difference in tone in two parts of the poem. When Beowulf fights Grendel, the reader is sure that he will be victorious, there is no suspense. The reader will not allow oneself to share the fears of the king Hrothgar. On the other hand, when Beowulf goes to fight the dragon, he is aware that his death has been foretold and he holds a speech for the ones who remain alive. Defeat is the theme of the second part of the poem:

If the dragon is the right end for Beowulf, and I agree with the author that it is, then Grendel is an eminently suitable beginning. They are creatures [...] of a similar order and kindred significance. Triumph over the lesser and more nearly human is cancelled by defeat before the older and more elemental. And the conquest of the ogres comes at the right moment: not in earliest youth [...] and not during the later period of recognized ability and prowess [...] The placing of the dragon is inevitable: a man can but die upon his death-day. (Ibid. 32)

There is again no suspense, but this time, the reader is sure that Beowulf will perish with the dragon.



It is very similar with Tolkien's works. The weakest monsters always come at the beginning, like Gollum, both in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Silmarillion*, there is only one important enemy, Melkor, and he gradually becomes stronger, together with the heroes. As the hero gets wiser and more experienced, the monsters gradually become stronger as well. In *The Hobbit*, in the episode where Bilbo holds a riddle-contest with Gollum and leaves victorious is a defining moment in the young hobbit's life. Only then does he earn the respect of the dwarves. In the end, Smaug does not kill him and he is not the one to kill Smaug either, but Bilbo steals a cup from Smaug and gets a part of his gold, which is a different kind of victory. It is a victory of Bilbo's mind over the dragon, which, in traditional sense of the word is not a victory because the dragon does not die and therefore is not defeated. Bilbo also talks to Smaug, and he makes a joke at the dragon's expense the end, which makes him the winner of the debate, but Smaug breathes fire after him as he is running away.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, in the beginning Frodo overcomes Gollum by making him his servant. In the end, Frodo faces the most cunning and deceptive enemy Sauron. He overcomes Sauron with the help of the weakest monster Gollum, but Frodo is also injured, enough that he cannot suffer the pains of Middle-earth anymore, so he leaves for the blessed lands. To conclude, even though Tolkien is the father of modern fantasy literature, more precisely, of high fantasy, he owes a lot to Anglo-Saxon literature, especially to an Old English poem *Beowulf*. Without *Beowulf*, Tolkien's world, along with its monsters, would never be the same.

## MONSTERS OF *BEOWULF*

*Grendel*. Exiled from the community of men, Grendel hates the merriment of king Hrothgar's warriors and their music pains him so he goes on a killing spree, devouring many of king Hrothgar's warriors while they are sleeping. However, Grendel does not touch the throne as it is protected by God. The Danes flee from Heorot, the king's hall, in fear. The young Geat warrior Beowulf hears of the king's troubles and comes to Hrothgar's aid. Hrothgar and his men return to Heorot where they hold a celebration. This annoys Grendel and he comes to the hall again, wanting to kill. But this time, Beowulf pretends to be asleep, and then leaps to seize Grendel. Beowulf tears out his arm and Grendel returns to his abode where he bleeds out and dies. This fight Beowulf wins with his bare hands:

Then his corslet of iron things he doffed, and  
 the helm from his head, and gave his jewelled sword, best of  
 iron-wrought things, to his esquire, and bade him have care  
 of his gear of battle. Then the brave man spake, Beowulf of  
 the Geats, a speech of proud words, ere he climbed upon his  
 bed: 'No whit do I account myself in my warlike stature a  
 man more despicable in deeds of battle than Grendel doth  
 himself. Therefore I will not with sword give him the sleep  
 of death, although I well could. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 547-555)

The warriors hang Grendel's arm in the mead-hall as a sign of victory and they celebrate the defeat of their foe.

*Grendel's mother.* Then Grendel's mother, stricken with grief for her son, goes after the warrior who killed her son. But when she comes to Heorot in a blind rage, she kills the first warrior she sees, king Hrothgar's most trusted adviser Æschere.

Dead is Æschere ...

my counsels were his and his wisdom

mine, at my right hand he stood when on fatal field we

fended our lives, as the ranks clashed in battle and the boar-

crests rang. (Ibid. 1105-1109)

Beowulf follows Grendel's mother into her lair under the lake where he confronts her. For a while neither seems to be winning as Beowulf is protected by his armour and Grendel's mother has a thick skin which no ordinary sword can pierce. Beowulf takes a sword Hrunting, given to him by Unferth, into this fight. But the sword turns out to be useless and Beowulf discards it. In the lair, amongst the treasure collected by Grendel's mother he finds a bigger sword, forged for giants with which he manages to kill her. Travelling further into the lake, Beowulf finds Grendel and decapitates him with the big sword. The sword melts when it touches Grendel's toxic blood until only the hilt is left. Beowulf takes the hilt and Grendel's head as trophies to king Hrothgar.

*The dragon.* Fifty years after the battle with Grendel's mother, Beowulf is a king of the Geats, but he is getting old and his strength is slowly declining. One of his slaves steals a cup from a sleeping dragon in order to pay back what he owes Beowulf, but the dragon awakes and, seeing that a part of his treasure is missing, leaves his cave and burns everything in sight searching for the thief. As a good king and defender of his kingdom, Beowulf takes

his men and goes to fight the dragon. But he changes his mind and leaves his men behind. He is well aware of the fact that the dragon is bigger and therefore stronger than him.

I would not bear sword or weapon against the serpent,  
 if I knew how else I might grapple with the fierce destroyer  
 to mine honour, as aforetime I did with Grendel. But here  
 do I look for fell fire's heat, for blast and venom; wherefore I  
 have upon me shield and corslet. (Ibid. 217-221)

The dragon wounds him. When Beowulf's men see that Beowulf is losing the fight they run into the woods driven by the fear for their lives. Only one, Wiglaf comes to Beowulf's aid and together they defeat the dragon.<sup>1</sup> Beowulf, however, dies from the wounds. The Geats bury their king in a ritual pyre in a barrow visible from the sea.

## TOLKIEN'S MONSTERS

*Gollum.* Tolkien's monsters are somewhat different. Firstly, there are many of them and they are different, each having a specific task and fate. Secondly, each of them belongs to a different order of creatures. A lesser creature called Gollum is not evil per se, so he did not fall under the rule of or ever was a servant of Sauron, the second Dark Lord. Once he was a hobbit called Sméagol. Sméagol had a cousin named Déagol, with whom he went fishing in the Gladden Fields on his birthday. Déagol was pulled into the water by a large fish and there

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<sup>1</sup>It is interesting to note here that Wiglaf, according to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, plays both the roles of the helper and the hero. He is the helper as he gives Beowulf a sword and then helps him defeat the dragon. On the other hand, this is Propp's case with two heroes, where the one higher in rank (Beowulf) hides because he is wounded and the one lower in rank (Wiglaf) is victorious in battle and he later becomes king of the Geats.

he found a gold ring. Almost immediately as Déagol got out of the water, Sméagol fell under the power of the One Ring and demanded it as a present for his birthday. Since Déagol did not want to give it up, Sméagol suffocated him and took the Ring for himself. The Ring corrupted him further and twisted his body as well as his mind until he was banished by his people. He was forced to find a new home for himself and his “Precious” so he crawled into a cave deep inside the Misty Mountains and there he had unnaturally long life. The name Gollum was derived from the sound he made when swallowing and coughing: “a small slimy creature. [...] He was Gollum – as dark as darkness except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face. [...] And when he said Gollum he made a horrible swallowing noise in his throat. That is how he got his name, though he always called himself ‘my precious’” (*Hobbit* 71, 72).

On his big quest to help Thorin Oakenshield and the dwarves retrieve the treasure that the dragon Smaug took from them, the hobbit Bilbo Baggins found himself lost in the Misty Mountains. When he tried to find his way out of the tunnels, he stumbled upon a gold ring – the very same ring that had earlier slipped from Gollum’s finger. Gollum did not know that Bilbo had found the One Ring so he made a deal with Bilbo that they will hold a riddle contest. If Gollum wins, he can kill and eat Bilbo. If Bilbo wins, Gollum will help him find his way out. Gollum, of course, did not plan on keeping his word. He was going to put on his Precious and kill Bilbo anyway. Bilbo won the riddle contest, but Gollum saw that his Precious was missing, deemed Bilbo a thief and from that moment on began hating all hobbits. “Curse it! Curse it! Curse it! Curse the Baggins! It’s gone! What has it got in its pocket? Oh we guess, we guess, my precious. He’s found it, yes he must have. My birthday-present. [...] Thief, thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it, we hates it, we hates it forever!” (*Ibid.* 84, 87).

At the time of *The Lord of the Rings* he follows the Fellowship on their journey. He tries to remain hidden but his eyes, like two lamps in the darkness, give him away. Constantly

switching between Sméagol, the good side, and Gollum, the bad side of him, the two always battle for domination. The hobbits discover him and he makes a pledge to Frodo Baggins, Bilbo's nephew, he swears on the One Ring to help him get to Mordor. Frodo, alongside with his loyal friend Samwise Gamgee<sup>2</sup>, is going to Mordor, to the Cracks of Mount Doom to destroy the Ring. No weapon that elves, men or dwarves possess could destroy it. It could only be thrown back into the fire from which it was made. Gollum is terrified that Frodo will fail at his mission, that Sauron will get the Ring back and reign in terror again. Yet, at the same time, he fears Frodo, the current master of the Ring. He is drawn to the Ring, wants to steal it back for himself, but still respects the one who carries it. Frodo calls him Sméagol, and tries to see the kind hobbit in him and so Gollum decides to be helpful and good. Frodo is fooled by this but Sam, however, is not. And he is right because at the end, when Frodo is about to throw the Ring into the fire, Gollum jumps on him and they fight for it. Frodo puts on the Ring and for a moment decides to keep it for himself, but Gollum bites his finger off, and falls into the fire with the Ring.<sup>3</sup> Sméagol was kind and fair, but the Ring corrupted him so much that Gollum is ready to steal and kill in order to get it back.

*Shelob.* Then a more menacing enemy appears. During the First and Second Age Ungoliant, the Dark Spider, was an ally of Melkor, the first Dark Lord. She was the mother of many offspring, the greatest of which was Shelob, the Great Spider. Gollum led Frodo and

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the story Sam is the helper, Frodo is his master and Sam swore never to leave his master. But an interesting thing happens in the end, Sam goes through transfiguration, he is knighted by Aragorn and gets married to Rosie Cotton, thus assuming the role of the hero. Before Frodo leaves for the Undying Lands, he presents Sam with Bilbo's book so that Sam could finish it.

<sup>3</sup> According to Propp, Gollum plays both the role of the villain and the helper. He is the villain as he constantly wants to steal the Ring from Frodo and keep it for himself so he attacks the hobbits both physically and mentally whenever he gets the chance. And he is the helper because he helps the hero Frodo complete his quest. Frodo could not have destroyed the Ring if it was not for Gollum, the Ring had too much power over him.

Sam to Shelob, thinking that she would eat them and spit out clothes and other belongings, meaning also the One Ring. Shelob lives in a dark lair in Ephel Duath, Mountains of Shadow, near Cirith Ungol which leads to Mordor. She made a labyrinth of webs inside of many tunnels she resides in. She was born in the First Age and since then became fat and huge, feeding on her own children, orcs, men and even elves when she managed to kill them: “But still she was there, who was there before Sauron, and before the first stone of Barad-dûr; and she served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts, weaving webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness” (*Two Towers* 335). Sauron is aware of her dwelling in the mountains and sometimes even sends slaves for her to feast. In return, she guards the secret passage to Mordor. Sauron calls her “his cat,” as she does not accept his authority but still co-exists with him, acting as a pet. The only authority that she recognizes is her own insatiable lust for flesh and blood.

It can be assumed that Gollum sometimes served Shelob, as he once stumbled into her lair and survived, promising to bring her tastier meats. The orcs who guarded the pass of Cirith Ungol saw him leave Shelob’s lair on a few occasions and they made jokes about him not being tasty enough for Shelob. Gollum kept his promise of bringing her more delicious food by bringing Frodo and Sam and leaving them deep inside Shelob’s tunnels. Gollum wants to regain the Ring this way, as Shelob does not care for inventions of the mind. Frodo manages to cut her cobwebs with Sting, the elven dagger he got from Bilbo and uses as a sword. Sam’s sword is incapable of harming her webs, they are too thick for normal weapons. But they hurt Shelob the most with the Phial of Galadriel, the light of Earendil’s star shone too bright for her senses, which were used to the darkness. Then Shelob returns to attack Frodo, she poisons him with her sting and paralyses him. Seeing this, Sam takes Sting and stabs her in one of her great eyes, injures her leg and pierces her underbelly, the most grievous

of the wounds. No one ever wounded her so badly. It is not known if she recovered from this battle or if she succumbed to her wounds. “Shelob was gone; and whether she lay long in her lair, nursing her malice and her misery, and in slow years of darkness healed herself from within, rebuilding her clustered eyes, until with hunger like death she spun once more her dreadful snare in the glens of Mountains of Shadow, this tale does not tell” (Ibid. 342).

*Sauron.* The last, and most vicious enemy in *The Lord of the Rings* is Sauron. Sauron belongs to a lesser angelic order, Maiar. The Maiar are spirits that descended to Arda to help the Valar in shaping the world. Sauron was once good but was corrupted by his master Melkor, the first Dark Lord: “in this ‘mythology’ all the ‘angelic’ powers concerned with this world were capable of many degrees of error and failing between the absolute Satanic rebellion and evil of Morgoth and his satellite Sauron, and the fainéance of some of the other higher powers or ‘gods’” (Letters, no. 156). He made the One Ring in order to conquer Arda. “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them, in the land of Mordor where the shadows lie” (*Fellowship of the Ring* 60). Since he studied the arts of ring making, Sauron gave the impetus for creating Rings of Power to help him subdue men, elves and dwarves. The rings were forged by elven-smiths with the help of Sauron, and the greatest three, intended for elves, were forged by Celebrimbor alone, Sauron had no hand in them. All rings were created in the Second Age and helped in creation of the Arda. The “Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky” never got into Sauron’s hands and he never managed to rule or subdue the elves. Also, the three never fell under the spell of the One. The “Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone” were used for amassing treasure (which then attracted dragons) but Sauron was unable to force dwarves to submit to his will since they were naturally hardy. In the Third Age, four were consumed by dragon fire and destroyed, but three were re-acquired by Sauron.



The “Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die” were given to Númenorean kings who used them to become great sorcerers and acquired great power and wealth. Since men were not immortal they were always jealous of the elves and wanted to go to Aman and live there forever. Sauron exploited this desire, came to live in Númenor, the greatest kingdom of men, and became the closest adviser of the king. “[S]uch was the cunning of his mind and mouth, and the strength of his hidden will, that ere three years had passed he had become closest to the secret counsels of the King; for flattery sweet as honey was ever on his tongue, and knowledge he had of many things yet unrevealed to Men” (*Silmarillion* 214). Very soon, men and their nine rings fell to the will of Sauron. Númenor perished under the sea and only a few worthy men saved themselves. They were called the Faithful and with Elendil at the head set sail in nine ships. They landed in Middle-earth and founded Arnor and Gondor. When Númenor fell, Sauron was robbed of his ability to assume charming forms:

But Sauron was not of mortal flesh, and though he was robbed now of that shape in which he had wrought so great an evil, so that he could never again appear fair to the eyes of Men, yet his spirit arose out of the deep and passed as a shadow and a black wind over the sea, and came back to Middle-earth and to Mordor that was his home. There he took up again his great Ring in Barad-dûr, and dwelt there, dark and silent, until he wrought himself a new guise, an image of malice and hatred made visible; and the Eye of Sauron the Terrible few could endure. (Ibid. 221)

At this moment, Sauron became the second Dark Lord. Since then he was once exiled from Mordor by the Last Alliance of elves and men but his spirit remained, as he was connected to the One Ring. The Ring was not destroyed as a man Isildur cut the finger with the Ring off his hand. Isildur then decided that he will not destroy the ring but use it to do good to this people. The Ring betrayed Isildur and he was shot by orcs. Since then the Ring has been ever searching for his true master’s hand, and in turn, the master has been desiring to re-acquire the

Ring. In the long years of the search, Sauron managed to capture Gollum, after Bilbo had already taken the Ring. Gollum was tortured terribly, and in the midst of the screams, Sauron managed to understand two words: Shire and Baggins. The Ring is eventually destroyed in the War for the Ring. When the One Ring is destroyed, so is Sauron.

*Smaug.* Lastly, there is the dragon Smaug. He is the last great fire drake alive in the Third Age: “There was a most specially greedy, strong and wicked worm called Smaug” (*Hobbit* 23). As all dragons do, he desires treasure above all else. Smaug, drawn to the enormous amounts of treasure amassed during the reign of king Thrór of the Lonely Mountain, laid waste on the neighbouring city Dale and took over the treasure. He drove dwarves of the Lonely Mountain into exile and slept on the gold for a long period of time until his skin became encrusted with gold and jewels:

There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. [...] Smaug lay, with his wings folded like an immeasurable bat, turned partly on one side, so that the hobbit could see his underparts and his long pale belly crusted with gems and fragments of gold from his long lying on his costly bed. (Ibid. 215)

All feared him, until one day Thorin Oakenshield, the King under the Mountain decided to take back what was rightfully his.

The dwarves dug deep and found the heart of the mountain, the greatest jewel of all time and called it Arkenstone. For a long time Thorin wanted to reacquire the Arkenstone. He took a company of twelve dwarves and the hobbit Bilbo Baggins on a quest to get it back. Bilbo managed to get inside the dragon’s lair and steal a cup from him. Smaug noticed this since he knew every piece of his treasure and, amused by Bilbo, he conversed with him. During the conversation, Bilbo noticed that his underbelly, even though covered by diamonds,

had one bare spot on the left side of his breast, near his heart. Smaug crawled out of the Lonely Mountain to get revenge for the theft. He attacked the near-by Lake-town because he still was not aware of the dwarves. There he was shot by a black arrow which was forged to kill dragons. Smaug was slain by Bard the Bowman as Bilbo conveyed the information about Smaug's weakness.<sup>4</sup> Smaug fell into the lake and sunk to the bottom.

## COMPARISON BETWEEN THE MONSTERS

*Grendel and Gollum*. Having situated the monsters from *Beowulf*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, I am now going to draw comparison between them. The first monster that appears in *Beowulf* is Grendel. He is never described physically in detail. The only information that the reader gets is:

[A] fiend

of hell. Grendel was that grim creature called, the ill-famed

haunter of the marches of the land, who kept the moors, the

fastness of the fens, and, unhappy one, inhabited long while

the troll-kind's home; for the Maker had proscribed him with

the race of Cain. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 82-87)

Grendel's anti-heroic and anti-social behaviour points out Beowulf's positive heroic and other values important for the community such as bravery, honour. He also possesses adequate strength which shows off Beowulf's own courage and might. The fact that he descended from Cain suggests that he is partly human and that he may have once possessed a normal human

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Hobbit* Bilbo Baggins is the hero. But when Bard kills Smaug, he assumes the role of the hero and Bilbo, having discovered Smaug's weakness, is the helper to Bard.

kind of strength. Over the years of life in the marshes, his strength grew wild beyond any rational control. When Grendel attacked Heorot in the past, king Hrothgar's warriors learned "that doer of evil none upon earth of swords of war would touch, not the most excellent of things of iron" (Ibid. 652-653). So Beowulf's decision to face him unarmed was the right one, since it was only his physical strength that tore out Grendel's hand:

Against Grendel Beowulf used neither weapons nor armour; he did not fight to gain treasure; he placed no reliance on his companions and needed no help from them, though they were all faithful to him. He trusted in God's help and in the strength that God had given him. Grendel was God's adversary; Beowulf, His champion, was easily victorious. ("Beowulf's Three Great Fights" 341)

And although Beowulf later laughs in his triumph over the monster, and all celebrate his victory and the death of Grendel, he still thinks that Grendel's death was pitiable.

Grendel is the adversary of God, being of Cain's clan. In the Bible, Cain killed his own brother Abel because of jealousy. Much in the same way, Grendel is killing king Hrothgar's men out of jealousy. Grendel's evil stems from that:

Grendel is the adversary of God, and as such he and his kin are linked to the first killer.[...] In the Christian poem of *Beowulf* the same monsters become the foes of the One God and later still they merge into the medieval Devil. And the hopeless struggle of the old gods against the monsters becomes, in *Beowulf*, the theme of man on earth, who must die with all his works. ("Approaches to Beowulf" 4, 5)

If he was once human, he would like to join the celebration of king Hrothgar's men, but he cannot as he is no longer apt for such a joyous occasion. He lives in a fen, is considered a freak and therefore cannot socialize normally with humans. And that is why the music and

merriment of the warriors bother him. And if he cannot join the festivities of men, he must destroy them.

Furthermore, when Beowulf fights Grendel, he actually fights himself, the monstrous aspect of his own self. Beowulf constructed his persona around his boasting speech to king Hrothgar about his past successes as a warrior. And since there were those who doubted him, like Unferth, he had to try even harder to convince everyone that he spoke the truth. Or to put it differently, he attempts to hold his body to his words, much in the same way as he tries to physically hold Grendel when they fight. During the struggle, their bodies become almost as one, so Beowulf wants to both destroy Grendel and hold on to him. Because by holding on to Grendel, he also holds on to his own self. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe says that:

the possibility of a taint from Grendel's evil contact is enhanced by the vocabulary and syntax of the description of combat which gradually blurs the distinction between the enemies. Beowulf's great triumph is to approach the limit and return unscathed. The paradox of Beowulf's heroic combat is that to prove himself supremely human he freely puts aside the signs of his humanity, the weapons and armor described in such detail throughout the poem, to challenge Grendel with his own primitive weapon, his grip (Transformations, 492).

She claims that Grendel is only a parody of a human being and therefore he is at his strongest, not in the marches, but in the place of men – king Hrothgar's hall. So, when Grendel enters Heorot humans are terrified, not of his monstrous aspect, but of his human aspect gone completely wild. Beowulf "confronts the monster Grendel; that is, he faces both his own body, which he alienates from himself, and the horror of losing that body, which is equally himself, through that alienation. Beowulf, heroically, tries to hold on to Grendel but cannot" (Ibid. 10).

“When Tolkien reads *Beowulf* and sees the character Grendel, he imagines that this character is based ultimately on Gollum. So his Gollum, he imagines, is the original type, the source for the literary Grendel” (“A Speculative Meditation” 5, 6). Gollum is the most brilliant character in the narrative. Tolkien spent much time thinking about him and defining him. “Gollum continues to develop into a most intriguing character” (*Letters*, no. 70). And Gollum is one of the few evil characters who Tolkien thought needed and deserved rehabilitation, and not punishing. Having considered everything about him, Gollum was good but spoiled, not evil for the sake of being evil. “After all, if all evil creatures were good in the beginning [...] what justice is there in condemning them irrevocably to perdition? Could there not be some way of saving them? [H]e did spend considerable time on the possibility of rehabilitating Gollum” (Shippey, *Roots and Branches* 251).

As was the case with Grendel, the reader does not find out many physical details about Gollum: “He was a loathsome little creature: he paddled a small boat with his large flat feet, peering with pale luminous eyes and catching blind fish with his long fingers, and eating them raw. [...] But after ages alone in the dark Gollum’s heart was black, and treachery was in it. [...] The light in his eyes was like a green flame” (*Fellowship of the Ring* 21, 22). More is told on his sneakiness and fast movements:

[A] small black shape was moving with its thin limbs splayed out. Maybe its soft clinging hands and toes were finding crevices and holds that no hobbit could ever have seen or used, but it looked as if it was just creeping down on sticky pads, like some large prowling thing of insect-kind. And it was coming down head first, as if it was smelling its way. Now and again it lifted its way slowly, turning it right back on its long skinny neck, and the hobbits caught a glimpse of two small pale gleaming lights, its eyes that blinked at the moon for a moment and then were quickly lidded again. (*Two Towers* 215)

Gollum is, like Grendel, anti-social as he spent much of his unnaturally long life in the dark caves and tunnels of the Misty Mountains. The Ring plays a great role in him not wanting to be around other people, as he constantly fears that someone is going to steal “his precious.” His hobbit mind was twisted by the Ring and he is not aware of the fact that the Ring possesses its own free will and it chose to leave Gollum. This proves that Bilbo is not a thief, he did not steal the Ring from Gollum even though Gollum is convinced that he did.

In *The Two Towers*, when Gollum acts as a guide<sup>5</sup> to Mordor for Frodo and Sam, he constantly switches between his good and bad side. He followed the two hobbits on their quest, wanting to regain the Ring, but the hobbits caught him. “Gollum’s reason for pleading clemency is his loneliness, his isolation, or – given the seeming singleness of his identity – his nature as difference personified. He is unique, he is one, and in his grotesque singleness, his Otherness, he desires companionship – the acknowledgement that difference is meaningless” (Chance, *Mythology of Power* 81, 82). He would not stop screaming and screeching so Frodo decided to make him his slave and guide. Frodo addresses Sméagol, the kind side of Gollum and plays on his loyalty and goodness of the heart, before the Ring corrupted him. At first, Gollum cannot believe this, since no one talked to him nicely ever since he was a hobbit. For a while, he really starts to be this person, but the Ring gnaws on him, making him bad again. “The aspects of language, body, and desire are not unknown in critical approaches to Gollum’s figure. He is often termed a ‘schizophrenic’ character, meaning that his language and behaviour are sensed to be divided and shifting” (“The ‘Lost’ Subject of Middle-earth” 4). Before Frodo tamed him, he addressed the Ring “my precious” and always used a plural for expressing himself “we”, “us”. But when Frodo became his master, Gollum started using “I” again and became gentle. Of course, this was only a pretence, but Frodo could not see it as

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<sup>5</sup>Guidance, as one of Propp's functions is applied very interestingly here. Gollum as the villain serves as a guide to the hobbits, thus assuming the role of the helper.

he was also under the influence of the Ring. Sam, on the other hand, was not fooled by Gollum so the two of them often fought for Frodo's love and affection. Sam was always on alert, since he believed he was the true companion of Frodo and was sincerely concerned that Gollum could betray him.

The fight which Gollum leads against himself is reflected in the struggle happening inside Frodo. Much in the same way as Gollum, Frodo was a quiet hobbit who did not go on any adventures or do anything extraordinary. Roaming the fields and meadows of the Shire for his own amusement, he was carefree. As he is approaching Mordor, the Ring presses ever harder on him. In Gollum he sees his distant future, if he lets the Ring corrupt him and he feels it is getting harder to resist it. The reason why he pleads for Sméagol lies in this, he wants to believe that, even though the Ring mutilated him, he can still be gentle and kind, and resist the will of the Ring: "[B]y the time Frodo meets him, his single remaining delight is eating fish"(Chance, *Tolkien the Medievalist*82). Frodo is terrified that the same destiny awaits him.

"Gollum is also psychotic, driven mad by his obsession with the Ring. [...] Gollum's split into the dual personae that Sam calls Slinker and Stinker is a psychological division into conflicting, even opposing selves" (Ibid. 103). He is also described as an animal, always walking on all fours, having no clothes, his eyes gleaming when caught in the light. He is often compared to the lowest life forms, like maggots, spiders and frogs.

In spite of that, much like Grendel, he is pitied. Bilbo had the chance to kill him when they held a riddle-contest, but did not because he pitied him. Frodo also had many chances to get rid of Gollum, but could not overcome the feeling of pity for the creature: "It seemed to Frodo then that he heard, quite plainly but far off, voices out of the past: *"What a pity Bilbo did not stab the vile creature, when he had a chance! Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy; not to strike without need.* [...]"Very well,' he answered aloud, lowering his



sword. [...] ‘I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him’”(Two Towers 217). And it was a good thing too, that they left Gollum alive, for he played a key role in the end. It was his merit that the Ring was finally destroyed.

*Grendel's mother and Shelob.* The second monster which the reader encounters in *Beowulf* is Grendel's mother. She is not mentioned or in any way announced until the very moment when she attacks Heorot. She does not have a name, she is only presented as Grendel's mother. After Beowulf killed Grendel and together with king Hrothgar's warriors went to celebrate his death, his mother suddenly appears, wanting to avenge her son. Her physical description is not plentiful. Her claws are an important detail. Both Grendel and his mother are described to have claws, which is unusual for humanoid monsters. And both of them used claws in battle against Beowulf: “She clutched then at him, seized / in her dire claws the warrior bold” (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1253-54). Altogether, Grendel's mother is a sarcastic representation of medieval queen, woman and, consequently mother:

Grendel's

mother, ogress, fierce destroyer in the form of woman.

Misery was in her heart, she who must abide in the dreadful

waters and the cold streams, since Cain with the sword

became the slayer of his only brother. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1045-49)

It is clear that Grendel's mother is also a descendant of Cain, and that she is even closer to him, so she bears the same sin as her son. But she is a female, which, biblically, marks her also with a different kind of sin. Furthermore, just as Grendel, she belongs to a race of giants, forgotten by God:

In the first place it should be recalled that Grendel's mother also belongs to the race of giants and that as a result of this origin she too bears the curse imposed on the progeny of Cain; indeed, in the genealogical table she is one step nearer to Cain. Yet none of the above mentioned condemnation of Grendel is applied to her. Further, she suffers what is in her opinion 'a very definite outrage', the loss of her son, without anyone thinking it necessary to defend her act of vengeance. ("Good and Evil" 2)

But, unlike her son, Grendel's mother is not bothered by the merriment of king Hrothgar's warriors, she is just furious with them because one of them killed her son. She attacks Heorot and kills one of the king's men, Æschere, as revenge for her son's death, steals Grendel's torn hand which hang from the ceiling and runs into the night. So Beowulf has to fight her too, since he already proved himself to be a great warrior. He and his men follow her into the swamp and track her down. There Beowulf prepares himself for battle, is presented with a sword Hrunting, stipulates a number of conditions to king Hrothgar in case he dies and dives into the lake. Grendel's mother quickly detects him, and when unable to harm him, drags him to the bottom of the lake:

Then that she-

wolf of the waves to the sea-bottom coming bore the mail-

clad prince unto her own abode. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1257-59)

This fight is for Beowulf more serious than the one against Grendel. It seems that Grendel's mother is more of a monster because Beowulf is sucked into her own world, her deep dark lair at the bottom of a lake. Beowulf killed Grendel in Heorot, amongst his people and on his own terms. Against Grendel's mother he faces a completely unknown landscape and the monster seems to be stronger as she has the advantage. But Beowulf is no fool: "Against Grendel's mother Beowulf wore full armour and used a borrowed sword. [...] Although

the female monster was weaker than her son, Beowulf had a more desperate struggle to overcome her; his armour protected him but the borrowed sword was useless" ("Beowulf's Three Great Fights" 341).

In the end Beowulf killed her with a magic sword which he found on her wall. It was the only weapon that could pierce her thick skin. It is never explained who made that sword or how Grendel's mother acquired it: "This is the only sword which can harm the monsters, who have laid a curse on weapons which has made them invulnerable to all but this one" ("The Necessity of Evil in *Beowulf*" 83). After killing Grendel's mother, Beowulf takes Grendel's head and the hilt of the sword which killed Grendel's mother to king Hrothgar as trophies. The sword is very important as it is inscribed with the image of God's judgement upon the race of giants. In the book of Genesis, the giants are described as descendants of Cain and they angered God so much that he flooded the earth: "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (*King James Bible*, Genesis 6:4, 6:5). That can, perhaps, explain why this sword is found under water, but not why Grendel and his mother would want to have it in their lair, as it depicts the destruction of their race: "The engraved sword actually announces itself, then, as a sword of divine judgement upon the race of Cain, and thus announces its own role in the poem, after its purpose has been accomplished in the death of Grendel and his mother" (Ibid. 84).

Like Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*, Shelob is the only female monster in *The Lord of the Rings*. And even though she is described as a spider, Tolkien explicitly says that she is "an evil thing in spider-form" (*Two Towers* 335). Her physical description is based mainly on her eyes. "[E]yes growing visible, two great clusters of many-windowed eyes – the coming

menace was unmasked at last. [...] Monstrous and abominable eyes they were, bestial and yet filled with purpose and with hideous delight, gloating over their prey trapped beyond all hope of escape” (Ibid. 332). The reader does not know what Frodo and Sam are going to find in the tunnels of Cirith Ungol, as Gollum only says that he is going to lead them to ‘her.’ She is a symbol of the physical sin as she thrives mainly on her voraciousness and ravenous appetite. She serves only herself and has no other master: “Her gluttony is revealed in her insatiable appetite, her sloth in her demands that others bring her food, and her lechery in her many bastards” (Chance, *Mythology for England* 164). Shelob, like Grendel’s mother is an adversary of God because she can be seen as a guardian to the gates of hell. Sauron approves of her living on the Cirith Ungol as it is the most secret way into Mordor. And if anyone ever found it, they would run into Shelob and could not sneak into Mordor by the back door. And she does not care about Sauron or his business: “Little she knew of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand, who only desired death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life, alone, swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness could not contain her” (*Two Towers* 335).

The orcs are aware of Shelob’s presence and they do not like her very much. They are careful not to get in her way. When she paralysed Frodo and Sam thought he was dead, he took the Ring and on the way to Mordor heard orcs talking:

She’s got more than one poison. When she’s hunting, she just gives ‘em a dab in the neck and they go as limp as boned fish, and then she has her way with them. D’you remember old Ufthak? We lost him for days. Then we found him in a corner; hanging up he was, but he was wide awake and glaring. How we laughed! She’d forgotten him, maybe, but we didn’t touch him – no good interfering with her. (Ibid. 353, 354)

Because the orcs know that her sting can be deadly, but more often she just paralyses her victims and later eats them, when they are still succulent.

In her book *Tolkien the Medievalist* Jane Chance discusses Shelob's dissimilarities to valkyries, female figures from Norse mythology, whose name means 'chooser of the slain' and in accordance with that, they chose who dies in battle and who gets to live. According to Chance, the characteristics of the valkyrie figures in *The Lord of the Rings* are: otherworldly radiance, physical prowess equal to the male heroes, serving ceremonial functions, performing prophetic acts, choosing to act on their own strong will and undergoing the loss of something important in their lives. Chance sees Shelob as a negative aspect of the valkyrie, fulfilling some of the traits enumerated above: "Illustrated by Shelob in *The Lord of the Rings*, the obverse valkyrie aspect, which incorporates many of these same characteristics in a negative chroma, is typified by baleful, vengeful, destructive female figures such as Grendel's mother in the Old English *Beowulf*" (*Tolkien the Medievalist* 111). The most obvious comparison is that of Shelob and Galadriel, especially when Sam uses Galadriel's phial against the malice of Shelob:

An emblem of unconquerable evil will, Shelob's gigantic, dark, bloated presence establishes an extreme contrast to Galadriel's humanly proportioned qualities of light, beauty and heightened moral goodness. As Shelob offers a parodic inversion of the benevolent valkyrie aspects of Tolkien's Elven queen whose maternal virtues guide and protect her people, so too has the valkyrie-associated Grendel's mother been described as "a parodic inversion, both of the Anglo-Saxon queen and mother, the ideal of which was embodied in the Virgin Mary." (Ibid.119)

Shelob, defined as a creature who bases her actions on her instincts, she serves the purpose of intensifying the benevolent valkyrie traits shown in other female characters.

Differing from the case of Grendel's mother, Shelob is a spider, not a humanoid monster. Shelob's unnaturalness is intensified by the fact that she has claws. It is not usual for normal spiders to have claws but Tolkien adds this to the description of Shelob: "at each leg's

end there was a claw” (*Two Towers* 337). She uses those claws, along with her sting in battle. Just like Grendel’s mother used her claws when she fought Beowulf. “Other evidence linking Tolkien’s spider creature to the inhuman qualities of such grim battle demons is that her hide resembles Grendel’s mother skin or body covering in that it is tough enough to deflect weapons, much like the armour commonly worn by valkyries” (Chance, *Tolkien the Medievalist* 120).

*The dragon and Sauron.* The third monster which Beowulf encounters, now as a well-respected king of the Geats, is a dragon. The poet never mentions his name, the monster is only referred to as the dragon. Scholars have agreed that this part of the poem is different than the first one where Beowulf kills Grendel’s kin. Beowulf is no longer a young glory hunter, he is now a renowned king and warrior. Here Beowulf finds himself in a totally different situation. The dragon is neither a jealous hater of warrior music nor a revengeful parent. His reason for laying waste on the land of the Geats is gold. As the guardian of the gold, he is stricken with dragon-sickness: “’Dragon-sickness’ is evidently avarice, but it is a specialised form of it. Passive rather than active - its sufferers want to hoard rather than spend or display - and strongly connected with love of metal” (Shippey, *Roots and Branches* 13).

The dragon sleeps on the treasure in a barrow -and when a thief steals a gold-plated cup from the dragon, the dragon feels the loss and goes rampant with rage. The thief brings the cup to king Beowulf to settle his debt to the king, but causes even greater unsettlement with the dragon. This is because “in other literature, treasure may perhaps bring no good to him who possesses it; in *Beowulf* the treasure is positively evil” (“Beowulf’s Three Great Fights” 340). Beowulf is also touched by dragon-sickness when he receives the cup, he is not quite immune to it, but the desire to defend his people prevails in him. Because, dragons “were no everyday occurrences but formidable adversaries which required exceptional human beings to quell them” (“Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant” 306).

The dragon is associated mainly with fire. Other phrases describe him as ‘Guardian of the Hoard,’ ‘serpent,’ ‘keeper of the barrow,’ and ‘fell beast.’

This hoarded loveliness did the old despoiler wandering  
in the gloom find standing unprotected, even he who filled  
with fire seeks out mounds (of burial), the naked dragon of  
fell heart that flies wrapped about in flame. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1912-15)

Beowulf knows that it is not going to be easy to defeat that dragon. And that is why he goes into the fight clad in armour, with sword and shield, taking his warriors with him. Even though he is old now, he is still mighty, but he fears it is not going to be enough. And he is right: “Against the Dragon Beowulf’s armour failed to protect him; his sword broke; he needed help from his companions, but all except one were faithless to him. The treasure he won by his death was buried again with him” (“Beowulf’s Three Great Fights” 341). Beowulf is aware of the fact that this is his last fight. He is also aware that by fighting the dragon, he is protecting his kingdom, he is not fighting to protect someone else’s kingdom like he was when he fought Grendel’s kin for king Hrothgar. “[I]n his earlier battles, Beowulf is able to gain glory for himself and defend Hrothgar’s kingdom, in his battle with the dragon he must weigh desire for personal glory and the need to defend his people against the possibility of leaving them bereft of a leader and without protection from the Swedes” (“Meditating on Men and Monsters” 4).

Another difference which separates Beowulf fighting Grendel’s kin and him fighting the dragon is the fact that dragons are also God’s foes, but not in the same way as giants are. There are many instances of dragons in the Bible and they usually stand for the devil, meaning God’s greatest enemy. Hence dragons and giants stand for different levels of God’s enemies. The dragon is not a humanoid monster and therefore not a descendant of Cain. He

does not bear the same curse as Grendel and his mother. Also, the dragon was provoked directly to attack and that was not the case with Grendel's kin. The dragon does not seek to harm humans because he does not like the way they are, he only wants that the gold, which was stolen, is returned to him. Dragon-sickness is in control of that rage, not the dragon himself: "The fact is that the dragon is altogether a different sort of creature from the Grendel-tribe. For he is nowhere called God's enemy, or a fiend, or joyless; in fact, no words of moral disapprobation are applied to him; his wrath is not aroused by any unreasonable jealousy of human happiness but by a very definite outrage" ("Approaches to Beowulf" 6).

The last characteristic of the dragon is that he, unlike Grendel's kin, is a symbol of the spiritual sin. He represents greed, pride and ultimately wrath, but nowhere is he described to be lecherous or voracious. He does not want to satisfy his physical needs, but his spiritual ones, making him a different and more mature kind of monster. "Certainly we can call the dragon 'evil' – but in a very different sense of the word; an impersonal, amoral sense: rather as we might think of a disease as an evil" (Ibid. 6). Bearing that in mind, the dragon is in fact a negative side of heroes. As Tolkien argued in his essay *The Monsters and the Critics*, the monsters in *Beowulf* play the role of challenging the hero's might and strength, and of showing the dark, evil side of the hero. As was the case with Grendel, when Beowulf fights the dragon, he actually fights his own self. But his own self which is now older and more mature than it was when he fought Grendel. With Grendel he fought to prove his strength and courage, with the dragon he fights to prove his wisdom and intelligence. "In a sudden flash of insight inspired by the ravages of the dragon, therefore, Beowulf's apprehension appears to turn inward, toward what is conceivably monstrous and "offensive" in his own nature" ("Metalepsis and Monstrosity" 263). The poet of *Beowulf* describes this thusly:

Wise though he was he thought that he had bitterly

angered the eternal Lord, Ruler of all, against the ancient law.



His breast within was whelmed in dark boding thought, as  
 was unwonted for him. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1962-65)

The battle with the dragon is a dignified way for Beowulf to realize his own imperfection. Because “the dragon is real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, nonetheless, approaches ‘*draconitas*’ rather than *draco*: ‘a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life)’” (Tolkien, *Monsters and the Critics* 17). Seamus Heaney in his introduction to *Beowulf* claims that the dragon is: “the psalmist’s valley of the shadow of death, the embodiment of a knowledge deeply ingrained in the species which is the very knowledge of the price to be paid for physical and spiritual survival. [D]ragon who could be read as a projection of Beowulf’s own chthonic wisdom refined in the crucible of experience” (Heaney, *Beowulf* xix, xx).

Beowulf’s sword Naegling breaks in battle, but Wiglaf, one of his companions, comes to his aid with another sword which is magical and which gives the dragon a lethal wound. But Beowulf also dies as the dragon wounded him badly in battle. Before he dies, he makes Wiglaf his heir to the throne. However, the poet then says that Beowulf’s kingdom is doomed. Beowulf’s people then build him a barrow overlooking the sea. “[T]he dragon also personifies death. As an uncommon man, Beowulf is marked for an uncommon end. The dragon is his destiny, and he senses it has arisen not only for the stolen flagon, but for him” (“The Fire-Drake” 590).

The third monster in *The Lord of the Rings* is Sauron. Sauron’s will is tied to the will of the Ring and so he is not at his most powerful without it. Only when the Ring was on Sauron’s hand could he take a physical form. Ever since Isildur cut the Ring off of his hand, he has only been a spirit. Since then he grew in power but remained a spirit. His spirituality is

shown in his dual nature: “It moves toward the ravenous imagination that takes its darkest shape in the visible form of Sauron himself: condensed to a single devouring Eye and a grasping hand” (Chance, *Tolkien the Medievalist* 83). Sauron belongs to an angelic order of Maiar and because of that he does not necessarily have to have a body to have a strong will. He used his will to obtain followers and servants. “In any case none of my ‘angelic’ persons are represented as knowing the future completely, or indeed at all where other wills are concerned. Hence their constant temptation to do, or try to do, what is for them wrong (and disastrous): to force lesser wills by power: by awe if not by actual fear, or physical constraint” (*Letters*, no. 156).

Like the dragon in *Beowulf*, Sauron is the last, strongest enemy of the hero Frodo and his Maiar origin suggest an old and wise creature. He is not a mindless creature oriented to satisfy his physical needs like Gollum and Shelob. Sauron is much more deceitful, intelligent and cunning. As Gandalf says, Sauron is a symbol of the Shadow, so that the Dark Lord himself seems to linger in all the shadows and dark places. Therefore his most powerful weapon is fear and temptation: “in Mordor [...] absence can take on a kind of life, can become presence [...] also a ‘shape’ poised between ‘substance’ and ‘shadow’” (Shippey, *Author of the Century* 129, 130). It is said that Sauron’s power lies in the earth itself: “And yet we see that Sauron can torture and destroy the very hills” (*Fellowship of the Ring* 292).

Sauron was at first good but was corrupted by the first Dark Lord. And as Gandalf points out: “The evil of Sauron cannot be wholly cured, nor made as if it had not been” (*Two Towers* 149). In the Third Age, Sauron is full of pride and greed, much like the dragon in *Beowulf*. Gandalf explains this in *The Return of the King*:

If he [Sauron] regains it [the Ring], your valour is vain, and his victory will be swift and complete: so complete that none can foresee the end of it while this world lasts. If it is destroyed, then he will fall; and his fall will be so low that none can foresee his

arising ever again. For he will lose the best part of the strength that was native to him in his beginning, and all that was made or begun with that power will crumble, and he will be maimed forever, becoming a mere spirit of malice that gnaws itself in the shadows, but cannot again grow or take shape. And so a great evil of this world will be removed. (*Return of the King*145)

Both his pride and his greed lie in the Ring. The Ring is his greatest accomplishment and he instilled it with a part of his will so they cannot be perfect without each other.

Sauron is very proud of the Ring, it took him years to learn the Elven secret of jewel-making and to make a Ring which cannot be destroyed by any weapon and affects everyone who wears it. His greed is shown in his desire to get the Ring back, at any cost, just so he could be the most powerful evil force in Middle-earth. So, as was the case with the dragon in *Beowulf*, Sauron is also stricken by dragon-sickness. The Shadow, which is controlled by Sauron, always tempts Frodo to put on the Ring, because Sauron can see him clearer in the words of shadow, as he is a spirit himself. "One sees in all this an echo of that dualism which had produced the Ring as hostile presence and psychic amplifier, or Sauron as enemy and as tempter" (Shippey, *Road to Middle-earth*228).

The Dark Lord is mostly described as fire and blackness. His evil nature is only shown as an abstract concept, Frodo never actually sees his face, the only thing he sees is the ever-watchful Eye: "Sauron as archetypal and abstract Evil projects a monstrous adversary far more terrifying in his formlessness than the lesser adversaries described as leaders and kings [...] Sauron's fragmented self symbolizes the divisiveness of his evil; his Eye searches the countryside while his Lieutenant as his Mouth addresses the free peoples at the Gate to Mordor"(Chance, *Mythology for England* 9).The divided psyche of Sauron symbolizes Frodo's inner fight between the kind hobbit and the monstrous self he is becoming while carrying the Ring. Consequently, when he finally destroys the Ring, he overcame both Sauron

and himself. Of course, with a little help from Gollum. Thus the end of *The Lord of the Rings* resembles that of *Beowulf*. The most mature adversary is defeated by the hero with the help of one character, with the difference that Wiglaf was king Beowulf's warrior and friend, and Gollum was Frodo's enemy. Without Gollum's help, however, the Ring would not be destroyed and Sauron would not be defeated: "When Frodo betrays himself enough to keep the Ring at the last moment, Gollum bites off both Ring and finger only to fall into the furnace of Mount Doom, the most ignominious "servant" finally achieving the coveted role of "Lord of the Rings." The least dangerous adversary finally fells the most dangerous—Sauron"(Ibid. 180).

And although Frodo did not die right away from the literal wounds like Beowulf, he felt that he could not live in Middle-earth anymore. The fact that he is the destroyer of the Ring granted him the right to go to Grey Havens with the elves, to enter the blessed land of the Valar and to live there eternally. Because the psychological wounds which he received in the War for the Ring could never fully heal in this world. And much like Beowulf passed his throne to Wiglaf, Frodo gave the book on the War of the Ring to Sam, his faithful servant. "The realm of Sauron hath ended and the Ring of Doom is nomore and the King [Aragorn] is victorious, he has passed through the Black Gate in triumph and all his enemies are fled" (*Sauron Defeated* 60).

## COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DRAGON AND SMAUG

So far my main focus was on *The Lord of the Rings* but now I am going to discuss *The Hobbit* and its main antagonist, the dragon Smaug. The reason for this is the fact that Smaug is very similar to the dragon in *Beowulf*, in fact Tolkien got the inspiration for Smaug from *Beowulf*. Tolkien explains it in one of his letters: "*Beowulf* is among my most valued sources;

though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing, in which the episode of the theft arose naturally (and almost inevitably) from the circumstances. It is difficult to think of any other way of conducting the story at this point. I fancy the author of *Beowulf* would say much the same” (*Letters*, no. 25).

Tolkien took some motifs directly from *Beowulf*. First of all, there is the fact that the dragon of *Beowulf* and Smaug are both dragons. And that both dragons are the last, most powerful and wisest adversaries. According to the Dictionary of Symbols, the dragon: “stands for ‘things animal’ par excellence, and here we have a first glimpse of its symbolic meaning, related to the Sumerian concept of the animal as the ‘adversary’, a concept which later came to be attached to the devil” (Dictionary of Symbols, 86). In the Bible, the devil uses trickery and deceptiveness in order to overcome his enemies. Therefore, dragons are symbols of old and more elemental, spiritual sins. That is particularly visible in Smaug, who is a great orator, and enjoys Bilbo’s flattering. Smaug is also greedy, proud and egoistic.

Second, both of them are guardians of a great hoard and, consequently, both have dragon-sickness. The poet of *Beowulf* says the following of the dragon: “Treasure in the ground it is ever his / wont to seize, and there wise with many years he guards the / heathen gold” (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1916-18). And Tolkien says of Smaug: “Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light” (*Hobbit* 215).

Third, the dragons sleep on the treasure in very similar abodes. The dragon of *Beowulf* inhabits a barrow: “he trusted in his barrow, in its wall and his own warlike / might” (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1956-57). And Smaug lives inside a mountain, in a stone city which the dwarves built to be their kingdom. “Before him lies the great bottom-most cellar or dungeon- hall of the ancient dwarves right at the Mountain’s root” (*Hobbit* 215).

Fourth, a secret passage leads to that dark stone abode where the dragons sleep. And right through that passage a thief enters and steals the cup from both dragons. The poet of *Beowulf* says:

[B]elow lay a path little known  
to men. Therein went some nameless man, creeping in nigh  
to the pagan treasure; his hand seized a goblet deep, bright  
with gems. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1862-65)

And in *The Hobbit* the dwarves discuss how the burglar Bilbo could enter Smaug's vault. Gandalf says to them: "There is one point that you haven't noticed [...] and that is the secret entrance. You see that rune on the West side, and the hand pointing to it from the other runes? That marks a hidden passage to the Lower Halls" (*Hobbit* 20). It is said that Smaug could never fit into that tunnel, he could not fit in it even when he was a young dragon.

Fifth, as I already mentioned, there is a thief in both cases. And in both cases, a piece of treasure which he steals is the gold cup. Also, both thieves operate while the dragon is sleeping. In *Beowulf*, a thief steals the cup from the dragon in order to settle a debt he has to king Beowulf:

[A]man, who bore  
to his liege-lord a goldplated goblet, beseeching truce and  
pardon of his master.

.....

The Guardian of the Hoard searched  
eagerly about the ground, desiring to discover the man who

had thus wrought him injury as he lay in sleep.(Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1921-23, 1931-33)

In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo went into Smaug's lair to look for the Arkenstone, but when he could not find it, he stole a cup to prove to the dwarves that it can be done: "Above him the sleeping dragon lay, a dire menace even in his sleep. He grasped a two-handled cup, as heavy as he could carry" (*Hobbit* 216).

Sixth, in both narratives, the dragons awake very soon to discover the theft and, outraged, leave their lairs to lay waste and scorch everything in their paths. The dragon of *Beowulf*:

Then was

the keeper of the barrow swollen with wrath, purposing, fell

beast, with fire to avenge his precious drinking-vessel. Now

was the day faded to the serpent's joy. No longer would he

tarry on the mountain-side, but went blazing forth, sped with

fire. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1940-45)

Much in the same way, Smaug decided to punish the near-by town because he thought that the thief was one of its settlers:

The dwarves were still passing the cup from hand to hand and talking delightedly of the recovery of their treasure, when suddenly a vast rumbling woke in the mountain underneath as if it was an old volcano that had made up its mind to start eruptions once again. [...] To hunt the whole mountain till he had caught the thief and had torn and trampled him was his one thought. He issued from the Gate, the waters rose in

fierce whistling steam, and up he soared blazing into the air and settled on the mountain-top in a spout of green and scarlet flame. (*Hobbit* 217, 218)

Seventh, both dragons had to be killed with special weapons, because no ordinary weapon could pierce their skin. Beowulf takes his sword Naegling, which he got from Hygelac after he returned victorious from Heorot, into the battle with the dragon. It is a sword of prestige because no ordinary sword was ever given as an award for heroic deeds. He manages to pierce dragon's skin but the sword breaks from the brute force of his hand:

[W]ith mighty strength he smote with his

warlike sword, and fast in the head it stood driven by fierce

hate. Nægling burst asunder! Beowulf's sword, old, grey-

bladed, had failed him in the fight. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 2250-53)

In *The Hobbit*, Bard the Bowman, heir to the throne of Dale, a great latent hero shoots a black arrow, made especially for dragons, to Smaug's belly, to the vulnerable spot which Bilbo saw earlier. Smaug crashes into the ruins of Lake-town and marks an end of dragon presence in Middle-earth: "The black arrow sped straight from the string, straight for the hollow by the left breast where the foreleg was flung wide. In it smote and vanished, barb, shaft and feather, so fierce was its flight" (*Hobbit* 251).

And last, both dragons end up in a pretty similar grave. Both dragons' flames are extinguished by water. The dragon of *Beowulf* lays ever after in the sea:

The

serpent too they thrust over the towering cliff, let the tide the



dragon take, the flowing sea engulf the keeper of fair things. (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 2629-31)

Smaug lays in the pilings of old Lake-town, right next to the lake: “for ever after they had a dread of the water where the dragon lay. He would never again return to his golden bed, but was stretched cold as stone, twisted upon the floor of the shallows” (*Hobbit*256).

## CONCLUSION

*Beowulf* was one of Tolkien’s favourite works. He translated it, wrote about it, and even integrated part and motifs from it into his own books. Monsters were in the centre of Tolkien’s attention. He claimed that the critics were wrong not to consider them as an important part of *Beowulf*. If it was not for the monsters, the protagonist’s strength would not be put to a test. This is also true of his own works; he wrote about monsters which become stronger as the protagonist progresses through the narrative. Every battle that the protagonist leads against the monsters is more difficult than the previous one, and each battle makes the protagonist wiser, more experienced and ready to face the next monster when the time comes.

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