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ENG 476

Professor Ellis

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Heroics or Luck

During the course of the novel *The Hobbit*, the main character Bilbo Baggins transforms from a quiet, respectable, boring hobbit into an adventurous, brave and, ultimately, heroic individual. One of the first instances when we truly see Bilbo’s heroic nature hinted at is during the underground competition of riddles that he has with Gollum. However, rather than highlighting the skill or courage of Bilbo during this scene, there is much more emphasis on Bilbo’s luck.

Bilbo’s confrontation with Gollum is the first time that Bilbo pulls out and truly wields his sword, which he eventually names Sting. However, he never actually has the chance to test just how sharp the edge of his blade is. First, he pulls it out in order to see if there are any goblins nearby. Rather than use it as a weapon he uses it as an indicator, which is more of an attempt to survive than a heroic action. Then, when he does threaten Gollum with the sword, his threat is not very determined or scary. Bilbo’s own fear reduces his intimidation so that Gollum finds him more a curiosity than a hazard to eliminate. This action reveals that Bilbo is forced to this stance to defend himself rather than by any apparent bravery. However, the fact that he is capable of defending himself against Gollum suggests that Bilbo does have a heroic nature but it is more dormant than active at this point in the story.

Although there was little to no actual physical conflict between Gollum and Bilbo, they did both participate in a battle of wits which did include a mental struggle, a competition and danger, especially for Bilbo. In Bilbo’s willingness to compete and win there is shown a small hint that perhaps Bilbo has the courage and determination to truly be a heroic hobbit. However, Bilbo is not heroic in the sense that he seeks to defeat Gollum simply because he is a cruel, evil creature. Instead, he is forced to defend himself by Gollum’s curious attempts to eat him.

Furthermore, at this moment in the story Bilbo’s heroic nature is only hinted at because rather than having a fast imagination or intellect to answers Gollum’s riddles, it is commented more than once that Bilbo is just lucky at either figuring it out on the spot or remembering a similar riddle. This acknowledgement of the interference of luck indicates that Bilbo is not truly a hero yet. Instead, he is pictured as a favored character with an advantage. As an audience, we rejoice at his triumph but not for any heroic or moral trait that Bilbo contains.

In conclusion, Bilbo Baggins’ trajectory towards a heroic figure is hinted at in this scene between himself and Gollum but at this point he is not a hero yet. He has far more adventures and trials to go through till his innate heroic trait because truly visible.