

The Dwarfish Desire for Gold

They say, “Money makes the world go round”. Well, at least I can say for sure, it makes the international film industry produce some fascinating and high-grossing blockbusters. We have Indiana Jones, a professor who is venturing in the jungles searching for a treasure, Bonnie and Clyde who partner in crime to rob banks off their money or Danny Ocean who plots a big coup with his ten friends to get a lot of cash from some casinos. But never ever have I seen a movie with a treasure that is as big as the one in the film series “The Hobbit”. In the second part of the series, the Hobbit, Bilbo, discovers the treasure guarded by the evil dragon Smaug, who invaded the home of a dwarf clan and hereby exiled the dwarves whose gold still lies in their former dwelling. While Bilbo is trying to find a specific gem in the masses of golden coins, precious silverware and other valuable things – a task that seems impossible considering the size of the dwarves' hall and the amount of gold piled up in there, but then again, this is just a movie – he could practically go for a swim in the heaps of gold lying around. One is instantly compelled to think of a very featherless very, very rich Scrooge McDuck. With a treasure this big, there is the question how the characters in “The Hobbit – The Desolation of Smaug” are influenced by it throughout the film?

When we have a look at it, the first time someone refers to the treasure explicitly is when the Elvenking Thranduil advises Thorin against going to the mountain in which the dragon resides to recapture their rightful home and the enormous amount of gold that lies within. According to Thranduil the gold in there made Thorin's father¹ go mad of greed and he doesn't want Thorin to suffer the same terrible fate.

The next time the treasure is mentioned is in Laketown, a small village on the foot of the Lonely Mountain in which the former home of the dwarves lies, when Thorin tries to persuade the inhabitants of the town and more importantly the master of Laketown to let them go and to assist them in the dwarves' mission. The master, who we got to know as a person who enjoys his bottle of good wine while the people outside his mansion are starving, is reluctant at first but after he heard about the tons of golden coins and jewels hidden in the mountain, he is all for fulfilling the dwarf's demands because he expects to increase his own wealth in doing so.

We can witness further evidence of the bad side of the treasure when Bilbo is already alone inside the mountain while his fellows are waiting outside. When they hear Smaug, the dragon roar inside the mountain, Balin wants Thorin, as the leader of their mission, to go inside and save Bilbo. The dwarf king hesitates because he's afraid to spoil Bilbo's attempt to go in there unnoticed and find the Arkenstone, but eventually he goes in the Lonely Mountain to find the frightened Hobbit fleeing the dragon's shelter. Thorin forces him to stop, using his sword, and doesn't want Bilbo to leave unless he knows the Hobbit has completed his task to find the precious gem. One could interpret his hostile reaction towards his former companion as him getting greedy while facing the gigantic amount of gold in the ancient dwarves' halls, and maybe that is exactly what it is.

Nevertheless, I am sure that there is more behind the dwarves' motivation to endure all the dangers and hardships of their journey than their desire for gold. There is the scene when, after their long and hard odyssey, they finally manage to open the secret door on the Lonely Mountain in the last light on Durinsday and even the dwarf Balin, who is old and experienced, has tears in his eyes. I believe nobody has such powerful emotions triggered by the thought of gold or money. I believe there is more to that, like the imagination to finally have returned home again, to stand in the same halls and look upon the same pillars as their ancestors did, centuries ago.

The aspect of home is also important in the previously mentioned scene, set in Laketown. It is true, Thorin appeals to the city's master's cupidity by promising him a lot of gold, but he guarantees the residents in Laketown that their village will be a flourishing place of trade and wealth again. So he wins them over by promising them prosperity for their precious hometown.

And after all, in the final scene, they melt a huge statue made of pure gold to – now literally – make the dragon go for a swim in the scalding hot fluid. Doesn't do Smaug any harm but shows what is important to the dwarves.

In conclusion, numerous characters in the film “The Hobbit – The Desolation of Smaug” are influenced by the prospect of the treasure. They get greedy from time to time and they forget their initial motive or who their friends are. But in the end, they always remember and come back to the bigger reason that makes them pursue their mission: the hope of a place to call home.

So all in all, dwarf king Thorin and his companions give us confidence to believe in human values – or at least the dwarves'. They throw the thought of money aside and return to better values.

And this may be the reason why this genre of film is called “fantasy”.

¹ Maybe, it was even his grandfather, who knows with all the names sounding somehow the same?