Beowulf
- from book to film

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C essay 15 hp
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June 2010
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Introduction

"I am Beowulf. I have come to kill your monster". He is big, blond and very strong in the film from 2007. The watchman’s spear is only one decimetre from his nose. Beowulf does not even blink. He has just come ashore from a very stormy boat ride. He is in Denmark in the year 507. The film is directed by Robert Zemeckis with actors like Ray Winston, Crispin Glover, Angelina Jolie, Brendan Gleeson, Anthony Hopkins and others. The computermade film is made in the USA and we find northern Europe is a vast land with ice and snow.

I have studied a new modern translation, Heaney’s, and all my questioning is from this book. Since the text is a poem, I have in order to understand everything, plus to get the right feeling for the text, I have also studied the Swedish translations Collinder from 1955 as well as Rudolf Wickberg’s from 1889 and 1914. Wickberg since Östen Martinsson has them on his homepage Tacitus.nu, and I assumed they to be better then Collinder. I also searched for another older version of Beowulf, in English to compare Heaney’s with, but I found, at Umeå University’s library, so many books about Beowulf, and thus, I had severe troubles finding one with the text.

When comparing Beowulf in this film and the old manuscript from 700 A.D. we do indeed find differences. A film is something else than a book. This film is made more than a thousand years later than the books I have studied. This can be seen in several ways. We have more sex and violence, just like Brian McFarlane says in his book Novel to film (1996:189). The audience is much younger, as Graeme Turner says in his book Film as Social practise (1993:96). A short description of the manuscript and the film, comes next in my essay, which follows by a discussion about different heros. I have used Dean Millers types of heros from his book The epic hero (2000:1-9) and I call them ‘Achilles hero’ and ‘Saviour hero’. I have taken a closer look on seven scenes and analysed them, from the point of view: is Beowulf different in the film and in the book?

Why these scenes? The first reason is, I wanted scenes which I could find in both the book and in the film. I have e.g. tried to avoid any scene with the golden horn, since the golden horn does not exist in the book. Secondary, I have chosen scenes where Beowulf is doing things. All the parts where he is only talking, I have avoided, because they differ so much in
the book and the film. My essay is about Beowulf, the hero, therefore I have not taken scenes
where Beowulf is only playing a minor part or none at all. It is my strongest believe, I have
chosen scenes from the film where Beowulf’s appearance is as his best. Scenes, where he is
lying for the king, are not heroic. Neither is him boasting after killing Grendel or his swim
competition with Bracca, where his friends are admitting Beowulf is lying. My heavies’
reason for choosing these scenes is, it must have flourished many stories during these more
than thousand years. Most of them are forgotten long ago. Why has Beowulf survived? I am
absolutely convinces, it is because of those scenes I have chosen.

The scenes, I have studied, are alike, but we find differences. Films are more often viewed by
younger people, due to Graeme Turner, a film is shorter says Holm and a film does not have
to be a filmed book, as Brian McFarlane says. I have also mentioned Christ and the Bible and
two very rich ship funerals from around 400 A.D.: Sutton Hoo and Högom.

Since my essay is about Beowulf the hero, I will argue that we have two totally different
heroes in this film and the manuscript. In the film Beowulf is what I call an Achilles hero, one
who does anything in order to get famous. It is a man who seeks the violent death, because it
will make him immortal. In the manuscript we find a king-to-come who is wise and takes
responsibility for his people. He does not rush in. He is taking no unnecessary risks, but when
needed he is prepared to risk own life. I call this a Saviour hero.

**A film is a film and a book is a book.**

When making a film you have to keep a lot of things in mind. First you only have one hour
and forty-five minutes to do it (Holm 16). This means you have to shorten the story. But in a
film you can see things which would take many words to explain in a book. Too many details
in a text makes us lose interest, also it would make books much too long (Holm 14-28). But
even before film making, authors have always tried to make us SEE. McFarlane is in his book
*Novel to film* (1996:3), quotes Joseph Conrad: “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by
the powers of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make
see” (1996:3). But “A film…is also a film of its time…”as McFarlane puts it (1996:200). He
clearly says, that in the last 40 years (McFarlane’s book is twelve years old) more sex and
violence on film are accepted (1996:189). This is something we can see very much of in the
film Beowulf from 2007. The screen writers, Neil Gaiman and Robert Avary, re-wrote the
story from the old manuscript, or as Robert Zemeckis states:
This is Beowulf. The true story of what goes on here on stage and it’s gonna be no bullshit. It’s gonna be just the way it is. The process being involved to figure out what the movie is. All I can say right now is: This has nothing to do with the Beowulf you were forced to read in junior high school. This is all about eating, drinking, fighting and fornicating (extra material on the DVD from 2008).

Looking at the film we can see much of what McFarlane calls “impressionistic sense” rather than a “near-fixation with the issue...” (1996: 194). The story is not at all the same. The story has been shortened and the whole plot is different.

One reason for all the changes we can see in the film, is therefore to flirt with the audience. They are young. According to Graeme Turner in his book Film as Social practice, the audience is mainly between 12 and 24 years old (1993:96). This film is also computer made. The actors have dots on their clothes and faces and the camera only films these dots. This means the camera can only see the movements and not the actors looks. Then the computer changes the way they and all props look. As far as I know most, boys between 12 and 24 are used to computer made figures. Another reason for all the violence and the sex is that a film has to make money. Or as Brian McFarlane expresses it: “Film-makers’ reasons for this continuing phenomenon appear to move between the poles of crass commercialism and high-minded respect for literary works. No doubt there is a lure of a pre-sold title…” (1996:7).

Zemeckis clearly says this film has nothing to do with the Beowulf you were “forced to read” in junior high school. The hero Beowulf is known to the audience even before seeing the film.

Stephen King says in the book Academic writing, (Björkman/Rääsinen 2003:32) that we go to the cinema to have fun and with this he means to see a horror movie. We do indeed see a lot of horror in the film Beowulf, we see the short cuts, the fire is going out, the monster Grendel is four meters high and looks awful, the music is there to frighten us. A woman screams desperately in one scene. Stephen King means: we are all mentally ill and we need horror to control our insanity. All the horror in the film is an attempt to flirt with the audience – ticket paying 12-24 year old men.

The manuscript, the book
The text is very old and it is an oral poem. It was probably written down in England around 700 (some say later). It has 3182 lines. One manuscript has survived until now. It is written on different pages, 195 cm high and 115-130 wide, but the order of them has been discussed and changed. It was badly burned around the edges – and thus some lines are missing - when the Ashburnham house caught fire in 1731. (Newton, preface, 1-7) We do not the names of the writers of the poem, and not for whom the text was original written. It has been translated several times, into many languages.

Joseph Conrad wanted us to SEE the text (McFarlane 1996:3). That was said in 1897 and tells us, that before we had film, authors tried to make us see their events and character, by accurate and detailed descriptions. The writer of the poem Beowulf has also done this. We find so many descriptions, “ring giver,” “wrongfooting,” “bolted down his blood.” But in those days it was important to have beautiful poems as well. We have alliterations, rhythm and rhyme. One example:

“Finnes thegnas, nemne feaum anum,
Thaet he ne mehte on thaem medel-stede
Wig Hengeste wiht gefeohtan,
Ne tha wea-lafe wige forthringan”

The modern English translation made by Seamus Heaney from 2001 is without alliterations and rhyme:

“Finn’s troop of thanes,
All but a few.
How then could Finn
Hold the line
Or fight on
To the end with Hengest,
How save
The rump of his force...” (1081-1084)

**Different heroes**

A hero has different characteristics depending on from the period of time he is from. In the book *The epic hero*, Dean Miller has a discussion of what a hero is: “An individual...had
intervened in some critical situation in an extraordinary fashion, acting outside, above, or in
disregard to normal patterns of behaviour, especially in putting his or her life at risk” (2000:1). This also includes people like Hitler, Jesse James or a psychotic serial murderer, says Miller. The word “hero” Miller found in French dictionaries from 1769 and onwards. The first explanation is “demigod” - this means a hero is almost a god but not quite.) As time goes by a hero is said to be “a man who distinguishes himself in war by extraordinary acts”. Now the hero has to be a warrior. Even later we find “a man who, on some occasion, betrays the marks of great pride...or of remarkable nobility” (2000:2), all according to Miller.

Then Miller introduces us to one other definition, the one Homer has: a hero, as any free man. Homer’s heroes seek the good death. A man who dies young by doing things that will make him famous is a hero. The contrast – bad death – is an old man dying in bed with no fame at all. The hero seeks the violent death, says Miller (2000:5). This is what I call an Achilles hero in this essay. Achilles’ mother even says, (in the Iliad) that instead of Achilles sitting on the shore with tears and shame, it had been better if she had never given birth to him (line 414). Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey are written about 700 B.C. and they are to have taken place a thousand years earlier. Beowulf is, due to my opinion, an Achilles hero in the film.

What I call the Saviour hero is a totally different hero. Miller says (2000:5) a hero’s main task is to guard his people and save them from any danger. By doing so, he - according to Miller - sets his own life at risk, but his life is not so important. As a warrior he has to protect his people. This is the type of hero, I believe, we find in Beowulf from the book.

Of course you can find many more types of heroes. On Wikipedia for example, we find: superhero, with their extra strength, the detective hero with or without extra strength, with or without right to kill. We find the crook-hero, the tragic hero, the outsider, the misfortuned hero, the vigilante, the developing hero, the every-day-hero and more. In spite of the fact a hero is never only one type of hero, but also show characteristics from others, I have chosen to focus on two types of heroes: one I call the Achilles type, who seeks glory and is therefore not afraid of death. He seeks the danger. The violent death will bring him glory, and his name shall live for ever. The other hero, I call the Saviour. His main task is to keep his people safe. He does not rush in. He is a king-to-come, ready to take risks to keep his people safe.
I have chosen to look at seven different scenes from the book and the manuscript and studied Beowulf there. How does he appear? What kind of hero is he in these scenes?

**Scene 1: the boat**

**From the film**
In the film we first see the boat from below, because it is riding on a very big wave. When the boat comes down we see Beowulf for the first time. The camera is close to his face, then pulls back and thus we can see he is standing up holding on to a rope. We see the boat from the top of the mast. When the camera returns to Beowulf, Wiglaf asks him if he can see the coast. Beowulf answers “I can see nothing but the wind and the rain. The sea is my mother. She wouldn’t take me back to her womb” (17 minutes). Beowulf makes his men row “For Beowulf. For gold. For glory” (18 min).

**From the book**
In the book we meet another Beowulf. The book *Beowulf* was written in a time, when everything was unsure. They had war and robbers. Therefore the book is making the audience feel that in spite of the danger, Beowulf knows what he is doing. He has absolute control. He is ‘high-born’ and he prepares the journey very thoroughly. He selects the best of men. His kin are not advising him not to go, but helping him by “inspected omen and spurred his ambition to go” (line 204). Beowulf and his men load the boat with weapons and “shining war-gear” (line 214). He has no hurry: “Time went by…” says the manuscript (210). After arriving in Denmark they thanked God for an easy ride on a calm sea.

**Analysis of this scene**
In the text we see Beowulf as a king (to come) who does not rush, doing things without thinking. He ordered the boat. He selected the men. He prepared the boat and even more, he chooses a time to leave his home shore in calm weather. In the text he is a king to come, a Saviour hero. He is in no hurry. He thanks God for a safe journey, after the sail. This is written in a time when Christianity was not taken for granted and Christianity took every chance to prove its superiority over all other religions. We see the same thing in the Icelandic sagas, (e.g *Njals saga* 295). Beowulf is – if he has existed – probably from around 500 A.D. At Högom, Sundsvall, we have a grave from 400 A.C. Per Ramqvist, professor at the department of archaeology, Umeå says in *Högom the excavations 1949-1984* (page 47 and
the person buried here was put in east-west direction (typical for Christ believers), had a Charon coin on his chest (a Greek tradition) and lots and lots of goods with him. The goods make us rather think of pre-Christian beliefs. But indeed – as Ramqvist says - under the church of Köln, Germany, we have Christian funerals with lots of goods. Högom is a grave from the same time as Beowulf. The grave in Högom looks very much like the one of Sutton Hoo. In the book The Treasure of Sutton Hoo, ship-burial for an Anglo-Saxon king, by Bernice Grohskopf we can see the similarity of the sword (96) the coins (100), the shield (90) and much more. The author in chapter four “Sutton Hoo and the age of Beowulf,” tells us about the resemblances. At Högom and Sutton Hoo we can see, that White Christ was not so important in 400 A.D. They had other gods as well. This we can see in the film. Unferth is the only one who talks about the “Roman God Jesus Christ”. Unferth is in the film made very unpleasant and when Beowulf says the Christian God does not permit heroes, we feel Jesus does not permit us to like Beowulf, the hero in the film we are watching. All through the film the heathen gods are good and Jesus Christ is bad. We are to feel this – the film - is the Zemeckis’ “true story” of Beowulf. In the book the characters are thanking God all the time, in the film the nice characters believe in the heathen gods. Zemeckis flirts with an audience which is used to non-Christian films like Tolkien’s Lord of the rings, and Eragorn – an audience that consist of boys between 12-24.

Another thing that differs between the film and the book is all the gold we can find in the manuscript. You needed arms in those days to protect yourself, and yes good arms are better than bad arms. But the author keeps coming back to how rich Beowulf and the Danish king Hrothgar are, throughout the whole book. It was extremely important in those days. Not only does the money prove that you are a good warrior. A good warrior wins the battle, and takes the gold. But you can also afford an army of your own. You can “order a boat”. To keep the loyalty in those days, you gave your men rings, gold or silver. But in the film it is not important to be rich. Glory is more worth, even than the magnificent golden horn, the king offers Beowulf if he can kill the monster.

Safety is a third difference between the film and the book and is something which we can find time after time in the manuscript. It must have been very important in those days, with all the insecurity they had. The film is made by and for people, who live in a safe world. Safety is safe, but boring. Especially young people need something exciting, something to thrill them. Many youngsters between 12-24, boys mainly, as far as I know, turn to computer games and
horror films. Older people turn to books. We, in our safe world, all need something to thrill us. Therefore we see safety in the book, which is written in a very unsecured time, while this modern film tries to frighten us.

In this scene Beowulf is an Achilles hero in the film. The camera is very close to his face. We hear the theme music, drums and chorus. Beowulf is not afraid in such a storm. He is even standing up and standing still, does not totter a bit. Coming ashore he has no need for thanking any god for the help. Here we see Beowulf from beneath as he slowly turns around. In the text we find another hero. He is in no hurry, is preparing everything thoroughly, loads weapons to protect himself and his men, makes sure everyone can see that here comes a ‘high-born’, thanks God for a safe journey. He is making everything as safe as he can, for his sake and his men’s. Beowulf in the poem is a Saviour hero, indeed.

Scene 2: the Watchman

The film
In the film we see one single watchman meeting fifteen men from abroad. Beowulf’s men want to draw their swords, but Beowulf stops them, and places himself in front of his men. The watchman rides very, very close to Beowulf and points at him with his spear. The spear being only one decimetre from his eyes, Beowulf doesn’t even blink. He is not looking at the spear, but at the man behind it, says his name and that he will kill the monster. At the guards’ remark, he …”thought there were no more heroes left ready to kill the monster for our gold” (19 min), Beowulf answers he is not doing it for the gold, but for the glory.

The book
In the book the watchman has men with him, and can from afar see that whoever it is who is coming, he is rich and noble. They saw “shields glittering” (line 231). In spite of the fact that Beowulf and his men have already gone ashore, without asking for permission, the guard addresses them politely. Beowulf does not say his name, only his father’s, and his errand. The hero asks polity for “right advise and direction” (269), says that nothing should be hidden and offers the king his “wholehearted help and counsel” (278). He also tells so much about the king and his family, that the guard realizes whoever is standing in front of him, he is not a foe. The guard not only shows Beowulf and his men the way to the king, but orders his fellow men
to keep Beowulf’s boat safe until he returns. The guard follows Beowulf and his men to the hall and explains carefully why he has to return to the shore.

Analysis:
In the film Beowulf is Achilles again. He steps forward. He is not afraid. He tells his name and that he shall kill their monster. Not for the gold but for the glory! He is willing to risk his life - and all his men’s life - for glory. Beowulf seems to be a big man. He does not have to look up to see a man on his horse. He does not blink, although the spear is only one decimetre from his eyes. The camera is very close to the spear and to Beowulf’s eyes and moves slowly back to the guard.

In the book, we see Beowulf as the safe-guard of right or wrong. The shields and armour tell the guard on shore, that men of war are coming, but they are not hiding their arms. Beowulf’s speech tells the guard the man in front of him is a well educated powerful thane. The hero must have known he has done wrong by not asking permission to land, but says nothing has to be hidden, because they are coming as friends. Beowulf addresses the guard politely and is talking to him for quite a while. Beowulf is not risking his men’s life by not being polite.

Scene 3 the hall scene

The film
In the film Beowulf and his men are riding fast. The guard from the beach does not say more than “Beowulf” and the king Hrothgar knows not only who he is, but also that he has come to kill the monster. The king embraces him. The Achilles hero answers he has come to kill the monster. The king says the name of the monster Grendel and Beowulf turns to the many people standing outside the hall and says: “Well, then I have come to kill your Grendel”. The queen argues that many men have come before and said the same thing. Beowulf steps up to her. He looks down at her and says “I have drunk nothing yet, but I will kill your monster” (19 min). Inside the hall we see a very beautiful golden horn. The king and the queen drink from it. The king has killed a dragon to get hold of this magnificent horn. The king offers this great horn to Beowulf, if he kills the monster.

The book
In the book Beowulf patiently waits outside the hall. To the man on shore Beowulf has not mentioned his own name, only his relatives’. Wulfgard is the Danish king Hrothgar’s herald and officer. To him Beowulf only says his name and that he is willing to say his errand to the king. Wulfgard – a Vendel chief – is so impressed by Beowulf’s looks, that he begs the king to meet him, because “he is formidable indeed” (line 370). As an archaeologist I know, that Vendel is outside Uppsala in Svealand Sweden and not in Denmark or Götaland. Wulfgard is not a Geat. Geat is assumed to be from Gotland or Götaland. The king in the book Beowulf, knew his guest from when he was a young boy, with the strength of 30 in every hand. The king tells his people much about Beowulf’s kin, and thanks God for sending Beowulf to Denmark to kill their monster. The king also offers the hero “much treasure” for his heroism. Beowulf and his men are allowed to meet the king in their armour, but without shields and spears.

Analysis
Family is important in the text version of Beowulf. To the guard on shore Beowulf says his father’s name, to the king his own. The king greets him. We learn that the herald is from Vendel, because in those days it was - I assume – very important to know, who you are and from where you are. Kin is important. Vendel, outside Uppsala in Svealand is known for the boat graves, just like the one in Sutton Hoo (e.g. Sven Lindqvist or Sam Newton, 137). In the film it is not important to have a family. The film-Beowulf is a modern kind of hero, with no need for relatives, just like Achilles had no need for his.

We again see in the film a hero, so sure of himself. He just knows, he is going to kill the monster. The camera is behind Beowulf when he turns to the people and when he speaks to the queen, as if we were sitting on his shoulder. In both camera angles the people and the queen are below Beowulf. In the text Beowulf waits patiently, addresses the herald so politely he begs the king to receive him. The king replies the harold shall immediately wish Beowulf and his men welcome to Denmark. Beowulf then asks the king very politely if he permits him to kill the monster. A Saviour hero does not risk his men’s life, by not being very polite to a king in his own hall.

Scene 4 the fighting scene
In both versions Beowulf wants to fight Grendel with no sword, because swords will do no good on this monster.

**The film**
In the film Beowulf takes off his hauberk and all his clothes. After telling his men to sing, Beowulf goes to sleep. He wakes up when the door is being crushed. Grendel jumps in. He screams and so does a woman. The lights go out, all but a blue flashing light. But the more Beowulf starts to fight, the more the lights come on. We hear the drums and the choir. Four of Beowulf’s men are being killed, Grendel just bites one man’s head off and eats it. The only thing you can hear then is the crushing sounds of the monster’s jaws. Beowulf lands on Grendel twice. He realizes Grendel is disturbed by noises, and therefore Beowulf hits Grendel’s ear time after time. When Grendel wants to escape, Beowulf tosses a chain around his arm, and with help of his dearest friend and the door, they twist off the demon’s arm. Grendel shrinks, (from over four metres to the size of a child when he is dead) runs away and dies in the swamp, after telling his mother the name of his killer.

**The book**
In the book the readers are from the very beginning being told that the monster’s days are over thanks to God. The readers do not have to fear. Beowulf’s men all think they will not survive the night, since so many Danes have been killed in this hall. The mead hall is being badly destroyed in the battle. Beowulf’s men try to protect their lord. Here they realize that swords will do no harm to the creature. This does not matter because Grendel is stuck in Beowulf’s strong hands. The monster wants to escape, but cannot. Beowulf himself twists off the arm of the monster.

**Analysis**
In the book, the audience is time after another being told, that Grendel shall die. We can feel safe. The hero will win this time. In the film nobody knows who is going to win. Heroes often win, but the fact is, we do not know for sure he will, this time.

Beowulf in the film is focusing on the beast the whole time. He is never disturbed by the fact that some men are being killed. Even in the scene with the head being crushed between Grendel’s teeth Beowulf never looses his focus. His only aim is to kill the monster. He screams only to frighten or disturb the beast. Beowulf accepts help from his men, but the fight
is his. We actually only learn the name of one man, Wiglaf. This friend told Beowulf before he went to sleep: “You are crazy. Do you know that?” (35 min) Of course Beowulf stripped in front of the queen. He did it very slowly, first taking off his armour, tossing it aside, the rest of the clothes Beowulf just lets fall down to the floor. He is not looking at his men. It is just him and the queen and later just him and the monster. This is typical of the Achilles hero.

In the text Beowulf is doing most of the fighting himself. He is the first to fight Grendel, and is doing so by taking a hard grip on Grendel’s arm and holding him there. Naturally, it is so much harder for the monster to fight with only one arm. Beowulf is – again – protecting his men. After Grendel’s escape, Beowulf wishes he had had the strength to keep Grendel in the hall, so the king could have seen the dead body of the monster.

**Scene 5 the mother**

**The film**

In the film Grendel’s mother is a beautiful woman with a funny tail, which later is her hair. Beowulf has met her before, when he fought the sea monsters while swimming with his friend Bracca, when they were young. Only the hero and his comrade went after Grendel’s mother, because all of Beowulf’s men were killed during the night. They followed her tracks to a lake and Beowulf dives in. The golden horn lights the way. When she shows herself, gold is flowing from her naked body and high-heeled shoes. Now she offers Beowulf gold and – of course – glory. She says: “underneath your glamour, you are as much a monster as my son” (56 min). If he gives her a new son, Beowulf shall be the greatest of all kings. His story will live forever and in this way make him immortal. The sword Unfred lended to Beowulf is melted. He accepts this agreement.

**The book**

The book differs a lot. The king and his men, as well as Beowulf and his fellow troops follow the tracks to the lake. Beowulf asks the king to take care of his men, if he should not return. Beowulf dives into the lake. The female monster grasps him, and takes him to her cave under water. The sword breaks. Beowulf tries to finish the monster off, with his bare hands. On the wall he sees a giant’s sword, so big that no man – but Beowulf – can swing it. He kills the mother monster. When he, in his anger, cut off the head of Grendel, the sword melts. The men above the surface see all the blood from Grendel, and mourn Beowulf as dead. The king and
his men ride back to the hall, only Beowulf’s men stay, not believing they shall never see their beloved prince again. But up he comes. Here again, everyone is thanking God for his help.

Analysis
Sex is not important at all in the book. But nowadays it is. We see it in every novel, even detective stories. In Beowulf the manuscript, we find nothing about sex. Only in the very end, we learned that Beowulf had a wife. The Danish king had two sons with his queen in the book (line 1188), none in the film. Here we have a modern hero with sexual desires. Something has definitely happened in film making the last –say- 50 years. As Brian McFarlane argues in his book Novell to film, “A film…is also a film of its time…”(1996:200) and sex and violence on film is more accepted (1996:189). What we see here in the film is ´a film of its time´ with much more sex and even more violence.

The film Beowulf jumps out of the water, lands in perfect balance on the rock – barefooted. It is not possible to make such a jump, but it gives a very strong and powerful feeling. The hero is alone, focus is on him and he is very sure of himself. This plus his strength give us an Achilles hero. Beowulf is standing still while Grendel’s mother circles around him. He is standing still and the camera is fixed on him. The hero is in the middle, just like Achilles. Beowulf never thinks of his men, Denmark or even of the new monster – his own son - to come in such an agreement. A Saviour hero would never have accepted those terms, but an Achilles hero would only think of himself and his glory. Not even the fact Beowulf is loosing this magnificent horn, bothers him. Glory is what matters.

From here the film takes a totally different direction than the book. The king commits suicide; Beowulf becomes king of the Danes, with the same Queen and a mistress.

Scene 6 Finn the Friesian

The film
The Friesian prince Finn also wants to become a hero – and kill Beowulf. The Frisian prince challenges Beowulf, and the Achilles-Beowulf of course accepts – in spite of his friend Wiglaf’s advice. Beowulf steps down from the horse and lets Finn stand up. Beowulf marches towards Finn and throws his sword away. He takes off his armour. He tears up his shirt and screams: “To do what? Kill me? Kill me! Kill me!” (69 min). Finn hesitates, and begs
someone to give Beowulf a sword or else…Finn realizes he will not become a hero if he kills Beowulf unarmed. The important thing was not to kill, but to become a hero.

The book
In the book this scene is a sad old story told in the hall after Beowulf killed Grendel and has nothing to do with Beowulf.

Analysis
The reason for changing this scene in the film, is first to show the audience that Beowulf is being challenged time after time, because he is a hero. Anyone who kills a hero is a greater hero. More fame! Second Beowulf, is a great warrior. In the film Beowulf totally focuses on Finn. He does not care what his men say. They advise him not to fight. They say they will kill Finn fast. Beowulf does what he wants and does not care for his men at all, just like Achilles. At the end he says. “Give him a piece of gold and let him go. He has a story to tell” (71 min). The story of the great hero Beowulf.

Before the battle with the Friesian, Beowulf said to his friend, “The Christian God does not allow any heroes. Only weeping martyrs and fear and shame” (67 min). This statement is absolutely impossible in the book. Maybe people who lived in 500 A.D. thought so, but the ones who wrote the book are most likely monks, since most people who could read and write, I assume, were monks – and especially those who could write such a long poem as Beowulf. The authors are therefore great believers in Christ. In the film Grendel’s father is the Danish king, but in the book line 1260ff Grendel’s father is Cain. That is, Cain’s son in the film is a monster, but not in the Bible. In Genesis we can read about Cain. he got married and had a son Henok, who had three sons; Jabal ancestor to all who lived in tent and had cattle, Jubal the piper and harp player and Tubal-Cain the smith who made everything in copper and iron. No monsters here. This, Grendel being the son of the old Danish king, is – as we have seen – an interpretation of the book. Later we will learn to know Beowulf’s son. We in the film see – again – Beowulf as the Achilles hero. He is not listening to what his men say (the king doesn’t fight), he is doing everything in his own way.

Scene 7 the dragon
The character of the dragon in the film is another free interpretation of the manuscript. In the film it is Beowulf’s son, with Grendel’s mother. They had an agreement, the mother keeps the horn, Beowulf has sex with her to give her a new son and she will make Beowulf the greatest king that ever lived. In the film the dragon is a true dragon, with wings and fire.

The book gives us a problem. What is the dragon there? On line 2400, we find in Old-English “wyrme”, but “dragon” in the modern version. On line 2520 still “dragon”, and still “wyrme”. On line 2529 he is a “sky-borne foe”, a “thon gud-glogan”. In Swedish we have “orm” (=snake) mostly but also “drake” (= dragon). Can the dragon fly? In the film, yes. In the script, I can find nothing which says this dragon actually did fly.

The film
The church is being burned down. We can see this scene from above. The queen and the mistress are standing on the wall of the castle and see a dragon. The priest is being carried, badly burned to Beowulf, and repeats what the man we just saw as a shadow said. The shadow is, of course, Beowulf’s son in the shape of a man this time, later we see him as a dragon. The priest keeps repeating the words “…sins of the fathers” (81 min). Beowulf and his friend ride to the same cave where Beowulf met the monster’s mother. The dragon comes out and it is enormous. It flies towards the castle. Now Beowulf wants to stop it. He rides after the dragon, tosses an axe at it, with a rope to pull/climb up with. The dragon strikes at the castle where the two women – the wife and the mistress - are. Beowulf manages to almost cut off one wing, but cannot reach the only deadly point under the dragon’s chin. The Danish king has told Beowulf, the only spot where you can kill a dragon is there. Beowulf cuts off his arm, loses his sword, but is hanging in a chain and swings himself close enough to drag out the dragon’s heart. The dragon falls to the same shore where the Danish king jumped in his suicide. Beowulf falls and lands only one meter from his son, the dragon. The dragon shifts and becomes a golden man and dies. Beowulf has time to talk to his friend Wiglaf. His best friend becomes king. Beowulf is buried in a boat. The sea monster is kissing him goodbye, and tempts the new king, with the golden horn...

The book
In the manuscript Beowulf had been a good king for 50 years, protecting his countrymen from any danger he could. Again Beowulf prepares himself for the battle. He makes a shield of iron, since the normal shields of wood will burn. He fights the dragon against his own will, is
doing it just because he has a promise (2520) to fulfil, to protect his men or/and country. He declares, he has always trusted his own strength and always been in the front line in every battle. We learn that, Beowulf one swam home alone, after a battle and after killing 30 men, just to protect his king’s son. He did not accept the king’s crown, that time, but helped the young prince to become a king. Only after the new king’s death, he finally accepts to become a king over the Geats. In the fight with the dragon – again – Beowulf goes into the battle alone. And again the sword fails do to its job. It slips on the bone, and later it breaks. Wiglaf, Beowulf’s young kin, helps him, while ten other men hid. Beowulf’s “Stabbing knife” (line 2703) kills the dragon – a beast of 30 feet - but the king himself, the great hero, Beowulf dies from the wounds. With his last breath, he asks Wiglaf to bring out the enormous treasure and deplores he has no child. Wiglaf is now afraid for the Svear, when the Geats have no king to protect them.

Analysis
Now Beowulf- in the film - is acting like a Saviour hero, for the first time. He is protecting his wife and mistress. He is not willing to wait for a younger hero as his queen suggests. In the battle itself, however Beowulf is still an Achilles hero. He is sitting on the back of a gigantic dragon which can spit fire and screams: "I have your little head on a spear” (86 min). This dragon has no ‘little head’. Its teeth are bigger than Beowulf’s hand. The hero is high up in the air and he has no idea how he can reach the deadly point on the dragon, sitting on its back as he is. The music is scary, but changes. The very minute Beowulf looks at his two women, and understands, the only way to kill the dragon is to cut off his own arm, we hear the theme music, the same music we have heard all through the film. Beowulf screams in victory when holding the heart, but not at all when cutting off his own arm. The camera angles are extreme. We are very high up in the air, we are beneath the surface, we see the women from up close, from above and from underneath. We see Wiglaf riding like a fool - to do what? We have short cuts from everywhere, but with very few people in them. Focus is on Beowulf, the women and the dragon. Achilles has no need for anyone.

We are – again – before the fight being told - in the manuscript - that Beowulf and the dragon shall die. It seems to have been important for people a thousand years ago, to know what is to come. In an insecure world, security is important. We will all die, but heroes die slowly. Beowulf has time to recall his life. He has time to say goodbye. He has time to decide his own funeral. Here we have a hero who is taking care of everything, to the bitter end. Beowulf has
planned this battle, he fought alone (it was his intention), trusted his strength, he was – as usual - first out; he was not willing to fight but had to keep his promise. After his death his people fear attacks from the Svear, because they have no king to protect them. This is a true Saviour hero.
Summary:

I have argued that we have two different heroes in the film and in the manuscript. This film is from 2007 and the manuscript *Beowulf* is from around 700 A.D. There are all sorts of different heroes, but I have focused on two: the Saviour of his people/community and the lonely Achilles. The differences I have found in the seven scenes are a many.

First, Beowulf in the manuscript has no hurry, but prepares the boat ride to Denmark probably during some time, maybe a year or so. Of this, we can see nothing in the film.

Second, in the manuscript God is very important. Everybody is thanking God many times, for the safe journey, for help when killing Grendel and his mother. The king and Beowulf are repeating that the monster will die, if God helps them. We the audience are being told – before the fight with Grendel - thanks to God - Grendel’s days are over. God is important. In the film, the heathen gods are mentioned more often. The only one who speaks about the ‘Roman God Jesus Christ’ is Unferth.

Gold is also very important in the manuscript. Giving rings as well. Except for the golden horn – which is magnificent indeed – and the Danish king carelessly throwing out money, we see nothing about money or gold in the film.

Safety is another very important thing in the manuscript. Not only does Beowulf take very good care of his men, we the audience are time after time being told what is to come, Grendel will die and so will his mother and in the end Beowulf will die.

Family is also very important in the manuscript, but not at all in the film. Not only does a relative of Beowulf’s make him go on killing the dragon, not only did the same young man help the beloved king Beowulf, but the ancestors are mentioned all through the book, but very little in the film.

One other thing that differs is that in the text Beowulf is always polite. He very politely asks the king, if the king will permit Beowulf to kill the monster. He is not so polite in the film, especially not to his own men.
On the other hand, in the film Beowulf is more a kind of super hero. He tosses the axe only once, and it gets stuck on a flying dragon, he jumps up from the water in perfect balance, he is standing in a boat in an extreme storm with perfect balance, he is very strong indeed with no fear and no concern for his men. He is so sure of himself, he tells the Danes he IS going to kill their monster, not try to or doing his best to, he IS going to kill Grendel.

The film hero is always very focused. Beowulf is focused on the monster when it appears and is not disturbed by the fact this four meter high monster is biting off the head of one of Beowulf’s men and is chewing it. The hero is very focused on the queen when taking of his clothes. This scene does not exist in the book.

Another thing that differs between the film and the text is that, all through the film we see a lot of sex, being performed and mentioned and suggested. In the manuscript we see absolutely nothing of sex.

In the manuscript Finn the Frisian is an old story being told and has nothing with Beowulf to do. In the film Beowulf is an Achilles hero, but at the end in the film in the Finn Friesian scene Beowulf is changing, from an arrogant Achilles hero to a tired hero, who does not want to fight anymore, but when it comes to acting, he still is Achilles and do and say what he wants and he is not listening on what his men are saying.

The scene with the dragon is very different in the two Medias. In the fight with the dragon, Beowulf is – as usual – an Achilles hero in the film. In the manuscript, on the other hand, Beowulf is so concerned with his people; he wants to fight in the first line, in spite of his age. He is no longer a young man. His men only are there to help him, if needed – and indeed - in the dragon scene Beowulf needs help.

We do indeed see two different heroes: the Achilles hero in the film and the Saviour hero from the book. Achilles is alone; every other actor is merely a background, something to make the story go on. We learn the name of only one of his men, and very little about the other characters. Focus lies on Beowulf and the hero himself is very focused on anything that can make him a hero. The book has a king-to-come hero. His first and foremost interest is and must be to protect his people. And so he does. In every battle, he had always tried to be in the
first line and he always tried to fight alone, not to put his men at any unnecessary danger. We find in the manuscript from around 700 A.D. a true Savour hero.
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