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<center>A Hero's Journey Essay</center>

As discussed in class, Joseph Campbell has a theory that says all heroic epic stories basically follow the same outline, include the same characters, and generally have the same plot. While this may seem a far-fetched theory at first, after a closer look, there is much more credit to be given to this theory – known as the "monomyth" – than a casual observer may initially believe. Character and plot analysis from both Beowulf and Napoleon Dynamite will provide proof that this theory can hold true.

One of the most basic points that Campbell points to is that certain character types, called archetypes, are present in all of these stories. Through this, even when we are for the first time watching a movie, reading a book, or experiencing a story, we can find something that is immediately familiar, attractive, and relatable. We know the good guy is going to win in Disney movies; we know Harry Potter will eventually overcome his challenges; we know that Frodo will drop the ring in the fires of Mount Doom and vanquish evil. However, the adventure, the path, the trials and struggle – those are the events that cause us to buy in and experience the same story over and over. To make this point clear there are millions of examples from which we can choose, but Beowulf and Napoleon Dynamite work well – mostly because of how dissimilar they initially seem. Because of their stark variations on a classic story, we can plainly see how versatile the monomyth proves to be.

When asked what the original hero story is - the first of its kind - anyone that is familiar with Beowulf may very likely speak its name for consideration without hesitation. After all, it predates Christianity, survived for centuries on nothing more than word of mouth, and fits the monomyth about as well as a story can. You clearly have the archetypes for the Hero, the Ally,

the Herald, the Guardian, and the Villain in this story. Of course the Hero is Beowulf; the Ally is present in many forms: the Geats that Beowulf brings with him, the Danes, and finally, Wiglaf – the warrior that stand with the Hero in his final battle; the Herald is present as the wise ones that send Beowulf to fight this battle – they consult the omens and see they are in their favor, so they send their greatest warrior to affect change; the Guardian is most likely the dragon in the last battle – if we consider that the last threshold is Beowulf dying (the dragon's treasure), then the guardian of that obstacle is the space between the hero and the final threshold; and, finally, the Shadow is the evil in the story, which can be Grendel, its mother, or the dragon, depending on individual preference or point of view. Beowulf has his calling (The Call), defeats the monsters (The Thresholds), and is eventually granted his ultimate treasure – passing on to the next life (The Atonement), and passes on his crown to the next in line to be king (The Return), all fitting the monomyth outline.

  While Beowulf is (literally) a textbook example of the monomyth, just about any story that has a hero overcome an obstacle can work. This may seem far-fetched at first, but I will use the film Napoleon Dynamite to show that the monomyth truly transcends both genre and time. Our Hero is Napoleon; his Ally is Pedro; the Herald may be the principal that announces class elections or even Pedro again because he finds the challenge of running for office; the Guardian can be presented by Summer because she is the opponent in the race for class president – standing between Pedro and his reign as (king) president; and, finally, the Shadow is also represented by Summer Wheatley because she and her group of friends are the direct opposition to Napoleon and Pedro being accepted socially, and to their bid for class president. Uncle Rico may also be a Shadow, although he's actually mostly harmless by the end of the movie – but he was a thorn in Napoleon's side before catching a beating from Rex! In this particular case of the Hero's Journey, The Call is when Napoleon decides to stand with Pedro in class elections; The Thresholds are when Napoleon goes to school in the first place (the bus scene), the school dance (as Napoleon and his crew come together and find their place in their

society), and the class officer candidate speeches – when Napoleon earns a standing ovation for one of the most astounding dance sequences to ever be recorded to film; The Atonement occurs when Deb forgives Napoleon for the trouble that Uncle Rico caused with his unwarranted sales pitch; and The Return happens after the credits, when Napoleon presents a tamed stallion as a wedding gift to Kip and Lafawnduh.

The monomyth theory states that the stories we enjoy, when a hero is involved and overcomes some obstacle, are enjoyable because they are familiar to us at their roots. Beowulf is a classic example of such a story, but the monomyth holds true with stories that we love from present day, as well. This is seen in movies and books like Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, practically any Disney movie, and even in a film as seemingly unrelated as Napoleon Dynamite. While a viewer may have to reach a little at first to see the monomyth present and its archetypes, it's clear once things become focused and we see the roots of the story for what they are: a familiar base that has a different coat of paint in order to make it seem like something new.