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## From Children's Book to Epic Prequel: Peter Jackson's Transformation of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

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### Abstract

Makes the case that Jackson's sometimes controversial screenwriting decisions actually echo Tolkien's own abortive attempt to revise and change *The Hobbit* to bring it into line with the mood and milieu of *The Lord of the Rings*.

### Additional Keywords

The Hobbit (dir. Peter Jackson); Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*—Adaptations; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*—Textual history; Adaptation



FROM CHILDREN'S BOOK TO EPIC PREQUEL:  
PETER JACKSON'S TRANSFORMATION  
OF TOLKIEN'S *THE HOBBIT*

FRANK D. RIGA, MAUREEN THUM,  
AND JUDITH KOLLMANN

AFTER MOZART'S DEATH IN 1791, HIS WIDOW CONSTANCE discovered among his papers a partially completed piece of music he had been composing. She at first persuaded Joseph von Eybler to try to complete the work, and when he failed, Constanze turned to Franz Xaver Süssmayr, Mozart's pupil and sometime assistant. After Süssmayr successfully completed the composition, Constanze arranged for a public benefit performance of the work which we now know as the standard version of Mozart's *Requiem* (Sadie 139, 164-65). Mozart is not the only artist to leave a work unfinished, only to have it completed, amplified, and even transposed into another medium posthumously. When Modest Mussorgsky's close friend, the architect and painter Viktor Hartmann, died in 1873, a mutual friend arranged a memorial exhibition of 400 of the artist's drawings, watercolors, and stage designs. Visiting the exhibition, Mussorgsky conceived his own tribute in the form of a suite of piano pieces, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, rendering ten of the artworks on display with a recurring theme, the *Promenade*, representing the composer walking about the exhibition. After Mussorgsky's death, the rich pictorial quality of these pieces drew the attention of other composers and arrangers. French composer Maurice Ravel's orchestration, first performed in 1923, nearly forty years after Mussorgsky's death, became the standard orchestration of the piano suite (James 101). Ravel's transposition of Mussorgsky's suite from one medium to another involved a number of significant changes, including the enlargement of the more limited scope of the piano with the many instrumental resources of a one-hundred piece symphony orchestra. As Bernard Jacobson suggests, "Ravel uses instrumental timbres to capture the atmosphere of Hartmann's paintings or to evoke the characters they depict" (3). The *Promenade* links each of the movements like a framing device. While the recurrence of the theme binds the entire composition, Ravel's orchestration gives the work a variety in unity unattainable in piano performance.

The above examples of unfinished works completed by other hands after an artist's death provide a telling analogy both to Tolkien's creative

strategies and to the completion and transformation of his works after his death. Tolkien's constantly evolving mythology of Middle-earth caused much of his work to remain unfinished, only to be published posthumously by his son Christopher, much in the way Mozart's *Requiem* was completed after the composer's death. *The Hobbit*, first published in 1937, was not exempt from this process. Tolkien himself planned a complete revision of this early novel in order to bring it into line with the later novel, *The Lord of the Rings*. He finished three chapters of the revision by 1960, only to abandon the project.

In his 2012 film of *The Hobbit*, director Peter Jackson has made the decision not simply to reproduce the published novel, but instead to carry out Tolkien's unfinished plans by incorporating changes and amplifications that Tolkien both suggested and foresaw, thus bringing a more complete tale to the audience, much like Süssmayr's posthumous completion of Mozart's unfinished *Requiem*. As Jackson observes, he has attempted something Tolkien had not completed in print. Jackson thus provides a "fresh" vision for "people who will never have seen the full story playing out in chronological order" (qtd. in Sibley 22). In transforming *The Hobbit* from a children's novel to an adult prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*, Jackson is therefore continuing a process that Tolkien had already begun. But there is one major difference that differentiates this "completion" both from Mozart's *Requiem* and from Christopher Tolkien's reworking of Tolkien's unfinished manuscripts after his father's death. These completions did not involve a change in medium. However, much like Mussorgsky, who developed a musical composition based on pictures at an exhibition, Jackson has taken his amplification a step further by not only completing the work, but also by translating the work of art from one medium to another, from children's novel to adult film. Moreover, like Ravel's transformation of Mussorgsky's piano suites into a complex orchestral work, Jackson has added new and rich tonalities that deepen our understanding of *The Hobbit* in its relation to Tolkien's mythological world.

While the majority of film reviewers (65%) and audiences (84%) gave positive reviews of *The Hobbit*, not everyone agreed that Jackson succeeded in enriching our experience of the novel. About 35% of 260 reviewers featured on the *Rotten Tomatoes* web site voiced recurring complaints that Jackson violated Tolkien's vision by changing a "children's book" into an adult film. Christopher Orr is not alone in wanting the film to be "more innocent and intimate, more hobbit-sized." A second complaint involves Jackson's amplification of the tale. Diva Valdez expresses a common objection when she states that the film suffers from "obvious padding" so that the story is "stretched out too thin."

Contrary to the detractors of Jackson's film, this paper will make the case that Jackson has not engaged in unwarranted "padding" of the original narrative nor has he violated generic codes by shifting *The Hobbit* from children's

story to adult tale. Instead, as the first part of this paper will demonstrate, Jackson has developed *The Hobbit* in a direction that Tolkien had already taken when he approached the novel as an unfinished work in progress. The second part then explores how Jackson accomplishes a shift in medium from novel to film. Drawing on Tolkien's own works and revisions, Jackson moves from an episodic, almost picaresque, tale to a chronologically developed and coherent narrative. The final part of the paper will examine how Jackson draws on the imaginative and creative abilities of his team of writers, actors, artists, and film technicians in order to provide the novel's schematically outlined characters with a compelling individual presence. This amplification allows Jackson to redefine two major characters, Bilbo and Thorin, as fully developed "comic" and "tragic" heroes in keeping with the epic sweep of the revised tale.

Jackson's film represents a personal and individual rendering of the novel. Yet, it is consistently grounded in Tolkien's own work and plans. Jackson's team-oriented directing style draws not only on Tolkien's own works, such as Appendix A of *The Return of the King* and the *Unfinished Tales*, but also on Tolkien's own conception of *The Hobbit* as an evolving story that was to act as the prequel for *The Lord of the Rings*. The result is a unique vision. It is not a definitive interpretation, and may not be the understanding individual readers take from the novel, but it is a vision that is far from superficial, enriching our perception of Tolkien's work and his world.

### **Tolkien's Evolving Vision**

In revising and amplifying the original novel, Jackson is following in Tolkien's footsteps. Because Jackson spent a good deal of time reading Tolkien's work, he and his fellow writers, researchers, and artists were well aware that Tolkien had been revising *The Hobbit* for many years after its first publication, planning "to bring it into line with what he now understood about the history of Middle-earth from having written *The Lord of the Rings*" (Sibley 22). In a letter of July 31, 1947, addressing problems arising from the differences between the Gollum of *The Hobbit* and that of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien reveals his plans to revise the earlier work when he states: "I certainly hope to leave behind me the whole thing revised and in final form" (*Letters* 121). That is, he intended eventually to make *The Hobbit* consistent in every detail with the later work (Rateliff 731). Tolkien later abandoned this plan, but before he did, he had completed the back stories and many of the revisions. Jackson was able to incorporate much of this material into his film. As he told Brian Sibley, "We looked beyond the pages of the novel [*The Hobbit*] and into Tolkien's Appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*, which tell of events leading up to and following those narrated in *The Hobbit*. Using this material has helped us take the story into Tolkien's broader mythology" (qtd. in Sibley 22).

The three principal places in Tolkien's work where this material can be found are the revised manuscripts of *The Hobbit*, now published in John D. Rateliff's *History of The Hobbit* (2007); "The Quest of Erebor" in the *Unfinished Tales of Numenor and Middle-earth* (1980); and "Durin's Folk" in Appendix A of *The Return of the King* (1954). The revised manuscripts of *The Hobbit* were written between 1944 and 1960 when Tolkien still planned to rewrite the entire novel to make all of its chronology, geography, style, and purpose agree with those of *The Lord of the Rings*. "The Quest of Erebor" closely and thoroughly connects the action of *The Hobbit* with the larger, cosmic concerns of the sequel, showing how the Dwarves' struggle to regain their homeland became crucial in frustrating Sauron's plan to attack Lórien and Rivendell. "Durin's Folk" details the history of the Dwarves, their fabulous prosperity, the loss of their homeland to Smaug the dragon, and their war with Azog and his Orc army.

Although the revised manuscripts of *The Hobbit* contain little specific material that Jackson could use in his film, the changes point to Tolkien's final plans and his partial efforts to realize them. John D. Rateliff, the editor and annotator of *The History of the Hobbit*, provides a concise summary of the revised manuscripts, which are divided into three periods:

The first of these [revisions, 1944-1947] made adjustments within the original book to make it better match [*The Lord of the Rings*], the second [1954] retold a small portion of Bilbo's story within the new book [...] while the third [1960] re-envisioned a complete recasting of the old book to agree with the new in minute detail. (731)

In order to indicate how Tolkien's revisions point to his evolving vision of *The Hobbit*, we will compare three parallel passages from the published version to the rewriting of the novel's first two chapters.

In paragraph three of the published novel, the narrator tells of Bilbo's loss of reputation when he returns from his adventure: "He may have lost the neighbours' respect, but he gained—well, you will see whether he gained anything in the end" (*The Hobbit* 1.11). Tolkien revises that passage to read: "He got caught up in great events, which he never understood; and he became enormously important, though he never realized it" (qtd. in Rateliff 768). As Rateliff notes, since he "took part in the council of Elrond [where he learned] his ring was the One Ring" (Rateliff 781), this statement still did not match the later novel and thus may even have suggested a further revision of *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet, in replacing a suggestion of Bilbo's loss of respect among his neighbors with a reference to his wider involvement in great events, Tolkien suggests a larger, more important theme than the original treasure quest of *The Hobbit*.

The next passage, from the second chapter of the published *Hobbit*, describes the Bridge of Mitheithel that Bilbo and the Dwarves cross during a storm as they journey to the Lonely Mountain. "Fortunately the road went over an ancient stone bridge, for the river, swollen with the rains, came rushing down from the hills and mountains in the north. It was nearly night when they had crossed over" (*Hobbit* 2.35). Toward the end of Book One of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo will recognize this same place as part of his "family history" and will specifically mention Bilbo's perilous escape from the Trolls. Frodo and his friends cross an intact bridge, as did Bilbo and the Dwarves in the published *Hobbit*. In the revision, however, the bridge is destroyed and Bilbo and the Dwarves must ford the torrential river.

"Ha!" said Gandalf, peering through the rain. "The bridge! The bridge is broken!" He turned away snapping his fingers and muttering to himself: "there is mischief here! Elrond must be told."

They did not know what he meant. (qtd. in Rateliff 792-93)

Bilbo and the Dwarves do not know what Gandalf means by his comment, "there is mischief here," but in the destruction of the bridge, Gandalf recognizes some greater danger that will ultimately threaten their quest. At this point, Gandalf disappears in order to investigate this larger issue, leaving Bilbo and the Dwarves to continue their journey without his help.

The third passage, also from chapter two of the published *Hobbit*, occurs after Gandalf returns and tricks the Trolls to delay their departure. They are thus caught in the sun and turned to stone. Gandalf then comments, "As I was saying I met two of Elrond's people. They were hurrying along for fear of the trolls. It was they who told me that three of them [the Trolls] had come down from the mountains" (*Hobbit* 2.45). Here, Gandalf is telling how he knew of the danger from the Trolls and, as it turned out, he returned just in time to save the company. Although he mentions Elrond's people, he only notes they were hurrying along for fear of the Trolls. The revised passage adds some significant details. "As I was saying, Elrond had heard of the trouble. The Rangers were out, and [Elrond] had sent two of his people to report. They told me that trolls had come down from the North" (qtd. in Rateliff 800). In this passage, Gandalf not only meets Elrond's people, but he also learns that they were sent by Elrond to investigate trouble not apparently relevant to Bilbo's adventure. The mention that the Rangers were out connects *The Hobbit* more closely and directly with *The Lord of the Rings*. In the later work, we learn that Strider, or Aragorn, is one of the Rangers who are protecting the Shire from Sauron's incursions.

If Tolkien's revisions of *The Hobbit* connect it more firmly to *The Lord of the Rings* by intimating the greater evil fomenting in Middle-earth, "The Quest of

Erebor” makes the connection explicit and detailed. Simply put, this story consists of Gandalf’s explanation of how *The Hobbit* quest came about and its relationship to the larger questions dealt with in *The Lord of the Rings*. After the end of the War of the Ring and the coronation of Aragorn as King Elessar, Gandalf relates the story to Frodo, Peregrin, Meriadoc, and Gimli. Tolkien portrays Frodo as narrating the story in turn:

[Gandalf] told us the whole strange story; how he came to arrange the journey to Erebor, why he thought of Bilbo, and how he persuaded the proud Thorin Oakenshield to take him into his company. I cannot remember the entire tale now, but we gathered that to begin with Gandalf was thinking only of the defense of the West against the Shadow. (“Quest” 321)

In addition to the above passage, Tolkien portrays two chance meetings which provide Gandalf with a plan to frustrate the Shadow, or Sauron. In prison in Dol Guldur, he finds the dying Thrain, who gives Gandalf a map of Erebor, or the Lonely Mountain, and the key to the secret entrance to the chambers under the mountain. Later, in Bree, he encounters Thorin who is brooding on his wrongs and burning with the desire for revenge on Smaug the dragon.

Already suspecting that Sauron could use the dragon in war with terrible effect, Gandalf sees in Thorin’s cause a way to thwart Sauron’s plans. When Thorin objects that he is being used for ulterior motives, Gandalf retorts, “If I had no other purposes, I should not be helping you at all. Great as your affairs may seem to you, they are only a small strand in a great web. I am concerned with many strands” (“Quest” 325). Among those many strands, Gandalf needs to prevent Saruman, his fellow wizard, from controlling the White Council, the group responsible for the security of Middle-earth. Should Saruman dominate the Council, nothing will be done to distract Sauron who “would not leave any attempt on Erebor unhindered, unless he had something else to deal with” (“Quest” 323). The quest of Erebor had to be successful or, as Gandalf explains, “the far more important events by the way would not come to pass” (“Quest” 325). In the film, consistent with this account, Jackson has Gandalf disregard Saruman’s order to stop the quest. Instead, Gandalf continues to aid the travelers, strengthened by Galadriel’s clearly expressed support.

The revisions of *The Hobbit* and the information in the “Quest of Erebor” are not the only sources Jackson used to interrelate *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. “Durin’s Folk” (part of Appendix A of *The Lord of the Rings*) provides a history of the Dwarves that plays a key role as a source for Jackson’s film. When he took the job of directing *The Hobbit*, Jackson knew he did not want to make a film for children. Instead, he wanted to find a way to make it appealing to an older audience. As he tells us, “the way I’ve done that is through the characters



of the Dwarves" (qtd. in Sibley 23). Having settled on the character of the Dwarves, he could also incorporate the larger issues dealt with in *The Lord of the Rings*. The quest, as explained by Ian McKellan, who plays Gandalf, is no longer simply a treasure hunt. Instead it has wider implications:

The reason [Gandalf] helps Thorin is not just because he sympathizes with the Dwarves' desire to regain their lost empire and wealth, but because it might be good for Middle-earth. [...] And, beyond that, there are other issues: Middle-earth is beginning to rumble and tumble; forces are at work, things are changing—and not for the better. (qtd. in Sibley 61)

McKellan's reasoning sounds almost like a paraphrase of Gandalf's explanation in the "Quest of Erebor" (325). As Part III of this paper will demonstrate, Jackson draws on the history of the dwarves to provide some of the explanation for the "forces at work" in Middle-earth. The history not only supplies new narrative material for the film, but it also establishes the plot conflict by defining the Dwarves' characters and mission.

Tolkien not only provides source material for a *Hobbit* revision, but he also gives a model for the further revision of his writings by others including both Christopher Tolkien and Jackson. In *The Return of the King*, Frodo agrees to take up Bilbo's unfinished tale. Samwise raises the problem of Bilbo's incomplete account: "I don't think, Mr. Frodo, that [Bilbo's] done much writing while we've been away. He won't ever write our story now" (VI.6.988). Bilbo responds to Sam by asking Frodo to complete the work and even suggesting that Samwise could help:

"I wonder, Frodo my dear fellow, if you would very much mind tidying things up a bit before you go? Collect all my notes and papers, and my diary too, and take them with you, if you will. You see, I haven't much time for the selection and arrangement and all that. Get Sam to help, and when you've knocked things into shape, come back, and I'll run over it. I won't be too critical."

"Of course I'll do it!" said Frodo. (VI.6.988)

Like Frodo taking up the task from Bilbo, Jackson has followed Tolkien's plans and revisions in order to reconstruct *The Hobbit* as a prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*.

### **Jackson's Film: Backdrop and Narrative**

When Peter Jackson decided to revisit the Middle-earth *mise en scène* in his film of *The Hobbit*, he faced several challenges. First, he needed to shift the landscape to provide a new look and tone to the Middle-earth setting so that it

would be both known and yet innovative and unfamiliar. Secondly, he needed to translate an episodic, almost picaresque novel about Thorin's quest to recover his wealth and homeland into a chronologically coherent film narrative which connects the quest with the broader goal of defeating Smaug, not simply as a guardian of stolen treasure, but as a potential instrument of Sauron (known in the first film only as the "Necromancer") and his spreading evil. A third challenge was to differentiate and individualize a large number of new main characters who are merged with familiar figures from *The Lord of the Rings* and to bring them and their motives into alignment with the broader history of Middle-earth. Jackson's final challenge was to find a way to develop the two major "heroes" of the tale, Bilbo and Thorin, so that he could move from a children's tale to an adult-oriented prequel to the epically conceived *Lord of the Rings*. In all of these challenges, Jackson grounded his vision in Tolkien's own work while developing the narrative in relation to the broader theme of an impending evil that already haunts Middle-earth.

The setting of *The Hobbit* represents a clear challenge to the film maker. Description is sparse. When he published *The Hobbit*, although Tolkien had already developed the Valinor, Beleriand, and Númenor legends, he had not yet fully fleshed out the more detailed accounts of the mythology of Middle-earth featured so largely in works such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Unfinished Tales*. At the same time, the relatively short and much more cryptically written *Hobbit* contains numerous references, suggestions, and brief asides that indicate subsequent developments in Tolkien's mythology, pointing implicitly to an available back story for the reader or director who was willing to be immersed in Tolkien lore. Jackson was especially interested in providing the later context and chronology in his film by drawing on these sources.

At the same time, while stressing their shared themes of impending evil, Jackson is careful to differentiate *The Hobbit* from *The Lord of the Rings* in a number of ways, including the settings and the visual feel of the film. In order to establish a more powerful sense of the epic nature of the journey of the thirteen Dwarves and the reluctant hobbit, Jackson worked with the Weta Workshop crew and the two major artists, Alan Lee and John Howe, to develop a new visual atmosphere for the film. According to Dan Hennah, the film's production designer:

This is a road movie, and in travelling that road, Bilbo and the Dwarves are discovering different and contrasting cultures. We have tried to reflect the epic nature of the journey while being true to our collective vision of Tolkien's world. It is essentially the same Middle-earth geography that we established in *The Lord of the Rings*, but whereas in those films we went south, this time we are going east. So in terms of our world, the inspiration

for these eastern locations would be Norway, Russia, even some Asian influence, although it is always just a suggestion [...]. (qtd. in Sibley 30)

The locations have a familiar resonance as part of the Middle-earth geography, but are slightly shifted toward the northern landscape and lighting.

New, previously unseen settings also play a strong role in the more striking differences between *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. The two conceptual art directors, Alan Lee and John Howe, have had a long history of illustrating Tolkien and they played an essential role in developing the settings for *The Lord of the Rings* (Sibley 28-32). In *the Hobbit*, they create a series of new and unfamiliar settings. The labyrinthine Goblin caves and Goblin Town provide good examples of the imaginative extension of a less detailed Tolkien setting. In designing the Goblin caves, Lee and Howe provided numerous sketches for Jackson to select from, so that the imagination of an entire team went into the interpretation, not only of the caves, but of the community of Goblin Town as a whole (Sibley 28-32). In the film, Goblin Town is developed from a few brief descriptive strokes to a major setting below the earth, widening the novel's concept of cave into cavern, chasm, and far flung labyrinth of buildings and bridges. In keeping with the film's epic sweep, Goblin Town itself first appears to the viewer in a high angle crane shot that shows us an entire city of gigantic proportions hanging precariously over the edge of a chasm. The camera then moves around the scene to provide a further sense of size and depth.

In the film, Gandalf does not simply pop up and disperse the Goblins as in the novel. Instead, after a sudden and spectacular arrival, there is an extended battle sequence, parallel to and suggestive of the flight of the fellowship at Moria in *The Lord of the Rings*. During the battle scenes with the Goblins, Jackson simultaneously creates a sense of breadth and depth while giving the strong visual impression of detail grounded in reality. To achieve this effect, the camera cross-cuts among extreme high angle shots of the battle, long shots at various angles from above, straight on and below, and close ups of action sequences. The lighting, consisting of torches, bathes the figures and the backdrop in golden light and creates intense shadows for a sense of chiaroscuro otherworldliness. The carefully detailed bridges across the chasms, as the Dwarves and Gandalf flee from the Goblins, give a sense of immediate and concrete reality in a scene only schematically suggested in the novel.

Jackson also creates spatial relationships between Gollum's cavern and Goblin Town so that the world of Middle-earth is given a greater sense of geographical and physical unity. In the novel, Bilbo, on the shoulders of Dori, is grabbed from behind and is struck unconscious. Crawling in the darkness he first finds the ring and then comes to Gollum's cave. In the film, spaces are vaster and more far flung and Bilbo's role is altered. When the company is first captured by

the Goblins, Bilbo, crawling on all fours, evades the captors and begins exploring on his own, only to grapple with a Goblin and to fall together with his foe into a deep chasm far below his fellows. There, he comes to himself and, concealed by giant fungi, he watches as Gollum attacks and kills the goblin that Bilbo had been fighting. Through these spatially connected scenes, Jackson accomplishes two purposes. Instead of merely depicting Gollum's fury at the Ring's loss as in the novel, Jackson presents an action sequence during which Gollum actually loses the Ring. In the film, while Gollum grapples with the goblin, the Ring flies from his finger, to be discovered and pocketed by the curious Bilbo. Jackson also places Bilbo and Gollum's encounter in a space clearly located in an abyss directly below Goblin Town and yet visually connected to the remainder of the caverns.

In addition to providing a more epic space and backdrop than is to be found in the novel, Jackson transforms Tolkien's episodic novel into a coherent narrative which is clearly connected to the broader theme of impending danger from the Necromancer. In order to do so, Jackson employs film techniques such as cross-cutting and the insertion of scenes from other sources so that he can segue visually from one episode to the next. He thus connects individual episodes far more clearly and seamlessly than in the novel. In the novel, on the journey toward the Misty Mountains, for example, after the Trolls have been turned to stone, the company arrives without further incident in Rivendell. In the film, Jackson not only segues between episodes, he also incorporates transitional scenes that connect the travelers' quest with the wider theme of the Necromancer's spreading evil. In Jackson's version, after the Troll adventure, the Hobbit-Dwarf fellowship meets the Wizard Radagast the Brown, who warns them of the spreading evil in Mirkwood. Radagast reports to Gandalf about his encounter in the ruined fortress of Dol Guldur not only with a ghostly apparition that the audience can recognize as one of the Nazgûl, or Ringwraiths, but also with a shadowy figure that Radagast refers to as the "Witch-king," whom the audience can recognize as the leader of the Nazgûl from Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*. Hard upon this encounter, the travelers are beset by Orcs and Wargs who appear to be a further expression of the spreading evil. Jackson now cross-cuts between the travelers fleeing and hiding behind a giant outcropping of rock on the one hand, and scenes depicting Radagast on his magical rabbit-drawn sleigh, leading the attackers away from the company, on the other.

The link between the attack of the Orcs and Wargs and the subsequent encounter with the Elves in Rivendell is deftly suggested rather than overtly stated, as the company, now hiding in what appears to be the entrance of a cave, watch as the body of an Orc rolls down before them, an arrow protruding from the corpse. Thorin, who pulls the arrow out of the body, immediately recognizes it as belonging to the Elves. Not only Radagast, but Elrond and his warrior Elves

have come to their rescue, as the shift in non-diegetic sound to the Elf horn and the musical Elf theme has already suggested. Thus, Jackson not only connects the quest of the Dwarves with the theme of evil by depicting the as yet puzzling attack of the Orcs and Wargs, but he also adumbrates the role of Elrond and the Elves of Rivendell in recognizing and countering this evil in all of its implicit and later more overt manifestations.

The danger averted, Jackson provides a more direct connection between the battle with the Wargs and the arrival at Rivendell, as we then see the Dwarves, Bilbo, and Gandalf from a helicopter shot threading their way through a deep canyon hidden in the mountains. At the end of the canyon, they emerge into the light and remain standing, awestruck by the otherworldly buildings and idyllic landscape of Rivendell laid out before them. The war-like Elves, who have just driven the Orcs and Wargs away, arrive on horseback and Elrond wonders aloud what could possibly have attracted the Orcs to an area so close to Rivendell. At this point, Gandalf already connects the quest with the theme of evil and we subsequently discover that the Wargs were sent by the Necromancer—later revealed as Sauron returned from exile—specifically in order to hinder the travelers' quest. Thus the scenes, beginning with the departure from the place of the Trolls and ending with the arrival in Rivendell, are no longer expressed as discrete episodes, but are carefully linked into a coherent whole which is in turn connected with the broader theme of the growing power and influence of evil in Middle-earth.

Every major episode of the novel is linked in the film through similar technical devices and thematic connections. While the White Council meets in Rivendell—just mentioned in passing in the novel—with Gandalf listening reluctantly to Saruman's demand to abandon the quest, the camera cross-cuts to the company who are already threading their way through the mountains and thus circumventing Saruman's command to Gandalf. The camera then follows the company high above the valley of Rivendell on narrow and treacherous stony outcroppings, cross-cutting to Galadriel and Gandalf as the latter makes clear that he does not plan to submit to Saruman's demands. The camera cuts to the subsequent storm on the mountain and the battle of the rocks which in turn segues to a cavern where the company takes refuge for the night. The link between the departure from Rivendell and the next episode in Goblin Town is established visually as the cavern suddenly opens out into the underground labyrinth where the King of the Goblins reigns.

In Goblin Town, by the intercutting of scenes, Jackson is able to portray simultaneously Bilbo's encounter with Gollum and the Dwarves' fight and flight through the chasms and structures of Goblin Town. The final cross-cut shows the travelers falling into the chasm below, where they are now, as we discover, on the same level as Bilbo and Gollum. Then, instead of having Bilbo emerge from

the labyrinth, not knowing where the rest of the company has gone, the camera follows Bilbo to the exit of the caves where the two separate cross-cut episodes merge visually into one. Through Bilbo's eyes, the camera catches a fleeting glimpse of his companions leaving the cave and emerging into the bright sunlight beyond. The invisible Bilbo, now in possession of the Ring, not only knows where his companions are when he leaps over Gollum and escapes, but he can almost immediately find and overhear his fellow questers, leading the audience into the next scene: Jackson's depiction of the growing tension between the hesitant hobbit and Thorin, the doubting leader of the dwarves.

Jackson's revisioning of *The Hobbit*, then, involves a transition from an episodic novel, in which discrete events are loosely linked through the main character or characters, to a series of causally and visually linked story lines. The overarching themes of the homecoming quest and the gradual spread of an as yet unknown evil have begun to connect the scenes in the film in a way that the quest of the Ring links the events depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*. In order to suggest the possible return of Sauron as the mysterious "Necromancer," Jackson has used an artifact drawn from *The Lord of the Rings*, a "Morgul blade," that Radagast has captured from the hands of what the audience recognizes to be a Ringwraith in the fortress of Dol Guldur. As Elrond informs us during the White Council, this sword, "a relic of Mordor," was buried with the Witch-king of Angmar in a tomb protected by impenetrable magic spells so that it "cannot be opened" (Jackson, *The Hobbit*, scene 22). The reappearance of this weapon in the hands of one of the Nazgûl suggests that the Necromancer—in Radagast's words, the "shadow of an ancient horror, one that can summon the spirits of the dead" (scene 15)—will later be revealed to be Sauron, who has summoned the Ringwraiths from their tombs. The spreading evil that in Galadriel's words "will not show itself, not yet" (scene 23), will then no longer be a mystery or a riddle, but will be understood as directly coming from Sauron himself.

### **Dwarves and Heroes**

The development of Tolkien's characters is no less challenging than the transformation of the novel into an epic prequel with its sweeping backdrop and a more coherent narrative. In this first *Hobbit* film, Jackson has incorporated several of the well-known characters and actors from his filming of *The Lord of the Rings*, including the actors playing the roles of Gandalf, Galadriel, Elrond, old Baggins, Frodo, Gollum, and Saruman. The filming of *The Hobbit* presents a challenge by introducing an additional fifteen major characters, thirteen of whom are Dwarves whose names alone challenge memory. In the novel, we find little more than sparse, bare bones descriptions of the Dwarves. How could they be developed into fully fleshed out, recognizable individuals that would be able to share the focus as memorable main characters and compete with such figures as

Gandalf? As Jackson states, "Frankly, I was a bit nervous about the idea of thirteen Gimlis [...] all those dwarves, a hobbit *and* a wizard; fifteen central characters who have to share the screen" (qtd. Sibley 23). The seven dwarves in Disney's 1937 film of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* may have been Jackson's conscious or unconscious point of departure for resolving the problem. In the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale, "Snow White," they are simply seven dwarves. In Disney's imaginative recreation of the fairy tale for an audience of children, the dwarves not only have names but distinct personalities. Jackson's solution was similar to Disney's: he has defined the Dwarves through their appearance, their background history, and their position in society. As screenwriter Philippa Boyens states,

We had Thorin as leader and around him we established a series of distinctive family groups: Balin and Dwalin, old warriors and members of the nobility; Fili and Kili, younger, eager and enthusiastic; Oin and Gloin, the well-to-do merchant class; Dori, Ori, and Nori, middle class; and Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur who were, we decided, miners from the west. (qtd. in Sibley 23)

Moreover, Jackson used make up, hair, costumes, and props to make the Dwarves "visually distinctive" (qtd. in Sibley 24) so that, even seeing them in silhouette, the viewer would be able to distinguish one from the other.

In order to differentiate the characters of the Dwarves, Jackson draws especially on Tolkien's own history of the Dwarves, "Durin's Folk," which forms part of Appendix A of *The Return of the King*. According to Tolkien's account, the Dwarves' original home and center of power was Moria, until it was destroyed when they "delved too deep" and released the Balrog. Their home destroyed, they eventually migrated to a new center of power in Erebor, where they discovered the Arkenstone. But, under King Thrór, Thorin Oakenshield's grandfather, the kingdom was destroyed by Smaug the Dragon, who took possession of their great wealth and homeland. After years of wandering, Thrór, who had gone mad, attempted to return to their original home in Moria, now in possession of the Orcs. Azog the Defiler killed and beheaded Thrór and sent a message to the Dwarves by burning his name on Thrór's severed head. "That was the beginning of the War of the Dwarves and Orcs, which was long and deadly" ("Durin's Folk" 1074). The war culminated in the Battle of Azanulbizar, a pyrrhic victory of the Dwarves, "at the memory of which the Orcs still shudder and the Dwarves weep" ("Durin's Folk" 1074). During this battle, when Thorin's shield was broken, he cut a branch from an oak tree to serve in its stead, and thus earned the name Oakenshield. In Tolkien's account, Azog the Defiler was killed by Dáin Ironfoot during the battle. Jackson alters this detail. In a film flashback,

Jackson shows Thorin chopping off Azog's left arm, mistakenly thinking it is his enemy's death wound.

As narrated in "Durin's Folk," after the Battle of Azanulbizar, the Dwarves were again dispersed. When King Thráin died in Sauron's prison in Dol Guldur, his son Thorin Oakenshield became the new King of the Dwarves, but he was a king without a kingdom ("Durin's Folk" 1045-55). The War of the Dwarves and the Orcs establishes the source of the plot conflict for Jackson's film, while the survival of Azog provides an antagonist for Thorin. Drawing on Tolkien's sources, the history and background as depicted in the film lend a new significance to Thorin's seemingly chance meeting with Gandalf, an encounter that now proves to have set the entire quest in motion.

The important role played by Thorin Oakenshield in "Durin's Folk" sets the stage for Jackson to develop characters with heroic dimensions. Tolkien has but one main hero in his gentle (and initially timid) Bilbo Baggins, although by the end of the tale Thorin Oakenshield approaches the stature of a tragic hero. Jackson has redefined both. Not only is Thorin an unquestionably heroic warrior from the opening scenes, but Bilbo becomes a decisive and bold fighter by the conclusion of the first film. Since the film concludes with the rescue of the questing party by the eagles, the half-way point in the novel, this is well before Tolkien started developing Bilbo as a decisive, take-charge personality. In the novel, that development begins when Bilbo, all alone, must rescue the Dwarves from the giant spiders of Mirkwood. In the film, by contrast, Bilbo takes initiative on the morning after his involuntary supper-party with the Dwarves, deciding on his own volition to join the quest. As he runs to meet the Dwarves, Jackson has him express his enthusiasm by shouting joyfully, "I'm going on an adventure!" (scene 9).

Of course Bilbo, whether in the novel or the film, is unquestionably the same character. Both hobbits love and value the same things—pipes, waistcoats, four (or six?) meals a day, and home—their cozy hobbit hole and, on a larger scale, the Shire. They value material goods, but they value family, love, and kindness even more. And they are, at the outset, both kind, gentle, and intelligent, as well as timid (Tolkien's more so than Jackson's). They are not only naïve, but they are also ignorant of the world outside of the Shire. Their differences are largely due to the audiences for which they were written. Tolkien wrote for children; consequently, his Bilbo is not only child-sized, but child-like, despite his whimsical age of "about fifty years old or so" (*Hobbit* 1.12). He is a little rabbit-like in that he tends to squeak under stress and frequently wishes for his "nice hole by the fire" (*Hobbit* 2.35). He engages in only one fight, when he must, of necessity, kill a number of giant spiders. His greatest heroic action is one, not of battle, but of moral courage. By delivering the Arkenstone to Thorin's alleged enemies, he unselfishly relinquishes his chosen part of the treasure in an



attempt to stop the war between men and Elves on the one side and the Dwarves on the other.

The film audience, however, is mainly an adult one and the precedent for its expectations had been set by Jackson's portrayal of Tolkien's four Hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*, as each goes through painful and terrifying rites of passage into adulthood and wisdom. For Jackson there was no going back to a hobbit whom Tolkien could describe rather condescendingly: "He was only a little hobbit you must remember" (*Hobbit* 1.33). Jackson would go forward into the development of yet another heroic Hobbit—this one rather more swash-buckling than Frodo, Samwise, Merry, or Pippin.

Perhaps the place where the differences in character treatment may be seen most clearly is in Bilbo's first major test: namely, the encounter with the Trolls. In Tolkien's *Hobbit*, the Dwarves, who have lost their food when a pony bolted, see a welcoming glow and send Bilbo, the burglar, to investigate. After sneaking up to the fire where three Trolls are roasting a sheep, Bilbo attempts to establish his credentials as a burglar by cutting off the (unfortunately talking) purse from a Troll's belt. After Bilbo's capture, each of the Dwarves suffers the same fate. But in the confusion, as Thorin resists, Bilbo is flung into a bush. From that vantage point, he passively watches as Gandalf arrives to save the entire company by distracting the trolls until the dawn turns them into stone. Gandalf alone rescues everyone.

Jackson's film has notable differences. First, the motives for the invasion of the Trolls' camp are both nobler and more necessary. The Trolls have stolen four of the ponies with the intention of eating them, and Bilbo is persuaded by two of the Dwarves to rescue them. Not only Bilbo, but the Dwarves play a more heroic role. When Bilbo is captured, the entire company charges en masse to rescue him, only surrendering when the trolls threaten to tear Bilbo limb from limb. In Jackson's vision, Bilbo, rather than Gandalf, has the ingenuity to employ successful delaying tactics by discussing how best to cook dwarf and later by claiming the Dwarves are infested with parasitic worms. As dawn comes, Bilbo has successfully distracted the Trolls while Gandalf's role is reduced to bringing the dawn's light a little earlier onto the scene as he dramatically splits a boulder in two so that the sunlight strikes the Trolls, turning them to stone.

In the film, this episode with the Trolls accomplishes a number of objectives. First, it demonstrates the extreme danger that lurks beyond the Shire. Second, in such a potentially lethal world, these Dwarves are not the Dwarves of Tolkien's *Hobbit* who go in a grudging and disorganized fashion to see what is keeping Bilbo, but rather, they are the warlike, heroic Dwarves of Tolkien's "Durin's Folk." Third, it is a tenacious and brave Bilbo who actually rescues everyone. Terrified though he might be, he persists in cutting the ponies free and he shrewdly turns the Trolls against themselves. By giving Bilbo an active role

during this incident, Jackson establishes Bilbo's credibility. When he is later alone in the darkness, at the bottom of the Misty Mountains with Gollum, the audience is prepared to accept that Bilbo does indeed have the courage to remain calm in a life-and-death riddle game of wits and have the sense to follow Gollum out of the caves to safety.

When in the penultimate scenes of the film, moreover, Bilbo rushes to save Thorin, the audience can accept Bilbo as a dynamic actor who is capable of killing when confronted by the threat of imminent death either to himself or a friend. As the company flees from pursuing Orcs and Wargs, he is charged by a Warg. His life at risk, Bilbo stands firm with his sword (later known as "Sting") drawn and extended. Fortuitously, the creature impales itself and falls to the ground dead. Instead of fleeing immediately, Bilbo then wrestles his weapon out of the corpse, runs to a tree, and nimbly leaps into its branches. When Thorin realizes that he is being pursued by Azog, his arch-enemy, he is galvanized. He runs down the fallen tree trunk to face his foe in an unequal duel. Thorin is cut down and lies helpless as Azog orders another Orc to chop off the Thorin's head. The camera has cross-cut several times between Thorin's battle with Azog, and Bilbo, who stands up, draws his sword, and prepares to descend from his haven in the tree. The camera cuts again to the powerless Thorin showing the sword about to descend. Suddenly Bilbo appears in a flying leap so violent that it catapults the sword-wielding Orc to the ground, saving Thorin from immediate danger. Bilbo then grapples hand to hand with the Orc and succeeds finally in gaining the upper hand, plunging Sting into his enemy's chest and killing him. Then Bilbo valiantly stands with drawn sword between the prone Thorin and his enemy Azog. Outnumbered, Bilbo goes forward to meet no fewer than three Warg-mounted Orcs. Unable to fight against insurmountable odds, he gazes not in fear, but in grim acceptance of his fate, as Azog moves to kill him. At this point, the Eagles come, snatching the Hobbit from the ground and out of danger. While his rescue is fortuitous and his initial kill a matter of luck, Bilbo has clearly shown his heroic qualities in his daring rescue of the Dwarf leader.

In Tolkien's novel, there is no question of Bilbo killing anything (the mutual hatred of Azog and Thorin is not part of the novel). Bilbo remains more a piece of baggage than anything else. Unlike Jackson's nimble hero, Tolkien's Bilbo is unable to climb into a tree and needs to be helped by Dori, who does so at considerable risk to himself. Then, when the Eagles come, Dori manages to grab an eagle's legs while Bilbo snatches Dori's legs—not the most elegant way to escape imminent death. This Bilbo has a long way to go in heroic development. Jackson's hero, by contrast, has already taken the initiative, grappled with a Goblin in Goblin Town, played and won a game of wits with Gollum, escaped from the Goblin caves, and has now killed not only a Warg (fortuitously) but has rescued Thorin from death by attacking and killing an Orc.

Jackson's second hero is Thorin Oakenshield. From the opening scenes of the film, all the Dwarves are depicted as Tolkien describes them in Appendix A of *The Return of the King*: as effective fighters. Thorin is depicted not only as the greatest warrior among them, but also as a prince of whom Balin says, "There is one I could follow. There is one I could call 'king'" (scene 10). In a series of flashbacks, Jackson shows Thorin in action. For example, when Smaug attacks, Thorin and his father Thráin along with his grandfather Thrór attempt to fight and repel the dragon, only retreating when resistance proves futile. Later, at the Battle of Azanulbizar, Thorin is not only shown in the forefront of the fight, but when his grandfather is beheaded by Azog, he engages in a duel with the giant Orc and lops off his left forearm, the motive in the film for Azog's personal mission to take revenge on the dwarf. And finally, in Jackson's film, when Thorin arrives at Bilbo's hobbit home, he carries himself like the king he is. Unlike Tolkien's Thorin, he makes a solo and dignified entrance (in Tolkien's story he arrives in a heap, one among four Dwarves who fall into Bilbo's foyer). He wears a tunic of midnight blue, studded with silver and a large silver belt buckle with a sword at his side. This is clearly the leader of his people.

In fact, what Jackson has done is to have humanized the Dwarves—they are not only individualized in terms of appearance, but they have become complex personalities, and none is more complex than Thorin. He is at once someone who has majesty, who is experienced in the ways of Middle-earth, and who is heroic. But he is also stubborn and he can be abrasive. From the beginning, he voices his doubts to Gandalf regarding Bilbo's fitness for this quest. He opposes Gandalf when the wizard wishes to consult with Elrond at Rivendell. Thorin hates and distrusts Elves because the Wood-elves refused to help the Dwarves fight Smaug. Above all, he is vengeful and obsessive in his desire to retake Erebor and to recover the Arkenstone. In short, he is deeply loved by his followers, but he is also deeply flawed. Richard Armitage, who plays Thorin in the film, sees his character as having Shakespearean stature: "I look at the character of Thorin and see echoes of Macbeth: the megalomania, the obstinacy, the tragedy of snowballing toward an inevitable fate he cannot escape because it is the path he has to tread" (qtd. in Sibley 48).

By giving Thorin such a complex personality, Jackson made him into the character Tolkien had only hinted at in his novel. Jackson's Thorin is a full-blown tragic hero, rather like Boromir, or perhaps a flawed Aragorn. Like Aragorn, he is the noble, dispossessed heir to a kingdom; like Boromir, he is obsessed, driven by his personal needs. Boromir is caught by his desire to please his father and to save Gondor, Thorin by his desire to regain his homeland and to take vengeance on Azog. And both characters are obsessed by the desire for an object. Boromir is enthralled by the One Ring. Thorin is obsessed with the Arkenstone, not necessarily for its value and beauty, although these may be

factors, but because of its symbolic value. He who possesses the Arkenstone is, in Thorin's eyes, the rightful, even divinely ordained, ruler of Erebor. In this first film, the audience sees Thorin's hatred of Azog, his desire to regain Erebor, and his need to possess the Arkenstone. And yet Thorin does not lack great generosity and true nobility. Rigid in his decisions, he dislikes Bilbo because he is convinced that Bilbo is too "gentle" for this venture, but after Bilbo has demonstrated courage and fortitude in his rescue of Thorin, it is Thorin who has the grace to say, "I have never been so wrong!" (scene 34).

With the use of two heroes, Jackson has covered the complete spectrum of the heroic experience: a comic hero in Bilbo, and a tragic one in Thorin. Bilbo is not a clown, but rather a hero who comes home alive with a great treasure and who lives happily-ever-after. Thorin is a tragic hero in the classic mode: one who is very great indeed, but who cannot yield and grow into true wisdom until he pays the ultimate price. The tragic catastrophe is thus balanced by the eucatastrophe. Through this balance, Jackson has deepened our adult experience of *The Hobbit* and has brought a children's story into alignment with the epic grandeur of *The Lord of the Rings*.

What has Jackson accomplished by using Tolkien's plans for revising *The Hobbit* and by incorporating so much relevant, but scattered material? The obvious answer is that he has turned *The Hobbit* into a chronologically developed and fully consistent prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*. As Jackson states,

I had thought of *The Hobbit* as a children's book and *The Lord of the Rings* as being more adult. *Rings* is about a dramatic confrontation between good and evil that builds to an apocalyptic conclusion. *The Hobbit* is simply about a group of Dwarves who are trying to regain their homeland—it is not the fate of the world that's at stake. (qtd. in Sibley 23).

Jackson has moved the plot from a simple treasure quest to the struggle of a king and his people to regain their homeland. The Dwarves' war with the Orcs, intensified by the deep personal hatred and desire for revenge between Thorin and Azog the Defiler, provides the motivation for recurring battle scenes linked both to the homecoming quest and to the developing evil of the Necromancer's (Sauron's) influence. The hatred and conflict between the Dwarves and the Orcs will give more narrative sense to the Battle of the Five Armies at the end of the final film, and since the Orcs are Sauron's allies, that final battle will then appear as the opening engagement in the struggle for Middle-earth taken up in *The Lord of the Rings*. Jackson's changes have thus transformed *The Hobbit's* episodic structure to a causal structure that explores not *what* happens next, but *why* that happens next.

What we have here is not a definitive interpretation of *The Hobbit*. Instead, we have a well-informed yet imaginative reinterpretation. Just as any

critical interpretation of a well-known work adds to our understanding and enjoyment, so Jackson's rendition of Tolkien's novel becomes the point of departure for a thoughtful reconsideration of *The Hobbit*. By causing us to take a closer look, to argue the point, and to take issue with Jackson, we are encouraged to re-examine our own assumptions, often formed in childhood, of what this novel really means.

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