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Abstract

Especially concerned with Bilbo's characterization, unusual in children's literature, as middle-aged, but also addresses other issues of world-building and story structure that reinforce this motif of "starting in the middle": maps, the sense of the past, racial characteristics and relations. Birns draws interesting contrasts with the *Alice in Wonderland* and *Oz* books.

Additional Keywords

Baum, L. Frank. Oz books; Carroll, Lewis. Alice books; Fantasy literature—Maps; Intermediacy; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Bilbo; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Dwarves

"The Inner Consistency of Reality": Intermediacy in *The Hobbit*

Nicholas Birns

Speculations on Intermediacy

This essay will discuss intermediacy in *The Hobbit*. It will concentrate both on what I will call *representational intermediacy*—the way Bilbo's adventures are ensconced in an ongoing world that is granted an autonomous and thickly detailed fictional reality—and *biographical intermediacy*, the way Bilbo is represented as being of middle age. These two intermediacies are crucial in showing both how *The Hobbit* both built on the children's books before it and how it achieved something utterly different.

The first sentence of *The Hobbit* portrays an intermediate state. Bilbo's hole is described as "not a nasty, dirty, wet hole," but also not "a dry, bare, sandy hole"; "comfort" lies in-between (I.29). Tom Shippey has famously analyzed Bilbo's state as "bourgeois" (72). Corey Olsen has seen it as "sedate and predictable" (21). I want to look at it from a slightly different vantage point and examine Bilbo's home in terms of intermediacy. This will allow us to go further and explore other sorts of intermediacy in the book: hobbits as intermediate between children and adults, Bilbo as taking part in the intermediacy of middle age, hobbits as intermediaries between the normal and the epic, the real and the fantastic, hobbits as intermediaries between human and the animal. More speculatively, there is the intermediary role *The Hobbit* played between Tolkien's early explorations into the Silmarillion material and his mature forging of the *Lord of the Rings*, as well as the intermediacy represented by the maps and incipient internal context, what Shippey calls the "humility and compromise" (85) of the world *The Hobbit* begins to create. As Gandalf tells the wiser Bilbo at the end of the tale, "you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" (XIX.363). In writing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien began to glimpse the wider world he further expanded *The Lord of the Rings*. He did this by finding intermediate histories between the already-extant legends of the First Age and the humdrum existence of the pre-adventure Bilbo.

The Hobbit in Literary Context

Understanding this intermediacy requires placing *The Hobbit* in the context of the children's literature of the preceding few generations. When *The Hobbit* first appeared it was compared, in the proposed book jacket of its first American edition, to *Alice in Wonderland*: "Here again a professor of an abstruse subject is at play" (qtd. in Tolkien, *Letters* 21). In *The New York Times*, Anne T. Eaton began her review: "Like 'Alice in Wonderland,' it comes from Oxford University, where the author is Professor of Anglo-Saxon, and like Lewis Carroll's story, it was written for children that the author knew (in this case his own four children) and then inevitably found a larger audience." That being said, it is clear that, although Tolkien read *Alice*, this famous children's book did not have any especial appeal to him; according to Humphrey Carpenter it "amused" but did not thrill him as a child (22). But part of the alchemy of authorship is that books which do not seem to register on a surface level can inform on a deep one. Indeed, it is this essay's contention that the influence had little to do with tone or narrative incident but rather the fundamental postulation of the two books: imaginative worlds. Dimitra Fimi has speculated (91) that Tolkien knew Carroll's *Jabberwocky* and that inspired him in some of his experiments in linguistic aesthetic, which indeed seems evidenced in Tolkien's use of "jabberwocks of historical and antiquarian research" in *"Beowulf*: The Monsters and The Critics"* (9) to rebuke those pedantic critics who will not see *Beowulf* as a poem. It is no accident that this reference comes up in the context of poetry and linguistic research. Despite the very different casts of their minds, Carroll and Tolkien were both interested in language as game and as practice.

There are deeper resemblances between the two books, though. These include the 'there and back again' departure from a settled to an unsettled world, the encounters with a multitude of heterogeneous humanoid yet not entirely human creatures, and the emphasis on riddles and their potential solutions. The crucial resemblance, though, becomes clearer in the second of Carroll's *Alice* books, *Through the Looking Glass*, where the author states that Alice's progress through her journey can be measured like moves on a chessboard, with Alice as a pawn becoming a Queen once she reaches the eighth row. Although there are no formal maps of Wonderland, this idea of giving the journey a pattern, an objectively traceable shape, is echoed in the maps of *The Hobbit*. From the first insertion of "here of old *was* Thrain king under the Mountain" (I.50; emphasis mine) in Thror's map, the mapping of the novel's world and the forcefulness of sub-creations are linked to give what Tolkien called, in "On Fairy-Stories," "the inner consistency of reality" (59).[1] The map is a kind of transcendent overview,

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[1] John Rateliff's research into the history of *The Hobbit* has revealed to be a fundamental part of the narrative conception from very early on, the earliest postulated owner of the

almost an ordained structure, that organizes and sustains the internal solidity of the book's imagined world.

Pace the jacket copy, *Alice* and *The Hobbit* are not just whimsical *jeux d'esprit* but serious efforts in what the philosopher Nelson Goodman called "worldmaking," and what Tolkien, as is well known, called "sub-creation." Indeed, as Anne Eaton's mention of Bernard Sleigh's *An Ancient Mappe of Fairyland, Newly Discovered and Set Forth* in her review indicates, how the world of *The Hobbit* was represented *in* the book itself, in other words the maps, was an apparent part of its literary success from the beginning. This sense of internal representation, not self-reflexivity so much as inner consistency, links *Alice* and *The Hobbit*.

This is not to say there were not substantial differences between *Alice* and *The Hobbit*. These differences will help us situate *The Hobbit's* particular instancing of intermediacy. Gender is of course an important variable. Carroll's book features a protagonist who is, unlike the author, is not a twenty-something shy Oxford mathematician but an adventurous six year old girl. Tolkien, on the other hand, cast Bilbo as a version of himself. When Tolkien described himself as a Hobbit "in all but size" (*Letters* 288) it clearly was Bilbo, not Frodo or Merry or Will Whitfoot, that he meant, and indeed the older Bilbo, pottering around in his study and completing his manuscript, becomes a figure for the author, explicitly so in being the *ur*-compiler of the Red Book of Westmarch (one thinks here of the anagram between 'Bilbo' and 'biblo-,' Bilbo as bookman, as bibliographer), and making as much, or as little, progress on his *Translations from the Elvish* as Tolkien did on his *Silmarillion*. Indeed, Tolkien was about Bilbo's age when he wrote the book, and even more if one adapts the slightly longer span of Hobbit-years to the years of *Atani* such as Tolkien. The pertinent aspect here is not so much that Bilbo is male but that he is an adult. Though small in stature, he is not a child. Indeed, *The Hobbit* is that rare children's classic with no representation of children in it.

The characters in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* are all adult animals, as is the swallow in Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince." But *The Hobbit* is different; hobbits are little adult human beings. Indeed, though Bilbo's small stature and lack of sophistication lead him occasionally to take on the role of a child in the new, wider world, Bilbo's problems are fundamentally middle-aged ones—complacency, a sense of potential left unfulfilled, the very Jamesian sense of an unlived life. Indeed, although he returns with far more palpable treasure than does the ascetic hero of *The Ambassadors*, Bilbo, as a confirmed bachelor finding new meaning in his life in middle age, can be compared to a character like Henry James's Lambert Strether. It is perhaps this slight

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map being Fimbulfambi (I.9, 17-23), originally the ancestor of the dwarf first named Gandalf, then renamed Thorin.

modernism in the idea of the unfulfilled middle-aged male that made the 1977 Rankin/Bass adaptation so didactic and developmental in its emphasis, as if its Piaget-like rhetoric of Bilbo's looking forward to future adventures would help conceal the fact that the story's hero is not the child that a more conventional developmental narrative would have suggested.

Thus Bilbo is not a child. Whereas Alice grows taller at times during her Wonderland odyssey, and eventually outgrows Wonderland, Bilbo grows morally. Unlike Alice, he cannot be said to grow up.[2] Although *The Hobbit* is a children's book, and, as Flieger points out (57) was originally (like the Alice books) *told* orally to children, it is not *about* children, or really even younger people. Bilbo's heroic development deviates from the paradigms set up in Otto Rank's *Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, in which a child suffers early trauma but surges to the fore, more or less just when he is newly ripened as an adult, as in the cases of Moses, Cyrus, Sargon, and Romulus.

Biographical Intermediacy

Bilbo's awakening is clotted by bourgeois dormancy until midway on the journey. Frodo, in the sequel, continues in this transition of the middle-aged hero, whose only real journey is towards self-knowledge and, ultimately, death, Yet Merry, Pippin, and Sam, the younger Hobbits—really a generation younger than Frodo—involved in the Quest are, though not children, young adults of the sort prominent in books often given to older children, such as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, entities who can still aspire to reach an intermediate stage of agreeable maturity before starting on the long road towards the halls of Mandos. Sam's romance with Rosie, especially her curt, uncomprehending response to his world-saving valor, is momentarily reminiscent of the behavior of Estella in *Great Expectations*, though with a far more immediate subsequent guarantee of domestic happiness. Similarly, Pippin's avowal to Treebeard (*The Lord of the Rings* [*LotR*] III.4.465) that he can be called "Pip" gives him the same name as that Dickens novel's protagonist. Pippin and Merry's Alice-like growth (though unaltered, unlike Alice's, by other food consumption) is part of a *Bildungsroman* aspect missing from *The Hobbit*. Bilbo, on the other hand, is a middle-aged Hobbit who has lost the spark Gandalf once saw in him. He has let his Baggins side overcome his Took. He is in a rut, has gone to waste. Gandalf's introduction of Bilbo to Thorin and company not only revitalizes Thorin's rather threadbare claim to suzerainty over the dwarves, but also catalyzes Bilbo's dormant curiosity and gumption. There is, of course (unlike as with Sam and Rosie), no marriage-plot, and for Bilbo, the financial motive—burglary--is

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[2] The ability of the "Eat Me" cake to make Alice grow clearly was an influence on what the Ent-draughts did to Pippin and Merry.

substituted for the sexual just as in *Alice* food is put in the place that sex has for most adults. But Bilbo's life has changed. He finds renewed purpose and meaning *in adulthood*.

Gandalf, in introducing Bilbo and Thorin, brings not one but two middle-aged *hnau*—to borrow C.S. Lewis's felicitous term from the space trilogy—to maturity and fulfillment. In the geostrategic sense, as later revealed in the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* and *Unfinished Tales*, Gandalf knowingly uses the Bilbo-Thorin conjunction to build up the strength of the anti-Sauron forces in the North. Unknown to himself but perhaps guided in a deep sense by Ilúvatar, Gandalf helps nudge the Ring into Bilbo's hands. But in *The Hobbit per se*, Gandalf is more of a life-coach, specializing in the counseling of dwarves and hobbits in midcourse who have lost their patrimony (in Bilbo's case, actually, the inheritance from his Took mother). Thorin's is literal, Bilbo's psychological, but they both need to be restored to what they once could have been. Gandalf coaxes them, indirectly, towards the direction where they can reclaim themselves, although for Thorin this requires the ultimate sacrifice of death. Both Bilbo and Thorin are biographically intermediate. But only Bilbo undergoes a passage into the next phase of life.

A Middle-Aged World

In their own life trajectories, the characters in *The Hobbit* are at an intermediate stage of development. Not only does *The Hobbit* have no children in it, but most of the characters, within the terms of their own fictional world, are quite old. Admittedly, one needs to go to *The Lord of the Rings* to find this information explicitly. Here, in the appendices, we find that Bilbo is fifty (perhaps thirty-seven in human years, but in Tolkien's era, before our current rhetoric of 'forty is the new thirty," this was middle age). Thorin is a hundred and ninety—not ancient for a dwarf, but by no means young either; as an exiled claimant Thorin is closer to being the Old Pretender than Bonnie Prince Charlie. Balin is only slightly younger, and Dwalin, Balin's younger brother, is slightly younger in turn, and Glóin is slightly younger than Dwalin. In the 2012 Peter Jackson adaptation of *The Hobbit*, Balin, played by the pushing-sixty Ken Stott, is represented as an experienced, silver-haired dwarf, by no means a stripling. The film portrayal of Balin seems slightly old for someone who, as future King of the foredoomed Moria revival, has a political future ahead of him. The dates of those dwarves not in the direct royal line, and those not of Durin's folk at all, are not given, but Bombur's obesity makes him certainly a *Khazâd d'un certain age*. Only Fili and Kili are young among the dwarf-company, and indeed Fili, Kili, and Bard are the only young people—not children, but younger adults—in the book. Given Fili and Kili's tragic deaths, this accentuates even more the lack of youth in the book, leaving Bard to bear all the youth among the survivors. The Elvenking

is old, and the son who later becomes so important is not mentioned in *The Hobbit*. Gandalf and Radagast are, of course, old; indeed, as we find out from *The Lord of the Rings* they are, in their Middle-earth avatars as 'wizards,' the oldest of all named in the book save Elrond, the Necromancer, and, presumably, Smaug. Gollum is tremendously old, and although again we only find out the details of his age from *The Lord of the Rings*, he has clearly been around the block, or slithered around the cave, a few times. Elrond is old enough to remember Gondolin. Although, as Rateliff has pointed out (I.84), Tolkien did not at the start necessarily intend to have the First Age be so far in the past from the events of the *Hobbit*, Elrond is clearly not young. The Master of Esgaroth is old. Smaug is old. Beorn is sufficiently old for him to be (according to *Letters* 178) certainly dead by the time the Ring quest is begun.

Why is this important? Remember that in a work of fantasy, as opposed to a work of realistic fiction, the author has more liberty to take with characters' ages, and is less constrained by actual events. In a novel set in the early twentieth century, for instance, a novelist has to decide whether their characters will be of age to fight in, or be affected by, the First World War. The known history will serve as a limit, a constraint. Tolkien, on the other hand, had total flexibility to fashion the ages of his characters to suit the events portrayed in the book. Moreover, his sense of exactitude and his clear pointing, in the *Lord Of The Rings* appendices, to facts that make interpretive comments on the people chronicled in the narrative's main body, give significance to, for instance, Frodo's being slightly younger (by one year) than Bilbo when setting off on their respective adventures. Gimli also is younger, by nineteen years, than his father when they join up with hobbits on quests. There is also, in both these cases, the additional flexibility of different *hnau* having different age-spans, so that the laws of nature can, as Northrop Frye famously said of the romance genre, be slightly suspended (Frye 33).

Thus it is not accidental that *The Lord of the Rings*—oddly given its being the more adult book—has many more young people in general, or at least people who are unrealized because of their inexperience, not because they have had experience but failed to capitalize on it. Faramir is young if exemplary. Even Bregalad is a hasty Ent. In *The Lord of the Rings* there are many more characters at the beginning of their journeys, not the middle. Boromir and Pippin, on their different levels, are both immature, and their disasters with the Ring and the *palantír* are precipitated by their immaturity. There might be less emphasis on biographical intermediacy (middle age) in *The Lord of the Rings* because the geographic intermediacy, the secondary world, is so well established. In other words, the biographical intermediacy of *The Hobbit* may have been a bridge for Tolkien to establish a sense of tradition and dwelling in later Middle-earth that his later work can then assume. This is suggested by the portrayal of the only

other Hobbits mentioned in *The Hobbit*, the Sackville-Bagginses. In *The Lord of the Rings*, they are younger than Bilbo by a generation. But they are not portrayed as young in *The Hobbit*.

The Hobbit, like Yeats' Byzantium, is a country for old men. This is very different from *The Lord of the Rings*, where we have youths such as Boromir, Faramir, Éowyn, Éomer, Merry, Pippin, Sam, Rosie, and even Gimli and Legolas (and for that matter, Elrond's children) who, unlike any of the Dwarves in Thorin and company except Fili and Kili, are represented as young enough to have living fathers.

Alice, The Hobbit, and animality as intermediacy

In the *Alice* books, there are far more male than female characters, though important figures such as the Red and White Queens are female. But the cast of the Hobbit is *all* male. As William Green (188) has commented, "there are no living female characters, human or animal" in the book (though some might aver Belladonna Took is an important character, even offstage). Furthermore, nearly all the men are older men, and males for the most part far more experienced, weathered, and wizened than Bilbo. Bilbo's intermediacy is further fortified by the similarity between orcs ('goblins' in *The Hobbit,* where they are seen as less menacing) and his own hobbit body as intermediate between men and animals. There is potential animality in the idea of hobbit in the closeness of the word 'hobbit' to rabbit (seen as potentially probative by both Shippey [67-68] and Rateliff), akin to *Alice*'s sense of children's amoral appetites, especially for food, being like those of animals. In both cases, there is intermediacy between human and animal. Despite his middle age, Bilbo is among, in relative terms, the younger *hnau* in *The Hobbit*. He has the same relative age-position with respect to the older denizens in his world as the juvenile Alice does to the creatures in Wonderland, who are all represented as eccentric adults of various stories and species. What is striking is that both Bilbo and Alice, bewildered by the new world around them, also keep their heads about them more than the majority of entities they encounter in these new, bewildering worlds.

Another link with *Alice* is the animality shared by the books. In *The Hobbit* we have Wargs, eagles, spiders, bear-men, a thrush; in *Alice*, a march hare, a dormouse, a Cheshire cat, among others. In both cases, there are anthropomorphized animals, animals who can be allies or enemies of human actors; in *The Lord of the Rings* we have Shelob and, arguably, Shadowfax and Bill the pony. But the trope of sentient animals is very much sidelined in *The Lord of the Rings*—one can see the talking fox in "Three is Company" as a final nod to a mode of representation Tolkien was leaving behind (I.2.72). In both *Alice* and *The Hobbit*, the journey out of bourgeois normality is represented as a descent into a riskier world of instinct and threat. In Alice's case, the trajectory is downward, in

Bilbo's case outward. But the complementary aspect of Bilbo's journey—the way he acquires sophistication and polish, the way he becomes a savvier man of the world—only emerges after the Quest has been completed. Throughout most of the book, Bilbo is as bewildered and disconcerted by this new world as is Alice. Similarly structured chapter titles in the books, such as "Curiouser and Curiouser" and "Over Hill and Under Hill"—testify to a sense of complication after complication, of how each protagonist is, if educated by their experiences, also disoriented by them.

Both Alice and Bilbo are injected into a strange world consisting of not necessarily rational creatures in which they are both innocents who have to have things explained to them. Yet, as evidenced in the episode with Thorin and the Arkenstone, Bilbo, like Alice, is a fundamentally more rational creature who has to model, for others, how to act rationally. That so many of the denizens of Bilbo's worlds are animals is consequential. Animality—meaning species identity as not mere brutality—as opposed to ecology (Dickerson/Evans and many others) and even geology (Hynes) and astronomy (Larsen) has not received major emphasis in the record of critical scholarship on Tolkien. Flieger, however, has made some suggestive remarks, particularly in differentiating the "Pigwiggenry" and "cute" characteristics (62) of most of the animals of *The Hobbit* from the more convincingly fantastic ones such as the Eagles. There is no doubt that the animality of *The Hobbit* is one of the traits that both links it to the tradition of children's fiction and differentiates it from the mien of *The Lord of the Rings.* And it is an animality that the worlds of the *Alice* books and *The Hobbit* share, and that is yet another mode of framing intermediacy.

Intermediate Worlds

But what is the nature of the intermediacy that *Alice* shares with *The Hobbit*? Here Carroll and Tolkien really diverge, as Tolkien is much more determined to depict an intermediate world. Carroll, like Tolkien, wrote a sequel to his original work, *Through the Looking Glass,* which deepened and made more methodical the more conjectural and scattershot world of the first book. Yet, even when one compares the first Tolkien and first Carroll book directly, differences emerge. Carroll's world is clearly a dream world, represented as the dream of a sleeping little girl in our own world, and not given any credence as an objective reality even on its own plane of representation. *Alice* is a world of the imagination, much on the order of Robert Louis Stevenson's Land of Counterpane. So is that of *The Hobbit.* But it is not represented as such. It is its own plane of lived reality. True, in the first edition of *The Hobbit* there were references, as Jason Fisher reminds us, to "policemen on bicycles […], Lilliputians, […] the Gobi Desert, the wild wireworms [sic] of the Chinese […]. After the first edition, Tolkien cut all of those references and made it more of its

own separate world" (Fisher). The only remixing residue of these is the Golfimbul/golf joke, something which Tolkien kept in probably both because it was funny and he realized that he could not entirely purge his world of either resemblances to our own modern world or to those real world references which did not resemble medieval Europe (the New World nutrient of potatoes, as cultivated by the Gamgees, is a prime example here). But even in the first edition Tolkien's *Hobbit* world has something which Carroll's *Alice* world does not: a past. Thrór's map, under different names, was part of the project from the beginning, and the map reveals a past betrayal, a primordial wound that the mission of Thorin and company needs to purge and avenge. Even, in other words, after Tolkien made the key decision to involve the *Silmarillion* references like Elrond and Gondolin in the plot, there was a level of feigned but palpable historical depth in a way there is not in *Alice*, whose denizens, although tremendously concerned about time, seem not to live in a fixed sequence. Indeed, anxiety about time, about being late, the Mad Hatter and March Hare quarreling over tea-time, the White Queen's mixed-up memory and perception patterns— consumes the creatures in the books. In the *Hobbit* world, on the other hand, time flows in a direct, forward sequence. *The Hobbit,* even if one excludes the Elves and their solicitation of the greater legendarium, has a past; as newer referents come in, such as Bard and Dale, they are given a past as well. The quest is not just to get rid of Smaug because he is evil. It is to restore a *status quo ante*, which is testified to by discernible documents, is archivally posited.

Tolkien thus uses the device of a detailed, simulated, intricate past in excess of what is needed for strictly motivational or plot reasons. Strangely, this device, which on the level of representation seems ultra-mimetic, actually heightens the fantasy. Indeed, the traceable shape of both the *Alice* books and *The Hobbit* can link them as Modernist works, along the lines of Juliet Dusinberre's analysis in her brilliant *Alice to the Lighthouse* that "radical experiments in the arts in the early modern period began in the books which Lewis Carroll and his successors wrote for children" (5). Carroll, with his subversion of linguistic order and his questioning of the distinction between illusion and reality, paved the way, in Dusinberre's argument, for the more obvious modernist experiments of writers like Virginia Woolf. One might, in a slightly more measured, more nuanced, and differently emphasized way, say the same for Tolkien with respect to modern experimentation. Tolkien believed deeply in linguistic order. His idea of sub-creation was very different from the proto-surreal imaginings of Carroll.

But the point here is that, in both authors, the internal mimetic solidity of the maps actually contributes to the thoroughness of fantastic engagement. The world is so removed from ours that it needs orderings of the sort we rely upon so that we may make sense of all. One can see this sort of experimental fictive literalism in overtly modernist works like Jorge Luis Borges's "Tlön,

Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," where the deadpan, mimesis-cloaked relation of the fantastic content makes them not more mundane, but more vividly fantastic. Inversely, one feels the realistic detail in Joyce's *Ulysses* is in the grain of its experimentation, not counterbalancing it. As Rateliff has recently shown in *The History of* The Hobbit, the filling-in of the story's narrative and the development of the maps were intimately linked. The plot of *The Hobbit* would never have achieved full realization without this sort of internal mimesis, which though different from the 'magical realism' of the late twentieth century, is not unrelated to it. Not just the characters but also the world in which they are represented as being in testify to an enveloping intermediacy.

Mapping Intermediacy

Maps play a crucial role in the intermediacy of *The Hobbit*. Whereas, in the modernist era, maps in fiction were seen as inappropriately literal, infringing upon the gossamer flights of the imaginative, in more recent times there has been a rehabilitation of maps. The work of the geographer Edward Soja, the literary historian Franco Moretti and his maps of characters and contexts in literary fiction, and the cataloguer of imaginative worlds of Alberto Manguel, demonstrate that maps are no longer seen as infringing upon the romantic elusiveness of imagination, but in their figuring of the real, might be akin to the motions of fiction-making themselves. China Miéville—otherwise an admirer of Tolkien—objects to the entire idea of maps in fantasy worlds as presuming too much to a fixed knowledge. But maps historicize, give a sense of possible transition and agency, demonstrate that conditions of power are not fixed, that dragons can be overthrown and polities overhauled. All this makes Tolkien seem not anachronistic but in tune with his time. Indeed, one could almost describe Tolkien as anticipating a more postmodern than modern foregrounding of the map. Here, concrete referents could not just be put on a securely metaphorical plane, but had to come across as eerily real at times even if fundamentally fictive or non-referential.

Related to this is how Tolkien's focus on language can be at once imaginative and scientific. Most scientists would be amused by Tolkien's contention, with respect to Carroll comparisons, that Anglo-Saxon philology was a more fundamental field of research than mathematics and logic. But if one is not only a humanist but believes deeply that the sources of the modern day English language in Anglo-Saxon are probative to the way we use and understand the language, the assertion becomes less outlandish. Carroll, incidentally, made satirical references to Anglo-Saxon philology in Chapter 3 of *Alice in Wonderland*, "A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale," including a hilarious account of the Norman Conquest, and in Chapter 7 of *Through The Looking Glass*, including the memorable phrase "Anglo-Saxon attitudes." The different tonalities

and visions of their works should not disguise the way both Tolkien and Carroll braided knowledge and imagination in ways that can be called mythic.

Indeed, as said before, Tolkien knew Carroll's work and admired it, even though he ruled out *Alice* as being a fairy-story. Tolkien's onetime student and second-generation Inkling, Roger Lancelyn Green, a noted Carroll scholar, also could have provided a link. But my interest is less in linking Carroll to Tolkien as a source than in examining how tracings of internal order in children's books is a sign of the imaginative ambition of children's literature. This can be seen in L. Frank Baum's *Oz* books, which also featured extensive maps that give a sense of coherence and specificity to their depicted fictional world. Even a look at the *Hobbit* map, however, shows a darker and more problematic world than the Oz maps, with their panoply of quirky realms and hidden corners. Not only do the words on *The Hobbit* map, such as Mirkwood, Wilderland, and the Dragon himself reveal a greater sense of danger and threat, but the way the internal geography resembles that of the real world—e.g. how the Misty Mountains resemble the Rockies or the Alps, mountain chains running inconveniently down the spine of the continent—make it clear that these are worlds we must face rather than evade. Far from tethering *The Hobbit* to the here and now, this eerie resemblance gives the fictional world a sense of gravity and consequence. Again, it is precisely because the subcreated world is so successfully rendered that the real can uncannily return to us in the shape of maps, traced sketches, and cartographic hauntings.

Few critics have seen Tolkien as alluding to Oz, although Brian Attebery and Lin Carter have analyzed the two authors' worlds under the same cover, Flieger (298) sees the Peter Jackson adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* as alluding to the Hollywood adaptation of Baum's first *Oz* novel, and Kapelle sees some putative Baum influence in the Father Christmas letters. There is no record of Tolkien reading the Oz books, although the presence of a talking bird called the Ork in *The Scarecrow of Oz* is as plausible a source for this word in Tolkien as is Blake's Orc, often adduced (as in Helms 69), really much further removed from the milieu and audience out of which and for which Tolkien was writing. Although as Tolkien reminded his potential adaptors, Orcs are not auks (*Letters* 274), the use of 'Ork' in a fantasy level is at least suggestive.

Yet, as opposed to Oz, Tolkien's maps are not about the difference between our own world and the faerie world. They are about phases of the past within that world. Anne T. Eaton, *The Hobbit*'s *New York Times* reviewer, perceived this when she described the story as set "between the age of Faerie and the dominion of men." The temporality of *The Hobbit* is intermediate, and contains both an implied contrast to our own world and to a world than itself that is older, more storied, and more legendary. The maps of the *Alice* and *Oz* books can diagnose the structure of their world and orient us, but they are

ultimately more for the convenience of the teller than to reaffirm some deep subcreative palpability on the part of the tale. Moreover, they show no abiding political antagonisms (beyond momentary confrontations that are generated by a rogue malign intent). The map of *The Hobbit* shows us the history of the land that is larger than these characters and that is not entirely at their disposition or control. The Battle of the Five Armies and the hovering presence of the Necromancer reveal that there is a thoroughness to the tableau here, a concert of Middle-earth, a balance of power, which is absent in *Alice* and *Oz*, where there is, in a more courtly-romance, less epic way, one adventure at a time. Only in *The Emerald City of Oz* does Baum at all take on any sort of geostrategic tableau. Indeed, that book—with its vista of the evil opposing armies from a dark, covert kingdom being stopped just at the gate of the great city—is another one that Tolkien might have read and might inform the siege of Minas Tirith, although in both cases these might have been informed by, for example, the sieges of Rome by barbarians (see Ford) and Constantinople (see Librán-Moreno) and then Vienna by Muslims. The evident weakness of Baum's world, though, as compared to Tolkien's, is its lack of historical depths: all the events and personages are more or less on the same plane of time. Within a few chapters of *The Hobbit*, one sees the historical layers beneath the present action, at once intriguing and ominous. But were these layers in Tolkien's mind when he began the book?

Rateliff's extraordinary work has shown us that when Tolkien first began to write *The Hobbit* he did not necessarily perceive the Silmarillion material as far in the past. Nor did he even think seriously about any referential relationship between one and the other world. Indeed, the Silmarillion references, given that the Silmarillion corpus was one at the pith of Tolkien's imaginative vision, are not taken so seriously in *The Hobbit*; they are lightly and even casually dropped. Given the far greater centrality of the Eldar to the Khazâd in Tolkien's legendarium, and given that the Dwarves are granted a supplementary place at most in the orders of the Children of Ilúvatar, it is, oddly, the *Dwarves* who are the focus of *The Hobbit*'s historical and cartographic specificity. Indeed, *four* Dwarvish kingdoms are mentioned in *The Hobbit*: the Blue Mountains, Erebor, Moria, and the Iron Hills.

The dynastic succession and relative position of these kingdoms is presented in great detail, so we understand why Dáin succeeds Thorin. As Rateliff concedes, Dáin emerges so late in the composition in the book as to raise questions about why people did not refer to his as having a greater role earlier (II.703). Dáin is another middle-aged hero, who despite his early feat of killing Azog (of which he is deprived in the Jackson film), is, like Bilbo, a late bloomer who only finds his life's work, as Dante would say, *nel mezzo del cammin*, in intermediacy, along a journey abandoned or momentarily obscured. Like Bilbo,

Dáin achieves an unexpected and life-changing triumph in middle age. In this as in many other ways, the intermediacy of *The Hobbit* as a text is secured by the intermediacy of Bilbo himself. Indeed, though at the beginning Bilbo seems a fish out of water, ultimately there is an increasing congruency between Bilbo and his expanded terrain simply because both are so intermediate. What Jean MacIntyre calls Bilbo's "comic incongruity in the heroic world" (16) in fact has considerably lessened by the end of the book, as Bilbo and his world find a common intermediacy.

Intermediacy and the Fashioning of Middle-earth

The representational intermediacy is not only in the depicted world, though, but in Tolkien's own developing compositional process. Tolkien was bringing a Hobbit into a mythological world thus far populated largely by Elves, with Men as important supporting cast members and Dwarves as minor villains and comic relief. It is thus notable that Bilbo's historicity and contingency is associated with the *Dwarves* whose company he joins, not at all with the Elves who so admires. Aside from his one moment of common cause with Bard, Bilbo is similarly detached from the Men depicted in the book, whose division into two political units parallels that between Rohan and Gondor in *The Lord of the Rings*— an older kingdom revived by a resurgent heir, and a newer kingdom with a less fancy dynastic apparatus. Elves and Men are vague, more mythic than historical. Indeed, the reader who has read *The Lord of the Rings* and returned to *The Hobbit* is probably disconcerted, thinking Gondolin is a misprint for Gondor, a place still politically and even geologically extant in Bilbo's time, whose *Dunâdan* workmanship might well have trickled a few hundred miles northwestward.

Tolkien's achievement was not just to hook his *Hobbit* world to the Silmarillion world. It was the invention of an intermediate past to plausibly connect them and suture them. In this way, it is the *Dwarvish,* not the Elvish, past in *The Hobbit* that sets the precedent. The Dwarvish past is accessible, only a couple of generations old, and is epitomized in places that, although perilous and distant, are accessible, can be visited, are not under the wave. The Dwarvish past, and the kingdom of Erebor that represents it, are models for the Gondor and Rohan later to be invented by Tolkien: richer, older cultures than that of hobbits, but not so ancient and imposing so as to be entirely incongruent with them. Fimi (196) links the "addition of the Second and Third Ages" with Tolkien's "experimenting with the genre of the novel." The Dwarfish past in *The Hobbit*, in its intermediate thickness, its suggestive context, was the model for this additive experimentation. There is another past in *The Hobbit* than the Silmarillion past, which as Rateliff has shown, veers between being both adjacent to and far distant from the action. In *The Lord of the Rings*, a far nearer past is available. For instance, when the hobbits take swords from the Barrow-wights,

Elrond finds they are the work of men of Westernesse—medieval, intermediate, as it were. These swords' owners were Númenóreans defending the rump kingdoms of Arnor against the Witch-King, thousands of years before. These rump kingdoms were thousands of years nearer to the late Third Age action than was Gondolin, destroyed by Morgoth in the First Age. It is as if in one book characters discovered the Parthenon, and in its sequel the stained-glass windows of Mont Saint-Michel.

The closeness of the original conception of hobbits to the Silmarillion material is perhaps one of the reasons the legendarium does not go into the origin of hobbits beyond their first sighting in the vales of Anduin. This origin might have been assigned a First Age date which became implausible after so many layers of history were put between *The Hobbit* and the Silmarillion. Ultimately, of course, hobbits are not given an origin because they stand in for the reader of the text—in both our littleness and in our modernity, in contrast to the great actors of storied realms. But in Tolkien's world, the ordinary can be seen as miraculous by others, as when Théoden says of Merry, "here before my eyes stand yet another of the folk of legend" (*LotR* III.8.557). The potential woven into Tolkien's incipient Middle-earth world in *The Hobbit* is full of this sort of reversibility. For instance, we are presented, in *The Lord of the Rings*, with the idea that Wilderland is the conventional, Westron name for Rhovanion. Yet in fact Rhovanion, although a word with a perfect linguistic pedigree in Sindarin, is a word invented in *The Lord of the Rings.* Wilderland (itself we might note, reminiscent as a name of Wonderland) has already been established in *The Hobbit,* and Tolkien needed something for the Eldar and Númenóreans to call it. Tolkien's singular achievement is bound up in this sense of intermediacy, of people and places being in the middle, with more around them in terms of detail and nuance than is needed for a conventional narrative. Bilbo's being middle-aged yet unfulfilled was a kind of origin-point for this intermediacy, reflecting on the biographical level what later and more systematically was instilled on the representational level. This suggests that the character of Bilbo is far more crucial to the very nature of Tolkien's represented world than is usually taken to be the case.

At the beginning of Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice is said to be "getting a little giddy with so much floating in the air, and was rather glad to find herself walking again in the natural way" (12). The strange experiences of these children's books are yet dependent on a sense of normality, with the readers' experience lying somewhere between the two. Intermediacy is as much there as sublimity or the abyss. Tolkien uses the device of a detailed, intricate past in excess of what is needed for strictly motivational or plot reasons. Tolkien showed that maps of terrain through which the hobbit and others walk in their natural way could also be those that most powerfully transport us to other

realms, as well as that meaningful journeys, those with the inner consistency of reality, could start at the middle as well as near the beginning of life. The biographic intermediacy of Bilbo Baggins was a needed spur to the development of the representational intermediacy of *The Hobbit* and of a realized Middle-earth.

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