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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Implied Reader and the Recovery of Childhood:
A Study of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit***

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of
English and Comparative Literature

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Georgette Rizk

Under the supervision of
Dr. William Melaney

October 2018

The American University in Cairo

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A Study of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit***

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* uses a storyteller-narrator and a child/adult implied reader to guide child readers towards maturity and allow adult readers to reengage with the world of childhood. The storyteller replicates traditional fairytale and epic storytelling, a tradition which simultaneously engages adults and children. The novel's language, intertexts, themes, humor and the reader's encouraged identification with the hobbit, Bilbo, suggest that the implied reader is both an adult and a child. The novel invites the reader to adopt Bilbo's development of a childlike perspective valuing the immaterial over the material. The life-like nature of time in the novel facilitates the reader's engagement with moral questions posed by the text which leads to Recovery: the adult's return to the pure view of childhood. The Christian concept of one's rebecoming a child as essential to a person's spiritual and moral development is shown to have inspired the construction of the novel's child/adult implied reader.

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To John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, for the literature.

To my professors, for the help.

To my department, for the support.

To my family, for the love.

To God, for everything.

"You are already too old for fairy tales . . . But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again."

(C. S. Lewis to Lucy Barfield)

Introduction

The epigraph at the beginning of this thesis is part of C. S. Lewis's dedication to Lucy Barfield, the girl who inspired the character of Lucy in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In his dedication, Lewis claims that he began writing the novel during her childhood. However, he realized by the time the novel was finished that Lucy was "too old" to appreciate it. Yet, he remained certain that one day Lucy would mature and, when she became an adult, would be able to appreciate his novel or "fairytale" that he knows she would have appreciated as a child. He predicts that when she is past her "too old" phase and becomes "old enough," she will seek out the literature of her childhood and reread it—from a modified point of view. Lewis's conception of fairytales or children's literature as a genre to be enjoyed in childhood, scoffed at as the reader moves toward maturity, and returned to in adulthood inspires my reading of J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, *The Hobbit*.

Tolkien's work is often examined in terms of its mythical/fairytale elements. Tolkien believed myth to be a means of illuminating truth, offering an incomplete vision of what is real and even convinced Lewis of the same (Veldman 49), who came to label his own novels as "fairytales," as indicated by the dedication to Lucy. The genre of fairytales is different from other forms of children's literature as it involves the participation of adults as well as children in the reading process. Fairytales are narrated, heard not read. A child is not expected to be able to read the Grimm brothers' tales and yet it is children that form the primary audience of these tales which are read to them by their adult caregivers. Thus, the act of fairytale storytelling while intended to allow children to acquire the values adults wish them to obtain, engages—and inevitably influences—adults as well. Tolkien himself had a similar, even

more extreme view of fairytale literature. In his essay, “On Fairy Stories”, he argued: “If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults” (Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories” 15). Tolkien saw fairytales as legitimate literature that should not mistakenly be confined to a child’s world but enjoyed by adults as well.

J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* is a modern take on the fairytale and myth genres. *The Hobbit*’s intended reader is both a child and an adult. Tolkien originally started writing the novel as he was bored grading exam papers, and thus the first person to be entertained by or offered a form of escape through that literary work was Tolkien himself. The intended reader is also a child, as Tolkien developed the novel to be a bedtime story for his children (Veldman 77). This is indeed reflected in the novel’s construction. The narrator seems to be an old-fashioned oral storyteller who transforms the novel’s reader into a listener. The narrator starts with a fairytale-style introduction to his tale, but instead of the classical “Once upon a time” he tells us: “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 11). He takes it for granted that the reader knows what a hobbit is, and after a few lines, appears to ‘hear’ the reader’s unspoken question about the identity and nature of hobbits, a question he then repeats before giving the reader the answer (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 12). This instance sets the tone for the rest of the novel and marks the first of many other ‘dialogues’ between the narrator and the reader where the storyteller ‘hears’ his listener’s questions and addresses them. Another element in the novel’s construction that highlights its adoption of fairytale style is that the narrator is portrayed as an adult who is a scholar. Thus, the narrator reads the findings of the hobbit’s historical records to his listener, while the listener as portrayed in the novel—or the implied reader if we go by Wolfgang Iser’s terminology—is a child.

In *The Act of Reading*, Iser examines various theories of reader response, discussing Wolff's intended reader before introducing his own implied reader. The intended reader is the audience the author had in mind when constructing the text. This reader reveals itself in many forms, from assumptions about "the norms and values of contemporary readers" (Iser 33) to the "didactic intentions" (Iser 33) of the author. Iser adds that this reader represents not only contemporary social conventions but also the author's desire to affirm or challenge them, making it possible to discover the author's real audience via characterization of the text's intended reader (33). However, he notes that this theory does not account for readers' ability to grasp some meaning of the text long after its publication and concludes that we must "differentiate between the fictitious reader and the reader's role" (33). It is at this point that he introduces the implied reader.

While previous models of readers are, according to Iser, abstract but map on to real readers under certain conditions, Iser's implied reader is completely textual (34). This theory reviews the reader's role as a construction of the text and as an act (Iser 35). According to Iser, any novel offers four main points of views: the narrator's, the plot's, the characters' and the fictional—or implied—reader's (35). The reader's task is to mediate between these various perspectives, a process that differs from one reader to the next according to her own experiences, to arrive at the meaning towards which these textual perspectives lead (Iser 38). It is especially important for my purposes to note that this difference between readers' experiences which affects their extraction of meaning from the text is allowed by the structure of the text (Iser 37).

This thesis draws on Iser's theory of the implied reader and Wolff's of the intended reader to argue that Tolkien, using the four main perspectives of the novel, especially an oral storyteller narrator and a dual-natured (child/adult) implied reader,

constructs textual difference in *The Hobbit* that expands his intended audience to include adults as well as children, allowing the adult reader to reclaim her childhood and reevaluate her moral values and understanding of the world. The novel is layered in such a manner that it offers two different yet wholesome reading experiences with different main themes to the child and the adult reader—coming of age and return to innocence, respectively. The novel does not only present textual elements that specifically target certain readers, but it also utilizes the difference in perspective between readers, conveying different messages while using the same imagery. While the act of fairytale storytelling, recreated in the novel through the exchange between the narrator and the reader, engages adult readers and child listeners, Tolkien engages the adult reader in the manner that Lewis suggests—through nostalgia and memory.

Some may question the validity of my thesis statement, arguing that it is true of any novel—not just *The Hobbit*—that the reader returns to it with new eyes after considerable time has passed and, consequently, sees in it something she has missed before. It is true that the evolution of the reader's response to any text is a function of his own maturity or development. However, it is crucial to note that this development of the reader's perspective is usually unanticipated by the text. Authors write with an audience in mind, and in the case of children's literature, that audience belongs to a certain age group. The text is constructed according to the author's assumptions regarding his intended readers. When those readers no longer belong to that age group, they no longer become the intended audience that the text addresses. Their response to the text will, of course, differ from the time of their childhood to that of their adulthood; however, the text neither anticipates nor counts on the development of their perspective to uncover new meanings.

This is not the case for *The Hobbit*, whose author does not believe in placing an age limit on literature. The novel understands that it will be reread by its child readers well into their adulthood and seeks to guide them towards maturity. This is reflected in the nature of the protagonist, Bilbo the hobbit, who initially acts as the child reader's ambassador in the unfamiliar world of Middle-earth but slowly develops and matures during the course of his journey. Not only does this novel accommodate the development of its reader's consciousness; it also counts on it. Tolkien seems to have carefully constructed the novel to be readable on both levels—the child's and the adult's. Even though the novel began as a written work narrated by Tolkien to his children, it offers knowledge as well as humor accessible only to an adult reader with an adult's life experiences and understanding of the world.

This suggests that the novel, despite its classification by publishers as a children's book, has two intended readers, namely, children and adults. To be more precise, *The Hobbit* has a maturing intended reader. It expects its reader to grow older and it is designed to accommodate her developing consciousness by revealing aspects built into it by the author, previously hidden from her child eyes. Moreover, the notion that the novel is designed to evolve and accommodate the evolution of its reader is supported by Tolkien's view of what children's literature ought to be:

Then, as a branch of a genuine art, children may hope to get fairystories fit for them to read and yet within their measure; as they may hope to get suitable introductions to poetry, history, and the sciences. Though it may be better for them to read some things, especially fairy-stories, that are beyond their measure rather than short of it. Their books like their clothes should allow for growth, and their books at any rate should encourage it. (“On Fairy Stories” 15)

The Hobbit succeeds in being such a book that encourages and accommodates the development of its child-reader's consciousness. By presenting ideas and humor that are "beyond their measure", the novel manages to be readable to its child readers well into their adulthood. This development of the intended reader opens up the possibility of a layered implied reader.

According to Iser, the implied reader is the vantage point the author creates for the reader from which she is invited to experience the unfamiliar world of the novel (Iser 35). That is not to say that the reader's view of the novel becomes that of the implied reader's. This vantage point, or the implied reader, is one of the main four perspectives through which the reader is exposed to the world of the novel and it becomes her task to synthesize these four and call upon her own experiences to uncover the novel's meaning(s) (Iser 35). If the novel's intended or actual reader evolves, then the space carved out for her from which she situates herself vis-à-vis the world of the novel may evolve as well. The implied reader is apparent in the responses the narrator expects the reader to have to the events that he describes.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, in addition to the Introduction and Conclusion. The first chapter discusses the novel's narrator; the second discusses the novel's readers (intended/implied and children/adults), while the third examines the role of time in the novel and its function in the interaction between narrator/reader and reader/text. As the novel's narrator and reader(s) have already been mentioned, the world of time where they interact and which impacts the reading experience should be briefly reviewed.

By writing *The Hobbit* and the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien created a world, not just a text. While Middle-earth is an ideal/unreal literary

construction, the narrator presents it as a historical realm and hints that the journey of the hobbit took place before the reader's time. This suggests that the reader's and Bilbo's worlds are one in space but separated by time. Time is not only a force inside the novel that impacts the characters and stands as the difference between success and failure of their journey to the Lonely Mountain. It also applies to the reader of the novel at the time of her engagement with the text. The reader matures along with Bilbo as time passes. The experiences of Bilbo change him, as Gandalf notes at the end, just as the child reader changes as she learns about the world through the trials, experiences and discoveries of Bilbo.

While time in *The Hobbit* engages the child reader by presenting her with what is familiar, it engages the adult reader by emphasizing the past rather than the present. At the beginning of the story, the dwarves convince Bilbo to join them on their dangerous journey to recover their dragon-occupied home by singing a dwarf song about the golden age before the fiery attack of the dragon. From then on, the reader is inspired by the dwarves' and Bilbo's desire to return to their roots, to the place or time of innocent and simple pleasures before decay and ruin were brought by the covetous dragon, a representation of evil or sin. Adult readers are invited to return to the world of their childhood, not to "[play] at being children" (Tolkien "On Fairy Stories" 15) but to engage with Recovery. As Tolkien puts it, "Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view" ("On Fairy Stories" 19) that serves as one of the functions of fantasy or fairytale literature. In the realm of Middle-earth to which *The Hobbit* is a window, adult readers are invited to recover what they may have lost of their childlike wonder, to rethink their priorities or values that may have been ill-shaped by adult life in the modern world.

Chapter One: The Narrator as Storyteller

A careful reading of J. R. R. Tolkien's early novel, *The Hobbit*, strongly suggests a belief in free will as crucial to the task of achieving maturity. This belief is combined with the understanding that innocence, as a pole to experience, can contribute to the development of the human personality. Tolkien's narrator addresses the reader directly and plainly, stating that the story he is telling occurred on earth long ago (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 9). He seems to have knowledge of the characters' inner lives and informs the reader of their intentions, thoughts and emotions. He also has great knowledge of Middle-earth and has no trouble describing and naming the landscape and the various species that occupy it. And yet, the narrator employs literary methods that provide the reader with a special role, engaging her in a way that is irreducible to the usual meaning of 'omniscience' as applied to objective narration. This chapter will discuss some of these literary methods, particularly in terms of the author's adoption of traditionary texts as the starting-point for communicating his unique vision of the world.

Tolkien's narrator sides with the reader, referring to modern human beings as "you and me" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 12). His peculiar position is partially explained at the end of the novel when he is presented as a scholar, a historian of sorts, reading Bilbo's records of his Lonely Mountain journey to the audience as readers of the novel. The novel, in this light, can be understood as the narrator's retelling of the journey prescribed by Bilbo. However, the narrator or storyteller does not simply pass on the hobbit's journal in its original textual form but performs the epic poet's role in narrating the events of the hero's journey, turning the historical text into an oral story. Not only does he narrate Bilbo's memoir, turning it into an oral narrative, but he also collects knowledge about Middle-earth and its inhabitants via oral history and

storytelling. When he first introduces Gandalf to the reader, he says “Gandalf! If you had heard only a quarter of what I have heard about him, and I have only heard very little of what there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 14). It becomes clear that the narrator is a scholar/historian gathering knowledge of Middle-earth and its history wherever he can find it. He is a scholar who recognizes oral literature and folktale and allows these to color and inform his own storytelling.

Furthermore, the position of the narrator is further complicated when one considers how Tolkien relinquishes authorial control over the text despite his obvious authorship of the novel in question. Benjamin Saxton states that, according to Anderson’s annotated version of *The Hobbit*, the runes on the cover of the novel’s first editions read, “The Hobbit or There and Back Again being the record of a year’s journey made by Bilbo Baggins of Hobbiton compiled from his memoirs by J.R.R. Tolkien and published by George Allen Unwin LTD” (Saxton 180). While literature students are trained to distinguish the narrator from the author, Tolkien names himself as the text’s ‘compiler’ and Bilbo as its author, which implies that the narrator who speaks to the reader is none other than Tolkien himself. Moreover, in one of his letters, Tolkien refers to “the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself)” (qtd in Saxton 173). He creates a distinction between the writer of the novel in the everyday world (himself) and the writer of the novel in the novel’s world (with Bilbo as original author and narrator-Tolkien as a re-teller of the story) (Saxton 173). Hence, the Tolkien who functions as narrator does more than transmit a ready-made tale but mediates between the reader and Bilbo’s original account.

According to Auerbach’s critical study, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, the epic and novel can be clearly distinguished

(Auerbach 23). However, *The Hobbit*, using various elements, including narration, makes this distinction harder to maintain. Tolkien engages with questions that epic poets never had to confront. Unlike the epic, the novel is not a memorized poem/tale representing the collective wisdom or history of a people but the creative endeavor of one man. The audience of epic poems, in contrast, would never confuse the poet/narrator with the author of the work. Several canonical epics cannot be traced to any single source and perhaps therein lies their credibility as narratives of well-known events that pertain to a common culture. The idea that the poem was faithfully passed down to the poet by some authority before him, that he is not fabricating its events as he wishes, ascribes a certain integrity and authenticity to the memorized and recited work. There is no writer for the epic, just a faithful narrator.

While the ancient novel typically begins with either the author or narrator introducing himself to the reader in order to establish credibility, Professor Tolkien and his narrator-Tolkien act in a similar, though not identical, manner. This approach gives *The Hobbit* the air of communal knowledge that is characteristic of the epic and also imbues the narrative with a sort of historicity. In this case, the book cover states that the literary work is Bilbo Baggins's memoir, not a novel by Professor Tolkien, which seem to mean that the story is a first-hand account of a person's life in textual form. Also, author-Tolkien gives narrator-Tolkien the title of compiler, not editor, suggesting that the narrator simply put together fragments of an original writing without changing the content. However, the narrator openly admits editing the narrative when he tells the reader that “[y]ou are familiar with Thorin's style on important occasions, so I will not give you any more of it, though he went on a good deal longer than this” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 257). The narrative is thus more than simply Bilbo's account of what happened.

Perhaps the most substantial change that the narrator introduces to Bilbo's narrative is the addition of his own voice. Memoirs are told in the first person and Bilbo's would have to be no exception. However, the reader is never exposed to Bilbo's account of his journey to the Lonely Mountain. The voice the reader hears from the first sentence to the last is the narrator's. Rather than stay true to the 'compiler' label, narrator-Tolkien assumes the role of storyteller in Bilbo's place and presents the hobbit's narrative in a manner and language suited to the expected audience. Saxton argues that while a multiplicity of voices and narrations emerges in Tolkien's novels, with various characters acting as storytellers and telling their stories in their own voices, Tolkien's voice predominates (172). This occurs most often through the voice of the narrator. This is the voice that guides the reader through Middle-earth and that replaces Bilbo's when it retells the events prescribed in the hobbit's memoirs. Narrator-Tolkien draws inspiration from styles of narration peculiar to both the epic and the novel to formulate his own.

According to Wolfgang Iser, "The repertoire of a literary text does not consist solely of social and cultural norms; it also incorporates elements and, indeed, whole traditions of past literature that are mixed together with these norms. It may even be said that the proportions of this mixture form the basis of the differences between literary genres" (Iser 79). This is true for Tolkien, who manages to incorporate elements of the epic into the novel. Author-Tolkien fashions a universe for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, complete with historical timelines, geography, world literature and languages. The novel is replete with traditional songs of Middle-earth that chronicle the various histories of its populations and cultures and anticipates the fulfillment of the prophesy detailing the slaughter of the dragon. It tells an epic story of a hero's impossible quest to help a people battle a monster to reclaim their

homeland. These aspects of the novel are reminiscent of the Homeric epics and Greek myths.

References to classical literature and mythology also emerge when Beorn describes the geography of Mirkwood to Bilbo and the dwarves, who must cross it despite being unfamiliar with it. In this context, Beorn says, “[t]here is one stream there, I know, black and strong which crosses the path. That you should neither drink of, nor bathe in; for I have heard that it carries enchantment and a great drowsiness and forgetfulness” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 166). What is being described here is the river Styx of the underworld. Mirkwood is indeed described much like the underworld of *The Odyssey*, a bleak and grim place, lacking drinking water or growing fruit (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 166). Its very name, Mirk, brings to mind the word ‘murky’, making it seem a confusing and dim place where the path is unclear. Since there is only one path there that the hero must tread if he wants to leave the woods, Mirkwood seems like a labyrinth. This path acts like Ariadne’s thread in leading the hero (Bilbo) out and in helping him defeat the monster (Smaug) at the end of his journey.

Beorn himself is a reference to the epic literature that inspires Tolkien, which includes more than ancient Greek poetry. Shippey argues that in the figure of Beorn, “*Beowulf* and *Hrolfs saga* have been assimilated and naturalized” (32). Beorn is a “were-bear” (32): a shape shifter who is a man that can transform into a bear, demonstrating a dual nature that carries traits of both species. His very name suggests his nature as it means ‘man’ in Old English, but once meant ‘bear’ before the term was “humanized” (Shippey 32). In all cases, he is an ode to the characters of *Beowulf* from the Anglo-Saxon poem by the same name and to Bjarki, the head of King Hrolf’s champions in the Old Norse tale, *The Saga of Hrolf Kraki*, whose names also mean

‘bear’ and demonstrate this man/bear duality—especially in the case of Bjarki, who can project a bear image of himself (Shippey 31).

In addition to using many of the techniques that are common to the classical epic, Tolkien’s narrative sometimes suggests the style and methods of the novel. Rather than use Homer’s digressions to increase or deflate suspense, the narrator employs direct foreshadowing. From time to time, the narrator directly interrupts his narrative to mention terrible or exciting events that go unexplained. For example, after Thorin is imprisoned by the Elven King, he lays in his cell wondering what happened to the other dwarves and Bilbo. The narrator tells the reader “[i]t was not very long before [Thorin] discovered; but that belongs to the next chapter and the beginning of another adventure in which the hobbit again showed his usefulness” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 209), and that line serves as the chapter’s last. The reader, then, must delve into the following chapter to discover what happened to Thorin’s company and how Bilbo proved useful.

Another example anticipates how the narrative will end. After Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves are rescued by the eagles, the narrator informs the reader that “Bilbo never saw [the eagles] again – except high and far off in the Battle of Five Armies. But as that comes in the end of this tale we will say no more about it now” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 144). Several things happen here. First, the narrator reminds the reader that he is telling a story, with a beginning, middle and end. Second, he looks towards the end of that story, offering the reader a brief glimpse into the future of the characters. He reveals that there will be a great battle at the end with five armies involved. This raises many questions in the reader’s mind: what armies are these or who will fight in that battle? What will be Bilbo’s and the dwarves’ fate? What are they fighting or

fighting for? To answer these questions the reader must continue reading, forming hypotheses, and seeing if they will turn out to be correct in the end.

Tolkien explains his method of narration, using Gandalf to play the part of storyteller and Beorn to represent the reader. After Gandalf, Bilbo, and the thirteen dwarves are rescued by the eagles, they seek Beorn for shelter and food. Gandalf, then, narrates to Beorn the course of their journey and misadventures thus far. As each dwarf is discreetly led by Gandalf to chip in with a comment, interrupting his narration, Bilbo notices “how clever Gandalf had been. The interruptions had made Beorn more interested in the story, and the story had kept him from sending the dwarves off at once like suspicious beggars” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 156). The reader understands, with Bilbo’s help, that the narrator’s foreshadowing and interruptions are to increase the reader’s interest in the narrative, to keep him reading until the end and to concern him with the fate of the characters. It seems that while the epic acts as a traditional text for *The Hobbit*, Tolkien also employs many of the literary devices that are more peculiar to the novel. Tolkien was a mythmaker and medievalist whose creative and academic work is influenced by ancient and epic literature, but his other most powerful influence is Christianity, which performs a crucial role in shaping this novel and its narration.

Erich Auerbach’s discussion of the differences between the epic and the novel is pertinent to how Tolkien employs narrative to communicate his view of the world. Auerbach argues that in the epic, descriptions are “fully externalized”; everything happens “in the foreground” and there are only “a few elements of historical development or psychological perspective” (Auerbach 23). In the epic, all of the characters’ emotions and thoughts are made explicit (Auerbach 12). Auerbach notes that characters are the sum of characteristics that never change; there is no sense of

events happening in the characters' past coloring their present. He concludes his survey by remarking on how there is little character development among epic heroes, who simply return home unchanged after completing their journeys.

On the other hand, in the novel, "certain parts [are] brought into high relief [while] others [are] left obscure"; there is a "background quality" to the narrative and characters as well as a "development of the concept of the historically becoming" (Auerbach 23). Not all description is external, and while the emotions and motives of characters are described by the narrator, some of these may be left unstated (Auerbach 11), which opens up the possibility of interpretation (Auerbach 12). Moreover, a sense of time pervades the novel whereby some events of the characters' past are shown to be important to their later condition. Perhaps most importantly, the human being becomes a site for change and growth in the novel. Readers learn to put together the character's previous life along with the impact that his/her current life has on decisions and actions in the present or future. The protagonist is changed physically, psychologically, and spiritually by both the events of the journey and the passage of time. The possibility of change in the life of characters is crucial for any perceptive reading of Tolkien's novels. Since the backgrounds of Homeric heroes have little or no bearing on their behavior; they are fated to perform certain tasks and fulfill the prophecies given to them. In contrast, characters in the novel (or the Old Testament, Auerbach's chosen example) make choices based on their past experiences (Auerbach 17-18). The experience of life changes characters and they find themselves called upon to make a variety of life, or narrative, altering decisions. The Christian concept of free will comes into play here for Tolkien and his method of narration.

Tolkien gave moral weight to daily decisions, and his characters, like those of the Old Testament, constantly find themselves at a crossroads, called upon to make a

choice that will impact who they are, determining who they will become in the future. At the very beginning of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is reclusive and at peace with his solitude and self-involvement, enjoying his quiet routine life in the Shire in the comfort of his cozy hobbit-hole and charming little garden. At first, he is unsuspecting and dismissive when approached by Gandalf and called to join Thorin, the prince of the dwarves, whose party journeys to the Lonely Mountain to take back their homeland and gold stolen by Smaug, the dragon. When Gandalf says that he has not been able to find someone to go on an adventure with him, Bilbo says: “I should think so – in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and I have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can’t think what anybody sees in them . . . We don’t want any adventures here, thank you!” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 15-16). And yet, while it is true that Bilbo, at fifty-year-old, thinks a great deal of his comfort and convenience, there seems to be a desire buried deep inside him for something new and extraordinary.

Gandalf sees in Bilbo the desire to be asked to join the adventure, despite or perhaps because of the frantic refusal he gives to the invitation that is not extended. Gandalf never officially asks Bilbo to join the adventure; he only says that he is looking for someone to join it. Bilbo immediately steers the conversation towards himself with the statement, “I have no use for adventures,”; and he then starts naming their evils, as if to remind himself why he should not want to be the chosen hobbit. Gandalf sees this, as is evident in his reply, “I will give you what you asked for” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 17), despite Bilbo’s objection that he has not asked for anything. All the reasons Bilbo gives himself not to go are self-involved and have to do with his own comfort, a point that undergoes significant development in the story. This attachment to the comfortable and the familiar materializes in the shape of his

handkerchief, which he realizes he forgot at the start of the journey and which he continues to recall throughout, just as he recalls his garden and kettle, representing the comfort and familiarity of home.

In any case, Bilbo is not coaxed into joining the adventure, nor is he manipulated by Chance or Fate like the Homeric heroes. He is called upon to make a free choice. Gandalf brings the dwarves to Bilbo's home and Bilbo, put upon as he may be, receives them. Had he turned them out, the story would have ended there; there would have been no adventures, no dragon, no gold, and no friends won or memories of friends lost. The turning point where Bilbo faces the hidden desire inside him, which propels him to accept the role he is offered in Thorin's party, is a result of his stepping outside himself and responding to others who are clearly unlike him. The dwarves sing in his presence a song composed by their people, chronicling their ancient glory and magical skill in shaping precious metals as well as the ruin that came with Smaug's attack on and occupation of their homeland:

Far over the Misty Mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away ere break of day,
To seek the pale enchanted gold.
...
Goblets they carved there for themselves
And harps of gold; where no man delves
There lay they long, and many a song
Was sung unheard by men or elves.

The pines were roaring on the height,
The winds were moaning in the night.
The fire was red, it flaming spread;

The trees like torches blazed with light.

...

The dwarves, they heard the stamp of doom.

They fled their hall to dying fall

Beneath his feet, beneath the moon

...

We must away ere break of day,

To win our harps and gold from him! (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 26-28).

The narrator reports the impact the song has on Bilbo, “[a]s they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains . . . and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 28). The dwarves’ song ignited deep desire, that part of Bilbo buried deep beneath the surface that longs for adventure, to know and to see great and unusual things.

After coming in contact with this lyrical song, Bilbo chooses to move beyond his long-standing desire to merely adjust to his conservative countryside community. Clearly, he would like to possess the magical gold of the dwarves stolen by Smaug. He is tempted and tried by *that* desire as well, but he does not succumb. He chooses to join the dwarves and to stay with them, despite the many dangers to which he is subjected during the journey. With every new monster encountered, with every new hardship, Bilbo reaffirms his initial choice to help the dwarves reclaim their home. Rather than give in to his desire for comfort or fear for his own safety, the hobbit chooses to keep his word and pursue the journey to the end. As his friendship with the dwarves develops, he makes choices for different reasons other than lust for adventure

or magical gold. For example, with the help of his invisibility ring, he manages to remain uncaptured by the elves and instead of escaping alone, he waits, plans and succeeds in freeing the dwarves and taking them to safety. These choices propel the plot and shape Bilbo's development.

Towards the end of the journey, when the party reaches the Lonely Mountain and the dwarves send Bilbo down the dark tunnel to steal the precious Arkenstone from the dragon, we see how far Bilbo has come while remaining true to his "essence" (Auerbach 18) that we encountered at the beginning of the novel. The narrator tells us, "[Bilbo] was trembling with fear, but his little face was set and grim. Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket-handkerchief from Bag-End long ago. He had not had a pocket-handkerchief for ages. He loosened his dagger in its sheath, tightened his belt, and went on" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 259). This image of the hobbit is far removed from the easy-going one we are presented with in the opening scene. What is crucial is that this new image, while different from the initial one the reader has of the hobbit, remains believable as it is the result and culmination of the choices the hobbit makes from the beginning of the journey to this moment of transition.

With the introduction of free will comes the possibility of sin. We see our protagonist Bilbo enchanted and seduced by the promise of gold and tempted by the vice of covetousness. However, where Bilbo succeeds in opposing this vice, Thorin fails. The narrator calls the desire for gold the "desire of the hearts of dwarves" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 28) and offers us the cautionary tale, narrated by Thorin, of Thorin's grandfather, Thrór, whose uncontrolled obsession with and extensive mining of gold bring Smaug's attention to the dwarf kingdom which leads to their people's demise and their kingdom's ruin (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 37-39). The narrator is fond of Thorin and

never fails to mention and show in action his commendable attributes such as courage, calculation and leadership. Thorin is presented as a lovable character and a loyal friend to the protagonist with whom the reader is invited to identify. He is a brave and ambitious leader who is willing to go on the journey that killed his father, to return to the Lonely Mountain in order to face the dragon and restore to his people their homeland and wealth.

However, the narrator also reveals to the reader how Thorin goes down a slippery slope once ‘dragon sickness’ or the ‘desire in the hearts of dwarves’ grips him as it did his grandfather. Obsession with possessing the Arkenstone—which he cannot find in his treasury since Bilbo has hidden it after seeing what gold was doing to his friend—propels him into making a series of irresponsible choices. These choices reduce him from the great leader he is at the beginning of the novel to an unwise king who repeats the mistakes of his ancestor. In Thorin’s time, this mistake, or transgression, has consequences that are similar to what is brought about during his grandfather’s reign: the death of his people. Thorin’s covetousness leads him to deny men whom he promised remuneration for their help—once he accesses his family fortune—or to give the Elven King jewelry that he commissioned Thorin’s grandfather to make before Smaug’s attack on the Mountain. The prince, now King under the Mountain, tramples his promise so as not to give up a single jewel from his large stash. This implicates the dwarves in the Battle of the Five Armies, which eventually leads to Thorin’s death and that of his kin, including his beloved young nephews.

In the Christian worldview to which Tolkien and his narrator ascribe, sin is followed by the possibility of redemption. This idea shapes the narrator’s description of characters’ intentions and actions. Hence, while the narrator points to Thorin’s mistakes, he explains how he comes to make them, that they are the result of a

pressing desire which clouds his true judgement. In one episode, we learn of the “long hours in the past days Thorin had spent in the treasury, and the lust of it was heavy on him” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 318). Here narrator-Tolkien does not demonize Thorin as he demonizes Smaug, who is presented as having a “wicked inside” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 271) and is possibly a representation of Satan. Thorin’s sin is presented as a fall into temptation, a wrong turn he took that led him to stray from the right path he was on, not a manifestation of innate and deeply embedded evil. He does not exercise his free will wisely, forcing himself early on to keep away from the source of his temptation, and the result is that temptation grows too strong for him to fight. However, when Thorin is almost driven mad by the love of gold, the reader cannot help but feel sorry for him and want him to see reason and return once more to the right path. He eventually does. As he lays dying, he reevaluates his position and comes to understand how wrong he was. He performs an act of confession that demonstrates his repentance when he tells Bilbo, “I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed. Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 346-47). Bilbo extends his forgiveness and the friendship he never withdrew by his mourning of his deceased friend.

In the end, Thorin is buried with honor at the hands of his kin and friends-turned enemies-turned friends again. The Arkenstone, symbol of his kingship, and his sword, representing his role as a heroic warrior, taken from him upon capture by the Elven King, are restored to him, sealed with him in his grave forever. He is redeemed upon repentance—Tolkien’s word, not mine, spoken by Thorin’s cousin—as his honor and dignity return to him, along with his identity as true King under the Mountain and

warrior for good. Thorin still dies and the consequences of his actions are not reversed—Fili and Kili still die defending him and his cousin becomes king in his place—but he is forgiven his transgression and his initial image as a good and honorable dwarf is reclaimed.

This is a particularly Christian conception of repentance as a change in thought and deed that results in man's return once more to enjoy peace with God. The natural consequences of sin often remain after the transgressor repents, but change occurs when the transgressor is redeemed: it impacts who he is and determines his divine standing. Thorin looks forward to resting with his ancestors until the world is “renewed” as suggested through as an allusion to “a new heaven and a new earth” that is anticipated in Revelation (*King James*, Revelation 21.1). The narrator offers no doubt and provides no basis for skepticism that Thorin will indeed go to rest with his ancestors, and, in this way, the reader comes to understand God’s place in Tolkien’s world.

God exists in Tolkien’s universe in a way that compares to His existence in the Old Testament, at least as described by Auerbach. Auerbach writes that “the stern hand of God is ever upon the Old Testament figures; he has not only made them once and for all and chosen them, but he continues to work upon them, bends them and kneads them, and, without destroying them in essence, produces from them forms which their youth gave no grounds for anticipating” (18). It is crucial to note that God’s contribution to the spiritual growth of His people is not in conflict with their free will. He places them in situations and trials that call upon them to make choices; if they make the right choice, they grow into better versions of themselves, more knowledgeable of who they are and of who He is. Auerbach’s discussion of Abraham’s and Isaac’s trial might be taken as an example of this sort of beneficial

relationship. This is one of the ways God shapes history. He guides man to make the proper choice but does not deny him agency or make the choice for him. Man, thus, finds himself to be part of a grander plan, a large scheme that spans the entire course of human history that moves towards a spiritual goal. Similarly, the God of Middle-earth, Saxton argues, is an “omnipotent force that leaves space for the creativity and agency of his subjects . . . without foreclosing the possibility of a mysterious type of Providence that is involved” (174).

The narrator points to the role played by the hidden God in the narrative. Narrator-Tolkien ends the novel with a statement placed in Gandalf's mouth by author-Tolkien. At the end of the journey, when Bilbo shows surprise that “the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!”, Gandalf asks in a mocking tone:

[A]nd why should not they prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? . . . you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all! (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 365).

Gandalf is obviously not expecting a real answer to his three questions as his language is somewhat satirical, even patronizing. He also provides in his questions the logic to help Bilbo see the statistical improbability—even impossibility—of his surviving every single danger and confrontation that came his way on his own.

The first question criticizes the assumption that faith does not map onto truth and challenges Bilbo to provide reasons to doubt the prophecies. The second question clears up Gandalf's meaning. Rephrased the question would be: Do you think the

prophecies are not true because they came about through your actions? In other words, do you think these are self-fulfilling prophecies? Then, he cites Bilbo's miraculous survival and completion of the journey as evidence that someone higher than himself was watching over him. The fact that the prophecies do not merely correspond to practical motivations speaks to the existence of an invisible power who shapes the history and future of Middle-earth.

An example of how Middle-earth's invisible God watches over Bilbo and sees the prophecies fulfilled presents itself in the riddle episode. Bilbo loses the dwarves and encounters Gollum, then possessor—or possession—of the ring, and has to engage with him in a riddle game. If Bilbo wins, Gollum will show him the way; if not, Gollum will eat him. Marie Nelson notes that Bilbo is stuck on one of Gollum's riddles when he is presented with “a *deus ex machina* solution! Straight from the hand of the sympathetic story-teller. A fish jumps out of the water and lands on Bilbo's toes and he has the answer to Gollum's riddle” (74). What saves Bilbo is not the “sympathetic story-teller” as the storyteller is narrator-Tolkien who exists in the reader's time and has no power to alter Middle-earth history.

While in our world the savior is the story-writer, author-Tolkien, he does not exist in the world of the novel. Who, in Middle-earth, has the power to know where Bilbo is lost, see what he is doing, understand his predicament and manipulate circumstances to inspire him with the answer he needs to survive the encounter with Gollum and leave safely, with the ring in his pocket? Bilbo is not saved by the sympathetic storyteller but by the sympathetic God of his world. We come to understand Gandalf's last statement, about Bilbo being a small person in a big world, in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy where the true power of the ring that seems to have fallen by chance into Bilbo's hand is revealed. It becomes clear that Bilbo, along with

Sam, Frodo, Gandalf and many others, play roles in defeating ultimate evil and restoring peace to Middle-earth. And the events of *The Hobbit* that lead to Bilbo's acquisition of the ring are the essential starting points to Sauron's defeat.

As Bilbo goes on his journey and is tried and tested, he acquires knowledge of the world, as does the reader. He learns from Thorin's mistake and loses interest in his promised share of gold. Whatever gold that is thrust upon him, he mostly spends on presents for his nephews and nieces upon his return (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 363). The narrator reports on the condition of the protagonist at the outcome of his journey: "[Bilbo] was quite content; and the sound of the kettle on his hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party . . . [h]e took to writing poetry and visiting elves . . . and though few believed any of his tales, he remained very happy to the end of his days, and those were extraordinarily long" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 363). He finally learns to step outside himself and build bridges between himself and others, squandering most of his hard-earned gold on the youngsters of his family and maintaining ties with the elves. He comes to value friendship, love, art and small pleasures more than piles of gold, and spends the rest of his life happier for it. The reader sees where other characters went wrong and how Bilbo came to make the right choices by learning from their mistakes. This adds a quality of verisimilitude to the narrative that helps the reader engage with the novel and allows the reader to picture herself in a similar situation. This enables the reader to apply the lessons of the novel to her own life and perhaps to allow the narrative to shape her own identity.

As redemption results in man's recovering of a spiritual origin, innocence can represent a possible renewal that can serve to connect man and God. Christ proclaims, "[v]erily I say unto you, unless ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall

not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (*King James*, Mathew 18.3). A possible interpretation of what Christ says here is that a child’s fresh approach to the world through mind and spirit is integral to the practice of virtue. Paul advises, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (*King James*, 1 Corinthians 14.20). The call to regain the perspective of children does not ask man to mentally regress or become naïve but to distinguish between growing wise in thought and growing well-versed in vice. Narrator-Tolkien seems to be addressing a child throughout the narrative, even when he expects from the reader knowledge of the world that goes beyond a child’s experience. The narrator’s simple language and contemporary metaphors seem tailored for children. The riddles/nursery rhymes that he employs evoke a young reader who cannot perform the sophisticated task the novel requires: an evaluation of and personal response to Bilbo’s moral growth.

The narrator throughout the novel invites the reader to reorient his world through Bilbo’s trials, to help him regain the eyes of a child who values adventure above gold, to help him realize, unlike a great number of working adults, that happiness and wealth are not necessarily connected. The pursuit of knowledge and wisdom is a central theme in this novel which argues that true wisdom and knowledge belong to those who can experience the world, face its cruelty and evil, yet maintain a certain moral integrity. The wise and knowledgeable character in this narrative appears, at the end, to be Bilbo who is not naïve but childlike. He experiences life-threatening situations, has to watch his friend turn into someone else through an unwise love of wealth, and eventually sees him die on the battlefield. He knows hardship and sorrow, but also great adventure and genuine friendship. At the end of that difficult road, Bilbo manages not to lose his sense of childlike wonder or his

honest affection for Gandalf, the dwarves, men, elves and his own young kin, despite his community's disapproval of his adventurous life and associations with outsiders.

Chapter Two: Childhood and the Implied Reader

Despite its classification as a children's novel, *The Hobbit* addresses a composite reader who is both a child and an adult. To uncover the identity of the novel's implied reader, we must examine the narrator, not in terms of his identity, as undertaken in the previous chapter, but in terms of his language and chosen methods of narration that reveal the addressee. Initially, the narrator seems to be addressing a child experiencing what is known as the 'critical stage' of cognitive development. He anticipates the reader's questions about the nature of hobbits when he first introduces Bilbo and provides her with a description of the creatures as well as two explanations as to why she has never encountered them herself. He says that hobbits "are (or were) a little people . . . there is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 12).

The clearer explanation is that they have great hearing and can skid off like rabbits—to which they have been compared to Tolkien's horror (Shippey 4)—once they hear a human walking towards them from a distance; the less noticeable one is that hobbits "were", or at one time existed. The reader has never seen one because the story she is about to be told is an ancient one of long ago, so long ago that the entire race of its protagonist is now extinct. This demonstrates that the novel's reader is a developing child who is able to use the stock of her knowledge of the world in which she lives to ask questions and show skepticism. Yet, the narrator also expects the reader to have a more extensive experience with life than a child would need, for example, to understand Bilbo's internal struggle when he has to 'betray' Thorin for the dwarf's own good. Moreover, sophisticated knowledge is necessary to fully grasp

aspects of the narrative, such as Tolkien's humor in some parts of the novel and his play on words in others.

One possible explanation for this apparent duality in the reader's identity comes from the epic tradition that inspired Tolkien. In the epic tradition, a relationship or even unity is sometimes assumed to exist between the adult and the child. The tradition of oral literature in which adults are engaged as storytellers brings children over to maturity by passing down to them the knowledge and wisdom of their people. Tolkien agreed with and, I argue, developed this concept in his own literature. He saw children's literature as a vehicle for maturity and growth. He argues in "On Fairy Stories" that books written for children should not only speak to their childhood but should also accommodate their impending adulthood. In other words, children's literature should be valuable to its readers, even if they are not children, which means that it should anticipate both maturing and mature readers. *The Hobbit* is such a text.

The novel's style draws on fairytale and epic literatures. Tolkien thought highly of fairytales and dreaded the tendency of some readers to separate them from epic literature or to classify the two genres into low and high art. He understood that these stories were composed at a time when adults as well as children believed in the existence of the supernatural creatures of which these tales speak (Shippey 26). Therefore, by downgrading fairytale/folk literature as a thing for children, the adult reader misses what they have to communicate to him. Sullivan argues that Tolkien as a writer succeeds in producing a "traditional narrative in print" (82) with *The Hobbit*. I argue that this narrative is not just traditional but oral. Obviously, the idea of an oral text is oxymoronic; however, I use the term in a very specific way. I mean that Tolkien not only uses the themes, settings, and character types of traditional literature as Sullivan and others note, but that he also replicates the orality of traditional

literature through the figure of the storyteller-narrator, who makes a listener of the reader, particularly through the use of powerful auditory metaphors.

It is of course true that any novel provides the reader with sensory descriptions, including auditory descriptions. However, in this novel, and at crucial points in the narrative, auditory descriptions perform a special role. For example, before we—and Bilbo—meet Smaug in person, he is just a faraway red glow. The real description we are given by the narrator is auditory. We hear the dragon, and the horrible sound of its breathing serves as an introduction to its horrible person. As Bilbo descends to the treasury, the narrator describes a sound that “began to throb in his ears, a sort of bubbling like the noise of a large pot galloping on the fire, mixed with a rumble as of a gigantic tom-cat purring. This grew to the unmistakable gurgling noise of some vast animal snoring in its sleep” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 260). The sound described is beastly, and that perfectly represents Smaug’s character, just as it helps the reader relate to Bilbo’s fear of the dragon.

Darkness also figures prominently in this literary narrative, which renders organic the narrator’s reliance on sound. For example, when Bilbo loses his way in the dark and steps into cold water, he has to rely on his hearing to realize that the “drops drip-drip-dripping from an unseen roof into the water below” means that he has stumbled into an underground pool or lake (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 93). When finding him a few moments later, Gollum makes his presence known by whispering and hissing into Bilbo’s ear. The hissing sound he produces with his Ss becomes his trademark, as much as the words, “my precious”. What is more, the “horrible swallowing noise” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 95) he makes, which sounds like the word ‘gollum’, becomes his name and gives him a new identity other than the one associated with Sméagol, the hobbit he once was. In addition, when Gandalf rescues

Bilbo and company from the goblins, he puts out all sources of light and then creates sparks that burn the goblins upon contact. However, the description we are given by the narrator of this horrific scene engages the ear more than the eye, even though Gandalf's weapon is fire/light: "the yells and yammering, croaking, jabbering and jabbering; howls, growls and curses; shrieking and striking, that followed were beyond description. Several hundred wild cats and wolves being roasted slowly alive together would not have compared with it" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 86). While the image of wild felines on fire is gruesome and powerful, the narrator points to the *sound* accompanying that image, rather than to the visual elements themselves.

The novel's intertextuality replicates the duality of its readership as it brings together children's and adults' literatures. One prominent example of how this duality operates is the riddle game between Bilbo and Gollum where Tolkien merges nursery rhymes with classical literature. Various scholars have read this episode and carefully analyzed the riddles, with Shippey focusing on their literary origins and Nelson reading the characters' answers to them as encouraging an interpretation of the characters themselves. These riddles, selected from various literary texts and edited by Tolkien for his novel, come from literature meant for—and would be known to—children as well as literature generally read and studied by adults. Therefore, this episode is constructed to be read on two different levels, depending on the reader's age and exposure to literature. It has been suggested that the exchange between Bilbo and Gollum parallels the exchange between Solomon and Saturn in the old English *Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* (Nelson 68), a fact with which an educated English adult of the mid-twentieth century might be familiar, just as the English child reader might be familiar with the 'teeth' and 'leg' riddles Bilbo borrows from nursely rhymes (Nelson 67).

Shippey notes a pattern in the kinds of riddles assigned to each Bilbo and Gollum. He argues that Gollum's riddles draw on ancient sources like Old Norse and medieval poems while Bilbo's three riddles are inspired by traditional nursery rhymes. He sees this as an indication of the worlds to which the two characters belong. Gollum belongs to the "ancient world of epic and saga" (Shippey 25), while Bilbo comes from the modern one. However, I see this as an indication of where they stand in relationship to the reader. The reader of Tolkien's novel, a modern and English one, would be able to solve Bilbo's riddles and laugh with him at Gollum as he struggles to answer them. Bilbo's riddles come straight from the world of the English child reader and from the childhood memories of the adult one.

Tolkien's language also represents the duality of his reader. On the surface, the narrator's language is simple, almost basic. The only terms that might perplex a native speaker reader are the ones Tolkien coins, such as the noun 'hobbit' and the adjective 'tookish', both of which narrator-Tolkien explains. The language of the novel is readily comprehensible by readers aged 8-10 (Wheadon). The narrator's style of speech and word choice also indicate that he is addressing a child, starting with his first words in the foreword. "This is a story of long ago" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 9), which is nothing but a modern way of saying, "Once upon a time". And the first line of the story, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 11), also calls to mind the traditional formulaic style used to open children's stories, or at least stories modernly considered to be strictly for children. Language is well controlled in the novel and no obscene term, sexual innuendo or any insinuation unfit for a child reader is to be found. Though the novel explores such themes as death, war and violence, it does so in carefully selected words and images. We see Thorin die at the end of the novel, for example, and understand that he sustained "many wounds" (Tolkien,

Hobbit 346) in battle, but no details describe the damage done to his body, and no mention is made of the blood that must have covered his armor.

However, Tolkien's humor requires a philologist, or at least an adult to understand. The novel is rife with word play and irony. At the end of the novel when Bilbo returns home, he finds himself presumed dead, his belongings taken out of his house and put up for auction. Tolkien understood that the word 'okshen' means 'mess' in the Huddersfield dialect, so what Bilbo finds is an 'okshen' in the sense of both 'auction' and 'mess' (Shippey 8). The narrator also makes statements that the child reader would probably take at face value but that the adult reader would recognize as ironical. For example, the irony in the covetous Town Master escaping with gold only to die from starvation would not be lost on an adult, but a child reader may be more inclined to read this as a classic case of the bad guy getting what he deserves. Larimore notes the irony in the dwarves "being cast as the 'good' guys" (66) when they are motivated by greed. Though—unlike Smaug—they are the rightful owners of the gold, making their pursuit of it morally justifiable, the novel definitely points to this irony. Thorin, the leader of the 'good guys', falls victim to greed and seems to only replace the 'bad guy' Smaug as the tyrannical ruler of the Lonely Mountain, rather than to usher in a new age of prosperity and justice as the reader expects of him. This is not to mention the irony in Thorin repeating his grandfather's mistake: obsessing over the gold, after having suffered all his life the consequences of his ancestor's error. The irony in this particular case points to several questions about the impact of man's attachment to wealth on his soul as well as the effect of circumstances versus innate characteristics on man's behavior. Many of these questions would be more apparent to the adult reader.

Tolkien uses humor to make social and political statements that would mostly resonate with the adult reader. When Bilbo first enters Smaug's treasury, he steals the dwarves a gold cup. Unbelievable as it may be, Smaug senses that something is missing from his stack of uncountable valuables and even realizes it is that particular cup. Narrator-Tolkien describes the dragon's mad rage as "the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something they have long had but never before used or wanted" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 263-4). To a child, this may be taken at face value as a piece of information: the rich do not enjoy losing what they have. To an adult, the humor in this statement exposes the ridiculousness of greed and covetousness which often becomes unobtrusive when we are tempted with the promise of wealth. What use could a dragon have of a drinking cup that he should burn down a town for it? It drives one to wonder if sorrow at losing money or material objects in one's everyday life is equally ridiculous.

In the Battle of Five Armies, the soldiers under Thorin's cousin tell Bilbo and Bard (who leads men in the battle against Thorin), "We are hastening to our kinsmen in the Mountain, since we learn that the kingdom of old is renewed. But who are you that sit in plain as foes before defended walls?" The narrator comments, "This, of course, in the polite and rather old-fashioned language of such occasions, meant simply: 'You have no business here. We are going on, so make way or we shall fight you!'" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 334). For a child reader, this is a useful introduction to 'political' or 'adult' speech. To an adult reader familiar with official language, this seems a mockery of formal and 'political' speech designed to convey the speaker's intentions without explicitly stating them. It is the form of speech used by world leaders when they wish to threaten one another in a 'diplomatic' manner that normally evades detection; adults more than children can make this connection.

How, then, do we resolve this conflict in the novel's implied reader? The novel's protagonist, Bilbo, is the key. There seems to be a general concession that the reader is encouraged to identify with Bilbo. I would argue that the hobbit himself is both child and adult. At the beginning of the novel, Bilbo is a fifty-year-old hobbit, an adult. Signs of his adulthood mark him in his first exchange with Gandalf. For example, he is a competent speaker of 'adult' speech, sending Gandalf and his adventure-offer off with artificial politeness. He first begins by pretending to be engrossed in what he is reading, and when Gandalf still does not leave, he repeats "Good morning!". He had already greeted him, and then restates his refusal, followed by suggestions of *other* places Gandalf can try: "We don't want any adventures here, thank you! you might try over The Hill or across The Water" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 16). Gandalf, a fellow adult, understands this "social code" familiar to English readers (Shippey 9); however, while Shippey argues that it is comical that Gandalf seems to ignore the code and acts as if he does not understand it, I believe that he *does* respond to it, but not in the manner expected of him. Gandalf meets Bilbo's social evasiveness with honesty, specifying the hobbit's real intentions clearly, much to Bilbo's embarrassment.

Bilbo undergoes the trials of his journey and returns home much changed, changed into an adult after Gandalf's model, rather than the model of adulthood to which he originally ascribed. It has been argued that Bilbo acts as a mediator between the world of Middle-earth and the reader (both child and adult) because he is sheltered from that magical world and has little or no knowledge of it beyond the Shire. If this is true, his position at the start of the journey is not much different from the reader's. He is also a modern middle-class Englishman who smokes a pipe, delights in tea time, and initially behaves like any modern person would if teleported to Middle-earth

(Shippey 6-7); thus, as a familiar character, the novel's intended readership easily identifies with him (Shippey 6-7). In general, Bilbo is far removed from other figures of Middle-earth (Shippey 11) who seem to belong to an ancient world, living in a different age.

Part of Bilbo's growth and maturity entails learning to communicate with and accept these figures, whom he would have previously labelled as 'other' and rejected as he initially attempted to do with Gandalf. At the end of the journey, when he meets Smaug and must respond to the dragon's request to name himself, rather than say 'Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Hobbiton' as he normally would have before he left the Shire, he redefines his identity according to his achievements throughout the journey. One of those new names is "the friend of bears and the guest of eagles" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 270). Nelson explains these achievements to be great feats for any hobbit since considerable bravery is required if he is to befriend wild creatures (80). This change in Bilbo is quite real as it continues to mark him for the remainder of his life. The friendship he develops with men, elves, and Gandalf the wizard stays strong even after his return to the Shire, and his reputation as a hobbit suffers as a result. Bilbo stops playing social games and becomes genuinely warm and welcoming of others, whether they be youngsters of his own kin or outsiders of races other than his own.

Originally, Bilbo would have been horrified to learn that his good standing in his community is threatened, but after meeting monsters, riddling with cannibals, killing giant spiders and siding with his friend's enemies to avoid a war, Bilbo matures enough to trust his own judgement and ceases to be overly dependent on the approval of others. He becomes a peculiar figure, an odd old hobbit, in the eyes of other adults ignorant about the outside world that has marked him with knowledge. He also becomes an educator, not a teacher but a storyteller. Like Gandalf, Bilbo

becomes generous with and outspoken about his knowledge of the world, of the many wondrous things in it that hobbits miss when they cocoon themselves inside comfort and narrow notions of respectability. He tells great tales of his adventures to children, who regard him with wide eyes, and to adults, who narrow their eyes at him in disbelief.

Thus, as a result of his many trials and adventures that open him up to other landscapes and people, Bilbo matures into a child. As he grows more experienced and knowledgeable, he also becomes more childlike, but not childish. He learns to value happiness above wealth and real friendship above social networks. In maturing, he becomes more like children and less like the sort of adult that he was at the beginning of his journey. Hence, Bilbo and his development communicate the Christian notion of return to innocence or rebecoming a child. The reader, who is encouraged to identify with Bilbo, is encouraged to contemplate the virtues of this development. Moreover, the theme of innocence and experience, which cannot be reduced to a chronological succession of opposed states, casts light on the dual (child/adult) identity of the novel's implied reader.

While Bilbo represents the reader, Gandalf represents the narrator and the relationship between both characters mirrors that of the reader and narrator, more broadly, and reveals a crucial aspect about the reader: she is a reader-in-making. Purtill argues that "Gandalf acts as a parental figure, pushing Bilbo to get him started but then stepping back to let Bilbo struggle and learn on his own" ("Hobbits and Heroism" 114). This is definitely true. Gandalf sets an example for Bilbo to learn from and imitate in a creative manner suiting his own abilities and talents. Gandalf lets Bilbo handle his first run-in with danger when three trolls capture the dwarves and attempt to cook them. Bilbo tries to help, and when his efforts fail, Gandalf steps

in to rescue the thirteen but does not use magic (a tool unavailable to Bilbo). Rather, he uses cunning and intellect to turn the trolls on each other. He buys time until the sun comes up and they turn to stone (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 58-59).

Bilbo learns his lesson and replicates it in his encounter with Smaug, his very last one-on-one encounter with a monster. Smaug asks an invisible Bilbo his name, as he wears the ring to be as inconspicuous as possible. Rather than anger the dragon with a flat-out refusal, he engages the dragon in a word game where he gives himself many names drawn from his achievements throughout the journey (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 270). The information Bilbo offers, while far more than the dragon requests, is useless as it is 'coded' for the dragon who, as narrator-Tolkien informs the reader, has no knowledge of what occurred on the journey. Narrator-Tolkien then presents the reader with a direct question: "I expect you [to understand Bilbo's riddles] since you know all about Bilbo's adventures to which he was referring". Smaug cannot 'read' Bilbo, that is to say, cannot interpret his metaphors, but narrator-Tolkien expects the reader whom he guided along Bilbo's journey to be able to draw on her stock of information as gathered through the adventure and recall the episodes to which Bilbo refers. She understands what Bilbo of Bag-End means when he says, "I came from the end of a bag" and "I was chosen for the lucky number"; she knows how many dwarves there are in Thorin's company. Here the narrator is "priming the reader to make the connections" (Nelson 77) with earlier parts of the narrative, teaching her how to read a literary text and interpret its metaphors.

The narrator guides the reader in the reading experience, even on the level of language. In the novel's first dialogue, when Bilbo tries to rebuff Gandalf, narrator-Tolkien does not assume the reader can understand this socially acceptable way of rejecting company and explains the intentions behind the hobbit's words, "Good

morning!' . . . By this he meant that the conversation was at an end" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 16). Gandalf elaborates on the narrator's meaning in his communication with Bilbo:

[W]hat a lot of things you do use *Good morning* for!" said Gandalf. "Now you mean that you want to get rid of me, and that it won't be good till I move off."
"Not at all, not at all, my dear sir! Let me see, I don't think I know your name?"

"Yes, yes, my dear sir—and I do know your name, Mr. Bilbo Baggins. And you do know my name, though you don't remember that I belong to it. I am Gandalf, and Gandalf means me! To think that I should have lived to be good-morninged by Belladonna Took's son, as if I was selling buttons at the door!
(Tolkien, *Hobbit* 16).

The reader is taught that many meanings can be attached to the same word, and that to discover the meaning of language, she must know the context in which the words occur and theorize about the speaker's intentions, rather than take language at face value, because people—possibly even the narrator telling this story—usually mean more than they say.

Presenting the reader with this exchange so early on in the novel, the narrator sets the tone for a story where language is alive and shifting, where many meanings can be made of the same word or scene and where the reader must allow herself to be guided through a text that is irreducible to surface meanings. Thus, the narrator offers the reader a primary role when the "unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said 'expands' to take on greater significance than might have been supposed . . . whenever the reader bridges the gaps and communication [between reader and text] begins" (Iser, "Interaction between Text and Reader" 111).

This parallel between narrator/reader and Gandalf/Bilbo is manifested at the end of the novel when narrator-Tolkien, like Gandalf, stops playing the parental role. He ceases to guide the reader with questions and direct statements and trusts that she, like Bilbo, has somewhat matured. He expects her to read Gandalf's last statement on her own with no prompting or clues, to situate the entire narrative that he just presented in a larger framework. The reader then realizes that an overarching power has been guiding Bilbo, and the entire history of Middle-earth, all this time. The narrator also throws a bit of metafiction at the reader and gives her no help in reading it, showing her Bilbo sitting down to write his memoirs and letting her realize on her own that it is these very memoirs that he (the narrator) is reading to her.

Gerald Prince argues that "the distribution of reading interludes may indicate a change in the narrator's attitude vis-à-vis his narratee: if he stops making metalinguistic statements . . . he has come to realize that his narratee is perfectly able to do without them" (237). Narrator-Tolkien's attitude towards the reader does change in this manner, and he stops guiding her reading at the end of the novel. Essentially, narrator-Tolkien teaches the reader how to read a novel and then steps back to let the reader make meaning on her own. However, I wish to stress what this says about the reader. This reveals that the novel's implied reader suggests a reader-in-the-making, a maturing reader who develops her literary/critical reading skills and deepens her understanding of language and its function. Had the reader been static and non-evolving, there would be no need for the narrator to cut back on the 'help' he has been offering to the reader since the beginning of the novel.

Several of the narrator's assumptions about the reader are revealed once we understand the reader as developing in time. First, the reader has limitations as an interpreter. Nonetheless, the reader has the ability to develop a more mature

standpoint and is expected to be able to do so. Finally, the reader has the creative potential to interpret the novel in ways that are pertinent to her own sense of moral agency. While it may appear that the first two assumptions limit the novel's readership to children, the third assumption seems to remind us that only adults can be competent readers. However, I believe that it is wrong to assume that only adults are capable of moral insight. It is true that education and practice with language and accumulated reading experiences prepare the adult reader to uncover elements in the novel hidden from the child reader, but the novel makes it the task of the adult reader to rebecome a child. She is cast into that role by the narrator who addresses her as such. In truth, the theme of rediscovery of innocence/childhood is at the heart of the narrative. Moreover, since no reader ever outgrows a good novel, *The Hobbit* has the capacity to appeal to a reader of any age and thus invariably to enable growth in insight and maturity.

Tolkien himself has argued that books written for children should simultaneously encourage the child's growth and count adults as part of their intended audience (Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" 15). Tolkien adamantly refused the allegorical reading of his work (Purtill, *Myth* 17), the narrow reading of a literary work that looks for set symbolic meanings instead of personal meanings that need to be negotiated by a thoughtful reader. Purtill argues that Tolkien would have considered "apply[ing] a work clean against the intentions of the author [to] be [an] intellectual sin" even as he understood that the reader's freedom is "never absolute" (*Myth* 17). Thus, the reader of *The Hobbit* is free to read inside the parameters of the text. She is expected to participate in constructing meaning of what narrator-Tolkien presents her with. Author-Tolkien expects that she will possibly encounter different meaning(s) from what came to mind when the book was in the process of composition. And as he

understood that his book would be read by both children and adults, Tolkien produced a novel that offers different yet equally wholesome reading experiences to its reader according to her age and literary exposure. This is where the reader's creative agency comes in, as she relies on her previous knowledge of literature and her own life experiences to formulate her interpretation. These two factors mostly vary according to age, a fact that the novel anticipates and exploits by drawing on child and adult literatures, offering readers of all ages something they would recognize and with which they could identify.

Several scholars have noted that in *The Hobbit*, the story's hero is split. The plot follows the format of traditional epic/fairytale narratives. The hero goes on a trying journey, is tested, slays the dragon/monster and returns victorious. However, Tolkien adds his original touch to the narrative by dividing the status and tasks of the hero between Bilbo "who finds the answers, and Bard, of the Royal Line of Dain who slays the dragon" (Sullivan 79). It is Bilbo who discovers, while engaging Smaug in word games, that the dragon has an Achilles' heel, a scale-less patch on his chest, and this information allows Bard to put his arrow to proper use. Many have theorized about Tolkien's decision to split the hero of his tale, some arguing that he draws on Icelandic family sagas and others suggesting that he reflects the modern rejection of heroes who "tend very strongly to be treated with irony" (Sullivan 81).

It is true that the protagonist Bilbo, the modern person in Middle-earth, does not slay the dragon and that this heroic task is given to Bard, a secondary character who possesses all the qualities of classical literature's heroes, including bravery, warriorhood and leadership. However, this does not entail a rejection of heroism since Bilbo also proves to be a hero, but after a different fashion. While Bard is brave, Bilbo is terribly afraid throughout his journey but pushes himself to face his fear. He

demonstrates great self-control and selflessness when he brings himself to descend to Smaug's treasury (for a second time!) because he understands the importance of retrieving the Arkenstone for the dwarves. While he is physically inept, he is mentally alert enough to engage Smaug in a battle of wits and exploit the dragon's narcissism, praising the creature long enough for him to find its weakness. Purtill summarizes Bilbo's virtues as "courage towards dangers and enemies, loyalty and love to friends, and humility with regard to his own qualities and achievements" ("Hobbits and Heroism" 114). What is crucial is that he identifies Bilbo's courage as "not the usual heroism of the folktales. He has to make a lonely moral decision as to rights and wrongs in a complex situation" (113). What is being described here is a 'modern' virtue, that of ethical individualism relying on sound judgement. Bilbo depends on his own moral judgement to save Thorin from his own greed, even if that means handing the Arkenstone over to whom the prince would call his 'enemies'. The split in the hero parallels, or even marries, modern and ancient modes of heroism.

To demonstrate this relation between them, author-Tolkien has Bard and Bilbo unite their efforts during the Battle of Five Armies. They stand on the same side against Thorin. Their confrontation with him also requires their joint effort. Bilbo takes the Arkenstone to Bard as a bargaining chip and Bard faces Thorin and the dwarf army to perform the bargaining. Bard, representing ancient or epic notions of heroism, and Bilbo, representing modern ones, are not polar opposites but parts of the same world, two sides of the same coin to use an overused phrase. This setting up of modern and epic heroism as complementary ideals rather than as separate and unreconcilable communicates an essential truth to the reader. Tolkien conceived of his reader as a modern individual, a Bilbo, and having this modern individual with modern virtues serve as the protagonist reveals that Tolkien understood that the age of

the epic is over. However, Smaug's rein would not have ended once and for all if not for Bard's epic heroism which suggests to the reader that there may be something of worth in such old-world conceptions of virtue. While the age of the epic cannot be resurrected, something of its spirit can be transferred into the modern world and serve the modern reader admirably.

Chapter Three: Time and the Ethics of Reading

Time is a crucial factor for the interaction between this novel's narrator and its reader, as well as that between the reader and the text itself. It functions as a crucial element in the plot's development. The reader feels a sense of urgency as characters are engaged in a constant race with time to reach the Lonely Mountain at the opportune moment. Time proves in many cases to be the difference between life and death for main characters who are major players in the divine plan to secure Middle-earth's future. Time in *The Hobbit* replicates that of the real world as it encompasses a past that is alluded to and hints at a future time to come but is only fully revealed in *The Lord of the Rings*. History, memory, time's continuity and their relationship to knowledge are major themes in *The Hobbit*. *The Hobbit* functions as a bridge, filling a gap in knowledge about the fairytale world and providing a historical background and a sense of time that is generally missing from the fairytale genre. The novel engages the adult reader through time, namely, through memory. It is this engagement with the novel that guides the reader's understanding of and response to the novel's moral meditations.

Time defines narrator-Tolkien's role as the mediator between the reader (to whose world he belongs) and the world of the hobbit (which he knows through scholarship and history), just as Gandalf mediates between Bilbo and the unfamiliar parts of Middle-earth. The study of history, knowledge of forgotten languages, and reading of ancient literature allow narrator-Tolkien to connect the reader, as modern as the narrator himself, with the vanished world of Middle-earth. When the reader first hears the narrator, the narrator is not acting as a storyteller but as a scholar and translator. In other words, he does not begin the novel with his telling of the narrative; rather he speaks to us in a foreword with a note on his translation of the old runes of a

Middle-earth language. (Bilbo's memoir that Tolkien is said to have translated on the novel's cover would have been written in this language). In this foreword, he explains to the modern English reader why the word "dwarfs" is spelled "dwarves" in this book, clarifying that it is intentional as English is only used to represent the original ancient letters. This indicates that this seeming misspelling is the most accurate translation of the original word. He also clarifies what Orcs are, or were, at the time of the text's formation, and that this word has nothing to do with similarly spelled English words with which the reader may mis-associate it (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 9). This demonstrates the narrator's position as a mediator between the modern reader and the ancient characters/world of the novel. A modern narrator, Tolkien is connected to ancient times through ancient knowledge. Philology enables him to decipher texts that may seem coded to the modern reader who lacks the linguistic and literary knowledge necessary to enter past worlds and connect with a time before his own. This allows him to decode Middle-earth for the reader, giving her the opportunity to connect with the time of Middle-earth through the text.

While *The Hobbit* presents a more-or-less traditional narrative, time behaves in the novel as it does in the reader's world, as opposed to the way that it unfolds in epic literature. Bilbo's journey is a series of linear episodes where the hobbit travels from one part of Middle-earth to the next, encountering a different challenge or monster each time. These travels and trials are time stamped, for example, by the passing of the night and the coming of the sun which gives the reader the sense that these trials unfold in real time. This real time has some effects on the characters who grow tired and weary from walking long distances and who often complain about having to go a long time without food. This indicates that they are like everyday people, unlike characters in the epic or in traditional literature that tells stories similar

to that of *The Hobbit*. While characters in the epic seem physically untouched by time (Auerbach 17), making time in the epic unnatural or unlike that of the reader's world, Tolkien's characters' long laborious journey leaves them exhausted and hungry, a position that the reader can easily believe she would have found herself in, had she been with them. Therefore, time functions in the novel in the same way that it does in the reader's world, which adds a layer of verisimilitude and facilitates the reader's absorption into the world of the novel. Time also impacts the characters' thoughts and behavior. Bilbo buries the Troll's gold at the start of the road when he first begins his journey, but when he returns to that same place, he is a new hobbit as Gandalf himself tells him "you are not the hobbit that you were" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 361). Bilbo does not object to Gandalf's statement. Reflecting on the happenings of the past year, Bilbo wants to give Gandalf the gold, saying that he has more than enough (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 360). Seeing the horrible impact of covetousness on his friend, Thorin, Bilbo's worldview is impacted and causes a shift in his priorities, marking the way he lives out the rest of his life.

While it takes the reader only a few hours to finish the journey that spans a year for Bilbo, her engagement with the text calls on her to become involved with it in a way that might have moral consequences. According to Barry Langford, Tolkien "exploits a sense of 'deep', and dimensional, time which operates for the reader in ways that are both structurally comparable and as sensuously palpable as [his work's] celebrated creation of a wholly fictitious, yet mimetically plausible, cultural and physical geography" (30). Time in the novel, as in the reader's own world, constitutes a past and a present that determine a future to come. Actions are not evaluated only in terms of what they mean for the characters' present but also in terms of their impact on the grand scheme of Middle-earth's future, where they fit into the divine plan for

Middle-earth's salvation as it plays out in *The Lord of the Rings*. Thus, when Bilbo finds the ring that in *The Lord of the Rings* turns out to be the coveted One Ring to rule them all (Purtill, "Hobbits and Heroism" 115), the narrator tells us that "it was a turning point in his career, but he did not know it" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 90). This does prove a turning point in Bilbo's near future, as it helps him survive Smaug, but the narrator's words remain true in the grand scheme of things. The fellowship of the ring would have never been possible, the ring would have never been destroyed and Middle-earth would have never been saved had Bilbo decided to leave the seemingly mundane ring where he found it.

This 'realness' of time in the novel, or its "narrative extension" (Langford 31), functions as a running thread that connects all of Tolkien's major novels. The events of *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* happen on the same plane which provides a 'realness' to the narrative and to the reader's engagement with it. Langford argues that the reader's "active participation in meaning construction [is] solicited by the modes of temporal extension present in the novel" (34). Thus, due to the way that time functions in the novel through the invocation of the past and the anticipation of the future, the reader is encouraged to actively participate in the creation of meaning and the assessment of various moral issues. In discussing time in *The Lord of the Rings*, Langford notes that the fellowship's timeline parallels that of the Old English Christian calendar.

For example, the date of the ring's destruction is the same as that of Christ's crucifixion (Langford 46). Since the ring is a symbol that evokes the potential for evil or sin, its destruction on the day of the crucifixion introduces a theological and moral aspect to the narrative and guides the reader to recognize that aspect's significance. The reader learns from the characters' successes and failures in answering or ignoring

their calling/roles in Middle-earth and the moral questions that they encounter become her own. As mentioned earlier, in *The Hobbit*, the reader is strongly invited to identify with Bilbo, which helps her consider what the moral lessons that he learns mean for her. As she considers Bilbo's trials and experiences, she witnesses his moral development and reevaluation of priorities; moreover, she is also inspired to reflect on these changes/choices in a personal way.

The narrator employs time to distance the reader from the time of Middle-earth, during which the events he narrates take place, and simultaneously connects the reader to the world of Middle-earth by presenting it as the past of the reader's own earth. Consider, for example, accounts for the evolution of modern proverbs which are represented as having their origin in Bilbo's time period. Panicking while being chased by wolves, Bilbo says, "[W]hat shall we do, what shall we do! Escaping goblins to be caught by wolves!" and the narrator immediately adds, "[I]t became a proverb, though we now say 'out of the frying-pan and into the fire' in the same sort of uncomfortable situation" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 127). Note the contrast of verb tenses in "became" and "say", especially with the narrator placing himself in the reader's world and time with "we" and "now". The origin of the modern proverb, known to any modern English-speaking reader, is claimed to be rooted in a similarly structured, though differently worded one, coined by the hobbit.

Thus, the origin of common knowledge (as proverbs are often a representation of a community's commonly held philosophy or ideals) is placed in Bilbo's world and referred to in the past tense, while the modern evolution of that knowledge is placed in the reader's own world, discussed in the immediate present tense of "now". Since Middle-earth and the reader's earth are the same physical spaces, separated only by time, as is evident from the narrator's insistence that this story happened "long ago"

(Tolkien, *Hobbit* 9)—at a different time, not in a different realm—the diction used to construct the proverb goes through an evolution accompanying the evolution of this space. Goblins no longer exist; therefore, a new vocabulary is necessary to communicate the proverb’s general idea in a way that the people of “now” can understand.

The narrator also comments on the change language undergoes and how different it is in the time of man compared to the time before him. Upon first seeing Smaug’s wealth up close, Bilbo is dumbfounded. The narrator says:

[T]o say that Bilbo’s breath was taken away is no description at all. There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learnt of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful. Bilbo had heard tell and sing of dragon-hoards before, but the splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure had never yet come home to him.

(Tolkien, *Hobbit* 261)

The narrator notes that Men (capital M) learned language from elves, though it is unclear what he means by “the language”, whether he means speech and language in general, a more elaborate original form of modern languages or a language acquired in addition to their own that has since devolved into a shadow of what it was, losing its color, complexity and wonder that marked the immortal and aesthetically inclined elves who spoke it and the time of Middle-earth when it was spoken

In any case, English in its modern form, the narrator’s and reader’s language, lacks the wonder of ancient language necessary to describe wonderful ancient times. What is being insinuated therefore is that the passage of time has dulled down the world’s magic. The modern world is as bland as its language; it is not “all wonderful”

which means that it has only managed to retain a bit of its old glory. However, as the old world is “all” wonderful, it becomes necessary for a wonderful language to exist, one that can be used to speak of the experiences its subjects can have, like watching a dragon sleeping on a hoard of fine gold. Tales and folksongs are represented as sources of knowledge that speak of these experiences. Though they do not prepare Bilbo for the actual encounter, they serve to document the existence of ones like it. In Bilbo’s time, of course, they are legitimate sources of knowledge that communicate truth about the world. Whatever of these stories and songs has survived into modern times are considered fairytales fit only for children and are no longer believed to be capable of communicating anything substantial about the world.

The narrator directly contrasts the wisdom of man and the hobbit. He says, “Hobbits are not quite like ordinary people . . . they have a fund of wisdom and wise sayings that men have mostly never heard or have forgotten long ago” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 92). Here, again, a connection is made between knowledge or wisdom and language. There is a store of wisdom in the sayings and proverbs of the hobbits, some of which were passed down to men, though distorted by the passage of time; others were completely forgotten and left in the past; most remained unknown. It seems that the only wise sayings or proverbs that man was able to recover are the ones narrator-Tolkien reveals to the reader through philology. The study of literature and the origin of languages are, thus, presented as the modern reader’s means to reconnect with the lost knowledge and wisdom of ancient times. Thus, the very act of reading *The Hobbit* allows the reader to reconnect with a lost past.

The passage of time, its turning of present into past, provides man with another source of knowledge: memory. Both Bilbo and Gollum turn to their memories to answer riddles. Gollum was once a hobbit—Sméagol—as ordinary as the next. He

was living with his grandmother before his obsession with the ring and the ring's hold over him turned him into a murderer and a monster—physically as well as psychologically. Gollum had been surviving on a diet of raw fish for centuries when Bilbo asked him a riddle about an egg. He is perplexed at first until a distant memory flashes into his mind of his old hobbit-self stealing eggs and instructing his grandmother on sucking them (Nelson 73). Gollum's memory, his stock of past experiences of a time that is no more, and of a person he once was but is no longer, continue to serve him in his present life.

Bilbo's life is saved by calling on memory (Nelson 71), albeit differently from Gollum. When Gollum presents Bilbo with a riddle on wind, he is able to answer immediately not because of something he once did but because of something he was told. He had heard that riddle before. The mind stores memories of past actions as well as memories of past exposure to any piece of knowledge or work of art, and it uses these different stocks of knowledge to answer any problem encountered, as Bilbo does when he riddles with Gollum, or to form new connections between these to produce new knowledge. That is what Bilbo does with his attempts to evade revealing his identity to Smaug. The hobbit uses the format of riddles which he knows from his exposure to a variety of riddles in his lifetime, such as when he formed cunning riddles in his contest with Gollum. This allows him to present Smaug with a true but ambiguous description of who he is, enabling him to buy time and save himself from the dragon's wrath. Thus, in the novel, the passage of time, the ability to remember what is past and to synthesize memories gathered from different sources of knowledge develops the ability to produce new knowledge and exercise creativity. The ability to remember past exposure to knowledge and modify what is already known to fit

present needs is a skill the reader is encouraged to develop, indirectly through the figure of Bilbo and directly by the narrator.

The theme of memory also engages the reader as the narrator constantly calls the reader to a state of ‘rememory’, asking her to remember throughout the novel, to dig up what she can recall of his narration of past events before he builds on them. The very name of the novel, *There and Back Again*, suggest memory. It can be interpreted as a reference to Bilbo journeying to the Lonely Mountain and then journeying back to the Shire. But it can also be understood as a reference to the journey the novel calls the reader to undertake, to childhood then back again to adulthood with modified perspectives. Stoddard discusses Tolkien’s scenes of memory. He argues that “Tolkien’s writing is filled with sentiment of heroic memory. All the moral races of Middle-earth love to tell of their ancestors and the great deeds of the past. Their cultures are based on the sense that the dead can live on in memory” (Stoddard 158). Memory is, thus, presented as a type of life preservation. The child that the adult reader once was can remain ‘alive’ in her memories, some of which are attached to the literature of her childhood. The traditional plot, fairytale characters/creatures, references to nursery rhyme and the conversational storyteller take the adult reader back to the time of her childhood when similar stories were read to her and when the world of fairytales was alive in her active imagination.

The Hobbit’s reader is simultaneously an adult and a child because she is encouraged to recover her innocent childhood while retaining adult experience. Tolkien makes it a point that when adults read fantasy as “a natural branch of literature” they should not be “playing at being children . . . nor being boys who would not grow up” (“On Fairy Stories” 15). What the adult reader gains from such literature are things adults need more than children, such as “Fantasy, Recovery,

Escape, Consolation” (“On Fairy Stories” 15). The reader maintains her developed consciousness, her experienced eyes, yet learns to look at the world afresh. The novel invites her to turn to her childhood, a time of her past when she was still formulating her knowledge of the world, to recover her lost inquisitive perspective, easily struck by wonder, and allow it to seep into her current perspective, the way she experiences her present world. Tolkien explains this process, which he terms Recovery:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness

This triteness is really the penalty of “appropriation”: the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring *ceased to look at them* (“On Fairy Stories” 19 emphasis mine).

Tolkien describes adult familiarity with and ownership of things in the world as the chief reasons behind the dull perspective adults have of the world versus the wonderful perspective of their childhood years. Recovery, inspired by Fantasy Literature, is the process whereby the adult reader can recover this wonderful perspective of her youth, a process all adults should seek.

Recovery is also suggested by the professor’s statement that “[w]e should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We

should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses— and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. In that sense only a taste for them may make us, or keep us, childish” (“On Fairy Stories” 19). Thus, Tolkien’s novel functions as a fantasy that initiates a process of Recovery for the reader, allowing for the clear and wonderful perspective of the past to carry over into the present. It offers the reader a deeper perspective with which to view time past, namely, the time of childhood. The novel brings the reader to the familiar but adds enough unfamiliarity (new landscape, language and creatures—including the protagonist) to keep her alert and pose questions that otherwise might not have been considered.

Time is also a determining factor for the hobbit’s journey in the world of the novel. Bilbo’s and the dwarves’ quest is largely a race with time. The map of the Lonely Mountain left for Thorin by his father does not only indicate space, like the maps of our world, but also time. Moreover, the map unravels in time. It is written in what the elf Elrond identifies as moon-letters, runes that are only revealed at night in the light of a moon as the “same shape and season as the day they were written”; thus, when Gandalf asks what the map says that Elrond does not share, he says that it reveals nothing more than can be seen by the moon of that night (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 73). In other words, the map contains a lot more information than appears at a given time and one must wait for that information to be revealed at the right moment. What Elrond can read and shares with the party is that “the setting sun with the last light of Durin’s day will shine upon the keyhole” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 73). Durin’s day is the Dwarves’ New Year, which is also the first day of the last moon of autumn before the coming of winter (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 73).

Thorin has a key that goes with the map that is supposed to open this hidden door. Smaug has no knowledge of the door, which the prince can then use to secretly enter his home, once more without the dragon taking heed. The map helps Thorin find his way to the door; however, the keyhole remains invisible until the specific date and time specified in the map, when the setting sun shines on the door to indicate the coming of the next day. Bilbo sees the newly-revealed keyhole and frantically calls for Thorin to “try [the key] now while there is still time” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 256). The assumption here is that once the sun sets on the first day of the last moon of autumn, the keyhole will disappear. The party will have to either give up and return to where it came from or camp by the mountain until the keyhole is revealed again on the same time in the following year, which is an impossible solution, considering the dangers involved and the lack of food. In both cases, Thorin’s party would have failed in its quest and returned empty-handed; Smaug’s rein would have continued. Mere seconds prove to be the difference between the party’s success and failure.

Time does not only constitute the difference between success and failure for Bilbo and the dwarves but even the difference between life and death. The hobbit and his friends often find themselves in life-threatening situations that they somehow succeed in escaping just in time. When the party is chased by wild wolves, everyone takes shelter on tree branches. Bilbo, unfortunately, finds himself running around, not knowing where to go with the sound of wolves howling all around. Dori leaves his branch to help the shorter Bilbo climb into a bough. The narrator describes the scene:

Just at that moment the wolves trotted howling into the clearing. All of a sudden there were hundreds of eyes looking at them. Still Dori did not let Bilbo down. He waited till he had clambered off his shoulders into the branches, and then he jumped for the branches himself. Only just in time! A

wolf snapped at his cloak as he swung up, and nearly got him. In a minute there was a whole pack of them yelping all around the tree (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 128-9).

Dori saves Bilbo and himself “only just in time” and is only a hair breadth away from a wolf’s mouth. Similar saved-in-the-nick of time situations happen throughout the journey. For instance, Gandalf manages to rescue the dwarves from the Trolls just in time because the sun rises at the most convenient moment, turning them to stone. He also makes a sudden appearance to save Bilbo and the dwarves from the goblins, at the very moment when the Great Goblin runs towards Thorin with an open mouth (Thorin, *Hobbit* 86).

The riddles game between Bilbo and Gollum also demonstrates the role time plays in the hobbit’s journey. Bilbo and Gollum take turns in this game, each proposing a riddle that he hopes the other will not be able to answer. Each time one of them gets the answer right, he is rewarded with the chance to propose a riddle to the other, but the real reward Bilbo receives when it is his turn to ask is time, time to live. The stakes are different for each participant and they are higher for Bilbo than for Gollum. If Gollum wins, he gets to eat Bilbo instead of fish. If he loses, then he loses nothing more than a novel meal. However, if Bilbo loses, he literally loses his life and becomes Gollum’s next meal. Nelson points out that this is a “neck riddle game, a game in which one contestant’s life [is] at stake” (76). I wish to add that in the larger scheme of things it is not just Bilbo’s life that is at stake, but the entire future of Middle-earth, as he plays a major role in Smaug’s defeat. Also, what he stands to win is greater than what Gollum does. If Bilbo wins he gets shown the way out of the cave in which he is lost. In other words, he gets to find an exit from a potentially dangerous dead-end, reunite with the rest of the party and complete his quest. One can say, if

Bilbo wins the game, he really wins his life in more ways than one, as with finding the road he strayed from he fulfills his calling and becomes the great hobbit he is at the end of the journey. Therefore, with each riddle he answers, he buys himself more time to live, to think up a riddle too obscure for Gollum so that he may be out of this dangerous detour and back on the right path, both literally and figuratively.

Tolkien alerts us to the urgency of the situation, the too-quick passing of time that may prove fatal for the protagonist, and with that he reminds us of the value of time in his world. Although the game is technically untimed with no rule laid out at any point detailing how long each one gets to think up or answer a riddle, the participants themselves act like a ticking clock. Once he has uttered his riddle, each one of them rushes the other as he puzzles over the answer, reminding him that time is passing, and it appears that he will be the one to lose. Time even acts as the subject of Gollum's last riddle and Bilbo unintentionally provides the right answer when he asks for "Time! Time!" (Nelson 75).

The description Tolkien gives time in the riddle reveals how he conceived of its power. Gollum describes time thus:

This thing all things devours:
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stone to meal;
Slays kings, ruins town,
And beats high mountain down. (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 101)

Time touches all creation, living creatures of all kinds as well as inanimate objects and even nature itself. It brings about the end of all things. Time can destroy or maim living beings beyond recognition. Iron and steel, some of the strongest metals in

existence, are used as examples of the things it can impact to demonstrate the extent of its strength. Time's teeth are harder than the hardest things we know, and it can bite iron brittle with rust (Nelson 75). Even stones and rocks erode with time; time carves a new shape of the earth's surface. Apart from its physical impact on the world, it can bring about the end of reigns, civilizations and cultures.

Some scholars suggest that this riddle is Tolkien's rewriting of and expansion on one found in *Solomon and Saturn* (Nelson 75). In the original riddle, old age is the subject, not time, and no mention is made of kings or towns but only of man. Solomon says of old age: “[S]he bites iron with rust; she does the same to us” (qtd. in Nelson 75). What is said here is that old age impacts man much as rust impacts iron. It makes man less than he originally was meant to be, costing him his strength and appearance. What Tolkien argues is different. No mention is made of time's impact on man's physical strength or youthfulness. Physical strength and youthful appearance aside, the experiences gained in his time with the dwarves change Bilbo into a better and happier hobbit. Tolkien appears to be saying that old age can bring with it wisdom and knowledge. Instead of discussing time's impact on man's body, he presents it as having the ability to alter the political status quo, ending the lives and reigns of those in power and changing societies or cultures as suggested by the word “town”. Time can alter man's being in the world. Therefore, every second of it counts for much. This second can be the difference between success and failure, life and death, even salvation and damnation. As we shall see, the life of the great dragon, Smaug, ends in a few seconds of time.

Time is integral to Bilbo's greatest achievement—saving Middle-earth—as he weaponizes it against Smaug. The hobbit is able to discover the dragon's weakness, which Bard uses to kill it, because he succeeds in manipulating the dragon into

conversing with him long enough for Bilbo to study it. Bilbo engages Smaug with a bit of riddling and the dragon, perhaps bored and definitely too haughty to think the insect-sized hobbit can be stronger or smarter than it, allows itself to be engaged. Smaug lets Bilbo live, possibly to toy with him, and Bilbo uses the time he is given, “itching for a closer view” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 274) of the dragon’s chest which he knows, and says, is the softest part of a dragon. The proud dragon reveals its chest to Bilbo to show off that it is fortified with an armor of scales and diamonds, and Bilbo takes advantage of this rare moment where he can examine the dragon’s fully-revealed chest and finds a bald spot (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 274).

Upon this discovery, Bilbo dashes back to the tunnel, before Smaug can realize he is escaping and breathe fire at him. Bilbo discovers Smaug’s weakness, and seals the dragon’s fate, in a few seconds. Time also plays a part in the sequel to Smaug’s defeat through the arrow shot made by Bard. The thrush (bird) that travels to Bard with word of the dragon’s weak spot reaches him just in time, at the very moment he is about to fire his very last arrow (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 300). Had Bard shot the arrow a second sooner, or had the thrush arrived a second too late, the arrow would have hit Smaug where he is strong and bounced off him. Proper exploitation of time, the unwasteful use of every second, results in Bilbo’s survival of his most dangerous encounter and the achievement of his greatest victory.

These numerous examples where characters are saved in the nick-of-time, where the door to the Mountain is opened at and for a specific time, and where Smaug’s destruction results from a few seconds of pride emphasize one idea: the power and value of time. Time is presented in Tolkien’s riddle as a beast that overcomes creation and seems to be a force that the characters wrestle with, or, perhaps more accurately, run from. Their success in escaping time’s fatal jaws is the

result of their actions, aided by invisible Providence that ensures Bilbo's survival, which in turn makes the fellowship of the ring and its destruction possible in the following novels. In any case, there is a strong presence of time in the novel and an emphasis on the value of time as the source of memory and knowledge or as a determining factor between salvation/life or damnation/death.

The reader is inspired by the novel's meditations on time to consider her own use or abuse of it, to ask herself if she is spending time wisely, like Bilbo at the end, or if she is squandering the time she is given on a loveless, adventure-less, purposeless existence, like Bilbo at the beginning. This also feeds into the novel's engaging the reader in moral questions. Actions occur in time; good actions are time well-spent while bad actions are time ill-spent. Smaug's sin, pride, manifests into a moment-long action: revealing his chest to Bilbo. This moment ill-spent leads to his desolation. Had he thought and behaved with more humility, he would not have shown off his body to Bilbo and his life would have been saved as his weak spot would not have been revealed. This, and similar examples, alert the reader to the impact of time and actions made in time on an individual's life, inviting the reader to reflect on moral questions.

The novel as a whole functions to fill a gap in time and knowledge, to provide a background for the fairytale genre and reveal the world out of which tales like the Grimm brothers' and the *Dvergatal* grew. Shippey notes that the world of wonderful creatures like dragons, dwarves, elves, and goblins existed before Tolkien in fairytales. He also notes two major problems with these narratives. The first is that there is no continuity between them. While they seem to share a common world where fantastic creatures exist, these tales remain unrelated to each other (12). The second is that this common world has no historical background or geographical layout

(12). Shippey concludes that because of these flaws fairytales “cannot, then, be developed. They stimulate the imagination, but do not satisfy it—not, at least, in the way that modern readers expect, with a full plot and developed characters and, perhaps most of all, a map” (13).

This is exactly what *The Hobbit* achieves. Tolkien provides very intricate maps of Middle-earth, not just a description of the landscape or setting as in most novels. Thorin’s map of the Lonely Mountain is included at the beginning of the book before the foreword. The map of Wilderland that reveals where the Lonely Mountain is vis-à-vis the surrounding landscape comes at the book’s end after the story’s conclusion. The narrative is practically bracketed in maps. Tolkien introduces all the different creatures of fairytales and those he invents, like hobbits, to this one wonderous landscape. He also gives that world a sense of real and complex time and offers all of these creatures an extensive background. Each people in Middle-earth have their language, art, philosophy/ideals/way of life, physical characteristics, unique qualities, culture, genealogy and history or past experiences resulting from living in that world and making friends or enemies with other creatures they share it with.

Tolkien borrows the figures and general characteristics of dwarves from *Snow White* and gets their names from the *Dvergatal* or “the Tally of the Dwarves” (Shippey 15). The *Dvergatal* includes the name “Gandalfr” and initially Tolkien gives that name to the leader of the dwarves before he discovers it means “‘staff-elf’ and that this must be a name for a wizard . . . the wizard in some way must have been mixed up with the dwarves” (Shippey 17) and, thus, Gandalf was born, along with the novel’s main plotline. Indeed, Shippey asserts that *The Hobbit* serves as “an *Odyssey* of the dwarves . . . [it is] the story that lies behind and makes sense of the *Dvergatal*, and much more indirectly gives a kind of context even to ‘Snow White’ and the half-

ruined tales of the brothers Grimm” (17). If we accept Shippey’s proposition, then, *The Hobbit*, provides the fairytale genre with an intertext that invites the reader to piece together the fragmented fairytales of her childhood. This intertext forms the background for these fairytales and the world out of which they grew.

Conclusion

Several readers have attempted to trace the origin of Tolkien's use of the Ring symbol to previous cultural and philosophical works. Some readers have pointed to the similarity between Tolkien's ring and that of Wagner's in *Ring of the Nibelung* (Ross "The Ring and the Rings"), whereas others have suggested the role of the Ring of Gyges as described in Plato's *Republic*. However, Tolkien denied that Wagner's ring had any influence on his own, stating in a letter to his publisher that "[b]oth rings were round, and there the resemblance ceases" (*Scifi.stackexchange*). As for the Ring of Gyges, two similarities may be noted. The first is that both rings turn those who wear them invisible. The second is that the rings demonstrate a possible corrupting impact on their owners. In Plato's *Republic*, the story of the shepherd who finds the ring and grows evil, committing all the crimes he desires with the knowledge that he can always escape punishment (Plato 47), is used to argue that human beings need to guard against substituting appearance for reality. It appears that Tolkien offers Bilbo as a model of the individual that would not be corrupted by that kind of power and instead uses it for the good of others. Bilbo passes the test that Plato proposes as the basis for distinguishing the good life from the deceptive life.

Bilbo also uses the power of invisibility to save himself from danger. Thus, the personal gain he derives from using the ring is legitimate and good because it allows for self-defense. He also uses the power of the ring to perform virtuous deeds, such as releasing the dwarves from captivity and approaching Smaug unawares. This leads to the defeat of the dragon and the restoration of the kingdom Smaug destroyed. Tolkien warns in his fictional work that power corrupts when we see the ring eat away at all its carriers, except Bilbo, but he also argues that man's behavior and use of the power he is given is a reflection of his character and true desires. A good hobbit,

Bilbo is motivated by love for his friends. He is undesiring of lordship over others and humble enough to carry the ring without being twisted by it like Sméagol. He is also wise enough to lock the ring up upon returning to the Shire to steer away from the temptation of constantly resorting to the ring's power. He succeeds in these efforts as he leaves the ring to Frodo, who assumes the task of destroying it.

This seems to be an argument in favor of man's ability to live virtuously, to perform good deeds born out of a pure heart. It also demonstrates how virtue is intrinsically good for man, which was Plato's central claim. Bilbo and Sméagol are both hobbits. Yet, the ring impacts them differently. Sméagol, who is utterly corrupted, lives a miserable and lonely life in damp caves, haunted by memories of murdering his friend for the ring. He loses both family and community and gains nothing in return except an evil band of gold that in the end causes his death. On the other hand, Bilbo does not grow covetous under the ring's influence but uses it to save his friends and the world he loves. He is then able to return home to a quiet and happy life, enriched by the many friendships he has made, and to live free of enslaving desires. Some have pointed out that the ring in *The Hobbit* had not yet acquired the role it would later assume in *The Lord of the Rings*, since it only allowed for invisibility and did not presuppose an evil use (*Scifi.stackexchange*). However, the function of the ring in the earlier text still sustains the importance of the Platonic allegory. Bilbo, tempted by gold as he was at the start of the journey, could have used the ring to satisfy his selfish desire and steal some of Smaug's gold for himself. Instead, he performs heroic acts inspired by love and gains peace, contentment and respect.

Tolkien's conception of virtue as beneficial for man was a Christian ideal that inspired much of his work. Christianity was an integral frame of reference for the

author and inspired his novels, unconsciously in the beginning but consciously later on (Purtill *Myth* 8). His themes in *The Hobbit* include covetousness, selfless love, the value of the immaterial versus the material, and the responsibility of free will. These are not only Christian themes, but in his work, they are dealt with in a Christian way. They are reviewed through a Christian lens, even as the world in which the story takes place is a pre-Christian one. Thus, Bilbo— as Purtill argues in “Hobbits and Heroism”—demonstrates a Christian understanding of love as discussed by Paul.

Perhaps the Christian concept that most centrally inspires the novel is the idea of a return to innocence, which might be expressed in the idea of man’s rebecoming a child. To go back to the epigraph, C. S. Lewis assumes that Lucy—growing out of childhood—is “too old” for fairytales and also assumes that when she is an adult she will be “old enough” for them again. His statement is marked by a general understanding that adults wish to reclaim memories and states of being or consciousness of their childhoods and see their childhood literature as a gateway to that time in their early lives. If one adds to this idea the Christian notion that man must be a child in matters of evil, though not a child in matters of intellect (*King James* 1 Corinthians 14.20), and that he must regain a heart and perspective as pure as those of the young who have not had extensive experience with evil (*King James* Matthew 18.3), one then understands the necessity and function of the novel’s implied reader. The implied reader, thus conceived, allows the adult reader to reengage with childhood and acquire a purer perspective on experience in general.

The Hobbit’s implied reader is both an adult and a child. The text is constructed to offer different, yet holistic, reading experiences to adult and child readers. On the level of language and narration, the text appears to be addressing a child. However, a more careful examination of the text shows the hidden adult. The

language is clear and simple, easily comprehensible to eight-year-old native speakers. There are references to children's literature, such as nursery rhymes and fairytales, that would commonly be read to children of that age. Moreover, the persona of the narrator acts as a traditional storyteller who replicates the function of the storyteller in the fairytale tradition by speaking in a conversational tone, directly addressing the reader, and appearing to 'hear' the reader posing questions which he then intercepts the narrative to answer. These factors seem to point towards a child implied reader. However, only an adult native speaker with extensive knowledge of the English language and the roots of its words would be able to understand puns in the narrative. There is also much irony that requires knowledge of politics and adult social codes which would be lost on a child. In terms of intertextuality, there are many references to classical literature and sagas that would only be familiar and meaningful to educated adults.

The character of Bilbo represents this child/ adult duality as it appears in the narrative. The reader is encouraged to identify with Bilbo who, much like a child, knows nothing of the world beyond the Shire. Gandalf acts as a parental figure to the hobbit, as the narrator does to the reader. As Bilbo engages with moral questions, the reader is encouraged to engage with them as well. Thus, Bilbo's reevaluation of his priorities—growing to value friendship and love above material wealth—is meant to inspire a similar process in the reader. As Bilbo grows wiser, he grows less 'adult-like' and becomes more like children. Perhaps because he comes to gain more knowledge of the world, he grows less fond of gold and more attentive to his friends and young kin; becoming a poet/writer, he learns to appreciate small pleasures.

The desire Lewis suggests as natural to man which is to return to the time of his childhood and the necessity of renewal/purification—or the assumption of the

child's likeness (as in Christian doctrine)—come together to inform this novel's implied reader. *The Hobbit* serves the adult reader's nostalgia for the time and literature of childhood by presenting her with a work that utilizes elements from both past and present to constitute an adult reading experience. It also allows her to engage in moral reflection on the development from childhood to adulthood, inviting her to understand basic human values from a new point of view. Time factors in the relationship between the narrator and the reader as well as in the process whereby the adult reader (re)connects with childhood. The narrator is able to connect the modern reader with the ancient world of Middle-earth because he is a modern person himself, living in the reader's world, who possesses knowledge of the ancient world through literary scholarship. Memory acts as a main theme in the novel. Bilbo's life is saved in his riddling with Gollum because he refers to memory. Moreover, the narrator repeatedly interrupts the narrative to ask the reader to recall past events before he continues, putting the reader in a reflective mindset. As Bilbo returns to the beginning of the road as a different hobbit, so does the reader return to his earlier life, to his childhood world, with a developed perspective that may be further developed as a result of this return.

The novel engages the child reader through the present and helps her develop into maturity and engages the already mature adult reader through the past/memory to help her develop into a childlike adulthood. The nature of time in the novel and its extension produce such verisimilitude that the reader easily engages and identifies with the characters of Middle-earth and finds it easy to take up the moral questions that this situation suggests. Time is a theme or subject of the novel as it is meditated upon in Gollum's last riddle. The value of mere seconds, and their impact on man's fate, are constantly indicated throughout the hobbits's journey. In this manner,

Tolkien calls the reader to question her use of her given time and to reflect on the dire consequences of wasting even moments on selfish, immoral or non-meaningful pursuits.

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