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**BARREL-RIDES AND SHE-ELVES:
AUDIENCE AND ANTICIPATION IN PETER JACKSON'S
HOBBIT TRILOGY**

JANET BRENNAN CROFT

Abstract: Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* trilogy, to the audience that loved the *Lord of the Rings* films, is an exciting opportunity to revisit Tolkien's fantastic world and see favorite characters acting out their earlier adventures. The reader of the books, though, is often likely to find the difference in tone between the children's book and the vastly expanded films jarring. This talk will explore audience expectations, the difficulties of filming a "prequel" after a "sequel," and issues of "anticipation" in relation to character development.

The Hobbit has been part of my life since I was seven years old, as comfortable as an old chair by the fire with the kettle beginning to sing—and yet still able to waken a in me Tookish desire to visit the elves and wear a mithril coat and see a dragon.

Today I want to talk primarily about Peter Jackson's three-film adaptation of *The Hobbit*, but first a little general background on some other attempts to film these books. Writers, both professional and amateur, began trying to adapt Tolkien's masterpieces *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* for film and stage almost as soon the ink was dry on the first printings. Before Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* series, released 2001-2003, there were a number of other efforts to develop a Hollywood movie based on that book. The Tolkien collection at Marquette University in Milwaukee holds materials relating to three of these attempts: the 1957 Zimmerman treatment, which Tolkien read and annotated; the 1970 draft script by John Boorman, which was never filmed; and three revisions of the Chris Conkling-Peter Beagle script for the 1978 Ralph Bakshi film that covered up through the Battle of Helm's Deep. There was also a 1981 cartoon from Rankin-Bass Studios, titled *The Return of the King*. *The Hobbit* hasn't been quite as tempting to film-makers, as far as I've been able to tell, though there have been a number of stage adaptations, often aimed at younger audiences. In 1977, the TV network NBC aired the Rankin-Bass animated version of *The Hobbit*, which won the Peabody Award and Christopher Award.

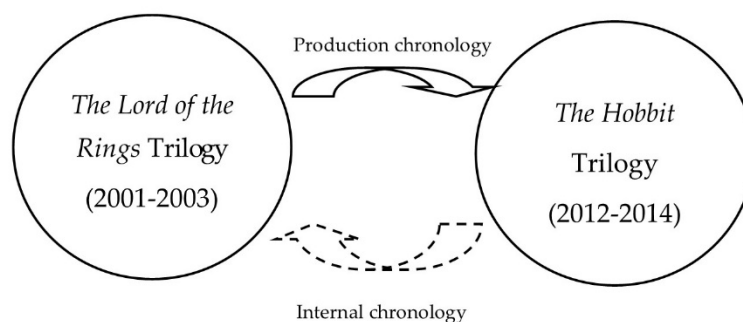
When Jackson originally pitched his idea of a film series based in Middle-earth, he wanted to start, as Tolkien did, with *The Hobbit*, but the studio wanted *The Lord of the Rings* first, probably expecting it to reach a wider audience than a film based on a children's book. A few years after the *Lord of the Rings* films, Jackson tried to go back to *The Hobbit*, but his lawsuit against Warner Brothers made them reluctant to work with him. But it wasn't long till they settled their differences and had him back as executive director, with Guillermo del Toro as director and primary writer. Filming delays and

other issues eventually led to del Toro backing out and Jackson stepping in to his old roles from *Lord of the Rings* days.

As soon as Jackson was confirmed as director, this created an interesting dynamic between the *Lord of the Rings* films and the *Hobbit* project. Another director, like del Toro, and a different creative team might have been able to go in a new direction and do something entirely fresh with the adaptation; even with many of the same actors reprising their *Lord of the Rings* roles, his vision of the film had been expected to have more of a dark fairy-tale feel, like his 2006 fantasy *Pan's Labyrinth*. But with Jackson, the new project was almost inescapably locked in to having to match his *Lord of the Rings* films not just in cast but in tone, look, locations, and theme.

Jackson faced an interesting challenge: how do you take a book that was originally a prequel—and not even that, really, it was a stand-alone novel and not originally planned to lead to another book continuing the story—and turn it into a what is technically a sequel to a film series but at the same time a prequel to the action in that series? In fact, it's very likely that future viewers might plan to watch the *Hobbit* trilogy before *The Lord of the Rings* for the sake of internal chronology, as many do with the second and first *Star Wars* trilogies. The problem with watching *The Hobbit* as a sequel to *The Lord of the Rings* is that we all know what the Ring is, who survives *The Hobbit* to return to action in the *Lord of the Rings*, and where they all end up sixty years later. We even know a good bit of what happens in *The Hobbit* already through history and flashbacks in the earlier films. So a lot of the tension that would be part of a chronological sequel is dissipated.

Jackson's Films

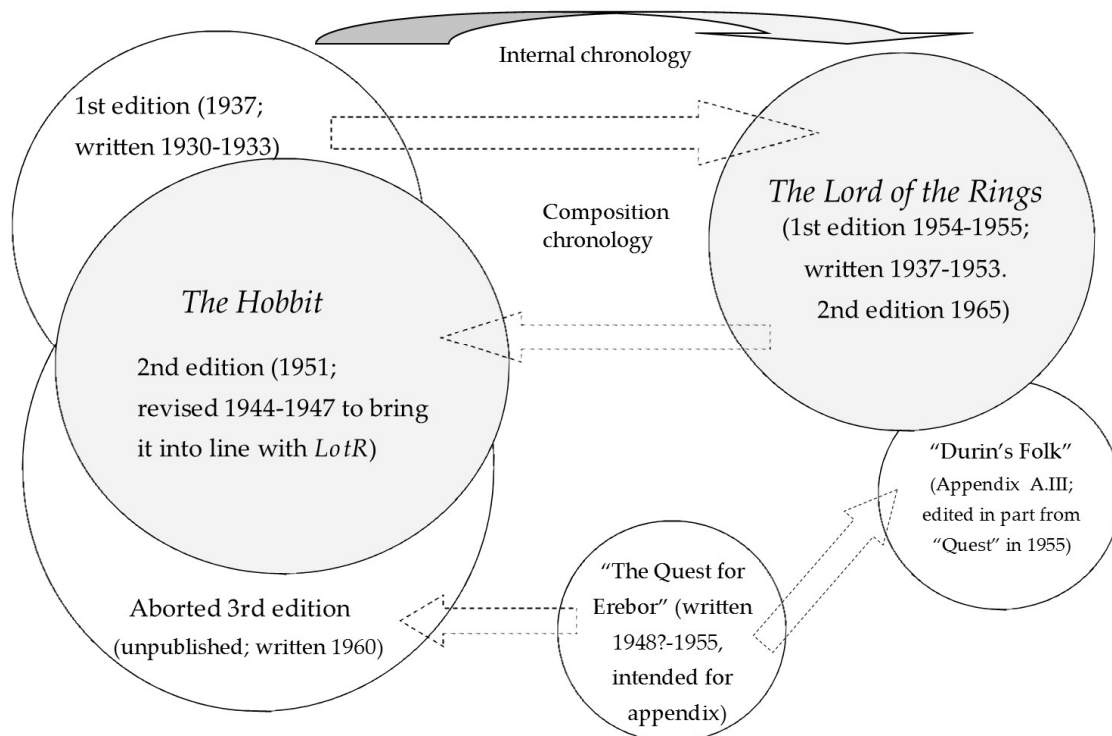


Two concepts Tolkien mentions in his criticism of the 1957 Zimmerman script are "anticipation" and "flattening." Tolkien said that Zimmerman had a "tendency to anticipate scenes or devices used later, thereby flattening the tale out" (*Letters* 271). For example, Zimmerman has Eagles landing in the Shire before the hobbits' journey begins, thus reducing the surprise factor of the Eagle rescuing Gandalf from Orthanc. "Flattening" can also describe what happens to a character arc when a writer anticipates

later development of the character in earlier scenes than in the source material. In addition, dialogue can be flattened; the scriptwriter may be tempted make Tolkien's language "more understandable" for a wider audience (Croft, "Mithril").

What we have here, then, is a sort of mirror-universe anticipation, in which a great deal of the plot of the second series of films has been anticipated in the first series, and in which the earlier source material has to be retro-fitted in order to match the earlier adaptation of the chronologically later material, and yet maintain the illusion that the chronologically later material does not yet exist.

Tolkien's Editions



The interesting thing is that Tolkien tried to do the same at one time. The first edition of *The Hobbit* was published in 1937, but as Tolkien worked on *The Lord of the Rings* throughout the mid-forties, he began rewriting some elements of the earlier book to bring them into line with the plot and themes of the larger work, including material in the Appendices like the section on "Durin's Folk." Most notably, he revised Chapter 5, "Riddles in the Dark," to turn Gollum's forfeit if he lost from giving Bilbo a present to showing him the way out of the goblin-tunnels, and to play up the importance of the Ring to Gollum. He was still going to eat Bilbo if he won, of course (*Annotated Hobbit* 128n25). In 1951 Allen & Unwin published this revised version as the 2nd edition of *The Hobbit*. The next piece of material related to these earlier events is "The Quest for

Erebor," originally written to form part of Appendix A of *The Lord of the Rings* but appearing there only in a much-shortened version as part of "Durin's Folk." It tells of the "Unexpected Party" and the events leading up to it from Gandalf's point of view, "very much to Bilbo's disadvantage" as it does not soften Thorin's "contemptuous" attitude towards the hobbit (Rateliff II.765). It was later published in *Unfinished Tales*, among other places (Rateliff I.xxvi-xxvii).

And now we get to where Tolkien tries to do what Jackson attempts with his films. In 1960, Tolkien "set out to rewrite the entire *Hobbit* in the style of *The Lord of the Rings*," but as John Rateliff puts it, "wisely abandoned this new draft at the start of Chapter III" (I.xxvi; see also Riga *et al.*). When Tolkien needed to make some changes to *The Hobbit* in 1966 to assert his American copyright, he incorporated a few of these edits, but only several of the minor ones, hardly even constituting a new edition in the serious sense of the word.

These chapters are included in Volume II of Rateliff's *History of the Hobbit*. The fullest treatment is given to Chapter I, which is here retitled "A Well-planned Party": already we can see the point of view shifting from Bilbo, for whom the party was entirely "unexpected," to Gandalf, who planned it. The first major change comes at the end of the third paragraph, where instead of the familiar and cozy "He may have lost the neighbours' respect, but he gained—well, you will see if he gained anything in the end" (I.30), Tolkien instead wrote "He got caught up in great events, which he never understood; and he became enormously important, though he never realised it" (Rateliff II.768; see also Riga *et al.* 100). An odd reinterpretation indeed—the Bilbo we see at Elrond's Council has a very good understanding of Middle-earth history and current events, is respected when he perfectly seriously offers to take the Ring to Mordor himself, and cuts right to the heart of what the Council needs to decide: who exactly will take the Ring to its destruction (*LotR* II.2.269-70). The revision continues in this somewhat more serious and realistic vein—"Confusticate and bebother these dwarves!" is replaced with "Confound and bother," the game of Golf is left out of the Bullroarer Took story, the line about shields in the Shire being used for cradles or dish-covers is replaced with one about bows being used for hunting small deer. We find Thorin far more confrontational about Gandalf's possession of Thrór's map: "'Ninety-one years!' cried Thorin. 'For ninety-one years you have kept my property?'" (Rateliff II.779), where he hardly blinks an eye at it in the original *Hobbit*. As Rateliff comments on this chapter, Gandalf is "more remote," Thorin is already obsessed by his property and grievances, and Bilbo is "more foolish" and naïve (II.781).

Keeping this in mind as an example of the difficulties of adapting the written *Hobbit* to the style of *The Lord of the Rings*, let's return now to Jackson. I want to break down this challenge of making a sequel out of a prequel into a number of smaller and

more specific challenges, and examine what he did to meet each one.¹ And let me just note I am using Jackson at all times as shorthand for “Jackson and his creative team” — the co-authors, studio, producers, and other people who had a say and a stake in how the film was written, not just Peter Jackson himself.

TONE

First let’s look at the problem of tone. *The Hobbit* was a children’s adventure book with fairy tale elements. Bilbo, though an adult by hobbit standards, is a clear stand-in for the child reader or listener. The book starts off on a comic note, with Bilbo flustered by his encounter with Gandalf and far more bewildered than alarmed by the dwarves on his doorstep. While the tone becomes more serious as the tale progresses, even in moments as grim as a life-and-death riddle game or an interview with a dragon, it never entirely loses sight of its humorous beginning and comes back to it at the end with the interrupted auction.

But with Jackson at the helm the *Hobbit* movies had to more or less match the tone of *Lord of the Rings* movies—they had to aim for an audience that expected something on a more significant scale than the quest of a small group of dwarves who just wanted their home and treasure back, and the hobbit hero had to be clearly an adult. Including the more crucial events going on elsewhere in Middle-earth—the meeting of the White Council, the growing threat of the mysterious occupant of Dol Guldur, the reappearance of the Nazgûl and the massing of the orc forces—raised the stakes and kept the films from seeming less serious in purpose than *The Lord of the Rings*. The mission of the Dwarves was thus revealed early in the series as more important to the geopolitics and strategy of Middle-earth than it was ever shown to be in the original children’s book.

This need for a heightened realism to match the tone of the *Lord of the Rings* movies therefore meant that some of the fairy tale elements had to be left out—Beorn’s wonderful serving-animals, for example, or the three interrupted forest feasts of the Woodland King, or the conversation with the King of the Eagles. And some things had to be shown in graphic detail rather than happening off-stage and just being recounted—Smaug’s attack on Dale and Erebor, which sets the tone by opening the first movie, or the Battle of Azanulbizar. As Nicholas Birns points out in his study of the role of Radagast in Tolkien’s legendarium, “a light-hearted tale of adventure now turned into a somber legend of loss” as Tolkien turned from *The Hobbit* to *The Lord of the Rings* (125); bringing the former into line with the latter perforce highlights the sense of loss hidden under the surface of the children’s tale.

¹ Riga et al also break down their analysis of the films into challenges, but they are more interested in how an episodic children’s book was turned into a film for an adult audience than in the prequel/sequel and anticipation issues I am exploring.

We see this with the songs as well. The first movie includes four songs: the dwarves' dishwashing song in Bag-End, and later in the same sequence their moody rendition of "Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold"; a comic version of "The Man in the Moon Came Down Too Soon" in the background at Rivendell (moved here from its origin in the Prancing Pony scene in *The Lord of the Rings*), and the Goblin King's song. But other than a few lines of the Lake-town prophecy song given as spoken rhymes in the second movie, the rest of the book's songs are dropped. So in some ways the movies do follow the arc of the tone of the book: the beginning is lighter with just moments of darkness, it gets darker with moments of light, and then there is a return to light at the end—but for the most part it's never quite as light as the book.²

AUDIENCE

Intended audience is another issue that Jackson needed to address. The original audience for *The Hobbit* was Tolkien's own children, who heard chapters in the evening as their father was writing it; it was especially aimed at the older boys, John and Michael, who were both under ten when he started the tale. Its publisher marketed it as a children's book. *The Lord of the Rings* aged with Tolkien's children; chapters were sent to Tolkien's third son, Christopher, as a young man training with the Royal Air Force in South Africa during World War I.

But the film audience is different. The majority of the audience for *The Hobbit* was likely to be people who had already seen *The Lord of the Rings* and who would be coming to these films with the expectation of seeing more of Peter Jackson's vision—a back-story tied seamlessly in to the movies they already knew and loved in character, tone, chronology, and visual detail. The book might be thought of as the version of the tale that Bilbo told to his young relatives and other children, with its intrusive narrator and fairy-tale elements; the film in comparison can be thought of as a more realistic (for the most part) depiction of what really happened. In fact the film frames the story as a confession Bilbo is writing and leaving for Frodo to read as an adult, finally telling him everything he had left out before when Frodo was younger.

Another thing Jackson would have needed to consider was world-wide audience expectations for Hollywood heroes. I have written elsewhere about how Jackson's revisions of Aragorn's character brought him more into line with what John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett call "the American superhero monomyth"—a variation on Joseph Campbell's well-known theory from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which he developed by examining myths, legends, and stories from all over the world

² Except we do have the occasional interruption for Jackson-style humor, like the dwarves coming up out of Bard's privy in the second movie, which to my taste at least jolts us right out of the tone he is trying to set. And the "heightened realism" is often undermined by the impression we get that the usual laws of physics do not apply to dwarves, particularly in scenes like the chase through the goblin caves.

and teasing out their common elements (Croft, "Jackson's Aragorn"). As Campbell summarizes it, in the broadest outline of the monomyth, there is a basic pattern of separation, initiation, and return:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 30)

Lawrence and Jewett similarly examined many iconic American works of literature and film (for example, westerns like Owen Wister's *The Virginian* and action films like *Jaws*) and discovered a typical pattern which makes some fundamental changes to the Campbellian monomyth. The outline they developed describes the American variation this way:

A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity. (Lawrence and Jewett 6)

Note that the hero is already not wholly a part of his community when the journey begins, either because he originates from outside or is a loner within but not of the community. Lawrence and Jewett add that "[H]is motivation is a selfless zeal for justice. [...] [H]e seeks nothing for himself and withstands all temptations. [...] [T]he purity of his motivations ensures his moral infallibility in judging persons and situations" (47). His victory, however, brings no guarantee of return to or acceptance by the community.

Now much of this could already be said of the original Bilbo of the book: the dwarvish community was destroyed by the dragon and could not deal with Smaug alone; Bilbo went with Thorin and company motivated more by his Tookish side than by the reward; he resisted the siren call of his own easy chair by the fire and stuck with the quest; with a good bit of luck and following his own moral judgment in the matter of the Arkenstone, he was able to help the dwarves regain Erebor; then he retired back to the Shire, where he "lost the respect of his neighbours." The focus in the book is much more internal, though, on Bilbo's own personal path to maturity, and we see much of what happens through his eyes rather than observing him from outside.

Jackson, on the other hand, emphasizes a few elements of this plot that play to the "American superhero" outline. (And yes, Jackson is from New Zealand, not America, but the studio is American and the target is an international audience that has certain expectations of a Hollywood film.) Being privy to the wider geopolitical situation, we know that defeating the dragon is essential to the whole community of the

free peoples of Middle-earth; Bilbo's sympathetic motivation for helping the dwarves regain their home is brought to the fore and more clearly articulated; Bilbo performs more heroic actions than he does in the book (more on this later); he nearly does give in to the temptation to turn around and go back to Rivendell and thence home; and including the frame of Bilbo at the ripe old age of eleventy-one back in the same cozy hobbit-hole where he began emphasizes his return to obscurity in the Shire.

In addition to an audience expecting this Hollywood version of the Americanized hero, Jackson was also looking to court the female audience that was attracted to the *Lord of the Rings* films by their strengthened female roles and attractive male heroes. *The Hobbit* book, of course, is notable for including no female characters aside from a few sentences about Bilbo's mother, Belladonna Took. The first film features no women other than Galadriel, but with the second installment we get the introduction of a new character, Tauriel. On her own she is not a bad character at all; I agree with Robin Reid, who calls her the "moral center" of the film in reference to her opposition to the Elvenking's isolationist policy in the face of a broadening threat to all Middle-earth. Particularly good is her "Are we not a part of this world?" speech. But she is also a rather blatant ploy to attract a female audience—and placing her in a love triangle with Legolas and Kili comes across as rather manipulative fan-service, especially as it takes over more of the third film and dilutes her potential as the conscience of the king.³

PLOT

Plot was another problem Jackson had to deal with. As I pointed out earlier, those who have seen *The Lord of the Rings* already know many things about the plot of *The Hobbit*, which takes away some elements of surprise and gives certain events a retrospective significance that they do not have in the original. Tolkien, too, had to struggle with this issue of retrospective significance and overplayed foreshadowing when he went back to revise *The Hobbit* for the second edition and then the later abortive 1960 revision.

For example, Jackson surrounds Bilbo with the "Ring-world" effect whenever he puts on the Ring, which we are familiar with from film-Frodo's experiences in *The Lord of the Rings*; Bilbo's scrabbling and vengeful panic to find the fallen Ring during the spider-battle anticipates Frodo's later addiction to it; and Smaug disturbingly senses that this thief carries something "Precious," which he does not do in the book. Chronologically, we do not find out it is THE Ring till sometime after it is inherited by

³ We do have the rather empowering moment when the women of Lake-town take up arms to defend Dale during the Battle of Five Armies; yet, as a member of the audience at the NYC Tolkien Conference pointed out, we never actually see them in combat, and the sequence is framed by the insulting stereotypes enacted by Alfrid in drag.

Frodo, and even in his revisions of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien still wrote “the ring” lower-case. But here the finding of the Ring is preceded by a scene where the White Council contentiously discusses its disappearance after Isildur’s death, so of course any ring found after that has to be THE Ring and must be shown to be such. Jackson further connects the ring Bilbo finds with the one Frodo carries, giving it more retroactive significance, by visually echoing the Ring-world effects and even the way the spinning Ring falls onto Bilbo’s finger.

A bit more problematic, though, are some of the revisions surrounding Thrór’s map. In the book, the map is taken entirely at its face value at the “Unexpected Party” — there’s no hint that there might be more to be learned from it. But in the movie, Gandalf insists that “The answer lies hidden in this map,” and when trying to persuade Thorin to go to Rivendell, says that the company has a “map we cannot read.” This anticipates the hidden moon-runes, leading the viewer to expect something to be discovered in Rivendell rather than, as in the book, the runes being a total and providential surprise when Thorin willingly shows the map to Elrond.⁴ But because Jackson has depicted Thorin as holding an animosity against all Elves, stemming in particular from his grudge against Thranduil and the wood-elves for not coming to the aid of the dwarves of Erebor after Smaug’s attack, it was essential that Gandalf use the prospect of Elrond’s help with the map to get Thorin and company to the Last Homely Home. However, Jackson muddies this motivation by adding an attack by orcs and wargs in the open lands north of Rivendell, which would have been enough to force them to seek shelter there anyway.

STRUCTURE

Because Jackson planned to divide the action of *The Hobbit* and the added material into first two and then three movies, he faced a problem with structure as well. How could the vastly expanded plot be divided to ensure the proper rhythm of action, climaxes, and cliffhanger endings across the series?

The first movie handles this reasonably well. The additional scenes—Radagast’s growing awareness of the forest’s sickness and reconnaissance of Dol Guldur, the Azog plot and his continuing pursuit of the company, the meeting of the White Council—are surrounded by more canonical scenes that in general stay close to the book.⁵ The movie ends with a proper climax: the fight with orcs and wargs after the escape from the goblin-caves, the rescue by the Eagles (more on this sequence later), and a satisfactory ending pointing directly to the next film, with the Company deposited on the Carrock and looking out towards Mirkwood and the next phase of their adventure.

⁴ I am indebted to Kristine Larsen for pointing out some of these logical inconsistencies.

⁵ Though as with any of the Jackson movies, as one of my friends has remarked, whenever anyone says “Run!” you probably have time to go out to the concession stand for more popcorn.

The second movie, though, runs into some structural difficulties and divides focus as it splits up the company. There has to be a climax for each separate thread now—Gandalf’s capture in Dol Guldur, the orc attack in Laketown, the dwarves fighting off Smaug in Erebor with the giant molten gold dwarf statue—and notice these are all invented scenes. Structurally, the movie is wheeling farther and farther away from both the book and Bilbo towards the end, despite the spider fight and barrel-riding escape from the Elvenking’s halls included in this installment. However, this splintering is to be expected from a middle volume of any trilogy; note that Tolkien’s own *Two Towers* starts with the Fellowship broken into pieces, not to be reunited until near the end of *The Return of the King*; and consider, for example, *The Empire Strikes Back* and how its protagonists are scattered across the Empire. Still, one of the notable things about the book of *The Hobbit* is that there are only a few sequences where Bilbo is not on the scene and the main focus: when he is separated from the dwarves in the goblin caves, when the Elvenking questions Thorin, and during Smaug’s attack on Lake-town.

Without the dwarves fighting Smaug in the tunnels of Erebor, the second movie would have had to end with Smaug’s destructive attack on Lake-town—which would have left the third movie without a slam-bang opening sequence. And this scene would have made the third movie front-heavy without the major expansion of the Battle of Five Armies at the end with separate personal confrontations for almost of our major focus characters—a far cry from the book, where Bilbo spends most of the battle quietly unconscious behind a rock, but necessary to balance the film and bring each character arc to a conclusion.

TROPES

Doing *The Hobbit* after *The Lord of the Rings* also meant that Jackson had to do some juggling with Tolkien’s tropes or themes. It is obvious, when you look at both books, that Tolkien first tried out some themes from the Cauldron of Story in *The Hobbit*, then later rewrote them to a larger scale in the following book. For example, take the hidden but rightful king who is a bit of an outsider and doesn’t appear too trustworthy at first but finally proves himself and wins a crown—or why Bard seems an awful lot like Aragorn-lite in many ways. And Jackson repeated his own tropes, too—once your “beautiful, strong-willed female elf warrior/healer caught in a love triangle” proves successful, why not have another one? Tauriel is practically *required* by movie-Arwen.

So Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* served as a first draft for some familiar *Lord of the Rings* tropes—humble but brave hobbits, mistrusted loner heroes, a hopeless quest, self-centered rulers, and isolationist elves. But at a smaller scale—one hobbit instead of four, king of a city rather than a continent, a quest to regain treasure rather than save the world, and so on.

In order to make the *Hobbit* movies a fitting sequel to *The Lord of the Rings*, then, Jackson had to up the ante on all the original small-scale tropes so that they wouldn’t be

a let-down. The Arkenstone, for example, had to be turned into an essential mystical mark of rightful kingship, like the White Tree of Gondor, an object that would unite the tribes of Dwarves under one ruler (and so serve Gandalf's geopolitical ends), rather than just being a particularly desirable gem.

Actually, though, Tolkien did do a little of this retrospective addition of significance himself. When he wrote "The Quest of Erebor" during the later stages of the composition of *The Lord of the Rings*, it added significance to the tropes of *The Hobbit* by clarifying the danger of Sauron retaking the North, and his revisions for the second edition of *The Hobbit* made the Ring subtly more powerful even at that point in the story.

But to return to Jackson, there are a number of other places where he reuses tropes, his or Tolkien's, in *The Hobbit* movies. There are numerous echoes of visual tropes; the enchanted stream in Jackson's Mirkwood disturbingly mirrors the imagery of the Dead Marshes with its ancient drowned warriors, for example, and as I already mentioned, the Ring falling onto Bilbo's finger as seen from above in the Goblin Caves copies the same view of Frodo in *The Prancing Pony*. "Scary veiny" Galadriel⁶ in her confrontation with Sauron in Dol Guldur brings to mind Galadriel tempted by the Ring in Lothlórien. Thorin's repeated assertion "I am not my grandfather" echoes film-Aragorn's concerns about the tainted blood of Isildur. Balin's description of Thorin—"There is one I could follow. There is one I could call king"—echoes Boromir's dying declaration of loyalty to Aragorn. Tauriel's healing of Kili visually repeats effects and plot tropes (like the hunt for *athelas*) used in Arwen's healing of Frodo. Consider as well the lead-up to the dwarves taking refuge in Rivendell—in addition to the orc-chase giving the resistant Thorin a reason to seek safety, as I said before, it also echoes the Nazgûl attack on Aragorn, Arwen, and the hobbits as they race to Rivendell in *The Lord of the Rings*. The conflict between Thorin and Gandalf over his chosen path also echoes his similar conflict with Aragorn over the path through Moria. Without these added elements of tension, Rivendell would simply be, as it is in the book of *The Hobbit*, a pleasant place to refresh, re-supply, and get advice about the path ahead.

There's also a family/romance complex of tropes which Jackson introduces to parallel a similar situation in the *Lord of the Rings* movies. The Tauriel-Legolas-Kili love triangle basically reflects that of Aragorn-Arwen-Éowyn; one potential mate (Legolas, Arwen) is forbidden to the focus of the triangle (Tauriel, Aragorn) by a powerful father (Thranduil, Elrond); the cross-species pairing (Kili/Tauriel, Arwen/Aragorn) turns out to be the true pairing; one partner in that pairing is mortal and leaves the other bereft in the end, sooner or later. There are twists, of course; the Tauriel/Thranduil clash over her class difference with Legolas echoes Elrond's initial rejection of the human Aragorn as

⁶ The makeup and effects put me in mind of dark Willow at the end of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* sixth season.

an unworthy suitor for his daughter, but also has hints of a daughter's rebellion against her father, as in movie-Arwen's determination to have Aragorn in spite of Elrond's objections. It's easy enough to say that Jackson introduced a romance that had no place in *The Hobbit*, but again, without this echo of the earlier film trilogy, this one might have fallen rather flat in comparison. And tragic love triangles and great cross-species romances are not at all uncommon in Tolkien's legendarium, as is evident throughout *The Silmarillion*.⁷

CHARACTER

I'll concede that these technical problems of tone, audience, structure, and theme presented some reasonable justifications for Jackson's departures from the source materials, much as they did for Tolkien's own attempts at retrofitting. But one area where I am less willing to give Jackson the benefit of the doubt is in interpretation of character. Of course one of the problems Jackson faces here is again due to filming the prequel after the sequel: we know who survives *The Hobbit* to appear again years later in *The Lord of the Rings*, and what they are like in that movie. Bilbo, Legolas, Gandalf, Galadriel, Elrond, Saruman, Sauron, even Lobelia Sackville-Baggins—all will be back later.

But as I pointed out in an article I wrote about the *Lord of the Rings* films, Jackson has a tendency to anticipate later character traits by introducing them far earlier in the character's development, thus flattening out their arc (Croft, "Mithril Coats"). For example, Denethor exhibits little of his initial stern dignity in the movie, seeming from the start a self-indulgent petty tyrant, unshaven and twitchy, bowed and weeping over Boromir's horn and neglecting his duties in his personal grief, instead of the book's "proud and subtle" ruler of ancient and noble blood (V.1.737), who slept fully armored in mail lest he weaken with age (V.4.800). His character arc in the movie begins in the middle of his decline instead of before it, and his spiritual fall is from a far lesser height; Jackson replaces it with an exaggerated physical fall instead.

We can also see this anticipation of later character traits in Thorin, for example. The gold-madness of Thrór in the opening scenes of Smaug's attack gives us a hint of what is to come, and Elrond talks of strain of insanity in the family, which ties in with Thorin's repeated assertion that he is not his grandfather. But in particular I am thinking of the point in the second movie where Thorin draws a sword and threatens Bilbo over his supposed theft of the Arkenstone. Where does this leave Thorin to build from here? His threat to throw Bilbo over the wall when the actual theft is revealed loses some of its punch; Thorin has threatened Bilbo's life before and not followed through, so why expect different this time?

⁷ Though this *is* the first time a dwarf has been involved, to our knowledge.

To me, Jackson seems to particularly rush the slow growth to full maturity of Tolkien's Bilbo; he demonstrates Bilbo's physical heroism much earlier than in the book. Tolkien's character, in this children's story, starts at what Northrop Frye would have called the "low mimetic" level—he is "superior neither to other men nor to his environment" and thus stands in for the young reader. In fact to an adult reader he can be read at the "ironic" level, as "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves" (Frye 34); one justification for making him more heroic earlier in the movie might be that he would not be sustainable as the hero of the piece if he stayed at the ironic level for the viewer for too long.

This is a bit of a sad loss; Bilbo's steady growth from child-like innocent to full maturity is one of the things that makes this such a classic of children's literature (see Green, among others). Yet when rewritten for an adult audience, the hobbit's initial immaturity is hard to sustain without falling into condescension and dismissiveness towards the character, as Tolkien found in his own 1960 attempt at revision.

But as Jackson tried to fit *The Hobbit* in with tone of earlier movies, this Bilbo had to "anticipate" the Bilbo of the earlier/later *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Though the troll scene gives us a hint that this Bilbo is more sensibly motivated than the one in the books (trying to steal a knife to free the ponies, rather than a coin-purse to show his thieving abilities), it is when he is given his sword from the troll-hoard that we start to see more serious departures from the original.

In the book, the very first time Bilbo even remembers he has a sword is when he has gotten lost in the Goblin caves and draws it only to find it glows blue like Orcrist and Glamdring—and points it at Gollum mainly because he was already using it as a light in the dark tunnels. The second time he draws it, Tolkien again remarks that he "remembered his sword" (VIII.207)—this is when he has been captured by a spider. This scene marks a turning point—"Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person" (VIII.208). But Bilbo's thoughts don't turn naturally towards the sword; this fight with the spiders is the only time he uses Sting in combat, and even during the Battle of Five Armies, he puts on the Ring and stays out of sight.

In the movies, Bilbo draws his sword within what seems like mere minutes of receiving it when they meet Radagast, and then again in the pre-Rivendell orc chase scene. Bilbo then fights with a goblin in the Goblin Caves, though Gollum finishes the creature off. In the "out of the frying pan, into the fire" scene, of which more later, he even kills a warg and an orc, and uses his sword in the Battle of Five Armies. So here, the fight with the spiders is not even his first combat alone, let alone his first kill.

Bilbo's solitary decision to use the Arkenstone to negotiate peace, as in the book, marks his independence from the Dwarves and his maturity. In keeping with his more physically daring Bilbo, Jackson adds a parallel moment where he stands up to Gandalf

as well. Gandalf forbids Bilbo from physically endangering himself by running through the battle lines to warn Thorin of a second wave of goblins; “I’m not asking you to allow it,” Bilbo replies.

“OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND INTO THE FIRE”

Now I want to go back and take a closer look at the “out of the frying pan in into the fire” scene (scene 33) and its anticipation of later character traits, tropes, and actions.

In the book, the scene has a sort of cheerfully macabre air to it in spite of the peril the company faces. They have escaped from the goblin tunnels and reached the other side of the mountains, but suddenly hear wolves howling and realize they are being tracked. Gandalf advises them to climb trees up out of their reach, and they lob blazing pine cones down on their besiegers, which is fine if uncomfortable until goblins join the wargs and get them under control. But while the goblins direct the fire towards the dwarves’ trees and tauntingly sing to them, the King of the Eagles, who has grown curious about the commotion below, swoops down with his companions and carries the dwarves, Gandalf, and Bilbo away.

Here, though, Jackson ties the scene in with his invented subplot about the orc Azog, who in this version survived the Battle of Azanulbizar, and his quest for vengeance against Thorin. There’s little in the way of humor in the scene, macabre or otherwise.

Azog tracks the company on the other side of the mountains. They are overtaken by the fastest of the wargs, and one corners Bilbo, who instinctively draws his sword; the warg impales itself when it charges. Bilbo has killed a warg at least twice his size, and seems in shock for a moment; he has trouble getting his sword out of beast’s head. Already we have a Bilbo far more ready to draw a sword than “scuttle from tree to tree” trying to get a dwarf to help him up out of reach.

Gandalf repeats a trope from his imprisonment in Orthanc in the first *Lord of the Rings* movie and sends a moth off to summon the Eagles; the Eagles do not appear providentially and of their own free will, but are anticipated by anyone who has seen the earlier movies. In typical Jackson fashion, the tension is ratcheted up by the fact that the trees are on the very edge of a great cliff; as the wargs try to bring them down, the trees collapse like dominoes and the entire company ends up in one tree, tilted over the edge of the cliff. Then Gandalf starts with his blazing pinecones.

Note that there is no “fifteen birds in five fir trees” song here, another indication of the growing realism and seriousness of the tone; these orcs are not the somewhat comic singing goblins encountered a few scenes earlier in the Misty Mountain caves. However, when Thorin lets Azog goad him into coming down from the tree to fight hand to hand, he is accompanied by a few moments of the sort of clichéd *Carmina Burana* music that so often accompanies battle scenes in recent years, including those elsewhere in this series.

And here is where Jackson truly departs from the Bilbo of the books. Bilbo joins the fight and actually kills the orc which Azog has told to behead Thorin, and then even confronts Azog, a foe ridiculously beyond his strength. It turns into a melee as other dwarves enter the fray, and even the Eagles toss wargs over the cliff as well as rescuing the dwarves—anticipating their role in the Battle of Five Armies.

So why ratchet up this scene this way? For one thing, the breaking of the story into three meant that Jackson needed a major heroic finish to the first film. With two films, the first one could have ended with the spider fight and capture by the elves, and the second started with the escape by barrel; but this scene was probably the best place to break when there were three films. So in a film which already included the huge set-pieces of Smaug's destruction of Erebor and the flashback to the Battle of Azanulbizar, this scene had to be the equal or better of those in terms of tension and significance in order to provide a proper climax.⁸

But what of Bilbo? Why take a character who never killed anything but spiders and have him kill a warg and an orc in quick succession? Part of it can probably be attributed to Jackson's tendency to do this with characters—to anticipate their later development and leave them less room to grow, and to exaggerate character traits and actions. Also at this point Jackson may have wanted a device to reconcile Thorin and Bilbo and set up the fact that in his later madness, Thorin generally trusts Bilbo more than his fellow dwarves, and having Bilbo save Thorin's life in such a dramatic manner would work to do this. Still, I feel this takes away from Bilbo's slow growth of courage and the way that after his single act of killing the spiders in the book, he never uses his blade again and relies only on his wits.⁹

CONCLUSION

I hope that what I have talked about here has offered some interesting ways to consider the possible reasons for Jackson's film-making decisions. I've deliberately avoided delving into the supplemental material on the extended DVDs—I wanted to see what sense I could make of the material itself on its own. While puzzling all this out is certainly an interesting exercise, what particularly fascinates me is that Tolkien ran into some of the same issues when he tried to re-create *The Hobbit* as a book equal in realism to *The Lord of the Rings* and aimed at the same adult audience—and gave it up after three chapters as an impossible task.

Did Jackson succeed in handling these particular challenges? I feel that in some ways he did and in some ways he did not, and you may or may not share my opinions;

⁸ However, this also meant that their first encounter with Beorn had to depict the skin-changer as more menacing than "polite if suspicious," to provide a high-action opener for the second film.

⁹ Here I disagree with Riga et al, who find this early revelation of a "swashbuckling" Bilbo demonstrates his "heroic qualities" in contrast to Tolkien's, who "has a long way to go" (112).

but then Bilbo's story has been a comfortable part of my mental furniture since I was seven years old, and new slipcovers take some getting used to.

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