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Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* Analysis

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a fantasy for children entitled *The Hobbit* in 1937. In the book, Tolkien writes the adventure of a Hobbit named Bilbo Baggins, his company of 13 dwarves, and a powerful wizard name Gandalf. The ultimate goal of the group is to recover a lost treasure that belongs to the dwarves’ leader, Thorin. Throughout the text Bilbo becomes a more developed character and plays an important role as the protagonist. In Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, the character setup and development of Bilbo is used to show the conflicting and complimentary dynamics that come from a dual-nature.

To begin, Bilbo’s character is arranged to be a dual-natured creature. Bilbo’s father was a member of the “Bagginses [family]… [who] people considered very respectable… because they never has any adventures or did anything unexpected (7).” The Bagginses possessed the characteristics of a traditional hobbit. They preferred the familiar and liked to be comfortable and peaceful. In contrast, Bilbo’s mother was a member of the “Took [family]… [which were] not entirely hobbit-like… they discreetly disappeared and would go and have adventures (8).” The Took family was not as respected as the Bagginses because they would go on adventures quite regularly. Bilbo, having ancestors from these contrasting families, possesses qualities and attributes that come from both. Namely, he is a quiet and traditional hobbit from his father’s Bagginses side, but is also potentially adventurous from his mother’s Tookish side. Tolkien setup Bilbo to be dual-natured being, meaning that he possesses opposing characteristics. This dual-nature is a very important element that is used throughout the rest of the text and provides the readers with an understanding of Bilbo’s decisions later on. As well, this dual-nature provides Bilbo with a constant internal struggle because his inclinations seem to be contradictory in some cases, and complimentary in others. Now that Bilbo’s dual-nature has been established, further analysis can begin.

Bilbo’s decision to either join the dwarves and Gandalf on their adventure for regaining Thorin’s treasure or not is the first major event that shows the conflicting dynamics that come about by Bilbo’s dual-nature. In the beginning, the dwarves and Gandalf come to Bilbo’s home and begin trying to recruit him for the position as a burglar. After a while, they give up and begin to leave when one dwarf says, “Will he do? It is all well for Gandalf to talk about this hobbit being fierce, but… he sounded more frightened than excited (18)!” Bilbo overheard this statement and decided to follow them because “the Took side had won (18),” yet he had to be “thought of [as] fierce (18)” without actually being able to be that. Both of these statements show the dynamics that come about by a dual-natured personality. In the first statement, Bilbo is characterized as being more frightened rather than excited. This shows that Bilbo was initially struggling with the decision to join dwarves on their adventure. This struggle came from the fact that he would have to leave his hometown, thus leaving the familiar and the comfortable and ultimately ignoring his Bagginses inclination to stay. The second statement makes it quite clear that the Took inclination to join the dwarves won, yet he was unable to be as fierce as he needed to be in order to convince the company that he would be able to perform the roles of his chosen position, the burglar. The reason he was unable to convince them was because of his Bagginses leanings towards remaining comfortable and not going on the adventure. In other words, even though the Took side had won, it had not completely conquered the Baggins side which was still able have an influence on Bilbo; thus creating a demonstration of the conflicting dynamics that result from a dual-natured character.

In constant, the scene at the Lonely Mountain just before the battle between the humans and elves against the dwarves was about begin shows the complimentary dynamics of Bilbo’s dual-nature. The human’s want a portion of Thorin’s treasure for reconciliation for the damage Smaug had caused when he burned down their town. Thorin, being a stubborn dwarf, refused and was unwilling to give up any part of his treasure. The human’s then proclaimed war, thus demonstrating that they were willing to fight for the treasure. Bilbo, not wanting a battle, took Thorin’s most prized possession, the Arkenstone. He then “slipped down the side of the wall… [to give Bard]… the Arkenstone of Thrain (183).” Bilbo then said, “it will aid you in your bargaining [with Thorin] (184).” Bilbo’s wanting of a peaceful resolution can be explained by his Bagginses blood. This part of his personality tends to influence Bilbo to be comfortable, complacent, and quiet, but ultimately peaceful. These traits provided by his Bagginses heritage show a conflicting nature because for Bilbo to provide a peaceful resolution, he must remove himself out of comfort and protection of the dwarves. Bilbo’s ability to provide the peaceful resolution can be explained by his Tookish blood because it influences him to be adventurous and daring. Combining the two sides of Bilbo’s personality, Bilbo was able to propose the peaceful resolution. In other words, Bilbo’s Bagginses side influences him to want a peaceful outcome, but the problem is that if he only had this side alone, it would not be enough for him to put his life in danger. It is the influence of the Tookish blood that enables him put his life in danger and to propose the peaceful resolution to Bard. The combination of the influences in Bilbo’s dual-nature is what enabled Bilbo to propose the solution to prevent the battle between the humans and elves against the dwarves. In short, Bilbo’s father’s side made him want peace; his mother’s side is what enabled him to propose a solution.

Bilbo’s return to his home town shows both conflicting and complimentary dynamics that result from a dual-nature. Bilbo was returning to his house in Hobbiton when he discovered that the town had presumed him dead and were auctioning all of his possessions. “The return of Bilbo Baggins created quite a disturbance… [and] he had lost his reputation. It is true that for ever after he remained an elf-friend, and had the honor of dwarves, and wizards… but he was no longer respected… by all the hobbits of the neighborhood (204).” This shows that Bilbo was now adored by some but hated by others as well, which ultimately resulted from Bilbo’s dual-nature. The conflicting dynamics involved with Bilbo’s personality ended with his own kind, the hobbits, losing respect for him. This is quite significant because in the beginning, before his adventure, he was well liked and respected. Although there are conflicting dynamics, the complimentary dynamics of Bilbo’s character resulted with him being favored and admired among some of the other characters in Middle-earth. This is substantial because hobbits were generally only befriended by their own kind and not by other creatures; especially elves, dwarves and wizards. In the end, Bilbo remained true to both sides of his dual-natured character. He remained true towards his Tookish side by going on the adventure; and towards his Bagginses side by returning to Hobbiton and living as he had done before, comfortably and peacefully. In short, Bilbo’s return to his home town showed the consequences of both the conflicting and complimentary dynamics of his dual-nature.

In conclusion, Tolkien uses the character Bilbo to show the conflicting and complimentary dynamics of a dual nature. Bilbo’s Bagginses bloodline influences him to be comfortable and peaceful and his Tookish bloodline influences him to be adventurous. His decision to join the dwarves showed that even though one side may win, the other side will always have an influence. The battle demonstrated the complimentary dynamics of his dual-nature by his Bagginses side providing him with the desire to prevent a battle and his Tookish side by enabling him to propose a solution to prevent the battle. Bilbo’s return home resulted in his loss of respect from his fellow hobbits and an increase of admiration by other creatures of Middle-earth, showing both conflicting and complimentary effects of a dual-nature.