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Rhetoric: Fitting Words, 8:00 am  
Dr. Soderberg, Instructor  
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## **An Honest Burglar Mistaken for a Traitor**

### **Introduction:**

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.” (Hobbit, 1966, 7). I’m sure that for many of us, the familiarity of these opening words brings a warm feeling into our hearts. It is a tale of adventure and friendship that rings true throughout the ages.

### **Narration:**

The tale follows Bilbo Baggins, a Hobbit on the Shire, who lived rather uneventfully, until Thorin Oakenshield and his company of dwarves hired him as a burglar. They promised him a share in the dwarvish treasure, but what Bilbo really looked forward to was the adventure—although he wouldn’t admit it. However, things turned out differently than he expected: Bilbo ended up saving the dwarves from many dangerous fates, from spiders and trolls to elves and goblins. Finally, the company made it to the Lonely Mountain, where the dwarvish treasure lay, guarded by a sleeping dragon. The dwarves insisted that Bilbo go down into the mountain alone to steal the treasure for them. Once there, Bilbo was stunned by the sight of the treasure, and one beautiful stone in particular, the Arkenstone.

**Division:**

While we agree that Bilbo did in fact “take” the Arkenstone of Thorin and did not tell the dwarves about it. Bilbo Baggins was entirely justified to claim the Arkenstone because it was owed to him for his valorous deeds, the stone possessed powerful enchantments, he used his decision for the greater good, and Thorin’s written contract plainly stated that he was permitted to choose his own 1/14th share of the spoils. As this speech will prove, this action was not a wrongdoing, because it was not completely voluntary, it was not a true injury, and it was not unlawful.

### **Proof 1: Bilbo was owed a reward**

The first reason: Bilbo was owed the reward from the dwarves for saving their lives on more than one occasion, without being repaid by the dwarves. Yet, the dwarves were very grateful for Bilbo and his actions in saving their lives. Like when he saved them from being eaten by the giant spiders in chapter eight, using his ring to draw the spiders away and cut the dwarves free. Unfortunately for the dwarves, they were soon captured by the Woodland Elves. After a great amount of time, Bilbo broke them out of the Elvish jail, stuffing them in barrels and sending them downstream. After Bilbo removed Thorin from his barrel, he said this; “Are you still in prison, or are you free? If you want food, and if you want to go on with this silly adventure—it's yours after all and not mine—you had better slap your arms and rub your legs and try and help me get the others out while there is a chance” (Hobbit 1966, 206). Remember that this is not Bilbo’s adventure—as he was so fond of calling it—it was the dwarves’ and Bilbo was taken along upon Gandalf’s request. Bilbo was never asked to save them, but he did it out of his own good nature. He never commanded something in return, but stated he should be repaid for his deeds. “If you mean you think it is my job to go into the secret passage first, O Thorin Thrain’s son Oakenshield, may your beard grow ever longer,” he said crossly, “say so at once and have done! I might refuse. I have got you out of two messes already, which were hardly in the original bargain, so that I am, **I think, already owed some reward.**” (Hobbit 1966, 224). The dwarves know that Bilbo was owed a reward for his deeds and Thorin said so; “As for your share, Mr. Baggins, I assure you we are more than grateful” (Hobbit 1966, 243).

## **Proof 2: Bilbo Under Enchantments.**

Secondly, when Bilbo saw the Arkenstone for the first time, it drew him near. While yes, he was aware of what he was doing, it was not “premeditated” but it was a spur-of-the-moment decision he made with heavy sway by the Arkenstone’s enchantments. “Suddenly Bilbo’s arm went towards it, drawn by its enchantments” (Hobbit 1966, 249). Bilbo was not acquainted with magic very well. This is shown better in the first chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Bilbo does not want to give up the ring to Frodo; “Well, if you want my ring yourself, say so! Cried Bilbo. But you won’t get it. I won’t give my **precious** away, I tell you. His hand strayed to the hilt of his small sword” (Fellowship of the Ring 1965, 42). Bilbo was easily affected by the magic of the ring, as was Gollum in the *Hobbit*. Gollum was frantic when he lost his “precious”, wanting to kill Bilbo to regain it. The Arkenstone had similar effects on Bilbo, “drawling him near”. Bilbo’s act in claiming the Arkenstone for himself was not a wrongdoing. He even said that he should tell the dwarves about it, “But I suppose I must tell the dwarves about it—some time” (Hobbit 1966, 249). The reason that Bilbo later didn’t tell the dwarves—especially Thorin—was because he was ashamed of his action, but still believed he was right in taking it. He did it without ill intentions as he wanted to tell the dwarves, and he had a right to it by written contract.

### **Proof 3: He used the Arkenstone for good things later**

Thirdly, Bilbo tried to use the Arkenstone for good later. He was entitled to a share in the treasure, and committed no wrong by taking the Arkenstone. He would have been well within his rights to keep the gem, and yet he gave it up to further the greater good. Before Bard killed the dragon Smaug, Smaug laid waste to the city of Dale. After the dragon was slain, the Lakemen, backed by the power of the elves, came to the Lonely Mountain to ask Thorin for enough riches to rebuild their city. Thorin stubbornly refused, and instead called for aid from the dwarves of the Iron Hills. Tensions were at their boiling point, but Bilbo had a plan. Bilbo gave the Arkenstone to the Elvenking, so that he could use it to bargain with Thorin. This act is done in the hope of sparing much unnecessary bloodshed. When Bilbo gives the stone up he says: “I am merely trying to avoid trouble for all concerned” (Hobbit 1966, 283) He has no ulterior motive here, other than avoiding outright war. Bilbo cares not only for his dwarvish friends, but also for the Lakemen and the elves, and is so concerned for everyone’s safety, that he is willing to give up his rightful portion of the treasure so that they might not suffer harm. This shows Bilbo’s kind nature and love for his friends. He is not in it for himself, and is more than willing to give up what is owed to him if it will help others.

**Proof 4: Bilbo claimed the Arkenstone as his 1/14th share owed to him by written contract.**

The final reason Bilbo was entirely justified in claiming the Arkenstone is because it was clearly permitted in a written document and by word of mouth more than once. In the Hobbit, Thorin tells Bilbo himself, under no outside influence: “As for your share, Mr. Baggins, I assure you we are more than grateful and **you shall choose your own fourteenth**, as soon as we have anything to divide” (Hobbit 1966, 224). Thorin tells Bilbo that he is permitted to choose whatever he wishes as his fourteenth share, and the Arkenstone of Thorin is definitely in that category. Further, before Bilbo sets off on the quest, the Dwarves start the journey without him, but left a physical document decisively declaring :) that Bilbo may take a 14th share of treasure. I will read a portion of this document verbatim for you:

“Thorin and Company to Burglar Bilbo, greeting! For your hospitality our sincerest thanks, and for your offer of professional assistance our grateful acceptance. Terms: *cash on delivery, up to and not exceeding one fourteenth of total profits* (if any); all traveling expenses guaranteed in any event; funeral expenses to be defrayed by us or our representatives, if occasion arises and the matter is not otherwise arranged for. (Hobbit 1966, 38)”

This is a defined and obvious, written and undeniable statement of Bilbo’s complete justification. Furthermore, was the Arkenstone part of the treasure? Yes. Was it less than a 14th of the treasure? Undoubtedly. There were said to be untold mountains of priceless treasure hoarded by Smaug, and one small fist-sized gem could have been no more, and was in fact a ridiculously small portion of a 14th’s worth of the treasure. Bilbo Baggins produces this important document as physical evidence later when he is accused of treachery; “This matter (Bilbo tells the indignant Thorin)—one fourteenth share, to be precise, according to a letter, which fortunately I believe I have kept... He drew from a pocket in his old jacket (which he still wore over his mail), crumpled and much folded, Thorin’s letter” (Hobbit 1966, 282). There is nothing more definitive than this.

### Refutation:

Although Bilbo appears justified for his actions in every respect, some might wonder: “But what about Bilbo’s own conscience? He felt guilty about taking the Arkenstone, and yet he did it anyway.” To this, I would say that Bilbo was well within his rights to take the Arkenstone. He had a binding contract that entitled him to a share in the profits. What is more, Thorin had promised Bilbo that he could choose his own share, with no mention whatsoever of the Arkenstone being off-limits. Bilbo might have felt guilty due to his overly kind nature, but he did not commit a crime in taking the Arkenstone, because his action was not unlawful.

Another counter-argument might be that Bilbo was betraying his friends by taking the Arkenstone. While it is true that Bilbo concealed this from them, and perhaps felt a little guilty about it, we find out in the long run that the dwarves don’t value the Arkenstone as much as Bilbo had thought. It is not a real injury to them. Thorin is the only one who seems to care that Bilbo took the Arkenstone, and even he eventually realizes that it’s not such a big deal, and forgives Bilbo. Taking the Arkenstone was not, in fact, a grim betrayal of his friends.

There is a key passage where Bilbo says that the Arkenstone is not really his to give. Some might point to this passage in order to disprove our argument. However, they miss what comes after. Sensitive Bilbo, although well within his rights to take the Arkenstone, and having committed no crime, still feels guilty. So, he says: “I am willing to let it stand against all my claims, don’t you know. I may be a burglar—or so they say: personally I never really felt like one—but I am an honest one, I hope, more or less. Anyway, I am going back now, and the dwarves can do what they like to me. I hope you will find it useful” (Hobbit, 1966, 284). Bilbo is quite heroic in this passage. If he is going to be called a burglar, he is determined to be an honest

one. He gives up the Arkenstone (and with it his share in the dwarf treasure) in an attempt to help his friends. Not only this, but he goes back to confess to the dwarves and suffer whatever they might unjustly do to him. Remember that Bilbo had done nothing wrong. Thorin had given him free rein to pick his reward from the treasure, and he chose the Arkenstone. It is unjust for Thorin to make such a friendly claim, only to retract it when he doesn't like the way things turned out.



**Conclusion: (Must be read in a British accent)**

As we have seen, Bilbo was completely justified in claiming the Arkenstone for himself. Following reason, common sense, past circumstances and the present situation, Bilbo had every right, some might even say an obviously one-sided right to declare the stone his property. Despite the fact that some may say he “*felt* guilty” or he was “betraying his friends,” further research which overlooks mere “feelings,” or petty reactions would reveal that he is in the right from both a moral and a legal standpoint. First: He was owed a huge reward for his actions, which, if you remember, involved saving the lives of his comrades time and time again. Next: The stone was beautiful, maybe even enchanted, and the only part of the treasure which he actually valued. Why claim part of it you wouldn't want?. Next, he utilized the stone later in yet another attempt to save his friends, generous to the point of selflessly giving away the stone itself and lastly: It was his by universal law. According to a written contract given him by the owner of the stone itself, he was entirely permitted to take the Arkenstone as a fourteenth share of the treasure.

The Hobbit is a masterful tale, and it is less than common that after someone finishes reading it they accuse the honest and friendly hobbit of wickedness and treachery. After the Battle of the Five Armies and Thorin's burial, Bilbo gave up the rest of his 14th share to the Lakemen so that they could rebuild their town. However, because the remaining dwarves wanted to honor their agreement, they gave their little friend as much gold as his pony could carry back to the Shire. Innocent, heroic Bilbo took a fond farewell of his friends, and made his way homeward, an honest, just burglar through and through.

### **Bibliography**

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 2 Park Street, Boston, Massachusetts, Houghton Mifflin Co. 1966.