

= The Hobbit =

The Hobbit , or There and Back Again is a children 's fantasy novel by English author J. R. R. Tolkien . It was published on 21 September 1937 to wide critical acclaim , being nominated for the Carnegie Medal and awarded a prize from the New York Herald Tribune for best juvenile fiction . The book remains popular and is recognized as a classic in children 's literature .

Set in a time " Between the Dawn of Færie and the Dominion of Men " , The Hobbit follows the quest of home @-@ loving hobbit Bilbo Baggins to win a share of the treasure guarded by the dragon , Smaug . Bilbo 's journey takes him from light @-@ hearted , rural surroundings into more sinister territory . The story is told in the form of an episodic quest , and most chapters introduce a specific creature , or type of creature , of Tolkien 's geography . By accepting the disreputable , romantic , fey and adventurous sides of his nature and applying his wits and common sense , Bilbo gains a new level of maturity , competence and wisdom . The story reaches its climax in the Battle of the Five Armies , where many of the characters and creatures from earlier chapters re @-@ emerge to engage in conflict .

Personal growth and forms of heroism are central themes of the story . Along with motifs of warfare , these themes have led critics to view Tolkien 's own experiences during World War I as instrumental in shaping the story . The author 's scholarly knowledge of Germanic philology and interest in fairy tales are often noted as influences .

Encouraged by the book 's critical and financial success , the publisher requested a sequel . As Tolkien 's work on the successor The Lord of the Rings progressed , he made retrospective accommodations for it in The Hobbit . These few but significant changes were integrated into the second edition . Further editions followed with minor emendations , including those reflecting Tolkien 's changing concept of the world into which Bilbo stumbled . The work has never been out of print . Its ongoing legacy encompasses many adaptations for stage , screen , radio , board games and video games . Several of these adaptations have received critical recognition on their own merits .

= = Characters = =

Bilbo Baggins , the titular protagonist , is a respectable , reserved hobbit . During his adventure , Bilbo often refers to the contents of his larder at home and wishes he had more food . Until he finds a magic ring , he is more baggage than help . Gandalf , an itinerant wizard , introduces Bilbo to a company of thirteen dwarves . During the journey the wizard disappears on side errands dimly hinted at , only to appear again at key moments in the story . Thorin Oakenshield , the proud , pompous head of the company of dwarves and heir to the destroyed dwarvish kingdom under the Lonely Mountain , makes many mistakes in his leadership , relying on Gandalf and Bilbo to get him out of trouble , but he proves himself a mighty warrior . Smaug is a dragon who long ago pillaged the dwarvish kingdom of Thorin 's grandfather and sleeps upon the vast treasure .

The plot involves a host of other characters of varying importance , such as the twelve other dwarves of the company ; two types of elves : both puckish and more serious warrior types ; Men ; man @-@ eating trolls ; boulder @-@ throwing giants ; evil cave @-@ dwelling goblins ; forest @-@ dwelling giant spiders who can speak ; immense and heroic eagles who also speak ; evil wolves , or wargs , who are allied with the goblins ; Elrond the sage ; Gollum , a strange creature inhabiting an underground lake ; Beorn , a man who can assume bear form ; and Bard the Bowman , a grim but honourable archer of Lake @-@ town .

= = Plot = =

Gandalf tricks Bilbo into hosting a party for Thorin and his band of dwarves , who sing of reclaiming the Lonely Mountain and its vast treasure from the dragon Smaug . When the music ends , Gandalf unveils a map showing a secret door into the Mountain and proposes that the dumbfounded Bilbo serve as the expedition 's " burglar " . The dwarves ridicule the idea , but Bilbo , indignant , joins despite himself .

The group travels into the wild , where Gandalf saves the company from trolls and leads them to Rivendell , where Elrond reveals more secrets from the map . Passing over the Misty Mountains , they are caught by goblins and driven deep underground . Although Gandalf rescues them , Bilbo gets separated from the others as they flee the goblins . Lost in the goblin tunnels , he stumbles across a mysterious ring and then encounters Gollum , who engages him in a game of riddles . As a reward for solving all riddles Gollum will show him the path out of the tunnels , but if Bilbo fails , his life will be forfeit . With the help of the ring , which confers invisibility , Bilbo escapes and rejoins the dwarves , improving his reputation with them . The goblins and Wargs give chase , but the company are saved by eagles before resting in the house of Beorn .

The company enters the black forest of Mirkwood without Gandalf . In Mirkwood , Bilbo first saves the dwarves from giant spiders and then from the dungeons of the Wood @-@ elves . Nearing the Lonely Mountain , the travellers are welcomed by the human inhabitants of Lake @-@ town , who hope the dwarves will fulfil prophecies of Smaug 's demise . The expedition travels to the Lonely Mountain and finds the secret door ; Bilbo scouts the dragon 's lair , stealing a great cup and learning of a weakness in Smaug 's armour . The enraged dragon , deducing that Lake @-@ town has aided the intruder , sets out to destroy the town . A thrush had overheard Bilbo 's report of Smaug 's vulnerability and reports it to Lake @-@ town defender Bard . His arrow finds the chink and slays the dragon .

When the dwarves take possession of the mountain , Bilbo finds the Arkenstone , an heirloom of Thorin 's dynasty , and hides it away . The Wood @-@ elves and Lake @-@ men besiege the mountain and request compensation for their aid , reparations for Lake @-@ town 's destruction , and settlement of old claims on the treasure . Thorin refuses and , having summoned his kin from the Iron Hills , reinforces his position . Bilbo tries to ransom the Arkenstone to head off a war , but Thorin is intransigent . He banishes Bilbo , and battle seems inevitable .

Gandalf reappears to warn all of an approaching army of goblins and Wargs . The dwarves , men and elves band together , but only with the timely arrival of the eagles and Beorn do they win the climactic Battle of Five Armies . Thorin is fatally wounded and reconciles with Bilbo before he dies . Bilbo accepts only a small portion of his share of the treasure , having no want or need for more , but still returns home a very wealthy hobbit .

= = Concept and creation = =

= = = Background = = =

In the early 1930s Tolkien was pursuing an academic career at Oxford as Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo @-@ Saxon , with a fellowship at Pembroke College . Several of his poems had been published in magazines and small collections , including Goblin Feet and The Cat and the Fiddle : A Nursery Rhyme Undone and its Scandalous Secret Unlocked , a reworking of the nursery rhyme Hey Diddle Diddle . His creative endeavours at this time also included letters from Father Christmas to his children ? illustrated manuscripts that featured warring gnomes and goblins , and a helpful polar bear ? alongside the creation of elven languages and an attendant mythology , which he had been creating since 1917 . These works all saw posthumous publication .

In a 1955 letter to W. H. Auden , Tolkien recollects that he began work on The Hobbit one day early in the 1930s , when he was marking School Certificate papers . He found a blank page . Suddenly inspired , he wrote the words , " In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit . " By late 1932 he had finished the story and then lent the manuscript to several friends , including C. S. Lewis and a student of Tolkien 's named Elaine Griffiths . In 1936 , when Griffiths was visited in Oxford by Susan Dagnall , a staff member of the publisher George Allen & Unwin , she is reported to have either lent Dagnall the book or suggested she borrow it from Tolkien . In any event , Dagnall was impressed by it , and showed the book to Stanley Unwin , who then asked his 10 @-@ year @-@ old son Rayner to review it . Rayner 's favourable comments settled Allen & Unwin 's decision to publish Tolkien 's book .

= = = Influences = = =

One of the greatest influences on Tolkien was the 19th century Arts and Crafts polymath William Morris . Tolkien wished to imitate Morris 's prose and poetry romances , following the general style and approach of the work . The Desolation of Smaug as portraying dragons as detrimental to landscape , has been noted as an explicit motif borrowed from Morris . Tolkien wrote also of being impressed as a boy by Samuel Rutherford Crockett 's historical novel The Black Douglas and of basing the Necromancer ? Sauron ? on its villain , Gilles de Retz . Incidents in both The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings are similar in narrative and style to the novel , and its overall style and imagery have been suggested as having had an influence on Tolkien .

Tolkien 's portrayal of goblins in The Hobbit was particularly influenced by George MacDonald 's The Princess and the Goblin . However , MacDonald influenced Tolkien more profoundly than just to shape individual characters and episodes ; his works further helped Tolkien form his whole thinking on the role of fantasy within his Christian faith .

Tolkien scholar Mark T. Hooker has cataloged a lengthy series of parallels between The Hobbit and Jules Verne 's Journey to the Center of the Earth . These include , among other things , a hidden runic message and a celestial alignment that direct the adventurers to the goals of their quests .

Tolkien 's works incorporate much influence from Norse mythology reflecting his lifelong passion for those stories and his academic career in Germanic philology . The Hobbit is no exception to this ; the work shows influences from northern European literature , myths and languages and the strong influence of Norse mythology , especially from the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda . Examples include the names of some characters , such as Fili , Kili , Oin , Gloin , Bifur , Bofur , Bombur , Dori , Nori , Dwalin , Balin , Dain , Nain , Thorin Oakenshield and Gandalf (deriving from the Old Norse names Fíli , Kíli , Oin , Glói , Bivör , Bávörr , Bömburr , Dori , Nóri , Dvalinn , Bláin , Dain , Nain , Þorin Eikinskjalði and Gandálfr) . But whilst their names are from Old Norse , the characters of the dwarves are more directly taken from fairy tales such as Snow White and Snow @-@ White and Rose @-@ Red as collected by the Brothers Grimm . The latter of these tales may have also influenced the character of Beorn .

Tolkien 's use of descriptive personal and place names such as Misty Mountains and Bag End echoes the descriptive names used in Old Norse sagas . The names of the dwarf @-@ friendly ravens are also derived from Old Norse for ' raven ' and ' rook ' , but their characters are unlike the typical war @-@ carrion from Old Norse and Old English literature . Tolkien , however , is not simply skimming historical sources for effect : linguistic styles , especially the relationship between the modern and ancient , has been seen to be one of the major themes explored by the story . Another characteristic of The Hobbit found in Old Norse sagas is maps accompanying the text of the story . Several of the author 's illustrations (including the dwarven map , the frontispiece and the dust jacket) make use of Anglo @-@ Saxon runes , an English extension of the Germanic runic alphabets .

Themes found in Old English literature , and specifically in the poem Beowulf , have a heavy presence in defining the ancient world Bilbo stepped into . Tolkien , an accomplished Beowulf scholar , claims the poem to be among his " most valued sources " in writing The Hobbit . Tolkien is credited with being the first critic to expound on Beowulf as a literary work with value beyond merely historical , and his 1936 lecture Beowulf : the Monsters and the Critics is still required in some Old English courses . The Beowulf poem contains several elements that Tolkien borrowed for The Hobbit , including a monstrous , intelligent dragon . Certain descriptions in The Hobbit seem to have been lifted straight out of Beowulf with some minor rewording , such as when each dragon stretches out its neck to sniff for intruders . Likewise , Tolkien 's descriptions of the lair as accessed through a secret passage mirror those in Beowulf . Other specific plot elements and features in The Hobbit that show similarities to Beowulf include the title thief as Bilbo is called by Gollum and later by Smaug , and Smaug 's personality which leads to the destruction of Lake @-@ town . Tolkien refines parts of Beowulf 's plot that he appears to have found less than satisfactorily described , such as details about the cup @-@ thief and the dragon 's intellect and personality .

Another influence from Old English sources is the appearance of named blades of renown , adorned in runes . It is in the use of his elf @-@ blade that we see Bilbo finally taking his first independent heroic action . By his naming the blade " Sting " we see Bilbo 's acceptance of the kinds of cultural and linguistic practices found in Beowulf , signifying his entrance into the ancient world in which he found himself . This progression culminates in Bilbo stealing a cup from the dragon 's hoard , rousing him to wrath ? an incident directly mirroring Beowulf , and an action entirely determined by traditional narrative patterns . As Tolkien wrote , " The episode of the theft arose naturally (and almost inevitably) from the circumstances . It is difficult to think of any other way of conducting the story at this point . I fancy the author of Beowulf would say much the same . "

The name of the wizard Radagast is widely recognized to be taken from the name of the Slavic deity Rodegast .

The representation of the dwarves in The Hobbit was influenced by his own selective reading of medieval texts regarding the Jewish people and their history . The dwarves ' characteristics of being dispossessed of their ancient homeland at the Lonely Mountain , and living among other groups whilst retaining their own culture are all derived from the medieval image of Jews , whilst their warlike nature stems from accounts in the Hebrew Bible . The Dwarven calendar invented for The Hobbit reflects the Jewish calendar in beginning in late autumn . And although Tolkien denied allegory , the dwarves taking Bilbo out of his complacent existence has been seen as an eloquent metaphor for the " impoverishment of Western society without Jews . "

= = = Publication = = =

George Allen & Unwin Ltd. of London published the first edition of The Hobbit on 21 September 1937 with a print run of 1 @, @ 500 copies , which sold out by December because of enthusiastic reviews . This first printing was illustrated in black and white by Tolkien , who designed the dust jacket as well . Houghton Mifflin of Boston and New York reset type for an American edition , to be released early in 1938 , in which four of the illustrations would be colour plates . Allen & Unwin decided to incorporate the colour illustrations into their second printing , released at the end of 1937 . Despite the book 's popularity , paper rationing brought on by wartime conditions and not ending until 1949 meant that the Allen & Unwin edition of the book was often unavailable during this period .

Subsequent editions in English were published in 1951 , 1966 , 1978 and 1995 . The novel has been reprinted frequently by many publishers . In addition , The Hobbit has been translated into over forty languages , with more than one published version for some languages .

= = = Revisions = = =

In December 1937 , The Hobbit 's publisher , Stanley Unwin , asked Tolkien for a sequel . In response Tolkien provided drafts for The Silmarillion , but the editors rejected them , believing that the public wanted " more about hobbits " . Tolkien subsequently began work on The New Hobbit , which would eventually become The Lord of the Rings , a course that would not only change the context of the original story , but lead to substantial changes to the character of Gollum .

In the first edition of The Hobbit , Gollum willingly bets his magic ring on the outcome of the riddle @-@ game , and he and Bilbo part amicably . In the second edition edits , to reflect the new concept of the ring and its corrupting abilities , Tolkien made Gollum more aggressive towards Bilbo and distraught at losing the ring . The encounter ends with Gollum 's curse , " Thief ! Thief , Thief , Baggins ! We hates it , we hates it , we hates it forever ! " This presages Gollum 's portrayal in The Lord of the Rings .

Tolkien sent this revised version of the chapter " Riddles in the Dark " to Unwin as an example of the kinds of changes needed to bring the book into conformity with The Lord of the Rings , but he heard nothing back for years . When he was sent galley proofs of a new edition , Tolkien was surprised to find the sample text had been incorporated . In The Lord of the Rings , the original version of the riddle game is explained as a " lie " made up by Bilbo under the harmful influence of

the Ring , whereas the revised version contains the " true " account . The revised text became the second edition , published in 1951 in both the UK and the US .

Tolkien began a new version in 1960 , attempting to adjust the tone of The Hobbit to its sequel . He abandoned the new revision at chapter three after he received criticism that it " just wasn 't The Hobbit " , implying it had lost much of its light @-@ hearted tone and quick pace .

After an unauthorized paperback edition of The Lord of the Rings appeared from Ace Books in 1965 , Houghton Mifflin and Ballantine asked Tolkien to refresh the text of The Hobbit to renew the US copyright . This text became the 1966 third edition . Tolkien took the opportunity to align the narrative even more closely to The Lord of the Rings and to cosmological developments from his still unpublished Quenta Silmarillion as it stood at that time . These small edits included , for example , changing the phrase " elves that are now called Gnomes " from the first and second editions on page 63 , to " High Elves of the West , my kin " in the third edition . Tolkien had used " gnome " in his earlier writing to refer to the second kindred of the High Elves ? the Noldor (or " Deep Elves ") ? thinking " gnome " , derived from the Greek gnosis (knowledge) , was a good name for the wisest of the elves . However , because of its common denotation of a garden gnome , derived from the 16th @-@ century Paracelsus , Tolkien abandoned the term .

= = = = Posthumous editions = = = =

Since the author 's death , two editions of The Hobbit have been published with commentary on the creation , emendation and development of the text . In The Annotated Hobbit Douglas Anderson provides the entire text of the published book , alongside commentary and illustrations . Later editions added the text of The Quest of Erebor . Anderson 's commentary shows many of the sources Tolkien brought together in preparing the text , and chronicles in detail the changes Tolkien made to the various published editions . Alongside the annotations , the text is illustrated by pictures from many of the translated editions , including images by Tove Jansson . The edition also presents a number of little @-@ known texts such as the 1923 version of Tolkien 's poem " Iumonna Gold Galdre Bewunden " .

With The History of The Hobbit , published in two parts in 2007 , John Rateliff provides the full text of the earliest and intermediary drafts of the book , alongside commentary that shows relationships to Tolkien 's scholarly and creative works , both contemporary and later . Rateliff moreover provides the abandoned 1960s retelling and previously unpublished illustrations by Tolkien . The book keeps Rateliff 's commentary separate from Tolkien 's text , allowing the reader to read the original drafts as contained stories .

= = = Illustration and design = = =

Tolkien 's correspondence and publisher 's records show that he was involved in the design and illustration of the entire book . All elements were the subject of considerable correspondence and fussing over by Tolkien . Rayner Unwin , in his publishing memoir , comments : " In 1937 alone Tolkien wrote 26 letters to George Allen & Unwin ... detailed , fluent , often pungent , but infinitely polite and exasperatingly precise ... I doubt any author today , however famous , would get such scrupulous attention . "

Even the maps , of which Tolkien originally proposed five , were considered and debated . He wished Thrór 's map to be tipped in (that is , glued in after the book has been bound) at first mention in the text , and with the moon @-@ letters (Anglo @-@ Saxon runes) on the reverse so they could be seen when held up to the light . In the end the cost , as well as the shading of the maps , which would be difficult to reproduce , resulted in the final design of two maps as endpapers , Thrór 's map , and the Map of Wilderland , both printed in black and red on the paper 's cream background .

Originally Allen & Unwin planned to illustrate the book only with the endpaper maps , but Tolkien 's first tendered sketches so charmed the publisher 's staff that they opted to include them without raising the book 's price despite the extra cost . Thus encouraged , Tolkien supplied a second batch

of illustrations . The publisher accepted all of these as well , giving the first edition ten black @-@ and @-@ white illustrations plus the two endpaper maps . The illustrated scenes were : The Hill : Hobbiton @-@ across @-@ the @-@ Water , The Trolls , The Mountain Path , The Misty Mountains looking West from the Eyrie towards Goblin Gate , Beorn 's Hall , Mirkwood , The Elvenking 's Gate , Lake Town , The Front Gate , and The Hall at Bag @-@ End . All but one of the illustrations were a full page , and one , the Mirkwood illustration , required a separate plate .

Satisfied with his skills , the publishers asked Tolkien to design a dust jacket . This project , too , became the subject of many iterations and much correspondence , with Tolkien always writing disparagingly of his own ability to draw . The runic inscription around the edges of the illustration are a phonetic transliteration of English , giving the title of the book and details of the author and publisher . The original jacket design contained several shades of various colours , but Tolkien redrew it several times using fewer colours each time . His final design consisted of four colours . The publishers , mindful of the cost , removed the red from the sun to end up with only black , blue , and green ink on white stock .

The publisher 's production staff designed a binding , but Tolkien objected to several elements . Through several iterations , the final design ended up as mostly the author 's . The spine shows Anglo Saxon runes : two " þ " (Thráin and Thrór) and one " D " (Door) . The front and back covers were mirror images of each other , with an elongated dragon characteristic of Tolkien 's style stamped along the lower edge , and with a sketch of the Misty Mountains stamped along the upper edge .

Once illustrations were approved for the book , Tolkien proposed colour plates as well . The publisher would not relent on this , so Tolkien pinned his hopes on the American edition to be published about six months later . Houghton Mifflin rewarded these hopes with the replacement of the frontispiece (The Hill : Hobbiton @-@ across @-@ the Water) in colour and the addition of new colour plates : Rivendell , Bilbo Woke Up with the Early Sun in His Eyes , Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raft @-@ elves and a Conversation with Smaug , which features a dwarvish curse written in Tolkien 's invented script Tengwar , and signed with two " þ " (" Th ") runes . The additional illustrations proved so appealing that George Allen & Unwin adopted the colour plates as well for their second printing , with exception of Bilbo Woke Up with the Early Sun in His Eyes .

Different editions have been illustrated in diverse ways . Many follow the original scheme at least loosely , but many others are illustrated by other artists , especially the many translated editions . Some cheaper editions , particularly paperback , are not illustrated except with the maps . " The Children 's Book Club " edition of 1942 includes the black @-@ and @-@ white pictures but no maps , an anomaly .

Tolkien 's use of runes , both as decorative devices and as magical signs within the story , has been cited as a major cause for the popularization of runes within " New Age " and esoteric literature , stemming from Tolkien 's popularity with the elements of counter @-@ culture in the 1970s .

= = Genre = =

The Hobbit takes cues from narrative models of children 's literature , as shown by its omniscient narrator and characters that young children can relate to , such as the small , food @-@ obsessed , and morally ambiguous Bilbo . The text emphasizes the relationship between time and narrative progress and it openly distinguishes " safe " from " dangerous " in its geography . Both are key elements of works intended for children , as is the " home @-@ away @-@ home " (or there and back again) plot structure typical of the Bildungsroman . While Tolkien later claimed to dislike the aspect of the narrative voice addressing the reader directly , the narrative voice contributes significantly to the success of the novel . Emer O 'Sullivan , in her Comparative Children 's Literature , notes The Hobbit as one of a handful of children 's books that has been accepted into mainstream literature , alongside Jostein Gaarder 's Sophie 's World (1991) and J. K. Rowling 's Harry Potter series (1997 ? 2007) .

Tolkien intended The Hobbit as a " fairy @-@ story " and wrote it in a tone suited to addressing children although he said later that the book was not specifically written for children but had rather

been created out of his interest in mythology and legend . Many of the initial reviews refer to the work as a fairy story . However , according to Jack Zipes writing in " The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales " , Bilbo is an atypical character for a fairy tale . The work is much longer than Tolkien 's ideal proposed in his essay On Fairy @-@ Stories . Many fairy tale motifs , such as the repetition of similar events seen in the dwarves ' arrival at Bilbo 's and Beorn 's homes , and folklore themes , such as trolls turning to stone , are to be found in the story .

The book is popularly called (and often marketed as) a fantasy novel , but like Peter Pan and Wendy by J. M. Barrie and The Princess and the Goblin by George MacDonald , both of which influenced Tolkien and contain fantasy elements , it is primarily identified as being children 's literature . The two genres are not mutually exclusive , so some definitions of high fantasy include works for children by authors such as L. Frank Baum and Lloyd Alexander alongside the works of Gene Wolfe and Jonathan Swift , which are more often considered adult literature . The Hobbit has been called " the most popular of all twentieth @-@ century fantasies written for children . " Chance , however , considers the book to be a children 's novel only in the sense that it appeals to the child in an adult reader . Sullivan credits the first publication of The Hobbit as an important step in the development of high fantasy , and further credits the 1960s paperback debuts of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings as essential to the creation of a mass market for fiction of this kind as well as the fantasy genre 's current status .

= = Style = =

Tolkien 's prose is unpretentious and straightforward , taking as given the existence of his imaginary world and describing its details in a matter @-@ of @-@ fact way , while often introducing the new and fantastic in an almost casual manner . This down @-@ to @-@ earth style , also found in later fantasy such as Richard Adams ' Watership Down and Peter Beagle 's The Last Unicorn , accepts readers into the fictional world , rather than cajoling or attempting to convince them of its reality . While The Hobbit is written in a simple , friendly language , each of its characters has a unique voice . The narrator , who occasionally interrupts the narrative flow with asides (a device common to both children 's and Anglo @-@ Saxon literature) , has his own linguistic style separate from those of the main characters .

The basic form of the story is that of a quest , told in episodes . For the most part of the book , each chapter introduces a different denizen of the Wilderland , some helpful and friendly towards the protagonists , and others threatening or dangerous . However the general tone is kept light @-@ hearted , being interspersed with songs and humour . One example of the use of song to maintain tone is when Thorin and Company are kidnapped by goblins , who , when marching them into the underworld , sing :

Clap ! Snap ! the black crack !

Grip , grab ! Pinch , nab !

And down down to Goblin @-@ town

You go , my lad !

This onomatopoeic singing undercuts the dangerous scene with a sense of humour . Tolkien achieves balance of humour and danger through other means as well , as seen in the foolishness and Cockney dialect of the trolls and in the drunkenness of the elven captors . The general form ? that of a journey into strange lands , told in a light @-@ hearted mood and interspersed with songs ? may be following the model of The Icelandic Journals by William Morris , an important literary influence on Tolkien .

= = Critical analysis = =

= = = Themes = = =

The evolution and maturation of the protagonist , Bilbo Baggins , is central to the story . This

journey of maturation , where Bilbo gains a clear sense of identity and confidence in the outside world , may be seen as a Bildungsroman rather than a traditional quest . The Jungian concept of individuation is also reflected through this theme of growing maturity and capability , with the author contrasting Bilbo 's personal growth against the arrested development of the dwarves . Thus , while Gandalf exerts a parental influence over Bilbo early on , it is Bilbo who gradually takes over leadership of the party , a fact the dwarves could not bear to acknowledge . The analogue of the " underworld " and the hero returning from it with a boon (such as the ring , or Elvish blades) that benefits his society is seen to fit the mythic archetypes regarding initiation and male coming @-@ of @-@ age as described by Joseph Campbell . Chance compares the development and growth of Bilbo against other characters to the concepts of just kingship versus sinful kingship derived from the Ancrene Wisse (which Tolkien had written on in 1929) and a Christian understanding of Beowulf .

The overcoming of greed and selfishness has been seen as the central moral of the story . Whilst greed is a recurring theme in the novel , with many of the episodes stemming from one or more of the characters ' simple desire for food (be it trolls eating dwarves or dwarves eating Wood @-@ elf fare) or a desire for beautiful objects , such as gold and jewels , it is only by the Arkenstone 's influence upon Thorin that greed , and its attendant vices " coveting " and " malignancy " , come fully to the fore in the story and provide the moral crux of the tale . Bilbo steals the Arkenstone ? a most ancient relic of the dwarves ? and attempts to ransom it to Thorin for peace . However , Thorin turns on the Hobbit as a traitor , disregarding all the promises and " at your services " he had previously bestowed . In the end Bilbo gives up the precious stone and most of his share of the treasure to help those in greater need . Tolkien also explores the motif of jewels that inspire intense greed that corrupts those who covet them in the Silmarillion , and there are connections between the words " Arkenstone " and " Silmaril " in Tolkien 's invented etymologies .

The Hobbit employs themes of animism . An important concept in anthropology and child development , animism is the idea that all things ? including inanimate objects and natural events , such as storms or purses , as well as living things like animals and plants ? possess human @-@ like intelligence . John D. Rateliff calls this the " Doctor Dolittle Theme " in The History of the Hobbit , and cites the multitude of talking animals as indicative of this theme . These talking creatures include ravens , a thrush , spiders and the dragon Smaug , alongside the anthropomorphic goblins and elves . Patrick Curry notes that animism is also found in Tolkien 's other works , and mentions the " roots of mountains " and " feet of trees " in The Hobbit as a linguistic shifting in level from the inanimate to animate . Tolkien saw the idea of animism as closely linked to the emergence of human language and myth : " ... The first men to talk of ' trees and stars ' saw things very differently . To them , the world was alive with mythological beings ... To them the whole of creation was ' myth @-@ woven and elf @-@ patterned ' . "

= = = Interpretation = = =

As in plot and setting , Tolkien brings his literary theories to bear in forming characters and their interactions . He portrays Bilbo as a modern anachronism exploring an essentially antique world . Bilbo is able to negotiate and interact within this antique world because language and tradition make connections between the two worlds . For example , Gollum 's riddles are taken from old historical sources , while those of Bilbo come from modern nursery books . It is the form of the riddle game , familiar to both , which allows Gollum and Bilbo to engage each other , rather than the content of the riddles themselves . This idea of a superficial contrast between characters ' individual linguistic style , tone and sphere of interest , leading to an understanding of the deeper unity between the ancient and modern , is a recurring theme in The Hobbit .

Smaug is the main antagonist . In many ways the Smaug episode reflects and references the dragon of Beowulf , and Tolkien uses the episode to put into practice some of the ground @-@ breaking literary theories he had developed about the Old English poem in its portrayal of the dragon as having bestial intelligence . Tolkien greatly prefers this motif over the later medieval trend of using the dragon as a symbolic or allegorical figure , such as in the legend of St. George . Smaug

the dragon with his golden hoard may be seen as an example of the traditional relationship between evil and metallurgy as collated in the depiction of Pandæmonium with its " Belched fire and rolling smoke " in Milton 's Paradise Lost . Of all the characters , Smaug 's speech is the most modern , using idioms such as " Don 't let your imagination run away with you ! "

Just as Tolkien 's literary theories have been seen to influence the tale , so have Tolkien 's experiences . The Hobbit may be read as Tolkien 's parable of World War I with the hero being plucked from his rural home and thrown into a far @-@ off war where traditional types of heroism are shown to be futile . The tale as such explores the theme of heroism . As Janet Croft notes , Tolkien 's literary reaction to war at this time differed from most post @-@ war writers by eschewing irony as a method for distancing events and instead using mythology to mediate his experiences . Similarities to the works of other writers who faced the Great War are seen in The Hobbit , including portraying warfare as anti @-@ pastoral : in " The Desolation of Smaug " , both the area under the influence of Smaug before his demise and the setting for The Battle of the Five Armies later are described as barren , damaged landscapes . The Hobbit makes a warning against repeating the tragedies of World War I , and Tolkien 's attitude as a veteran may well be summed up by Bilbo 's comment : " Victory after all , I suppose ! Well , it seems a very gloomy business . "

= = Reception = =

On first publication in October 1937 , The Hobbit was met with almost unanimously favourable reviews from publications both in the UK and the US , including The Times , Catholic World and The New York Post . C. S. Lewis , friend of Tolkien (and later author of The Chronicles of Narnia between 1949 and 1954) , writing in The Times reports :

The truth is that in this book a number of good things , never before united , have come together : a fund of humour , an understanding of children , and a happy fusion of the scholar 's with the poet 's grasp of mythology ... The professor has the air of inventing nothing . He has studied trolls and dragons at first hand and describes them with that fidelity that is worth oceans of glib " originality . "

Lewis compares the book to Alice in Wonderland in that both children and adults may find different things to enjoy in it , and places it alongside Flatland , Phantastes , and The Wind in the Willows . W. H. Auden , in his review of the sequel The Fellowship of the Ring calls The Hobbit " one of the best children 's stories of this century " . Auden was later to correspond with Tolkien , and they became friends . The Hobbit was nominated for the Carnegie Medal and awarded a prize from the New York Herald Tribune for best juvenile fiction of the year (1938) . More recently , the book has been recognized as " Most Important 20th @-@ Century Novel (for Older Readers) " in the Children 's Books of the Century poll in Books for Keeps .

Publication of the sequel The Lord of the Rings altered many critics ' reception of the work . Instead of approaching The Hobbit as a children 's book in its own right , critics such as Randell Helms picked up on the idea of The Hobbit as being a " prelude " , relegating the story to a dry @-@ run for the later work . Countering a presentist interpretation are those who say this approach misses out on much of the original 's value as a children 's book and as a work of high fantasy in its own right , and that it disregards the book 's influence on these genres . Commentators such as Paul Kocher , John D. Rateliff and C. W. Sullivan encourage readers to treat the works separately , both because The Hobbit was conceived , published , and received independently of the later work , and also to prevent the reader from having false expectations of tone and style dashed .

= = Legacy = =

= = = The Lord of the Rings = = =

While The Hobbit has been adapted and elaborated upon in many ways , its sequel The Lord of the Rings is often claimed to be its greatest legacy . The plots share the same basic structure progressing in the same sequence : the stories begin at Bag End , the home of Bilbo Baggins ; Bilbo

hosts a party that sets the novel's main plot into motion ; Gandalf sends the protagonist into a quest eastward ; Elrond offers a haven and advice ; the adventurers escape dangerous creatures underground (Goblin Town / Moria) ; they engage another group of elves (The Elvenking's realm / Lothlórien) ; they traverse a desolate region (Desolation of Smaug / the Dead Marshes) ; they are received and nourished by a small settlement of men (Lake-town / Ithilien) ; they fight in a massive battle (The Battle of Five Armies / Battle of Pelennor Fields) ; their journey climaxes within an infamous mountain peak (Lonely Mountain / Mount Doom) ; a descendant of kings is restored to his ancestral throne (Bard / Aragorn) ; and the questing party returns home to find it in a deteriorated condition (having possessions auctioned off / the scouring of the Shire) .

The Lord of the Rings contains several more supporting scenes , and has a more sophisticated plot structure , following the paths of multiple characters . Tolkien wrote the later story in much less humorous tones and infused it with more complex moral and philosophical themes . The differences between the two stories can cause difficulties when readers , expecting them to be similar , find that they are not . Many of the thematic and stylistic differences arose because Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* as a story for children , and *The Lord of the Rings* for the same audience , who had subsequently grown up since its publication . Further , Tolkien's concept of Middle-earth was to continually change and slowly evolve throughout his life and writings .

== In education ==

The style and themes of the book have been seen to help stretch young readers' literacy skills , preparing them to approach the works of Dickens and Shakespeare . By contrast , offering advanced younger readers modern teenage-oriented fiction may not exercise their reading skills , while the material may contain themes more suited to adolescents . As one of several books that have been recommended for 11- to 14-year-old boys to encourage literacy in that demographic , *The Hobbit* is promoted as " the original and still the best fantasy ever written . "

Several teaching guides and books of study notes have been published to help teachers and students gain the most from the book . *The Hobbit* introduces literary concepts , notably allegory , to young readers , as the work has been seen to have allegorical aspects reflecting the life and times of the author . Meanwhile , the author himself rejected an allegorical reading of his work . This tension can help introduce readers to readerly and writerly interpretations , to tenets of New Criticism , and critical tools from Freudian analysis , such as sublimation , in approaching literary works .

Another approach to critique taken in the classroom has been to propose the insignificance of female characters in the story as sexist . While Bilbo may be seen as a literary symbol of small folk of any gender , a gender-conscious approach can help students establish notions of a " socially symbolic text " where meaning is generated by tendentious readings of a given work . By this interpretation , it is ironic that the first authorized adaptation was a stage production in a girls' school .

== Adaptations ==

The first authorized adaptation of *The Hobbit* appeared in March 1953 , a stage production by St. Margaret's School , Edinburgh . *The Hobbit* has since been adapted for other media many times .

The first motion picture adaptation of *The Hobbit* , a 12-minute film of cartoon stills , was commissioned from Gene Deitch by William L. Snyder in 1966 , as related by Deitch himself . This film was publicly screened in New York City . In 1969 (over 30 years after first publication) , Tolkien sold the film and merchandising rights to *The Hobbit* to United Artists under an agreement stipulating a lump sum payment of £ 10,000 plus a 7.5 % royalty after costs , payable to Allen & Unwin and the author . In 1976 (three years after the author's death) United Artists sold the rights to Saul Zaentz Company , who trade as Tolkien Enterprises . Since then all " authorized " adaptations have been signed off by Tolkien Enterprises . In 1997 Tolkien Enterprises licensed the film rights to Miramax , which assigned them in 1998 to New Line Cinema . The heirs of

Tolkien , including his son Christopher Tolkien , filed suit against New Line Cinema in February 2008 seeking payment of profits and to be " entitled to cancel ... all future rights of New Line ... to produce , distribute , and / or exploit future films based upon the Trilogy and / or the Films ... and / or ... films based on The Hobbit . " In September 2009 , he and New Line reached an undisclosed settlement , and he has withdrawn his legal objection to The Hobbit films .

The BBC Radio 4 series The Hobbit radio drama was an adaptation by Michael Kilgariff , broadcast in eight parts (four hours in total) from September to November 1968 . It starred Anthony Jackson as narrator , Paul Daneman as Bilbo and Heron Carvic as Gandalf . The series was released on audio cassette in 1988 and on CD in 1997 .

The Hobbit , an animated version of the story produced by Rankin / Bass , debuted as a television movie in the United States in 1977 . In 1978 , Romeo Muller won a Peabody Award for his teleplay for The Hobbit . The film was also nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation , but lost to Star Wars . The adaptation has been called " execrable " and confusing for those not already familiar with the plot .

In Decembers of 2012 , 2013 , and 2014 , Metro Goldwyn Mayer and New Line Cinema released one part each of a three part live action film version produced and directed by Peter Jackson . The titles were The Hobbit : An Unexpected Journey , The Hobbit : The Desolation of Smaug , and The Hobbit : The Battle of the Five Armies .

A three part comic book adaptation with script by Chuck Dixon and Sean Deming and illustrated by David Wenzel was published by Eclipse Comics in 1989 . In 1990 a one volume edition was released by Unwin Paperbacks . The cover was artwork by the original illustrator David Wenzel . A reprint collected in one volume was released by Del Rey Books in 2001 . Its cover , illustrated by Donato Giancola , was awarded the Association of Science Fiction Artists Award for Best Cover Illustration in 2002 .

ME Games Ltd (formerly Middle Earth Play by Mail) , which has won several Origin Awards , uses the Battle of Five Armies as an introductory scenario to the full game and includes characters and armies from the book .

Several computer and video games , both licensed and unlicensed , have been based on the story . One of the most successful was The Hobbit , an award winning computer game published in 1982 by Beam Software and published by Melbourne House with compatibility for most computers available at the time . A copy of the novel was included in each game package . The game does not retell the story , but rather sits alongside it , using the book 's narrative to both structure and motivate gameplay . The game won the Golden Joystick Award for Strategy Game of the Year in 1983 and was responsible for popularizing the phrase , " Thorin sits down and starts singing about gold . "

== Collectors ' market ==

While reliable figures are difficult to obtain , estimated global sales of The Hobbit run between 35 and 100 million copies since 1937 . In the UK The Hobbit has not retreated from the top 5 ,000 books of Nielsen BookScan since 1995 , when the index began , achieving a three year sales peak rising from 33 ,084 (2000) to 142 ,541 (2001) , 126 ,771 (2002) and 61 ,229 (2003) , ranking it at the 3rd position in Nielsens ' " Evergreen " book list . The enduring popularity of The Hobbit makes early printings of the book attractive collectors ' items . The first printing of the first English language edition can sell for between £ 6 ,000 and £ 20 ,000 at auction , although the price for a signed first edition has reached over £ 60 ,000 .