



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

J. R. R. Tolkien

A Marxist Reading

B.A. Essay

S. Gestur Stefánsson

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University of Iceland

School of Humanities

Department of English

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S. Gestur Stefánsson

Kt.: 210282-3279

Supervisor: Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir

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Abstract

J. R. R. Tolkien is a world renowned writer that is credited with the revival of the fantasy genre with his hobbit driven epics. His works have sold in the hundreds of millions and his novels have been transposed to films and comics which have been successful in their own right. With such exposure it is inevitable for his works to exert an influence on its audience. To criticize Tolkien's work with the aim of getting a fuller understanding of both the author J. R. R. Tolkien and his works calls for well-defined form of literary criticism. Fortunately there is a school of literary criticism that promises to do just that.

Marxist literary criticism is a form of criticism that is founded in the theories of Karl Marx and can be applied to any literary text. The aim of Marxist literary criticism is to expose the underlying social and political leanings of the author as well as his works. It is a literary criticism that does not only analyse the literary work but also the author himself in order to get a deeper understanding of both. Marxist literary criticism revolves around the idea that the input of an author affects his output, i.e. the condition, environment, education, religion and historical reality of the author affects his writing and the views expressed there within.

Applying Marxist literary criticism to Tolkien and his work, in this case *The Hobbit*, will clarify the political leanings of both the author and the novel. It will bring to the surface political leanings of the author that are infused into his work. The political message of such a beloved novel, with such a huge audience is inevitably of interest to those who have the twin interests of both politics and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
The Hobbit	8
Marxist Literary Criticism and Theory.....	10
Character Analysis	15
A Fairy Tale, sort of	18
J. R. R. Tolkien introduction	20
The story of Tolkien and early influences:	21
Early days	21
Orphan Tolkien	24
Tolkien's Military years	26
Tolkien's academic and writing career	27
In Conclusion	28
Bibliography	30

Introduction

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien has written some of the world's foremost fantasy fiction in works such as *The Hobbit: There and Back Again* (1937), *The Lord of The Rings* (published in three volumes in 1954 and 1955) and *The Silmarillion* (pub. posthumously 1977). His tales of Middle-Earth have been credited for the revival of the fantasy genre in modern times. It is easy to extrapolate his influences merely in terms of copies sold, 150 million copies of *The Lord of the Rings* and 100 million copies sold of *The Hobbit*, it was first published just two years before the start of the Second World War and his second fantasy novel, *The Lord of the Rings* was partially written during the Second World War. Tolkien's works are thought of as fantasy novels. In a fantasy novel the realm in which the story takes place is fictional, such as Tolkien's Middle-Earth, rather than in some version of the real world. Even though these works of fiction are in the realm of fantasy it is important to note that every piece of fiction, no matter how fantastic, is derived from the ideologies of the writer and as such is based in reality. (Jeff419) (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

Tolkien's works of fantasy have reached millions of people as the sales numbers of his novels would suggest. But obviously his audience is not limited to the readers of his novels as there have been number adaptations for other media. The best known adaptations would be Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 2001, *The Two Towers* 2002 and *The Return of the King* 2003). There were of course numerous other adaptations. For instance there was a comic book version made based on Ralph Bakshi's movie, published in three volumes in 1979, 1980 and 1981) and cartoon versions of both *The Hobbit* (*Bilbo Baggins: A Hobbits tale*, Jules Bass & Arthur Rankin Jr. 1978) and *The Lord of the Rings* (Ralph Bakshi 1978) along with a host of other projects. (The Lord of the Rings) (Tolkien Comics) (The Hobbit) (Peter Robert Jackson)

There are common themes running through Tolkien's two best known works. The theme of the unspectacular individual overcoming the odds and becoming the hero runs through both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. There is also the theme of staying true despite the uncertainty of success. There are common themes of heroism and bravery. Obviously there are also strong themes of good and evil. In fact, the battle between good and evil is rarely as obvious

as in Tolkien's most popular works as they incorporate traditions of both myth and fairy tales who are traditionally overt in regard to good and evil. The good characters are mostly honourable, men, elves and dwarfs and they live in relative peace and harmony with their environment while evil is represented by a necromancer who destroys his lands in quest of power and commands legions of goblins. (campbell)

In a historical analysis of one of his works *The Hobbit* we will get some kind of a sense of his ideologies and at the same time learn more about the person behind the children's classic. It is though difficult to keep only to *The Hobbit* in this context as Tolkien's works are so interrelated. Thus referring to Tolkien's other works becomes inevitable and necessary to give a more full reading of Tolkien and his works as a whole. However taking a closer look at *The Hobbit* does provide us with a window into Tolkien's psyche as it is an allegory of his belief system. Marxist literary criticism offers a method that might yield clues as to the underlying ideologies of any writer, at least to an extent. It can help bring to focus otherwise obscure tendencies of a writer and ultimately it will help deciphering the ideologies of Tolkien in their varied complexity. It can perhaps shed a light on his religious background and how it helped shape his mythical world, it might bring to light why his writings have such a strong leaning towards preservation of the natural realm. I would argue that in some ways he was ahead of his times and that his opinions would be popular today, even though he had a religious background which these days is often somewhat frowned upon. He received an excellent education and had a stellar academic career and a writing career. His experiences with nature on the one hand and religion on the other, as a child and an adolescent make him seem as an enlightened individual. He was something a kin to an environmentalist and a humanist with an audience in the hundreds of millions. His influence as such is considerable and the question of the underlying meaning of his works and of his own ideologies becomes relevant.

It was Tolkien's convictions of religion, inspired by his mother and later his guardian, that guided him in the early 20th century and not the humanist movement directly. Tolkien was a proto-environmentalist with an audience in the hundreds of millions whose works were published right about the time the environmental movement, or green movement, started gaining momentum in the 1950's. His ideas of politics, faith, social-system and his thoughts on conservation, or respect for nature, would make him popular among large parts of the current Western World but there is a more controversial aspect to his ideologies. Tolkien was by today's

standards of politics a proto-environmentalist and a quite devout Catholic. Tolkien's texts also suggest that he was in favour of a class system, as he writes about a society that is in essence a feudal system and that system is never challenged. Tolkien was a proto-environmentalist, religious and conservative. In consideration of space I will look to analyse only one of his novels: *The Hobbit*. The analysis of *The Hobbit* along with a look at his life along with historic events and evolutions he lived through will give an insight into Tolkien's ideologies as well as giving insight into his writings. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

The Hobbit

Tolkien's foray into the genre of fantasy literature was written during trying times. What effect the political circumstance of Britain had on *The Hobbit* is somewhat unclear, as Tolkien had written the story before the most polarising events took place. The similarities between the high politics in real life and his fantasy world are there to be seen for anyone who looks for them. The most striking similarity is perhaps between the power struggles behind closed doors. The narrative that the population is familiar with is fundamentally different from that of the ruling class believes. It is however apparent that much of his influences in writing *The Hobbit* were not the turbulent events occurring between the First and Second World War, but rather his earlier experiences of the horrors of the First World War, and predictably his life experiences from his youth appear to have shaped his adult outlook as well. The Hobbit was conceived of and written as a children's book and is a work of fantasy fiction that takes place in an entirely fictional world named Middle-Earth. It is the world in which all of Tolkien's fantasy novels take place. As such it is the most important common thread of his works, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* and various other short stories and poems Tolkien wrote. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography) (Pearce)

The story of *The Hobbit*, *There and Back Again*, revolves around a Hobbit, a halfling, named Bilbo Baggins. He is a character who values peace and quiet along with a good meal higher than most other things. He lives in a sedate rural environment that is at a technological stage we would associate with the middle ages. Bilbo is a land owner and something a kin to aristocracy in his home land called the Shire. Bilbo is a character that is easy to relate to. He is small, a bit chubby and appreciates comfort. He is humorous in a quirky way. He is kind and honourable and he is a character that is easy to trust.

One day the wizard Gandalf the Grey, tricks him into hosting a dinner for a company of dwarfs. They are on a path to take back their ancestral kingdom, known as The Lonely Mountain. It had been taken over by Smaug the dragon. Unbeknownst to Bilbo, Gandalf means for him to take part in the dwarf's journey. Bilbo is quite taken aback when talk of adventure arises:

“Sorry! I don’t want any adventures, thank you! Not today!
 Good morning! But please come to tea – anytime you like! Why not
 tomorrow? Come tomorrow! Goodbye!” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 17)

But Bilbo allowed a meeting in his house nonetheless. Gandalf suggests to the dwarfs that the hobbit would be the group’s burglar. Despite the dwarfs disinterested demeanour they decide to trust in Gandalf’s judgement when he implies that Bilbo might have a trick or two up his sleeve. The dwarfs eventually offer Bilbo a place in their group. Bilbo does not like the idea very much at first but warms to it and decides to go with them on their journey, despite his reservations. Gandalf sees his part in that as if he just gave Bilbo a nudge out the door. Gandalf’s assessment of Bilbo as being someone who possesses the seeds of greatness is appealing to the reader. It makes it seem possible that anyone possess greatness, even the most unlikely of persons if just given the necessary nudge in the right direction.

The companionship of Bilbo, the twelve dwarfs and Gandalf the wizard encounter numerous perils along the way, including trolls, a shape shifter, oversized spiders, goblins, wargs, two types of elves, men and last but not least a dragon. Each encounter helps Bilbo grow as a person and become more self-reliant and of course there is his encounter with Smeagol, or Gollum a creature that at one point had been related to hobbits but had been corrupted by the power of a magical ring. In that episode Bilbo finds Smeagol’s ring and wins a game of riddles deep under a goblin infested mountain. The benign and even childish sounding nature of a game of riddles really belies the morbid stakes. If Bilbo were to lose the contest, he would end up as Gollum’s dinner.

While Bilbo is busy dealing with the various riddles Gollum represents him with, the rest of the company is fighting for their lives against a hoard of goblins. That was only a taste of magical creatures as they encounter a host of them and are seemingly in constant mortal danger. That danger is manifested by Trolls in the opening stages of the journey, goblins and wargs in later stages and then both elves and men that hinder them. It is worth mentioning that when faced with these dangers the company also has allies to help them through, such as the giant eagles and Beron the shape shifter.

Our protagonist, Bilbo, emerges as a hero in his own right, out thinking trolls, fighting giant spiders and generally picking up the slack of Gandalf that appears to be missing half the time, off somewhere on wizard business. Although Gandalf does usually show up just in time to

rescue the company from certain death. The company's journey takes them through the wilderness, they meet the elves' in Rivendell and in the Mirkwood they encounter the wood-elves. Both of whom are people that live in harmony with nature. The journey goes on and they end up in Lakeown where men live in the shadow of the Lonely Mountain, the location of Erebor the dwarfish kingdom. In the Lonely Mountain lies in wait the ultimate challenge, the dragon Smaug. The dragon had taken over the dwarfish kingdom and amassed an incredible hoard of gold, jewels, various precious stones and gems.

Inevitably Bilbo and the dwarfs disturb Smaug when they find a way into the mountain and start looking for the Arcenstone, an heirloom of Thorin. It is the symbol of power that the ruler of Erebor traditionally possessed in order to claim their right to the throne. Smaug then goes on a rampage but is put down by a human bowman in Lakeown after a furious battle. There is some friction afterwards between Bilbo, Thorin, the elves of Mirkwood and people of Lakeown. Thorin means to keep the hoard of gold for himself and sends for dwarfish reinforcements, but both the men of Lakeown and elves of Mirkwood feel they deserve a share. Bilbo is caught in the middle and tries in vain to reconcile the different factions.

Then there is the climax of the story, the battle of the five armies. When the forces of dwarfs, elves and men learn of the goblin and warg army, they quickly band together. With some help from giant eagles and Beron the shape-shifter, the forces of good, i.e. the alliance of men, dwarfs and elves, triumphs. There are some notable characters that perish in the battle the main one being Thorin, who dies of his wounds after the battle. Bilbo refuses a vast majority of his pay, because it is more than he could ever use. He takes only two small chests, one of gold and the other of silver, and returns home extremely wealthy despite taking only a fraction of what he earned. In the end the reserved Bilbo had become a true adventurer in possession of plenty of gold and a magic ring. His position in the shire is unassailable although many of the residents do not appreciate that a gentleman of the Shire went on an adventure to fight a dragon.

Marxist Literary Criticism and Theory

The common foundation of Marxist theory is of course derived from Karl Marx's 1848 *The Communist Manifesto* and 1867's work *Capital* among others. In essence he concerns himself with the relationship between the proletariat (the working class) and the bourgeoisie (upper class). That relationship is defined in terms of control of the economy, or production of goods, i.e. the

base of society. In simple terms it says the upper class is in control of the means of production while the working class provides the labour. The relationship between these two classes goes through certain stages, from the establishment of a society based on the remains of an older society to growing inequities which will lead to revolution and the creation of a new more equal society, it is a cycle of events based on class struggle. The upper class maintains its control of society through hegemony. Hegemony is the control of the upper class of all means of production that forms the economic base on which the legal system, politics, media and culture are based upon, a superstructure. This hegemony then creates a false consciousness with the working class, in other words it is a false interpretation of history and the place of the individual in it. This philosophy applies well to an all-inclusive literary criticism as we will see. (Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism) (Marx)

Marxist literary theory as a method maybe difficult to define and Marxism has many interpretations. It is therefore perhaps best to define Marxist literary criticism in terms of shared goals rather than a shared approach. As Moyra Haslet, a scholar and author on the subject, states in an essay that was a part of *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide and Glossary* (2001):

“The theories of Western Marxism, and especially its cultural theories, have been marked by their divergence from, rather than fidelity to communist dogma and the most deterministic readings of Marx, identified with Engels and Lenin.”(Haslet 68)

Haslet also says that Marxist literary criticism revolves around the relationship of the text and the reality it springs from. She goes on to say that Marxist literary criticism is: “Committed to exposing and challenging the inequities of the capitalist system in its various forms.” (Haslet 67)

Another way to try and understand what Marxist literary criticism is, is to think of it as a way to analyse the often, but not always, obscured political tendencies of a text, and by extension the author as well. The implied political leaning of the author maybe intentional, and reinforcing some political view in a successful or unsuccessful way. Or it could be unintentional and reveal some unintended political meaning or reality of the author. Ideology as it applies, according to Terry Eagleton, to Marxist literary criticism is: the beliefs and ideas of an individual combined,

or as he defines ideology in his book *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976): “ideologies – the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times.” (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* viii) Eagleton further states that in order to understand ideology: “[...] we must analyse the precise relations between different classes in a society; and to do that means grasping where those classes stand in relation to the mode of production.” (Eagleton viii) A Marxist view on literature is, according to Terry Eagleton, that literature is nothing more or less than a social construction derived from the background and ideology of the author. As Marxist literary criticism is more than a sociological approach to literature, dealing with the presence or absence of the working class and the production of said literature, but rather: “Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history.” (Eagleton 3)

The question whether or not a Marxist criticism lends itself to fantasy fiction might not seem straightforward at first glance. But due to the all-inclusive nature of the dialectic method all texts can be viewed in a Marxist light and there is also the fact that Marx himself drew on myths to help clarify his stance to society: “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.” (Marx 160)

To analyse a work of fiction from a Marxist point of view requires that not only must the text be analysed in regards to the form, style, and content. There must also be an equal effort put into looking at the author as an individual, his status or class and the historical events at the time he produced said work of fiction. It is an important form of criticism, at least in the eyes of Marxist critics as they according to Eagleton “[...] warn that we are in danger of forgetting not just how to act but how to think in resistance to capitalism.” (Eagleton vi) This implies Marxist criticism is a method that can provide intellectual resistance in an almost exclusively capitalist society. (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*)

The dialectic method is a method that is created to identify contradictions and resolving them. It is this very method that Marxist criticism rests upon and is crucial to the validity of the approach. George Lukács, a prominent voice in Western Marxism explains his notion of what Marxism is, and that is not an ideology but a method of criticism that holds value in and of itself or as Lukács put it: “It is not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book.” (Lukács 1) And he goes on to say: “It is the scientific conviction that dialectical

materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders." (Lukács 1) As we can see from this quote it is not "belief" that is key, it is the method which is malleable and relevant form of scientific methodology. Marxist reading should also take a look at the power relations within the text in question. The questions of who wields the power and to whom does his power extend are imperative as they are a clue to the intentions of the author, and his intentions are without question derived from the ideology of the author. (Lukács)

There are of course other methods of criticism that wholly discard the author and the poststructuralist Roland Barthes wrote about the death of the author. Barthes spoke in the sense that it was the reader that was the one that gave meaning to the text and he should be the focus point: "Hence it is logical that with regard to literature it should be positivism, resume and the result of capitalist ideology, which has accorded the greatest importance to the author's "person". (barthes) Barthes argued that a single orthodox interpretation of a text was limiting as the multitude of interpretations by different readers was what made texts interesting, that the author was merely a scripter. His idea that the author was a person who simply produced text but did not render it with meaning was in essence what he meant by the "death of the author". Barthes agreed that the author was influenced by the input he was subject to but "[...] it is language which speaks, not the author [...]" (barthes) Even though Barthes disregarded the author and concentrated on the reader, 'the author' remains pivotal in Marxist criticism. As the author is the producer of the text and as such dictates the contents and directs meaning of a text. That makes the author relevant as well as his ideologies as they are the lens through which the author sees the world and thus inevitably influences the production of said text. (barthes) (Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism)

Terry Eagleton speaks of sensitivity to form and function, which raises the question of the form and function of *The Hobbit*. *The Hobbit* falls into a group of writings known as fantasy fiction. It is a term used to describe a genre that is heavily influenced by myth and fairy tale. This genre holds to Joseph Campbell's idea of a hero's journey and that idea is related to the classical epics but the modern epic is written in prose form, not as poetry. *The Hobbit* is a children's novel in the style of that storied tradition of the epic, usually called fantasy fiction today. It is a genre that generally not highly thought of among literary critics as it is perceived to be simplistic or childish, which holds true in the sense that it is on the murky borders between a fairy tale and

fantasy, as it is considered fantasy which inevitably means it has fairy tale elements. Yet works such as *The Hobbit* and the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series do appeal to both younger and older readers blurring the line between adult and youth fiction. This detrimental view holds despite the long and illustrious history of the epic which started its journey through the human psyche as epic poetry, be it *Beowulf* or *Gilgamesh*. Today though the epics are no longer in the form of a poem, it is a long story that takes place in an alternate world, i.e. a fantasy world usually inhabited by magical creatures and persons. The story revolves around an unwilling hero that, at least in case of *The Hobbit*, falls extremely well to the ideas of Joseph Campbell introduced in his ground breaking work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). (campbell) (Eagleton, Marxisim and Literary Criticism)

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Campbell introduces the theory of the monomyth. A theory that looks at all the world's mythic hero's as an expression of a single idea albeit with many variations, i.e. the monomyth. In his theory Campbell speaks of 'the hero's journey'. The hero is an unwilling participant in an adventure, in case of *The Hobbit* Bilbo is given a push out the door. Campbell speaks of rites of passage as an integral part of this journey, or adventure, of the hero: "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)

Bilbo Baggins follows the 'hero's journey' as he goes forth from his idyllic country home and ventures forth into the wilderness, marked by lawlessness and various dangers. There in the wilderness he encounters elves and goblins that either help or hinder his progress. He also finds a magic ring in his adventure in the goblin caves. Bilbo then is part of the victory of the dragon Smaug and survives the battle of the five armies. Bilbo then returns home with plenty of gold and a magic ring that gives him unnaturally long life. Bilbo's tale rhymes well with Campbell's idea of the "hero's journey" as he spoke of magical creatures that either help the hero or hinder it. Campbell also speaks about the acquirement of a life altering treasure, which Bilbo has in the guise of a magical ring. (campbell)

The ideas of Joseph Campbell are useful in relation Marxist literary criticism when the subject at hand is an author and novel of fantasy. Marxist literary criticism is a scientific dialectic method that tries to fully understand a literary work. It strives to explain and expose the power

struggles within a text and the relationship between text and author, and author and society. It sees literature as a product of society and through examining the text, the historical context, the author and his social position. I will try and analyse the complex relationship between the text and the reality it springs from. That means to analyse the author in context with his social position, education and background. It also demands that the historical context of the author to be taken into account, i.e. to take a look at the political and economic situation throughout the life of the author, which mould his ideologies. It also means that the text itself must be analysed in relation to the cast of characters within and the balance of power between them. It is a way to see who wields the power, who are the bourgeoisie, and who is the subject to that power, the proletariat. There is also the question of what the text reveals of the ideology that forms it and how it is realised in the text. There is also the question of what is represented in the text and what is omitted. A Marxist reading aims to answer these questions and to do so there is also helpful to remember Freud's idea of suppressed memories, as it may help to clarify some elements of Tolkien's writing. Freud's work on suppressed memories in the late 19th century is quite useful for literary criticism as it opens a way to explain connections to events that may sneak into the author's writings that the author himself is unaware of. As Freud himself stated in a 1910 lecture *Sigmund Freud Five Lectures On Psychoanalysis* (1910) "[...] that many forgotten memories are not forever lost but merely suspended in the unconscious." (Freud) (Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism)

Character Analysis

The main characters of the story are of course Bilbo, the main protagonist, Gandalf the driving force behind most events in the story and Thorin, the rightful king of the Dwarfs. There are however a few other characters that should be considered important to a Marxist reading of the story and those characters are Smaug the dragon, the Master of Laketown, perhaps the necromancer, and the other wizard of the story Radagast.

To start somewhere let's take a look at Smaug the fire breathing dragon., he is important not only because he takes over the dwarfish kingdom of Erebor and its immense hoard of gold and precious stones, but also because he controls the means of production. The metal smelts, the dwarfs made, are with in his control, even if he sleeps for decades satisfied with his immense wealth, the smelts remain unused. Smaug's greed in other words stands in the way for there being

any more production of the wealth he is so fond of. He is a symbol of both greed and the destruction it can create. Smaug believes himself to be all but invincible, but predictably that is hubris as it turns out that he can be slain. The noble archers from Laketown demonstrate as much when Bard, captain of the Laketown guard, guides an elfish made arrow into the one weak spot of Smaug's impressive armour. Greed, arrogance and power lust are Smaug's downfalls this should be thought of in relation to Smaug's position, as a representative of the upper class. (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*)

The master of Laketown is important too as he is an example of an administrator who is capable and knowledgeable as a leader. He is though ultimately more interested in holding on to power and personal wealth than he is interested in the wellbeing of the people under his charge. He does though step down to allow Beron, captain of the guard to lead the people of Laketown. But he only does so when he can tell he is out of options and cannot hold on to power, a rare instance of a character that is not overtly evil to lose his position of power.

Lord Sauron, the necromancer, is hardly mentioned in the story but is important nonetheless because he is the power that drives action behind the scenes. Gandalf and Thorin mention peak of him thusly: ““We must give a thought to the necromancer.” “Don’t be absurd! He is an enemy quite beyond the powers of all the dwarfs put together, if they could be gathered from the four corners of the world.”” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 35) This bit of conversation implies that the necromancer is one of the most powerful entities in Middle-Earth, an invisible force. The necromancer is even, in essence, Smaugs commander, the invisible hand that guides the forces of evil, if you will. Sauron is the commander that orders the attack of the goblins and wargs after Smaug is felled, even though that information does not feature in *The Hobbit* but *The Quest of Erebor*. (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*) (Tolkien, *The Quest of Erebor*)

And then there is the wizard, Radagast the Brown. He might only play a bit part in *The Hobbit* and is as such only a minor character but he is important nonetheless. Radagast's role as a nature representative and even a voice of nature cannot be understated. Radagast is powerful in his own nature friendly way and oozes with love of all things natural. It is interesting to note that Gandalf holds him in great regard and values his counsel despite Radagast's exceedingly odd appearance and demeanour. His attention and affection to smaller animals that are traditionally considered pests, if they get any attention at all, is reminiscent of the view of the environmentally aware of the present.

Bilbo Baggins is the title character of *The Hobbit*. He is a hobbit, a strange race of humanoids. As stated earlier about Bilbo, hobbits in general are perhaps an allusion to the childlike qualities in each human being, qualities that can be moulded for good or evil, two cases in point are Bilbo and Gollum. Bilbo has kindness of heart that leads him to become the hero of the quest while Gollum is the opposite of that. Gollum, or Sméagol, was a creature like the hobbits at one point, but his greed and cruelty coupled with an extended time in the possession of a magical ring turned him into the monstrous figure known as Gollum, power corrupted him. Hobbits are smaller than humans, also called half-lings, are fond of good food and the comforts of home. Bilbo Baggins is well set in the Shire but a bit strange even among the strange hobbit. For he is both a bachelor and a wealthy hobbit, being the owner of Bag End an ancestral home of the Baggins's. Bag End is a comfortable Hobbit hole in the style of early Hobbit settlement as opposed to the above dwellings that are popular in Bilbo's era. Bilbo is fond of staying home and not doing anything unexpected, as a good Hobbit should. He is though pushed out the door by Gandalf and joins Thorin and the other dwarfs on their journey. The fact that Gandalf was able to push Bilbo out the door to take part in an adventure implies a desire for adventure, despite his own words to the contrary. Bilbo becomes essential to the party as he is often their saviour in difficult situations, at least in conjunction with Gandalf, as in the instance of the trolls and the giant spiders.

Gandalf the Grey is a wizard and a counter point to the necromancer. Gandalf is a character that expects other to do as he says because he always seems to know best, he rarely needs to make his case as most characters take his word for it. There aren't many exceptions but there is Thorin who challenges him on several occasions but is satisfied with Gandalf's answers. Gandalf is therefore the de facto leader of the company. Even though that honour is on paper at least Thorin's. Gandalf is interested in keeping the balance in all things, including the political scene. He is on the side of all that is good and green on this earth, as Tolkien says in *The Lord of the Rings*, against the chaos and darkness, which is personified by the necromancer. Gandalf like Radagast, is a keen believer in the inherent goodness of all things natural. Gandalf is a friend of many strange creatures and shape-shifters including the influential Beron, a shape-shifter who is human but can turn himself into a huge and powerful bear. Gandalf's influence is far reaching and even though not stated in the hobbit, it is said in another tale *The Quest of Erebor* (1980 pub. Posthumously) that he in fact is the instigator for the journey, a part of a scheme to prepare the

northern territories for war with Sauron, the necromancer. Gandalf goes off on his own quite a bit in *The Hobbit* and those episodes form the plot of *The Quest of Erebor*. (Tolkien, *The Quest of Erebor*)

Thorin is a proud dwarf but does not seem very adept to leading the company. Not until they find themselves in battle at least. Thorin leads the company into some trouble and is only saved by either Bildo or Gandalf at the last possible minute. In battle, though, Thorin distinguishes himself. He first puts on herocis display in the tunnels fighting the goblins and then again in the battle of the five armies, even though Thorin is mortally wounded in the battle. Thorin in his dying moments makes his peace with Bilbo whom had had a falling out with and denounces the greed that led to that unfortunate predicament. Thorin Oakenshield is the leader of the dwarf company and the rightful heir of Erebor, or the Kingdom under the Mountain. He is the grandson of Thrór the last king under the mountain. Thrór was the reigning king when Smaug took over Erebor. Thorin is called Oakenshield because he cut an oak branch and used as shield in battle. His display on the battlefield, fighting goblins brought him much acclaim as a warrior, especially among the dwarfs. Thorin is a symbol for the frailties of men, even though he is a dwarf. He shows greed and pompousness in life, qualities that he rejects on his deathbed as he adopts the Hobbit way of thinking, valuing food and merriment above hoards of gold. He has grown as a person but does not live to enjoy his epiphany. The epiphany being that a quiet country life is better than one of great wealth.

A Fairy Tale, sort of

The journey undertaken by the company and described the novel is, among other fairy tale themes incorporated in the story, a quest compatible to Campbell's hero's journey. The company is lead through different landscapes, such as the wilderness, the mountains and the goblin tunnels, and the journeys through each landscape are episodes of an epic quest, all elements of the hero's journey. Although was based on fairy tale format, and clearly is influenced by them, the outcome is not quite what could be called a fairy tale. *The Hobbit* is much too long and complicated a story to be called a fairy tale. The main character is also atypical, at age 50 Bilbo is much older than the typical fairy tale hero. But it is true however that *The Hobbit* hits on most elements of the fairy tale including the magical beings such as trolls, elves, stone giants, goblins, a dragon, wizards to name a few. It also uses devices such as riddles and songs as well as utilising the,

afore mentioned, quest format. There are more examples of fairy tale themes in the story such as repetition, when the dwarfs arrive at Bag End, trolls turning to stone and the slaying of a dragon. It could perhaps be considered to be an extremely long and complicated fairy tale with an unusual protagonist. (Campbell)

The tone and narrative style of the novel is in many ways typical of a children's novel as it is friendly and simple, the reader is introduced to the most amazing sights such as trolls as if they were a matter of fact, and not something that is a strain to believe. The narrator is all knowing, a third-person omniscient narrative voice and helps the reader by underscoring or explaining the relations between the different characters and settings. The narration helps the reader connect different episodes and also simplifies the task of keeping track of different characters. This narrative approach is appealing both to children and adults and as a result it reaches a universal audience.

The most important and most pervasive themes of *The Hobbit* are the classic themes of literature. Tolkien manages to make the question of good and evil all pervasive. There is hardly a character or place that cannot be characterised as either good or evil in the entire world of Middle-Earth. Bilbo, our protagonist is good and honest, kind and reliable a true symbol of that which is good in humanity, while his enemies are foul creatures, both in terms of disposition and appearance, the pure malice demonstrated by Smaug for example is an epitome of evil. Good in the face of concentrated malice is doomed if not for another characteristic that is frequent in Tolkien's works, and that is the act of staying true, despite negative odds. Bilbo has several opportunities to flee and save his own skin in the story, but despite the obvious option of running, he stays true every step of the way. It is true however that Bilbo had a little disagreement with Thorin at one point which ended with Bilbo stealing Thorin's prize, the Arkenstone. Bilbo did that in the mistaken belief that he could be of help by doing so, not out of malice or greed. In the end the deadlock was only broken when the goblins and wargs attacked, forcing the men, dwarfs and elves to band together.

The act of staying true demands another quality, at least in the setting of Middle-Earth, and that is bravery. There are heroes abound in *The Hobbit*, the dwarfs in the company, Gandalf, Bilbo, Beorn the shape shifter, Captain Bard and the eagles just to name a few. The story and its progression truly depends on heroism, otherwise there simply would not be a story to tell. The dwarfs would not have come to Bilbo, Bilbo would not have left Bag End and Gandalf would be

some altogether different character. Heroism and goodness, along with the act of staying true are the themes that if missing would destroy the story and turn it into something else entirely.

J. R. R. Tolkien introduction

The Hobbit: There and back again was Tolkien's first fantasy novel, it was written in trying times. In 1929 the American stock market crashed and brought about a worldwide recession. The recession even spilled over to being a depression and had a catastrophic effect on British industry. Unemployment reached new heights in 1932 when just shy of 3.5 million people found themselves out of work as the very industries, which had been the backbone of the nation's industry, faltered. (The Depression of the 1930s)

During the great depression Tolkien was in England working as a professor, he was married and a father of four, as such he was lucky to have a steady job. In his spare time he would tell his children a story about a hobbit that lived in a hole in the ground. The story about the hobbit grew and eventually became *The Hobbit*, the renowned children's novel. Despite the recession Tolkien was encouraged to publish his novel. The recession might not have damaged Tolkien's chances of publication but the effects were felt elsewhere. The recession made it possible for extreme forms of ideology to flourish and paved the way directly, or indirectly for fascist as well as Communist factions to gain popularity and even to ascend to power. Fascism was gaining popularity as was Communism. The popularisation of extreme political views during economic downturns is well documented, and in particular has there been shown a light on the unfortunate circumstances in which Hitler and Lenin came to power. Austerity causes unrest and adverse reactions to prevailing political parties and governments who are seen, rightly or wrongly, as being responsible for the crisis and thus extreme political movements grew precariously from the end of the First World War. It was in this volatile environment that Tolkien penned *The Hobbit*. (Gardiner) (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

These were times of radicals. The Russian revolution had taken place. Stalin was firmly in control of Russia, preceded by Lenin who took charge after the 1918 revolution. In Germany Adolf Hitler had risen to power through treachery, deceit and murder. Both of these leaders, Hitler and Stalin, implemented huge government projects that were designed to imprison or exterminate certain undesirable individuals of the population, such as in Hitler's Germany where minorities were systematically eradicated. This in essence split Europe into two sides, the east

and the west. It was a culmination of political tensions that had been brewing since 1918 or the end of the First World War. (Llewellyn, hitler and stalin) (Llewellyn, “Nazi Germany”, Alpha History <http://alphahistory.com/nazigermany/>)

Despite Hitler’s belligerent actions that threatened the peace and stability in Europe there was an appeasement movement with considerable power within Europe’s respective governments. This was especially true of Great Britain and the British government. The appeasement movement’s aim was to avoid war with Germany through various concessions. These concessions, including the unopposed annexing of Austria and Czechoslovakia, were motivated by the hope of avoiding the devastation of the First World War. It was not to be, as Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and started the Second World War. These events inevitably had some influence over the writer we know as Tolkien. The political manoeuvrings of both Hitler and Stalin went through are reflected in some ways in *The Hobbit*. The necromancer is behind the scenes manipulating the course of events and building up his military force and could very well be influenced by either Stalin or Hitler. To figure out what the truth of the matter is, it is imperative to study what influenced Tolkien and so we are forced to take a closer look at Tolkien himself. (Llewellyn, hitler and stalin) (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*)

The story of Tolkien and early influences:

Early days

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in 1892. His younger brother Hilary was born two years later, both were born in South-Africa. More specifically, they were born in Orange Free State now called Free State Province, in the town of Bloemfontein. His father Arthur was a bank manager at the British bank headquartered there. It was a country in the grips of apartheid and would reflect in some ways the brutality and inhumane treatment of some European leaders later in the 20th century. Apartheid would not be abolished until a century later in 1989. Tolkien later commented on apartheid in South Africa, saying: “The treatment of colour nearly always horrifies anyone going out from Britain.” (Carpenter 73) Tolkien’s wording in this letter to his son Christopher is cautious as he allows for the possibility of there being Britons who would not be horrified by the treatment. Perhaps that is in and of itself a mark of radicalisation of Britain in his times. He was not sure he could speak for everyone despite it being against acts that are today

universally condemned. This cautious wording of what we today would consider a universal sentiment can be seen as a hint that Tolkien had some understanding of the single-mindedness of what he considered evil, or the unjust, and helped shape the forces of the antagonists both in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. These sentiments mirror both humanist and religious sentiment. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

Tolkien's early life was that of an aristocrat, even though his family had no titles and were on paper not of noble birth. Tolkien's mother was of a family that had some fame in the midlands. Her grandfather had been a successful business man even though her family wealth was all but gone by the time she gained permission to marry Arthur Tolkien, J.R.R. Tolkien's father, her father was reluctant to allow a marriage to what he considered a German immigrant. The Tolkien name was German and indeed was the family lineage traced back to German's who immigrated to England in the 18th century. The Tolkien family's lifestyle though, was akin to that of aristocrats. The family lived in a big house with several servants and his father had a big salary. These circumstances are similar to those of our title character in Bilbo Baggins. Bilbo is a well off individual living an upper-class existence in nice accommodations and servants helping with the daily work load. (Carpenter, The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien) (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

There are a few anecdotes from this period which promise to be fruitful in trying to cast a light on at least some of the themes in Tolkien's later writings, despite the fact that Tolkien himself claimed that he had little or no recollection of the events but Freud's theory of repressed memories does imply that despite Tolkien's own lack of memory these events may have cropped up subconsciously. One story goes that Tolkien was bitten by a baboon spider at the age of three and suffered some illness consequently. This story could feasibly help explain the giant spiders in his later works, as a baboon spider is rather large. A baboon spider is a spider of the tarantula family, also known as bird eaters. Tolkien also had the rather unique experience of being kidnapped, and held overnight, by a servant who wanted to show off Tolkien's good looks. Tolkien was brought back unharmed. Again, this story promises to be able to help the reoccurring themes of being captured or kidnapped in his later works but Tolkien had little or no recollection of the event. Yet according to Freud the link could be subconscious. Further implications of these episodes, and especially the latter one could influence Tolkien's choice to portray every servant in his main works to be loyal to their masters as the servant apparently wished no harm to

Tolkien but was infatuated by his good looks. (Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*)
(Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*)

When Tolkien was only three years old, in 1896, he left for England from South Africa, along with his mother and younger brother for what was supposed to be a visit, his father was supposed to follow them soon after. Arthur Tolkien fell ill before he could join his young family and died soon after. That tragic event transformed the Tolkien family. After Arthur's death Tolkien's mother was left without a steady income and was forced to move to her parents in Birmingham. That arrangement was only temporarily though as the family moved around quite a bit in the following years. They lived in several different locations during the next few years, either in, or bordering Birmingham. During these childhood years Tolkien was fortunate enough to be able to explore various striking landscapes of nature. There was a forest named Mosley Bog adjacent to Sarehole where he lived in 1890's. It was during this time that Tolkien developed an affinity for trees. Joseph Pearce speaks of this in his biography about Tolkien and quotes him: "One day they cut it down. They didn't do anything with it: the log just lay there. I never forgot that." Tolkien was talking about a tree that had been cut down for no apparent reason, that kind of disrespect to nature was something he despised. (Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*) (Pearce)

Tolkien's acquaintance of Mosley Bog could very well be the inspiration for Old Forest in Middle-Earth. Old Forest is described as being dense and mostly made up of oak and ash and as such is reminiscent of Mosley Bog as it is also dense. Also in Sarehole there is a mill that found its way into Tolkien's writings along with a college that stood on a hill. That college could very well be the inspiration of Bag End, as it is rumoured that the hill is riddled with tunnels. His time spent exploring nature would awaken in him a deep respect for nature and all things wild and put him on a course of being a conservationist in the modern sense of the word. It is telling of Tolkien to point out that he reached his stance on environmental issues through his admiration of God's work and not because he had any practical information that might influence his stance. (Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*)

During this same period Tolkien, and his younger brother, were educated by their mother, Mabel. Mabel thought her son was an excellent student and she taught him various subjects but young Tolkien seemed to have a particular liking for languages. He could read and write at very early age and soon after learned some rudimentary Latin. In the days of Tolkien's youth he would experiment with creating languages, first with his cousins and later on his own. He would of

course later use his linguistic creativity to enhance Middle-Earth as he assigned his own made up languages to some of the different races in Middle-Earth. Tolkien's creation of the different races of Middle-Earth is quite fascinating as he endows different races with different human traits. The Goblins are greedy and belligerent. The elves are for the most part noble and fair, but capable of demonstrating vengeance. The dwarfs are greedy but hardworking and value material wealth above all things. In that sense every race that inhabits Middle-Earth is a demonstration of both human frailties and strengths. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

When Tolkien was eight years old his mother, Mabel, converted to Catholicism. This was in the year 1900. Her conversion was despite considerable uproar from her Baptist family. Mabel had despite her strong character and will, fallen ill as she suffered from diabetes. At the time diabetes was an incurable disease. Four short years later, in 1904, she would die from her illness, full two decades before insulin was invented. She passed on to her son a great respect for religion and the Catholic Church. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

Orphan Tolkien

After his mother's passing Tolkien and his brother were entrusted to the care of a Catholic priest. Father Francis was a good friend of Mabel who liked him immensely but did not particularly respect his intellect.

“Francis Morgan was not a man of great intellect, but he had an immense fund of kindness and humour and a flamboyance that was often attributed to his Spanish connections.” (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography 12)

He was handed the task of making sure the Tolkien brothers would get a good education and become good Catholics, as per their mother's wishes. Fr. Francis was according to Tolkien himself an upper-class conservative but also taught him valuable lessons regarding forgiveness and charity. It was something that would influence his character creation later on as a writer. Tolkien would frequently speak about forgiveness in his work and usually bestows it upon powerful or particularly decent characters, such as Bilbo as seen when he spares Gollum in the goblin tunnels or Gandalf who is often quick to anger but also forgives quickly. Forgiveness was

not only a theme of his writing but also of his personal life i.e. Tolkien spoke of forgiveness in a letter to his friend C.S. Lewis, creator of the *Narnia* series: “Of course, the power of mercy is only delegated and is always exercised with or without cooperation by Higher Authority.” (Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 127) Here Tolkien not only speaks of forgiveness but alludes to his strong faith. Tolkien’s mother untimely demise taught him about perseverance in the face of adversity and showed him first-hand what dedication to one’s children looks like. Tolkien thought of his late mother as saintly due to her dedication and love she showed him and his brother. The lessons learned there were perhaps among the most influential lessons of character he would receive, at least until his involvement in the Great War. (Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*)

Tolkien’s love life was rather unique. Tolkien was 16 years old when he fell in love with a girl named Edith Mary Bratt. She was an orphan and a reportedly a talented piano player. Tolkien and she fell deeply in love, but the fledgling romance was soon stopped. Fr. Francis found out about the romance quickly after it started and when he did, he forbade Tolkien to see his beloved Edith or have any contact with her, until he turned 21 years old. Those were conditions that Tolkien followed exactly. The night before Tolkien turned 21 years old he wrote a letter to Edith proclaiming his love for her. Tolkien went on to express his desire for them to be married. She was betrothed to another when she received the letter but broke it off in favour of Tolkien. It is in some ways reminiscent of a fairy tale. When viewed from a certain perspective it is easy to see his own love life to be a precursor to some the love stories and romances in his literary works. And it must be said, that he did say as much, attributing several characters to his wife, including Lúthien the most beautiful among the Children of Ilúvatar, a race of elves. Lúthien forsook her immortality to be with a human. (Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography*)

Tolkien was not just influenced by the people and places of natural beauty that he saw as a child. Tolkien was also influenced by romantic medieval paintings, by for example Edward Burne-Jones and the architecture of buildings he would have known from his youth. There was a tower by his school in Edgbaston it was built in the late 19th century. The tower has crept into his most famous works, both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Tolkien’s influences are many and it would be impossible to mention them all so it must suffice to mention but one more from this period. In 1911 Tolkien went on a summer holiday to Switzerland. There he saw the Alps who had a strong influence on Tolkien in their majesty and beauty. They are also represented in

The Hobbit in the guise of the Misty Mountains. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)
(Pearce)

Tolkien's Military years

In 1914 Tolkien entered the Military on a special contract that would see him graduate with a degree before entering the service of the Royal Army. Some of his relatives were surprised to see that Tolkien did not join the army straightaway. But Tolkien graduated with a degree in the English Language and Literature in 1915. He was then commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Army and spent about a year in training with the 13th Battalion before being sent to France as a signals officer with the Lancashire Fusiliers. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

Tolkien had not been in France for long before he saw first-hand, the horrors of World War I. It was in July 1916 that Tolkien took part in the battle of the Somme. The battle of the Somme was a fierce battle that is today best known for the first successful deployment of armour vehicles, forerunners of the present day tank. Both the loss of his friends and fellow soldiers through sniper fire and German artillery bombardment haunted him. Tolkien on top of that nerve-racking experience had to find a way to endure the cold, wet, unsanitary and generally miserable conditions created by trench warfare. As previously stated, Tolkien took part in some famous battles of World War I, including the attack on the Leipzig Salient and Schwaben Redoubt both part of the battle of the Somme. After taking part in these famous battles Tolkien was lucky enough to fall ill to Trench Fever and be sent home to England for treatment. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography) (Carpenter, The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien) (Howard)

As Tolkien was being treated in England his old battalion was all but wiped out in France, he lost many of his friends from training. Tolkien spent the remainder of his military career either in treatment or performing light duties in various barracks until he was discharged. It was during this time that Edith bore them their first child. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

These terrible experiences of war clearly influenced Tolkien as a writer as he wrote poems and short stories inspired by his time as a soldier. But his experiences in war also reinforced his religious devotion, in that religion demands certain steadfastness of belief in face of overwhelming adversity. This steadfastness of religion is clearly reinforced by the soldiers' ethic, which is to follow orders despite it often being akin to suicide. This strength of character is essential to the business of war, without it no army would ever function. These experiences are

also echoed in his literary works as his characters often endure terrible hardships in relation to battle and warfare. His characters often show tremendous courage against, seemingly, impossible odds. Those sentiments are reflected in *The Hobbit* in the way that under no circumstances does Bilbo give up or stray from his mission, not when he is in terrible danger in Mirkwood of being eaten by giant spiders nor does he flee in the face of a dragon. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography) (Carpenter, The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien)

Tolkien's academic and writing career

After the Great War Tolkien's academic career took off, he started working for the Oxford English Dictionary. There he was researching the etymology of words of German origin. It was not long after that that he became the youngest professor on staff at the University of Leeds. Tolkien had great success with his academic work and was his critique of Beowulf especially well received. Tolkien won much acclaim for various other feats of academia as well, some of which would become the standard text in their respective fields. In 1925 Tolkien became a professor of Pembroke College, as a so called Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, a post he would hold until his retirement in 1959. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography)

Tolkien's academic career is characterised by subjects that require heavy research and a steady mind, exactly the kind of research that one would expect being done at the Oxford English Dictionary. But for our purposes it is perhaps his analysis of Beowulf that the most relevant to *The Hobbit*. Tolkien's analysis of the epic poem Beowulf is a land mark in Anglo-Saxon literature. In his 1936 paper *Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics* Tolkien talks in some depth about some commonly overlooked elements of Beowulf and he talks up the importance of the fantastical elements in Beowulf. That means that Beowulf should be read as art and not just looked at in the traditional sense. The traditional idea was to concentrate on the historical elements of the poem. Tolkien's analysis is important to *The Hobbit* in the sense that Tolkien's take on Grendel and the dragon, the antagonists of Beowulf, is that they are central to the story and not an afterthought. This view is reflected in *The Hobbit* as Smaug the dragon is indeed central to story. He is the foe that drove the dwarfs from their homelands and represents culmination of the challenge the company faces in their epic journey. (Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien a Biography) (Pearce) (Tolkien, Beowulf-the-Monsters-and-the-Critics)

In Conclusion

J.R.R. Tolkien was a man with a background that would probably only be possible in an empire such as Great Britain. He spent his first years on this earth living in South-Africa, a colony to Great Britain. He lost his father at an early age and lived with his mother in England until her untimely death. Tolkien got an excellent education and was indoctrinated into Catholicism as he was provided for by a catholic priest. He also fought for Britain in the First World War, which affected him on a personal level as he lived through the horrors of trench warfare and lost many friends. The loss of his companions from the army is reflected in his works as even though *The Hobbit* is considered a children's novel some of the main characters on the side of the protagonist die. It could be noted that his upbringing is very much in keeping with a privileged upbringing. Despite the hardships accompanied by being orphaned at an early age Tolkien must be construed as a member of the upper class as he is gifted with the educational privileges associated with the upper class, the bourgeoisie according to Marx.

While writing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien utilised the specialised knowledge, obtained during his academic career, which has traditionally been linked to the upper class, to endow his novel with traits of the fairy tale, forever connecting *The Hobbit* to a role as a children's novel. Much as the real world of Tolkien, the world of Bilbo is effectively divided up by two power blocks. In the case of Middle-Earth the power blocks represent good and evil, or god and the devil. On the side of good there is a loose conglomeration of free races that more or less live in harmony with nature. The common factor among the free races is that they all seem to respect Gandalf and his opinions. Gandalf is symbol of the almighty while the necromancer represents the devil, but can also be construed to represent either Hitler or Stalin in their war preparation. It is interesting though that it is never a question of avoiding war as war seems inescapable in Tolkien's Middle-Earth. This reflects a traditional member of the upper class, someone who is educated, has a respectable career, has military experience and in the case of *The Hobbit*, writes about a feudal system and how the 'rightful' ruler takes back his kingdom. There is however in one area that Tolkien is not traditionally upper class in his thinking and that is when it comes to his thoughts on nature. Tolkien's respect for nature is indeed a sign of a proto-environmentalist as respect leads to understanding and understanding calls for protection of nature. Viewed in a Marxist light it is the continuation of a feudal system and complete lack of attention to the working class that is the most important as it focuses on the upper class and its continuation.

All the main characters of *The Hobbit* are upper class by birth and fight to either maintain or regain their birth right. Gandalf is in the role of a politician as he manoeuvres to prepare for an inescapable war with the representation of evil, the necromancer and ultimately is working to maintain a feudal system by aiding Thorin in regaining his kingdom. This suggests that Tolkien views war as inescapable and is also sympathetic towards the aristocracy. That sentiment can be tied in with his religion, as Catholicism describes a god that is in essence an all-knowing and benevolent monarch. The political systems of *The Hobbit* do reflect the monarch of the Catholic Church and are systems meant to concentrate power and wealth at the expense of the working class. Bilbo is also a beneficiary of maintaining the existing feudal system as he is a rich land owner and winds up richer and more powerful than he was before, thanks to a magic ring.

Tolkien's Catholicism impacts his ideologies and normalises the idea of a monarch in tandem with the fact that he was a subject of the British Empire, a country with a history draped with kings and queens. This makes it seem that he covets a world with a just, benevolent and loving monarch. In other words Tolkien was conservative, Christian and a proto-environmentalist. In regard to environmentalism he seems to have been ahead of his time and his message resonated across the globe in the guise of fantasy novels but at the same time promote the idea of the birth right and monarchs.

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