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## Song Lyrics in The Hobbit: What They Tell Us

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Song Lyrics in *The Hobbit*: What They Tell Us

by

Thalia McInnis Trussell

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of Honors Requirements

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tolkien is argued by many to be the author of the century, a legend, and the kickstart to the fantasy genre. Despite these claims, there is very little research done about the song lyrics in his works, especially not in *The Hobbit*. I have analyzed how the song lyrics show the relationship with time and history of each race—dwarves, elves, hobbits, and goblins—and how their values are shown through their lyrics.

***Keywords: Tolkien, The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings, Songs, Music, Hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, Goblins, Values***

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Logan Trussell, who has been with me for all of the ups and downs of the project, as well as my parents who have supported me through the good days and bad days alike.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER I : Introduction

Tolkien first came up with the idea for *The Hobbit* by writing on a student's paper "In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit" (*Hobbit* 1). So began the process of creating the world of fantasy, music, and adventure that is *The Hobbit*. It is widely researched and discussed among scholars, but there is an aspect that is overlooked: the lyrics. Tolkien scholars have said little about how the lyrics of *The Hobbit* show each race's relationship with time and history, at least as far as my research has taken me, and I have looked at many potential sources.<sup>1</sup> Even the likely critical studies and biographies such as *The Great War and Modern Memory* by Paul Fussell, *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon* by Brian Rosebury, and *Splintered Light, Logos and Languages in Tolkien's World* by Verlyn Flieger tend to be evaluations of his influences and early life rather than his works. If they are not about his early life, they are about the success of his career, Duriez's biography claiming that Tolkien was a legend, Shippey's that he was the author of the century, and many others that praise him and his work. Even then, none of them focus on music, especially the lyrics. They may mention it occasionally, with phrases such as "Music, the initiating force and the design in which all is contained" (Flieger 57), or "his mother and sisters played the piano" (Carpenter 18). These quotes allude to the influence music had in Tolkien's life, but they do no more than that.

J. R. R. Tolkien is an important author. His books reinvigorated the fantasy genre, especially the epic fantasy genre. *The Hobbit* (1937) is one of his important works. It is a

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<sup>1</sup> I have searched three different databases (JSTOR, Google Scholar, and WorldCat) as well as the databases of several different universities to which USM students are granted access (Pennsylvania, Oxford, Signum, Brigham Young, and California) to see if they had online resources that we lacked. I searched terms such as *music in culture*, *music in Tolkien*, *Tolkien and races*, *music and races in the Hobbit*, as well as various searches using similar wording.

fantasy novel that even eighty-five years later is still a best-seller, with twelve editions published since 2000 and translations in 69 different languages. The song lyrics are an overlooked aspect of *The Hobbit*, with little research having been done on them. Critics and biographers such as Tom Shippey, Colin Duriez, and Humphrey Carpenter write about his life, but song lyrics are not a part of their otherwise excellent discussions, even though the lyrics in *The Hobbit* are a fruitful source of information about the various races Tolkien invented and helped bring to life.

Tolkien's lyrics are part of his meticulous world-building, of which Lewis said, "*The Hobbit* was merely a fragment torn from the author's huge myth and adapted for children" (Lewis 129). Tolkien is recognized as one of the most efficient worldbuilders, as I will further detail in the literature review. The songs in *The Hobbit* are an essential part of Tolkien's effective world-building. It has been argued by many<sup>2</sup> that Tolkien is a master of world-building. C. S. Lewis said of the world of *The Hobbit*,

To define the world of *The Hobbit* is, of course, impossible, because it is new.

You cannot anticipate it before you go there, as you cannot forget it once you have gone. The author's admirable illustrations and maps of Mirkwood and Goblingate and Esgaroth give one inkling—and so do the names of the dwarf and dragon that catch our eyes as we first ruffle the pages. (66).

Indeed, three essential traits of worldbuilding are geography, culture, and history (Pezzini par 2). Tolkien drew multiple maps of his world before coming to a final decision.

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<sup>2</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien; A Biography* 164-187; Colin Duriez, *J. R. R. Tolkien, The Making of a Legend* 124; Brian Rosebury, *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon*, 193-220; Tom Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*; Paul Fussell *The Great War and Modern Memory* 114-155, and Verlyn Flieger, *Splintered Light; Logos and Languages in Tolkien's World* 34-40.

Geography gives a world more depth, especially if the characters have to travel, as Bilbo and the dwarves do. For instance, Tolkien's having identified water sources allows readers to know that the character can get water when they need without the author's describing it every time. It also acts as a good boundary for land areas, such as continents or countries. As Bilbo travels such a long way, Tolkien names several sources of water that they cross to get to the Lonely Mountain. Part of the reason water is so important to Bilbo's journey is that not all water is safe. When Bombur falls into the water after being startled by a deer, he falls into a deep sleep, which indicates that there is something in the water. When Tolkien created maps of his world, he made that world more realistic. It also opened the door for other stories to emerge from the same world, just in different countries. One indication of the extent of Tolkien's world-building is Diana Wynne Jones's satirical guide to bad Tolkien imitations, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, an A-Z tour guide of the deficiencies in medievalized fantasies published since *The Lord of the Rings*. Her very first words emphasize the importance of a map:

## TO USE THIS BOOK

### **What to do first**

[1.] Find the MAP. It will be there. No tour of Fantasyland is complete without one.

Indeed, Tolkien popularized the use of maps in fantasy works. He used maps so often and so effectively that Shippey titled one of his chapters in *Tolkien: Author of the Century* “*The Lord of the Rings* (1): Mapping Out a Plot” (50-111).

The second effective trait of worldbuilding is culture. Elves, for example, are typically more lighthearted and playful in their songs than the dwarves, who are solemn and serious. I will have much to say below about how the various races’ cultures are embedded in their songs. The third trait of effective worldbuilding is creating a history of the world. *The Silmarillion* is such a history about the creation of the world and each race, though it is only the tip of the iceberg of the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* that were published by Christopher Tolkien during the decades after his father’s death and before his own. In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien indicates his interest in music, as in how the world was created through song. Music acts as a means of unity in this book, as the world is given a song to create harmony amongst all living things that inhabit it. In this book, music also represents emotions such as unity, fear, anger, distrust, happiness, and safety. So present is music in *The Silmarillion* that it is particularly surprising that there are so few studies of Tolkien and music, as it stands for creation. The elves created the world through music, men came in and created harmony, and then the dark elves created chaos and disruption.

Authors agree that Tolkien was influenced by his experiences and the world around him. While creating the hobbits, he took many of the qualities he saw in himself and gave them to the little creatures. Tolkien himself stated that “I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like

good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats” (BBC interview). Despite talking lifestyle similarities to that of a hobbit, he was first and foremost a linguist. He was fascinated with the study of language and learned 35 languages<sup>3</sup> in addition to English, both in modern and ancient tongues (Carpenter, *passim*). He especially focused on the elves, making sure to make grammar rules and speech patterns that would reflect in elvish writing. Tolkien spoke very highly of the elven language, even making the offhand comment in his interview with BBC that rather than English, "I should have preferred to write in Elvish" (BBC Interview). He created fifteen different Elvish languages, along with languages for the Ents, the Orcs, the Dwarves, the men and the Hobbits; he even created a separate sign language for the dwarves to communicate in while working with the loud forges (Shippey, *Road to Middle-earth*).

*The Hobbit* and its popular sequel *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>4</sup> both have song lyrics written by Tolkien. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus mainly on *The Hobbit*, with occasional references to the other, as *The Hobbit* is shorter which makes it a better length for an undergraduate thesis.

The dwarves, who will be the first race I discuss, are a noble race obsessed with ancestry and the past. They tend to sing in past tense and focus on events that happened before the beginning of the book. The dwarves take on the role of informants from which readers learn about the events before the story began. When the novel starts, readers are

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<sup>3</sup> This is the number of languages Humphrey Carpenter mentioned throughout his book that Tolkien knew.

<sup>4</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* was written as one volume but had to be printed as three different volumes due to paper shortages during World War I. Because Tolkien imitators thought he had written a trilogy, fantasy trilogies have been produced in great numbers and continue to be published as such.

introduced to Bilbo Baggins who has never left the Shire, so he is not a reliable informant on world events. The dwarves, however, travel far and wide and have many songs referring to their own history. Dwarven history is important to the story, as their past is the catalyst for the action of getting their gold back from the dragon. The dwarves value ancestry, history, loyalty, and bravery. The second race I will discuss is the elves. The elves are one of the oldest races in the books,<sup>5</sup> partially because they are so long lived. Elves are immortal and will not die of natural causes. Tolkien plays with immortality in his novel. The first definition of immortal is living forever, unable to be killed or die of natural causes, but Tolkien changes this definition for his elves. The elves can be killed if another living creature decides to take their life. Otherwise, the elves age very slowly and stop aging once they are in peak condition, which is why most elves are beautiful and agile. Their immortality makes their values quite different from the dwarves. They do not have to sing about the past, as most of them have lived through it. The elves sing for fun and also provide plot points for readers. Often, the elves tell readers details that would not otherwise be known, as I will discuss later. Their songs show the unity of the elven people and the respect the elves have for all other creatures, both living and nonliving. The elves are the only race in which we see different kinds. We see both Light-elves, which are the elves of Rivendell, and Sea elves, or the elves of Mirkwood. The Sea elves have been rebranded as wood elves since they no longer live by the water. The hobbits and goblins, whom I will discuss last, share a chapter. Neither race has many songs throughout the book, so I thought it best to combine them. Hobbit songs are difficult to

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<sup>5</sup> The other ancient race are the wizards, but I will not be discussing them in this thesis as Tolkien records no songs for them in *The Hobbit*.

analyze based only on *The Hobbit*, as we only see Bilbo singing, so for hobbits, I will be pulling more references from *The Lord of the Ring* than I will in any other chapter. The goblins do not sing with much purpose outside of striking fear into their next victim. As I will discuss, goblins sing in present tense, only focusing on what is immediately happening. They do not care about the past or the future, which includes the immediate future. They are only concerned with the situation they are going through at that moment. I will be going into detail about each race in the following chapters.

### Biography

J. R. R. Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa on January 3, 1892. His mother raised him as a single parent after his father died, and she pushed her son to further his education as much as he could. This push from Tolkien's mother may have had a significant influence on introducing his passion for writing. Tolkien grew up on the verge of poverty. Mable Tolkien, his mother, made a vow to herself that she would do everything in her power to make sure her children did not end up in the same financial situation she lived in. During his childhood, money was a concern. His mother died of diabetes when he was twelve, leaving him an orphan. He never quite fit in with the other boys his age, nor did he fit in with most of the children in his town. When he went off to school, however, that was when he found his friends. He found like-minded people who helped him along in his journey, such as Father Francis, a Roman Catholic priest who guided Tolkien through most of his young adult life, the father figure that Tolkien did not have before. Father Francis helped Tolkien all through his schooling and provided a listening ear for the young man. Many years later, Father Francis disapproved of Tolkien's courting of his future wife, Edith Bratt, but the two men remained close until

Father Francis's death in 1935. This connection to the Catholic Church also could have influenced Tolkien's view of music. The church had many hymns and musical numbers that Tolkien enjoyed, many of them narratives of what Christ went through on the cross. This narrative style of singing may have influenced him, particularly with the elves, as they sing narrations and allow readers to gain insight into the current situation.

Another influence on Tolkien's writing was the war. Some veterans, such as his friend C. S. Lewis, took comfort in writing about war and their experiences, Tolkien, however, took a different approach. Tolkien actively avoided any mention of the war and gave as few details as he could on the subject. I will talk about this more when I talk about "Misty Mountains" in the dwarf chapter.

Many cultures have used music or oral stories as a way to pass on traditions. The story may take the form of a parable or ballad. Native Americans passed their stories through the generations by raising their children with certain songs, dances, and outfits. Other cultures have these same ways to pass traditions along, such as in Mexico, many countries in South America, and many African tribes. Music is a way that keeps stories alive long after the heroes of the song have died, and it is a way to keep new generations interested in the past. Many cultures were nomadic and had little way to record stories that happened or traditions they wanted to pass on, so they made them into songs. Even now, many recognize the aid of music in remembering stories. The popular musical *Hamilton* has reminded us of important dates and stories that were easily forgotten before. Music has a way of staying in people's minds, therefore making events that are made into song seem more significant. Songs also make the event more memorable, which could be why the dwarves sing about their history so emphatically.



The dwarves, elves, hobbits, and goblins will all be discussed in detail in this thesis. Once again, I have often had to rely on Tolkien's own words and opinions, as I have not been able to find any sources to help support or argue against my claim.

#### Literature Review

Three prominent Tolkien scholars whose works have assisted me in my research are Colin Duriez, Humphrey Carpenter, and Tom Shippey. Duriez's *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Making of a Legend* describes Tolkien's early life in depth. He discusses Tolkien's love of language and the influence of his friends and his family on *The Hobbit*, and he explains why Tolkien's works have made him a legend. In *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, Carpenter focuses heavily on Tolkien's experiences in the war and how they changed not only his writing style but his entire perception of the world around him. Carpenter also describes the end of Tolkien's life and his desire to "take his time" (Carpenter 253) enjoying the world around him, such as having a good lunch and spending time with friends, which furthers Tolkien's comparison between himself and hobbits. Shippey claims in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* that Tolkien needs to be recognized as his title, based on 1) his general popularity, 2) the overwhelming commercial success of the heroic fantasy genre he popularized, and 3) the excellent qualities of his own writing (xvii).

Other authors of whom I made use were Paul Fussell, whose *The Great War and Modern Memory* includes details of Tolkien's experience in the war, similarly to Carpenter, but with more context of the state of the world during World War I. In *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon*, Brian Rosebury discusses Tolkien's importance in the literary world, effectively claiming that Tolkien is indeed one of the most important, if

not the most important, modern authors. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* by Verlyn Flieger focused heavily on Tolkien's love and mastery of languages, including both those that he created and those that already existed. Other sources have been typically less useful, though they do discuss Tolkien's life or his influence on the fantasy genre.

As previously discussed, I will proceed in this thesis as follows. The second chapter will discuss the dwarves and what their songs tell us about them. The third chapter will do the same for the elves and also say more about the various types. The fourth chapter will discuss what we can tell about hobbits and goblins from their songs. As neither have many songs in *The Hobbit*, I have decided to combine them into one chapter. In my conclusion, I will briefly revisit the arguments I have made about each race.

## CHAPTER II :The Dwarves

Very little research has been done on the topic of race and song in *The Hobbit*. I have focused on fifteen books by various authors,<sup>6</sup> along with several articles about Tolkien and even interviews with him and with his son Christopher, who edited his father's works from the time of his father's death in 1973 to his own death in 2020. Many of these texts various aspects of Tolkien's life, such as his childhood and his experiences in World War I, but they do not discuss the significance of music in his works. They tend to be more biographical than critical.<sup>7</sup> A few briefly mention that music was an influence in Tolkien's life, but do not go into much more detail than that.

The topic of song lyrics in Tolkien's works is a conversation that has not yet been initiated, but Tolkien's inclusion of song lyrics is a significant sign of the values of his characters as races. Unfortunately, I do not have time to survey the hundreds of pages of Christopher Tolkien's thoughts on his father's writing, so for this thesis, I will specifically be focusing on *The Hobbit* with a few *Lord of the Rings* references. The song lyrics in these novels have not yet been deeply analyzed, at most they have been skimmed and vaguely referenced by authors and researchers. Analyzing these song lyrics can give people a clearer understanding not only of the book, but also of Tolkien, as his personal experiences shape each race, for instance his experience in the war of which I will say more below.

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<sup>6</sup> These books include Tom Shippey's *The Road to Middle-Earth* and *Author of the Century*, Brian Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light*, all three books of *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, Stuart Lee's *A companion to J. R. R. Tolkien*, Humphrey Carpenter's *J. R. R. Tolkien A Biography*, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Handbook* by Colin Duriez, Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Brian Rosebury's *Tolkien A Cultural Phenomenon*, Colin Manlove's *From Alice to Harry Potter, The Annotated Hobbit* as well as numerous online articles of which it would take many pages to name.

<sup>7</sup> Duriez, Carpenter, Shippey, and Fussell to name a few.

It is the dwarves who sing the most songs in the book---three songs in all, along with two of them reprised, representing five different instances where they sing: two instances where they sing “Misty Mountains Cold” or versions of it, once at Bilbo’s home after dinner, and once with Thorin by himself adding a verse. They also sing “Blunt the Knives” and two different songs in Lake Town which I will call “Lake Town” and “Lake Town Reprise,” as Tolkien did not name these songs. They might have been named by Peter Jackson if he had included them in his three-part cinematic adaptation of *The Hobbit*.<sup>8</sup> By providing not one but three songs in *The Hobbit*, Tolkien might be arguing that the dwarves should not be perceived as simply greedy or selfish but are in fact complex beings. This complexity is lost in the Peter Jackson movie version, because Peter Jackson deletes the dwarven history the songs reveal. I will briefly discuss this loss when mentioning each song, demonstrating the value the dwarves place on home, history, tradition, treasure, and family. All but one of the dwarven songs reference what has happened before the beginning of the book, and also what is inspiring the dwarves to keep pushing forward in their difficult journey to the Lonely Mountain. The dwarves' love and respect for history are explained through song rather than taking multiple pages to describe. The songs also reveal not only the events that occurred, but how the dwarves feel about and react to what happened, along with the difference in the dwarves' values once they have lost something so great. That is, they sing of their desires to return home, to reclaim what was stolen from them, and to maintain their status as a noble race. Fighting is not as important to them. For them, fighting is only necessary to achieve their goal of getting their gold and home back.

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<sup>8</sup> Released on December 25 in the years 2016, 2017, 2018

The dwarves demonstrate their love of music from the moment when they are first introduced in *The Hobbit* and Thorin exclaims “[W]e must have some music first!” (*Hobbit* 12). Tolkien’s idea to express dwarven history through music could come from his childhood experiences. In his early life, the piano and song were an influence on him. His mother played the piano, as did Edith Bratt, the woman he was in love with and eventually married. He also, as I will show, wanted to show the history of the dwarves in a way that would still be interesting to children, his original audience. He decided that song would be effective. Through the history included in their songs, the dwarves become sympathetic despite their gruff manner, and their bloody history is toned down to be appropriate for children.

While discussing the dwarves, I will reference Peter Jackson’s adaptation of *The Hobbit*, as the dwarves were the most wrongly portrayed race in that series. I will be discussing how the inclusion of their songs could have helped solve this issue.

### Blunt the Knives

The first song the dwarves sing is an ironic one, in that they describe destroying Bilbo’s kitchen and dishware, all while carefully washing everything and putting it away (*Hobbit* 13). “Blunt the Knives” is not only the first song the dwarves sing, but the first song of the book. Though the hobbits have already been introduced, it is the dwarves who sing the first song, suggesting early on that they are a race that enjoys music and finds it important. This song is a good introduction to the dwarves, as it not only shows that they can have fun, but that they also can take things seriously, as they are purposefully making Bilbo nervous by singing about breaking his dishes, blunting his knives, and destroying his kitchen in general, all the time while they are carefully washing the dishes and drying

them to make sure their host knows his generosity was appreciated. “Blunt the Knives” is meant to be playful and satirical, as the dwarves' physical actions drastically differ from those described in the lyrics. The song unusually shows the dwarves to be playful, loud, and even chaotic, which is different from their typically stolid, serious presentation in folklore and fairytale. “Blunt the Knives” even shows that the dwarves are a little mischievous, as they are playing a prank on Bilbo. This song also reveals something about Bilbo, who in his reaction to the threat to his kitchen is nevertheless polite, saying such things as “I can manage,” and “Please don’t trouble” (13), even under situations that are extremely stressful for him.

Peter Jackson does use this song to characterize his dwarves. This song in which the dwarves are taunting Bilbo with his dishware is much longer on screen than the serious song they sing about their history. As this song is sung in viewers’ first meeting of the dwarves, the director is setting up how the audience will think of them for the rest of the film—which is often as comedic, a fault even more pronounced in Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, especially in how the movies primarily make Gimli into a comedic character, as for instance the scene where Legolas has to toss him over a broken section of the bridge at Khazad Dum.<sup>9</sup> His lack of intelligence in the film, which is contrary to the text, also adds to the comedic aspect of his nature, such as when he does not understand how secret dwarven doors work, though we understand from the books that he has built several, so that Gandalf must explain it to him. In the books, Gimli is a skilled warrior who is brave and will do anything for his friends. He is the only dwarf on the

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<sup>9</sup> Since this film is not a primary source in this thesis, I have not obtained minute or second marks from the standard DVD. I have included the film in my works cited section.

journey who truly understands how the secret dwarven doors work and is used to inform readers and the rest of his party what to expect. During this same trip, he also narrates a long poem that he has memorized about the first dwarf (*Fellowship* 314-315). Peter Jackson's portrayal of Gimli shaped audiences' perspective of dwarves. Instead of seeing them as their songs portray--brave, focused on history, knowledgeable--Jackson places them in the role of comic relief. Had he added songs, their portrayal would have been more accurate. Granted, in *The Hobbit*, the dwarves do have comedic moments as here with their prank on Bilbo, but they are far more complex than that. "Misty Mountain" was an opportunity for Jackson to correct the initial view the audience had of the dwarves, but he let that opportunity slip past, making the song much shorter and less about the history of the battle.

Tolkien does use this song to show the comedic and playful side of the dwarves, but "Blunt the Knives" is not meant to be the only interpretation or understanding of the dwarves that readers get. It is a tool used to carry the plot, show the anxiety of Bilbo, and show that the dwarves are not always serious. Apart from this one, the other dwarven songs are about ancestry and history

#### Misty Mountains Cold

"Misty Mountains" is the more popular song in *The Hobbit* franchise. The song describes the dwarves' reasons for wanting to reclaim their gold and their home: the trauma of their past battle with the dragon that brought about the near-extinction of their people. This song describes a war, but Tolkien did not want to include violent imagery in a children's book. He was shell shocked from his service in World War I and did not want to expose children to the same images he was subjected to, but he still wanted to

appeal to adult readers. To accomplish this appeal while also keeping his work child-friendly, he only hints in the song at certain details and imagery.

This song is recognizably a ballad,<sup>10</sup> a long narrative poem written in rhyming quatrains. According to the sixth edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, a ballad is a vehicle of oral tradition, which the dwarves were so keen on, that outlasts their written counterparts. The *Norton* also states that a ballad typically focuses on a few dramatic moments. Tolkien was able to mask the bloody details of war in the ballad, since a ballad hints at the tragic details rather than describing them, leaving the details of the war up to readers' imaginations, as ballads often do. They soften the grisly details of war and tragedy by repetition and further delay the action with multiple refrains. Ballads often rely on information that is only hinted at. The ballad form makes this song both haunting and informative without overwhelming images of a gory battle.

Tolkien's knowledge of balladry works to his advantage in this case. In making this song a ballad, he does not have to describe details of the war, and instead can hint at them. He does not want to discuss war or violent imagery any further, as he demonstrates in interviews in which he is asked about the war and changes the subject, as I will discuss below. However, he also could not get the war out of his head. A noted author quotes from an interview with Tolkien who says he sees other veterans as superior, "What it is that Tolkien sees as 'far superior' to himself in other veterans might be their ability to make that final step away from the field of battle, their ability to move on" (Livingston 16). Christopher Tolkien was constantly encouraging his father to add

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<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Jameela Lares for bringing to my attention that this song was a ballad.



more detail, but J. R. R. Tolkien refused. World War I gave Tolkien severe PTSD, though at this time there was no name for it (Duriez 98), Tolkien did not want to mention the war in his writings, especially in his children's books. In fact, he tried to avoid mentioning the war at all. One of the few mentions he makes of the war is in the foreword of *The Lord of The Rings* in which he laments, "all but one of my close friends were dead" (LotR I: Foreword, xvii).

This song also alerts readers how important the preservation of historical narratives is to the dwarves. The first time "Misty Mountains" is sung is in Bilbo's sitting room, when the dwarves are explaining the reason for their quest. The song describes the battle that took place and the reason the dwarves are determined to reclaim their home and their gold. It also displays dwarven emotions. Although they are typically somber and stoic, here they express the pain they feel over losing their home. The song is also a way to keep the history of the dwarves alive. Tolkien was keen to keep the history of his own dwarves alive, as he said they were different from other dwarfs; he even changed the spelling from *dwarfs* to *dwarves*. Tolkien's dwarves are not good at keeping records, as they are often focused on acquiring more riches or protecting the ones they have, so they still need a way to make sure the next generations know about the battle and are warned about what greed and pride can do to a dwarf.

The dwarves have been compared to Jews. Tolkien himself has said in many interviews that the dwarves have Semitic values. However, this translates for many scholars to the dwarves' being greedy, which is not true. The dwarves do like gold, but unlike the dragon who steals from those around him and hoards the treasure, the dwarves do not steal gold or treasure from anyone; they are just trying to get back what is theirs.

There are researchers that disagree with this claim. For instance, Lisa Burnsten compares the greed of the dwarves to the greed of the dragon. She argues that “both dwarves and dragons are depicted as creatures with natural greedy tendencies” (68). This quote makes it seem as though the dwarves are thieves who hoard treasure, as the dragon is.<sup>11</sup> But the dwarves are not concerned with the treasure of others. The dwarves are concentrated on reclaiming what is rightfully theirs.

The second time the song is sung is by Thorin, who sings a verse as the other dwarves and Bilbo are drifting to sleep:

Far over the misty mountains cold  
To dungeons deep and caverns old  
We must away, ere break of day,  
To find out long-forgotten gold. (*Hobbit* 26)

Thorin demonstrates that getting their gold back has become an obsession for many of the dwarves, as the song is apparently on his mind. He sings this song absentmindedly. The dwarves sing about battles lost and battles not yet fought. The battles they lost are mourned with the lyrics of “Far Over the Misty Mountain Cold,” as when they sing “The mountains smoked beneath the moon; / The dwarves, they heard the tramp of doom. . .<sup>12</sup>” (*Hobbit* 15). In this same song, they sing of the battle they have yet to fight, “We must away, ere break of day, / To win our harps and gold from him!” (*Hobbit* 16). They do have some greed in the book, as seen when Bilbo realizes that “he did not reckon with the power that gold has upon which a dragon has long brooded, nor

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<sup>11</sup> Bilbo steals a cup as in Beowulf burglar in this case means taking without being caught

<sup>12</sup> The word *doom* has several meanings. Tolkien, in this instance, used it to mean *fate* rather than the modern definition of the word.

with dwarvish hearts” (*Hobbit* 241). The dwarves, however, are not portrayed as always craving more riches.

#### Lake-town

The dwarves do not only sing about battles, though as this is a major part of their history, it is a focus. They sing a song of celebration when Thorin the grandson of their original king Thrór, returns to Lake-Town. They sing that “The King beneath the mountains . . . Shall come into his own” (*Hobbit* 182). Dwarven values of reclaiming what is rightfully theirs are shown through these particular lyrics. The dwarves are rejoicing that their rightful king has come back to his home. They want to honor tradition. Here again we see the dwarves’ sense of solemnity and duty to recover their stolen home and treasure, a desire mostly seen through their songs, rather than their actions or dialogue. Without the songs, the dwarves are mostly perceived as comic relief, such as when Bombur, the heaviest dwarf, falls asleep and the other dwarves must carry him. The book portrays the dwarves as noble, valiant, and brave. Thorin is an example of this bravery. His bravery is evident when the goblins and Wargs attack his home before the start of the book, though others recount his greatness, and he does not hesitate to jump into the heart of the battle. This battle took place before he had lost his home and was the one where he lost his father. Thorin is not the only dwarf who shows bravery through his rush into the battle with the Wargs. The other dwarves in his company also show that they are willing to make great sacrifices for each other, such as when they carry each other after emerging from the barrels when some cannot walk, or when Bombur falls asleep.

## Life-span

The dwarves sing much about ancestry, because they need to pass songs from generation to generation. They have a limited lifespan--about two hundred fifty years--not abnormally long for Middle-earth standards, and therefore have not necessarily lived through the events they are singing about. Because they have shorter lives, they must make sure their history stays alive, they must have a way to make sure their future generations understand their history and the significance of certain people and events. The dwarves also need a way to express their emotions, and since much of their life is lived fighting for survival, they do not have time to sit and talk about their feelings, nor do they have the desire to. Dwarves wish to be seen as tough and brave, and letting their sorrows show makes this difficult. From intense sorrow over losing their home and treasure, to intense joy in getting it back, they show in their music that they are complex characters with a variety of emotions. The dwarves are loud, brash, and bold with their actions, and their songs reflect this.

### CHAPTER III :The Elves

Through the many works I have consulted for this thesis, I find that Tolkien scholars generally agree on elves, who are typically more lighthearted and playful than the dwarves, and who focus on hospitality as well as intelligence. In our first meeting of them in *The Hobbit*, the elves' hospitality can be seen in their lyrics, "O! Will you be staying / or will you be flying . . . to fly would be folly / to stay would be jolly. . . ." (46). Tolkien mentions four different kinds of elves, the sea elves, wood elves, light elves, and deep elves (*Hobbit* 154).<sup>13</sup> Though he does not go into great detail about them in *The Hobbit*, he has mentioned them in a few other works. Light elves, such as those of Rivendell, have stronger moral character and are considered the top tier of elves (*Muse* 11). Deep elves are knowledgeable; *deep* refers to the depth of their knowledge (Bergman 113).<sup>14</sup> Sea elves, as their name suggests, used to live close to the water, though now they are quite scattered. They are considered unorganized and are the least intelligent of all the types of elves. The elves of Mirkwood are of this kind, though they have taken the name of wood-elves (Bergman 109). For the purposes of this thesis, I will be focusing on sea elves of Mirkwood and the light elves of Rivendell. Though their elven languages are related, they differ slightly, as their languages have evolved over time (*Lord of the Rings* 1114), as Tolkien recognized was the case with language (Duriez 146). Tolkien was well-known for his love of language, which could have inspired him to create elven grammar and writing rules though he does this for no other race. He describes his creation of

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<sup>13</sup> I will be referring to these different classifications of elves as *kinds* of elves for the remainder of this paper.

<sup>14</sup> I am using Tolkien's own spelling and capitalization for the names of these elves.

languages in “A Secret Vice.” Since the elves are so long-lived, each kind remembers their own history, and since they would have a difficult time passing their history to speakers of a different form of elvish, they do not sing about history at all.

The three elven songs do not have names. For the sake of this thesis, I will call them “The Rivendale Song,” along with its reprise, “Barrel Song,” and “Lullaby.” The first elven song to appear is sung by the light elves, or the elves of Rivendell, and it indicates that the dwarves and Bilbo are in a valley at dusk, as well as pointing out how exhausted the travelers and their animals are. Bilbo, as the main character whose thoughts we know, does not focus on the animals. The elves are the ones who draw our attention to the struggling ponies with the mention that the “ponies need shoeing” (*Hobbit* 46). They sing a reprise of this song at the end of the book, welcoming him back and congratulating him for his journey. Their next song describes the release of barrels in which the dwarves escape from Mirkwood, which I will detail later, and notes that the barrels are going south. It is important for the narrator to note that they are heading south, as direction is very important to the quest. The song also describes the landscape which Bilbo and the dwarves will need to go through to get to the mountains. The final song describes how the dwarves and Bilbo have just helped to defeat the dragon, Smaug—though Bard makes the killing shot, defeating the dragon—which also shows that the dragon affected other races than just the dwarves. Ironically, though the elves are singing this song quite loudly, they call it a lullaby. All three of the elves’ songs are about what is currently happening, and they allow Tolkien to describe the situation without long prose descriptions. The elves sing about the situation, often paying attention to the scenery as well. They do not sing out of necessity of keeping their history alive as the dwarves do;

they sing because they enjoy it. As the elves live much longer than the dwarves, they have lived through most of the historical events; therefore, they do not need to sing about them. Another possible reason for the elven songs is to show their hospitality. They often offer shelter to weary travelers through their songs. The elves are also very united as a race, which they further demonstrate with their songs, as they all sing and dance together harmoniously. Their song lyrics do not say as much about the elves as do the lyrics the dwarves, as most of their elven songs just add to the plot, but there are some things that can be learned about their values, such as their hospitality as mentioned previously, their respect for other living and nonliving creatures and objects, and their desire for peace and happiness among all living things, as I will discuss with each song. The songs also demonstrate the wisdom of the elves, as their lyrics show that they understand what is happening in parts of Middle-earth other than their own. They are very knowledgeable about world affairs and how it affects each of the various races. They do not need to sing about the past, but unlike the goblins, whom I will discuss later, it is not because of disinterest. Elves have a very long lifespan and lived through most of the historical events, and if they did not, it is easy to read about, as elves are meticulous about keeping good records, as mentioned by Gandalf to Frodo when discussing an old elven kind who “hoarded” scrolls and books of historical value (*Fellowship* 252). The elves are not unconcerned about the past; they learn from it but do not think that they do not need to dwell on it. Elves sing to pass time and, much as dwarves, because they are a musical people. The first song the elves sing, which demonstrates several of these points, is “The Rivendale Song.”

### The Rivendale Song (and its' reprise)

The first introduction to the elves is with “The Rivendale Song,” an invitation to spend the night in the valley with the elves. Their hospitality and desire to take care of other living creatures is shown in this song, along with their silliness and snarky attitude. The elves and dwarves do not get along, as even Bilbo knows. As the narrator puts it, “Dwarves don’t get on well with [elves]” (47). Yet the elves still know the names of the dwarves, as well as their quest, and they still invite them to stay the night in their valley. The elves have had very little interaction with hobbits, as the hobbits do not typically leave their home, and the elves would not intrude, but they will address Bilbo as “Mister Baggins.” The elves also have a vast knowledge, as demonstrated through their songs. not just about current events, but also about the intentions of those they encounter. This acknowledgement, before anything else, suggests the magical nature of the elves. Through song, before Tolkien even tells us that they are magical, or possess any type of abilities, those features of their identity are suggested through song. Though this identity is shown through song first, it is supported by Bilbo, who thinks “Elves know a lot and are wondrous folk for news” (*Hobbit* 47) and as there is no type of telephone in this universe, one has to wonder how the elves get such information. They know Bilbo’s name, though they have never met him, and they know what path the dwarves are on, at least enough to tell them that they have strayed from their path and offer them proper directions. The travelers are invited to stay for dinner and have their horses, as well as themselves, taken care of. This invitation tells readers that the elves are a people who care about the present, as they are focused on the current needs of the travelers. In fact,



the only person in either *The Hobbit* or *Lord of the Rings* to sing of the elves' history is Bilbo, and he possibly does this because he knows the elves will not sing of their own history. The song also tells the readers that the elves are concerned with the future of others, as they try to make sure the travelers know that they are going in the wrong direction, they give them proper directions, and they make sure they know they have a place to stay for the night. The elves are also concerned with creatures such as animals. They point out to the dwarves in the Rivendale song that "Your ponies need shoeing" (*Hobbit* 46), which shows that the elves are not just focused on the needs of the dwarves and Bilbo, but also of the needs of their animals.

They later sing a reprise of this song about the destruction of the dragon, and the elves sing of how the world seems better now that the dragon has been vanquished. They sing phrases such as "Here grass is still growing / And leaves are yet swinging" (*Hobbit* 269). The elves sing this song when Bilbo is on his journey home to the Shire, inviting the hero to stay in the valley to recover from his journey. They welcome him back home and point out all the beautiful aspects of nature now that he has returned, such as "The stars are far brighter. . . . / Come back to the valley" (*Hobbit* 270). In singing this song, they demonstrate the same sense of hospitality mentioned above, and they also demonstrate their span of knowledge. The elves know things before others have to tell them, such as the dragon's being defeated. They know how the dwarves helped conquer the dragon, along with Bard, and are already singing their praises. Though the elves do not live close to the dragon, nor does Smaug likely have too much effect on their lives, they demonstrate their knowledge of world events by singing this song. They also still show their sense of hospitality through this song. Since they know of Smaug's defeat at

the hands of the dwarves, it is reasonable to assume they know of the dwarves' escape from the Mirkwood elves in barrels. Yet they still welcome Bilbo back and tell him that they are proud of him and that he did well. They also invite Bilbo to stay for as long as he needs to recover from his long and difficult journey.<sup>15</sup>

This hospitality is the opposite of what critic Elisha Swett had to say about the elves in *The Hobbit*. Swett describes elven songs as tending to “produce feelings of remoteness in readers and listeners” (Swett 72). Here, she is saying that elven songs make listeners feel as though elves do not care about others; however, as I have pointed out, elves specifically sing songs of welcome and hospitality. She also claims that the elves hold too tightly to the past, but the elves sing in present tense, and then only about current events. Her argument—that they sing of what has happened to their people, as they have been around since the beginning of time—is not supported by the text.

#### Barrel Song

The second song the elves sing is when the dwarves are escaping in barrels. The dwarves have been captured by the ruler of the elves who dwell in the Mirkwood Forest, but Bilbo uses the One Ring to turn himself invisible and escape. Using this same method, he gets the dwarves out of the cells they have been trapped in. Together, they come up with a plan to hide in the barrels that the elves are throwing into the river so they may escape. The elves sing of hoping the barrels stay safe and find their way back to where they came from. The desire for even nonsentient objects to stay safe shows the elves' respect for all things, whether living or nonliving. These elves, however, are sea

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<sup>15</sup> The elves know that Bilbo is not alone in his adventure, yet they welcome him back as though he is the singular hero who defeated the dragon, which further demonstrates their hospitality.

elves, or as they have been renamed because of their location, wood-elves, and I will be referring to them as such for the remainder of this thesis. The wood-elves are not as concerned as the light elves with the well-being of other races; they are very protective of their secrets, which is why they so quickly attack Bilbo and the dwarves when they get too close to their home. While the Light elves are described as friends of the dwarves and rescuers to the weary, the Mirkwood elves are only described as being “decent to the prisoners” and one of them as “not a bad fellow” (*Hobbit* 166). The Mirkwood elves are quite defensive of their home, as when Thorin gets too close they capture him and interrogate him, as well as the other dwarves when they come along later. This desire for safety reflects the elves’ own desire for the safety of their species, as they mention numerous times throughout the book. They do not mistreat the prisoners, and the only creatures they have no mercy for are the giant spiders (156), but they do not treat the dwarves as well as they would have been treated in Rivendell. Elves tend to not dwell on what has happened in the far past, only the immediate past which is going to affect their future. They look to the future as a hopeful time, and are not too concerned with the past, as they cannot change what has already happened. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Legolas describes how time seems to the elves by telling Bilbo, “Nay, time does not tarry ever, but change and growth is not in all things and places alike. For the Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow” (*Fellowship* 388). This quote demonstrates the elves’ acceptance of time. They cannot control the speed at which it goes, and they cannot alter it. The elves have accepted this fact and try to do what they can to move forward instead of living in the past.

“Barrel Song” shows further that the elves sing to pass time. They have to do the work of throwing the barrels in the stream anyway, so they sing while doing it. Music for the elves, as I will later discuss, is not a necessity, as they do not have to sing to pass on traditions, or for any reason at all. They sing because they are musical people. This song shows a side of the wood elves of Mirkwood that was not previously seen. As I have previously mentioned, the elves belong to different tribes and live in different locations, which could affect their values. In Rivendell, the elves wanted to make sure the dwarves were taken care of and well-rested, but with the wood elves, the dwarves are taken captive, as the king wants to find out what they are doing in his woods. None of the dwarves or Bilbo will tell him, so he decides to lock them up until they tell him what he wants to know. He still cares about how comfortable they are, to an extent. Though he makes sure they have food and water, he is still holding them prisoner and not allowing them to communicate with each other. This behavior contrasts with the elves’ typically hospitable nature, but they show the nature of caring for other living and nonliving things through this song. They wish the barrels a safe journey and bid them farewell. They also thank the barrels for the purpose that they have served the elves. It is interesting to consider that the elves value barrels and care for their well-being more so than they care for the well-being of the dwarves; however, at this point, the dwarves are not being treated unfairly by the elves by any means, though they do not get along with each other. They are treated as prisoners, but well cared for prisoners. The elves’ sense of hospitality goes beyond those they consider guests or friends and even goes to their prisoners and those races they consider to be inferior to themselves.

Lullaby

The final song the elves sing occurs when Bilbo has almost completed his journey to return to the Shire. As he is passing through Rivendell, the elves offer him rest and refreshment before the last leg of his trip. Bilbo excitedly agrees and spends hours talking with the elves. After he goes to bed, they sing what they call a lullaby, but it is so loud that it awakens Bilbo, who comments that their singing would “waken a drunken goblin,” (*Hobbit* 270). Their performance of the song highlights the elves' playfulness, and not only their joy in singing that the other songs emphasize. They are also dancing while they are singing this song, and they call for others to join with them, singing, “Dance all ye joyful, now dance all together,” (*Hobbit* 271). They are described by Bilbo as *merry*, a description he has not used for the elves before. His new realization that the elves are a merry, playful, and slightly mischievous race has come from his time in Rivendell after his adventure. They sing a lullaby, though they seem to not be surprised when it wakes Bilbo, and they joke back and forth, which shows Bilbo a mischievous side that he did not see before.

This particular song shows the joy of the elves and their love for singing. Many of the elven songs are plot points. They are written to explain what is happening in the story or the setting. This song is not a plot point, but it does show the type of people the elves are. “Lullaby” is the first song the elves sing that does not serve a purpose other than showing the joy of the elves. It does not introduce any new information not already in the prose.

The elves further show their hospitality in this song, as immediately preceding the singing, they have placed Bilbo in a soft bed, noticing that he had fallen asleep while recounting his adventure. In the lyrics, they sing of the restfulness they hope Bilbo will

achieve “Sing we now softly, and dreams let us weave him! / Wind him in slumber and there let us leave him!” (*Hobbit* 271). The song lyrics also indicate that the elves value unity, even from the very first line they sing, “Sing all ye joyful, now sing all together!” (*Hobbit* 271). The Light elves who sing this song are focused on hospitality and joy, whereas the Mirkwood elves are more serious and do not have such hospitality. The Rivendell elves want to make sure that Bilbo is comfortable. They sing about his soft bed and pillow and how they hope he sleeps well. Multiple times, they show how much they want to be good hosts to Bilbo and describe how they hope he enjoys his rest and enjoys his time at Rivendell.

#### Life-span

As already noted, the elves are very long-lived, and in fact immortal, and will not die of natural causes, therefore they do not need to sing about history, as they were there for it. The elves only sing in present tense in *The Hobbit*, which could show that the elves live in the present, but not the same way that the goblins sing in present tense. The goblins have no regard for the past or future, but rather they only care about what is immediately happening. The elves, however, chose to live in the present. The elves understand the significance of the past, as they have long lives, and they understand the importance of the future, as they have seen the cause and effect of actions. The dwarves sing to keep their past alive. The elves, however, not only lived through historic events, but also are good at keeping records. The elves do not sing out of necessity, they sing for enjoyment. When anything is done for enjoyment instead of necessity, a person can see where another's real values lie. Elves, with their long lifespan, do not have to sing, therefore their songs show that they want others to know about their hospitality. They do

not have to sing about history, as the dwarves do, they do not need to show their racial unity, as the goblins do, they just enjoy singing and want others to experience the same joy they get when they sing. They also want to make sure others know that they are welcome in the elves' home and can stay as long as they need. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, there are two tribes of elves in this novel, the light elves and the wood-elves. As they are not of the same tribe, it is reasonable to assume they do not have the exact same values, but both tribes show that they value unity. The light elves of Rivendell show their unity by singing and dancing together, however their unity goes beyond the borders of their race. They want to be unified and helpful to other races as well, as demonstrated by their hospitality. The Sea elves, or the elves of Mirkwood, are much more hostile to outsiders, and though still wanting them to be safe, they still value the comfort and safety of non-living things much more. They demonstrate this preference with the barrel song when they sing that they hope the barrels find their destination safely, and that they are sending them home. Mirkwood elves do not treat the dwarves with the same respect. They make sure the dwarves have enough food and water, but they do not care about their comfort. Though the elves as a race show their hospitality and the value they place on living things, the songs of each tribe specifically do show slight differences.

## CHAPTER IV : The Hobbits and Goblins

Neither hobbits<sup>16</sup> nor goblins sing much in *The Hobbit*, so I cover them both in this chapter. Again, there is not much material written on song lyrics in *The Hobbit*, so I do not have many outside sources. Hobbits also tend to be more reserved than other races, such as the loud and brash dwarves, and do not typically sing in *The Hobbit*. Because of this lack of material, I will reference *The Lord of The Rings* in this chapter, especially regarding the hobbits. What the hobbits consider important is difficult to determine based on their singing, as there is not much to go on, but the few songs Bilbo does sing, as well as the lack of singing overall on the part of the hobbits, help our understanding of hobbit values, as I will discuss. Goblins, on the other hand, sing partially just to make noise. They do not particularly care about anything outside of their immediate needs, as their songs show and as I will discuss later in this chapter.

### Hobbits

Though hobbits are the race the story focuses on, they only have two songs in *The Hobbit*, “The Spider Song” and “Roads Go Ever On,” as I will call them, both of which are sung by Bilbo, and about both of which other characters notice how un-hobbit like his singing is. Gandalf makes such an observation after Bilbo’s second song when in surprise he says, “My dear Bilbo! . . . You are not the hobbit that you were” (*Hobbit* 274).

Hobbits like things to stay the way they are and not vary too much from person to person.

When Tolkien first introduces readers to Bilbo, he mentions that the other hobbits

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<sup>16</sup> Tolkien said if he were to be any race, it would be a hobbit, as they eat as he would like. This preference could also explain Bilbo’s later fascination with languages, mirroring Tolkien’s own love of the spoken word (Duriez 124).



respected the Baggins family because “they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (*Hobbit* 3). They find it odd when someone acts differently, though they do not reject them. Rather, they are fascinated by them. Bilbo is an example of this fascination. He disappeared for a long time, and “The return of Mr. Bilbo Baggins created quite a disturbance . . . it was a great deal more than a nine day’s wonder” (*Hobbit* 274). When he celebrates his birthday at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, everyone wants to be there to see the odd Mr. Bilbo Baggins, “There was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton. Bilbo was very rich and very peculiar” (*Fellowship* 21).

Bilbo was not a musical hobbit, nor are most hobbits musical. Although in *Lord of the Rings*, specifically *Fellowship*, Bilbo adopts singing as a regular part of life, he does this only after his adventure with the dwarves. Part of the reason for the scarcity of song on the hobbits' part could be their lack of imagination. In an interview, Tolkien says of the Hobbits, “Hobbits are just rustic English people, made small in size because it reflects (in general) the small reach of their imagination” (1964 BBC Interview with J. R. R. Tolkien). Bilbo references the dwarves’ singing and how it made him feel, such as at the beginning of the story when the dwarves first sing of the Misty Mountains, but never joins in or expresses any desire to do so. The desire to sing, or lack thereof, shows that Hobbits are not worried about passing traditions to their children, at least not through song. The lack of necessity to pass traditions from generation to generation further shows the value of staying close to home. Hobbits do not like adventure, they do not travel, and they do not leave their village unless absolutely necessary. They are a race strongly dedicated to staying home and not having things change. This being said, there are traditions Hobbits pass to their children, but the lack of song shows that there is very little

risk taken by hobbits, as they do not need to come up with songs to be able to pass on these traditions. This is further proven by the quote mentioned above stating that the Bagginses were respected because they did not go on adventures. Hobbits tend to play it safe; therefore, it is unnecessary to pass tradition on through song; they can show their children and grandchildren the traditions they have instead of worrying that they need an alternate way to pass them along. The average lifespan of a hobbit is about one hundred years (Atkins 4), with many of them living to be about 120, and they do not need to worry about dying before they are able to pass on traditions as other races who take more risks, such as the dwarves, do.

### Spider Song

There are no hobbit songs until page 147, more than halfway through the book. This delay suggests how rare it is to have a hobbit sing. At this time in the novel, the dwarves have been captured in Mirkwood Forest and bound by a giant spider's massive strong threads. Bilbo manages to escape—he kills the spider who was tying him, which inspires him to name his sword Sting. Bilbo must think of a way to get the dwarves out of the spiders' webs. He sings this song out of necessity to distract the spiders from the captured dwarves. As he was panicked, and not in his right mind, the only thing he could think to do was sing a distracting song. Hobbits typically avoid doing anything they say is foolish, or unnecessary, and for many, this includes singing, but Bilbo needed a way for the dwarves to hear his voice as well as a clever way to make sure he had the spiders' full attention so an escape could be made. If it had been up to Bilbo, he would not have sung at all, but he could think of no other distraction, as he was invisible at the time “he began to sing a song to infuriate them and bring them all after him, and also to let the dwarves

hear his voice” (*Hobbit* 147). His song is not thought out or planned, he just sings what comes to his mind. He mocks the spiders for not being able to see him, singing “I am far more sweet than other meat, but still they cannot find me!” (*Hobbit* 148). His inability to quickly write a better song speaks to how little hobbits think of music. Bilbo has, of course, heard songs, but until this point, he has never had to compose one or even think about how to do so. Bilbo thus demonstrates how different he is from the other hobbits through his song.

The timing of the song also shows that Bilbo is fiercely loyal to his friends. He is in a very dangerous situation at the time, as he, along with the dwarves, are being threatened by these giant spiders. In a panic, Bilbo starts to sing and throw rocks and branches to distract the spiders. Bilbo shows his bravery as the spiders are a terrifying sight, chasing the hobbit with “hairy legs waving, nippers and spinners snapping . . . full of froth and rage.” (*Hobbit* 148). The first thing he tries to do is to throw stones and branches, a familiar action to him. As the narrator tells us, “Bilbo was a pretty fair shot with a stone. . . . As a boy he used to practise throwing stones at things.” (*Hobbit* 146). He hoped this action would be enough to distract the spiders, but it was just making them run around looking for him, not daring to leave the group<sup>17</sup> of dwarves they now held captive. Bilbo had to improvise. However, as previously mentioned, hobbits have little imagination, and the only thing Bilbo can think of is to call the spiders by the term *attercop*, which means *spider*. The only other term he could think of to anger them was to

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<sup>17</sup> You have a murder of crows, a herd of cows, but no one can seem to agree on what to call a group of dwarves.

call them *tomnoddy*, which means *stupid* or *foolish*. Both of these terms are listed in the *OED*.

### Roads Go Ever On

Upon returning home at the end of the book, Bilbo sings a song of celebration. He sings of the adventure he has gone through and the trials he has faced, and he sings of his joy to return home. This song represents the change Bilbo has gone through as he has completed his journey. The lyrics of “Roads Go Ever On” describe the joy of coming home after a long adventure. Bilbo sings “Look at last on meadows green / And trees and hills they long have known” (*Hobbit* 273). These lyrics show how relieved Bilbo is to be back in the familiar place he has called his home after wandering so far from it. This song also demonstrates that he feels that home will be waiting for him, no matter how far he goes or how long he is gone.<sup>18</sup> People have actually tried to sell his home and goods; he is surprised that it is not waiting for him. Before this adventure, Bilbo would have never sung. The hobbits do not have many songs in either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of The Rings* that they sing as a race, nor do they have many songs they sing individually for the most part.<sup>19</sup> Bilbo seems to be the only hobbit who sings throughout the book. It is true that he is one of the only hobbits encountered in *The Hobbit*, but this statement is also true about the hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo demonstrates the importance of song by singing to the elves, who are noted as great songwriters. Bilbo asks Strider for his advice on writing a song to please the elves. The narrator tells us that

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<sup>18</sup> People have actually tried to sell his home and goods, and he is surprised that they are not waiting for him. The song is still valid because he is not aware of his home’s invasion at the time he is singing (*Hobbit* 2.)

<sup>19</sup> Hobbits do have bath songs, but even those are usually typically sung alone in the bath rather than as a group (*Fellowship* 101).

Bilbo writes many songs now and takes great delight in telling the stories of the past (*Fellowship* 237). This focus on the past could be because he spent so much time with the dwarves, and their desire to sing about the past has influenced Bilbo. When hobbits sing, though it is rare, they typically sing in the present tense. However, Bilbo clearly is interested in History as he writes “the Red Book,” which recounts both the adventures of the hobbits in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. One reason for Bilbo’s interest in history could be that he has gone on adventures himself now. Hobbits typically stay in the Shire, where they are safe and relatively few things happen out of the ordinary, so they do not have an epic history to sing about. Bilbo, however, has now made history, so he views it much differently than his fellow hobbits. The type of songs Bilbo is most well known for in *The Fellowship of the Ring* are his songs about elven history. Elves, as discussed in the previous chapter, do not sing about their history, but history has become increasingly important to Bilbo, so he writes songs about the elves that they do not feel the need to write.

### Goblins

The two goblin songs, which I will call “Clap! Snap!” and “The Fire Song,” are much harsher than the songs of the other races and utilize harsh onomatopoeic words such as “Clap!” and “Snap!” (*Hobbit* 58). The goblin’s songs also take on a mocking tone, such as when they are taunting the party for being stuck in trees (*Hobbit* 98). Both of the goblin songs use simple diction, showing not the lack of intelligence, but carelessness about how they are perceived by other races, and their focus on immediate desires, such as torturing Bilbo and his party. The goblins mostly sing about how much they can eat or destroy. They only sing in present tense about what is happening in the

moment. In English, since it relies on a two-tense verb system, the present can sometimes refer to the future, as in “we are meeting” but the goblins do not sing about any future but the immediate one such as when they sing “So dwarves shall die” (*Hobbit* 99).

Although goblins sing mostly to make noise, their songs do serve a few purposes: to show that they are excited about eating and to demonstrate racial unity. The goblins do in many instances show that they are united as a race, but this racial unity is focused on killing and maiming. Ironically, though they act as a single people, goblins do not like other individual goblins. They kill each other at a moment's notice, as mentioned by Frodo in *The Lord of The Ring*, when he notes in passing that the goblins have mostly died out due to civil war (*Fellowship* 159). Tolkien insists that his characters are divided by race. In fact, when asked in an interview if he meant for his characters to be divided as such, he replied “When you've got these people on your hands, you've got to make them different, haven't you?” (BBC interview). One way he accomplishes goblin unity is through song. Tolkien actually changed the name *goblins* to *orcs*<sup>20</sup> in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Rearick 871). Through song, the goblins show that they communicate with each other at least to an extent. When goblins speak to each other, it is rude and disrespectful with interactions which are described as “growls and curses, shrieking and skriking” (*Hobbit* 64). Through song, goblins demonstrate positive communication that is not seen in their speech. Through song, they also show that they do not have any individual thought, which explains their later disregard of the consequences of the fire. One Tolkien scholar notes this fault in an essay when she says “Aside from the Great

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<sup>20</sup> Tolkien does say that Morgoth captured elves and tortured them with genetic engineering to create this race. Duriez notes that *goblin* is the word for *orc* in various languages, such as the hobbits' language (198).

Goblin, no individuality is presented throughout their population; consequently, the reader views the race—their disregard for the order of nature—as a uniform force. The lack of individuality of the Goblins throughout *The Hobbit* removes any complexity or culture within their race” (Stine 5). The lack of individuality makes the goblins feel less unified, but through song, they show their unity, though as previously mentioned, not friendship, as a race.

Clap! Snap!

This is the first song the goblins sing, and the occasion is their taking the dwarves and Bilbo as prisoners to their king. The dwarves, Bilbo, and Gandalf have found a cave to sleep in for the night, but unfortunately for them, it is the entrance to the goblins' home, which is how they came to be in this situation. Readers do not know at this point what the goblins plan to do with their prisoners, but it is obvious from the goblins' bad attitudes that it will not be good. This intention is immediately noticeable as they pinch their prisoners, shove them along, kick them, and shake them, as Bilbo describes (*Hobbit* 57). “Clap! Snap!” is mostly composed of short, simple words marked by onomatopoeia. Here is one place where the language shows that the goblins focus on the immediate present, as they are only singing about what is currently happening to them and those they have captured. Part of the reason for this attack on the dwarves and Bilbo, as well as the goblins' asocial nature, could be that they live underground. Living underground and away from others for so many years possibly made the goblins unaware of how to react in social situations, as well as making them more cruel and vicious. Goblins are heavily

focused on immediate gratification.<sup>21</sup> They are singing about the torture through which they will put the dwarves and Bilbo as well as how they are going to cook and eat them. In this song, the goblins show how unconcerned they are about the possibility of the dwarves' escaping, further indicating that they do not think about the future even though they witnessed magic when they captured the dwarves but not Gandalf, who disappeared in a cloud of smoke with a loud crack (*Hobbit* 57). Despite this oversight, goblins are said by Tolkien to be clever, as for instance, "It is not unlikely that [the goblins] invented some of the machines" (*Hobbit* 59). Through their songs, goblins show that they do not care to use their intelligence, at least in terms of language. The elves sing because they delight in their intelligence, the dwarves sing to make sure their history will be kept alive and accurate, and goblins sing because they want to make noise and are thinking about how they can cause the most destruction and pain to those they wish to inflict it upon. "Clap! Snap!" describes how the goblins want to skin the dwarves and whip them. They further demonstrate their cruelty by forcing Bilbo to the back of the line, which successfully mocks his small size, as he has to jog and run to keep up with the dwarves.

#### Fire Song

In this song, which is the only other song we hear from the goblins, they are mocking Bilbo, Gandolf, and the dwarves who are stuck in several trees around—unfortunately—the Wargs' meeting point. At this point in the story, we are with Bilbo, the dwarves, and Gandalf, who have just run away from the goblins' home, and are now

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<sup>21</sup> *The Princess and the Goblin* is a children's fantasy by George MccDonald that may have influenced Tolkien's version of Goblins. He read this story while growing up, which may have caused him to draw similarities between his own goblins and the goblins in the story. There are also several songs in this book that are similar to his. He was also inspired by *Letters from Father Christmas* in the creation of his goblins (Ordway 91-92).



attempting to escape them by climbing high into trees. The goblins have set the trees on fire to make Bilbo and the dwarves ready to eat. The goblins sing about what they will do to the group once they get them out of the trees, threatening to “Roast them alive, or stew them in a pot; fry them, boil them, and eat them hot” (*Hobbit* 98). They do not think about the consequences of catching fire to the trees, which might include starting a forest fire. They have only one goal: to kill the dwarves and their companions. The goal is stated quite clearly by the goblins when they sing “So dwarves shall die and light the night for our delight” (*Hobbit* 99). This action, along with their song, shows their shortsightedness, as they do not care, or think about, how this fire is going to affect the rest of the forest, or their nearby home. They only focus on one moment at a time. As their songs show, they do not acknowledge the consequences of their actions, such as letting the goblin king get killed by Thorin, letting the dwarves escape, or setting fire to the trees that surround their home. They focus on the dwarves, Gandalf, and Bilbo so much that they do not notice the eagle who first comes to rescue Bilbo’s party until the eagle has already accomplished its goal. Had the goblins been paying attention to anything other than taunting those in the tree, they would have realized that the eagles were coming rather obviously. Tolkien describes them as “huge black shadows” with “Heavy beating wings” (*Hobbit* 99).

### Conclusion

Among both the races I have discussed, hobbit songs are more revealing than goblin songs. Goblins show their values not only through their songs, but also through their actions, while the hobbits tend to keep their thoughts to themselves. Through *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* it is clear the growth Bilbo goes through

as a character, even if only looking at the songs he sings. He is hesitant in *The Hobbit* about singing, adventure, or anything out of the ordinary, but by *The Fellowship of the Ring* Bilbo is writing his own songs and books about history and adventure. Arguably, the most important song of the two hobbit songs is *Roads Go Ever On*, as this song shows Bilbo's character growth more so than the spider song. This song shows that Bilbo now recognizes the beauty of the world around him, as well as developing a deeper love for the shire. He sings about how life goes on no matter where a person decides to go, but also about how home will always be waiting for them. He describes the new view he has adopted on traveling, with lines such as "By caves where never sun has shone, / By streams that never find the sea" (*Hobbit* 273). Bilbo, who was so closed-minded to adventure at the beginning of the book, has now become more receptive to new ideas. The lines in "Roads Go Ever On" shows the receptiveness he has developed. Instead of reminiscing on his hobbit hole he has left behind, he can now acknowledge the beauty that he has encountered while on his adventures. He has now seen new caves, rivers, and forests, and has also had more interaction with the world. In other words, as Gandalf says (*Hobbit* 274), Bilbo is no longer the hobbit he previously was.

## CHAPTER V : Conclusion

Tolkien's song lyrics represent a conversation that needs to be started. Through studying these lyrics, we can more deeply understand what Tolkien portrayed in each race that his prose does not otherwise reveal. This knowledge could be helpful not only for Tolkien scholars who are trying to more fully understand his work, but also for creative writers who are already inspired by Tolkien's worldbuilding. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Ring* inspired future fantasy authors to divide their works into trilogies, as it appeared Tolkien had done, showing just how much impact he had on the world of fantasy writing.

The dwarves in the Jackson films differ from those in the book. They are greedy, violent, bumbling, and often unintelligent. They may have been one of the reasons Christopher Tolkien angrily complained about the movie adaptation, calling it a disgrace to all his father's work. As he told an interviewer, "They eviscerated the book by making it an action movie for young people aged 15 to 25" (Rérôle).<sup>22</sup> That Christopher even says this much is surprising to the interviewer, as the junior Tolkien had been silent about every other adaptation of his father's work. He grew up with his father's work, and he helped edit and publish most of the history of Middle-earth after his father's death. Though he does not mention any specific instance of the change to an action movie, it is reasonable to assume he does not approve of the bloodthirsty violence of the film dwarves. Such a misconception could have more easily been avoided had Jackson added

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<sup>22</sup> "Ils ont éviscéré le livre en en faisant un film d'action pour les jeunes de 15 à 25 ans" (Translation mine).

the songs, which show the dwarves are emotional about their past, their desire to reunite with what is theirs, and their respect for those who came before them. The fact that Jackson took out most of the dwarven songs greatly changed the audience perception of the race, especially because the dwarves have the most songs in the book, singing a total of five different times, with three original songs, and two reprises or additions. The song lyrics show that the dwarves find importance in their history rather than simply wanting to fight for the sake of fighting. The lyrics give them a reason to fight for what is theirs instead of portraying them as greedy, as the movie does. The dwarves do find joy in fighting well, but they only do it when necessary. Their songs show that they value history, as they often sing in past tense since they are singing about past events.

The elves are a playful, slightly mischievous race who care about other living creatures. Most of the elven songs furnish further narrative information such as the setting, time of day, or state of the characters and their animals. For instance, the first song points out that the party has traveled a long way. The elves notice that both the horses and the riders must be exhausted from their long trip. The first song also plays an important role in establishing the elves' extensive knowledge of Middle-earth. They know Bilbo Baggins's name, they know where the party is headed, and they are willing to do whatever they can to help them.

The hobbits and goblins sing two songs each, and just as with the elves and dwarves, their songs tell us much about their races, such as that hobbits do not typically sing, with Bilbo being the exception. The reason for this exception could be that Bilbo is descended from the Tooks, and his Tookish side is elven and loves adventure, though he only sings when it is necessary or when particularly moved. The only two times Bilbo

sings are when he is in a moment of panic to save his dwarven companions and when he celebrates returning to the Shire after his adventure, which demonstrates his character development. As Bilbo is the only hobbit who sings in the book, he is the main example I have. Although in *The Lord of the Rings*, there are a few additional hobbit songs, such as the bath songs, I have chosen not to focus on them, as this thesis is about *The Hobbit*. In addition, the other hobbits who sing in *The Lord of the Rings* could do so because of Bilbo's influence over them, and all of them are viewed by other hobbits as strange and outlandish.

The goblins are the final race I have discussed. The goblins' songs show the goblins values, or rather lack thereof. The goblins do not value much besides eating and torturing. Their songs are all brash and loud and full of harsh onomatopoeia. It is important to note that both the elves and goblins sing in present tense. The elves focus on the present, as they know they cannot change the past and they believe it best to live in the present. They choose to sing in present tense because they want to make sure their race, and other races, appreciate their time in the present rather than wishing their lives away or dwelling on events they cannot change. The goblins, however, sing in present tense because they do not care about the past or the future; they only care about what is happening to them in the moment. They disregard what will happen because of their actions in the past, or who they have hurt in the past. The only concern of the goblins is that they focus on what they are doing while it is happening. They eat, and enjoy doing so, explaining how they will cook the dwarves and Hobbit when they make them get out of the tree, and they enjoy torturing.

The topic of Tolkien and song is important. Tolkien was an amazing world builder who built worlds that still live on and are continuing to influence literature even now, almost fifty years after his death. Studying how and why he wrote the lyrics he did can help historians and Tolkien scholars both better understand and appreciate Tolkien's world of Middle-Earth.

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