

# J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" as a Bildungsroman

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Šveger, Ena

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i  
pedagogije

Ena Šveger

***Hobbit* J. R. R. Tolkiena kao Bildungsroman**

Završni rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr.sc. Ljubica Matek

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Bachelor's Thesis

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## **Abstract**

For many, fantasy books represent a form of escapism. They offer their audience abundant fictional worlds to get lost in and intricate characters one may identify themselves with. As opposed to adult audiences, the fantasy genre is popular among children and young adults. Some of the benefits observed in providing children with fantasy books is that they offer children a way of seeing the world differently, and making direct connections between fictional scenarios and their reality. Specifically, many young adult and children's books heavily focus on the theme of coming of age. The plot strictly follows the life of the main character faced with various challenges, usually social and personal in nature. Some of the representative works of this genre are *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. All these books belong to the coming-of-age genre, also known as Bildungsroman. As a literary genre, Bildungsroman plays an important educational role since it helps children understand the world around them. Exploring your own identity, stepping outside of your comfort zone, and going through the process of maturing may prove challenging to many children. Therefore, *The Hobbit*, featuring all of these themes in a fictional and exciting setting, may aid many children who are, like the main character Bilbo Baggins, on their own quest of searching for their identity. This paper will focus on *The Hobbit* as a Bildungsroman and the coming-of-age journey of Bilbo Baggins.

**Keywords:** Bildungsroman, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, J. R. R. Tolkien, Bilbo Baggins, journey, identity, self.

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## Introduction

J. R. R. Tolkien, one of the most famous writers of fantasy novels, is widely known for his trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as its prequel, *The Hobbit*. *The Hobbit*, while less popular than *The Lord of the Rings*, scores 4,3 out of 5 on *Goodreads*. The main character of *The Hobbit* is a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins. Bilbo enjoys the serenity and peace of his rural life until one day this serenity is disrupted by the arrival of Gandalf the Grey. After Gandalf's arrival, Thorin Oakenshield, an heir to the dwarven throne, arrives with his party on a quest to reclaim his homeland and their lost gold. Even though reluctant, Bilbo is hired as the burglar of the party and with a heavy heart leaves his home on a quest to steal the gold from Smaug, the dragon who guards the Lonely Mountain.

While the plot heavily relies on the end goal of Thorin's quest to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, hidden underneath lies another quest: Bilbo's search for his identity and meaning of life. It should be noted that even though *The Hobbit* gained a lot of popularity amongst adult audiences, Tolkien originally wrote *The Hobbit* for his children and as a children's book. One of the most popular genres of books for children is that of coming-of-age, also known as Bildungsroman. It features a specific pattern, style, and themes which can also be observed in *The Hobbit*. While *The Hobbit* is classified as a fantasy novel, this paper will argue that it also belongs to the genre of Bildungsroman.

The first part of this paper will focus on J. R. R. Tolkien and Bildungsroman, explaining the reasoning behind the popularity of Tolkien's works and analysing the Bildungsroman as a literary genre. The second part of the paper will focus on the main Bildungsroman themes (journey, identity and the self, conflicts, apprenticeship, and the meaning of life) and analyse them in the context of *The Hobbit*, providing theoretical arguments followed by examples from the book. The paper ends with concluding remarks and the list of works cited.

## 1. J. R. R. Tolkien – The Great Storyteller

J. R. R. Tolkien was born in South Africa on January 3, 1892. He was an English writer and a scholar who achieved fame thanks to some of the best-known fantasy books, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. According to Hammond, after the death of both of his parents, a twelve-year-old Tolkien and his older brother became orphans and wards of a Catholic priest. Later, Tolkien met Edith Bratt, his future wife, who would inspire him to create the character of Lúthien Tinúviel. Tolkien attended King Edward's School in Birmingham and Exeter College, Oxford. He specialized in Old and Middle English and taught English language and literature for most of his life. Today, he is a well-known author whose books have sold in over 50 million copies ("J. R. R. Tolkien"). Both of these great fantasy books have been turned into movie adaptations. Tolkien infatuated many people with his work and gathered a large audience. A quick Google search will reveal impressive fandom, and fans who continue to further examine and build upon his fictional world.

To understand Tolkien's skill to enthrall so many readers, it is necessary to analyse the background and roots of his work. According to Rateliff, Tolkien produced a small number of influential scholarly publications such as a standard edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in 1925 and a landmark lecture on *Beowulf* in 1936. However, it is in his free time that he wrote intricate fantasy tales to amuse himself. Infatuated with fantasy, elves, and dragons, Tolkien decided to devise a lighter version of these stories to suit younger readers. His creation of one of the best-known books for children, *The Hobbit*, started in the 1930s when Tolkien began writing stories to entertain his four children. In 1937 *The Hobbit* was published and gained massive popularity. Hammond notes that due to the high request of his readers, seventeen years later Tolkien published *The Lord of the Rings*, a sequel to *The Hobbit*. *The Lord of the Rings* was named the best book of the twentieth century by several polls. DiGiorgio states that Tolkien manages to enthrall his readers due to his vast knowledge of Greek literature (9). He singles out Tolkien's knowledge of Greek literature and the *Odyssey* as the main inspiration for *The Hobbit* and the character of Bilbo Baggins. The similarity between the two works can be found in the theme of the main characters' quest to achieve something and the maturation process, which occurs on the quest. While Odysseus faces the challenges of hubris before he can be reunited with his wife, Bilbo Baggins, the main character of *The Hobbit*, is faced with various dangerous

adventures before he can obtain the treasure (DiGiorgio 9-10). There are many other similarities between the two works, but DiGiorgio notes that just because Tolkien takes inspiration from Homer it does not take away from his ability to produce rather successful and phenomenal works (9). According to DiGiorgio, another reason why *The Hobbit* gained such high popularity is due to Tolkien's ability to achieve high participation of the reader in the imagined world (14). Rateliff states that Tolkien took his time writing *The Hobbit* and even dropped it at times when he thought that some complications would impact the story and the narrative. However, even with issues within the story, Tolkien gave it time and would return to writing. It is also important to note that by the time he began writing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien had been writing short fantasy stories for his children for about 10 years. Rateliff further notes that Tolkien's imagination came together through *The Hobbit*. He used academic knowledge, his love for fiction, and his *Legendarium* to create this unique story and through it, he mastered his narrative voice which captivates so many readers even today.

## **2. Bildungsroman**

### **2.1. The Origin of Bildungsroman**

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Bildungsroman as a “class of novel that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically” (“Bildungsroman. German Literary Genre”). The word Bildungsroman is further explained as a novel of education and as a novel of formation. The term was coined by Karl von Morgenstern in 1817 but it was not commonly used until the nineteenth century when the genre flourished in England and the United States (Thamarana 22). Thamarana explains the term Bildungsroman as “the name affixed to those novels that concentrate on the development or education of a central character” and analyses the word's two parts: the word “bildungs” meaning formation and the word “roman” meaning novel (22). However, the origin of Bildungsroman is a rather complicated one.

Graham points out that in 1916 Bildungsroman was defined as “a variety of the novel that is German, typically German, legitimately national” by Thomas Mann (3). Another reason why Bildungsroman is considered an exclusively German genre is due to it being associated with the

German Enlightenment and the works of Goethe and Wieland that portray the transition from youth to maturity (Graham 3). However, Graham opposes this idea and argues that while Bildungsroman has very distinct features that can be recognized easily, it is not strictly bound to German works (3). To support her idea, Graham points out that as long as the structure and the model of the genre are sustained, the work can be considered a Bildungsroman (3). Therefore, Graham states that the historical development of Bildungsroman is rather complicated and calls for a different perspective. Instead of the typical linear development of the genre, the development of Bildungsroman should be approached with a different pattern, that of a rhizome (Graham 4).

Even with a complicated history of origin, the birth of Bildungsroman is attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Graham 18). However, the very first known English example of this genre is written by Christoph Martin Wieland and it is *The History of Agathon* in 1766-1767 (Thamarana 22). Thamarana notes that there is a difference between German and English Bildungsroman; while the German Bildungsroman is focused on internal psychological struggle, English Bildungsroman focuses on the battle of establishing individual identity followed up with challenges on the outside (22). Aside from this difference, there are also variations of Bildungsroman. Thamarana notes a few: *Entwicklungsroman* (novel of development), *Erziehungsroman* (novel of education), *Künstlerroman* (novel of artistic development), and *Zeitroman* (development of era along with personal development) (25). Some of the best-known examples of Bildungsroman are *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence, and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath (Thamarana 24).

Over time, the genre changed. The most prominent changes happened in the protagonist. In the period between 1700-1800, the real sign of maturity was the protagonist finding his place in society. However, since the 1900s and till today the protagonist is just as likely to accept isolation as he is to accept his role in the mainstream. Women as the protagonists of the Bildungsroman novel were not popular before the 1900s and were restricted to seek education through men and marriage. In contemporary Bildungsroman, women protagonists have the freedom to explore their self-discovery path outside of marriage ("Bildungsroman").

## 2.2. Themes and Style of Bildungsroman

Even though there are many different variations and styles of Bildungsroman, they all follow a specific pattern and possess similar features. Galens sums it up: “the sensitive, intelligent protagonist leaves home, undergoes stages of conflict and growth, is tested by crises and love affairs, then finally finds the best place to use his/her unique talents” (64). Similarly to Galens, Thamarana suggests that the main feature of Bildungsroman is the psychological maturation of the main character, and this process follows a very specific pattern: the innocent and sensitive protagonist leaves the comfort of his home in pursuit of an adventure where he faces various stages of conflict and is continuously tested in various crises (22). Galens mentions some of the key themes that can be found in the Bildungsroman genre: identity and the self, journey, love, education, and search for the meaning of life (70).

When talking about the theme of education, it is important to note that it is life that serves as education to the protagonist (“Bildungsroman”). Furthermore, while education can also be in the academic sense, it can also appear as a process of learning social graces, conducting business, and gaining integrity (Galens 70). Usually, the protagonist will have a hidden unique talent that he or she needs to discover and figure out how to use it. The discovery of the said talent happens on the protagonist’s journey and usually gives the protagonist a different perspective of himself and others (“Bildungsroman”).

The journey is another theme that dominates the Bildungsroman genre. Usually, the protagonist leaves the comfort of his home and wanders into the world where his mettle is tested. Finally, finding love and adult connections is another important theme. Sometimes, the formalization of the said love can be a final event of the novel (“Bildungsroman”). Apprenticeship and coming of age are rather important themes as well. Apprenticeship is the main distinguishing factor of the genre. The protagonist is placed with an older practitioner who serves as a teacher and as a role model (“Bildungsroman”). All these themes can be found in *The Hobbit* and will be discussed in the following chapters of the paper.

Galens touches upon the style of the Bildungsroman and claims that it is written in such a way that it involves the reader in the same process of education that the protagonist undergoes (71). This means that at times the reader might not agree with the actions of the protagonist and compares his mentality and morals with the protagonists. The heavy focus on the protagonist

enables the reader to engross himself with the said maturation process and the life lessons that are present in the novel. Furthermore, Bildungsroman is a chronicle, meaning that it follows a record of events presented as a chronological diary recording (Galens 71). The conflicts that the protagonist must go through are a strong device that is used to portray the difficulty of finding one's purpose in life. These conflicts can be between the protagonist and nature, the others, fate, or even himself. The dialogue of a Bildungsroman is very specific in a way that it is the main way of carrying the plot. Therefore, the plot and narrative are secondary to it ("Bildungsroman"). The following chapters will focus on the occurrence of the key elements of Bildungsroman in *The Hobbit* and their analysis followed by examples.

### **3. *The Hobbit***

According to Hall, *The Hobbit*, published in 1937, serves as a prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel tells a story of Tolkien's imagined world of Middle Earth in its Third Age ("The Hobbit"). It belongs to the category of fantasy novels and portrays a story "of a hobbit who helps thirteen dwarves to get back their rightful kingdom and treasure from the ferocious dragon, Smaug" (Collins 137). Hall notes that the novel combines the ancient heroic Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian epics, which Tolkien studied at his university. She also points out that some critics have tried to find metaphors for England's heroism or inherent evil. However, since Tolkien is known for disliking allegory, this novel is more likely to be "the heroic story of a small, charming person who had no idea how resourceful he is until his abilities are put to test" (Hall). The main character of the novel, Bilbo Baggins, fits this description.

Namely, Bilbo is a hobbit, a member of a race of small humanoid creatures who value peace, simplicity, and coziness (Hall). On a seemingly ordinary day, Bilbo Baggins is visited by Gandalf the Grey, a traveling wizard who invites him on an adventure (Tolkien 7). Even though Bilbo rejects Gandalf's offer, the very next day a party of thirteen dwarves comes to Bilbo's house to discuss the plans for the mentioned adventure, and to hire Bilbo as their burglar (Tolkien 22). Bilbo is introduced to Thorin Oakenshield, the next King under the Mountain, and his loyal dwarves (Tolkien 27-29). Thorin informs him of their quest to retrieve their stolen treasure which is guarded by the dragon Smaug (Tolkien 23-25). At first, Bilbo is too reluctant to

leave the comfort and serenity of his home. However, after some encouragement by Gandalf, at the very last minute, he joins the party on their quest to reach the Lonely Mountain and retrieve what was once theirs (Tolkien 35-36). This quest will turn out to be Bilbo's journey toward maturity and self-actualization. In fact, Hall states that *The Hobbit* is "the story of Bilbo's maturing from a seeker of warmth and comforts to a fighter, however humble, for the greater good." The following chapters will depict Bilbo's growth and key elements of the Bildungsroman genre through an analysis of the plot and key challenges that contributed to Bilbo's growth and the formation of his identity.

#### **4. Bilbo Baggins's Journey**

As mentioned in previous chapters, the journey is one of the most prominent elements of a Bildungsroman. This applies to *The Hobbit* as well, as the whole plot revolves around a large quest split into various challenges and adventures. The main character usually unwillingly leaves the comfort of their home, which is also the case with Bilbo Baggins who had to be talked into joining by Gandalf. Thamarana touches upon the theme of the journey, stating that the hero usually leaves their rural home and travels into the wider world (24). Bilbo is faced with the same fate, as he leaves the comfort of The Hill and crosses The Water, a territory beyond which no hobbit was to be found (Tolkien 4). The journey Bilbo finds himself on, although mostly physical, can also be considered a metaphorical journey, that of discovering the self and building his new identity. More precisely, Collins states that on this journey Bilbo matures "on multiple levels, gaining awareness of his psyche alongside increased social proficiency" (1). Therefore, Collins concludes that the text can be read through a psychoanalytic lens to investigate Bilbo's development (1).

Bilbo's journey can also be seen as that from a child to an adult. Collins states that at the very beginning, Bilbo is described as a sheltered and childlike individual (3). This is true, as the very first thing Tolkien describes in the novel is Bilbo's home:

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit

down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort ... The best rooms were all on the left-hand side (going in), for these were the only ones to have windows, deep-set round windows looking over his garden, and meadows beyond, sloping down to the river. (1-2)

After describing Bilbo's home, Tolkien goes on to briefly explain the nature of the Bagginses. They were regarded as a respectable family, both for their wealth and their predictability: "they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected: you could tell what a Baggins would say on any question without the bother of asking him" (Tolkien 2). Just from reading the first few pages, it is clear that Bilbo Baggins lived in a rural setting where peace, order, and predictability were some of the main social values. These social values sheltered the individuals, but they also deprived them of any adventures that might make them act unpredictably. Arslan further supports the idea of Bilbo being a childlike character by commenting on the serenity and comfort of Bilbo's home, comparing it to the comfort of a mother's womb (137).

Another important feature is Bilbo's attitude towards this journey. Whether physical or psychological, Bilbo is uncomfortable with any adventure and the journey represents something disturbing and uncomfortable to him. This can be seen in Bilbo's reply to Gandalf's invitation: "We are a plain quiet folk and I have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them" (Tolkien 5). However, for any maturation to happen, Bilbo must accept the discomfort that the journey presents, and he must abandon his everyday life of routine. This is where the physical journey takes part in his development. To reach their destination, the Lonely Mountain, the party needs to travel a rather long distance over dangerous terrain. On their journey to the Lonely Mountain, Bilbo, together with the rest of the party, is faced with various challenges that test their wit and dexterity. Even though these events are mostly physical, they provide Bilbo with necessary challenges that form him into a strong and confident individual. Arslan states that this change is not instant, and his development happens gradually through various incidents (139), which reflects the period of growing-up or adolescence. Furthermore, Arslan also notes that it is these specific events that played a key role in Bilbo's development: the first incident where they are captured by trolls, later being captured by the goblins and meeting Gollum, passing through Mirkwood, and getting attacked by spiders and captured by elves, facing Smaug and finally



playing an important role in being a mediator between Elvenking, Bard, and Thorin (137-142). Each of these events plays an important role in Bilbo's life, ultimately allowing him to find his identity and courage, as will be shown in the following chapter.

#### **4.1. Identity and the Self**

The reader is introduced to Bilbo's heritage early on. Tolkien explains that Bilbo Baggins is the son of Belladonna Took and Bungo Baggins (3). In contrast to Bungo Baggins, Belladonna Took was "one of the three remarkable daughters of the Old Took, head of the hobbits who lived across The Water" (Tolkien 3). The Tookes are further described as different from the usual hobbits, as they "would go and have adventures" (Tolkien 3). Contrary to that, Bungo Baggins was much less adventurous and more concerned with building a luxurious home (Tolkien 3). Arslan observes this dual heritage and points out that it plays an important role in Bilbo's character development (137). He further explains that Bilbo being a mixture of these genes meant that the two sides of him would often clash.

The very first time this clash of identities happens is when Bilbo is trying to decide whether he wants to go on this adventure or not. After hearing the song of the dwarves which described the Lonely Mountain, "something Tookish woke up inside of him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and waterfalls, and explore the caves and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick" (Tolkien 18). But only seconds after imagining himself going on an adventure, Bilbo "shuddered; and very quickly he was plain Mr. Baggins of Bag-End, Underhill, again" (Tolkien 19). This inner struggle happens whenever Bilbo faces making big decisions such as when he must act in order to defend himself and his friends. Arslan states that there is a disbalance between these sides and that his Tookish side is "almost in slumber" (138). Furthermore, Arslan notes that the journey is necessary for Bilbo not just to obtain the gold as a prize for his work, but also to obtain the balance between his Tookish and Baggins sides (138). Eventually, Bilbo does achieve a healthy balance between the two sides, but the progress is gradual.

At the beginning of their adventure, Bilbo is still more of a Baggins than a Took. Just as they depart, Bilbo notices that he did not bring his hat and walking stick (Tolkien 36). Arslan

sees this as Bilbo metaphorically leaving his Baggins identity and starting his identity quest (138). The first time his Tookish side takes over is when the party is ambushed by the trolls. Bilbo's instinct to act like a burglar awakens when he sees an opportunity to pickpocket the trolls' bags. He is hesitant but feels too guilty to go back to the party empty-handed (Tolkien 42). Though he fails and is eventually captured by the trolls and rescued by Gandalf, Arslan states that this is just the beginning of his search for his identity and that bigger challenges await (139).

The first real danger that Bilbo finds himself in alone is when he faces Gollum after the party was captured by goblins. Arslan suggests that this event serves as Bilbo's physical awakening and gaining of conscience (139). As Bilbo and Gollum play the game of riddles, Bilbo uses his intellect to defeat Gollum's challenges (Tolkien 86-91). When Gollum notices that Bilbo stole his ring, he tries to find him and inadvertently leads him to the exit. As Bilbo escapes, Gollum yells "Thief! Thief! Thief!" (Tolkien 103), acknowledging Bilbo's nature and his role in the quest.

Likewise, another metaphorical awakening of his Tookish side can be seen when Bilbo is stuck and unable to escape the goblin cave due to his brass buttons preventing him from squeezing through the exit (Tolkien 105). Just like the hat and walking stick, the brass buttons of his waistcoat represent his Baggins heritage. In order for him to free himself and escape the danger, Bilbo had to sacrifice the buttons and squirm through, ultimately ripping off the buttons and leaving them (Tolkien 105-106), suggesting his rejection of Baggins heritage and stagnant lifestyle, which he must abandon in order to be free and to grow. According to Arslan, in this event Bilbo did not only gain the ring that helps him in the future but also self-confidence (140).

As the plot progresses, Bilbo takes the initiative a lot more and is more vocal about his ideas and plans. He also engages with the party a lot more and rescues them on multiple occasions using his newly gained confidence and skills. This can be seen in the events that happened in Mirkwood when the party is captured by the elves. Arslan reflects on this event and says the following:

Not having his friends or Gandalf around, Bilbo uses the ring, his wit and courage. He gets the keys to the prison cells and releases the dwarves. Yet, he plots his escape plan and finds out that the only way to get out is by getting into barrels and floating on the

stream. It is observed that like a real leader, Bilbo directs all the dwarves, puts them in the barrels and saves them. (140)

Finally, Bilbo begins to gain confidence and his Tookish side comes to the surface even more. Arslan states that the climax of his journey on the discovery of self and balancing his two sides is when he is faced with Smaug and the issue of Arkenstone (141-142).

After Smaug's death, Bilbo must decide whether to give the Arkenstone to the Elvenking or Thorin (Tolkien 312). Arslan points out that at this point in the plot, Bilbo has matured enough to make his own decisions, and opts for stopping the war by offering the Elvenking the Arkenstone as a way of a bargain (142). It is noteworthy that Bilbo, who previously used to put himself and his comfort or needs first, now looks at the wider picture and makes a moral decision that ultimately brings peace to everyone, even at the cost of his own discomfort because of betraying Thorin's trust. Through many challenges, Bilbo awoke his Tookish side and gained self-confidence. Yet his Baggins side is still present in a way that it does not discourage or drown his Tookish one. This can be seen in Bilbo's reply to Elvenking: "I may be a burglar – or so they say: personally I never really felt like one – but I am an honest one, I hope, more or less" (Tolkien 317). At the end of the journey, the change in Bilbo's identity is evident. Arslan concludes:

While going back home, Bilbo is not the same person anymore. He is not the Baggins whose Tookish side is suppressed and who is against adventures and unexpected events. Gandalf tells "My dear Bilbo! You are not the hobbit that you were!" (347). As the under title presents, "there and back again" refers to Bilbo's discovering his potential through adventures and coming back as a person whose inner conflict comes to a wholeness and harmony. (142)

As the chapter has shown, *The Hobbit* heavily relies on the theme of searching for identity and the self, as Bilbo comes back to his home a truly changed – more mature and self-confident – hobbit. In this, the novel employs typical strategies of a Bildungsroman. But, it uses others as well, such as dealing with conflicts, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

## 4.2. Conflicts

Galens points out that conflict is another key element of Bildungsroman and that it can come in the form of mistakes, pitfalls, and forces beyond one's control (71). He further states that these conflicts can be between the protagonist and fate, nature, others, or self. All these conflicts are a part of the maturation process, and Galens points out that they help the main character deepen his self-knowledge and strengthen his mental fortitude (71). The reason why it is necessary for conflicts to arise in Bildungsroman is so that the work can reflect real-life experiences, which are filled with various conflicts (Galens 71).

Undeniably, *The Hobbit* is a novel filled with conflicts of all kinds. Bilbo faces conflicts between himself and his identity, which was discussed in the previous chapter. There are also conflicts between him and society. As a hobbit, Bilbo is expected to stay passive and not behave in an unexpected way. When he does step out of these societal rules, he loses his reputation: "Indeed Bilbo found he had lost more than spoons – he had lost his reputation. . . . He was in fact held by all the hobbits of the neighbourhood to be 'queer'" (Tolkien 353).

In addition to that, Bilbo also finds himself in conflict with his own party, as they at first doubt him and his skills. Gloin, one of the dwarves, was the first to doubt Bilbo: "I clapped my eyes on the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat, I had my doubts. He looks more like a grocer than a burglar!" (Tolkien 21). Bombur also makes a remark on hiring Bilbo: "Why, o why did I ever bring a wretched little hobbit on a treasure hunt!" (Tolkien 78). At one point, when Bilbo is seemingly lost, they comment: "He has been more trouble than use so far" (Tolkien 109). Of course, these conflicts between Bilbo and his party are more prominent at the beginning of the novel, as he is still rather insecure and unskilled and truly weighs down the party. As his skills improve, and his self-confidence becomes more prominent, the party notices this, and their tone toward him changes. It is after saving the dwarves from the spiders in Mirkwood that he starts gaining their trust and respect: "These questions they asked over and over again . . . From which you can see that they had changed their opinion of Mr Baggins very much, and have begun to have a great respect for him (as Gandalf said they would)" (Tolkien 194).

Finally, after saving the dwarves from Elvenking, facing Smaug head-on, and enduring the final battle, Bilbo gains respect from all of those who knew him. As Thorin parts with Bilbo, he says: "There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage

and some wisdom, blended in measure” (Tolkien 336). Elvenking names Bilbo elf-friend (Tolkien 343), and Gandalf also points out the positive change in Bilbo: “You are not the hobbit that you were” (Tolkien 351). There are other, physical, conflicts that occur mostly in the shape of combat, but they serve as devices for the development of Bilbo’s courage and mental fortitude (Galens 71), since psychological development of the protagonist is more crucial in Bildungsroman. Moreover, although Bilbo did face many challenges, Arslan states that Tolkien does not paint him as a hero since he is not the one to kill the dragon, and this is a heroic deed (142). It follows that Bilbo was never on a quest to become a hero, but rather on a personal quest of finding his identity by taking up various challenges and by learning – in the form of an apprentice – from those who have more knowledge and experience.

### 4.3. Apprenticeship

Galens reflects on the role of apprenticeship in Bildungsroman: “As a coming-of-age novel, the Bildungsroman focuses on the main character’s apprenticeship. These experiences place the character near older practitioners whose roles as models the character either emulates or rejects” (79). In the case of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins is placed under the apprenticeship of Gandalf the Grey. Their roles of master and apprentice can be observed in the way Gandalf behaves toward Bilbo. It can even be argued that Gandalf, in the role of a master, plays a caring and almost parental role.

At the very beginning of the novel, when Gandalf and Bilbo meet for the first time, Gandalf places a symbol on Bilbo’s door (Tolkien 8), so that the dwarves can find Bilbo’s house. Once everyone’s there and suspicions arise about Bilbo’s skills and worthiness, Gandalf says:

You asked me to find the fourteenth man for your expedition, and I chose Mister Baggins . . . I have chosen Mister Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself. (Tolkien 23)

Arslan comments on this situation and points out Gandalf’s knowledge of Bilbo’s potential strength and growth (138), which emulates a student-teacher relationship, or that of a father and son. In fact, Collins takes a psychological approach to the relationship between Bilbo and

Gandalf, stating that Gandalf is painted as a parental figure, which highlights Bilbo's immaturity (4).

The first challenge Bilbo faces without the aid of Gandalf is when the party is captured by trolls. Arslan states that Gandalf's departure at that time is not coincidental: "This is necessary for the plot now that Bilbo's dependency and comfort disappear with Gandalf" (139). At this point, Bilbo is still inexperienced and heavily relies on Gandalf's aid. Even though he makes an attempt at fighting the trolls, he fails and is eventually rescued by Gandalf. Collins points out that Bilbo's way of alarming Gandalf, by letting out a very loud yell, is very childlike and may resemble a child calling out to a parent (5). In the end, Bilbo realizes that Gandalf had been there all along watching over the party and making sure to keep trolls occupied until the sun rose and turned them to stone (Tolkien 49). Evidently, even though Gandalf leaves the party, he never truly lets Bilbo face challenges he is not ready for alone. The one time that Gandalf loses sight of Bilbo, in the goblins' cave, he gets rather upset and urges the whole party to go back and look for him (Tolkien 109). Like a caring parent, Gandalf is unwilling to leave Bilbo behind even if it means risking his own life. When Bilbo, who managed to escape by using the ring he found, finally does show himself to the party, Gandalf is "as astonished as any of them, but probably more pleased than all of them" (Tolkien 110). Even though he is evidently pleased with knowing that Bilbo is safe, Gandalf is also proud of his apprentice for managing to handle quite a big challenge all by himself. Like always, Gandalf is quick to praise Bilbo after he faces challenges: "'What did I tell you?' said Gandalf laughing. 'Mr. Baggins has more about him than you guess'" (Tolkien 111). Collins states that this dependent behaviour resides with Bilbo until they reach the Lonely Mountain, where he first shows real signs of maturity (6), as he has to act alone.

The relationship between Gandalf and Bilbo changes at that point as well. Whereas Gandalf started out as the leader everyone heavily relies on, slowly but surely, the dwarves begin to turn to Bilbo for guidance as Gandalf yet again leaves the party to tend to his own private matters. In Mirkwood, after defeating the spiders and saving the party, the dwarves start trusting Bilbo more and more as he proves himself a warrior and gains their respect (Tolkien 194). This is the moment when Bilbo realizes that he does not need the comfort of his home, Gandalf, or anyone else to survive (Arslan 140). Furthermore, after being captured by the Elvenking, the

dwarves are forced to trust Bilbo as he is the only one who can save them. Using his wit and the ring, Bilbo, like a true leader, guides the dwarves to freedom:

It is observed that like a real leader, Bilbo directs all the dwarves, puts them in the barrels and saves them. Dorothy Matthews supports this idea of Bilbo's leadership by saying "from this point on, Bilbo has the self-esteem needed to fulfil his responsibilities as a mature and trustworthy leader. It is through his ingenuity that they escape from the dungeon prisons in the subterranean halls of wood-elves" (Matthews 38). (Arslan 140-141)

It is only after the plot climax that Gandalf shows up and departs back home with Bilbo. On their journey back, Gandalf is well pleased with his apprentice and praises him by positively commenting on Bilbo's change: "My dear Bilbo! You are not the hobbit that you were!" (Tolkien 351).

In summation, the relationship between Gandalf and Bilbo is evidently that of a master and apprentice. Even if one sees it as a relationship between teacher and student, or parent and child, it is evident that Bilbo learns from and leans on Gandalf until he is ready to act alone. Gandalf serves as a gentle guide in Bilbo's life, rescuing Bilbo when needed but also pushing him towards new challenges to aid his character development.

#### **4.4. The Meaning of Life**

So far it has been argued that Bilbo was, while on the quest of returning the gold and the Lonely Mountain to dwarves, on his own journey. His journey was a developmental one, enabling him to mature from a very stiff, passive, and ordinary hobbit to a very confident and adventurous one. Thanks to his mentor Gandalf, Bilbo had an opportunity to spread his horizons and enrich his life. Significantly, this is another key theme of Bildungsroman: finding the meaning of one's life. Galens says that growing up involves the search for universal truths. Paradoxically, these universal truths varied; for Victorians, they meant achieving middle-class values such as marrying and settling down, and, quite opposite, for some other writers they meant the abandonment of middle-class values (Galens 70).

When analysing the race of hobbits, it can be determined from their lifestyles that their universal truth and meaning of life is to live orderly and peacefully, maintaining their daily routines and staying in one place for the rest of their life. This can be noticed in the way Bilbo describes hobbits: “We are plain and quiet folk” (Tolkien 5). They were regarded as reputable based on their predictability: “people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (Tolkien 2). Therefore, Bilbo’s meaning of life was rather simple, conservative, and bound to his peaceful lifestyle. For many-people, leaving the comfort that such a lifestyle provides may prove challenging, just like it was for Bilbo, and they would not want to try new things or change anything in their life for fear of losing what they have. But this is where *The Hobbit* teaches its audience a very important lesson. Even though Bilbo fears the change and is very nostalgic for his old life, his adventures teach him that there is more to life than his hobbit hole. At the end of his adventure, Bilbo is as content with his new life and identity as he could ever be: “He was quite content; and the sound of the kettle on his hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party” (Tolkien 353).

Through his adventures, Bilbo changed his own view of life: “He took to writing poetry and visiting elves; and though many shook their heads and touched their foreheads and said ‘Poor old Baggins!’ and though few believed any of his tales, he remained very happy to the end of his days, and these were extraordinarily long” (Tolkien 353). With those words, Tolkien concludes that even though his new approach to life, which includes adventure and exploration beyond his home, may cost him the respect of his social circles, it helped him enjoy his life to the fullest. Conclusively, *The Hobbit* teaches its audience that by stepping out of their comfort zone and overcoming the challenges that the journey brings, the reward for enduring the discomfort it all brings will result in personal growth and the enrichment of life, which is well worth the struggles.



## Conclusion

J. R. R Tolkien, although best known for his fantasy novel *The Lord of the Rings*, wrote another marvellous and highly popular work, *The Hobbit*. Both of these great fantasy novels are prized for their depiction of fictional worlds and races, as well as for a captivating and thrilling plot. However, even though most of Tolkien's audience is comprised of young adults and adults, *The Hobbit* was originally meant as a book for children. More precisely, *The Hobbit* can be considered to be a coming-of-age novel due to its style and themes.

Like a classic Bildungsroman, *The Hobbit* follows the same pattern of a sensitive protagonist who leaves their home and faces many challenges which end up aiding his growth as a person. It also heavily relies on prominent Bildungsroman themes, such as journey, identity, the self, conflicts, apprenticeship, and the meaning of life. In this case, the main protagonist is a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins. The character of Bilbo Baggins is portrayed as an insecure and very childlike person who must leave the comfort of his lifestyle in order to obtain something much more valuable than the serenity his home provides him with: his identity.

Identity crisis is a developmental event that many people face and that many people fear. It is an event in which people question themselves and their sense of self, trying to find their own place in the world. This process can be scary, especially so for young adults and children who are forced to make big decisions about their life. The aim of a Bildungsroman for children and young adults is to provide the readers with a relatable character who goes through the same issues as them. Bilbo Baggins, although primarily taking on the physical challenges of his quest undergoes identity crisis and embarks on the journey of self-discovery.

In conclusion, Tolkien produced a remarkable Bildungsroman that still may inspire children worldwide to embark on their own journey of self-discovery. The character of Bilbo Baggins provides children with many valuable life lessons, most prominently that it is okay to occasionally step out of your comfort zone, as the result will be more than rewarding. *The Hobbit* also teaches a powerful lesson on fear and failure; just like Jack Canfield said: "Everything you want is on the other side of fear," the character of Bilbo Baggins teaches children that fear is natural, and that failure is necessary for them to make a change in their own life and grow.

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