

About *The Hobbit*

elements towards an analysis

(compiled from enotes.com, sparknotes.com and cliffnotes.com)

Beginning of chapter 1, a summary

Bilbo Baggins lives in a dry, comfortable hole in the ground. Bilbo is a hobbit, a little person about half the height of an ordinary man. Hobbits have fat bellies and shoeless, hairy feet. They like food, comfort, and simple lives. Among the hobbits, Bilbo's family is highly respected for being predictable and never having adventures—but that is about to change.

One day Bilbo is out in the sunshine smoking a pipe when Gandalf the wizard stops to talk with him. Gandalf explains that he wants to find a companion for an adventure, and Bilbo scoffs, saying that nobody in his neighborhood would agree to go along. Gandalf tells Bilbo that an adventure would be good for him.

Tolkien the writer

Tolkien is one of the preeminent fantasy writers of the twentieth century. For many readers, his books provide the standards by which to judge all other fantasy. Tolkien's success lies in his ability to "sub-create," a process he defines in his essay "On Fairy Stories" as the artist's ability to create a "Secondary World" that follows consistent internal rules. By describing in depth the peoples, geography, and history of his invented world, Tolkien offers an imaginary world so vividly portrayed in its complexity that readers do not so much suspend disbelief while reading as much as simply believe in Middle-earth.

Tolkien the professor

One component of Tolkien's success as a sub-creator is his profound knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature. He freely borrows its trolls, goblins, dwarves, elves, and dragons, as well as the quest motif. The quest is an archetypal pattern of fantasy literature present in fairy tales, romances, and epics; it provides structure for both the plot and character development in *The Hobbit*. Quest stories depict people, most often young, who leave home in search of some object. On the journey the protagonists pass a series of tests, often encountering evil and attempting to destroy it. At the end, the heroes return home fundamentally altered, with their identities reshaped.

Bilbo as a hero

Bilbo is a model quest hero. Readers easily identify with him. At the beginning of his travels he is not particularly imaginative, brave, or competent, but he develops these qualities as events demand them of him. Leaving his quiet, unchallenging home for the quest forces Bilbo to grow psychologically during his travels. One fundamental characteristic never changes: He remains good-hearted throughout the story, and much of his success comes from his best qualities of loyalty, perseverance, kindness, and unselfishness. In contrast with Bilbo, the dwarves, elves, and men lack these qualities; their greed over the dragon's treasure causes the clash among them that precedes the Battle of Five Armies.

A book for children?

The Hobbit has a reputation as a children's book, but it appeals to a broader audience because it is simultaneously amusing and serious. It deals with important themes in a humorous narrative style. The narrator is intrusive, addressing his audience directly to comment on the action or give information, a trait that younger readers enjoy but that some older readers may occasionally find tiresome. The novel reads aloud well to children, partly because of Tolkien's use of comic verse and onomatopoeic words.

Comparison with The Lord of the Rings

The Lord of the Rings, the trilogy sequel to The Hobbit, differs vastly in its epic scope and thus is appropriate for adult readers rather than children. It tells the story of Bilbo's nephew Frodo, who must destroy the Ring of Power of Sauron, the Dark Lord. It explores the same themes of heroism and conflict between good and evil that are present in The Hobbit, but in far greater complexity and intricacy of detail. Although critics frequently favor the epic over its precursor, the two differ so much in aim that comparisons are unfair. The Hobbit furnishes an incomparable introduction to The Lord of the Rings, and its readers often wish to go on to the trilogy, but The Hobbit can stand alone as a rich fantasy experience.

The hobbit's house.

Bilbo's house is described in lavish detail in the opening pages of the book. It is said to have a round door, painted bright green, which led into a hole. Importantly, the hole is neither too wet nor too dry, nor is it empty – the defining feature of a hobbit hole is comfort, and accordingly Bilbo's hobbit hole is fully furnished, tiled and carpeted and with wallpaper and fittings as you would expect in any other house. Built into the side of the hill in a series of tunnels, the house is like a bungalow, all on one level, and includes bedrooms, pantries, bathrooms, wardrobes, dining rooms, and so on. There are many many rooms in the hobbit's house, and lots of pegs for people to hang their hats and coats on, because Bilbo is fond of receiving visitors. Only rooms on the left side (going in) have windows, because these are on the outside of the hill.

The point of view in The Hobbit

The point of view in The Hobbit is the third person point of view, meaning that the story is told with words such as "he", "she", "it", and "they" (rather than words such as "I" or "me", which are the first person point of view, or "you" which is indicative of the second person point of view). The Hobbit is told through an omniscient, or all knowing, narrator, who occasionally slips into the first person to comment on the story. One instance of that can be seen at the very beginning of the story: "I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays...", though there are many examples of the narrator doing things like this. Aside from that, the narration mostly sticks to Bilbo, occasionally branching out to other characters for very short periods of time, such as when Gollum is introduced in the chapter "Riddles in the Dark".