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# From Page to Screen, the Differences that Occur from *The Hobbit* Novel to its Movie Adaptation *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*

Bachelor's thesis in Bacheloroppgave i engelsk ENG2910 BENG

Supervisor: Dr. Nicole Falkenhayner

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## Introduction

When J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Hobbit* was released, the story was immediately considered a well-made work and sold a great number of copies. The book even won The Herald's Tribune's prize in 1938 for the best children's book published (Scull 49). Tolkien managed to make a new world that would gain a larger audience than he might imagined when he wrote about a hobbit who lived in a hole in the ground. In later years, the popularity of the novel led to the creation of large fan bases, and the marketing value of The Hobbit universe increased with the making of board games, video games and stage plays. The decision to make a movie adaptation of The Hobbit was made after the major success of a previous movie trilogy based on *The Lord of the Rings* books. The trilogy, made by Peter Jackson, told Tolkien's stories with visual representation and actors who brought the characters to life. After its massive profit at the box office, Jackson was allowed to continue his plan about the making of the adaptation *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. When making a movie where the source material is already beloved by many, and a prequel of an already successful movie trilogy, there will be obstacles and reactions to the content. Jackson had decided to make one novel into three movies, all reaching three hours in length. By doing it that way, the changes to the original work will have an effect on the storyline. This thesis will make use of different theories, such as adaptation theory and inductive content analysis theory, to explain how Jackson's adaptation was changed while still staying true to the author and his novel. The theories will also explain in depth the opinions of individual fans. The questions of how these differences have affected the story regarding its continuation in *The Lord of the Rings*, and whether it was a good idea to add plot points and changes to the story will be answered. Also, what were the consequences of making a beloved novel into a movie adaptation regarding the audience and fanbase?

## *The Hobbit* – an analysis of the novel and its adaptation

### *The Hobbit* – The Novel

*The Hobbit* was written by J.R.R Tolkien and was published in 1937. It has become a classic fantasy novel, known by readers of all ages. The plot revolves around the character Bilbo Baggins, who is a hobbit living his quiet life in the Shire. However, his content life changes when a wizard named Gandalf appears with a company of dwarves. The group is led by Thorin Oakenshield, a strongminded dwarf on a mission to take back what is theirs. Bilbo is recruited as the burglar to help them with the quest of reclaiming the Lonely Mountain from the dragon Smaug. On this journey, Bilbo experiences new challenges and meets elves, trolls

and more. Throughout the novel, Bilbo shows that he is more courageous than both he and the group expected, as he is faced with different situations he must survive.

*The Hobbit* explores several major themes such as heroism, good against evil and the nature of adventure. The theme heroism is mostly shown through Bilbo's journey in the novel. He is presented as a character who is a timid hobbit that values peace and quiet, but takes a leap into a new adventure, which forces him to realize new sides to himself. An example of Bilbo's character is when he is trapped in a cave deep beneath the Misty Mountains with the character Gollum. "When Bilbo opened his eyes, he wondered if he has; for it was just as dark as with them shut. No one was anywhere near him. Just imagine his fright! He could hear nothing. He could see nothing, and he could feel nothing except the stone of the floor" (Tolkien 65). The beginning of chapter five is where Bilbo is alone on the dangerous journey for the first time. It is the chapter where Bilbo has most of his character development, and is a crucial moment to the story progression. He wakes up after being separated from the dwarves and must wander into the cave where he is met with a creature. Bilbo must now rely only on himself to survive, which leads to an intense atmosphere as he scrambles for new riddles and answers. The article *There and Back Again: The Structure of The Lord of the Rings as Monomyth* by Barbala Stroda who is the assistant editor in the University journal *Humanities and Social Sciences. Latvia*. She discusses the literary fantasy genre in connection with the archetypal structure, specifically about the hero's journey. Stroda explores Joseph Campbell, a prolific American scientist of comparative mythology. His parallels between structures in myths and fantasy stories is the theory of monomyth in Campbell's book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This theory consists of the combination of recurrent motifs in heroic quests of different mythological traditions (Stroda 185). A specific pattern mentioned by Campbell; "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men" (Stroda 185), fits the narrative in *The Hobbit*. Bilbo's evolvment from a quiet hobbit in his daily life in the Shire is interrupted with the heroic journey he must go on. He battles fabulous forces and after being a part of the victory he wanders back home to the shire.

By the use of expressive language and intense imagery Tolkien managed to let the reader feel how claustrophobic and tense the scene is. "He did not know whether it was just a pool in the path, or the edge of an underground stream that crossed the passage, or the brink of a deep dark subterranean lake" (Tolkien 67). Here, the writing shows how the reader and



Bilbo are equally unaware of what lies ahead. Is it a large monster, or a dead end? Or is he walking right into a trap? Tolkien manages to create this atmosphere by making the scene so dark that it is only the few details revealed by Bilbo's eyes that can be seen, as well as relying on the anticipation and imagination of the reader. Continuing the scene, at the water he stumbles upon, Bilbo realizes that it is either a pool or a lake, and here he meets Gollum. The introduction of Gollum is shown through a tense game of riddles as Bilbo tries to gain access to the exit. It is both the appearance and peculiarity of Gollum that creates a curiousness around his character. "Old Gollum, a small slimy creature. He was Gollum – as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face." (Tolkien 68). He is described as a small, withered creature whose appearance reflects the time he has spent deep inside a mountain where the sun does not shine. Gollum is a character with wittiness and is cunning as he lures in his prey, and this time he uses the riddle game against Bilbo. However, this demonstrates how Bilbo's character has intelligence and resourcefulness enough to be up against Gollum's clever riddles. It is not a game that tests physical strength, but instead challenges the two characters to be quick of mind and evaluates the wit between them.

The cave scene in the story is one of the crucial moments in *The Hobbit* because of the consequences that occur from the encounter between Bilbo and Gollum. Besides the character development of Bilbo, he also finds the Ring which is a key tool that begins a domino effect of how middle-earth will evolve. This brings in the theme of fate, as it is an encounter that has a significant impact on the lives of several future people, as well as Bilbo's journey in *The Hobbit*. After he has obtained the ring, he accidentally puts it on and it reveals the ring's power of invisibility. He stands unseen by Gollum, and lets the creature lead the way to the exit. Returning to the theme of heroism which is substantial in the novel, Bilbo displays it by sparing Gollum's life at the end of the cave scene. "He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost" (Tolkien 81). The decision Bilbo makes to show mercy for Gollum gives a deeper insight into him as a character. His characteristics are that of a timid hobbit who does not care much for what happens outside of the shire, and is content with his small life in one place. Despite this, he can sympathize with Gollum on a deep level of understanding, showing that Bilbo is a much more complex character than what meets the eye. Proceeding, Bilbo manages to escape the cave with ring in hand, without knowing the consequences this will have in the future. The interesting aspect of the ring regarding Bilbo's character, is that invisibility is not the only trait the ring possesses. As seen by Gollum's fate, the ring holds the power to corrupt its user with greed and temptation. Why did this not happen to Bilbo's character? The answer

lies in what Bilbo's main morals are. He is from the beginning a kindhearted, just and merciful hobbit, who does not have the need for great power or grand fortunes. These values are what lets Bilbo remain himself throughout the story even when he uses the power of the ring. As Kara K. Keeling explains about Bilbo's character in *Critical Survey of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*: "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" (Keeling 556). It shows that Bilbo's personal traits have been seen as stronger than the forces of evil, and this is a conclusion which several analytics, such as Keeling, have reached. It is not until later, in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy that the effects of the ring have manifested in Bilbo because of the many years he has kept it close. Nevertheless, even at this time, he has remained the content hobbit who lives in a hole in the ground.

### *The Hobbit – The Movie*

Moving on to the year 2012, the movie adaptation of the novel came out, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. The book was split into three movies, all directed by Peter Jackson. The focus in this thesis will be the first installment as it follows many important scenes in the novel. The reasoning behind why the book was made into three movies is mostly because of profit. After Peter Jackson's success with *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, one of the reasons for why *The Hobbit* also became a trilogy could be that the studio saw how they could maximize the profit by releasing numerous movies over several years. The movie starts off with the destruction of the dwarf kingdom before it moves onto Bilbo in his old age, writing about his adventures with Gandalf, played by Ian McKellen, and the dwarves. The contrasts of the two beginning scenes become a shock to the audience because of the shift of what is happening on screen. This way of storytelling captures the spectators' attention from the first minutes of the movie, and then delves into a calm atmosphere, like a calm before the storm. The movie proceeds its story by going back to the young Bilbo, played by Martin Freeman, who is unaware of what is to come, as Gandalf the Wizard appears before him, and here begins the narration by the old Bilbo. The themes in the movie are the same as in the novel, as it leans into heroism and the struggle between good and evil. It is presented again through the character of Bilbo, but this time it is visually shown instead of written.

The theory of monomyth is also relevant when looking into the adaptation of *The Hobbit*, as the movie follows the same structure of elements found in traditional stories where heroism is a greater theme. Stroda mentions in their article about the initiation of a hero, and

how it consists of certain formulaic parts; “a stage when order has been disturbed and the equilibrium of earlier times must be re-established (...) a challenge must typically be overcome, or some dire threat looms over the land. The structure dictates that elements of chaos must be dissolved or unified in order to regain a state of balance” (Stroda 186). The movie follows the theory well by first showing the dwarf kingdom descending into chaos, establishing the dire threat before continuing to show the content hero, who does not yet know what is ahead. Bilbo is shown as a typical character who fits into this theory by also being born and raised in a closed community, such as the Shire; “The hero’s childhood and/or youth is spent in a closed community, in the relatively blessed state of ignorance regarding her chosen status as well as the wide world outside his/her village” (Stroda 186).

The visual effects and cinematography are stunning in the movie, as Jackson decided to use an extensive amount of CGI to fulfill the fantasy that Tolkien had created. The colors are vibrant and warm in scenes such as the audiences first look at the Shire (Jackson 10:15) and they turn cold and tense in scenes such as the encounter between Bilbo and Gollum (Jackson 02:10:00). The cave scene is one that is the most similar to the novel as it is an important passage in the story. In the movie, the lighting is not pitch black, an obvious idea since the audience need see what is happening, yet Jackson managed to create the same atmosphere as the novel. The scene is suspenseful, nerve-wracking and overall tense as the audience follows Bilbo’s riddle game with an enemy. Also, as Bilbo had gained a sword from a troll cave previously to the cave scene, he marks another milestone in the monomyth theory. “The hero is given a talismanic object and crosses one or several thresholds that are guarded by various powers. After crossing the threshold there is no looking back” (Stroda 187). The sword came from a cave that was inhabited by three trolls that Bilbo had been a part of stopping as the group were in danger. Here he stepped over one threshold, readying him for the scene with Gollum where he had to create a solution by himself. After the sword came the ring, the major talismanic object. Outwitting, or defeating, Gollum was Bilbo’s final threshold before he fully emerged himself to the cause of following Thorin and the dwarves to take back the The Lonely Mountain.

Another tool which is used in the movie is the soundtrack. Music has the ability to create a specific feeling a viewer is supposed to have about a scene. Howard Shore was the composer to both *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit*, and he has managed to create a theme to each character and location. In an early scene where the dwarves are gathered at Bilbo’s house, they begin to sing a song in low tones and hums (Jackson 39:50). This creates a great contrast to their earlier behavior of goofiness as it becomes clear that they are on a

serious quest to take back their home. The audience can feel the significance from the way the room has only a light glow from the fire and the collected voices of the dwarves. Shore used music selectively to not only set a mood, but create the world that Tolkien wanted to show. Overall, the movie adaptation *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* is a visually beautiful movie. Jackson's use of colors and music created a fulfilling storytelling, and his usage of the main source material has been taken into account when making the movie.

## From Novel to Movie – The Changes Made in Adaptation

What differences were made?

Even though a movie adaptation is made from already existing material, it can be hard to make everything the same. To make a movie adaptation can be compared to a translation of a text to another, as it is a rewriting of an original text. "Translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and... it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin" (Munday 200). When Jackson made *The Hobbit* trilogy, he took one book and evolved it into three movies that was rewritten. For a novel to become such a long story, a compiled result of almost nine hours, there are bound to be some differences. The major difference is the extended storyline. It is only possible to make a movie a certain length if it were to follow the source material perfectly, and as Jackson and the studio saw the profit from *The Lord of the Rings*, it makes sense to try another trilogy. This created time to expand on the storyline by delving more into the backstories of the characters, adding new ones and having subplots. One interesting difference is the relationship between Bilbo Baggins and Thorin Oakenshield. In the novel Thorin views Bilbo as an outcast, someone who they should not have brought into their group, and he continues to be skeptical of how useful Bilbo's skills are. Thorin slowly comes around to trusting Bilbo as he proves his worth. The relationship between the two characters in the movie gets more scenes of complexity as Jackson deepened their interactions. He did this by creating a scene where the atmosphere is tense and emotions are high such as the scene when Bilbo puts his life in danger to save Thorin from the villain of the story; Azog the orc (Jackson 2:43:50). The entire last scene of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, chapter six of the novel, was altered to fit the narrative of an anticipated battle instead of an altercation between an enemy who has little effect on the plotline. Azog is a character who is introduced as the main villain in the movie, but is only briefly mentioned in the novel; "Your grandfather Thrór was killed, you remember, in the mines of Moria by Azog the Goblin" (Tolkien 24). However, in the movie, Azog has been made the main antagonist

who hunts Thorin and the group until their battle scene at the end of the movie. Azog was originally a Goblin, but Jackson decided to have the character build suspense through the plot, by giving the group a constant need to keep going forward to escape the orcs. The ending scene was originally made without much fight as the characters never left the trees they were in to avoid the wolves, and the interaction between Bilbo and Thorin remained superficial. Instead, Thorin views Bilbo with a deeper respect after his courageous venture to jump into danger to save Thorin. This scene would not have happened had Jackson not made Azog a greater part of the story, as Thorin would not have had the motivation to leave the safety of the trees. It is the revenge that Thorin must enact upon the killer of his father that lets him leave the trees to fight Azog.

There are also minor changes between the novel and the movie, such as how Bilbo joins the quest. In the movie, the dwarves are telling Bilbo of the plans to take back their home during the dinner where he is given a contract. Bilbo reads it, and faints from the stress of what might happen on this journey. He proceeds to decline the offer and listens in his room as the dwarves sing a somber song. It is not until the morning after that Bilbo decides to go with them (Jackson 33:20). In the novel however, this scene plays out quite differently. The dwarves are already finished with their meals before bringing in instruments to play the somber song. It is here the plans are revealed to Bilbo and the backstory of how the mountain was taken over by Smaug the dragon (Tolkien 17-25). The movie becomes similar to the novel again for a few moments as Bilbo wakes alone in his house the day after. However, he was ready to forget the night before rather than running after the group that, in the movie, had already left. Instead, Gandalf comes in after a while and urges the hobbit to get going, and before he knows it, Bilbo became a part of the journey (Tolkien 27-28).

There exists plot driven differences between the novel and its first adaptation, there are also differences in what a movie can bring to life as compared to a novel. Gollum is one of the characters who was described modestly in the novel, as it only directed the focus to him being pale with glowing eyes. This gives *The Hobbit's* vfx supervisor Joe Letteri more leniency to build Gollum's looks for a visual representation. However, because of the previous work *The Lord of the Rings*, Letteri already had a finished appearance of the character, yet there were mentions of changing Gollum more in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. In an article in *Animated Magazine*, Letteri explains; "We did toy with the idea of giving Gollum more hair and more teeth and making him look younger. We tried it, but he looked too different" (Zahed 12). Because of the lack of detailed descriptions of Gollum in the novel, it gave Letteri a larger range of creativity when designing the character. Therefore,

it cannot be regarded as a difference, but is instead a comparison of what the individual audience had pictured themselves. Gollum, played by the actor Andy Serkis, was the character that got much attention for its appearance and movements; “Many reviewers have pointed out that Gollum’s appearance more than halfway through the film is one of the epic’s biggest draws” (Zahed 13). The work that Letteri put into Gollum was well received, and it demonstrates that not everything can be shown in a novel like it can through a movie.

How has this affected the original story and the continuation of Tolkien’s work?

An important fact to know about the adaptation, is that Jackson did not just adapt from the novel alone, but also drew material from later writings by Tolkien. Since adaptation theory revolves around the process of forming one text into a new concept, there are many factors that must be taken into consideration when an adaptation is made. “When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works... This is not to say that adaptations are not also autonomous works that can be interpreted and valued as such” (Hutcheon 7). In this case, it is not a text adaptation but a movie. However, the same factors are applied when analyzing it to understand how an adaptation works. There are many scholars who have shared their theory of what an adaptation is, such as V. I. Pudovkin; “every object, taken from a given viewpoint and shown on the screen to spectators, is a dead object, even though it has moved before the camera” (Meikle 176). By what Pudovkin is expressing, it can be interpreted that he views adaptation of text to movie is to take away the images that was created by an audience, and put them on a screen where they cannot be changed. The characters may move, but they cannot be altered when first created in the way a mind can change its imagination as it pleases. However, Pudovkin’s remark is protested against by George Bluestone, who replies; “If by a 'dead object' in this context we understand 'dead' to mean lacking in significance with respect to total structure, just as a phrase detached from a poem is dead, then Pudovkin will not seem to be overstating his case” (Meikle 176). Bluestone is of a different opinion, but can understand the aspect of adaptation which Pudovkin establishes that there are certain factors that are lost during the process of adaptation. However, Bluestone also considers; “the end products of novel and film as representing different aesthetic genera, since each is autonomous and each is characterized by unique and specific properties” (Cruz 38). His words are a favorable explanation of how a story can be created line by line from a text, but differences will still be made from the nature of the two different entertainment genres. The biggest difference is that the story no longer mentally created, but is now a film that is meant to be perceived and not envisioned in the

audience's mind. By removing the imagination of the audience, it can create a distinction between novel and adaptation even if the director follows the source material closely. *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* shows these distinctions by the choices Peter Jackson decided to make to alter the original story. Since the original novel that Tolkien wrote did not have a connection to the later story of Lord of the Rings, Jackson had to add plot points in an attempt to give the two trilogies have a connecting storyline.

Therefore, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* can arguably be viewed as more of a prequel to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy than the novel because of Jackson's use of Tolkien's later work. The changes which affected the connection between the adaptation *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are two major factors that does not play a big part in the novel. As described by Judy Ann Ford and Robin Anne Reed in their article *Polytemporality and Epic Characterization in The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*; "First, the film focuses on political and military themes that echo the history of twentieth-century Europe. Second, the film employs the conventions of medieval epic, specifically those of epic masculinity, especially in respect to the construction of the characters Thorin and Bilbo" (Ford og Reid 208-209). This quote indicates an agreeable argument as there were changes to the characters of Thorin and Bilbo in the movie that took their characterization into a less childlike theme. By combining politic and military themes with more epic masculinity it gave the movie a more mature setting. An example of this is when the story of Thorin in battle is told. The scene is raw with emotions such as grief, fear and a sense of failure even though the battle was won (Jackson 48:17). Thorin is shown as a great warrior, a leader who has endured great losses and must live on to reclaim what has been lost. Even though this is also his quest in the novel, his character lacks the amount of light-heartedness in the movie as he does in the novel. This is also a conscious choice by Jackson, to make the movie have more of the same tone that the continuation in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy does. While *The Lord of the Rings* have a dark theme throughout its entirety, *The Hobbit* remains a more comedic narrative and consists of several scenes from the original source material. Despite this, it was important to show the seriousness of the dwarves' quest, and the importance of Bilbo finding the ring in the cave by altering the story to fit the narrative.

## Long-time Fans and New Ones - How Did the Audience React?

### The Negative Response – Anti-Fandom

J.R.R. Tolkien has gained a massive fanbase with his work *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* books, as well as the giant success the trilogies of these movies brought with them.

His fans exist in every age group, and for those who were fans of the novel previously to the adaptation will have reactions to the movies. When *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* first came out, there were both negative and positive reactions from the audience. The reasons for why these reactions are different was looked into by Minna Siikila-Laitila who wrote an article, “*I’m just being a difficult LoTR hardcore fan*”: *Tolkien Fans’ Actions and Reactions to Peter Jackson’s The Hobbit Trilogy*. It describes the audience reception of *The Hobbit* trilogy. Her study focuses on the disappointments caused by and the critical perspectives on *The Hobbit* movies (Siikila-Laitila). In the article Siikila mentions the word anti-fandom, which can be defined as the opposite of a fan, some even refusing to watch the movie; “anti-fandom, defined by Gray as the vocal expression of dislike or hatred towards a given media text, genre, or personality” (Mardon, Cocker og Daunt 1133). However, this does not mean that they will always keep away from the source material of their critical opinions: “While anti-fans have a different attitude towards a particular media text than do fans, their behaviour and strategies often resemble those of fans” (Siikila-Laitila 50). Often, these anti-fans will research the topic which they are against in an effort to partake in the activity of demonstrating their opinion of it, often on online platforms. The people who are described as such anti-fans were often declared as admirers of Tolkien and have a dislike towards Jackson. Because of this, this part of the audience has formed an opinion of the movie before watching it, as they will feel it is a betrayal to replicate a story which is already perfected by the main creator. “Anti-fans are energized by demonstrating their level of knowledge, as this gives them a feeling of superiority. Also present is a keen sense of moralism. Anti-fans do not necessarily have anything against fandom as such; they simply dislike a certain media text or genre. They may perceive the object of their dislike as inane, stupid, morally corrupt, or just simply bad” (Siikila-Laitila 51). The movie can be viewed as a good film by those who do not have a strong association toward the original source material, however the anti-fans will find what they can to criticize.

There are also those who did not appreciate the interpretation that Jackson had of *The Hobbit*. An audience like this is not as intense as the anti-fandom, but does not like the way the novel was represented visually; “*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954–1955) and *The Hobbit* (1937) had an ardent fan base long before Jackson made his films. In this kind of situation, the task of the director is anything but easy. It is impossible to avoid comparisons between the movies and the books” (Siikila-Laitila 52). As mentioned here, the comparisons are futile to avoid as it is a natural process for the fans. Jackson did expand on the novel as he made the adaptation, more so than when he directed *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Another



reason for the dislike of the adaptation is not only the comparison to the novel, but also to the previous trilogy Jackson directed. *The Lord of the Rings* was a success in every way.

Inductive content analysis; “ICA essentially involves producing an overall summary of the content of different individual texts in a data set” (Vears og Lynn 112) By using the inductive content analysis method, it will be easier to explain the reactions of the audience more as individuals who experienced the movie first hand and processed it as either a fan, anti-fan or a neutral viewer. Published in *The Spectator*, a weekly magazine that features the best British journalists, authors and critics, the article *Don't watch The Hobbit: The book is perfectly formed – the film can spoil it* by Melanie McDonagh is a good example of an anti-fan of the movie. By the title alone, it is clear that McDonagh is a fan of the original work by Tolkien. She states her opinions during her meeting with the daughter of J. R. R. Tolkien, Pricilla Tolkien, at Oxford Catholic Chaplaincy about the audience present. “Some were the ordinary Tolkien admirers, the normal, slightly shabby young people you get at chaplaincy talks, and the others were, well, a bit scary” (McDonagh 15). McDonagh voices her opinions of the fanbase belonging to *The Hobbit* universe in plain words. Even the normal fans of the movie, she describes with condescending words, as if to say that there should not be any competent fans to the movies. McDonagh views the audience with distaste, arguably because of her own opinion of Tolkien’s work. One quote from the article; “There are those of us who love *The Hobbit* as a story. And then there are the members of the extraordinary world of fantasy it generated, with plastic orcs, computer games pitting men in cloaks against warty things with clubs, an entire world of good vs evil as imagined by awkward adolescent males” (McDonagh 15), this would seem to put fans such as herself on a pedestal, above those who immerse themselves too deep into the story. Her language is informal and talks down to a part of the audience who do not share the same view as McDonagh. She continues the article with how she would rather stay in her bath, reading the book instead of going to watch the movie. “But what, you might ask, if the director, Peter Jackson, has made an enjoyable film --or three? I don't care” (McDonagh 15). By disregarding the movie, rather than viewing it as an individual project that can be entertaining to an audience, McDonagh decides to keep her belief of not ruining a story which is already perfect. Her article is a good example of the specific type of anti-fan who does not view the source material as the wrongdoing, but instead any changes or new creations based on it are disrespectful to the original work.

The way it was filmed also sparked some controversy amongst critics. *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* was what could be described as an experiment that the studio Warner Bros already knew about. Jackson had decided to film the movie in what is called 48fps, 48

frames per second. "The critics hate the high frame rate (HFR) - "off-putting," "failed experiment," "eye-straining.'" (Bacon 24). Kenneth James Bacon, a creative director at Boxoffice Pro, writes in an article about his opinion of the first Hobbit movie. He describes that many critics found the use of 48fps projection to be the wrong choice. Usually, it is 24fps that is the most common camera work in the movie industry, but Jackson wanted to have the visual effects be as clearly as he could in front of the audience. With the 48fps, the film would be projected in a way that is similar to how the human eye perceives its surroundings, which gives *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* a more realistic viewing experience. Explained from the perspective of an audience member, the framework that was used made the experience put the viewer in an awkward position when they could not get accustomed to the 48fps. "At certain moments in the visuals, I would suddenly find myself "thrown out" of the viewing experience as a sudden movement would prove "unfilm-like" and almost "cartoonish" (James). Though, there were options of watching the movie later in the regular framework of 24fps, it still left an impression that there is a difference in the filmmaking to the audience that had to adapt to a dissimilar framework than what the eyes are used to regarding moving picture. It was not only the audience who reacted to the frame work, as it gave the vfx team an extra challenge when making the movie. The supervisor Joe Letteri also told *Animated Magazine*; "You still do your traditional amount of work on each scene, but then you have to add one more pass to refine it for 48 fps," says Letteri. "Basically, you have to render twice as many frames" (Zahed 14).

## The Positive Response – New and Neutral Fans

There was no lack of positive response to the newly made Hobbit movie when it came out, as long time, and new, fans looked forward to watch another success by Peter Jackson. Since the release of *The Lord of the Rings*, the expectations to Peter Jackson to make yet another blockbuster movie increased. "The films received mixed reviews: while many critics praised the actors' performances, the high production values and the quality of the visual effects, some reviewers criticized Jackson's decision to turn the adaptation of *The Hobbit* into a trilogy" (Leotta 204). As mentioned here, it was the performance of actors such as Martin Freeman as Bilbo, who carried the movie into more success. Freeman's portrayal of Bilbo was the most accurate to the book, and both fans and critics gave praise for the acting performance Freeman gave. However, it was the fans who had not yet read the book who were most likely to give the movie a higher rating than those who had. Emily Midkiff wrote

an analysis about the statistic regarding the age, whether or not a participant had read the book, and how they rated the book, to understand how the audience receives the adaptation; “Overall, the variables about age, having read the book once or more than once, or having the book read to you decreased the odds of a higher movie rating” (Midkiff 401). The reasoning behind this can be the association the fans who have read the book have with the story, as mentioned previously. Regarding the audience who have not read the books, they are met with a movie that is its own creation and holds no disdain for the changes that have been made. Midkiff concluded that the results from the statistical analysis stated that age had much impact on how an audience member would rate *The Hobbit* movie; “Even when controlling for different experiences with the book and the LOTR films, the analysis shows decreasing odds of getting higher ratings from the older young people” (Midkiff 402). However, there are exceptions to these statistics, as there were also fans who had read the book and was within the older age of adolescence that would rate the movie high.

Sarah M. Cradit, the USA Bestselling Author, wrote a positive film review; *A Completely Biased Review of The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* after she watched the movie. “I’ve seen *The Hobbit* twice; I was there at midnight (in costume no less; Shieldmaiden of Rohan, you better believe it) on opening night. I went again during the day when I was far less tired and able to do more than just stare in sleep-deprived amazement” (Cradit). Cradit is considered the opposite of an anti-fan such as McDonagh, and would be grouped into an individual of the fandom. It is clear from the beginning of her review that she was a fan before the movie had been released as she had acquired a costume, and decided to watch the movie twice in one day. From the title it is clear that her self-awareness of what kind of fan she is will be taken into consideration when writing the review. Therefore, Cradit is a good example to use for those who were impacted positively by the movie, and as she explains the reasons for why she enjoyed the adaptation, it gives the review a credibility of seeing the perspective from other audiences. “I was surprised when I read negative reviews. How could anyone not love this? Upon further thought, I realized that there are really three types of people going to see this movie: hard-core Tolkienites, casual fans and people with nothing better to do” (Cradit). Cradit shows her understanding of the people who are not like herself, who has a passion for Tolkien’s work. To her, it did not matter that Jackson had taken liberties to change a 300-page book into three movies, as it gave a fan like her more content about the topic she loves. By elaborating on the reasons for her enjoyment of the movie, Cradit lists point such as the visual imagery of Erebor, the Shire and the Misty Mountains; “The visual imagery of Erebor was stunning, and it was everything I thought it would be and

more. The beautiful geometry of their building, and the lovely shots of pre-destruction Dale were perfect” (Cradit). Another difference between McDonagh and Cradit is the way of open-mindedness to criticism. While McDonagh had no intentions of watching the adaptation, and meant it was wrong to make it in the first place, Cradit could understand that there are always aspects that can be improved. Even as the big fan that Cradit is, she included in her review what she meant could have been done better such as the CGI or the pacing, which she compared to *The Lord of the Rings*; “The Lord of the Rings trilogy did a good job balancing the heaviness of their tasks with a bit of levity and adventure- without being cheesy. The Hobbit, at times, had difficulty deciding what it wanted to be, I felt” (Cradit). However, to Cradit, the movie did not have to be a master-piece to be what she considered a good movie. Her usage of words is considered informal, as she uses phrases such as “The Ball-sack chin”, “The damn eagles”, and “the bro-hug”, which is allowed as it is a personal film review. It does also show the impression she had of the movie because it created a reaction strong enough to use strengthening words to get her point across. She concludes her review with her positive response and displays her gratitude of receiving another look into the Hobbit world, and would watch the movie several times more.

A previously mentioned contributor tells his opinions in the form of a film review. Going by the name James, he writes a lengthy review on his blog of his experience with *The Hobbit; An Unexpected Journey*. His mentions about the framerates are only a part of his opinion, as he elaborates in more detail of the positive aspects of the movie. James published his review several months after the movie had been released, giving him more time to rewatch and form opinions not only based on one viewing. James writes early in his review about the changes made in the adaptation between the novel and movie. “One of the things that makes AUJ so special are the many links and consistencies between it and what happens in ‘*The Lord of the Rings*’. The filmmakers have managed to “bridge” the two stories and make them feel as if they are part and parcel of the same world and that the events in one will help shape the events in the other” (James). Instead of viewing change as a negative part of adaptation, James invites it because of the ability to further the work into a richer story. James mentions the criticism surrounding the length of the film, but express the opposite reaction because the length gives time to present every dialogue and the surroundings in more detail; “The beautiful candle lighting inside the hobbit hole, together with the gorgeous clothing, accessory details, score and the actors’ actions, allow for the scene to unfold into a visual feast” (James). James expresses that he is a fan of Tolkien’s original novel, and it strengthens his association to the movie. There were moments of change that James did not consider as well as others,

such as removing certain characters – Dain Ironfoot – as it disappointed him. However, it did not take away the joy of watching since there were more good than bad. James’ appreciation for creating a bridge between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is clear in both obvious ways and small details such as the trollshaw sequence. When Bilbo and his dwarves come upon three trolls, they must survive the encounter by turning the trolls to stone (Jackson 1:07:30), James points out; “once the Trolls are being petrified and turned to stone by the sun, they assume the exact same positions found in film one of the *Rings* trilogy” (James), which gives the audience who are fans of the previous trilogy an exciting moment as they again get a reminder that the actions in *The Hobbit; An Unexpected Journey* have consequences for the history of *The Hobbit* universe. Though James is thoroughly pleased with the movie, and will continue to remember it fondly as he rewatches it in the years to come, he was not afraid to mention what he missed in the adaptation as seen from a book fan perspective. In his final remarks, James writes about what could have been changed, such as a more in-depth introduction of the dwarves and the relationship between them. Though, these relationships are more explored in the later movies, and would have added too much length of the first movie if all introductions of the thirteen dwarves were to be made. Jackson seems to have made a conscious choice to keep the information about the dwarves to a minimum as it would have taken up more screentime than what was available. With a positive remark, James concludes his review; “As long as the story itself delivers what it should, I will find myself returning to the screens more than once and enjoy the experience of delving once more into Middle-earth” (James).

## Conclusion

In 1937, J. R. R. Tolkien released his first version of *The Hobbit* which originally was a children’s book. However, he revisited the story several times, and as the time of the first adaptations of his books *The Lord of the Rings* took place, Tolkien had created a universe with much lore and knowledge. All this information is found in Tolkien’s Middle-Earth Legendarium, and it is from this work Jackson took inspiration to make the adaptation of *The Hobbit*. Jackson was tasked with continuing his success after *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by adapting a timeless classic. Jackson’s use of CGI and stunning cinematography, together with a compelling soundtrack composed by Howard Shore, was a major factor in bringing the novel to life. From the viewpoint of box-office profit, *The Hobbit* trilogy was a major success and there would be no reason to regret the making of it. However, when considering whether or not the adaptation had consequences, the answer lies mostly with the audience. It was the

framework and obvious need to make the movie into a piggy bank that was the greater enemy of why *The Hobbit* adaptation could be viewed as something other than a success.

Nevertheless, it is the audience's opinion of the movie that matters most when considering the question of whether or not there were consequences by making the adaptation of a beloved novel. The audience's reactions were diverse and included both fervent approval and harsh criticism. The anti-fandom rejected Jackson's work as they believed Tolkien's work should remain untouched. On the other hand, the positive response shows a splitting of generations regarding the reception of the adaptation. It was the younger viewers and those who had no relation to the novel that were more likely to rate the movie high. This audience and many longtime fans appreciated the changes made in the adaptation process and enjoyed an expanded storyline. To say it was a good idea to make an adaptation of *The Hobbit* is correct regarding the profit the movie made and by the many fans who enjoyed the experience.

However, the mixed reviews shows that the making of adaptations is a complex process, and it is difficult to create a satisfying transformation of a beloved literary work into a visual film that would suit every fan. Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* will continue to be an example of how adaptation from book to a movie will bring many challenges regarding its audience's association with the source material.

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## Declaration on AI Use:

### Authorship statement

I confirm that I take full responsibility for the answers I have provided for this examination. I have checked the sources and data that it is based on and understand the arguments presented here. I have not used any sources that I have not acknowledged.

In preparing my answers, I made use of the following ICT services: Google, ChatGPT. Where I have drawn on information from these sources I have cross-checked and verified them.

My writing process worked as follows: I first found basic information and analysis about the book and movie on ChatGPT, so that I had a baseline on how to build my own analysis. I used Google Scholar and Oria to find articles of the audiences' reactions and critics. I have used ChatGPT to search for explanations about theories, and crosschecked this with other sources. My information is from articles, the novel *The Hobbit* and the movie adaptation *The Hobbit; An Unexpected Journey*. The theories I have used were first found either through Oria or help from my supervisor.

I have thoroughly proof-read the final version of my answers and am happy that they represent my own understanding of how to reply to those questions I chose to answer.

Name: Mina Berg Sivertsen

Date: 03.06.2024



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