**The Hobbit: Deeper Questions**

*Answer all of the questions in this packet, making references to the text and to the Peter Jackson films as necessary to make your point. Be thorough and reflective, writing at least a ¾-to full double-spaced typed page in response. Clearly, the more attentive you are to detail, the higher your word-count will be, but do not fill your response with “air” just to meet a word-requirement. I am more interested in depth of response than in length. Due December 14 at 11:59PM on turnitin.com.*

1. *The Hobbit* is often characterized as a children’s book. In his memoirs, Tolkien mentions that he wanted to write a book for his children. However, many years later when he wrote Lord of the Rings, Tolkien saw his book more as a “prequel” and rewrote it three times, adding elements that were more directed toward adults, such as the One Ring, the obsessed Gollum, and the darker Mirkwood Forest.

a) C. S. Lewis' wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* review (2 October 1937) of *The Hobbit:*

"For it must be understood that this is a children's book only in the sense that the first of many readings can be undertaken in the nursery. *Alice [in Wonderland]* is read gravely by children and with laughter by grown-ups; *The Hobbit*, on the other hand, will be funniest to its youngest readers, and only years later, at a tenth or a twentieth reading, will they begin to realise what deft scholarship and profound reflection have gone to make everything in it so ripe, so friendly, and in its own way so true. Prediction is dangerous: but *The Hobbit* may well prove a classic."

b) In an interview, director Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh said:

Jackson: “*The Hobbit*is very much a children’s book and *The Lord of the Rings*is something else; it’s not really aimed at children at all. I realized the characters of the dwarves are the difference. Their energy and disdain of anything politically correct brings a new kind of spirit to it… The dwarves give it a kind of childish, comedic quality that gives us a very different tone from [the 'Rings' trilogy].”

Walsh: “We always saw *The Hobbit*more in the golden light of a fairytale. It’s more playful. But by the time you get to the end, Tolkien is writing himself into that place where he can begin that epic journey of writing LOTR, which took, as he put it, his life’s blood. All those heavier, darker themes which are so prevalent in the later trilogy start to come [more] into play in ['There and Back Again'].”

Comment on whether you view this book as a children’s story or a fairy tale. Do the Jackson films present the story in the same light? Consider the quotes above in your response and consider the claims made by the speakers. Also in your response, use terms such as narrative, tone, continuity, and fidelity. If you have familiarity with Lord of the Rings, you may certainly discuss that text, as needed.

2. In the Director’s Commentary, Phillipa Boyens says that Professor Tolkien was able to expand in greater detail what the characters are thinking and feeling, whereas on screen the narrative must at times leave the written word and delve into what the camera can capture. Consider five sections of the book and discuss how the digital/film presentation is a careful produced deviation from the written script. Explain what the visual requirement were of the scene and how it differs or expands upon the narrative. Quote directly from the text and comment carefully on the film. Be very specific.

3. Chapter One, which comprises 36-pages, has been criticized as being too lonh, as well as being somewhat boring. Peter Jackson has been criticized for including what amounts to 21-minutes of Prologue to his “Unexpected Journey” film. In response, he challenged film-makers to film this critical scene any differently. Look closely at Chapter One. Why did Tolkien take such a long time with this chapter? What important elements of the story did he introduce in the chapter? How does the chapter shed light on the personalities of the characters involved in the story? Now, consider the film. Jackson worked carefully to give all thirteen dwarves a distinct personality, which was not necessary in the book. How did he deviate from the narrative of Chapter One in his film? To what did he remain true? How critical is Chapter One to the storytellers- both Tolkien and Jackson?

4. Tolkien wrote:

“Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons; it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.”
Tolkien introduces a number of characters who are mythological in nature, including hobbits, dwarves, elves, wizards, orcs, goblins, skin-changers, and talking animals. In his famous essay on fancy, Tolkien maintains that in order to fully appreciate mythical characters, the reader must suspend his disbelief, and allow ourselves to be enchanted. What does Tolkien mean by this, and did he succeed with his text? Consider the presentation on film by Peter Jackson. Jackson has stated that he strongly worked to keep a distance between his world and the Harry Potter universe. Therefore, he did not include talking animals and the troll’s talking wallet. In our world of superhero and fantasy film-making, what role does fancy and suspension of disbelief play? How willing is today’s audience to suspend disbelief and enter a fantasy realm?

5. How are Bilbo and Gollum alike? Can you call Gollum evil? Discuss the concept that Gollum is the negative side of Bilbo, with which Bilbo must come to terms before he can achieve his identity. Just before Bilbo escapes from the tunnel which leads to the exit from the Misty Mountains, he must get past Gollum, who is blocking the way. At first, Bilbo was tempted to injure or kill Gollum but he changed his mind. Tolkien comments as follows: “A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror welled in Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second.” Later, in The Lord of the Rings, Gandalf tells Bilbo’s nephew, Frodo, that Bilbo’s pity for Gollum was the primary reason that prevented the ring gaining a hold over Bilbo.
[*Frodo*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000704/)*: It's a pity Bilbo didn't kill him when he had the chance.*[*Gandalf*](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005212/)*: Pity? It was pity that stayed Bilbo's hand. Many that live deserve death. Some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. Even the very wise cannot see all ends. My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play yet, for good or ill before this is over. The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many.*

In the film “The Unexpected Journey”, Peter Jackson takes a conversation between Gandalf and Frodo in Th*e Lord of the Rings* and places it in a conversation between Gandalf and Bilbo.

***Bilbo:*** *I have...I have never used a sword in my life.****Gandalf:*** *And I hope you never have to. But if you do, remember this: true courage is about knowing not when to take a life, but when to spare one.*

Why is pity such an important concept in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings? How did Bilbo’s action affect the trajectory of the story? If you know the story of The Lord of the Rings, you may also discuss the trajector of that story in your response. Why did Bilbo act as he did toward Gollum, when it was clear that Gollum would not act this way toward Bilbo?

6. Near the end of the novel, Bilbo purloins the Arkenstone, and uses it as a random in an attempt to avoid a war among the dwarves, elves and men. Was Bilbo justified in his actions? Was the “theft” of the Arkenstone a sufficient justification for avoiding a war? Consider also Tolkien’s presentation of greed throughout the novel, and his personal experiences in World War I. He wrote: *One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression; but as the years go by it seems now often forgotten that to be caught in youth by 1914 was no less hideous an experience than to be involved in 1939 and the following years. By 1918, all but one of my close friends were dead. — forward to The Lord of the Rings*

At this point in the novel, Bilbo, too, has lost friends, has felt the shadow of war, and feels the struggle for the Arkenstone personally. Look closely at the text and evaluate each group’s reason for wanting the Arkenstone. Did Bilbo become a burglar after all, and at what cost? Is he becoming a burglar, a hero, or something else? Do you agree that Bilbo has a right to the stone? What does the fact that Bilbo is willing to give up gold and jewels to have it suggest about the worth of the Arkenstone? What might be the symbolic importance of the stone?

7. For your final exam, you will need to memorize and perform one of the “songs” from Tolkien’s world. Tolkien uses these poems and songs to add to the mood of the novel, but also to provide a background to the world of Middle Earth, to connect to the Nordic tradition, and to fast-forward the narrative. Discuss the role that music plays in the development of the different magical beings. Compare the songs sung by the dwarves, the elves and the goblins. How do the songs differ in tone, content and structure? What can be determined about the characters by examining their songs? Choose one of the songs from the text, except Blunt the Knives, and analyze the language, syntax, structure, mood, tone, and message.

8. From the very beginning, Bilbo has assumed that the climax of the adventure would be the recovery of the treasure. Then, he realizes that Smaug must also be dealt with. Once again, he realizes that even Smaug’s death does not end the adventure. If Bilbo had known from the beginning what would happen, do you think that he would have still agreed to come? What do you think Tolkien is trying to say about the purpose of trials and tribulations in a person’s life?

9. In the action of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo changes from being a soft and timid hobbit to being a character of wisdom and courage. In truth, Bilbo is a different character WEST of the Misty Mountains than he is EAST of them. When he reaches the Lonely Mountain, he becomes more complex. Make a chart of Bilbo’s conflicts, using three column headings EAST, WEST and LONELY MOUNTAIN. For each conflict, list what he faced, how he reacted, and what he learned as a result. What conclusions can you draw about the creation of the plot and how it corresponds to the geography of the quest? Explain what the major turning points are in the story and how each changed Bilbo in some way, or how they marked a milestone in Bilbo's development. Finally, Tolkien wrote originally that The Hobbit had an ending and that it did not need a prequel. And yet, many years later, Tolkien makes Bilbo an important character in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo tells Gandalf this story about Bilbo: “*He often used to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep and every path was its tributary. “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,” he used to say. “You step into the Road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there is no telling where you might be swept off to.”* Finally, at the end of The Hobbit, Bilbo finds that he is “only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!” Discuss which aspects of The Hobbit contributed to this philosophy, and what it reveals about Bilbo’s development as a character. Was he truly the dwarves’s “lucky number”?

10. In The Lord of the Rings, Gandalf says: “Courage will now be your best defence against the storm that is at hand-—that and such hope as I bring.” Consider the depth of this quote. Tolkien uses the presence and absence of the character of Gandalf to develop both the plot and the character of Bilbo Baggins. Discuss the “absences” of Gandalf and what they contribute to the narrative and to the development of courage. Are the textual absences different than the film’s absences? Explain. How much of an asset does Gandalf seem to be? Do his actions seem consistent with the way you think wizards operate? Why doesn’t Gandalf do more to “save the day”? Are his powers limited or is he intentionally refraining from using them? Do you believe that Bilbo’s development as a character is dependent upon Gandalf’s choice making in intruding or not-intruding? Consider this quote: “Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did… he fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait.” According to Tolkien, what is real courage? How does this assist in understanding why Gandalf is so frequently absent in the narrative?

11. Consider the journey of Thorin Oakenshield. How is he presented in the text and in Jackson’s version? Why is there such a discrepancy? Does this seem like a faithful presentation, why or why not? Is his Quest fulfilled at the end of the story? Why is his death necessary to the narrative? What lesson does he learn? Does he deserve our respect or admiration? Is it right to bury him with the Arkenstone? Look at his final quote: “There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage… and some widsom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.” What are we meant to learn about Thorin’s perspective at this point? Why was it so difficult for him to think this way at the beginning of the story?

12. Good fantasy offers the possibility of active, serious participation by the reader in an imagined world, which heightens one’s sense of Self or Other. This participation depends not only on the reader’s intentions but also on moral plausibility of the fantasy world. The reward for this participation is a sense of wonder that enables the reader to return to the “real” world with enhanced understanding and appreciation – either of the world itself or of his relation to it. In his famous essay, “On Fairy Stories,” Tolkien coined the idea of “mythopoeia” and is considered the Grandfather of Fantasy. He argued that fantasy has an important function and he asserts that literature of fantasy can be an escape to a serious Secondary World or sub-creation as much as an escape from the Primary World of reality. For a Secondary World to be serious, it must first arouse enchantment and possess the “inner consistency of reality,” to be true on its own terms. The Secondary World must be created as a wonder in itself, not with the pretense of altering the Primary World or the reader’s status in it. Thus, a fantasy world is a mirror of our own, and Tolkien uses these four words: Recovery (of the familiar), Escape (from things worth fleeing), Consolation (of the Happy Ending), and Eucatastrophe (unexpected turning of the plot so that the story is resolved). Tolkien writes: Fantasy admits the possibility of failure, sorrow and death, but it denies much ... universal final defeat… giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” Thus, in reading novels, with their magic, monsters, hurdles, and happily ever afters we learn about ourselves. Thus, the development of the hero is less a matter of change than of self-discovery.

A) Examine your own experience with fantasy reading. Comment on what aspects of the Secondary World are appealing to you, and what aspects of the Primary World you wish to leave behind when you read.

B) Do you agree that literature is an Escape that offers a Consolation to the reader?

C) Analyze the concept of the Eucatastrophe in four fantasies that you have read or experienced. How closely do they resemble the “deus ex machina”, and why do you think that we NEED them in our storytelling?

D) Discuss at least three fantasy worlds you have discovered that share the “inner consistency of reality” and are true on their own terms, but which differ largely from our own. What is it about these worlds that you find appealing or Consoling?

E) Discuss one story that you read where the reader is given a “glimpse of Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” Think carefully and argue why Joy can be considered hand-in-hand with grief.

13. Discuss the ancient feud between dwarves and elves. Whose fault is it? If neither side is in the right, how can you tell the difference between good and evil? Why do you think Tolkien creates this sort of ambiguity? What does it reveal about the author’s purpose? Consider the world Tolkien experienced in World War I, and the ambiguity there. How does this get written into the narrative? Now, look at the battle between the Lake Town men of Esgaroth and Thorin. How is their struggle similar or different to that between the dwarves and the elves? What comment is Tolkien making here about alliances, promises, greed and nobility? At the end, what does this story show about unification, forgiveness, and fighting for the right? Why is the final film Jackson is making called “The Battle of the Five Armies”? Before the arrival of the goblins and wargs, who are the “good guys” and who are the “bad guys”? How does your opinion change when the goblins arrive? Which would be the greater tragedy: the killing of the armies of men, elves and dwarves by the goblins, or a war between the men, elves and dwarves? How does this part of the story encapsulate the struggles of the Primary and the Secondary World, as Tolkien imagined in Question 12?