Chapter III: The Cognitive of the Grotesque in Tolkien’s *Hobbit or There and Back Again*

I will get things rolling in this chapter by picking up from where I had ended the previous chapter. Tolkien, a very good friend of Lewis moves on similar tracks. The Tolkien narratives create ‘ground rules’ of their own, and there are some principles by which we know these ‘real worlds’. Our traditional views of the real are manipulated with calculated strategies which create the fantasy. Magic reigns supreme in this world of wizards. There are no portals and no role of the inhabitants of the real world as one finds in the Narnia Chronicles. In this discussion I will take up the major texts of Tolkien, and analyze thread bare the techniques through which he creates his fantasy. In this chapter, I will focus on the first book *Hobbit or There and Back Again* (1937). This is the first instance in which he introduces these ‘beings’. In the next Chapter I will take up the *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* together.

*The Hobbit or There and Back Again* was published in 1937. The reason I decide to discuss Tolkien after Lewis, though he comes chronologically before Lewis is a strategic one. There is a progression of sorts in this text as far as the creation of the magical world is concerned. There are no portals or gateways to enter this world as the ground rules are more profoundly done and there is hardly any chance for humans to enter this world. There is more totalizing sense of the ‘para-real’ here, it seems.

The first lines that Tolkien scribbled in the late 1920s read like this; “In a hole and a ground they lived.” He had no clue what would come out of this. He wrote the story of Bilbo Baggins based on these principle. I must quote from the very beginning of the text; “the home looking hobbit … small people, smaller than dwarves but very such larger than Liliputians” (*Hobbit 1,*). There are three significant aspects that come up here. First we have the
issue of size and secondly, the almost sudden yet effective use of the word “hobbit” which does not have etymological value as such. The author immediately works as the accomplice narrator and uses tropes of suddenness and manipulates the normative sense of reality by miniaturizing the normal parameters of size.1 Also critical is the comparison to Liliputs, another unreal fictional being.

The Hobbit world is ‘a real world’ in its own right and so it is so essential to know of its history. Tolkien tries to place these events, but “sometime long ago in the quiet of the world.”

The hobbits are given an existence, which realistically comes out of the narrative that Tolkien has to offer us. The foreword starts like this, as in a typical fantasy tale mode, is

“This is a story of long ago. At that time the language, and letters were quite different from ours of today. English is used to represent the languages.” (Hobbit 14)

Two points may be noted. Tolkien specifies why he has used dwarves and what orcs are. ‘Orcs’ actually are the ‘hobbit’ equivalent for goblins. He specifies what runes are, and what sort of scripts the hobbits used. The moon runes specifically are discussed and illustrated. I am supplying one such script in the annexure.(Annexure I). The purpose to incorporate these scripts here is to show through these ‘graphic details’, how Tolkien constructs his ‘other world’ realistically. The ‘time’ factor also makes his other world resemble the real. The time when these events took place gets specified once he goes further ahead with his future books in the Hobbit series. The information on time at the beginning is a specific narrative device. Even before the book begins, the foreward does two things. First it introduces us to the fairy tale frame work, ‘Once upon a time long, long ago there lived …’ and secondly it initiates us to the world in

which reality is being distorted. The first lines of ‘Hobbit or There and Back Again certainly have more to say on this.

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty dirty hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down or to eat: it was a hobbit hole and that means comfort (Hobbit 14)

He locates the exact details of the hole in the subsequent paragraphs and a number of questions flock to our mind. This sort of questioning comes quite naturally to a child. Piaget’s study pertaining to assimilation and accommodation is revealed.  

This is truly a ‘magic beginning’ and the narrator’s ploy to distort reality starts. The reader asks who a hobbit is and what a hobbit is like, what its features are, what their functions are like and how they behave. We cannot wait to know answers to these questions, which baffle us. The first set of characters is introduced, and the questions do not cease to explode.

This hobbit was a very well-to–do hobbit, and his name was Baggins. The Bagginses have lived in the neighborhood of the Hills for time out of mind”(Hobbit 14)
The ‘time’ factor, one of the most essential components of a narrative comes in again and we want to know more about the hobbits and their secondary world for which we need ‘Secondary Belief’ as Tolkien suggests distinguishing it from ‘Primary Belief” in things that actually

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Vol. I. New York: Wiley, 1983.p53. “Assimilation is the process of taking one’s environment and new information and fitting it into pre-existing cognitive schemas. Assimilation occurs when humans are faced with new or unfamiliar information and refer to previously learned information in order to make sense of it. Accommodation, unlike assimilation is the process of taking one's environment and new information, and altering one's pre-existing schemas in order to fit in the new information”

3 J.R.R.Tolkien. Tree and Leaf, London: Allen and Unwin,1964. p47, Though such an attempt to distinguish between Secondary Belief and primary belief is not a very effective means to define fantasy, it nevertheless helps us that Tolkien felt the need to manipulate the real for a distorted version of it. In an introduction to The Fellowship of the Ring (II) (1966), Tolkien suggests that those who would create such secondary worlds or get introduced to such worlds would treat these as real: “If you are present at a
happen. There are two very interesting observations to be made here. First, the term, “secondary world” that Tolkien talks of is created by certain tropes which operate as the author acts as an accomplice of the child reader. We realize that Tolkien himself was unable to theorise the concept of fantasy. An attempt to demarcate between Primary Belief and Secondary Belief is very sketchy. He attempts to differentiate between abstractions which actually do not have any difference. Second, Tolkien distorts reality by mentioning the history of a place which actually does not exist. The magic thus does not cease and it is so ‘real’ all the time. The hobbit world is a product of fantasy rooted in reality. This hobbit world is sort of a pastoral world, and anti technological. Before beginning the story Tolkien draws out his characters.

The hobbits “are (or were) little people, about half our height and smaller than the bearded dwarves (Hobbit 15).

They are constructed so realistically that they are said to have little or no magic about them, and he gives a sketchy and precise account of these hobbits. He takes great pains to locate the events in a specific time and place. He works out the time charts of the natural history of middle Earth, where the hobbits reign. He painstakingly draws out maps and puts into detail every possible aspect. Even in the Hobbit he inserts the details but details are supplied with greater precision as we go to the next volumes/titles in the Hobbit series. It is thus imperative for the reader to get right into the Hobbit world. We are firmly located in the world of the symbolic universe of Tolkien. By the time we have been through the entire series, or even when we are in the second book The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the first book of the Lord of the Rings an entirely new world has been presented realistically before us. The narrative techniques employed

Faerian drama you yourself are, or think you are, bodily inside its secondary World.” He suggests that Lord of the Rings scripts the chronological historical record in an Extant Middle Earth chronicle, the Red Book of West March. He intends to intensify the ‘verisimilitude’, not the verity of his work, unless we are simple minded or Tolkien himself out to be an elf. Actually, Tolkien exploits the child’s non-rational ideas of reality.
are full of the wonderful and fantastic. This magical world is constructed in unparalleled details. An assertion from Gary Wolfe is the perfect platform on which we can progress with our discussion of Hobbit and can enter the Hobbit World.³

The psychological effect is created by the narrative strategies that Lewis uses to distort reality and the ideational structure is basically built upon the theme of ‘Good’ versus ‘Evil.’ Though Tolkien is unable to formulate a definition of fantasy his ‘secondary world’ is very close to what is the para-real.

The title Hobbit or There and Back Again, in a major way kicks off the narrative. The phrase ‘There and Back Again’ makes us look at the secondary world with a perspective which makes us take it seriously. We must be there and transport ourselves into that land and we must participate in the affairs of this sort of a Utopian landscape, a landscape to which we must surrender ourselves to. The fantasy tale does not change the primary world of course but it obviously alters our outlook of how we see the primary world.

Thus the narrative strategy is quite clear. Tolkien attempts to create this other world, which has to be taken for real, and the wonderful ambience created reminds us of the real physical world so the other para-real world becomes alluring The narrative is narrated from the point of view of the hobbits, the protagonists, and as has been mentioned earlier we are mere visitors to into this world of fantasy. We can take up this assertion by Waggoner⁴ before we get

³ Gary K. Wolfe, The Encounter with Fantasy, R.C. Schlobin, ed. The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press and The Harvester Press, 1982. p14, “Belief in fantasy, what Tolkien calls ‘secondary belief’ to distinguish it from the ‘primary belief’ in implemental reality arises from the conjunction of psychological affect and ideational structure, and as Tolkien notes it is quite a different thing from Coleridge’s willing suspension of disbelief.

deeper into the narrative of *The Hobbit* in connection to her observations about the hobbits of Middle Earth. Tolkien introduces the Tooks who constitute an eminent clan in this land. After introducing the Tooks, he starts describing the adventure:

> By some curious chance, one morning in long ago in the quiet of the world… Gandalf came by. Gandalf! If you had heard only a quarter of what I have heard about him, and I have heard very little of all there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale. Tales and adventures probed up all the place wherever he went, or the most extraordinary fashions (*Hobbit* 52).

We do not know at this point who Gandalf is. Gandalf is introduced as an ageing wizard who needs to pass on his mantle to younger people. The Child’s mind wants to know more, who Gandalf is, of his whereabouts, and more about his adventures and many other aspects and the inevitable question “What happens next?” explodes in his mind. The narrative is initiated with the mention of Gandalf as a kind of godfather for the hobbits. Gandalf tricks one Bilbo into hosting a party for Thorin and his band of dwarves, who sing of reclaiming the Lonely Mountain and its vast treasure from the dragon Smaug. When the music ends, Gandalf unveils a map showing a secret door into the Mountain and proposes that the dumbfounded Bilbo serve as the expedition’s "burglar". The dwarves ridicule the idea, but Bilbo, indignant, joins in spite of himself. The plot is thus initiated. There is a treasure hunt in the offing and there is a stiff challenge to be overcome.

The story intensifies with more adventures created realistically with more magic and fantasy. The narrative conjures up charms beyond the average writer’s domain. An example can suffice “Then something Tookish woke inside him” (*Hobbit* 52) The ease with which Tolkien makes use of this adjective is remarkable and speaks volumes about his narrative innovativeness. Once more Tolkien takes liberties with the possibilities of language. Language, we can thus
understand becomes a very significant instrument in the hands of the narrator. The Tookish temperament evokes the journey in search of the treasure. The journey commences as do the dangers of the journey which are codified in very distinct terms by Gandalf and the rest can only listen in dismay. The end of Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3 build up the adventure. The group travels into the wild, where Gandalf saves the company from trolls who are keen to eat the dwarfs and leads them to a place called Rivendell, where Elrond, ‘Half-elven Lord of Rivendell’ and father of Arwen Undómiel and the Keeper of another of the Elven rings who reveals more secrets from the map, including the secret door that leads to the mountain caverns. There is a lot to comment on these. I shall begin by referring to Gandalf’s warning that trolls are dangerous. There is a fear generated about ‘trolls.’ This is a crucial ploy. Trolls are dangerous creatures and they can be very destructive. Tolkien introduces negative characters by describing the trolls. In his very illuminating text *The Complete Guide to Middle Earth*, Robert Foster enlists all the qualities of the trolls with injunctions he gathers from the hobbit series.

They are the evil race of Middle Earth, trolls were very large (perhaps as large as ents), strong, ugly and stupid. They had thick skin and black blood, and most trolls (except the Uruk-hai) turned to stone when exposed to sunlight. They hoarded treasures, killed for pleasure, and ate raw flesh of all kinds. Although they could never be really intelligent, Sauron increased their wits and wickedness and towards the end of the Third Age trolls became quite dangerous. There seems to be at least four strands of trolls.5

The description of the trolls is based on factual details that emerge from the different texts in the Hobbit series and naturally there is more than one comment to make in this respect. First we

need to talk about about the trolls. Foster has drawn certain factual aspects from the different 
*Hobbit* texts. It is a fact that it is a painstaking effort but a very interesting one. Considering the 
context we are presently dealing with, we can find that the trolls turn out to be a very ‘real’ hoard 
of mischief making creatures which create havoc whenever they get a chance. These details 
which are furnished only elaborate the efforts Tolkien took to give this series a ‘real’ ambience 
acting as an accomplice narrator and distorting traditional norms of reality. From the pages of the 
narrative, one can find such amazing details, precise structures which aid in shaping this 
secondary world of fantasy and wonder. We learn that the genealogy of trolls are detested and 
are feared greatly. Tolkien uses the tropes of shock, horror, and suddenness, The warning from 
Gandalf that they ought to be more careful is thus to be taken seriously if they think of meeting 
with success in this venture of restoring the treasure. Gandalf’s grey beards matter a lot in this 
aspect and Thorin acknowledges it. The conversation here shows how they are dealing with a 
‘real’ problem and the narrative, once we are in it, does not even for once, allows us to believe 
that it in a fictional world we are in. The magic and fantasy all seem so real to us.

The next chapter is titled ‘*A Short Rest*’ and it takes off from the place where we were at 
the end of Ch2, the previous chapter. On the way to the Milky Mountain they take some rest. The 
rest is not a very comfortable one for they know of impending dangers lurking in the vicinity, 
and the ever nonchalant and lackadaisical Bilbo inquires whether they have reached the Misty 
Mountain to which his aide Robin answers it was just the beginning. Bilbo longed for his hobbit 
hole and its comfort. During his adventure, Bilbo often refers to the contents of his larder at 
home and wishes he had more food. The problems encountered and faced in this instance are all 
‘real’ problems posed to this bunch of ‘Treasure hunters’. The narrative is very gripping and it 
creates the real world of ordinary affairs and thus as we go ahead, the world of the para real
becomes more and more real as for instance. In the same chapter, a little later Gandalf states

“Here it is at last”, and later, Bilbo suggests:

“Hmm, it smells like stars”, thought Bilbo, and he looked up at the stars. They were burning bright and blue. Just then there came a burst of song like laughter in the trees.

O What are you doing?
And where are you going,
Your ponies need shoeing!
The river is flowing!
O! tra-la-la-lally
Here down in the valley! (Hobbi 63).

This passage too requires a few comments. We are informed that hobbits can smell stars. Tolkien constructs this adventure by using signifiers from the real world. The information that Bilbo can smell stars is indicative of a peculiar characteristic habit of the hobbits. This gives us a fair idea how Tolkien constructs the world of the para real. The sense of smell here identifies a very recognizable smell for Bilbo Baggins just as we could smell a fox or such a creature. There is some cause for celebration and this song is sung out in all its beauty. One can feel the rhythm of joy oozing out of this lyric, which is being sung after a long and hard day’s trek. The song is constructed so that it sounds very real in its essence and the narratee can easily visualize a merry group huddling together and putting their lips together. Such a song may not be unusual for a tired group of treasure hunters. Tolkien creates this world by means of substitution of the real for a distorted version of the real. In another chapter Over Hill and Under Hill Tolkien lets us know more about the goblins:
Now goblins are cruel, wicked and bad hearted. They make no beautiful thing, but they make many clever ones. They can turned and mine as well as any, but the most skilled dwarves, when they take the trouble, thought they are … untidy and dirty. (*Hobbit* 98)

More details are furnished about their likes, dislikes, their wickedness and their types of weapons. These details work wonders in the context of the narrative as they produce before the readers a very real, life like description of the goblins. It is necessary as a mortal fight is to emerge between the goblins and the hobbits. It is presented in a very realistic mode and that is the essence of this entire *Hobbit* series. We can feel what sort of creatures these goblins are. Tolkien uses the trope of transference of epithets. Here epithets which are used in any story depicting the feud between the good and the bad is transferred to a world which does not exist but is created realistically.

In the same chapter there is mention of a sword, and it is called ‘orcrist’, as the goblins are furious as the Great Goblin shouted,

> “Murderers and elf-friends. Slash them, Bite them, gnash them. Take them away to dark holes full of snakes and never let them see light again. (*Hobbit* 80)

This forms a very formidable battlefield of sorts, and this is constructed very realistically in a fascinating manner for all the readers. The description of the battle has no dearth of such emotions and feelings which can be felt in any real battle and are hence very recognisable to the reader. The reference to the goblins here agrees with the earlier description of the Goblins which has been quoted earlier in this chapter itself. Verbs like ‘yammering’, ‘jabbering’, ‘croaking’ and ‘shirking’ while referring to the goblins make the picture even more real. It helps the child reader to identify certain referents as Piaget had suggested.⁶

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After Piaget we can suggest that such texts involve readers with situations in which conventional wisdom is brought into question.\(^7\)

The story intensifies as the novel progresses. Passing over the Misty Mountains, they are caught by goblins and driven deep underground. There is defeat staring at the hobbits as of now.

“Suddenly a sword flashed in its own light. Bilbo saw it go right from the Great Goblin as he stood dumbfounded in the middle of his rage. He fell dead and the goblin soldiers fled before the sword strictly into the darkness” (Hobbit 111).

Although Gandalf rescues them, Bilbo gets separated from the others as they flee the goblins. Such mesmerizing descriptions can only intensify the world of the ‘para real’. The reader is aware that he is only reading fiction, but that does not deter him from being engrossed in the affair of the hobbits that have that different world of their own. Magic is ubiquitous in the narrative and it is embedded in the very structure of the narrative and is achieved by substituting the real by conscious language games.\(^8\) Tolkien uses language games to tweak the parameters of the real. Consider this observation about the hobbits:

“Hobbits are not quite like ordinary people and after all if their holes are nice cheery places and properly aired, quite different from the tunnels of the goblins, moral values. At the later part of the stage (nine to eleven), they are very interested in examining the rules that govern their lives. They seem to have more respect for established standards than for adult authority.”

\(^7\) Ibid.102, “An examination of rules and what happens when rules and adult authority are rejected might be a logical topic for discussion of literature with children who are moving toward the upper range of this concrete operational stage.”

\(^8\) According to Wittgenstein, words are like tools in a tool-box. Words are instruments of language which may have varying uses, according to the purposes for which language may be used. The varying ways in which words may be used help to structure our concepts of reality. Wittgenstein also argues that the uses or meaning of words may change, according to changes in the circumstances and scene of a language-game. To use words meaningfully, people must decide which language-game they want to play, and how they want to play it.
still they are more used to tunneling than we are, and they do not easily lose their sense of direction underground not when their heads have recovered from being bumped. Also they can move very quietly, and hide easily, and recover wonderfully from falls and bruises and they have a fund of wisdom and sayings that men have mostly never heard or have forgotten long ago.” (Hobbit 75)

In this description, Tolkien gives the hobbit world a location, a stature and certain features. The reader is transferred to a world which does not exist but created realistically. He creates a world by manipulating the sense of reality by calculated strategies, which is peculiar to such texts. The normal world becomes alien and foreign; magic is the chief criterion. Fantasy and magic reign supreme. The narrative is carried forward by means of substitution of the real for a distorted version of the real. There is also very distinctly a Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque in such descriptions where hierarchies disappear. When he distinguishes between the trolls of hobbits and goblins, there is an obvious link to the Bakhtinian framework. Tolkien gives to his fantasy a very ‘realistic’ structure. Magic itself becomes a narrative device and shapes the novel as these goblins and hobbits are made to exist exactly as humans exist, with a set of laws and regulations which match only with the reality. Normative rules do not matter in this scheme of things, hobbits dominate and humans are only visitors in their world. They are the center as it were and we at the periphery as it were. It is the hobbit world, the realistically created hobbit world and we can only sit back and watch the proceedings unfurl before us as the accomplice narrator takes charge. The narrative only gets more and more precise, for instance when he talks of Gollum.; ‘He was a Gollum as dark and darkness except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face’. Epithets like, ‘big’; ‘round’, and ‘pale’ almost pictorially present the eyes for us and the epithet ‘thin’ adds some precision to the face also. The simile, ‘as dark as darkness’, not only adds to the horror but it serves more than one purpose for us. It gives physical descriptions of Gollum and also gives us an indication about what sort of a character
Gollum would turn out to be. Transference of epithets as mentioned earlier becomes a very significant trope. Epithets normally used about a very evil being are transferred to a world which does not exist for real but created realistically. Lost in the goblin tunnels, Bilbo who had earlier separated from his group he stumbles across a mysterious ring and then encounters Gollum, who engages him in a game of riddles. As a reward for solving all riddles Gollum will show him the path out of the tunnels, but if Bilbo fails, his life will be forfeit. The narrative is very gripping when Gollum and Bilbo plays this game of riddles. It is not merely a game of question and answer but a game of survival. Bilbo must win to survive. Gollum throws the riddle to him:

   This thing all things devours:
   Birds, beasts trees, flowers;
   Gnaws iron, bites steel;
   Grinds hard stones to meal;
   Slays Kings; ruins town,
   And beasts high mountain down. (Hobbit 85)

Bilbo has no clue about the answer to this question. It is too difficult for Bilbo to answer and he wanted more time to sort out. What he wanted to say was “Give me more time! Give me time!” but what emerged from his mind was ‘Time’ ‘Time’! (Hobbit 85) Bilbo was saved by his skin and it was a sort of a miracle as ‘time’ indeed is the answer to this riddle.

The child reader can understand the fun and is relieved all the same. Such language games continuously distort the real. He can breathe a little easier. Tolkein engages in another of his language games; exploring the possibilities of the language. Further he also exploits the child’s love for riddles. The child surely would engage in the endeavour to solve this riddle. We can interpret this from Piaget’s ideas.⁹

The reader is prepared for more adventures, and he is not denied of more reality bites in the amazing fantastic world of hobbits. The reader has already been introduced to a seemingly innocuous little ring; one which would change the course of Bilbo’s life and would prove material for three subsequent books of the same series, a ring which made one invisible. With the help of the ring, which confers invisibility, Bilbo escapes and rejoins the dwarves, improving his reputation with them. The goblins and Wargs give chase but the company is saved by eagles before resting in the house of Beorn.

Details just do not stop pouring in. In the chapter entitled *Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire* for instance, Tolkien chips in with another piece of information; “The wargs and the goblins often helped one another in wicked deeds’ Knowing full well that both goblin and wargs are fictitious beings, such detail can only aid us into a deeper understanding of the situation as the narrator realistically creates this world. Fantasy is constructed by strategic manipulation of the real. There is a very curious event when hobbits meet a man in the chapter *Queer Lodgings*. In this instance the hobbits meet a man on their terms, as this ‘hunger man’ (*Hobbit*118) is the outsider here and he is drawn into the affair of the hobbits, but he is only to take a passive part. Bilbo and company would not let others take the initiative. The journey must go on for them. The company enters the black forest of Mirkwood without Gandalf. In Mirkwood, Bilbo first saves the dwarves from giant spiders and then from the dungeons of the Wood-elves, helping the company escape downriver in barrels. Nearing the Lonely Mountain, the travellers are welcomed problem solving ability. The logical quality of the adolescent's thought is when children are more likely to solve problems in a trial-and-error fashion. Adolescents begin to think more as a scientist thinks, devising plans to solve problems and systematically testing solutions. They use hypothetical-deductive reasoning, which means that they develop hypotheses or best guesses, and systematically deduce, or conclude, which is the best path to follow in solving the problem.”
by the human inhabitants of Lake-town, who hope the dwarves will fulfil prophecies of Smaug's demise. The expedition travels to the Lonely Mountain and finds the secret door; Bilbo scouts the dragon's lair, stealing a great cup and learning of a weakness in Smaug's armour. Upon noticing the theft, the enraged dragon, deducing that Lake-town has aided the intruder, sets out to destroy the town. A noble thrush had overheard Bilbo's report of Smaug's vulnerability and reports it to the Lake-town defender, Bard, who slays the dragon. So it is the hobbits who actually aid humans.

The adventure is designed for the hobbits, and it is they who must do the needful. The journey goes on and the plot thickens. In *Barrels out of Bond*, we have more tension as the ‘Eleven King’ declares in a real menacing tone. “There is no escape from my magic down for those who are once brought inside” (*Hobbit* 167). Tolkien uses the tropes of horror and suddenness to involve the reader. The magic is there for everyone to see, it is prominent but what is remarkable rests in the fact that they are always represented realistically. The details are really striking and each time they get more and more precise.

Tolkien was himself a major theorist of fantasy. We need to go into some of the assertions that Tolkien had to provide on fantasy literature and try and analyse what he thought of such writing so that it can aid our thesis. For him fantasy is ‘the most nearly pure form of art’¹⁰. That is the magic of the secondary world, we are in it so long as are mentally in it. The secondary world is so mesmerizing that it is not often that we can actually come out of it. The unknown lands, the beasts, who seem so real, awful and magnificent alternatively or at the same time, the fairies, the mythic tales, the names which spin magic themselves comprise the

J.R.R. Tolkien made fantasy his forte. It is this world of magic that pervades the text. Tolkien is not entirely happy with the phrase magical.  

The artistic aspect is of utmost importance. Enchantment or magic, whatever terminology one might be tempted to use, the basic promise is about creating a world which is unfamiliar and unknown to normative, cognitive ideas. The author must never forget in the process of his narration that such texts have to be written in a way that a relationship with the real world is continuously maintained so that the reader will be able to identify with real signifiers but will still be in dismay. It is imperative that the parameters of the real world is substituted by the imaginary world at every given instant.

This fascinating art of narration, spinning yarns as it were, and creating this fantastic other world really requires a lot of craft, ‘elvish craft’ as Tolkien would suggest. These are realms into which we must look at from the point of view of the inhabitants of these lands and that is the primary condition. The language games operative in these texts the texts which create the ‘para-real’ worlds are crafted on indices which we have to understand as manipulation of the real. One has to give oneself to believe that such a world exists. The reader knows that such worlds cannot exist on the physical level. The rules of this world call the shots here and it is only desirable that we surrender to the principles of these bizarre worlds which are there for us to see and comprehend. The fantastic world is real, once we enter it and it is created by the creative faculty of the author. Tolkien suggests in On Fairy Stories:

“In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wondered, but its way richness and strangeness tie the tongue of the traveler who would report...”

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11 Ibid,37, “Magic should be reserved for the operation of the Magician. Enchantment produces a secondary world into which both designer and spectator can enter to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside, but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose”

12 Ibid,37
them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost”\textsuperscript{13}. Although Tolkien misses the precision and the cognitive aspect which can formulate a theory on fantasy he is close to what I am demonstrating in this thesis. The reader of fantasy must give in to the paradigms and rules of the ‘para-real’ world not from rational cognitive nationality but from the non rational point of view more akin to a child’s thought process. Fantasy is the forte of Tolkien. Whether it is ‘the most pure form of art’ can always he put to debate but it is a fact that Tolkien’s art nears perfection. He looks into fantasy as a genre which has to be taken seriously and that is essentially what we should try to do. This is exactly what happens in the Hobbit world.

In the chapter which depicts heightening tension titled \textit{On the Doorstep}, we are introduced to a place called Mirkwood where Bilbo had treaded in:

\begin{quote}
[These are]lands to the black walls of Mirkwood, and to the distances beyond, in which he sometimes thought he could catch glimpses of the Misty Mountains small and jar. If the dwarves asked him what he was doing he answered...”(\textit{Hobbit} 198)
\end{quote}

The land is painted in details and we are transported to that sinister land, right into it, and we can hardly wait to see and watch what happens next. Mirkwood and Misty Mountain may have no place in maps drawn by human cartographers but it has been granted a proper place in the world of hobbit who have specific geographical locales of their own. Such realistically constructed exist and they excel in their own rights. The lands are real and Tolkien even draws maps to show specific details. These maps are another instance to elucidate the pains Tolkien took to manipulate the real. Reality is distorted at every instance. The maps which are being enclosed (Annexure 2) show it all, and speak volume of the devotion that Tolkien put in while creating

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid,33
the magical world realistically. The company enters the black forest of Mirkwood without Gandalf. In Mirkwood, Bilbo first saves the dwarves from giant spiders and then from the dungeons of the Wood-elves, helping the company escape downriver in barrels. Bilbo scouts the dragon's lair, stealing a great cup and learning of a weakness in Smaug's armour. Upon noticing the theft, the enraged dragon, deducing that Lake-town has aided the intruder, sets out to destroy the town. A noble thrush had overheard Bilbo's report of Smaug's vulnerability and reports it to the Lake-town defender, Bard, who slays the dragon. The details that are supplied are in the truest sense mind boggling. The example provided below is a case in point:

“Now they all pushed together, and slowly a part of the rock-wall gave away. Long straight cracks appeared and widened. A door five feet high and three broad was outlined and slowly without a sound swung inwards. It seemed as if darkness flowed out like a vapour from the hole in the mountain side, and deep darkness in which nothing could be seen lay before their eyes, a yawning mouth leading in and down” (Hobbit 202).

Such polyphonic exchanges are typical of the art of novel as Bakhtin suggested. The author draws the narrative to its closure but still a lot remains to be decoded. These details have a remarkable effect on the text. It can truly work wonders for the cause of the narrative. The detailed discussion on how the rocks gave away and they could get in are mentioned by substituting the real by a distorted version of the real. That the next chapter is titled Inside Information comes as no surprise, with a deliberate and very intelligent use of pun on the word ‘inside’. The ring which Bilbo had managed from Gollum has a crucial place in the narrative.

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The ring of course has to emerge as the framework for three further books of the series. I quote from the chapter:

Then the hobbit slipped on his ring, and warned by the echoes to take more than hobbits care to make no sound, he crept noiselessly down, but his little face was set and grim. Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket handkerchief from Bag End long ago. He had not had a pocket handkerchief for ages. He loosened his dagger in its sheath, tightened his belt and went in. (*Hobbit* 212)

The reference to the pocket handkerchief was taken up in the introduction to this thesis. We can see how a pocket hanky characterizes a hobbit and not having one is a matter of discredit and shame in that worldview so realistically constructed for the child reader. The remarkable preciseness of detail can match any real adventure or treasure hunt, and be as gripping, only it is the world of fantasy.

Even a single sentence can evoke so much of excitement as we find in “There came a night when suddenly there were many lights as fires and torches away south in sale before them”. (*Hobbit* 219). There are so many significant key words in this extract. The word ‘there’, serves as a continuum with what has been happening and it also heightens the significance of the activities to come up. The article ‘a’ too specifies the night and distinguishes it from a whole bunch of other nights. ‘Suddenly’ adds to the flair and it is further intensified by the information about lights and torches. There is something gripping in Tolkien’s narrative which not for once seems out of place. The magic is endless as the narrative draws to its culmination and more discussion on the magic ring becomes rather imperative for all;

A magic ring of that sort is not a complete protection in a goblin charge, nor does stop flying arrows and wild spears, but it does help in getting out of the way, and it prevents your head from being specially chosen for a weeping stroke by a goblin sword.(Hobbit 265).
The war heightens. When the dwarves take possession of the mountain, Bilbo finds the Arkenstone, an heirloom of Thorin's dynasty, and hides it. The Wood-elves and Lake-men besiege the mountain and request compensation for their aid, reparations for Lake-town's destruction, and settlement of old claims on the treasure. Thorin refuses, and, having summoned his kin from the mountains of the North, reinforces his position. Bilbo gives the Arkenstone to the Elvenking so that he can ransom it to head off a war, but Thorin is intransigent. He banishes Bilbo, and battle seems inevitable.

Gandalf reappears to warn all of an approaching army of goblins and Wargs. The dwarves, men and elves band together, but only with the timely arrival of the eagles and Beorn do they win the climactic Battle of Five Armies. Thorin is fatally wounded and reconciles with Bilbo before he dies and victory has to fall on the ‘good’ hobbits. The book ends with a conversation between the wizard Gandalf and a rather lackadaisical Bilbo Baggins also chips in:

“You are a very fine person, Mr Baggins, and I am very fond of you, but are quite a better fellow in a wide world after all!”

‘Thank goodness!’ said Bilbo laughing, and handed him the tobacco jar. *(Hobbit, 272)*

The job well done, Bilbo could rest on the laurels and Tolkien too brings the narrative to its obvious closure. Bilbo accepts only a small portion of his share of the treasure, having no want or need for more, but still returns home as a very wealthy hobbit.

There is the traditional topos of good prevailing over bad. There is a Maarchen like journey, a journey which Tolkien had envisaged even earlier in his *Beowulf*. He realized the
significance of the coherence of the secondary world when he was working on *Beowulf*. Tolkien
gives to the framework a heteroglottic framework as Bakhtin would suggest. Dragons and such
creatures have been vested with a realistic existence. The departure from consensus reality is of
of course a very conscious stance. Tolkien draws from ancient epics and analogues of antiquities
from which he sharpen his world of high fantasy, his world of the ‘para real’. *Hobbit* is set in that
‘secondary’ world which truly has been given a realistic setting. As David Bisneiks quips;
“There is no pretending as in some modern novels”15 The hobbit world has been constructed
serious magic and genuine dangers lurking. The Maarchen like journey into Middle Earth, a
world full of wizards, elves, trolls, giants, shape changes and dragons never cease to wonder us,
and by the end of the novel, the treasure is recovered and Bilbo is more informed of the Hobbit
world at the end of it all. The mythological pattern gets portrayed in a more detailed manner in
*The Silmarillon* (1953-54). Bilbo is a name generated from the term ‘Bilbo,’ the sword boy. The
sword takes central place in the development of the plot. Such details are taken care of with
extraordinary deftness. The plot is one which grows up with intrusions by the author in which
language and words play a vital role. It is Tolkien’s ‘rhetoric of childhood. Tolkien certainly is
the ‘originator of modern fantasy’ C.S. Lewis calls this universe an amalgamation of “a number
of good things, never before united”.16 The *Hobbit* has a cyclic structure, with the departure from
the shire, the journey to the Misty Mountains, then the march to Mirkwood, and the final journey
to the Lonely Mountain where the search for treasure reaches its culmination. The fantasy
reaches its real climax. If we put in a thought about the mythical pattern of ‘Middle Earth’, and

15 David Bisneiks. *Tales from perilous realms* in *International Companion Encyclopedia of

the extent to which Tolkien sweated to give it the realistic pattern we realize how remarkable the entire proposition can be. Says Robert Crossley:

The author of Utopias enjoys drawing blue prints for an imaginary society for some of the same reasons Tokien laboured over his maps of Middle Earth: both are explorers of the topography of desire, the Utopian attitude may be more playful than practical, the application of fantasy in Utopia is chiefly internal, within the ideal world, rather than metafictional.\textsuperscript{17}

The realm of this Utopia is idealistic of course; the fight between good and bad cannot have another conclusion. It is better that ‘keys’ that Tolkien had talked of while trying to define fantasy be ‘lost’ and fewer the questions be asked the ‘better’ as the realms the readers have been transported into are most wondrous and at the same time realistically constructed. Things get more fascinating once we are in the \textit{Lord of the Rings} realm. William.H.Grahame chips in quite aptly:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The Hobbit} is a fairy story; its world is a world where things are broken open alchemically to show what they really are. Inside the half witted third son of the tale is the future King. Inside the future king is a prince and inside the selfish little Baggins is a noble Took, more worthy to wear the amours of elf princes than many that have looked more comely in it."\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

It is remarkably realistic in all its fantastic and magical brilliance, and before passing on to \textit{Lord of the Rings} series we can conclude that in the \textit{Hobbit} the narrator indeed acts an accomplice of the child reader by consciously distorting reality by manipulating the real using some tropes which are recurrent in nature to create the fantasy.

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\textsuperscript{18} W.H.Grahame, \textit{The Hobbit, A journey into Middle Earth}, Michigan; Twayne Publishers,1995;p145
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