The Childlike Hobbit

Abstract
Considers aspects of the depiction of hobbits in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* that emphasize their childlike qualities, and considers questions of the significance of this depiction and of the intended audience for these works.

Additional Keywords
Children in fantasy; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Hobbits—As children; Stephen Peregrine
The question of whether The Lord of the Rings is more suited to an adult or a juvenile readership has been the object of no little attention ever since the story was first published. The problem of whether it is related to children in any other way, however, seems to have been largely neglected.

I believe that the association of the book with children, particularly in the minds of unsympathetic critics, is largely due to childlike qualities of the principal protagonists — the hobbits. I would go further and propose that the hobbits can be regarded as one literary version of children; and that the world of childhood, as it is portrayed in literature written for an adult readership provides a useful perspective for an understanding of the book.

In order to maintain this view, it will be necessary to examine and define both "hobbit(s)" and "child(ren)." An authoritative definition of "hobbit" at least, is readily available. In 1970, when the Oxford English Dictionary staff was compiling an entry for "hobbit" in the Second Supplement, Tolkien's help was sought. He offered the following definition:

One of an imaginary people, a small variety of the human race, that gave themselves this name (meaning 'hole-dweller') but were called by others 'halflings' since they were half the height of normal men. (1)

This seems to take us some way toward establishing the likeness between hobbit and child already, since they both share the attributes of smallness, and membership in the human race. Limiting attention to the hobbit for the moment, it is the diminutive stature, rather than any other feature, that is apparently regarded as the defining characteristic by the unspecified "others" of Tolkien's definition, since this is the feature referred to in their naming of the hobbits.

Thus, two relevant points arise from this definition. The hobbits are small, and they are human. The first of these may be accepted simply as a given fact, together with the habit of living in hole-like homes. The second, since the hobbit is an imaginary creature, requires elaboration.

The fact that the hobbit was basically human in conception was repeatedly stressed by its creator on a number of occasions. In the early fifties, when Tolkien was trying to interest Collins, a publishing company, in bringing out The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion together, he wrote a long letter of more than a thousand words explaining the cosmology of his created world, and the interdependent nature of the two works. In a footnote on the hobbits, we find:

The Hobbits (2) are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically human race (not Elves or Dwarves) — hence the two kinds can dwell together (as at Bree), and are called just the Big Folk and the Little Folk. They are entirely without non-human powers, but are represented as being more in touch with 'nature' (the soil and other living things, plants and animals) and abnormally, for humans, free from ambition or greed of wealth. ... (author's italics)

Here again, the operative description is: diminutive
human. In addition, the hobbits are "more in touch with 'nature,' and unconcerned with worldly ambition; rather like Wordsworth's idealized rusties, or his "growing boy" who "still is Nature's priest," and whose vision has yet to "fade into the light of common day." (Ode, Intimations of Immortality)

The point that Tolkien's hobbits were human in inspiration and intention was even more emphatically stated in a conversation with Denys Gueroult, first broadcast on BBC's Radio 4, in December 1970. The following is taken from a transcript of that conversation:

G: Did you intend, in The Lord of the Rings, that certain races should embody certain principles; the elves wisdom, the dwarves craftsmanship; men husbandry and battle, and so forth?
T: I didn't intend it; but when you've got these people on your hands, you've got to make them different ... but of course, as we all know, ultimately, we've only got humanity to work with. ...the hobbits are just rustic English people made smaller....

Having thus arrived at an operational definition of "hobbits" as rustic little folk, it is now necessary to examine some versions of "children."

The word "child" seems to be a relative term, susceptible of precise definition only when employed in the context of systems which themselves provide the (often apparently arbitrary) definition; as in a legal, or medical bureaucratic frame of reference, in which a child would be defined respectively (at the present time, in most Western or Western influenced societies) as under-eighteen and under-twelve.

In literary terms, the "child" has been portrayed in so many fundamentally different ways that exceptions will be found to any definition more exact than the rather uninformative one of juvenile human. Even here, the miniature adults of the sixteenth century, ideally "models of gracious eloquence, youngsters with the finesse and intellectual development of educated adults" (3) can be invoked against the concept of juvenility. Particularly as sixteenth century humanists seemed to have adopted, in a general way, the classical view of regarding:

children too young to follow the dictates of reason [as] not yet classifiable as human.... Children inhabited a no man's land in the great chain of being, joining the realm of animals to that of human beings but not really belonging to either group." (4)

This version of the "child," whatever our personal reactions may be, is completely compatible with Tolkien's portrayal of the hobbits in The Lord of the Rings. The hobbit, Frodo Baggins, often regarded as the hero of the tale, comes of age at the beginning of the story, so that he is, for all practical purposes, a miniature adult like the ideal Renaissance child.

As to eloquence and courtesy, Frodo exhibits a degree of poise and courtliness in remembering, if somewhat tardily, to bow and to speak the proper words of greeting in his first encounter with the Elves in the woods around the Shire. It should be noted that this has immediate effect upon these tall, (5) elegant and ancient creatures. While they had been prepared to offer guidance and protection to the hobbits even before Frodo's little performance -- in the same way that any responsible adult would have tried to help a party of children lost in the woods at night, no matter how uninteresting these children were -- the relationship is changed to one of friendship, of dealing on equal terms, when the Elves see that Frodo is a well-tutored hobbit. The Elf Gildor now hails Frodo formally as "Elf-friend," and bows in his turn. (1.3 p.84)

Frodo's demonstration of his good manners, of his ability to conduct himself with propriety, seems to set him slightly apart from the rest of the company. After the other (younger) hobbits have fallen asleep, he is pictured as remaining with Gildor, talking of many things, far into the night.

It may be remembered that the place, assigned by neo-classic society to children who cannot be dealt with on adult terms, is situated somewhere between the human and animal realms. This seems to be precisely the area occupied by the race of hobbits. Though in all other respects human in appearance and behavior, the hobbits have furry feet like animals, which gives them the ability to move about very quietly on natural terrain. Like little animals, they are also:

...quick of hearing and sharp-eyed, and...are nimble and deft in their movements.... They also possessed from the first the art of disappearing when large folk whom they do not wish to meet come blundering by. (7)

This part-animal, part-human nature of the hobbit is partly due to its genesis. The hobbit started life as the central character in a book intended for a juvenile readership; and was, in all likelihood conceived of in the tradition of the humanized animals that frequent the pages of English children's literature. Indeed, the hobbit has been compared to Mole and Pooh. (8) But while these two characters belong in the category of "one of a kind" and are completely identifiable as the named animals in their appearance, the hobbit is one of an imaginary race, and realized very much as a variety of the race of humans, thus imaginatively occupying the middle ground between the human and animal worlds; inhabited also by young children in the classic and neo-classic versions of the great chain of being.

Although the hobbit can thus be seen to resemble in different ways, the sixteenth century humanists' concept of "child," this is only a partial picture. Other versions of the "child," in particular, the one that occupies a position of considerable importance in the body of literature which generally goes under the label of "Romantic," remains to be examined.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the "child" emerged "from comparative unimportance to become the focus of an unprecedented literary interest; and, in time the central figure of an increasingly significant proportion of [English] literature" (9) This "Romantic child" (10) was in many ways the antithesis of his precocious Renaissance predecessor. He was the very image of purity and innocence; an exemplar of the best kind of unworldliness; the embodiment of Blake's "innocence" and Wordsworth's "natural piety."

Instead of being regarded as attaining humanity when achieving some measure of adulthood, the Romantic child was seen as doomed to lose his innocence and sensibility, "of natural objects with the environment of experience and maturity. One consequence of such a view was that, since by definition, the adult will have lost the intuitive and visionary understanding of the child, he cannot share in the child's comprehension of the world around him, nor can he fully understand the child's
perception. In other words, the child is unknowable, and hence, to a degree, mysterious.

Into this scheme, the hobbit, as he is portrayed in The Lord of the Rings, also fits. His simplicity and rusticity, his being in touch with nature and nature things and characteristics that have already been noted earlier in this essay. One other hobbit feature that could contribute to a comparison of this imaginary creature with the image of the "Romantic child" is its normal unconcern regarding the affairs of the civilized world. The race of hobbits is presented as having lived quietly in a small and little known (11) area of Middle-earth called "The Shire," and as having avoided the notice of the great and powerful. Of these, only the wizard Gandalf and a few, select guardians of the realms have any knowledge, even of the existence of the race.

Partly as a result of this seclusion, they are virtually unknown outside this very limited area, and like the Romantic child, something of a mystery to the Big Folk. Even Gandalf, the Middle-earth expert on hobbit affairs, can only guess at their true potential. Nevertheless, he places great faith in the ability of the halflings to surprise the Big Folk by their mettle and endurance, trusting them to succeed where greater ones were sure to fail. His trust is completely vindicated; and Frodo, together with his companion hobbits, Pippin and Merry, are duly recognized and greatly honored at the end of the story.

The image of the child is used to represent the virtues that are associated with simplicity: innocence and purity. Also present is the idea of unrecognized worth, perhaps no where as clearly expressed as in the line: "Suffer the little children come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God." (Mark X.14)

In the story of The Lord of the Rings, the hobbits are often not taken seriously by the Big Folk that they encounter. They are overlooked or patronized except by the few who either guess at their worth or are persuaded of it by Gandalf. This is turned to good use in the line: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew XVIII.3). The image of the child is used to represent the virtues that are associated with simplicity: innocence and purity. Also present is the idea of unrecognized worth, perhaps no where as clearly expressed as in the line: "Suffer the little children come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God." (Mark X.14)

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The raising up of the meek and lowly is a cardinal principle in yet another version of the "child" — one which is to be found in the writings of the Christian Church, particularly in the New Testament texts. (12) In this context, "child" is often employed as a metaphor for the simple virtues of meekness and humility. Thus: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew XVIII.3) The image of the child is used to represent the virtues that are associated with simplicity: innocence and purity. Also present is the idea of unrecognized worth, perhaps no where as clearly expressed as in the line: "Suffer the little children come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God." (Mark X.14)

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The image of the Christ child, simple and innocent, destined to be "rejected and reviled of man," and who will yet secure the possibility of eternal joy for them, at the cost of great suffering to himself, invites comparison with the hobbits, particularly with Frodo; who, one of lowly and hitherto unhonored race, secures for Middle-earth freedom from the domination of evil, also at the cost of extremely great personal suffering, endured for the greater good of all. This analogy appears particularly seductive because it is the hobbit's successful completing of their mission, against enormous odds, that gives the story its eucatastrophic (13) ending. And in his essay "On Fairy-stories," Tolkien referred to the Christian story of Redemption as the greatest eucatastrophe of all.

In the light of the foregoing discussion of different versions of the "child" in literature, and the hobbits manifest compatibility with all these versions, it seems that the tentative definition of "hobbit" as "rustic little folk" is inadequate and ultimately as uninformative as the definition of "child" as "juvenile human." What emerges, therefore, is the apparent ability of both "child" and "hobbit" to transcend the limits of any one description, because they share in common the potential to be, to become and to represent in myriad ways, any part of an enormous range of human experience.

II

Although The Lord of the Rings is a work of fantasy, dealing with the history of imaginary races in an imaginary world, it is executed with considerable realism of presentation. (14) This is especially true of the depiction of low characters and in comic scenes. In consequence, the homely hobbits, particularly Merry, Pippin and Sam who are sometimes introduced to provide comic relief, are portrayed in a manner that calls to mind the children of realistic fiction.

These fictional children are, of course, immediately recognizable as children; and in description, dialog and action, are intended to resemble children as we know them in life. Where they are successfully rendered, their appeal is based in reinforcements of a post-Romantic readership's assumptions about children and childhood. This appeal can be seen in numerous examples in the text.

One such example occurs on the very first morning of Frodo's adventures after leaving home. On waking up, after having spent the night in the open in the woods of the Shire, Frodo tries to stir his friends. Pippin refuses to budge, "peering over the edge of his blanket with one eye." So Frodo strips the blankets from him, rolls him over and walks off. The horseplay, the friendly callousness and Frodo's restlessness all exemplify the type of boyish behavior that one might expect of Ralph in the relaxed atmosphere of the early part of Golding's Lord of the Flies. In the course of their adventures, the hobbits reveal a mixture of boldness and curiosity, preserverance and fear, loyalty to friendship and sheer love of fun very like that which endeared such mellelsonsome youngsters as
Huckleberry Finn to generations of readers. Indeed, the hobbits' predilection for taking time off for a meal and a pipe after the trials of their most recent adventures (III.8, p.141) forcefully recalls Huck having a quiet smoke after making his escape from his father's cabin.

But life is not all fun and games for children in literature of any significance. The world is a large and threatening place. Here the child, in spite of courage and pluck, is very small and very helpless. This is vividly presented at the end of the fourth book of The Lord of the Rings:

Sam yelled and brandished Sting [the sword], but his little voice was drowned in the tumult. No one heeded him. The great doors slammed to. Boom. The bars of iron fell into place inside. Clang. The gate was shut. Sam hurled himself against the bolted brazen plates and fell senseless to the ground. (IV.10, p.300)

Being shut out, ignored and unheard by a large, hard and uncaring world is an experience common to many of Dickens' children. Nell, Oliver, David and Little Pip have all heard the clanging of the gate, and the boom of the door being shut.

Perhaps an even more poignant image of the vulnerable and helpless child, and one which is prefigured as a prototype by the sleeping children of Bebes in the Wood, is that of the child asleep. The hobbits fall asleep in the midst of other activities on a number of occasions; and like a child, are carried of and put to bed by kindly "adults." The first hobbit to succumb thus to his own weariness is Pippin.

After a while Pippin fell fast asleep, and was lifted up and borne away to a bower under the trees; there he was laid upon a soft bed and slept the rest of the night away. (I.3, p.86)

Frodo too, is overcome by weariness while in Faramir's camp, and literally falls asleep on his feet:

Faramir stared at him for a moment in grave astonishment. Then suddenly he caught him as he swayed, and lifting him gently, carried him to the bed and laid him there, and covered him warmly. (IV.5, p.57)

In contrast, the man Strider is described as ever vigilant. As the hobbits note: "He never sleeps." The use of contrast is an important element in the comic scene of Sam's confrontation with Faramir:

He planted himself squarely in front of Faramir, his hands on his hips, and a look on his face as if he was addressing a young hobbit who had offered him what he called 'sauce' when questioned about visits to the orchard. (IV.5, p.241)

The reference to saucy young hobbits and their visits to the orchard has the effect of immediately bringing the scene, until now conducted in a totally serious and lofty attitude, down to the level of the homely. Sam's comparison of Faramir's concerns - questions of family heirlooms and national security - with his own anxiety about what happens to the apples in to orchard not only telescopes the two scenes together in such a way that radically alters the level of each in the readers' experience, but reveals that Sam himself regards the two matters of equal gravity, showing a childlike hierarchy of priorities that are determined by a very subjective, very self centered view of the world.

Although Sam tries to play the same authoritative role towards Faramir as he would to a young hobbit, by trying to wear the same look on his face, his seriousness only serves to emphasize the incongruity of the very attempt, and to reinforce the suggestion that Sam is very much in the child's position in this scene.

The possibility of Sam's real authority over a young hobbit need not, I think, detract from the picture of Sam as a child. Slightly older children's assertions of authority over younger or smaller ones is not uncommon either in life or in literature; as the schools' prefect system, or the separation of boys into the leading Big'uns and the following Little'uns in Golding's Lord of the Flies will show. (15) Furthermore, Sam takes himself too seriously for us to accept without question his self-image as a true representation of his place and personality. In contrast to his strained pomposity, Faramir's quiet tolerance is an apt image of truly adult behavior.

While contrast is important, it is perhaps in the rejections that the hobbits elicit from other characters in the story that their childlike quality is made most apparent. Faramir's gentleness towards the exhausted Frodo, and his patience with the rudely belligerent Sam have already been noted. In general, the hobbits meet with similarly kindly treatment, though at times, this is colored with a good measure of exasperation. This combination of caring and annoyance is particularly characteristic of the responses of the dwarf Gimli. For example, when he comes upon Merry and Pippin at Orthanc, after having been separated from them by a party of orcs, he opens up an absolute barrage:

You rascals, you woolly-footed and wool pated truants! A fine hunt you have led us! Two hundred leagues, through fen and forest, battle and death, to rescue you! And here we find you feasting and idling...! (III.9, p.146)

Beneath his gruff and teasing manner, the dwarf reveals true concern. Certainly, he shows the same kind of observant care that a parent might — it is he who remarks, later in the same episode: "Why, your hair is twice as thick and curly as when we parted; and I would swear that you have both grown somewhat..." This discussion of the details of personal appearance, especially in the context of growth forcibly calls to mind the type of remarks made to children.

Underneath Gimli's irrepressibility, lies not only personal affection, but concern that is based on a recognition of the hobbits' weakness, their inability to fend for themselves in a hostile world, and his own responsibility, as an adult, to take care of them. All these factors are hinted at in his remark at their final parting: "You should come safe to your own homes now, and I shall not be kept awake for fear of your peril." (VI.6, p.288-9) This recognition of the hobbits' childlike helplessness is apparent almost from the beginning of the journey, when the travelers meet their first insurmountable obstacle in the form of a bitter snowstorm on the Peak of Caradhras. When they finally decide to make a retreat while it is still possible to do so, the snow is already too deep for the hobbits to be able to make their way through the drift in which they are caught. So between them, the men carry the hobbits to safety. It should be noted that the dwarf, similarly trapped, and about the same height as the hobbits, does not receive the same treatment. (II.3, p.279-80)

The image of the hobbit as child is supported by the
parental roles that are assumed by a number of characters in their relationship with these diminutive folk. Marion Zimmer Bradley identifies the relationship between Gandalf and Pippin as that of father and son in her paper "Men, Halflings and Hero Worship," and notes that Gandalf treats Pippin as:

most emphatically the spolit youngest child...indulgently when he is not squelching his bubbling spirits. [Pippin’s rebellious response to Gandalf’s kind authority culminates in...his theft of the Palantir — which [through] treachery in essence — is motivated and at last understood simply as an act of purely childish mischief and devilry. (16)

She goes on to note that the father-son relationship between Gandalf and Pippin remains; and in the course of the Great Ride, with Pippin huddled in the folds of the wizard’s cloak, "Gandalf first scolds, then lectures, and finally forgives him in true fatherly fashion."

In Tolkien’s correspondence, there is evidence that he saw Gandalf’s usual stance vis a vis the hobbits in general to be one of indulgence towards children. In a letter to Donald Swann in 1968, he complained about being made to watch a fireworks display as part of a BBC documentary program entitled “Tolkien in Oxford.” Elaborating on his displeasure, he explained:

Fireworks have no special relationship to me. They appear in the books because they are part of the representation of Gandalf, bearer of the Ring of Fire, the Kindler: the most childlike aspect shown to the hobbits being fireworks. (18)

This indicates that Tolkien saw the hobbit as childlike, and that Gandalf’s skill with fireworks was the one facet of his complex personality which the ordinary hobbit of the Shire would have the capacity to appreciate. He thus indulged them in this in his dealings with them.

Pippin is not the only hobbit to find a surrogate father in the story. In Rohan, Merry enters the service of King Theoden.

Filled suddenly with love for this old man, he knelt on one knee, and took his hand and kissed it. ‘May I lay the sword of Meriadoc of the Shire on your lap, Theoden King?’ he cried. ‘Receive my service if you will!’ ‘Gladly will I take it,’ said the king;... ‘As a father you shall be to me,’ said Merry. (V.2, p.43)

Merry’s claim to kinship is not merely a formal one. It is an unformulated attempt to make a place for himself, to secure an identifiable position and a point of focus for his sense of commitment, in the world that is surging around him.

Many of the companions with whom he had started out on the journey to Rohan had been dispersed. Those that remain, even for a short while, are too taken up with the urgent affairs of Men to spare him much attention. Merry had begged to be allowed to follow Aragorn: “I don’t want to be laid aside, like baggage to be called for when all is over.” (V.2, p.39) But Aragorn’s task at this stage is considered too fraught with danger, and he is refused. Like a child, he is told to stay indoors until the excitement is over. The most bitter blow of all comes when he learns, just before the battle, that his offer of service and sword had not been taken seriously — that Theoden regarded him still as a child to be cared for when he is told: “I received you for your safe-keeping.” (V.3, p.67)

There is a measure of sibling rivalry (an important motif in the affairs of the men of Rohan), of the younger brother envying the opportunities and the father’s love, as Merry watches Theoden give command of the first troops to his nephew Eomer, after he is forbidden to ride into battle. Merry’s ultimate act of disobedience when he joins the battle, together with the Lady Eowyn, who had also been commanded to stay out of the action, is in part the response of the child who can keep still no longer; but it is also an assertion of his duty and his right, as Theoden’s adoptive son, to do so. Woman and child, excluded from the affairs of men, vindicate themselves in the great Battle of Pelennor Fields, dispatching together the fearful Nazgul whom “no living man may hinder”; yet another example of the weak and the despised succeeding where the strongest would fail. Eomer, in whom the King placed so much confidence, almost causes the battle to end in a rout, but the tide is turned once again in their favor, when Aragorn arrives with reinforcements.

Aragorn is seen in Miss Bradley’s discussion, as the ideal elder brother, and the object of “hero worship.” In his efforts to comfort Merry after Theoden’s death, Aragorn certainly discharges the duties of elder brother to perfection. He thoughtfully provides both for Merry’s physical and spiritual comforts: consoling him, teaching him, and finally, the best cure of all for the self-respect of a child who has felt himself to be regarded as just so much baggage thus far, taking him into his confidence by allowing him to see something of his own trouble and weariness. (V.5, p.128-9)

If the adult Aragorn is an elder brother, and the aged Gandalf a father, the the ancient ent Treebeard is an admirable grandfather figure to the young hobbits. Like Gandalf and Aragorn, Treebeard is a character of commanding authority and enormous power, but like them, these qualities are held in abeyance when dealing with the hobbits. Although he can “split stone like the roots of trees... split Isengard into splinters and crack its
walls into rubble," (III.4, p.77) he is so gentle in handling the hobbits that they show no fear of him, even in their first encounter with this enormous, treelike being, when:

A large knob-knuckled hand was laid on each of their shoulders, and they were twisted round, gently but irresistibly; then two great arms lifted them up. (III.4, p.57)

This is essentially the gesture of a benevolent parent, and the hobbits, who are immediately impressed by his enormous size (at least fourteen feet high) and evident antiquity, are soon on very easy terms with him. On this, and subsequent occasions on which he carries them because his entish stride is too long for their little legs to be able to keep up with him, the only evidence of his stone splitting strength is his endurance, the effortless way in which he lifts them either in his arms or onto his shoulders, and in the hobbits' sense of security while thus moving along removed from the ground to a height that is several times their own.

Like the best kind of grandparent, he tells the hobbits endless stories of the past, "was immensely interested in everything" that they had to tell him, and prepared to answer all of their many questions by lending only cautions to not be hasty. The ent's isolation from the affairs of Middle-earth at the beginning of this episode, and his subsequent contributions to them as a result of his meeting the hobbits, can be regarded in terms of a retired grandparent, whose quiet life-style is disrupted by a visit from the grandchildren, and who is prodded by them into resuming an active life.

That the ent's good natured benevolence towards the hobbits, and his habit of indulging in their shared love of long stories and songs is not characteristic of Treebeard in general, but only of his attitude towards the hobbits, can be seen from the very different way in which he conducts his conversations with Gandalf, or with the elves Galadriel and Celeborn. To the wizard, he is friendly and businesslike. To the elves, he is the embodiment of formal courtesy. This is very much in evidence at the final parting when he bows to the elves "with great reverence" and says: "It is long, long since we met.... It is sad that we should meet only thus at the ending;" but to Merry and Pippin, his words are: "Well, my merry folk,...will you drink another draught with me before you go?" (VI.6, p.299)

IV

With Treebeard as grandfather, Gandalf (and Theoden) as father, Aragorn (and Eomer) as elder brother, and Eowyn as sister, what is manifestly lacking is a mother figure to complete the hobbit-child's family.

Of the female characters that appear in the book, Goldberry and Galadriel have both provided shelter and sustenance, but Treebeard and Faramir have also done as much, so this cannot be adequate grounds for judging only cautioning them not to be hasty. The ent's isolation from the affairs of Middle-earth at the beginning of this episode, and his subsequent contributions to them as a result of his meeting the hobbits, can be regarded in terms of a retired grandparent, whose quiet life-style is disrupted by a visit from the grandchildren, and who is prodded by them into resuming an active life.

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IV

Before drawing this preliminary disquisition on the conception of the hobbit as a child to a close, I would like to turn to its creator once more to note that, with his passionate interest in names, Tolkien wanted to change the name of Sam Gamgee, who he considered to
be "the most closely drawn character, the successor to Bilbo in the first book, the genuine hobbit" (19) to that of "Goodchild" (20).

It is now possible to conclude that, whether considered in term of different versions of the child figure as it is found in schools of literature, in comparison with examples of various portraits of children in fictional works, in terms of the author's conception of the character, or in possible interpretations of the work, the hobbit can be regarded as a child. We should now be at liberty to scrutinize the implications of this view.

NOTES
2 The lower case 'h' is used throughout this essay for 'hobbit' except when reference is made to the book title The Hobbit. Tolkien was inconsistent on this point in his letters. The capital form employed here is retained from the original.
4 ibid., p.10
5 Tolkien's elves are not the diminutive, gossamer creatures of popular conception, but beautiful, ancient and very long lived. In the cosmology of Tolkien's imaginary world, they are the first born of the speaking races of Middle-earth, man being the next; and are generally of the stature of tall men, i.e. about six feet.
6 References to the text of The Lord of the Rings are made by book and chapter numbers; page references are taken from the authorized Unwin Book edition, second impression 1974.
9 Poor Monkey, Peter Coveney, University of Hull 1957, p.ix.
10 ibid., p.1
11 This is evident from the trouble that the servants of the Enemy have in locating the place. Even the wizard Radagast, Gandalf's friend, is confused about its name.
12 Besides being extremely widely read — Tolkien is described as a man who could hold a sensible conversation on any subject and seemed to have read any book that is mentioned in conversation — he was a practising Roman Catholic all his life. His guardian was a priest, and he kept in close touch with members of the religious orders.
13 In discussing the importance of the "Consolation of the Happy Ending" in fairy tales, Tolkien wrote: Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite — I will call it eucatastrophe. The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function...The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn': this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce so well...does not deny the existence of dyseucatastrophe, of sorrow and failure; it denies universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. "On Fairy-stories" in Tree and Leaf, Unwin Books 1978, p.68.
14 "Realism of Presentation," C.S.Lewis' term, is defined as "the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail"; the dragon "sniffling along the stone" in Beowulf is cited as an example. An Experiment in Criticism, C.S. Lewis, Cambridge University Press 1961, p.57.
15 The characters of Ralph and Jack, in particular, provide studies in the childlike exercise of authority.
17 ibid., p.112.
18 Letters, No. 301, p.390
19 ibid., No. 93, p.105
20 ibid., No. 72, p.83

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