

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED **2**

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING **3**

FEL 1:1 A Long Expected Party3

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

I am a member of an on-line book club that has been meeting both virtually and consistently for over a decade. In 2018 I threw out the idea of doing a “slow read” of The Lord of the Rings.

I took the idea from the slow food movement — the idea of chewing slowly and appreciating each bite, not rushing to get done or anticipating the next course — it all seemed like it would be an interesting way to read a longer/deeper work.

Luckily, half a dozen other readers agreed with me. We broke the books up into 2-3 chapters of reading a week and set the schedule to run from February 7th to August 29th, with a bit of chatter before and after.

What developed was a really interesting mix of viewpoints and knowledge bases. [PROBABLY MORE TO SAY HERE, AND ALSO WILL INCLUDE THOUGHTS AS AN AFTERWORD.]

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

FEL 1:1 A LONG EXPECTED PARTY

Bilbo is eleventy-one (111). He has aged remarkably well, which is to say he looks much the same he did at 50, but he's feeling a bit stretched. Frodo Baggins, his nephew and heir, shares a birthday with old Bilbo and will be coming of age, 33. This calls for a major party and all the Shire is talking about it. Gandalf shows up with a load of fireworks and the party is a pretty big hit, until Bilbo gives a confusing speech ... and then disappears! In the aftermath we discover that he has used his ring of course and that he is slipping away from the Shire with some dwarves for another/last adventure. He intends to leave the ring to Frodo, along with Bag End itself, but somehow nearly forgets it ... several times ... and Gandalf has to get a little stern with him before he finally gives it up and takes to the road.

RAY OTUS +5

I'm just going to say (to get things started) that I love how Tolkien quietly injects humor without dwelling on it and I love that Gandalf is both tender and kind of a prick.

(Example of humor.) "Gardeners came by arrangement, and removed in wheelbarrows those that had inadvertently remained behind."

(Example of Gandalf being a sarcastic prick!) [Bilbo] ... I might find somewhere where I can finish my book. I have thought of a nice ending for it: and he lived happily ever after to the end of his days.'

Gandalf laughed. 'I hope he will. But nobody will read the book, however it ends.'

RAY OTUS +5

Also, I'm just going to say it, I got a little choked up over this line:

"Gandalf remained for a while staring after him into the darkness. 'Good-bye, my dear Bilbo – until our next meeting!' he said softly and went back indoors."

I felt like that was the goodbye to Bilbo as a main character and to the relative innocence that is the story of The Hobbit.

RAY OTUS +3

And "three dwarves." Really, JRRT? You can't name them for us? Bastard. :)

PAUL MITCHENER +4

One thing I really like is the going away presents Bilbo has left for various hobbits. And Frodo accidentally insulting Merry.

CLASH BOWLEY +2

The gifts were the best part of the party!

CLASH BOWLEY +3

I always thought this book was the slowest and most boring book in the LotR when I was a wee lad. Now I appreciate it much more.

AONGHAIS MACINNES +4

I really enjoyed revisiting this book after many years. The transition between the Hobbit and LOTR was is hyper mode for me with this reading. Tolkien did several allusions to The Hobbit. For instance, "It was driven by outlandish folk, singing strange songs: dwarves with long beards and deep hoods. A few of them remained at Bag End... arrived to supplement the dwarves and other odd folk that were quartered at Bag End." Just like you +Ray Otus, I wanted to know who were these dwarves and odd folk? Bilbo must have liked them enough and/or felt a closeness with them to have them quartered at Bag End. Were they a part of his previous adventures? Bilbo working on his book and effectively placing his past story inside of LOTR was also a clever device which I have always liked. I was also taken with how Gaffer viewed the Brandybucks of Buckland: "but they're a queer breed, seemingly. They fool about with boats on the big river - and that isn't natural."

CLASH BOWLEY +4

This chapter anchors you in the story.

RAY OTUS +3

I agree +clash bowley. To me it says "Relax. The story will come. We aren't in any hurry here, let's explore the stage and do some housekeeping from The

Hobbit." It's a great tone and sets the mood for the "micro" scale of the following chapters.

DOMINIC O'ROURKE +5

I'm interested in 'Tweens' - only becoming an adult at 33, seems to allow a hobbit a fair number of years to be frivolous-

APOCRYPHAL CHRIS +4

My favourite part is the speech and the description of how the hobbits react to it. And this might be my favourite bit in the whole book:

"I don't know half of you half as well as I should like; and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve. This was unexpected and rather difficult. There was some scattered clapping, but most of them were trying to work it out to see if it came to a compliment."

And another bit of humour:

"In the matter of roots, especially potatoes, the Gaffer was recognized as a leading authority by all in the neighborhood (including himself)."

+clash bowley The first book has always been my favourite. The two towers is where I usually bog down - on the interminable Emyr Muil.

RAY OTUS +5

Proudfest!

RICHARD ABBOTT +2

Like several others I struggled on first read many years ago. My parents had got me a three-volumes-in-one version and on the first go I gave up before the end of ch1. Persuaded to try again, I got to ch2 and was hooked. That single volume book fell apart with rereading before too long - and in any case didn't have the appendices...

MARK DELSING +4

Is it worth noting that this first chapter was written at a time when Tolkien was still thinking of this book as like-in-tone- sequel to The Hobbit? I.e., there's a reason it feels so different from the rest of the book.

MICHAEL MILLER +3

Can I just say how rough Tolkien's language looks when I'm coming fresh off of LeGuin's simple, direct, lyrical prose?

It's been thirty years since I read this chapter and I really don't want to for another few decades. So many in-text lists! So many tangents! In a way, I suppose the writing itself mirrors the unhurried country busybody sensibility of Hobbit life, but, man, it was a slog.

I had forgotten that Frodo's parents had drowned. He's orphaned by water and then much later confronted by a being that thrives in water.

RAY OTUS +4

+Michael Miller I would call it "rustic" or intentionally cozy/homey rather than rough. I like the rambling nature of it. Impatient readers will be disappointed. Having said that he is way more efficient than you think he is. The whole of the LotR is both grander/more epic and far shorter than most modern fantasy series. GRR Martin anyone? Wheel of Time?

APOCRYPHAL CHRIS +2

I don't find it rough, myself, but I think I know what you mean. Can you compare a few sentences to illustrate, +Michael Miller?

PAUL MITCHENER +5

+Michael Miller Tolkien breaks an awful lot of rules for good writing. He rambles. He describes much that is irrelevant to the story, sometimes in great detail; much seems more about the world around the story. He rambles; rather than extracting three details from a single sentence, it can be three sentences to get to the most relevant detail.

And I've not yet got to things like poems in invented languages!

Yet there's talent. Words are chosen carefully, and the style fits the mood. For example, the first chapter is a bucolic style for bucolic events.

The problem is that Tolkien is a terrible example for other fantasy authors, who miss the key point about the depth (which can't really be imitated without spending decades fleshing out a world and its legends before even writing). And without the depth, the surface features are quite bad....made up nonsense words, the fantasy trilogy rather than self-contained work, the quest to overthrow the dark lord- need I go on?

RAY OTUS +3

+Paul Mitchener Story teller and scholar, more than an "author."

MATTHEW G. +3

+Paul Mitchener and +Ray Otus: This is a re-read for me. I approached this thinking a) that there was so much detail, I'm sure to have forgotten so much more than I know and b) my endurance had best be up to the challenge because it took a running start like and a few failed attempts last time, like others in this thread.

However.

"Reading" via audiobook this time round is a thoroughly enjoyable experience. It feels like Tolkien wrote LOTR as an oral history, meant to be spoken aloud and not quietly digested. The way the prose rolls vs. the structure of the print has made the detailing of shopping lists and Hobbit family histories joyful and not just a slog.

APOCRYPHAL CHRIS +4

+Matthew G. I do think there's something to that - the Hobbit has its origins in his evening story hour with his children. LOTR doesn't (his son, Christopher, was in the RAF at the time) but I can't help but think that story hour was always in the back of his mind when he was writing.

MARK DELSING +4

+Apocryphal Chris "These chapters, eventually to become Book Four, were written and sent out as a serial to my son, Christopher, then in South Africa with the RAF." This from Tolkien's preface to the second edition.

So, still writing for Christopher! :)

CLASH BOWLEY +4

Christopher wasn't his only child. :D

But yes - he always kept the oral telling of the tale in mind. It's all in the way the words sound. LeGuin had a different end in mind.

MICHAEL MILLER +3

+Apocryphal Chris Not the best example, maybe:

Tolkien:

Into the envelope he slipped his golden ring, and its fine chain, and then sealed it, and addressed it to Frodo. At first he put it on the mantelpiece, but suddenly he removed it and stuck it in his pocket.

LeGuin:

As Ged looked round the room his wizard's eye caught one stone of those that made the floor. It was rough and dank as the rest, a heavy unshapen paving-stone: yet he felt the power of it as if it spoke to him aloud. And his breath caught in his throat, and a sickness came over him for a moment. This was the foundingstone of the tower.

I tried to get similar scenes of temptation, but both books have a lot of dialog in the temptation parts, which is only fitting.

To me, the Tolkien passage has a lot of short, disconnected phrases. It's more like "this happened, then this happened, then this happened." More like a list. Something clung or choppy. Much of this first chapter struck me the same way.

To me, the LeGuin passage flows from idea to idea, from sensory impression to sensory impression. There's a sense of causality there that, for this reader at least, led me to more profoundly feel the malevolent power emanating from the stone more deeply.

It's personal preference, surely. But I was struck by the difference in style.

Speaking of odd phrasing, did anyone catch "The dragon passed like an express train," regarding the fireworks? I would say that very much is a sign of the spoken origins of Tolkien's style. When you are speaking, you can make comparisons to things your hearers know but your characters don't. It's odd to see it in writing, though.

RAY OTUS +3

+Michael Miller Re: express train. Yeah those 'slips' are a little jarring. He mentions football and golf in *The Hobbit*, which I find odd. And he talks about goblins being responsible (?) for some of the noisy and noxious machines we have today. I'll look up the reference later but he breaks the fourth wall a little.

APOCRYPHAL CHRIS +4

+Michael Miller Hmm, yes, I see what you mean from the Tolkien example. I'm not sure that LeGuin example is the best because it also makes lists, but I do remember her prose from *The Wizard*, and she does have some poetic

passages and I can't recall from Tolkien. And yet there's something about Tolkien's language that I find very appealing. I'll keep an eye out, as I read, for examples of what you mention, and for things I feel appealing. Ultimately, voice probably trumps technique, much as in music.

MARK DELSING +4

+Michael Miller The express train is one of a handful (maybe two?) of anachronisms in... the whole legendarium, I think? It's another one of the remnants of the first chapter being written as "The Hobbit 2: Electric Boogaloo" and not yet the epic history of the War of the Ring.

What's really weird is that he left it in during his extensive revisions.

RAY OTUS +3

Tolkien can be direct too. Check out this paragraph.

A heavy silence fell in the room. Frodo could hear his heart beating. Even outside everything seemed still. No sound of Sam's shears could now be heard.

I found it at random looking to see how often JRRT used short sentences. This example is nothing but short sentences.

Here's another passage (one I think it's important for us to remember later, lol). Grammatically, this one is a mess, though the meaning is still quite clear.

When he took it out he had intended to fling it from him into the very hottest part of the fire. But he found now that he could not do so, not without a great struggle. He weighed the Ring in his hand, hesitating, and forcing himself to remember all that Gandalf had told him; and then with an effort of will he made a movement, as if to cast it away – but he found that he had put it back in his pocket.

Oddly, I prefer the "voice" in the second paragraph.

CLASH BOWLEY +2

+Ray Otus - So do I.