



THE HOBBITS

by

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On the 22nd January 1976 I came into possession of a first edition copy of 'The Hobbit', along with a first edition of 'Farmer Giles of Ham', from a private source.

I decided to make a comparison between this edition and a modern, dog-eared copy. Although I was prepared for the difference in the chapter "Riddles in the Dark", the fact that there were considerable changes in other parts of the book came, as of times, as a pleasant, puzzling and welcome surprise.

'The Hobbit' was first published in 1937 by Allen and Unwin; the first impression of the book sold so well that a second impression was brought out late in 1937. My book is of this second impression, which is distinguished by the fact that the first impression had all black-and-white plates. The first noticeable difference between the two books is that the 1937 one cost the grand price of 7s 6d, whilst my dog-eared copy cost £2.50, although a first edition copy of 'The Hobbit' is now worth approximately £150.

After 1937, a further two impressions were made, in 1942 and 1946. In 1951 a second, revised edition of 'The Hobbit' was published, of which there were ten impressions, from 1954 to 1963.

The third edition 'Hobbit' was published in 1966 and my dog-eared copy is the 9th of that breed, being published in 1974.

Among the fly-leaves there is very little difference between editions, except that the first edition (hereafter referred to as /1/) has the coloured plate "The Hill: Hobbiton-across-The-Water" on fly-leaf 4, whereas the third edition (hereafter referred to as /3/) does not use this illustration until page 32. Also on page 6 of /3/ there is a short introductory note on the story. This note includes a reference to 'The Lord of the Rings', so you will not be surprised to find that /1/ does not have this note.

The actual story starts on different pages in each edition, in /1/ on page 11 and on page 9 in /3/. You will notice, therefore, a discrepancy between page numbers throughout this article.

The first revised passage comes on page 12/10, the second page of text.

page 12 /1/ "They are (or were) small people, smaller than Dwarves (and they have no beards), but very much larger than Lilliputians."

11 /3/ "They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards."

This is a very good example of Tolkien injecting more serious attitudes into the story, to make it more acceptable to adult readers, and can be read in conjunction with a further change on the same page.

page 12 /1/ "It has always been said that long ago one or the other of the Tooks had married into a fairy family (the less friendly said a Goblin family).

page 11 /3/

"It was often said (in other families) that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife. That of course was absurd."

In the first quote the Hobbits are made out to be less 'human' than they develop into in the rest of the book and also later in 'The Lord of the Rings'. They are not such 'fantastic' creatures as they first seem to be. Of course no self-respecting Took would marry a fairy (a Dwarf perhaps, but not a fairy) !

The next change comes on page 30/29; firstly there is a slight grammatical change, changing the ambiguous "This was made by your grandfather Thorin", into "This was made by Thrór, your grandfather, Thorin."

page 30 /1/

"Five feet high the door and three abreast may enter it."

29 /3/

"Five feet high the door and three may walk abreast."

Both the above passages are translations of the red runes that appear next to the pointing hand in the top left-hand corner of the map, given by Gandalf to Thorin, of the mountain. The runes themselves do not change. So, linguists, which is the correct translation ?

page 30 /1/

" ... certainly not after devouring so many maidens of the valley."

29 /3/

" ... certainly not after devouring so many of the Dwarves and Men of Dale."

Again this is a good example of Tolkien playing down the make-believe element of the story. Smaug is turned from being a semi-comical St. George-type Dragon, who only eats Maidens on a Monday, into the Dragon of Imperial lineage we love to hate.

The next major change you come to is on page 35/33, and is the first one which involves dates :

page 35 /1/ "And your father went away on the third of March, a hundred years ago last Thursday."

34 /3/ "And Thráin your father went away on the twenty-first of April, a hundred years ago last Thursday."

At first this change was puzzling. I knew that when Tolkien revised 'The Lord of the Rings' in 1966, he changed a lot of dates in "The Tale of Years" in Appendix B, and brought similar dates in 'The Hobbit' and 'The Lord of the Rings' into line with this. It still did not explain the change as above. The date when Thráin leaves for Erebor is never mentioned. It does begin to make some sort of sense if you read on, and find that there is a further date change on page 41/40.

page 41 /1/ "To think it is June the first tomorrow."

40 /3/ "To think it will soon be June."

It would seem that Tolkien is shortening the time it took the Hobbit and the Dwarves to get from Hobbiton to Rivendell. It took Frodo 27 days to get from Hobbiton to Rivendell, starting on September 23rd and crossing the Ford of Bruinen on October 20th. Now, if according to the first edition 'Hobbit', Bilbo left Hobbiton on March 10th (he does leave on Thursday), when he is saying, "To think it will be June the first tomorrow.", is actually prior to the meeting with the Trolls; it would seem the journey is taking over 82 days. This, of course, is highly improbable, especially when you think that Frodo took the long way about via the Old Forest and Weathertop.

In between these two date changes, there are two minor changes, in which a reference to "Tinkers" and a reference to "Inns" are deleted.

On page 42/41 is the first time Tolkien introduces a totally new element into the story, which is needed to back up 'The Lord of the Rings'.

page 42 /1/ " ... for it began to get dark. Wind got up, and the willows along the river bent and sighed. I don't know what river it was, a rushing red one, swollen with the rains of the last few days, that came down from the mountains and hills in front of them."

41 /3/ " ... for it began to get dark as they went down into a deep valley with a river at the bottom. Wind got up, and willows along its bank bent and sighed. Fortunately, the road went over an ancient stone bridge, for the river, swollen with the rains, came rushing down from the hills and mountains in the north.

It was nearly night when they crossed over.
The wind broke up the grey clouds."

The stone bridge that he introduces is of course the Last Bridge over the river Hoarwell. At this point in the story Bilbo's route is the same as that taken by Frodo in 'The Lord of the Rings'. Both must cross the Hoarwell and both come across the Trolls, though in different states of solidity.

page 43 /1/ "These parts are none too well known, and are too near the mountains. Policemen never come so far, and the map-makers have not reached this country."

42 /3/ "These parts are none too well known, and are too near the mountains. Travellers seldom come this way now. The old maps are no use: things have changed for the worse and the road is unguarded."

I was both sorry and glad about these changes. Sorry because I thought for a short while that at least there was a job for me if ever I found my way to Middle Earth. Glad because when you

remember that the land that the makers of maps have not yet reached, is Rhudaur, in the Kingdom of Arnor.

page 63 /1/ " ... very old swords of the Elves that are now called Gnomes."

62 /3/ " ... very old swords of the High Elves of the West ... "

Oh dear ! I don't think you'd have much chance, if you walked into Lothlórien and called Galadriel a Gnome !

page 64 /1/ "'Durin, Durin !', said Thorin. 'He was the father of the fathers of one of the two races of Dwarves, the Longbeards.'"

63 /3/ "'Durin, Durin', said Thorin. 'He was the father of the fathers of the eldest race of Dwarves, the Longbeards, and my first ancestor. I am his heir.'"

The changing from the two races of Dwarves to the seven races which are mentioned in Appendix A of 'The Lord of the Rings' is to fit into the rhyme of the Ring, 'Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone.'

That is the last change made before the chapter "Riddles in the Dark", which I feel deserves an article to itself.

Up to now although I was surprised at first at the amount of changes, the reasons for all of them have been good. On reflection, when it is remembered that the part of Bilbo's journey from Hobbiton to Rivendell corresponds with Frodo's journey of the same distance, and also somewhat influences it, then the amount of change becomes less surprising. I don't think so far that the story has lost anything and may, in fact, have gained somewhat from several of the changes.

