

Growing out of it: *The Hobbit* films and young people

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Abstract:

In past decades, *The Hobbit* was a much more common read for children. Now, the movie adaptations are a relative success that may mediate the relationship between young people and Tolkien's story. This analysis offers a glimpse into the engagement of contemporary young people with this classic children's tale to answer the question: how did international adolescents from 13 to 19 years old receive *The Hobbit* films based on their age, while accounting for experiences with the novel and *The Lord of the Rings* films? The essay relies on statistical analysis of respondents' age, how (and if) they read the book, what they rated the book, and ratings of *The Lord of the Rings* movies. Results indicate a statistically significant relationship between the rating of the films, age of adolescent participants, and the book ratings/experiences. On average, the ratings of the movies decrease as age increases. This may imply that older adolescents have a more nuanced reaction to the films, even when controlling for their different experiences with the book and *LOTR* films.

Keywords: The Hobbit; children's literature; age; adaptation

Introduction

Since its publication in 1937, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* has been a classic—a classic *children's book*. Although some Tolkien apologists scoff at such a categorization, as though it is demeaning to be associated with young readers, this original intended audience is especially important when examining young people's responses to Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* films (2012-2014).

In Humphrey Carpenter's (1987) biography of Tolkien, it is clear that Tolkien developed *The Hobbit* for a very specific and small audience: 'a story that he is writing to amuse himself and his children,' who were at the time 1, 6, 10, and 13 (p. 126). The story was later famously vetted by his publisher's 10-year-old son, Rayner Unwin, who

recommended it be published for children between '5 and 9' (p. 184), though with the caveat that he expected children 'will miss something of it' and have to grow into a full understanding (p. 206). To the present day, Bilbo's adventure continues to be 'widely considered a classic of children's literature' (Croft, 2004, p. 67). It is cited as foundational or exemplary in the history of children's fantasy in children's literature textbooks (Galda et. al., 2013) and professional literature reference sites (Dewan, 2016). Even the requirements for the Mythopoeic Society's 'Fantasy Award for Children's Literature' list *The Hobbit* as a prototypical text of the Children's category, as distinguished from Adult or Young Adult books ('Mythopoeic Awards,' 2016). The book functions as Tolkien's most famous work for children, though he wrote several other excellent stories such as *Roverandum* and *Mr. Bliss*, both of which develop his complex themes and world creations for a young audience (Croft, 2004).

In our contemporary children's literacy environment, *The Hobbit* has become recommended for increasingly older children or adolescent audiences—but not without some disagreement. The *Lexile Framework for Reading*, an international difficulty measure for English and Spanish reading teachers and other educators, scores the English language text of *The Hobbit* at 1000L, or an 11-14 year-old reading level. This evaluation may feel harsh, because the Lexile is vocabulary-based and Tolkien's now-dated diction inflates the score. Yet this scale is not alone in rating the book for what could be called a 'pre-teen' audience. The School Library Association of the UK included *The Hobbit* in their 'Boys into Books 11-14' program in 2007. On the other hand, many crowd-sourced web resources give younger recommendations. Users on popular rating sites like *Common Sense Media* recommend the book for readers 10+, with good read-aloud potential for 8+. Many personal accounts on mainstream sites such as *Goodreads* indicate that parents have successfully read the book with children as young as 5 years old. These user recommendations reflect only the occasional concern for violence, but otherwise seem to indicate that parents and other concerned adults find the content, at least, well-suited for even very young read-aloud audiences. Like any children's book, adults are also welcomed to enjoy *The Hobbit*, but its direct invitation to young people creates a particular point of interest when examining audience reactions to the films.

In the context of this article and special issue, it is important to recognize that *The Hobbit* was written as and regularly regarded as a children's story since it reveals an extra dimension to the growth and adaption of the story over the years. Since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954-55, *The Hobbit* is rarely presented in isolation. The connection with the larger epic re-orientes readers to perceive Bilbo's story as a prequel to the more mature *Lord of the Rings* series. Nonetheless, the tone, style, and pacing of *The Hobbit* continue to belie the intention of a young audience. As Marek Oziewicz (in press) puts it, '*The Hobbit* is not a prequel to *The Lord of the Rings* but a children's story full of songs, adventures, but also quiet moral reflection' (np). He evokes this description in service of his larger argument that the films are a 'beautiful disaster' (np) due to their simultaneous success as breathtaking filmic art and failure as adaptations, according to Linda Hutcheon's

criteria of truth-of-coherence and truth-of-correspondence. He attributes the failure, in part, to Jackson's efforts to firmly situate the films as prequels to his *LOTR* films.

The retrospective prequel status of *The Hobbit* puts it in a strange position of being a children's story that is forced to introduce an adult epic. Tolkien's later revisions to *The Hobbit* indicate his desire to smooth out that transition, tailoring it to better fit into Middle-earth as represented in *The Lord of the Rings*. This intent is most obvious in the differences between the 1937, 1951, and 1966 editions of Chapter 5: 'Riddles in the Dark.' Many of Tolkien's revisions were not formally published, and he abandoned a full re-write in 1959. In his letters, Tolkien explained that he had realized *The Hobbit* was better situated as an independent story, not a prequel (p. 298). Meanwhile, Jackson's alterations reinforce the prequel status, and in doing so adjust the association with children toward older children and generally situate the films at the crux of the tension between child and adult target audiences in Tolkien studies. Riga, Thum, and Kollman (2014) explicitly orient their adaptation analysis around the age of the target audience. They argue that Jackson's directorial decisions act as an extension of Tolkien's revisions and offer a complete transition from 'children's novel to adult film' (p. 100). The changes that Tolkien made during his lifetime, they explain, were contained in notes, manuscripts, and appendices that Jackson read and extrapolated from. They argue that Tolkien intended to make *The Hobbit* a more adult story, but this work was only completed in the *Hobbit* films. Meanwhile, Oziewicz explains that while Tolkien's changes naturally developed as an exploration of his world, Jackson's changes in the film adaptation are not such an organic outgrowth as Riga, Thum, and Kollman claim:

each responded to different pressures and worked for a different audience. Tolkien worked to fine-tune the moral vision of the story and fill in details that would make it more consistent with his growing of mythology of Middle Earth; Jackson's main challenge was to create a prequel to his earlier interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings* that would also be a fan-gear adaptation of *The Hobbit*. (n.p.).

Whether the changes and new material in the film adaptations are an outgrowth of Tolkien's intentions or not, audience seems to be at the core of the film's differences from the book and similarity to *The Lord of the Rings* films.

Jackson worked to produce a prequel that felt connected—borrowing heavily from the music, actors, color palate, and overall epic tone of *The Lord of the Rings* films (2001-2003), no doubt due to their dramatic box-office successes. This connection further distances the story from the tone of all the books, not just *The Hobbit*. As Oziewicz notes: 'the connection Jackson so meticulously forged was to his own earlier films rather than to *The Lord of the Rings* novel' (n.p.). The writing and directing of *The Hobbit* films discarded the simpler quest hero trajectory of the book and replaced it with darker and more complex story strands from the *LOTR* appendices, such as Gandalf's investigation of the

Necromancer, as well as invented, mature portions like the Tauriel/Fili romantic arc—both of which enabled better tie-ins like the appearance of Legolas. Jackson rejected the entire possibility of *The Hobbit* as a stand-alone story, which in turn rejected the potential of a younger audience. It was immediately apparent to me upon viewing the films that the director, writers, and creative team actively eschewed the association between the story and young children. Our questionnaire respondents confirm this strongly, with ‘Children’s Story’ being one of the most rejected and least accepted categories for the films [see the introduction to this Themed Section].

However, making this judgement requires attention to the extremely hard task of defining which children we mean when we say ‘children’s story,’ including delineating young vs older children, as well as the whole other category of young adults or adolescents. Since defining age groups usually ends up being very subjective and prone to cultural differences, it is worthwhile to look at age by year to see who was included. As seen above, online users recommended the book for children as young as 5 years old. However, the marketing strategy of the films was very far removed from children’s movie marketing for this age, as exemplified by what I would call the brightly colored and friendly look of major children’s movies by Disney, Pixar, and Dreamworks that rarely showcase such a dark palette and battle scenes. In turn, the judgement of major film rating associations and government rating offices across the world did not recommend *The Hobbit* films for very young children, with only a few exceptions. While Canada, France, and Thailand gave the films a general audience rating, most other large-scale rating services offered older, specific age guidelines.

On the younger end, Russia and Chile’s rating organizations were unusual for recommending the films for relatively young viewers aged 6+ and 7+, respectively. Jumping several years, Sweden’s board rated the films for 11+. A 12+ recommendation was popular, occurring in Brazil, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Korea, Switzerland, and the UK. The rating was 13+ in Argentina, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and the United States. The films received a 15+ rating in Australia, 16+ in New Zealand, and Hong Kong rated them ‘not suitable for young persons and children’ (‘Film Division,’ 2014). This sampling of global ratings demonstrates that the movies were frequently not deemed appropriate for all children, but specific ages varied. On the whole, the ratings fixated on ages 12 and 13, or the cusp of ‘teen’ years. Younger children were largely not welcomed into this film trilogy by the creators or the evaluators—despite their marked inclusion in the history and reading recommendations for the book.

These debates and recommendations for the age of *The Hobbit*’s audience are especially fascinating since they depend upon a value judgement: whether or not we are expecting a traditional, moral children’s story conceived by adults, or a renovated story in keeping with the interests of contemporary children and young people. Oziewicz explains, ‘The Hobbit films are clearly shot not for Tolkien’s original audience but for the modern audience of video gamers, raised with expectations of stunning visual effects and familiar with a stock of stylistic references from *The Lord of the Rings* games and films’ (n.p). He adds that ‘Many of Jackson’s jokes work well, deflate narrative tension during epic fight

sequences, and account for some of the films' appeal especially among the younger audience' (n.p). In other words, the obsession with special effects and absurd humor may be on-target for a contemporary young audience of video-game age viewers, which generally means, at the youngest, the 10-12 age range if we can go by the age recommendations for the video games (*LEGO: The Hobbit* is rated 10+ while *The Hobbit: Kingdoms of Middle-earth* is rated 12+).

This connection to 10-12 year olds seems associated with negative reactions to the films. Oziewicz points out that Jackson's video-game-style special effects break the films' own internal consistency and plausibility to such a hyperbolic extent as to become unintentionally parodic and a mockery of fantasy film: 'the story becomes more farcical the more serious it strives to appear,' much like an excited child's storytelling that has become too exaggerated to stand under its own weight (n.p). The question here may actually concern a condescending view of contemporary young people's tastes. This certainly seems to be reflected in one of the more scathing critiques of the *LOTR* films by David Bratman, who accused Jackson of having 'a nine-year-old's understanding of Tolkien' (2004: p. 31). A nine-year-old understanding, evidently, focuses obsessively on the monsters and action. Given that age 9 falls within the book's recommended read-aloud bracket, but not the majority of the films' recommendations, Bratman's comment may be more of an insult to nine or twelve-year-olds than to Jackson. The essential distinction here seems to revolve around a disparagement of modern 'juvenile' aesthetics, versus an idealized view of classic children's literature. What adults think children enjoy has always been fraught with false assumptions, as famously noted in Jacqueline Rose's (1992) foundational complaint: *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. As a result, even as the film moves away from the traditional markers of a children's text like songs and light-hearted asides, it becomes even more (negatively) associated with contemporary young people. The films seem to be perceived as less like children's literature and simultaneously more negatively 'childish.'

Overall, *The Hobbit* has made a fascinating journey from children's book to adult movie, and in the process has excluded younger children and developed more of a focus on people from 12 or 13 and older—or at least their perceived tastes. The global film ratings certainly indicate the inclusion (or at least tolerance) of young adolescents, especially those aged 12 and up. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine how these young viewers experienced the *Hobbit* films as a culmination of this change from a children's story to a mature prequel.

Methods

This analysis offers a glimpse into the engagement of contemporary young people with this classic children's story to answer the question: how did international young people from 13 to 19 years old receive *The Hobbit* films based on their age, while accounting for experiences with the novel and *The Lord of the Rings* films? This paper relies on statistical

analysis of age, how (and if) respondents read the book, what they rated the book, and their ratings of *The Lord of the Rings* movies.

For this analysis, I positioned the overall rating of *The Hobbit* films as the dependent variable in an ordered logistic regression model. This type of analysis identifies the odds of an individual increasing their rating of the films, while controlling for other variables. In this case, the independent variable of most interest to me was age, since I wanted to see if there would be any consistent pattern to the ratings across ages. Given the overall evidence [see this Section's introduction] that the highest ratings were given by the youngest respondent age group, dividing the analysis by individual years of age offers a more detailed glimpse of what is going on with these young participants.

Given my interest in the films as a part of the 'growing up' of the *Hobbit* story over the years, I also wanted to make sure that reading the book and enjoying the book did not confound the primary analysis by age. Therefore, I dummy coded if and how respondents read *The Hobbit*, with 'Not Read' as the reference category as opposed to 'Planning to Read', 'Still Reading', 'Read to Me', 'Read Once', and 'Read More than Once'. Additionally, I dummy coded if the respondents rated the books as 'Excellent' or not. The book ratings in the survey were on a 6-point scale, but were split fairly evenly between 'Excellent' and all other responses combined, meaning that redefining the variable into 'Excellent' and other responses evened out the distribution considerably and offered more statistically sound results. This would not have been possible were the whole scale kept separate, since the disparity between the 'Excellent' category and the others would have thrown off the distribution assumptions of the model. The resulting binary between 'Excellent' and others still offers a good glimpse into the reading experience by distinguishing those who felt the book is unequivocally great from those with less positively polarized reactions.

Finally, I included how the respondents rated the *LOTR* films in the model, since the developers of *the Hobbit* films had linked the film series to each other strongly, as mentioned above, and the associations between *The Hobbit* and childhood are also linked to its debatable prequel status. Additionally, the present survey project was conceived as a follow-up to the first large-scale survey about the *LOTR* films, establishing an inherent connection.

Participants

Due to my focus on young people, I isolated the responses of participants from 13-19 years old from the larger data set. I would have included those under 13, but response numbers were too small for those aged below 13 to offer statistically sound results. I capped the results at 19 simply due to its being the literal end of the 'teen' age group. Given the international participation in the survey, any more socially-informed decision of where adolescence ended would have been extremely subjective, and could have reasonably fluctuated between 16 and 21. Age 19 offered a middle-ground, and a simpler stopping point overall. Overall 4,680 people from 13-19 years old responded to the survey, with consistently higher participation with each age group, going from only 38 13-year-olds

steadily up to 1,432 19-year-olds. All ages that were ultimately included had over 30 participants, meaning that while the distribution is skewed there is a satisfactory minimum even for the youngest included age. Due to the skewed ages, I will offer percentages throughout this article for clearer comparison.

Respondents gave overwhelmingly positive ratings for the movies (see **Table 1**), with 89% of the respondents giving the *Hobbit* movies a rating of ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’. In comparison, 98% of the respondents who had seen the *LOTR* movies rated them as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’. The distinctly higher rating for the *LOTR* movies may point to some small recognition of difference between the quality of each trilogy.

Table 1: Response frequencies for the survey items relating to age and movie ratings (N=4,680).

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Response Categories</u>						
Your age:	<u>13yrs</u>	<u>14yrs</u>	<u>15yrs</u>	<u>16yrs</u>	<u>17yrs</u>	<u>18yrs</u>	<u>19yrs</u>
	38	124	302	644	925	1215	1432
	(0.8%)	(2.7%)	(6.5%)	(13.8%)	(19.8%)	(26.0%)	(30.6%)
What did you think of <i>The Hobbit</i> films overall?	<u>Awful</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>		
	39	129	345	1320	2847		
	(0.8%)	(2.8%)	(7.4%)	(28.2%)	(60.8%)		
What did you think of <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> films overall?	<u>Not Seen</u>	<u>Awful</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	
	109	8	12	78	572	3901	
	(2.3%)	(0.2%)	(0.3%)	(1.7%)	(12.2%)	(83.3%)	

At the time of taking the survey, the participants had read *The Hobbit* book in several ways (see **Table 2**). Just under three-quarters of the respondents had read the book in some

Table 2: Response frequencies for the survey item relating to reading *The Hobbit* (N=4,680).

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Response Categories</u>					
Have you read <i>The Hobbit</i> ?	Not read	Planning to read	Still reading	Read to me	Read once	Read more than once
	382	737	272	101	1266	1922
	(8.2%)	(15.7%)	(5.8%)	(2.2%)	(27.1%)	(41.1%)

fashion before taking the survey (70.4%), with the largest group having read the book more than once (41.1%). When separated by age (see **Table 3**), several categories of reading resulted in similar percentages across years. Aside from the 13-year-old group, consistently around 27% of the respondents in each age group had read the book once, while approximately 41% of each age group had read the book more than once. The larger percentage of those who read the book more than once may be a function of the survey, wherein these book enthusiasts may be more interested in a survey concerning such a favored and re-read story. Very few respondents across ages had the book read to them, with no group going over 3%. This may be more of a reflection of contemporary parents' or teachers' reading choices. This low number could also reflect the age of solitary reading proficiency at which they likely encountered the book, indicating that not many of the participants would have encountered the book until old enough to read it alone.

Other categories showed a pattern across ages. A greater percentage of younger teens were still reading the book, with a gradual drop of about 10 percentage points across the age groups. Meanwhile, a greater percentage of older respondents had not read the book at all, but with only about a 4 percentage point increase from 13 to 19-year-olds. This indicates that while younger participants were more likely to be giving the book a try, it was slightly more common for older participants to have decided not to read it at all (since they did not select 'Planning to Read' either). This may be a function of feeling like they have grown out of the proper age range for reading the novel, but not watching the films.

Table 3: Response frequencies for the survey item relating to reading *The Hobbit*, divided by age ($N=4,680$).

Age	Not Read	Planning to Read	Still reading	Read to me	Read once	More than once
13	2 (5.3%)	9 (23.7%)	6 (15.8%)	1 (2.6%)	5 (13.2%)	15 (39.5%)
14	9 (7.3%)	18 (14.5%)	15 (12.1%)	1 (0.8%)	32 (25.8%)	49 (39.5%)
15	20 (6.6%)	38 (12.6%)	25 (8.3%)	9 (3.0%)	80 (26.5%)	130 (43.0%)
16	47 (7.3%)	92 (14.3%)	36 (5.6%)	13 (2.0%)	172 (26.7%)	284 (44.1%)
17	63 (6.8%)	143 (15.5%)	63 (6.8%)	21 (2.3%)	237 (25.6%)	398 (43.0%)
18	105 (8.6%)	194 (16.0%)	55 (4.5%)	19 (1.6%)	342 (28.1%)	500 (41.2%)
19	136 (9.5%)	243 (17.0%)	72 (5.0%)	37 (2.6%)	398 (27.8%)	546 (38.1%)

In two categories, the 13-year-olds stood out. Markedly fewer 13-year-olds had read the book just once (about a 13 percentage point difference). Similarly, this age group also had the highest percentage of respondents planning to read it, by nearly 10 percentage points, once again echoing the possibility that younger participants felt more inclined to read the book if they had not already.

Results

The ordered logistic regression analysis (see **Table 4**) indicated that all of the independent variables explained significant variance in the overall rating of *The Hobbit* films. Overall, the variables about age, having read the book once or more than once, or having the book read to you decreased the odds of a higher movie rating. Meanwhile, a higher *LOTR* rating, book rating, and still reading or planning to read the book increased the odds of a higher score.

Table 4: Results of the ordinal logistic regression with *The Hobbit* film ratings as the dependent variable ($N=4,680$).

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-statistic	Odds Ratio	Percent Likelihood ^a
Age in years	-0.2111	0.02252	-9.375	0.8096701	-19%
LOTR rating	0.2619	0.03414	7.671	1.2993575	30%
Book rating	0.8075	0.07248	11.141	2.2422121	124%
Read once	-0.6374	0.12281	-5.190	0.5286726	-47%
Read more than once	-0.9245	0.12655	-7.305	0.3967312	-60%
Still reading	0.3099	0.18211	1.702	1.3632906	36%
Planning to read	0.4652	0.13129	3.543	1.5922705	59%
Read to	-0.9553	0.22430	-4.259	0.3846972	-62%

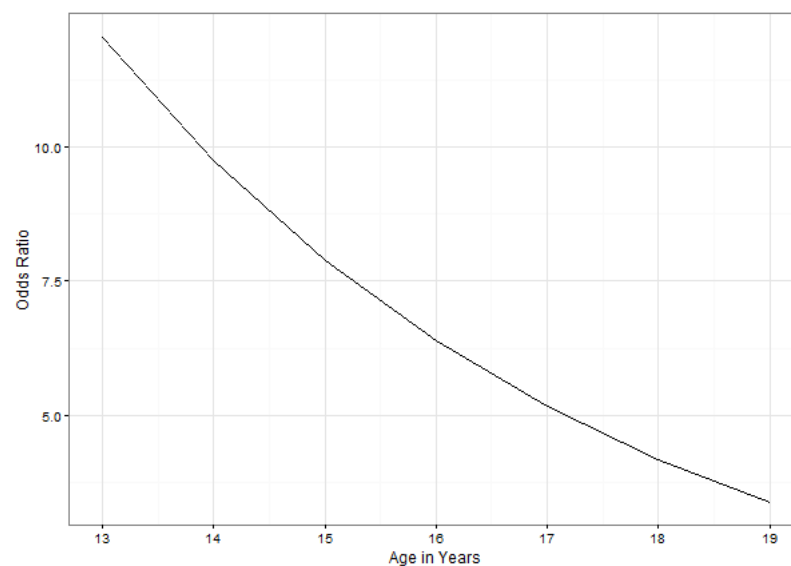
^a Percent likelihood of giving the next highest rating on the scale.

While the ratings remained largely positive, with each year of increased age the odds of giving a higher rating of the movies decreased. For a one year increase in age, respondents are 19% less likely to giving a higher rating to the films. **Figure 1** demonstrates the downward trend in the odds for rating *The Hobbit* films highly, with each year in age, and holding all other variables constant. This trend may indicate more nuanced responses from older 'teens.'

Whether or not the book was fully read seems to have had an impact on the odds of giving a higher rating. Since these variables were dummy coded, the odds are all compared to the reference category of not having read the book. Not having finished the books, but intending to, produced higher odds of a positive movie rating. For those respondents who

were still reading the book or planning to read the book, the odds of giving a rating of Excellent were 36% and 59% more likely, respectively, than if the respondents did not read the book at all. On the other hand, having read the books entirely produced lower odds. Respondents who had the book read to them, read it once, or more than once were respectively 62%, 47%, 60% less likely to give a higher rating on the films than if they had not read the book at all.

Figure 1: Odds ratio by age in years, while holding all other variables constant.



Meanwhile, giving a positive rating to the *LOTR* films or *The Hobbit* book increased the odds of rating the *Hobbit* films more favorably. For a one-unit increase in rating of the *LOTR* movies, the odds of giving a rating of Excellent are 30% greater. Rating the book as Excellent as opposed to all other ratings combined increased the odds of a higher movie rating by a remarkable 124%!

Discussion

In total, the results suggest that age did play a part in how adolescents rated *The Hobbit* films. Even when controlling for different experiences with the book and the *LOTR* films, the analysis shows decreasing odds of getting higher ratings from the older young people. While the odds consistently decrease, it is useful to keep in mind the overall scale of the ratings. The largest portions of *The Hobbit* film ratings still fall into 'Good' and 'Excellent', indicating that the decreasing odds may be a hesitation in the older 'teens' to make the move between the more conservative connotation of the Good option and the full, unequivocal praise of selecting 'Excellent'. More of these same teens rated the *LOTR* movies as 'Excellent' rather than 'Good', perhaps also indicating a value judgement in the quality between the series and a careful attention to the nuance between these two scores.

Less interaction with the books seems to be associated with higher rating of the films. The odds of giving a better movie rating were higher for respondents who had intentions to read the book or had started (planning to read 59% more likely; still reading 36% more likely). Respondents who had the book read to them, read it once, or more than once were less likely to give a higher rating on the films (read to them 62% less likely; read once 47% less likely; read more than once 60% less likely). These results suggest the possibility that the young people who had not read the book fully prior to viewing the films had a more positive experience. This relationship seems especially important for the youngest respondents. The highest percentage of respondents who were planning to read the book or still reading it were 13-year-olds, and this age also had a much lower percentage of participants who read the book once. It is possible that a less cemented opinion of the book led to a more open viewing of the movie, and therefore a willingness to give it a higher rating.

The relationship between the book ratings and having read the entire book is an interesting one, since the odds go in different directions. As noted above, having finished the book lowered the odds of a higher movie rating, but rating the book as 'Excellent' more than doubled the odds of rating the movies favorably. I can only postulate that this may have something to do with a general fervor for the story and characters, demonstrated in the qualitative distinction between rating the books as 'Excellent' rather than 'Good'. If a teen thought the book was amazing enough to be 'Excellent,' then their enthusiasm and love for those characters may spill over into the movie, regardless of other considerations such as faithfulness to the story. The stereotype tossed carelessly around the release of book-to-film adaptations may be that 'the book is always better'—regardless of research or evidence to the contrary—but these respondents seem to resist that negativity. Additionally, those who were still reading the book may have given it very high ratings without having finished, placing them in the group mentioned in the previous paragraph.

It is worth noting that the respondents who had read the book more than once, who are by extension more likely a fan or to have a special relationship with the story, were less likely to give a higher rating than those who had read it once. More casual readers, or those who remember the book fondly but have not read it recently, could be inflating the relationship between the high rating of the book and higher rating of the films.

Limits

It is important to consider these results in the light of the survey overall. Due to the voluntary, opportunistic nature of the survey and the lack of random sampling, it is important to keep in mind that the smaller size of younger respondents offers an unrepresentative slice of the population for those age groups. The types of 13 and 14-year olds who successfully became aware of this survey and took it could represent unusual situations such as a Tolkien-loving household or a club. Therefore, these results show an interesting pattern but cannot be used to make solid conclusions about these age groups and *The Hobbit* films.

Conclusion

From a children's book to an epic's prequel to a film for older audiences, this story has endured many shifts and challenges to its audience. This small analysis indicates that even if the story's intended viewers shifted upward in age during the process of adaptation, that does not at all mean that the films were more positively received by older viewers. The young people who are closer to adulthood or, considering the international data set, are already considered an adult were more likely to withhold the best ratings. These results indicate a curious trend, and one that that further research on this subject could productively address.

The movies may not have been marketed or rated in favor of very young children, but these results indicate that they were received more positively by the younger end of the 'teen' age group. Considering *The Hobbit's* status as exemplary children's literature, it is fascinating that the 13-year-old participants, still within the contemporary professionally recommended reading age of 11-14, gave the movies the highest ratings—despite differences in tone and content between the book and the films, and regardless of their ratings of the book and *LOTR* films. This may be a reflection of Oziewicz's speculation, noted above, that the video-game-like effects and absurd humor would be particularly successful among the youngest viewers. It is worth noting that since the 13-year-olds had a much lower percentage of participants who read the book once and the highest percentage of respondents who were planning to read the book or still reading it, they had some of the least experience with the novel. These results indicate that this film may be a particularly fruitful site for more research in terms of book-to-movie adaptations and young people. Furthermore, the higher rating among the youngest participants calls to question what the statistics may have shown if our survey had captured the reactions of more children aged 12 and under who were permitted to see the films. Future survey research into children's literature adaptations may benefit from a heightened attempt to gather young participants. In this case, it may have been too big of a challenge due to the film's mature approach and ratings as well as the global scale.

The ultimate caution offered by this data warns that, due to the decreasing enthusiasm by older audiences that is displayed in this data, Tolkien's original works may in turn be misremembered and decreasingly appreciated as well. Even for those with a knowledge of the book, that memory is not sacred or safe. Oziewicz points out that for those of us with memory of the book, cognitive science indicates that our memories will be infiltrated by 'movie facts' in place of book-based information. Even more extreme, 'For the audiences who have not read the novel, Jackson's *The Hobbit* will create a memory of characters, plot, and themes that will be impossible to erase, all of it amplified by tie-ins, especially computer games' and this expectation will not be met by the novel, if ever read (Oziewicz, n.p). Given the downward trend indicated by the data in this article, I wonder if this may mean that Tolkien will be remembered less and less for his gentle, child-friendly meditation on heroism and morality, because this does not appear in the films. If the global audience's memories have been invaded by the films, which are appreciated less with age,

then how many will miss out on reading and appreciating Tolkien's works throughout their lives due to remembering the frivolous version of the story from the films? Perhaps this may seem inconsequential to some, but to others this would be a great loss of cultural memory and value.

For better or worse, these films have become an important moment in the history of *The Hobbit*, its target audience, and reception among young people. For the 21.5% of young respondents who were still planning to read the books or reading them at the time of taking the survey, the movie may have influenced their experience with the book—a response far beyond the scope of this project, but one of important consequences for scholars of Tolkien, adaptation, and children's literature.

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