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FROM WILDERLAND TO EAST END AND BACK AGAIN:  
ON THE LINKS BETWEEN HAROLD PINTER'S  
*THE DWARFS: A NOVEL* AND J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S *THE HOBBIT*

**Abstract.** The article focuses on the links between Harold Pinter's only work of fiction entitled *The Dwarfs: A Novel* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*, with special emphasis on the figures of dwarfs as well as the characters of Len and Bilbo within the spaces of post-war London and Middle-earth, respectively. Pinter seems to have created a compelling multi-level variation on the themes from Tolkien's book. A careful examination of the thematic and structural role of the dwarfs reveals intriguing echoes of Tolkien's novel in Pinter's book. *The Dwarfs* thus turn out to be infused with Pinteresquely transformed mythology and folklore to the extent which seems to have neither precedent nor continuation in his other writings.

**Keywords:** Harold Pinter; J. R. R. Tolkien; *The Dwarfs: A Novel*; *Hobbit*.

In Harold Pinter's *oeuvre* *The Dwarfs: A Novel* (written in 1952–56 and published in 1990) stands out as an exceptional case not only because it is his only work of fiction. Its unusual character is readily revealed by the title itself. It has been noted that Pinter characteristically chose titles with an underlying concrete metaphor or symbol, as exemplified by *The Room*, *The Caretaker*, or *Ashes to Ashes* (cf. Esslin 57). Thus, in this light *The Dwarfs* seems one of a kind due to its titular reference to folklore, legends, and myths. In this context, it is especially fruitful to investigate intriguing links between *The Dwarfs: A Novel* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937).

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As noted by Murfin and Ray, besides C. S. Lewis, Tolkien is “commonly regarded as the fountainhead of contemporary fantasy fiction” (153). His works have inspired numerous literary followers and researchers. It is enough to mention *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* (2013) by Michael D. C. Drout or, with regard to *The Hobbit*, the monumental two-volume work by John D. Rateliff *The History of The Hobbit* (2007). One of Tolkien’s achievements was to become a “discoverer of legend” (Carpenter 83), since his creative works “reflect[ed] his interest in medieval English literature” and reshaped his responses to it (Chance). In this way, “[t]he new myth cycle that Tolkien created ... has had deep resonance for England and ... for the English-speaking world” (Cecire). As we shall see, Pinter seems to have been inspired to create a compelling multi-level variation on the themes from Tolkien’s book, which could expand Pinter’s usual influences to include Tolkien,<sup>1</sup> along with Joyce, Kafka and Beckett.

Pinter wrote his only novel in his twenties. The story of three friends, Mark, Len and Pete as well as Pete’s girlfriend Virginia was very strongly inspired by Pinter’s life in post-war Hackney and is “as close to actual characters and events as anything Pinter has ever written” (Billington 58). For instance, “the four characters ... all have their prototypes in real life,” like Mark Gilbert, who is “a by no means uncritical self-portrait” (58). In short, the novel focuses on male friendship and its slow disintegration. On the surface, the reason for the final break-up seems to be the fact that Virginia cheats on Pete with Mark and reveals Pete’s contempt towards him, but the slow falling apart of the relations between the characters can be traced throughout the novel as an inevitable consequence of their developing maturity, the differences between them and their inability to reach compromise. Each character’s perspective is presented quite differently. Mark is the most mysterious. Pete’s thoughts are represented through interior monologues (e.g., Chapter Nine), and Virginia’s observations are scarce and mostly concern her views on Pete (as in Chapter Three). The most compelling and important perspective is Len’s. He appears in five chapters where he not only mentions the other male characters, but he also introduces the mysterious dwarfs. Len’s visions are interwoven throughout the novel with other episodes. Importantly, the last chapter clearly points to the intended significance of the dwarfs for the reception of the text by making

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise and comprehensive overview of Tolkien’s influence on other authors see Cecire.

Len the last one to speak about their unexpected disappearance right after the disintegration of the friendship.<sup>2</sup>

Critical response to Pinter's novel has so far been rather mixed and scarce. Probably the latest contribution of this kind is the article by Jane Wong Yeang Chui (2014) on the concepts of Pinteresque and menace as springing from the tensions between the three male characters as well as between them and Virginia. Even less has been written on the significance of the title figures. For example, Dukore sees the dwarfs as Len's alter ego (60), Taylor perceives them as a metaphor for people's constant struggle to get to know others while concealing the truth about themselves (115–16), and Sykes openly admits to helplessness in the face of their unclear symbolism (53–54). The critics, then, focus on metaphorical interpretations of the dwarfs while omitting the folk/mythological dimension of the title figures.

In *The Hobbit*, contrary to what the title might suggest, it is the dwarves<sup>3</sup> that provide the motivation for the whole story. When one morning the wizard Gandalf appears at Bilbo's door, the hobbit does not suspect that he will be drawn into an adventure which will make him leave his comfortable home. Soon after Gandalf's arrival the dwarves appear quite unexpectedly. It turns out that they are preparing to reclaim the long-lost treasure from the dragon Smaug and Gandalf talks them into staying at Bilbo's house in order to offer them his services as a burglar they are bound to need on their quest. At first Bilbo refuses, but the mocking attitude of the dwarves who do not believe in his abilities provokes him into agreeing to join them. The story is full of fast-paced adventures which involve meetings with a range of creatures inhabiting Tolkien's Middle-earth, such as elves, goblins or the terrifying Gollum. The climax of the story is the Battle of Five Armies which the dwarves and their allies win and after which Bilbo returns home as a wealthy, albeit not too highly esteemed hobbit.

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<sup>2</sup> Recently, Jeremy Goldstein, the son of Mick Goldstein, on whom Len was modelled, has repeatedly spoken about his late father and mentioned that "the idea for the dwarves [!] was based on Mick's description to Pinter of similar creatures that preyed on his own psychological state" (Herman). It ought to be stressed, however, that because this article presents Pinter's vision of the dwarfs as stemming not only from one source, the decision has been made not to follow this biographical thread at this stage.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Hobbit*, the plural of the word 'dwarf' is 'dwarves' (which Tolkien first justifies in the introduction to *The Hobbit* and then in Appendix F to *The Lord of the Rings*). In this paper, when both Pinter's and Tolkien's dwarfs are referred to collectively, the spelling will follow the standard English rules (i.e., dwarfs). In all other cases, each author's spelling is adhered to.

There are some similarities between the Tolkien and the Pinter texts that invite the comparison. Both works represent liminal moments for each author. Even if in general *The Hobbit*'s "structure is simple, its narration didactic and its language playful ... [it] becomes more philosophically challenging as the plot unfolds as its protagonist is increasingly required to maturely consider such complex concepts as *entitlement*, *proprietorship* and *obligation*" (O'Sullivan 21). This makes Tolkien's novel "[occupy] a precarious liminal space between fictions thought appropriate either for children or for adults" (16). Pinter's choice of the title may have had a similar effect on mystified critics accustomed to Pinter's "reality-based" titles. What is more, as in Pinter's novel, *The Hobbit* draws on Tolkien's biography (see for instance, Firchow 18), even if not to such an extreme extent. All this seems to form an intriguing common ground for both works. While there is little evidence that Pinter appreciated Tolkien and the only recent connection to the two might be Ian McKellen's one-man show *Shakespeare, Tolkien, Others and You* performed at the Harold Pinter Theatre in London in 2019–2020,<sup>4</sup> the popularity of Tolkien's novel is indisputable, and it seems highly unlikely that Pinter would not have been familiar with it.

A careful examination of the thematic and structural role of the dwarfs reveals intriguing echoes of Tolkien's novel in Pinter's book. Thus, Pinter's novel presents itself as more than a juvenal version of a modernist *bildungsroman*<sup>5</sup> which contains the seeds of some of Pinter's predominant concerns from his later works (see, e.g., Gillen 56–59). In fact, *The Dwarfs* can be read as an original take on *The Hobbit*. In Pinter's novel elements of Tolkien's mythology and folklore have been Pinteresquely reflected and transformed to the extent which seems to have neither precedent nor continuation in his writings.

Both novels are also very firmly rooted in clearly specified spaces. As Murfin and Ray observe, Tolkien's narrative strategy is to "set stories entirely in a 'second world,' one that is separate and different from historical reality, though it may contain familiar elements" (153). In the case of *The Hobbit* the realm is the well-known Middle-earth, but more specifically "vague and shifting" Wilderland, whose "perception depends ... on the background of the one speaking" (e.g., when we contrast Bilbo's and the dwarves' perspectives) and which is "a place easy to wander astray" (Dickerson 706–7).

Pinter's "Wilderland" is much more concrete, as the characters of his novel wander the streets of post-war London's East End and visit real locations

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to one of my reviewers for pointing out this fact to me.

<sup>5</sup> *The Hobbit* has also been perceived as such; see for example O'Sullivan 18–19 for an overview of such approaches to the book.

(like the Embankment, Hackney Empire or Swan Café). However, the vagueness of space is characteristic of Pinter's works. In his debut play *The Room* (1957) the indeterminacy of space becomes especially apparent when Mr Kidd, the landlord, comments on the number of floors in his tenement house: "Well, to tell you the truth, I don't count them now" (Pinter, *The Room* 92). In this way, "the universe in which [the title room] exists is unstructured" (Kerr 13). In *The Dwarfs* Len also openly manifests his doubts towards the fixity of space: "The rooms ... we live in ... change shape at their own will.... I can't see the boundaries, the limits" (11–12).<sup>6</sup> The dwarfs of Len's visions further mystify the represented reality. Thus, Tolkien's and Pinter's approaches to space seem to merge as regards the intermingling of reality and its perception. As O'Sullivan notes: "[A]lthough fantasy is sometimes commonly misunderstood as being significantly detached from reality, it exists,... in a symbiotic relationship with reality, depending on it for its existence, but at the same time reflecting on it, challenging it and illuminating it" (23–24).

The first and obvious link between the two works could be located in their titles, both of which refer to unreal creatures known from fairy tales and folklore. As regards Pinter's novel, it ought to be noted that by focusing entirely on one female and three male characters, Pinter may be said to refer to characteristically British depictions of the so-called *Genii cucullati*, or hooded spirits, often referred to as dwarfs. These were typically presented as three males in the company of a woman (perhaps a goddess of fertility) and their hoods pointed to their ability to remain invisible (Bord; Bane 157–58). Taking this connection into account, the title of Pinter's novel acquires additional significance and points to the crucial aspects of the story.

Although much has been written on the evolution of the race of dwarves in Tolkien's *oeuvre*,<sup>7</sup> there seems to be an agreement that there are "links and continuity" (Rateliff 11) in Tolkien's other depictions.<sup>8</sup> Thus, before turning to a detailed analysis, a brief outline of the common historical and folk core from which the figures of dwarfs have emerged is necessary.

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<sup>6</sup> All subsequent references to the novel are to Pinter, *The Dwarfs*.

<sup>7</sup> See especially the essays by Rateliff and Hynes, but also the bibliography in Drout (135), let alone Tolkien fans' websites such as [dwarrowscholar.com](http://dwarrowscholar.com).

<sup>8</sup> Intriguingly enough, the same, though with reference to Pinter's works in general, has been explicitly said about *The Dwarfs* in the subtitle to Billington's article "Look Back in Hackney": "*The Dwarfs* holds the key to all his later plays."

The origins of the word ‘dwarf’ in the English language reach back to myths and folktales of Germanic and Scandinavian peoples.<sup>9</sup> Dwarfs can be said to be one of many sub-categories of the so-called fairies, which would typically include such creatures as trolls, gnomes and ogres. Beliefs in fairies were popular and diverse, as they stemmed from numerous sources. In Europe especially, wars and migrations of tribes led to the mixing of beliefs and superstitions of various provenance.

What connects the majority of fairies is their mischievousness rather than malice, big appetite, and the tendency to appear and become active after dark. More historically-based theories locate the origins of beliefs in fairies in legends concerning a mysterious race of little people with supernatural qualities. Such legends are especially typical of Egyptian culture (Pygmies) or Buddhist art. In fact, a lot of traits characteristic of Pygmy tribes are also true about dwarfs. Among these, one could enumerate: trade based on exchange with outsiders, reluctance to show themselves in public, and the ability to appear and disappear very quickly. In Old Norse sagas and Germanic tales, the figure of the dwarf has a strong position and common characteristics: they are usually blacksmiths and gunsmiths; manifest a fair degree of wisdom and love of precious objects; they never hurt anyone unless provoked and could be great helpers if one manages to get them to cooperate. As protective spirits dwarfs would usually help in the households in exchange for food and good treatment. Interestingly, the cooperation between dwarfs and people had to be based on a contract. How many of these characteristics have been retained in *The Hobbit* and *The Dwarfs* can be seen through a juxtaposition of relevant fragments which present these fairy creatures.

At the beginning of *The Hobbit*, quite a few details concerning the dwarves are presented. They all bear a close resemblance to folk beliefs and mainly concern their appearance, love of food and music and a tendency for manifesting discourteousness.<sup>10</sup> Tolkien’s dwarves are depicted as creatures with beards and “bright eyes under [hoods]” (17).<sup>11</sup> They always carry tools with them and do not bother much about good manners: the first dwarf that appears at Bilbo’s doorstep “[pushes] the door inside, just as if he [was] expected” (17).

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<sup>9</sup> The following overview is based on: Briggs, *The English Fairies*; Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*; Kopaliński, Pełka, Mielczewska, Evans, and Davidson.

<sup>10</sup> Another link between Tolkien and Pinter, for which there is no space in this paper, are the dwarfs’ implied Jewish traits (see Brackmann) and the fact that Pinter, Jewish himself, presents in his novel a deeply personal snapshot of London life of the English Jews after World War II.

<sup>11</sup> All subsequent references to the novel are to Tolkien, *The Hobbit*.

The dwarves' leader Thorin admits that they do not care about growing their own food-supplies since they are used to receiving them as payment for their services (30). This is very clearly visible during their visit at Bilbo's home, when soon after the dwarves' arrival "[s]ome [call] for ale, and some for porter, and one for coffee, and all of them for cakes" (19). Their feast is accompanied by music, which Bilbo finds very moving and emotional: "As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves" (24). This love is best felt and expressed in darkness. When Bilbo offers to brighten the room, the dwarves exclaim: "Dark for dark business!" (24).

While Tolkien establishes the dwarves quickly and efficiently, Pinter's representations are scattered throughout five chapters devoted specifically to the title creatures of his novel. In Pinter's version, the dwarfs "are not bothered" and are "never at a loose end" (120), which points to the above-mentioned behaviour of Tolkien's creatures. However, their general appearance remains a mystery. The only, quite imprecise, indication of their height is a mention of "the lower sink" at which one of them "scrubs his veins" (75). Len mentions their "curly hair," "oiled necks" (120), and "bristled skin" (75). In addition, despite being able to present themselves as "spruced and preened" (75), their behaviour can verge on repulsiveness, as they "show the blood stuck between their teeth" (106) and clearly enjoy "yowl[ing]..., pinch[ing], dribbl[ing], chew[ing], whimper[ing]" (120), thus giving a sonic expression of their rowdy character. Just like Tolkien's dwarves, they clearly take pleasure in eating, as Len indignantly observes: "They've gone on a picnic. They've time for picnics" (106). Although it is not specifically shown that they have preference for darkness, the late hours of the day seem to be their time for relaxation and curious games with "beetles and twigs," after which they "settle down for the night with ginger beer and a doughnut" (120). Finally, the dwarfs emerge as "skilled labourers" who carry their "kit" and "don't stop work until the job at hand is ended" (53), which reflects their depiction by Tolkien, the only difference being that "they only work in cities" (53), as if to fit in with the East End setting of Pinter's novel.

However, even closer interrelations between the two novels come to the fore in three more detailed instances. First, both authors focus on the dwarves' messiness. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is left without any assistance when he wakes up after the dwarves' first visit: "Up jumped Bilbo, and putting on his dressing-gown went into the dining-room. There he saw nobody, but all the

signs of a large and hurried breakfast. There was a fearful mess in the room, and piles of unwashed crocks in the kitchen. Nearly every pot and pat he possessed seemed to have been used” (34).

A very close equivalent, even if expressed in more contemporary language, can be found in Chapter Sixteen of Pinter’s novel, in Len’s monologue about cleaning the mess left by the dwarfs: “The longer they stay the greater the mess. Nobody lifts a finger. Nobody gets rid of a damn thing. All their leavings pile up, pile mixing with pile” (106).

Second, both authors emphasize the reluctance of their main characters to interact with dwarfs. Len expresses this in a series of complaints which undermine Peacock’s observation that dwarfs “[keep] [Len’s] world organized” (32): “When they return from their picnics ... I tell them I’ve slaved like a martyr, I’ve skivvied till I was black in the face, what about a tip, what about a promise of a bonus, what about a little something?” (106).

In a very similar vein, Bilbo is also openly expressing his dissatisfaction: “‘Confusticate and bebother these dwarves!’ he said aloud. ‘Why don’t they come and lend a hand?’” (21). However, although the dwarves actually lend a hand at that particular moment, this does not change the position of Bilbo as “instrumental in aiding” the dwarves to get what they desire (Dueck at al. 647). In Chapter 11, when the dwarves are waiting for Bilbo to open the secret door in the Lonely Mountain and complain that their “beards will grow till they hang down the cliff to the valley before anything happens” Bilbo sadly observes: “It is always poor me that has to get them out of their difficulties” (178).

Third, the visual imagery associated with the dwarves in both texts is strikingly similar and clearly demonstrated by comparing the dwarves’ song from Chapter 1 of *The Hobbit* to a fragment from the last chapter of *The Dwarfs*:

*Chip the glasses and crack the plates!  
Blunt the knives and bend the forks!  
That’s what Bilbo Baggins hates –  
Smash the bottles and burn the corks!*

*Cut the cloth and tread on the fat!  
Pour the milk on the pantry floor!  
Leave the bones on the bedroom mat!  
Splash the wine on every door!*

*Dump the crocks in a boiling bowl;  
Pound them up with a thumping pole;  
And when you’ve finished, if any are whole,  
Send them down the hall to roll! (21)*

The yard as I know it is littered with scraps of catsmeat, pigbollocks, tincans, birdbrains, spare parts of all the little animals, a squelching squealing carpet, all the dwarfs’ leavings spittled in the muck, worms stuck in the poisoned shitheaps, the alleys a whirlpool of piss, slime, blood and fruitjuice. (183)



While Len's description is less jocular and more naturalistic in tone, the power of the food imagery as a metaphor for the havoc and intentional mischievousness represented by the dwarfs appears in both works.

The similarities persist in the true nature and role of the dwarves' in the story, which is openly expressed by the narrator of *The Hobbit* in Chapter 12: "[T]hey had brought [Bilbo] to do a nasty job for them, and they did not mind the poor little fellow doing it if he would" (180–81). Therefore, the dwarves create an opportunity for Bilbo to go through an adventure and learn something about himself, but they never lose sight of their own benefit. The same seems to be happening in the relationship between Len and his imaginary creatures. After all the struggle to gain their appreciation he realizes that the dwarfs are ready to leave him and they do not seem to care what happens to him afterwards: "What is the cause for alarm? Why is everything packed? Why are they ready for the off? But they say nothing" (183).

Therefore, with their efficiency and determination, the dwarfs of the two novels emerge as a "calculating folk," "tricky," "treacherous," even if sometimes "decent" (*The Hobbit* 181) who highlight the importance of the central characters, Bilbo and Len. In the case of *The Hobbit*, it is clear that Bilbo is significant because he is the title character. But in *The Dwarfs*, Len's importance is especially emphasized by his interaction with the creatures, and leads Billington to observe that Len is "more finely tuned than the [other characters]" (60) and Gillen to conclude that Len is "in many ways superior to the others in the novel" (53).

Another noteworthy aspect of Pinter's text is that by sticking with the dwarfs of his visions Len aims to remain unnoticed, just like the dwarfs are visible to no one but him:<sup>12</sup> "neither Pete nor Mark is aware of the contract, nor of the contractor" (75). The issue of remaining invisible is already emphasized in the first chapter devoted to the dwarfs in which Len points to the need of "[keeping] an eye on proceedings" between Pete and Mark together with the dwarfs, as they "miss very little" and can give him a "due warning" in case the "landslide" (53) of the friendship should be approaching.

Invisibility also figures prominently in *The Hobbit*. It is linked with the ring which Bilbo unwittingly steals from Gollum. The magical object allows Bilbo to save the dwarves from elves' capture and subsequently makes him earn the dwarves' respect (169). Most crucially, however, for some time Bilbo keeps the ring as well as the ability to become invisible secret. This is Len's

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the linguistic roots of the word 'dwarf' also point to the illusionary nature of the creatures: "Old Indic *dhvaras*, 'demonic spirit,' suggests underlying *\*dhreugh-*, 'fantasy, delusion,' with 'phantom, hallucination' as possible alternative meanings" (Evans 134).

approach, too. In fact, it is only the reader who learns about the dwarfs' existence almost one third through the book. In this way, Len's invisibility in the company of dwarfs becomes a metaphorical means to remain at a distance from the possible conflict between Pete and Mark.

Len's inconspicuousness is also reflected in his mysterious and sudden departure to Paris and later his unannounced comeback. In fact, Len's return occurs shortly before the three crucial events of the story: Virginia's announcement that she needs a rest from her relationship with Pete (144–45), Mark's visit at Virginia's when "the two seduce one another in a brief scene which ends with her informing him that Pete thinks him a fool" (Taylor-Batty 50), and Mark and Pete's walk to visit Len at hospital when it gradually transpires that Pete's words constitute for Mark an irrevocable betrayal of their friendship. Thus, taking into consideration Len's visions to which only the reader has access and Pinter's view on communication as "a necessary avoidance" (Pinter, "Writing" xiii), Len's explanation that he came back from Paris because he suffered from food poisoning might be just a feeble excuse caused by sensing the impending conflict among the friends.

Betrayal is also one of the key elements in *The Hobbit* and an important source of "moral tensions" in the book (Firchow 20). In the chapter titled "A Thief in the Night," Bilbo, unnoticed, steals the dwarves' most prized jewel called the Arkenstone. Seeing the impending conflict between elves, men and the dwarves and in order to prevent it, Bilbo decides to use the stone to buy peace. Shortly afterwards, during the negotiations between the opposing sides, when it is revealed that the Arkenstone has been passed over to elves and men by Bilbo, Thorin exclaims: "[M]ay we never meet again!... I am betrayed" (230). It turns out, however, that the sudden appearance of the goblins and wild wolves forces dwarves, men and elves to join forces in defence. The Battle of Five Armies takes place and the unexpected attackers are defeated. Bilbo and Thorin become reconciled, but the latter is on his deathbed due to injuries. Consequently, their renewed friendship cannot ever come to fruition and the hobbit comments sadly: "This is a bitter adventure, if it must end so" (240). At the same time, Bilbo learns from Thorin's last words that "there is more in [him] of good than [he knows]" (240), which indicates that the hobbit's betrayal was a necessary stage on his journey to learn something new about himself.

Len also makes attempts to reach peace among the members of the "gang" in order to prevent the impending break-up. Just like in *The Hobbit*, however, betrayal and disintegration are unavoidable. Interestingly, Part III of Pinter's

novel starts with Len's confrontation with Mark which is a clear indication of a warning Len is trying to give to both friends. At first Mark is openly evasive, but then Len begins his monologue whose key question is "who are you?" (151). It seems to be addressed not only to Mark, but also to himself as he tries to verify his position among his friends. When Len admits: "I believe I perceive a little of what you are" he concludes that such momentous perception "might also be hallucination" (151). In this concealed way Len also refers to his visions of the dwarfs and highlights their role in aiding his attempts to find his own place among Pete and Mark. Even more significantly, his subsequent description of how he perceives Mark is closely reminiscent of his already quoted perception of space: "What you are ... at any given time, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it" (150). Therefore, Len's perception of other human beings' congenital inner flux is also projected on his surroundings. An important reason why this is so may be found in Len occupying a borderline space between the realms of reality and illusion stemming from the mythological and illusionary nature of the dwarfs. Mark's paradoxically taunting reply shows him as fully aware of the ambiguity inherent in the three men and as reconciled to its eternal elusiveness: "I don't know what we want. But whatever it is we won't get it.... Because we've got it" (153).

Soon afterwards, Mark uses a simple excuse ("I thought I'd take a strawzy round to see ya" 154) to talk with Pete about Virginia. In the course of the conversation Pete finally reveals to Mark that their split-up is final and irrevocable: "She's done the dirty on me. It's finished" (155). Nevertheless, Mark offers to "[f]ind out how things really stand" (156). The last comment seems ironically prophetic in the light of what he subsequently learns from Virginia about Pete considering him a fool. In this way, "[t]his betrayal of friendship ... is ... pitted against the perceived betrayal of sleeping with [Pete's] ex" (Taylor-Batty 50).

The next chapter shows Pete and Mark walking to visit Len in hospital. His physical condition ("bowels wouldn't work," 164) may be said to reflect the malfunctioning of the friendship. Literally, Len has problems cleaning his organism from unwanted matter, just like Mark and Pete cannot rid themselves of mutual distrust, concealed contempt and pride. The friends' meeting beside Len's bed is their last one in this configuration.<sup>13</sup> Len makes

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, sickness is also mentioned in *The Hobbit* in Chapter 10, in which the dwarves arrive in Lake-town and Thorin proudly declares himself King under the Mountain "as if his kingdom was already regained and Smaug chopped up into little pieces" (169). As it is later

feeble attempts to probe the problem by asking obliquely: “Who’s driving the tank?” to which he receives an ominous and equally puzzling reply: “We’ve been walking up the road back to back” (168). Even asking Pete and Mark to sit on chairs instead on the bed indirectly suggests a request to abide by some fixed rules which could restore order and balance in their mutual relations.

Therefore, both Len and Bilbo are unable to stop the events from happening and in an intriguing way this happens due to their absence in both cases. In *The Hobbit* Bilbo loses consciousness and as a result cannot participate in the events crucial for the development of the battle (238–41). A similar thing happens to Len, who is in hospital at the time of the final confrontation between Mark and Pete when they “[unpick] what they feel about one another” (Taylor-Batty 50). But the disintegration is imminent and certain and thus Bilbo’s words when he comes round after the battle seem fitting both for him and Len: “[T]here was a battle, in spite of all your efforts to buy peace and quiet, but I suppose you can hardly be blamed for that” (241).

It seems that Len’s blame cannot be placed neither in his feebleness, avoidance, or inarticulateness (visible in his puzzling remarks from the hospital). This is part of his and his friends’ development. Len may have no distance to his inner feelings and his commitment may be indirectly expressed, but it turns out to be extremely strong. In this way, “he does not shut out or define his territory or that of others,... he is more open to reality” (Gillen 53).

At the end of the story Bilbo turns out to be a “queer” (251) character who begins to write poetry (which is another link with Len, presented in *The Dwarfs* (11) as an aspiring though unsuccessful poet). Most importantly, however, Bilbo loses his reputation among other hobbits, but his queerness does not bother him too much and gives him a new perspective on the surrounding reality: “[T]he sound of the kettle on his hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party” (251).

A similar comment could be made with regard to Len. After the last exchange between Mark and Pete, Len speaks in the final chapter and it becomes clear that the dwarfs’ mission in Len’s case is also over: “It’ll be a quick getout when the whistle blows.” Len does not seem to understand the

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revealed, the dwarves’ expedition ends in the fierce Battle of Five Armies and it is suggested that Bilbo already at this early stage feels that dwarves’ mission will not end so easily: “He had not forgotten the look of the Mountain, nor the thought of the dragon, and he had beside a shocking cold” (169). Although apparently a comic addition to the story, it is interesting that Bilbo’s illness appears in one sentence with his premonitions.

situation and feels helpless, as references to the severed contract appear (“They’ve cut me off without a penny”) and the dwarfs’ silence announces the change, since they are on the lookout for “a choicer spread” (183).

The food imagery which reappears in this fragment has intricate connections with the aforementioned folk tradition, Tolkien’s descriptions of dwarves’ feast and Len’s physical state (indigestion) prior to the conflict that results in the disintegration of the relationships in Pinter’s work. The dwarfs’ leavings (“catsmeat, pigbollocks, tincans, birdbrains ... a squelching squealing carpet”) become metaphorical “ashes” of the destroyed friendship and an announcement of another stage in the characters’ development.

Len’s new perspective is suggestive of Bilbo’s renewed and refreshed outlook on the basics of reality and may be said to be contained in the novel’s last paragraph: “Now all is bare. All is clean. All is scrubbed. There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower” (183). The stage seems to have been cleaned and the dwarfs’ search for “a rarer dish” (183) might also be part of Len’s new expectations. In Billington’s words: “[W]hat gives the novel its final glimmer of hope is that the burden of the dwarfs is lifted from Len: the severance of the friendship between Mark and Pete leaves him somehow cleansed, purified, stronger” (61). Thus, clearly all that happened to Len and his friends seems to have taken place for a reason.

A similar thought is expressed in Gandalf’s words addressed to Bilbo on the last page of *The Hobbit*: “You don’t really suppose ... that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit” (253). The fact of Bilbo being “frequently tested and challenged” makes him “[emerge] as a stronger and more courageous man” (Post 74). Len’s “adventures and escapes” with the dwarfs awaken in him an inner feeling of approaching transformation: “All about me the change” (183). Paradoxically, this turns out to work for Len’s and his friends’ benefit, as betrayal reveals what has been consciously concealed in their everyday interactions and relations. Gandalf also adds: “You are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!” to which Bilbo replies “Thank goodness!”. Len’s reaction is more reluctant in accordance with Pinter’s own observation that “a playwright under any exhortation [should not] damage the consistency of his characters by injecting a remedy or apology for their actions into the last act” (Pinter, “Writing” x). Len, then, typically for Pinter, merely observes and lets the reader into his new perception of reality, closes one door, while opening another into the old space now seen with new eyes.

In both novels the dwarfs make a sudden appearance and swiftly part from Bilbo and Len. Despite the fact that their farewells are quite different, both characters are left inevitably transformed as a result of their encounter with the creatures. Due to their contradictory and elusive nature, the dwarfs become, in the words of Ármann Jakobsson, who discusses problems of medieval dwarfology, “absent ancestor[s], whose very absence confirms our presence” (70). Bilbo and Len arrive at the beginning of the new stage in their life, whatever its possible dangers and challenges. What seems especially significant is that the dwarfs of both novels, despite their differences, uphold the symbolic representation of dwarfs from Old Norse legends. In both texts dwarfs become “metaphors for the past” and “[s]ince they are our past, their most important role is to vanish to make way for us” (Jakobsson 70). For Pinter, this vanishing highlights his tendency to resist “any kind of universal myth that gives life any form of *a priori* meaning” (Gillen 57). That is why Mark, Pinter’s self-portrait, claims in the novel, “A myth is what you make it” (135). Therefore, for the characters in both texts the dwarfs’ disappearance may be said to constitute the end of one myth and beginning of another. Importantly, this beginning seems to come with an increased awareness of what can be “made” of these myths before they become the past once again.

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Z WILDERLANDU NA EAST END I Z POWROTEM:  
O ZWIĄZKACH MIĘDZY POWIEŚCIĄ HAROLDA PINTERA  
*THE DWARFS* A *HOBBITEM* J. R. R. TOLKIENA

Streszczenie

W artykule omówione zostały powiązania między jedyną powieścią Harolda Pintera pod tytułem *The Dwarfs: A Novel* i książką *Hobbit, czyli tam i z powrotem* autorstwa J. R. R. Tolkiena, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem postaci karzełków/krasnołudów (określanych w języku angielskim tym samym słowem *dwarf*) oraz bohaterów obu utworów, Lena i Bilbo, w przestrzeni, odpowiednio, powojennego Londynu i Śródziemia. Dokładne zbadanie tematycznej i strukturalnej roli karzełków/krasnołudów ujawnia intrygujące echa powieści Tolkiena w książce Pintera. Z tej perspektywy *The Dwarfs* okazuje się powieścią, w której Pinter w charakterystyczny dla siebie sposób przekształcił wątki mitologiczne i folklorystyczne w stopniu niespotykanym ani w jego wcześniejszych, ani późniejszych pisarskich dokonaniach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Harold Pinter; J. R. R. Tolkien; *The Dwarfs: A Novel*; *Hobbit*.