



**Denise Burkhard**

## **Ancient Dwarf Kingdom or the Hoard of a Fiery Dragon?**

**J.R.R. Tolkien's Erebor as a Transformed  
and Dynamic Place**

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**Tectum Verlag**

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## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction: Or “‘I am looking for someone to share in an adventure’” .....    | 9  |
| PART I: APPROACHING THE SPATIAL DIMENSION .....                                 | 15 |
| 1.1 Place and Space in Literature.....  | 17 |
| 1.2 Diasporic Space.....  | 23 |
| PART II: THE DWARF KINGDOM.....   | 31 |
| 2.1 A Brief Introduction to the Depiction of Dwarves in Tolkien’s Writings..... | 33 |
| 2.2 Collective Memory and the Reconstruction of Erebor .....                    | 35 |
| 2.3 Harps, Gems and Gold: The Treasure in Erebor .....                          | 47 |
| 2.4 Peter Jackson’s Visual Creation of Erebor .....                             | 52 |
| PART III: THE DRAGON’S HOARD .....  | 59 |
| 3.1 A Brief Introduction to Tolkien’s Dragons.....                              | 61 |
| 3.2 The Dwarves’ Antagonist: Smaug.....   | 63 |
| 3.3 Eerie, Creepy and Dangerous: The Dragon’s Lair .....                        | 71 |
| 3.4 Peter Jackson’s Visual Destruction and Reshaping of Erebor.....             | 78 |
| Conclusion.....   | 85 |
| Works Cited.....  | 91 |
| Appendix: ‘Song of the Lonely Mountain’ .....                                   | 99 |



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## Introduction:

### Or “‘I am looking for someone to share in an adventure’”<sup>1</sup>

In J.R.R. Tolkien's children's novel *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), Erebor<sup>2</sup> is not only a place on a map marked by a red dragon and a dwarvish rune but a mountain in which the ancient and majestic dwarf kingdom had been built. Before the dragon attacked the mountain, the treasures of Erebor had been legendary and the kingdom within the mountain had grown wealthy and prosperous. Its halls had been “‘full of armour and jewels and carvings and cups’”<sup>3</sup>, fashioned from metals and gemstones the dwarves<sup>4</sup> found in the depths of the mountain. But “‘the rumour of the wealth of Erebor spread abroad and reached the ears of the dragons’”<sup>5</sup>, and the fierce and sinister Smaug was attracted by the golden treasure. When he came down from the North, he conquered the dwarf kingdom, dispersed the mountain's inhabitants and converted the treasure into “‘a bed of gold’”<sup>6</sup>. Although Erebor has been occupied by the dragon since that day, its former inhabitants still remember their erstwhile kingdom and attempt to reclaim the mountain.

Against this background, Erebor is not only one of the most significant and virtually ever-present places in the story, but at the same time one of its most ambivalent ones, which has up until now not received extensive scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> Throughout this book, I will read Erebor as a multiply encoded place and

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<sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Hobbit*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Erebor’ is the Sindarin (Elvish) word for the ‘Lonely Mountain’; the two terms will be used synonymously.

<sup>3</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Hobbit*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Tolkien explained his idiosyncratic spelling of the plural of ‘dwarf’ in a letter to the editor of the ‘Observer’: “Grammar prescribes *dwarfs*; philology suggests that *dwarrows* would be the historical form. The real answer is that I knew no better. But *dwarves* goes well with *elves*; and, in any case, *elf*, *gnome*, *goblin*, *dwarf* are only approximate translations of the Old Elvish names for beings of not quite the same kinds and functions”. Humphrey Carpenter (Ed.). *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 31 [Letter 25: To the editor of the ‘Observer’, February 1938], original emphasis. I will, thus, adopt Tolkien's spelling and his use of small letters in the names for the peoples of Middle-earth, which some scholars tend to capitalise.

<sup>5</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Return of the King*, 1408.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Suzanne Carroll also stresses the fact that in contrast to scholars' keen interest in language in Tolkien's writings “there is comparatively little critical interest in the role of landscape in his fiction”, and encourages the analysis of the depiction of landscape by observing that “Tolkien was acutely aware of the significance of topography, and the wealth of landscape detail within his fiction and the rich cartography surrounding it lend weight to this awareness”. Jane Suzanne Carroll. “A Topoanalytical Reading of Landscapes.”, 122-23.