

There and Back Again: JRR Tolkien and the Origins of the Hobbit

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"Even the smallest person can change the course of the future." The prophetic words of Galadriel, addressed to Frodo as he prepared to travel from Lothlórien to Mordor to destroy the One Ring, are just as pertinent to J.R.R. Tolkien's own fiction. For decades, hobbits and the other fantastical creatures of Middle-earth have captured the imaginations of a fiercely loyal tribe of readers, all enhanced by the immense success of Peter Jackson's films: first *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and now his newest movie, *The Hobbit*. But for all Tolkien's global fame and the familiarity of modern culture with Gandalf, Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, the sources of the great mythmaker's own myth-making have been neglected. Mark Atherton here explores the chief influences on Tolkien's work: his boyhood in the West Midlands; the landscapes and seascapes which shaped his mythologies; his experiences in World War I; his interest in Scandinavian myth; his friendships, especially with the other Oxford-based Inklings; and the relevance of his themes, especially ecological ones, to the present day.

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
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Chris Griffith says

If you love English (Old or New), Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythology and history, Tolkien, The Hobbit, etc. you'll enjoy this book. Atherton splits the book into three parts: The first part he explores the plot structure of the tale of the most famous Took of all - Bilbo Baggins. The second part he looks into Norse and Anglo Saxon mythology and its influence over Tolkien and finally in the third part, he delves into the structure and history of the English language and the origins of interesting and important words and dialects. This is a very good book. Atherton is brilliant.

Cree Cullimore says

A fascinating look at the philological background that lead to the writing of The Hobbit. This reads like an academic paper and as such anyone without, at least, rudimentary knowledge of Anglo-Saxon, Old English and Old Norse; as well as Tolkien's contemporaries (such as myself) will find that their enjoyment of this book is somewhat lessened. Regardless, this book definitely shed some light on the groundwork of The Hobbit, which I greatly enjoyed as I feel that The Hobbit is somewhat passed over by academics in favour of Tolkien's other works such as LOTR and The Silmarillion etc.

Recommended for Tolkien fans.

Cade Thomas says

In this story Bilbo Baggins is a hobbit living in the shire. He is one day visited by Gandalf the grey. Gandalf tells Bilbo that he is setting him out on an adventure. Bilbo says no because hobbits don't go on ventures. But little did poor Bilbo know that thirteen dwarves were to end up at his house for supper the next night. From there the journey to the Lonely Mountain begins. Bilbo is along for the ride and is hired as the companies burglar.

I LOVED THE BOOK/MOVIE! I can not wait for the next part of the hobbit to come out. The movie does a great job in telling the story how it is in the book. It even puts in some phrases and words from the book. You will catch some of the main characters saying the names of some of the chapters in the book. The characters are dead on. The story is great.

I would recommend this to anyone who has not already read it. Many have because the movie was such a big hit. This book has joy, happiness, action, cleverness, and lots of adventure/ discoveries.

Jessica Shelton says

I wasn't sure how this book would hold up to Tolkien's work but I was pleasantly surprised this book held its own

Alan says

I won this book in the Goodreads First Reads Giveaway.

I struggled to read this book, but cannot deny that the author did a wonderful job in giving readers an insight into Tolkien's hidden world.

Sarah says

Well-researched, interesting subject matter, but ultimately too meandering and hard to follow.

Tracy Terry says

Never a big fan of the star rating system, I feel it is books like this, well enough written but simply not to my taste, that suffer because of it.

Interesting in parts (and with some good illustrations) but essentially this is a dry, academic study of the myriad of influences that shaped Tolkien's works and in particular the Hobbit.

Essential reading for fans? Perhaps, but I'm guessing that with headings such as 'The appeal of philology' and 'Sound symbolism and onomatopoeia' this may well only really appeal to those fans of the books with a serious interest in linguistics.

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Ape says

This is a rather academic book on the origins on the Hobbit, so strictly speaking I think this is for the serious fans only. I've read the Hobbit and LOTR but not the Similarion and other books, so this one was perhaps a bit too much information for what I wanted to know. Although it's title is the origins of the Hobbit, it does touch a lot on Tolkien's other words, which is understandable really considering how they are all part of the one world so to speak. The book is split into three sections; Shaping the Plot; Making the mythology and Finding the Words. I found the first and last the most interesting personally, and my attention did sometimes drift in the second one. I also was a little bemused by some of the illustrations in the book - some seemed a little amateurish. Considering the wealth of artwork that has come from these stories, these illustrations seemed like a bizarre choice. Do the artists have some special connection to Tolkien?

I did find the life story of Tolkien, intermingled through the book, particularly interesting. It's also interesting to see how much of our northern European heritage - myths, history, linguistics, is mixed up in these stories. Perhaps this is part of the reason why his books have been so popular - because they are in such a detailed world, and there are so many references to a history and culture that we may consciously or unconsciously be

aware of.

I won this on a goodreads giveaway - many thanks for the copy!

Steve Cran says

This book offers probably the most in depth look at the writing of “The Hobbit “ and “Lord of the Rings” Instead of offering the reader another biography of Tolkien, the author goes way behind the scene and offers us a view of what really inspired Tolkien’s writing. Such influences would include literary influences, life time experiences and his interest in philology or the study of languages.

The first two parts of the book kept me glued but the third and final part had me reading on in pain. Way too scholarly at the end, something that perhaps only a linguistic major would appreciate.

To begin with “The Hobbit was first meant to be told a children’s tale. “Roverandom was a tale he came up with in order to comfort a child after losing a toy dog. He would grade papers at Leeds and in his boredom he would draw upon the paper and hence the idea of the Hobbit. The shire of Hobbit’s home was originally inspired by the village in which Tolkien grew up in Sarehol which is near Warwickshire. There are several literary influences for “The Hobbit” Kenneth Grahm’s “Wind in the Willow” provides an inspiration about a Ground hog who lives like Bilbo, in a hole in the ground. “Babbit” is another story of escape where in a man who works in a futuristic boring factory town escapes away with a faery princess and comes back changed. “The Merry Land of the Snegs” features Hobbit like creatures who are sort of bungling and one of them must save two human being. Besides literature Tolkien also drew from Norse Literature especially the idea of the ring, the dwarf list came from a work called Volupsa.

Bilbo is put in on chance adventure one which he did not ask for. The dangers takes to Rivendel where there are dragon and elves and sorts of danger. Yet Tolkien has created a world that is unique. It is a well ordered world that believes in faery like beings that could come into a story and change everything around. Tolkien offered forward a definition of a faery story. It was a story in which a man or woman would travel into the world of faery and interact. It was not the same as an animal fable or a travel story. Tolkien considered it a faery story yet it had elements of a travelogue and an animal story. Obviously Bilbo is traveling but in Tolkien’s mythos there are talking animals especially in the History of the Middle Earth Series. You have Tevildo, a talking cat, Huor a speaking hound who fights against Morgoth. Beorn who appears as a shape shifter appears in the Hobbit and he communicates with his animal servants. Beorn could be based on a Norse legend called Bothvi who was a bear warrior that struck up an uneasy alliance with a Norse King.

“Not green, great dragons” scolded Mabel Suffield “rather great, green dragons” a correction in grammar but never a challenge as to whether or not dragon existed. Tolkien had a great desire for dragons. Yet he did not want one in his neck of the woods. Tolkien had red and gold dragon in his works but never green ones. Tolkien oft times considered himself a Hobbit and in the “The Hobbit” Bilbo had a similar longing for dwarves. Tolkien’s main inspiration for dragon came from Norse Mythology and The Red Fairy Book. Dragon were oft to mean green as they always hoarded their gold

The review can get rather exhaustive so I shall close out and advise reading the book. I give 4 stars out of 5.

Dr. Andrew Higgins says

This is a brilliant book written by someone who is a lover of language and philology. Atherton uses the Hobbit as a basis to explore Tolkien's world with a heavy these days Rae focus on philology and language. Atherton also includes selections from Geoffrey Bache Smith's poems which Tolkien edited and published after Bache's death in WW1 in 1916 and other poems that Tolkien and colleagues published in Leeds. This is a must read book for all Tolkienist. My copy is heavily underlined and I will go back to it in my Tolkien research,
