



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

*Mark Atherton*

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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 themes, to the present-day.

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