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J.R.R. TOLKIEN ON CARVING YOUR OWN PATH

"Not all those who wander are lost."

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Not many authors of the last century can claim to have had a more lasting impact on literature than John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. We all know of his two main works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and are familiar with many others that have spawned as a result of Tolkien's legacy, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, George Lucas's *Star Wars*, and *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin, among countless others.

But how did Tolkien get there? How did he achieve that larger-than-life status and what can we learn from him?

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." –Excerpt from *The Hobbit*

Funnily enough, Tolkien never intended to become the father of modern-day fantasy literature. Much of his gigantic legendarium (the fantasy universe in his works) originated in his early years as a WWI soldier. Having lost nearly all of his friends during the conflict, he is understood to have turned to fantasy as a means to cope with his grief. His early writings during this time laid the foundation for what would later become *The Silmarillion*, the first of several of his works to be published posthumously. They also served as the building blocks for his tales of hobbits and Rings of Power that were published a few years later.

However, he mostly kept his writings private. He wrote for no audience other than himself and occasionally his children, which allowed him a great degree of creative freedom.

He continued on this path even after the success of his first novel, *The Hobbit*. He loved his position as a writer in the middle of two worlds; a conjurer drawing from ancient sources to create modern material.

He did not conform to contemporary narrative conventions—he relied, maybe too heavily, on flashbacks, his main characters tended to be one-dimensional, and he employed archaic devices such as long epic speeches as well as music and song in his dialogues. For all this and more he was criticized by some of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, he stuck to his own ideas and continued to write in his own fashion, in the world he himself created.

"Not all those who wander are lost." –Excerpt from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

Tolkien never compromised his style to please any publisher or audience and neither should we. Many of us would probably do well to take a page out of Tolkien's book and carve our own paths to fulfillment. Thinking of switching majors? Give it a try. Unsatisfied with your new career? Look into a field that interests you. The next time you are presented

with an opportunity to do something new, think of Bilbo and how leaving the comfort of his little hobbit-hole resulted in the greatest adventure of his life.

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.” – Gandalf the Grey
in The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

Learn More:

Tales from the Perilous Realm, a collection of short stories and poems that explores Tolkien’s creativity on a smaller scale.

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