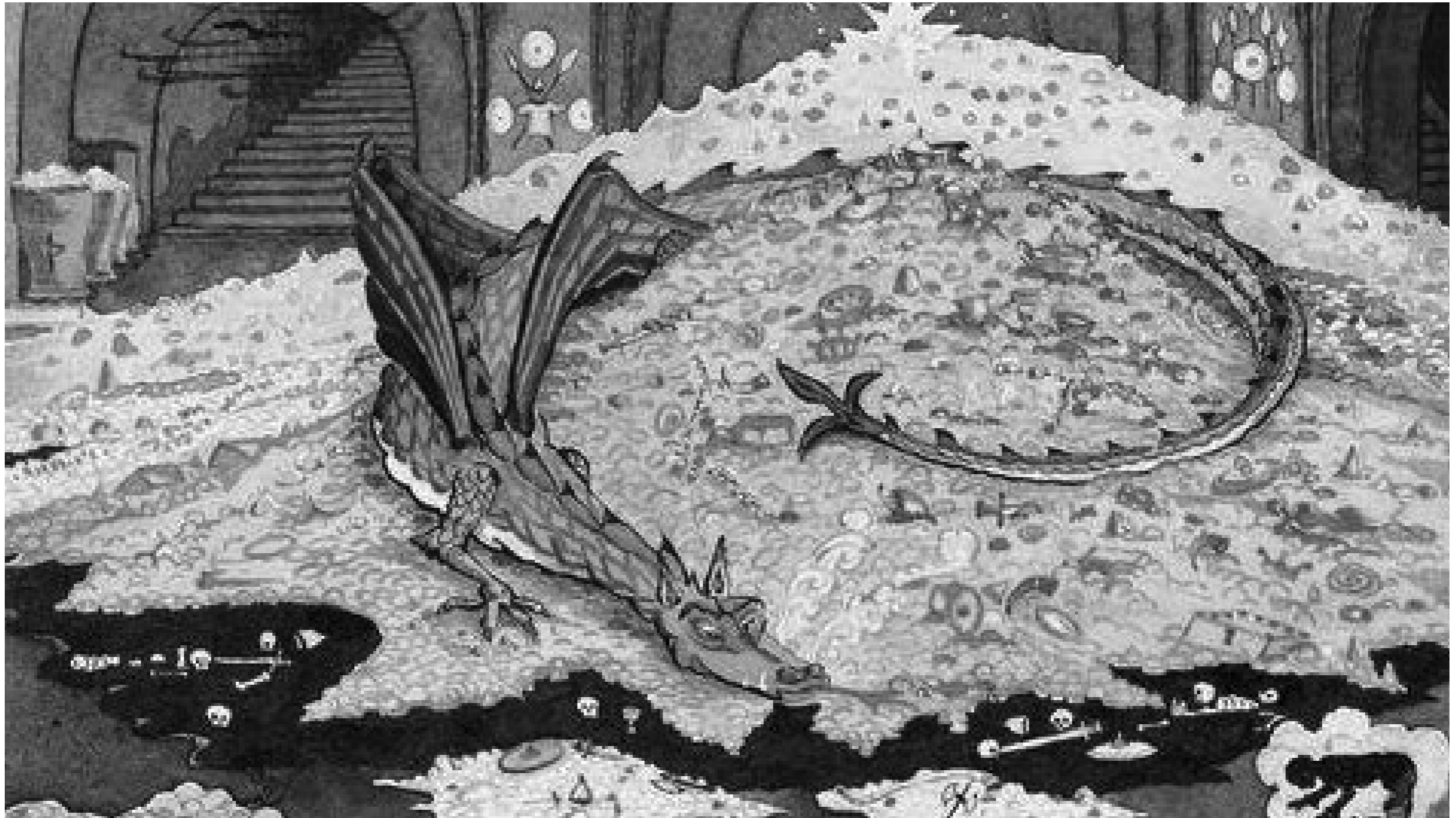


Tolkien's World **B1** **B2**



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Anyone who has read *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* knows that JRR Tolkien was a past master at creating astonishing worlds and civilisations. A new exhibition in Paris shows that his published work is merely the tip of the iceberg. Detailed maps, chronologies, and dozens of illustrations give a glimpse of the entire universe Tolkien spent his life inventing.

Unusually for a popular writer of fiction, Tolkien (1892-1973) spent his life in the academic world as a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University. He had a prodigious knowledge of ancient texts and languages, yet he wore his learning lightly, writing stories millions of people around the world came to love. You don't need Tolkien's learning to enjoy his books, but he clearly needed it in order to write them.

The exhibition opens on a chronology of Middle Earth – Tolkien's fictional world – over millennia, not compiled by a fantasy-fiction buff but by the author himself. Visitors move on through a series of hand-drawn maps the author used to visualise his created world and ensure the journeys described in his characters' odysseys were logical.

Talking Tolkien

Tolkien started inventing languages as a teenager: Elvish, Dwarvish and many other languages, dialects and alphabets. They are everywhere in the exhibition, in beautiful hand-lettered illustrations and you can even hear a story in Elvish. There are also several video extracts from a BBC documentary



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Help

past master (exp) an expert

glimpse of (n) a brief image of

wear something lightly (exp) here, he was modest and able to talk about his subject to non-experts

buff (n) fan, someone who knows a lot about a favourite subject

showing Tolkien late in life discussing his work. It almost feels as if the author is showing you around. Also everywhere are Tolkien's own illustrations of his creations. Some were done at his publisher's request, for book covers or interior illustrations, but there are many more than were ever needed for publication. They show idyllic vales and rivers in spate, hellish battlefields and alien mines. We see how he pictured the hobbits, Gandalf the wizard, Smaug the dragon or the talking, walking trees, the Ents. The wealth of material presented from the Bodleian Library collection in Oxford has been made available for lay readers by the Herculean work of Tolkien's youngest son Christopher, who spent years surfing through his father's accumulated papers after his death in 1973. Thanks to Christopher's work, *The Silmarillion* was published in 1977, showing much of the history invented by Tolkien that lay behind the more famous works.

Tolkien, voyage en Terre du Milieu

Till 16 February 2020

Bibliothèque François Mitterrand

<https://www.bnf.fr/fr/agenda/tolkien-voyage-en-terre-du-milieu>. ■

Help

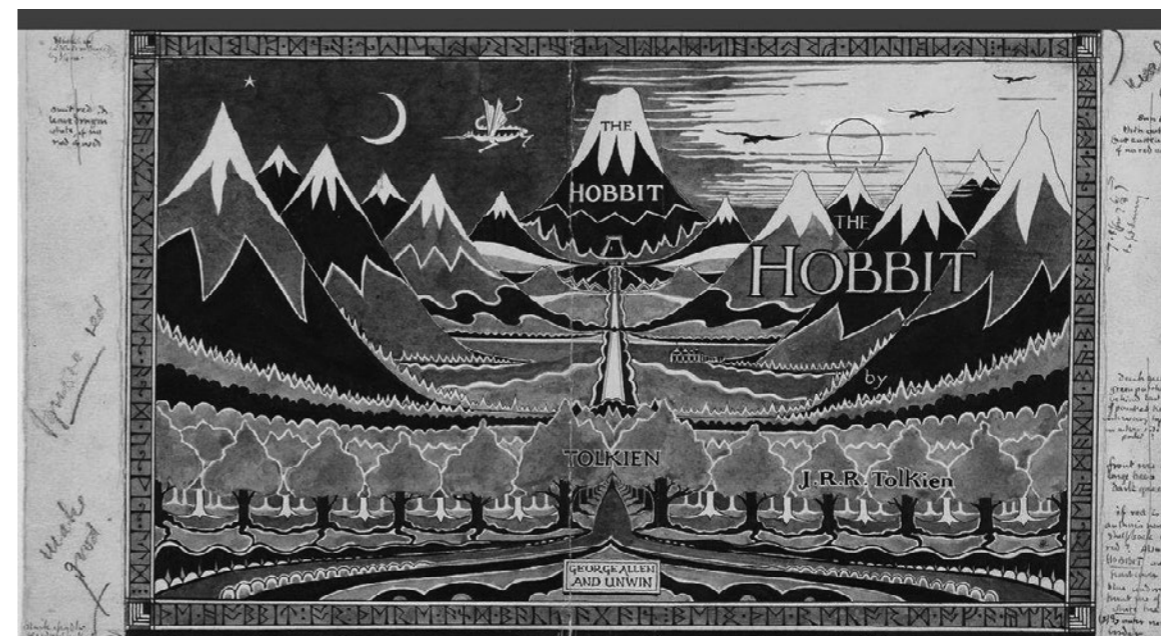
vale (n) valley

in spate (exp) when there is a lot of water, flowing fast

lay (n) here, non-academics, ordinary readers

Norse (n) the language spoken in Scandinavian countries in medieval times

very like (exp) very similar to



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■ **The Hobbit (1937)** B1

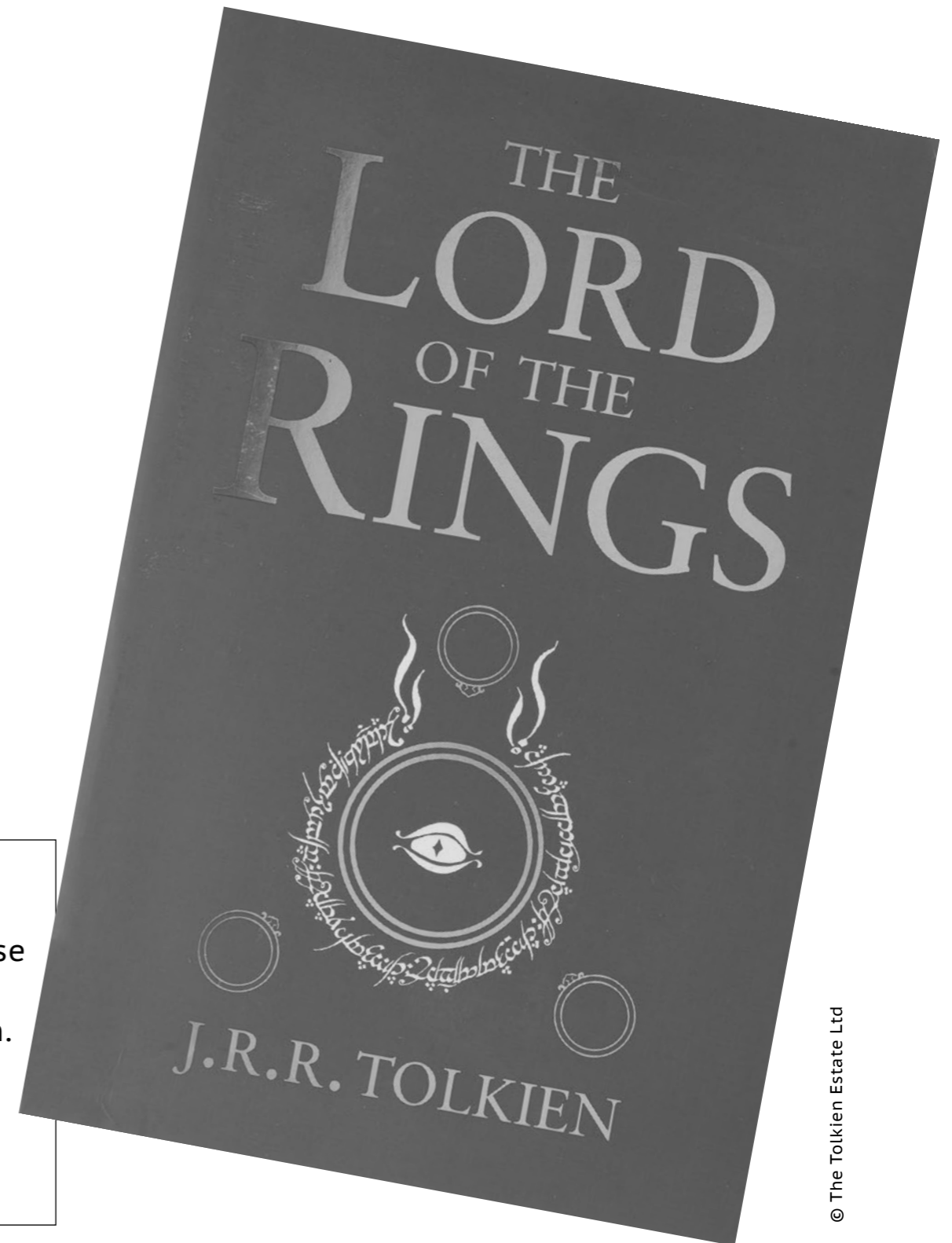
The Hobbit was one of the amazing stories that Tolkien told his four children. Like the Anglo-Saxon and Norse legends he loved, it had lots of magical creatures. Positive ones like wizards, elves and dwarves, and villainous ones like trolls, wolves, goblins and a terrifying dragon.

But hobbits are Tolkien's invention. They are small, quiet people with large, hairy feet, living in fertile countryside very like England in medieval times.

A hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, is chosen by the wizard Gandalf to go on a quest with a group of dwarves. They want to take back a treasure of gold the dragon Smaug has stolen. During the adventure, Bilbo meets a strange creature, Gollum, and accidentally takes his magic ring. When you put the ring on your finger, you disappear.



© Billett Potter, Oxford



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■ **The Lord of the Rings (1954-55)** **B1**

The Lord of the Rings has been described as an anti-quest, because the heroes aren't trying to find something, they are trying to find the place where they can destroy Bilbo's ring and save civilisation. This time it is Bilbo's young cousin, Frodo, who Gandalf chooses. He gets help from elves, other hobbits, a dwarf and many other communities in Middle-Earth. But ultimately it is Frodo who must carry the ring and face many terrible tests