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A NOTE ON ONOMASTICS
IN POPULAR CULTURE, I

At the eleventh annual convention of the Popular Culture Association, held in Cincinnati, Ohio, March 25-29, 1981, several papers were presented on onomastic topics. One of them was "The Philosophical Etymology of Hobbit" by Stan McDaniel of Sonoma State University. Professor McDaniel provided the following abstract:

The word hobbit was not a piece of accidental trivia vaguely connected with rabbit or hobby (as some have wrongly thought); and it was not a deliberate, consciously chosen name. It was generated rather in a moment of spontaneous intuition. Tolkien was busy grading examination papers when the word popped into his mind--not alone, but accompanied by an entire sentence: In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.

This paper traces the remarkable philological background of that sentence, its influence upon Tolkien's fiction, and the proper (respectable) etymology of hobbit.

Editors