

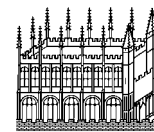




Tolkien

MAKER OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Catherine McIlwaine



Bodleian Library
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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Note to the Reader

In the catalogue entries, if the author or artist has not been specified it can be taken as J.R.R. Tolkien (with the exception of photographs and item nos 15a–d, 21, 24, 84, 125–7, 132). Where dates are given in square brackets this indicates that the date is not given on the manuscript but is definite, unless preceded by a question mark or 'c.'. Unless stated otherwise, the material is paper and the item is housed at the Bodleian Library. All quotations from manuscript material are given verbatim even where there are misspellings or inaccuracies. Entries use the form of names appropriate to the item being discussed (e.g. Taur-na-Fúin for maps and drawings of the 1920s and 1930s, rather than the later spelling Taur-nu-Fúin). References to races have been capitalized except for hobbits, following Tolkien's usage in *The Lord of the Rings*. As there are many different editions of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, references are given by chapter for the former and book and chapter for the latter. References to 'The Silmarillion' refer to the unpublished work, unless specified. Material from the 'Tolkien family papers' is not yet available to researchers, nor are items with shelfmarks beginning 'MS. Tolkien B' or 'MS. Tolkien S'.



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Foreword

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien first visited the Bodleian Library just over a century ago, in November 1913. It was a momentous occasion, and he recorded his experience in a letter to his fiancée, Edith:

At 11 I put on my gown and braced myself for an ordeal I have long shelved: that is going to register myself and take the oath at the Bodleian Library as a reader. I was received better than I expected – they are very rude to some people – and then went on to the Radcliffe Camera [the Public Reading Room to the Bodleian] to register myself there. You have no idea what an awesome and splendid place this library of wonderful manuscripts and books without price is little one.

From that point onwards he would be a regular reader in the Bodleian. For the rest of his life, he would use it to consult manuscripts, early printed books and secondary literature there and in other libraries that are now part of the Bodleian: especially the English Faculty Library and the Taylor Institution Library. He went on to work and lecture on the Old and Middle English texts that survive in the Library, perhaps most notably the ‘Katherine Group’ in MS. Bodl. 34, a group of five anonymous 13th-century texts addressed to anchorites. But it was not only the English vernacular manuscripts that provided him with his material; August 1938 saw him collating Greek manuscripts of Saints’ Lives in the Bodleian as part of his collaboration with the Belgian scholar Simonne d’Ardenne.

Like many Oxford scholars, the Bodleian would become part of the fabric of his life.

Over the years following the death of J.R.R. Tolkien, the Bodleian has sought to work with the Tolkien Estate to support the preservation of his intellectual and literary heritage. Through gifts of important manuscripts and artwork, as well as parts of his personal scholarly library, the Bodleian’s own collections of Tolkien material have grown substantially since 1973 and now encompass the greater part of his archive and that of the Literary Estate. Throughout this period staff have continued the work of putting order on the archival material and in other ways promoting the collection as a way of understanding the breadth of Tolkien’s life and work. Catalogues of his papers have been created, materials have been conserved for future generations and parts of the collection have been digitized. Countless scholars have been assisted in their navigation through, and use of, the documentary and literary materials entrusted into the Bodleian’s safekeeping. Just as the Bodleian has preserved the medieval manuscripts that Tolkien worked on, so it now applies the same care to the materials he himself created.

The Bodleian has also exhibited materials from the Tolkien Collection from time to time. Major exhibitions of Bodleian treasures, in 2002 and 2015, have featured masterpieces from the Tolkien Archive, and in 1992 the Bodleian mounted a large-scale exhibition: *J.R.R. Tolkien: Life and Legend*. Given

the passage of two and a half decades since that show, it is a good moment for the institution that has been so closely associated with Tolkien and his Estate to bring forward a major exhibition, bringing to the public’s attention the fullest picture possible not just of the life and work of a remarkable literary imagination, but of a son, husband, father, friend, scholar and artist. Tolkien led a full life as an academic – he edited some of the most important medieval texts in Old and Middle English, and understood languages in a deep way. This scholarly approach is deeply interwoven in his literary work, so much so that these two aspects of his life cannot properly be understood in isolation from one another. There is one other aspect of the exhibition, and this accompanying catalogue, to which I wish to draw the reader’s attention – this project seeks to give due recognition to the extraordinary contribution made to our understanding of Tolkien’s work by his son Christopher. Theirs has been a literary collaboration lasting ninety years or more, one that is unique in literary history. The Bodleian was proud to bestow its highest honour – the Bodley Medal – on Christopher Tolkien in 2016 in recognition of his great contribution to scholarship and literature.

I would like to express my thanks to Catherine McIlwaine in the Department of Special Collections, who, with strong support from her colleagues in the department, and from Maddy Slaven and her team in the Exhibitions section, has drawn this exhibition together. They have both been

strongly supported by Dr Christopher Fletcher, Keeper of Special Collections. The exhibition has been conceived as a collaborative venture with our colleagues from the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, and I would like to thank Colin B. Bailey, its Director, and his curatorial colleagues Drs John Bidwell and John T. McQuillen, for the collaborative spirit in which they have engaged with us. Key items for the exhibition and book have been generously loaned from institutions around the world. The biggest thanks must go to Marquette University Library, and to Janice Welburn, Dean of Libraries and her colleagues, Amy Cooper Cary, Head of Special Collections and William Fliss, Archivist. We also thank many private lenders, especially members of the Tolkien family.

We have benefited greatly over many years from a close relationship with the Tolkien Trust, and I would like to express a sincere debt of gratitude to the Trustees and to Cathleen Blackburn for their strong support, especially for guiding us through legal and other issues with great skill and creative problem solving. David Brawn and his team at HarperCollins have been wonderful collaborators, working with Dr Samuel Fanous and his colleagues in Bodleian Library Publishing, who have brought this publication to fruition.

Finally I would like to express my own personal thanks to Christopher and Baillie Tolkien, and to Priscilla Tolkien, for their deep knowledge, strong encouragement, great friendship and long-standing confidence in the Bodleian.

RICHARD OVENDEN
Bodley’s Librarian
August 2017



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ESSAYS



Fig. 1 Tolkien smoking his pipe in his study at Merton Street, taken by Billett Potter, 22 September 1972. (Photograph © Billett Potter)

J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biographical Sketch

Catherine McIlwaine

SOUTH AFRICA, 1892–5

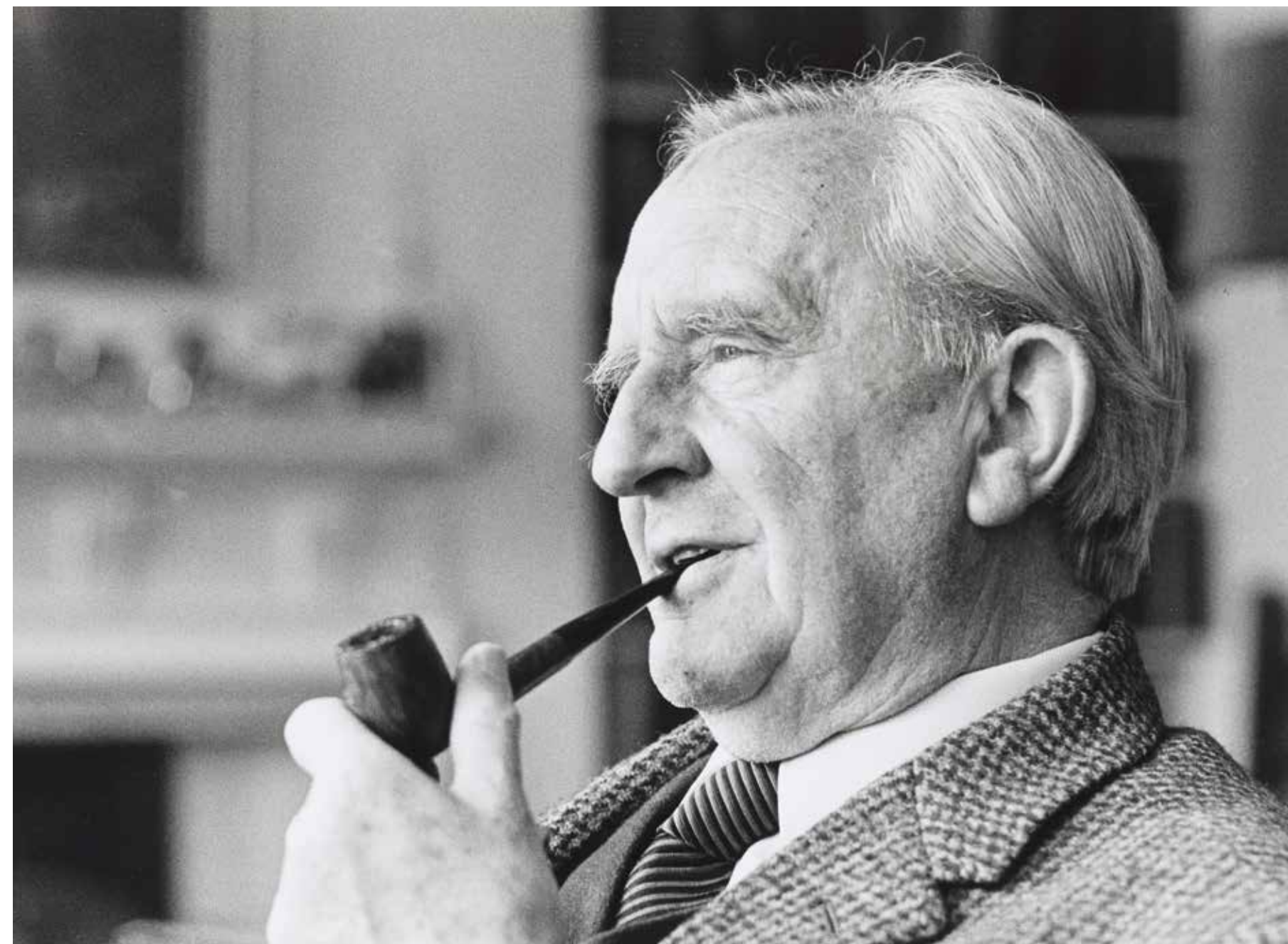
John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, 3 January 1892, to English parents, Arthur and Mabel Tolkien. His father, Arthur Reuel Tolkien, left Birmingham in 1889 to take up a position with the Bank of Africa, seeking opportunities for swift advancement. After a year travelling across South Africa, inspecting bank branches, his ambitions were realized and he was promoted to a coveted managerial position in Bloemfontein. A small town in the high veldt, 600 miles from Cape Town, Bloemfontein was rapidly expanding and the railway was expected to arrive within six months. The Orange Free State was a Boer republic and Arthur began taking lessons in Dutch (the official language) so that he could conduct business and communicate with the Boers and the indigenous African people.

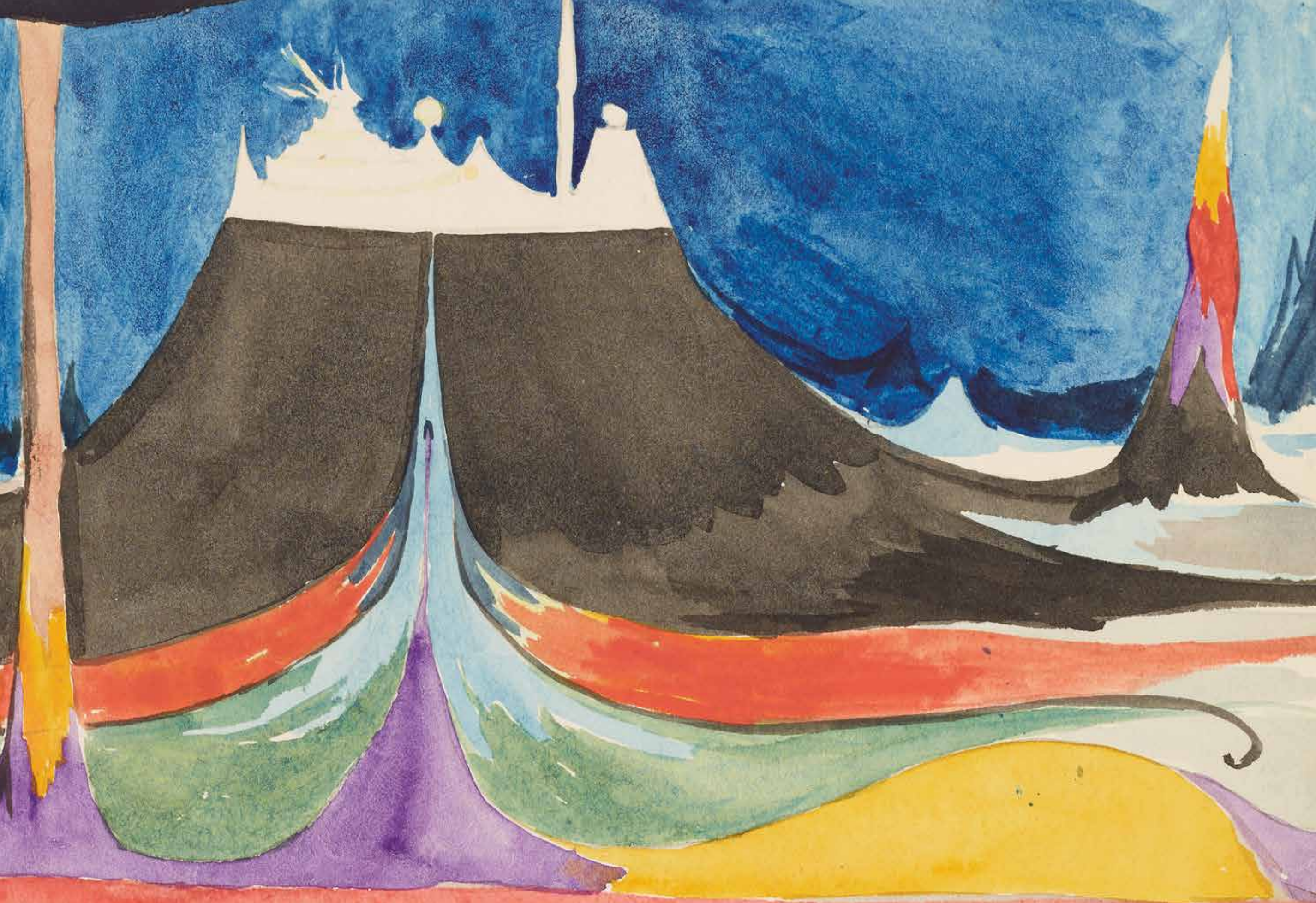
Arthur moved into Bank House in October 1890 and settled into his new life overseeing a growing business, which nevertheless afforded him plenty of time for playing lawn tennis, singing in the church choir and reading the English newspapers in the Bloemfontein Club. He now only required the arrival in Africa of his fiancée, Mabel Suffield, to complete his home life. She had remained in Birmingham until he could secure a financially viable position. She was thirteen years his junior and only nineteen years old when he left for South Africa. Her father, John Suffield, had refused to give her permission to marry until she was twenty-one, perhaps hoping to protect her from an itinerant lifestyle. Shortly after reaching ‘full age’, and after two long years of separation, she sailed out

to South Africa to join Arthur. The day after her arrival, on 16 April 1891, they were married in St George’s Cathedral in Cape Town. They spent the first few days of married life at a fine hotel overlooking the sea in Cape Town, with a splendid view of Table Mountain.

A month later they were happily settled in Bloemfontein with a kitten, and a fox terrier puppy called Meg. Nine months after they married, their first child, John Ronald Reuel, was born. John was a traditional name for the first-born son in the Tolkien family and was also the name of both of his grandfathers. Ronald was a substitute for Rosalind, the name Mabel had chosen convinced that the baby would be a girl. Reuel was his father’s middle name (it is found in the Old Testament) and was given in remembrance of a family friend. John Ronald Reuel being something of a mouthful, the child was simply called Ronald.

The marriage was a very happy one and the family of three soon became four with the birth of a second son, Hilary Arthur Reuel Tolkien, in February 1894. Arthur and Mabel doted on their sons, and it was only the great distance separating them from their families in Birmingham that caused any sadness. Oft-delayed plans for an extended visit home eventually became a priority as Ronald suffered frequent bouts of illness, exacerbated by the intense heat of the African summer. Mabel and the two boys left for England at the end of March 1895. Arthur planned to join them in Birmingham in time for Christmas and travel back to South Africa with them the following May. They were all looking forward to seeing their

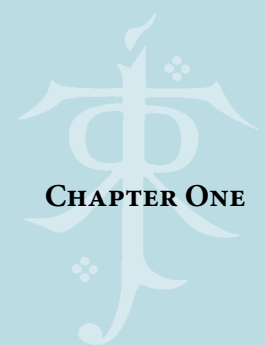
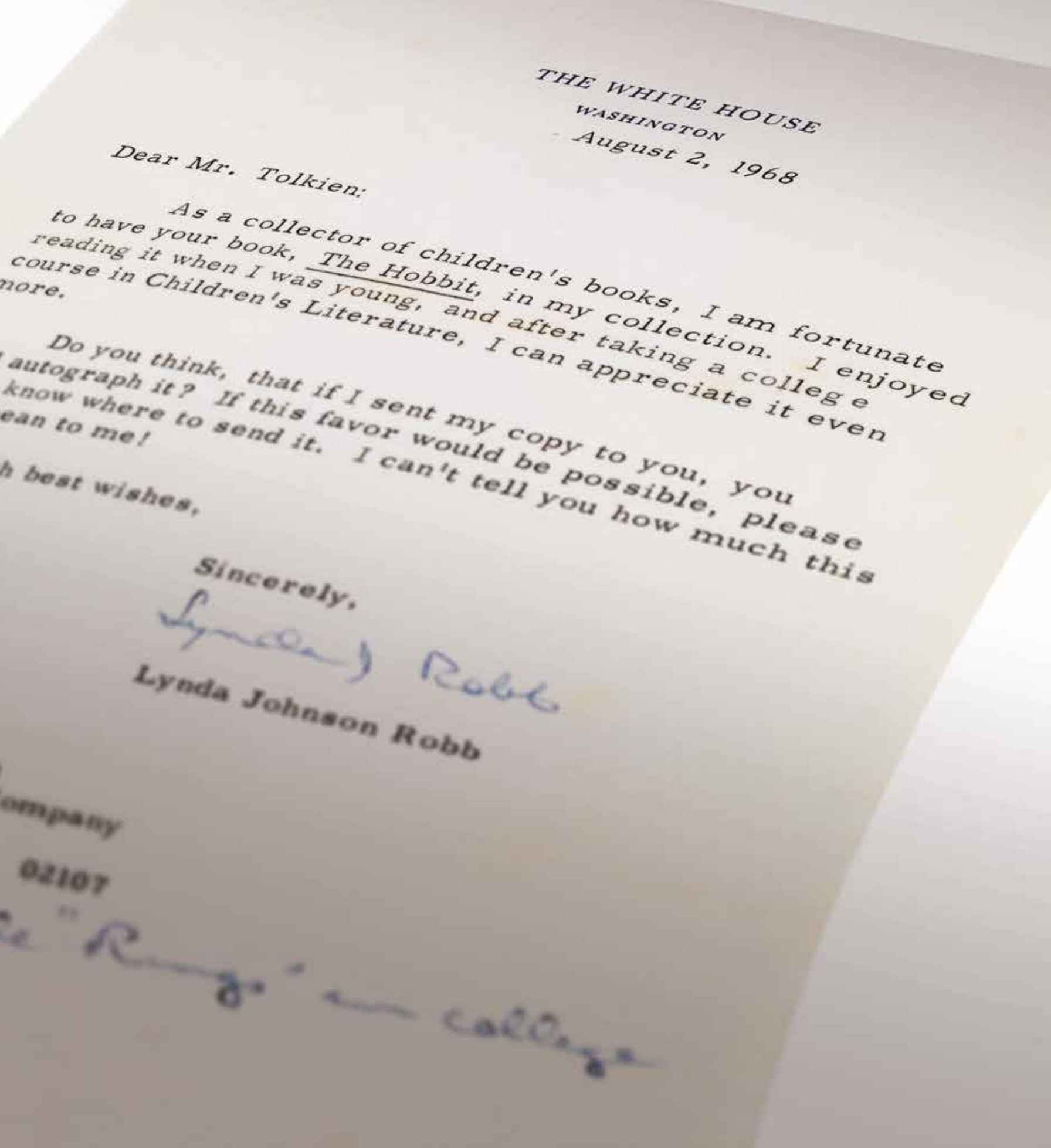




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CATALOGUE





CHAPTER ONE

READING TOLKIEN 'to England; to my country'

In 1955 the final part of Tolkien's epic work *The Lord of the Rings* was published. Tolkien was sixty-three years old, a respected university professor who had taught Old and Middle English for thirty-five years and was now close to retirement. His quiet corner of academia was about to be shattered as, to the astonishment of both Tolkien and his publisher, the work proved wildly popular and he was set on course to become the most famous fantasy author in the world.

Tolkien had begun writing the book as a sequel to his popular children's work *The Hobbit*, but the tale soon outgrew its original purpose and became a long adult fantasy novel. His aim was to write 'a really long narrative which would hold the average reader right through' but behind this lay a more wide-ranging ambition to give to England its own mythology and legends.¹ He explained the impulse behind his work: 'to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story ... which I could dedicate simply to England; to my country.'² Behind *The Lord of the Rings* was a whole world of mythology and legend that Tolkien had been populating with people, stories and languages for over forty years. The full scale of the work was laid bare in the appendices, which included a mass of 'historical' detail such as

the annals of the kings and rulers of Númenor spanning thousands of years, charts of Elvish and Dwarvish alphabets and hobbit family trees. *The Lord of the Rings* had become a sequel not only to *The Hobbit* but to his vast unpublished work, 'The Silmarillion'.

Immediate reviews were mixed as journalists and literary pundits poured forth a torrent of extreme views: some loved it, some hated it and some were merely baffled by it. They struggled to classify the book in an age where fairy tales were seen as children's stories and fantasies were more likely to be set on another planet, aping the science fiction stories that were popular at the time. Reviewers variously called the work 'super science-fiction', an 'epic fairy-tale', a 'heroic romance' and a 'romantic trilogy'. Was it 'a monumental waste of time' or 'one of the most remarkable works of literature of our, or any, time'?³ Readers were in no doubt – copies quickly sold out and more printings were required. Since its first publication it has never been out of print and has regularly topped readers' polls as their favourite book. In 1997 Waterstones the bookseller polled 25,000 readers to find the 'Book of the Century', and *The Lord of the Rings* was the winner by a clear margin. This result was repeated in 2003 when the BBC's 'Big Read' ran a poll to find the nation's favourite book, and it again took the top spot.

¹ Tolkien 1968.

² Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 144.

³ *Washington Post*, Nov 1954; Bernard Levin, *Truth*, 28 October 1955.

HENRY BRADLEY (1845–1923)

Letter of reference for J.R.R. Tolkien

Oxford, 7 June 1920
Autograph
Single leaf, 232 × 179 mm
Tolkien family papers

When Tolkien was discharged from the Army at the end of the First World War, he returned to Oxford as ‘a jobless soldier in 1918’, looking for work.¹ With the aid of William Craigie, his former tutor in Old Norse, he was appointed as a lexicographer on the *New English Dictionary* (later called the *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED]). Here he was able to use his extensive knowledge of Germanic languages to write definitions for words beginning with the letter ‘W’. He worked under Henry Bradley, one of the OED’s editors, in ‘that great dusty workshop, that brownest of brown studies’ in the Old Ashmolean (now the Museum of the History of Science on Broad Street), where he toiled away as ‘a fledgling prentice in the Dictionary Room (fiddling with slips for WAG and WALRUS and WAMPUM).’²

After a year at the OED Tolkien applied for an academic position as the Reader of English Language at the University of Leeds. He sought a reference from Bradley, whose praise was fulsome and correct in as far as it went: ‘I feel no doubt that ... he will attain a highly distinguished position among philological scholars.’ Within five years Tolkien had indeed risen to the eminent position of Professor of Anglo-Saxon having returned to Oxford, but he was to attain distinction far beyond the field of philology as the foremost

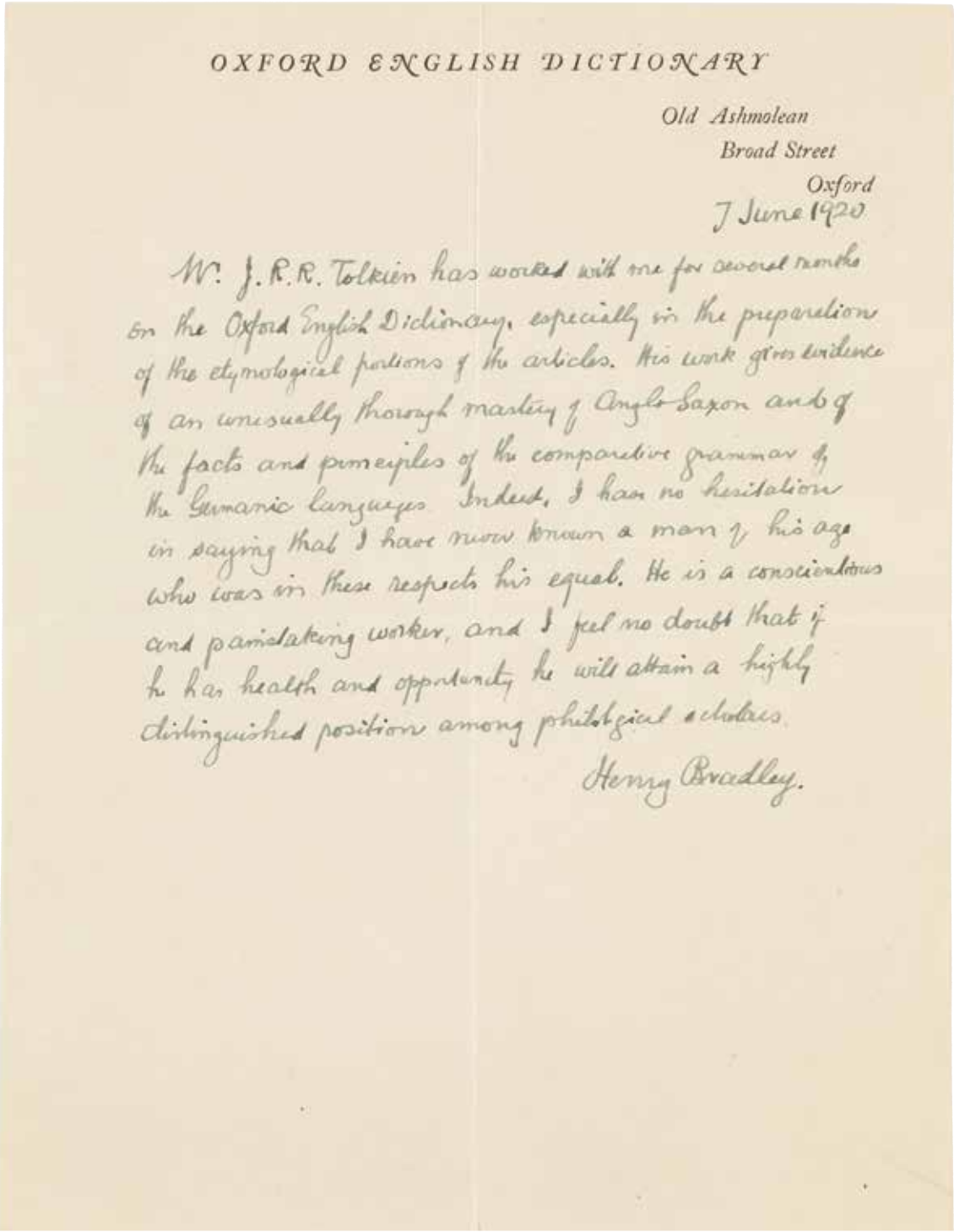
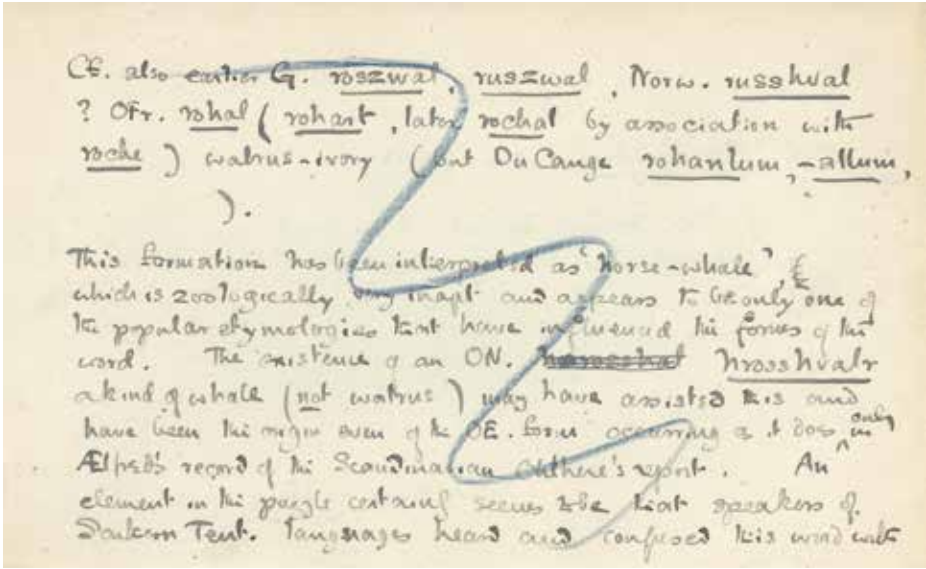
fantasy author of the twentieth century.

Many years later he was himself added to the OED as the inventor of the word ‘hobbit’. On being asked to proofread the entry before publication he hesitated to lay claim to the word in case he had unconsciously taken it from another source. He sought the help of his former pupil Roger Lancelyn Green, who was an expert on fairy tales, declaring

(in a parody of Walter Scott), ‘Oh what a tangled web they weave who try a new word to conceive’.³ No earlier occurrence could be found at that time and he was credited as the inventor of the word.

- 1 Tolkien 1983B, p. 238.
- 2 Tolkien 1923, pp. 4–5; Tolkien 1983B, p. 238.
- 3 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 407.

Fig. 40 Dictionary slip for ‘walrus’, showing Tolkien’s draft definition, [c.1919].
(By permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press , OED/A/1/2)



ARTHUR RANSOME (1884–1967)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

Norwich, 13 December 1937
Autograph
Single leaf, 176 × 115 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 113
Literature: Oxford 1992; Brogan 1997
MS. Tolkien 21, fol. 91

The very first ‘fan’ letter of any type in the Bodleian Library archive is a letter from Arthur Ransome praising *The Hobbit*. Ransome was already a famous children’s author and had written seven (out of an eventual twelve) books in the ‘Swallows and Amazons’ series. He wrote to Tolkien in glowing terms, describing himself ‘as a humble hobbit-fancier (and one certain that your book will be many times reprinted)’. Entering into Tolkien’s construct that *The Hobbit* was a true account of Bilbo’s journey recorded in his memoirs, he queried the use of ‘man’ and ‘boys’ when referring to hobbits and dwarves, as perhaps an error introduced by a later scribe. Ransome’s books were well known in the Tolkien household and Tolkien was delighted to receive this letter. He confessed, ‘My reputation will go up with my children – the eldest are now rather to be classed as “men”, but on their shelves, winnowed of the chaff left behind in the nursery, I notice that their “Ransomes” remain.’¹

He accepted some of Ransome’s criticisms and sent a list of corrections to his publisher to be included in any future edition, adding, ‘It really requires The Silmarillion to answer him.’² This was a (pointed) reference to his Elvish mythology which had been

recently rejected by the publisher. Writing to Ransome by return of post, Tolkien responded, ‘I am sure Mr Baggins would agree in words such as he used to Thorin – to have been fancied by you, that is more than any hobbit could have expected.’³ In his reply Ransome praises the extraordinary ‘skill with which you had made Mr. Baggins so Hobbitty’, coining a new derivative of the word, ‘hobbit’.⁴ This is not included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* which currently lists only three derivatives: Hobbitomane, Hobbitry and Hobbitish.

Ransome’s letters were written from a nursing home in Norwich, where he was recovering from an operation for an umbilical hernia, incurred by over-exertion while boating on the Norfolk Broads. He declared that ‘The Hobbit has done a great deal to turn these weeks into a pleasure. And as for new editions... there will be dozens of them: of that I have no doubt whatever.’⁵

1 Tolkien family papers, copy letter to Arthur Ransome, 15 December 1937.
2 HarperCollins archive, letter to Stanley Unwin, 16 December 1937.
3 Brogan 1997, p. 250.
4 Brogan 1997, p. 251.
5 Brogan 1997, p. 251.

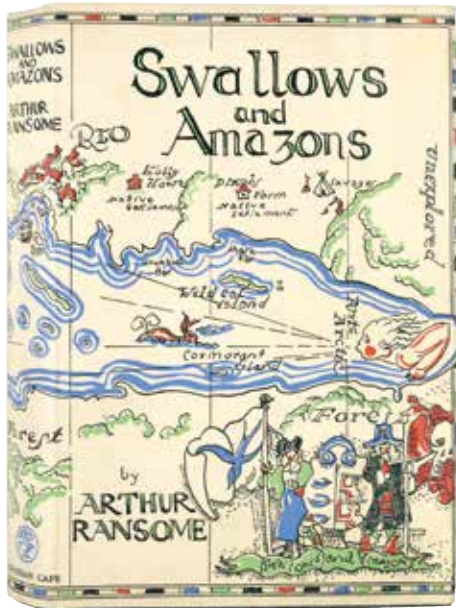


Fig. 41 Dust jacket for *Swallows and Amazons*, Jonathan Cape, 1930. (Image courtesy of Blackwell’s Rare Books)

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Nursing Home,
32 Surrey Street,
Norwich

Dec. 13. 1937

Sir,

As a humble hobbit-fancier (and one certain that your book will be many times reprinted) may I complain that on page 27 where Gandalf calls Bilbo an occasional little hobbit, the scribe (human no doubt) has written “man” by mistake?. On page 112 Gandalf calls the goblins “little boys”, but he meant it as an insult so that is no doubt right. But on page 294 Thorin surely is misreported. Why his concern for men? Didn’t he say “more of us” thinking of dwarves, elves, goblins & dragons and not of a species which is him much less and not very important. The error, if it is an error, is a natural one, due again to the humanity of the scribe to whom is must all be grateful for this chronicle.

I am, Sir,
Yours respectfully,
Arthur Ransome

C.S. LEWIS (1898–1963)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

Magdalen College, Oxford, 27 October 1949
Autograph
3 pages, 175 × 151 mm
Tolkien family papers

‘I have drained the rich cup and satisfied a long thirst’, wrote C.S. Lewis to Tolkien on reading the completed typescript of *The Lord of the Rings*. Lewis was a colleague, friend, fellow Inklings and fan, and had encouraged Tolkien over many years to complete *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien confessed that he had no trouble starting stories but great difficulty in finishing them, describing himself as ‘a notorious beginner of enterprises and non-finisher’.¹ He began writing *The Lord of the Rings* shortly after the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937 but it was twelve years before he finally brought the huge work to completion. During this time he was encouraged by his children and by his friends, the Inklings, to whom he read chapters aloud as they were written. Lewis read the complete work in 1949 and immediately sent this letter of congratulations, beginning with a phrase in Old English, ‘Uton herian holbytlas’ (‘let us praise hobbits’) and ending with a reference to its lengthy gestation, ‘All the long years you have spent on it are justified’. Tolkien later acknowledged that its completion ‘still astonishes me ... I still wonder how and why I managed to peg away at this thing year after year, often under real difficulties, and bring it to a conclusion.’²

Its journey to full publication took a further six years. After Tolkien had secured a publisher, Lewis wrote to him again to express his delight that the manuscript would indeed be published: ‘So much of your whole life, so much of our joint life, so much of the war, so much that seemed to be slipping away ... into the past, is now, in a sort, made permanent.’³ Tolkien dedicated the work to his children, ‘and to my friends the Inklings ... because they have already listened to it with a patience, and indeed an interest, that almost leads me to suspect that they have hobbit-blood in their venerable ancestry.’⁴ After Lewis’s death in 1963, Tolkien explained to a correspondent that, ‘The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not “influence” as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement ... But for his interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought *The Lord of the Rings* to a conclusion.’⁵

1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 257.
2 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 257.
3 Hooper 2000–6, vol. 3, pp. 249–50.
4 Tolkien 1954–5, vol. 1, p. 7.
5 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 362.



Fig. 42 Photograph of C.S. Lewis sitting at his desk [1940s], taken by Arthur Strong. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien photogr. 31, fol. 20; © Arthur Strong / Camera Press, London)

C. S. LEWIS
MAGDALEN COLLEGE
OXFORD
Oct 27. 1949

My dear Toller - Uton herian holbytlas indeed. I have drained the rich cup and satisfied a long thirst. Once it really gets under weigh the steady upward slope of grandeur and terror (not unrelieved by green dells, without which it wd. indeed be intolerable) is almost unequalled in the whole range of narrative art known to me. In two virtues I think it excels: sheer sub-creation - Bombadil, Barrow Wights, Elves, Ents - as if from inexhaustible resources, and construction - the construction Tams aimed at (but did not equally achieve) wd. seem to combine the variety of Ariosto with the unity of Virgil. Also, in granitas. No romance can repel the charge of "en-capsism" with such confidence. If it errs, it errs in precisely the opposite direction: the sickness of hope deferred and the morbidness piling up of odds against the heroes are near to being too painful. And the long coda after the catastrophe, whether yet intended or no, has the effect of reminding us that victory is as transitory as conflict, that (as

W.H. AUDEN (1907–1973)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

Berlin, 1955
Autograph
3 pages, 261 × 210 mm
Tolkien family papers

The poet W.H. Auden was a generation younger than Tolkien. He studied English at Christ Church, Oxford, attending Tolkien’s lectures on *Beowulf*. Years later he wrote to Tolkien from his home in Italy, ‘I don’t think I have ever told you what an unforgettable experience it was for me as an undergraduate, hearing you recite *Beowulf*. The voice was the voice of Gandalf.’¹ The following year when he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford (1956–61), he stated in his inaugural lecture, ‘Making, Knowing and Judging’, that Old and Middle English poetry were amongst his strongest personal influences.

He was an early fan of *The Lord of the Rings* and was given a proof copy to review. After reading it with close attention he wrote this letter to Tolkien, ‘Have now read The Return [of the King] three times ... As I expected, you have managed to keep it up wonderfully right to the end.’ He raised a number of pertinent queries but finished his letter, ‘Forgive these trivial remarks. As you know, *The War of the Ring* is one of the very few books which I shall keep re-reading all my life.’ Auden uses Tolkien’s preferred title for the final volume. His publisher, Rayner Unwin, disagreed and *The Return of the King* was the title finally selected, although Tolkien

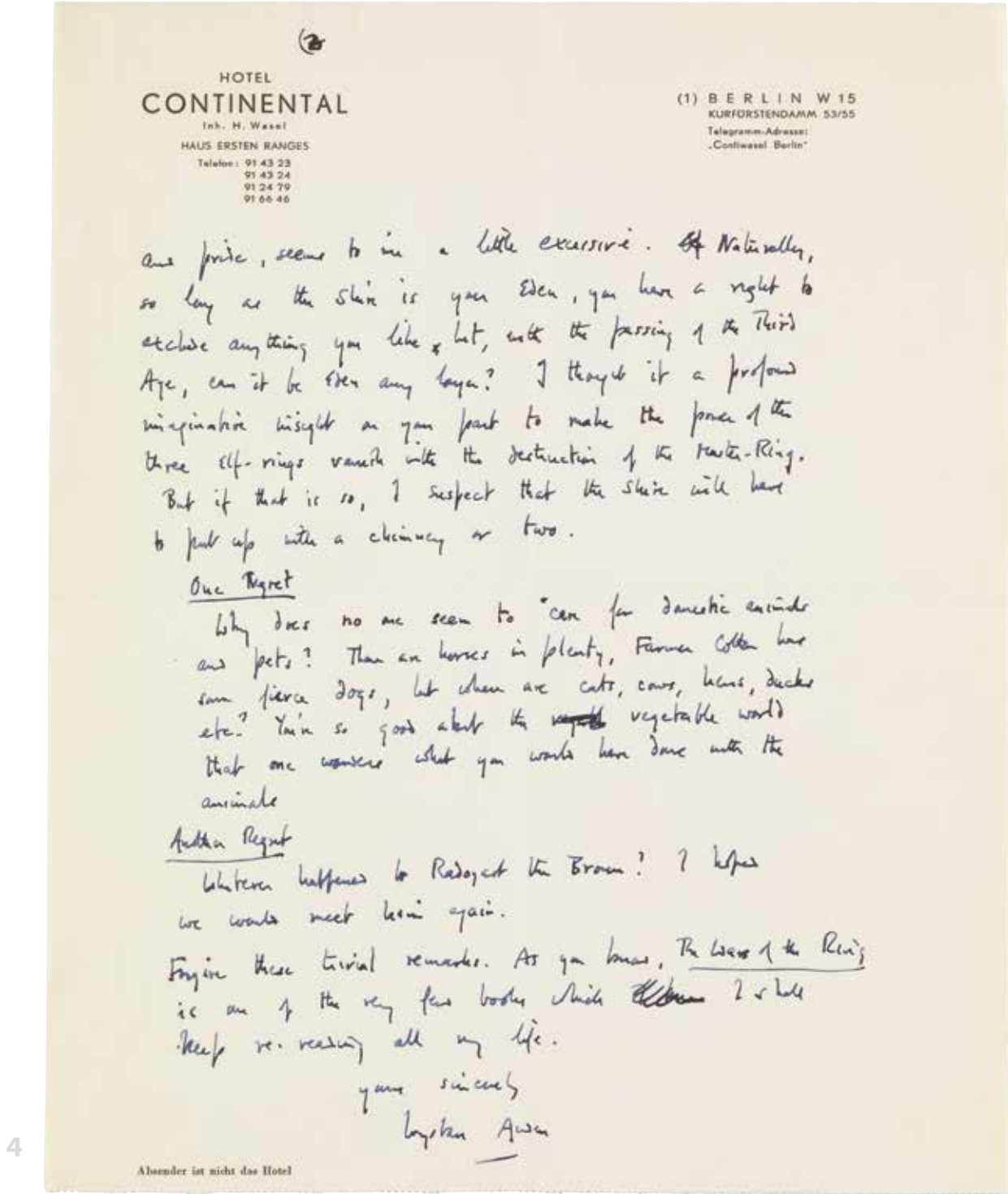
had reservations that this might give away the ending.

In his review for *The New York Times Book Review*, Auden’s praise for *The Fellowship of the Ring* could not have been higher: ‘No fiction I have read in the last five years has given me more joy than “The Fellowship of the Ring”.’² Tolkien was grateful for his attention and wrote to his old friend Nevill Coghill, ‘I am really most touched by W.H. Auden, who writes with a warmth and generosity that I find amazing in one who has become so much more famous than the now old professor.’³ By the time Auden reviewed the final volume in 1956 he had encountered the peculiar divisions that Tolkien’s work caused in the literary world, noting ‘I rarely remember a book about which I have had such violent arguments. Nobody seems to have a moderate opinion: either, like myself, people find it a masterpiece of its genre or they cannot abide it.’⁴

¹ Tolkien family papers, letter from Auden, 28 July 1955.
² *The New York Times Book Review*, 31 October 1954.
³ Tolkien family papers, copy letter to Coghill, 20 November 1954.
⁴ *The New York Times Book Review*, 22 January 1956.



Fig. 43 Picture postcard of ‘The North Cape Plateau, Norway’ sent by Auden to his former tutor, Nevill Coghill and endorsed, ‘Very Tolkien country!’, 1961. (Tolkien family papers)



SAM GAMGEE

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

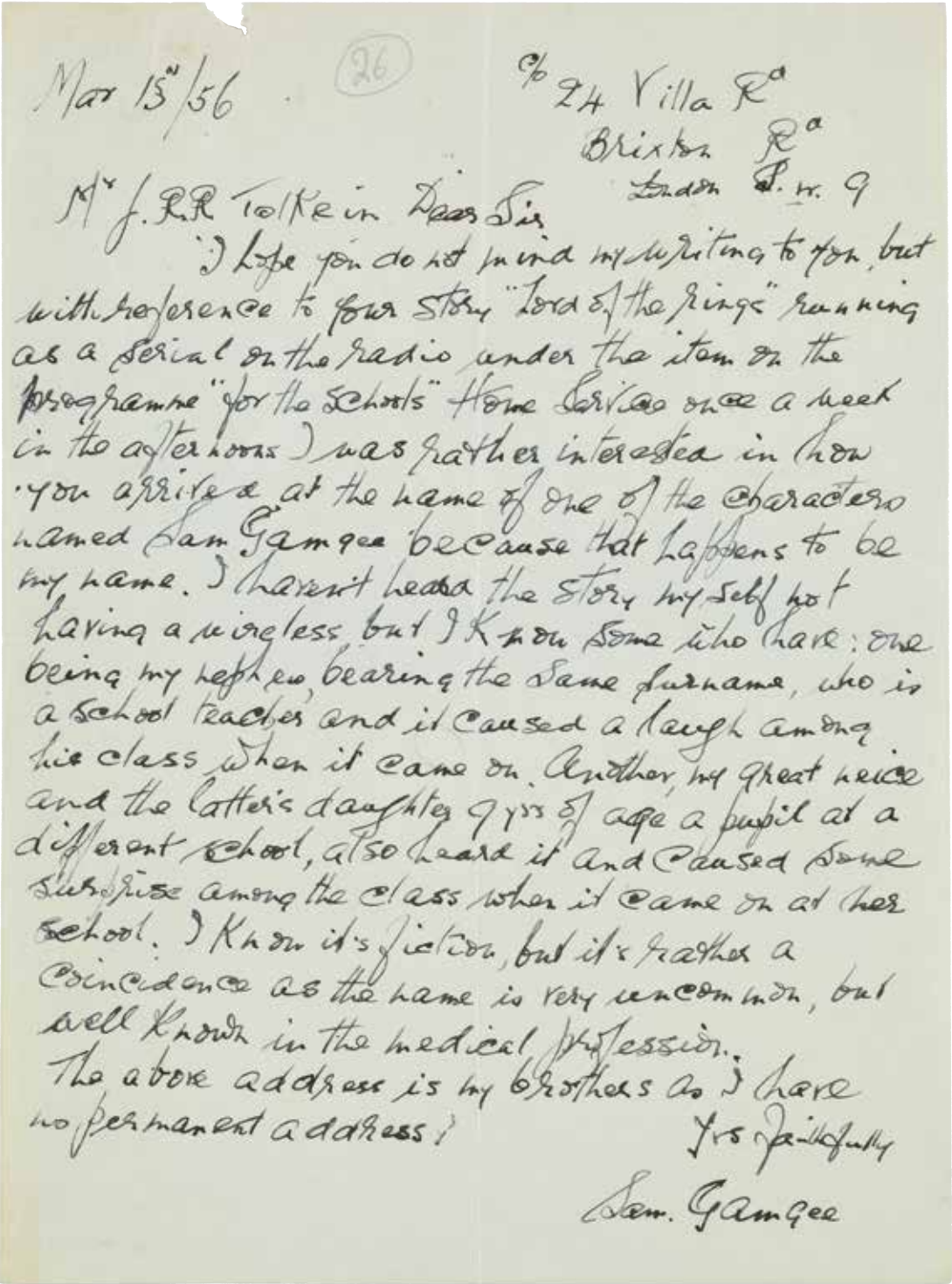
London, 13 March 1956
Autograph
Single page, 231 × 171 mm
Tolkien family papers

Shortly after the publication of the final volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien received a letter from Mr Sam Gamgee, an elderly gentleman who was baffled to learn from younger relatives that his rather unusual name was also the name of a character in a vast fantasy novel. Tolkien was delighted to receive the letter and reassured his correspondent that ‘the “Sam Gamgee” of my story is a most heroic character, now widely beloved by many readers, even though his origins are rustic’.¹ He relayed the story to his publisher and joked, ‘I hope I shan’t now get letters from S. Gollum, or Shagrat.’² He sent the ‘real’ Sam Gamgee a signed copy of *The Lord of the Rings* and the recipient was mollified: ‘Certainly I do not mind the unintentional use of my name. Please do not think for a moment that [I] am complaining: far from it, but as the name is so uncommon it was particularly interesting.’³

The name ‘Gaffer Gamgee’ (Sam Gamgee’s father in the book) was coined by Tolkien during a family holiday in Cornwall to describe ‘a curious local character, an old

man who used to go about swapping gossip and weather-wisdom and such like. To amuse my boys I named him Gaffer Gamgee, and the name became part of family lore to fix on old chaps of the kind.’⁴ The comic alliteration cries out to be pronounced in a south-west accent. The word ‘gamgee’ was actually a relic from Tolkien’s childhood in Birmingham where it was used as a local term for ‘cotton-wool’, which had been invented by a local surgeon named Sampson Gamgee. The association between the Gamgee and Cotton hobbit families, cemented by the marriage of Sam Gamgee and Rosie Cotton in *The Lord of the Rings*, was but a short step in Tolkien’s imagination.

1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 244.
2 Tolkien family papers, copy letter to Rayner Unwin, 21 March 1956.
3 Tolkien family papers, letter from Sam Gamgee, 30 March 1956.
4 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 348.



Poem, ‘Rosalind Ramage’

1963
Autograph
Single page, 176 × 137 mm
Loan

Charmed by a letter and poem written for him by a seven-year-old fan of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien wrote a poem especially for her. A hidden story lies behind this extraordinary gift, made in response to a seemingly typical fan letter. Rosalind Ramage was the daughter of a former porter at Merton College, where Tolkien had been Professor of English Language and Literature. *The Tolkien Family Album*, written by two of Tolkien’s children, records that Mr Ramage, then a single man, volunteered to cover all the Christmas shifts so that the other porters could spend the holiday with their families. Hearing of this act of kindness, Tolkien cycled down to the college on Christmas Day with a bottle of wine for him. He found him hard at work, studying for admission to the university. James Ramage went on to read English at

Letter to Rosalind Ramage

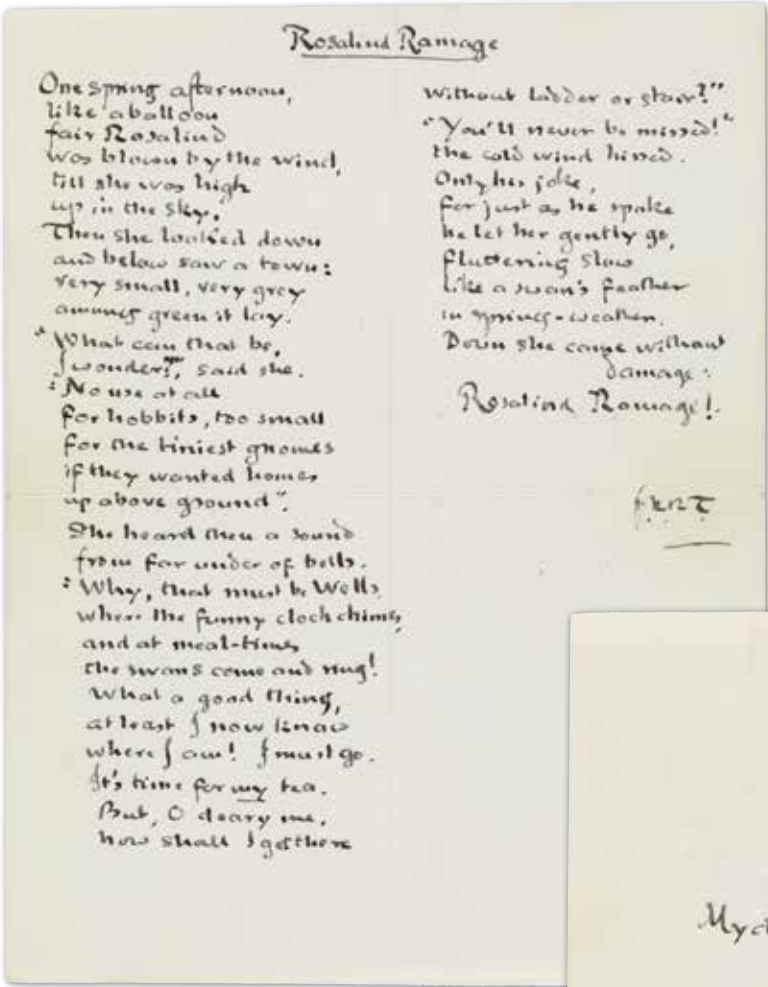
Oxford, 7 December 1963
Autograph
3 pages, 176 × 137 mm
Loan

Balliol College, Oxford, from 1951 to 1954. By the time his young daughter wrote to Tolkien, he was a teacher at the Cathedral School in Wells, Somerset. Tolkien was familiar with the city and wrote in his letter to Rosalind, ‘I have not been in Wells since 1940, but I hope the clock and the swans still perform.’ This was a reference to the astronomical cathedral clock (one of the oldest in the country) and the swans who lived, and still live, in the moat around the Bishop’s Palace and are trained to ring a bell in return for food. Tolkien incorporated both into his poem, which accompanied the letter. In his letter to Rosalind, he mentions the beauty of the word ‘harp’ as distinct from the beauty of the physical object. Tolkien was particularly sensitive to the sounds of words

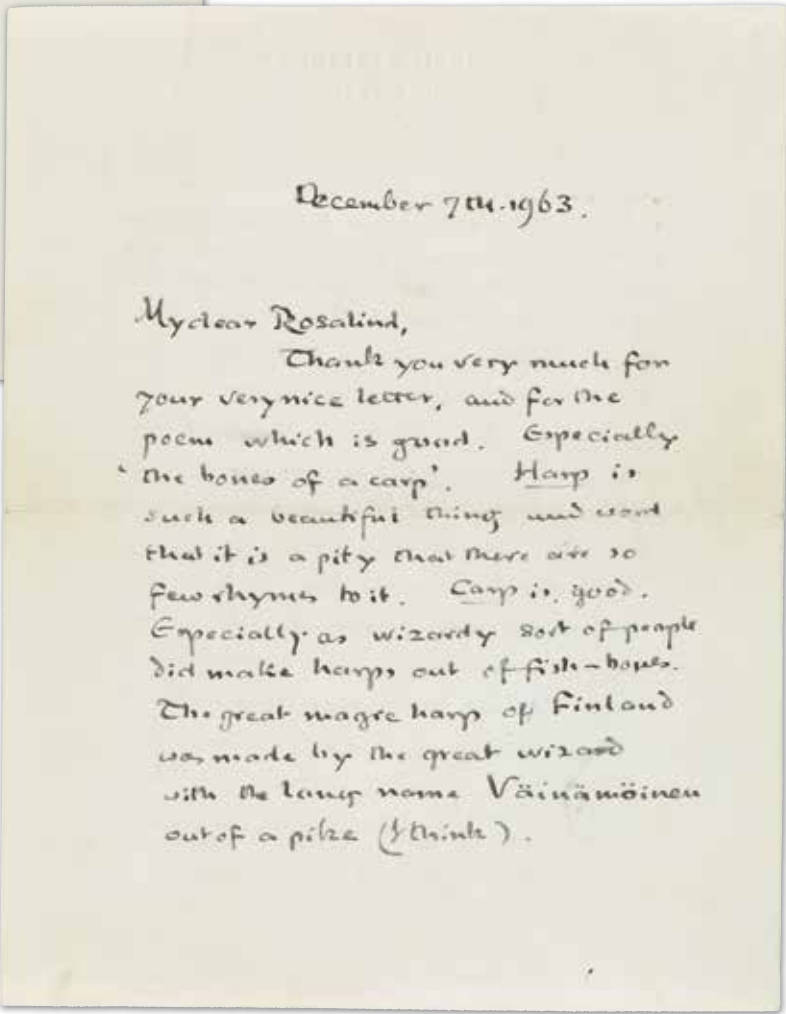
and created the Elvish language, Quenya, to appeal to his own linguistic aesthetic. Perhaps Rosalind’s name inspired him to write the poem? ‘I always in writing, always start with a name. Give me a name and it produces a story’, he told an interviewer the following year.¹ Her name certainly has a beautiful sound and Tolkien skilfully ends the poem with a rhyming couplet ending with her name: ‘Down she came without damage: / Rosalind Ramage.’ The poem was offered by Tolkien the following year to Caroline Hillier, editor of the poetry anthology *Winter’s Tales for Children*, but it was not included and has remained unpublished until now.

1 Tolkien 1964.

6



7



IRIS MURDOCH (1919–1999)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

Steeple Aston, Oxford, 2 January [1965]
Autograph
4 pages, 177 × 136 mm
Tolkien family papers

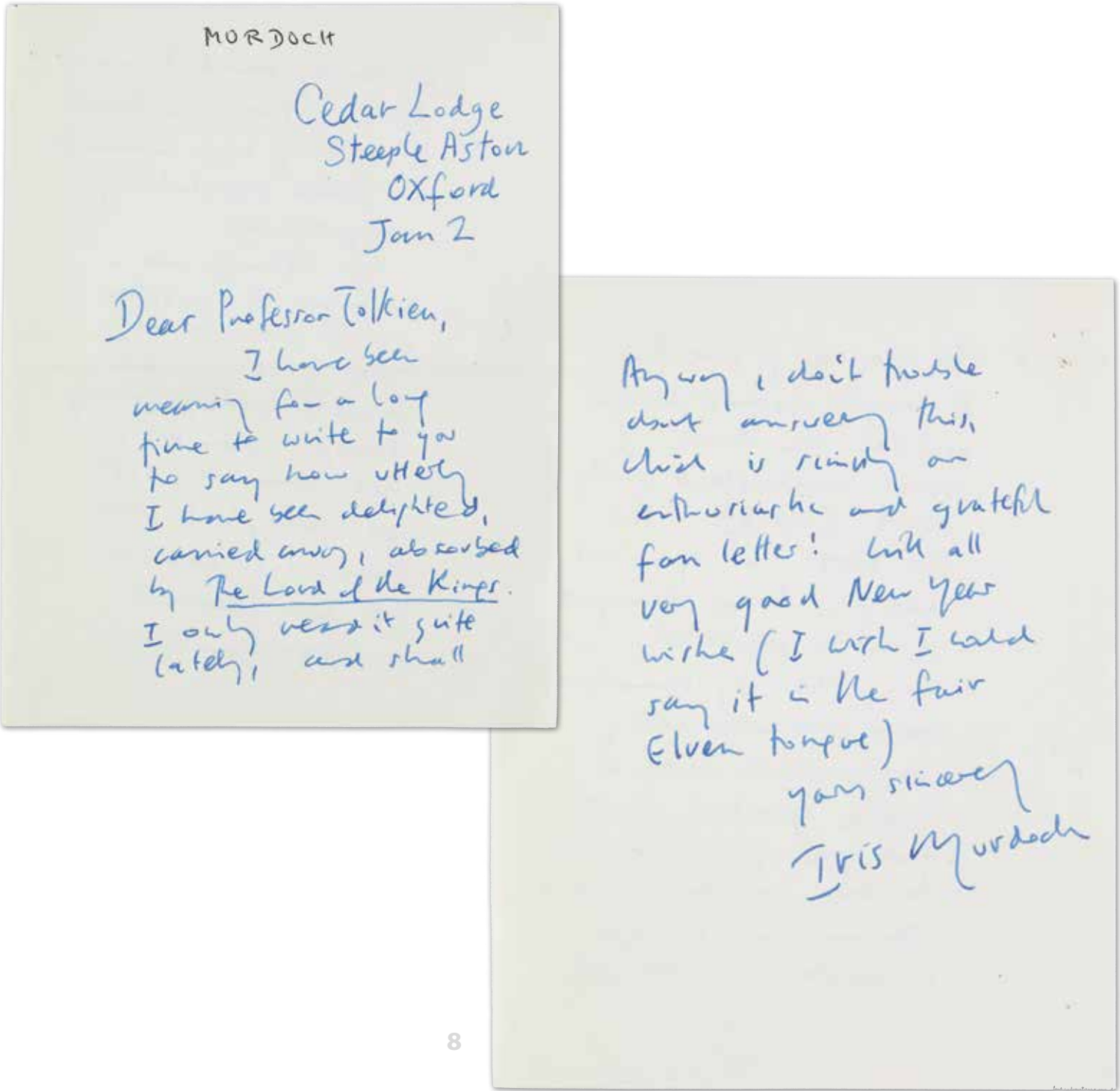
Ten years after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien received a fan letter from the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch, which read:

I have been meaning for a long time to write to you to say how utterly I have been delighted, carried away, absorbed by The Lord of the Rings. ... Anyway, don't trouble about answering this, which is simply an enthusiastic and grateful fan letter! With all very good New Year wishes (I wish I could say it in the fair Elven tongue) Yours sincerely Iris Murdoch.

He wrote shortly afterwards to his son, Michael, 'My greatest surprise was 4 days ago to get a warm fan-letter from Iris Murdoch.'¹ Murdoch was already a successful novelist and had given up her post as a tutor in philosophy at St Anne's College, Oxford, in order to concentrate on her writing career. The tone of her letter does not seem to indicate that there was any personal

familiarity between author and recipient. Indeed it seems unlikely that she moved in the same circles as Tolkien at Oxford, as she was much younger, and had been a member of a different faculty and a tutor at one of the all-female colleges. Tolkien's surprise is probably based on his knowledge of her own literary style, which was very different from his own. Murdoch's fiction is set firmly amongst the middle classes of the twentieth century and is concerned with character, motivation and sexuality, rather than with incident and a fast-moving plot line. Clearly her own literary style did not preclude her from enjoying entirely different literary genres, including Tolkien's heroic romance. Nor did her own fame as a writer deter her from writing this generous letter of appreciation to a fellow author.

¹ Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 353.



Photograph of Chuck and Joni Mitchell

[1960s]
224 × 199 mm
Tolkien family papers



In 1966 Joni Mitchell and her husband Chuck were aspiring folk musicians based in Detroit, living in an apartment scheduled for demolition and earning meagre wages from live performances. Whilst Joni wrote the songs, Chuck sought to protect their music by creating both a recording company and a publishing company. Inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*, which they were both reading, he wrote to Tolkien requesting permission

whilst a second choice, *Aragorn*, was too similar to another company named Aragon. Finally the Mitchells suggested *Lorien* and *Gandalf* which were accepted. ‘Seems that they have nothing quite like Gandalf in their listings’, Chuck Mitchell wrote to Tolkien’s publisher.²

As a thank-you gift, Chuck sent a copy of Joni’s lyrics for the song ‘I think I understand’, in which she sings that fear is like a

to use the names *Lorien* and *Strider* for the two companies. ‘Joni and I stumbled upon, ventured into and loved the world which you (and I hesitate here) created. Perhaps “revealed” is more correct ... Our request is simple: we would like to call the recording company Lorien and the publishing company Strider.’¹

Tolkien and his publishers granted their request but the couple ran into difficulty when attempting to register the names with the agency BMI (Broadcast Music Inc.). *Strider* was too similar to the name of an existing client, Stride Publishing,

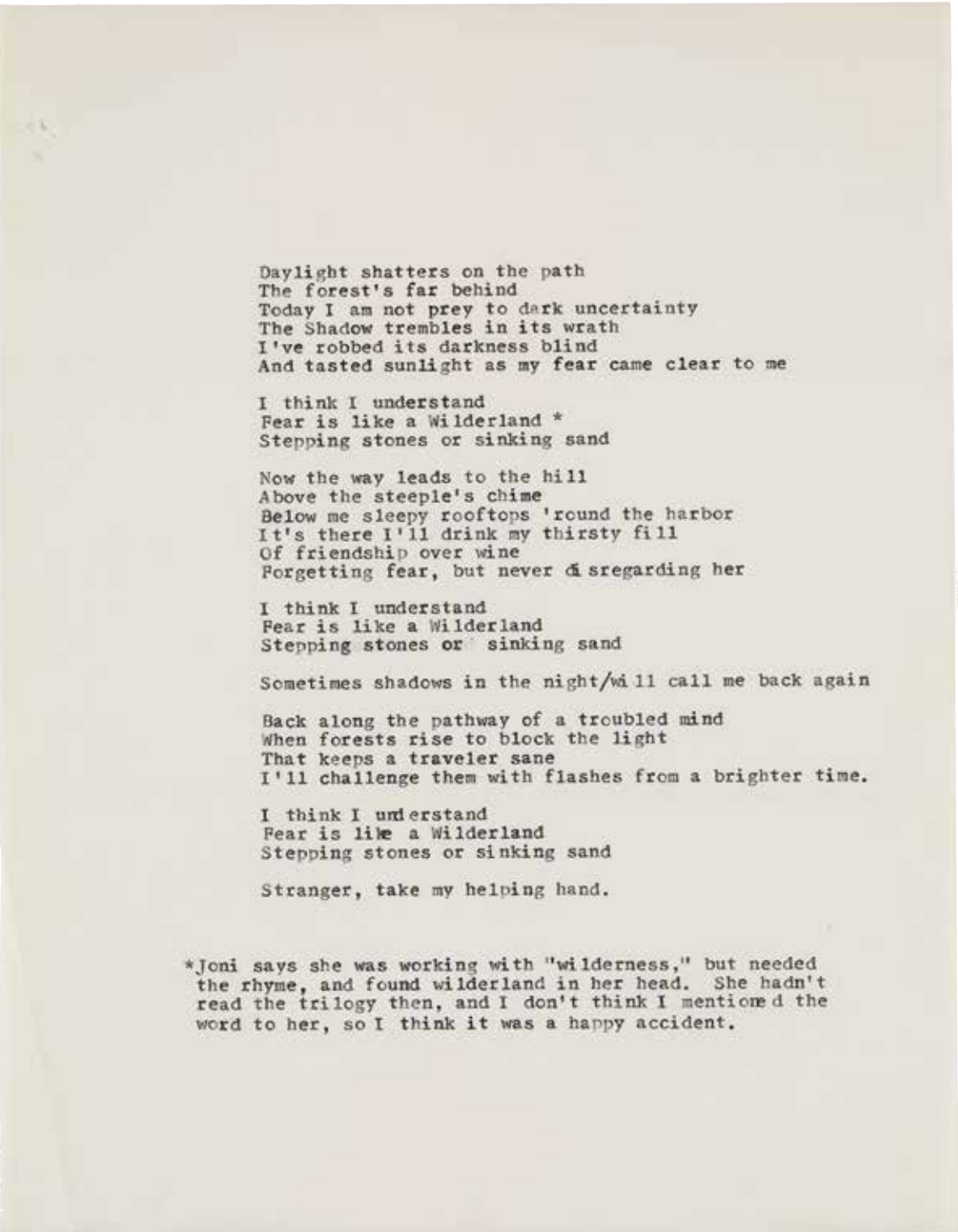
JONI MITCHELL (B. 1943)

Lyrics for ‘I think I understand’

Detroit, [26 Aug 1966]
Typescript
Single page, 278 × 216 mm
Tolkien family papers

‘Wilderland’. Chuck Mitchell stated that her use of the word ‘Wilderland’ preceded her reading of Tolkien’s work: ‘I’ve started my second trip through Middle-earth, looking at lyrics, and Joni has just finished her first. Before she began reading, she wrote a little song which somehow sounds as if it were written after she had read the trilogy.’ The word was invented by Tolkien, and seemingly also by Joni Mitchell independently. The song was released three years later on her album *Clouds*.

- 1 Tolkien family papers, letter from Charles Mitchell, 20 March 1966.
- 2 Tolkien family papers, letter from Charles Mitchell, 26 August 1966.



Daylight shatters on the path
The forest's far behind
Today I am not prey to dark uncertainty
The Shadow trembles in its wrath
I've robbed its darkness blind
And tasted sunlight as my fear came clear to me

I think I understand
Fear is like a Wilderland *
Stepping stones or sinking sand

Now the way leads to the hill
Above the steeple's chime
Below me sleepy rooftops 'round the harbor
It's there I'll drink my thirsty fill
Of friendship over wine
Forgetting fear, but never dis regarding her

I think I understand
Fear is like a Wilderland
Stepping stones or sinking sand

Sometimes shadows in the night/will call me back again

Back along the pathway of a troubled mind
When forests rise to block the light
That keeps a traveler sane
I'll challenge them with flashes from a brighter time.

I think I understand
Fear is like a Wilderland
Stepping stones or sinking sand

Stranger, take my helping hand.

*Joni says she was working with "wilderness," but needed the rhyme, and found wilderland in her head. She hadn't read the trilogy then, and I don't think I mentioned the word to her, so I think it was a happy accident.

TERRY PRATCHETT (1948–2015)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

Beaconsfield, 22 November 1967
Typed letter, signed
Single page, 227 × 178 mm
Exhibition: Salisbury 2017–18, facsimile
Tolkien family papers

When Tolkien was an old man he wrote a short story called *Smith of Wootton Major*. He described it as being ‘written with deep emotion, partly drawn from my own experience of the bereavement of “retirement”, and of advancing age.’¹ The first fan letter he received in response to this work came from a young Terry Pratchett, who was already making a living from writing as a journalist on a local newspaper, *The Bucks Free Press*. Although only nineteen years old, Pratchett grasped the depth of feeling in the book and also the sense of bereavement that lay behind it. He wrote to Tolkien, ‘An odd feeling of grief overcame me as I read it.’ As with most of his fan mail Tolkien wrote a personal reply: ‘You evidently feel about the story very much as I do myself. I can hardly say more.’² Pratchett had been a fan of Tolkien’s work since reading *The Lord of the Rings* six years earlier; then aged thirteen, he read the whole book in twenty-five hours. It was a life-changing experience and was his introduction to fantasy literature. He later recalled, ‘I have never since then so truly had the experience of being inside the story.’³

Pratchett finished his ‘letter of appreciation’ with the line ‘Now I await the Silmarillion’, summing up the feelings of

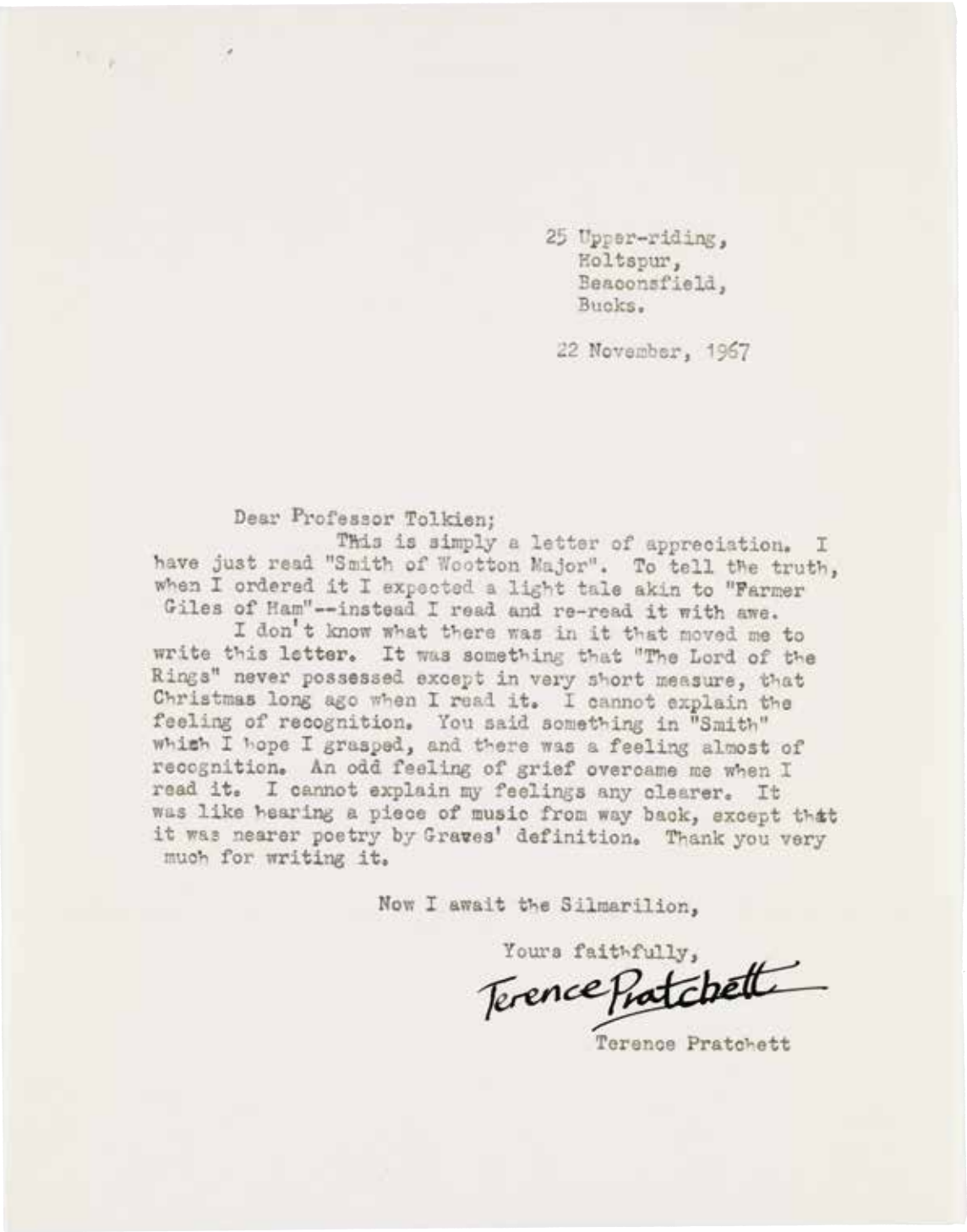
many of Tolkien’s fans, who were eagerly awaiting the legends of the Elder Days. Although it was twelve years after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, Pratchett would have to wait some time longer for *The Silmarillion*. It was not published in Tolkien’s lifetime, but was brought into a coherent form by his son and literary executor, Christopher Tolkien.

Terry Pratchett later became a famous fantasy author, most notably writing the Discworld series which eventually comprised forty-one books. He has described Tolkien’s towering status in the field of fantasy: ‘Tolkien has become a sort of mountain, appearing in all subsequent fantasy in the way that Mount Fuji appears so often in Japanese prints. Sometimes it’s big and up close. Sometimes it’s a shape on the horizon. Sometimes it’s not there at all, which means that the artist ... is in fact standing on Mount Fuji.’⁴

1 Tolkien family papers, draft letter to Queen Margrethe of Denmark, 29 January 1972.
2 Tolkien family papers, copy letter to Terry Pratchett, 24 November 1967.
3 Pratchett 2013, p. 123.
4 Pratchett 1999.



Fig. 44 Proof illustration for *Smith of Wootton Major* by Pauline Baynes, 1967. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien 10, fol. 52; reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd)



LYNDA JOHNSON ROBB (B. 1944)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

The White House, Washington, 2 August 1968
Typed letter, signed
Single page, 234 × 159 mm
Tolkien family papers

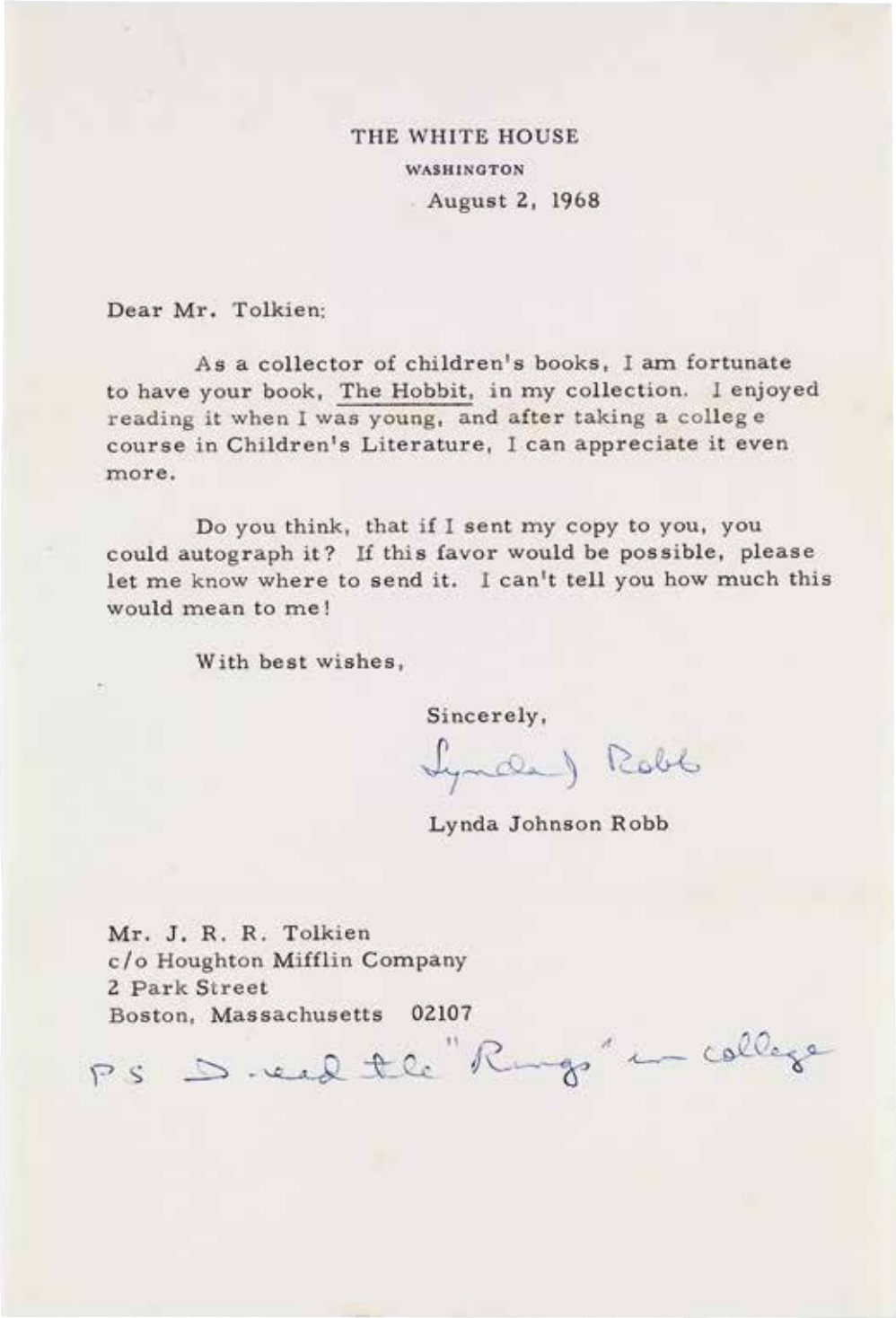
During the 1960s the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* soared in America, where it acquired almost cult status on university campuses. Students wore lapel badges proclaiming ‘Frodo Lives’ and ‘Gandalf for President’. Clubs and societies were formed: one of the earliest was the New York Tolkien Society, on the campus of Columbia University in 1965. The book’s popularity was fuelled by the publication of a pirate edition, issued in America by Ace Books in 1965. This cheap paperback made the work more widely available but it also deprived Tolkien of any royalties. A storm of publicity ensued, dubbed the ‘War of Middle-earth’, which gave Tolkien’s work enormous exposure. An authorized paperback edition, published by Ballantine Books, was rushed into print the same year, carrying a statement by Tolkien: ‘Those who approve of courtesy (at least) to living authors will purchase it, and no other’. By early the

following year Ace Books had capitulated completely and the war was over.

In the summer of 1968 Lynda Johnson Robb, elder daughter of President Lyndon B. Johnson, wrote to Tolkien asking if he would sign her copy of *The Hobbit*: ‘Do you think, that if I sent my copy to you, you could autograph it? ... I can’t tell you how much this would mean to me!’ Lynda, who had married Charles Robb in a ceremony in the White House the previous December, was twenty-four years old and seven months pregnant with her first child. Perhaps she hoped to pass on her signed copy of *The Hobbit* to her own child? Certainly by this time her father’s days at the White House were numbered and she would not have the advantage of using the White House letterheaded paper for much longer. After failing to win the war in Vietnam, Johnson announced in 1968 that he would not be seeking re-nomination for the presidency. Nixon took over in January 1969.



Fig. 45 ‘Frodo Lives’ badge and Tolkien Society badge. (Tolkien family papers)



MARGRETHE, PRINCESS OF DENMARK (B. 1940)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

Amalienborg Palace, Copenhagen, 24 October 1970
Autograph
3 pages, 224 × 173 mm
Tolkien family papers

Copies of seven drawings of chapter headings

[1970]
2 pages
'A Conspiracy Unmasked', 339 × 210 mm;
'A Journey in the Dark', 297 × 210 mm
Tolkien family papers

Praise for *The Lord of the Rings* came from far and wide in the years following its publication. Fifteen years after it was published Tolkien received a letter from the Royal Palace in Copenhagen. Margrethe, Princess of Denmark, had only recently read *The Lord of the Rings*, and wrote to convey ‘how much pleasure I have derived from it; it is no exaggeration to say that I have been reading it ever since.’ As a way of expressing her thanks she sent copies of illustrations she had made for the book, in the form of chapter headings. Tolkien was charmed by them and wrote in a draft reply, ‘At times I have been struck by a resemblance between them and attempts of my own (unpublished); but more often by their unexpectedness – as if the story and the landscapes were independently real, but viewed by a different eye. The device

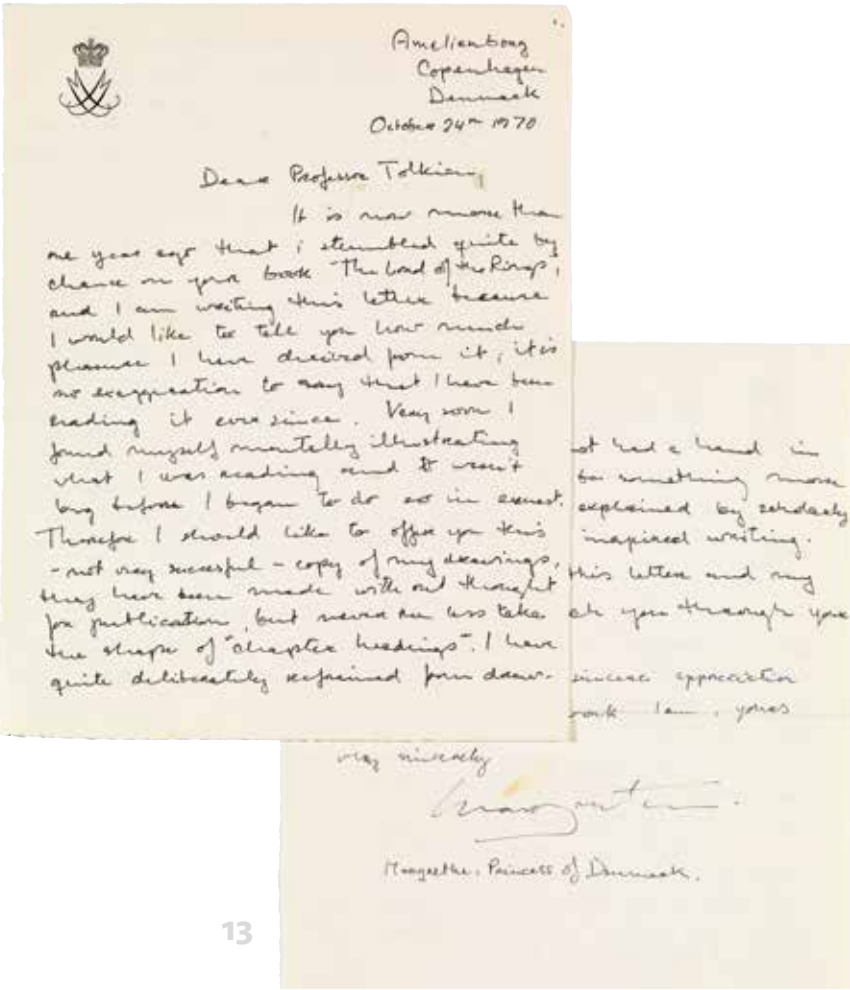
of illustrating the theme or “air” of chapters instead of particular events or characters is successful, especially in providing a running contrast between glimpses of sinister darkness and homely simplicity, which is characteristic of the tale.’¹

They continued to correspond and to exchange illustrations over the next two years. Tolkien was delighted to receive a Christmas card in 1971 bearing her illustration of Bilbo hard at work in his study writing his memoirs: ‘You have caught both the childishness of Bilbo and his wisdom, and at the same time suggested the struggle of age with a task beyond its power to complete:

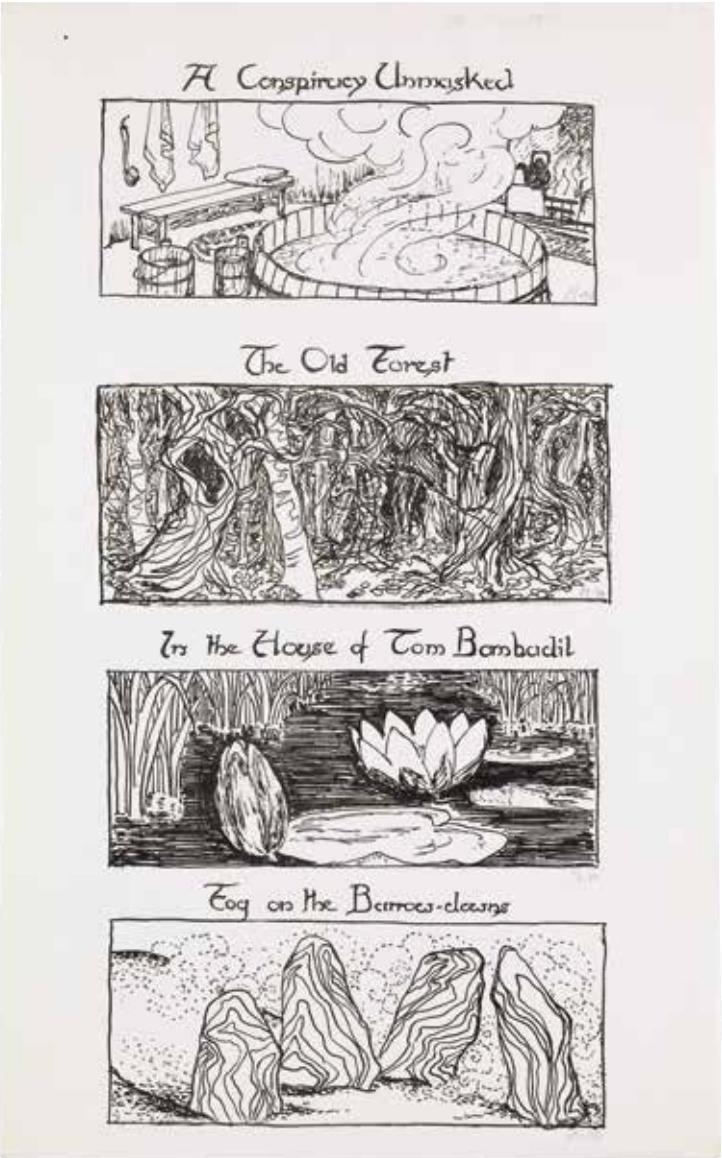
a situation with which I now sympathize more poignantly than when I wrote the last chapters of The Lord of the Rings.’² At this point Tolkien knew that he was unlikely to ever bring his legendarium, ‘The Silmarillion’, into a suitable form for publication.

Margrethe became queen of Denmark in 1972 on the death of her father, King Frederik IX. In 1977 she illustrated the Folio Society edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, using the pseudonym Ingahild Grathmer.

¹ Tolkien family papers, draft letter, [January 1971].
² Tolkien family papers, draft letter, [January 1971].



13



14



Fan mail

1972–3
4 letters
Tolkien family papers

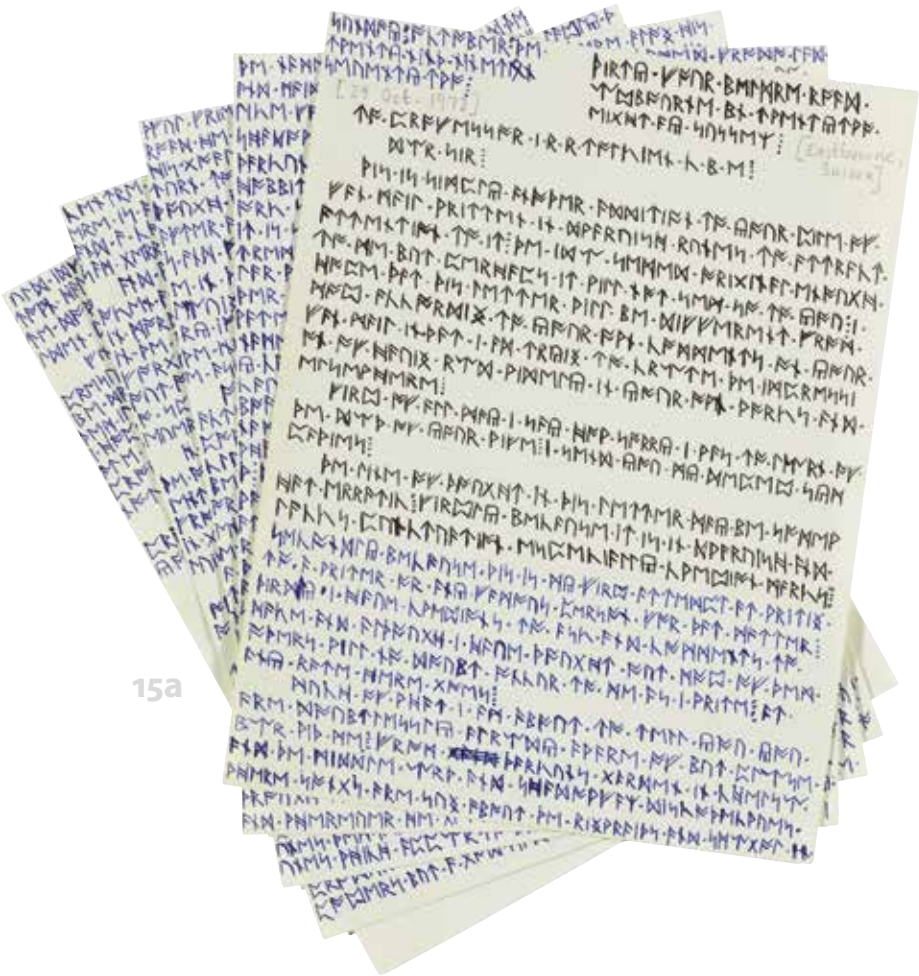
Following the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and retirement from his academic post, Tolkien hoped to complete his work on ‘The Silmarillion’. Instead the huge popularity of the published book created more and more demands on his time: requests for interviews, talks, photographs, contributions to other publications and for permission to dramatize the work in every known form. Intrusions were not limited to letters: visitors turned up at his house uninvited and he received telephone calls in the middle of the night from American fans unaware of the time difference. Eventually in 1968, feeling under siege, he and his wife moved from Oxford to Poole on the south coast of England and he removed his address and telephone number from all public reference works.

Large amounts of fan mail continued to arrive via his publisher’s offices in London. Readers were enthralled by the world revealed in *The Lord of the Rings* and sought information about every aspect of his secondary world, ‘about the Wainriders, the Harad, Dwarvish origins, the Dead Men, the Beornings, and the missing two wizards.’ Some were merely letters of appreciation but others were written in runes or in Elvish letters, others came with photographs of places that resembled Middle-earth, or photographs of people dressed up as

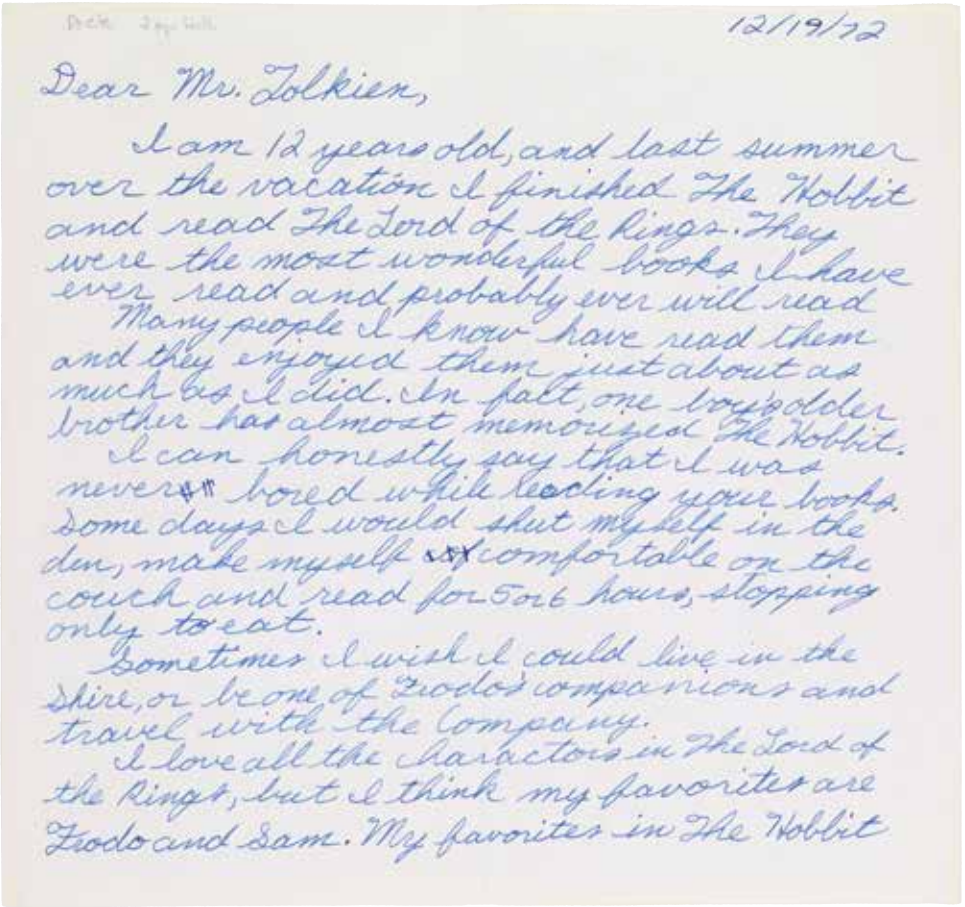
characters from the book; yet others were accompanied by illustrations or songs inspired by the work. Tolkien felt obliged to respond personally to all correspondents, but he was incapable of dashing off a quick reply. His archive provides plentiful evidence of his perfectionism and even replies to fan mail were carefully considered, written

out in draft and then revised before being sent. This was immensely time-consuming and also distracting, particularly when a correspondent raised an issue of interest to Tolkien, which he might then spend several hours ‘researching’.

1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 248.



15a



15b



Dear Professor Tolkien,

I have been an admirer of your histories of Middle Earth for some time. Any praise I might give would sound faint, but I do say that they are my favorite books.

I have also searched in vain for knowledge of the Istari of the other two hues. It is said that the whole White Council united against the Shadow and drove Sauron from Mirkwood. Where, then, were the other wizards employed during the Great War? We have thought that perhaps their work lay in Mirkwood or further north in Dale, for at least Radagast resided near the borders of Mirkwood. I do not doubt that these answers are before my nose, but until now they remain elusive.

In closing I should like to ask a favor of you. In your preface to the Houghton-Mifflin edition you mentioned that you have always had a penchant for histories, real and imagined. I confess to having a similar passion, but I have been repeatedly disappointed by the quality of historical fiction or nonfiction I have encountered. I would be greatly in your debt if you could recommend any works of quality or interest in which you have found particular delight in your long life of reading. Please do not confine yourself to histories only.

In return I should like to offer you these seeds that I found in the interior of Mexico. They will grow into quite large trees, though a hot house may be required in your climate; and I fancy that hobbits would have been particularly fond of them since they have brightly colored flowers and leaves of a curious shape.

Good Health to You,

You,
Clyde Thomas Gray

[John R. Jones]

23 ԹԶԵՐԻՆԵՇ
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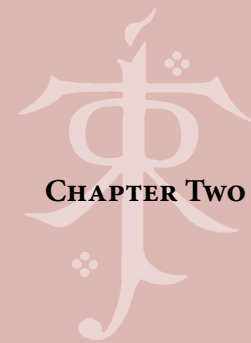
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 ԵՐ ՄԵՐՇ

- պարո պաճ

This is full of errors both in use of the 'dash' letter' and in its attempt to represent with them English phoneticals. After it is the spelling form that is frustrated. It proves also designed to be a piece of vexatious work, which amounts to more than I can you read me the British language, please? In answer please it appears to be meant to say: 23 Blenheim (= November). The shadows of wind and clouds that bind / have darkened fear before my mind / but through the vague wet fingerings mist / a vague and flowing Sun exists / the blue hills appear in timeless time, as riders, night, and stream of rain / form pictures on a shore. The world to come is a bank of love. As twilight if I dream it be / near in food and stream - or when I seek in but language of old is distant and strange / and sometimes beyond my audible range / there I cannot hear nor can I spend / those brilliant sounds in leaves I seek / I ask of you help as your time allows / to give me the language of moon and boughs / The high eleven tongue I wish to know / and has to write of the wind drifting suns / For behind our dark and daring [sic] walls a wish there is which beckons, which calls.

$$T_{\text{off}} T_{\text{on}} \neq$$

874



CHAPTER TWO

CHILDHOOD

‘born with a talent for language’

Tolkien’s childhood was marked by the contrasts created by a series of seismic shifts in his early personal life. He was born in the dry heat, dust and wide open spaces of the high veldt in South Africa, where his earliest memories were of a wilting eucalyptus instead of a Christmas tree, and of running towards the Indian Ocean on his first trip to the seaside. At the age of three he was brought to England, where he spent the rest of his childhood in Birmingham and the surrounding countryside of the Midlands; the green fields, bounded with hedgerows and bordered by meandering rivers, gave him an abiding love of rural England. The sudden break in his life, caused by this transplantation from the southern to the northern hemisphere, left vivid memories of the two halves of his childhood. It also gave him an enhanced appreciation of the climate and flora of his adopted country, experienced by him as a small child as something of a homecoming.

In South Africa he had been the adored eldest child of a prosperous bank manager and his wife, spoilt by household servants and bank employees alike and sharing the high social status of his parents. The return to England coincided with the death of Arthur Tolkien, which caused the family’s fortunes to plummet. Four-year-old Tolkien became a fatherless child from a low-income household, and his widowed mother struggled to bring up her two young children on a small private income.

His initial years in England were spent in a rural village in relative poverty, but they were very happy, with the companionship of his younger brother, Hilary, and the full-time attention of a loving and well-educated mother. Tolkien later recalled that he ‘was born with a talent for language’, and certainly his mother nurtured his interests in language and poetry.¹ After four years the family moved from the village of Sarehole to the suburbs of industrial Birmingham. Tolkien found the city a poor substitute for life in the country but it did have the effect of fixing his memories of his childhood in rural Warwickshire as a golden period.

The sharpest division was yet to come. The death of his mother from diabetes when he was twelve years old created a break that could not be healed. Later in life he recalled his ‘happy childhood that ended when I was orphaned at twelve’.² From this time onwards, he and his brother did not have a home or a family life. They lived in lodgings, their care overseen by a guardian who was loving and ever-present in their lives, but nevertheless they were now orphans and financially impoverished.

Tolkien’s childhood can be viewed as a series of events which successively compartmentalized his life into ‘before’ and ‘after’. The contrasts were sharp and their effects long-lasting: from South Africa to England; from Sarehole village to the city of Birmingham; from prosperity to financial insecurity; from a stable family life to orphanhood.

¹ Tolkien 1966.

² Plimmer and Plimmer 1968.

MABEL TOLKIEN (1870–1904)

Photograph of family group, annotated by Mabel Tolkien

Bloemfontein, 15 November 1892
Single leaf, 89 × 55 mm
Literature: Carpenter 1977
MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fols. 2–3

Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein on 3 January 1892, the first child of loving and devoted parents. His father, Arthur Reuel Tolkien, wrote immediately to his family in Birmingham with the happy news: ‘Mabel gave me a beautiful little son last night (3 Jan). It was rather before time but the baby is strong & well and Mabel has come through wonderfully ... The baby is (of course) lovely. It has beautiful hands & ears (very long fingers) very light hair, “Tolkien” eyes & very distinctly a “Suffield” mouth.’¹ Suffield was Mabel’s maiden name and the new father’s description is admirably even-handed.

Arthur was a bank manager in Bloemfontein and the family lived in Bank House, an impressive building in the centre of town. The small town was the capital of the Orange Free State, a Boer republic established relatively recently in 1854. It was situated in high grasslands, surrounded by small flat-topped hills or *koppies*, and though the official language was Dutch there were many English people residing there. Arthur and Mabel were people of some standing in the local community and participated in the somewhat limited social life: singing in the cathedral choir on Sundays, playing lawn tennis and golf and taking part in theatrical productions.

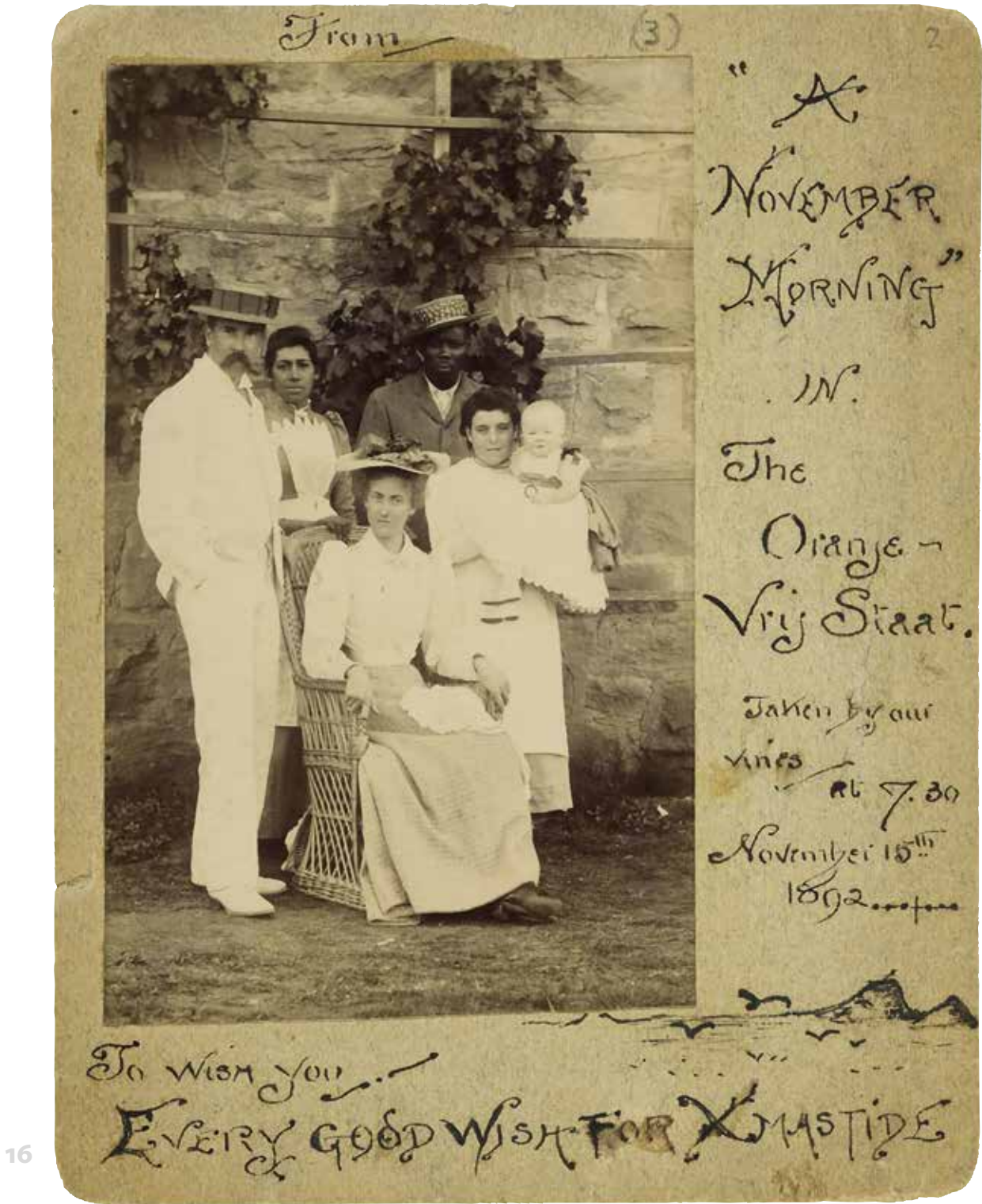
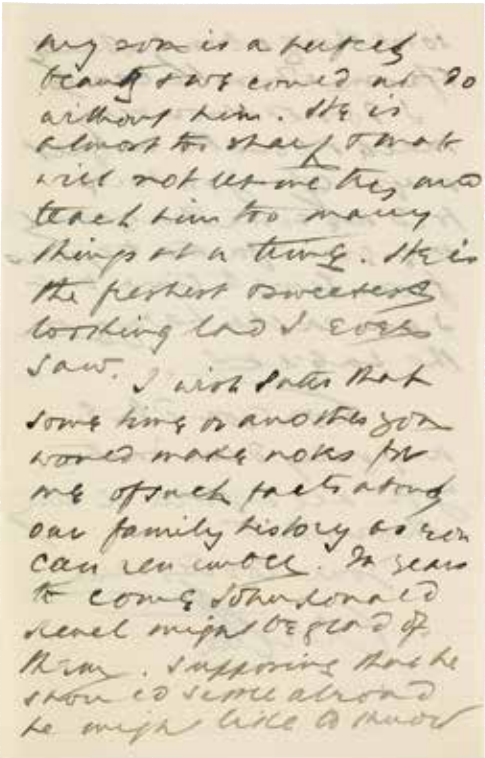
In November 1892 a family photograph was taken to send back to their families and close friends in England in time for Christmas. Unusually, in a country marked by racial divisions, it also included all of the household servants. Tolkien, a frilled and beribboned ten-month-old child, is held by his nurse. His mother, Mabel, sits somewhat stiffly in the centre, whilst his father, Arthur, with a resplendent moustache, strikes a more relaxed pose at her side. Mabel’s distinctive handwriting enlivens the mount: “A NOVEMBER MORNING” IN The Oranje-Vrij Staat. Taken by our vines at 7.30 November 15th 1892. To wish you EVERY GOOD WISH FOR XMASTIDE.’ The card is given a further personal touch by her drawing of the flat-topped hills which dotted the landscape.

The day before the photograph was taken, Arthur Tolkien wrote to his father, ‘My son is a perfect beauty & we could not do without him. He is almost too sharp & Mab will not let me try and teach him too many things at a time. He is the freshest sweetest looking lad I ever saw.’²

1 Carpenter 1977, p. 12.

2 Tolkien family papers, letter to J.B. Tolkien, 14 November 1892.

Fig. 46 Page from Arthur’s letter to his father, 14 November 1892. (Tolkien family papers)



MABEL TOLKIEN (1870–1904)

Letter to John Benjamin and Mary Jane Tolkien

Bloemfontein, 4 March 1893
Autograph
2 pages, 203 × 127 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 6
Literature: Carpenter 1977; Oxford 1992
Tolkien family papers

In a small, distinctive hand Mabel Tolkien wrote lively letters home describing vivid episodes from their daily life in Bloemfontein. ‘The next-door pet monkeys had been over & “eaten” 3 of Ronald’s pinafores & several other things into rags a few days before’, she wrote to Arthur’s parents. How exotic this must have sounded to the family as they endured an English winter in the suburbs of Birmingham!

Mabel and Arthur’s marriage was a happy one and they did almost everything together. The day after they were married in St George’s Cathedral in Cape Town in 1891, Arthur wrote to his mother declaring, ‘I am outrageously happy.’¹ Two years later his views were unchanged: ‘I am so happy in my home life & am one of the fortunate ones who has made a lucky marriage.’² The young married couple enjoyed one another’s company and frequently entertained friends and visitors at Bank House. Arthur was a family man who preferred to be at home rather than out at the club. He loved the climate in Bloemfontein, with its long hot summers and cold dry winters: ‘I find the

high dry climate suits me perfectly. I have never had better general health than since I have been here.’³ Nevertheless he sought to improve their home for Mabel and young John Ronald by adding a large verandah and planting a grove of fruit trees, all designed to provide shade from the burning heat of summer.

Mabel had a nursemaid, a cook, a general maid and a house-boy to help run the household. As the bank manager’s wife she was expected to host dinners and parties but she was also intrepid enough to accompany Arthur when he went on lengthy business trips across the rugged terrain. Naturally she delighted in her young son: ‘Baby does look such a fairy when he’s very much dressed-up in white frills & white shoes – I wish you could all see him – or even when he’s very much undressed I think he looks more of an elf still.’

- ¹ Tolkien family papers, letter to M.J. Tolkien, 23 April 1891.
- ² Tolkien family papers, letter to his parents, 30 July 1893.
- ³ Tolkien family papers, letter to his parents, 4 January 1891.



Fig. 47 Programme for amateur theatricals in which Mabel played ‘Peggy: a maid of all work’ in a farce entitled *The Two Puddifoots*, 9 August 1892. (Tolkien family papers)

Sat. Night
March 4th 1893. -
The Bank House
Maitland Street
Bloemfontein.
My dear Mr & M^{rs} Tolkien
I expect you all think very badly of me that I never write to any of you, or even answer your kind letters to me? - I was very very pleased with the two lovely little pinafores. - so daintily made! & sent off (as we could see) by Mr Tolkien - The next-door pet monkeys had been over & eaten "3 of Ronald's pinafores & several other things into rags a few days before" - Baby does look such a fairy when he's very much dressed-up in white frills & white shoes - I wish you could all see him - or even when he's very much undressed. I think he looks more of an elf still. - We are all hoping & praying for cooler days soon, when Fannie's & Mabel's lovely little Xmas frocks will be just the thing for Baby - at present (not being the most extraordinarily sensible of mothers I suppose) I dress him chiefly in little flimsy muslins with very short sleeves & low neck - he never goes out even now between 1/2 past 9 & 1/2 past 4 - so he does not brown at all, or catch "briskly heat" - the weather is still intensely hot & trying & one does get so tired of it by Feb. & March. - I am of course utterly delighted! at the bare thought of May's visit but I am very disappointed at the time of the year they have arranged to come - is it not surely a pleasure visit I should beg them to wait till English Autumn - as it is they will see no typical S. African weather unless they stay right through the winter - April is warm & thundery not really blazing - May very English (often wet, & it's so miserable here when it's wet, when the sunshine is gone Bloemfontein has very few other attractions left!) in June the cold dry dusty time begins, & July & August are bitter months - winds & air that make you gasp! - Just as they get here too the fruit season will be nearly over, & it is so good this year too. I am so sorry - every-day at every meal our table is full of grapes - delicious ones

MABEL TOLKIEN (1870–1904)

Gift card from ‘Ronald’ to his father, Arthur Reuel Tolkien

Bloemfontein, Christmas 1893
Autograph
Single leaf, 35 × 75 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 7
Literature: Oxford 1992
Tolkien family papers

Unlike Arthur, Mabel did not adjust to the climate in Bloemfontein. She found the summers difficult, reporting that ‘the weather is still intensely hot & trying & one does get so tired of it.’¹ John Ronald, with his ‘golden hair blue eyes & rosy cheeks’, had to be kept indoors from 9.30 in the morning until 4.30 in the afternoon to avoid burning and prickly heat.² The winters brought little relief, as the heat gave way to a ‘cold dry dusty time’ with two months of bitter cold and ‘winds and air that make you gasp’.³

Christmas was a topsy-turvy affair for English people living in South Africa. It fell in the middle of the blazing heat of summer and many people opted for picnics in the countryside rather than cooking and eating a large roast dinner. In the Tolkien household, however, the old traditions still reigned and the family invited a few close friends to join them for Christmas dinner.

A gift card has survived from Ronald’s second Christmas in Bloemfontein, supposedly delivered by Santa Claus. In Mabel Tolkien’s handwriting, it is written as though from Ronald to his father: ‘Daddy Toekins from Wanild Toekins’. The phonetic

spelling instantly brings to life the child’s voice as he struggles to pronounce all the consonants. Shortly before Christmas Arthur had written to his younger sister, Grace, boasting of his son’s accomplishments: ‘Ron can say almost anything now (if he likes) & is beginning to count. 2. 4. 3. 10 it generally is ... Every day he comes down into the office with me after lunch for a few minutes to see the men who all spoil him & make a fuss of him. He is not at all shy about asking for “penkils” & paper.’⁴ This was Ronald’s last Christmas as an only child; his younger brother Hilary was born the following February, shortly after his second birthday.

Many years later, when he was a young father, Tolkien wrote a letter to his three-year-old son John from Father Christmas. It seems that he was carrying on a family tradition started by his mother.

- 1 Tolkien and Tolkien 1992, p. 17.
- 2 Tolkien family papers, letter from Arthur Tolkien to his father, 6 August 1894.
- 3 Tolkien and Tolkien 1992, p. 17.
- 4 Tolkien family papers, letter to Grace Mountain, 28 October 1893.

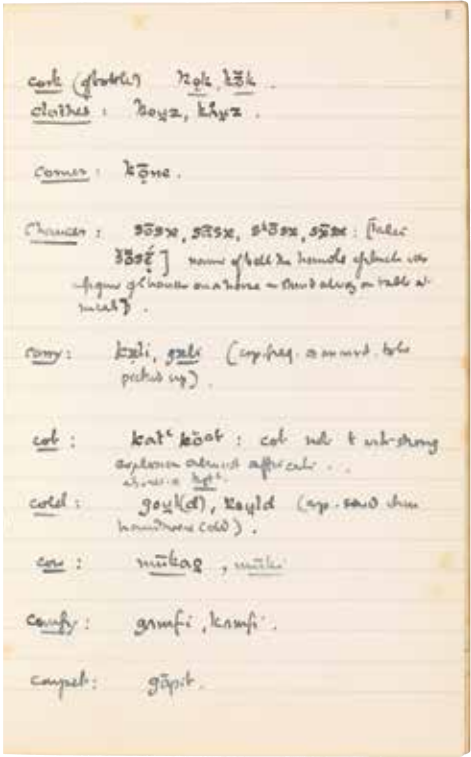
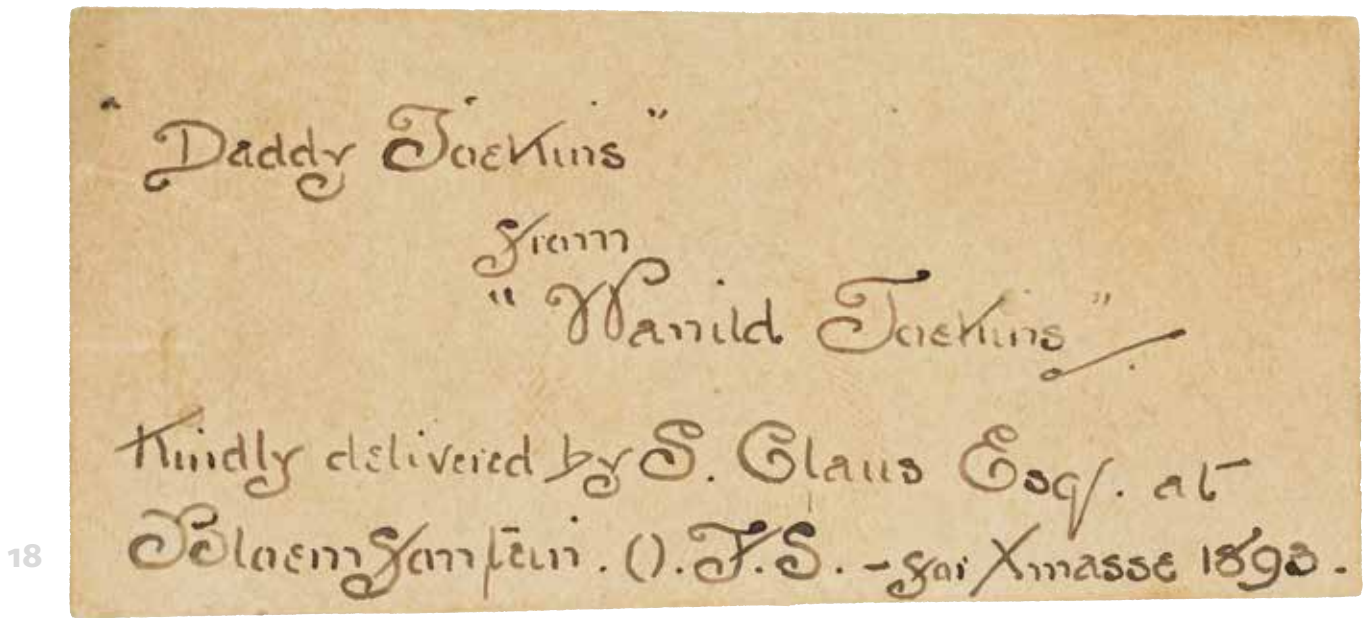


Fig. 48 Record kept by J.R.R. Tolkien of his eldest son’s language development, showing ‘Chaucer’ as part of his vocabulary aged two, [c.1919]. (Tolkien family papers)



Photograph of Hilary A.R. and J.R.R. Tolkien

September 1895
139 × 100 mm
Studio of Harold Baker, 58 New Street, Birmingham
Literature: Carpenter 1977; Tolkien and Tolkien 1992
MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 6

Naturally Mabel missed her family back at home, and longed to see them all and to show off her two young sons. However, Arthur’s job came with heavy responsibilities and there never seemed to be a good time to leave the business in the hands of others. When Hilary was born in February 1894 their trip home was postponed, and the cost of the sea voyage (increased by the recent addition to the family) now seemed prohibitive. In the end Ronald’s health decided the matter. He had suffered many bouts of illness and was often unwell during the long, dry summers. ‘The hot weather does not suit him at all’, Arthur wrote to his father.¹ It was arranged that Mabel would travel back to Birmingham on her own with the two children in April 1895. It was a long journey: over 600 miles overland from Bloemfontein to Cape Town and then a three-week voyage from there to Southampton. Mabel planned to stay with her family until the following year. Arthur would join them in Birmingham in time for Christmas and travel back to Bloemfontein with them in the New Year.

As his wife was getting ready to leave, Arthur wrote to his father in Birmingham: ‘I do hope you will love my boys. It is very hard to part with them but is I feel sure for the best. Ronald has been very poorly again but is better – either the heat or the altitude of this place is too much for him.’² It was hoped that a year away from the extreme climate would give him time to grow stronger and sturdier. Five months after Mabel arrived in Birmingham she arranged for this photograph to be taken of Ronald and Hilary; perhaps she intended to send it back to their father in South Africa. Although they look rather feminine to the modern eye, the brothers are wearing Victorian outfits typical for young boys. It is easy to imagine how the elder Tolkien brother, with his fair complexion and blond hair, was particularly unsuited to the South African climate.

¹ Tolkien family papers, letter, 14 May 1894.
² Tolkien family papers, letter, 25 March 1895.



Letter to his father from J.R.R. Tolkien, written by his nurse

Birmingham, 14 February 1896
4 pages, 101 × 69 mm;
envelope 90 × 72 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 9
Literature: Carpenter 1977; Oxford 1992
Tolkien family papers

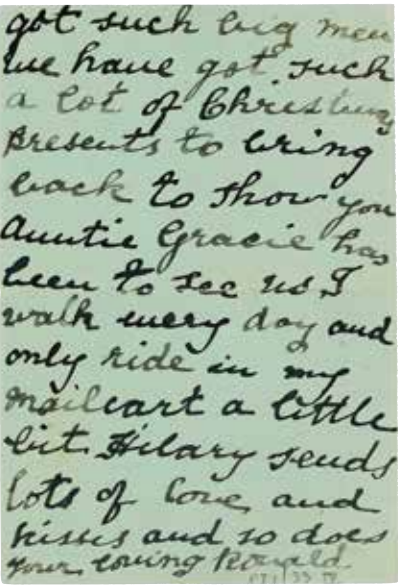
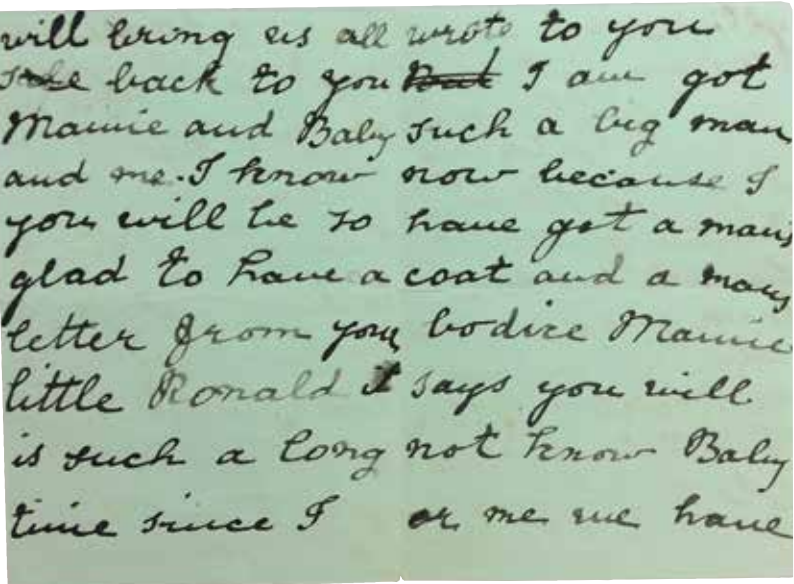
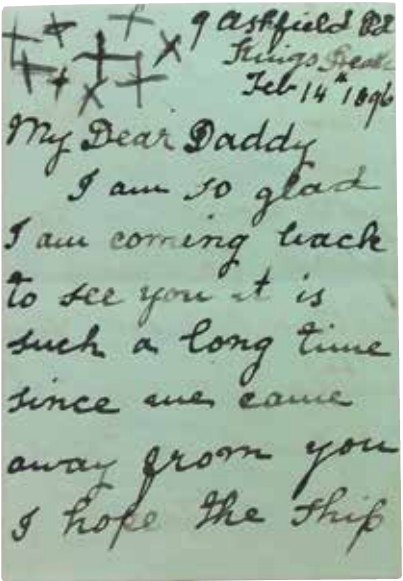
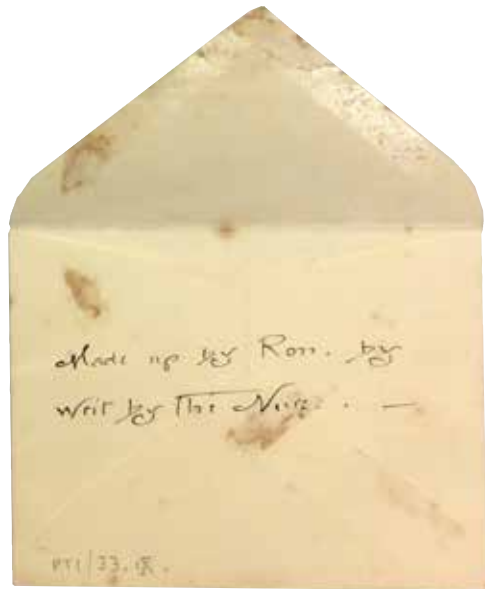
Mabel’s trip was a success. She arrived safely after the long voyage and enjoyed an extended stay, introducing the boys to their grandparents and the wider family. Arthur, meanwhile, prevaricated about his own plans, being reluctant to take a lengthy holiday when he had so much work to do. In November 1895 he suffered a serious attack of rheumatic fever, which required several weeks of recuperation. It was clear that he was not strong enough to travel back to England for Christmas and he feared the effects of a cold, damp English winter in his weakened state. His ill health and the long separation from his family had taken their toll.

He and Mabel decided that she would return to Bloemfontein with the boys once the intense heat of the South African summer had passed. Arthur was starting to feel the absence of his family sorely. Since they left he had been living in serviced accommodation rather than in the family home, and at the start of December he confided in his father,

‘I must have Mab & the lads out as soon as our hot weather is over as I have been alone quite long enough – too long in truth – and am longing to have a home of my own again.’¹ By mid-February the following year Mabel’s travel arrangements had been made. Shortly before the family’s return voyage to South Africa, Tolkien, aged four, dictated a letter to his father. It was written down by his nurse: ‘I am so glad I am coming back to see you it is such a long time since we came away from you I hope the ship will bring us all safe back ... Mamie says you will not know Baby or me we have got such big men.’

The letter was never sent. A telegram arrived the same day informing the family that Arthur Tolkien was seriously ill. He died the following day, 15 February 1896, in Bloemfontein, from complications arising from rheumatic fever. Mabel, Ronald and Hilary never returned to South Africa.

¹ Tolkien family papers, letter from A.R. Tolkien, 1 December 1895.



Obituary for A.R. Tolkien (1857–1896)

February 1896
220 × 135 mm
Tolkien family papers

During his life in Bloemfontein, Arthur had frequently praised the climate in the letters he wrote to his parents: ‘I do love the dry air & sunshine & really hardly know sometimes whether I should care to settle in England again.’¹ What had begun as a necessity to further his career had become a preferred choice of lifestyle. However, the same letters reveal that he had in fact suffered continual bouts of illness and had been struck down by severe attacks of fever or influenza at least once a year. On top of this his responsibilities in his job, working in difficult economic and political circumstances brought a certain amount of stress. His clients were mainly farmers whose finances were at the mercy of plagues of locusts and drought, either of which could wipe out entire crops. In addition he was required to make arduous journeys to outlying areas. These trips were lengthy and hazardous, involving extremely uncomfortable carriage rides on unmade roads, and sometimes completely exposed to the elements. It was following just such a journey that Arthur, weakened by fever, relapsed and died. He was three days short of his thirty-ninth birthday.

An obituary torn from a Bloemfontein newspaper records the circumstances of his death:

It is our sad duty to announce the death of Mr. A.R. Tolkien, the able and respected manager of the Bloemfontein branch of the Bank of Africa. About four months ago Mr Tolkien was seized with an attack of rheumatic fever, from which he never fully recovered. About three weeks ago he went to the Conquered Territory to recruit, and, although on his return he was still weak,

yet he appeared to be in good spirits until Friday evening, when he fell ill again ... on Saturday afternoon, having received the sacrament, Mr. Tolkien breathed his last.

1 Tolkien family papers, letter to his father, 9 March 1893.



Fig. 49 A.R. Tolkien (seated centre) with his bank staff outside Bank House, [c.1890]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien photogr. 9, fol. 1)

...ing it he has to neg-
other work, and that Advocate
Lohmann is to take charge of the
prosecution. The examination will
not be resumed for at least fourteen
days, witnesses who came from afar
having been paid off and sent to their
homes.

Death of Mr. Tolkien.

It is our sad duty to announce the death of Mr. A. R. Tolkien, the able and respected manager of the Bloemfontein branch of the Bank of Africa. About four months ago Mr. Tolkien was seized with an attack of rheumatic fever, from which he never fully recovered. About three weeks ago he went to the Conquered Territory to recruit, and, although on his return he was still weak, yet he appeared to be in good spirits until Friday evening, when he fell ill again. The patient did not at first surmise how bad his case was, and as late as Friday afternoon he expressed the hope that he would be able to resume his duties on Wednesday next, so as to enable his accountant to attend the cricket match on that day. But during the night hæmorrhage set in, and on Saturday afternoon, after having received the sacrament, Mr. Tolkien breathed his last, in the presence of the Dean, the nurse Sister Flora, and Mr. van Zyl, the accountant.

Mr. Tolkien was a native of Birmingham, and had only reached the age of forty. He was for years a trusted official in Lloyd's Bank in his native town, and joined the Bank of Africa about nine years ago. The last six years were spent in Bloemfontein, where the deceased, through his sterling qualities, gained the esteem of all with whom he came in contact.

Mrs. Tolkien, who is at present in England with her two children, was to have sailed for South Africa on the 2nd March. She was cabled to on Saturday morning to expect the worst, and will have the sincere sympathy of a large circle of friends.

The funeral took place yesterday afternoon and was largely attended. There was a full choral service in the Cathedral.

London Reptile Journalism.

Great satisfaction is felt here at the Press Law to be introduced at the next Volksraad sitting, says a London correspondent, the *Johannesburg Times*, as the abominably malicious statements which the press should be free to make.

settlemen.
Sprigg, H
Sir James
Upington,
Namaquala
David Grass
the Paarl).
isters, leaders
other men of influ
tinction of party.

Port Elizabeth,
ANOTHER SEVERE DUST.
LOHMANN UNPLAYABLE.

England won by 288 runs. Lohmann was practically unplayable. Score continued :—

Butt ...	...	0
Wright...	...	32
O'Brien	...	16
Hayward	...	6
Fry ...	...	15
Lohmann	...	0
Hill ...	...	37
Woods ...	...	53
Davenport	...	7
Hawke ...	...	30
Miller, not out	...	20

226

SOUTH AFRICA.—2ND INNINGS.

Routledge ...	...	2
Hearne...	...	5
Poore ...	...	10
Sinclair ...	...	0
Fiehardt ...	...	1
Hime ...	...	8
Halliwell	...	3
Gleeson ...	...	1
Cook ...	...	0
Middleton	...	0
Willoughby	...	0

30

Lohmann took 8 wickets for 7

Vryburg

GUN-RUNNER CAUG

Seakumo, chief of Pitsa
Molopo River, has been arre
Germans in Damaraland,
party of his men, for gun-

MOONSHIN

It is stated that secret
of the Transvaal are
the Boers in Bechuana

TRANS

CHAMBER

Photograph of Mabel Tolkien

[?1890s]
217 × 163 mm
MS. Tolkien photogr. 2, fol. 6

A studio photograph of Mabel Tolkien, probably taken in the 1890s, shows a beautiful and composed young woman. Aged only twenty-six, after her husband's death Mabel sought to build a new life for herself and her sons in Birmingham. There was no reason for her to return to Bloemfontein. Friends in South Africa helped to arrange the sale of household items and to ship other items back to England. Arthur had taken out life insurance and had actually increased his premiums after the children were born. He also had some mining shares which were left to Mabel and afforded her a small degree of independence, although the family were by no means well off. Mabel and the boys stayed on with her parents in Kings Heath, while the estate was settled. Afterwards they moved to a cottage in Sarehole, a hamlet about 2 miles away. Here the boys experienced English rural life for the first time.

Mabel seems to have been extremely able and educated the boys herself at home, covering all topics except geometry, which her sister Jane undertook. Jane Suffield (later Neave) was two years younger than her sister. Whilst Mabel was in South Africa, Jane had obtained a science degree at Mason College, the forerunner of Birmingham University, and had become a teacher at King Edward's Foundation Bath Row School. With the tuition of his mother and his aunt, Tolkien

passed the entrance examination and later won a scholarship for King Edward VI School in Birmingham, the same school which his father had attended.

Later in life he described his mother as 'a gifted lady of great wit and beauty', and acknowledged her influence on his education: 'It is to my mother who taught me (until I obtained a scholarship at the ancient Grammar School in Birmingham) that I owe my tastes for philology, especially of Germanic languages, and for romance.'

From these and other reminiscences it is clear that his mother taught him Latin and German and aroused his interest in poetry, comparative philology, etymology, alphabets and handwriting. He pursued these interests throughout his adult life, both in his academic work as a philologist and in his literary work, notably in the invented languages and scripts which populate his fantasy works.

1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, pp. 54 and 218.

Fig. 50 Gracewell Road, Sarehole, where the family lived for four years, [c.1900]. (Tolkien family papers)



Untitled watercolour [Alder by a stream]

[c.1906]
Watercolour
90 × 133 mm
Literature: Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 84, fol. 28r

Mabel and the two boys lived in their rural idyll for four years, when Tolkien was aged between four and eight years old. He later described it as ‘the longest-seeming and most formative part of my life.’¹ In a small cloth-covered sketchbook, purchased from C.H. Britten on the High Street in Birmingham, he began to paint and draw scenes from his new life. This rural scene was probably painted in Warwickshire.

The brothers did not attend school but were taught by their mother in a supportive and enquiring atmosphere. Outside of lessons they had each other for company and the whole countryside as their playground. There was a mill pond nearby with a working mill, fields and woods to explore and a dell where they could picnic and, in the right season, pick blackberries and mushrooms. Tolkien recalled being ‘brought up in considerable poverty’ but his mother’s independent income, education and social standing would have set them apart from the village children.² There was some name-calling because of the boys’ refined accents, fancy clothes and long hair, but Tolkien was fascinated by the local dialect and the new words he heard.

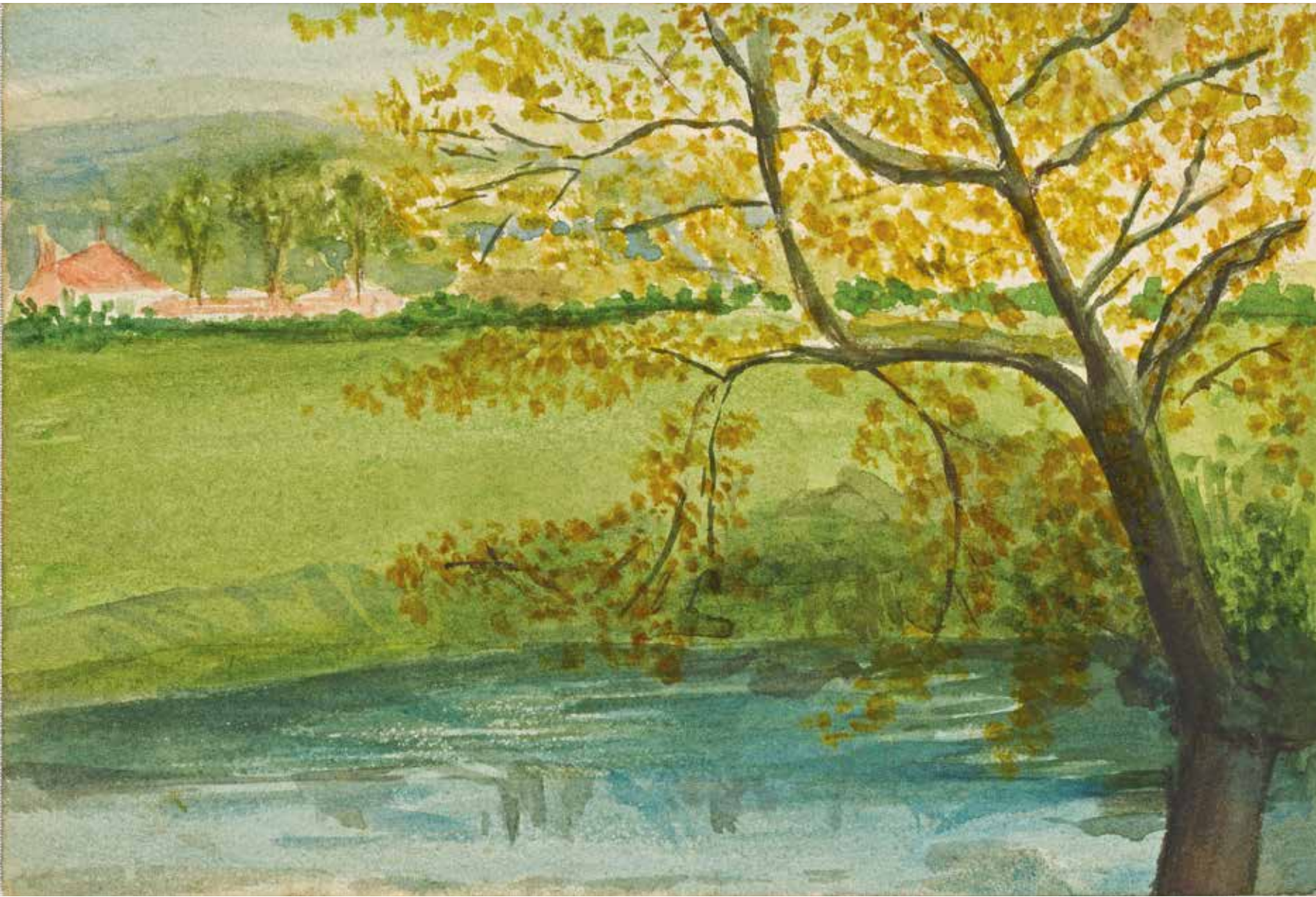
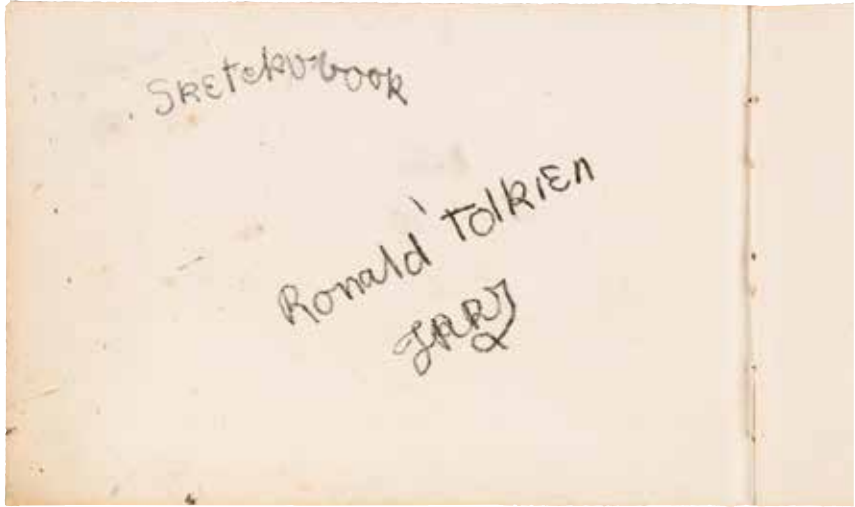
The sharp break from his early years in the hot, dusty climate of the high veldt, to the lush, green landscape of the English Midlands, made a strong impression on him.

After the searing heat and uncomfortable climate of South Africa, in Sarehole it seemed that he found his natural home: ‘If you’re normally troubled by heat and sand then to, just as the age of imagination is opening out, suddenly find yourself in a quiet Warwickshire village – I think it engenders a particular love of what you might call central Midland English countryside based on good water, stones and elm trees and small quiet rivers.’³

These were very happy years for Tolkien. Looking back later in life he described Sarehole as ‘a kind of lost paradise’.⁴ It was a time and place he would later conjure up in his descriptions of the Shire.

- 1 Carpenter 1977, p. 24.
- 2 Ezard 1966.
- 3 Tolkien 1964.
- 4 Ezard 1966.

Fig. 51 Inscription at the front of Tolkien’s sketchbook. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 84)



Postcard: ‘Sarehole Mill: view across the mill yard c.1890. Mr George Andrew and his son at work’

[c.1890]
Published by Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery
169 × 120 mm
Tolkien family papers

When Tolkien lived in Sarehole the mill was operated by Mr Andrew the miller and his son (both seen in the postcard opposite). The Tolkien boys called them the ‘White Ogre’ and the ‘Black Ogre’ and they were ‘characters of wonder and terror’ to the two small boys.¹

After four years in Sarehole the family returned to Birmingham, where they lived in a succession of uninspiring houses, hemmed in by the railway and by tramlines with a sad lack of greenery and open spaces. The contrast burnished his memories of that time: ‘I loved [Sarehole] with an intensity of love that was a kind of nostalgia reversed. There was an old mill that really did grind corn, with two millers who went straight into *Farmer Giles of Ham*, a great big pond with swans on it, a sandpit, a wonderful dell with flowers, a few old-fashioned village houses and, further away, a stream with another mill.’²

He would draw on these memories to create the Shire and the hobbits who lived there, recalling how he ‘took the idea of the hobbits from the village people and

children’.³ After *The Lord of the Rings* was published he wrote a letter to his publishers declaring, ‘The Shire ... is in fact more or less a Warwickshire village of about the period of the Diamond Jubilee.’⁴ Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee was celebrated with street parties, fireworks and bunting in June 1897, the year after Tolkien and his family moved to Sarehole.

His watercolour illustration of Hobbiton in the Shire, drawn for *The Hobbit* in 1937, shows a well-tended landscape of fields, bordered by hedgerows and trees, with a large watermill in the foreground (see no. 136). This is not Sarehole but an idealized view of the English countryside, which Tolkien had loved since his early childhood in the Warwickshire village.

1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 390.
2 Ezard 1966.
3 Ezard 1966.
4 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 230.



Fig. 52 Ronald and Hilary aged seven and five years old, 1899. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 7)



‘What is Home Without A Mother {Or A Wife}’

[April–June] 1904
Black ink, pencil
115 × 152 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 15
Literature: Oxford 1992; Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 86, fol. 5

Mabel Tolkien converted to Catholicism in 1900 and in the same year she moved back to Birmingham, where the family could be closer to a Catholic church and to King Edward VI School, where Tolkien was a pupil. Both Mabel’s family, the Suffields, and her Tolkien in-laws were strongly opposed to her religious conversion. Her sister’s husband, Walter Incedon, a wealthy business man, immediately cut off the financial support he had been giving to her, leaving the family in reduced circumstances. Fortunately, Tolkien’s school fees (£12 a year) were paid by his father’s younger brother, Lawrence Tolkien. This was a significant amount for his uncle, who was an unmarried man aged twenty-seven.

Nevertheless, Mabel was unshaken in her new-found faith and soon her sons also began to receive instruction in the faith, although both had been baptized in the Anglican Cathedral in Bloemfontein. They moved to a house close to the Oratory in Birmingham, a Catholic church which suited Mabel’s tastes and where she found supportive priests, including Father Francis Morgan.

In 1904, when Tolkien was twelve years old, his mother was diagnosed with diabetes – at the time, a very serious and untreatable condition. She was hospitalized for a while as medical staff sought to treat the symptoms. Tolkien was sent to stay in Brighton with his ‘uncle’ Edwin Neave, whilst his brother Hilary stayed with his Suffield grandparents and Aunt Jane in Birmingham. Edwin Neave was engaged to, and later married, Mabel’s younger sister, Jane. He was something of a character, with red hair, a huge moustache and a strong Manchester accent, who entertained his nephew with banjo renditions of popular musical hall songs.

Tolkien drew a series of pictures of his new life and sent them to his mother in the New General Hospital, Birmingham. One drawing shows the two ‘men’ sitting by the fire mending clothes and has the poignant title, ‘What is Home Without A Mother {Or A Wife}’. Another entitled ‘For Men Must Work’, shows Edwin and Ronald walking to the Guardian Office (the insurance company where Edwin worked), wearing regulation bowler hats (see Fig. 53).





Fig. 53 'For Men Must Work', 1904. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 38)

Photograph of J.R.R. and Hilary A.R. Tolkien

May 1905
 103 × 103 mm
 Studio of Harold Baker, 17 Cannon Street, Birmingham
 Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 17
 Literature: Carpenter 1977; Oxford 1992
 MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 9r
 (shown overleaf)

After a stay of two months Mabel Tolkien recovered sufficiently to leave hospital. She took rooms in a cottage in the village of Rednal, outside Birmingham, where she could continue her recuperation. It was close to the country estate of Cardinal Newman, another Catholic convert and the founder of the Birmingham Oratory and the Oxford Movement, whose estate was used as a retreat by the priests from the Oratory. Her sons joined her in Rednal. Although they had only two rooms to live in and they all slept in the same room, the boys were free to roam over the large estate, were able to attend mass at the retreat house and could see more of Father Francis Morgan (see Fig. 54). He was often to be found 'smoking a large cherrywood pipe on the ivy-grown verandah', and they took his dog 'Lord Roberts' with them as they roamed the estate.¹

The boys understood little of their mother's illness and her collapse in November 1904 seemed to them both 'terrifying and sudden'.² She died on 9 November aged thirty-four, leaving her sons as orphans. Tolkien was twelve and Hilary was ten. Fearing that her family would not bring the boys up in the Roman Catholic faith, she appointed Father Francis as their guardian. This photograph of the two boys was taken six months after her death. Father Francis had it framed and it hung in his room for many years until he died in 1935. Tolkien thought of him more as his 'second father' than his guardian, and he was in fact almost exactly the same age as his real father would have been.³ Unable to live with him at the Oratory, the boys were accommodated 'in lodgings first with an aunt (by marriage) and later with strangers'.⁴ He described it as a rootless and homeless

life: 'I was an orphan child moving from one orphan's lodgings to another in depressing suburbs.'⁵ Fortunately, Father Francis ensured that their lodgings were always close to the Oratory so that he could see them every day. He supplemented the expense of their upbringing with his own money, ensuring that they received a first-class education at King Edward VI School, and every summer he took them on holiday, sometimes to the seaside resort of Lyme Regis. Somehow they adapted to their new life and even flourished, with 'Fr. Francis' love and care and humour'.⁶

- 1 Tolkien family papers, biographical notes on Rednal.
- 2 Tolkien family papers, biographical notes on Rednal.
- 3 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 416.
- 4 Tolkien family papers, biographical notes.
- 5 Ezard 1966.
- 6 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 417.



HAROLD BAKER
17 CANNON STREET
BIRMINGHAM



Fig. 54 Father Francis Morgan, [nd]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien fotogr. 31, fol. 31)



CHAPTER THREE

STUDENT DAYS

‘the beginning of the legendarium’

Despite his difficult family circumstances, Tolkien made a great success of his time at King Edward VI School, gaining a scholarship to study Classics at Exeter College, Oxford, in 1911. ‘Exeter was not a reading college ... the vast majority of its members were only pass men, who lived healthy outdoor lives, especially on the river, without any great consumption of midnight oil, at least for studious purposes,’ wrote Arthur Brodribb, who graduated in 1873.¹ Undergraduates certainly had plenty of time for extra-curricular clubs, sports and social activities. Their lives revolved around the college where they were taught and where they also lived, ate, drank and socialized. Exeter College was a small community – fifty-five men matriculated with Tolkien in 1911 – and the students all knew each other, regardless of age or subject studied. Loyalty to the college was paramount and Tolkien was still cheering for the Exeter College rowing team when he was a Professor at Pembroke College.

During his first two years, Tolkien’s interests in the languages and legends of north-western Europe developed to such an extent that he changed his degree course, switching from Classics to English in his third year, so that he could study the early English language, literature and comparative philology. He was now able to legitimately study Norse and Germanic mythology, and privately he continued to explore the Finnish language and legends which fascinated him. All this material influenced his own legendarium and the invented languages that he was building at the time. In fact it was his attempt

in 1914 to rewrite the story of Kullervo from the Finnish *Kalevala* which was ‘the beginning of the legendarium’.² The earliest works relating to *The Silmarillion* appear during these years, when he wrote poems and painted scenes from his legendarium, including ‘The Shores of Faery’ and ‘Tanaqui’, both of which portray Kôr, the city of the Elves in Valinor (see no. 65 and Fig. 80).

Tolkien’s final year was radically different from the preceding three. In August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. Like many others he thought that the war would soon be over and reassured his fiancée Edith, ‘Germany it is quite possible will get badly beaten before long and the war may end soon.’³ He did not consider enlisting. As a student with meagre finances and no parental support, he needed to complete his degree, so that he could pursue an academic career and provide financial security for himself and Edith. He returned to Oxford in October and was aghast to find his college empty, the Examination Schools converted into a military hospital and wounded soldiers filling the streets. A day later he enlisted in the Officer Training Corps, under a scheme allowing him to complete his final year of studies whilst simultaneously undertaking military training. He was provided with a uniform and was committed to spending half his time on ‘drill, field-days and lectures’.⁴ It showed determination and strength of character to follow this particular course of action at a time when ‘chaps joined up, or were scorned publicly.’⁵

¹ Maddicott 1981.

² Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 214

³ Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith Bratt, 11 August 1914.

⁴ Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith Bratt, 11 October 1914.

⁵ Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 53.

Photograph of Tolkien aged nineteen

January 1911
145 × 95 mm
Studio of H.J. Whitlock & Sons Ltd., Birmingham
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 32
Literature: Carpenter 1977; Oxford 1992
MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 16

A studio photograph of Tolkien taken in Birmingham in 1911 shows him as a young man on the brink of adulthood. He had just turned nineteen and was in his final year at King Edward VI School. He enjoyed his time at school, excelling in languages and debates, and performing with gusto on the rugby pitch or in theatrical productions. He developed a number of close friendships and was at the centre of a group who called themselves the Tea Club and Barrovian Society or T.C.B.S. for short. This group included the son of the headmaster, Rob (R.Q.) Gilson and Chris (C.L.) Wiseman, the son of a Methodist minister. A younger pupil, Geoffrey (G.B.) Smith, became a more central member of the group after he had followed Tolkien to Oxford in 1913, studying history at Corpus Christi College. The T.C.B.S. derived its name from the group's habit of brewing tea in the school library. This was strictly against the school's rules and eventually the 'tea club' moved their meetings to the café in a local department store, Barrows Stores. In the school magazine for 1911 the group added the mysterious letters, 'T.C., B.S.' to their names, causing a minor stir and adding to their mystique.

Tolkien was an able student and progressed easily through his classes. Initially he studied arithmetic and mathematics, English, scripture, history, geography, botany, French,

Latin, drawing and PE. Later he moved up to the Classical side of the school, taking Latin, Greek, Roman and Greek history, English, German and mathematics. Outside of lessons he developed an 'interest in Germanic Philology (& Philol. in general)', learning Old and Middle English, Old Norse, Gothic and even the invented language, Esperanto.¹ On his second attempt he won a scholarship

to study Classics at Exeter College, Oxford. He may have felt some trepidation as he left school to embark on his university career but life in his all-male college at Oxford was to continue in much the same vein as life at his boys' grammar school.

1 Bodleian MS. Tolkien E 16/8.

Fig. 55 Tolkien in the school rugby team, 1909–10. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 12)



Programme design for Exeter College Smoker

19 November 1913
Black ink on 7board
260 x 190 mm
Literature: Oxford 1992; Garth 2014
Tolkien family papers

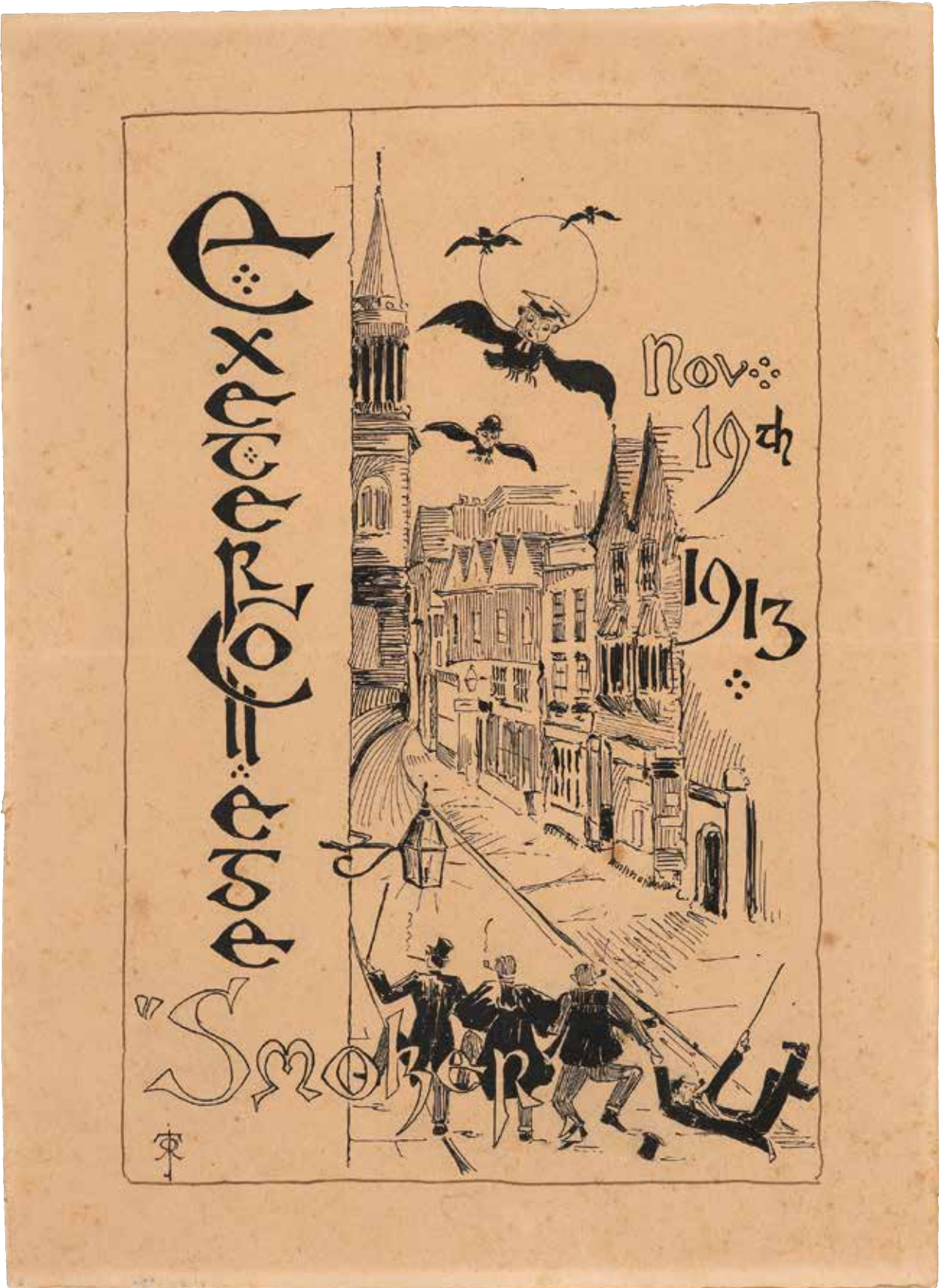
Tolkien threw himself into college life. He was a sociable undergraduate, participating in sporting events, literary clubs and debates, as well as more self-indulgent activities, such as drinking, smoking and fine dining. He played rugby and tennis and was an enthusiastic supporter of the college's rowing team. He participated in Exeter's debating society, the Stapledon, as well as the more philosophical Dialectical Society and the Essay Club where original compositions were read aloud and discussed. He even founded his own club, The Apolausticks ('those devoted to self-indulgence'), where he and a small number of friends discussed literary works and treated themselves to expensive dinners (see Fig. 57).

His artistic talents and sense of humour are apparent in his design for a programme cover for the 'Exeter College Smoker', a college concert. The programme listed various musical pieces performed by students, including songs, a piano recital, banjo solos and orchestral pieces. The second half comprised a selection of dances, and this was presumably one of the few occasions on which women (suitably chaperoned) were allowed into the college. In Tolkien's design carousing students can be seen staggering down Turl Street, away from Exeter College. Overhead the proctor and his 'bulldogs',

the bowler-hatted University Police, are depicted as owls, keeping a watchful eye on the students. The street is still recognizable today, looking south down Turl Street from the corner of Brasenose Lane.

Tolkien lived in college for his first three years as an undergraduate. His rooms were in the Tudor-style 'Swiss Cottage' building, at the opposite end of Turl Street, now demolished and replaced by Blackwell's Art Shop.

Fig. 56 Exeter College, Turl Street, in 1914. (Published with the permission of the Rector and Fellows of Exeter College, Oxford)



BERNARD WILLIAM HENDERSON (1871–1929) AND E.A. BARBER (1888–1965)

Sub-rector’s report card

Exeter College, Oxford, 1911–73
75 × 124 mm
Literature: Garth 2014
Loan: Exeter College, Oxford

The Sub-rector of the college kept a report card on each student. Tolkien’s card notes a poor performance during his first year. The note, ‘V lazy & warned re exhibn.’ indicates that he was under threat of losing his scholarship (an ‘exhibition’) of £60 a year, without which he would not have been able to afford to study at Oxford. Like many other undergraduates, though, Tolkien was enjoying the relative freedom afforded by college life. He had his own rooms and was provided with a scout (a college servant) to clean them, make up a fire and bring him breakfast and lunch if required. He was in charge of his own finances for the first time and could purchase books, clothes and furnishings for his room, and of course food, drink and tobacco. Undergraduates were not permitted to visit public houses in the town, so most evenings were spent either in each other’s rooms, drinking, smoking and talking, or attending college clubs and societies. Far from being restrictive, this represented a great deal of freedom for Tolkien and was in stark contrast to his former life as an orphan living in lodgings, where he had been forbidden to have friends in his room or even to have them call for him at his lodging house.

His status as a Roman Catholic, ‘R.C.’, is recorded on the report card. Oxford University had been an Anglican institution

since the English Reformation in the sixteenth century. Formerly, one of its primary functions had been to educate Anglican clergy, and undergraduates were still expected to attend services in the college chapel. Catholic students were very much in the minority. In fact, until 1895 they had been forbidden by their own bishops from attending Anglican universities such as Oxford and Cambridge due to the ‘intellectual and spiritual dangers’ these institutions posed.¹ This prohibition was

lifted only sixteen years before Tolkien arrived at Oxford. He was, however, better prepared than most for a non-Catholic world. The school he had attended in Birmingham was Anglican, and he was used to the separation of his spiritual life from his scholastic life. Rather than attend services in college, he walked, or ran (as he was frequently late), up the wide street of St Giles to the beautiful Catholic church of St Aloysius on Woodstock Road.

1 ‘Catholics at Oxford and Cambridge’, *The Tablet*, 15 August 1896, p. 38.

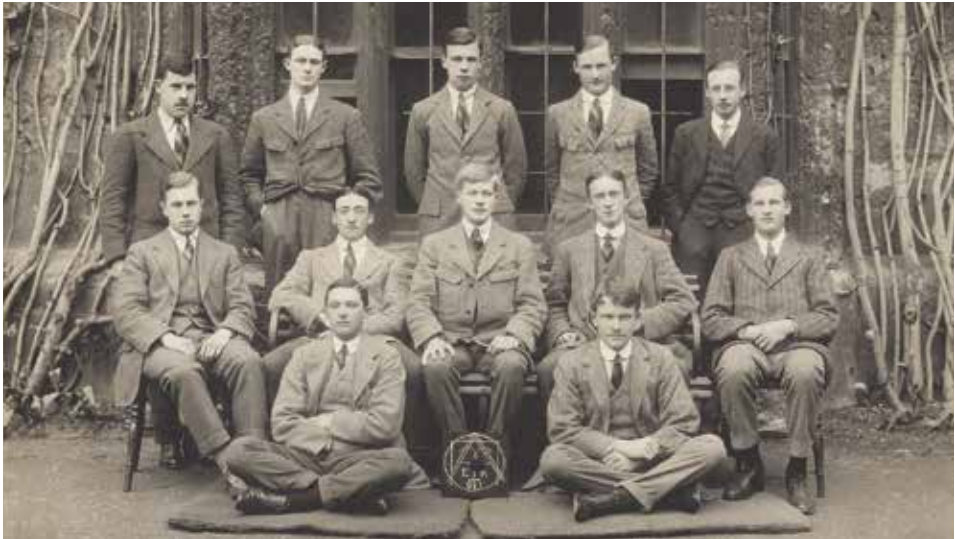
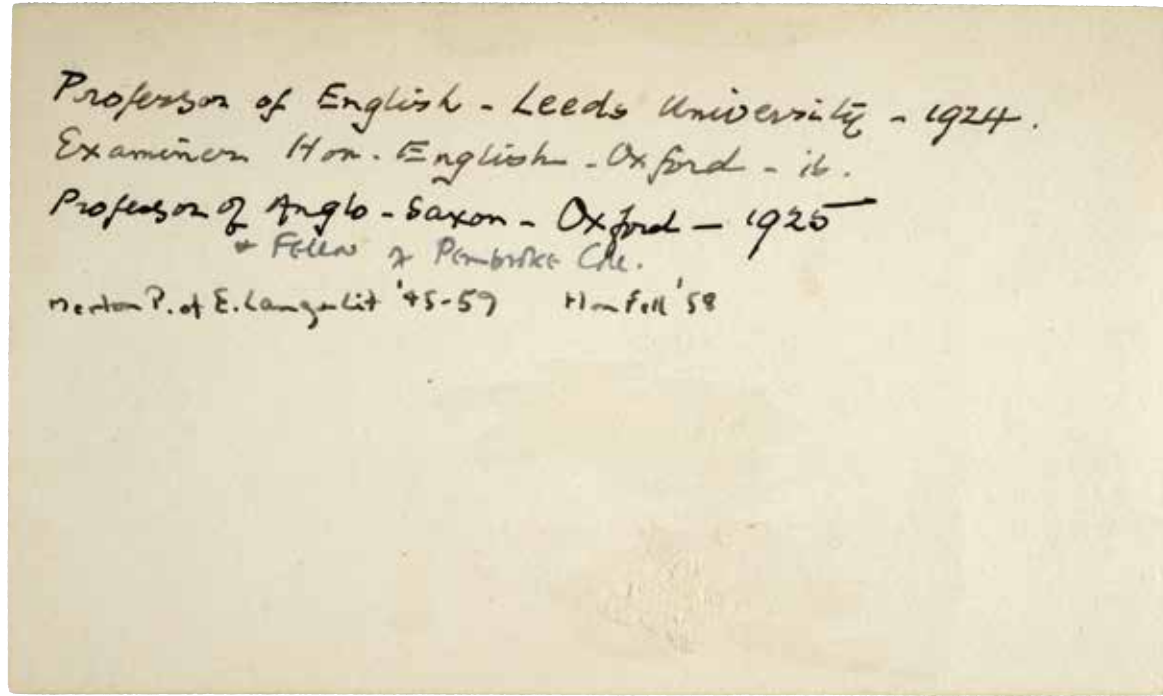
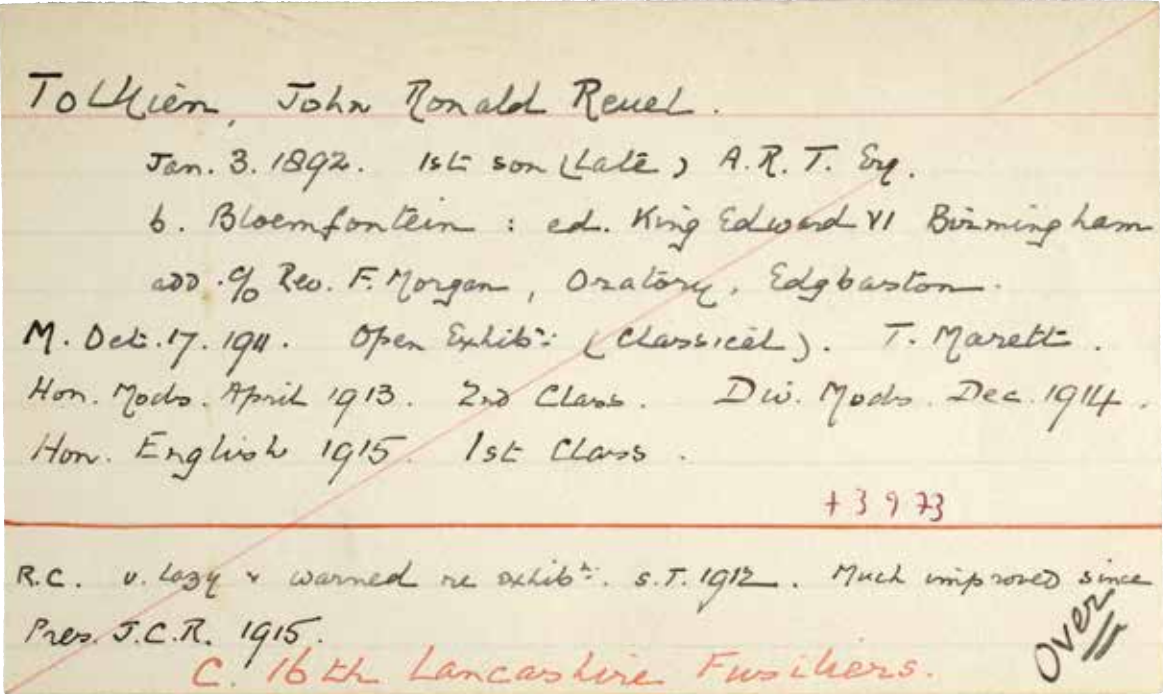


Fig. 57 The Apolausticks, the group founded by Tolkien at Exeter College, May 1912 (Tolkien’s friend Colin Cullis seated centre, with Tolkien on his left). (Bodleian MS. Tolkien photogr. 9, fols. 14–16)



Photograph of Edith Bratt (1889–1971)

1906
252 × 176 mm
The Victoria Studio, 201 Broad Street, Birmingham
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 24
Literature: Carpenter 1977; Oxford 1992
MS. Tolkien photogr. 16, fol. 1

Whilst at school in Birmingham, Tolkien had met and fallen in love with Edith Bratt, a young woman who lived in the same lodging house. Edith gave him this photograph as a keepsake at the beginning of their romance in 1909. It was taken when she was seventeen years old.

She was several years older than Tolkien and had already finished school when they met. Like him she was an orphan living on a small independent income with the aid of a guardian. Their similar circumstances drew them together, and they found common cause in the frustrations of lodging house life. They colluded with a household servant, Annie Gollins, to smuggle extra food rations out of the kitchen and shared their contraband at their bedroom windows (entering each other's rooms would have been unthinkable). Long evening talks at the window gave way to cycle rides in the country and visits to tea shops. When his guardian, Father Francis, found out that he was seeing a young woman, his reaction was rather draconian. He insisted that Tolkien and his brother move to new lodgings immediately and, fearing that a romantic relationship would distract him from his studies, he forbade Tolkien from seeing Edith until he was of full age (a period of almost three years). Tolkien was devastated, but out of love for his guardian and a strong sense of duty he

acknowledged, 'I owe all to F[ather] F[rancis] and so must obey.'

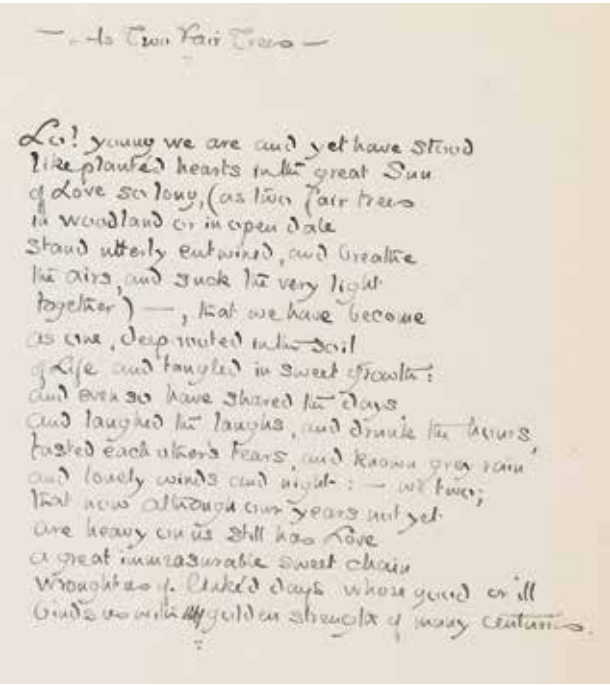
Edith's reputation was also at stake. She left her lodgings in Birmingham and moved to Cheltenham to live with a wealthy, elderly couple who were family friends. There she made a new life: practising the piano, playing the organ in the Anglican Church and renewing friendships with old school friends. She heard nothing from Tolkien for almost three years. At midnight on the eve of his twenty-first birthday he wrote her a long letter, restating his love for her. Edith's reply was unexpected: she was engaged to be married to George Field, the brother of her school friend Molly. Undaunted, Tolkien went to Cheltenham as soon as possible to declare his love in person and before the day was over they were engaged. They married three years later in 1916, and their union lasted for fifty-five years until her death in 1971.

'With her long dark hair, fair face and starry eyes', Edith became the inspiration for the Elven princess Lúthien Tinúviel, a central character in Tolkien's

legendarium, 'The Silmarillion'.² After her death, Tolkien wrote, 'She was (and knew she was) my Lúthien.'³

- 1 Carpenter 1977, p. 43.
- 2 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 417.
- 3 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 420.

Fig. 58 'As Two Fair Trees', a poem expressing his love for Edith, January 1915. (Courtesy of the Tolkien family)



Account book

1913–15
Exercise book, blank pages, red watered cloth on stiffened paper covers, i + 15 leaves
226 × 182 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 43 [different opening]
Literature: Oxford 1992
Tolkien family papers

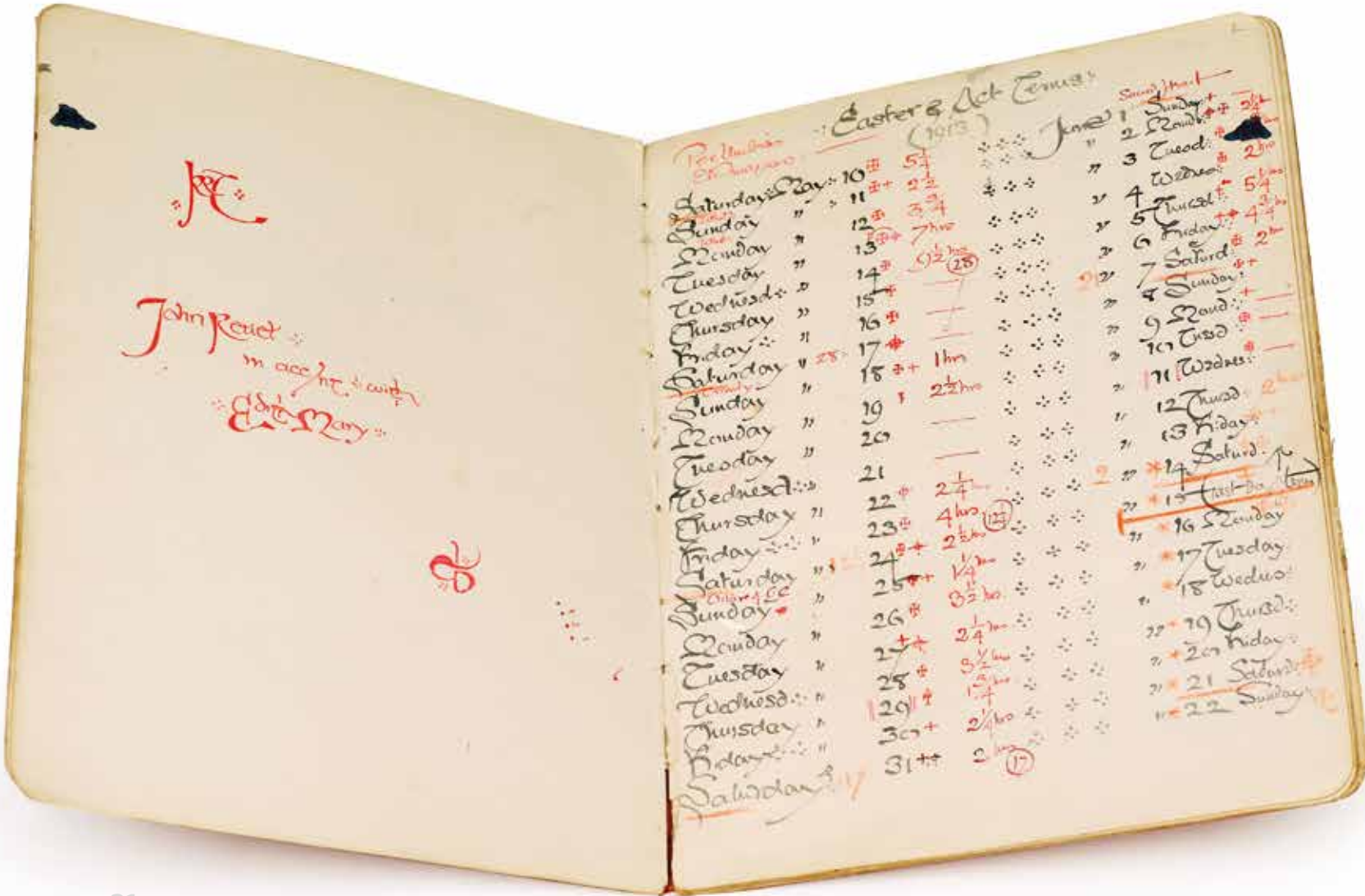
Tolkien was in his second year at Oxford when he renewed his relationship with Edith. From that moment on a new impetus was added to his academic studies, and he determined to put all ‘lawless and bachelorlike things’ behind him.¹ Though they aimed to marry as soon as possible, this was impossible until he was able to provide financially for his wife and the family they hoped for. ‘I realize how hazy are my prospects, and how very small my talents’, he wrote to her during his third year at university.² Nevertheless he redoubled his academic efforts in the hope of achieving a good degree and pursuing an academic career. He devised an ingenious plan for improving his work rate: ‘I am going to send you in a “bill” at the end of each week for amount of work done to be paid for at the rate of a kiss an hour as soon as I see you again.’³ As well as a ‘bill’, he also kept an account book which recorded the number of hours worked each day and the number of kisses she owed him.

In the resolutely male world of Oxford University, Tolkien had little interaction

with women. The students let off steam by playing sport and indulging in pranks. Now he was able to share his hopes, dreams and fears with the woman he was to marry. His letters to Edith are full of love and longing: ‘I am waiting – for something; for a footstep I know, a figure I shall recognise even in the twilight and it never comes – because I am waiting for you.’⁴

Central to their love affair was their status as orphans. They had both experienced grief and loss in their early years and this made their relationship even more precious. Two days before their formal betrothal in church, Tolkien wrote to her, ‘the next few years will bring us joy and content and love and sweetness such as could not be if we hadn’t first been two homeless children and had found one another after long waiting.’⁵

1 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 17 January 1913.
2 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 28 February 1914.
3 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 15 January 1913.
4 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 26 January 1913.
5 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 14 January 1914.



Photograph of Tolkien and friends

[from left to right: G.C.N. Mackarness, Charles Cartwright, J.R.R. Tolkien, Anthony Shakespeare and B.J. Tolhurst]
Exeter College, Oxford, May 1914
81 × 104 mm
Literature: Carpenter 1977
MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 32

Although he committed to working harder and improving his grades, there were many distractions at Oxford. A procession of friends called at his rooms, persuading him to go punting, to take a walk along the river or to cycle out to White Horse Hill on the Oxfordshire/Berkshire border. In the evenings he would happily sit by the fire into the small hours, talking with friends or reading an engrossing book. This informal photograph captures Tolkien (seen at the window, smoking a pipe) and his friends relaxing in college in May 1914. Their air of sophistication and loucheness clearly indicates that they are third- and fourth-year students.

In a letter to Edith, written shortly after their reunion, he confessed, ‘I am so dreadfully tempted to sloth.’¹ Actually he was never slothful but his conscience was so well-developed that he was inclined to chastise himself for any hours not spent on his studies, or for any small lapse in religious observance, such as not getting up early to go to confession. He had many intellectual interests outside his formal studies. At school he had begun reconstructing Gothic, an extinct Germanic language, found in fragmentary texts dating from the fifth and sixth centuries. At university, when he should have been studying Latin and Greek, he began teaching himself Finnish. This

was entirely unlike any other language that Tolkien had encountered. It belongs to the Uralic family of languages, which includes Estonian and Hungarian. He described the impact of reading a grammar of the Finnish language as, ‘like discovering a complete wine-cellar filled with bottles of an amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before. It quite intoxicated me.’²

Tolkien derived an aesthetic pleasure from language in the same way that other people enjoy listening to a Beethoven sonata or gazing at Monet’s waterlilies. Since

childhood he had invented his own languages for pleasure: from picture code letters to invented alphabets to complete language structures. Upon discovering Finnish his linguistic interests took an unexpected turn. He found the sound, shape and structure of Finnish so pleasurable that it strongly influenced his own linguistic inventions, including his nascent Elvish languages.

1 Tolkien family papers, letter, 24 January 1913.
2 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 214.

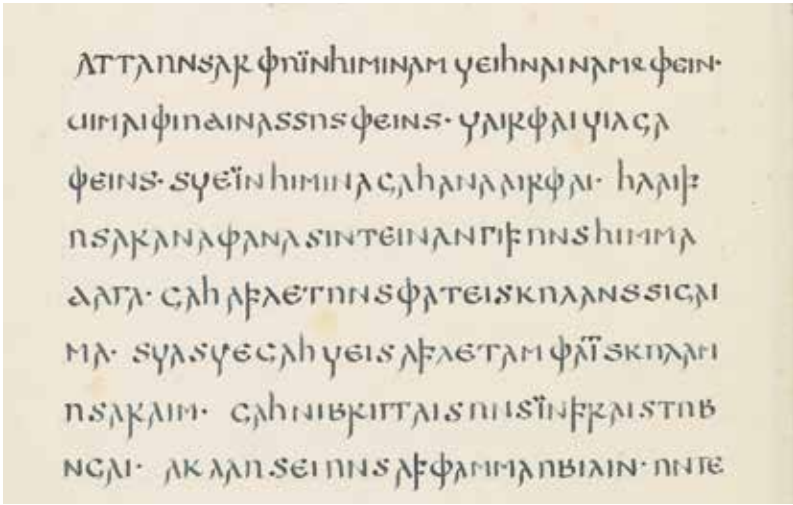


Fig. 59 Translation of ‘Our Father’ into Gothic, [c.1950]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien A 14/2, fol. 10r)



Letter to Edith Bratt

Oxford, 3 November 1913
Autograph
8 pages, 177 × 114 mm
Tolkien family papers

Every Oxford college had its own library, and for the first two years of his undergraduate studies Tolkien was content to use that at Exeter College, as well as his own personal collection of books, mostly acquired second-hand. It was not until the beginning of his third year that Tolkien went to register as a reader at the Bodleian Library, the university's main library. He had recently embarked on the English course and may have found himself in need of the Bodleian's more extensive resources. The English degree was relatively new at Oxford. The English Final Honour School had been established less than twenty years earlier, in 1894.

During Michaelmas term 1913, he wrote to his fiancée:

At 11 I put on my gown and braced myself for an ordeal I have long shelved: that is going to register myself and take the oath at the Bodleian Library as a reader. I was received better than I expected – they are very rude to some people – and then went on to the Radcliffe Camera [the Public Reading Room to the Bodleian] to register myself there. You have no idea what an awesome and splendid place this library of wonderful manuscripts and books without price is little one.

His letter refers to the oath spoken by all readers before they can be admitted as members, in which they swear not to remove, mark or damage any books nor to kindle fire and flame. The Bodleian was a reference library, not a lending library, and all books had to be consulted on the premises: even Charles I was refused permission to borrow a book in 1645 when he was based in Oxford during the Civil War. As a copyright library, the Bodleian has the right to acquire

a copy of every book published in England and Wales. Dating back to 1610, this is based on Sir Thomas Bodley's agreement with the Stationer's Company and the result is an ever-expanding and incredibly valuable collection. To reduce the risk of fire, no candles or other artificial lighting were used in the library when Tolkien was a student. Consequently, the reading rooms were only open in the hours of strong daylight, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the winter and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the summer.

Fig. 60 Sketch of the Radcliffe Camera (one reading room of the Bodleian Library), by Fred Richards from *Oxford: A Sketch-book*, 1913. (Bodleian G.A. Oxon 8° 880)



At 11 I put on my gown and braced myself for an ordeal I have long shelved: that is going to register myself and take the oath at the Bodleian Library as a reader. I was received better than I expected – they are very rude to some people – and then went on to the Radcliffe Camera [the Public Reading Room to the Bodleian] to register myself there. You have no idea what an awesome and splendid place this library of wonderful manuscripts and books without price is little one. The actual buildings too are immensely ancient too as well. I must take you to see it some time my darling.

Letter to Edith Bratt

59 St John Street, Oxford, 29 November 1914
Autograph
2 pages, 254 × 204 mm
Tolkien family papers

J.R.R. Tolkien, Second Lieutenant, 13th Lancashire Fusiliers

Edgbaston, Birmingham, 1916
223 × 96 mm
Studio of A. Clara Cooper
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 46
Literature: Carpenter 1977; Oxford 1992
MS. Tolkien photogr. 4, fol. 33

‘Our time apparently is not to be one of peace.’ The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 smashed the plans that Tolkien and Edith had made for their future. Tolkien returned to Oxford to complete his final year of studies but found the city and his college drastically changed. Many undergraduates had already joined the army, and the clubs and societies which were once the mainstay of college life now simply ceased to operate. Tolkien shared his dismay with Edith: ‘The gloom of this place is terrible: it is like being on a sinking ship ... everything I and my friends cared for or spent our time in running or establishing here has crashed to the ground.’² The previous term Tolkien had received special permission to spend his fourth year living in lodgings in St John Street with his friend Colin Cullis. This arrangement was now fortuitous as they did

not have to live in the echoing spaces of the half-empty college.

Tolkien was determined to complete his degree and secure his precarious future but, acknowledging the new reality, he also enrolled in the Officer Training Corps. This meant regular drills in the University Parks as well as war ‘games’ on Port Meadow, a large open space, north of the city centre. He described night-time manoeuvres in a letter to Edith: ‘We spent about an hour creeping and crouching in the squelch of Port meadow and then rushed the trenches under a feeble fire of blanks, joined hands and rolled sleepily home singing (at about 11pm).’³ The camaraderie of the student-soldiers holding hands and strolling home singing, after a mock-battle on the meadow, could hardly have been further from the grim reality of trench warfare that he would encounter in France.

It was a crucial year for his academic studies but fortunately he found the physical demands of military training energizing: ‘Drill is a godsend: that regular exercise 3 times a week in the morning before getting to books suits me wonderfully. I have been up a fortnight nearly and have not yet got a touch even of the real Oxford “sleepies”!’⁴ It was also a very productive year for him creatively. He painted several watercolours relating to his Elvish mythology, worked on Qenya (the Elvish language he was inventing) and wrote a number of poems, some of which were connected to the legends of the Elves.

1 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 13 October 1914.
2 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 13 October 1914.
3 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 29 November 1914.
4 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith, 22 October 1914.

Ps. How's hope day?
Miss the love of Jennie
I hope she is married.
-R-

59: St John Street
Oxford.

Sunday: Nov. 29: 1914. 8.30 pm.

My own dearest : I really must just write you another little letter; because I read your letter again last night before blowing out my candle, and it was a very dear one, and I felt that my last one was rather piggy. You found I was right then and that nothing more than increasing easy-goingness was at bottom of the silence, didn't you little one -: I mean about Auntie? As for Mr Francis he was very jolly quite content to sit with his breviary or paper while I worked & full of his usual kindly 'scandal' and rumours. As soon as ever I sealed your letter I rushed to bed in last night (pushing on the way): I was most realistic: in long rows of uniformed figures falling in in the narrow Oxford streets (by the Bodleian outside Hertford). Luckily for comfort it was a fresh night - but mild with just a breeze and a high brilliant moon that made all the stars pale - but I made the whole business too simple and quick of course from the point of view of instruction. We marched through North Oxford & Wolvercote (the inhabitants on the outskirts thought it was an invasion or a general mobilisation! - you even looks a lot. The other half were intrenched in the mud of Port Meadow waiting to be attacked). We spent about an hour creeping and crouching in the squelch of Port Meadow and then rushed the trenches under a feeble fire of blanks joined hands and rolled sleepily home singing (at about 11 pm). I had never been out on Port Meadow (a huge stretch of flat land on the east bank of the upper (northward) Thames about 3 x 1 miles in area) at that time of day before and so enjoyed it in spite of the mud. I was in bed reading your letter by 12: but was rather tired this morning. I got up at 7.40 and just reached Church in time, and went to Communion. I have spent a most arduous day at Divinity Study since: 10 - 1: 1.45 to just after 4; when I reluctantly, but of necessity had to swallow my last opportunity of performing my duty to Mr Vincent's mother and in the wilds (143!) of Baubury Road.



Geoffrey Bache Smith (1894–1916)

Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien

France, 3 February 1916
Autograph
4 pages, 173 × 111 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 53
Literature: Oxford 1992; Garth 2003
Tolkien family papers
(shown overleaf)

Tolkien was the last of his school friends to join up. His three closest friends from school, Rob Gilson, Chris Wiseman and Geoffrey Smith – who had formed the core of the T.C.B.S. – had already enlisted. The four friends had kept in touch at university, exchanging their views on the world and discussing how they could use their individual talents to bring some aesthetic beauty, purity of spirit and morality back into the world. For Tolkien the driving force behind these creative aspirations was religious, and more particularly Catholic. He wished more than anything ‘to make England Catholic’ again, and in doing so to reintroduce beauty, purity and love to his country.¹

Tolkien was particularly close to Geoffrey Smith, who was at Oxford with him and

matriculated at Corpus Christi College in 1912. He had joined the Lancashire Fusiliers hoping to be placed in the same battalion as Smith, but this never transpired. Nevertheless, he received practical advice from Smith on how to survive military life and they exchanged poems they had each written. Smith was an enthusiastic supporter of Tolkien’s work and urged his friend to ‘publish by all means. I am a wild and whole-hearted admirer.’²

Smith was already on active service in France whilst Tolkien was undergoing training in Staffordshire. Shortly before going out into No Man’s Land on a night patrol, he wrote a hasty note in pencil to Tolkien (shown overleaf). Only too well aware that he might not return, he ended the letter with the lines: ‘May God bless you

my dear John Ronald and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them, if such be my lot.’³

Ten months later Smith was dead, killed by wounds sustained by shellfire in France. Rob Gilson was already dead. He was killed leading his men into battle on the first day of the Somme in July 1916. Only Christopher Wiseman survived the war. Six years later Tolkien named his beloved third son, Christopher, after his sole surviving school friend.

1 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith Bratt, 12 February 1916.
2 Oxford 1992, p. 31.
3 Oxford 1992, p. 31.

But anyhow, it is alive,
because its matter is so
close to us all the time.)
May God bless you, my
dear John Ronald, and
may you say the things I
have tried to say long after
I am not there to say
them, if such be my lot.

Yours ever,
G.B.S.

Fig. 61 opposite Tolkien's friend G.B. Smith,
1915. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien photogr. 30, fol. 65)



Photograph of Exeter College freshmen

(Tolkien on the back row, second from left)
Fellows' Garden, Exeter College, Oxford, 1911
439 × 530 mm
Hills & Saunders, Oxford
MS. Tolkien photogr. 9, fol. 13r

The First World War cut a swathe through Oxford graduates and undergraduates. Most university-educated men entered the ranks as officers, and as such they were expected to lead their men into battle. Because they were at the forefront of the action, their losses were proportionally higher than those of the lower ranks. This photograph of Tolkien's freshman year at Exeter College shows the young men who matriculated with him in 1911. There are fifty-three men in the photograph; four are missing. Out of this year group forty-six men, including Tolkien, fought in the war, and twenty-four (almost half of the group) were killed.

By the time Tolkien took his finals in June 1915 the war had been underway for almost a year, and he had begun to hear of the deaths of classmates and college friends. Ernest Hall, who started at Exeter College at the same time as Tolkien and was a member of his club, the Apolausticks, was killed at Gallipoli in May 1915: 'The first of my real personal friends to go; but I know it will soon be a long list.'¹

Tolkien graduated with a first-class degree in June 1915 and 'bolted into the army' proper.² He was sent to Bedford for initial training, where he was billeted in a large suburban house with other officers. After this gentle start to army life he was assigned to his new regiment, the Lancashire Fusiliers, and spent the next year living in camp, in

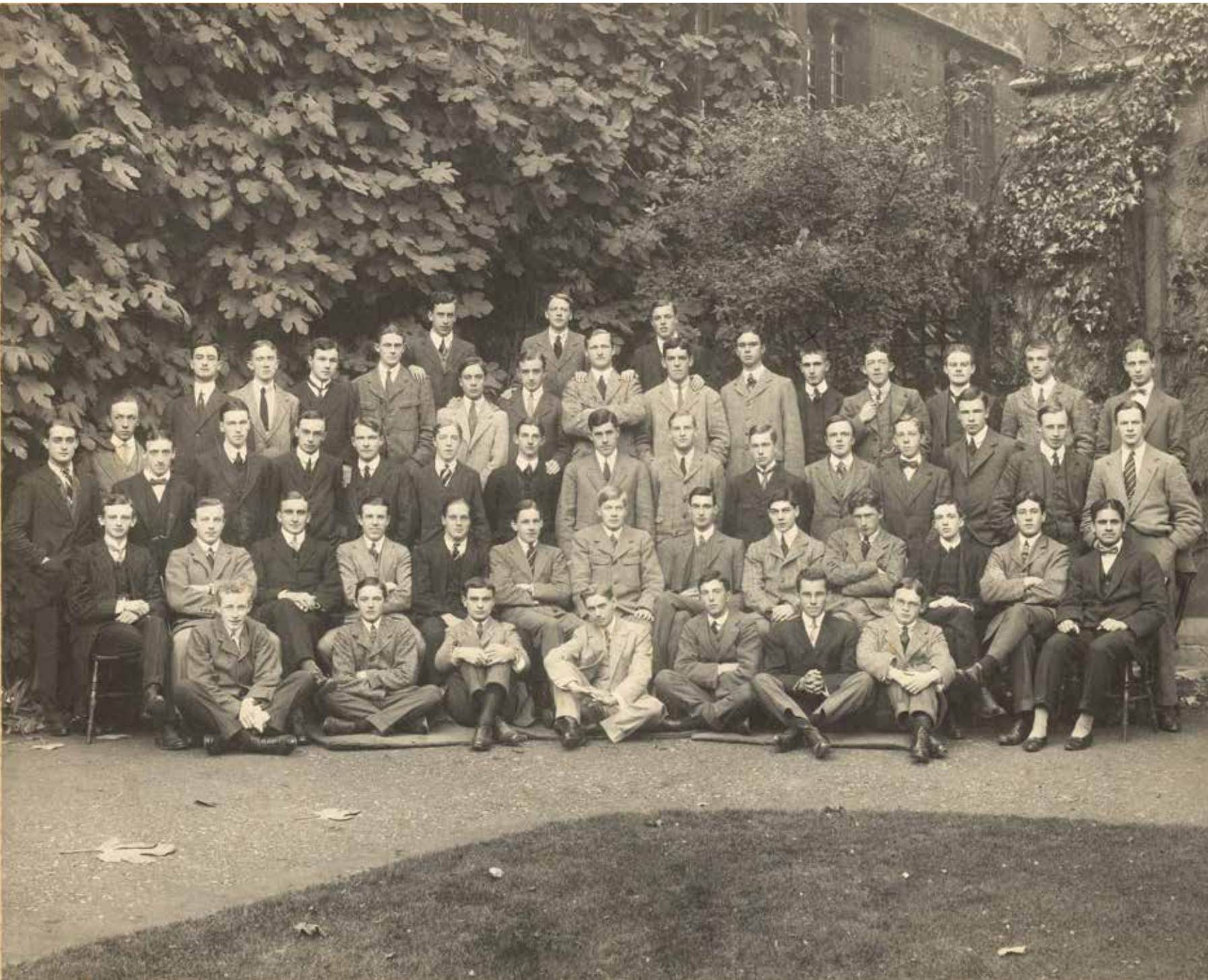
tents and huts, mostly on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire. Amongst endless drills, trench-digging and military lectures he found time to work on his Elvish mythology. Whilst he was in camp on Whittington Heath, Lichfield, he wrote a poem about the Elves (the 'Shadow Folk') who had been left behind in Middle-earth on their journey to Valinor. He shared his poetry with Edith who declared, "A Song of Aryador" is my favourite. How can you compose such dainty things while you're in that old camp?"³

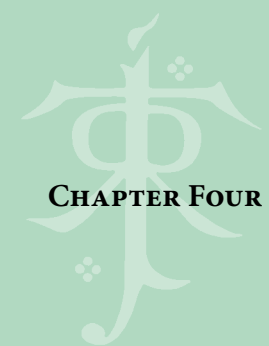
After a full year of military training, including specialist signalling training, he

was shipped to France for the start of the Somme offensive in July 1916. He and Edith had married the previous March, having decided to wait no longer. On his arrival at Bouzincourt in northern France, close to the front line, he wrote a poem for his wife, poignantly entitled, 'A dream of coming home'.

1 Tolkien family papers, letter to Edith Bratt, 1 June 1915.
2 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 53.
3 Tolkien family papers, letter from Edith Bratt, 14 September 1915.

Fig. 62 Exeter College freshmen, 1911, highlighting those who died in service in the First World War.





CHAPTER FOUR

SHEER INVENTION 'new patterns of old colours'

The range of Tolkien's artistic output is surprising: from vivid, abstract expressions of feelings created whilst he was a student, to art nouveau-inspired designs and black ink drawings in a Japanese style. He was unafraid to experiment in his artwork both with different styles and different mediums.

He was initially taught to draw by his mother and later received lessons in drawing at King Edward VI School. It was, however, only when he left behind his formal art education that he embarked on a period of discovery and began to try his hand at different styles. His undergraduate years at Oxford are marked by a period of experimentation, as he eschewed painting and drawing from real life in favour of abstract expressionism, which moved gradually towards visual depictions of the secondary world that he was creating – the world that would become Middle-earth.

Art and literature were closely connected for Tolkien. As he wrote his fictional works in verse and prose, he was moved to portray them visually as well. He created many wonderful illustrations to accompany the stories he produced for his children, particularly *Roverandom* and the letters from Father Christmas. But even the 'grim and tragic' tales from his Elven mythology, written purely for an adult audience, were illustrated with watercolour paintings such as the forest of 'Taur-na-Fúin' (see no. 74), and pencil drawings such as 'Nargothrond'.¹ Increasingly his work on 'The Silmarillion' became

all-encompassing and previously unconnected tales, poems and designs were drawn into its orbit, such as the abstract designs on newspaper which became Númenórean patterns. When asked about the sources for his work, his response was typically self-deprecating: 'sheer invention so far as one can "invent" anything, more than new patterns of old colours'.²

His early work, dating from his schooldays, shows a proficiency in pen and ink, pencil and watercolour. Later he also worked in coloured inks, ballpoint pen and coloured pencil. His painting in watercolours reached its apogee in *The Hobbit* illustrations, which were painted in 1937. After this date he worked more readily with coloured pencils as shown in his illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings*. After this work was published in the mid-1950s he turned to more abstract designs in ink and ballpoint pen, as seen in the newspaper designs and the Elvish heraldic devices.

His early work made as an adolescent, including scenes of Whitby harbour and St Andrews, shows that he turned to his sketchpad when he was not at school and this remained true throughout his academic career. Although he was able to write stories and poems, and even create his own languages, in the cracks of time which appeared in his term-time schedule, he did not turn to artwork unless he was on holiday, and had extended periods of free time in which to relax, draw and paint.

¹ Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 333.

² Tolkien family papers, note on letter from A. Shepherdson [1964].

‘The Book of Ishness’

1914–28
Beige cloth-covered boards, sticker on front
pastedown, ‘Sketchers’ Note Book ... Winsor & Newton,
Ltd., London, W.’
278 × 215 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 87

‘The Book of Ishness’ was a hardback sketchbook used by Tolkien for his imaginative paintings and drawings from January 1914 onwards. A separate brown envelope, annotated, ‘Earliest Ishnesses’, contained similar artwork dating from 1911. The ‘Ishnesses’ date from his time as an undergraduate at Oxford and were an attempt to express feelings or abstract ideas through art. The first pages in ‘The Book of Ishness’ contain experimental paintings such as ‘Eeriness’ (see no. 40), ‘Beyond’ (see Fig. 66) and ‘There ... & ... Here’ (see no. 41). By December 1914, these give way to paintings inspired by the Finnish legends, *The Kalevala*, and then to drawings inspired by his own mythology, which was just burgeoning in 1915, such as ‘Tanaqui’ (see Fig. 80) and ‘The Shores of Faery’ (see no. 65). Later paintings, dating mostly from 1927–8, depict scenes from ‘The Silmarillion’, although these are interspersed with views from real life such as the rather surreal view of pollarded trees entitled ‘London to Oxford through Berkshire’, perhaps glimpsed from the train as he travelled home.

Tolkien left no written description of his ‘Ishnesses’ or the concepts behind them, but he obviously discussed them with his cousins Mary and Marjorie Incledon, who were both

amateur artists. An intriguing reference in a letter to him from Mary, written in 1917, links the Ishnesses with John Ruskin, the art critic and social reformer: ‘I was fearfully interested in what you said to Marj[orie] about Ruskin & ishnesses I have been in a muddle about them for ages – any I did turned out disgusting, they go wrong if you take them seriously don’t you think.’¹ Ruskin espoused radical ideas in the late nineteenth century relating to imaginative art, and considered the imagination the highest faculty of an artist or poet.

Tolkien’s Incledon cousins were the daughters of his mother’s older sister May (Tolkien’s favourite aunt) and they had been friends since early childhood, participating in Tolkien’s early forays into invented languages with their use of ‘Animalic’. As a student Tolkien often spent part of his vacation at their ‘Cottage’ in Barnt Green in the Worcestershire countryside. Writing to him later in life, Marjorie poignantly recalled, ‘throughout the whole of my life, from the nursery days in Chantry Rd when we pressed our noses against the windows watching for the tram which would bring the happy moment of your arrival, up to my last visit to you at Poole – all the days we ever met were red letter days. No other days came up to them ever.’²

- 1 Tolkien family papers, letter postmarked 23 November 1917.
- 2 Tolkien family papers, notes from Marjorie Incledon, 5–6 January [1971].



Fig. 63 ‘London to Oxford through Berkshire’, [nd]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 25)

‘Undertenishness’

[1912]
Watercolour, black ink, coloured pencil, pencil
175 × 251 mm
Literature: Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 13r

This vibrant painting is one of Tolkien’s early ‘Ishnesses’. It appears to depict a giant butterfly, within which a central pathway appears, framed in the foreground by two bright red trees. It was probably painted in 1912; the painting on the verso is dated ‘Dec 1912’. Tolkien was then twenty years old and this painting may be an attempt to recapture the feeling of his happy childhood when he was ‘under ten’ years old, during his years in the rural village of Sarehole, and before his mother’s death.

It is one of only two ‘Ishnesses’ which actually incorporates the suffix ‘-ishness’ in the title, the other one being ‘Grownupishness’, which was perhaps a counterpart to ‘Undertenishness’. It was drawn in black ink and lacks any of the vivid colours with which Tolkien portrayed childhood. The tonsured male in the centre seems to radiate stress with exclamation marks and question marks being flung out and his hands portrayed in a blur of

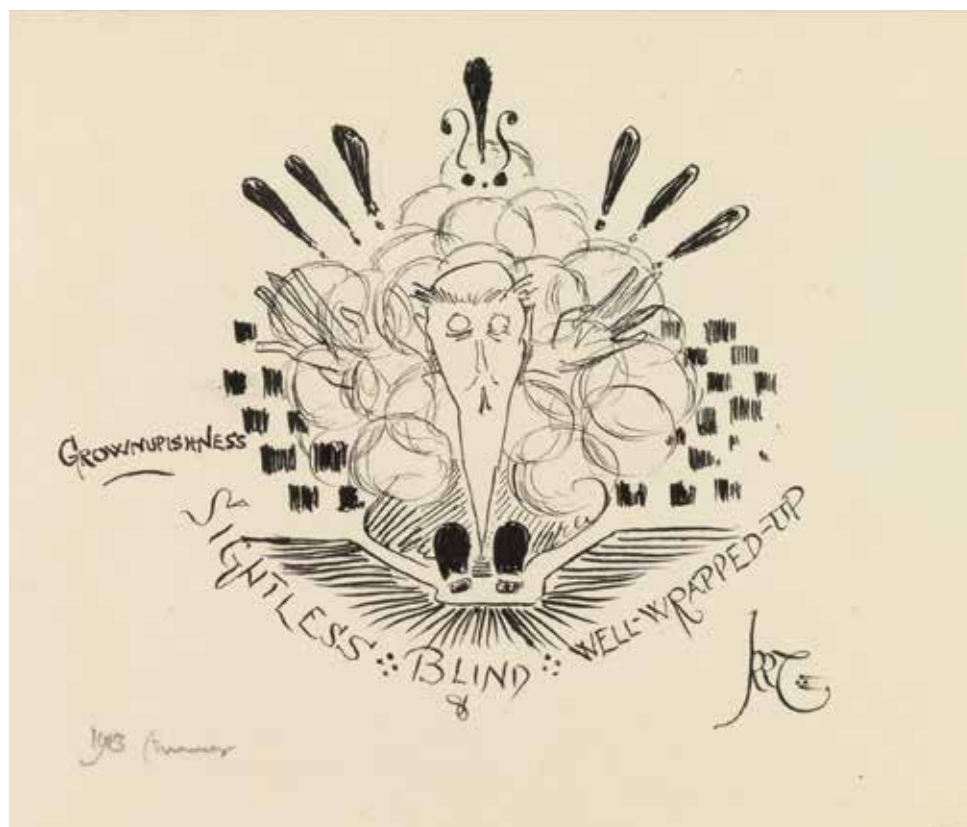


Fig. 64 ‘Grownupishness’, [c.1912]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 7)

movement. However, he is clearly blind and this is emphasized by the subtitle, ‘Sightless blind & well-wrapped-up’. The use of two words to highlight his lack of sight is a strong statement. Could this be a portrait of a typical male academic, hurling out statements and questions, completely

wrapped up in his own research and oblivious to his pupils or to the wider world?

The date ‘Summer 1913’ has been added later in pencil and may be an estimate; certainly drawings before and after this one, in the envelope marked ‘Earliest Ishnesses’, are more likely to date from 1912.



‘Eeriness’

[January 1914]
Watercolour, pencil
279 × 215 mm
Literature: Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 10

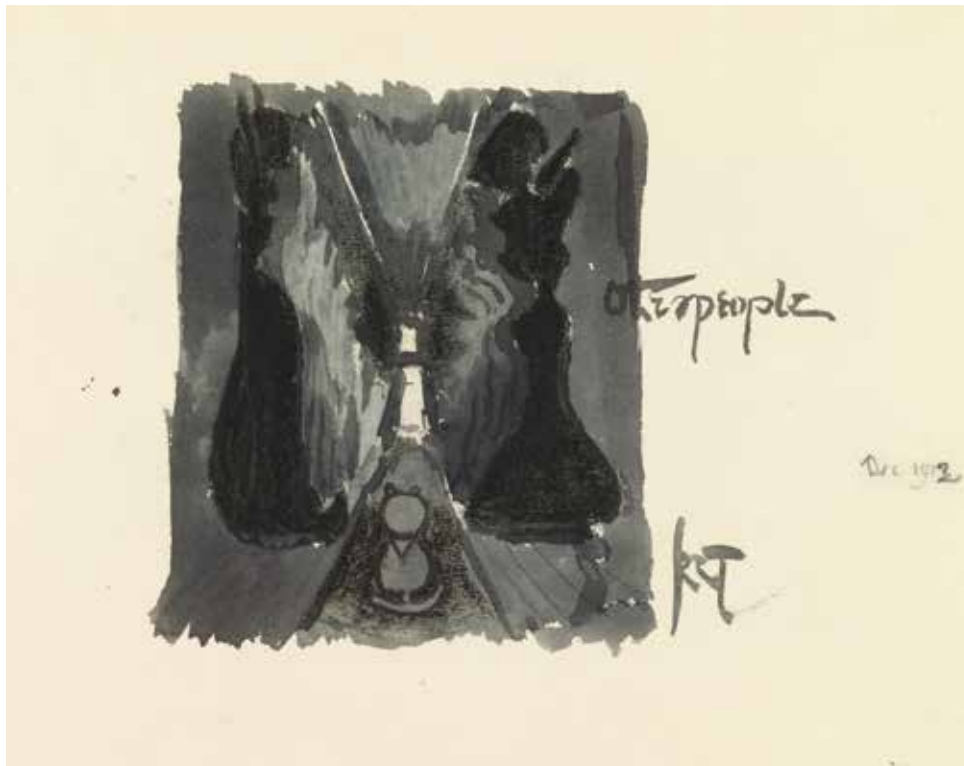


Fig. 65 ‘Otherpeople’, an early ‘Ishness’, December 1912. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 13v)

The Odinic figure in ‘Eeriness’ looks like an early iteration of the wizard Gandalf, who first appears in *The Hobbit* as ‘an old man with a staff ... a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots.’ This watercolour was made quickly over a sketchy pencil outline. Rapidity seems to be a feature of the ‘Ishnesses’ and may have been central to the artist’s intention to capture a true or honest impression of a particular feeling, without the

intrusion of the intellect. The grey, blue and purple colours indicate a night-time scene but the central figure is standing in a circle of light, as are the three purple trees on the hill, in the top left. It is not clear where this light is emanating from. An empty road leads away into the distance, emphasizing the figure’s loneliness, and an element of dread creeps in with the outstretched branches of the trees in the foreground, which seem to reach towards the figure with claw-like hands.

Tolkien painted this work in January 1914, possibly over Christmas, before returning to Oxford for the start of term. As usual, lacking a family home, he spent the holidays moving between different friends and relations. Nevertheless, it was an important time for him. His fiancée Edith was received into the Catholic Church and they were formally betrothed in church on 16 January 1914. This was a crucial step towards the married life and stability that they both desired.



‘There (when you don’t want to go from here)’
& ‘Here (in an exciting place)’

[1914]
Watercolour, pencil
279 × 216 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 13

These two related paintings from ‘The Book of Ishness’ probably date from January 1914, when Tolkien was in his third year as an undergraduate at Exeter College. ‘There (when you don’t want to go from here)’ depicts a distant mountain. Mountain ranges were often used in Tolkien’s work to portray great distances and were frequently a barrier that had to be crossed in order to continue the journey. ‘Here (in an exciting place)’ shows three trees close-up, with concentric circles swirling around the central tree, perhaps conveying the dizziness of excitement. The images and the feelings they attempt to depict may pertain to his relationship with Edith. They had resumed their courtship a year earlier, after an enforced separation of almost three years, and it had been mostly conducted by letter with only brief times spent together when chaperones could be arranged.

The preceding painting in the book is entitled ‘Beyond’, and is dated 12 January 1914. It uses the same colour palette as ‘There & Here’, and the paintings are also linked by their pencil annotations. ‘Beyond’ is annotated underneath ‘... in a dreadful mood!’ whilst ‘There & Here’ is annotated, ‘... same mood getting milder’. Tolkien was afflicted with depression at various times in his life but particularly during his childhood and adolescence, when the deaths of his

father and his mother left him without a family home. In later life he recalled suffering from ‘a terrible chaos which darkened my youth and early manhood.’¹

¹ Tolkien family papers, annotation on letter received December 1964.

Fig. 66 ‘Beyond’, 12 January 1914. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 12)



There (when you don't want to go from here)

There



Here (in an exciting place)

Same mood getting milder

‘Water Wind & Sand’

[1915]
Watercolour, white bodycolour, pencil
278 × 217 mm
Literature: Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 20

At the end of his third year as an undergraduate Tolkien went on holiday with Father Vincent Reade, one of the younger priests from the Birmingham Oratory. They travelled by train to the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall, the most southerly point on mainland Britain, where they stayed in a lodging house. Tolkien could look out to sea from his bedroom window and the August weather was fine and sunny. Most days were spent walking along the headland, or scrambling among the rocks and peering into rockpools, with plenty of time for reading and letter-writing. Tolkien described the tremendous scenery in a letter to Edith:

We walked over the moor-land on top of the cliffs to Kynance Cove. Nothing I could say in a dull old letter would describe it to you. The sun beats down on you and a huge Atlantic swell smashes and spouts over the snags and reefs. The sea has carved weird wind-holes and spouts into the cliffs which blow with trumpety noises or spout foam like a whale, and everywhere you see black and red rock and white foam against violet and transparent seagreen.¹

Tolkien’s description is not overstated for the rocks were ‘Lizard serpentine, a beautiful marble of a dark green colour, variegated with veins of purple, white, red, scarlet and various other hues.’² The seascape made a

deep impression on him. He made several paintings and drawings during the holiday, including one entitled ‘Cove near The Lizard Aug 12 1914’, which captures waves crashing over rocks.

After the holiday he sought to capture the scene in poetry, revising a poem that he had written in St Andrews on the east coast of Scotland in 1912. It was originally titled ‘The Grimness of the Sea’, but he now renamed it ‘The Tides’. By March 1915 the poem had been enlarged again and was named, ‘Sea-Chant of an Elder Day’. At the same time he painted ‘Water Wind & Sand’ in ‘The Book of Ishness’, where it is described as ‘Illustration to Sea-Song of an Elder Day’. This is clearly inspired by the coastal places that Tolkien had visited. Moving away from a realistic depiction, he uses surreal colours and adds a small figure trapped in the foreground, to give it a distinctly modern look. Within two years the poem had been incorporated into his Elvish mythology as ‘The Horns of Ulmo: Sea-Song of an Elder Day’, which describes how the God Ulmo enchanted Tuor with the sounds of the sea so that, ‘Thereafter did Tuor hunger ever after for the sea and had no peace in his heart did he dwell in pleasant inland places.’³ Many years later this same sea-enchancement was ascribed to Legolas in *The Lord of the Rings*.

- 1 Carpenter 1977, p. 70.
- 2 Kelly’s *Directory of Devon and Cornwall*, 1914, p. 176.
- 3 Tolkien 1986, p. 215.

Fig. 67 ‘Cove near The Lizard Aug 12 1914’. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 85, fol. 13r)



Fantasy landscape

[?1915]
Watercolour, black ink
148 × 173 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 26

The bold, psychedelic colours link this drawing to his early abstract works. It appears in ‘The Book of Ishness’, following on from other paintings dated 1915, which places it at the end of his undergraduate days. The surreal colours and explosive bursts of light link it most closely with the painting ‘Water Wind & Sand’ (see no. 42). The tunnel or man-made structure seems to protrude out of the page, pushing out over the bottom border of the picture: a technique used later in his portrayal of Glórun, where the dragon slithers out over the lower border of the painting (see no. 76).

The central pathway leading through a forest or towards mountains – such as the forest path in ‘Eeriness’ (see no. 40) or the entrance to the Elvenking’s halls – is a recurring image in Tolkien’s drawings. His visualization of landscapes is often clearly related to a journey, such as those on which both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are based. A poem, described as Bilbo’s walking song, first appears at the end of *The Hobbit*, but variants also occur at the beginning and end of *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo’s original version begins:

Roads go ever ever on,
Over rock and under tree,
By caves where never sun has shone,
By streams that never find the sea ...¹

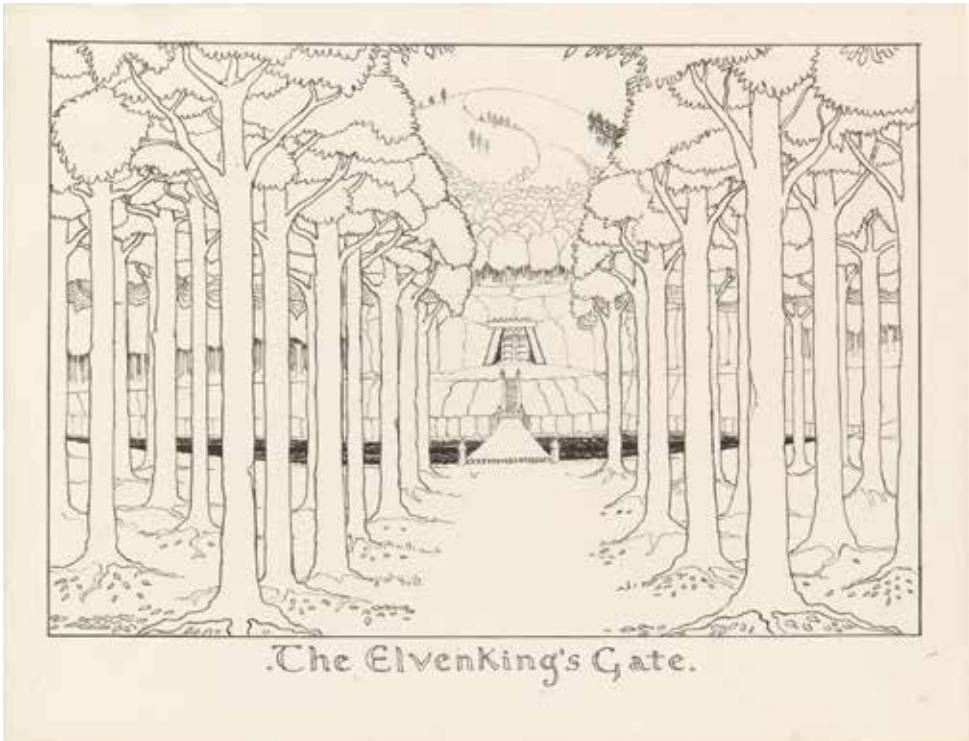


Fig. 68 ‘The Elvenking’s Gate’, [1936]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 19)

Tolkien was not particularly well travelled by modern standards. In his youth he went on a walking holiday in Switzerland and was sent to France twice, first as a tutor accompanying three young Mexican boys and later on active service during the First World War. Later in life, when all his children had grown up and left home, he visited his friend and colleague Simonne d’Ardenne in Belgium; travelled to Assisi and Venice in Italy with his daughter; attended a dinner in Holland to celebrate hobbits; and made a number of trips to Ireland as an external examiner. Mainly,

though, he took his holidays in England and Wales – mostly in seaside resorts – seemingly content to travel further via books or his own imagination. In the repetition of Bilbo’s walking song (and variants) he strives to convey a broader concept of travel – that paths and choices confront everyone on a daily basis: ‘As I tried to express it in Bilbo’s Walking Song, even an afternoon-to-evening walk may have important effects.’²

1 Tolkien 1937, ch. 19.
2 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 239.



‘The Land of Pohja’

27 December 1914
Watercolour, black ink
278 × 216 mm
Literature: Hammond and Scull 1995; Flieger 2015
MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fols. 17–18

Since his schooldays Tolkien had loved the Finnish legends told in the verse epic, *The Kalevala*. He was even ‘reprimanded’ for borrowing W.F. Kirby’s complete verse translation from the school library and taking it with him to university. The first book he borrowed from Exeter College library when he arrived in 1911 was a Finnish grammar, as he sought to learn enough to read the tales in their original language. He soon found that the language held just as great an attraction for him as the legends, and both were to have a strong influence on his own invented languages (notably Qenya, the forerunner of his Elvish language, Quenya), and the tales of the Elves.

At the start of his fourth and final year as an undergraduate, he began to adapt one of the verse tales from *The Kalevala* into a prose story. He confided in his fiancée Edith, ‘I am trying to turn one of the stories – which is really a very great story and most tragic – into a short story somewhat on the lines of [William] Morris’ romances with chunks of poetry in between.’ This was the dark, violent and tragic tale of Kullervo, a man of monstrous strength who was enslaved from infancy by his uncle, unwittingly slept with his sister (who subsequently killed herself), made war upon his uncle and all his followers and then killed himself with his own sword.

Tolkien never finished ‘The Story of Kullervo’ but he wrote and delivered an essay on *The Kalevala* to two student societies at Oxford (at Corpus Christi College in November 1914 and at Exeter College in February 1915). He also painted this illustration from *The Kalevala*, entitled ‘The Land of Pohja’, during the Christmas vacation in 1914. It is astonishing that he found time for these activities as during the autumn term

he was required to attend lectures on the Old Norse *Völsunga Saga*, the Old English verse epic *Beowulf*, the Middle English poem *Pearl* and ‘Chaucer and his contemporaries’, as well as taking part in ten hours of military drill every week. It was a remarkably productive and creative period.

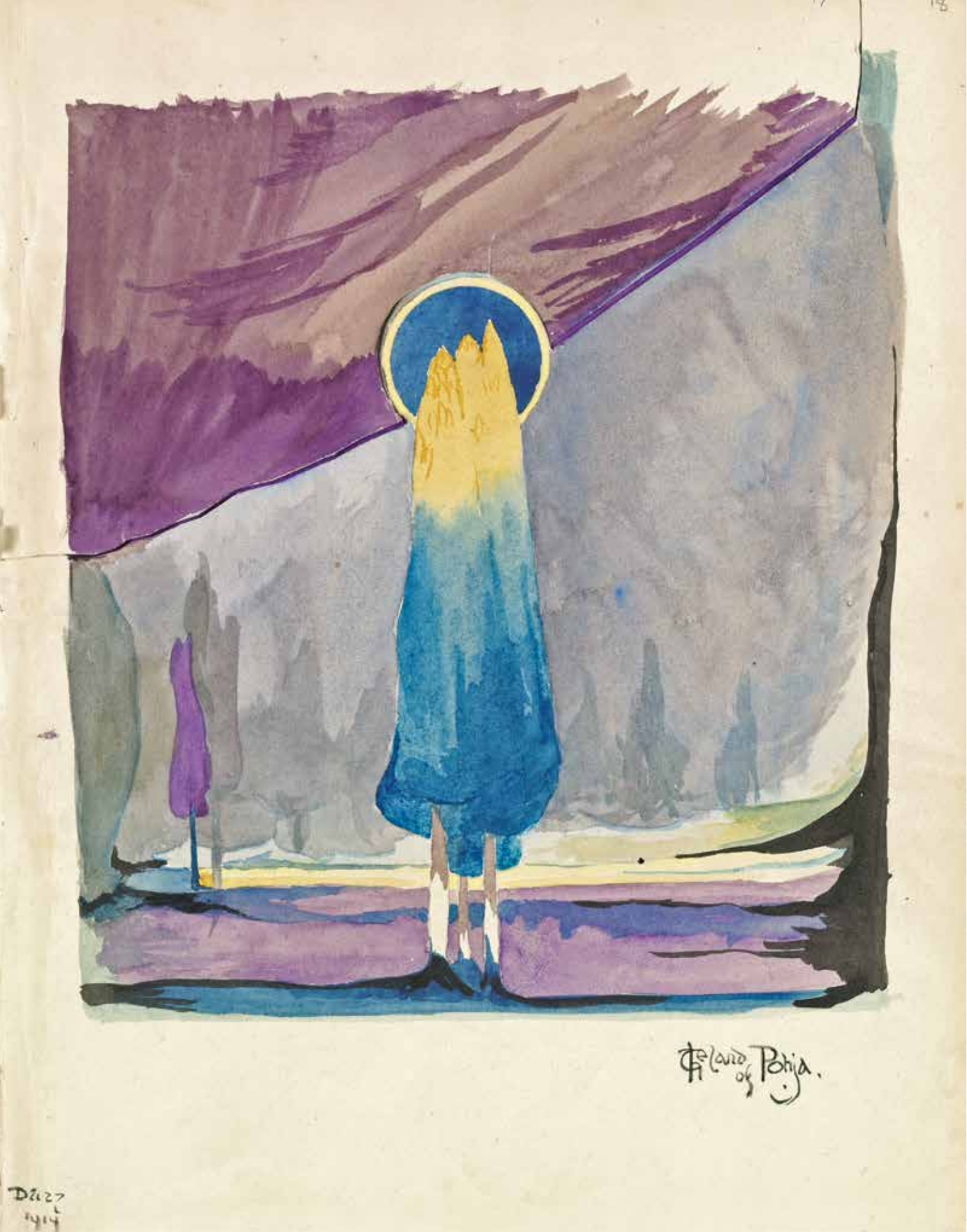
1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 7.

Fig. 69 Lecture and drill timetable, Michaelmas Term, 1914. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien A 21/13, fol. 182v)

1914

— Mich. Term —

	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-1	2-4	5-6
Drill.				Sigurd (Mun.)		
			Chaucer (Mun.)	Pearl (Mun.)		
Drill.					2-4:30 Drill	
			Chaucer (Mun.)	Beowulf (Mun.)		Völsunga (Taylor)
Drill.					Drill 2-4:30	
				Beowulf (Mun.)	Drill 2-4:30	



‘Owlamoo’

1928
Black and coloured inks
88 × 115 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 134
Literature: Oxford 1992; Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 32r

Tolkien’s second son, Michael, had recurrent nightmares as a child, about two creatures he called ‘Maddo’ and ‘Owlamoo’. Maddo was the armless hand ‘that opened curtains a crack after dark and crawled down the curtain.’ Owlamoo was, ‘a large sinister owl-like figure that perched on high furniture or pictures and glared at you.’¹ Tolkien drew both creatures in an attempt to dispel Michael’s fears. He noted years later, ‘Maddo & Owlamoo were two of Michael’s imagined bogeys when he was about 6–8 years old. I tried to draw them from his descriptions – which seemed to rob them of terror.’² The rather mesmerizing Owlamoo, drawn in coloured inks, certainly looks menacing but Tolkien’s depiction seems to have had the desired effect.

Richard Hughes, an early reviewer of *The Hobbit*, warned that ‘adults may think parts of this book rather terrifying for bedside reading’, whilst acknowledging that children have ‘a natural capacity for terror which it is next to impossible to curtail.’³ Tolkien’s own children seem to have been particularly imaginative. In response to this review he wrote to his publisher, ‘My daughter, aged 8, has long distinguished between literary and actual terrors. She can take any amount of dragon, and a reasonable dose of goblin; but we recently had to change all the handles on the chest-of-drawers in her room because the



Fig. 70 ‘Maddo’, 1928. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 31)

former handles “grinned at her”, even in the dark.’⁴

Shortly after Tolkien’s death in 1973, his son Michael wrote of his father’s rare talent for ‘combining fatherhood with friendship’, describing him as ‘a unique adult, the only “grown-up” who appeared to take my childish comments and questions with complete seriousness.’⁵

- 1 Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 33.
- 2 Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 33.
- 3 Books for Pre-adults’, *New Statesman*, 4 December 1937.
- 4 Tolkien family papers, letter to Stanley Unwin, 15 October 1937.
- 5 ‘J.R.R. Tolkien – the wizard father’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 September 1973.



‘The Gardens of the Merking’s palace’

September 1927
Watercolour, black ink, pencil
278 × 217 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 130
Literature: Oxford 1992; Hammond and Scull 1995; Scull and Hammond 1998
MS. Tolkien Drawings 89, fol. 4

In the 1920s Tolkien’s growing family of three young sons sent his imagination in the direction of children’s stories. A family holiday in Filey on the North Yorkshire coast in 1925 was marred by the loss of Michael’s toy dog on the beach. To explain the toy’s disappearance and also to ease the loss, Tolkien told the children a story about a little dog called Rover, who was changed into a toy dog, Roverandom, by a passing wizard. Roverandom hated being a toy who couldn’t speak or move (except at night) and managed to escape from the little boy who owned him by wriggling out of his pocket. Landing on the beach he was taken under the protection of a sand-sorcerer and became embroiled in many exciting adventures. These included a sojourn under the sea in the Merking’s palace where he learnt to swim, enjoying watery escapades with his comrade-in-arms, the mer-dog, also Rover, and becoming ‘a permanent pet of the palace’.

Two years after the Filey holiday Tolkien painted this watercolour of the Merking’s palace and his underwater gardens. Roverandom was taken to the bottom of the Deep Blue Sea by the great whale, Uin, who can be seen at the top left. Tolkien wrote

about Uin twenty years earlier in *The Book of Lost Tales*. He was an ally of the god Ulmo, and helped to pull the island of Tol Eressëa towards Middle-earth in order to transport the Elves to Valinor. The sinuous plant in the foreground and the rippling outlines of plants in the background add movement to the picture, reminding the viewer that the scene is underwater. A path leads from the front right of the picture to the palace, which has a distinctly Eastern design. In the story Roverandom is amazed to find that the sea is not blue at all: ‘There was only a pale green light; and Rover walked out to find himself on a white path of sand winding through a dim and fantastic forest ... soon before him he saw the gate of a great palace, made it seemed of pink and white stone that shone with a pale light coming through it.’¹ The muted colour palette, dominated by green, reflects the text.

Tolkien offered ‘Roverandom’ to George Allen & Unwin in 1937 but at that time the publisher was keen for him to produce a new story about hobbits and the tale of Rover’s adventures languished and was not published until 1998, long after his death.

¹ Scull and Hammond 1998, p. 59.



Fig. 71 Tolkien and his three sons on the beach at Filey, 1925. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien fotogr. 5, fol. 7)



The Tree of Amalion

[?1940s]
Coloured pencil, watercolour, silver paint, black ink on
grey paper
300 × 240 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 211
Literature: Tolkien 1979
MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 1

*He was the sort of painter who
can paint leaves better than trees.
He used to spend a long time on a
single leaf, trying to catch its shape,
and its sheen, and the glistening of
dewdrops on its edges. Yet he wanted
to paint a whole tree, with all of its
leaves in the same style, and all of
them different.'*

This extract from Tolkien's allegorical short story, 'Leaf by Niggle', is a poignant expression of his own creative struggles as he sought to bring his works, both literary and academic, to completion. The story was written in the early 1940s as he worked fitfully on *The Lord of the Rings*, his Elvish languages and his wider legendarium, all of which seemed very far from completion. His perfectionism often resulted in numerous revisions and rewritings, whilst his interest in the minutiae led him down interesting but distracting side roads.

Like Niggle, the painter in his story, Tolkien drew a tree bearing different flowers and leaves many times over the years; there are examples as early as 1928 and as late as 1972. The tree was a representation of the stories and poems that arose in his mind but required uninterrupted time and concentration to bring to fulfilment:

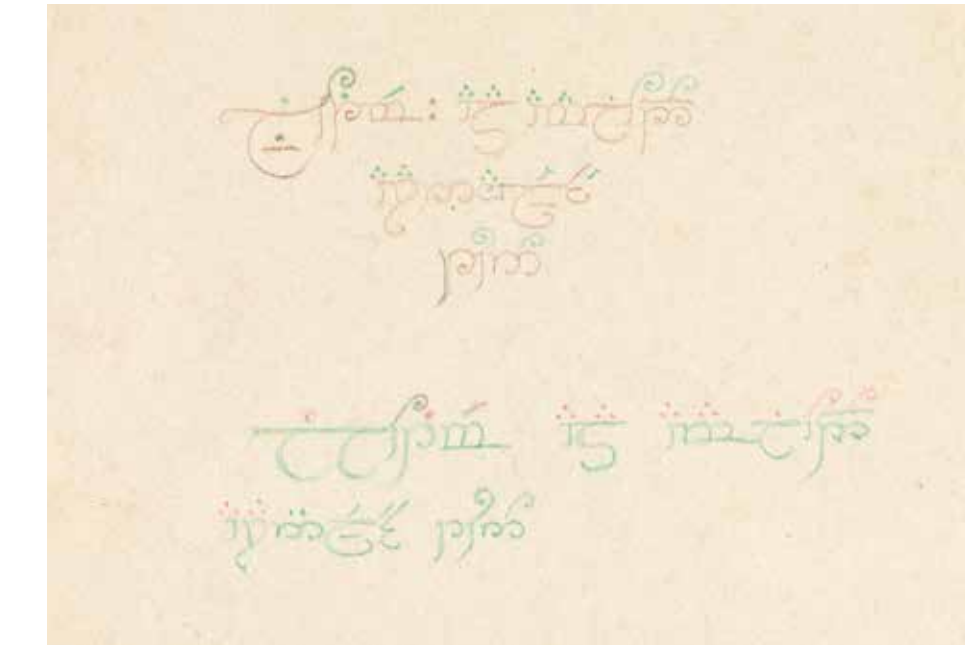


Fig. 72 Elvish phrase, 'lilótime alda amaliondo aranyallessé túno'. [nd].
(Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 93, fol. 33)

luxuries which, as a conscientious academic and devoted husband and father, he did not possess. Tolkien called it the Tree of Amalion and described it as bearing 'various shapes of leaves many flowers small and large signifying poems and major legends.'² In his essay 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien refers to 'the countless foliage of the Tree of Tales, with which the Forest of Days is carpeted.'³ This beautiful description could apply to 'The Silmarillion', Tolkien's personal 'Tree of Tales' with its foliage of poems, tales and myths, which were constantly being rewritten, revised and expanded but which he was never able to bring into a finished form.

The word *Amalion* is not explained in Tolkien's writings but it is included in an Elvish phrase (written in Quenya), which appears twice in his artwork, 'lilótime alda amaliondo aranyallessé túno', which may translate as 'the many-flowered tree of Amalion in the kingdom of Tuna' (see Fig. 72). If one looks to the Elvish language Quenya for clues, it is possible that the name is derived from the same root as *Aman* – the Blessed Land of the Gods; or *amal* – riches, blessing, good fortune.

1 Tolkien 2001, p. 94.
2 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 342.
3 Tolkien 1983B, p. 145.

‘linquë súrissë’

[1960s]
Black ink
228 × 178 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 65

One of a late series of paintings of plants and grasses using black ink, dating from the 1960s. Although drawn later in life these paintings are in a very different style to Tolkien's other art. They resemble the Eastern art form of black ink painting, and the depiction of bamboo also indicates an Eastern influence. In a sense they exemplify his willingness to experiment with different artistic styles, a tendency which he exhibited throughout his life, from the extremely modern and almost counter-cultural 'Ishnesses' to his early adoption of the ballpoint pen in his artwork.

Several of these paintings have Quenya titles. 'Linquë súrissë' may translate as 'grass

in the wind'. The word *linquë* originally meant 'wet' or 'water' in Quenya and could in this context relate to a plant that grows by water, whilst *súrissë* derives from *súri* meaning 'wind', with the addition of a locative ending. Other similar paintings are entitled 'Súriquessë' ('wind feather'), and 'Pilinehtar' ('arrow spearman'), both relating to their shape.

Tolkien created many languages for the different peoples in Middle-earth. Some exist only in brief outlines, such as Khuzdul (the language of the Dwarves), Adûnaic (that of the men of Númenor), Rohirric (spoken by the people of Rohan) and the Black Speech

(devised by Sauron). Others were highly developed, with grammatical structures and extensive vocabularies. The main focus of his language creation was the Elvish languages. His early 'Silmarillion' writings are concerned almost exclusively with Elves and although Men enter into the tales, *The Silmarillion* was a 'History of the Elves'. Quenya and Sindarin were the most fully developed Elvish languages. Quenya was an archaic, formal language, described as the book-Latin of Elvish. Sindarin was a more modern rendition used in everyday life. Most of the place names in *The Lord of the Rings* are Sindarin names.



48

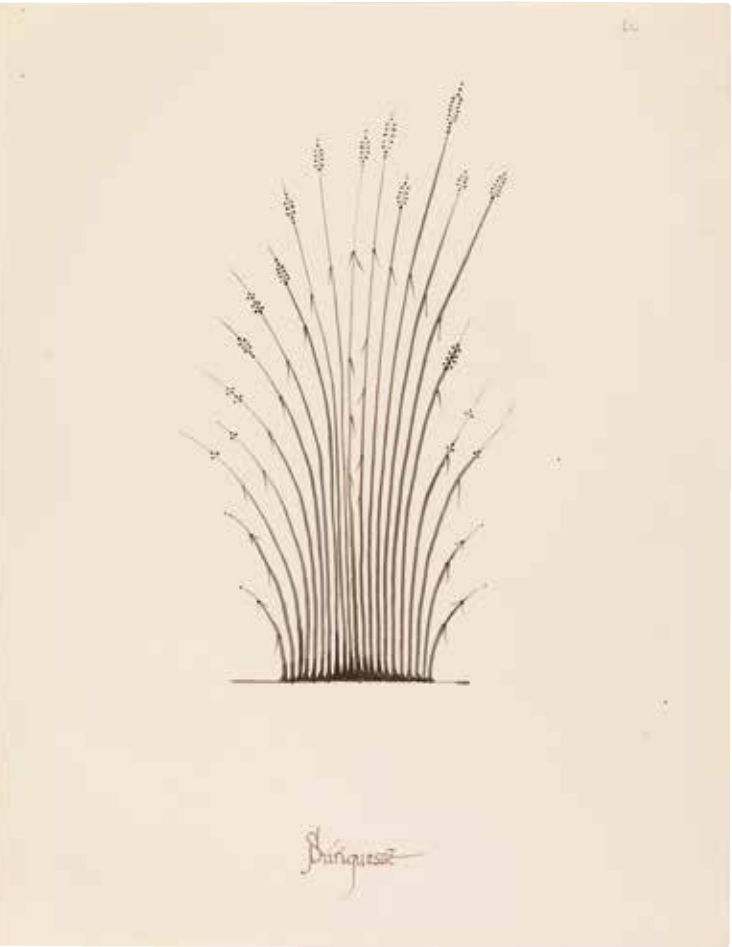


Fig. 73 ‘Súriquessë’, [1960s]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 64)

Decorative alphabet

November 1960
Coloured pencil, coloured ballpoint, black ink, pencil
229 × 178 mm
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 221
Literature: Oxford 1992; Hammond and Scull 1995
MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 24

Tolkien had a lifelong interest in calligraphy, which he attributed to his mother’s influence as his almost sole teacher before he attended King Edward VI School. He recalled years later that she ‘aroused my interest ... in alphabets and handwriting’, as well as introducing him to foreign languages, philology and etymology.¹ After retirement he drew this decorative alphabet using ink, coloured ballpoint pens and coloured pencils. The use of ballpoint in particular dates it to the later period of his life. The ballpoint pen arrived in Britain from America after the Second World War and Tolkien began to use it in his writing from 1950, and in his artwork from 1953.

Although not set out in alphabetical order, this page of decorated capital letters *does* include the whole alphabet. Many of the decorations use plants, flowers and trees. They resemble the decorated capitals used in medieval manuscripts to denote new

chapters or sections. As a scholar of Old and Middle English, Tolkien was familiar with medieval manuscripts in the Bodleian’s own collections and elsewhere. Some medieval manuscripts were plain texts but religious works in particular often had decorated and illuminated capitals. He worked for many years on an edition of the Middle-English text *Ancrene Wisse* using the thirteenth-century manuscript at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (MS. 402). This manuscript has numerous decorated capitals drawn in red and blue ink. An even earlier manuscript at the Bodleian, MS. Junius 11, dates from around AD 1000 and contains the only surviving text of the Old English *Exodus* which Tolkien lectured on for twenty years as Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. This manuscript has decorated capitals formed from intertwining mythical creatures.

¹ Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 377.



Fig. 74 *Ancrene Wisse*, decorated initials, [early 13th century]. (By permission of the Master and Fellows, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, CCCC. MS. 402, fol. 92v)



Fig. 75 Opening of the Old English *Exodus*, [c.1000]. (Bodleian MS. Junius 11, p. 143)



Newspaper doodles

50 ABSTRACT DESIGN

[February 1960]
Black ink
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 136

51 FLOWERING RUSHES AND FLOWER PATTERN

March 1960
Coloured ballpoint, pencil, black ink
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 223
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 13

52 FIVE PAISLEY DESIGNS

11 June 1960
Coloured ballpoint, black ink, coloured pencil
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 28

53 ABSTRACT DESIGN IN COLOURED BALLPOINT

[February 1960]
Black ink, coloured ballpoint
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 119

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a philologist and a professor of the English language, Tolkien was a keen solver of crossword puzzles. He read two national daily newspapers, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, often taking both on the same day, and he saved each newspaper so that he could complete the crosswords at his leisure. Whilst filling in the clues (there is not an unfinished crossword in the Bodleian archive), he would doodle intricate designs and patterns alongside them. The drawings were mostly in ballpoint pen and include geometric designs, borders

54 BORDER DESIGNS AND GEOMETRIC PATTERNS

[August 1960]
Coloured ballpoint, pencil
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 51

55 FLOWER DESIGN

17 October 1960
Coloured ballpoint, coloured pencil, black ink
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 64

56 BORDER DESIGNS AND FLORAL PATTERNS

[September 1960]
Coloured ballpoint
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 54

57 'NUMENOREAN CERAMICS PATTERNS'

March 1960
Black ink, coloured ballpoint
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 12
Exhibition: Oxford 1992, no. 222

or friezes with repeated patterns, paisley designs, scrolls, stylized flowers and plants and abstract curving designs. There are 183 drawings on newspaper and the majority can be dated to either 1960 or 1967. It is perhaps not surprising that they proliferate after his retirement in 1959, when he was released from the pressures of the academic timetable. Some of the designs were incorporated into his legendarium and are attributed to artefacts from Númenor dating from the Second Age of Middle-earth.

58 FLORAL DESIGN AND THREE BORDERS

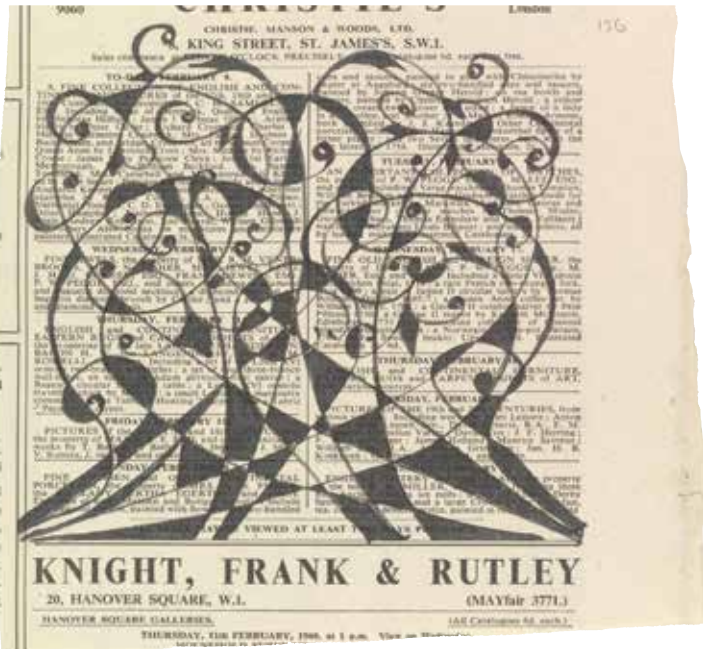
5 November 1960
Coloured ballpoint, black ink
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 65

59 'NUM[ENÓREAN] CERAMIC GRASS PATTERNS'

February 1960
Coloured ballpoint
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 11

60 BORDER DESIGNS, BELT DESIGNS AND PLANTS

5 November 1960
Black ink, coloured ballpoint
MS. Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 66



12 ACRES, 11,500 FREEHOLD, R.A.W. 12,100/1.

OVERSEAS PROPERTIES.

12 ACRES, 11,500 FREEHOLD, R.A.W. 12,100/1.

PREFERENCE.

12 ACRES, 11,500 FREEHOLD, R.A.W. 12,100/1.

OVERSEAS PROPERTIES.

12 ACRES, 11,500 FREEHOLD, R.A.W. 12,100/1.

OVERSEAS PROPERTIES.

PREFERENCE.

12 ACRES, 11,500 FREEHOLD, R.A.W. 12,100/1.

OVERSEAS PROPERTIES.

[illegible][illegible]

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Controversed with this amendment several delegates who had helped draft the final fabric of compromise seemingly felt compelled to uphold the primary interests of their Government rather than those of the convention. Mr. Larsen promptly resigned. Confusion ensued. Finally it was agreed to defer further consideration of the article until December.

BOY, 7, SAT ON
 BABY SISTER

The full facts of the case are being collected for consideration by L.C.C. children's welfare departments.

BLACKBURN CHOICE
 Mr. John M. A. Verburgh, 35, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire, was chosen last night as prospective Conservative candidate for Blackburn, where he will oppose Mrs. Barbara Castle, chairman of the Labour party. He is a director of a Blackburn brewery.

GENERAL ELECTRIC LTD. B. A. Cable
 (Incorporated in England) 5, Abchurch Lane, London E.C. 4A

Hand 1460
 M. A. Verburgh
 Blackburn

[illegible]

DEFIANCE GROWS IN ARGENTINA

From Our Own Correspondent.

Buenos Aires, Wednesday.—Battle lines were drawn today, but what could be the definitive showdown between President Frondizi and the Peronist-Communist workers who supported his overthrow? Frondizi has now opened his policies, especially his austerity program.

Bank franchise clerks have called a general strike to begin at midnight. They are protesting in order to force the government to stop reporting for work. President Frondizi intends to transfer excess staff from other departments to official banks.

[illegible]

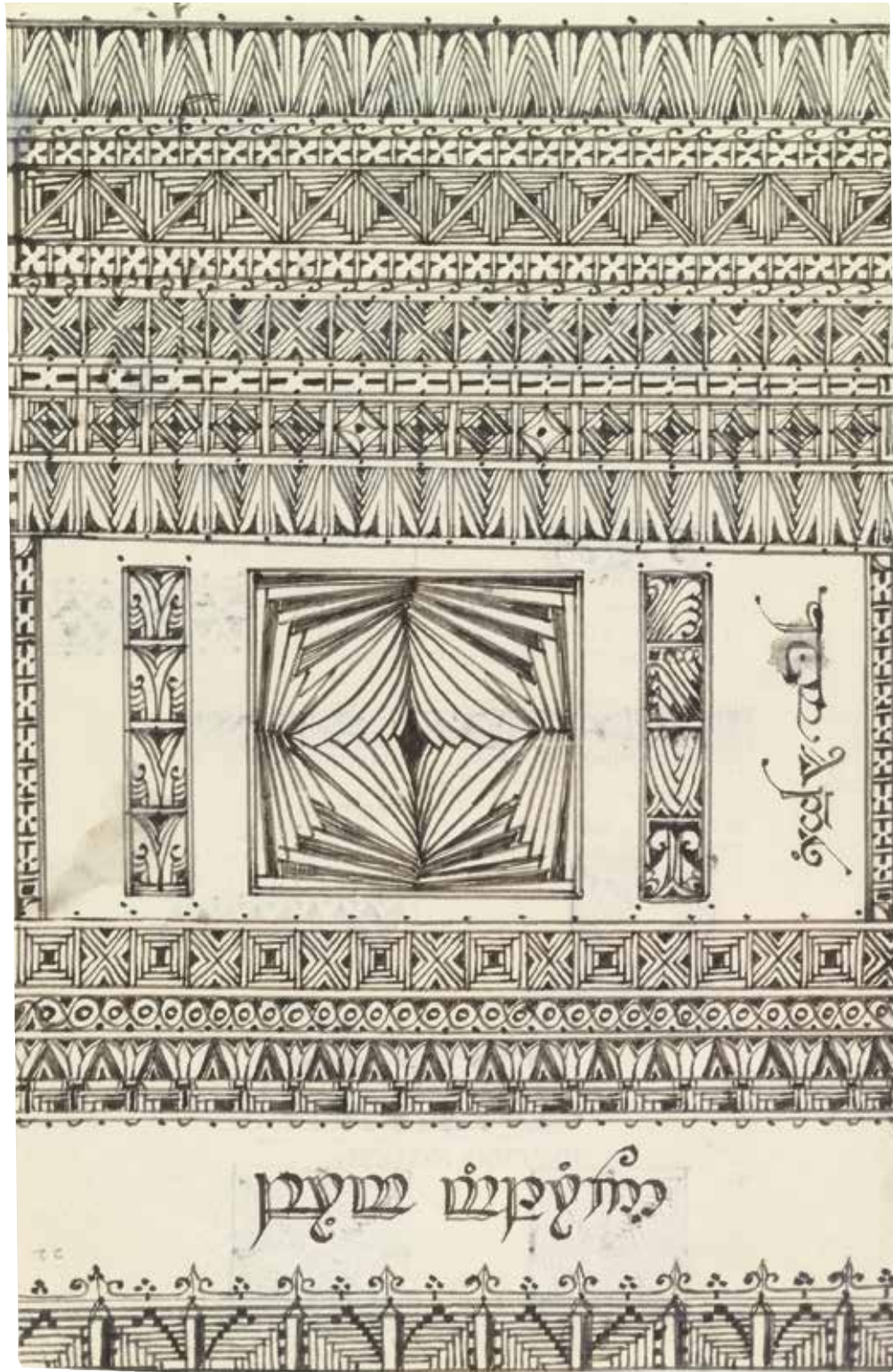
‘parma mittarion’ – ‘the book of enterings’

[?1957]
Black ink
222 × 143 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 22r

On the back of an agenda for a meeting at Merton College, dated 26 November 1957, Tolkien used his black ink pen to fill the page with rows of repeating patterns in intricate designs. He had made similar designs in black ink next to the crossword in *The Times* newspaper dated 7 November 1957, and these were probably forerunners of this larger design (see ‘Newspaper doodles’, p. 188). He added a title at the bottom using the Fëanorian letters known as the Tengwar, a script invented by the Elven prince, Fëanor. The letters were devised in Valinor, the land of the Gods, and brought to Middle-earth by the Elves during their years of exile. Fëanor was one of the most gifted of all the Elves and created the Silmarils, the three great jewels which contained the light of the Two Trees of Valinor. The text is in the Elvish language, Quenya, and transliterates as ‘parma mittarion’ or ‘book of enterings’.¹ This seems

to indicate that the design was intended as a book cover, but there are no other references in the Bodleian archive to such a book or its contents. At the right-hand side Tolkien has written another Quenya phrase using the Elvish script which reads, ‘kalma hendas’ or ‘light in the eye’.² In the two main Elvish languages, Quenya and Sindarin, vowels were frequently indicated by diacritics, known as *tehtar*. In Quenya these small symbols were placed above the preceding consonant. The letter ‘a’ was so common in Quenya that its symbol (three dots in a triangular pattern) was often omitted. This is the case in both of these phrases, which are actually written ‘prm mittrion’ and ‘klm hnds’.

¹ With thanks to Carl F. Hostetter for his translation.
² Smith 1992, p. 7.



‘Númenórean patterns’

[?1960]
Black ink, coloured ballpoint
228 × 177 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 23

During the late 1930s and 1940s Tolkien wrote numerous versions of the downfall of Númenor. This was intended to be his own version of the Atlantis myth, where a great civilization was drowned – destroyed in effect by its own hubris. Tolkien, from his youth, had been troubled by a recurring nightmare in which ‘the Great Wave, towering up, and coming in ineluctably over the trees and green fields’, would cause him to wake gasping for air.¹ The Númenor/Atlantis story was initially part of his unfinished time-travel story, *The Lost Road*, and its successor, *The Notion Club Papers*. However, he was also writing *The Lord of the Rings* during this period and the history of Númenor became drawn more and more closely into the background legends of that work. So that eventually the whole history of Númenor, from its foundation to its destruction, was coterminous with the history of the Second Age of Middle-earth.

After the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5) Tolkien turned again to the legends of the preceding age. Around 1960 he wrote a number of pieces relating to Númenor, including: ‘A Description of Númenor’, an account of the geography, flora and fauna of the island; ‘The Line of Elros: Kings of Númenor’, brief annals of the island, listing all the kings and the main events of their reign and ‘Aldarion and Erendis’,

the tale of the mariner king Aldarion and his wife, Erendis, an early episode in Númenórean history. He also drew these ‘Númenórean patterns’ which look like designs for brooches or clasps. They are undated but resemble the patterns and designs drawn on newspaper in the 1960s. The newspaper designs were drawn using ballpoint pens and black ink,

the materials Tolkien had to hand whilst he was completing the cryptic crossword. The ‘Númenórean patterns’ are created with the same materials and it seems clear that certain patterns doodled next to the crossword were later redrawn on clean sheets of paper and ascribed to the legends of Númenor, which were uppermost in his mind at that time.

1 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 213.

Fig. 76 Draft of ‘The Line of Elros: Kings of Númenor from the founding of the City of Armenelos to the Down=fall’, [nd]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien B 40, fol. 242)

5.	Tar-Meneldur	eldest son and first child of Tar-Alanor : b. 532, d. 934 (399); ruled 740-926	179
6.	Tar-Alanor	: b. 900, d. 1095 (395); ruled 926-1075 This name he took because he began the planting of great woods to furnish timber for ship-building; for the Númenóreans were become great mariners, and began to make war galleys ships in their days, that could endure the storms of the great sea.	149
7.	Tar-Ankalinë	the first ruling Queen : b. 868, d. 1265 (397); ruled 1075-1262 She was the daughter and only child of Tar-Alanor, and it was made a law of the royal house in that time that the king should marry his daughter (or eldest daughter) should receive the sceptre and have the authority of the king; and she should not one of the descendants of Elendur for generations united.	187
8.	Tar-Ancorian	: b. 1013, d. 1414 (401); ruled 1262-1400	138
9.	Tar-Súrion	: b. 1174, d. 1574 (400); ruled 1400-1556	156
10.	Tar-Telperiën	the second ruling Queen She was long-lived (for the women of the Númenóreans had the longer life) and took both these lives 1522 and 1613, and she would not	

‘Numenore’ / ‘Aldarion’

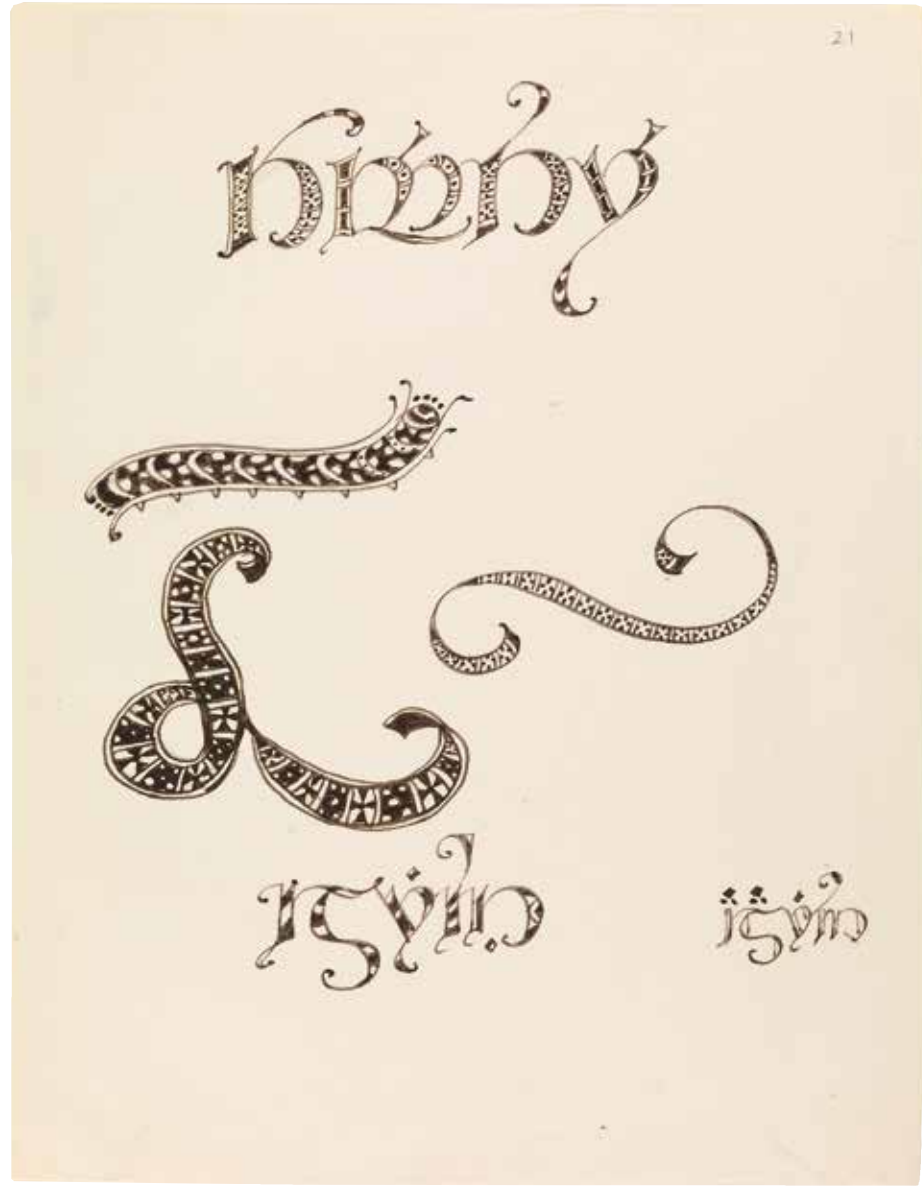
[c.1960]
Black ink, pencil
228 x 177 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 21

63

These designs are undated, but similar to curving designs that Tolkien drew on his newspaper in November 1960. They also resemble elaborate belt designs he drew around the same time. The word ‘Numenore’ is written at the top of the page and the name ‘Aldarion’ is written twice at the bottom of the page, in the Elvish script.

When the lands of Beleriand in Middle-earth were destroyed at the end of the First Age, the Valar created an island for those Men who had fought with the Elves against Morgoth, the Dark Lord. This island was called Númenor or Westernesse and it was set in the western ocean between Middle-earth and Valinor, the land of the Gods. Its people, the Númenóreans or Dúnedain, were mortal men but they had great longevity, rarely suffered from sickness or ill health and were much taller than normal men. They appeared to the Men of Middle-earth as ‘Kings of Men.’ As befitted an island nation they were great seafarers but were forbidden by the Gods from voyaging westwards towards Valinor or Tol Eressëa, the land of the Elves.

Aldarion was the sixth King of Númenor and a renowned mariner. Tolkien was working on the tale of Aldarion and Erendis in 1960, around the time he made these designs.² This story is the only narrative tale written about Númenor, apart from its



downfall. It tells of the great sea-longing of Aldarion and the many journeys he made to Middle-earth where he forged alliances with the Elven lords, Gil-galad and Círdan (against the rising threat of Sauron). Aldarion fell in love with, and married, Erendis, a woman of great beauty and strength of character, who came from the pasture-lands of Númenor. Erendis had no love of the sea and no wish to journey from the land that she loved. Eventually Aldarion’s long and frequent sea

voyages caused bitterness between them and they became estranged. Their only daughter Ancalimë was the sole heir to the throne but, tainted by the rancour surrounding her parents’ separation, she too made an unhappy marriage. Unfortunately the story was never completed but it was published posthumously in *Unfinished Tales*, edited by Christopher Tolkien.

¹ Tolkien 1992, p. 392
² Tolkien 1996, pp. 141 and 163.

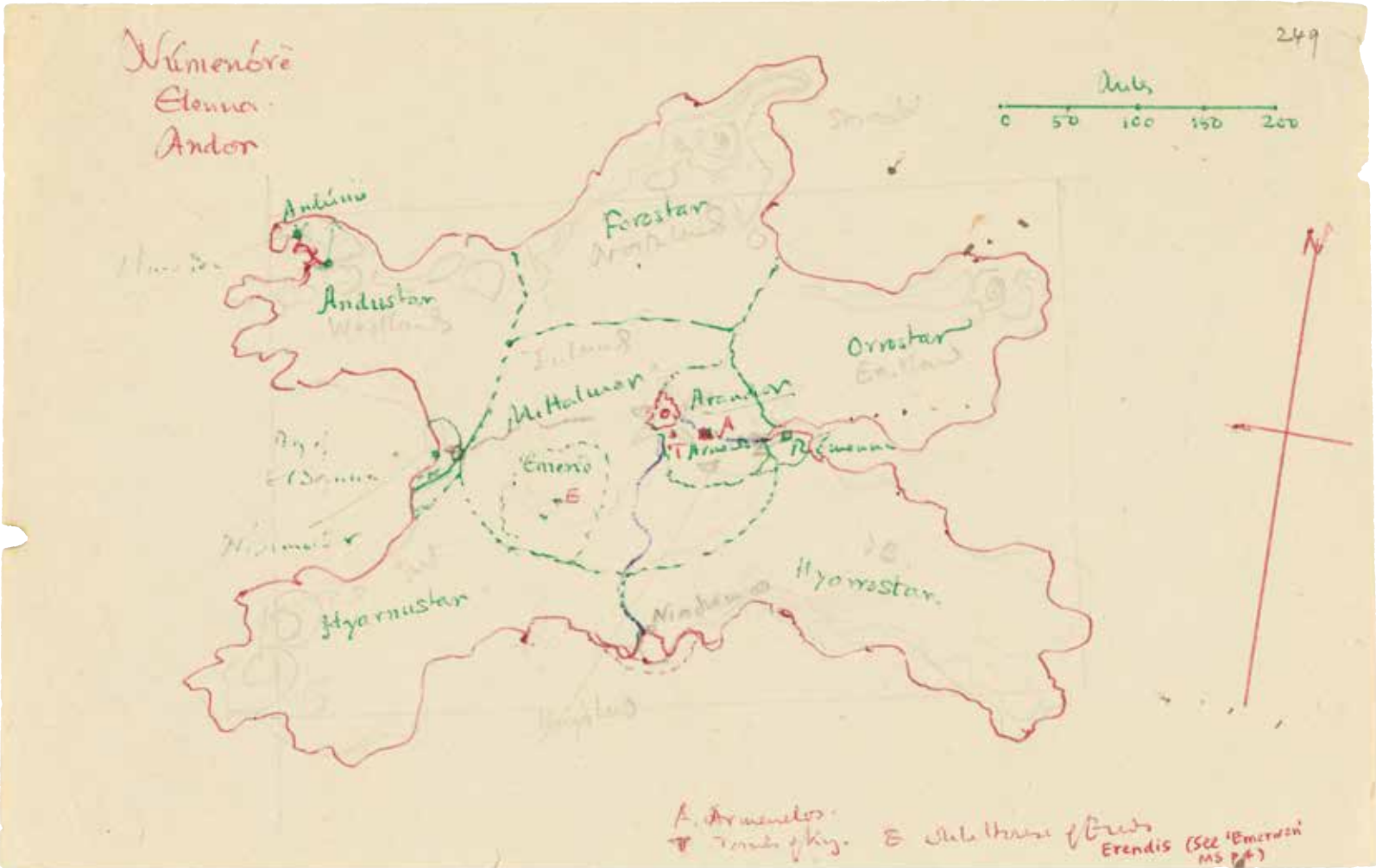


Fig. 77 Map of Númenor, [c.1960]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien B 40, fol. 249)

‘ranalinque’ – ‘moon-grass’

[c.1960]
Black ink, pencil
228 × 178 mm
MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 57

The Elvish (Quenya) name, ‘ranalinque’, meaning ‘moon-grass’, is written underneath the drawing in Elvish letters. The design and Elvish title were drawn first in pencil before black ink was placed confidently on top. The clean lines and curving scrolls recall art nouveau designs and are similar to ones that Tolkien made on newspaper in 1960, particularly the two designs described as ‘Númenorean ceramics patterns’ (see nos 57 and 59). The name ‘ranalinque’ was also given to another similar stylized plant design, drawn using black ink and green ballpoint. Both drawings are part of a series drawn on plain paper.

Tolkien had a lifelong interest in botany. When asked to name the book that had influenced him most as a teenager, he chose not a novel but a botanical text, recalling that in his early teens his ‘most treasured volume was Johns’ *Flowers of the Field*, an account of the flora of the British Isles.¹ During walking holidays with his fellow Inklings, he would often slow down the group by stopping to examine flowers and plants and discourse on them. C.S. Lewis and his brother, Warnie, were particularly aggrieved at these interruptions to their route march (Tolkien called them ‘ruthless walkers’).² Towards the end of his life, in a letter to his friend Amy

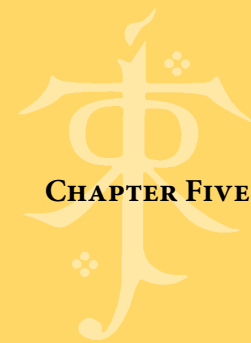
Ronald, he wrote, ‘All illustrated botany books ... have for me a special fascination ... in the variations and permutations of flowers that are the evident kin of those I know – but not the same. They rouse in me visions of kinship and descent through great ages, and also thoughts of the mystery of pattern/design.’³ Tolkien used his botanical knowledge to create flowers for his secondary world which might have been ancestors of real flowers. Five imaginary flowers appear in *The Lord of the Rings*: *alfirin*, *elanor*, *mallos*, *niphredil* and *simbelmyne*. He described three of these in some detail: *elanor* ‘growing sun-golden flowers and star-silver ones on the same plant’ and *niphredil* ‘a delicate kin of a snowdrop’ which both flowered on the grassy hill of Cerin Amroth in Lothlórien, and *simbelmyne*, small white flowers which grew in such profusion on the burial mounds of the Kings of Rohan that they looked like a snowdrift.⁴ All these plants are described as flowering throughout the year, a highly desirable but distinctly other-worldly quality.

1 Byrne and Penzler 1971, p. 43.
2 Carpenter 1978, p. 58.
3 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 402.
4 Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 402.



Fig. 78 ‘ranalinque’, stylized floral design entitled ‘moon-grass’ in Quenya, [c.1960]. (Bodleian MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 56v)





THE SILMARILLION ‘the Silmarils are in my heart’

The Silmarillion is the history of the Elves, told from the creation of the world to the end of the First Age: a period known as the Elder Days. It tells of the awakening of the Elves in Middle-earth; their journey to, and blissful sojourn in, Aman, the Blessed Realm; their creation of the Silmarils, the three great jewels which contained the unsullied light of the Two Trees of Valinor; the theft of these jewels by the evil god, Morgoth, and the long quest of the Elves to reclaim the Silmarils from his stronghold in the north of Middle-earth.¹ In the course of this history they rebel against the Gods, spill the blood of fellow Elves and form and break alliances with men and with each other. It is a bitter history of vengeance, treachery and death, interspersed with tales of heroism, sacrifice and love.

The history of the Elder Days covered a period of several thousand years. Filling this time-span with a chronological history, vivid tales and evolving languages was a huge undertaking and one which occupied Tolkien throughout his life. Poems and drawings dating from 1915 show that he was working on the legends when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, and he later claimed, ‘I do not remember a time when I was not building it.’²

The Silmarillion was never published in Tolkien’s lifetime. Unfinished tales from the work (in verse and prose) were first

rejected by his publisher in 1937, and he was urged instead to write a sequel to his popular children’s story, *The Hobbit*. Tolkien, to whom hobbits were very much a sideline, replied, ‘I am sure you will sympathize when I say that the construction of elaborate and consistent mythology (and two languages) rather occupies the mind, and the Silmarils are in my heart.’³ Although he did turn his creative efforts to a hobbit sequel, which eventually became *The Lord of the Rings*, he never stopped working on *The Silmarillion*. He sought to have it published again in the 1950s in conjunction with *The Lord of the Rings*, but neither his own publisher nor another firm, Collins, could be persuaded to take the huge financial risk of publishing both works at once.

Although rejected and unpublished, the underlying history, geography and languages of the Elves provided a backdrop that gave an impression of great depth and historicity to the published works. The world that he had created for *The Silmarillion* became Middle-earth, and *The Hobbit*, originally meant to be a standalone story, was drawn into it. Its effect on *The Lord of the Rings* was even more potent. Tolkien described it as like ‘viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist.’⁴

¹ Morgoth, the Dark Lord of the First Age, is named Melko (later Melkor) in the earlier tales.

² Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 143.

³ Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 26.

⁴ Carpenter and Tolkien 1981, p. 333.