

[After Allen & Unwin, under pressure from Tolkien to make up their minds, had reluctantly declined to publish *The Lord of the Rings* together with *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien was confident that Milton Waldman of Collins would shortly issue both books under his firm's imprint. In the spring of 1950, Waldman told Tolkien that he hoped to begin typesetting the following autumn. But there were delays, largely caused by Waldman's frequent absences in Italy and his ill-health. By the latter part of 1951 no definite arrangements for publication had yet been made, and Collins were becoming anxious about the combined length of both books. It was apparently at Waldman's suggestion that Tolkien wrote the following letter – of which the full text is some ten thousand words long – with the intention of demonstrating that *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* were interdependent and indivisible. The letter, which interested Waldman so much that he had a typed copy made (see the end of no. 137), is not dated, but was probably written late in 1951.]

My dear Milton,

You asked for a brief sketch of my stuff that is connected with my imaginary world. It is difficult to say anything without saying too much: the attempt to say a few words opens a floodgate of excitement, the egoist and artist at once desires to say how the stuff has grown, what it is like, and what (he thinks) he means or is trying to represent by it all. I shall inflict some of this on you; but I will append a mere resume of its contents: which is (may be) all that you want or will have use or time for.

In order of time, growth and composition, this stuff began with me – though I do not suppose that that is of much interest to anyone but myself. I mean, I do not remember a time when I was not building it. Many children make up, or begin to make up, imaginary languages. I have been at it since I could write. But I have never stopped, and of course, as a professional philologist (especially interested in linguistic aesthetics), I have changed in taste, improved in theory, and probably in craft. Behind my stories is now a nexus of languages (mostly only structurally sketched). But to those creatures which in English I call misleadingly Elves* are assigned two related languages more nearly completed, whose history is written, and whose forms (representing two different sides of my own linguistic taste) are deduced scientifically from a common origin. Out of these languages are made nearly all the *names* that appear in my legends. This gives a certain character (a cohesion, a consistency of linguistic style, and an illusion of historicity) to the nomenclature, or so I believe, that is markedly lacking in other

*Intending the word to be understood in its ancient meanings, which continued as late as Spenser – a murrain on Will Shakespeare and his damned cobwebs.

comparable things. Not all will feel this as important as I do, since I am cursed by acute sensibility in such matters.

But an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite. I was an undergraduate before thought and experience revealed to me that these were not divergent interests – opposite poles of science and romance – but integrally related. I am *not* 'learned'* in the matters of myth and fairy-story, however, for in such things (as far as known to me) I have always been seeking material, things of a certain tone and air, and not simple knowledge. Also – and here I hope I shall not sound absurd – I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. For one thing its 'faerie' is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion.

For reasons which I will not elaborate, that seems to me fatal. Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world. (I am speaking, of course, of our present situation, not of ancient pagan, pre-Christian days. And I will not repeat what I tried to say in my essay, which you read.)

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now

*Though I have thought *about* them a good deal.

steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd.

Of course, such an overweening purpose did not develop all at once. The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as 'given' things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew. An absorbing, though continually interrupted labour (especially since, even apart from the necessities of life, the mind would wing to the other pole and spend itself on the linguistics): yet always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'.

Of course, I made up and even wrote lots of other things (especially for my children). Some escaped from the grasp of this branching acquisitive theme, being ultimately and radically unrelated: *Leaf by Niggle* and *Farmer Giles*, for instance, the only two that have been printed. *The Hobbit*, which has much more essential life in it, was quite independently conceived: I did not know as I began it that it belonged. But it proved to be the discovery of the completion of the whole, its mode of descent to earth, and merging into 'history'. As the high Legends of the beginning are supposed to look at things through Elvish minds, so the middle tale of the Hobbit takes a virtually human point of view – and the last tale blends them.

I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory – yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language. (And, of course, the more 'life' a story has the more readily will it be susceptible of allegorical interpretations: while the better a deliberate allegory is made the more nearly will it be acceptable just as a story.) Anyway all this stuff* is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. With Mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological function, and to be apart from the satisfactions of plain ordinary biological life, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife. This desire is at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, and yet unsatisfied by it. It has various opportunities of 'Fall'. It may become possessive, clinging to the things made as 'its own', the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective, – and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use

*It is, I suppose, fundamentally concerned with the problem of the relation of Art (and Sub-creation) and Primary Reality.

of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised.

I have not used 'magic' consistently, and indeed the Elven-queen Galadriel is obliged to remonstrate with the Hobbits on their confused use of the word both for the devices and operations of the Enemy, and for those of the Elves. I have not, because there is not a word for the latter (since all human stories have suffered the same confusion). But the Elves are there (in my tales) to demonstrate the difference. Their 'magic' is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence). And its object is Art not Power, sub-creation not domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation. The 'Elves' are 'immortal', at least as far as this world goes: and hence are concerned rather with the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change, than with death. The Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others* – speedily and according to the benefactor's own plans – is a recurrent motive.

The cycles begin with a cosmogonical myth: the *Music of the Ainur*. God and the Valar (or powers: Englished as gods) are revealed. These latter are as we should say angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation, making or re-making). They are 'divine', that is, were originally 'outside' and existed 'before' the making of the world. Their power and wisdom is derived from their Knowledge of the cosmogonical drama, which they perceived first as a drama (that is as in a fashion we perceive a story composed by some-one else), and later as a 'reality'. On the side of mere narrative device, this is, of course, meant to provide beings of the same order of beauty, power, and majesty as the 'gods' of higher mythology, which can yet be accepted – well, shall we say baldly, by a mind that believes in the Blessed Trinity.

It moves then swiftly to the *History of the Elves*, or the *Silmarillion* proper; to the world as we perceive it, but of course transfigured in a still half-mythical mode: that is it deals with rational incarnate creatures of

*Not in the Beginner of Evil: his was a sub-creative Fall, and hence the Elves (the representatives of sub-creation par excellence) were peculiarly his enemies, and the special object of his desire and hate – and open to his deceptions. Their Fall is into possessiveness and (to a less degree) into perversion of their art to power.

more or less comparable stature with our own. The Knowledge of the Creation Drama was incomplete: incomplete in each individual 'god', and incomplete if all the knowledge of the pantheon were pooled. For (partly to redress the evil of the rebel Melkor, partly for the completion of all in an ultimate finesse of detail) the Creator had not revealed all. The making, and nature, of the Children of God, were the two chief secrets. All that the gods knew was that they would come, at appointed times. The Children of God are thus primevally related and akin, and primevally different. Since also they are something wholly 'other' to the gods, in the making of which the gods played no part, they are the object of the special desire and love of the gods. These are the *First-born*, the Elves; and the *Followers* Men. The doom of the Elves is to be immortal, to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts, never leaving it even when 'slain', but returning – and yet, when the Followers come, to teach them, and make way for them, to 'fade' as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which both proceed. The Doom (or the Gift) of Men is mortality, freedom from the circles of the world. Since the point of view of the whole cycle is the Elvish, mortality is not explained mythically: it is a mystery of God of which no more is known than that 'what God has purposed for Men is hidden': a grief and an envy to the immortal Elves.

As I say, the legendary *Silmarillion* is peculiar, and differs from all similar things that I know in not being anthropocentric. Its centre of view and interest is not Men but 'Elves'. Men came in inevitably: after all the author is a man, and if he has an audience they will be Men and Men must come in to our tales, as such, and not merely transfigured or partially represented as Elves, Dwarfs, Hobbits, etc. But they remain peripheral – late comers, and however growingly important, not principals.

In the cosmogony there is a fall: a fall of Angels we should say. Though quite different in form, of course, to that of Christian myth. These tales are 'new', they are not directly derived from other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any 'story' without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them.

So, proceeding, the Elves have a fall, before their 'history' can become storied. (The first fall of Man, for reasons explained, nowhere appears – Men do not come on the stage until all that is long past, and there is only

a rumour that for a while they fell under the domination of the Enemy and that some repented.) The main body of the tale, the *Silmarillion* proper, is about the fall of the most gifted kindred of the Elves, their exile from Valinor (a kind of Paradise, the home of the Gods) in the furthest West, their re-entry into Middle-earth, the land of their birth but long under the rule of the Enemy, and their strife with him, the power of Evil still visibly incarnate. It receives its name because the events are all threaded upon the fate and significance of the *Silmarilli* ('radiance of pure light') or Primeval Jewels. By the making of gems the sub-creative function of the Elves is chiefly symbolized, but the *Silmarilli* were more than just beautiful things as such. There was Light. There was the Light of Valinor made visible in the Two Trees of Silver and Gold.* These were slain by the Enemy out of malice, and Valinor was darkened, though from them, ere they died utterly, were derived the lights of Sun and Moon. (A marked difference here between these legends and most others is that the Sun is not a divine symbol, but a second-best thing, and the 'light of the Sun' (the world under the sun) become terms for a fallen world, and a dislocated imperfect vision).

But the chief artificer of the Elves (Fëanor) had imprisoned the Light of Valinor in the three supreme jewels, the *Silmarilli*, before the Trees were sullied or slain. This Light thus lived thereafter only in these gems. The fall of the Elves comes about through the possessive attitude of Fëanor and his seven sons to these gems. They are captured by the Enemy, set in his Iron Crown, and guarded in his impenetrable stronghold. The sons of Fëanor take a terrible and blasphemous oath of enmity and vengeance against all or any, even of the gods, who dares to claim any part or right in the *Silmarilli*. They pervert the greater part of their kindred, who rebel against the gods, and depart from paradise, and go to make hopeless war upon the Enemy. The first fruit of their fall is war in Paradise, the slaying of Elves by Elves, and this and their evil oath dogs all their later heroism, generating treacheries and undoing all victories. *The Silmarillion* is the history of the War of the Exiled Elves against the Enemy, which all takes place in the North-west of the world (Middle-earth). Several tales of victory and tragedy are caught up in it; but it ends with catastrophe, and the passing of the Ancient World, the world of the long *First Age*. The jewels are recovered (by the final intervention of the gods) only to be lost for ever to the Elves, one in the sea, one in the deeps

*As far as all this has symbolical or allegorical significance, Light is such a primeval symbol in the nature of the Universe, that it can hardly be analysed. The Light of Valinor (derived from light before any fall) is the light of art undivorced from reason, that sees things both scientifically (or philosophically) and imaginatively (or subcreatively) and says that they are good' – as beautiful. The Light of Sun (or Moon) is derived from the Trees only after they were sullied by Evil.

of earth, and one as a star of heaven. This legendarium ends with a vision of the end of the world, its breaking and remaking, and the recovery of the Silmarilli and the 'light before the Sun' – after a final battle which owes, I suppose, more to the Norse vision of Ragnarök than to anything else, though it is not much like it.

As the stories become less mythical, and more like stories and romances, Men are interwoven. For the most part these are 'good Men' – families and their chiefs who rejecting the service of Evil, and hearing rumours of the Gods of the West and the High Elves, flee westward and come into contact with the Exiled Elves in the midst of their war. The Men who appear are mainly those of the Three Houses of the Fathers of them, whose chieftains become allies of the Elflords. The contact of Men and Elves already foreshadows the history of the later Ages, and a recurrent theme is the idea that in Men (as they now are) there is a strand of 'blood' and inheritance, derived from the Elves, and that the art and poetry of Men is largely dependent on it, or modified by it.* There are thus two marriages of mortal and elf – both later coalescing in the kindred of Earendil, represented by Elrond the Half-elven who appears in all the stories, even *The Hobbit*. The chief of the stories of the *Silmarillion*, and the one most fully treated is the *Story of Beren and Lúthien the Elfmaiden*.† Here we meet, among other things, the first example of the motive (to become dominant in Hobbits) that the great policies of world history, 'the wheels of the world', are often turned not by the Lords and Governors, even gods, but by the seemingly unknown and weak – owing to the secret life in creation, and the part unknowable to all wisdom but One, that resides in the intrusions of the Children of God into the Drama. It is Beren the outlawed mortal who succeeds (with the help of Lúthien, a mere maiden even if an elf of royalty) where all the armies and warriors have failed: he penetrates the stronghold of the Enemy and wrests one of the Silmarilli from the Iron Crown. Thus he wins the hand of Lúthien and the first marriage of mortal and immortal is achieved.

As such the story is (I think a beautiful and powerful) heroic-fairy-romance, receivable in itself with only a very general vague knowledge of the background. But it is also a fundamental link in the cycle, deprived of its full significance out of its place therein. For the capture of the Silmaril, a supreme victory, leads to disaster. The oath of the sons of Fëanor becomes operative, and lust for the Silmaril brings all the kingdoms of the Elves to ruin.

*Of course in reality this only means that my 'elves' are only a representation or an apprehension of a part of human nature, but that is not the legendary mode of talking.

†It exists indeed as a poem of considerable length, of which the prose version in *The Silmarillion* is only a reduced version.¹

There are other stories almost equally full in treatment, and equally independent and yet linked to the general history. There is the *Children of Húrin*, the tragic tale of Túrin Turambar and his sister Níniel – of which Túrin is the hero: a figure that might be said (by people who like that sort of thing, though it is not very useful) to be derived from elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo. There is the *Fall of Gondolin*: the chief Elvish stronghold. And the tale, or tales, of *Earendil the Wanderer*.* He is important as the person who brings the Silmarillion to its end, and as providing in his offspring the main links to and persons in the tales of later Ages. His function, as a representative of both Kindreds, Elves and Men, is to find a sea-passage back to the Land of the Gods, and as ambassador persuade them to take thought again for the Exiles, to pity them, and rescue them from the Enemy. His wife Elwing descends from Lúthien and still possesses the Silmaril. But the curse still works, and Earendil's home is destroyed by the sons of Fëanor. But this provides the solution: Elwing casting herself into the Sea to save the Jewel comes to Earendil, and with the power of the great Gem they pass at last to Valinor, and accomplish their errand – at the cost of never being allowed to return or dwell again with Elves or Men. The gods then move again, and great power comes out of the West, and the Stronghold of the Enemy is destroyed; and he himself [is] thrust out of the World into the Void, never to reappear there in incarnate form again. The remaining two Silmarils are regained from the Iron Crown – only to be lost. The last two sons of Fëanor, compelled by their oath, steal them, and are destroyed by them, casting themselves into the sea, and the pits of the earth. The ship of Earendil adorned with the last Silmaril is set in heaven as the brightest star. So ends *The Silmarillion* and the tales of the First Age.

The next cycle deals (or would deal) with the Second Age. But it is on Earth a dark age, and not very much of its history is (or need be) told. In the great battles against the First Enemy the lands were broken and ruined, and the West of Middle-earth became desolate. We learn that the Exiled Elves were, if not commanded, at least sternly counselled to return into the West, and there be at peace. They were not to dwell permanently in Valinor again, but in the Lonely Isle of Eressëa within sight of the Blessed Realm. The Men of the Three Houses were rewarded for their valour and faithful alliance, by being allowed to dwell 'western-

*His name is in actual origin Anglo-Saxon: *earendel* 'ray of light' applied sometimes to the morning-star, a name of ramified mythological connexions (now largely obscure). But that is a mere 'learned note'. In fact his name is Elvish signifying the Great Mariner or Sea-lover.

most of all mortals', in the great 'Atlantis' isle of *Númenóre*.^{*} The doom or gift of God, of mortality, the gods of course cannot abrogate, but the Númenóreans have a great span of life. They set sail and leave Middle-earth, and establish a great kingdom of mariners just within furthest sight of Eressëa (but not of Valinor). Most of the High Elves depart also back into the West. Not all. Some Men akin to the Númenóreans remain in the land not far from the shores of the Sea. Some of the Exiles will not return, or delay their return (for the way west is ever open to the immortals and in the Grey Havens ships are ever ready to sail away for ever). Also the Orcs (goblins) and other monsters bred by the First Enemy are not wholly destroyed. And there is *Sauron*. In the *Silmarillion* and Tales of the First Age Sauron was a being of Valinor perverted to the service of the Enemy and becoming his chief captain and servant. He repents in fear when the First Enemy is utterly defeated, but in the end does not do as was commanded, return to the judgement of the gods. He lingers in Middle-earth. Very slowly, beginning with fair motives: the reorganising and rehabilitation of the ruin of Middle-earth, 'neglected by the gods', he becomes a reincarnation of Evil, and a thing lusting for Complete Power – and so consumed ever more fiercely with hate (especially of gods and Elves). All through the twilight of the Second Age the Shadow is growing in the East of Middle-earth, spreading its sway more and more over Men – who multiply as the Elves begin to fade. The three main themes are thus The Delaying Elves that lingered in Middle-earth; Sauron's growth to a new Dark Lord, master and god of Men; and Numenor-Atlantis. They are dealt with annalistically, and in two Tales or Accounts, *The Rings of Power* and the *Downfall of Númenor*. Both are the essential background to *The Hobbit* and its sequel.

In the first we see a sort of second fall or at least 'error' of the Elves. There was nothing wrong essentially in their lingering against counsel, still sadly with³ the mortal lands of their old heroic deeds. But they wanted to have their cake without eating it. They wanted the peace and bliss and perfect memory of 'The West', and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people, above wild Elves, dwarves, and Men, was greater than at the bottom of the hierarchy of Valinor. They thus became obsessed with 'fading', the mode in which the changes of time (the law of the world under the sun) was perceived by them. They became sad, and their art (shall we say) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming – even though they also retained the old motive of their kind, the adornment of earth, and the

healing of its hurts. We hear of a lingering kingdom, in the extreme North-west more or less in what was left in the old lands of *The Silmarillion*, under Gilgalad; and of other settlements, such as Imladris (Rivendell) near Elrond; and a great one at Eregion at the Western feet of the Misty Mountains, adjacent to the Mines of Moria, the major realm of the Dwarves in the Second Age. There arose a friendship between the usually hostile folk (of Elves and Dwarves) for the first and only time, and smithcraft reached its highest development. But many of the Elves listened to Sauron. He was still fair in that early time, and his motives and those of the Elves seemed to go partly together: the healing of the desolate lands. Sauron found their weak point in suggesting that, helping one another, they could make Western Middle-earth as beautiful as Valinor. It was really a veiled attack on the gods, an incitement to try and make a separate independent paradise. Gilgalad repulsed all such overtures, as also did Elrond. But at Eregion great work began – and the Elves came their nearest to falling to 'magic' and machinery. With the aid of Sauron's lore they made *Rings of Power* ('power' is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the gods).

The chief power (of all the rings alike) was the prevention or slowing of *decay* (i.e. 'change' viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance – this is more or less an Elvish motive. But also they enhanced the natural powers of a possessor – thus approaching 'magic', a motive easily corruptible into evil, a lust for domination. And finally they had other powers, more directly derived from Sauron ('the Necromancer': so he is called as he casts a fleeting shadow and presage on the pages of *The Hobbit*): such as rendering invisible the material body, and making things of the invisible world visible.

The Elves of Eregion made Three supremely beautiful and powerful rings, almost solely of their own imagination, and directed to the preservation of beauty: they did not confer invisibility. But secretly in the subterranean Fire, in his own Black Land, Sauron made One Ring, the Ruling Ring that contained the powers of all the others, and controlled them, so that its wearer could see the thoughts of all those that used the lesser rings, could govern all that they did, and in the end could utterly enslave them. He reckoned, however, without the wisdom and subtle perceptions of the Elves. The moment he assumed the One, they were aware of it, and of his secret purpose, and were afraid. They hid the Three Rings, so that not even Sauron ever discovered where they were and they remained unsullied. The others they tried to destroy.

In the resulting war between Sauron and the Elves Middle-earth, especially in the west, was further ruined. Eregion was captured and destroyed, and Sauron seized many Rings of Power. These he gave, for

^{*}A name that Lewis derives from me and cannot be restrained from using, and mis-spelling as Numinor. Númenóre means in 'Elvish' simply Westernesse or Land in the West, and is not related to *numen* numinous, or *νοῦμενον*.¹²

their ultimate corruption and enslavement, to those who would accept them (out of ambition or greed). Hence the 'ancient rhyme' that appears as the leit-motif of *The Lord of the Rings*,

Three Rings for the Elven-Kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the shadows lie.

Sauron became thus almost supreme in Middle-earth. The Elves held out in secret places (not yet revealed). The last Elf-Kingdom of Gilgalad is maintained precariously on the extreme west-shores, where are the havens of the Ships. Elrond the Half-elven, son of Earendil, maintains a kind of enchanted sanctuary at *Imladris* (in English *Rivendell*) on the extreme eastern margin of the western lands.* But Sauron dominates all the multiplying hordes of Men that have had no contact with the Elves and so indirectly with the true and unfallen Valar and gods. He rules a growing empire from the great dark tower of Barad-dûr in Mordor, near to the Mountain of Fire, wielding the One Ring.

But to achieve this he had been obliged to let a great part of his own inherent power (a frequent and very significant motive in myth and fairy-story) pass into the One Ring. While he wore it, his power on earth was actually enhanced. But even if he did not wear it, that power existed and was in 'rapport' with himself: he was not 'diminished'. Unless some other seized it and became possessed of it. If that happened, the new possessor could (if sufficiently strong and heroic by nature) challenge Sauron, become master of all that he had learned or done since the making of the One Ring, and so overthrow him and usurp his place. This was the essential weakness he had introduced into his situation in his effort (largely unsuccessful) to enslave the Elves, and in his desire to establish a control over the minds and wills of his servants. There was another weakness: if the One Ring was actually *unmade*, annihilated, then its power would be dissolved, Sauron's own being would be diminished to vanishing point, and he would be reduced to a shadow, a mere memory of malicious will. But that he never contemplated nor feared. The Ring was unbreakable by any smithcraft less than his own. It was indissoluble in any fire, save the undying subterranean fire where

*Elrond symbolises throughout the ancient wisdom, and his House represents Lore – the preservation in reverent memory of all tradition concerning the good, wise, and beautiful. It is not a scene of *action* but of *reflection*. Thus it is a place visited on the way to all deeds, or 'adventures'. It may prove to be on the direct road (as in *The Hobbit*); but it may be necessary to go from there in a totally unexpected course. So necessarily in *The Lord of the Rings*, having escaped to Elrond from the imminent pursuit of present evil, the hero departs in a wholly new direction: to go and face it at its source.

it was made – and that was unapproachable, in Mordor. Also so great was the Ring's power of lust, that anyone who used it became mastered by it; it was beyond the strength of any will (even his own) to injure it, cast it away, or neglect it. So he thought. It was in any case on his finger.

Thus, as the Second Age draws on, we have a great Kingdom and evil theocracy (for Sauron is also the god of his slaves) growing up in Middle-earth. In the West – actually the North-West is the only part clearly envisaged in these tales – lie the precarious refuges of the Elves, while Men in those parts remain more or less uncorrupted if ignorant. The better and nobler sort of Men are in fact the kin of those that had departed to Númenor, but remain in a simple 'Homeric' state of patriarchal and tribal life.

Meanwhile *Númenor* has grown in wealth, wisdom, and glory, under its line of great kings of long life, directly descended from Elros, Earendil's son, brother of Elrond. The *Downfall of Númenor*, the Second Fall of Man (or Man rehabilitated but still mortal), brings on the catastrophic end, not only of the Second Age, but of the Old World, the primeval world of legend (envisaged as flat and bounded). After which the Third Age began, a Twilight Age, a Medium Aevum, the first of the broken and changed world; the last of the lingering dominion of visible fully incarnate Elves, and the last also in which Evil assumes a single dominant incarnate shape.

The Downfall is partly the result of an inner weakness in Men – consequent, if you will, upon the first Fall (unrecorded in these tales), repented but not finally healed. Reward on earth is more dangerous for men than punishment! The Fall is achieved by the cunning of Sauron in exploiting this weakness. Its central theme is (inevitably, I think, in a story of Men) a Ban, or Prohibition.

The Númenóreans dwell within far sight of the easternmost 'immortal' land, Eressëa; and as the only men to speak an Elvish tongue (learned in the days of their Alliance) they are in constant communication with their ancient friends and allies, either in the bliss of Eressëa, or in the kingdom of Gilgalad on the shores of Middle-earth. They became thus in appearance, and even in powers of mind, hardly distinguishable from the Elves – but they remained mortal, even though rewarded by a triple, or more than a triple, span of years. Their reward is their undoing – or the means of their temptation. Their long life aids their achievements in art and wisdom, but breeds a possessive attitude to these things, and desire awakes for more *time* for their enjoyment. Foreseeing this in part, the gods laid a Ban on the Númenóreans from the beginning: they must never sail to Eressëa, nor westward out of sight of their own land. In all other directions they could go as they would. They must not set foot on 'immortal' lands, and so become enamoured of an immortality (within

the world), which was against their law, the special doom or gift of Ilúvatar (God), and which their nature could not in fact endure.*

There are three phases in their fall from grace. First acquiescence, obedience that is free and willing, though without complete understanding. Then for long they obey unwillingly, murmuring more and more openly. Finally they rebel – and a rift appears between the King's men and rebels, and the small minority of persecuted Faithful.

In the first stage, being men of peace, their courage is devoted to sea-voyages. As descendants of Earendil, they became the supreme mariners, and being barred from the West, they sail to the uttermost north, and south, and east. Mostly they come to the west-shores of Middle-earth, where they aid the Elves and Men against Sauron, and incur his undying hatred. In those days they would come amongst Wild Men as almost divine benefactors, bringing gifts of arts and knowledge, and passing away again – leaving many legends behind of kings and gods out of the sunset.

In the second stage, the days of Pride and Glory and grudging of the Ban, they begin to seek wealth rather than bliss. The desire to escape death produced a cult of the dead, and they lavished wealth and art on tombs and memorials. They now made settlements on the west-shores, but these became rather strongholds and 'factories' of lords seeking wealth, and the Númenóreans became tax-gatherers carrying off over the sea ever more and more goods in their great ships. The Númenóreans began the forging of arms and engines.

This phase ended and the last began with the ascent of the throne by the thirteenth⁴ king of the line of Elros, Tar-Calion the Golden, the most powerful and proud of all kings. When he learned that Sauron had taken the title of King of Kings and Lord of the World, he resolved to put down the 'pretender'. He goes in strength and majesty to Middle-earth, and so vast is his armament, and so terrible are the Númenóreans in the day of their glory that Sauron's servants will not face them. Sauron humbles himself, does homage to Tar-Calion, and is carried off to Númenor as hostage and prisoner. But there he swiftly rises by his cunning and knowledge from servant to chief counsellor of the king, and seduces the king and most of the lords and people with his lies. He denies the existence of God, saying that the One is a mere invention of the jealous Valar of the West, the oracle of their own wishes. The chief of the gods is he that dwells in the Void, who will conquer in the end,

*The view is taken (as clearly reappears later in the case of the Hobbits that have the Ring for a while) that each 'Kind' has a natural span, integral to its biological and spiritual nature. This cannot really be increased qualitatively or quantitatively; so that prolongation in time is like stretching a wire out ever tauter, or 'spreading butter ever thinner' – it becomes an intolerable torment.

and in the void make endless realms for his servants. The Ban is only a lying device of fear to restrain the Kings of Men from seizing everlasting life and rivalling the Valar.

A new religion, and worship of the Dark, with its temple under Sauron arises. The Faithful are persecuted and sacrificed. The Númenóreans carry their evil also to Middle-earth and there become cruel and wicked lords of necromancy, slaying and tormenting men; and the old legends are overlaid with dark tales of horror. This does not happen, however, in the North West; for thither, because of the Elves, only the Faithful who remain Elf-friends will come. The chief haven of the good Númenóreans is near the mouth of the great river Anduin. Thence the still beneficent influence of Númenor spreads up the River and along the coasts as far north as the realm of Gilgalad, as a Common Speech grows up.

But at last Sauron's plot comes to fulfilment. Tar-Calion feels old age and death approaching, and he listens to the last prompting of Sauron, and building the greatest of all armadas, he sets sail into the West, breaking the Ban, and going up with war to wrest from the gods 'everlasting life within the circles of the world'. Faced by this rebellion, of appalling folly and blasphemy, and also real peril (since the Númenóreans directed by Sauron could have wrought ruin in Valinor itself) the Valar lay down their delegated power and appeal to God, and receive the power and permission to deal with the situation; the old world is broken and changed. A chasm is opened in the sea and Tar-Calion and his armada is engulfed. Númenor itself on the edge of the rift topples and vanishes for ever with all its glory in the abyss. Thereafter there is no visible dwelling of the divine or immortal on earth. Valinor (or Paradise) and even Eressëa are removed, remaining only in the memory of the earth. Men may sail now West, if they will, as far as they may, and come no nearer to Valinor or the Blessed Realm, but return only into the east and so back again; for the world is round, and finite, and a circle inescapable – save by death. Only the 'immortals', the lingering Elves, may still if they will, wearying of the circle of the world, take ship and find the 'straight way', and come to the ancient or True West, and be at peace.

So the end of the Second Age draws on in a major catastrophe; but it is not yet quite concluded. From the cataclysm there are survivors: *Elendil* the Fair, chief of the Faithful (his name means *Elf-friend*), and his sons *Isildur* and *Anarion*. Elendil, a Noachian figure, who has held off from the rebellion, and kept ships manned and furnished off the east coast of Númenor, flees before the overwhelming storm of the wrath of the West, and is borne high upon the towering waves that bring ruin to the west of the Middle-earth. He and his folk are cast away as exiles upon

the shores. There they establish the Númenórean kingdoms of Arnor in the north close to the realm of Gilgalad, and Gondor about the mouths of Anduin further south. Sauron, being an immortal, hardly escapes the ruin of Númenor and returns to Mordor, where after a while he is strong enough to challenge the exiles of Númenor.

The Second Age ends with the *Last Alliance* (of Elves and Men), and the great siege of Mordor. It ends with the overthrow of Sauron and destruction of the second visible incarnation of evil. But at a cost, and with one disastrous mistake. Gilgalad and Elendil are slain in the act of slaying Sauron. Isildur, Elendil's son, cuts the ring from Sauron's hand, and his power departs, and his spirit flees into the shadows. But the evil begins to work. Isildur claims the Ring as his own, as 'the Weregild of his father', and refuses to cast it into the Fire nearby. He marches away, but is drowned in the Great River, and the Ring is lost, passing out of all knowledge. But it is not unmade, and the Dark Tower built with its aid still stands, empty but not destroyed. So ends the Second Age with the coming of the Númenórean realms and the passing of the last kingship of the High Elves.

The Third Age is concerned mainly with the Ring. The Dark Lord is no longer on his throne, but his monsters are not wholly destroyed, and his dreadful servants, slaves of the Ring, endure as shadows among the shadows. Mordor is empty and the Dark Tower void, and a watch is kept upon the borders of the evil land. The Elves still have hidden refuges: at the Grey Havens of their ships, in the House of Elrond, and elsewhere. In the North is the Kingdom of Arnor ruled by the descendants of Isildur. Southward athwart the Great River Anduin are the cities and forts of the Númenórean realm of Gondor, with kings of the line of Anárion. Away in the (to these tales) uncharted East and South are the countries and realms of wild or evil men, alike only in their hatred of the West, derived from their master Sauron; but Gondor and its power bars the way. The Ring is lost, for ever it is hoped; and the Three Rings of the Elves, wielded by secret guardians, are operative in preserving the memory of the beauty of old, maintaining enchanted enclaves of peace where Time seems to stand still and decay is restrained, a semblance of the bliss of the True West.

But in the north Arnor dwindles, is broken into petty princedoms, and finally vanishes. The remnant of the Númenóreans becomes a hidden wandering Folk, and though their true line of Kings of Isildur's heirs never fails this is known only in the House of Elrond. In the south Gondor rises to a peak of power, almost reflecting Númenor, and then fades slowly to decayed Middle Age, a kind of proud, venerable, but increasingly impotent Byzantium. The watch upon Mordor is relaxed. The pressure of the Easterlings and Southrons increases. The line of

Kings fails, and the last city of Gondor, Minas Tirith ('Tower of Vigilance'), is ruled by hereditary Stewards. The Horsemen of the North, the Rohirrim or Riders of Rohan, taken into perpetual alliance, settle in the now unpeopled green plains that were once the northern part of the realm of Gondor. On the great primeval forest, Greenwood the Great, east of the upper waters of the Great River, a shadow falls, and grows, and it becomes Mirkwood. The Wise discover that it proceeds from a Sorcerer ('The Necromancer' of *The Hobbit*) who has a secret castle in the south of the Great Wood.*

In the middle of this Age the Hobbits appear. Their origin is unknown (even to themselves)† for they escaped the notice of the great, or the civilised peoples with records, and kept none themselves, save vague oral traditions, until they had migrated from the borders of Mirkwood, fleeing from the Shadow, and wandered westward, coming into contact with the last remnants of the Kingdom of Arnor.

Their chief settlement, where all the inhabitants are hobbits, and where an ordered, civilised, if simple and rural life is maintained, is *the Shire*, originally the farmlands and forests of the royal demesne of Arnor, granted as a fief: but the 'King', author of laws, has long vanished save in memory before we hear much of *the Shire*. It is in the year 1341 of the Shire (or 2941 of the Third Age: that is in its last century) that Bilbo – The Hobbit and hero of that tale – starts on his 'adventure'.

In that story, which need not be resumed, hobbitry and the hobbit-situation are not explained, but taken for granted, and what little is told of their history is in the form of casual allusion as to something known. The whole of the 'world-politics', outlined above, is of course there in mind, and also alluded to occasionally as to things elsewhere recorded in full. Elrond is an important character, though his reverence, high powers, and lineage are toned down and not revealed in full. There are allusions to the history of the Elves, and to the fall of Gondolin and so on. The shadows and evil of Mirkwood provide, in diminished 'fairy-story' mode, one of the major parts of the adventure. Only in one point

*It is only in the time between *The Hobbit* and its sequel that it is discovered that the Necromancer is *Sauron Redivivus*, growing swiftly to visible shape and power again. He escapes the vigilance and re-enters Mordor and the Dark Tower.

†The Hobbits are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically *human* race (not Elves or Dwarves) – hence the two kinds can dwell together (as at Bree), and are called just the Big Folk and Little Folk. They are entirely without non-human powers, but are represented as being more in touch with 'nature' (the soil and other living things, plants and animals), and abnormally, for humans, free from ambition or greed of wealth. They are made *small* (little more than half human stature, but dwindling as the years pass) partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man – though not with either the smallness or the savageness of Swift, and mostly to show up, in creatures of very small physical power, the amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men 'at a pinch'.

do these 'world-politics' act as part of the mechanism of the story. Gandalf the Wizard* is called away on high business, an attempt to deal with the menace of the Necromancer, and so leaves the Hobbit without help or advice in the midst of his 'adventure', forcing him to stand on his own legs, and become in his mode heroic. (Many readers have observed this point and guessed that the Necromancer must figure largely in any sequel or further tales of this time.)

The generally different tone and style of *The Hobbit* is due, in point of genesis, to it being taken by me as a matter from the great cycle susceptible of treatment as a 'fairy-story', for children. Some of the details of tone and treatment are, I now think, even on that basis, mistaken. But I should not wish to change much. For in effect this is a study of simple ordinary man, neither artistic nor noble and heroic (but not without the undeveloped seeds of these things) against a high setting – and in fact (as a critic has perceived) the tone and style change with the Hobbit's development, passing from fairy-tale to the noble and high and relapsing with the return.

The Quest of the Dragon-gold, the main theme of the actual tale of *The Hobbit*, is to the general cycle quite peripheral and incidental – connected with it mainly through Dwarf-history, which is nowhere central to these tales, though often important.† But in the course of the Quest, the Hobbit becomes possessed by seeming 'accident' of a 'magic ring', the chief and only immediately obvious power of which is to make its wearer invisible. Though for this tale an accident, unforeseen and having no place in any plan for the quest, it proves an essential to success. On return the Hobbit, enlarged in vision and wisdom, if unchanged in idiom, retains the ring as a personal secret.

The sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, much the largest, and I hope also in proportion the best, of the entire cycle, concludes the whole business – an attempt is made to include in it, and wind up, all the elements and motives of what has preceded: elves, dwarves, the Kings of Men, heroic 'Homeric' horsemen, orcs and demons, the terrors of the Ring-servants and Necromancy, and the vast horror of the Dark Throne, even in style

*Nowhere is the place or nature of 'the Wizards' made fully explicit. Their name, as related to Wise, is an Englishing of their Elvish name, and is used throughout as utterly distinct from Sorcerer or Magician. It appears finally that they were as one might say the near equivalent in the mode of these tales of Angels, guardian Angels. Their powers are directed primarily to the encouragement of the enemies of evil, to cause them to use their own wits and valour, to unite and endure. They appear always as old men and sages, and though (sent by the powers of the True West) in the world they suffer themselves, their age and grey hairs increase only slowly. Gandalf whose function is especially to watch human affairs (Men and Hobbits) goes on through all the tales.

†The hostility of (even good) Dwarves and Elves, a motive that often appears, derives from the legends of the First Age; the Mines of Moria, the wars of Dwarves and Orcs (goblins, soldiery of the Dark Lord) refer to the Second Age and early Third.

it is to include the colloquialism and vulgarity of Hobbits, poetry and the highest style of prose. We are to see the overthrow of the last incarnation of Evil, the unmaking of the Ring, the final departure of the Elves, and the return in majesty of the true King, to take over the Dominion of Men, inheriting all that can be transmitted of Elfdom in his high marriage with Arwen daughter of Elrond, as well as the lineal royalty of Númenor. But as the earliest Tales are seen through Elvish eyes, as it were, this last great Tale, coming down from myth and legend to the earth, is seen mainly through the eyes of Hobbits: it thus becomes in fact anthropocentric. But through Hobbits, not Men so-called, because the last Tale is to exemplify most clearly a recurrent theme: the place in 'world politics' of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten in the places of the Wise and Great (good as well as evil). A moral of the whole (after the primary symbolism of the Ring, as the will to mere power, seeking to make itself objective by physical force and mechanism, and so also inevitably by lies) is the obvious one that without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless.

It is not possible even at great length to 'pot' *The Lord of the Rings* in a paragraph or two. . . . It was begun in 1936,⁵ and every part has been written many times. Hardly a word in its 600,000 or more has been unconsidered. And the placing, size, style, and contribution to the whole of all the features, incidents, and chapters has been laboriously pondered. I do not say this in recommendation. It is, I feel, only too likely that I am deluded, lost in a web of vain imaginings of not much value to others – in spite of the fact that a few readers have found it good, on the whole.* What I intend to say is this: I cannot substantially alter the thing. I have finished it, it is 'off my mind': the labour has been colossal; and it must stand or fall, practically as it is.

[The letter continues with a summary (without comments) of the story of *The Lord of the Rings*, after which Tolkien writes:]

That is a long and yet bald resumé. Many characters important to the tale are not even mentioned. Even some whole inventions like the remarkable *Ents*, oldest of living rational creatures, *Shepherds of the Trees*, are omitted. Since we now try to deal with 'ordinary life', springing up ever unquenched under the trample of world policies and events, there are love-stories touched in, or love in different modes, wholly absent from *The Hobbit*. But the highest love-story, that of

*But as each has disliked this or that, I should (if I took all the criticisms together and obeyed them) find little left, and am forced to the conclusion that so great a work (in size) cannot be perfect, nor even if perfect, be liked entirely by any one reader.

Aragorn and Arwen Elrond's daughter is only alluded to as a known thing. It is told elsewhere in a short tale, *Of Aragorn and Arwen Undómiel*. I think the simple 'rustic' love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes, and the 'longing for Elves', and sheer beauty. But I will say no more, nor defend the theme of mistaken love seen in Eowyn and her first love for Aragorn. I do not feel much can now be done to heal the faults of this large and much-embracing tale – or to make it 'publishable', if it is not so now. A slight revision (now accomplished) of a crucial point in *The Hobbit*, clarifying the character of Gollum and his relation to the Ring, will enable me to reduce Book I chapter II 'The Shadow of the Past', simplify it, and quicken it – and also simplify the debatable opening of Book II a little. If *the other material*, 'The Silmarillion' and some other tales or links such as *The Downfall of Númenor* are published or in process of this, then much explanation of background, and especially that found in the *Council of Elrond* (Bk II) could be dispensed with. But altogether it would hardly amount to the excision of a single long chapter (out of about 72).

I wonder if (even if legible) you will ever read this ??