

A color photograph of J.R.R. Tolkien, an elderly man with white hair, sitting on a grassy lawn. He is leaning against a large tree trunk on his right side. He is wearing a brown tweed jacket over a dark green vest and a white shirt with a striped tie. His left hand is resting on his knee. The background shows a lush green lawn and trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

THE LETTERS OF  
J.R.R.  
TOLKIEN

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**J. R. R. Tolkien**



**The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien**

*A selection edited by*  
Humphrey Carpenter

with the assistance of  
Christopher Tolkien

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February 4th. 1938.

Dear Mr. Furth,

I enclose copy of Chapter I 'A Long-expected Party' of possible sequel to *The Hobbit*.

I received safely 4 additional copies of *The Hobbit*.

I received a letter from a young reader in Boston (Lincs) enclosing a list of errata. I then put on my youngest son, lying in bed with a bad heart, to find any more at twopenny a time. He did. I enclose the results — which added to those already submitted should (I hope) make an exhaustive list. I also hope they may one day be required.

Yours sincerely  
J.R.R. Tolkien.



## Introduction

Towards the end of his life, J. R. R. Tolkien was deprived for a few weeks of the use of his right arm. He told his publisher: 'I found not being able to use a pen or pencil as defeating as the loss of her beak would be to a hen.'

An immense amount of Tolkien's time was taken up with the written word: not just his academic work and the stories of 'Middle-earth', but also letters. Many of these had to be written in the way of business, but in any case letter-writing was on most occasions a favourite activity with him. The consequence is that an immense number of letters by Tolkien survive; and when, with the help of Christopher Tolkien, I began work on this selection, it became obvious that an enormous quantity of material would have to be omitted, and that only passages of particular interest could be included. Naturally, priority has been given to those letters where Tolkien discusses his own books; but the selection has also been made with an eye to demonstrating the huge range of Tolkien's mind and interests, and his idiosyncratic but always clear view of the world.

Among the omissions is the very large body of letters he wrote between 1913 and 1918 to Edith Bratt, who was his fiancée and then his wife; these are highly personal in character, and from them I have chosen only a few passages which refer to writings in which Tolkien was engaged at the time. Between 1918 and 1937 few letters survive, and such as have been preserved record (unfortunately) nothing about Tolkien's work on *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit*, which he was writing at this time. But from 1937 onwards there is an unbroken series of letters to the end of his life, giving, often in great detail, an account of the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*, and of later work on *The Silmarillion*, and often including lengthy discussions of the meaning of his writings.

Within the letters chosen for publication, all passages omitted have been indicated by a row of *four* dots, thus:.... In cases where *three* dots appear, this is the usage employed by Tolkien himself in the letter. In almost all cases, omissions have been made simply for reasons of space, and only very rarely has it been necessary to leave a passage out of a letter for reasons of discretion.

Tolkien's original text has been left unaltered except in the case of the address and date, which have been given according to the same system throughout the book. and in the matter of titles of Tolkien's books. He

himself employed a number of different systems for giving titles: for instance, *the Hobbit*, the 'Hobbit', *The Hobbit*, '*the Hobbit*', '*The Hobbit*'; so also with *The Lord of the Rings*. In general, editorial practice has been to regularise these titles according to the usual system, though the original form has been left where it is of interest.

Some letters are printed from carbon copies kept by Tolkien; he only began to make carbons of his letters towards the end of his life, and this explains why there is no trace of earlier letters unless the originals themselves can be discovered. Other letters in the book are printed from a draft or drafts which differ from the text that he actually sent (if he sent one at all), and in certain instances a continuous text has been assembled from several fragments of drafts: in cases where this has been done, the letter is headed 'Drafts'. The frequency of such drafts among his correspondence, and the great length of many of them, was partly explained by Tolkien in a letter to his son Michael:

Words beget words, and thoughts skid off into side-track. .... The 'laconic' is by me only occasionally achieved as an 'art form' by the cutting out of  $\frac{3}{4}$  or more of what I have written and so is, of course, in fact more time-taking and laborious than 'free length'.

Where only a portion of a letter has been printed, the address and opening salutation have been omitted, together with the ending and signature; in such cases the letter is headed 'From a letter to ——.' All footnotes to letters are Tolkien's own.

Where I have thought it necessary, letters are preceded by a headnote giving the context of the correspondence. All other notes will be found at the back of the book; the existence of such a note is indicated by a superior numeral in the text. Notes are numbered consecutively throughout each letter, and are identified letter by letter (rather than page by page) at the back of the book. The notes have been compiled according to the principle of providing such information as is necessary for comprehension, but the aim has been brevity, too, and it is assumed that the reader will have a fairly thorough knowledge of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Bearing in mind the large number of editions of the latter book, with their different paginations, Tolkien's page-references to it in his letters are explained in the notes, with a citation of the passage to which he is referring.

In the editorial notes, four books are cited by brief titles: *Pictures*, *Unfinished Tales*, *Biography*, *Inklings*. These are, in full: *Pictures by J. R. R. Tolkien*, with foreword and notes by Christopher Tolkien (1979); J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (1980); Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien, a biography* (1977); and Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (1978). All four books are published in Britain by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., and in America by the Houghton Mifflin Company.

The division of labour between myself and Christopher Tolkien has been as follows. I myself collected and transcribed all the letters, and the initial selection was mine; he commented on the selection and transcription, and made various suggestions for changes, which we discussed further, and adopted with various emendations. We then found it necessary to reduce the text quite severely, for considerations of space; again, I proposed the initial cuts, he made comments on my suggestions, and we agreed on a final procedure. With the notes, too, I wrote the original text, and he again commented on what I had done and supplied certain additional pieces of information. The book as published therefore reflects my own taste and judgement rather more than his, but it is also the product of our joint work; and I am very grateful to him for sparing many hours, and for guiding and encouraging me.

Finally I am, of course, very grateful too to those many people who lent letters. Most of these are acknowledged in the book, in that their names appear as the recipients of the letters; in those few cases where letters were lent but have not been included, I must both thank those concerned and apologise to them for the fact that their letter or letters were omitted for reasons of space. I must also thank the various organisations and individuals who helped me: members of the Tolkien Society of Great Britain, the American Tolkien Society, and the Mythopoeic Society, who publicised our wish to trace letters, and in some cases put us in touch with owners of letters; the BBC Written Archives, the Bodleian Library, the Oxford University Press and its Dictionary Department, the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Wade Collection at Wheaton College, Illinois, all of whom made letters available to us; the various executors (especially the Rev. Walter Hooper) and other people who helped us trace letters to persons now deceased; and finally Douglas Anderson, who helped greatly and generously in a number

of ways with the preparation of the book. He and Charles Noad kindly read proofs for us.

Despite the length of this volume, and the great number of letters we have collected, there can be no doubt that much of Tolkien's correspondence still remains untraced. Any reader knowing of further letters which might deserve publication is encouraged to contact the publishers of this book, in the hope that it may be possible to add them to a second edition.

Humphrey Carpenter



## LETTERS

## 1 To Edith Bratt

[Tolkien became engaged to Edith Bratt, whom he had met during his adolescence in Birmingham, in January 1913, when he was twenty-one. The following letter was written during his final year as an undergraduate at Oxford, when he was studying English Language & Literature, and at the same time was drilling in the University Officers' Training Corps as a preparation for joining the army.]

[Not dated; October 1914]

Exeter College, Oxford

My Edith darling:

Yes I was rather surprised by your card of Sat. morning and rather sorry because I knew my letter would have to wander after you. You do write splendid letters to me, little one; I am such a pig to you though. It seems age[s] since I wrote. I have had a busy (and very wet!) week end.

Friday was completely uneventful and Sat too though we had a drill all afternoon and got soaked several times and our rifles got all filthy and took ages to clean afterwards.

I spent most of the rest of those days indoors reading: I had an essay, as I told you, but I didn't get it finished as Shakespeare came up and then (Lieutenant) Thompson (very healthy and well in his new uniform) and prevented me doing work on the Sabbath, as I had proposed to do..... I went to St Aloysius for High Mass – and I rather enjoyed it – it is such ages since I heard one for Fr. F. wouldn't let me go when I was at the Oratory last week.

I *had* to pay a duty call to the Rector in the afternoon which was very boring. His wife really is appalling! I got away as soon as possible and fled back in the rain to my books. Then I went and saw Mr Sisam and told him I could not finish my essay till Wed: and stayed and talked with him for some time, then I went and had an interesting talk with that quaint man Earp I have told you of and introduced him (to his great delight) to the 'Kālevalā' the Finnish ballads.

Amongst other work 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 Morris' romances with chunks of poetry in between.....

I have got to go to the college library now and get filthy amongst dusty books – and then hang about and see the Bursar. .... R.

## **2 From a letter to Edith Bratt 27 November 1914**

I did about 4 hrs. [work] 9.20-1 or so in the morning: drilled all afternoon went to a lecture 5-6 and after dinner (with a man called Earp) had to go to a meeting of the Essay Club – an informal kind of last gasp [?]. There was a bad paper but an interesting discussion. It was also composition meeting and I read 'Earendel' which was well criticised.

### 3 From a letter to Edith Bratt 26 November 1915

[After graduating at Oxford with a First Class in English, Tolkien was commissioned in the Lancashire Fusiliers. This letter was written from Rugeley Camp in Staffordshire, where he was training. Meanwhile he was working on a poem, 'Kortirion among the Trees', suggested by Warwick, where Edith Bratt was living. The poem describes a 'fading town upon a little hill', where 'linger yet the Lonely Companies ..... The holy fairies and immortal elves.' For 'the T.C.B.S.' see no. 5.]

The usual kind of morning standing about and freezing and then trotting to get warmer so as to freeze again. We ended up by an hour's bomb-throwing with dummies. Lunch and a freezing afternoon. All the hot days of summer we doubled about at full speed and perspiration, and now we stand in icy groups in the open being talked at! Tea and another scramble – I fought for a place at the stove and made a piece of toast on the end of a knife: what days! I have written out a pencil copy of 'Kortirion'. I hope you won't mind my sending it to the T.C.B.S. I want to send them something: I owe them all long letters. I will start on a careful ink copy for little you now and send it tomorrow night, as I don't think I shall get more than one copy typed (it is so long). No on second thoughts I am sending you the pencil copy (which is very neat) and shall keep the T.C.B.S. waiting till I can make another.

#### **4 From a letter to Edith Bratt 2 March 1916**

This miserable drizzling afternoon I have been reading up old military lecture-notes again:— and getting bored with them after an hour and a half. I have done some touches to my nonsense fairy language – to its improvement.

I often long to work at it and don't let myself 'cause though I love it so it does seem such a mad hobby!

## 5 To G. B. Smith

[While they were at King Edward's School, Birmingham, in 1911, Tolkien and three friends, Rob Gilson, Geoffrey Smith and Christopher Wiseman, formed themselves into an unofficial and semi-secret society which they called 'the T.C.B.S.', initials standing for 'Tea Club and Barrovian Society', an allusion to their fondness for having tea in the school library, illicitly, and in Barrow's Stores near the school. Since leaving King Edward's, the T.C.B.S. had kept in close touch with each other, and in December 1914 had held a 'Council' at Wiseman's London home, following which Tolkien had begun to devote much energy to writing poetry – the result, he believed, of the shared ideals and mutual encouragement of the T.C.B.S. Wiseman was now serving in the Navy, Gilson and Smith were sent out to the Somme, and Tolkien arrived on that battlefield, as Battalion Signalling Officer to the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers, just as the Allied offensive of 1 July was beginning. On that day, Rob Gilson was killed in action, but news of his death did not reach the other members of the T.C.B.S. for some weeks. Geoffrey Smith sent Tolkien a note about it, and later passed him a letter from Christopher Wiseman.]

12 August 1916

11th Lancashire Fusiliers, B.E.F., France

My dear old Geoffrey,

Thank you indeed for Christopher's letter. I have thought much of things since – most of them incommunicable thoughts until God brings us together again if it be only for a space.

I don't agree with Chris – although of course he does not say much. I agree most heartily of course with the pan you underlined – but strangely enough not in the least now with the part I marked and commented. I went out into the wood – we are out in camp again from our second bout of trenches still in the same old area as when I saw you – last night and also the night before and sat and thought.

I cannot get away from the conclusion that it is wrong to confound the greatness which Rob has won with the greatness which he himself doubted. He himself will know that I am only being perfectly sincere and I am in no way unfaithful to my love for him – which I only realise now, more and more daily, that he has gone from the four — when I say that I now believe that if the greatness which we three certainly meant (and meant as more than holiness or nobility alone) is really the lot of the TCBS, then the death of any of its members is but a bitter winnowing of those who were not meant to be great – at least directly. God grant that this does not sound arrogant – I feel humbler enough in truth and immeasurably weaker and poorer now. The greatness I meant was that of a great instrument in God's hands – a mover, a doer, even an achiever of great things, a beginner at the very least of large things.

The greatness which Rob has found is in no way smaller – for the greatness I meant and tremblingly hoped for as ours is valueless unless steeped with the same holiness of courage suffering and sacrifice – but is of a different kind. His greatness is in other words now a personal matter with us – of a kind to make us keep July 1st as a special day for all the years God may grant to any of us – but only touches the TCBS on that precise side which perhaps – it is possible – was the only one that Rob really felt – 'Friendship to the Nth power'. What I meant, and thought



Chris meant, and am almost sure you meant, was that the TCBS had been granted some spark of fire – certainly as a body if not singly – that was destined to kindle a new light, or, what is the same thing, rekindle an old light in the world; that the TCBS was destined to testify for God and Truth in a more direct way even than by laying down its several lives in this war (which is for all the evil of our own side with large view good against evil).

So far my chief impression is that something has gone crack. I feel just the same to both of you — nearer if anything and very much in need of you — I am hungry and lonely of course – but I don't feel a member of a little complete body now. I honestly feel that the TCBS has ended – but I am not at all sure that it is not an unreliable feeling that will vanish – like magic perhaps when we come together again. Still I feel a mere individual at present — with intense feelings more than ideas but very powerless.

Of course the TCBS may have been all we dreamt — and its work in the end be done by three or two or one survivor and the part of the others be trusted by God to that of the inspiration which we do know we all got and get from one another. To this I now pin my hopes, and pray God that the people chosen to carry on the TCBS may be no fewer than we three. ....

I do however dread and grieve about it – apart from my own personal longings – because I cannot abandon yet the hope and ambitions (inchoate and cloudy I know) that first became conscious at the Council of London. That Council was as you know followed in my own case with my finding a voice for all kinds of pent up things and a tremendous opening up of everything for me:—I have always laid that to the credit of the inspiration that even a few hours with the four always brought to all of us.

There you are — I have sat solemnly down and tried to tell you drily just what I think. I have made it sound very cold and distant – and if it is incoherent that is due to its being written at different sittings amongst the noise of a very boring Company mess.

Send it on to Chris if you think it worth while. I do not know what is to be our move next or what is in store. Rumour is as busy as the universal weariness of all this war allows it to be. I wish I could know where you are. I make a guess of course.

I could write a huge letter but I have lots of jobs on. The Bde. Sig. Offr. is after me for a confabulation, and I have two rows 10 have with the QM and a detestable 6.30 parade – 6.30 pm of a sunny Sabbath.

Write to me when you get the ghost of a chance.

Yours

John Ronald.

## 6 To Mrs E. M. Wright

[In 1920 Tolkien was appointed Reader in English Language at Leeds University, a post that was later converted into a Professorship; see no. 46 for an account of the interview leading to his appointment. Tolkien was now married to Edith Bran; by 1923 he had two children, John and Michael. In 1922 he published a glossary to a Middle

English Reader edited by his former tutor, Kenneth Sisam. He also began work with E. V. Gordon on an edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The following letter,

acknowledging receipt of an article about that poem, is addressed to the wife of Joseph Wright, editor of the *English Dialect Dictionary* ('E.D.D.'). Tolkien had studied philology with Wright at Oxford.]

13 February 1923

The University, Leeds

Dear Mrs Wright,

I am very grateful to you for the offprint – and also for your kind remarks about the glossary. I certainly lavished an amount of time on it which is terrible to recall, and long delayed the Reader bringing curses on my head; but it was instructive.

I need hardly say that I am quite convinced by your article and am delighted to feel confident that another rough patch in 'Sir G.' is now smoothed out finally by you.

We have just passed through a somewhat disastrous Christmas, as the children chose that time to sicken for measles – by the beginning of January I was the only one in the house left up, the patients including the wife & nursemaid. The vacation work lay in ruins; but they (not the work) are all better now and not much the worse. I escaped. I hope you are well, and that Professor Wright is well – I have not heard any news of him lately, which I have interpreted favourably.

Middle English is an exciting field-almost uncharted I begin to think, because as soon as one turns detailed personal attention on to any little corner of it the received notions and ideas seem to crumple up and fall to pieces — as far as language goes at any rate. E.D.D. is certainly indispensable, or 'unentbehrlich' as really comes more natural to the philological mind, and I encourage people to browse in it.

My wife wishes to be remembered to you both and joins her greetings to mine.

Yours sincerely  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

Philology is making headway here. The proportion of 'language' students is very high, and there is no trace of the press-gang! JRRT.

## 7 To the Electors of the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon, University of Oxford

[In the summer of 1925 the Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford was advertised, following the resignation of W. A. Craigie. Tolkien decided to apply, though he was only thirty-three. This is his formal letter of application, dated 27 June 1925.]

Gentlemen,

I desire to offer myself as a candidate for the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon.

A Chair which affords such opportunity of expressing and communicating an instructed enthusiasm for Anglo-Saxon studies and for the study of the other Old Germanic languages is naturally attractive to me, nor could I desire anything better than to be reassociated in this way with the Oxford English School. I was a member of that School both as undergraduate and as tutor, and during my five years' absence in Leeds am happy to have remained in touch with it, more especially, in the last two years, as an Examiner in the Final Schools.

I entered Exeter College as Stapledon Exhibitioner in 1911. After taking Classical Moderations in 1913 (in which I specialized in Greek philology), I graduated with first class honours in English in 1915, my special subject being Old Icelandic. Until the end of 1918 I held a commission in the Lancashire Fusiliers, and at that date entered the service of the Oxford English Dictionary. I was one of Dr. Bradley's assistants until the spring of 1920, when my own work and the increasing labours of a tutor made it impossible to continue.

In October 1920 I went to Leeds as Reader in English Language, with a free commission to develop the linguistic side of a large and growing School of English Studies, in which no regular provision had as yet been made for the linguistic specialist. I began with five hesitant pioneers out of a School (exclusive of the first year) of about sixty members. The proportion to-day is 43 literary to 20 linguistic students. The linguists are in no way isolated or cut off from the general life and work of the department, and share in many of the literary courses and activities of the School; but since 1922 their purely linguistic work has been conducted in special classes, and examined in distinct papers of special standard and attitude. The instruction offered has been gradually extended, and now covers a large part of the field of English and Germanic philology. Courses are given on Old English heroic verse, the history of English\*, various Old English and Middle English texts\*, Old and Middle English philology\*, introductory Germanic philology\*, Gothic, Old Icelandic (a second-year\*

and third-year course), and Medieval Welsh\*. All these courses I have from time to time given myself; those that I have given personally in the past year are marked\*. During this last session a course of voluntary reading of texts not specially considered in the current syllabus has attracted more than fifteen students, not all of them from the linguistic side of the department.

Philology, indeed, appears to have lost for these students its connotations of terror if not of mystery. An active discussion-class has been conducted, on lines more familiar in schools of literature than of language, which has borne fruit in friendly rivalry and open debate with the corresponding literary assembly. A Viking Club has even been formed, by past and present students of Old Icelandic, which promises to carry on the same kind of activity independently of the staff. Old Icelandic has been a point of special development, and usually reaches a higher standard than the other special subjects, being studied for two years and in much the same detail as Anglo-Saxon.....

The large amount of teaching and direction which my post has hitherto involved, supplemented by a share in the general administration of a growing department, and latterly by the duties of a member of Senate at a time of special difficulty in University policy, has seriously interfered with my projects for publishable work; but I append a note of what I have found time to do. If elected to the Rawlinson and Bosworth Chair I should endeavour to make productive use of the opportunities which it offers for research; to advance, to the best of my ability, the growing neighbourliness of linguistic and literary studies, which can never be enemies except by misunderstanding or without loss to both; and to continue in a wider and more fertile field the encouragement of philological enthusiasm among the young.

I remain,  
Gentlemen,  
Your obedient servant,  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

## **8 From a letter to the Vice Chancellor of Leeds University**

22 July 1925

My election to the Rawlinson & Bosworth professorship at Oxford has just been announced to me, & I have accepted – it takes effect from next October 1st — only with feelings of great regret at this sudden severance, in spite of this unexpected turn of fortune for myself.

Only the sudden resignation of my predecessor has thrust this upon me so soon — I dimly coveted it as a thing perhaps for the more distant years, but now after this University's kindness, and the great happiness of my brief period of work here, I feel ungrateful in asking to be released from my appointment so soon. I hope for your forgiveness.



## 9 To Susan Dagnall, George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

[Tolkien wrote the greater part of *The Hobbit* during his first seven years as Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. A text was in existence by the winter of 1932, when it was read by C. S. Lewis, though at this stage the typescript apparently lacked the final chapters, and broke off shortly before the death of the dragon Smaug. This typescript was eventually seen by Susan Dagnall, an Oxford graduate working for the London publishing house of Allen & Unwin, and she encouraged Tolkien to complete the story and offer it for publication. See nos. 163, 257, and 294 for Tolkien's account of her involvement with the book, though two of these later letters are in error in suggesting that

Susan Dagnall was still an Oxford student when she read the manuscript. See further *Biography* p. 180. It was on 3 October 1936 that Tolkien sent the completed typescript to Allen & Unwin. Stanley Unwin, founder and chairman of the firm, replied on 5 October that they would give their 'immediate and careful consideration' to the book. No further correspondence survives until the following letter. By the time that Tolkien wrote it, the book had been accepted for publication, and he was already preparing maps and illustrations.]

4 January 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Miss Dagnall,

Maps &c. for '*The Hobbit*'.

I am sorry for the long delay. I was unwell for some time, and then faced by a family laid low one by one by influenza, brought back from school for the entire ruin of Christmas. I succumbed myself on New Year's Eve. It has been difficult to do anything, and what I have done is I fear poor enough. I have redrawn two items: the chart, which has to be tipped in (in Chapter I), and the general map. I can only hope – as I have small skill, and no experience of preparing such things for reproduction – that they may possibly serve. The other maps I have decided are not wanted.

I have redrawn (as far as I am capable) one or two of the amateur illustrations of the 'home manuscript', conceiving that they might serve as endpapers, frontispiece or what not. I think on the whole such things, if they were better, might be an improvement. But it may be impossible at this stage, and in any case they are not very good and may be technically unsuitable. It would be kind if you would return the rejected.

Yours sincerely  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

## 10 To C. A. Furth, Allen & Unwin

[Some time between 1932 and 1937, Tolkien wrote and illustrated a short book for children entitled *Mr Bliss*. For a description of it, see *Biography* p. 163. It was shown to

Allen & Unwin at the same time that *The Hobbit* was submitted. The publishers said they would be happy to accept it, providing Tolkien could reduce the number of colours in the drawings.]

17 January 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Sir,

'Mr Bliss' returned safely. I can only say that I was surprised to receive your kind letter the following morning. I did not imagine that he was worth so much trouble. The pictures seem to me mostly only to prove that the author cannot draw. But if your firm really think that he is worth publishing, I will try and make the illustrations more easy to reproduce. Certainly it would be a great help, if you would be so kind as to call, as you suggest, and give me some advice. I am at present endeavouring to earn a grant for 'research', in addition to my ordinary duties, but I may find some odd moments in the near future, especially as I am freed from the burden of examining for two years.

I am also grateful and pleasantly surprised that the drawings for 'the Hobbit' can be used. I leave it in your hands as to the best way of reproducing and using them. Actually the *chart* – the map with runes – was intended to be tipped in (folded) in Chapter I, opposite the first mention of it: 'a piece of parchment rather like a map', towards the end of the chapter. The *other map* in the 'home MS.' came at the end, and the long narrow drawing of *Mirkwood* was at the beginning. The *Elvenking's Gate* came at the end of Ch. VIII, *Lake Town* in Ch. X, *The Front Gate* in Ch. XI after the description of the adventurers' first sight of it: 'they could see the dark cavernous opening in a great cliff-wall'. In considering the matter closer I see that this concentrates all the maps and pictures, in place or reference, towards the end. This is due to no plan, but occurs simply because I failed to reduce the other illustrations to even passable shape. I was also advised that those with a geographical or landscape content were the most suitable – even apart from my inability to draw anything else.

I now enclose 6 more. They all are obviously defective, and quite apart from this may, each or some, present difficulties of reproduction. Also you may be quite unwilling to consider thus belatedly any more complications, and a change of plan. So that I shall be neither pained nor surprised if you return them, all or any. ....

I am yrs. truly,  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

## 11 From a letter to Allen & Unwin 5 February 1937

[Concerning the reproduction of illustrations in *The Hobbit*.]

I approve the rough prints. Reduction has improved all except 'the Trolls'. On this there are one or two defects, probably simply due to the impression. I have marked them: the thin white outline of one of the background trees is slightly broken; some of the tiny dots outlining a flame have failed to come out; the dot after 'Trolls.' also.

In the 'Hall at Bag-End' I misguidedly put in a wash shadow reaching right up to the side beam. This has of course come out black (with disappearance of the key) though not right up to the beam. But the print is I think as good as the original allows. Please note – these are not serious criticisms! I am still surprised that these indifferent pictures have been accepted at all, and that you have taken so much trouble with them – especially against economics (a factor I had not forgotten, and the reason for my originally forswearing illustrations).

## 12 To Allen & Unwin

[In mid-March, Tolkien returned the proofs of *The Hobbit* to Allen & Unwin, having marked them with a very large number of alterations to the original text. He was told that as a result he might have to pay part of the cost of correction, though the publishers noted that he had devised revisions which would occupy exactly the same space as the original text. With the following letter, he submitted a drawing for the dust-jacket, which included a runic inscription.]

13 April 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Sirs,

I return under separate cover the corrected *Revises* of *the Hobbit*, complete. .... I note what you so kindly say about the cost of corrections. I must pay what is just, if required; though I shall naturally be grateful for clemency. Thank you for your trouble & consideration. ....

You will find with the revised proofs a *draft of the jacket*, for your criticism. I discovered (as I anticipated) that it was rather beyond my craft and experience. But perhaps the general design would do?

I foresee the main objections.

There are too many colours: blue, green, red, black. (The 2 reds are an accident; the 2 greens inessential.) This could be met, with possible improvement, by substituting *white* for *red*; and omitting the sun, or drawing a line round it. The presence of the sun and moon in the sky together refers to the magic attaching to the door.

It is too complicated, and needs simplifying: e.g. by reducing the mountains to a single colour, and simplification of the jagged 'fir-trees'.....

In redrawing the whole thing could be reduced – if you think the runes are attractive. Though magical in appearance they merely run:

*The Hobbit or There and Back Again, being the record of a year's journey made by Bilbo Baggins; compiled from his memoirs by J. R. R. Tolkien and published by George Allen & Unwin. ....*

Yrs truly

J. R. R. Tolkien.

### 13 To C. A. Furth, Allen & Unwin

[On 11 May, Allen & Unwin told Tolkien that they had interested 'one of the outstanding firms of American publishers' in *The Hobbit*, and said that this firm 'would like a number of further illustrations in colour and suggested employing good American artists'. Allen & Unwin, however, thought 'it would be better if all the illustrations were from your hand'.]

13 May 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Furth,

Thank you for the information concerning prospective American publication. Could you tell me the name of the firm, and what are likely to be the financial arrangements?

As for the illustrations: I am divided between knowledge of my own inability and fear of what American artists (doubtless of admirable skill) might produce. In any case I agree that all the illustrations ought to be by the same hand: four professional pictures would make my own amateurish productions look rather silly. I have some 'pictures' in my drawer, but though they represent scenes from the mythology on the outskirts of which the Hobbit had his adventures, they do not really illustrate his story. The only possible one is the original coloured version of *Mirkwood* (re-drawn in black and white for 'the Hobbit'). I should have to try and draw some five or six others for the purpose. I will attempt this, as far as time allows in the middle of term, if you think it advisable. But I could not promise anything for some time. Perhaps the matter does not allow of much delay? It might be advisable, rather than lose the American interest, to let the Americans do what seems good to them – as long as it was possible (I should like to add) to veto anything from or influenced by the Disney studios (for all whose works I have a heartfelt loathing). I have seen American illustrations that suggest that excellent things might be produced – only too excellent for their companions. But perhaps you could tell me how long there is before I must produce samples that might hope to satisfy Transatlantic juvenile taste (or its expert connoisseurs)?....

Yours sincerely

J. R. R. Tolkien



## 14 To Allen & Unwin

[The publishers had suggested to Tolkien that *The Hobbit* should be published in October 1937, just after the beginning of the Michaelmas Term at Oxford. They also told him that they had forwarded his letter about illustrations (no. 13) to the Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston, Massachusetts, who were to publish the book in America.]

28 May 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Sirs,

....*Date of publication.* This is, of course, your business, and entails many considerations outside my knowledge. In any case the final decision is now, I suppose, made; and America has also to be considered. But as far as G.B. is concerned, I cannot help thinking that you are possibly mistaken in taking Oxford University and its terms into account; and alternatively, if you do, in considering early October better than June. Most of O.U. will take no interest in such a story; that part of it that will is already clamouring, and indeed beginning to add *The Hobbit* to my long list of never-never procrastinations. As far as 'local interest' is concerned it is probably at its peak (not that at its best it will amount to much reckoned in direct sales, I imagine). In any case late June between the last preparations for exams and the battle with scripts (affecting only a minority of seniors) is a quiescent interlude, when lighter reading is sought, for immediate use and for the vacation. October with the inrush of a new academic year is most distracted.

Mr Lewis of Magdalen, who reviews for the Times Literary Supplement, tells me that he has already written urging a review and claiming the book as a specialist in fairy-stories; and he is now disgruntled because he will get 'juveniles' that he does not want, while *The Hobbit* will not reach him until the vacation is over, and will have to wait till December to be read & written up properly. Also if the book had been available before the university disintegrates I could have got my friend the editor of the O.U. Magazine, who has been giving it a good dose of my dragon-lore recently, to allocate it and get a review at the beginning of the autumn term. However, I say these things too late I expect. In any case I do not suppose it makes in the long run a great deal of difference. I have only one personal motive in regretting this delay: and that is that I was anxious that it should appear as soon as possible, because I am under research-contract since last October, and not supposed to be indulging in exams or in 'frivolities'. The further we advance into my contract time, the more difficulty I shall have (and I have already had some) in pretending

that the work belongs wholly to the period before October 1936. I shall now find it very hard to make people believe that this is not the major fruits of 'research' 1936—7!

*Houghton Mifflin Co.* I was perturbed to learn that my letter had been sent across the water. It was not intended for American consumption unedited: I should have expressed myself rather differently. I now feel even greater hesitation in posing further as an illustrator.... However, I enclose three coloured 'pictures'. I cannot do much better, and if their standard is too low, the H.M.Co can say so at once and without offence, as long as they send them back. These are casual and careless pastime products, illustrating other stories. Having publication in view I could possibly improve the standard a little, make drawings rather bolder in colour & less messy and fussy in detail (and also larger). The Mirkwood picture is much the same as the plate in *the Hobbit*, but illustrates a different adventure. I think if the H.M.Co wish me to proceed I should leave that black and grey plate and do four other scenes. I will try my hand at them as soon as possible, which is not likely to be before their verdict arrives, if cabled...

Yours truly,  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

## 15 To Allen & Unwin

[Enclosed with this letter was a coloured version of the drawing 'The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the-Water'. Tolkien had already sent four new coloured drawings: 'Rivendell', 'Bilbo woke with the early sun in his eyes', 'Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves', and 'Conversation with Smaug'. All of these except the 'Huts of the Raft-elves' were used in the first American edition, and all except 'Bilbo woke with the early sun in his eyes' were added to the second British impression.]

31 August 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Furth,

I send herewith the coloured version of the frontispiece. If you think it good enough, you may send it on to the Houghton Mifflin Co. Could you at the same time make it finally clear to them (It does not seem easy): that the first *three* drawings were *not* illustrations to 'the Hobbit', but only samples: they cannot be used for that book, and may now be returned. Also that the ensuing *five* drawings (*four* and now *one*) were specially made for the H.M.Co, and for 'the Hobbit'. They are, of course, at liberty to reject or use all or any of these *five*. But I would point out that they are specially selected so as to distribute illustration fairly evenly throughout the book (especially when taken in conjunction with the black-and-white drawings).

I suppose no question of remuneration arises? I have no consciousness of merit (though the labour was considerable), and I imagine that the 'gratis' quality of my efforts compensates for other defects. But I gathered that the H.M.Co's original terms simply covered 'The Hobbit', as you produced it, and that they then proposed to top up with coloured pictures, as a selling attraction of their own, employing good American artists. They would have had to pay these independently. At the moment I am in such difficulties (largely owing to medical expenses) that even a very small fee would be a blessing. Would it be possible to suggest (*when* they have decided if they want any of these things) that a small financial consideration would be gracious?

Perhaps you will advise me, or tell me where I get off? I need hardly say that such an idea only occurs to me with regard to the Americans – who have given a lot of unnecessary trouble. Even if I did not know that your production costs have been excessive (and that I have been hard on proofs), you are most welcome at any time to anything you think I can do, in the way of drawing or redrawing, that is fit to use on The Hobbit.

I hope Mr Baggins will eventually come to my rescue – in a moderate way (I do not expect pots of troll-gold). I am beginning to have hopes that the publishers (*vide* jacket) may be justified. I have had two testimonials recently, which promise moderately well. For one thing Professor Gordon

has actually read the book (supposed to be a rare event); and assures me that he will recommend it generally and to the Book Society. I may warn you that his promises are usually generous – but his judgement, at any rate, is pretty good. Professor Chambers writes very enthusiastically, but he is an old and kindhearted friend. The most valuable is the document I enclose, in case it may interest you: a letter from R. Meiggs (at present editing the Oxford Magazine). He has no reason for sparing my feelings, and is usually a plain speaker. Of course, he has no connexions with reviewing coteries, and is virtually a mere member of the avuncular public.

Yours sincerely  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

P.S. I enclose also a commentary on the jacket-flap words for your perusal at leisure — if you can read it.

[When *The Hobbit* was published on 21 September 1937, Allen & Unwin printed the following remarks on the jacket-flap: 'J. R. R. Tolkien.... has four children and *The Hobbit* .... was read aloud to them in nursery days. .... The manuscript.... was lent to friends in Oxford and read to their children. .... The birth of *The Hobbit* recalls very strongly that of *Alice in Wonderland*. Here again a professor of an abstruse subject is at play.' Tolkien now sent the following commentary on these remarks.]

By the way. I meant some time ago to comment on the additional matter that appears on the jacket. I don't suppose it is a very important item in launching *The Hobbit* (while that book is only one minor incident in your concerns); so I hope you will take the ensuing essay in good part, and allow me the pleasure of explaining things (the professor will out), even if it does not appear useful.

I am in your hands, if you think that is the right note. Strict truth is, I suppose, not necessary (or even desirable). But I have a certain anxiety lest the H.M.Co seize upon the words and exaggerate the inaccuracy to falsehood. And reviewers are apt to lean on hints. At least I am when performing that function.

*Nursery*: I have never had one, and the study has always been the place for such amusements. In any case is the age-implication right? I should have said 'the nursery' ended about 8 when children go forth to school. That is too young. My eldest boy was thirteen when he heard the serial. It did not appeal to the younger ones who had to grow up to it successively.

*Lent*: we must pass that (though strictly it was forced on the friends by me). The MS. certainly wandered about, but it was not, as far as I know,

ever read *to* children, and only read *by* one child (a girl of 12-13), before Mr Unwin tried it out.

*Abstruse*: I do not profess an 'abstruse' subject – not qua 'Anglo-Saxon'. Some folk may think so, but I do not like encouraging them. Old English and Icelandic literature are no more remote from human concerns, or difficult to acquire cheaply, than commercial Spanish (say). I have tried both. In any case – except for the runes (Anglo-Saxon) and the dwarf-names (Icelandic), neither used with antiquarian accuracy, and both regretfully substituted to avoid abstruseness for the genuine alphabets and names of the mythology into which Mr Baggins intrudes – I am afraid my professional knowledge is not directly used. The magic and mythology and assumed 'history' and most of the names (e.g. the epic of the Fall of Gondolin) are, alas!, drawn from unpublished inventions, known only to my family, Miss Griffiths and Mr Lewis. I believe they give the narrative an air of 'reality' and have a northern atmosphere. But I wonder whether one should lead the unsuspecting to imagine it all comes out of the 'old books', or tempt the knowing to point out that it does not?

'Philology' – my real professional bag of tricks – may be abstruse, and perhaps more comparable to Dodgson's maths. So the real parallel (if one exists: I feel very much that it breaks down if examined)<sup>1</sup> lies in the fact that both these technical subjects in any overt form are absent. The only philological remark (I think) in *The Hobbit* is on p. 221 (lines 6-7 from end): an odd mythological way of referring to linguistic philosophy, and a point that will (happily) be missed by any who have not read Barfield (few have), and probably by those who have. I am afraid this stuff of mine is really more comparable to Dodgson's amateur photography, and his song of Hiawatha's failure than *to Alice*.

*Professor*: a professor at play rather suggests an elephant in its bath – as Sir Walter Raleigh said of Professor Jo Wright in a sportive mood at a *viva*. Strictly (I believe) Dodgson was not a 'professor', but a college lecturer — though he was kind to my kind in making the 'professor' the best character (unless you prefer the mad gardener) in *Sylvie & Bruno*. Why not 'student'? The word has the added advantage that Dodgson's official status was Student of Christ Church. If you think it good, and fair (the compliment to *The Hobbit* is rather high) to maintain the comparison – *Looking-glass* ought to be mentioned. It is much closer in every way. ....

J. R. R. Tolkien.



## 16 To Michael Tolkien

[Tolkien's second son Michael, now aged sixteen, was a pupil at the Oratory School in Berkshire, together with his younger brother Christopher. He was hoping to get into the school rugby football team.]

3 October 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dearest Mick,

It was nice to have a letter from you. I hope all is going well. I thought the new flats looked as if they would be presentable when furnished. It is good of you to keep a kindly eye on Chris, as far as you can. I expect he will make a mess of things to begin with, but he ought soon to find his bearings and be no more trouble to you or himself.

I am sorry and surprised you are not (yet) in the team. But many a man ends up in it and even with colours, who is rejected at first. It was so with me – and for same reason: too light. But one day I decided to make up for weight by (legitimate) ferocity, and I ended up a house-captain at end of that season, & got my colours the next. But I got rather damaged – among things having my tongue nearly cut out – and as I am on the whole rather luckier than you, I should really be quite happy if you remain uninjured though not in the team! But God bless you & keep you anyway. There is no very special news. Mummy seems to have taken to car-riding. We have been two since you left, and I have now got to take her, P. and J.B. out this afternoon instead of writing. So this must be all for the moment. With v. much love indeed. Your own Father

## 17 To Stanley Unwin, Chairman of Allen & Unwin

[Unwin had sent Tolkien a letter from the author Richard Hughes, who had been given a copy of *The Hobbit* by Allen & Unwin. Hughes wrote to Unwin: 'I agree with you that it is one of the best stories for children I have come across for a very long time..... The only snag I can see is that many parents .... may be afraid that certain parts of it would be too terrifying for bedside reading.' Unwin also mentioned that his own eleven-year-old son Rayner, who had written the report on the manuscript of *The Hobbit* which had led to its publication (see *Biography* pp. 180-81), had been re-reading the book now that it was in print. Unwin concluded by warning Tolkien that 'a large public' would be 'clamouring next year to hear more from you about Hobbits!']

15 October 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Unwin,

Thank you very much for your kind letter of October 11th, and now for the copy of Richard Hughes' letter. I was particularly interested in this, since we are quite unknown to one another. The reviews in *The Times* and its *Literary Supplement* were good – that is (unduly) flattering; though I guess, from internal evidence, that they were both written by the same man, and one whose approval was assured: we started with common tastes and reading, and have been closely associated for years. Still that in no way detracts from their public effect. Also I must respect his opinion, as I believed him to be the best living critic until he turned his attention to me, and no degree of friendship would make him say what he does not mean: he is the most uncompromisingly honest man I have met!....

No reviewer (that I have seen), although all have carefully used the correct *dwarfs* themselves, has commented on the fact (which I only became conscious of through reviews) that I use throughout the 'incorrect' plural *dwarves*. I am afraid it is just a piece of private bad grammar, rather shocking in a philologist; but I shall have to go on with it. Perhaps my *dwarf* – since he and the *Gnome* are only translations into approximate equivalents of creatures with different names and rather different functions in their own world – may be allowed a peculiar plural. The real 'historical' plural of *dwarf* (like *teeth* of *tooth*) is *dwarrows*, anyway: rather a nice word, but a bit too archaic. Still I rather wish I had used the word *dwarrow*.

My heart warms to your son. To read the faint and close typescript was noble: to read the whole thing again so soon was a magnificent compliment.

I have received one postcard, alluding I suppose to the *Times*' review: containing just the words:

*sic hobbitur ad astra.*



All the same I am a little perturbed. I cannot think of anything more to say about *hobbits*. Mr Baggins seems to have exhibited so fully both the Took and the Baggins side of their nature. But I have only too much to say, and much already written, about the world into which the hobbit intruded. You can, of course, see any of it, and say what you like about it, if and when you wish. I should rather like an opinion, other than that of Mrs C.S.Lewis and my children, whether it has any value in itself, or as a marketable commodity, apart from hobbits. But if it is true that *The Hobbit* has come to stay and more will be wanted, I will start the process of thought, and try to get some idea of a theme drawn from this material for treatment in a similar style and for a similar audience – possibly including actual hobbits. My daughter would like something on the Took family. One reader wants fuller details about Gandalf and the Necromancer. But that is too dark – much too much for Richard Hughes' snag. I am afraid that snag appears in everything; though actually the presence (even if only on the borders) of the terrible is, I believe, what gives this imagined world its verisimilitude. A safe fairy-land is untrue to all worlds. At the moment I am suffering like Mr Baggins from a touch of 'staggerment', and I hope I am not taking myself too seriously. But I must confess that your letter has aroused in me a faint hope. I mean, I begin to wonder whether duty and desire may not (perhaps) in future go more closely together. I have spent nearly all the vacation-times of seventeen years examining, and doing things of that sort, driven by immediate financial necessity (mainly medical and educational). Writing stories in prose or verse has been stolen, often guiltily, from time already mortgaged, and has been broken and ineffective. I may perhaps now do what I much desire to do, and not fail of financial duty. Perhaps!<sup>2</sup>

I think 'Oxford' interest is mildly aroused. I am constantly asked how my hobbit is. The attitude is (as I foresaw) not unmixed with surprise and a little pity. My own college is I think good for about six copies, if only in order to find material for teasing me. Appearance in *The Times* convinced one or two of my more sedate colleagues that they could admit knowledge of my 'fantasy' (i.e. indiscretion) without loss of academic dignity. The professor of Byzantine Greek bought a copy, 'because first editions of "Alice" are now very valuable'. I did hear that the Regius Professor of Modern History was recently seen reading 'The Hobbit'. It is displayed by Parkers but not elsewhere (I think).

I am probably coming to town, to hear Professor Joseph Vendryes at the Academy on Wednesday Oct. 27th. I wonder would that be a suitable day for the luncheon you kindly asked me to last summer? And in any case, I could bring *Mr Bliss* to the office so as to get the definite advice on what is needed to make it reproducible promised by Mr Furth?

Yours sincerely

J. R. R. Tolkien.

PS. I acknowledge safe receipt of the specimen 'pictures' sent to America.

## **18 From a letter to Stanley Unwin 23 October 1937**

[On 19 October, Unwin wrote to Tolkien: 'I think there is cause for your faint hope..... It is seldom that a children's writer gets firmly established with one book, but that you will do so very rapidly I have not the slightest doubt. .... You are one of those rare people with genius, and, unlike some publishers, it is a word I have not used half a dozen times in thirty years of publishing.']

Thank you in return for your encouraging letter. I will start something soon, & submit it to your boy at the earliest opportunity.

## 19 To Stanley Unwin

[Tolkien lunched with Unwin in London on 15 November, and told him about a number of his writings which already existed in manuscript: the series of *Father Christmas*

*Letters*, which he had addressed to his children each Christmas since 1920; various short tales and poems; and *The Silmarillion*. Following this meeting, he handed to Allen & Unwin the 'Quenta Silmarillion', a prose formulation of the latter book, together with the long unfinished poem 'The Gest of Beren and Lúthien'. These were shown to one of the firm's outside readers, Edward Crankshaw, who reported unfavourably on the poem, but praised the prose narrative for its 'brevity and dignity', though he said he disliked its 'eye-splitting Celtic names'. His report continued: 'It has something of that mad, bright-eyed beauty that perplexes all Anglo-Saxons in face of Celtic art.' These comments were passed on to Tolkien.]

16 December 1937

20 Nonhmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Unwin,

I have been ill and am still rather tottery, and have had others of the common human troubles, so that time has slipped out of my hands: I have accomplished next to nothing of any kind since I saw you. Father Christmas' 1937 letter is unwritten yet. ....

My chief joy comes from learning that the *Silmarillion* is not rejected with scorn. I have suffered a sense of fear and bereavement, quite ridiculous, since I let this private and beloved nonsense out; and I think if it had seemed to you to be nonsense I should have felt really crushed. I do not mind about the verse-form, which in spite of certain virtuous passages has grave defects, for it is only for me the rough material. But I shall certainly now hope one day to be able, or to be able to afford, to publish the *Silmarillion*! Your reader's comment affords me delight. I am sorry the names split his eyes – personally I believe (and here believe I am a good judge) they are good, and a large part of the effect. They are coherent and consistent and made upon two related linguistic formulae, so that they achieve a reality not fully achieved to my feeling by other name-inventors (say Swift or Dunsany!). Needless to say they are not Celtic! Neither are the tales. I do know Celtic things (many in their original languages Irish and Welsh), and feel for them a certain distaste: largely for their fundamental unreason. They have bright colour, but are like a broken stained glass window reassembled without design. They are in fact 'mad' as your reader says – but I don't believe I am. Still I am very grateful for his words, and particularly encouraged that the style is good for the purpose and even gets over the nomenclature.

I did not think any of the stuff I dropped on you filled the bill. But I did want to know whether any of the stuff had any exterior non-personal value. I think it is plain that quite apart from it, a sequel or successor to *The Hobbit* is called for. I promise to give this thought and attention. But 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. So that goodness knows what will happen. Mr Baggins began as a comic tale among conventional and inconsistent Grimm's fairy-tale dwarves, and got drawn into the edge of it – so that even Sauron the terrible peeped over the edge. And what more can hobbits do? They can be comic, but their comedy is suburban unless it is set against things more elemental. But the real fun about orcs and dragons (to my mind) was before their time. Perhaps a new (if similar) line? Do you think Tom Bombadil, the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside, could be made into the hero of a story? Or is he, as I suspect, fully enshrined in the enclosed verses? Still I could enlarge the portrait.

Which are the four coloured illustrations you are using? Have the five originals yet returned? Is there a spare one available of the dragon on his hoard? I have to give a lecture on *dragons*, (at the Natural History Museum!!!) and they want a picture to make a slide of.

Could I have four more copies of *the Hobbit* at author's rates, to use as Christmas presents?

May I wish you bon voyage – and a safe return. I am supposed to be broadcasting from BBC on Jan 14th, but that will I suppose be after your return. I shall look forward to seeing you again.

Yours sincerely

J. R. R. Tolkien

P.S. I have received several queries, on behalf of children and adults, concerning the *runes* and whether they are real and can be read. Some children have tried to puzzle them out. Would it be a good thing to provide a runic alphabet? I have had to write one out for several people. Please excuse scrawling and rambling nature of this letter. I feel only half-alive. JRRT.

I have received safely by a later post the *Geste* (in verse) and the *Silmarillion* and related fragments.

## 20 To C. A. Furth, Allen & Unwin

[On 17 December, Furth wrote to Tolkien: 'The demand for *The Hobbit* became so acute with the beginning of the Christmas orders that we had to rush the reprint though.... At the last minute the crisis was so acute that we fetched part of the reprint from our printers at Woking in a private car.']

19 December 1937

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Furth,

Thank you for the account of recent events with regard to 'the Hobbit'. It sounds quite exciting.

I have received *four* copies of the new impression charged to me, as ordered in my letter to Mr Unwin. I think the coloured pictures have come out well... I am sorry that the Eagle picture (to face p. 118) is not included – merely because I should have liked to see it reproduced. I marvel that four can have been included without raising the price. Perhaps the Americans will use it? Odd folk...

I have written the first chapter of a new story about Hobbits – 'A long expected party'. A merry Christmas.

Yrs sincerely

J. R. R. Tolkien.

[P.S.] .... Mr Arthur Ransome objects to *man* on p. 27 (line 7 from end). Read *fellow* as in earlier recension? He also objects to *more men* on p. 294 l.11. Read *more of us*? *Men* with a capital is, I think, used in text when 'human kind' are specifically intended; and *man*, *men* with a minuscule are occasionally and loosely used as 'adult male' and 'people'. But perhaps, although this can be mythologically defended (and is according to Anglo-Saxon usage!), it may be as well to avoid raising mythological issues outside the story. Mr Ransome also seems not to like Gandalf's use of *boys* on p. 112 (lines 11, 13). But, though I agree that his insult was rather silly and not quite up to form, I do not think anything can be done about it now. Unless *oaves* would do? JRRT.

**21 From a letter to Allen & Unwin 1 February 1938**

Would you ask Mr Unwin whether his son, a very reliable critic, would care to read the first chapter of the sequel to *The Hobbit*? I have typed it. I have no confidence in it, but if he thought it a promising beginning, could add to it the tale that is brewing.

**22 To C. A. Furth, Allen & Unwin 20 Northmoor Road, Oxford**

4 February 1938

Dear Mr Furth,

I enclose copy of Chapter I 'A Long-expected Party' of possible sequel to *The Hobbit*. ....

I received a letter from a young reader in Boston (Lincs) enclosing a list of *errata* [in *The Hobbit*]. I then put my youngest son, lying in bed with a bad heart, to find any more at twopence a time. He did. I enclose the results – which added to those already submitted should (I hope) make an exhaustive list. I also hope they may one day be required.

Yours sincerely,

J. R. R. Tolkien.



## 23 To C. A. Furth, Allen & Unwin

[The publishers had again been considering the possibility of publishing *Mr Bliss*, for which see the introductory note to no. 10.]

17 February 1938

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Furth,

'Mr Bliss' returned safely. I am sorry you have had so much trouble with him. I wish you could find someone to redraw the pictures properly. I don't believe I am capable of it. I have at any rate no time now — it is easier to write a story at odd moments than draw (though neither are easy).....

They say it is the first step that costs the effort. I do not find it so. I am sure I could write unlimited 'first chapters'. I have indeed written many. The Hobbit sequel is still where it was, and I have only the vaguest notions of how to proceed. Not ever intending any sequel, I fear I squandered all my favourite 'motifs' and characters on the original 'Hobbit'.

I will write and get your advice on 'Mr Bliss' before I do anything. It will hardly be before the Long Vacation, or the end of my 'research fellowship'.

Yours sincerely  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

## 24 To Stanley Unwin

[On 11 February, Unwin reported that his son Rayner was 'delighted with the first chapter' of the new story.]

18 February 1938

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Unwin,

I am most grateful to your son Rayner; and am encouraged. At the same time I find it only too easy to write opening chapters – and for the moment the story is not unfolding. I have unfortunately very little time, made shorter by a rather disastrous Christmas vacation. I squandered so much on the original 'Hobbit' (which was not meant to have a sequel) that it is difficult to find anything new in that world.

Mr C.S.Lewis tells me that you have allowed him to submit to you 'Out of the Silent Planet'. I read it, of course; and I have since heard it pass a rather different test: that of being read aloud to our local club (which goes in for reading things short and long aloud). It proved an exciting serial, and was highly approved. But of course we are all rather like-minded.

It is only by an odd accident that the hero is a philologist (one point in which he resembles me) and has your name. The latter detail could I am sure be altered: I do not believe it has any special significance.

We originally meant each to write an excursionary 'Thriller': a Space-journey and a Time-journey (mine) each discovering Myth. But the Space-journey has been finished, and the Time-journey remains owing to my slowness and uncertainty only a fragment, as you know.

Yours sincerely  
J. R. R. Tolkien.

## 25 To the editor of the 'Observer'

[On 16 January 1938, the *Observer* published a letter, signed 'Habit', asking whether hobbits might have been suggested to Tolkien by Julian Huxley's account of 'the "little furry men" seen in Africa by natives and .... at least one scientist'. The letter-writer also mentioned that a friend had 'said she remembered an old fairy tale called "The Hobbit" in a collection read about 1904', in which the creature of that name 'was definitely frightening'. The writer asked if Tolkien would 'tell us some more about the name and inception of the intriguing hero of his book. .... It would save so many research students so very much trouble in the generations to come. And, by the way, is the hobbit's

stealing of the dragon's cup based on the cup-stealing episode in *Beowulf*? I hope so, since one of the book's charms appears to be its Spenserian harmonising of the brilliant threads of so many branches of epic, mythology, and Victorian fairy literature.' Tolkien's reply, though it was not intended for publication (see the conclusion of no. 26), was printed in the *Observer* on 20 February 1938.]

Sir, – I need no persuasion: I am as susceptible as a dragon to flattery, and would gladly show off my diamond waistcoat, and even discuss its sources, since the Habit (more inquisitive than the Hobbit) has not only professed to admire it, but has also asked where I got it from. But would not that be rather unfair to the research students? To save them trouble is to rob them of any excuse for existing.

However, with regard to the Habit's principal question there is no danger: I do not remember anything about the name and inception of the hero. I could guess, of course, but the guesses would have no more authority than those of future researchers, and I leave the game to them.

I was born in Africa, and have read several books on African exploration. I have, since about 1896, read even more books of fairy-tales of the genuine kind. Both the facts produced by the Habit would appear, therefore, to be significant.

But are they? I have no waking recollection of furry pigmies (in book or moonlight); nor of any Hobbit bogey in print by 1904. I suspect that the two hobbits are accidental homophones, and am content<sup>3</sup> that they are not (it would seem) synonyms. And I protest that my hobbit did not live in Africa, and was not furry, except about the feet. Nor indeed was he like a rabbit. He was a prosperous, well-fed young bachelor of independent means. Calling him a 'nassty little rabbit' was a piece of vulgar trolery, just as 'descendant of rats' was a piece of dwarfish malice — deliberate insults to his size and feet, which he deeply resented. His feet, if conveniently clad and shod by nature, were as elegant as his long, clever fingers.

As for the rest of the tale it is, as the Habit suggests, derived from (previously digested) epic, mythology, and fairy-story – not, however, Victorian in authorship, as a rule to which George Macdonald is the chief exception. *Beowulf* is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing, in which the episode of the theft arose naturally (and almost inevitably) from the

circumstances. It is difficult to think of any other way of conducting the story at that point. I fancy the author of *Beowulf* would say much the same.

My tale is not consciously based on any other book — save one, and that is unpublished: the 'Silmarillion', a history of the Elves, to which frequent allusion is made. I had not thought of the future researchers; and as there is only one manuscript there seems at the moment small chance of this reference proving useful.

But these questions are mere preliminaries. Now that I have been made to see Mr. Baggins's adventures as the subject of future enquiry I realise that a lot of work will be needed. There is the question of nomenclature. The dwarf-names, and the wizard's, are from the Elder Edda. The hobbit-names from Obvious Sources proper to their kind. The full list of their wealthier families is: Baggins, Boffin, Bolger, Bracegirdle, Brandybuck, Burrowes, Chubb, Grubb, Hornblower, Proudfoot, Sackville, and Took. The dragon bears as name — a pseudonym — the past tense of the primitive Germanic verb *Smugan*, to squeeze through a hole: a low philological jest. The rest of the names are of the Ancient and Elvish World, and have not been modernised.

And why *dwarves*? Grammar prescribes *dwarfs*; philology suggests that *dwarrows* would be the historical form. The real answer is that I knew no better. But *dwarves* goes well with *elves*; and, in any case, *elf*, *gnome*, *goblin*, *dwarf* are only approximate translations of the Old Elvish names for beings of not quite the same kinds and functions.

These dwarves are not quite the dwarfs of better known lore. They have been given Scandinavian names, it is true; but that is an editorial concession. Too many names in the tongues proper to the period might have been alarming. Dwarvish was both complicated and cacophonous. Even early elvish philologists avoided it, and the dwarves were obliged to use other languages, except for entirely private conversations. The language of hobbits was remarkably like English, as one would expect: they only lived on the borders of The Wild, and were mostly unaware of it. Their family names remain for the most part as well known and justly respected in this island as they were in Hobbiton and Bywater.

There is the matter of the Runes. Those used by Thorin and Co., for special purposes, were comprised in an alphabet of thirty-two letters (full list on application), similar to, but not identical, with the runes of Anglo-Saxon inscriptions. There is doubtless an historical connection between

the two. The Feanorian alphabet, generally used at that time, was of Elvish origin. It appears in the curse inscribed on the pot of gold in the picture of Smaug's lair, but had otherwise been transcribed (a facsimile of the original letter left on the mantelpiece can be supplied).

\*

And what about the Riddles? There is work to be done here on the sources and analogues. I should not be at all surprised to learn that both the hobbit and Gollum will find their claim to have invented any of them disallowed.

Finally, I present the future researcher with a little problem. The tale halted in the telling for about a year at two separate points: where are they? But probably that would have been discovered anyway. And suddenly I remember that the hobbit thought 'Old fool', when the dragon succumbed to blandishment. I fear that the Habit's comment (and yours) will already be the same. But you must admit that the temptation was strong. – Yours, etc.,

J. R. R. Tolkien.

## 26 To Stanley Unwin

[On 2 March, Unwin sent Tolkien an extract from a reader's report on C.S.Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet*. The reader commented: 'Mr Lewis is quite likely, I dare say, to write a worth while novel one day. This one isn't good enough – quite.' The reader judged the creatures of the planet Malacandra to be 'bunk'. Unwin asked Tolkien for his opinion of the book.]

4 March 1938

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Dear Mr Unwin,

I wrote you the enclosed letter some time ago; but I hesitated to send it, knowing that you would wish to send Mr Lewis' work to your reader, and not wishing to interfere beyond getting you to consider it. Lewis is a great friend of mine, and we are in close sympathy (witness his two reviews of my *Hobbit*): this may make for understanding, but it may also cast an unduly rosy light. Since you ask for my opinion, here it is.

I read the story in the original MS. and was so enthralled that I could do nothing else until I had finished it. My first criticism was simply that it was too short. I still think that criticism holds, for both practical and artistic reasons. Other criticisms, concerning narrative style (Lewis is always apt to have rather creaking stiff-jointed passages), inconsistent details in the plot, and philology, have since been corrected to my satisfaction. The author holds to items of linguistic invention that do not appeal to me (Malacandra, Maleldil — eldila, in any case, I suspect to be due to the influence of the *Eldar* in the *Silmarillion* — and *Pfifltriggi*); but this is a matter of taste. After all your reader found my invented names, made with cherished care, eye-splitting. But the linguistic inventions and the philology on the whole are more than good enough. All the pan about language and poetry — the glimpses of its Malacandrian nature and form — is very well done, and extremely interesting, far superior to what one usually gets from travellers in untravelled regions. The language difficulty is usually slid over or fudged. Here it not only has verisimilitude, but also underlying thought.

I was disturbed by your reader's report. I am afraid that at the first blush I feel inclined to retort that anyone capable of using the word 'bunk' will inevitably find matter of this sort — bunk. But one must be reasonable. I realize of course that to be even moderately marketable such a story must pass muster on its surface value, as a *vera historia* of a journey to a strange land. I am extremely fond of the genre, even having read *Land under England* with some pleasure (though it was a weak example, and distasteful to me in many points). I thought *Out of the Silent Planet* did

pass this test very successfully. The openings and the actual mode of transportation in time or space are always the weakest points of such tales. They are well enough worked here, but there should be more narrative given to adventure on Malacandra to balance and justify them. The theme of three distinct rational species (*hnau*) requires more attention to the third species, *Pfifltriggi*. Also the central episode of the visit to Eldilorn is reached too soon, artistically. Also would not the book be in fact practically rather short for a narrative of this type?

But I should have said that the story had for the more intelligent reader a great number of philosophical and mythical implications that enormously enhanced without detracting from the surface 'adventure'. I found the blend of *vera historia* with *mythos* irresistible. There are of course certain satirical elements, inevitable in any such traveller's tale, and also a spice of satire on other superficially similar works of 'scientific' fiction — such as the reference to the notion that higher intelligence will inevitably be combined with ruthlessness. The underlying myth is of course that of the Fall of the Angels (and the fall of man on this our silent planet); and the central point is the sculpture of the planets revealing the erasure of the sign of the Angel of this world. I cannot understand how any one can say this sticks in his gullet, unless (a) he thinks this particular myth 'bunk', that is not worth adult attention (even on a mythical plane); or (b) the use of it unjustified or perhaps unsuccessful.

The latter is perhaps arguable — though I dissent — but at any rate the critique should have pointed out the existence of the myth. Oyarsa is not of course a 'nice kind scientific God', but something so profoundly different that the difference seems to have been unnoticed, namely an Angel. Yet even as a nice kind scientific God I think he compares favourably with the governing potentates of other stories of this kind. His name is not invented, but is from Bernardus Silvestris, as I think is explained at the end of the book (not that I think that this learned detail matters, but it is as legitimate as pseudo-scientific learning). In conclusion I might say that in designating the *Pfifltriggi* as the 'workers' your reader also misses the point, and is misled by current notions that are not applicable. But I have probably said more than enough. I at any rate should have bought this story at almost any price if I had found it in print, and loudly recommended it as a 'thriller' by (however and surprisingly) an intelligent man. But I know only too sadly from efforts to find anything to

read even with an 'on demand' subscription at a library that my taste is not normal. I read 'Voyage to Arcturus' with avidity — the most comparable work, though it is both more powerful and more mythical (and less rational, and also less of a story — no one could read it merely as a thriller and without interest in philosophy religion and morals). I wonder what your reader thinks of it? All the same I shall be comforted on my own behalf, if the second reader supports my taste a bit more!

\*

The sequel to *The Hobbit* has now progressed as far as the end of the third chapter. But stories tend to get out of hand, and this has taken an unpremeditated turn. Mr Lewis and my youngest boy are reading it in bits as a serial. I hesitate to bother your son, though I should value his criticisms. At any rate if he would like to read it in serial form he can. My Christopher and Mr Lewis approve it enough to say that they think it is better than the *Hobbit*; but Rayner need not agree!

I have received a copy of the American edition. Not so bad. I am glad they have included the eagle picture, but I cannot imagine why they have spoilt the Rivendell picture, by slicing the top and cutting out the ornament at the bottom. All the numerous textual errors are of course included. I hope it will some day be possible to get rid of them.

I don't know whether you saw the long and ridiculous letter in *The Observer* of Feb. 20, and thought I had suddenly gone cracked. I think the editor was unfair. There was a letter signed Habit in the paper in January (asking if the hobbit was influenced by Julian Huxley's lectures on furry African pygmies, and other questions). I sent this jesting reply with a stamped envelope for transmission to Habit; and also a short and fairly sane reply for publication. Nothing happened for a month, and then I woke up to find my ill-considered joke occupying nearly a column.

With best wishes. Yours sincerely,  
J. R. R. Tolkien.