

and gives less hint about the turn of the story: the chapter titles have been chosen also to give away as little as possible in advance. But I am not set in my choice.

Reconsidering our conversation: I doubt if *red* letters are now sufficiently important for the fire-letters of the Ring in Book I ch. 2 (Galley 15) to be worth the expense of alteration. I think it would be a good thing to have the last Runic page of the Book of Mazarbul (Book II ch. 5) reproduced, as a frontispiece (?). The last page because, though less well forged, perhaps, it closely concerns the actual narrative.

I will bring in person the Copy for Vol. II on September the 1st. It already seems pretty well in order. I am now turning to the Maps – and the Foreword.

Excuse red: it does not represent any fiery emotion. Mere economy. I now type such a lot for my hand's sake that type-reels are a consideration; and the red on this one is hardly used!

#### 141 From a letter to Allen & Unwin 9 October 1953

The Maps. I am stumped. Indeed in a panic. They are essential; and urgent; but I just cannot get them done. I have spent an enormous amount of time on them without profitable result. Lack of skill combined with being harried. Also the shape and proportions of 'The Shire' as described in the tale cannot (by me) be made to fit into shape of a page; nor at that size be contrived to be informative. . . .

I feel that the maps ought to be done properly. The 'burned manuscripts', which readers had found engaging, have disappeared, – making the text of Book ii, Ch. 5 at the beginning rather absurd, and losing the Runes which seem a great attraction to readers of all ages (such as are foolish enough to read this kind of thing at all). Even at a little cost there should be picturesque maps, providing more than a mere index to what is said in the text. I could do maps suitable to the text. It is the attempt to cut them down and omitting all their colour (verbal and otherwise) to reduce them to black and white bareness, on a scale so small that hardly any names can appear, that has stumped me.

#### 142 To Robert Murray, S.J.

[Father Robert Murray, grandson of Sir James Murray (the founder of the *Oxford English Dictionary*) and a close friend of the Tolkien family, had read part of *The Lord of the Rings* in galley-proofs and typescript, and had, at Tolkien's instigation, sent comments and criticism. He wrote that the book left him with a strong sense of 'a positive compatibility with the

offered for publication years ago, and turned down. Good may come of such blows. *The Lord of the Rings* was the result. The hobbits had been welcomed. I loved them myself, since I love the vulgar and simple as dearly as the noble, and nothing moves my heart (beyond all the passions and heartbreaks of the world) so much as 'ennoblement' (from the Ugly Duckling to Frodo). I would build on the hobbits. And I saw that I was *meant* to do it (as Gandalf\* would say), since without thought, in a 'blurb' I wrote for *The Hobbit*, I spoke of the time between the Elder Days and the Dominion of Men. Out of that came the 'missing link': the 'Downfall of Númenor', releasing some hidden 'complex'. For when Faramir speaks of his private vision of the Great Wave, he speaks for me. That vision and dream has been ever with me – and has been inherited (as I only discovered recently) by one of my children.<sup>3</sup>

However, such has been the success – not financial: costs were enormous, and nobody nowadays buys a book that they can borrow: I have not yet received a farthing – of *The Lord of the Rings* that the ugly duckling has become a publisher's swan, and I am being positively *bullied* to put *The Silmarillion* into form, and anything else!

[The draft is incomplete.]

### 181 To Michael Straight [drafts]

[Before writing a review of *The Lord of the Rings*, Michael Straight, the editor of *New Republic*, wrote to Tolkien asking a number of questions: first, whether there was a 'meaning' in Gollum's rôle in the story and in Frodo's moral failure at the climax; second, whether the 'Scouring of the Shire' chapter was directed especially to contemporary England; and third, why the other voyagers should depart from the Grey Havens with Frodo at the end of the book – 'Is it for the same reason that there are those who gain in the victory but cannot enjoy it?']

[Not dated; probably January or February 1956.]

Dear Mr Straight,

Thank you for your letter. I hope that you have *enjoyed* *The Lord of the Rings*? *Enjoyed* is the key-word. For it was written to *amuse* (in the highest sense): to be readable. There is *no* 'allegory', moral, political, or contemporary in the work at all.

It is a 'fairy-story', but one written – according to the belief I once expressed in an extended essay 'On Fairy-stories' that they are the

\*I am *not* Gandalf, being a transcendent Sub-creator in this little world. As far as any character is 'like me' it is Faramir – except that I lack what all my characters possess (let the psychoanalysts note!) *Courage*.

proper audience – for adults. Because I think that fairy story has its own mode of reflecting ‘truth’, different from allegory, or (sustained) satire, or ‘realism’, and in some ways more powerful. But first of all it must succeed just as a tale, excite, please, and even on occasion move, and within its own imagined world be accorded (literary) belief. To succeed in that was my primary object.

But, of course, if one sets out to address ‘adults’ (mentally adult people anyway), they will not be pleased, excited, or moved unless the whole, or the incidents, seem to be about something worth considering, more e.g. than mere danger and escape: there must be some relevance to the ‘human situation’ (of all periods). So something of the teller’s own reflections and ‘values’ will inevitably get worked in. This is not the same as allegory. We all, in groups or as individuals, *exemplify* general principles; but we do not *represent* them. The Hobbits are no more an ‘allegory’ than are (say) the pygmies of the African forest. Gollum is to me just a ‘character’ – an imagined person – who granted the situation acted so and so under opposing strains, as it appears to be *probable* that he would (there is always an incalculable element in any individual real or imagined: otherwise he/she would not be an individual but a ‘type’.)

I will try and answer your specific questions. The final scene of the Quest was so shaped simply because having regard to the situation, and to the ‘characters’ of Frodo, Sam, and Gollum, those events seemed to me mechanically, morally, and psychologically credible. But, of course, if you wish for more reflection, I should say that within the mode of the story the ‘catastrophe’ *exemplifies* (an aspect of) the familiar words: ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’

‘Lead us not into temptation &c’ is the harder and the less often considered petition. The view, in the terms of my story, is that though every event or situation has (at least) two aspects: the history and development of the individual (it is something out of which he can get good, ultimate good, for himself, or fail to do so), and the history of the world (which depends on his action for its own sake) – still there are abnormal situations in which one may be placed. ‘Sacrificial’ situations, I should call them: sc. positions in which the ‘good’ of the world depends on the behaviour of an individual in circumstances which demand of him suffering and endurance far beyond the normal – even, it may happen (or seem, humanly speaking), demand a strength of body and mind which he does not possess: he is in a sense doomed to failure, doomed to fall to temptation or be broken by pressure against his ‘will’: that is against any choice he could make or would make unfettered, not under the duress.

Frodo was in such a position: an apparently complete trap: a person }

of greater native power could probably never have resisted the Ring's lure to power so long; a person of less power could not hope to resist it in the final decision. (Already Frodo had been unwilling to harm the Ring before he set out, and was incapable of surrendering it to Sam.)

The Quest  $\therefore$  was bound to fail as a piece of world-plan, and also was bound to end in disaster as the story of humble Frodo's development to the 'noble', his sanctification. Fail it would and did as far as Frodo considered alone was concerned. He 'apostatized' – and I have had one savage letter, crying out that he shd. have been executed as a traitor, not honoured. Believe me, it was not until I read this that I had myself any idea how 'topical' such a situation might appear. It arose naturally from my 'plot' conceived in main outline in 1936.<sup>1</sup> I did not foresee that before the tale was published we should enter a dark age in which the technique of torture and disruption of personality would rival that of Mordor and the Ring and present us with the practical problem of honest men of good will broken down into apostates and traitors.

But at this point the 'salvation' of the world and Frodo's own 'salvation' is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury. At any point any prudent person would have told Frodo that Gollum would certainly\* betray him, and could rob him in the end. To 'pity' him, to forbear to kill him, was a piece of folly, or a mystical belief in the ultimate value-in-itself of pity and generosity even if disastrous in the world of time. He did rob him and injure him in the end – but by a 'grace', that last betrayal was at a precise juncture when the final evil deed was the most beneficial thing any one cd. have done for Frodo! By a situation created by his 'forgiveness', he was saved himself, and relieved of his burden. He was very justly accorded the highest honours – since it is clear that he & Sam never concealed the precise course of events. Into the ultimate judgement upon Gollum I would not care to enquire. This would be to investigate 'Goddes privitee', as the Medievals said. Gollum was pitiable, but he ended in persistent wickedness, and the fact that this worked good was no credit to him. His marvellous courage and endurance, as great as Frodo and Sam's or greater, being devoted to evil was portentous, but not honourable. I am afraid, whatever our beliefs, we have to face the fact that there are persons who yield to temptation, reject their chances of nobility or salvation, and appear to be 'damnable'. Their 'damnability' is *not* measurable in the terms of the macrocosm (where it may work good). But we who are all 'in the same boat' must not usurp the Judge. The domination of the Ring was much too strong for the mean soul of Sméagol. But he would have never had to endure it if he had not become a mean sort of thief before it

\*Not quite 'certainly'. The clumsiness in fidelity of Sam was what finally pushed Gollum over the brink, when about to repent.

crossed his path. Need it ever have crossed his path? Need anything dangerous ever cross any of our paths? A kind of answer cd. be found in trying to imagine Gollum overcoming temptation. The story would have been quite different! By temporizing, not fixing the still not wholly corrupt Sméagol-will towards good in the debate in the slag hole, he weakened himself for the final chance when dawning love of Frodo was too easily withered by the jealousy of Sam before Shelob's lair. After that he was lost.

There is no special reference to England in the 'Shire' – except of course that as an Englishman brought up in an 'almost rural' village of Warwickshire on the edge of the prosperous bourgeoisie of Birmingham (about the time of the Diamond Jubilee!) I take my models like anyone else – from such 'life' as I know. But there is no post-war reference. I am not a 'socialist' in any sense – being averse to 'planning' (as must be plain) most of all because the 'planners', when they acquire power, become so bad – but I would not say that we had to suffer the malice of Sharkey and his Ruffians here. Though the spirit of 'Isengard', if not of Mordor, is of course always cropping up. The present design of destroying Oxford in order to accommodate motor-cars is a case.<sup>2</sup> But our chief adversary is a member of a 'Tory' Government. But you could apply it anywhere in these days.

Yes: I think that 'victors' never can enjoy 'victory' – not in the terms that they envisaged; and in so far as they fought for something *to be enjoyed by themselves* (whether acquisition or mere preservation) the less satisfactory will 'victory' seem. But the departure of the Ringbearers has quite another side, as far as the Three are concerned. There is, of course, a mythological structure behind this story. It was actually written first, and may now perhaps be in part published. It is, I should say, a 'monotheistic but "sub-creational" mythology'. There is no embodiment of the One, of God, who indeed remains remote, outside the World, and only directly accessible to the Valar or Rulers. These take the place of the 'gods', but are created spirits, or those of the primary creation who by their own will have entered into the world.\* But the One retains all ultimate authority, and (or so it seems as viewed in serial time) reserves the right to intrude the finger of God into the story: that is to produce realities which could not be deduced even from a complete knowledge of the previous past, but which being real become part of the effective past for all subsequent time (a possible definition of a 'miracle'). According to the fable Elves and Men were the first of these intrusions, made indeed while the 'story' was still only a story and not

\*They shared in its 'making' – but only on the same terms as we 'make' a work of art or story. The realization of it, the gift to it of a created reality of the same grade as their own, was the act of the One God.

'realized'; they were not therefore in any sense conceived or made by the gods, the Valar, and were called the Eruhíni or 'Children of God', and were for the Valar an incalculable element: that is they were rational creatures of free will in regard to God, of the same historical rank as the Valar, though of far smaller spiritual and intellectual power and status.

Of course, in fact exterior to my story, Elves and Men are just different aspects of the Humane, and represent the problem of Death as seen by a finite but willing and self-conscious person. In this mythological world the Elves and Men are in their incarnate forms kindred, but in the relation of their 'spirits' to the world in time represent different 'experiments', each of which has its own natural trend, and weakness. The Elves represent, as it were, the artistic, aesthetic, and purely scientific aspects of the Humane nature raised to a higher level than is actually seen in Men. That is: they have a devoted love of the physical world, and a desire to observe and understand it for its own sake and as 'other' – sc. as a reality derived from God in the same degree as themselves – not as a material for use or as a power-platform. They also possess a 'subcreational' or artistic faculty of great excellence. They are therefore 'immortal'. *Not* 'eternally', but to endure with and within the created world, while its story lasts. When 'killed', by the injury or destruction of their incarnate form, they do not escape from time, but remain *in* the world, either discarnate, or being re-born. This becomes a great burden as the ages lengthen, especially in a world in which there is malice and destruction (I have left out the mythological form which Malice or the Fall of the Angels takes in this fable). Mere *change* as such is not represented as 'evil': it is the unfolding of the story and to refuse this is of course against the design of God. But the Elvish weakness is in these terms naturally to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change: as if a man were to hate a very long book still going on, and wished to settle down in a favourite chapter. Hence they fell in a measure to Sauron's deceits: they desired some 'power' over things as they are (which is quite distinct from art), to make their particular will to preservation effective: to arrest change, and keep things always fresh and fair. The 'Three Rings' were 'unsullied', because this object was in a limited way good, it included the healing of the real damages of malice, as well as the mere arrest of change; and the Elves did not desire to dominate other wills, nor to usurp all the world to their particular pleasure. But with the downfall of 'Power' their little efforts at preserving the past fell to bits. There was nothing more in Middle-earth for them, but weariness. So Elrond and Galadriel depart. Gandalf is a special case. He was not the maker or original holder of the Ring – but it was surrendered to him by Círdan, to assist him in his task. Gandalf was

returning, his labour and errand finished, to his home, the land of the Valar.

The passage over Sea is not Death. The 'mythology' is Elf-centred. According to it there was at first an actual Earthly Paradise, home and realm of the Valar, as a physical part of the earth.

There is no 'embodiment' of the Creator anywhere in this story or mythology. Gandalf is a 'created' person; though possibly a spirit that existed before in the physical world. His function as a 'wizard' is an angelos or messenger from the Valar or Rulers: to assist the rational creatures of Middle-earth to resist Sauron, a power too great for them unaided. But since in the view of this tale & mythology Power – when it dominates or seeks to dominate other wills and minds (except by the assent of their reason) – is evil, these 'wizards' were incarnated in the life-forms of Middle-earth, and so suffered the pains both of mind and body. They were also, for the same reason, thus involved in the peril of the incarnate: the possibility of 'fall', of sin, if you will. The chief form this would take with them would be impatience, leading to the desire to force others to their own good ends, and so inevitably at last to mere desire to make their own wills effective by any means. To this evil Saruman succumbed. Gandalf did not. But the situation became so much the worse by the fall of Saruman, that the 'good' were obliged to greater effort and sacrifice. Thus Gandalf faced and suffered death; and came back or was sent back, as he says, with enhanced power. But though one may be in this reminded of the Gospels, it is not really the same thing at all. The Incarnation of God is an *infinitely* greater thing than anything I would dare to write. Here I am only concerned with Death as part of the nature, physical and spiritual, of Man, and with Hope without guarantees. That is why I regard the tale of Arwen and Aragorn as the most important of the Appendices; it is part of the essential story, and is only placed so, because it could not be worked into the main narrative without destroying its structure: which is planned to be 'hobbito-centric', that is, primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble.

[None of the drafts from which this text has been assembled was completed.]

182 From a letter to Anne Barrett, Houghton Mifflin Co.

[Not dated; 1956]

I shall certainly now, if I am allowed, publish the parts of the great history that was written first – and rejected. But the (to me v. surprising) success of *The Lord of the Rings* will probably cause that rejection to be

I do not like giving 'facts' about myself other than 'dry' ones (which anyway are quite as relevant to my books as any other more juicy details). Not simply for personal reasons; but also because I object to the contemporary trend in criticism, with its excessive interest in the details of the lives of authors and artists. They only distract attention from an author's works (if the works are in fact worthy of attention), and end, as one now often sees, in becoming the main interest. But only one's guardian Angel, or indeed God Himself, could unravel the real relationship between personal facts and an author's works. Not the author himself (though he knows more than any investigator), and certainly not so-called 'psychologists'.

But, of course, there is a scale of significance in 'facts' of this sort. There are insignificant facts (those particularly dear to analysts and writers about writers): such as drunkenness, wife-beating, and suchlike disorders. I do not happen to be guilty of these particular sins. But if I were, I should not suppose that artistic work proceeded from the weaknesses that produced them, but from other and still uncorrupted regions of my being. Modern 'researchers' inform me that Beethoven cheated his publishers, and abominably ill-treated his nephew; but I do not believe that has anything to do with his music. Then there are more significant facts, which *have* some relation to an author's works; though knowledge of them does not really explain the works, even if examined at length. For instance I dislike French, and prefer Spanish to Italian – but the relation of these facts to my taste in languages (which is obviously a large ingredient in *The Lord of the Rings*) would take a long time to unravel, and leave you liking (or disliking) the names and bits of language in my books, just as before. And there are a few basic facts, which however drily expressed, are really significant. For instance I was born in 1892 and lived for my early years in 'the Shire' in a pre-mechanical age. Or more important, I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic. The latter 'fact' perhaps cannot be deduced; though one critic (by letter) asserted that the invocations of Elbereth, and the character of Galadriel as directly described (or through the words of Gimli and Sam) were clearly related to Catholic devotion to Mary. Another saw in waybread (lembas)= viaticum and the reference to its feeding the *will* (vol. III, p. 213) and being more potent when fasting, a derivation from the Eucharist. (That is: far greater things may colour the mind in dealing with the lesser things of a fairy-story.)

I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food

(unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much. I love Wales (what is left of it, when mines, and the even more ghastly sea-side resorts, have done their worst), and especially the Welsh language. But I have not in fact been in W. for a long time (except for crossing it on the way to Ireland). I go frequently to Ireland (Eire: Southern Ireland) being fond of it and of (most of) its people; but the Irish language I find wholly unattractive. I hope that is enough to go on with.

## 214 To A. C. Nunn (draft)

[A reply to a reader who pointed out an apparent contradiction in *The Lord of the Rings*: that in the chapter 'A Long-expected Party' it is stated that 'Hobbits give presents to other people on their own birthdays'; yet Gollum refers to the Ring as his 'birthday present', and the account of how he acquired it, in the chapter 'The Shadow of the Past', indicates that his people *received* presents on their birthdays. Mr Nunn's letter continued: 'Therefore, one of the following must be true: (1) Sméagol's people were *not* "of hobbit-kind" as suggested by Gandalf (I p. 62); (2) the Hobbit custom of giving presents was only a recent growth; (3) the customs of the Stoors [Sméagol-Gollum's people] differed from those of other Hobbits; or (5) [sic] there is an error in the text. I shall be most grateful if you can spare the time to undertake some research into this important matter.]

[Not dated; probably late 1958-early 1959.]

Dear Mr Nunn,

I am not a model of scholarship;<sup>1</sup> but in the matter of the Third Age I regard myself as a 'recorder' only. The faults that may appear in my record are, I believe, in no case due to errors, that is statements of what is not true, but omissions, and incompleteness of information, mostly due to the necessity of compression, and to the attempt to introduce information *en passant* in the course of narrative which naturally tended to cut out many things not immediately bearing on the tale.

In the matter of birthday-customs and the apparent discrepancies that you note, we can therefore, I think, dismiss your alternatives (1) and (5). You omit (4).

With regard to (1) Gandalf certainly says at first 'I guess' p. 62; but that is in accordance with his character and wisdom. In more modern