

THE SILMARILLION



J.R.R. TOLKIEN

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HarperCollins *Publishers*
77-85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB
www.tolkien.co.uk

This paperback edition 1999
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First published in Great Britain by
George Allen & Unwin 1977
First paperback edition 1979

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ISBN 0 261 10273 7

Set in Plantin Light by
Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd,
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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FOREWORD

The Silmarillion, now published four years after the death of its author, is an account of the Elder Days, or the First Age of the World. In *The Lord of the Rings* were narrated the great events at the end of the Third Age; but the tales of *The Silmarillion* are legends deriving from a much deeper past, when Morgoth, the first Dark Lord, dwelt in Middle-earth, and the High Elves made war upon him for the recovery of the Silmarils.

Not only, however, does *The Silmarillion* relate the events of a far earlier time than those of *The Lord of the Rings*; it is also, in all the essentials of its conception, far the earlier work. Indeed, although it was not then called *The Silmarillion*, it was already in being half a century ago; and in battered notebooks extending back to 1917 can still be read the earliest versions, often hastily pencilled, of the central stories of the mythology. But it was never published (though some indication of its content could be gleaned from *The Lord of the Rings*), and throughout my father's long life he never abandoned it, nor ceased even in his last years to work on it. In all that time *The Silmarillion*, considered simply as a large narrative structure, underwent relatively little radical change; it became long ago a fixed tradition, and background to later writings. But it was far indeed from being a fixed text, and did not remain unchanged even in certain fundamental ideas concerning the nature of the world it portrays; while the same legends came to be retold in longer and shorter forms, and in different styles. As the years passed the changes and variants, both in detail and in larger perspectives, became so complex, so pervasive, and so many-layered that a final and definitive version seemed unattainable. Moreover the old legends ('old' now not only in their derivation from the remote First Age, but also in terms of my father's life) became the vehicle and depository of his profoundest reflec-

tions. In his later writing mythology and poetry sank down behind his theological and philosophical preoccupations: from which arose incompatibilities of tone.

On my father's death it fell to me to try to bring the work into publishable form. It became clear to me that to attempt to present, within the covers of a single book, the diversity of the materials – to show *The Silmarillion* as in truth a continuing and evolving creation extending over more than half a century – would in fact lead only to confusion and the submerging of what is essential. I set myself therefore to work out a single text, selecting and arranging in such a way as seemed to me to produce the most coherent and internally self-consistent narrative. In this work the concluding chapters (from the death of Túrin Turambar) introduced peculiar difficulties, in that they had remained unchanged for many years, and were in some respects in serious disharmony with more developed conceptions in other parts of the book.

A complete consistency (either within the compass of *The Silmarillion* itself or between *The Silmarillion* and other published writings of my father's) is not to be looked for, and could only be achieved, if at all, at heavy and needless cost. Moreover, my father came to conceive *The Silmarillion* as a compilation, a compendious narrative, made long afterwards from sources of great diversity (poems, and annals, and oral tales) that had survived in a long tradition; and this conception has indeed its parallel in the actual history of the book, for a great deal of earlier prose and poetry does underlie it, and it is to some extent a compendium in fact and not only in theory. To this may be ascribed the varying speed of the narrative and fullness of detail in different parts, the contrast (for example) of the precise recollections of place and motive in the legend of Túrin Turambar beside the high and remote account of the end of the First Age, when Thangorodrim was broken and Morgoth overthrown; and also some differences of tone and portrayal, some obscurities, and, here and there, some lack of cohesion. In the case of the *Valaquenta*, for instance, we have to assume that while it contains much

that must go back to the earliest days of the Eldar in Valinor, it was remodelled in later times; and thus explain its continual shifting of tense and viewpoint, so that the divine powers seem now present and active in the world, now remote, a vanished order known only to memory.

The book, though entitled as it must be *The Silmarillion*, contains not only the *Quenta Silmarillion*, or *Silmarillion* proper, but also four other short works. The *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta*, which are given at the beginning, are indeed closely associated with *The Silmarillion*; but the *Akallabêth* and *Of the Rings of Power*, which appear at the end, are (it must be emphasised) wholly separate and independent. They are included according to my father's explicit intention, and by their inclusion the entire history is set forth from the Music of the Ainur in which the world began to the passing of the Ringbearers from the Havens of Mithlond at the end of the Third Age.

The number of names that occur in the book is very large, and I have provided a full index; but the number of persons (Elves and Men) who play an important part in the narrative of the First Age is very much smaller, and all of these will be found in the genealogical tables. In addition I have provided a table setting out the rather complex naming of the different Elvish peoples; a note on the pronunciation of Elvish names, and a list of some of the chief elements found in these names; and a map. It may be noted that the great mountain range in the east, Ered Luin or Ered Lindon, the Blue Mountains, appears in the extreme west of the map in *The Lord of the Rings*. In the body of the book there is a smaller map: the intention of this is to make clear at a glance where lay the kingdoms of the Elves after the return of the Noldor to Middle-earth. I have not burdened the book further with any sort of commentary or annotation.

In the difficult and doubtful task of preparing the text of the book I was very greatly assisted by Guy Kay, who worked with me in 1974-1975.

Christopher Tolkien 1977

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Probably towards the end of 1951, when *The Lord of the Rings* was completed but difficulties lay in the way of its publication, my father wrote a very long letter to his friend Milton Waldman, at that time an editor at the publishing house of Collins. The context and occasion of this letter lay in the painful differences that arose over my father's insistence that *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* should be published in 'conjunction or in connexion' 'as one long Saga of the Jewels and the Rings'. There is however no need to enter into this matter here. The letter that he wrote with a view to justifying and explaining his contention emerged as a brilliant exposition of his conception of the earlier Ages (the latter part of the letter, as he himself said, was no more than 'a long and yet bald résumé' of the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*), and it is for this reason that I believe that it merits inclusion within the covers of *The Silmarillion*, as is done in this edition.

The original letter is lost, but Milton Waldman had a typescript made of it, and sent a copy to my father: it was from this copy that the letter was printed (in part) in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1981), no. 131. The text given here is that in *Letters*, pp. 143-157, with minor corrections and the omission of some of the footnotes. There were many errors in the typescript, especially in names; these were very largely corrected by my father, but he did not observe the sentence on p. xviii: 'There was nothing wrong essentially in their lingering against counsel, *still sadly with* the mortal lands of their old heroic deeds.' Here the typist certainly omitted words in the manuscript, and perhaps misread those given as well.

I have removed a number of errors in the text and index which until now have escaped correction in the hardback

printings (only) of *The Silmarillion*. Chief among these are those that concern the numbering in sequence of certain of the rulers of Númenor (for these errors and an explanation of how they arose see *Unfinished Tales* (1980), p.226, note 11, and *The Peoples of Middle-earth* (1996), p.154, §31).

Christopher Tolkien

1999

FROM A LETTER BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN
TO MILTON WALDMAN, 1951

My dear Milton,

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

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

But an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth

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

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

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on

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

the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our ‘air’ (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be ‘high’, purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd.

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

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

I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory

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

I have not used 'magic' consistently, and indeed the Elvenqueen Galadriel is obliged to remonstrate with the Hobbits on their confused use of the word both for the devices and operations of the Enemy, and for those of the Elves. I have not, because there is not a word for the latter (since all human stories have suffered the same confusion). But the Elves are there (in my tales) to demonstrate the difference. Their

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

'magic' is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence). And its object is Art not Power, sub-creation not domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation. The 'Elves' are 'immortal', at least as far as this world goes: and hence are concerned rather with the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change, than with death. The Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others* – speedily and according to the benefactors own plans – is a recurrent motive.

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

It moves then swiftly to the *History of the Elves*, or the *Silmarillion* proper; to the world as we perceive it, but of

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

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

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

In the cosmogony there is a fall: a fall of Angels we should

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

So, proceeding, the Elves have a fall, before their 'history' can become storied. (The first fall of Man, for reasons explained, nowhere appears – Men do not come on the stage until all that is long past, and there is only a rumour that for a while they fell under the domination of the Enemy and that some repented.) The main body of the tale, the *Silmarillion* proper, is about the fall of the most gifted kindred of the Elves, their exile from Valinor (a kind of Paradise, the home of the Gods) in the furthest West, their re-entry into Middle-earth, the land of their birth but long under the rule of the Enemy, and their strife with him, the power of Evil still visibly incarnate. It receives its name because the events are all threaded upon the fate and significance of the *Silmarilli* ('radiance of pure light') or Primeval Jewels. By the making of gems the sub-creative function of the Elves is chiefly symbolized, but the *Silmarilli* were more than just beautiful things as such. There was Light. There was the Light of Valinor made visible in the Two Trees of Silver and Gold.* These

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

were slain by the Enemy out of malice, and Valinor was darkened, though from them, ere they died utterly, were derived the lights of Sun and Moon. (A marked difference here between these legends and most others is that the Sun is not a divine symbol, but a second-best thing, and the 'light of the Sun' (the world under the sun) become terms for a fallen world, and a dislocated imperfect vision).

But the chief artificer of the Elves (Fëanor) had imprisoned the Light of Valinor in the three supreme jewels, the Silmarilli, before the Trees were sullied or slain. This Light thus lived thereafter only in these gems. The fall of the Elves comes about through the possessive attitude of Fëanor and his seven sons to these gems. They are captured by the Enemy, set in his Iron Crown, and guarded in his impenetrable stronghold. The sons of Fëanor take a terrible and blasphemous oath of enmity and vengeance against all or any, even of the gods, who dares to claim any part or right in the Silmarilli. They pervert the greater part of their kindred, who rebel against the gods, and depart from paradise, and go to make hopeless war upon the Enemy. The first fruit of their fall is war in Paradise, the slaying of Elves by Elves, and this and their evil oath dogs all their later heroism, generating treacheries and undoing all victories. The *Silmarillion* is the history of the War of the Exiled Elves against the Enemy, which all takes place in the North-west of the world (Middle-earth). Several tales of victory and tragedy are caught up in it; but it ends with catastrophe, and the passing of the Ancient World, the world of the long *First Age*. The jewels are recovered (by the final intervention of the gods) only to be lost for ever to the Elves, one in the sea, one in the deeps of earth, and one as a star of heaven. This legendarium ends with a vision of the end of the world, its breaking and remaking, and the recovery of the Silmarilli and the 'light before the Sun' – after a final battle which owes, I suppose, more to the Norse vision of Ragnarök than to anything else, though it is not much like it.

As the stories become less mythical, and more like stories

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

As such the story is (I think a beautiful and powerful) heroic-fairy-romance, receivable in itself with only a very

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