

# **J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography Study Guide**

**J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography by Humphrey Carpenter**

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# Plot Summary

"J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography" by Humphrey Carpenter is a biography of the well known author of the classic tales "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings."

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa, where his father, Arthur Tolkien, worked in the banking industry. Tolkien, who was called Ronald, spent his first five years in South Africa before returning to England to visit family. While in England, Arthur Tolkien died and the family, now under the care of Tolkien's mother, Mabel Suffield Tolkien, stayed in England.

Tolkien and his younger brother, Hilary, grew up living in several different houses, from the English countryside to more than one dismal house in the city. Mabel was insistent on teaching the boys religion, language, and other important subjects until they could attend school. It was during this time that Tolkien developed a deep and abiding love for languages.

Mabel Tolkien died from diabetes when Ronald was thirteen and Hilary was ten. The boys were left under the guardianship of Father Francis Morgan the family's priest and dear friend. Father Francis would continue to play a very important role in the boys' lives although they did not live with him.

The Tolkiens excelled in school, although Hilary was known as a bit "dreamy," which often got him into trouble. Ronald continued to study languages and eventually spoke many fluently, including Latin, Greek, German, French, Norse, Welsh, Middle English, Chaucerian English, and Icelandic. The love of these languages was what would cause Tolkien to create his own elvish languages, starting in boyhood.

Tolkien loved school and met many friends, some of whom would be there for the rest of his life. Shortly after graduating from King Edward's School, Ronald met Edith Bratt, a 19 year old orphan who lived in the same boarding house. Although there was a three year age difference and much scandal about the pair being seen together, Ronald would eventually marry Edith. The Tolkiens would have four children and a solid home.

Tolkien was blissful when he was granted a scholarship to Oxford. The years Tolkien spent at Oxford were the most enlightened and joyous of his life. Several years later, it wasn't a surprise to anyone that Tolkien would return to Oxford as a member of the faculty, where he would excel into a high ranking professorship.

Throughout Tolkien's entire life, he created and wrote. The impetus for his great English epic had been with him for a long time. It wasn't until one of his closest friends had died that Tolkien put pen to paper. The process saw the completion of "The Hobbit," "The Lord of the Rings," "The Silmarillion," and many other works throughout Tolkien's long and successful life.

Tolkien's books may be more popular now than ever, thanks to the devotion of generations of fans, academicians, friends, and critics.



# Part 1, Part 2, Chapters 1-3

## Part 1, Part 2, Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Part one relays details of Humphrey Carpenter's visit to Ronald Tolkien in 1967. The Tolkiens live in a suburb of Oxford known as Headington. Carpenter is expected, but is greeted with some puzzlement as if the professor has forgotten about the appointment. Carpenter notes that Tolkien is a small man, which is somewhat surprising considering the emphasis the author places on height in his work. Carpenter meets Edith Tolkien, who is very petite and pleasant.

Tolkien takes Carpenter into a garage that has been converted into an office. Tolkien apologizes for the lack of amenities, but the study of the typical uses in the house is cramped and not fit for guests. Tolkien is in the process of working on a contradiction that appears in the "Lord of the Rings." The error had been pointed out by a reader and Tolkien considers the matter urgent because a revised edition is about to be printed. Carpenter notes that Tolkien talks about the series as if it is historical fact and not his own creation.

Part Two: "1892-1916: The Early Years." Chapter one is titled "Bloemfontein." In 1891 Mabel Suffield leaves her family in Birmingham to travel to South Africa, where she would marry Arthur Tolkien. Mabel and Arthur had been engaged for three years at the insistence of her father, who would not permit a marriage until she is 21 years old. Arthur Tolkien had gone to South Africa to obtain a position in the banking industry.

After a three-week journey, Mabel arrives in Cape Town, where she is greeted by Arthur. The couple is married on April 16, 1891 and moves into the Bank House, a residence on the premises of the Bank of Africa, where Arthur is employed.

Mabel is not fond of Bloemfontein, but makes every effort to like it for the sake of her husband. On January 3, 1892 Mabel Suffield Tolkien gives birth to a baby boy, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. The baby is named John after his grandfather and Reuel is Arthur's middle name. There is no precedent for the name Ronald, which would become the name by which the baby's parents would address him.

There are many strange disturbances in the house at Bloemfontein, from monkeys climbing over the wall and the presence of tarantulas. Mabel is very careful to keep Ronald out of the midday heat to protect his fair skin.

Mabel quickly grows tiresome of life in Bloemfontein and plans a trip to England. The trip has to be postponed when Mabel becomes pregnant. On February 17, 1894, a second Tolkien son is born. This child is named Hilary Arthur Reuel Tolkien.

Mabel never gives up hope that family will move back to England. Mabel is disappointed when Arthur tells his father that he cannot see returning to England on a permanent basis.



In 1895 Mabel and the boys return to England for a visit. While the family is in Southampton, Arthur Tolkien's health begins to fail. On February 15, 1896 Arthur Tolkien dies of a severe hemorrhage.

Chapter Two, "Birmingham," begins with Mabel Tolkien making decisions about how she will live her life and take care of the children. The small sum of money that had been invested by Arthur would only bring an income of 30 shillings per week, an amount that is barely enough to sustain the family at the poverty level. Mabel decides that she would home school the children and find an inexpensive house to rent. Meanwhile Mabel and the boys would live with her parents. Although Arthur's family stays in touch with Mabel and children, Ronald becomes well-versed in the ways of the Suffields.

The Tolkiens eventually move to a house in the small village of Sarehole. The move to the English countryside is a bit of a shock for Ronald who is just beginning to be used to living in Birmingham. However, it turns out to be one of the best experiences of Ronald's life as he and Hilary could play freely in the woods and throughout the town. Tolkien would later say that the area is inspiration for the setting of "The Hobbit."

During this time, Mabel is home schooling the children and notices that Ronald is a bright student who is interested in languages. It is also at this time that Mabel decides to convert to Catholicism, a decision that is not well met by her family or the Tolkiens.

Ronald enters King Edward's School at age 7. The school is the best one in Birmingham and it is fortunate that a relative agrees to pay the annual fees.

After a long search Mabel finally finds a Catholic Church where she feels welcome. The Birmingham Oratory is attached to the Grammar School of St. Philip, a less expensive school that would enable the boys to have a Catholic education. At the Oratory, Mabel Tolkien meets Father Francis Xavier Morgan, a 43 year old parish priest. Father Morgan becomes a close friend of the family and would eventually be named guardian to Ronald and Hilary.

St. Philip's is not the best school for the boys and eventually, Ronald wins a scholarship to King Edward's school. Hilary is also removed from school and Mabel home schools him until he is able to pass the entrance exam to King Edward's. The return to King Edward's means yet another move for the Tolkiens which does not please Ronald who has not been happy with their home since Sarehole.

At the end of 1903 the boys and Mabel are sick for an extended period of time. In the spring of 1904 Mabel is diagnosed with diabetes. There is no treatment for diabetes at this time and Mabel has to be hospitalized. Eventually, Mabel goes to convalesce in a cottage in the country while the children are sent off to relatives. In November, Mabel falls into a diabetic coma and dies.

Chapter Three is titled "'Private Lang.' - and Edith." The chapter begins with Tolkien writing about his mother nine years after her death. Carpenter believes that Tolkien may have substituted his mother with his faith in the Catholic Church. Some also believe that Mabel's death encouraged Tolkien to expand his study of various languages. The



experience also turns Tolkien into a pessimist. As a general rule Tolkien was a cheerful person with a love of life, good conversation and physical activity. The professor was known for having a good sense of humor and a wide circle of friends. There were times, however, when he would suffer from great depression and grief.

After Mabel died, Father Francis became guardian to Ronald and Hilary. The first thing that needed to be done was to find a place for the boys live. Father Francis worried that the family will try to take the boys away from the Catholic Church and send them to a Protestant boarding school. The boys were eventually placed with an aunt by marriage, Beatrice Suffield. Beatrice was recently widowed and somewhat poor. Although Beatrice was willing to take in the boys there was little she could offer them, in a way of luxury or affection. It wasn't that Beatrice was mean. It was just that she was childless and could not relate to the boys. For example, one day, Ronald found that Beatrice had burned all of Mabel's papers never suspecting that the boys might want to keep them.

It was easy for Ronald to make friends at school, one of which would become his best friend. This friend, Christopher Wiseman, whose father was a Wesley minister, was relatively good-natured, albeit "energetically critical." The boys met in 1905 in the Fifth Class. In addition to friendship the boys develop a healthy rivalry.

During this time, Ronald continued to study various languages including Latin German, French and Greek. It was not the linguistics themselves that fascinated Tolkien; rather it was the "bones" or the elements that were present in all languages. Tolkien began to study philology. Some of the new languages that captured Tolkien's imagination were Old English also referred to as Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, Old Norse, Chaucerian English, and Middle English.

Tolkien began to experiment with language, and even developed his own rudimentary language with his cousins Marjorie and Mary Incedon. The language was referred to as "Animalic" and consisted mainly of words created from animal names.

Father Francis discovered that the boys were unhappy living with Beatrice. The boys were moved to a house behind the Oratory. The house was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner. In addition to the couple, the house was occupied by the Faulkners' daughter Helen, a maid named Annie, and another border named Edith Bratt. Ronald was taken with the 19-year-old orphan, who was petite and slender with dark hair and gray eyes. Edith's guardian had hoped she would become a concert pianist or teacher, however, Mrs. Faulkner had little patience for Edith's extensive practicing on the piano.

Ronald and Edith became friends, even though Ronald was three years her junior. By the summer of 1909 Ronald and Edith decided they had fallen in love. During this time, Ronald should have been studying for a scholarship at Oxford but the boy found the task difficult, since one half of his mind was obsessed with languages and the other half with Edith.

Ronald had been seen with Edith and Father Francis demanded that the couple break off their relationship. Ronald would not think of disobeying Father Francis, who had



been so kind to him and Hilary. Despite an attempt at clandestine meetings, Ronald and Edith were spotted together again. Edith was preparing to go away and Ronald was forbidden to see or write to her until he had finished university three years hence.





## Part 2, Chapters 4-7

### Part 2, Chapters 4-7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 is titled "T.C., B.S., Etc." Father Francis was still angry with Ronald for deceiving him regarding the relationship of Edith. Even after a few weeks without Edith Ronald was often depressed and morbid. On Easter Father Francis permitted Tolkien to write to Edith. Ronald learned that Edith was happy in her new home at Cheltenham and this both pleased and dismayed Ronald.

Without Edith, Ronald focused his entire life around school at King Edward's. Eventually he formed a group with several other boys, including Christopher Wiseman, R.Q. Gilson, George Bache Smith and several others. The group was unofficially named the "Tea Club." The group routinely met in the library and exchanged their love of literature and music. Tolkien was prone to recite from symbol of his favorite works including "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and "Beowulf." Eventually the group changed its name to the "Barrovian Society" but often referred to it as "T.C.B.S."

Tolkien also began to recite and compose poetry. Some of the pressure was relieved when Ronald received a scholarship titled the "Open Classical Exhibition" to Exeter College at Oxford. Ronald spent his final year at King Edward's deeply involved in the debating society and the football league. Ronald continued to study the Norse sagas as well as a collection of poetry detailing Finnish mythology.

Chapter 5, "Oxford," finds Tolkien arriving at Exeter College. The moment Ronald set foot on campus he knew the college was bound to be his real home. Although Oxford was known for its upper class, students, including some aristocrats, there was little in the way of the caste system and Ronald managed to fit in with the help of some fellow Catholic students. Tolkien jumped into his studies and was thrilled when he had the opportunity to meet Joseph Wright, a Professor of Comparative Philology.

Much to Ronald's delight the T.C.B.S. survived graduation from King Edward's and continued its activities, including the production of a play.

In January 1913, Ronald Tolkien turned 21 and was thrilled that he could finally be reunited with Edith. Ronald wrote the letter to his love only to find that Edith was engaged to be married.

Chapter 6, "Reunion," details the reunion between Edith and Ronald. No one in Ronald's life save for Father Francis knew about Edith. It would have been wise for Ronald to forget about the girl and allow her to marry. However, Ronald was convinced that he could persuade Edith to break off her engagement and marry him instead. Ronald wrote to Father Francis to tell him the news about his impending marriage to Edith. Father Francis was no longer the legal guardian for Ronald, but was still in



charge of monetary support and Ronald was eager to please him. Father Francis accepted the news of the engagement, although he was less than thrilled.

Ronald returned to his studies only to find that he had fallen behind and had to cram six weeks of work into a short period of time in order to complete the course. Although Ronald had come in second place, members of Exeter College saw great promise in the student and suggested that Ronald become a philologist.

As Ronald and Edith's wedding drew nearer, the subject of religion became a concern. Edith had agreed to convert to Catholicism, although she was a very active member of the Church of England. Ronald was adamant that Edith become a Catholic. Edith was concerned about the reaction from her family, many of which were extremely anti-Catholic.

Chapter 7, titled "War," takes place during the summer of 1914, after England declared war on Germany. Hilary signed up to become a soldier and the family expected Ronald to follow suit. Ronald, however, was concerned about leaving Oxford and wanted to finish his studies.

It was during this time that Tolkien started to write. Ronald was eager to share his work with the other members of the T.C.B.S. who were both kind and critical.

Chapter 8, "The Breaking of the Fellowship," starts with Ronald and Edith returning from their honeymoon. Ronald had just received his first rejection letter for poetry he had submitted to a publisher.

Tolkien joined the war effort. While in service Tolkien received a letter from his friend, G. B. Smith, stating that Rob Gilson had been killed. Tolkien replied that he felt the T.C.B.S. had come to an end. Smith said the T.C.B.S. would never end. Tolkien was fortunate to survive what he referred to as "trench warfare" until he was stricken with what the doctors referred to as "pyrexia of unknown origin." Ronald received medical care, but never got any better and was sent home to England. Not long after Tolkien received a letter from Christopher Wiseman, informing him that G. B. Smith had been killed. To Tolkien, it was the end of an era.



## Parts 3-4

### Parts 3-4 Summary and Analysis

Part 3 is titled "1917-1925: The Making of a Mythology." Chapter 1, "Lost Tales," begins with G.B. Smith's words: "May you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them." These words inspired Tolkien to write his great epic work. Tolkien had decided that in order to create a new language he would also have to create a history around it if he was going to achieve the level of complexity desired. Additionally, Tolkien wanted to create an English mythology like that of the Norse or Finnish cultures using the same intense feeling he put into his early poetry.

As Tolkien was recovering from trench fever, Christopher Wiseman wrote and told his friend that it was time to start writing the epic. Tolkien began writing what he referred to as "The Book of Lost Tales." The first story would eventually become "Silmarillion."

Many people question how Tolkien could create a mythology without a clear presence of God considering his devout Catholic faith. Tolkien claims that there is a God, a supreme being, in the epic work as well is the presence of angels. The important thing for Tolkien was to be able to create a remote and strange land, while adhering to his beliefs. It was also important that the work did not become an allegory.

Tolkien's love of languages also allowed him to create the characters' names, an aspect Tolkien thoroughly enjoyed. The first language Tolkien produced to his own satisfaction was Quenya, a complex language based on the Finnish vocabulary. The second language was Sindarin, which was reminiscent of Welsh, Tolkien's second favorite language.

Carpenter explains the process by which Tolkien began to pay the most attention to the language as opposed to the story itself. Tolkien was called back to duty and Edith followed. By this time, Edith was in the final stages of pregnancy and was completely miserable. Eventually Edith and her cousin Jennie Grove moved back to Cheltenham.

In 1917, Edith gave birth to a baby boy, John Francis Reuel, the name Francis after Father Francis Morgan. For the next couple of years Edith traveled to be with Ronald but eventually, the moving was too much for her and the baby and she settled in one place until Ronald was permitted to move back to Oxford, in order to finish his education.

Chapter 2, "Oxford Interlude," details Tolkien's return to Oxford, where he continued to create his language, while working at the New English Dictionary workroom. Ronald felt at home once again in Oxford.

In 1920, Ronald applied for a job at the University of Leeds as a Reader in English Language. By the end of the first interview, Ronald knew he would be taking the job.



Chapter 3, "Northern Adventure," details the Tolkien family's move to Leeds. While at Leeds Tolkien met up with Eric Valentine Gordon, whom he had tutored at one point, and the two men compiled a new edition of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," one of Tolkien's favorite middle English poems. Together Gordon and Tolkien formed the Viking Club, whose sole purpose was to drink massive quantities of beer, read sagas, and sing songs. The songs were largely written by Gordon and Tolkien and lyrics were often quite rude. The Viking Club made Gordon and Tolkien popular teachers.

The Tolkiens had a second son in 1920 named Michael Hilary Reuel.

In 1922, Tolkien was appointed to the position of Professorship of the English Language, a position created especially for Tolkien.

In 1924, Edith gave birth to a third son, Christopher Reuel, named after Christopher Wiseman.

Part 4 is titled "1925-1949(i): 'In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit'." Chapter 1, "Oxford Life," details how Oxford had changed in recent years. Until the late 1800s, most of the college fellows were required to take holy vows and were not permitted to marry. It was a group of reformers who introduced "non-clerical fellowships" that effectively eliminated vow of celibacy. North Oxford had become a community of academics, their wives and families who lived in the grand mansions and suburban villas. The Tolkiens bought a house where they would live for 21 years.

In 1929 Edith gave birth to their fourth and final child, Priscilla Mary Reuel. Edith had been miserable much of the time during her pregnancies but was finally rewarded with a daughter.

The family settles into their new home and Tolkien embraced his duties as a professor. During this time, Tolkien also dedicates himself to writing his epic.

At this point Carpenter introduces C.S. Lewis, a friend of Tolkien's and popular lecturer on medieval studies.

Chapter Two, "Photographs Observed," glosses over many of the day-to-day events in Tolkien's life. Carpenter states that many of the details would be quite boring for the reader and therefore should be mentioned only briefly. Instead Carpenter focuses on the myriad of photographs taken and preserved by the Tolkiens. Carpenter points out that in every photograph the situation and location seemed to be quite ordinary. One notable aspect of the photos is the way Ronald Tolkien preferred to dress. Tolkien and Lewis both indulged in wearing extremely masculine clothes, somewhat offended by the current trend of "dandyism." The men preferred tweed jackets, bland colored rain coats, flannel trousers, and "solid brown shoes that were built for country walks."

Carpenter explains that Tolkien appeared to be a conventional man and was not given to the "externals of existence." Tolkien said that he had such a great deal of experience in his early years that it was sufficient to nourish him as he grew older.



Despite Tolkien's success and accolades, the professor always remained humble and was very fond of exhibiting a sense of humor, often with himself as the subject.

Chapter 3, "He Had Been Inside the Language," explores Tolkien's fondness for language and the excitement of learning new languages as well as creating his own. In addition to reading German, Norse, Finish, Middle English and Anglo-Saxon, Tolkien was fond of Icelandic. The professor's love of languages often made his lectures interesting to undergraduates, particularly his lectures on "Beowulf." In later years, W. H. Auden commented that the voice Tolkien used while reciting a Beowulf was the voice of Gandalf.

During this time Tolkien was named Oxford's Professor of Anglo-Saxon. While it was a prestigious title, Tolkien found the position to be filled with an immense amount of hard work, from teaching classes to giving lectures. It was required at Tolkien give at least 36 classes and lectures per year, but the professor felt that 36 were not sufficient to embrace the entire subject, and in his second year of professorship, Tolkien gave 136 classes and lectures. Professors were also expected to perform many administrative tasks as well as doing their own original research.

Gordon had taken over Tolkien's former position as a professor at the University of Leeds. In 1938 Gordon went into the hospital for a routine operation and died of a kidney disorder that had not been previously detected. Tolkien was devastated for he had lost a close friend and collaborator.

Chapter 4, titled "Jack," examines Tolkien's friendship with Clive Staples Lewis referred to by his friends as "Jack." Since Lewis was a medievalist, he was somewhat of a competitor to Tolkien. The two were wary of one another in the beginning, but eventually developed a deep friendship. Carpenter points out that both Lewis and Tolkien believed that male companionship is essential, particularly when the two have so much in common in the way of a love of mythology. The two became so close that it was often suggested that they had a homosexual relationship, which both men scoffed at and considered it to be an absurd accusation.

The only real conflict between the men seemed to be religion. Tolkien was a devout Catholic and Lewis was an Ulster Protestant. As an adolescent, Lewis claimed to be agnostic and also took delight in examining pagan mythology.

Through Lewis' talks with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson, a lecturer in English Literature, Lewis professed not only to believe in God but to embrace Christianity. The men often met on Thursday nights and would drink tea, smoke pipes, and read to one another. This group became known as The Inklings. Other members of the group included, R.E. Havard; Major Warren Lewis; Jack's brother; and occasionally, Owen Barfield. In 1939, Charles Williams joined the group. Williams worked for London's Oxford University Press. Like the others Williams was a writer. Williams' participation in the Inklings caused some conflict, especially when Lewis turned his attention away from Tolkien and toward the new member. Tolkien's attitude toward Lewis began to cool although Lewis was most likely unaware of the change in his friend.



Chapter 5, "Northmoor Road," examines Edith's life during the time when her husband was completely immersed in his work and life at Oxford.

Edith did not have the benefit of a university education, and therefore felt quite awkward and intimidated by the presence of the other Oxford wives. Ronald encouraged Edith to return calls from the wives of the other professors but Edith was also shy and could not. Eventually, she became friendly with Lizzie Wright, wife of Joseph Wright, and Agnes Wrenn, wife of Charles Wrenn. By and large Edith was unhappy and began to feel ignored by Ronald. Edith did not understand Ronald's devotion to Jack Lewis and became jealous of the relationship.

While the couple lived in the same house, they seemed to live separate lives. Ronald did not shut Edith out of his life however; the couple shared many friends and were always worried about one another. Edith was also very proud of Ronald's work.

Chapter 6, "The Storyteller," talks about Tolkien's gift for storytelling, particularly when it came to creating whimsical bedtime stories for the children. The children enjoyed Tolkien's many flights of fancy and outrageous adventure stories. Tolkien kept the creation of these children's stories completely separate from his grand myth, until one day, while correcting exam papers. On a blank piece of paper Tolkien wrote, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." Tolkien had no idea what it meant and decided that he needed to "find out what hobbits were like."



## Part 5

### Part 5 Summary and Analysis

Part five is titled "1925-1949(ii): The Third Age." Chapter one, "Enter Mr. Baggins," talks about the origin of The Hobbit character Bilbo Baggins. In many ways, Bilbo Baggins is J.R.R. Tolkien. Both are somewhat middle-aged, like to dress in comfortable clothes with some splashes of bright color, and like to eat plain food. Bilbo Baggins is the son of Belladonna Took, who is one of three daughters of Old Took, who is descended from the respectable Baggins family. This is much like Tolkien himself, who was the son of Mabel Suffield, one of the three daughters of the remarkable John Suffield.

One of the great mysteries about The Hobbit is that no one is quite sure when the book was started. Tolkien narrowed it down to a five-year period, before 1935, but after 1930 when family moved to Northmoor Road. In a letter to his publisher Tolkien stated that John, the eldest son, was 13 when he first heard the story, which would be in 1930 or 1931. It is also known that there was a completed manuscript in 1932 because it was shown to Jack Lewis. On the other hand, John and Michael remember hearing parts of the story before 1930, although it may not have been written down at that time.

The story of The Hobbit was written for Tolkien's own amusement and was not written as a part of Tolkien's great mythology. However, as the story of The Hobbit moved along, some of Tolkien's mythology crept in. Regardless of how The Hobbit is viewed it was intended to be a children's story.

The Hobbit had been abandoned until a student of Tolkien's mentioned it to a college friend who was working for a London publisher. The woman took the Typescript, read it and recommended it to the publishers. Soon charged with finishing, the story so that it could be published.

The publication of The Hobbit was quite a learning experience for Tolkien, who had no idea of the processes involved with producing a book. The maps had to be redrawn because the originals contained too many colors; the maps were moved to the end of the book; and the author's plan for having invisible lettering on the maps, which would be revealed when put up in front of a light, had to be put aside. The book was finally published in 1937. Tolkien received rave reviews from many critics and the first edition sold out by that Christmas.

Chapter 2 "The New Hobbit," begins with Tolkien meeting with his publisher to discuss a sequel to The Hobbit. It was the first time in Tolkien had met Stanley Unwin, and each thought the other was quite strange. Tolkien said Unwin looked a lot like one of his dwarves.

Unwin was anxious to read subsequent works by Tolkien, although none of them contained hobbits, something that Unwin was sure Tolkien's audience would want. After



reading through Tolkien's completed manuscripts, Unwin rejected all of them in favor of another book written as a sequel to *The Hobbit*.

Tolkien found writing a sequel somewhat troublesome since *The Hobbit* had a definite end period. Instead of writing a story about Bilbo Baggins, Tolkien focused on Bilbo's son, Bingo and his cousins Odo and Frodo. The three lads were meant to take a long journey in order to return the ring.

All of Tolkien's attention was split between the new book along and the Oxford professorship until Christopher was diagnosed with a mysterious heart ailment. Tolkien spent several months caring for his son who had been sent home from boarding school.

In writing "*The Lord of the Rings*" Tolkien became frustrated and did not know where to end the story. At this point, he wanted to write something for adults and put the hobbits off to the side. Eventually, Tolkien told his publisher that he was "forgetting about children" as the new story was becoming frightening and was perhaps unsuitable for young minds.

The war hit in 1939 and things began to change at the Tolkien House. John moved to Rome to study for the Catholic priesthood; Michael attended Trinity College, and went on to become an anti-aircraft gunner; Christopher recovered from his ailment, returned to school and eventually went on to Trinity College. Priscilla remained at home. The war made things difficult for everyone in Europe and the Tolkiens often took in lodgers and also raised hens to combat the shortage of eggs.

The delay in Tolkien's next installment of books could be blamed in part on the man's perfectionism. Tolkien insisted on drawing maps in order to help the story move along so that every detail would fit in perfectly. It was frustrating for the publishers to see Tolkien focused on every minute detail rather than working on the book as a whole. Tolkien typically did not record his life or actions in a journal. However, there are many letters Tolkien wrote to Christopher when he was in the RAF in South Africa. Excerpts of some of those letters appear in this chapter.

In 1949 Tolkien finished the manuscript and sent it to C.S. Lewis who replied with both criticism and accolades. Tolkien had never believed that the work was flawless.



## Part 6

### Part 6 Summary and Analysis

Part 6 is titled "1949-1966: Success." Chapter 1, "Slamming the Gates," begins shortly after the completion of "The Lord of the Rings." By then Tolkien was almost 60 years old. Tolkien wasn't sure he wanted his publishers, Allen and Unwin, to publish the book even though they had approved the manuscript. Tolkien found someone who would be willing to publish The Lord of the Rings along with The Silmarillion. Ever since The Silmarillion was rejected in 1937 Tolkien was desperate to have it published. Tolkien met with Milton Waldman, who thought The Silmarillion was brilliant and asked Tolkien to finish it. Waldman was concerned that Tolkien might have a legal, or at least a moral, obligation to his publishers. Tolkien was angry with his publishers for the lack of publicity for one of the recent books and wanted to get out of the promises made.

Tolkien wrote to Stanley Unwin to tell him that The Lord of the Rings was finished. Tolkien was eager to cut ties with the publishers and made comments which he felt would deter Stanley Unwin from publishing the book. However, Stanley Unwin surprised Tolkien by showing interest in accepting both of the books. Stanley Unwin wrote to his son Rayner at Harvard, who had acted as an adolescent test subject and critic for the earlier works. Rayner said that because Tolkien was not willing to do any editing or split the books into several volumes, Unwin should take The Lord of the Rings and reject the Silmarillion. Stanley Unwin made a grave mistake by sending a copy of this letter to Tolkien, who was understandably angry. Tolkien offered an ultimatum to Stanley Unwin, who in the end rejected the package. Tolkien was now free to go ahead with Milton Waldman and Collins publishing. Walden told Tolkien that he would have to do some heavy editing on the books before they could be published. Several years of delays and mishaps occurred until in 1952 when Tolkien gave up on Collins and went back to Allen and Unwin.

Chapter Two, "A Big Risk," details Tolkien's renewed relationship with Rayner Unwin. Unwin wanted Tolkien to send The Lord of the Rings posthaste. Tolkien was reluctant since there was only one copy in existence and insisted on delivering it by hand.

In 1952, Rayner Unwin proposed a new deal to Tolkien for The Lord of the Rings. Instead of a traditional contract with royalty payments Tolkien would be contracted in a profit-sharing agreement. While Tolkien stood to make more money, it also meant that he would not see any money until the cost of the book production was covered. Much to Tolkien's delight Rayner Unwin did not want Tolkien to cut anything from the manuscript as Waldman had suggested.

Tolkien was unhappy about splitting the work into three volumes and insisted on maintaining the title The Lord of the Rings for the entire series. Although the book was split into three sections it could not be considered a trilogy. There were also more issues with production from the reconstruction of maps due to the expense of reproduction to



the fact that the typesetters often changed many of Tolkien's spellings, which upset the author.

As the time drew near for the book to be published Tolkien was afraid of the critics' reaction. As he told a close friend, Father Robert Murray, "exposed my heart to be shot at."

Chapter 3, "Cash or Kudos," talks about the period of Tolkien's life right after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The first book review was written by C.S. Lewis. The review praised the work which was a mixed blessing. It was unusual for someone to write both a blurb for the book jacket as well as a review, but Lewis wanted to help Tolkien in any way he could. Lewis warns Tolkien however, that he had become a much hated man and the accolades may do more harm than good. Although the reviews from other critics were mixed, they were better than Tolkien had expected and the book sold very well.

Oxford finally took notice of the book and the powers that be discovered what Tolkien had been doing for so many years while leading his research and other duties slide. Tolkien was required to complete several overdue projects.

The money began pouring in and soon Tolkien was worried about having to pay an exorbitant amount in taxes. Tolkien ended up retiring from Oxford at age 65, 2 years earlier than he had expected. The excessive tax encouraged Tolkien to sell the original manuscripts of his published works to Marquette University in Michigan.

Allen and Unwin began to negotiate deals for foreign translations of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien was pleased with the first translation into Dutch, but was angered when the translation for the Swedish edition included a five-page foreword from the translator attempting to decipher the work and also told where Tolkien lived. The foreword was removed.

There was a considerable problem when an American company reprinted the saga without permission, which was legal at the time but not ethical. Tolkien's fans rose up and in the end, the infringement was a blessing in disguise.

The company that illegally published the book eventually apologized to Tolkien and offered to pay him royalties on volumes sold. By this time, the number of books sold numbered in the millions.

In addition to receiving royalties on books sold, the battle with the publishing company made Tolkien and his work overnight sensations. There was a great popularity explosion all over the world and Tolkien was surprised to find that he had become a cult idol.

Tolkien began to find that people were confusing the man with the work. The author's iconic status completely puzzled him. Letters and cards from fans started pouring in by the thousands and Tolkien soon found himself completely overwhelmed. The publishing



company offered Tolkien help in answering the mail, which greatly relieved some of the pressure put on Tolkien.

Fan mail was not something that the author dismissed, however. There were letters from fans interested in the characters in the books but there were also many letters from fellow and future philologists, eager to discuss Tolkien's elvish languages and how they were created. This interest thrilled Tolkien. While the author took special care in replying to all of his fan mail, the letters from those interested in languages were given a great deal of consideration.

People also began to ask for permission to use the names in the books, for everything to naming children, locations, and even a cow. Tolkien was honored and appreciated that he was asked.

## Part 7

### Part 7 Summary and Analysis

Part 7, "1959-1973: Last Years", Chapter 1, "Headington," continues with Tolkien becoming adjusted to fame, which greatly puzzled him. People began to call all hours of the day and night, and send cards, letters and gifts. The most disturbing events were when people would take photos through the windows and into the house.

The money was coming in and Tolkien found that he would not have to worry about funds ever again. Tolkien has already retired early from Oxford and planned to spend his retirement working on unfinished projects.

The relationship with Lewis deteriorated further when Lewis married Joy Davidson. Tolkien disapproved for a number of reasons and was also jealous of the relationship. Oddly enough, it was Edith who befriended Joy Lewis.

Tolkien kept busy but was often solitary and somewhat lonely. After a while, the author's concentration waned and he found it difficult to write. There were many times when Tolkien would fall back into his periods of despair, much like he had in his youth. The depression prevented him from working and accompanied by 25 years of working on one or projects had taken its toll on the author. Tolkien maintained contact with Christopher Wiseman and C.S. Lewis, who encouraged him to write. The depression eventually subsided and Tolkien got back to work.

When C.S. Lewis died in 1963, Tolkien was devastated, as if part of his world had been taken away. Other than Christopher Wiseman, Lewis had been Tolkien's closest friend and confidant for many years.

Tolkien also wrote to his children a great deal. Priscilla and John were close at hand while Christopher and Michael were often far away, either in the service or with work. Tolkien wrote long letters to all, but to Christopher in particular, telling his son about all of the problems and adventures involved with the work.

Chapter 2, "Bournemouth," details the Tolkiens' trips to the seaside town where Edith regained good spirits. It was a strange choice for holidays since Tolkien was not fond of Bournemouth. The town itself was "a peculiarly unlovable place" and not at all picturesque. Carpenter refers to it as being the anemic English equivalent to the French Riviera. Many elderly British couples retired to Bournemouth. There must have been something that attracted the Tolkiens there, however, because they left the house in Headington and moved to the seaside town. The Tolkiens hoped that their new, unpublicized, address would give them some relief from the almost constant and intolerable flow of visitors, mail, and gifts that were always present in Headington.



The strain of keeping up the house was taking a toll on Edith and she was often unwell. Living in Bournemouth had a good effect on Edith. It may have been the restorative properties of the sea air. The Tolkiens lived in Bournemouth for three years.

In 1971, Edith was taken to the hospital with an infected gall bladder and was expected to have a full recovery. Edith suffered from a short and severe illness and the hospital and on November 29, 1971, Edith Bratt Tolkien died.

Chapter 3, "Merton Street," details Tolkien's final years. After Edith died, Tolkien worked hard to stay busy and was often awarded many honors. Moving back to Merton Street in Oxford was a good choice for Tolkien. At Merton Street, Tolkien would have less to take care of in the way of the house and also have a scout and his wife to look after him. Additionally, Tolkien could not bear to stay in Bournemouth without Edith.

In addition to returning to his great English mythology, Tolkien was also the recipient of a great number of awards, from Oxford and other prestigious universities. In 1972, Tolkien was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters. The awards and accolades pleased Tolkien, as did the many requests for his presence as a professor emeritus.

Tolkien was doing well at Oxford, the place he had always considered to be his true home. In 1973, Tolkien died suddenly of a chest infection.



# Characters

## John Ronald Reuel Tolkien

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973) was a famous British author, professor, and iconic figure of the 1950s and '60s.

Having lost his father at the age of five, Ronald Tolkien and his younger brother Hilary were raised by their mother. Mabel Suffield was a loving mother who wanted only the best for her children, from their schooling to religious upbringing. When Ronald was thirteen, Mabel died and the boys were put under the guardianship of Father Francis Morgan.

Ronald excelled in school, particularly when it came to languages. The author showed a great aptitude early on for Latin and Greek and eventually moved on to learn many other languages, such as Welsh, Middle English, Norse, and Icelandic. Tolkien was also famous for creating his own languages, Quenya and Sindarin, for his books, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien devoted his entire life to creating a great mythology for England. The road was long and hard but immensely rewarding for the philologist. In addition to the writing, Tolkien also became a revered professor at several universities, including Oxford.

At age 21, Tolkien married his childhood sweetheart, Edith Bratt, and together they had four children. Tolkien would outlive Edith by two years.

Tolkien was well known for his friendships with other writers, including lifelong friend Christopher Wiseman and author C.S. Lewis.

## Edith Bratt Tolkien

Edith Bratt (1889-1971) was a 19-year-old lodger at Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner's house when she met Ronald Tolkien. The girl, petite with dark hair, and gray eyes, was orphaned as well as illegitimate. Edith was a good seamstress and musically inclined.

Despite the three year age difference between Edith and Tolkien, the teenagers became good friends. After spending an entire summer together, the pair knew that they were in love.

Edith had some decisions to make about her future. An inheritance had left her a small amount of money which she could survive on but eventually, the girl wanted to realize her dreams and become a pianist.



Edith went away to Cheltenham after she and Ronald were not allowed to see each other for three years. Edith was engaged to be married when Ronald persuaded her to marry him instead.

The marriage was satisfactory but the couple was quite different in many ways. Tolkien was much more outgoing, particularly in the Oxford years and Edith was shy and easily intimidated by Ronald's learned friends and their wives.

Pregnancy was hard for Edith and in the end, taking care of the children and the home took precedence over her own career. All in all, Edith was supportive of Ronald and proud of his work.

## **Mabel Suffield Tolkien**

Mother to Ronald and Hilary Tolkien.

## **Christopher Wiseman**

Ronald Tolkien's best friend at Oxford and member of the Tea Club/Barrovian Society.

## **Father Francis Morgan**

The Roman Catholic priest who became guardian of Ronald and Hilary Tolkien after the death of their mother.

## **Joseph Wright**

Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford's Exeter College.

## **C. S. Lewis**

Clive Staples Lewis is the famed author of Alice in Wonderland, and close friend to Ronald Tolkien.

## **Christopher Tolkien**

Ronald and Edith Tolkien's son, responsible for the publication of many of J.R.R. Tolkien's works.

## **Bilbo Baggins**

The main character in "The Hobbit."



## **Jane Suffield Neave**

Mabel Tolkien's Sister

## **Hilary Tolkien**

Ronald Tolkien's younger brother.





# Objects/Places

## Oxford

Oxford is a prestigious university in England where Tolkien went to college and eventually worked as a professor.

Oxford is well known for its upper class students, including aristocrats. In Tolkien's day, there wasn't much of a caste system and scholarship students such as himself were treated almost equal to the wealthier students. After Tolkien met with some fellow Catholic students, he began to feel more at home at Oxford than any place since Sarehole when he was a child.

Oxford proved to be a great joy for Tolkien, especially when it came to the study of languages. The experience was heightened when Tolkien met Joseph Wright, a philologist who would be a great inspiration. It was Wright, in part, who encouraged Tolkien to follow in his footsteps and take up the same career.

The T.C.B.S. continued to thrive while Tolkien was at Oxford and admitted new members. These friends would remain loyal to one another until their deaths.

Tolkien left Oxford to join the war effort but eventually returned as a member of the faculty. Tolkien worked his way up from an assistant professor to the prestigious position of Professor of English Language and finally a Professor of Anglo-Saxon. After Tolkien's retirement, he was a frequent visitor at Oxford, performing as professor emeritus and as the recipient of many awards.

## T.C.B.S.

The Tea Club was an organization formed by Ronald Tolkien, Christopher Wiseman, R.Q. Gilson and George Bache Smith while they were students at King Edward's school. The club met in the afternoons in the school library, discussing language and literature as well as writing. The boys often shared their work with one another. The club would eventually be renamed The Barrovian Society, after Barrow's Stores where the boys often met. The group would become known as The Tea Club/Barrovian Society or T.C.B.S.

The group was a vital part of Tolkien's life. The T.C.B.S. would be the first to hear many of Tolkien's works, their criticism helpful to the shaping of the author's great epics.

The club survived after the boys graduated and went their separate ways. Others eventually joined the group such as Hugo Dyson. Tolkien was devastated when several of the members died, as if part of him had died as well.



A newer version of the group, The Inklings, would help ease the pain of the end of the T.C.B.S.

## **London**

City in which Tolkien spent a great deal of time while at University.

## **Bloemfontein**

The small town located in the Orange Free state. Mabel and Arthur took in lived in Bloemfontein for five years.

## **South Africa**

Country in which Arthur and Mabel Tolkien lived while Arthur worked in the booming banking industry. Location of the births of Ronald and Hilary Tolkien.

## **Headington**

Home to Ronald and Edith Tolkien.

## **Birmingham**

Home to the Suffields and the place the Tolkiens stayed after returning from South Africa.

## **King Edward's School**

Private school attended by Ronald and Hilary Tolkien.

## **Sarehole**

Rural area in the country where the Ronald Tolkien spent several years of his childhood. Tolkien credits Sarehole as the inspiration for the setting of "The Hobbit."

## **Birmingham Oratory**

The home of Father Francis Morgan and various priests from the Catholic Church.



# Themes

## Faith

One of the main themes throughout Tolkien's life was his devout faith in the Catholic religion. Mabel Suffield Tolkien was raised in the Church of England but converted to Catholicism after Arthur Tolkien died and the family moved back to England from South Africa. The decision to become a Catholic was a sore point with the Suffields and the Tolkiens, but Mabel would not stray from her faith. As a result, Ronald and Hilary Tolkien were raised receiving a Catholic education, first at their mother's knee, then at various schools, and finally, under the guidance of Father Francis Morgan.

Ronald took Catholicism quite seriously. After Mabel died, Ronald turned to religion to feed him emotionally and spiritually.

Edith Bratt was an Anglican and it caused quite a row in the family when she announced first of all that she would marry a "papist" and secondly, that she intended to convert. Edith was never much interested in converting but it meant the world to Ronald.

Throughout Ronald's youth, it was faith that sustained him during the hard times and gave him joy and gratitude in the good times. Tolkien also worked faith into his many works. Some of Tolkien's critics questioned his religious devotion when it was pointed out that *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* had no discernible God. Tolkien explained the presence of the supreme being in his stories.

## Language

Throughout Tolkien's entire life, there was little that was more important to him than languages. It began with Mabel Tolkien, who wanted her children to learn Latin and Greek. Young Ronald proved to be an apt pupil and the experience set the boy off on a lifelong journey of discovering and dissecting languages, and eventually, creating two of his own.

Unlike many students who like the particular sound of a language or enjoy playing with words, Tolkien wanted to know what it was made of, what made it work. Tolkien referred to it as wanting to know what its "bones" were. Long before Tolkien considered himself to be a philologist, he was one.

Tolkien spent a great deal of time learning various languages and eventually using some of them, such as Finnish and Welsh, to create his own.

The languages Tolkien created were elvish languages to be used in *The Hobbit* and more extensively in *The Lord of the Rings*. Even after the publication of the books, Tolkien continued to work on his languages, Quenya and Sindarin, creating more words and compiling a dictionary of their meanings.



Tolkien became so immersed in the study of his own language that he often joked that Edith did not understand when he spoke in "fairy language nonsense."

## Friendships

Friendships were an integral part of Tolkien's life from the time he entered King Edward's School. Tolkien seemed to make friends easily and many of his relationships lasted for a lifetime. One example of this is his relationship with Christopher Wiseman. The boys met at King Edward's, were vital to the creation of the Tea Club/Barrovian Society, and maintained the club and their friendship long after graduating from school. Tolkien's third son, Christopher, was named after Wiseman.

Another strong and important friendship for Tolkien was the one he had with fellow writer C.S. Lewis. Tolkien and Lewis were unsure of each other at first but their friendship grew to the point that they were inseparable. Both men believed that male companionship was a necessity in life and that no woman should ever come between them. There were often rumors that the men had a homosexual relationship but it was unfounded.

Tolkien maintained his friendships throughout his life. Even toward the end, when the author retired, he managed to keep in touch with his closest friends, to whom he would go to for advice and literary criticism.

Tolkien's relationship with Edith began as a friendship when he was 16 and she was 19. Nearly an entire summer passed before the pair realized that their friendship was in fact love.



# Style

## Perspective

Humphrey Carpenter was a British author and biographer who was noted for his works involving many celebrated authors from J.R.R. Tolkien to W.H. Auden to Ezra Pound to Evelyn Waugh. In addition to writing biographies, Carpenter was also a jazz musician, founder of a children's theater troupe and a highly regarded radio broadcaster.

Carpenter's reputation preceded him when he met with Tolkien in 1967. It is not recorded how their first meeting came about but Carpenter ended up being one of the few people to have access to Tolkien's insights, personal accounts, and private papers.

It is clear that Carpenter was well versed in Tolkien's life before he began to write the biography as it is written with feeling and does not have the feel of an unemotional work or textbook. The perspective in the biography is one of a man who is not only a writer and researcher but also one who was a fan of Tolkien's work. Carpenter was not afraid to say that he found Tolkien to be a strange and unusual creature, in fact, the author's eccentricities only added more flair to the work.

Although it is clear that Carpenter had a fondness for the subject, it did not cloud his ability to report the events in Tolkien's life as they happened, without prejudice.

## Tone

The tone used in "J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography" by Humphrey Carpenter is mostly objective. Carpenter does add a part in the beginning of the book, "Part One: The Visit," that relates Carpenter's first face to face meeting with Tolkien, who had become a famous author and cult figure. The experiences in The Visit are recorded from Carpenter's own personal experience and observations; therefore, it is partisan in nature.

Despite his relationship with Tolkien, which is never addressed beyond the initial meeting, Carpenter maintains an objective tone throughout the work, as if he was reporting events as they occurred and did not get caught up in the fact that he was a fan of Tolkien's work.

Carpenter's tone also causes the reader to become curious about the lifestyle of the Oxford professor. Although Carpenter was born and raised in Oxford, the author manages to tell the story so that it is universal in nature and not privy only to those from Oxford or England.

## Structure

"J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography" by Humphrey Carpenter is a biography and therefore non-fiction. The book is 343 pages in length. The text is broken up into 7 main parts. The shortest part is 8 pages in length; the longest part is 88 pages in length. The average length of the parts is 49 pages. The parts are written in chronological order.

Part One: The Visit details Carpenter's first meeting with J.R.R. Tolkien, at the Tolkien home in Headington.

Part Two: 1892-1916: The Early Years is broken into 8 chapters. The shortest chapter is 10 pages in length; the longest chapter is 18 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 11 pages.

Part Three: 1917-1925: The Making of a Mythology is broken down into three chapters. The shortest chapter is 4 pages in length; the longest chapter is 14 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 9 pages.

Part Four: 1925-1949(i): "In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit" is comprised of 6 chapters. The shortest chapter is 9 pages in length; the longest chapter is 17 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 11 pages.

Part Five: 1925-1949(II): The Third Age consists of 2 chapters. The shortest chapter is 11 pages in length; the longest chapter is 33 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 22 pages.

Part Six: 1949-1966: Success is broken into 3 chapters. The shortest chapter is 7 pages in length; the longest chapter is 15 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 10 pages.

Part Seven: 1959-1973: The Last Years is comprised of 3 chapters. The shortest chapter is 5 pages in length; the longest chapter is 15 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 9 pages.



## Quotes

"Anglo-Saxon, also called old English, was familiar and recognisable to him as an antecedent of his own language, and at the same time was removed and obscure."

Page 54

"In adult life Tolkien came to believe that his impulse towards linguistic invention was similar to that felt by many schoolchildren."

Page 57

""The Elder Edda' is the name given to a collection of poems, some of them incomplete or textually corrupt, whose principal manuscript dates from the 13th century."

Page 93

"When talking about it to Edith he referred to it as 'my nonsense fairy language.'"

Page 108

"No account of the external events of Tolkien's life and provide more than a superficial explanation of the origins of his mythology."

Pages 126-127

"Tolkien cast his mythology in this form because he wanted it to be remote and strange, and yet at the same time not to be a lie."

Page 128

"It is impossible in a few sentences to give an adequate account of how Tolkien used elvish languages to make names for the characters and places in his stories."

Page 131

"Realising that he had entered a new phase of his life, Tolkien began (on New Year's Day 1919) to keep a diary in which he recorded principal events and his thoughts on them."

Page 139

"Perhaps in his years of middle age and old age we can do no more than observe, and puzzle; or perhaps, slowly, we shall see a pattern emerge."

Page 151

"In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit."

Page 153



"Even when dealing solely with technical matters of language, Tolkien was a vivid teacher."

Page 180

"The Inklings have now entered literary history, and a good deal has been written about them, much of it over-solemn."

Page 200

"Besides being entertained by their father's own stories, the Tolkien children were always provided with full nursery bookshelves."

Page 220



## Topics for Discussion

How might Tolkien's work have changed if the family had remained in South Africa?

Would books like "The Hobbit" and "Lord of the Rings" be as popular if they had been written in the last decade?

If the Inklings still existed today, who might be a member?

Why do you think Tolkien was so surprised by his fans' devotion?

How might Tolkien's work been different if his mother had lived?

Why was it so difficult for G.B. Smith to let go of the T.C.B.S.?

Do you think the deaths of R.Q. Gilson and G.B. Smith prompted or hindered the work on "The Silmarillion?" Explain.

Do you think Tolkien would have fared so well if he had remained at Bournemouth after Edith's death?