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Ways of World Making: J.R.R. Tolkien

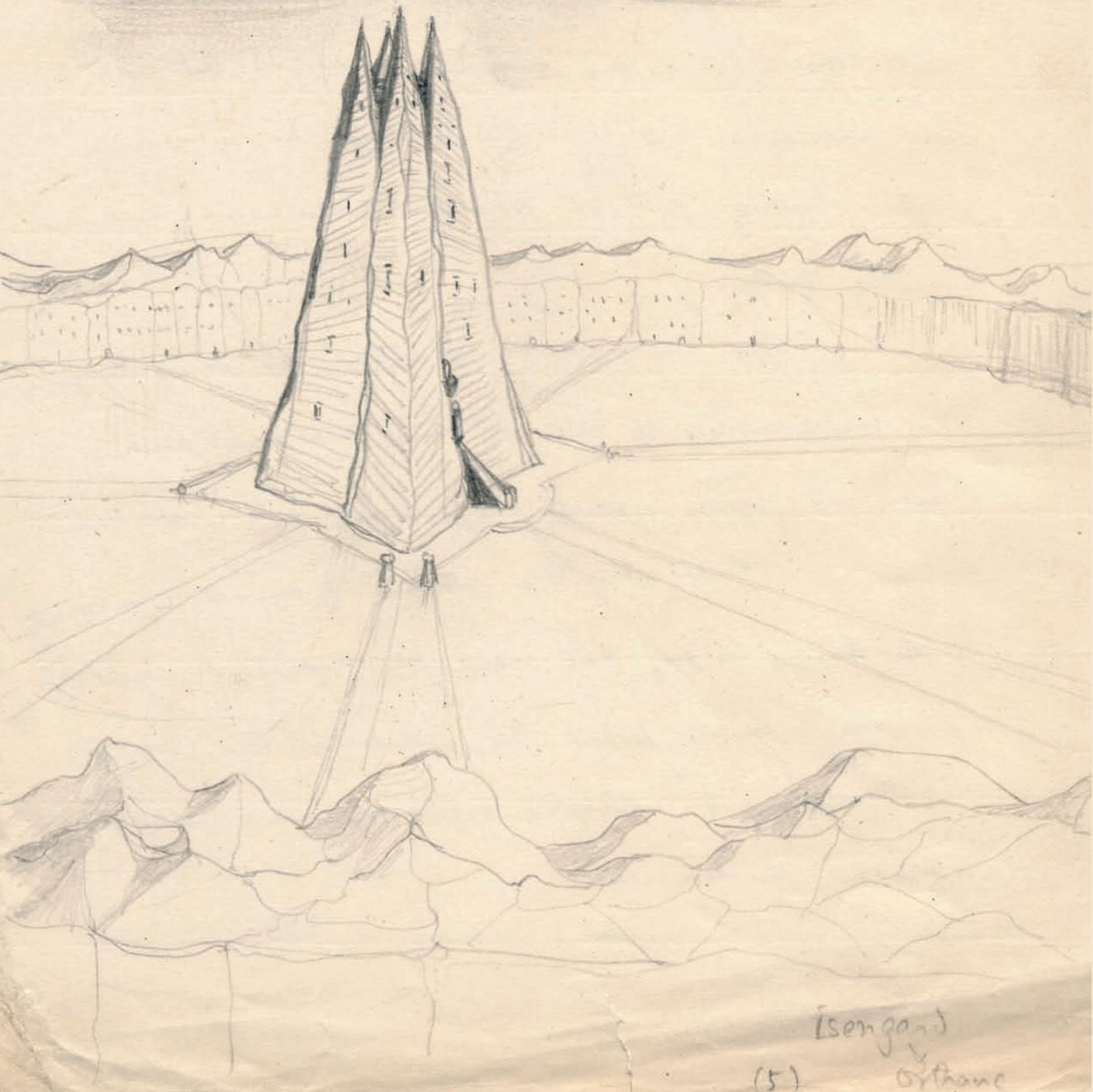
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The Invented Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien

Drawings and Original Manuscripts from the Marquette University Collection

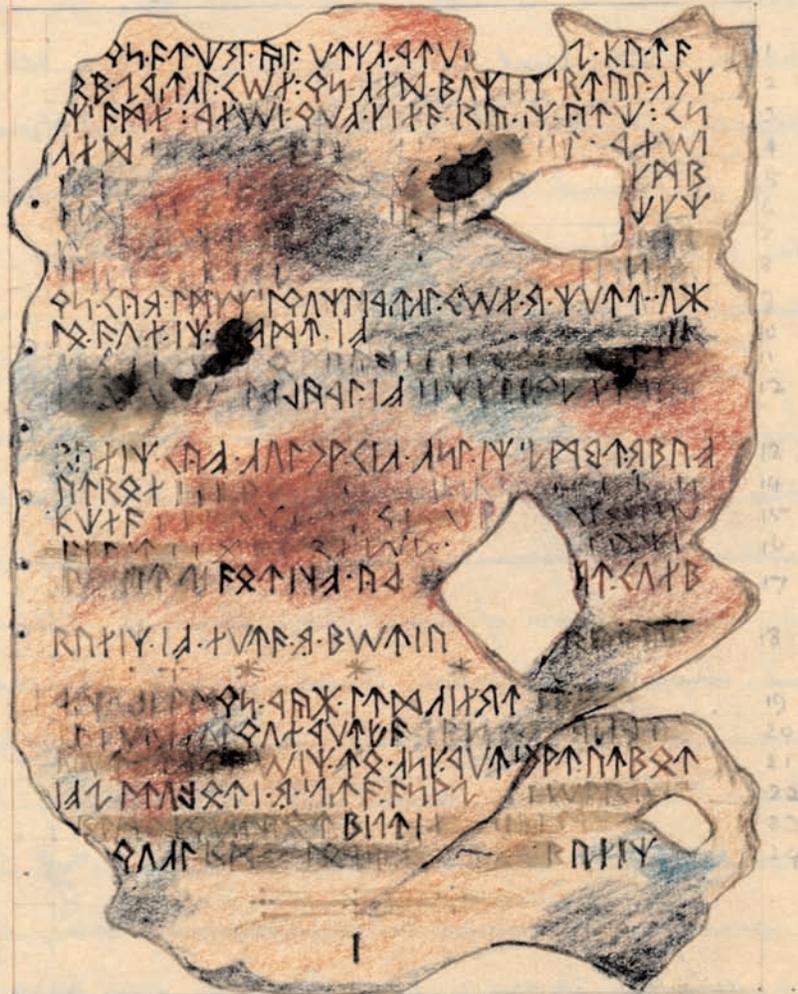


Isengard

(5)

Orthanc

A page of the Book of *Moria Mazarbul*



PAGE 1 FROM BOOK OF
MAZARBUL
BOOK II, CHAPTER 4

Page 1 of *The Book of Mazarbul* (first version), 1940-41

Ink and colored pencil on paper

9 1/4 x 7 1/4 in. (235 x 184 mm)

Marquette University MS. Tolkien, 3/4/12

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Ways of Worldmaking: J.R.R. Tolkien

Curtis L. Carter

The subject of J.R.R. Tolkien's (1892-1973) literary masterpieces, represented in the set of books known as *The Lord of the Rings* first published in three volumes in 1954-55 and *The Hobbit* which appeared in 1937, suggests immediately the theme of worldmaking. It is not the worldmaking of statesmen that occupies Tolkien. Rather it is worldmaking made possible through the author's imaginative constructions using words. This theme has caught the attention of other great minds of the twentieth century. Among them would be the American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) whose fascinating book *Ways of Worldmaking* examines the formative functions of symbols. Goodman asks probing questions concerning our uses of language/literature, pictures, and other types of symbols to create worlds of understanding. For example, he asks, "In just what sense are there many worlds? What distinguishes genuine from spurious worlds? How are they made? ...And how is worldmaking related to knowing?"¹ Goodman holds that "the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge" in their role of advancement of understanding.²

Tolkien's literary texts cannot be fully appreciated apart from a larger, philosophical issue concerning language. His childhood fascination with inventing languages eventually led him to the study of languages. For Tolkien, a language is a wholly invented enterprise constructed by a mind, or set of minds, and has no natural existence apart from its invention and use by a human mind, or a community of such minds. At the core of his invented worlds is the assumption that "language creates the reality it describes."³ In this respect, Tolkien holds similar views to those of Goodman who views languages as entirely constructed symbol systems. As a part of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien simulated pages representing *The Book of Mazarbul* which is constructed from runes invented by Tolkien. Pages from the original manuscript are included in the current exhibition. *Page 1 of The Book of Mazarbul, first version, 1940-41*, is intended as a diary kept by the Dwarves of Balin's expedition to Moria in the Third Age.

As a philologist and professor of Anglo Saxon languages at Oxford University, Tolkien might well have contemplated similar questions to those raised by Goodman concerning worldmaking. It seems certain that his detailed literary constructions address the very essence of worldmaking in a concrete frame of reference that Goodman considers from a broader philosophical perspective. Just as it is possible for human minds to construct scientific and every day practical worlds, it is equally feasible for them to invent fantasy or secondary worlds with their own systems of logic and alternative structures. The world of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* represents such a construction with its delineation of names corresponding to players and places that reside solely within Tolkien's invented secondary world. Within his imaginary landscape, Tolkien supplies the definition of a hobbit, as "one of an imaginary people, [in the tales of J. R. R. Tolkien]. 'Hobbit' thus refers to a small variety of people-like characters, who give themselves this name meaning "hole-dweller," who were called by others "halflings," since they were half the height of normal men."⁴ Similarly, the names 'Bilbo' and 'Gandalf' refer to characters that reside in the fictive world created by Tolkien. The creation of such worlds is the essence of mythopoeia, or the making of myths.

Hence works of fiction such as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* command a significant role in worldmaking. They function not as literal description, but as a metaphorical alternative world view that may actually live in the experiences of those who read or otherwise participate. As works of lit-

erature, Tolkien's constructed worlds are not the world of the physicist, or the man on the street. But they may nevertheless inform and enrich the worlds of both.

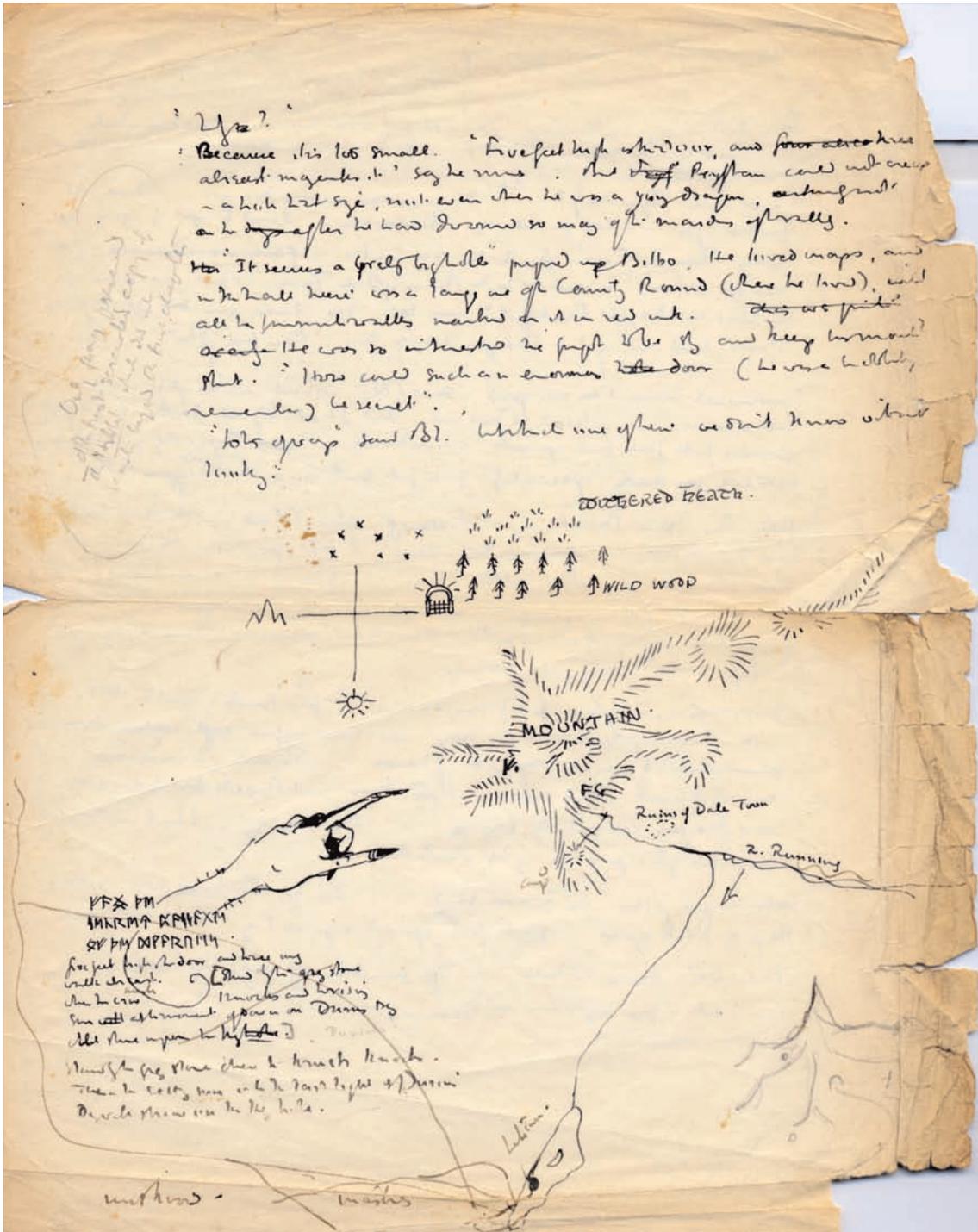
Tolkien's Drawings and Water Color Paintings

Pictures are also invented "languages" according to Tolkien. In this instance, the pictures invented to amplify his literary texts form a coherent set of visual images approaching a visual language. As illustrations, they provide viewers with visual symbols to augment the written texts in forming his invented world.

Fewer people are aware that Tolkien was a talented visual artist, not having had the opportunity to view his original drawings and watercolor paintings. These works are known primarily as the illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*.⁵ The principal body of thirty-some known drawings and watercolors relating to *The Hobbit*, executed between 1930 and 1937, are currently in the collection of Oxford University's Bodleian Library. Additional preliminary sketches from *The Hobbit* comprise a part of the Tolkien Manuscript Collection at Marquette University, and at least one additional is in private hands. (There may, of course, be others not presently recorded, such as a drawing of Mirkwood that Tolkien reportedly gave to a Chinese student.) Nine of the black and white drawings (Bodleian Library MS. Tolkien drawings 7, 9, 13, 14, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25) appeared in the first editions in England and America, and four of five watercolors (Bodleian Library MS. Tolkien drawings 27, 28, 29, 30) were initially published in the first American edition. An exhibition at Marquette University's Haggerty Museum of Art in 1987 offered their first American showing.⁶ An exhibition, *Drawings for The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien* at the Bodleian Library, was organized in 1987 in conjunction with the exhibition held at the Haggerty Museum,⁷ and in 2004 the Bodleian presented the exhibition *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings*, July 26 – September 18, 2004.

Tolkien's landscapes cover the world of Middle-earth "from domestic interiors to mountain ranges" and provide "intimate overviews, interior views, closed off perspectives, panoramic vistas, and dramatic approaches" to help the reader enter into his fantasy world.⁸ For example, *The Hill: Hobbiton Across the Water*, at the Bodleian shows the architecture, bridges, roadways, land elevations and contours helps to give Tolkien's followers understanding of the world where the inhabitants of *The Hobbit* enact their alternative world drama. Similarly the spectacular sunglazed mountain panorama that awakens the character Bilbo in "Bilbo woke up with early sun in his eyes," (Bodleian Library, MS. Tolkien drawings 28) can only heighten the imagination of a curious reader.

The present exhibition of Tolkien materials includes watercolor and drawings and manuscripts mainly focusing on *The Lord of the Rings* with selections from *The Hobbit* and *Mr. Bliss* all from Marquette University's Raynor Library Special Collections and Archives. Among the pictures included is *Thror's Map* (Marquette University MS Tolkien, Mss 1/1/1) from *The Hobbit*. Thror was a Dwarf King from under the Mountain during the Third Age whose adventures included an escape from the dreaded Dragon Smaug. His murder by the Orcs was responsible for a war between the Orcs and the Dwarves who eventually avenged his death. Other notable drawings in the exhibition are *Minas Tirith* (Marquette University MS. Tolkien, 3/5/8) and *Isengard and Orthanc* (Marquette University MS. Tolkien, 3/5/8) each representing an important fortress in *The Lord of the Rings*. Minas Tirith or "Tower of the Guard" is the name given by the Elf-king Felagund to a fortress on the island of Tol Sirion during the First Age. Isengard was a powerful fortification in Middle-earth during the Third Age. The fortress called the Ring of Isengard consisted of a massive rock-wall in a circular shape.



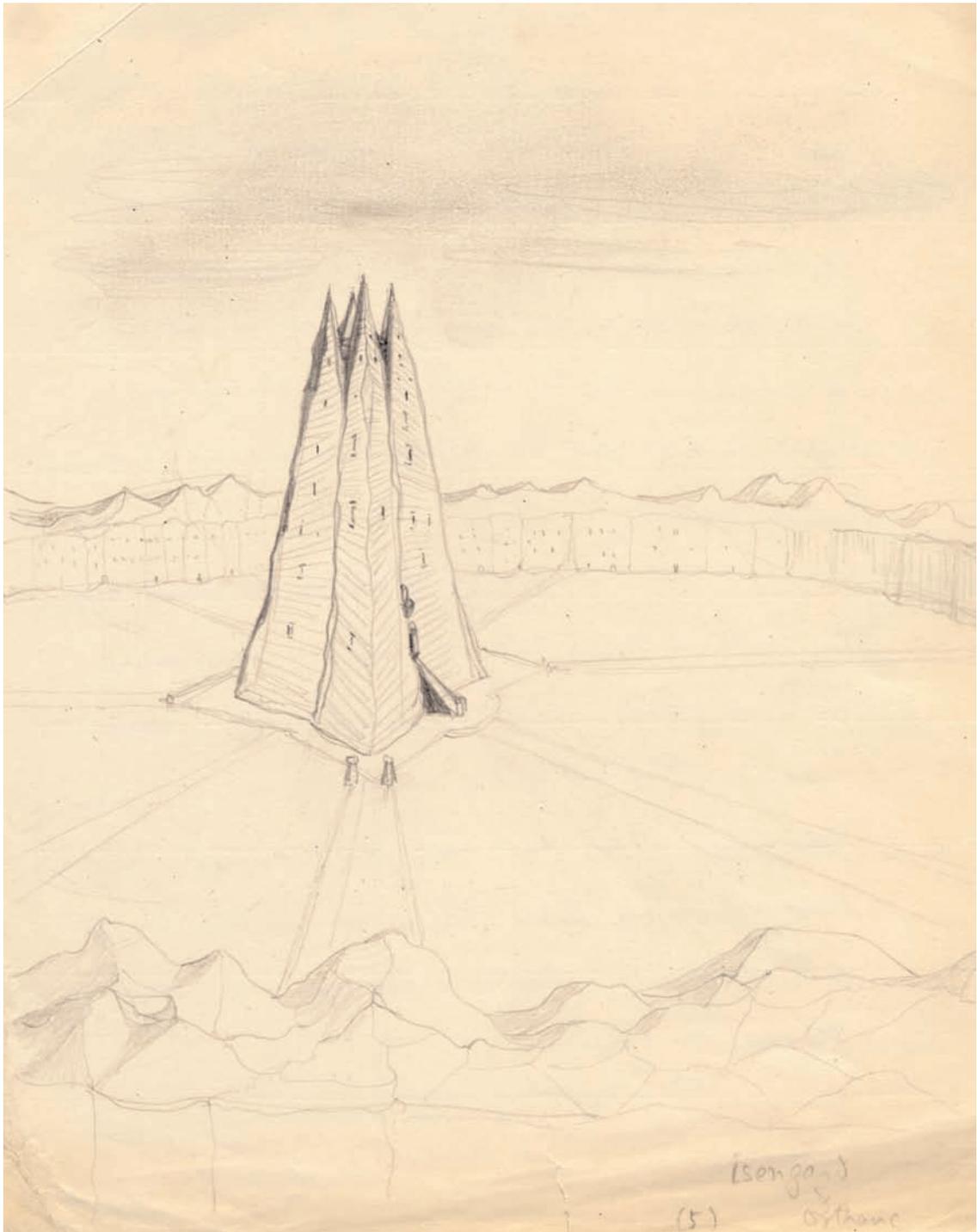
Thor's Map (original version), ca. 1935-36

Ink and pencil on paper

10 5/8 x 8 1/2 in. (270 x 216 mm)

Marquette University MS Tolkien, Mss-1/1/1

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Isengard and Orthanc

Pencil on paper

9 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (241 x 191 mm)

Marquette University MS. Tolkien, 3/5/8

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How are the visual images of Tolkien connected to his verbal texts? Both verbal and the visual produce symbols which participate in the worldmaking process engaged in by Tolkien. The connections can be seen in the exhibition as representative textual passages from the original handwritten or typed manuscripts of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are exhibited side by side. The opportunity to experience these two elements, the verbal and the visual texts in proximity helps us to see how they function, sometimes independently, sometimes together to build the worlds of Tolkien.

The pictures do not necessarily reveal the complex “moral” or the action of the tale told concerning “the achievements of specially graced and gifted individuals” as described in *The Hobbit*. However, his pictures construct visual landscapes of the place and time with sky, roads, mountains, caves, streams, and the architecture of the fantasy land that is so essential to the meaning of the story. Similarly, the visual hobbit figures enhance Tolkien’s verbal descriptions of the characters and enable the reader more easily to enter into the magical world of *The Hobbit*. Without the pictures, it would be impossible to imagine the particular nuances of height, angle, and depth of the mountains, and the roundness of the Hill, or to grasp the vastness of the land and the mysterious qualities of the forest. Word and image are complementary devices in constructing the worlds of Tolkien. If they are so inclined, his viewer-readers can also search out edifying connections, some intended by the author and others invented by themselves, linking Tolkien’s fantasy world with their own worlds.

Tolkien’s drawings and watercolors, especially those located in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, warrant consideration as original works of art extending beyond their role as illustrations of his texts.⁹

...Tolkien was also himself an artist, who painted and drew despite many demands upon his time, and who would struggle through several versions of a picture, if needed, to capture his inner vision...In his eighty-one years he made many paintings and drawings, some of them from life or nature, but most out of his imagination, related to his epic *Silmarillion* mythology or legendarium and to his other tales of Middle-earth, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*... [The work] was an integral part of his life which has not been fully appreciated, in fact is usually overlooked, especially in connection with his books. As Christopher Tolkien, his youngest son and literary executor, has remarked, no study of J.R.R. Tolkien's written work can be complete without also looking at his art. He was by no means a professional artist. But he loved to draw, and found in his pictures as in his writing an outlet for the visions that burgeoned within his thoughts - another means of expression, another language.¹⁰

Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien’s biographer, lends valuable insight into the scope and seriousness of Tolkien’s visual art when he reminds us that Tolkien practiced art from his childhood on throughout his life. According to Carpenter, Tolkien illustrated several of his own poems during undergraduate days and began drawing regularly from about 1925 on. He subsequently produced illustrations for *The Father Christmas Letters*, *Mr. Bliss*, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Silmarillion*, and his other works. Carpenter cites the lavish illustrations done for *Mr. Bliss* between 1932 and 1937 and the fact that *Mr. Bliss* was actually constructed around the pictures, as “indicators of how seriously Tolkien was taking the business of drawing and painting.” “He was by now a very talented artist,” Carpenter writes, “although he had not the same skill at drawing figures as he had with landscapes.”¹¹ Baillie Tolkien, also affirms the artistic skill of J.R.R. Tolkien: “He appears to have been unaware that

he possessed considerable artistic skill and a wholly original talent. . . .”¹² Yet, Letters No. 13-15, and 27 in Carpenter, written in 1937 to Allen & Unwin, show that he had certain reservations about the adequacy of his pictures for the purpose of illustrating *The Hobbit*, particularly about drawing figures.¹³

Stylistically, *The Hobbit* drawings and paintings are difficult to classify into any distinct school or style. In some instances the artist appears to rely primarily on his own experiences. For instance, *The Mountain-path* depicting the journey from Rivendell to the other side of the Misty Mountains, may have been inspired by Tolkien’s youthful adventures at age 19 in the mountains of Switzerland. A letter to his son Michael, No. 306 in Carpenter, describes in detail incidents from this hiking trip where he narrowly escaped the rush of boulders dislodged by melting snow.¹⁴ Reminiscences of a delicate oriental sensibility appear in other of his works. (*The Misty Mountains looking West from the Eyrie towards Goblin Gate*, Bodleian Library, Ms. Tolkien drawings 14). Still others respectively suggest the influence of art nouveau (*Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves*, Bodleian Library, MS. Tolkien Drawings 29), expressionist (*The Mountain-path*, Bodleian Library, MS. Tolkien drawing 13), and medieval styles (*The Hill: Hobbiton across the Water* Bodleian Library, MS. Tolkien drawing 7). Perhaps the wide variety of stylistic devices is a result of an original creative impulse that freely appropriates any available style for its own unique purposes. This stylistic pluralism in the visual images parallels similar variety in his literary texts. Tolkien’s extensive knowledge of the diverse northern fairy tales and myths is woven into his own highly original tales.

Whatever the sources of Tolkien’s pictorial conventions, the images themselves reveal a pristine individuality that carries the artist’s own stamp throughout. Each image, whether a bare sketch or a finished image, possesses a richness of structure and detail that warrants continuous exploration for subtle visual connections in reference to the surrounding texts. These special qualities of form and fantasy are available to any knowledgeable viewer who seizes the opportunity to explore Tolkien’s drawings and watercolors.

Despite his accomplishments as a visual artist, there is no evidence that Tolkien deliberately set out to produce art for exhibition purposes, as Baillie Tolkien and others have noted. His pictures, as well as his literary tales, appear to be the product of an essentially private activity. Tolkien’s own words affirm the private nature of his creations.

It must be emphasized that this process of invention was/is a private enterprise undertaken to give pleasure to myself by giving expression to my personal linguistic “aesthetic” or taste and its fluctuations.¹⁵

Still their origin in the realm of private activity does not preclude the images being perceived and valued as art by a larger public.

The Haggerty Museum exhibition accompanying this catalogue represents the second dedicated to showing and examining the original Tolkien manuscripts contained in the Marquette University Special Collections and Archives. The first, held in 1987, included drawings and water colors for *The Hobbit* housed in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University.

Three rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie .
One Ring to rule them all, one Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie .

Yumwica pors 6 J h m a g y u m m i a t p o b e h j o j m a g u m m i a t
j o j m m i a t j o m a g j o j i o o j o j o c t m o q u o n y j a t h j o j o m a m o j o
Z a j o j a m m o j o m a o d a n j o o c l a r j a t t e Z a t

"Three Rings Poem" (calligraphy)

Black and red ink on paper

8 7/8 x 6 7/8 in. (225 x 175 mm)

Marquette University MS. Tolkien, 3/1/3

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