Tolkien and World War I

TOLKIEN AND THE GREAT WAR

The Threshold of Middle-earth

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J. R. R. Tolkien: Chronology

- 1913  Begins to develop Elvish languages
- 1917  Earliest Elvish tale, “The Fall of Gondolin”
- c. 1930 Earliest version of *The Hobbit* (bedtime story)
- 1936  *The Hobbit* accepted for publication
- 1954-55 *The Lord of the Rings* published (three separate volumes at publisher’s insistence)
- 1965  American pirated reprint of the British *The Lord of the Rings*
“Deep Time”: the “Ages” of Middle-Earth

Events in *the Lord of the Rings* take place at the end of the Third Age, narrated from the perspective of the beginning of the Fourth Age.

The First Age began with the ordering of Arda by the Valar and ended with the defeat/expulsion of Morgoth;

The Second Age included the loss of Numenor, the Last Alliance, and the “defeat”/disappearance of Sauron;

The Third Age ends with the defeat of Sauron/destruction of the Ring, the return of the King, the departure of the Three Rings and of many Elves, and the ascendancy of humans.
Morgoth’s Ring in the Legendarium

Christopher Tolkien, regarding his father's work:
‘Among the chief 'structural' conceptions of the mythology that he pondered in those years were the myth of Light; the nature of Aman; the immortality (and death) of the Elves; the mode of their rebirth; the Fall of Men and the length of their early history; the origin of the Orcs; and above all, the power and significance of Melkor-Morgoth, which was enlarged to become the ground and source of the corruption of Arda (Morgoth’s Ring ix).’

He further states: "In these writings is seen my father's preoccupation in the years following the publication of The Lord of the Rings with the philosophical aspects of the mythology and its systematisation" (Morgoth’s Ring 271).
"Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say *the green sun*. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough--though it may already be a more potent thing than many a "thumbnail sketch" or "transcript of life" that receives literary praise.

"To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill...."
“Melian was the name of a Maia who served both Vána and Estë; she dwelt long in Lórien, tending the trees that flower in the gardens of Irmo, ere she came to Middle-earth. Nightingales sang about her wherever she went.

“Wisest of the Maiar was Olórin. ... But of Olórin that tale does not speak; for though he loved the Elves, he walked among them unseen, or in form as one of them, and they did not know whence came the fair visions or the promptings of wisdom that he put into their hearts. In later days he was the friend of all the Children of Šúar, and took pity on their sorrows; and those who listened to him awoke from despair and put away the imaginations of darkness.” [This Maia is later known as Gandalf.]
“Last of all is set the name of Melkor, He who arises in Might. But that name he has forfeited; and the Noldor, who among the Elves suffered most from his malice, will not utter it, and they name him. Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World.

“Among those of his servants that have names the greatest was that spirit whom the Eldar called Sauron, or Gorthaur the Cruel. … he remained mighty in the lore of that people. In all the deeds of Melkor the Morgoth upon Arda, in his vast works and in the deceits of his cunning, Sauron had a part, and was only less evil than his master in that for long he served another and not himself. “ [Sauron took other names, notably “Thu” in the tale of Beren and Lúthien.]
The Fall of Melkor/Morgoth

"From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless. Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame. He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness..." (The Silmarillion 25).

A later observation: “...when Melkor was confronted by the existence of other inhabitants of Arda [especially Elves and humans], with other wills and intelligences, he was enraged by the mere fact of their existence and his only notion of dealing with them was by physical force, or the fear of it...” (Morgoth’s Ring 395).