



The Fall of Arthur

By J.R.R. Tolkien

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The Fall of Arthur By J.R.R. Tolkien

The Fall of Arthur, the only venture by J.R.R. Tolkien into the legends of Arthur, king of Britain, may well be regarded as his finest and most skillful achievement in the use of Old English alliterative meter, in which he brought to his transforming perceptions of the old narratives a pervasive sense of the grave and fateful nature of all that is told: of Arthur's expedition overseas into distant heathen lands, of Guinevere's flight from Camelot, of the great sea battle on Arthur's return to Britain, in the portrait of the traitor Mordred, in the tormented doubts of Lancelot in his French castle.

Unhappily, *The Fall of Arthur* was one of several long narrative poems that Tolkien abandoned. He evidently began it in the 1930s, and it was sufficiently advanced for him to send it to a very perceptive friend who read it with great enthusiasm at the end of 1934 and urgently pressed him, "You simply must finish it!" But in vain: he abandoned it at some unknown date, though there is evidence that it may have been in 1937, the year of publication of *The Hobbit* and the first stirrings of *The Lord of the Rings*. Years later, in a letter of 1955, he said that he "hoped to finish a long poem on *The Fall of Arthur*," but that day never came. Associated with the text of the poem, however, are many manuscript pages: a great quantity of drafting and experimentation in verse, in which the strange evolution of the poem's structure is revealed, together with narrative synopses and significant tantalizing notes. In these notes can be discerned clear if mysterious associations of the Arthurian conclusion with *The Silmarillion*, and the bitter ending of the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, which was never written.

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The Fall of Arthur By J.R.R. Tolkien Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #238035 in Books
- Published on: 2013-05-23
- Released on: 2013-05-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .87" w x 5.50" l, .75 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún:

“This is the most unexpected of Tolkien’s many posthumous publications; his son’s ‘Commentary’ is a model of informed accessibility; the poems stand comparison with their Eddic models, and there is little poetry in the world like those” *Times Literary Supplement*

“The compact verse form is ideally suited to describing impact... elsewhere it achieves a stark beauty” *Telegraph*

From the Back Cover

“An incomplete but highly compelling retelling . . . An action-packed, doom-haunted saga, full of vivid natural description.”—*New York Times Book Review*

The Fall of Arthur recounts in verse the last campaign of King Arthur, who, even as he stands at the threshold of Mirkwood, is summoned back to Britain by news of the treachery of Mordred. Already weakened in spirit by Guinevere’s infidelity with the now-exiled Lancelot, Arthur must rouse his knights to battle one last time against Mordred’s rebels and foreign mercenaries. Powerful, passionate, and filled with vivid imagery, this unfinished poem reveals Tolkien’s gift for storytelling at its brilliant best. Christopher Tolkien, editor, contributes three illuminating essays that explore the literary world of King Arthur, reveal the deeper meaning of the verses and the painstaking work that his father applied to bring it to a finished form, and explore the intriguing links between the poem and Tolkien’s Middle-earth.

“Compelling in pace, haunted by loss, it lives up to expectations.”—*Daily Beast*

“Erudite and beautiful.” – NPR.org

J.R.R. TOLKIEN (1892–1973) is the creator of Middle-earth and author of such classic and extraordinary works of fiction as *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. His books have been translated into more than sixty languages and have sold many millions of copies worldwide.

About the Author

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CHRISTOPHER TOLKIEN is the third son of J.R.R. Tolkien. Appointed by Tolkien to be his literary executor, he has devoted himself to the editing and publication of unpublished writings, notably *The*

Silmarillion, *Unfinished Tales*, and *The History of Middle-earth*.

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