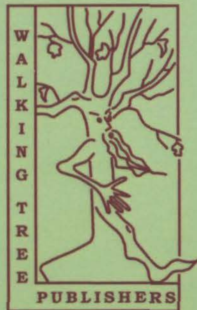
Ross Smith

Inside Language

Linguistic and Aesthetic Theory in Tolkien



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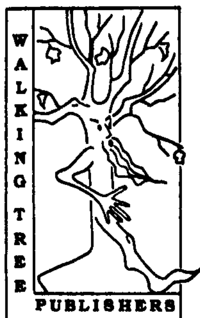

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To Ana

Series Editor's Preface

Tolkien's views on language, though never published as a formalised theory, were in some aspects rather 'heretic' (to use Tom Shippey's term) and seemed to fly into the face of 'established' linguistic theory – most notably his conception of 'native (hereditary) language' and, related to it, the idea of 'linguistic aesthetic' and 'phonetic fitness'. Unfortunately, this aspect of Tolkien's linguistic work has, as yet, not received the attention it deserves – a first tentative attempt at coming to grips with at least some of the underlying concepts has been made by Bachmann and Honegger in 2006.[1] Ross Smith, in a series of articles that appeared in *English Today* and *Tolkien Studies*, was one of the first Tolkien scholars to investigate the question of Tolkien's position on language vis-a-vis the then (and even now) dominant tenet(s) in some depth. That he is able to present the topic in an accessible, (for laypersons) understandable, and enjoyable form is all the more to his credit. The following study is thus not aimed so much at the specialist in Elvish (and other Middle-earth languages), even though s/he may also learn some new things, but at the general reader who wants an informed introduction to Tolkien's views on language and their historical relevance.

Thomas Honegger
Jena, March 07

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1 Dieter Bachmann and Thomas Honegger, "Ein Mythos für das 20. Jahrhundert: Blut, Rasse und Erbgedächtnis bei Tolkien." *Hither Shore* 2:13-39.

Preface

When C.S. Lewis, in his obituary on his friend and colleague J.R.R. Tolkien, remarked that Tolkien "had been inside language", he was seeking to explain the extraordinarily intimate understanding of language and poetics that Tolkien had achieved during a lifetime devoted to philological study and linguistic invention.

For Tolkien, language was everything: he was a scholar of language, a professor of language, and above all a creator of language. His letters and essays abound in references to the passion he felt for all things linguistic. He tells us of his secret vice of inventing languages, his acute sensibility towards the sounds of speech, his joy on discovering the mechanisms and phonetics of other tongues, and his view of himself, first and foremost, as a philologist, a lover of words.

It is surprising to discover, therefore, that to date this fundamental area of Tolkien's life and work has not been adequately addressed in a single critical work. There are numerous books which discuss language-related issues in Tolkien's writing, of course, but they tend to concentrate narrowly on the Anglo-Saxon and medieval aspects of his work, or on the technicalities of his invented languages. This leaves many other areas unexplored. How exactly did Tolkien's scholarly knowledge of language, literature and linguistics interact with his works of imaginative fiction? What did he mean when he referred to Linguistic Aesthetics? How did his work relate to the broader linguistic currents existing outside the limited geographical and cultural scope of north-western Europe? How do his invented languages compare with the other attempts that have been made to construct artificial languages over the last eight centuries? And finally, to what extent is it feasible to talk about a specifically Tolkienian philosophy of language?

The purpose of this book is to examine these relatively neglected areas of study and attempt to provide an all-encompassing account (with the errors, misinterpretations and omissions this will inevitably entail) of Tolkien's ideas and theories in relation to language, linguistics and aesthetics. These matters will be approached not from the typically Anglo-centric viewpoint of most Tolkien criticism, but from a genuinely broad, international perspective. Reference will necessarily be made to the most relevant figures from the English literary tradition (Malory, Shakespeare, Blake, Auden, Lewis, Barfield, etc.), but there is also room for Jespersen, Saussure, Jakobson, Wittgenstein, Borges, Eco, Steiner and a host of other authors and language scholars whose significance in relation to Tolkien is studied for the first time.

Early versions of some of the following chapters were published in the language journals *English Today* (Cambridge University Press) and *Tolkien Studies* (West Virginia University Press). Specifically, chapters I and II are partly based on a series of articles that appeared in *English Today* during 2005 under the generic title "Timeless Tolkien", while chapters III and IV are developed from an article called "Fitting Sense to Sound: Linguistic Aesthetics and Phonosemantics in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien" which was published in *Tolkien Studies* Vol. 3 (2006). I wish to thank the publishers and the editors of these journals – Tom McArthur of *English Today* and Douglas A. Anderson, Michael D.C. Drout and Verlyn Flieger of *Tolkien Studies* – for allowing me to reuse some of that material.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude to Tom McArthur for providing me with the initial opportunity to communicate my ideas on Tolkien to a wider audience; to Patrick Curry and my stepfather, Roy Willis, for reading some of the early articles and providing me with their feedback and encouragement; to Doug Anderson for his generous support and advice throughout; and to Thomas Honegger and the other editors at Walking Tree Publishers for enabling me to bring this project to fruition. Finally, I must thank my wife Ana for her unstinting support from start to

finish, and say a word for my father, John, whose inspired choice of literature for reading to his children set my feet on the road to Middle-earth so many years ago.

Ross Smith
Madrid, February 2007

I

Worlds of Language

In the middle of the last century the great Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges published a short story, now considered a classic, called "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius".[2] In it, Borges describes a planet called Tlön, our knowledge of which, according to the narrator (Borges himself), has been pieced together from various works by anonymous authors, each writing on a specific characteristic of the world of Tlön.

The fictitious Borges comes across Tlön for the first time in a mysterious copy of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which contains an entry not to be found in any other copy. The intrigued author seeks to increase his knowledge elsewhere, but there is nothing to be found in any of the numerous sources he consults. However, the fictitious world resurfaces in a mysterious book addressed to a recently deceased friend of the author, in the form of the eleventh volume of "*A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*". This encyclopaedia, we are told, describes in the finest detail each and every aspect of the history, geography and culture of Tlön. The narrator hypothesises that this "brave new world" is the work of a "secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicists, poets, chemists, algebraists, moralists, painters, geometricians, all directed by an obscure man of genius." Each specialist contributes data on his or her area, which are weaved into the overall plan by the anonymous master.

Given the brief format chosen for his fantasy, Borges cannot be too profuse so he offers short but brilliant descriptions of the science, philosophy, architecture, language, mathematics, literature, archaeology and history of Tlön, containing references of persuasively profound erudition. On

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[2] "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" was originally published in the collection *Ficciones*, Editorial Sur, Buenos Aires 1944; all translations from the Spanish by R. Smith.

the subject of literature, for instance, we are told that in the world of Tlön: "Works of fiction address a single argument, with all imaginable permutations. Philosophical works invariably contain a thesis and an antithesis, rigorously for and against a doctrine. A book that does not encompass its counterbook is considered incomplete." Concerning the language of Tlön, Borges informs us in gravely academic tones that: "There are no nouns in the conjectural *Ursprache* of Tlön, from which the "current" languages and dialects derive: there are impersonal verbs, qualified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) of an adverbial character." He then offers us an example of how the sentence "The moon rose over the river" would be rendered – quite beautifully – in the language of Tlön:

> Upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned.

It should be noted that this sentence was written in English (a language Borges spoke fluently and deeply appreciated) in the original Spanish narrative since the *Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, we are told, is in English. There is considerably more on both literature and language, as well as on the other subjects referred to above.

Borges then goes on to describe his discovery of the identity of the "obscure genius" behind the creation of Tlön, the formation during the late 19th century of a secret team of 300 specialists who wrote the forty volumes of the "*First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*", the chance finding of this encyclopaedia in a Memphis library in 1944, its unveiling via the international press, and the ensuing worldwide furore concerning all things to do with Tlön.

In addition to deploying his extraordinary imagination and narrative skill, in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" Borges uses a number of devices to make his tale seem more factual than fictitious. These include references to real people alive at the time (such as fellow writer and Argentinian Bioy Casares, who initiates the search for Tlön in the story), comments and footnotes on the work of historically relevant authors (Berkeley, Hume,

Russell), specific place names, dates, and so on. He also takes advantage of his vast erudition in descriptions such as those quoted above on literature and language to strengthen the sense of reality.

Nonetheless, readers are evidently aware of Borges' literary magic and know that this is fiction, however skilfully he has enabled them to suspend reality. The story is provocative and brilliantly told, but the belief persists that no-one could ever truly invent an entire world, with the almost infinite strength of imagination and volume of information that such an undertaking would require.

Philologist-fictionists

When Borges published the works of fiction during the 1940s that were to bring him world-wide fame, however, an English author and academic on the other side of the Atlantic had already been assembling a whole universe for decades, partly from his own imagination and partly from his scholarly knowledge of ancient tales and sagas from north-western Europe. It was a world with its own seas, islands and rivers, mountain ranges, plains and swamps, its own skies and stars, inhabited not only by men but also by other sapient beings, each with a specific language and culture. There were wild beasts, some like those of our world and some not, and abundant plant life. The author had also created a history for this world, which went back not just to primitive times but to the very creation of the world itself, by its particular deities.

The English academic in question was, of course, J.R.R. Tolkien, and to make his world credible he did not need to use any of the literary artifices employed by Borges. His approach to the creation of worlds took a different course. As in much of his greatest work, in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" Borges sought to compress an intellectually stimulating idea into the shortest format possible. One of his devices, for instance, was to write a brief, entirely fictitious review of a book rather than the book itself, thus conveying the same basic concepts in a far smaller format. Tolkien's creativity

followed the opposite direction: most of his work was boundless, thousands of pages which told one vast story, so difficult to get into a publishable shape that in the end it was the author's son who had to take on the task, since Tolkien himself had not managed to do so during his lifetime. His two most popular published works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, are but two clearly delimited islands in Tolkien's wide sea of fictitious creation, the former emerging from this literary primeval soup almost wholly by chance,[3] the latter as an extremely long sequel.

In addition to a penchant for creating worlds, albeit on differing literary scales, Tolkien and Borges shared a passion for language, and for languages. Their fiction is informed at every stage by this love of words and by their enormous linguistic erudition. If one seeks to identify writers who, in addition to being great authors of fiction, are also scholars of language with a profound knowledge of both the theoretical aspects of linguistics and the matters involved in learning and using languages, then without doubt, Tolkien and Borges tower above the rest. No-one has come close before or since, and in modern times only the Italian semiologist Umberto Eco stands out in this intriguing and extraordinarily rare speciality. Above all, these authors are philologists, in the original sense of both lovers of language and lovers of learning. It is obvious that language is fundamental in any work of literature – it provides the clay from which poetry and prose are built – but for these authors, language is not only the clay, it is also the foundations and superstructure upon which their writing is constructed.

Classing Tolkien alongside an Argentinian and an Italian is an unusual step; he is more commonly placed in distinctly Anglo-Saxon company, whether ancient or modern. This is the case in the books of the world's leading Tolkien critic Professor Tom Shippey, who first analysed Tolkien's fiction from a philological viewpoint in *The Road to Middle-*

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[3] *The Hobbit* was famously born when a distracted Tolkien scribbled "in a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit" while correcting exam papers.

earth, tracing his sources from *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain*, Chaucer, and the Norse sagas up to Spenser and Jacob Grimm, and then in *Tolkien: Author of the Century*, studied Tolkien as one of a group of mid-20th century authors including C.S. Lewis and T.H. White, who had lived through two appalling world wars in the space of just thirty years and who attempted to come to terms with this grim reality in their fiction. For his part, the great critic and humanist George Steiner, in an article published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* shortly after Tolkien's death, placed him within a tradition of English writers that included Robert Graves, John Cowper Powys and William Golding, for whom myth and legend were essential themes. In all these cases, as we can see, the geographical area of influence is clearly restricted to north-western Europe. Yet Tolkien has much in common with Borges and Eco because, as well as sharing the unique characteristics of fiction-writing language scholars, all three of them are worthy of that somewhat overused adjective, "universal". Indeed, in the case of Borges, reading him in translation it is easy to forget his South-American origin. He could speak English perfectly and deeply admired both English and American literature and the English language. He even complained that his expressive capacity was sometimes hampered by having to write in Spanish, and that he wished he could take advantage of the flexibility and variety which English offers its users.[4] His writing is rarely local in either theme or setting. The same can be said for Umberto Eco: his approach is international, especially in a pan-European kind of way. His knowledge of the major European languages ranges from excellent to absolute, and he puts this to good effect by collaborating closely with the translators of his novels and bombarding them

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[4] In an interview for the magazine *Artful Dodge* published in April 1980, Borges remarked the following: "In Kipling's *Ballad of East and West*, an English officer is pursuing an Afghan horse thief. They're both on horseback. And Kipling writes: "They have ridden the low moon out of the sky. / Their hooves drum up the dawn." Now you can't *ride the low moon out of the sky* in Spanish, and you can't *drum up the dawn*. It can't be done. Even such simple sentences as *he fell down* or *he picked himself up*, you can't do in Spanish."

with recommendations about the best way to render his work in their respective tongues. His confidence in English is such that one of his most recent scholarly works, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*, was actually written straight off in English. These authors, therefore, are universal in both their knowledge and their approach, a quality shared on the deepest level by Tolkien.

In addition to the pleasure he gained from the study and use of languages, however, Tolkien also enjoyed inventing them. In fact, he regarded his invented languages, developed from a remarkable combination of Finnish, Welsh, Latin, Greek, Old English, Old Norse, other linguistic ingredients and his own abundant imagination, as the cause (not the effect) of his literary creations. He once said: "The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows" (*Letters* 165). Tolkien's passion for philology generated his imaginary languages (particularly those later referred to as Elvish), which in turn formed the subsoil of his literary output. By his own account, he started inventing languages almost as soon as he could read. What was initially a schoolboy hobby gradually turned into a serious intellectual pursuit, so that by the time he entered academia in his mid-twenties, he had already amassed a huge store of both theoretical notions and practical output in this area.

This is where Tolkien stands apart from his fellow authors. Borges, Eco and perhaps a few others have woven their linguistic knowledge into the fabric of their fictitious creations, but Tolkien gives the impression that he lived and breathed language, that he spent his existence in a kind of linguistic cocoon. According to his colleague and friend C.S. Lewis, Tolkien "had been inside language."[5] Language was his profession, his hobby and

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[5] Lewis made this remark in an obituary published in *The Times* in relation to Tolkien's facet as a linguistic inventor: "Strange as it many seem, it was undoubtedly the source of that unparalleled richness and concreteness which later distinguished him from other philologists. He had been inside language." (Carpenter 1977, 138).

his means of artistic expression. He is said to have known around twenty languages, ancient and modern,[6] though evidently saying that he could "speak" twenty languages, as has sometimes been claimed, is an exaggeration (many he knew had not been spoken for centuries). His "secret vice" of inventing languages fed off his vast linguistic knowledge, on the one hand, while on the other it generated his fictitious creations, in which the matter of language is a vital component, as is analysed further on. Nevertheless, a non-specialist could read all of Tolkien's fictional output without being aware at any time of the great linguistic backdrop. Tolkien wore his erudition lightly, in his fictional narrative at least, unlike the two other philological fictionists mentioned above, Jorge Luis Borges and Umberto Eco, who usually put their scholarly knowledge on full display in their work.

It is interesting to compare their approach in this respect with Tolkien's. Concerning Borges, one need look no further than the reference above to "adverbial monosyllabic suffixes" to verify that the great Argentinian had no intention of dissimulating his lore, or making life easy for his readers. Borges's linguistic knowledge was vast: he was brought up speaking Spanish and English, and during his childhood his family lived in Geneva for a time, enabling him to become familiar with French and German. He was a voracious reader and a scrupulous scholar, and towards the end of his life he even devoted himself to the study of Anglo-Saxon – "the language of the rough Saxons"[7] – and Icelandic, so that he could read *Beowulf* and the *Eddas* in their original versions (providing a curiously inverted reflection of Tolkien, who taught himself these languages at the opposite end of his earthly span, while still a schoolboy). Borges coincided with Tolkien in considering that the sound, shape and evolution of individual words was

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6 The number is taken from the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopaedia*, edited by Michael Drout, Routledge, 2007.

7 From a poem called "Composition written in a copy of *Beowulf*" by Borges on his efforts to learn Old English at a very advanced age, published in a volume titled *El otro, el mismo* (1964).

of the utmost importance. "Words have a life of their own" he said on one occasion, and this idea is reflected with memorable eloquence in the opening lines of his poem *El Golem*:

> *Si (como el griego afirma en el Cratilo)*
> *El nombre es arquetipo de la cosa,*
> *En las letras de rosa está la rosa*
> *Y todo el Nilo en la palabra Nilo.*

This may be translated, to the extent possible, as follows:

> If (as in the Cratylus the Greek claims to know)
> An object's archetype consists in its name
> Then a rose and its letters are one and the same
> And through the word Nile the whole Nile must flow.

Therefore, as Plato speculated in his dialogue *Cratylus* to which Borges refers in his poem, if it is true that the names we give to things are archetypes of the physical objects they indicate, then in a certain sense the word "rose" is the flower itself, and the word "Nile" contains the very river Nile. This is important because the relation between word, sound and meaning was an essential element in Tolkien's approach to understanding language and his linguistic invention, as is discussed further on in the context of his notions about linguistic aesthetics.

Borges is widely regarded as one of the 20th century's most erudite authors and his writings bristle with learned references (which may also be fictitious, despite their convincingly factual appearance). From his interviews and lectures it is clear that, despite his apparent humility (in one interview he claimed that his library at home did not contain a single volume

of his own work) and broadly humanistic approach, he was something of an elitist and had little time for the uneducated.[8]

Eco, for his part, is a professor of semiotics. His profound knowledge of language and linguistics can be appreciated from his large – and very well written – non-fiction output, as well as from his fiction. He derives considerable pleasure from weaving his learning into his stories, as he has readily acknowledged, though his attitude is one of fun, not superiority. In his own words: "As an author of novels where intertextual echoes play an important role, I am always pleased when a reader catches my allusions" (Eco 2003, 116). As well as explicit or hidden references to the literary canon, which Eco refers to as "double coding", his novels also contain a strong multilingual component. His most famous work, *The Name of the Rose*, includes numerous passages in Latin which are not translated, and a character, Salvatore, who speaks a private *patois* which can only be properly comprehended by fellow polyglots. In one of his more recent works, *Baudolino*, the opening pages consist of an error-ridden manuscript written on second-hand parchment by the protagonist – who, in case the theme needs reinforcing, happens to be a natural linguistic genius with a true "gift of tongues" – in a confusing mixture of different languages (as the author himself explains: "a pseudo-medieval North Italian language, written by a quasi-illiterate boy of Piedmontese origin, in the twelfth century" [Eco 2003, 35]), which has to be pieced through with considerable patience if anything is to be understood. As with Borges, Eco has no interest in making life easy for his readers. Curiously, for our present purposes at least, in *The Name of the Rose* there is even a reference to Jorge Luis Borges himself, via the character of the blind librarian Jorge de Burgos. From the light-hearted and sometimes self-deprecating tone of his essays, however, Eco makes clear that he is no intellectual snob: he simply designs his stories to function

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[8] Borges regarded Africa as the paradigm of ignorance and once sullied his reputation by stating that if all blacks disappeared off the face of the earth, we would be no worse for it.

on different levels of knowledge, which will be appreciated to a greater or lesser extent depending on the reader's prior learning, and the effort the reader is willing to make.

We may say, therefore, that Borges's fiction operates solely on the complex level and can be appreciated only with a fair amount of effort on the reader's part, probably demanding that they carry a certain quantity of cultural baggage. Eco writes on both this complex level and on a more amenable one in which his work can be read simply to enjoy his flowing narrative skills and entertaining plots. In Eco's own words, his work can be appreciated by both sophisticated and naïve readers, though the former will enjoy a deeper artistic experience.

Tolkien's approach was quite different from that of either of these two philologist-fabulists. *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were written as stories, first and foremost, into which he wove elements of his vast stock of literary and linguistic lore in a manner which is invisible to all but those who also happen to be specialists in old north-west European languages. When Tolkien used a name taken from some ancient Germanic or Norse source (the name Éomer in *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance, or the names of all the dwarves in *The Hobbit*), he was not making any effort to show off his knowledge of *Beowulf* or the Icelandic *Eddas*. His intentions were considerably grander than that. His foremost consideration was doubtless that the names suited the characters and he happened to know the names from his academic work, but he was also seeking to create a bridge between Old Norse and Germanic mythology and modern English literature, and one way to do this was to mingle ancient ingredients in his modern creations. Thus, scholarly and imaginary elements combine, ancient characters are recast in new settings, and real languages and fictitious languages are used side by side. However, this is done with apparent ease and Tolkien never gives the impression that he is trying to be clever. He absorbed data from his linguistic cocoon and reformulated it in his fiction through a flow of knowledge which to him was quite natural, and which he knew would be

perceptible to a very reduced number of scholars. This desire to reincorporate ancient Norse mythology into a new setting, his own Middle-earth, is of course another factor which distinguishes Tolkien from his fellows. In the absence of Old English sources he often used Old Norse ones, but again, this was not intended as an intellectual exercise either for himself or his readers, but formed part of his grand project to create a new, Anglo-centric mythology. In fact Tolkien seems not to have thought much about his potential readers at all: on the one hand, his fiction was essentially a personal matter, created for his own pleasure with the additional purpose of entertaining his children; on the other, he was generally pessimistic about having any readers at all, due precisely to the singularity and personal nature of his creations.

If we ask how Tolkien's academic knowledge influenced his novels, we will find that it permeated his fiction on various levels and the one described above in relation to Anglo-Saxon, Old German and Norse is the most basic of them. His choice of names for, and the very nature of, certain characters, creatures and places mostly derived from what Tolkien knew about ancient northern European languages and literature. Professor Tom Shippey and other specialists have tracked down many such cases, and Tolkien himself provides numerous examples in his essays and letters. They usually combine Tolkien's philological acumen with his great sensibility towards "phonetic fitness", discussed in a later chapter. This is clearly illustrated when he comments, with regard to his invented creatures called Orcs, that "the word as far as I am concerned actually derived from Old English *orc*, demon, but only because of its phonetic suitability"[9] (*Letters* 144). In other words, the suitability of the word's sound to the creature it donates is far more important than any consideration as to its etymological origin. The name of the dragon Smaug, from *The Hobbit*, is another good

[9] Curiously, another English poet and creator of myths, William Blake, used *Orc* as a name in his private mythology as well, though in Blake's case it refers not to a race of evil monsters but to a good character.

example. Tolkien himself informs us that he took the dragon's name from "the past tense of the primitive Germanic verb *smugan*, to squeeze through a hole" (*Letters* 25),[10] considering it appropriate to a dragon's habits and movement. However, *Smaug* is more than that, it is a word which also evokes "smog", "murk", or a mixture of "smoke" and "morgue" (at least in Tolkien's R.P. accent), all of which are highly apposite. It also bring "smug" to mind, which is again appropriate to the self-satisfied monster so named. It is worth reiterating, therefore, that although these names derive from old Germanic and Old English sources, it is their phonetic character, not just their specific origin, which is the deciding factor in their incorporation into his novels. Words not spoken for centuries are thus brought back to life, echoing like-sounding words from modern English and resulting in that particularly Tolkienian touch which Auden called his "gift for naming".

On a second level, Tolkien's learning percolates into his stories through his invented languages. In addition to the tracts of song and poetry in Elvish Quenya and Sindarin, and the brief snatches of Dwarvish, Orcish and Entish that appear in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, many of the commonest place names in Middle-earth are derived from his invented languages (as discussed in more detail farther on). In fact, every river, plain and mountain in Middle-earth seems to have an Elvish name, although we only learn some of them. Elvish is omnipresent in *The Lord of the Rings* and in *The Silmarillion*. As Tolkien scholars are well aware, his two main invented languages (Quenya and Sindarin) owe their existence largely to Tolkien's knowledge of Finnish and Welsh, as well as containing elements of Latin and Greek, and therefore all these languages can be said to be present to some extent in Tolkien's literary works.

On the third level, Tolkien's fiction is influenced by his knowledge of English literature in general, from *Beowulf* through Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Coleridge, up to the literature of his own day. The term

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[10] Also mentioned in Tom Shippey's essay "Tolkien and Iceland: the Philology of Envy".

"influence" must be treated with some care, of course. Evidently, no-one writes in a vacuum and Tolkien was open to the currents of the past, but he was notoriously single minded as well, and according to his friend C.S. Lewis and the evidence provided by his own writing, he was not easily influenced by anyone. A work as large as *The Lord of the Rings*, often written in a mock-archaic style, will inevitably contain passages that echo other writers. Isolating clear instances of external influence, however, is not easy (suggesting unclear ones, in contrast, is rather more simple). This question is discussed in more detail in chapter II.

We can see, therefore, that Tolkien's fiction was underpinned by multiple linguistic aspects on a level of erudition that can be matched, among writers of imaginative fiction, only by Jorge Luis Borges and Umberto Eco, and that his academic knowledge seeped into his stories essentially on three different planes: from ancient Germanic and Norse languages, through his invented languages, and via his philological/literary acumen. Below, we will look at how Tolkien moulded language and mythology, both real and invented, to create Middle-earth.

Scale and Scope

Tolkien created a universe on a scale which was entirely unique. No-one before or since has come close to equalling his achievement, because nobody before or since has followed a creative process as singular and unrepeatable as Tolkien's. Many authors have created cities, continents, planets, galaxies, even parallel universes, but none have succeeded like Tolkien because his Middle-earth was much more than just a setting for his novels; rather, it was his life's work, spanning more than half a century, during which time he sought to fill in every detail, to leave no corner of his enormous canvas blank. He was not particularly concerned about being a successful author in critical or commercial terms. These issues mattered to him as they would to anyone, but they were not central to his work. He was in the comfortable position of earning the salary, and enjoying the relatively

undemanding timetable, of a professional academic, and although he regularly complained about being underpaid and gratefully accepted his publishing royalties as a supplement to his pension, he did not write with the specific aim of earning money. However, this should not be taken to mean that Tolkien was some Kafkaesque intellectual ascetic, shunning worldly gain in his pursuit of artistic expression. Simply, he wished to create a new mythology for his own satisfaction, and his two main novels are small chapters in this overall design of Middle-earth, from its creation by the supreme God Eru onwards, which absorbed much of his life.

The practical repercussions of this huge background in novelistic terms are clear: when the characters in his two main stories (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) wish to describe some present or past element of their wider world, the material is already there, so abundant as to be almost infinite. His repository of imaginary historical, cultural, scientific and geographical data is massive and this gives his novels a breadth, density, or to use the spatial metaphor preferred by Tolkienian scholar Tom Shippey, a depth, that cannot be equalled even by the most gifted writers of fantasy or imaginative fiction.

Readers come into contact with this wider universe during *The Lord of the Rings* essentially through comments by the more learned characters (Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond and other elves), as rail travellers might briefly catch sight of distant valleys and mountains as they speed on their journey. Tolkien himself described this impression in the following terms: "Part of the attraction of The L.R. is, I think, due to the glimpses of a large history in the background: an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist" (*Letters* 247). There is also the sporadic appearance of his invented languages in the mouths of elves, dwarves, orcs and ents, leaving readers with the impression that behind these brief snatches of Quenya, Entish, etc. there must be whole languages, spoken by entire, as-yet invisible populations. We become aware that in Tolkien's fiction there is a much larger world in space

and time than the geographical and temporal framework to which their story (the War of the Ring) is limited. As well as through the inclusion of his invented languages, this sense of larger reality is created by means of relatively lengthy historical descriptions of the kind offered by the wizard Gandalf to Frodo near the beginning of the story (Book 1 Chapter 2) and by the elf leader Elrond to the assembled Council of the Free Peoples (Book 2 Chapter 2); and through small off-hand comments and references made as the action progresses. There are countless such occasions in the book: the following example is taken from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Aragorn (the king-to-be, who at this stage of the story is known only as a wandering Ranger, the anonymous guardians of unprotected hobbits and men against the forces of evil) is trying to heal a wound inflicted on the hobbit Frodo by one of the Black Riders (later revealed as the Nazgûl, the fearful servants of Sauron, the Dark Lord), using some leaves he has found growing in the wild. As he prepares to dress Frodo's wound on a lonely hillside he informs the other hobbits present (Sam, Merry and Pippin) about the plant concerned:

> It is fortunate that I could find it, for it is a healing plant that the Men of the West brought to Middle-earth. *Athelas* they named it, and it grows now sparsely and only near places where they dwelt or camped of old; and it is not known in the North, except to some of those who wander in the Wild.
> (*FR*, I, xii, 265)

The importance of these two sentences is more in what is not told than what is.

Who are the Men of the West, that deserve to be thus capitalised? We are not sure, though earlier in the story there was a similar reference to the Men of Westernesse, who were overthrown by an evil king centuries earlier. Are the West and Westernesse the same? In any case, how far west was their homeland, and when did they come to this part of Middle-earth,

where, we are also told, they dwelt and camped of old? They brought this plant with them, Aragorn tells us, but from where precisely, and what else did they bring?

The plant itself is also enigmatic. It is called *Athelas*, written in cursive in the original to indicate an unknown language, but which language is it? An Elvish language, or a lost language of men? Furthermore, we are told that it is not known in the North; does this mean that it *is* known in the South (capitals should again be noted)? And finally, who are "those that wander in the Wild"? Men like Aragorn, or others?

Our curiosity is continually fed by passages such as this. At face value it seems little more than a brief explanation by Aragorn to keep Frodo's companions informed as he tries to save their friend's life, but on a narrative level the effect is to weave a few more strands into Tolkien's vast tapestry. We gradually piece these strands together as we progress through the book, and by the end most of the questions of the kind posed above have been answered, to our great satisfaction.

When seeking to explain the unique character of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and their continuous popularity over the years, this "depth" or density, this larger reality in space and time, is a key factor. Reading fiction always entails stepping into an imaginary world, be it past, present or future; what is unique to Tolkien is the extraordinary level of detail used to describe the settings for his stories. As Brian Rosebury has commented, "The circumstantial expansiveness of Middle-earth itself is central to the work's aesthetic power: once that is grasped, many other aspects of the work fall into place" (Rosebury 2003, 13). The sense of full immersion in a new reality is exceptionally strong and many readers find this a thrilling and powerful experience, one which they often wish to repeat almost as soon as they finish the final volume. *The Lord of the Rings* is a much re-read book, which may seem surprising in view of its considerable length and the amount of reading required. This fact is widely recognised in Tolkienian circles and is also backed by research data: according to

information collected by the *Lord of the Rings Research Project,*[11] 48% of the 25,000 respondents to the project's on-line questionnaire had read all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* more than once. Perhaps its very size is one reason that so many readers come back to it, as one reading is insufficient to take in the whole story. Whatever the case, the level of detail is such that even after finishing the story *per se*, readers can continue to broaden their knowledge of Middle-earth, its people, customs and languages by examining the Appendices that Tolkien added to the final volume, *The Return of the King*. In fact these Appendices are largely a synopsis of his own broader writings that would appear posthumously in *The Silmarillion* and other works. Tolkien did not think up the information given in the Appendices in order to heighten the sense of reality felt by his readers; the information had already been available for years in his writings on a full history of Middle-earth. Like Borges, he provides detailed descriptions of his invented languages, including correct pronunciation, but he differs from Borges in that these descriptions are but the tip of the iceberg. As he said himself when referring to the additional material that he had to submit to Allen & Unwin for inclusion at the end of *The Return of the King*: "My problem is not the difficulty of providing it, but choosing from the mass of material I have already composed." (Letter to Naomi Mitchison, *Letters* 144).

Elvish

In fact Tolkien had been working on his imaginary languages since his youth (in his own words, "since I could write"[12]), applying his knowledge of both modern and ancient languages as he matured, and therefore the volume of data he had amassed by the time he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* was

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11 *The Lord of the Rings Research Project* is an initiative undertaken by the University of Wales with funding from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (www.lordoftheringsresearch.net).

12 Letter to M Waldman, in the preface to *The Silmarillion*. HarperCollins, 1992 edition.

infinitely greater than that available to other authors. As he mentioned on various occasions, language was largely the source of his fiction rather than an appendage to it; his characters and their languages developed organically over the years. His original use of language is perhaps the greatest single factor which sets him apart from other writers of fantasy, with regard to both English and the languages he made up for his own entertainment and which would eventually be spoken by the elves.

It seems paradoxical that text which is incomprehensible to virtually all readers should lend credibility to the story, yet this is the effect that Tolkien achieves when he sprinkles Elvish expressions or verses through his prose. Readers get that familiar feeling of being faced by an unknown foreign language, yet at the same time the words, though not understood, sound pleasant when spoken (whether openly or mentally) and certainly look as if they pertain to a real language.

The first Elvish words we meet in *The Lord of the Rings* belong to a typical greeting: "*Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo*": "A star shines on the hour of our meeting" (this belongs to High-Elvish, or Quenya). From this brief example it appears that in Elvish the light "e" and "i" vowels predominate, coupled with soft-sounding consonants like "l", "m", "n". There are no hard consonants or throaty, guttural sounds. Many words end in vowels, and the overall impression is a language which is agreeable to the ear. The dwarf language occasionally voiced by Gimli (the only significant dwarf character in *The Lord of the Rings*) produces the contrasting effect. The place-name *Khazad-dûm*, for instance, sounds quite the opposite of Quenya; it contains the harsh Dwarvish "kh" which equates to "ch" in Scottish, the buzzing and aggressive "z", the low "u", and consonant endings. This reflects the hard, earthy character of the dwarves themselves.

These two languages sound dissimilar but they produce a similar effect, as do the written runes and Elvish script to be found in Tolkien's text. Depth, or density, is at work again: we sense that these incomprehensible lines are a glimpse of something far larger, in this case an entire

linguistic system. The feeling of fullness, of being totally immersed in another world, is thus further heightened.

Tolkien's imaginary languages are a world in themselves. They have been and continue to be the subject of much research and effort by both academics and amateur enthusiasts, and constitute a full sub-field of Tolkienian lore. This is an area which is too vast to go into in detail[13] in this study, although a brief analysis of some Elvish verse is included further on in chapter III and the matter of invented languages in general is examined in chapter V.

What it is also interesting to consider on a more conceptual level is Tolkien's singular interest in linguistic aesthetics, the sound of words and the impression they produce. As mentioned above, Tolkien's fascination with language is impossible to exaggerate: he devoted his academic life to studying languages and his free time to inventing them. While his main professional interest was the study of Old English and other ancient Germanic languages, he felt genuine passion for the aesthetics of language in general. Tolkien's interest in this matter is exceptional because, apart from his particular inclinations, he was continually in the process of inventing and replenishing his own languages, and had the unique power to determine what those languages sounded like. On one occasion he called himself a "professional philologist especially interested in linguistic aesthetics" (*Letters* 131), while elsewhere he commented that: "*The Lord of the Rings* is to me largely an essay in 'linguistic aesthetic'." And: "Nobody believes me when I say that my long book is an attempt to create a world in which a form of language agreeable to my personal aesthetic might seem real [...] but it is true" (*Letters* 205).

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[13] An outstanding study of the development of Tolkien's Elvish languages is to be found in *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* by Verlyn Flieger, Kent State University Press, revised edition 2002; there is also an excellent Tolkienian linguistics website at www.Elvish.org.

These remarkable affirmations are not always taken at face value by Tolkien scholars and are contradicted by Tolkien himself to some extent when, for instance, he states with reference to his reasons for writing *The Lord of the Rings*: "The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them."[14] Linguistic aesthetics is evidently not the only driving force behind his fiction; however, the above comments obviously reflect a deep fascination with this subject, and there are indications in his academic work that he would have liked to have turned this into a coherent theory. Throughout his academic life he came back time and again to the chimerical relationship between sound and emotion, seeking some kind of satisfactory explanation; in fact his last major lecture dealt with the subject.[15] However, he never produced a theory of linguistic aesthetics, perhaps because he did not have enough time, but probably because he realised that an all-encompassing doctrine was impossible, like trying to bottle the sea. On the one hand, not many people shared Tolkien's "acute sensibility" on this matter so achieving understanding was difficult; on the other, the degree of subjectivity is simply too high for a rational theory to be formulated. Put simply, what sounds delightful to A may leave B indifferent, and C cold. This can be observed in the enormous degree to which peoples' taste in music varies, and Tolkien himself was well aware of this limitation, stating in one of his letters that his Elvish tongues were intended to be specially pleasant, but that this was difficult to achieve, "since individuals' personal predilections, specifically in the phonetic structure of languages, varies widely, even when modified by the imposed languages (including their so-called 'native' tongue)." He concluded: "I have therefore pleased myself." (*Letters* 144). On a more sombre level, there are aspects bordering on racism, of which

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[14] Foreword to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, HarperCollins (1966 edition).

[15] The O'Donnell Lecture on "Welsh and English", Oxford 1954, included in *The Monsters and the Critics*.

Tolkien may or may not have been aware, which make any pursuit of such a theory to its final consequences a dangerous undertaking. The languages of his evil characters certainly do not sound English, north-western European or Mediterranean, these being Tolkien's zones of emotional and intellectual devotion. Tolkien has been accused of racism, among many other things, and it cannot be denied that his more unsavoury characters tend to be "squat", "swarthy" and perhaps "slant-eyed", though like all authors he has to be criticised within the general trends of his time (one imagines he might have avoided such adjectives if writing in our more racially sensitive days). Parallel accusations could perhaps be voiced in his choice of phonemes for Orcish and the language of Mordor.

Over and above the effects of individual sounds, Tolkien believed that language was at the root of all consciousness and expression, with a power of its own beyond a given language's grammar and lexis. To a certain extent, he felt that we could somehow understand language on a primitive (or exalted) level even when we do not comprehend, in the traditional sense, what is being said. These considerations, which are discussed in more detail in chapters IV and V, are evidently theoretical; what is more tangible is that the sense of realism that originates from the depth, or density, already discussed above is partly derived from the presence of invented languages in Tolkien's fiction. On a more specific level, his imaginary languages have provided generations of readers who are interested in such things with a vast treasure-trove of material for their study and enjoyment. This is particularly true in recent years with the advent of the Internet, which has enabled fans of Tolkienian linguistics to share material and ideas with a speed and efficiency that was previously unthinkable.

A Gift for Naming

In his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring* for the *New York Times* in October 1954, the renowned English poet W.H. Auden, who was a friend and, to some extent, a disciple of Tolkien, mentioned that "Mr Tolkien is

fortunate in possessing an amazing gift for naming and a wonderfully exact eye for description." Few people have been as acutely aware and knowledgeable as Tolkien with regard to the development of English and other northern European languages over the last two thousand years. His interest in etymology was of course a basic element of his larger knowledge of old languages as a philologist and his hobby of inventing languages. He had a scholarly knowledge of many languages in addition to those of Germanic origin (he was particularly fascinated by Welsh and Finnish, which as mentioned above formed the basis of his two main Elvish languages) and took advantage of this when constructing his invented languages and also when finding names for the places and characters in his stories. As has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter, the names of the company of thirteen Dwarves in *The Hobbit*, are lifted from the ancient Norse *Eddas*, while *orc*, *warg* and *ent* are adapted from sources in Old English and Old Norse.[16] The "gift for naming" mentioned by Auden, then, was part gift and part erudition. Certainly, names are central to Tolkien's fiction and none are used by chance. There are three main classes: names derived directly from ancient northern European sources, those derived from his invented languages (which may also have an ancient Norse or Germanic root), and the rest. The former include the examples given above, while the second group comprises the names of elven and some human characters and several towns and other place names, including *Minas Ithil, Minas Tirith,* and *Osgiliath*. The last group includes names that have a recognisable modern English source such as *Rivendell* for Elrond's Elvish sanctuary (*dell* meaning valley and *riven* to indicate a deep cleft; at one stage in *The Fellowship of the Ring* the narrator actually refers to the "cloven vale of Rivendell", as if to clarify any

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16 These examples are taken from T. Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth* and are also mentioned in *Letters*: see chapter V below. Information on names in Tolkien is contained in *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, Robert Foster, HarperCollins 2000. A useful on-line dictionary is also available at the time of writing at the following web address: *www.quicksilver899.com/Tolkien/Tolkien_Dictionary.html*

doubt), or those which derived from a combination of ancient root and right modern sound, such *Withywindle* for the magical river with banks full of willow trees that winds its way through the Old Forest in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Following his notions about linguistic aesthetics, Tolkien always strove to make his names sound appropriate to the things they denominated. The names of Frodo's three hobbit companions in *The Lord of the Rings* give a simple example: Sam is down to earth and straightforward, Merry (short for Meriadoc) is optimistic, Pippin (short for Peregrin) is effervescent and cheeky. At the other extreme is the wretched Gollum, whose name comes from a gargling sound he makes when speaking to himself, as he often does. In a very long story with a large number of characters, this facility for inventing, or "finding", memorable names happens to be very useful for readers as it makes it easier to remember who is who, and helps to make *The Lord of the Rings* more manageable. This subject of the relationship between sound and meaning (commonly referred to as sound-symbolism) in both Tolkien and in linguistics in general is studied in greater depth in chapter III.

II

Telling the Story

The unprecedented figure of 100 million copies[17] of *The Lord of the Rings* have been sold around the world; as is evident, it has been translated into every major language and a number of less widely-spoken ones as well (Basque, Catalan, Croatian, Esperanto, Finnish, Galician, Hebrew and Ukrainian among them). Tolkien seems to be impervious to trends: his work was equally popular in the swinging sixties as in the neo-conservative nineties, and has attained even greater success in the 21st century's Global Information Society.

Explanations for this remarkable achievement have been put forward from many angles, in addition to those of a particularly linguistic nature discussed in this study. When considering the Tolkien phenomenon as a whole, however, we should always recall that, over and above the questions of ethics, environmentalism, religion, historical allegory and so on that his work raises, his gift as a teller of tales is the fundamental reason for his popularity and continued success. Social concerns fluctuate over the years, or even over months, but a great read is eternal. Tolkien himself liked the epithet of "tale-teller", one assumes because it describes what he did best. He was quite insistent that his overriding purpose in writing *The Lord of the Rings* was not to preach ethics or furnish allegories, but just to tell a good story. In one of his letters he refers to this book as a "fairy story" in the following terms:

> I think that fairy story has its own mode of reflecting truth, different from allegory, or (sustained) satire, or "realism", and in some ways more powerful. But first of

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[17] The figure is taken from the HarperCollins web site; this seems to coincide with the figure of 150 million copies for sales of all Tolkien's work mentioned in the blurb on the dust-jacket of the 50th anniversary edition of *The Lord of the Rings.*

> all it must succeed just as a tale, excite, please and even on occasion move, and in its own imagined world be accorded (literary) belief. To succeed in that was my primary object. (*Letters* 181)

These comments closely reflect a similar statement in the preface to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, cited in the preceding chapter, and he repeats the message again in a letter to W.H. Auden from 1955: "Anyway most people that have enjoyed *The Lord of the Rings* have been affected by it primarily as an exciting story: and that is how it was written" (*Letters* 163).

His forte was not the brilliant literary inventiveness of the kind shown by Borges (exemplified above in "upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned"), or by more closely related novelists like Dickens or Conrad. In fact Tolkien was a master of many registers and an excellent essayist, capable of expressing complex ideas with great grace and considerable humour, particularly of the ironic sort, in his non-fiction output. However, he mostly chose to clothe his long works of fiction in the sombre tones of the great myths and legends, in which there is no place for cutting wit or eye-catching turns of phrase. This should not be taken to imply that he employed a consistently archaic or quasi-biblical style throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien resorted to a mock-medieval narrative and dialogue (discussed in more detail below) only occasionally in his story where this was required by specially intense dramatic scenes or by a speaker's particular social status; otherwise, his most celebrated work was written in plain, modern English, albeit of an educated sort. What is true is that, setting aside the opening chapters (which were initially written as a continuation of *The Hobbit,* essentially a children's tale), the style in *The Lord of the Rings* is uniformly serious. This is essential to avoid any possible decline into parody. Put simply, Tolkien's readers must *believe* in Middle-earth, and to achieve this the tale has to be told in absolutely serious, sober tones. There is no place for irony or frivolity, as this would break the author's carefully

woven spell. There are a few humorous interludes, usually protagonised by the hobbits, but not many.

Some literary analysts have attacked this pervading solemnity as pedantry, but it seems beyond doubt that if Tolkien had taken any other approach his greatest story simply would not have worked, for anyone. In view of his extraordinary knowledge of his own language, Tolkien could have used any form of historical English, from Anglo-Saxon onward, to narrate his stories, but evidently he had to choose a version which conveyed the requisite sense of sobriety while being fully comprehensible to 20th century readers. His critics have traditionally sniped at the use of words like "thither" and "yonder", the antiquated "thou" form[18] and other such archaic modes, but Tolkien used these terms with full knowledge of their potential impact, as an inevitable part of his creative process.

In fact, Tolkien had to defend himself vigorously against such criticism virtually from the time *The Lord of the Rings* was initially published, and he went to some length to explain his choices. On one occasion, when replying to a specific accusation that his work – *The Two Towers* in particular – was "tushery"[19] (*Letters* 171, draft of a letter to Hugh Brogan), he used as an example from *The Two Towers* a quote from Théoden, king of Rohan, who responded as follows to concerns about whether he was too old and frail to lead his army in person: "Nay Gandalf! [...] You do not know your own skill in healing. It shall not be so. I myself will go to war, to fall in the front of the battle, if it must be. Thus shall I sleep better." Tolkien first rebutted the criticism by offering a farcical version of the same

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18 Tolkien's deliberately grandiose style has been attacked over the years by illustrious members of the literary community including Edmund Wilson and Edwin Muir, and still causes hackles to rise in certain quarters. A relatively recent example is an article by American literary pundit Judith Shulevitz in *The New York Times*, whose assault on *The Lord of the Rings* contains references to "fusty archaisms", "pedantry" and "portentousness" ("Hobbits in Hollywood", *New York Times*, April 22, 2001).

19 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this now old-fashioned term means: "Conventional romantic writing characterized by excessive use of affected archaisms such as 'tush'."

sentence in modern English to illustrate the erroneousness of Brogan's condemnation and show how out of place a non-archaic register would be: "Not at all, my dear G. You don't know your own skill as a doctor. Things aren't going to be like that. I shall go to the war in person, even if I have to be one of the first casualties." Having offered this humorous riposte, Tolkien goes on to explain the really essential, underlying issue in the following terms:

> A King who spoke in a modern style would not really think in such terms at all, and any reference to sleeping quietly in the grave would be a deliberate archaism of expression on his part (however worded) far more bogus than the actual 'archaic' English that I have used.

In other words, a modern king would certainly not consider the option of dying on the front line, or of dying on any battle line for that matter, and therefore the utilisation of modern language would have been inappropriate, provoking in Tolkien's words a "disunion of word and meaning". Tom Shippey has summed up the dilemma as follows:

> I would say that this was the problem of *The Lord of the Rings*: in that work Tolkien wanted to express a heroic ethic, set in a pre-Christian world, which he derived from Old English epic and Old Norse edda and saga. But he also wanted to make it sayable in a contemporary idiom, understandable to contemporary readers, and not in contradiction of Christian belief.[20]

Remarkably, Tolkien was still being criticised on the same grounds almost fifty years after Brogan's letter. In an article by American critic Judith Shulevitz published in the *New York Times* (April 22, 2001), she disparagingly offers the sentence "There lie the woods of Lothlórien!" as an

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20 From "Tolkien and Iceland: the Philology of Envy", republished in Shippey 2007.

example of what she calls linguistic pedantry. Here it is again obvious that if instead Legolas had said: "Look everyone, Lothlórien wood is over there!", we would be on a literary terrain more typical of Enid Blyton or J.K. Rowling, than of Tolkien. In fact, ordinary, everyday, modern English is to be found aplenty in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, as already mentioned above, particularly in the passages delivered by the impersonal narrator and in the speech of the hobbits, who are the most modern – and least heroic – of Middle-earth's inhabitants. Characters such as Legolas, Aragorn and Gandalf come from more ancient stock, however, and this must be reflected in the diction and vocabulary they use. Their style of speech is a fundamental part of their creation as characters because, as mentioned with reference to Théoden above, Tolkien wanted his characters' way of talking to reflect not only their social standing, learning, ethnicity, etc., but to mirror their very way of thinking. As a philologist (in the modern sense), he was profoundly aware of the shades of meaning that words take on and also shed as they develop through the centuries, and how the use of language in a given era is the reflection of the very consciousness of the people that used it at that time (a theme also close to the heart of Owen Barfield, who may have influenced Tolkien to some extent in this area, as is discussed further on). The vivacity and credibility of his characters is a key element in the enduring popularity of his novels, and their use of language is perhaps the single most important contribution to this.

The Cast

Tolkien's assertions concerning the fundamental importance of language in his work and indeed his whole life as a linguist, philologist and author reflect, as we have already seen, his own deepest preferences or inclinations. His love of language gave rise to the background on which his stories could be drawn, providing his formidable gifts as a narrator with a medium in which to flourish. These gifts included an outstanding capacity to create credible characters, whether human or otherwise, and their accompanying

cultures, as well as skilful scene-setting, mastery of pace and timing, and an unusually powerful imagination. It may be true that, as Tolkien himself asserted, having invented the languages he needed characters to speak them and a setting in which to place them, but he would not have got far without his ability to describe those characters and settings in such a compelling way.

The cast of characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are not all squeaky-clean goodies or wholly black baddies, as has sometimes been alleged;[21] if this were the case, it is unlikely that Tolkien's fiction would have endured for so many decades. Popular modern literature is full of imaginative novels which are a "cracking good read", ranging from Edwardian adventure stories (exemplified by Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*[22]) to modern science fiction (Asimov, Herbert, Bradbury, Aldiss...) in which the exciting pace and continuous action, combined with ingenious plots, provide fine entertainment for their readers. Yet these books are essentially superficial: the action may be gripping, but the characters are shallow and one-sided, and in general are rapidly forgotten.

In Tolkien's leading roles, in contrast, virtue and vice are both present in good measure. Gandalf the heroic wizard is wise and brave, but also impatient and cantankerous; the warrior Boromir and Pippin the hobbit are morally correct but each succumbs in turn to the temptation of evil, with devastating consequences; Frodo the ring-bearer has a titanic struggle against temptation as well, and in fact ultimately gives in; and so on. On the other side, Saruman the good wizard turned bad is clearly malignant but is also charming and intelligent, while the wretched, half-starved Gollum is mostly treacherous but has his moments of potential salvation. (The use of

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21 The best-known example is the review by Edwin Muir in *The Observer* in August 1954 when among other things he complains that "[Tolkien's] good people are consistently good, his evil figures immutably evil."

22 Similarities between *The Lord of the Rings* and Edwardian adventure stories are explored in *The World of the Rings: Language, Religion, and Adventure in Tolkien* by Jared Lobdell, Open Court Publishing Company, 2004.

"good", "evil", "temptation" and "salvation" here obviously reflect the Christian ethics that, by Tolkien's own frank admission, underlie his fiction.) For his part, Bilbo Baggins, the hero of *The Hobbit*, shows a broad range of traits varying from smug complacence to courageous self-sacrifice, as could hardly be otherwise for a self-satisfied member of the hobbit bourgeoisie turned reluctant adventurer and, ultimately, thief. Again in *The Hobbit*, the terrible dragon Smaug, despite his devastating power and cruelty, converses with the charm and wit (and accent, the reader infers) of a well-educated member of the British upper class.[23]

These characters are carefully developed, subtle and convincing, and the fact that some of them have become household names is no coincidence. Readers easily empathise with them: they suffer in the face of hardship, and have to make difficult decisions implying sacrifice; they occasionally become desperate and lose faith in their goals. Good ultimately triumphs, but not without a struggle. They include certain archetypes, particularly Gandalf, who combines the figure of the Wise Old Man common to numerous mythological and literary traditions around the world with the Odinic figure, more typical of Norse and Germanic legend, of an old mage with a formidable staff clothed in a long cloak and broad-brimmed hat who moves incognito among the inhabitants of the mortal world, his purposes often unclear. As mentioned above, however, Gandalf is also a clearly recognisable individual with a fiery, changeable temper and a wonderful command of language, showing enough human nuances to take him beyond the stereotypical wise-man role. Aragorn is also an archetypical character, in this case of the virile, all-powerful hero, but again he is an archetype with subtle shades of character. This is particularly true in his initial role as

[23] It is interesting to note that Tolkien's marvellous invention of a terrifying and merciless monster conversing in the most refined and civilised of accents has been repeatedly copied in Walt Disney's animated films, as is evidenced by the characters of Shere Khan in *The Jungle Book*, Scar in *The Lion King*, Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*, and others.

Strider, when he has to conceal precisely this heroic character. The way he enters the story is dramatically illustrative of this nuanced role. Other great mythological or literary heroes and putative predecessors of Aragorn – Ulysses, Lancelot, Gawain, Beowulf, Siegfried – tend to come charging in through the front door, swords at the ready and thirsting for action. Aragorn, in contrast, is first seen sitting in the dark corner of an inn dining hall, shrouded in a dirty old cloak and hood, observing the goings-on of drinkers and guests with what initially appears to be a rather insidious attitude. He seems anything but a knight in shining armour. It takes some time to clarify whether he is good or evil, and even after he offers himself as the hobbits' guide, the slightly wild, dangerous air we initially perceive clings to him for some time, fuelled by Sam's defensive mistrust. It is only after they reach Rivendell, where he effectively ceases to be Strider and becomes Aragorn, that he starts to take on the heroic leadership role and by this time the reader is well aware that there is more to him than meets the eye.

It is an oft-commented fact in Tolkienian criticism that his work has few women in leading roles, and those that there are tend to be stereotypes. This is primarily a result of the kind of literature on which Tolkien's fiction is modelled, namely the mediaeval heroic quest and ancient Norse and Anglo-Saxon legends and sagas. In such literature there is little place for women, who with few exceptions are no more than submissive spouses, rarely seen and never heard. Additionally, Tolkien seems to share Josef Conrad's vague discomfort with the creation of leading female characters (perhaps due to his strong Roman Catholic upbringing in a traditional English setting, with male and female roles being very clearly delimited, and in which trying to cross the divide produced some perplexity in the author). Nonetheless, there are two major exceptions to this in *The Lord of the Rings*, namely Galadriel and Éowyn.

The elven queen Galadriel is both kindly and forceful, showing sympathy for Frodo and his worn-out companions when they enter her domains, yet also quite ready to interrupt and correct her husband, himself an eminent

Elf lord, at good length when she considers him to be mistaken. She enters the mind of Frodo's companions without warning to test their loyalty and courage, and is capable of presenting herself to Frodo as a potentially glorious and devastating ruler when he offers her the chance to take the Ring of Power for herself (which evidently she refuses). She is the most venerable and powerful of all the good characters, above even Elrond and Gandalf, and gives Frodo the only artefact that he carries in the entire story which to some extent can help him withstand the dreadful influence of the Ring. The youthful Éowyn, for her part, is expected to stay at home looking after the elderly and young while the men are led off to war in Gondor by the rejuvenated King Théoden. She refuses to accept this discriminatory treatment and departs with them, disguised as a male warrior under a false name, and ends up playing a decisive role in the greatest battle of the story thanks to the very fact that she is a woman (as is explained further on).

The low number of female protagonists, therefore, is compensated for somewhat by the enormous significance of those that there are. Coming back to Tolkien's difficulty with creating credible women characters, it is interesting to consider that Galadriel and Éowyn both possess the traditionally masculine traits of leadership, strength and endurance, with which Tolkien felt quite secure. This may help to explain why they are more convincingly drawn than, say, the chaste and lovely Arwen, Elrond's daughter, who barely merits a couple of lines in the entire book, despite being Aragorn's future wife and queen (in contrast to the film version, in which a whole new role is invented for her).

It is worth noting that although most of the leading figures in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are male, this has not been an obstacle to the works' popularity among both male and female readers (figures from

The Lord of the Rings Research Project[24] show fans to be evenly divided between men and women).

The literary source of Tolkien's characters and possible influences on his characterisations, narrative style and plots, is a subject that has generated a considerable amount of literature among Tolkienists. It has been said, for instance, that the character of the King's Steward, Lord Denethor, is modelled on King Lear in his embittered old age, and that the malignant Morgoth and Sauron are a reflection of Milton's Satan, evil powers intent on wrecking the work of good deities. Yet these characters are to a large extent universal, and if necessary this line of enquiry can be followed all the way back to the Greek myths and legends, replacing Lear with Oedipus, and Satan by the Titans. The writers that are purported to have influenced Tolkien actually span the last two millennia, from the Roman historian Tacitus[25] all the way up to the Edwardian adventure novelist H. Rider Haggard,[26] and the scholars who have put forward these theories back their arguments with a wealth of documentation and careful research. But are they right? Tolkien was both inventive and extremely well-read, which makes it difficult to distinguish between invention and erudition in his work. It may be vaguely feasible that the notion of tree-dwelling elves came to him as he read Tacitus's account of the Roman campaigns against the Germanic tribes, or that the Mines of Moria owe their existence to King Solomon's Mines; however, it is equally feasible that these ideas came from quite a different source, or from none. Certainly, the safest way to proceed in this regard is to concentrate on the influences that are recognised by Tolkien himself (largely limited to scholars and philologists specialising in

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[24] *The Lord of the Rings Research Project* is an initiative undertaken by the University of Wales with funding from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (www.lordoftheringsresearch.net).

[25] James Obertino, "Barbarians and Imperialism in Tacitus and *The Lord of the Rings*" in *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review 3*. Morgantown, W.V.: West Virginia University Press, 2006.

[26] As claimed by Jared Lobdell (2004).

Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon and other Germanic sources, plus the anonymous authors themselves, and a few others such as Owen Barfield; an appendix on this subject is available in Shippey 2005), and those which can be evidenced by unmistakeable likenesses between his and other authors' work. In the latter case, Shakespeare, Malory and William Morris are the most clearly identifiable.

Tom Shippey cites one case where there can be no doubt at all, this being a short poem in *The Fellowship of the Ring* which Bilbo recites as the Fellowship make ready to leave Rivendell:

> When winter first begins to bite
> And stones crack in the frosty night
> When pools are black and trees are bare
> 'tis evil in the Wild to fare.

This is a mirror image, in terms of both metre and subject matter, of the following portion of the song which closes Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost* (Act 5, Scene 2):

> When icicles hang by the walls
> And Dick the shepherd blows his nail
> And Tom bears logs into the hall,
> And milk comes frozen home in pail,
> [...]

This is certainly not a case of passive influence; rather, it is premeditated copying, and as such is quite extraordinary. An author that employs such tactics lays himself open to ridicule and accusations of plagiarism, yet Tolkien somehow manages to carry this imitation off, fitting it into the continuous flow between past and present, historical and mythological, that characterises his fiction. Paradoxically, the very fact that the similarity is so blatant makes it acceptable. As he mentioned more than once in his correspondence, he was ambivalent with regard to Shakespeare's worth but here it seems that he decided to include a wry homage to the Bard, as if to

recognise that even he could not escape the pervasive influence of Shakespeare's genius. This may also be a rare "wink" at his readers, of the kind so liked by Umberto Eco but uncommon in the more self-effacing Tolkien.

There are other cases in which we know a "direct" Shakespearian influence exists because it is recognised by Tolkien himself. By his own account, the movement of a whole forest of Ents and Huorns during the battle of Isengard owes its existence to the scene in *Macbeth* where Birnam Wood creeps up to Macbeth's castle. In the latter case, the apparently moving trees are just leafy branches held up by the advancing army of Macbeth's enemies to try to confuse or dismay the castle's defenders, while in *The Lord of the Rings* what moves are the trees themselves, or rather, as Tolkien calls them, the Huorns, led by the Ents. Tolkien's moving forest really is an army, while Shakespeare's is merely camouflage. He explained in a letter to W.H. Auden, on the subject of how he invented the Ents, that he had felt "bitter disappointment and disgust from schooldays with the shabby use made in Shakespeare of the coming of 'Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill': I longed to devise a setting in which the trees might really march to war" (*Letters* 163). Tolkien therefore took it upon himself to improve on Shakespeare and realise the full poetic and dramatic potential of a marching forest.

Other instances of Shakespearian influence are less clear, however, such as the one cited by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth* concerning the death of Macbeth himself and that of the Nazgûl leader in *The Lord of the Rings*, which involve a couple of rather misleading prophecies. The witches in Act IV of *Macbeth* prophesy that "no man of woman born" can harm Macbeth, but when he faces his enemy Macduff in single combat at the climax of the play he is informed that his foe "was from his mother's womb untimely ripped." Technically, therefore, Macduff was not really born but was delivered by Caesarean section; he is hence capable of slaying the misled Macbeth, and does. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the supposedly parallel case is the chief of the Nazgûl who confidently proclaims in the

heat of battle that "no living man may hinder me", on the basis of an ancient prophecy, only to discover that the soldier by whom he is about to be stabbed is a woman, namely Éowyn.

Did Tolkien take this idea of the prophecy from Shakespeare on purpose, did he imitate him subconsciously, or was the idea entirely his own? We cannot be sure, and different analysts will interpret the evidence in the manner best suited to their own arguments.

As for Malory, it would be an exaggeration to say that he influenced Tolkien directly since Tolkien did not particularly admire the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur* or his subject matter. The chaotic presentation of the characters and action in Malory's work is diametrically opposed to the tight narrative control admired, and exercised, by Tolkien. However, Malory's underlying presence in certain parts of *The Lord of the Rings* is undeniable, particularly in *The Return of the King*, because he provided the kind of language that those parts of the plot required, as is illustrated further on.

Settings

Tolkien's characters move in landscapes which are described to us in marvellous detail. As W.H. Auden said in his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring* for the *New York Times* in October 1954: "Mr Tolkien is fortunate in possessing an amazing gift for naming and a wonderfully exact eye for description; by the time one has finished his book one knows the histories of Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves and the landscape they inhabit as well as one knows one's own childhood." This is echoed in Auden's 1956 review for the same newspaper of the trilogy's final volume, *The Return of the King:* "By the time the reader has finished the trilogy, including the appendices to this last volume, he knows as much about Tolkien's Middle-earth, its landscape, its fauna and flora, its peoples, their languages, their history, their cultural habits, as, outside his special field, he knows about the actual world."

This can be clearly illustrated by looking at the following paragraph from Book IV of *The Lord of the Rings*, when the hobbits Frodo and Sam enter the forests of Ithilien, close to the end of their journey:

> Many great trees grew there, planted long ago, falling into untended age amid a riot of careless descendants; and groves and thickets there were of tamarisk and pungent terebinth, of olive and bay; and there were junipers and myrtles; and thymes that grew in bushes, or with their woody creeping stems mantled in deep tapestries the hidden stones; sages of many kinds putting forth blue flowers, or red, or pale green; and marjorams and new-sprouting parsleys, and many herbs of forms and scents beyond the garden-lore of Sam. The grots and rocky walls were already starred with saxifrages and stonecrops. Primeroles and anemones were awake in the filbert-brakes; and asphodel and many lily-flowers nodded their half-opened heads in the grass: deep green grass beside the pools, where falling streams halted in cool hollows on their journey down to Anduin.

The passage shows Tolkien's typical device of linking clauses with "and" and semi-colons – a total of five in a single sentence – in biblical fashion, lending an air of gravity and antiquity to his description of what seems to be an ancient and even venerable place. It must once have been a park – the trees have not just grown, but were planted long ago, we are told – but it has become absolutely overgrown. One gains an impression of abundant, overwhelming vegetation, almost tropical in its intensity. The "hidden stones", the "grots and rocky walls", are rendered almost invisible by layers of roots, creepers and starry flowers; the deep green grass carpets the ground right up to the edge of the pools and streams. This is a picture of Nature unrestrained, as Tolkien loved it, a "riot" of groves, thickets, bushes, sprouts, herbs, and "woody creeping stems". There are so many types of herb that even Sam, a professional gardener, cannot name them all. Tolkien

had a deep fondness for plants, particularly trees, and this explains why, in the above passage, we can appreciate that he is capable of naming seventeen different plant species in a single paragraph. Finally, of course, there is abundant water, pools, streams and cool hollows, as there must be to maintain such a riotous profusion of flora.

We are again in the presence of the "density" or "depth" discussed in the preceding chapter, the overwhelming volume of detail which heightens the illusion of reality. However, overwhelming detail on its own would be insufficient to create such memorable fiction, and due credit must also be given to Tolkien's narrative skill. As Auden said, Tolkien had an "exact eye for description", the ability to choose the precise term, image or metaphor, as well as appropriate sentence structure and punctuation, to paint a scene in the reader's mind. This can be seen from the following brief passage describing Frodo and his hobbit companions' departure from the Shire at daybreak, when their adventure really begins:

> The leaves of trees were glistening, and every twig was dripping; the grass was grey with cold dew. Everything was still, and far-away noises seemed near and clear: fowls chattering in a yard, someone closing a door of a distant house.

Anyone who has ever made an early start on a silent, dewy, northern European morning will immediately recognise how brilliantly this little scene is depicted. Every word is weighted: there are internal rhymes (leaves / trees, near / clear) and alliteration (grass / grey, far / fowls, noises / near door / distant) to brighten the narrative, and the punctuation is meticulous. Describing the grass as "grey" is an unusual but inspired choice, since in this particular case grey is the right colour to bring to mind a dew-covered meadow at the break of dawn, when the layer of droplets on the grass reflects the still-unlit shades of the sky overhead.

Yet this passage is taken almost at random from *The Lord of the Rings*. As Tolkien said is his letter to Milton Waldman: "Hardly a word in

its 600,000 or more has been unconsidered. And the placing, size, style and contribution to the whole of all the features, incidents, and chapters has been laboriously pondered" (*Letters* 131). We must remember that, even though Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* in response to a request for a sequel to *The Hobbit*, he felt under no constraint to produce the work within a restricted period of time, and was certainly not prepared to deliver it for final publication until he had read all the chapters to his son Christopher and his friend C.S. Lewis for approval or admonition, and had painstakingly revised every sentence. This helps to explain why the "sequel" took 17 years to finally reach the printers.

In a quite different register, we can look at the following instance when the ring-bearing hero Frodo sights from a vantage point, at a great distance (thanks to the special powers of perception conferred by the Ring), the stronghold of Sauron, the Dark Lord, in the evil Land of Mordor:

> Then at last his gaze was held: wall upon wall, battlement upon battlement, black, immeasurably strong, mountain of iron, gate of steel, tower of adamant, he saw it: Barad-dûr, Fortress of Sauron. All hope left him.

The language does not give any great impression of complexity, though the syntax of the sentence is far from simple (an adverbial clause followed by the object and the verb, then a 22-word description and a further embedded subject-verb-object clause before we finally reach the subject and discover what Frodo's gaze was being held by). Tolkien achieves his purpose here through repetition, suggesting one layer of huge fortification upon another, in appropriate monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon words: wall, black, strong, iron, steel, with the evocative name of the fortress itself, *Barad-dûr*, which means "dark tower" in Sindarin Elvish, being kept to the end (educated readers with no knowledge of Tolkienian languages but with some French will equate *dûr* with the French for "hard", appropriate if probably accidental since Tolkien showed no great affection for French). There are

virtually no adjectives, yet the impression of fabulous strength is clearly conveyed.

As is clear from these brief samples, Tolkien's use of English (modern descriptive English in this case) was masterly. His style becomes biblical at times, employing tones that echo the majestic prose of the King James Bible. To give another small example, below is an account of the dramatic moment when Théoden, King of Rohan, and his army of horsemen finally come to the aid of their fellow men and allies in the besieged city of Minas Tirith and charge the enemy from the open plain (from *The Return of the King*, Chapter 5):

> Fey he seemed, or the battle fury of his fathers ran like new fire in his veins, and he was borne up on Snowmane like a god of old, even as Oromë the Great in the battle of the Valar when the world was young. His golden shield was uncovered and lo! It shone like an image of the Sun, and the grass flamed into green about the white feet of his steed. For morning came, morning and a wind from the sea; and darkness was removed, and the hosts of Mordor wailed, and terror took them, and they fled, and died, and the hoofs of wrath rode over them.

Oromë, *Valar* (the names of Middle-earth deities derived indirectly via Tolkien's erudition from ancient Anglo-Germanic roots) and *Snowmane* clearly evoke Northern sagas and Old English legends. This air of myth is accentuated through the use of antiquated terms (*fey, borne, lo, wail, flee* and *wrath*) in the manner described earlier. As we have also seen above in the woodland description of Ithilien, the clauses strung together by commas and the occasional semicolon, commencing repeatedly with *and*, together with the interjection "lo!", reflect the grandiose style chosen by the translators of the 17th century "official version" of the Bible (commonly known as the King James Bible). They also echo Malory and his predilection for repeating this most common conjunction in *Le Morte d'Arthur* any number

of times.[27] As already mentioned, Tolkien never showed much enthusiasm for Malory or King Arthur in general. The fact that most of *Le Morte D'Arthur* was a reworking of French sources, and that Arthur himself was probably of Celtic origin, made them unsuitable components for Tolkien's English mythology. When choosing a suitably heroic style of language for scenes such as this one, however, he had little choice but to recur to the modes of classic chivalric literature, which he could feel sure would be recognised by his readers.

The above examples also illustrate the importance of punctuation in Tolkien's prose, and how it is broken up into logical chunks that exactly reflect how the text would sound if spoken. Tolkien's prose is ideal for reading aloud, as is mentioned by the American writer and literary critic Ursula LeGuin, who refers to this oral quality in her essay in *Meditations on Middle-earth*: "It's a wonderful book to read aloud or listen to. Even when the sentences are long, their flow is perfectly clear and follows the breath; punctuation comes just where you need to pause; the cadences are graceful and inevitable."[28]

This helps to explain why generations of Tolkien-loving parents (who are usually book-loving parents) have tried to keep the tradition going by reading the books to their children. This means of awakening enthusiasm for Tolkien's work has doubtless been superseded by the overwhelming success of the film versions, which provide children with a path into Tolkien's world that the omnipresence of television and video makes almost unavoidable (despite being supposedly for an adult audience), yet

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27 As may be seen in the following example: "And on the morn Sir Launcelot arose, and delivered the damosel with letters unto Sir Tristram, and then he took his way after La Cote Male Taile; and by the way upon a bridge there was a knight proffered Sir Launcelot to joust, and Sir Launcelot smote him down, and then they fought upon foot a noble battle together, and a mighty; and at the last Sir Launcelot smote him down." (*Le Morte d'Arthur*, Book 9 Chapter 5).

28 Ursula K. LeGuin, "Rhythmic Patterning in *The Lord of the Rings*", in *Meditations on Middle-earth*, ed. Karen Haber, St. Martin's Press, 2001, 101.

stubborn purists will still try to instil a pre-eminent appreciation for the original written works. It may be said in passing that one positive factor of the film version of *The Lord of the Rings* is that many thousands of people have read the book after seeing it.

Pace

Another of the narrative singularities of *The Lord of the Rings* is its very gradual build-up, a slow gathering of momentum as the action progresses from the peaceful meadows of the Shire to the desolate wastelands of Mordor. This does not mean that all the action is reserved for the later stages of the adventure, though it is certainly true that at the commencement of the story Tolkien takes his time. For a start, he knew that not all readers would have read *The Hobbit* and so some background information had to be supplied on hobbits and other Middle-earth matters.

In *The Road to Middle-earth,* Tom Shippey postulates that this slow commencement is due to a certain apprehension on Tolkien's part when faced by the need to depart from the cosy confines of the Shire, which so closely reflected the rural south of England which he loved, and venture out into the wild world beyond, where the story really gets on its way. This could be true, although perhaps a simpler explanation is that Tolkien was in no hurry to get anywhere. In the Foreword to *The Lord of the Rings* (1966 edition) he mentioned that he wished to fulfil the tale-teller's urge to try his hand at "a really long story", without prior restrictions on time or length.

It is interesting to consider a parallel case from another great story teller, Alexandre Dumas, and his novel *The Count of Monte Cristo.* In his book *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2003), Umberto Eco discusses his own experience translating Dumas's novel into Italian and refers to its enormous length and apparently excessive verbosity. It has been traditional for critics to put this down to the author's desire to draw the story out as much as he could in order to assure his earnings over a longer period, since it was originally published in episodes

which were paid by the line. Eco ultimately dismisses this however, asserting that Dumas needed all those pages (a thousand or so, depending on the edition) to relate properly what is practically the entire adult life of the protagonist and all the adventures he went through. He could not tell the tale to his liking otherwise, and nor could Tolkien.

The initial chapters therefore take place among hobbits in the placid atmosphere of the Shire, with little more action than a surprising disappearance by Bilbo Baggins and some snuffling and hissing from the sinister Black Riders. Even some of Tolkien's stoutest defenders are not wholly comfortable with the opening pages of the book, to say nothing of his more hostile critics, in relation to whom W.H. Auden pithily remarked: "A few may have been put off by the first forty pages of the first chapter of the first volume in which the daily life of the hobbits is described; this is light comedy and light comedy is not Mr. Tolkien's forte."[29] Once the story gets rolling, however, Tolkien moves into dramatic adventure narrative, which certainly is his forte, and suspense and uncertainty keep readers turning the pages to find out "what happens next".

As noted by Ursula LeGuin, the action in *The Lord of the Rings* has a marked peaks-and-troughs character. This is true from the very moment the real adventure starts: the hobbits almost perish as soon as they venture out of the Shire into the Old Forest, and narrowly escape to enjoy a rest at their rescuer Tom Bombadil's abode. After setting off again they become trapped in ancient graves on the Barrow Downs and are almost beheaded, with Bombadil having to rescue them for a second time. Then they enjoy some comfort in the town of Bree before being dramatically attacked by the Black Riders in the Wilderness, receive solace in the elven sanctuary of Rivendell, return to high drama trying to pass through the tunnels of the Mines of Moria, escape from the orcs and balrog to another elven haven in Lothlórien, and so on. All the time the pitch of the action and excitement increases, and

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[29] W.H. Auden, *New York Times* 1956.

the effect is rather like a linear graph with peaks and valleys but which inexorably moves upwards towards the final confrontation at the gates of Mordor.

This is classic "heroic quest" literature, as the hero moves ever-closer to his goal with a good number of adventures and deserved rests on the way. What sets Tolkien apart, among other things, is again his devotion to detail. Each stop along the way is a mini-novel in itself. To take two examples, the "rest" in Rivendell lasts a full 80 pages,[30] during which time the reader finds out all sorts of things about Rivendell itself and its master, the Elf lord Elrond, the every-day life of the elves, some Elvish poetry, the history of the Rings of Power and the One Ring, who-is-who on the sides of Good and Evil, and much else. The next respite for Frodo and company, after their perilous journey through the Misty Mountains, takes up a further 50 pages, when we discover the hidden wood of Lothlórien, realm of the elven queen Galadriel, with its city in the tree-tops. Each of these pauses adds further substance to the "density" discussed above.

Sustaining the excitement and readers' interest in the plot while obliging us to bear with the characters through their periods of respite is no small feat, but Tolkien managed it. In Auden's words again, "The demands made on the writer's powers in an epic as long as *The Lord of the Rings* are enormous and increase as the tale proceeds – the battles have to get more spectacular, the situations more critical, the adventures more thrilling – but I can only say that Mr. Tolkien has proved equal to them." Like Milton with *Paradise Lost* or Beethoven with his *Ninth Symphony*, Tolkien had the courage and self-belief to try something "really long", and fortunately had the skill to bring it off.

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[30] The version in question, of the many published, is the Unwin 1973 paperback reprint of the 1966 2nd edition.

Long, Complex and Bitter

As must be the case in a powerful tale, this experience is not all positive. Would *The Lord of the Rings* have achieved such success if, as some critics have wished to make out, it were a childishly simple tale of good beating evil and everyone living happily ever after?[31] This seems very unlikely. It might have enjoyed brief popularity, but it is difficult to imagine an over-blown fairy tale selling 100 million copies over fifty years. *The Lord of the Rings* is a tale of heroic deeds and victory against the odds, but it also has profoundly melancholy undertones, and is imbued throughout with a sense of loss. Victory without sacrifice is shallow, a deeper experience inevitably requires some pain as well. As has been mentioned above, Tolkien was a serious Catholic and accordingly he considered humankind to be a fallen species, struggling through earthly existence from the original Fall towards a very distant final redemption, a generally painful process though with occasional flashes of joy along the way. This is embodied in Middle-earth fiction in particular through one people – the elves – and one character – Frodo.

Anyone who has been interested enough to read this far will doubtless be familiar with Tolkien's pre-*Lord of the Rings* mythology. In the book called *The Silmarillion* which was completed by his son Christopher and published posthumously, Tolkien describes the mythological roots of Middle-earth and explains how the elves were given a safe land for themselves (Aman) but succumbed to pride and over-ambition, and were accordingly punished by Middle-earth guardian deities known as the Valar.

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31 Aggressive criticism and accusations of infantile simplicity go back to the very first reviews of *The Lord of the Rings* in the fifties. American writer and critic Edmund Wilson called it "juvenile trash", no less, though it is questionable whether he ever read more than the first chapter, while the celebrated literary critic Harold Bloom referred more delicately to "this quaint stuff". Tolkien has also been staunchly defended, with particular efficiency by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth*, HarperCollins 2005 (revised edition) and *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century,* HarperCollins 2000, and by Patrick Curry in *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity*, Houghton Mifflin 2004 (revised edition).

Men were also provided with a paradisiacal sanctuary (Westernesse) by the Valar but like the elves they overstepped the limits imposed on their freedom and were all but exterminated in an Atlantis-type catastrophe. Many centuries later, the Middle-earth of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is inhabited by the descendants of these fallen peoples, or in the case of the elves, by some of the original "exiles" themselves (such as Galadriel) since elves do not die of old age. Both men and elves have fallen a long way since their days of glory, as is made repeatedly clear throughout the story. They had their opportunity but they failed, and their power has gradually waned.

The elves that remain in Middle-earth are the minority that preferred to stay when the Valar offered them a second chance, though they can go back to their homeland "over the sea" whenever they wish (but not return to Middle-earth thereafter). Their capacity to keep their sanctuaries free from evil is largely bound up in the Elvish Rings of Power held by Elrond and Galadriel, which are dependant for their power on that of the One Ring; if it is destroyed, the elves will effectively lose their "supernatural" powers and will have to leave Middle-earth. They are therefore faced by what in modern jargon would be called a lose-lose situation: if the One Ring is not destroyed but is regained by the Dark Lord, he will annihilate the elves; if the One Ring is destroyed, the elves' Rings of Power will lose their potency and the elves will fade away. This is evidently a very melancholic scenario, since the elves are generally likeable, kind and loyal. No matter what the outcome of the War of the Ring they are condemned to depart from their home in Middle-earth back over the sea, which is a sad loss for both them and for those (men, dwarves and hobbits) that stay behind.

On an individual level, Frodo's tale is tragic. His unhappy ending may to some extent be overlooked by many readers in the broader happiness of Aragorn's recovery of his kingdom and the hobbits' final recovery of the Shire, yet his is a grim fate. As well as trying his hand at a very long story, Tolkien wished to get certain messages across, particularly the Chris-

tian concepts of "hope (or faith) without guarantees" which imbues the quest to destroy the Ring, and "no victory without sacrifice", which leads to Frodo's demise. His strength is slowly sapped and his will gradually crushed by the weight of the burden he voluntarily carries. He manages to resist right to the last moment, but then gives way. He is saved at the last, but is a mental and physical wreck. Even after recovering his strength and returning home to his hobbit-hole he is not happy or at peace. In the end he is allowed the honour of accompanying the departing elves on their return journey over the sea, to a land which is doubtless like paradise for a mortal, but which cannot be regarded with certainty as a final reward for his sacrifice because Tolkien tells us that even in the elven homeland there is no assurance that he will be cured. Life can be cruel, and the elves' dignified acceptance of their fate and Frodo's courageous self-sacrifice lend a certain grandeur to the story of *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole.

Tolkien was sometimes apprehensive about this darker side of his tale. He said of it himself, in dramatic terms: "I have produced a monster: an immensely long, complex, rather bitter, and very terrifying romance, quite unfit for children (if fit for anybody)" (*Letters* 124). These words were written shortly after he had finally succeeded in finishing his great work, and for the first time could truly appreciate the actual size and complexity of what he had produced. A long, complex and terrifying romance it certainly is, though the use of "bitter" is perhaps surprising. Doubtless he was referring to the sense of unrewarded loss mentioned above, and the continuous reminiscence by both elves and men about the distant, glorious past that they threw away through their own folly. The lost Eden theme could hardly be stronger in his books, though it is to some extent balanced by moderate hope for the future – as Tolkien believed was the case for mankind as a whole. His characters are continuously forced to leave safe, comfortable surroundings – the Shire, Beorn's home, Laketown in *The Hobbit*; Bombadil's house, Rivendell, Lothlórien, Treebeard's home, and so on in *The Lord of the Rings* – and venture unwillingly into hostile lands. The

following passage from *The Fellowship of the Ring* illustrates this theme to perfection, as the companions of the Fellowship are dragged away by the current in fragile little boats from Edenesque Lothlórien: "For so it seemed to them: Lórien was slipping backwards, like a bright ship masted with enchanted trees, sailing on to forgotten shores, while they sat helpless upon the margin of the grey and leafless world" (*FR*, II, vii, 490). Behind stays the bright ship; ahead all is dour. We know that the virtuous heroes win through in the end, but the price they have to pay is heavy and the suffering is considerable. Patrick Curry, who examines this theme of loss in the broader context of Tolkienian and other mythologies in his book *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity*, also uses the above metaphor to describe a different feeling of loss: that experienced by readers when they finish *The Lord of the Rings* and are forced back into consciousness of their everyday existence, returning to their own "grey and treeless world".

We can see, therefore, that there is nothing trivial about Tolkien. With the exception of *The Hobbit* (and even then with caveats), none of his literature was written for children, and he himself regards his longest story as unsuitable for them, due to the underlying bitterness and sometimes terrifying power of the scenes and images he describes. His ability as a storyteller is sufficient to make his fiction interesting *per se*, without any further consideration, which according to Tolkien himself is what he most desired; yet if we also take into account his overarching mythology and the extraordinary use he makes of his linguistic knowledge, his literary creations must be seen to ascend from the plane of superb tale-telling, and to reach the exalted level of historically outstanding artistic and intellectual creation.

Tolkien is a curious case. His books have probably sold more copies than any other in history save the Bible and have generated a vast amount of academic literature, thousands of articles, papers and books, as can be readily verified through Internet searches or by consulting library and bookshop catalogues. In addition, they were written by an Oxford Professor of English. Yet his fiction is still not regarded as "serious literature" by a large

part of the literary establishment, and possibly never will be. It is simply too different, and too difficult to classify. And there is the fact stressed above that Tolkien's fame and enduring popularity are largely due to his gifts as a storyteller, and storytellers are not particularly well liked by the literary intelligentsia.

III

Linguistic Aesthetics

In the following two chapters we shall turn our attention to Tolkien's notions about language and aesthetics, which formed an essential part of the subsoil from which his major works grew.

"Linguistic aesthetics" is a term which Tolkien employed on a number of occasions to refer to the fickle relationship between the sounds of words, their meaning and our emotional responses to them. He explored this complex issue by means of his invented languages, where the fundamental question of the relationship between sound and meaning (*phonosemantics*) came into play, and also addressed it directly in some academic papers.

Such was his interest in this subject that on one occasion he described himself as "a professional philologist particularly interested in linguistic aesthetics" (*S* xi) while on another he declared that his largest published work (excluding posthumous publications), *The Lord of the Rings*, was "largely an essay in linguistic aesthetic" (*Letters* 219). In his lectures and letters he made some effort to communicate exactly what he meant by this term and why it was of such importance to him, but he seemed to find it difficult to convey his notions and explain his enthusiasm in terms that were understandable to a wider audience.

Indeed, Tolkien sometimes worried that his ideas on linguistic aesthetics and phonosemantics, which were intimately tied up with his passion for inventing languages, would not be taken seriously and might even cause derision. One of the most explicit sources of his views in this area is the posthumously published paper on his hobby of creating invented languages called "A Secret Vice", in which he refers to his own essay as "this absurd paper" (*MC* 203), and among other pleas for understanding, entreats the reader to "be kindly" (*MC* 213). Elsewhere, in the vast letter delineating the main features of his fictitious universe that he sent to the publisher Milton

Waldman, Tolkien mentions his desire to achieve cohesion and consistency in his invented languages, but expresses his concern that: "Not all will feel this as important as I do, since I am cursed by an acute sensibility in such matters" (*S* xi). Further on in the same letter he even says: "It is, I feel, only too likely that I am deluded, lost in a web of vain imaginings of not much value to others [...]." He found talking about these supposedly unconventional matters rather embarrassing. His love of the subject was so immense that he was prepared to risk ridicule in order to communicate his enthusiasm to others, but in general he preferred to transmit his passion for word-sounds through his fiction and his linguistic inventions.

The Phonosemantic Current

In fact, Tolkien was not alone in his misgivings about publicly voicing his opinions on phonetics and pleasure, and on sound and meaning. It is true that some other renowned thinkers also considered there to be a direct link between the sound of words, their significance, how we use them and how we react to them. Yet, setting aside unassailable giants of linguistic theory and philosophy like Jespersen and Jakobson, the norm has been for linguists to share Tolkien's fear of humiliation in this regard[32] because their ideas openly contradict the ruling commandments of modern linguistic theory. These were cast in stone in the early 20th century by Ferdinand de Saussure and reinforced in the latter half of the century by the Chomskyan school of generative grammar.

Saussure, as all students of theoretical linguistics will know, was adamant that the linguistic sign (i.e. word, utterance) was arbitrary and wholly unrelated to the referent (i.e. thing referred to). He regarded this rule as being so important that he referred to it, in his seminal work *A Course in*

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[32] Margaret Magnus, a modern specialist in phonosemantics, has remarked the following: "I am aware of several works in phonsemantics whose authors suppressed even their informal dissemination for fear that this would have a negative effect on their professional life." (M. Magnus, doctoral thesis 2001).

General Linguistics, as "the organising principle for the whole of linguistics." Only by severing phonetic relations between spoken words and the notions or objects they referred to could he isolate the inert elements he needed to create a "scientific" system, or structure. This systematic, abstract approach was further refined by the Chomskyan school, with its enthusiasm for sophisticated models and mechanisms, and scant interest in language as a dynamic phenomenon in the real world of human communication.

The influence of Saussure and Chomsky on 20th century linguistics has been immense, and few have had the confidence to contradict them. Even the great humanist, literary critic and polyglot George Steiner, who criticised Chomsky's insistence on a universally structuralist approach in the face of the vast linguistic diversity to be found in the real world, glibly affirmed in his most important work that "languages are wholly arbitrary sets of signals and conventional counters" (Steiner 1992, 21). That someone as linguistically sensitive as Steiner accepted the Saussurean doctrine without question (though perhaps with some unwitting self-contradiction, in view of other remarks by Steiner quoted further on in this study and elsewhere[33]) is indicative of how deeply that doctrine has become rooted in Western linguistic thinking.

There are some exceptions to this rule, however, thanks to those illustrious thinkers who have had sufficient intellectual status to be able to swim against the tide without ridicule. The great Danish linguist Otto Jespersen had no doubts on the subject and stated categorically:

> Is there really much more logic in the opposite extreme which denies any kind of sound symbolism (apart from the small class of evident echoisms and 'onomatopoeia') and sees in our words only a collection of accidental and irrational associations of sound and meaning? [...] There

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33 In his collection of essays *Les Logocrates* Steiner distanced himself from his former position saying that "words are not Saussure's arbitrary counters. They designate, and therefore define, the essence of beings" (Steiner 2003, 17).

> is no denying that there are words which we feel instinctively to be adequate to express the ideas they stand for. (Jespersen 1922, 397)

This opinion was shared by the 19th century German humanist Wilhelm von Humboldt, who wrote extensively on the subject of what he referred to as "sound symbolism", and by Jerspersen's contemporary, the linguist Edward Sapir, who went beyond theory and devised tests to obtain proof for the existence of a relationship between sound and sense.[34] In the latter half of the 20th century the phonosemantic cause was taken up by the linguist and philosopher Roman Jakobson, who firmly opposed both the Saussurean structuralists and the Chomskyan generativists, with their insistence on the arbitrariness of word form. To illustrate his ideas he used a framework devised by the American semiologist C.S. Peirce. According to Peirce, signs can be classed into three different categories, or levels, and this provided a helpful framework for distinguishing the degree of closeness between phonemes and the notions they relate to. These are, in the terms he used, the iconic level, in which sign (i.e. word or utterance) and referent are the same thing; the indexical level, in which the nature of the sign is indicative of some essence or quality in its referent; and the symbolic level, where the relationship is indeed arbitrary. For Peirce and Jakobson, most words fit into the first two levels and the third is the exception, not the rule.

These theoretical considerations reinforce what must be regarded as a common-sense view of sound and meaning. Evidently, pure onomatopoeia (*moo, cuckoo*) is a case apart, but what about such strings of terms as *glisten, glimmer, glitter, glow, gleam, glint, glare*, all of which refer to

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[34] One of the most amenable of these consisted of eliciting responses from a wide sample of people of all ages to questions such as: "The word *mal* and the word *mil* both mean 'table' in some language. Which type of table is bigger: *mal* or *mil*?" According to Sapir's results, around 90% of respondents consistently found "i" to be smaller and "a" to be bigger, suggesting a strong and direct link between these phonemes and the notions of "little" and "large". Sapir carried out numerous experiments of this kind, with similar findings.

light, or *lump, bump, rump, hump, stump, mumps*, which all contain the "ump" syllable and refer to some kind of protuberance? It seems that we unconsciously regard these phonemes as being apt for the phenomena they relate to. There are hundreds of such examples, some more iconic, some more indexical. Many occupy a middle ground between the two, such as the sequence *splash, spatter, splatter, splosh, slosh* (plus perhaps *spurt, sprinkle, spout*), which seem onomatopoeic until one considers the fact that the noise water makes when it hits a hard surface is never actually "splash" or "splosh", or anything of the sort.

In recent years some detailed research has been carried out to find a reliable, scientific basis for our intuition, continuing the efforts of Sapir and others. A leading specialist in this field is Margaret Magnus, who has written a book on the subject (*Gods of the Words*, Truman State University Press 1999) and has a web-site packed with useful information on phonosemantics and related matters.[35] She has devised and implemented numerous experiments and gathered a large volume of evidence to provide logical weaponry for confronting the Saussurean school, which can be consulted on her site. New evidence for a clear relationship between sound and meaning has also been furnished by the neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, who set out the findings of his experiments in sensory interaction in the prestigious BBC Reith Lectures for 2003.[36]

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[35] The address of Margaret Magnus's site is: http://www.conknet.com/~mmagnus/

[36] In his discussion of the ways in which messages from the different sensory organs interact in the brain, particularly with regard to the condition known as "synesthaesia", Dr. Ramachandran cited an experiment he and his team had conducted in which people were asked to relate two words in an imaginary "Martian" language – *kiki* and *booba* – with two different shapes, one a bulbous amoeboid form with lots of undulating curves and the other jagged, like a piece of shattered glass with jagged edges. According to his results, 98% of people say the jagged, shattered glass shape is *kiki*, and the bulbous amoeboid shape is *booba*. Dr. Ramachandran explains this from a neurological viewpoint in terms of the shape and sound having a shared property – a sharp sudden inflection, or jaggedness, in the case of *kiki* – which the brain identifies as being common to them both. He has conducted many other experiments of this kind with similar results. The importance of this research for phonosemantics is clear, as it proves that a given object can be identified purely on the basis of the sound of the word used to signal it.

In the face of all this reasoning and carefully verified evidence, therefore, it seems almost foolhardy to continue insisting that the phonetic nature of words is entirely arbitrary.

Phonetic Fitness in Tolkien

Where would Tolkien fit into this counter-tradition? While not a theoretical linguist as such, it seems inevitable that he was aware of the main currents in conventional linguistic theory, including a powerful disregard for features of language not directly involved in communication. Being a poet and lover of languages as things of beauty, he could not agree with this and accordingly stated that:

> The communication factor has been very powerful in directing the development of language; but the more individual and personal factor – pleasure in articulate sound, and in the symbolic use of it, independent of communication though constantly in fact entangled with it – must not be forgotten for a moment.
> (*MC* 208)

This echoes Jakobson, who commented that "the iconic and indexical constituents of verbal systems have too often remained underestimated," i.e. communication between speakers is an essential feature of language but should not be allowed to eclipse all others, or treated in isolation from them. We do not know the extent to which Tolkien was familiar with the work of Jespersen, Jakobson and company, but their efforts would doubtless have comforted him and made him feel less concerned about being considered eccentric.

That Tolkien believed firmly in the direct link between sound and sense is beyond doubt; it formed the basis of his linguistic investigations, as

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The full content of the Reith Lectures can be found at the BBC website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2003.

he readily acknowledged. In "A Secret Vice" he talks of "the fitting of notion to oral symbol" (*MC* 206), and sets out his position quite clearly in the context of what he calls "language construction": "I am personally more interested perhaps in word-form in itself, and in word-form in relation to meaning (so-called phonetic fitness) than in any other department" (*MC* 211). Elsewhere in the same essay he refers to the fundamental link between what he calls "phonetic fitness" and pleasure in language: "Certainly, it is the contemplation of the relation between sound and notion which is the main source of pleasure" (*MC* 206). In other words, the pleasing emotion that can be provoked by language is largely caused by the fitness of its phonetics to its meaning. Tolkien's interest in this matter was unusually deep because, as well as the "acute sensibility" he mentions, he had three separate areas in which to study and experiment: English, foreign languages both ancient and modern, and his own Elvish languages. With regard to the latter, he was evidently free to combine sounds with meanings in the manner he saw fit, though in practice (as mentioned in the preceding chapters) he imposed a certain discipline by modelling one form of Elvish on Finnish and another on Welsh, these being his favourite foreign languages in phonetic terms. In English, the enormous care he took over making names seem appropriate to characters and places is well documented, sometimes drawing on ancient Anglo-Saxon and Nordic sources, and sometimes just letting his imagination and inventive genius do the work.

Indeed, many Tolkienian names could be used themselves as evidence in favour of phonosemantics. One merely has to think of how apposite the name "Withywindle" is to a slow, winding, magical river overhung by willows, or how well the name "Tom Bombadil" fits its jolly, rumbustious owner. Looking at the matter from the opposite angle, could the broad and majestic Anduin ever have been called the Withywindle? Or can we imagine the brooding Lord Denethor being named Lord Bombadil? The idea is so absurd as to be comical, but for no reason other than, in this case, severe phonetic unfitness.

Tolkien's beliefs on the subject of phonosemantics, therefore, formed part of a larger current which was regarded as marginal and undesirable by mainstream linguists, yet which was strongly supported by some of the greatest language philosophers of the last two centuries. His ideas, though at times tentatively expressed, coincided with those of thinkers such as Jespersen, Sapir and Jakobson who, like him, were interested not just in abstract notions of structures and systems, but in language as a vast and essential component of human existence, with all its poetic, philosophical and social connotations.

However, he differed from other scholars (as far as we are aware!) in that his thinking on this area, in addition to relating to real languages, was closely tied to his private, invented ones as well.

Such was the breadth of Tolkien's knowledge that he was able to look at whole languages, not just individual words. When talking of his initial experience of medieval Welsh in his lecture "English and Welsh", he said:

> It would not be of much use if I tried to illustrate by examples the pleasure that I got there. For, of course, the pleasure is not solely concerned with any word, any 'sound-pattern + meaning', by itself, but with its fitness also to a whole style. Even single notes of a large music may please in their place, but one cannot illustrate this pleasure [...] by repeating them in isolation. (*MC* 192)

Later, in "A Secret Vice", he talks of his creation, Quenya Elvish, as "a language that has [...] reached a highish level both of beauty in word-form considered abstractly, and of ingenuity in the relations of symbol and sense" (*MC* 210). The "phonetic fitness" and resulting beauty, therefore, are also to be found on a scale vastly larger than that of individual words, namely the level of an entire language. The foundations are again the same: "sound-pattern + meaning", "symbol and sense". For Tolkien, language without sound-symbolism would have been a lifeless thing.

One of the examples Tolkien gives in "A Secret Vice" to illustrate his invented language that has reached a "highish level of beauty" is a poem called "The Last Ark" (*MC* 213-214). Students of Tolkienian linguistics find this a particularly interesting text because, as well as being relatively lengthy, Tolkien produced three different versions of the poem during his lifetime, each in Quenya at a different stage of evolution. As already mentioned in a preceding chapter, the existing literature on Tolkien's Elvish languages is vast[37] and it would not be appropriate to go into the matter in great detail in this broad study of language in Tolkien's life and work, but it is enlightening to briefly examine the phonetics of this poem and deduce how Tolkien applied in practice the ideas discussed above. For our present purposes it is sufficient to reproduce the first two verses of the poem as it appears in "A Secret Vice", with Tolkien's translation into English:

Oilima Markirya

Man kiluva kirya ninqe
oilima ailinello lúte,
níve qímari ringa ambar
ve mainwin qaine?

man tiruva kirya ninqe
valkane wilwarindon
lúnelinqe vear
tinwelindon talalínen
vea falastane,
falma pustane,
rámali tíne,
kalma histane?

[37] The Internet is a vast storehouse of useful material on elven linguistics, with some excellent sites that include the home page of the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship (www.Elvish.org) and the site run by Helge K. Fauskanger called Ardalambion (http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf/).

The Last Ark

Who shall see a white ship
leave the last shore,
the pale phantoms
in her cold bosom
like gulls wailing?

Who shall heed a white ship,
vague as a butterfly,
in the flowing sea
on wings like stars,
the sea surging,
the foam blowing,
the wings shining,
the light fading?

Reading the Quenya text from a viewpoint of complete semantic ignorance one is forced to concentrate on the words' shapes and sounds, and what is immediately noticeable is that the majority of them end in a vowel (the guidelines to pronunciation included in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* indicate that final vowels are always pronounced). Additionally, in the rare cases that they end in a consonant, only /n/ and /r/ are used. The entire poem comprises ninety-six words, of which a mere seventeen end in a consonant.

There are none of the brusque consonant clusters so typical of English (e.g. *ngths* as in strengths, or *sps* as in crisps), nor are there any hard, guttural phonemes. The potentially harsh fricatives are restricted to the soft /f/ and /v/, together with non-sounded /s/. Among the vowel phonemes in the above sample there are seventy-six higher-sounding front vowels (such as /i/) and a mere seven lower-sounding back vowels (/o/, /u/). Long words in the style of German or Greek are excluded; the maximum word length in the poem is four syllables, and most have three or less.

The overall effect, therefore, is a flowing language in which the words run smoothly together, with final vowels linking easily to initial consonants. The sound is light and melodious thanks to the predominance of front vowels and soft consonants, the absence of harsh phonemes, and the even spacing of consonant-vowel syllables.

Tolkien pointed out that his Elvish languages were largely modelled on Finnish and Welsh, but it is worth noting that the linguistic characteristics described above are also applicable, to a considerable extent, to Italian and Spanish. Tolkien liked Italian and particularly appreciated Spanish (in his own words, it gave him "strong pleasure" [*MC* 191]), including it in that small group of languages that he regarded as essential to his personal happiness, and it is relevant to consider that these two Mediterranean tongues are popularly held – by English-speakers at least – to be among the most beautiful of European languages.

On the level of individual words, rather than whole languages, there is no better account of Tolkien's approach to lexical creation than that given in *The Lost Road* by his son Christopher:

> He did not [...] 'invent' new words and names arbitrarily: in principle, he devised from within the historical structure, proceeding from the 'bases' or primitive stems, adding suffix or prefix or forming compounds, deciding (or, as he would have said, 'finding out') when the word came into the language, following it through the regular changes in form that it would thus have undergone, and observing the possibilities of formal or semantic influence from other words in the course of its history. (*Lost Road* 342)

This creative process can be illustrated by looking at the second verse of the version of *Oilima Markirya* included above (as already mentioned there are three versions of this poem, the last of which is helpfully accompanied by a glossarial commentary) which contains the words *valkane wilwarindon*,

translated by Tolkien as "vague as a butterfly". In the later version of the poem, probably written during the last decade of the author's life, this stanza changes to *wilwarin wilwa,* but the translation remains the same. Tolkien informs us in his glossary that *wilwa* means "fluttering to and fro" and that *wilwarin* means butterfly. The stem, therefore, is *wilwa*, which describes an action, and the suffix *rin* is added to create a noun to denote a creature that habitually moves in such a manner, just as in English we add *er* to a verb to make the corresponding noun (run-runner, fish-fisher, etc.). In the earlier version of the poem a further, adverbial suffix *don* is added, which means "like, in the way of" and corresponds to the English suffix "-wise", to give the final compound word *wilwarindon.* In fact, we can see that what Tolkien translates as "vague as a butterfly" is literally "fluttering like a butterfly" in the earlier version and "[a] fluttering butterfly" (it should be noted that Quenya has no indefinite article) in the later version.

From a phonosemantic viewpoint, the phonemes in *wilwa* and *wilwarin* have evidently been chosen with care. On an entirely subjective level, I can say that to me the name *wilwarin* sounds well suited to the insect which in English we call a butterfly. From an objective viewpoint, we can observe that the source verb *wilwa*, as Tolkien tells us, indicates a "fluttering to and fro" action, i.e. a repetitive up-and-down or side-to-side action. The two phonetically similar syllables (*wi* and *wa*) are therefore used deliberately to reflect the repetitive nature of the action: in English, we find similar repetition, for instance, in the phrase "to-and-fro" and the verbs "zigzag" and "crisscross", which also denote a repetitive side-to-side movement or form. It should be noted that this device is also used in the name "Withywindle" mentioned earlier, to reflect the winding, side-to-side course of that river.

Tolkien's choice of phonemes, therefore, met a double purpose. On the one hand, he "found" a beautiful name for a beautiful creature; on the other, he used phonetic resources that can be readily recognised by the

language processing centres in our minds to convey the kind of movement which that creature makes.

The use of a poem to illustrate Tolkien's creative process is no coincidence, since poetry and song were perhaps his favourite media for expressing linguistic beauty. Tolkien had a strong predilection for the spoken word, and even when he had no choice but to communicate in writing, as in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, he included a detailed appendix on the pronunciation of his invented languages to assure that readers could come as close as possible to "hearing" them as they should be pronounced. It is interesting to note in this regard that many of Tolkien's most important works of non-fiction were not initially written as essays, but as speeches, and the two papers most quoted in this chapter, namely "English and Welsh" and "A Secret Vice", were both originally lectures. He also enjoyed reading his fiction aloud and recorded himself on tape reading passages from his work, a practice usually confined to poets and songwriters. He thought his works, and his languages, were beautiful, and he was keen to communicate this.

Tolkien's Cellar Door

In a frequently-cited passage from his paper "English and Welsh", Tolkien made a brief stab at explaining his notions of linguistic aesthetics by means of – we must imagine – a few very carefully chosen examples. To illustrate his own predilection for the sounds of Welsh, he cited the words *cellar door* as an instance of what he considered to be undeniable phonetic beauty: "Most English-speaking people [...] will admit that *cellar door* is beautiful, especially if dissociated from its sense (and from its spelling). More beautiful than say, *sky*, and far more beautiful than *beautiful*." (*MC* 190). He continued that for him, many words in Welsh awoke the pleasure that he imagined English speakers gained from *cellar door*.

The fact that he was so wary of saying anything specific about his aesthetic theories for the reasons of unorthodoxy explained above in

connection with phonosemantics has caused Tolkienian commentators to focus a considerable amount of attention on this brief paragraph, due to the lack of more abundant material. In fact, it not very helpful for understanding his beliefs in this area as Tolkien himself was doubtless aware. As is evident from the wealth of quotations from his work cited in this study, the aesthetics of phonology was of great interest to Tolkien, yet when he approached the subject directly the material he chose was questionable.

One may ask, for instance, in what regional accent *cellar door* should be pronounced to achieve such beauty. The answer, one imagines, is Tolkien's own accent, standard southern UK English, rather than, say, a rural American or Australian accent. Would these two words pronounced in another accent have given Tolkien such pleasure? This seems unlikely, since the aesthetic pleasure is closely linked to the vowel sounds, which are bound to change if another regional accent is used. In addition, in standard Scottish, Irish and American English the "r" at the end of both words would be pronounced, unlike in Tolkien's standard R.P., changing the auditory impact considerably.

Such considerations make generalisations of this kind appear unreliable. Tolkien's claim that "most English-speaking people" will find *cellar door* particularly pleasing is also dubious. There is no way to substantiate such a statement, and in fact it is reasonable to think that many people might disagree with his view and consider *sky* to be more attractive, or even *beautiful* itself, for no reason other than fickle personal preference.

Another problem arises when Tolkien remarks: "[...] especially if dissociated from its sense (and from its spelling)." In fact, it is impossible to dissociate the sound from the sense, and the sense from the spelling, as can be easily demonstrated. An average English speaker just cannot hear the words *cellar door* without thinking of a door (probably old, wooden and mildewed) leading into an underground storage room habitually called a cellar. Our minds simply do not allow us to isolate the sound from the

meaning: readers are invited to try themselves. Tolkien's comment concerning dissociation from spelling is equally questionable. What if he had written "*seller daw*"? Both these words exist in English and according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* they share the same pronunciation as *cellar door*, yet it is self-evident that when we see them on the page they do not evoke anything special, or beautiful, precisely because we do not associate them with a romantic old door to a cellar. The evocative power of the words *cellar door* is inextricably tied to their habitual meaning in English, not just the phonemes involved: we cannot block out the empirically learned concept that cellars are often interesting places, dank, dark and with a touch of mystery. The doors to them are the key to whatever they may have to hide. Simply by saying *cellar door* to ourselves, we can observe that we are unable to ignore these associations and focus only on the sound. The relation between sound, meaning and spelling is therefore more complex here than Tolkien imagined.[38]

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[38] A curious polemic has arisen in recent years over the actual source of the words *cellar door* as a paradigm of aesthetic beauty in the English language. The controversy may have begun with Richard Lederer's popular book *Crazy English* (Pocket Books, 1989), where he cites a survey of American writers conducted around 1940 in which they were asked which English words they considered "most beautiful". In the course of this survey the writer H.L. Mencken is said to have mentioned the case of an English student of his acquaintance, apparently of Chinese nationality, who reckoned that *cellar door* sounded particularly beautiful. The phrase came back into the public eye in the 2001 Hollywood film, *Donnie Darko*, in which a teacher of literature (played by the American actress Drew Barrymore) states that a "famous linguist" once said *cellar door* was the most beautiful combination of phonemes possible in the English language. When asked about the origin of the remark, the director of the film mistakenly attributed it to Edgar Allan Poe. It appears that the *cellar door* case has also been misattributed to Dorothy Parker and Robert Frost. In fact, there is no record of Poe, Parker or Frost ever having said anything about *cellar door* in such a context, nor is there any first-hand evidence of Mencken's supposed remark about the Chinese student of English. This is hardly surprising, since upon the briefest of examinations it becomes clear that such an attribution is nonsensical. Speakers of Chinese languages have enormous problems distinguishing between the phonemes /l/ and /r/, and correctly identifying /d/, all of which are present in *cellar door*. Unless he had a truly exceptional ear for language, therefore, Mencken's Chinese student would have heard a confused combination of phonemes that only remotely reflected the correct English pronunciation of this phrase. It may be due to this evident incongruity that in another version of the story, the nationality of the student is changed from Chinese to Italian.

This brief and rather unsuccessful venture into the treacherous area of aesthetics does not detract from Tolkien's belief that sound and meaning are linked on the profoundest of levels. As mentioned above, this notion is shared by some of history's greatest philosophers of language, and is supported by experimental evidence. However, Tolkien took the further step of stating that this link is an essential component of phonological beauty, and it is here that a complex subject becomes even more difficult to examine in anything but subjective terms. As Tolkien saw, there is little more we can do than say "most people think ...", because whatever evidence there is derives simply from majority opinion, and even then, as indicated above, the term "most" has to be used carefully. Unless affirmations about what people think are backed by objective research data, they are of little help. Drawing an analogy with music, one may feel inclined to say that Mozart expressed some universal essence of beauty because most people think his music is agreeable, but in reality most people would be at a loss to correctly identify a single Mozart symphony. Even if the majority of the public were adequately acquainted with his work, they would be influenced by social and historical factors often beyond their own awareness (the popular media tend to treat Mozart in a positive manner, perhaps under the pervasive influence of Hollywood; compare this with the often negative perception of, say, Beethoven and Wagner). In such cases, objective elements are difficult to isolate and therefore argumentation tends to be circular ("most people like Mozart because he is popular").

On the basis of the above considerations, therefore, it would appear that we can use experimental evidence and a certain common-sense reasoning to argue in favour of a solid link between phonology and semantics,

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The issue therefore seems to be purely anecdotal, with no real academic or literary substance, and has been blown out of all sensible proportion by the ease with which inaccurate information can be disseminated over the Internet. It seems clear that the idea of using *cellar door* as an example of phonetic beauty was Tolkien's alone, and the rest is mere speculation. It also seems very unlikely that Tolkien would have used an example taken from another author without citing his source, had that been the case.

but establishing a similarly "scientific" basis for the relationship between phonology and pleasure is more difficult. Being an acutely intelligent philologist, Tolkien was evidently aware of such snags. This is evidenced by the fact that shortly after his *cellar door* exposition he states: "The nature of this pleasure is difficult, perhaps impossible, to analyse. It cannot, of course, be discovered by structural analysis" (*MC* 191). Therefore it can only be examined through practical examples and presuppositions about taste, an approach which is subject to the limitations discussed above. We can see from the examples of the invented names Withywindle and Bombadil that Tolkien knew how to provoke certain reactions in readers minds through the use and combination of specific phonemes. Similarly, composers of music know how to arouse certain emotions through the use of specific keys. For instance, both Beethoven (in his *Ninth Symphony*) and Mozart (in *Don Giovanni*, the *Requiem* and other works) knew that they could arouse feelings of unquiet and fear in listeners by using the key of D minor. The means, therefore, can be identified, but what nobody knows is *why* this happens. As Tolkien said, ascertaining the "why" in linguistic aesthetics is probably impossible using traditional analytical methods. Certainly, no-one has succeeded to date in defining satisfactorily the causal relation between sound and pleasure or other emotions by means of philosophical or logical analysis.

The answer may eventually be found, however, in a different discipline, namely neuroscience. A parallel may be drawn with the considerations on sound and meaning discussed earlier. The observable phenomenon called sound-symbolism has been studied in depth and is backed by plenty of practical evidence, but until very recently no convincing explanation had been found as to *why* (in Jespersen's words) certain sounds seem so adequate to express the ideas they stand for. However, thanks to neurobiological work of the kind cited by Vilayanur Ramachandran, we now have a plausible explanation of why our minds link sound to sense. If neuroscience can start to explain phonosemantics by studying instances of synesthaesia, it

may be possible that our aesthetic judgements can also come to be explainable, to some extent, through similar research on mental processes. Anyone who feels sceptical about this should beware: Dr. Ramachandran has already started work on this novel discipline, which he calls "Neuro-aesthetics", with interesting results (*Reith Lectures 2003*, lecture 3).

IV

Language and the Environment

As we have already seen, Tolkien saw language as being much more than a mere vehicle for communication between atomised members of the human community. He felt that language was at the root of our consciousness, inextricably bound up with our condition as human beings. In his own words: "Language – and more so as *expression* than as communication – is a natural product of our humanity" (*MC* 190).

He considered the meaning of words to be tied to their etymology, sound, shape, resonances, practically every conceivable factor in their existence. Although he never explicitly expressed any theory in this regard, Tolkien apparently liked the idea that some kind of Platonic, meta-linguistic level could exist on which words can be comprehended to some extent even if one is entirely ignorant of the language to which they belong (an idea shared by the Russian futurist poets: see chapter V). This explains why he included, without any translation, songs and poems in his Elvish languages within the body of the English narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*: as mentioned in preceding chapters this helped to deepen the sense of "density" in his work, but he also reckoned that even though virtually no-one would understand the text, by shaping the sounds aloud or in our minds we would somehow be able to capture their essence and beauty.

In this respect, Tolkien reflects some of the ideas of his contemporary and fellow member of the group of friends and academics know as the Inklings,[39] the linguist and philosopher Owen Barfield. As Tolkien scholars are

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[39] The relationship between Tolkien and the rest of the scholars and thinkers that made up the informal "society" known as the Inklings has been studied in depth by Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter and is reflected on numerous occasions in Tolkien's letters. In fact. the Inklings were so important to Tolkien that in the preface to the first edition of *The Lord of the Rings* he dedicated the book to them.

well aware, the intriguing matter of Barfield's relation to and influence on Tolkien's work is studied in depth, and with great eloquence, by Verlyn Flieger in her book *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* (Kent State University Press, revised edition 2002). For our present purposes, it is interesting to consider Barfield's view that humans have progressed – necessarily in order to become free, independent creatures – from being a part of the world, existing inside nature, to being separate from the world, extraneous to and detached from our natural environment. He considered this gradual detachment to be reflected in our use of language. The further we distance ourselves from nature, the more fragmented language becomes. In its origin language was at one with the world, i.e. sound and meaning were united. In George Steiner's words:

> In God's language [...] each name, each proposition was an equation, with uniquely and perfectly defined roots, between human perception and the facts of the case.[40] Our speech interposes itself between apprehension and truth like a dusty pane or warped mirror. The tongue of Eden was like a flawless glass: a light of total understanding streamed through it.
> (Steiner 1992, 61)

Over time language has become more and more subjective and symbolic, and more opaque. Yet in Barfield's view the words we use never completely lose their original character, and a trace frequently remains of their ancient oneness with natural phenomena. In one of his later works he explains his ideas in this regard, in rather mystical terms, and brings up the related matter of sound-symbolism discussed in the preceding chapter:

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40 This phrase, "the facts of the case", echoes the opening of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "The world is everything that is the case. The world is the totality of facts, not things." The relationship between Wittgenstein's and Tolkien's ideas is discussed in chapter VII.

> The Hebrew language [...] is that one among the ancient languages in which the roots preserve most clearly (though still dimly enough) the old unity of sound and meaning. If we try to think of these roots as "words", then we must think of words with a potential rather than an actual meaning. Certainly those who have any feeling for sound-symbolism, and who wish to develop it, will be well advised to ponder them. They may find, in the consonantal element in language, vestiges of those forces which brought into being the external structure of nature, including the body of man; and, in the original vowel-sounds, the expression of that inner life of feeling and memory which constitutes his soul.
> (Barfield 1988, 124)

It is on this primeval level that language, as Tolkien seems to think, is able to function without a specific knowledge of a particular tongue being necessary.

In line with this meta-linguistic ideal, Tolkien also seemed to regard language as being rooted in, and inseparable from, the environment in which it develops. In this he may be said to be following a current that began with the American linguists Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir, which in recent times has been swelled by the work of linguistic anthropologists living with indigenous communities in various parts of the world. Their efforts, in turn, have been drawn on by contemporary linguists and philosophers of language who have taken a close look at the Saussurean assumptions on which modern linguistic theory is based, and have decided that Saussure's model is severely lacking. Foremost among these is the anthropologist and philosopher David Abram, who offers a spellbinding exposition of his ideas about the intimate relationship between language and the natural world in his widely acclaimed book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage Books 1996).

Much of what Abram has to say provides an eloquent reflection of Tolkien's cherished beliefs about the fundamental link between word, consciousness and reality. In his book Abram studies the negative repercussions of mankind's current isolation from his natural surroundings, mainly on the basis, in addition to his own insights, of the pioneering work of the phenomenological philosophers Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the data gathered more recently by linguistic anthropologists in the Americas and Australia. He puts forward a number of powerful arguments against the traditional Western dichotomy between mind and body, and its logical continuation in the separation between language and the "real world", arguing that classical Greek and subsequent Cartesian philosophy has led to a severe dissociation between Western society and nature which has not occurred in other societies with different ontological views, or different approaches to the essence of language.

The invention of writing is also examined from an unusually negative perspective. For Abram, a key point in the process of man turning his back on nature was the invention of alphabetic script and its subsequent refinement in ancient Greece. Briefly, it may be said that the wonder, or magic, of writing gradually replaced the wonder, or magic, of the natural world. In literate societies, this led to an increasing emphasis on the importance of knowledge transmitted through literature, to the detriment of knowledge gleaned from the landscape. In pre-alphabetic societies, however, this central role of nature has never been displaced.

Part of David Abram's discourse runs parallel to that of Owen Barfield, though there is a certain difference in focus: while Barfield saw man's separation from nature as being an inexorable and essential factor in our humanness and not necessarily negative since in fact it is utterly inevitable (at least for a time), Abram regards it as damaging both to ourselves and to the environment, and considers corrective action to be necessary. As mentioned above, an essential part of Barfield's philosophy derives from the notion of the fragmentation of human consciousness and language from

an initial, primitive state of semantic unity to the current situation of complexity and dichotomy. He believed that mankind can overcome this segmentation (which is an unavoidable product of the development of our awareness of the world) through imagination and poetry, and return to a state of unity with the world. In this his ideas reflect those of Tolkien, whose Elvish languages, as envisaged in *The Silmarillion*, follow a course of disintegration (in the literal sense) which mirrors Barfield's concept of linguistic fragmentation, developing and becoming more complex but never losing their primitive roots. As mentioned above, they both seem to have felt that perhaps in those roots there resides a semantic sediment that can be comprehended without the restraints of individual language.

For his part, David Abram regards the gulf between our consciousness and the natural world to be pernicious, an inevitable consequence of technological progress perhaps, but undesirable nonetheless. In the eyes of Abram, Merleau-Ponty and people living in pre-industrial societies, nature is not something that is distant from and external to us – rather, it is something that interacts with us all the time. Abram says: "To the sensing body, *no* thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. *Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.*" (Abram 1996, 56; italics in the original). He goes on to assert that the most powerful agent of this interaction, the "ongoing reciprocity with the world", is language.

> Communicative meaning is always, in its depths, affective; it remains rooted in the sensual dimension of experience, born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole. Linguistic meaning is not some ideal and bodiless essence that we arbitrarily assign to a physical sound or word and then toss out into the 'external' world. Rather, meaning sprouts in the very depths of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation.
> (Abram 1996, 75)

The Animate Landscape

The parallels between Tolkien's view of language and nature, mainly expressed via his fiction, and the notions explained by Abram himself and by the indigenous people he quotes, are intriguingly clear. The above reference to the notion that linguistic meaning is not arbitrary but is born of sensual perception agrees with Tolkien's ideas about semantics and phonology, while the idea of meaning sprouting "from the very depths of the sensory world" perfectly encapsulates the essence of Tolkien's thinking on this matter.

This similarity in approach can be well illustrated by looking at the following two passages. The first is from *The Lord of the Rings*, when Legolas the elf responds to a song sung by Aragorn in the language of Rohan, of which Legolas is ignorant: "That, I guess, is the language of the Rohirrim [...] for it is like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains. But I cannot guess what it means, save that it is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men" (*TT*, III, vi, 136).

The second passage is from *The Spell of the Sensuous:*

> If we listen, first, to the sounds of an oral language – to the rhythms, tones, and inflections that play through the speech of an oral culture – we will likely find that these elements are attuned, in multiple and subtle ways, to the contour and scale of the local landscape, to the depth of its valleys or the open stretch of its distances, to the visual rhythms of the local topography. (Abram 1996, 140)

They are saying the same thing: in a pre-alphabetic, pre-industrial culture, language is in tune with the landscape. "Our own speaking does not set us outside of the animate landscape" says Abram (1996, 80), "but – whether or not we are aware of it – inscribes us more fully in its chattering, whispering, soundful depths." This again mirrors Tolkien's views, in the sense that the landscape can be an animated place, interacting with our senses and our feelings. This is particularly true in his fiction of woods and forests:

Mirkwood, Fangorn, Lothlórien, and the Old Forest on the borders of the Shire.

We can observe this in *The Lord of the Rings* when the company of hobbits comprising Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin commence their journey. Having ventured into the sinister gloom of the Old Forest, they sense that they are being watched, and judged: "For the moment there was no whispering or movement among the branches; but they all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity" (*FR*, I, vi, 155). This feeling grows as they wander deeper and deeper into the Forest, until they lose their way.

By the middle of the chapter, when they finally arrive at the Forest's magical heart, on the banks of the wonderfully named river Withywindle, the usual order of things has been inverted: the animate beings, i.e. the hobbits, are at the mercy of the supposedly inanimate world. Everything is personified and active, from the trees to the air itself: "A golden afternoon of late sunshine lay warm and drowsy upon the hidden land between. In the midst of it there wound lazily a dark river of brown water, bordered with ancient willows."

The tiredness of Frodo and his companions comes not from their own aching muscles and bones, but from the air and the land itself: "Sleepiness seemed to be creeping out of the ground and up their legs, and falling softly out of the air upon their heads and eyes." (*FR*, I, vi, 160, 161). The travellers are almost consumed by this overwhelming, devouring landscape, but are rescued in time by someone capable of speaking directly to and commanding the land and the trees, namely Tom Bombadil.

Tolkien's love of trees is well documented[41] and his spokesman on this subject in *The Lord of the Rings* is usually Legolas, who expresses his admiration for the woods of Lothlórien and Ithilien, and the mysterious

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41 Tolkien's love of trees and woods is described in particular detail by Patrick Curry in *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity*, Houghton Mifflin, revised 2004.

glades of Fangorn Forest. It is in Fangorn that this notion of animate nature reaches its ultimate manifestation, of course, in the form of the Ents. And the Ents bring us back again to language and the landscape: their language is tremendously ponderous and long-winded, like the slow growth of roots through the soil, and full of enormous words, like the great trees themselves.[42] As Treebeard, the most ancient and venerable of the Ents, says himself: "My name is growing all the time [...] Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language." (*TT*, III, iv, 80).

Knowingly or otherwise, Tolkien again echoes the ideas of Owen Barfield, who would have agreed with Treebeard's comment, albeit with reference to words in any language, not just Entish. Barfield studied the way in which the etymology of languages mirrors the historical development not just of the meaning of the words themselves but also of the societies that speak them, and noted that a large part of our lexis can be traced back, in the ultimate instance, to natural phenomena involving either objects or movements (in *Poetic Diction* he gives a number of examples, including such different terms as *elasticity* and *abstract*, which are traceable, respectively, to verbs that express the elemental concepts of "draw" and "drag"). The idea that words "tell the story of the things they belong to" would therefore have been entirely familiar to him.

Tolkien felt tremendous affection for the Ents, who were definitely his second most favourite invention, surpassed only by his beloved hobbits. They figure in many of his letters and he sometimes became rather mystical when talking about them, insisting that they suddenly arose, out of nowhere, in Book III of *The Lord of the Rings*, just when he needed them. "I

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[42] In Appendix F ("The Languages and Peoples of the Third Age") which is included at the end of *The Return of the King*, Tolkien said the following about the Ents and their language: "The language that they made was unlike all others: slow, sonorous, agglomerated, repetitive, indeed long-winded; formed of a multiplicity of vowel-shades and distinctions of tone and quantity which even the lore-masters of the Eldar had not attempted to represent in writing. They used it only among themselves; but they had no need to keep it secret, for no others could learn it."

did not consciously invent them at all", he said in a letter to Rayner Unwin from 1955 (*Letters* 162), while in another written two years later he said: "I have no recollection of inventing Ents. I came at last to the point, and wrote the 'Treebeard' chapter without any recollection of any previous thought; just as it now is." (*Letters* 180). And later, in 1963: "The Ents in fact only presented themselves to my sight, without premeditation or any previous conscious knowledge, when I came to Chapter IV of Book Three." (*Letters* 247). One thing we do know is that when he encountered them, he had a name ready (see chapter V below). The only other creatures upon which Tolkien confers such an opportune and inexplicable birth are the hobbits themselves. One possible explanation of the fondness Tolkien felt for his Ents, and the way they spontaneously arose in the course of his creative process, is precisely that they represent, more than any other being in his mythology, the fusion of his three cherished themes of myth, nature and language. Their name may come from an ancient source, as is practically inevitable, but he invented them and they therefore pertain to his myth; of all things in nature he probably loved trees the most, and Ents are tree-like; and they had a language which had grown from the ancient roots of Middle-earth like no other.

Another character in *The Lord of the Rings* who can be mentioned in this connection is Gimli the dwarf, who never fails to make clear his preference for rocks over trees. He is therefore the obvious choice to voice another case of the landscape being treated as a living thing, specifically the mountain Caradhras, which refuses to allow the Fellowship over its high pass into the lands beyond, thus condemning them to seek the alternative route through the perilous Mines of Moria, with dramatic consequences. When the companions finally decide to give up their attempt, after yet another heavy fall of snow, Gimli addresses the mountain directly:

> 'Enough, enough!' cried Gimli. 'We are departing as quickly as we may!' And indeed with that last stroke the malice of the mountain seemed to be expended, as if

> Caradhras was satisfied that the invaders had been beaten off and would not dare to return. The threat of snow lifted; the clouds began to break and the light grew broader. (*FR*, II, iii, 383)

Further on, as the battered remains of the Fellowship flee towards the safety of Lothlórien after their traumatic passage through Moria, Frodo asks Gimli to find out whether they are being followed by the orcs, or perhaps by Gollum, and the dwarf obliges: "Gimli halted and stooped to the ground. 'I hear nothing but the night-speech of plant and stone', he said." (*FR*, II, vi, 337). For Gimli, therefore, plants and stones do no merely make noises: they speak. Gimli may be talking figuratively, yet the nuance is important; after all, he could have said "night-sound" or "night-noise". His choice of "night-speech" indicates his appreciation of the capacity of natural objects to produce meaningful sounds on their own, whether or not he is expressing himself literally.

This perception of nature is quite logical in the overall context of Tolkien's Middle-earth fiction. As we know from linguistic studies of ancient texts and the work of modern anthropologists and linguists, the members of pre-alphabetic communities are much closer to nature than those of industrial, literate societies.[43] They treat their natural surroundings as something immediate and dynamic, with influence flowing in both directions. Knowledge is seen to reside in the woods and hills, the sun and the stars, rather than on pages of alphabetic script. Gimli, Legolas and the other characters in Tolkien's fiction live in an essentially non-literate society. We know that there are libraries in Rivendell, Orthanc and Minas Tirith, and are told or assume that most of the characters can read and write. However, the written word plays a decidedly secondary role in Middle-earth. The characters themselves use tale-telling and song both to enjoy themselves

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43 A well-known example of this is Homer's *Iliad*, in which the forces of nature interact continually with the activities of the human characters.

and to relate the history of their communities. The only occasion on which written records play a significant role is during Gandalf's research into the history of the One Ring at the library in Minas Tirith, prior to Frodo's departure from Hobbiton, and even here the reader is informed of the results of his investigations through a direct, spoken report from Gandalf himself, rather than by the impersonal narrator. Otherwise, speech and song are the preferred media for conveying knowledge, whether this be the ancient history of the elves, an item of hobbit lore or a private message from Arwen to Aragorn.

As can be seen from these comments on Tolkien's notions of sound-symbolism and linguistic aesthetics, he was both a man of his time, although he seemed not to know it, and a man before his time. His belief that sound and sense could fit together was not heretical, but in fact was part of a counter-tradition which, though followed by a minority, had the support of such significant linguists as Humboldt, Jespersen and Sapir, all well-known in Tolkien's day. He was before his time in seeing language as a part of man's participation in nature, something both internal and external, flowing in both directions, a notion that has become relatively popular only in the last few years when we have started to ask why we have turned our backs on the natural world with such devastating consequences. Tolkien would doubtless have been glad to know that these ideas are being taken up with increasing force by those who are concerned, as he was, with restoring the empathy between ourselves and our natural surroundings.

V

Invented Languages

It is clear from the preceding chapters that Tolkien's process of literary creation and his fondness for inventing languages are inextricably intertwined, to the extent that the former could not exist without the latter. Tolkien was insistent, as has already been mentioned, that his stories developed from his fictional languages and not the other way round, stating categorically: "The invention of languages is the foundation" (*Letters* 165). The process for naming his characters also followed what must be regarded as the inverse of the usual course of literary creation, developing from individual words and names rather than vice-versa. "To me, a name comes first and the story follows" he said in one of his letters (*Letters* 165), and in another, on the subject of the Ents: "As usually with me they grew rather out of their name, than the other way about" (*Letters* 157). The insistence on *names* is revealing, because it provides a key to understanding his linguistic inventiveness and, to some extent, his overall linguistic philosophy.

When he says "names", Tolkien is not talking about only the epithets given to fictional figures, of the kind he tacked onto his own characters from ancient sources (Gandalf, Thorin, etc.), but also the names of things. The specific words used to denote individual phenomena provided him with endless fascination. "Ent", for instance, as we have already seen in chapter IV, refers in Tolkien's fiction to living tree-like creatures but in fact it is derived from a word in Anglo-Saxon meaning simply "giant" (*Letters* 157, 163). Tolkien wanted to use the word *ent* simply because he liked how it sounded and "felt that something ought to be done about it", as he said himself. When Tolkien liked a word and thought something should be done about it, the outcome was inevitable: it would end up as a name in his fiction for a specific character (e.g. Eärendil, Éomer), thing (*lembas*, *flet*, *attercop*) or being (*ent*, *wose*, or the hobbits themselves). As we know from

his letters and biography, Tolkien could spend days pondering the meaning of a single word from Anglo-Saxon or Norse, such was his interest. He referred to this approach himself, in his valedictory address at Oxford: "I would always rather try to wring the juice out of a single sentence, or explore the implications of one word, than try to sum up a period in a lecture, or pot a poet in a paragraph [...] and I am afraid that what I would rather do is what I have usually done" (*MC* 224). In practical terms, there were two main results of this fascination with individual phrases and lexemes, and his endless patience: Tolkien's reinterpretation of certain old texts, which helped enhance his scholarly reputation, and the obtainment of an enormous lexicon for his private languages and fiction.

Tolkien's interest in invented languages is well described in his essay "A Secret Vice", where we learn that he took up this hobby during his childhood, inventing languages with his school friends which only they could understand. This source of schoolboy entertainment became a serious pursuit once Tolkien was at Oxford as an undergraduate student, around the time of the outbreak of the Great War (*Letters* 180). By his own account, the true significance of his "secret vice" came upon him when he became aware of the essential link between his private languages and his invented mythology: "It was just as the 1914 War burst on me that I made the discovery that "legends" depend on the language to which they belong; but a living language depends equally on the "legends" which it conveys by tradition."[44] Having thus tied his languages and mythology together on a level of profound interdependence, Tolkien enthusiastically continued to develop his Elvish creations, Quenya and Sindarin, alongside his Middle-earth mythology until the end of his days. It is worth clarifying here that although Tolkien "invented" a number of languages, the only ones that actually reached an advanced stage of lexical and grammatical development were

44 George Steiner referred to this as Tolkien's "great discovery" and added: "The Hobbits, the world of Middle-earth, the quest for the magic ring which long after would bring world-wide fame to Tolkien, all derived from an insight." (Article in *Le Monde,* 1973).

the higher and lower Elvish tongues (Quenya and Sindarin). The others, including the languages spoken by ents, dwarves and the evil hosts of Mordor, appear only fleetingly in his Middle-earth stories and were not elaborated to any great extent. In fact he never actually "finished" developing either Quenya or Sindarin, because that was not his intention. He derived pleasure not only from inventing languages but also from tinkering with the ones he had created, and he never stopped making alterations to his Elvish languages in his search for aesthetic perfection. In the process, he created an enormous lexicon for these languages as well as meticulous and highly complex grammars covering all areas of speech,[45] making them perfectly useable in practical terms and providing enthusiasts of Tolkienian linguistics with abundant material for their own investigations and possible enhancement over the years.

Of course, Tolkien was not the first philologist or linguist to try his hand at inventing a language. Over the last eight hundred years, from the times of Dante Alighieri and Ramon Lull right up to Otto Jespersen and Bertrand Russell, many of the greatest thinkers in European culture have focused their wisdom and knowledge on the notion of devising a linguistic system that would achieve the aim of perfect communication, and it is pertinent and interesting to briefly consider what they achieved, and how their inventions relate to Tolkien's efforts.

Such linguistic systems are usually called artificial languages and can be broken down into three basic classes: philosophical languages, auxiliary languages, and poetic languages. The invented languages known as philosophical languages include the systems sometimes called logical and

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[45] To give an idea of the astonishing level of detail Tolkien achieved, there follows a brief example from Appendix E to *The Lord of the Rings* on the subject of stress in Quenya and Sindarin: "In words of two syllables it falls in practically all cases on the first syllable. In longer words it falls on the last syllable but one, where that contains a long vowel, a diphthong, or a vowel followed by two (or more) consonants. Where the last syllable but one contains (as often) a short vowel followed by only one (or no) consonant, the stress falls on the syllable before it, the third from the end." If we did not know Tolkien was being deadly serious, we might even think this was a parody.

analytical – also known as "ideal" languages – the overriding purpose of which, to simplify considerably what is often a very complex subject, is to construct a linguistic system in which thoughts can be expressed with perfect accuracy, free of any kind of ambiguity. In this way, mathematicians and philosophers would be able to express themselves with absolute clarity and could be perfectly well understood by their fellows.

On a different plane, the languages invented in more recent times such as Esperanto, Interlingua, Volapük and Novial (this last being created by Jespersen) are international auxiliary languages that aim to provide neutral ground for international communications by means of constructions that contain elements of all the main linguistic systems and are therefore easy to learn, in addition to being as grammatically simple and unambiguous as possible. As Umberto Eco explains in his book *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Blackwell 1994), the creators of these systems were all searching for modes of expression which were ideal, or perfect, either because they maximise accuracy or because they optimise comprehensibility.

The final category given above – poetic languages – covers those invented for literary purposes within a process of fictional creation and logically includes the languages of Tolkien and Jorge Luis Borges, as well as other contemporary writers like George Orwell, Anthony Burgess and Ursula LeGuin. Such inventions are also know as art languages, a term that Tolkien used himself.

Philosophical and Auxiliary Languages

The great Italian writer Dante Alighieri, the Catalan philosopher Ramon Lull, and the 17th century British thinkers Francis Lodwick, John Wilkins and George Dalgarno (who invented a linguistic system for deaf-mutes that is still in use), are among those who pursued the ideal of a philosophical language. Their systems are called "*a priori*" languages because they sought to construct a language from scratch, using a series of supposedly logical parameters. The most amenable example, for the purpose of taking a

brief look at how these constructions worked and how they compare to Tolkien's creations, is the philosophical language of John Wilkins, which also happens to be the subject of an essay by Jorge Luis Borges.

Wilkins was an English churchman, born in 1614, who served as Bishop of Chester and was interested in a vast range of subjects and pursuits, which according to Borges included "theology, cryptography, music, the production of transparent beehives, the course of an invisible planet, the possibility of travelling to the moon, and the possibility and principles of a world language" (Borges 1952). To achieve this last-named ambition, Wilkins devised a system that involved dividing reality into forty categories, each of which is represented by a two-letter monosyllable, which are then subdivided into categories of differences (represented by a consonant), and further divided into categories of species (represented by a vowel). Borges gives the example of the word "flame", which in Wilkins's languages is *deba:* this word is obtained from the main category *de*, which means an element; *deb*, which means fire; and thus *deba*, a portion of fire, or flame. The system contains a number of weaknesses, not least the choice of categories and sub-categories, which are necessarily subjective and sometimes bizarre. The incorporation of new concepts is difficult, and everything has to be memorised from scratch (unlike in the "*a posteriori*" auxiliary languages like Esperanto, which are usually modelled on Latin and English for easy recognition). Nevertheless, the underlying concept is intriguing and, as Borges says, it has certain advantages since meaning can be deduced from spelling. For instance, the word "salmon" in English is intrinsically meaningless, but the equivalent in Wilkins's language – *zana* – means a scaly river fish with red flesh, as can be figured out by anyone with sufficient expertise in the genus, differences and species of the Wilkins system.

Although their lexicons are largely his own creation, from a grammatical viewpoint Tolkien's Elvish languages are essentially *a posteriori* creations, derived from Finnish, Welsh, Greek, Latin, and, to a lesser extent, Germanic sources, and therefore the creative process involved is

very different from that applied by Wilkins and the other creators of *a priori* systems. In addition, Wilkins assigned phonemes to the different categories in a completely arbitrary manner, except insofar as he chose phonemes that, according to his investigations, were common in many languages, whereas the phonetic quality of each term was of essential importance to Tolkien. There is one point in common, however, this being the formation of words through successive additions to a basic stem, as illustrated in the previous chapter by the term *wilwarindon*.

In more recent times, the attempts to create artificial languages have centred more on the so-called international auxiliary languages (IALs), i.e. secondary languages designed for international communication between different language-speaking communities. The most famous of these is Esperanto, created by Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof towards the end of the 19th century. Others, such as Ido, Volapük and Interlingua, have enjoyed a certain degree of popularity at different times but are now extinct in practical terms. In contrast to the analytical or philosophical languages discussed above, Esperanto (like the other modern auxiliary languages) is an *a posteriori* creation and takes its lexis and grammar principally from a combination of the ancient languages of Latin and Greek, and modern German, French, English and Russian, in the hope of being as widely comprehensible as possible. It has just sixteen unvarying rules. Some items in its grammar are regarded as dubious and the result of Slavic mother-tongue influence (noun-adjective agreement and accusative case inflection, as well as the absence of an indefinite article), though its creator defended himself by saying that these elements had been incorporated into his invention with the time-honoured aim of banishing ambiguity on a permanent basis. The most reliable study carried out to date (by Professor S. Culbert in the 1990s) placed the number of truly fluent Esperanto speakers at around two million, which indicates a certain degree of success and resilience. For its part, the IAL called Novial (that is, "new+I.A.L."), which was introduced in 1928 by one of the linguists already referred to in this study, Otto Jespersen, draws

its lexis mainly from Germanic and Romance languages, while its grammar is very closely modelled on modern English (for instance, "I would protect" is rendered *me vud protekte*). Jespersen found Esperanto unnecessarily complicated and reckoned he could do better. Novial was the result, free of case inflection and agreements, its grammar based on the language Jespersen rightly expected to be the dominant linguistic force for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond. It has not enjoyed the same popularity as Esperanto, however, and subsists merely as a linguistic curiosity.

The most recent attempt at an internationally beneficial constructed language which has achieved at least a mild degree of success is Loglan. Loglan is supposed to be a totally logical language – hence the name – and is worth considering if only because it was invented for a singular and intriguing purpose: to test the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. We have already come across the American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf in the preceding chapters of this study in relation to how our understanding of the world may be moulded by the language we use. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is commonly regarded as holding that the structure of a language places restrictions on the perception and understanding of its speakers, i.e. a given language actually determines the cognitive scope of its community. Taking this to an extreme, it can be postulated that different language communities have different mind-sets, and that certain cognitive processes may simply be unavailable to the speakers of certain languages because of the limits on thought those languages impose. This is a rather rigid interpretation of Sapir and Whorf's approach and exaggerates their basic postulation, with which Tolkien would have sympathised, that language and mind are interdependent and our behaviour and thoughts are therefore heavily influenced by the language we speak. Nevertheless, it is the one which inspired Dr. James Brown to devise Loglan as from 1955. Dr. Brown's aim was to test the "strong" Sapir-Whorf position by creating a perfectly logical language, teaching it to people in widely varying linguistic communities, and monitoring the results over a number of years. The idea was that since Loglan

was so different from natural languages, the people learning it would think in a different way in the event of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis being true. However, since these tests were never carried out Loglan's ultimate purpose has been scaled down to that of helping humanity to escape from the limits imposed by natural languages and "releasing [Loglan's] speakers' minds from their ancient linguistic bonds."[46]

The idea of releasing people's awareness from ancient bonds would doubtless have appealed to Tolkien, though he certainly went about things in a different fashion. Loglan is the antithesis of Quenya and Sindarin: it is language based on pure rationality, constructed from the rules of predicate logic and designed to be totally accurate and unambiguous. Russell and Wittgenstein (see chapter VII) would doubtless have thought highly of it. Thanks to this logical base Loglan has been regarded as being potentially useful in communications between human beings and computers, and this application led to it being mentioned in a science fiction novel by Robert Heinlein called *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*.[47] It is also a literary language, therefore, though in a small way. Loglan's sounds and word roots were taken from the eight most widely spoken languages in the world – English, Spanish, Russian, French, German, Hindi, Japanese and Mandarin – following the conventional approach of making constructed languages accessible to as many people as possible. Phonetically, it is biased towards English. It may therefore be regarded as an *a posterior* construction, although the fact that its grammar is derived from an artificial system of logical representation rather than an existing natural language makes it an atypical case. It should be stressed that its apparently rigid origins do not prevent Loglan from being omni-expressive. Suffice it to say that Whitman has been translated into Loglan. To give an idea of how this vehicular lan-

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46 From the Loglan Institute's website: www.loglan.org.

47 Information taken from an article by Lewis Jones called "Logla takna mi" in *English Today* (Cambridge University Press), October 2005.

guage functions, there follows a brief example[48] of the procedure involved in translating into Loglan the English saying "All that glitters is not gold."

The English phrase is first recast in logical terms: "It is not the case that, for all x, if x glitters, then x is gold", and this sequence is then expressed in Loglan: *No, raba goi, ba brili noa aurmo.* The author of this example went a step further and sought a more poetic alternative that would mirror the vivid succinctness of the original English: *No, raba ji brili ga aurmo.*

Loglan is worth taking into account because it continues to have a small but dedicated following. The fact that it is rooted in logical language, with connotations for computer programming and artificial intelligence, seems to give it both a current relevance and a future projection that have helped to keep it alive where others have failed. In terms of development and utilisation, Loglan and Esperanto are the only real survivors of the idealistic projects that sought to create an international auxiliary language during the last century.

Coming back to Tolkien, we can see how the *a posteriori* invented languages discussed above are put together in a fashion similar to Quenya and Sindarin, since, as already mentioned, Tolkien's Elvish languages are based on real ancient and modern languages in terms of both their vocabulary and their grammar. However, there are two major differences, with regard to both purpose and form: firstly, Tolkien invented his languages for personal pleasure and to accompany his new mythology, not for international communication or non-ambiguous representation; and secondly, for him the phonetic element was essential, while for Zamenhof, Jespersen and company the phonetic element was again arbitrary, depending solely on the source word from which a given lexeme is derived (for instance, "butterfly" in Esperanto is *papilio* and moon is *luno*, both taken from Latin without any phonological adaptation).

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48 Taken from the Loglan Institute web site.

In this field as in so many others, therefore, Tolkien's approach was unique. He too was searching for a perfect language, though not for communicative purposes, but rather for aesthetic reasons. Other language philosophers have devised quasi-linguistic systems, other novelists and poets have invented words: yet he is the only one to have done both to such a high level of perfection.

Examining his two main constructed languages, Quenya and Sindarin, it is self-evident that, while both are internally logical and regular, simplicity and ease of learning were certainly not Tolkien's principal concerns. They are highly complex languages, in different ways. As has already been mentioned, Tolkien provided clear explanations of the grammatical origin of his languages in his academic papers and letters. Quenya, or High-elvish, derives from Finnish and Ancient Greek, both of which Tolkien adored from a phonological viewpoint. Additionally, Greek is the mother language of European culture and therefore was an appropriate choice for an ancient and venerable tongue such as Quenya. Quenya is also based to some extent on Latin, since Tolkien said he wished it to be a kind of "Elven-Latin" in practical terms (*Letters* 176). It is therefore a highly inflected language, at quite the opposite end of the scale from modern English, which is an essentially isolating language. Quenya verbs inflect for case, as do those of Finnish and Greek, and also modify their form internally to create tenses, which makes them rather daunting for English speakers. The perfect tense, for instance, is reflected by changes in the verb's vowels, rather than by using an auxiliary verb and past participle (e.g. "have found" in English). Individual lexemes are stretched even further by incorporating object pronouns as suffixes rather than individual words.

All of these grammatical rules can be illustrated by a single word in Quenya.[49] In *The Return of the King*, following the battle of Minas Tirith,

[49] My thanks to Helge K. Fauskanger for this example from his web site: http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf/

Gandalf takes Aragorn to a lonely mountain spot and shows him a place where a sapling of the White Tree of Gondor has pushed its way through the rough ground. Aragorn, in delight, exclaims: *Utúvienyes!* which in Quenya means "I have found it!" We can see, therefore, that one word in Quenya suffices to express four words in English, which in linguistic terms is a dramatic difference. An explanation is as follows:

- The root word is *tuv*, which expresses the notion of "find".
- To make the perfect tense both a prefix and suffix are added, giving *utúvië.*
- The first person is expressed by adding *n*;
- and the final suffix, *yes*, corresponds to the pronoun "it".

The grammar of Quenya, therefore, is agglutinative and Greco-Romanic in flavour. The demotic form of Elvish called Sindarin, in contrast, was intended from the start to have a more earthy, Celtic feel to it, and Tolkien therefore based it on Welsh, a language he regarded as exceptionally beautiful. Sindarin seems even more complicated than Quenya, although at least it has no noun case inflections. For instance, plurals are usually formed through an internal vowel change (like "man/men" in English) which is typical of Celtic tongues, rather than by adding "s" or any other suffix. There are over twenty options just for forming plurals. By way of example we can consider the Sindarin noun *Amon*, meaning "hill" (readers may be familiar with the hill called *Amon Hen* in *The Lord of the Rings*) which forms its plural by changing both its vowels, giving *Emyn* (also familiar from the range of hills known as *Emyn Muil*). Sindarin also boasts the morphological device known as mutation, which again is characteristic of Celtic languages. In mutation, the preceding presence of certain phonemes triggers changes in the phonemes of the subsequent word. For instance, the use of a certain definite article means that the noun it relates to must mutate. This sounds complicated, and it is. As already mentioned, ease of learning and

structural simplicity were not two of Tolkien's main criteria when it came to language invention. However, it is equally true that both Quenya and Sindarin have logically coherent grammatical structures and therefore are perfectly learnable by anyone willing to make the effort.

Tolkien mentioned many times that he chose the individual words for his invented languages on the basis of their "phonetic fitness". With regard to their grammars, however, while we know that he chose them because he wanted to echo the mechanisms of certain real languages, we do not know whether – for instance – he regarded an inflecting kind of grammar as being intrinsically more beautiful than an isolating kind, or whether he thought that words which form their plurals through internal vowel changes were essentially more attractive than those that do so by adding a particle at the end. It seems unlikely that his extreme sensibility in language matters went quite this far, and we may suppose that his grammatical choices, as mentioned above, derived essentially from his wish to create languages for Middle-earth that mirrored, respectively, the ancient classical languages and the Celtic tongues in our world.

Tolkien's invented languages are as complete as any, therefore, yet they exist by reason of their beauty, not their flawless logic or transparency. In fact, Tolkien would have said that they were more complete, and certainly more alive, because they had an accompanying legendarium and mythology. As he said in a letter from 1956: "Volapük, Esperanto, Ido, Novial, etc. etc. are dead, far deader than ancient unused languages, because their authors never invented any Esperanto legends." (*Letters* 180). This is an intriguing contention, and time would appear to have proved him to be right. In effect, the popularity of his own Elvish languages never ceases to rise thanks to the continued and parallel interest of millions of people in the mythology contained in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* and his other writings. In contrast, the other vehicular languages he mentioned are virtually extinct. Esperanto (and to a lesser extent Loglan) is the exception, and this could be precisely because it does have a certain body of fictional

creation behind it, though nothing that could merit being termed a mythology.

Poetic Languages in Borges and Eco

As may be expected from their fascination with language and its historical development, the other two philologist-fictionists that from time to time accompany Tolkien in this study – Umberto Eco and Jorge Luis Borges – are also profoundly interested in this area, from both a creative and a critical viewpoint. As we have already seen above, Borges wrote an essay on Wilkins's attempts to devise a philosophical language (called "*El idioma analítico de John Wilkins*" – "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" – first published in 1952 in the collection *Otras Inquisiciones*) and he also created fragments of an invented language himself for his celebrated story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", discussed in chapter I, providing details of both its lexis and grammar. According to Borges, the inhabitants of his imaginary world Tlön speak a language that contains no nouns. Their world, he tells us, is not a collection of objects in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent acts. It is successive and temporal, not spatial: therefore, there are no substantives in the language used to describe it. Instead, there are verbs, which may be modified by adverbial prefixes and suffixes. As mentioned in chapter I, Borges gives the example of the word "moon" (a word which seemed to particularly fascinate him),[50] saying that the nearest we can get in Spanish or English to the equivalent in the Tlön language would be "*lunecer/lunar*", or "to moon". Thus, the utterance *hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö,* equivalent to "the moon rose above the river", can be rendered without using any nouns as "upward, behind the onstreaming it

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50 Borges also referred to the word "moon" in the above-mentioned essay on Wilkins, and made the following comments in an interview in 1980, with which Tolkien would doubtless have agreed: "The word *moon* is a beautiful word. That sound is not found, let's say in Spanish. *The moon.* I can linger in words. Words inspire you. Words have a life of their own." (Interview in *Artful Dodge*, April 1980).

mooned." However, he further informs us that this brief account refers only to the languages of the southern hemisphere. In the northern hemisphere, the essential element is not the verb, but the monosyllabic adjective, the noun being formed by an accumulation of adjectives. Therefore, again we cannot say "moon", but must make do with something like "aerial-clear on dark-round". In this case, he continues, the clump of adjectives relates to a real object, but this is purely fortuitous. In the literature of Tlön's northern hemisphere, there is an abundance of ideal objects, which are summoned and dissolved in a moment, in response to poetic needs:

> There are objects composed of two terms, one visual, the other auditory: the colour of the rising sun, and the remote cry of a bird. There are others composed of many terms: the sun and the water against a swimmer's breast, the delicate pink we see when we close our eyes, the feeling of one who lets himself be carried away by a river current, and by dreams.
> (Borges 1944, 22)

These secondary objects may be combined with others in a process which is practically infinite. Borges tells us that there are famous poems comprising just one, enormous word, a huge "poetic object". The fact that no-body believes that nouns are real means, paradoxically, that the number of nouns is interminable, and the languages of Tlön's northern hemisphere include all the nouns of Indo-European languages, and many more.

Borges created these languages, or grammatical systems, for the limited purpose of his story, as part of his philosophical ruminations. He makes no attempt to devise a system that is either practical or extensible. In fact, linguistic evidence to date suggests that his languages are impossible in real terms, since no language has yet been discovered which does not contain nouns. As usual, however, the ideas he puts forward are curious and thought-provoking, providing a glimpse of a world that seems impossible, yet could just exist.

For his part, Umberto Eco is so interested in artificial languages that he has written an entire book on the subject (*The Search for the Perfect Language*, Blackwell 1994), in which mankind's attempts to create ideal languages are described from the times of the earliest alphabetic scripts right up to the modern IALs. Since its original publication in 1993 it has become a standard reference work on this area. In a somewhat Tolkienian manner, Eco subsequently wove his knowledge of artificial languages into his fiction, specifically in his novel *Baudolino*. They appear towards the end of the novel, when the leading character Baudolino and his ragged travelling companions finally come to the outer reaches of the utopian realm they have crossed the world to find, the kingdom of Prester John, a legendary Christian patriarch and king. (The possible existence of Prester John, also known as Presbyter John, was actually the subject of great speculation in medieval Europe, and Baudolino's quest to find his kingdom is typical of how legends, historical facts and pure fiction are combined in Eco's novels.) They reach what is supposed to be an early outpost of John's realm, the city of Pndapetzim, which is ruled by Prester John's heir-in-waiting. The city and the surrounding area are inhabited by fantastic medieval creatures, including giants, satyrs, one-footed skiapods and dog-headed cynocephali. Each of these species has its own language, which readers first encounter in the following passage, after Baudolino and company have been forced to interrupt their journey while the city authorities decide the safest way for them to continue towards Prester John's realm:

> Not knowing what to do, we learned, little by little, to express ourselves in the various languages of that country; by now we knew that if a pygmy cried *ü Hekinah degul*, he meant that he was happy, and the greeting to exchange with him was *Lumus kelmin pesso desmar lon emposo*, which means that you pledged not to make war against him and his people; and that if a giant replied to a question with *Bodhkoom*, it meant that he didn't know, that the nubians called a horse *nek* perhaps in imitation

> of *nekbrafpfar*, which was camel, while the blemmyae for horse said *houyhmhmm*, and this was the only time we heard sounds uttered that were not vowels, a sign that they were inventing a never-used term for an animal they had never seen; the skiapods prayed saying *Hai coba*, which for them meant Pater Noster, and they called fire *deba*, rainbow *deta*, and dog *zita*. The eunuchs, during their Mass, praised God singing: *Khondinbas Ospamerostas, kamedumas karpanemphas, kapsinumas Kamerostas perisimbasrostamprostamas*. We were becoming inhabitants of Pndapetzim ...
> (Eco 2002, 394)

A few chapters later, it turns out that their territory is about to be attacked by an invading army of White Huns, and so to defend Pndapetzim the different creatures group together to form an army. As they march to war on the eve of battle, each species recites the *pater noster* in its own language:

> *Mael nio, kui o les zael, aepseno lezai tio mita. Veze lezai tio tsaeleda.*
>
> *O fat obas, kel binol in süs, paisalidumöz nemola. Komönöd monargän ola.*
>
> *Pat isel, ka bi ni sielos. Nom al zi bi santed. Kkol alzi komi.*
>
> *O baderus noderus, ki du esso in seluma, fakdade sankadus, hanominanda duus, adfenade ha rennada duus.*
>
> *Amy Pornio dan chin Orhnio viey, gnayjorhe sai lory, eyfodere sai bagalin, johre dai domion.*
>
> *Hai coba ggia rild dad, ha babi io sgymta, ha salta io velca ...* (Eco 2002, 449)

Upon seeing these strange words, the unsuspecting reader (unless versed in artificial languages) logically assumes that Umberto Eco has invented a different tongue for each class of creature, and may well feel admiration for the effort this must have required. The truth, however, is quite different, as

the author himself admitted in an interview when asked about these versions of the Lord's prayer:

> I wrote a book about the search for the perfect language. I examined all the attempts throughout history to create perfect languages. My *pater noster* is a combination of real *pater nosters* in several universal languages from the last three or four centuries, including Esperanto, plus, if I remember correctly, a piece from *Gulliver's Travels.*[51]

The reader has therefore been hoodwinked, in true Eco fashion. Instead of poetic or artistic languages created by the author himself, we are faced by Eco's characteristic device (reminiscent of Borges) of mixing fact and fantasy, borrowing material unaltered from the vast stock of European culture and inserting it in his own creations whenever he deems fit.

It is evident, therefore, that although Eco and Borges are deeply interested in the subject of invented languages, their own creative ventures in this field are limited to mischievous mimicry in one case and a superficial, if fascinating, sketch in the other. This is the dominant trend as concerns imaginary languages which have been invented within the plots of literary works. George Orwell (Newspeak) and Anthony Burgess (Nadsat) also devised new languages of very differing kinds as part of their celebrated dystopian satires *1984* and *A Clockwork Orange*, respectively, but in each case only a limited portion of what would actually correspond to the total

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[51] Interview in *Bookforum*. Fall 2002 edition. In fact Eco makes a minor error in his recollection here since his "wink" in Swift's direction comes a few pages earlier (in the passage quoted) when the word *houyhnhnmm*, which in *Gulliver's Travels* denotes certain horse-like beings, is given as the word for horse in the language of the blemmies, headless beings with eyes in their chests and mouths in their bellies. It is also interesting to note, in view of the philosophical languages discussed above, that *deba* (fire), *deta* (rainbow) and *zita* (dog), as well as *hai Koba*, are offered in the same passage as instances of vocabulary in the language of the one-legged skiapods, when in fact all these terms are taken from Wilkins' analytical language.

lexis and grammar of a fully-fledged language was invented and applied by them in the body of the narrative.[52] In addition, they are restricted to spe-

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[52] Nasdat was created by Burgess for his novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1963). It is not a language *per se* but a slang vocabulary used by an urban gang in the bleak and violent future he describes. Burgess wished to reflect the tribal slang used by youth gangs of the time in British and American cities. However, he could not use the terms they actually employed because that would have tied down his work to a certain historical period, so he invented his own using his polyglot skills. Nasdat terms are derived mainly from Russian (e.g. *droog* for friend and *Bog* for God) and English (e.g. *cancer* for cigarette, *staja* for State Jail), together with a little German (e.g. *shlaga*, from "schlager" for club) and other English slang terms that are now familiar but were not so at the time: *sarky* for sarcastic, *snuff it* for die, etc. The gang-leader protagonist of the novel, Alex, uses Nasdat continuously and any reader wishing to fully understand the book has to learn the vocabulary. Burgess initially wished readers to do this through their own intuition and deductive capacity, and therefore gave no guidance about Nasdat in the first edition. In subsequent editions, however, a glossary of some 200 Nasdat words was included. The literary consequence of obliging readers to familiarise themselves with the invented slang is that by acquiring this exclusive knowledge they seem to join Alex's gang and become more closely involved with Alex himself, drawing them deeply into the substance of the novel. This is a remarkable and contradictory achievement, since Alex is a murderous psychopath and is not the kind of character that readers would normally empathise with. Thanks to his literary inventiveness, however, Burgess leaves them with no choice. [My thanks to Judd Taylor's *A History of Nasdat* for the above examples].

Newspeak is perhaps the most famous invented language in English literature. Orwell's *1984* (1949) is a satire on totalitarian states, and Newspeak is a satire on totalitarian language. It is not really a constructed language because, despite the considerable modifications, it is taken wholly from English. Newspeak is language reduced to the minimum expression. If Khlebnikov's Zaum is emotional Esperanto, then Newspeak is emotionless Esperanto. Orwell included an appendix on Newspeak in *1984*, so we have a fairly detailed explanation of its mechanisms and purpose. In Orwell's words: "Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism [...] The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak [i.e. traditional English] forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words." The aim of the all-powerful Party, therefore, was to make insurgency impossible because Oceania's citizens would not even be able to conceive of unorthodox behaviour as the words relating to such thoughts would simply not exist. Only two options would remain: orthodoxy (encompassed by the Newspeak word *goodthinking)*, or everything else (comprehensively covered by the term *crimethink*). Its aim was to reduce and simplify English vocabulary and grammar literally as far as possible. For instance, all opposites are covered by the prefix *un-*. We have "good", but "bad" is *ungood*. Emphasis and superlative expressions for all adjectives are rendered using *plus-* and *doubleplus-*. The vast stock of English adjectives to describe extreme negativity – terrible, awful, appalling, etc. – are therefore covered in Newspeak by a single word: *double-*

cific books and no attempt is made to take them farther. In *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Umberto Eco provides a checklist for a symbolic communication system to actually qualify as a language *per se*. The prerequisites are having a phonological system, a lexicon, syntactic rules and the capacity or predisposition to express anything (our entire mental and physical experience: feelings, perceptions, abstractions, etc.). None of the above literary languages meet, even minimally, these conditions. This is logical, of course, since creating a whole language is a titanic task, which very few are willing, or able, to undertake ... Tolkien, as ever, being the exception.

Khlebnikov's Zaum

Before going on to study the writing systems Tolkien devised to accompany his languages, it is worth examining one more poetic language which, in fact, has more points in common with Tolkien's creations than any other. The language in question was given the name "Zaum", which is taken from two Russian words meaning "beyond" and "mind". Its name expresses Zaum's underlying purpose and accordingly it has been variously called transrational, suprarational, transmental and transcendental. It was formed during the early years of the last century within the Russian avant-garde and

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plusungood. In Newspeak nouns and verbs are always identical, all adjectives (with a few exceptions such as *good*) are formed with "ful" and all adjectives are formed by adding "wise". Taking the example of *goodthink*, therefore, Orwell offers us the following sum total of possible inflections: noun-verb, *goodthink*; past tense and past participle, *goodthinked*; present participle, *goodthinking*; adjective, *goodthinkful*; adverb, *goodthinkwise*; verbal noun, *goodthinker*. Newspeak represents Barfield's semantic fragmentation in reverse.

Thanks to Newspeak, the Party in Orwell's novel could control not only the actions of the population, but their very thoughts. As such, it is the ultimate tool of a totalitarian regime. Had Tolkien continued to develop the language of Mordor further than just an outline, applying his knowledge – and evident rejection – of totalitarian thinking and his understanding of the mechanisms of language, he may well have ended up with a minimalistic, skeletal system of the kind invented by Orwell for his depressing futuristic satire.

futuristic movements in a climate of revolutionary optimism and hope for a better future. A number of artists dabbled in the ideas of Zaum, but the poet generally accredited with its creation and having developed it far beyond any other is Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922). He saw Zaum as a kind of emotional Esperanto, a perfect language for the expression of human consciousness and feelings that would help to bring people together into the longed-for brotherhood of man. Khlebnikov expressed his language's essential purpose as follows, echoing to some extent the beliefs of Barfield and Abram discussed in preceding chapters: "Zaum is the universal language of the future, although it is still in an embryonic state. It alone will be able to unite all people. Rational languages have separated them." (Douglas 1989, vol. 1, 385)

In structural terms, Zaum is a long way from Quenya or Sindarin. Tolkien maintained a relatively close structural control over his creations, reflecting both his own methodical character and the need to make his languages useable within the context of a heroic story that had to be at least partly accessible and explicable to the average reader. Consequently, his linguistic creations are governed by consistent rules and enclosed within a defined syntactic structure. Zaum, in contrast, reflects the delirious creativity and inventiveness of its epoch, pre-revolutionary Russia, a time when futurism, symbolism and modernism in their various forms were undergoing enthusiastic development in the country's artistic and intellectual centres. Writers and painters rejected the formalisms of the past and were determined to push the limits of art to unknown extremes. In the field of language Velimir Khlebnikov was the main exponent of this philosophy and the language he and others termed Zaum embodied his conviction that language and meaning could be re-invented. As Thomas Seifrid explains in his analysis of *fin-de-siecle* Russian writers (*The Word Made Self: Russian Writings on Language 1860-1930*), this led Khlebnikov to propose "a millenarian project for uncovering the true esoteric roots of language and on their basis constructing an entirely new, universal tongue" (Seifrid 2005,

68). Like Tolkien, Khlebnikov and his fellow Russian poets Konstantin Balmont and Andrei Bely believed fervently in sound-symbolism and in the existence of a pure ancient idiom, which to some extent subsisted in the oral traditions of Slavic folk tales and incantations. Their ideas are closely akin to the theories on linguistic aesthetics and oneness with nature already analysed in the preceding chapters of this study and they certainly anticipated the beliefs of Tolkien, Barfield and Abram in this respect. This can be seen in the following comment by Seifrid (2005, 66):

> What joins this desire to find an absolute set of meanings in language with a belief in language's incantatory powers is, again, the longing for a direct link with essence: if linguistic signification is not "arbitrary" in a Saussurean sense, and sounds enjoy an essential link with their referents, then by divining the roots of language can we gain direct access to the essence of the world.

We are confronted yet again, therefore, by the seemingly unending battle between the defenders of poetry and imagination (the aforementioned Russians, Tolkien, Barfield, etc.) and the advocates of rigid structuralism (Saussure, Chomsky and company).

For Khlebnikov, meaning was either pure, partaking of this essence, or quotidian, tarnished and exhausted by everyday use. As he said: "A word contains two parts: pure essence and everyday dross." (Douglas 1989, vol. 1, 377). If we could see past everyday language, we might be able to uncover what he termed the "self-sufficient word". Accordingly, Khlebnikov tried strip away the superficial, conventional meanings from Russian words and search underneath for their phonetic and semantic roots. He wished to concentrate solely upon their sounds and the concepts they suggested to him after being emptied of their pre-existing semantic content. Khlebnikov reckoned that in this way he could isolate language in its purest, pre-rational state, as close as possible to our direct experience of the surrounding world.

Having identified pure words and their natural associated meanings, he was then able to use them to construct his future language of the world. As a result of his etymological and phonetic experimentation he arrived at a number of conclusions about the relation of sound to meaning, some of which are decidedly curious. For instance, since the Russian words for "skull", "stocking" and "cup" all commence with the phoneme represented in English by *ch* and since these three objects are all a kind of container, he deduced that this phoneme must have some essential quality that made it appropriate for representing container-type objects. Khlebnikov considered that the first consonant in a word had a defining influence over the intrinsic meaning of the word as a whole, and hence that words having the same initial phoneme might share some common primeval semantic element. Some of his discoveries are surprising: for instance, he thought that *B* related to red and flames, and *Z* to reflection and gold, a perception that has no equivalent in the Greek and Latin alphabets. Even more bizarre was his assertion that the sounds *la* and *ti* were capable of increasing muscular capacity. On the basis of this observation, in a manifesto called "Radio of the Future" he recommended that these phonemes should be broadcast by radio around the country during the summer harvest to increase the collective strength of the Russian peasantry.

Khlebnikov devised a series of mental images to represent these proto-phonemes, which are the essential lexemes of Zaum, and systematised them into what he called his Alphabet of the Stars. He referred to these icons, or pictograms, as "hieroglyphs". For instance, he assigned the *ch* phoneme mentioned above the image of "the empty space of one body containing the volume of another body", which is appropriate to its associated notion of "container". He also informed us that: "*V* in all languages denotes rotation around a point, *kh* means a closed curve, *sh* means the fusions of several planes into one, and so forth." (Seifrid 2005, 69).

Khlebnikov was obviously naïve in his reference to "all languages" since evidently the non-Slavic languages employ different sets of phonemes

(the *v* and *sh* sounds are not pronounced at all in modern Spanish, for example); this probably reflects his passionate interest in his own Russian language and its Cyrillic script, and the fact that he regarded it in a certain sense as being the sum and essence of all other languages. For Khlebnikov, the primordial consideration was the phonetic quality of words – Russian words. Just as Tolkien and Barfield delved into the semantic history of the English lexicon and found delight in their investigations, so Khlebnikov proudly and deliberately concentrated on the lexemes of his own tongue. He dismissed the international orientation of other futurists and modernists, who looked to Italy and France for inspiration, in the belief that the Russians' historical obligation was to concentrate their efforts on their own Slavic heritage. Accordingly, Zaum has its etymological and phonetic roots in the Russian language of Khlebnikov's time.

The above description of some of the more esoteric components of Khlebnikov's linguistic research might give a certain impression of frivolity, but this would be false. He was absolutely earnest in his quest to isolate the essential nature of language and much of the poetic output that resulted from his philological efforts was of the highest literary quality, as well as being extremely innovative and stimulating to those around him. Khlebnikov's work in relation to Zaum made a deep impression on the young Roman Jakobson and constituted one of the earliest and most lasting influences on Jakobson's ideas about language as a whole and about phonosemantics in particular (see chapter III). This has been acknowledged by the great linguist himself (Jakobson 1985, 376):

> Yet what must have primarily influenced my approach to poetics and linguistics was my proximity to the poets and painters of the avant-garde. Thus, my programmatic monograph on Khlebnikov's verbal art, written in 1919 and printed in 1921, owes certain of its arguments to my meetings with this unparalleled poet, which began on the eve of 1914.

While Khlebnikov himself has remained a relatively marginal figure, therefore, his ideas about language have found their way to the core of twentieth century linguistic and poetic theory.

Khlebnikov used Zaum in certain poems and in the theatrical works called "super-sagas" which merged elements of prose, poetry and drama. The supersagas were Khlebnikov's greatest and most lasting achievement. They combine elements of Slavic and Asian legend with historical and political events of Khlebnikov's time, ranging from Marxist revolution to the sinking of the Titanic. He used them, on the one hand, as a vehicle to express his political ideas about a broad Asian/Slavic front that he hoped would arise to defend Russian culture against West European encroachment, and on the other as a means of communicating his beliefs about language and Zaum. We may again note a distant echo of Tolkien's emphasis on local legend and myth, and the way in which his writing was influenced by the massive political upheavals of the early 20th century.

The most celebrated of Khlebnikov's supersagas is the last, which was called *Zangezi*. It is structured into twenty "planes" or sections, "each with its own special god, its special faith, and its special rule" (Douglas 1989, vol. 2, 331). The hero of the work, after whom it is named, is Zangezi, a Khlebnikov alter-ego, who is capable of interpreting the language of the birds, insects, gods and stars and who attempts to explain what they say to the masses gathered together to listen to him. The birds, insects, gods and stars cannot express themselves in ordinary human language but must do so in Zaum, the *Ursprache*, the language beyond reason, a type of meta-linguistic communication based purely on sound. Zaum appears sporadically through the performance in forms which vary according to the area, or plane, concerned. It makes virtually no sense, even to Russian speakers, as only a few phonemes can be traced back to some recognisable Russian root, but it sounds appealing and in its own way appropriate to its subjects. Transcribed into the Roman alphabet and English phonemes, an instance of Zaum as spoken by the Greek god Eros is as follows:

> "*Mara-roma, Beebah-bool: Ook, kooks, ell! Rededeedee dee-dee-dee! Peeree, pepee, pa-pa-pee! Chogi, goona, geni-gan! Ahl, Ell, Eeell! Ahlee, Ellee, Eelee! Ek, ak, ook! Gamch, gemch, ee-o! Rrr-pee! Rrr-pee!*"
> (Douglas 1989, vol. 2, 333)

As can be partly deduced from the concentration of high-pitched vowels, this sample consists of bird-language as spoken by both the birds and the Gods. It is extra-human language, pertaining to beings below and above humanity in the traditional order of things. I have included this small sample to address readers' curiosity as to what Zaum might look like; however, it does not do justice to the poetic text, which has to be heard as Khlebnikov meant it to sound for its charm and originality to be properly appreciated.

Khlebnikov died in poverty at the age of 37, shortly after completing *Zangesi*, during one of the many famines the Russian people had to endure in the harsh post-revolutionary period. His early life, in which he studied mathematics and biology before turning to poetry, had been full of promise. His poetic talent and intellectual daring brought him fame while still relatively young, but by the time of his death his reputation had waned and he had come to be regarded as an eccentric, and a writer of gibberish. As in the case of William Blake, and to some extent even Tolkien himself, for many years the true value of Khlebnikov's contribution to European and World literature was overshadowed by his reputation as an eccentric mystic and visionary. With the passing of time, however, his work has been re-appraised and he is now widely regarded as one of the most important Russian poets of the 20th century, and one of Russia's greatest linguistic innovators.

As for Zaum, while Khlebnikov's universal tongue never got past the stage of phonetic and graphic experimentation, it has continued to fascinate poets and artistic creators over the decades. The poems written by Khlebnikov in both Russian and his transmental language are still readily available in print and they are sometimes recited, alongside performances of his theatrical creations, by modern theatre companies. In addition, as

mentioned above, Zaum played a decisive role in the early formation of Roman Jakobson's linguistic theories, which are among the most influential of the 20th century.

Despite their obvious differences as regards personal background and literary focus, it can been seen that Tolkien and Khlebnikov coincided on a number of essential points. There is a strong nationalistic element in their efforts, as Tolkien pursued his "Mythology for England" while Khlebnikov sought to construct his transrational language solely from Russian roots; their creations are purely aesthetic in origin; sound-symbolism is a fundamental component; both authors believed in the communicative power of words over and above their conventional meanings; and they sought to find new methods of graphic representation (Tolkien's Tengwar and Cirth, Khlebnikov's hieroglyphs) that would be capable of visually depicting their invented languages in a satisfactory manner. There is no indication anywhere in his writings that Tolkien knew about or was influenced by the Russian symbolists and futurists, yet one cannot but be intrigued by this curious series of interconnections between the avant-garde poet from Astrakhan and the great Oxford philologist. The above account of Khlebnikov's art also reminds us, once again, that Tolkien was not as isolated as is often thought in his endeavours to link sound and meaning and to create language from purely aesthetic sources.

Sarati, Tengwar and Cirth

Tolkien was, above all, a perfectionist, and he strove to maximise the internal coherence and logic of his invented languages and mythology. The elves were intelligent, sensitive creatures with sophisticated linguistic skills and therefore it was inevitable that at a fairly early stage in their existence they would need to invent writing. However, to make his invented universe consistent with our experience in the real world, and thus more believable, a fully-fledged alphabet could not be allowed simply to appear out of nowhere. Some degree of evolution was required and accordingly Tolkien

invented a number of scripts for the elves (and subsequently for men and dwarves) which followed a recognisable course of development.

In his mythology, writing was invented early on in the elven homeland of Valinor by an ancient Elvish sage called Rúmil, "who first achieved fitting signs for the recording of speech and song" (*S* 63). The great hero Fëanor, artist, creator and formidable warrior, subsequently developed a new script based on Rúmil's signs which was called Tengwar ("letters" in Quenya) and took it with him when he and his followers decided to forsake Valinor and return to Middle-earth. In the meantime, the elves that had remained in Middle-earth had invented their own, more simple, writing system called the Cirth ("runes" in Tengwar). After its arrival from Valinor the Fëanorian Tengwar system became the main alphabet for the elves and was also adopted by men for their written records on paper and parchment. The dwarves, however, more accustomed to inscribing letters on stone than writing them in ink, retained their preference for the Cirth. At the time of the events described in *The Lord of the Rings*, therefore, there were two dominant writing systems in Middle-earth, the Tengwar alphabet and the Cirth runes, both of which are described in detail in Appendix E to *The Lord of the Rings*.

As was the case with his private languages, Tolkien's scripts followed a parallel development in his fictitious world and his real life. In his biography, Humphrey Carpenter tells us that in 1919 Tolkien started to keep a diary, coinciding with the commencement of a new stage in his life as a married man with a steady job – working as an assistant on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) – and a home of his own. There is nothing unusual about keeping a diary, but there certainly *is* something unusual about keeping one in a totally incomprehensible, home-brewed alphabet, as Tolkien did. He called it the "alphabet of Rúmil", after the inventor of the script in his mythology described above, and according to Carpenter it looked like "a mixture of Hebrew, Greek and Pitman's shorthand." Being the perfectionist that he was, Tolkien refined and adjusted his invented

script as he used it but unfortunately he did not always keep a record of the changes he made. This made his diary rather difficult to decipher, particularly as the Rúmil alphabet can be written both horizontally and vertically, and Carpenter was forced to make a considerable effort to be able to make sense of it in the course of his research for his biography of Tolkien. As time went by Tolkien came up with a new alphabet derived from Sarati (the Quenya name for Rúmil's script), this being the one referred to above as the Fëanorian Tengwar. In his later life Tolkien even devised a new alphabet for English which aimed to make its spelling more coherent, in which the Latin alphabet was supplemented by certain Tengwar characters, again using it to write his diary. The Tengwar script, like modern English and other Germanic and Romance European languages, is written from left to right, while the older Sarati could be written horizontally or vertically, from left to right or vice-versa, mirroring the less formal nature of the rules used to write ancient scripts in the real world.

The written Elvish texts that appear in *The Lord of the Rings*, therefore, are in Tengwar, which in appearance bears a certain resemblance to the Indian Devangari alphabet, used to write Sanskrit, Hindi and many other languages, and to the Tibetan alphabet, which like Devangari is derived from the ancient Brahmi alphabet of the Indian sub-continent. It is also similar to these languages in that it is syllabic and makes use of diacritics, i.e. marks above or below the main letters which indicate adaptations to the vowel phonemes. Tengwar differs from these and almost all other alphabets, however, in that the shapes of the letters are not arbitrary but have phonetic significance. According to Jim Allen (1978), Tengwar may be compared in this respect with the "Universal Alphabet" which was devised in the 17th century by another philosophical language inventor, Francis Lodwick, with regard to both the relation between shape and sound, and the appearance of the letters themselves. Lodwick was a predecessor of Dalgarno and Wilkins, who both acknowledged his significance. His aim, typically enough, was to devise a system of written characters that could

express ideas transparently and unambiguously, and which at the same time would be easily comprehended by English speakers. He was original in taking actions, or modes of action, as a starting point for his names, rather than nouns. Commencing from a basic stem, as in Tengwar, each new derivative mode or thing (say, from "drinking" to "drinking-house") gives rise to a new branch springing out from the stem to form the specific character. Meaning can therefore be deduced from the shape of the character, by those who understand the mechanisms. His system ran into numerous difficulties because reducing all parts of speech – abstract and concrete nouns, adverbs, adjectives, etc. – to modes of action is intrinsically unfeasible. Eco (1994, 225) mentions that, curiously, Lodwick's system is to some extent mirrored in the invented language of Jorge Luis Borges mentioned above in which there are no nouns, and therefore verbs such as "to moon" have to be used instead.

Unfortunately, Tolkien did not leave any clues concerning the origins of his invented scripts (with the exception of a couple of brief references to Anglo-Saxon runes) and therefore we cannot know whether he based them on Lodwick's alphabet or any other specific writing system, or whether he came up with idea of phonetic representation himself. Considering the fact that he seemed to spend most of his adult life musing over language in one way or another (one can imagine him alone late at night, staring at the embers in the fireplace or playing patience, puffing on his pipe and thinking of every imaginable option for personalising an alphabet), it is not unlikely that this idea was his own, but we cannot know for certain.

The letters of Tengwar mostly consist of a vertical line with other lines curving off to the left or right from this stem. These curved appendages may be single or double, open or closed. There are 24 basic letters and a number of additional letters to cover unusual phonemes or specific vowels (the exact way the shape relates to pronunciation is described in Appendix E to *The Lord of the Rings*, which can be consulted by anyone wishing to obtain a detailed account). The Tengwar system was used to write both

Quenya and Sindarin in Tolkien's fiction, and in fact can be adapted to modern languages as well, the variations in the allocation of phonemes and diacritics being referred to as "modes" in Tolkien's terminology. It was also used in *The Lord of the Rings* for writing the Black Tongue of Mordor in the well-known inscription on the Ring of Power itself ("One ring to rule them all, One ring to find them, One ring to bring them all, And in the darkness bind them").

We can imagine that Tolkien wished to achieve a double purpose with his Tengwar script; firstly, it had to be aesthetically pleasing, since it was specifically devised by him to represent his beautiful Elvish tongues; secondly, it had to look other-worldly, appropriate to a time and culture far removed from ours. The predominance of straight stems and sideways curves gives it a rather leafy, organic appearance, somewhat like a grape-vine growing across the page, which is accentuated by the dots and dashes of the diacritics. It certainly looks utterly different from our Roman alphabet, which seems spiky and disjointed in comparison.

The Cirth, or runes, are relatively simple in comparison with Tengwar and Sarati, due basically to the very limitations that any runic system must observe. Runes were devised in northern Europe in very ancient times, being used in oracular ceremonies and other rituals probably from the Bronze Age, and were grouped together to form an alphabet roughly from the 3rd century onward. Most authorities consider that the runic alphabets which became standardised and remained in use right up to the 15th century were based on the Roman alphabet, though others regard similarities between them as a coincidence and argue that rune shapes developed independently in the ancient Scandinavian and Germanic territories. Since they were devised for being scratched or burned onto wood, stone and bone, rather than being drawn on paper or parchment, the lines of runes must be strong and straight. They can only be vertical or diagonal, against the grain when carved in wood, since any line carved with the grain runs the risk of disappearing if the wood heals and closes.

The main runic system used in Anglo-Saxon England was called the Futhorc, after the sounds of the first six letters (the Scandinavian variation is called the Futhark, as the phonemes differed slightly), and this was the system which Tolkien used, by his own account, in the maps and illustrations in *The Hobbit* (*Letters* 15, 25). The use of runes in his fiction must have been a logical choice for Tolkien, thanks to their air of mystery and magic, and their association with the *Beowulf* period which he often wished to evoke. Needless to say, however, he could not go long without devising a system of his own and so he started tinkering with the existing options. As we have already seen, the runic system is necessarily rigid but Tolkien did what he could and changed the phonetic values of the Futhark runes to give the symbols his own sounds, based on criteria that unfortunately he never revealed, as well as inventing a few signs of his own. Thus, the rune which we are told stands for the "G" in Gandalf in *The Fellowship of the Ring* did in fact represent the "F" phoneme in the Futhark scheme. In fact, it looked suspiciously similar to the Roman F, which is probably the reason Tolkien wished to change it. The new, strictly Tolkienian system of runes is the one used in *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance in the inscription found by Gimli and the rest of the Fellowship on Balin's tomb in the Mines of Moria and in the "G for Gandalf" example given above, and is set out in full, with English phonetic equivalents, in Appendix E at the end of *The Return of the King*. Of course, this is not the only runic system existing in the history of Middle-earth: the dwarves' alphabet (known as Angerthas Moria) is an adaptation of the Elvish Cirth, suited to the particular phonology of their language, and the elves themselves devised different systems which varied according to the kind of Elvish they spoke and the degree of contact they enjoyed with other communities.

As usual with Tolkien's linguistic inventions, a certain amount of additional information is available. As well as the above-mentioned Appendix E, readers wishing for more detailed data on this area may consult the "Appendix on Runes" in *The Treason of Isengard: The History of Middle-*

earth Vol. 7 (HarperCollins 2002) which was compiled and published posthumously by Christopher Tolkien.

What did Tolkien achieve through the invention, or adaptation, of these writing systems? On a personal level, we can imagine that he gained a kind of satisfaction which was similar to that produced by the invention of languages, providing him with an attractive medium for the physical representation of his Elvish creations and also a coding system only he and a few others could understand. In his fiction, the effect is comparable to that caused by the sporadic appearance of his invented languages, in that the inclusion of Elvish and Dwarvish scripts and runes within the English text gives us a brief glimpse of what we imagine to be whole alphabets that must have been widely used in his imaginary world, increasing the "depth" mentioned in preceding chapters and providing a greater sense of realness inside Tolkien's secondary universe. The Tengwar and Cirth were also used widely by Tolkien for decorative purposes. They figure on the book covers he drew himself for the three volumes and the title page to *The Lord of the Rings*, and in his maps, drawings and illustrations.

VI

Tolkien's Languages in Peter Jackson's Film Versions of *The Lord of the Rings*

As we have already seen in the preceding chapters, in the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* and in other writings (basically posthumously published notes and drafts, and his letters) Tolkien provided a considerable volume of information on the languages spoken by the inhabitants of Middle-earth. These fall into three categories: the languages specific to certain beings such as elves, ents, dwarves and orcs; the individual "mannish languages" belonging to communities of men like the Rohirrim and Dunlanders; and the "Common Speech" spoken by the majority of men and hobbits, and used as a *lingua franca* by all creatures, also know as *Westron*. This common tongue, which Tolkien informs us was translated into modern English from the "Red Book of Westmarch" (a record kept in Westron by Bilbo and Frodo Baggins of the events that comprised the War of the Ring), itself varied considerably from one region to another, and particularly from North to South. In the appendix on languages he tells us, for instance, that in the north-western hobbit form of Westron the distinction between the formal and informal second person had gradually disappeared and that only the familiar form was in common use, unlike in the southern and more antiquated Gondor speech, where both forms (equivalent to "you" and "thou") were common. We are also informed that he conveyed the differentness of the Rohan form of Westron, under the influence of Rohan's own ancient language, by equating Rohirric to Old English and inserting a few words of Old English origin into the Westron spoken by the inhabitants of Rohan to reflect this mother-tongue interference. As for Rohirric itself and the other "mannish" tongues, while we are told that they exist by the characters in the course of the action (e.g. when we meet the wild men of the Druadan forest, when Aragorn sings in Rohirric or when the Dunlanders shout oaths in their

own tongue), they hardly appear at all in the narrative and almost all man-talk is represented by English.

Commendably, Peter Jackson was determined from the outset that Tolkien's passion for languages had to be reflected as faithfully as possible in his enormously successful cinematographic version of *The Lord of the Rings,* within the inevitable constraints imposed by the change in medium from page to film. He and his team therefore had to find a solution to two essential issues: how to represent Tolkien's invented languages of elves and orcs on screen, and how to reflect the regional and class variations existing in the Common Speech, which would evidently be represented by English in the film.

It may seem paradoxical, but the first issue was easier to solve than the second, probably because no "translation" was actually required and no nuances had to be found. An invented language has an immediate impact on an audience by reason simply of its strangeness and unintelligibility, and this simplifies matters. The film producers engaged the services of David Salo, a young American doctoral student of linguistics and recognised as one of the world's leading authorities on Tolkien's Elvish, to fabricate useable versions of Tolkien's constructed languages. His efforts logically concentrated on Quenya and Sindarin, though he also devised speakable versions of Dwarvish and the Orc language, which also figure within the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. Therefore, in the scenes of everyday Elvish the characters speak Salo's neo-Sindarin while for high-Elvish pronouncements, they declaim in neo-Quenya. The orcs, in turn, grunt and snuffle in neo-Orcish.

As may be expected, in terms of cinematographic impact the overall results for the constructed languages were very successful, though the credit for this must largely go to Tolkien himself and his devotion to his "secret vice". He spent his life perfecting the grammar and phonology of his Elvish languages in order to make them – literally – as beautiful as possible. Most of the hardest work, therefore, had already been done and Salo's job

consisted mainly of filling in the gaps in Sindarin grammar and vocabulary, so that Aragorn, Elrond and Arwen could actually pronounce whole sentences. The same can be said for Orcish, at the other end of the aesthetic scale. Again, Tolkien had laid down the phonological guidelines, and therefore the most difficult element in this linguistic exercise – making the orcs' language sound evil and threatening – had already been resolved. David Salo used this to construct a sufficient body of grammar and vocabulary to fulfil the requirements for Orcish speech in the film. Though some specialists have criticised his work, inevitably perhaps since he had some serious competitors for the position of language consultant on *The Lord of the Rings* project, it seems fair to say that Salo did a good job, and this is one of the few areas of the film which was resolved satisfactorily.

In true Hollywood fashion, no stone was to be left unturned in the quest for a convincing on-screen rendering of Tolkien's greatest obsession, so another expert, Daniel Reeve, was hired to deal with the written aspects of Tolkien's constructed languages. Again, the main work had already been done by Tolkien himself, through the invention of his Tengwar script and system of runes (see chapter V). Reeve, an artist, calligraphist and native New-Zealander like Jackson, produced the Tengwar documents and runic inscriptions that appear sporadically in the film in a partial attempt to recreate the "depth" which is such an essential component of Tolkien's Middle-earth fiction. The result is attractive, though it is curious that most of the Tengwar texts that flit past in the course of the film are written renderings of passages in English, not Elvish.[53] This has been discovered by *The Lord of the Rings* enthusiasts who have painstakingly analysed the DVDs of the films to find out what the writing on parchments and books, and the inscriptions on stone, actually mean, and have made their findings available on the Internet. Some of the Elvish and Dwarvish writings are taken directly

[53] In this Reeve imitates Tolkien himself who, for the facsimile-pages from the *Book of Mazarbul*, also transcribed an English text into Tengwar and runes.

from Tolkien's work, but much has been added for the delight and continued amusement of these enthusiasts, and also to provide artificial substance for some of the extra scenes added to the plot by Jackson (for instance, a detailed description of orc production from Saruman's underground factory at Orthanc).

Resolving the problems posed by the Common Speech was more complex, and the results less satisfactory. As mentioned above, in the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* and elsewhere Tolkien offered some information about the origin and development of Westron, and its regional varieties. Within the narrative itself, Tolkien used all the mechanisms that were available to him to reflect these varieties, though evidently the written word is severely limited in this area. Thus, the common, uneducated hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*, who in Tolkien's words spoke a "rustic dialect", employ an unsophisticated, countrified vocabulary and deviate from grammatical standard (for example: "A decent respectable hobbit was Mr. Drogo Baggins; there was never much to tell of him, till he was drownded"). The educated hobbits such as Frodo, Merry and Pippin speak correctly according to the standard and with more lexical variety than the lower-class hobbits. Their style of diction pertains basically to the educated, middle-class southern-British English of the mid-twentieth century, and accordingly they occasionally sound a bit twee by the standards of current English usage (e.g. when Merry expresses his concern about Frodo's wound: "I am dreadfully anxious about him; what are we to do?"). For their part, the elves, wizards, kings and princes, and the proud soldiers of Gondor, use a wide range of grammatical structures and a number of archaisms to show their superior cultural status and the long-standing nobility of their language (thus King Théoden of Rohan: "Behold! I go forth and it seems like to be my last riding."). The orcs, when they speak the common tongue, are given working-class accents and use colloquialisms appropriate to the lowest ranks of soldiers in any army and we can imagine that Tolkien was looking back to his own years of service in the Great War when he chose their style

and vocabulary ("Garn!"; "Now we'll have to leg it double quick"). Tolkien's choices inevitably reflect the social stereotypes of his time and for all of his narrative skill, Sam's country-bumpkin delivery and the orcs' exaggerated Cockney can seem a bit excessive to modern readers. In Tolkien's defence, it may be said that he did not have many other options available for differentiating between speaking styles, and what now seems an exaggeration may not have been such in his day.

Many more examples could be given of how accent and register are used for characterisation purposes throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, but the above should suffice to give an idea of the task facing the film production team.[54] Again, the first step was to bring in a specialist, in this case the experienced "dialogue coach" Andrew Jack. He spent sixteen months on the set in New Zealand together with Peter Jackson, defining the characters' accents and helping them to train their vocal organs to cope with the new phonetic demands. In Jack's words, this was "the biggest dialect and language challenge ever offered in the cinema." They studied Tolkien's indications and the solutions he offered in his narrative, referred to above, and in the end they found themselves to be subject to much the same restrictions that he was. Eventually, knowingly or otherwise, they adopted the standard Hollywood approach for heroic epic productions: the most important and dignified characters were to speak educated British English (the accent of English private schools usually referred to as "received pronunciation", or RP) while the lower-class or rustic members of the cast used accents associated with more geographically isolated or socially deprived areas.

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[54] Anyone wishing to consult a detailed description of how Tolkien used standard and non-standard speech forms to express social and educational status in *The Lord of the Rings* should consult "The Speech of the Individual and of the Community in *The Lord of the Rings*", by Nils-Lennart Johannesson (published in Peter Buchs and Thomas Honegger (eds.). 2004. *News from the Shire and Beyond – Approaches towards Understanding Tolkien*. Second edition. First edition 1997. Zurich and Berne: WTP, pp. 13-57)

For whatever reason, American film producers do not traditionally regard their own American accents as appropriate to the heroes of their epic productions and they invariably endow them with educated British-English accents instead, obliging American (and Canadian or Australian) actors to disguise their native pronunciation and inadvertently providing British actors with a minor advantage. One has to look no further than such recent epics as *Troy* and *Gladiator* to verify that this is still the case. The probable origin of this tradition is Shakespearian theatre: until relatively recently, it was unthinkable that the actors in leading Shakespearian roles should use any accent other than standard educated southern English, with rustic and low-class tones being reserved for the lesser members of the cast – shoemakers, labourers, court jesters, etc. – and this notion seems to have spilled over into historical-epic film productions in general. An outstanding example with respect to both heroic epic and Shakespearian cinema is the great American actor Marlon Brando, who for his portrayals of Fletcher Christian in *Mutiny on the Bounty* and Marc Anthony in *Julius Caesar* adopted an impeccable and entirely convincing RP accent. Other cinema productions of Shakespeare's plays, from Laurence Olivier's numerous Shakespearian films in the 1940s right up to the more recent versions of Kenneth Branagh, faithfully reflect this trend. We may therefore say that in phonetic terms, there is a direct link from Queen Gertrude to Queen Galadriel, and from the grave-diggers to the Gamgees.

It is particularly relevant here to emphasise the curious fact that the pronunciation of the /r/ phoneme after a vowel (e.g. saying ca*r*d rather than caad) is standard practice in American, Canadian, Irish and Scottish English, but has traditionally been seen as evidence of rustic ignorance or social deprivation in the English of England. In phonetic terminology, those who pronounce the /r/ in all cases (Scots, Irish, etc.) are said to have a rhotic accent, while those who do not (English, Australians and very few others) are said to have nonrhotic accents. The importance of this with regard to the question of accents in *The Lord of the Rings* is explained with admirable

clarity by Andrew Jack on his web site (www.andrewjack.com), the main points being as follows.

Concerning the hobbits, Jack says:

> True to Tolkien's ideas, we have based the accents of the people of *The Lord of the Rings* on varieties of UK English. We began with the Hobbits; since their accents were to be based on English accents and we were aware that we were looking for something timeless and rustic, we chose the speech of Gloucestershire which gave us everything we were looking for without being too heavily West Country. This is a rhotic accent and is spoken by all the Shire Hobbits except the Bagginses and the Tooks. Samwise Gamgee (Sam) can be considered a working-class Hobbit: he is the son of a gardener. Sam's accent is as strong as the other Shire Hobbits'. Bilbo and Frodo Baggins are educated Hobbits and considered slightly different owing to their love of learning and adventure. Their accent reflects the patterns of accents within the UK where the more educated the speaker, the less localisable and the closer to RP or 'Received Pronunciation'.

With regard to men, Jack continues:

> The people of Gondor, such as Boromir, Faramir and Denethor, spoke a more 'antique language – more formal and more terse' [here he uses Tolkien's own words]. We chose RP (Received Pronunciation) to represent this way of speech and coloured it with undertones of the speech of the counties of northern England (which are generally perceived as a little more terse). [As for the wizards:] Gandalf and Saruman both use RP to give themselves an air of authority and communication power without any identifiable place of origin.

In other words, Andrew Jack and Peter Jackson adopted the time-honoured Hollywood solution described above: nonrhotic RP for the upper classes, rhotic "West Country" for the common people. The learned wizards, the wise elves, the royal families of Rohan and Gondor and the Hobbit gentry employ classic Shakespearian tones to imply superior education and authority, while the humble hobbits, whether rustic or "working class", adopt standard rural south-western British to make clear their inferior status. This may be a comprehensible escape route from the pronunciation conundrum, but it lacks any originality and hardly seems worthy of all the hype. At the end of the day, Jack and Jackson have done nothing more than combine Tolkien's initial approach with the standard movie-industry method, sticking to reliable clichés that will be easily recognisable to cinema audiences. Nothing essentially new is contributed at all. Furthermore, it is curious to note that Pippin the hobbit and Gimli the dwarf both speak with Scottish (rhotic) accents. Jack offers a rather contrived justification on his site, based on a self-interested interpretation of Tolkienian etymology, for allowing the Glaswegian actor that played Pippin to retain his Scottish accent while all the other hobbits were required to speak Gloucestershire or RP. However, he says nothing about Gimli. The fact of the matter is that Pippin and Gimli belong to two entirely distinct ethnic and linguistic communities and it is highly implausible that they would share the same accent in Tolkien's imaginary world. We have to conclude, therefore, that the language team in the film version of *The Lord of the Rings* were willing to overlook this incongruity, and did not share Tolkien's perfectionist conviction that all aspects of his mythology and related tales had to be absolutely coherent and consistent.

VII

A Tolkienian Philosophy of Language

Tolkien had his own ideas about most subjects and was notoriously difficult to influence. However, in the field of linguistic theory (particularly in relation to the origin, development and essential purpose of language) his approach seems to have been affected to a large extent by Owen Barfield, one of the Inklings and a close friend of C.S. Lewis, whose impact on Tolkien's work has already been mentioned in chapters III and IV.

In her book *Splintered Light*, Verlyn Flieger cites a passage from Humphrey Carpenter's biographical work *The Inklings* in which Lewis tells Barfield how deeply Tolkien had been impressed by his work (he was probably referring to Barfield's *Poetic Diction*, in view of the date involved, 1928), saying of Tolkien that Barfield's notion of ancient semantic unity "had modified his whole outlook" (Flieger 2002, 34, from Carpenter, *Inklings* 42). This is strong praise from one as knowledgeable and sure of his ideas as Tolkien; yet there is perhaps an even greater, though less explicit, tribute to Barfield by Tolkien concealed in the pages of his fiction. In one of his letters Tolkien mentions a hidden reference in *The Hobbit* concerning his own "linguistic philosophy" which he says would be spotted only by those familiar with Barfield's work (*Letters* 15). The reference is to be found in chapter 12, when Bilbo sees Smaug's treasure for the first time: "To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all. There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful." The nod towards Barfield here is twofold: the inclusion of "breath" reflects Barfield's use of the Latin *spiritus* in *Poetic Diction* as an example of how meaning decomposes into multiple variants, while the reference to "the language learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful" relates to Barfield's notions about the original semantic unity of

language and reality. This is the only recognisable reference in *The Hobbit* to the ideas of any other writer or scholar, so its significance should be justly valued.

As well as the above references, there is no lack of indirect evidence concerning Barfield's influence on Tolkien's writings, as is made clear in the following succinct description by Verlyn Flieger:

> The path from Barfield's "Meaning and Myth" [a chapter title in *Poetic Diction*] leads straight to "On Fairy Stories" and thence to *The Silmarillion*. In "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien follows Barfield in arguing against Max Müller. In *The Silmarillion* he uses "to shine", the specific example proposed by Müller and refuted by Barfield, as the formative mythological and philological concept behind his fiction. *The Silmarillion* is all about light, light treated in just that manner that Barfield proposed and defended. It is something that begins as "a definite spiritual reality", becomes divided into "pure human thinking" and "physical light", and further divides, both as precepts and as words, into myriad fragments, all of which serve to express and describe Tolkien's world and those who dwell in it. (Flieger 2002, 69)

It is therefore understandable that Owen Barfield will be a notable presence – on occasions almost a spokesman for Tolkien and the other Inklings – in this chapter, in which an attempt will be made to describe Tolkien's overall theory, or philosophy, of language.

Language and Myth

Tolkien's theory of language developed partly as a reaction against other linguistic and philological currents with which he disagreed. He particularly disliked the notions of Max Müller about philology and myth (as did Barfield), these being the two disciplines closest to Tolkien's heart.

Additionally, as mentioned in preceding chapters, his writing reveals a general rejection of the structuralist ideas followed by Saussure and his disciples, with their emphasis on the purely communicative function of language and disregard for sound symbolism, and the restrictive logical approach championed by Russell, Wittgenstein and the logical positivists at Cambridge in the 1920s and 1930s.

Tolkien began his academic career as a philologist just after the "golden age" of philology had been truncated by the Great War. One of the leading figures of the latter half of that golden age was Max Müller, a German philologist, linguist, orientalist and philosopher, who exercised an enormous influence over the study of language and mythology. Like Tolkien, he spent the most important part of his career as a language professor at Oxford. Though less well-known nowadays, Müller was an intellectual powerhouse and a major academic figure of the Romantic era. His work covered multiple areas, ranging from a critical edition of the Hindu *Vedas* and numerous other studies of religious Indian texts to an English translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.* He was a pioneer in Europe in the study of oriental religions and comparative linguistics. In fact, Müller seemed to have an opinion on virtually every area of learning, and is reminiscent of the great 17th century thinker Athanasius Kircher, whose writings covered an admirably huge range of disciplines but whose work was, to a large extent, subsequently challenged and refuted by better-informed scholars. This does not detract from the fact that their valuable efforts laid the foundations for a considerable volume of subsequent investigation and discovery. Specifically, it was Müller's theories about the evolution of language, and the relationship between language and myth, that raised Tolkien's hackles, and Barfield's. In fact, if one specifically sought to devise a statement that Tolkien would have found radically irritating, one could not do much better than Müller's assertion that mythology is a "disease of language".

In *Poetic Diction*, Barfield takes it upon himself to refute Müller's ideas about the origin of language and words, and he does so with such eloquence and wit that it is worth citing his arguments directly.

Firstly, Barfield quotes the following paragraph from Müller's *Science of Language* where the great philologist confidently describes a putative "metaphorical period" in the evolution of human language:

> *Spiritus* in Latin meant originally blowing, or wind. But when the principle of life within man or animal had to be named, its outward sign, namely the breath of the mouth, was naturally chosen to express it. Hence in Sanskrit *asu*, breath and life; in Latin *spiritus*, breath and life. Again, when it was perceived that there was something else to be named, not the mere animal life, but that which was supported by this animal life, the same word was chosen, in the modern Latin dialects, to express the spiritual as opposed to the mere material or animal element in man. All this is a metaphor. We read in the Veda, ii. 3, 4: 'Who saw the first-born when he who had no form (lit. bones) bore him that had form? Where was the breath (asuh), the blood (asrik), the self (atma) of the earth? Who went to ask this from any that knew it?' Here breath, blood, self are so many attempts at expressing what we should now call 'cause'.

Barfield then provides us with his own scathing judgement of Müller's analysis:

> It would be difficult to conceive anything more perverse than this paragraph; there is, indeed, something painful in the spectacle of so catholic and enthusiastic a scholar as Max Müller seated so firmly on the saddle of etymology, with his face set so earnestly towards the tail of the beast. He seems to have gone out of his way to seek for impossibly modern and abstract concepts to project into that luckless dustbin of pseudo-scientific fantasies – the

> mind of primitive man. Not only 'cause', we are to suppose, was within the range of his intellection, but 'something', 'principle of life', 'outward sign', 'mere animal life', 'spiritual as opposed to mere material', and heaven knows what else. Perverse; and yet for that very reason useful; for it pushes to a conclusion as logical as it is absurd, a view of mental history which [...] might easily prejudice an understanding of my meaning, if it were ignored without comment. (Barfield 1928, 74-75)

A little further on, Barfield puts his own arguments in a nutshell:

> The full meanings of words are flashing, iridescent shapes like flames – ever-flickering vestiges of the slowly evolving consciousness beneath them. To the Locke-Müller-France[55] way of thinking, on the contrary, they appear as solid chunks with definite boundaries and limits, to which other chunks may be added as occasion arises. (Barfield 1928, 75)

There are two main elements here which are essential to understanding Tolkien's theory of language. Firstly, as Jorge Luis Borges also observed, words have a life of their own; the meanings of single words can grow, shrink or change radically over time, always carrying a trace of their previous avatars. Secondly, we must not project our own 21st century consciousness, our present way of thinking – indeed the way of thinking prevalent in any historical age – onto those living in preceding ages, and particularly onto the minds of humans living at the dawn of language and intellect, whose thought processes and modes of perception must necessarily have been utterly different from ours. The "meaning of meaning" is never fixed, but always fluctuating. At the time when, as George Steiner said, language was like flawless glass, perception must have been uncontaminated by

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[55] That is to say, Max Müller himself, the English philosopher John Locke, and the French writer Anatole France.

rational thought and it is absurd to try to restrict whatever it was that went through the mind of ancient man to the mere seeing of "material" objects. This insight is also relevant to linguistic perception in pre-literate and pre-alphabetic societies. As we saw in chapter II when Tolkien described his reasons for using archaic language for the utterances of King Théoden, modes of thinking vary from one stage of human development to another and modes of speech change accordingly.

As mentioned above in the quote from Verlyn Flieger, Tolkien referred directly to the work of Max Müller in his essay "On Fairy Stories", in which he laconically stated that Müller's theory could be "abandoned without regret" (*MC* 121). Like Barfield, Tolkien found Müller's idea that mythology is a disease of language to be absolutely unacceptable, and the end result of a line of reasoning that is mistaken from the start and gets worse as it progresses. By "disease of language", Müller meant, in essence, that mythology has its origin in the erroneous understanding or misinterpretation of words of ancient Sanskrit origin that were no longer understood by the only slightly less ancient persons that used them, leading to the creation of mythological figures as a kind of accidental by-product of linguistic activity. Tolkien had very different ideas and regarded language and mythology as developing in a parallel, symbiotic relationship in which each nourished and was nourished by the other; although, if pushed, he would have placed mythology in a position of precedence over language (*Letters* 180). This was as true of real language and myth as of his own creations. Tolkien was therefore keen to refute Müller's theory, since it directly opposed his own, and thus his affirmation, also in "On Fairy Stories", that if one had to talk about disease, then one would have to say that language is a disease of mythology, rather than vice versa (*MC* 122). Tolkien goes on to criticise Müller on two further occasions in the same essay. Firstly, he rejects those who, like Müller, argue that mythology arose simply from the observation of natural phenomena by ancestral minds with the other necessary ingredients being appended subsequently at undefined intervals, in a

cognitive process which is both unsupported and illogical (*MC* 123). Taking the Norse thunder-god Thor as an example, Tolkien says that it is essentially irrelevant, and meaningless, to ask: "Which came first, nature allegories about personalised thunder in the mountains, splitting rocks and trees; or stories about an irascible, not very clever, red-bearded farmer, of a strength beyond common measure, a person (in all but mere stature) very like the Northern farmers, the *boendr* by whom Thórr was chiefly beloved?" For Tolkien, the "mythological" meaning and the "linguistic" meaning have to be viewed as arising simultaneously. He therefore continues: "It is more reasonable to suppose that the farmer popped up in the very moment when Thunder got a voice and face; that there was a distant growl of thunder in the hills every time a story-teller heard a farmer in a rage." (*MC* 124).

Tolkien then objects directly to Müller's comments on the well known folk-tale theme of the "frog-prince", denouncing his dismal failure to understand the underlying purpose of the tale (Müller said that no intelligent person would believe that a princess could wish to marry a frog; Tolkien points out that the story is a moral tale designed to reinforce social values and prohibitions, not a narrative to be taken at face value – and anyway, the princess marries an enchanted human prince, not an amphibian) (*MC* 152). One gains the impression that Tolkien wished to clear Müller out of his path to leave the way clear for his own notions on language, myth and storytelling – and accordingly did so.

As has been pointed out on numerous occasions, both in this study and elsewhere, myth is an essential component in Tolkien's philosophy of language and in the creation of his own private languages. In his essay "A Secret Vice", he says the following on the importance of myth: "[F]or perfect construction of an art-language it is found necessary to construct at least in outline a mythology concomitant [...] To give your language an individual flavour, it must have woven into it the threads of an individual mythology, while working within the scheme of natural human

mythopoeia" (*MC* 210). Without its own mythology a language will die of starvation, as Tolkien claimed was the case with artificial languages such as Esperanto (see chapter V). But apart from giving it an "individual flavour", just what is it that myth contributes to an invented language (or to any language)?

Like the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer,[56] Tolkien took the view that in an initial state of human consciousness language, perception and myth were united. Then, as intellect intervened, the objects of human thought were assigned different meanings: mythical, linguistic, scientific. In pre-rational consciousness, "sun" is a single phenomenon containing all possible meanings, with no distinction between *mythos* and *logos*. Once the processes of a rational mind start operating, however, "sun" separates into various meanings: symbolic linguistic object, phenomenological natural object, and mythical or religious object (mirroring Barfield's fragmentation of meaning). In Cassirer's theory, in the subsequent evolution of human rationality the *mythos* side of meaning gives rise to the development of art while the *logos* side provides the basis of scientific development. But of course there is continuous interaction between both elements, since in their essence they are really one, and no absolute distinction can ever be made between art and science or, in Tolkien's view, between myth and language. Tolkien, Cassirer and Barfield also coincide in their view that the fundamental concept of metaphor is also present in this primeval awakening of consciousness. Language develops through a largely metaphorical process of semantic fragmentation while myth, for its part, is fundamentally symbolic in character, providing human communities with a metaphor for both the natural world and their own behaviour. The *mythos* therefore provides a natural source for the development and enrichment of the *logos*. Myth provides a base from which language can evolve. It is undeniably linguistic in

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[56] See in particular *Language and Myth* (translated by Susanne Langer). Dover Publications, 1953

its essence like practically everything generated by human imagination and ingenuity, but it also generates language, providing a framework for language to grow and climb. Words need to come from somewhere; the people that speak the language need to have things to talk about; a language needs to have subjects about which its users can argue and theorise. Just as religion has provided the subject-matter for pictorial art over countless centuries, so myth has provided a subject-matter for the millennial evolution of language. The gods and heroes of mythology gave poets the stories they needed to devise songs and sagas. The rights and wrongs of the actions of mythological and legendary figures provided subjects for argument, developing the finer nuances of language skills and creating more subtle modes of expression. Mythology itself is a rich source of words, expressions and aphorisms, which nourish the language's lexicon and enrich its expressive capacity.

Tolkien used the linguistic potency of myth to heighten the realism and density of his stories, providing a bridge between the remote past of Middle-earth and the epoch in which his tales took place. Hence, in *The Lord of the Ring*, the elves and Elvish-speaking figures sing songs dedicated to Beren, Eärendil and other legendary heroes and heroines; a soldier of Gondor says "May the Valar turn him aside" when attacked by a Mûmak; Frodo says "By Elbereth and Lúthien the fair, you shall have neither the ring nor me!" when threatened by the ring-wraiths; the name "Elbereth Gilthoniel" is used, variously, as a desperate shield by Frodo on Weathertop, a war-cry by Sam in Cirith Ungol, and an expletive of despair by Legolas at the sight of a winged Nazgûl on the banks of Anduin; in the dark of Moria, Aragorn says of Gandalf: "He is surer of finding the way home in a blind night than the cats of Queen Berúthiel"; and so on. In Tolkien's world, language (Quenya, Sindarin), myth (*Quenta Silmarillion*) and fairy story (*The Lord of the Rings*) live side by side and nurture each other, in a circular, symbiotic process. The names came first and the stories followed, said Tolkien, but the mythology was present in both.

Unity and Disintegration

Logically, of the above-named functions of myth in language creation, we can find examples for poems, songs, expletives and aphorisms in Tolkien's fiction, but space is not given over to theological or historical debates in Sindarin: these have to be imagined. However, we can look at the process for creating individual words from "mythological" sources, which in turn brings us to another pillar of Tolkien's theory of language, also related to Barfield, namely the notion of original semantic unity and subsequent fragmentation.

In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien's principal work on the mythology of Middle-earth which was published and edited posthumously by his son Christopher, the awakening of the elves is described as follows:

> By the starlit mere of Cuiviénen, Water of Awakening, they rose from the sleep of Ilúvatar; and while they dwelt yet silent by Cuiviénen their eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven. Therefore they have ever loved the starlight, and have revered Varda Elentári above all the Valar. [...] Long they dwelt in their first home by the water under stars, and they walked the Earth in wonder; and they began to make speech and to give names to all things that they perceived. Themselves they named the Quendi, signifying those that speak with voices; for as yet they had met no other living things that spoke or sang. (*S* 45)

Further on, in the appendix called "Elements in Quenya and Sindarin names" which Christopher Tolkien helpfully attached at the end of *The Silmarillion*, we are informed as follows:

> *êl, elen* – 'star'. According to Elvish legend, *ele* was a primitive exclamation 'behold' made by the elves when they first saw the stars. From this origin derived the an-

> cient words *êl* and *elen*, meaning 'star', and the adjectives *elda* and *elena*, meaning 'of the stars'. These elements appear in a great many names. (*S* 434)

Thus, we are told that the first-born in elvish mythology, according to Elvish legend as recounted by the elves themselves, emitted the expletive "*ele!*" upon seeing the stars, and from this they derived not only *ele* itself, to mean "behold", but also the noun for the celestial bodies themselves, adjectives for "starry" or "of the stars" (*elda, elena*), and elements in other more complex words and names: *Elbereth, Eldar, Eldarin, Elendil, Elenna, Elwing*, etc. These words subsequently entered the lexicon of habitual Quenya usage, and thus is vocabulary created from myth. There are many more such examples, which are available to us thanks to Tolkien's copious notes on the development of his languages and their related lexicons which were brought together and rationalised by Christopher Tolkien, principally in the just-mentioned appendix to *The Silmarillion* and in "The Etymologies" which are to be found in *The Lost Road and Other Writings*.

The above passages from *The Silmarillion* also encapsulate Tolkien's notions about the birth and early childhood of language, and his way of representing Barfield's ideas about original semantic unity and subsequent fragmentation. Firstly, the elves open their eyes, see the stars and say "*ele*!" This is the moment of semantic unity, the tongue of Eden. Stars, light, the heavens, the word, perception, all are one. But this does not last long: immediately the elves start to explore their surroundings, "making speech" and categorising their perceptions. As we have already seen, Tolkien chose his words with incomparable care and so we must assume that when he says "making speech" he is being deliberately playful with language, meaning merely "talking" on the one hand but also exploiting the ambiguity of "make" and "speech" on the other to give a secondary meaning of "creating language". The elves give names to the things they perceive: reality is thus fragmented into a series of separate objects, each with a name, and speech starts to be made.

The fact that the elves call themselves *Quendi*, those that speak, is of enormous significance in symbolic terms, since it reinforces the central importance of language in Tolkien's universe. They are the first sapient and "mortal" beings in Middle-earth (the Valar are deities); history begins with the elves, with their speech, and its fragmentation. This happens in a manner that we can assume reflects Tolkien's ideas about how real languages have developed since prehistoric times. The upheavals of Middle-earth's early history forces physical movement and migration upon the elves, who occupy different territories and break up into various groups, each of which uses language in a slightly different way from the others. Words take on new meanings, or agglomerate to form new lexemes. The name *Quendi* provides a good example itself, since within the process of increasing fragmentation and linguistic sophistication it becomes *Calaquendi*, combining *cala*, which pertains to the notion of "shining" to the existing word *Quendi*, to form the denomination for the Elves of the Light. We cannot long have light without dark, of course, and a name also had to be given to the elves that shunned the light of the Two Trees of Aman and remained in the dark of Middle-earth before the Sun and Moon were created. *Mor* conveys the notion of darkness (those familiar with Tolkien's fiction will recognise the dark places of Mordor, Morgoth and Moria) and therefore these elves were named the *Moriquendi*.

We can thus clearly appreciate how, in Tolkien's mythological universe, consciousness awoke in an Eden-like world of semantic unity among sign, signifier and signified. It then fragmented into more complex linguistic systems with the commencement of speech and naming. The likeness with Owen Barfield's theory is too obvious to ignore, as Tolkien acknowledged by means of the concealed reference in *The Hobbit* mentioned above. This notion of semantic unity followed by the (metaphorical) fragmentation of meaning, and the significance of myth discussed above, are the two basic elements of Tolkien's theory of language origin and development.

Verlyn Flieger sums the matter up in the following passage from *Splintered Light*:

> Mirroring the presumed linguistic history of our own world, Tolkien gives language a relatively late entry into Middle-earth. Long after creation and the wars of Melkor, the Elves, the Firstborn of Ilúvatar, awaken in the starlit darkness [...] With their coming to consciousness, language begins. With their language, their history begins. In any world this is an event of prime importance; in Tolkien's world we see it happen. Asleep, the elves are an unconscious element in the creation they inhabit and of which they are a part. With their awakening (and the word has both a literal and a metaphoric value here) they begin to be aware of and interact with their surroundings. With and through the Elves, Tolkien makes real the interdependence of consciousness, language and myth. (Flieger 2002, 72)

One final clarification should be included in this respect, since on the basis of the brief outline given above an unsuspecting reader could erroneously deduce that Tolkien and Barfield are simply reiterating the commonly held theory that originally language was simple in syntactic and semantic terms, and has become more complex as humanity has progressed. In fact, they held quite the opposite view, and Barfield made this clear in *Poetic Diction* where, as well as setting out his own reasoning, he cites Otto Jespersen's arguments from his book *Progress in Language* (1894) to the effect that in fact languages have become simpler, not more complex, as civilisation has developed. Ancient Greek and Latin, for instance, to take two relatively recent examples, are considerably more complex in grammatical terms than their modern counterparts, or than modern English. It is also essential to take into account that, although the original unity of object and meaning subsequently breaks up into myriads of meanings, the latter stage does not necessarily erase the former. Tolkien followed Barfield in believing, as

discussed above, that some trace of the original semantic unity could be found in many words. They stress as essential that the metaphorical values acquired by words over time were not somehow tacked on by successive generations of illuminati but rather, in Barfield's words, "were latent in meaning from the beginning [...] Men do not *invent* those mysterious relationships between separate external objects and between objects and feelings or ideas, which it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker" (Barfield 1928, 85-86). The opposite view, as posited by Müller and others, is the one Tolkien said could be abandoned without regret. Myth, meaning and metaphor are inseparable, and they all bubble together in the metaphorical "soup" of poetic creativity that Tolkien mentions repeatedly in his seminal essay "On Fairy Stories".

Saving the Poetics

> By divorcing itself from the intimate collaboration with poetics which animates the work of Roman Jakobson, of the Moscow and Prague language circles, and of I.A. Richards, formal linguistics has taken an abstract, often trivialised view of the relations between language and mind, between language and social progress, between word and culture.

These lines were not written by Tolkien or Barfield, although they clearly reflect their sentiments. They are taken from George Steiner's *After Babel* (1992, 496) probably the greatest single post-war work on comparative literature and philology. Steiner's comments, made in the early eighties as he looked back over the linguistic trends of the twentieth century, are - wholly applicable to the pre- and post-war periods when Tolkien and the other Inklings were at their most productive. Jakobson and Richards were already well-know figures, having produced paradigmatic works (particularly Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning*), but philology as an

academic discipline was struggling and academia had been won over by more "scientific", analytical approaches to language study. Barfield (1928, 62-63) complained in the following terms: "We have had, then, to the full, language as it is grasped by logical mind. What we have not had – or what we have only had in hints and flashes – is language as it is grasped by poetic mind."

In fact, Tolkien and Barfield happened to commence their professional careers just as one major period of linguistic investigation was ending and another was beginning. The first of these, as mentioned above with reference to Müller, was the great era of Philology (the term being understood in the restricted modern sense) which started in the late eighteenth century with the studies on etymology of William Jones and other scholars, and continued up to the outbreak of the Great War. The second was the age of structural and analytical linguistics, the start of which is essentially marked by the posthumous publication of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in 1915, and the appearance of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921. The former laid the foundations of linguistic structuralism, while the latter was essential in the development of the linguistic philosophy that underlies the logical analysis and positivist movement. Evidently, scholarly interest in philology continued after the war and continues today, but it was eclipsed to a large extent by the appearance of the dynamic new science of Theoretical Linguistics which was ushered in by Saussure and his followers.

A number of philologists and linguists found this trend disturbing and they reacted accordingly, making a concerted effort to refute the excessively rigid, systematic approach of the new linguistics and reinstate poetics and imagination to their proper place within the study and understanding of language. The best-known of them was I.A. Richards, who was accompanied by Jespersen and later by Jakobson, though perhaps the academic who has ultimately done the most to help the cause of poetry, imagination and aesthetics, albeit indirectly, is Tolkien himself thanks to the massive sales

of *The Lord of the Rings*. He has certainly reached many more minds than all the structuralists, positivists and generativists combined.

Tolkien was naturally opposed to the analytical/logical trends in the study of language because they attacked some of his most deeply felt beliefs, not just about language but about consciousness in general. Tolkien saw himself as an "old school" philologist, not a newfangled linguist. His position was made clear repeatedly in his lectures and letters. As we have already seen in an earlier chapter, he regarded himself as "professional philologist especially interested in linguistic aesthetics" (*Letters* 131); "a philologist by nature and trade (yet one always primarily interested in the aesthetic rather than the functional aspects of language)" (*MC* 231). Expression, imagination and beauty were fundamental to him, not just communication, as he reiterated in his essays: "Language – and more so as *expression* than as communication – is a natural product of our humanity" (*MC* 190); and: "The communication factor has been very powerful in directing the development of language; but the more individual and personal factor – pleasure in articulate sound, and in the symbolic use of it, independent of communication though constantly in fact entangled with it – must not be forgotten for a moment" (*MC* 208).

As already mentioned in chapter III, Tolkien could not possibly be in agreement with a theory of linguistics that negated, in the most absolute terms, the existence of any relationship between sound and meaning. This is precisely what Saussure's theory does, because a fundamental tenet of his approach to explaining how language works is to insist that the sound of words has no logical connection with their meaning. This principle is repeated time and again in *A Course in General Linguistics*: word-sound is arbitrary, and therefore the entire area of phonosemantics and aesthetics could be conveniently pushed aside, allowing Saussure and his disciples to concentrate on what they regarded as their essential task, that of constructing a "scientific", structuralist theory of language. This detached, scientific approach to language, with its denial of sound-symbolism and resulting

disdain for poetics, directly contradicted Tolkien's linguistic principles. As Humphrey Carpenter said in his biography with reference to Tolkien's precocious interest in language: "Philology: 'the love of words' [...] that was what motivated him. It was not an arid interest in the scientific principles of language; it was a deep love for the look and the sound of words, springing from the days when his mother had given him his first Latin lessons." (Carpenter 1977, 43). In Tolkien's view, language was a beautiful, mysterious, powerful creature, to be treated with respect and care, not some mindless beast to be laid on an operating table and dissected in search of a scientific structure; and individual words were precious, with their own internal life and packed with significance, not just dots in a diagram. For language scholars with a strong feeling for poetry, such as Tolkien, Barfield and Jakobson, it was unlikely that any attempt to explain language in such terms would ever get very far because it entirely ignored the fundamental areas of personal expression and aesthetic pleasure. With his habitual eloquence and stylistic economy, Tolkien condensed his essential beliefs in this area into the following paragraph in his essay "English and Welsh":

> The basic pleasure in the phonetic elements of a language and in the style of their patterns, and then in a higher dimension, pleasure in the association of these word-forms with meanings, is of fundamental importance. This pleasure is quite distinct from the practical knowledge of a language, and not the same as an analytic understanding of its structure. It is simpler, deeper-rooted, and yet more immediate than the enjoyment of literature. Though it may be allied to some of the elements in the appreciation of verse, it does not need any poets, other than the nameless artists who composed the language. It can be strongly felt in the simple contemplation of a vocabulary, or even in a string of names. (*MC* 190)

One thing is an "analytic", or scientific, understanding of a given tongue; quite another is a true appreciation of its essential aesthetic nature. In fact, the notion that language could be treated in scientific terms was a relatively new idea during the inter-war period when Tolkien was shaping his own linguistic theories, and one that was regarded by a certain part of the academic community as not worth taking seriously. As mentioned above, a particularly important and influential critic was I.A. Richards, a contemporary of Tolkien and Barfield, who was scornful of the Saussurean school's efforts and considered that they had it wrong from the very start. In *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923, 4) he openly scoffed at Saussure:

> How great is the tyranny of language over those who propose to inquire into its workings is well shown in the speculations of the late F. de Saussure, a writer regarded by perhaps a majority of French and Swiss students as having for the first time placed linguistic upon a scientific basis. This author begins by inquiring, 'What is the object at once integral and concrete of linguistic?' He does not ask whether it has one, he obeys blindly the primitive impulse to infer from a word some object for which it stands, and sets out determined to find it. But, he continues, speech (*le langage*) though concrete enough, as a set of events is not integral; 'Thus, from whatever side we approach the question, we nowhere find the integral object of linguistic.' De Saussure does not pause at this point to ask himself what he is looking for, or whether there is any reason why there should be such a thing. He proceeds instead in a fashion familiar in the beginnings of all sciences, and concocts a suitable object – '*la langue*', the language, as opposed to speech.

In Richards' opinion, Saussure's system was flawed from the very outset because he based his whole structure on notions which, it turns out, are

arbitrary and subjective. Accordingly, it was not worthy of much respect, a position that Tolkien would heartily have supported.

Another line of reasoning which was prevalent in the period just after the Great War, and which was also troubling to people of Tolkien's mindset, was that propounded by the school of logical analysis, which is a close relative of logical positivism and the precursor of the strictly language-focused philosophy of linguistic analysis. It was led by two men of undoubted genius: Bertrand Russell and Ludwig von Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's celebrated early work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, contained a large part of the philosophical groundwork and linguistic investigations on which logical positivism, and subsequently linguistic analysis, were based. The philosophical writings of Russell and Wittgenstein from this period are not easy reading, but certain basic principles can be condensed and put into plain language, and some of Wittgenstein's more memorable passages are expressed perfectly clearly. The best know of these, and clearly contrary to Tolkien's philosophy, is Wittgenstein's dictum with which he brings his *Tractatus* to a close: "*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen*", which was famously rendered in his 1922 translation by C.K. Ogen as: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."[57]

Wittgenstein reached this conclusion after affirming that most philosophical investigation was hopelessly flawed because it was carried out using an inadequate tool, i.e. normal human language. He says (*Tractatus* 6.53): "The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions." In other

[57] In their 1962 translation, Pears and McGuiness translate this rather less poetically as: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

words, ordinary language is not suitable for philosophical discussion because it is too vague, it is syntactically and semantically unsound. A consequence of this is that philosophers must devise a logical philosophical language in which to conduct their investigations, an ideal already investigated in chapter V; in the meantime, since our everyday speech is inappropriate for inquiry into deep ontological and metaphysical matters (God, Free Will, The Meaning of Life, etc.), the best solution is to keep quiet. People can think about what Wittgenstein called the "mystical", but talking out loud is pointless.

There is no specific written account of Tolkien's attitude towards the philosophies of logical analysis, positivism and linguistic analysis, but it is reasonable to assume that he was familiar with the theories involved. Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis certainly were, and as we know, Tolkien spent a considerable amount of time discussing philological matters with these two scholars both during the regular meetings of the Inklings and on other occasions – particularly with Lewis, without whom, by Tolkien's own recognition, *The Lord of the Rings* might well have never been published – and he was well aware of their attitudes with regard to language and consciousness. Therefore, bearing in mind Tolkien's closeness to Lewis during this period and his explicit acknowledgement of his admiration for Barfield's ideas about language and mind, it seems reasonably safe to assume that his opinions in this area closely mirrored those of his fellow Inklings.

C.S. Lewis's disrespectful opinion of the positivist/analysis school is revealed in Barfield's book *The Rediscovery of Meaning* (Middletown, C.T: Wesleyan UP, 1977), in which he quotes Lewis as having said that if linguistic analysis is correct, then "the history of the human mind since the beginning has consisted in almost nobody making linguistic mistakes about almost nothing."[58] As a defender of Christian principles, Lewis saw the

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58 Reference found at: www.owenbarfield.com, a very useful resource for anyone interested in Barfield's ideas.

positivists as his ideological opponents, even as his enemies, whom he was morally obliged to confront as and when the need arose. In a letter to a colleague from the fifties he complains about the "Logical Positivist menace" and the fact that positivism's proponents (led at Oxford by the celebrated philosopher A.J. Ayer) were giving the Christian apologists a hard time. In Lewis' rather bellicose words, "the enemy often wipe the floor with us" in the debates held at the Oxford Socratic Club.[59]

The reasons Lewis felt obliged to confront the positivist and analytical school (most notably in his book *The Abolition of Man*), particularly from the 1930s onward, are explained by his biographer in the following terms:

> [A]broad, Hitler and Stalin were defying all previously understood notions of decency – indeed inventing value or non-value systems of their own – while at home Lewis was finding himself, at the Socratic Club and elsewhere, with philosophers like A.J. Ayer who absolutely denied the possibility of attaching meaning to sentences which were not either verifiable through sense perception or verifiable as a priori truths. Into the latter category Ayer and the other logical positivists would only admit certain mathematical and logical formulae. Such concepts as right and wrong, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, were dismissed from their vocabulary.
> (Wilson 1990, 198)

What may also be added is that logical positivism was an essentially atheistic philosophy and was led by the most famous self-declared atheist of the time, Bertrand Russell. Considering their denial of the existence of God and their refusal to accept as meaningful any utterance concerning morality and

[59] From the 2004 C.S. Lewis Lecture at the University of Tennessee, delivered by Dr. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, who quotes from *C.S. Lewis in Context* by Doris T. Myers (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 1994).

ethical values, it is easy to understand why Christian thinkers like Lewis, Barfield and Tolkien should regard the positivists as "the enemy".

Barfield followed Lewis in trying to adopt an essentially ironic tone when referring to these schools of philosophy but from his writing we can deduce a considerable amount of exasperation as well. He found the linguistic postulations of formal logic, logical positivism and linguistic analysis to be particularly obnoxious and repeated this opinion time and again in his many works. Looking at *Poetic Diction*, his first major work and the one that Tolkien so admired (though linguistic analysis and positivism are also mentioned in his other works *Worlds Apart, Saving the Appearances* and the above-cited *Rediscovery of Meaning*), we find that in the initial 1928 edition Barfield the philologist was already sceptical of the logical approach to the study of language. "To anyone attempting to construct a metaphysic in strict accordance with the canons and categories of formal logic, the fact that the meanings of words change, not only from age to age, but from context to context, is certainly interesting; but it is interesting solely because it is a nuisance" (1928, 61).

By the time he wrote the preface to the second edition of *Poetic Diction* in 1951, this scepticism had turned to profound irritation, as Barfield complained:

> There is a curiously aggressive note, often degenerating into a sneer, in the style of those who expound the principles of linguistic analysis. Before he even begins to write, the Logical Positivist has taken the step from 'I prefer not to interest myself in propositions which cannot be empirically verified' to 'all propositions which cannot be empirically verified are meaningless.' (Barfield 1928, 22)

A few paragraphs further on in the same preface, Barfield even expressed his concern that the notions of the positivists could have sinister implica-

tions regarding the future manipulation of language to totalitarian ends, recalling Orwell's Newspeak (see chapter V):

> If therefore they succeed in expunging from language all the substance of its past, in which it is naturally so rich, and finally converting it into the species of algebra that is best adapted to the uses of indoctrination and empirical science, a long and important step forward will have been taken in the selfless cause of the liquidation of the human spirit.

Finally, in the afterword to a reprint of *Poetic Diction* published in 1972 – almost half a century after the book first appeared – Barfield reiterates his aversion to logical analysis in the following rather exasperated terms: "It is a fact that almost everybody with a spark of life in his mind has long been finding the whole riddle-me-ree of analytical linguistics tedious to the point of extinction, while we in turn are seen by its exponents as dwellers beyond the pale in some nameless abyss of empty verbiage." (Barfield 1928, 214).

From these comments we can deduce that there were irreconcilable differences between the approach taken to language by the Inklings, and that supported by the advocates of analytical linguistics. As George Steiner and I.A. Richards also pointed out, in logical analysis there is no place for imagination or poetics, and these are the matters that were of the greatest worth as far as Tolkien and his friends were concerned. Tolkien was a poet and inventor of languages, passionately interested in the question of how language gives rise to pleasure in speakers and listeners, and how individual words can awaken the deepest emotions in sensitive minds. Language is often seen by those of a poetic and artistic inclination as the greatest gift of humankind, a subject that must be approached as a unique artistic and aesthetic phenomenon, not as a quasi-scientific system. For Tolkien and his kind, studying language only on the basis of logical structures and tree-diagrams was comparable to analysing painting from the viewpoint of chemistry and physics, and affirming that the essence of great pictorial art is to be

found not in the emotional and aesthetic response it provokes, but in the chemical composition of the pigments employed and the forces involved when applying paint to canvas.

It is also evident from his letters, essays and stories that Tolkien could not have any sympathy with the postulations of Wittgenstein, as cited above, in the sense that one should not talk about subjects that common language is inadequately equipped to tackle ("whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"). Along with Lewis and Barfield, he wanted to talk precisely about those complex areas that Wittgenstein described as "mysticism" and regarded as unapproachable in ordinary speech, the propositions which, in Barfield's words, the positivists classed as meaningless. As is well known, in his later years Wittgenstein modified his stance considerably and embraced a much less restrictive approach to language and consciousness, dedicating himself largely to the challenging task of refuting his own earlier theories. In the twenties and thirties, however, when Tolkien and his scholarly friends met regularly during Inklings sessions to read their poems, translations and stories, and to talk about theoretical matters of this kind, the early Wittgenstein, together with Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer, ruled the roost of linguistic philosophy at Oxford and Cambridge, and - somehow had to be confronted. The Inklings were a profoundly erudite and artistically sensitive group of people who wanted to share their ideas about an unlimited range of subjects: religion, philology, ethics, art or whatever else arose. As Humphrey Carpenter mentions various times in his biography of Tolkien, these hours spent drinking and talking with his fellow scholars and friends (all men, as was almost inevitable at that time) provided Tolkien with enormous pleasure, and were tremendously important for him from both an emotional and an academic viewpoint. It is therefore obvious that he and the other Inklings were going to dismiss out of hand any theorist that regarded these cherished moments as a waste of time.

We have already seen how Tolkien's treatment of myth and legend is partly a reaction against the theories of language development exemplified

by Locke and Müller. His artistic production, apart from entertaining his children and fulfilling his ambitions as a storyteller, is also a reaction against the structural, analytical and positivist schools of thought. He was an excellent lecturer and essay writer, but his true talent lay in fiction and, as we have already seen, it was through his fictitious creations that he tended to convey his most deeply felt convictions. Lewis and Barfield expressed their opposition to the logical-positivist school explicitly in their essays, but Tolkien preferred the medium of creative literature. His Middle-earth mythology and stories are a celebration of the irrational, the aesthetic and the romantic, in a world increasingly dominated by the rational, the scientific and the realistic. He refused to accept that the essential function of language was merely to achieve communication between human beings and regarded the aesthetic component as having at least the same importance, and so he wrote poetry and imaginative fiction. He rejected outright the notion that the sounds of the words we use in our everyday speech are just a meaningless array of arbitrary noises and spent a large part of his life crafting words with meanings essentially based on their phonetic components. He could not possibly accept that the languages fashioned and perfected by peoples in so many different times and places in the course of human development, containing such infinite variation and subtlety, were no more than shadows, pale and inadequate, of some true linguistic system in which philosophers could achieve untainted communication, and he made as many allusions as he deemed fit in his fiction to the whole range of subjects prohibited by the positivists: faith, belief, divine redemption and reward, goodness and wickedness. Tolkien's theory of language, therefore, is at the opposite end of the theoretical spectrum from the structuralists and analysts, and is more closely aligned with the less rigid approaches taken by his contemporaries Owen Barfield, I.A. Richards and Roman Jakobson, among others, who were capable of seeing language as worthy of analysis not just in terms of semiotics, but also as art.

Single Words

The final component of Tolkien's overall philosophy of language to be considered in this chapter – the others mentioned so far being sound-symbolism, semantic unity and fragmentation, mythological origins and the importance of expression and imagination – is his almost obsessive interest in individual words. At heart Tolkien was a philologist, as he repeatedly pointed out, and he looked at words as a gardener may contemplate the plants he tends, reflecting affectionately on how long they have taken to grow, whether they will stand up to current pressures, how they may or may not continue to flourish in the future. At other times he is more like a linguistic archaeologist, brushing the earth off some ancient, recently unburied lexeme with enormous care, to try to guess what it was for and who made it, and to contemplate its beauty. In either case, his approach was singular and extraordinarily focussed.

In a chapter called "Philological Investigations" in his book *The Road to Middle-earth*, Tom Shippey gives examples of some of Tolkien's early academic studies on Anglo-Saxon in which he produced lengthy and intricate papers devoted exclusively to the etymology and possible significance of single words. On one occasion, he was commissioned by the English Society of Antiquarians to provide an explanation for the unknown name *Nodens* which appeared in an inscription on the site of an ancient church which had been discovered in 1928. Tolkien's paper was published in 1932, and in it he described the possible etymological development of *Nodens* and related terms from pre-Saxon times all the way up to Shakespeare, in enormous detail. During the same period he published an article called "Sigelwara land" in successive editions of *Medium Aevum*, the bi-annual Oxford journal on medieval language and literature, in which he described his investigation of the Old English word *sigelware*. He was not satisfied with the usual translation given by Anglo-Saxon scholars of "Ethiopian", and therefore he tried to trace the word further back in time using the components *sigel* and *hearwa*, coming to the conclusion that since

the former meant both "sun" and "jewel" and the latter could mean "soot", the word did not refer just to black-coloured persons, but might relate to "rather the sons of Múspell (a fire-giant of Norse mythology) than of Ham, the ancestors of the Silearwan with red-hot eyes that emitted sparks, with faces black as soot." As Shippey points out, as well as its academic aspect, this imaginative interpretation has the benefit – albeit on very tentative grounds – of fitting one of Tolkien's fictitious creatures, the fiery Balrog, into a possible ancient northern legend, and also ties in with the combination of sunlight and physical jewels that make up the *silmarils*, the wondrous gems that give *The Silmarillion* its name. Tolkien himself admits that his interpretation of *sigelware* is almost purely speculative, but in any event it is difficult to imagine any other writer or academic drawing so much profit from a single, very obscure word.

We know that Tolkien showed an unusual passion for language from an early age, and his fascination with single words may have been accentuated even further by the time he spent working on *The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) – called just "The Dictionary" at the time – after leaving the army at the end of the First World War and before receiving his first university appointment. At that time the *OED* was still incomplete and Tolkien's job was to research the etymology of words to be included under "W". According to Humphrey Carpenter, he was told to start with *warm, wasp, water, wick* and *winter*. Thanks to his unusually profound knowledge of ancient Germanic languages he was quickly directed to concentrate on words of Germanic origin, which are especially plentiful under that particular letter. The work was obviously to Tolkien's liking, and in his typical way he often went far beyond his theoretical obligations, providing detailed essays on the etymologies of single words rather than the succinct drafts he was supposed to prepare. We know this because a few of the "slips" he wrote still exist, and can be compared with the entries that were finally

included in the *OED*.[60] Some of these were accepted almost word-for-word, and of particular relevance is his major contribution to the entry on “want”, one of the largest in the *OED*, and his analysis of “wan”; but most were substantially reduced because even in a publication as massive as the *OED*, certain space restrictions must be observed. He worked on the *OED* for close to two years before being offered an academic position at Leeds University; not a particularly long spell, but one which Tolkien thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from. He even went so far as to remark: “I learned more in those two years than in any other equal period of my life.” Considering how extraordinarily intense Tolkien’s scholarly life was, this is an impressive statement of the importance to him of the time he spent as a lexicographer.

Tolkien, therefore, loved individual words with a rare passion and this had powerful repercussions on both his academic and his fictitious writing, as has already been discussed above with reference to his contribution to Anglo-Saxon scholarship and the names he invented or adapted for his stories. The fact that each item in our lexicon was for Tolkien a potential world in itself meant that again, as with his objections to the overall approach of the linguistic structuralists and analysts, he could not contemplate as serious or relevant any description of language that regarded words as mere building blocks, or dots at which lines intersect in tree diagrams, or inert vessels of meaning that we fill or empty in a totally arbitrary process. Instead, Tolkien viewed language as something organic and spontaneous. In his short story *Leaf by Niggle* Tolkien used the tree as a metaphor for his own creative process, and this is also the most fitting image for reflecting his theory of how language grows from the seed of semantic unity and myth, and then branches out and divides into a multitude of greater and lesser boughs, terminating in fragile leaves which represent the individual

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[60] Tolkien’s time and work at the *OED* is described in detail in Gilliver et al., *The Ring of Words*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

words of human speech. These words flourish and fade, and may ultimately fall to the ground, yet the tree itself remains steady, eternally rooted in the soil from which it originally sprouted.

Conclusions

The purpose of this final chapter has been to bring together the strands studied in the preceding sections, as well as to place Tolkien's work in the context of the great linguistic currents of his time, and respond to the question of whether it is valid to refer to a specifically Tolkienian theory, or philosophy, of language. On the basis of the above evidence it would seem that the answer must be affirmative. Of course, Tolkien never wrote a book or paper called "My Theory of Language", but neither did Wittgenstein or Chomsky. What is beyond doubt is that a number of ideas and convictions can be identified in Tolkien's work which he consistently maintained throughout his lengthy academic and literary life, and which together form a coherent linguistic philosophy.

We can therefore affirm that the central tenets of a Tolkienian theory of language would be that myth and storytelling, poetry and imagination, are at least as important as structural and logical analysis; that speech has evolved from prehistoric semantic unity to modern complexity through a process in which meaning fragments, changes and becomes metaphorical without necessarily losing its primeval significance; and that any approach to language which does not take phonology into account is incomplete.

These basic principles of mythology, semantic fragmentation, imagination (or poetics) and phonosemantics are inter-connected in turn through the overriding concept of metaphor. The pervading presence of metaphor can be appreciated by taking each of these central themes in turn. Starting with mythology, and the closely related areas of legend and fairy stories which were so close to Tolkien's heart and which he strove repeatedly to explain and to dignify, it is self-evident that myths and legends are imbued with enormous metaphorical significance. Essentially, they are

mechanisms whereby mankind has sought to provide a comprehensible, symbolic account for the fundamental aspects of human existence. To some extent, mythology is little more than a metaphor for the human condition on a gigantic scale, a fact appreciated by language philosophers from Müller through to Cassirer. For its part, as we have already seen, the fragmentation of language is largely a metaphorical process, as concrete terms expand to include an increasing number of figurative meanings through metaphorical associations, which in the last instance also acquire poetic significance as they provide creative writers with the words they need to try to express that which cannot be conveyed in ordinary speech. Concerning poetics and imagination, it is again self-evident that metaphor is a fundamental component of poetry and all imaginative writing, to the extent that the term "metaphor" is often used to cover the whole of imaginative literary expression. This is the case, for instance, when Jorge Luis Borges says: "*la censura es madre de la metáfora*"; "censorship is the mother of metaphor." This should be taken to include almost all philosophical discourse from Socrates onwards, however much this must have disappointed the logical positivists. Finally, as we saw earlier in the discussion of phonosemantics, people have a clear tendency to associate certain sounds with certain notions or objects through a mental process which is entirely metaphorical, whether viewed scientifically in the context of Dr. Vilayanur Ramachandran's neurological model of how metaphors are generated (chapter III) or whether considered unscientifically as a product of our everyday imagination.

Myth and metaphor, semantic fragmentation and sound-symbolism: these are the cornerstones of the linguistic philosophy of J.R.R. Tolkien, the man who had been inside language.

The conventions and abbreviations recommended by the journal *Tolkien Studies* (West Virginia University Press) have been followed when referring to Tolkien's work. As there are so many editions of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, citations are by book and chapter as well as by page-number (referenced to the editions listed below). Thus a citation from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, book two, chapter four, page 318 is written (*FR*, II, iv, 318).

Abbreviation	**Text**
FR	*The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954; 2nd edition 1966.
Letters	*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 1999 (references by letter number)
Lost Road	*The Lost Road and Other Writings*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: Unwin Hyman, 1987.
LotR	*The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien; the work itself irrespective of edition.
MC	*The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: Harper-Collins, 1997.
RK	*The Return of the King*. London: George Allen & Unwin 1955; 2nd edition 1966.
S	*The Silmarillion*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: 2nd edition. London:HarperCollins, 1999.
TL	*Tree and Leaf*. London: HarperCollins, 2001.
TT	*The Two Towers*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954; 2nd edition 1966.

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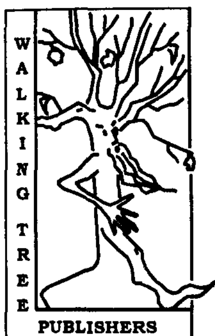

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