Quenti Lambardillion: A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

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Abstract
Examines the linguistic structure of three of the spells cast by Gandalf.

Additional Keywords
Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gandalf; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages

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Quenti Lambardillion

A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

Paul Nolan Hyde

With the writing of this second article, we have concluded that there will be greater virtue in alternating the focus of this column (at least for the time being) between Transcriptions from the various scripts used in Middle-earth and Translations from the various languages represented in the Middle-earth volumes. The best part of this decision had to do with the actual physical production of Mythlore. (I am actually writing this article before receiving the Fall issue.) We will proceed, however, with our original intent to have this feature be more of an open forum rather than a pontificating.

There are over thirty passages written in Middle-earth languages extant in Tolkien’s works. Chosing one or two to discuss is an extraordinary challenge. The semantic complexity of Quenya is enormous; Sindarin is dialect ridden; Black Speech, Laiquendi, Silvan, and the other languages are scantily represented or not at all. Some of the passages, however, have common threads, sometimes in conjunction with the narrative and sometimes in conjunction with the speakers. We have chosen three short pieces which have both narrative and speaker threads: Gandalf’s invocations of fire and his command to the West-gate of Moria.

Of the three spells which Gandalf cast while the Fellowship was in the Misty Mountains, the two cast on Caradhras are the most difficult because the Translation requires an understanding of the power with which Gandalf has been endowed. In both instances fire is produced, but no explanation is given as to what kind of fire it is or why it obeys Gandalf, other than the fact that he is a wizard. Being a wizard, however, does not allow Gandalf to set aside Order for anarchal magic. The key to understanding what Gandalf does and, thus, what is happening in the Translations of his commands, requires insight into the source of all being, the Imperishable Flame.

The first section of S, “Ainulindale”, recounts the origin of the Ainur and of the world.

And it came to pass that Iluvatar called together all the Ainur and declared to them a mighty theme, unfoldng to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed; and the glory of its beginning and the splendor of its end amazed the Ainur, so that they bowed before Iluvatar and were silent.

Then Iluvatar said unto them: ‘Of the theme that I have declared unto you, I will that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has wakened into song. (p. 15)

Later, Iluvatar says: ‘...I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall be...’ (p. 20)

In the “Valaquenta”, speaking of the music of the Ainur, Tolkien says: Iluvatar gave to their vision Being, and set it amid the Void, and the Secret Fire was sent to burn at the heart of the World; and it was called Ea. (p. 25)

All life and being is permeated with this Secret Fire or Flame Imperishable. In the case of Melkor and his servants, the flame has become negative, a dark or black flame. When Gandalf confronts the Balrog in the mines of Moria, the contrast between the two is clear:

‘You cannot pass,’ he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. ‘I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udun. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.’

The Balrog mad no answer. The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew. It stepped slowly on the bridge, and suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall; but still Gandalf could be seen, glimmering in the gloom; he seemed small, and altogether alone: grey and bent, like a wizened tree before the onset of a storm.

From out of the shadow a great red sword leaped flaming. Glamdring glittered white in answer.

There was a ringing crash and a stab of white fire. The Balrog fell back and its sword flew up in molten fragments. The wizard swareyed on the bridge, stepped back a pace, and then again stood still.

‘You cannot pass!’ he said.

With a bound the Balrog leaped full upon the bridge. Its whip whirled and hissed.

‘He cannot stand alone!’ cried Aragorn suddenly and ran back along the bridge. ‘Elendil!’ he shouted.

‘I am with you Gandalf!’

‘Gondor!’ cried Boromir and leaped after him.

At that moment Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge before him. The staff broke asunder and fell from his hand. A blinding sheet of white flame sprang up. The bridge cracked. Right at the Balrog’s feet it broke, and the stone upon which it stood crashed into the gulf, while the rest remained, poised, quivering like a tongue of rock thrust out into emptiness.

With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadowplunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard’s knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered and fell, grasping vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. ‘Fly you fools!’ he cried, and was gone.

The fires went out, and blank darkness fell.

(1, 344-5)

Gandalf as a servant of the Secret Fire has lawful authority to call upon it wherever it may be found. The question is what happens when he does call upon it. With regard to the two spells on Caladhras, Gandalf is apparently calling the Imperishable Flame out of the objects he commands. When Boromir asks if they could build a fire against the storm, Gandalf responds:
"You can make a fire, if you can," answered Gandalf. "If there are any watchers that can endure this storm, then they can see us fire or no.'

But though they had brought wood and kindlings by the advice of Boromir, it passed the skill of Elf or even Dwarf to strike a flame that would hold amid the swirling wind or catch in the wet fuel. At last reluctantly Gandalf himself took a hand. Picking up a faggot he held it aloft for a moment, and then with a word of command, *naur an edraith ammen!* he thrust the end of his staff into the midst of it. At once a great spout of green and blue flame sprang out, and the wood flared and sputtered.

'If there are any to see, then I at least am revealed to them,' he said. 'I have written Gandalf is here in signs that all can read from Rivendell to the mouths of Anduin.' (1, p. 304)

There was no objection to normal fire, but Gandalf's fire, tapping as it did the very source of life and existence, was a tell-tale sign of his presence. With this as a foundation, it is possible to proceed with the Translation of Gandalf's command for fire starting.

```
fire for me open (collective imperative)
1 2 3 4 5
say (past) (1st per.sing.)
6 7 8
amm e n
```

The Sindarin passage is quite similar in construction as the one given above.

```
fire for (1st per. sing.) open (coll. imp.)
1 2 3 4 5
naur a(n) n edra(a)ith
say (past) (1st per.sing.) fire overwhelm
6 7 8 9 10
amm e n naur d(i)
```

#10-#13 is the most difficult to speculate about, again because the overall corpus of the passage is so small, but the interpretation is consistent with the structure and lexicon of Sindarin. This kind of vowel telescoping is encountered frequently in the language. #1-#8 is precisely the same as the first Translation discussed. #9-#16 translates as if Gandalf were saying, "Secret Fire, overwhelm the host of the werewolves for me".

The third passage involving one of Gandalf's spells is found on page 320 of the *Fellowship*. Here Gandalf attempts to open the West-gate by way of a Sindarin incantation. This one is for you. Many of the elements can be found in Ruth Noel's little book on Middle-earth languages. A more exhaustive source for Elvish morphology is Jim Allen's *An Introduction to Elvish*, Bob Foster's *Guide* is helpful as well. The thing to remember about Tolkien's languages is that the more profound and complex the translation is, especially if it enriches the flow of the narrative (and vice versa), the more the Translation is apt to be correct.

**GLOSSARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aith</td>
<td>(collective imperative); Translation derived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an</td>
<td>for; Allen, 71; <em>Road</em>, 50; PNH-130,131</td>
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<tr>
<td>amm</td>
<td>say; Allen, 71; PNH-106; Trans.dr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>an(n)u</td>
<td>west, western, of the west; Allen, 72; PNH-195</td>
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<td>beth</td>
<td>word; S, 363; PNH-62; see quen, quetta, lasto, Tammen</td>
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<tr>
<td>d(i)</td>
<td>overwelm, beneath; <em>Road</em>, 64; Allen, 75; see <em>Dingthorth</em>, PNH-32,33</td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>(past tense marker); Trans.dr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>edhel</td>
<td>elf; Allen, 77; S,348; PNH-26; see el, elda, edhil</td>
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<tr>
<td>edra(a)</td>
<td>open; Allen, 77;PNH-32; Trans. dr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>fen</td>
<td>door, gate; Trans. drv; PNH-38</td>
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<tr>
<td>hi</td>
<td>this; Trans.drv; PNH-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>hoth</td>
<td>people, men, horde, host; Allen, 81; S, 359; see <em>Dingthorth</em>, PNH-116</td>
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<td>i</td>
<td>the, (pl.art.); Allen, 76; PNH-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>lam</td>
<td>tongue, voice; Allen, 82; PNH-23</td>
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<tr>
<td>len</td>
<td>way; Allen, 82; S, 338; PNH-70, 72</td>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>(1st per.sing.); me, I; Allen, 85; PNH-1, 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>nas</td>
<td>passages; Trans. drv.</td>
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<td>naur</td>
<td>fire; III, 415;S, 362; PNH-53</td>
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<td>ngaur</td>
<td>werewolf; Trans.drv;PNH-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>nog</td>
<td>dwarf; Allen, 85; PNH-145</td>
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<tr>
<td>non</td>
<td>gate; Trans. drv.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(o)</td>
<td>(imperative marker); Trans.drv.</td>
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continued on page 32
need to find Merlin. According to some of the
great number, host (coll.pl.); Allen, 88;U,
rim S the second time. Merlin must once more partici-
pate in the deliverance of the Fisher-King
(Ransom), and Logres. Merlin's existence is
more plausible because of the Fisher-King. If
the Fisher-King, or one of his descendants is
alive in twentieth century England, why couldn't Merlin be walking the Earth? The whole
idea of the Fisher-King leads to Merlin's wak-
ing, which leads to the awakening of the spir-
its, such as St. Charity.

The Fisher-King is finally healed this
time. In the grail stories, he sometimes is
healed, but more often is not. Only now is
he fully healed and the enchantments (in twen-
tieth century England, the influence of the
N.I.C.E.) are removed from England. Logres
seems to be permanently restored. Jane, act-
ing as Perceval in some instances, fulfills
her part in the resurrection of Logres. The
child she may later bear will eventually be
the new Pendragon, the heir to Ransom, the
Fisher-King. The Fisher-King legend has been
completed.

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 Allen, An Introduction to Elvish
S, The Silmarillion
Road, The Road Goes Ever On
PNH, Computer derived glossary, Appendix A, Linguistic
Techniques Used to Develop Character in the Works
of J.R.R. Tolkien, Purdue University (1982)

The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award

Christine Lowentrout, the Steward in charge of the
Mythopoeic Fantasy Award, would like to thank last
year's selection committee, and to announce that mem-
bers of the Society who wish to nominate a book (fan-
tasy in category, published in 1982) for the 1982 Award,
or who wish to serve on this year's selection com-mittee,
should write to her by March 1, 1983, at 115 5th
St. #2, Seal Beach, CA 90740. Committee members
must be willing to read all five of the final runners off.
The nominations received by March 1 will be sent to the
committee within ten days. Committee members
will have until April 15 to select five books from the
list and to mail their choices back to her.

We realize that this is the weak link in the system
--expecting the committee to be familiar with a list of
books before the final reading period, but most of the
committee last year assured us (when we first tired
this system) that they were indeed familiar with most of
the new works in the genre, which was why they
volunteered to serve on the committee in the first place!

Within ten days after April 15 the committee will
receive a list of the five works with the most nomi-
 nations. They will have until July 15 to read (or reread)
the five works, and to return the list with the five list-
ed in order of preference. The book with the most
points will be announced at the August Conference.

The University of Otherwhere

Announcement of Course Offerings

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

History 201. The Kingdom of Narnia, from
Frank to Tirian. A survey course with special
emphasis on the reign of Caspian the Sea-
farer. Dr. Cornelius.

History 141-2. Hobbits in the Third Age.
Guided research in the Red Book of Westmarch
and other documents. There in the fall sem-
ester, Back Again in the spring. Instructor,
Mr. Bilbo Baggins.

DEPARTMENT OF MAGIC

Applied Wizardry 201-2. Simple spells, read-
ing the runes, and fancy fireworks, taught by
Gandalf the Grey. Note: Candidates for more
advanced study will be subjected to piercing
scrutiny.

Gramaire 1 and 2. Lore of Logres, taught by
Master Merlinus Ambrosius. Field research in
Broceliande, spring semester.

Gradalogy 606. De Retz and other reputations
re-examined; medieval darkness probed. Pro-
fessor Giles Tumulty. Laboratory experiments
with selected volunteers.

COMBINED MAJOR IN WOMEN'S STUDIES:

Philosophy 3. The Platonic Ideas as they en-
ter the world of reality. Dr. Damaris Tighe.

English 215. The Mystical Marriage: Donne's
poetry re-examined in the light of practical
experience. Mrs. Jane Tudor Studdock.

LINGUISTICS AND PHILOSOPHY

Introduction to Old Solar, I and II. Hressa-
Hlab as spoken by the various rational beings
within the Field of Arbol, with an excursus on
the dating of Surnibur. Dr. Elwin Ransom.

Logic 123. The impossibility of a credible
contemporary angelology is conclusively demon-
strated. Mr. McPhee.

 Philosophy 01. It's all in Plato; why look
further? Professor Digory Kirke.

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Water Sports 509. Messing about in boats,
taught by two experts.

Self-Realization 1. Motor Mechanics, Martial
Arts, and Singing. BY MR. TOAD.

Mary M Stolzenbach