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Quenti Lambardillion: A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

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Quenti Lambardillion: A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

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 dialects 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. Choosing 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 Caradhas 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, unfolding 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 had no answer. The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew. It stepped slowly on to 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 swayed 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 shadow plunged 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. (I, 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, aur 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.' (I, 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
aur	a(n)	n	edr(a)	aith

say	(past)	(1st per.sing.)
6	7	8
amm	e	n

Because of the limited corpus and the possible differences of Gandalf's Sindarin dialect, some of the elements must be speculative with regard to their translation. The basis for this and other Translations is a computer-derived glossary developed as part of my dissertation at Purdue University. I will include the entries pertinent to these three Sindarin passages at the end of this article. The only obscure element is #5 which I have suggested is some kind of collective imperative. Thus, Gandalf may very well be saying, "Fire open up for me, I said it."

When the werewolves attacked the Fellowship a short time after the above incident, Gandalf is again compelled to call upon the Flame Imperishable.

In the wavering firelight Gandalf seemed suddenly to grow: he rose up, a great menacing shape like a monument of some ancient king of stone set upon a hill. Stooping like a cloud, he lifted a burning branch and strode to meet the wolves. They gave back before him. High in the air he tossed the blazing brand. It flared with a sudden white radiance like lightning; and his voice rolled like thunder.

Naur an edraith ammen! Naur dan i ngaurhoth! he cried.

There was a roar and a crackle, and the tree above him burst into a leaf and bloom of blinding flame. The fire leaped from tree-top to tree-top. The whole hill was crowned with dazzling light. The swords and knives of the defenders shone and flickered. The last arrow of Legolas kindled in the air as it flew, and plunged burning into the heart of the great wolf chieftain. All the others fled.

Slowly the fire died till nothing was left but falling ash and sparks; a bitter smoke curled above the burned tree-stumps, and blew darkly from the hill, as the first light of dawn came dimly in the sky. Their enemies were routed and did not return. (I, p. 312)

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
aur	a(n)	n	edr(a)	aith

say	(past)	(1st per.sing.)	fire	overwhelm
6	7	8	9	10
amm	e	n	aur	d(i)

(imp.)	for	(1st per.sing)	the	werewolf	host
11	12	13	14	15	16
(o)	a(n)	n	i	ngaur	hoth

#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

aith	S	(collective imperative); Translation derived
a(n)	S	for; Allen, 71; Road, 58; PNH-130,131
amm	S	say; Allen, 71; PNH-106; Trans.driv.
an(n)(u)	S	west, western, of the west; Allen, 72; PNH-195
beth	S	word; S, 363; PNH-62; see quen, quetta, lasto, Tammen
d(i)	S	overwhelm, beneath; Road, 64; Allen, 75; see di'ngurthos; PNH-32,33
e	S	(past tense marker); Trans.driv.
edhel	S	elf; Allen, 77; S,348; PNH-26; see el, elda, edhil
edr(a)	S	open; Allen, 77;PNH-32; Trans. driv.
fen	S	door, gate; Trans. driv; PNH-38
hi	S	this; Trans.driv.; PNH-69
(h)oth	S	people, men, horde, host; Allen, 81; S, 359; U, 313; PNH-116
i	S	the, (pl.art.);Allen, 76; PNH-15
lamm	S	tongue, voice; Allen, 82; PNH-23
len	S	way; Allen, 82; S, 338; PNH-70, 72
n	S	(1st per.sing.), me, I; Allen, 85; PNH-1, 2
nas	S	passage; Trans. driv.
aur	S	fire;III, 415;S, 362; PNH-53
ngaur	S	werewolf; Trans.driv;PNH-94
nog	S	dwarf; Allen, 85; PNH-145
non	S	gate; Trans. driv.
(o)	S	(imperative marker); Trans.driv.

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need to find Merlin. According to some of the grail stories, it was Merlin who helped Perceval find and cure the Fisher-King the second time. Merlin must once more participate 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 descendents 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 waking, which leads to the awakening of the spirits, 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 twentieth century England, the influence of the N.I.C.E.) are removed from England. Logres seems to be permanently restored. Jane, acting 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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rim S great number, host (coll.pl.); Allen, 88; U, 318; S, 363; PNH-65, 66

Allen, An Introduction to Elvish

S, The Silmarillion

U, Unfinished Tales

Road, The Road Goes Ever On

PHN, 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 Lowentrou, the Steward in charge of the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award, would like to thank last year's selection committee, and to announce that members of the Society who wish to nominate a book (fantasy in category, published in 1982) for the 1982 Award, or who wish to serve on this year's selection committee, 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 nominations. They will have until July 15 to read (or reread) the five works, and to return the list with the five listed 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 Seafarer. 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 semester, Back Again in the spring. Instructor, Mr. Bilbo Baggins.

DEPARTMENT OF MAGIC

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

Gramarye 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. Professor Giles Tumulty. Laboratory experiments with selected volunteers.

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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 demonstrated. Mr. McPhee.

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

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Mary M Stolzenbach