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# Quenti Lambardillion

## **Abstract**

A history of the languages of Middle-earth and their relationships with each other.

## **Additional Keywords**

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages

# Quenti Lambardillion

## A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

### Paul Nolan Hyde

## The Languages of Middle-earth

### Part I

As has been demonstrated in previous columns, Tolkien's theory of language is inexorably connected with culture and history. An understanding of the historical relationship among the speaking beings of Middle-earth facilitates an understanding of the nature of the relationship among their languages. A careful reading of the "Ainulindale", the "Valaquenta", and the related material in Unfinished Tales helps delineate these relationships.

Eru is the ultimate source of all being and the act of creation brings about different kinds of beings: those that are called the "offspring of Eru's thought", the Ainur (S,15) and the Maiar (S,30); the "children of Eru", Men and Elves (S,18); the physical creations of Aule, the Dwarves (S,43), which were given life by Eru (S,44); and the product of the thought of Yavanna, the Ents (S,45-46).

Of the Ainur, the "Ainurindale" recounts:

Thus it came to pass that of the Ainur some still abode with Iluvatar beyond the confines of the World; but others, and among them many of the greatest and the most fair, took leave of Iluvatar and descended into it. But this condition Iluvatar made, or it is the necessity of their love, that their power should thence forward be contained and bounded in the World, to be within it forever, until it is complete, so that they are its life and it is theirs. And therefore they are its life and it is theirs. And therefore they are named the Valar, the Powers of the World (S,20).

Melkor, later referred to as Morgoth, is one of the Valar who rebelled against Eru and attempted to take Arda for his own.

Of the Maiar, the "Valaquenta" says:

With the Valar came other spirits whose being also began before the World, of the same order as the Valar of a less degree. These are the Maiar, the people of the Valar, and their servants and helpers. Their number is not known to the Elves, and few have names in any of the tongues of the children of Iluvatar; for though it is otherwise in Aman, in Middle-earth the Maiar have seldom appeared in form to Elves and Men (S,30).

Notable exceptions to this policy of non-appearance were the Istari, certain Maiar like Melian, and those Maiar seduced by Melkor. The Istari, or Wizards, were sent by the Valar to counter the power of Sauron. The account in Unfinished Tales reads:

Who would go? For they must be mighty, peers

of Sauron, but must forgo might, and clothe themselves in flesh so as to treat on equality and win the trust of Elves and Men. But this would imperil them, dimming their wisdom and knowledge, and confusing them with fears, cares, and wearinesses coming from the flesh (U,393).

Tolkien says in another place:

We must assume that they [the Istari] were all Maiar, that is, persons of the 'angelic' order, though not necessarily of the same rank. The Maiar were 'spirits', but capable of self-incarnation, and could take 'human' (especially Elvish) forms (U,394).

Of the five Istari sent to Arda, the Middle-earth names of only three are given: Saruman [Curumo], Radagast [Aiwendil], and Gandalf [Olorin] (U,388-402).

Of the Maia Melian it is said:

Melian was the name of a Maia who served both Vana and Este; she dwelt long in Lorien, tending the trees that flower in the gardens of Iromo, ere she came to Middle-earth. Nightengales sang about her wherever she went (S,30).

Melian loved the Elf, Elu Thingol, and in her Elven form bore him Luthien.

Besides Saruman the White, the Maiar corrupted to Melkor's service included Sauron (S, 32), the Balrogs (S,31), and Ungoliant (S,73).

The Children of Eru are the Elves and Men, although Orcs, Ents, Trolls, and Hobbits are related. Orcs were corruptions bred from Elves by Melkor. Speaking of the scattering of the Elves, the Silmarillion says:

But those unhappy ones who were ensnared by Melkor little is known for a certainty. For who of the living has descended into the pits of Utumno, or has explored the darkness of the counsels of Melkor? Yet this is held true by the wise of Eressea, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were ever afterwards the bitterest foes (S,50).

The Ents considered themselves to be more like men. As Treebeard says:

"We are tree-herds, we old Ents. Few enough of us are left now. Sheep get like shepherd, and shepherds like sheep, it is said; but slowly, and neither have long in the world.

It is quicker and closer with trees and Ents, and they walk down the ages together. For Ents are more like elves: less interested in themselves than men are, and better at getting inside other things. And yet Ents are more like Men, more changeable than Elves are, and quicker at taking the colour of the outside, you might say. Or better than them both: for they are steadier and keep their minds on things longer.' (II,71)

Trolls were corruptions like orcs, as Treebeard says to Merry:

'You do not know, perhaps, how strong we are. Maybe you have heard of Trolls? They are mighty strong. But Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves. We are stronger than Trolls. We are made of the bones of the earth.' (II,89)

Footnoting his own letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien says of the Hobbits:

The Hobbits are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically human race (not Elves or Dwarves) -- hence the two kinds can dwell together (as at Bree), and are called just the Big Folk and the Little Folk... They are made small (little more than half human stature, but dwindling as the years pass) partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man... and mostly to show up, in creatures of very small physical power, the amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men 'at a pinch'. (L,158)

The Dwarves, the creations of Aule, are adopted children of Eru (S,44).

Although Eru is directly responsible for his "children", there is inter-influence throughout all of creation. The Elves, for example, were responsible for teaching the Ents how to speak (II,71).

Although Tolkien says that Eru and the Ainur have no need of speech, they are often represented as communicative beings, usually is represented by speech. Eru says "Ea!" to begin the song of creation and the others listen as he propounds the themes of music. The Ainur join their voices with his to weave the pattern of creation, the song which ultimately takes substance as Arda. Aule obviously has some concept of verbalization, however, for he teaches his creations, the Dwarves, their tongue. Even Melkor gives his corruptions their unique speech. It would seem reasonable that the other languages in Middle Earth were given by Eru or by others of the Ainur.

The Elves were the Quendi, the Speakers, the Firstborn of the children of Iluvatar. The first major division of the Elves (other than that caused by Melkor's perversions) takes place when the Valar summon the Quendi to Valinor (S,52). Those who make the attempt are termed the Eldar; those who are "the refusers" or "the unwilling" are called the Avari. The Avari become the Silvan or Woodelves (U,256). Those of the Eldar, led by Ingwe, who responded first are called the Vanyar. They ultimately remain in Valinor, beloved of Manwe and Varda. The Noldor, led by Finwe, followed after the Vanyar and dwelt in Tirion until they were exiled to Beleriand in Middle-earth for the kin-slaying

at Alqualonde. Led by Olwe, Elwe, and Lenwe, the Teleri progressively fragmented in their journey. The Nandor, headed by Lenwe, dropped off from the main body of the Teleri out of fear of the Misty Mountains. After much wandering and further fragmenting, a body of Nandor, under Lenwe's son Denethor, settled in Ossirland and became the Laiquendi or the Green Elves. The Sindar crossed over the Misty Mountains to arrive at the coast of the great sea and would travel no further because they felt that their leader, Elwe, was not dead as others of the Teleri had supposed. The main body of Sindar returned to Beleriand under the leadership of Elwe (Thingol Sincollo) who was alive as it turns out. Of the remaining Teleri, only the Falmari, led by Olwe, arrive at Eldmar. A small portion who could not go across the sea nor return to Beleriand remained on the coast with Cirdan as their ruler and became known as the Falathrim.

Although only two of the Elven languages are presented in any detail in his works, Tolkien hints that there were other dialects extant during the Third Age of Middle-earth.

The earliest elven tongue, Quenya, develops an eastern dialect, and eventually a separate language, Silvan, as a result of the First Sundering. Silvan is seldom referred to in the published fantasies. In a letter to Rhona Beare in October of 1958, however, Tolkien informs his correspondent that "Legolas means 'green leaves', a woodland name -- dialectal form of pure Sindarin Laegolas" (L,282). Legolas' father, Thranduil, is a Sindarin elf who is king over the Silvan elves in northern Mirkwood. Apparently his son's name had been influenced by the Silvan language. In another place, Tolkien says of this dialect:

In Lorien at this period Sindarin was spoken, though with an 'accent', since most of its folk were of Silvan origin. This 'accent' and his own limited acquaintance with Sindarin misled Frodo (as is pointed out in The Thain's Book by a commentator of Gondor). All the Elvish words cited in I, chs 6, 7, 8 are in fact Sindarin and so are most of the names, places and persons. But Lorien, Caras Galadon, Amroth, Nimrodel are probably of Silvan origin, adapted to Sindarin. (III,405;U,256-7)

West Elven is spoken of continually as the language of the Eldar and, thus, is called Eldarin, but actually it is a continuation of the original Quenya. When the Elves woke the Ents and taught them to speak, the resulting language was Entish. Eldarin subsequently develops several other dialects, other than Quenya, which were brought about by the Teleri fragmentation, one of these becomes the second major Elven language extant in the accounts of the Third Age of Middle-earth, Sindarin (Grey Elven). From the notes Christopher Tolkien includes in Unfinished Tales, it is reasonable to assume that Nandor and Laiquendi also had dialects or languages of their own which evolved over the process of time (U,252-3,257).

Depicting the historical and cultural relationships between the various groups of men is difficult because the legends contained in the Middle-earth volumes do not give an account of their creation nor their subsequent development before their meeting with the elves during the First Age of Middle-earth. All that is recounted is the result of their western migrations into Belerland from their origins in the eastern part of Middle-earth near Rhun and beyond.

The men of Middle-earth can be divided historically into two major groups: those who at one time or another were Elf friends (the Three Houses of the Edain) and the rest of mankind which the Numenoreans termed the "Wild Men". The First and Third Houses of the Edain were reportedly related; their traditions and languages were similar. The Second house, that of the Haladin differed considerably from the other two. The First and Second Houses ultimately fall or meld with the Third House. It is their Mannish language from which the majority of the languages of the High and Middle Men used in Middle-earth eventually develops. Adunaic (the language of Numenor), Westron (the Common Speech), and a variety of other Mannish languages, including that of the Rohirrim, come from the ancient language of the Third House of the Edain. Their languages were heavily influenced by the languages of the Elves with whom they came in contact, primarily Sindarin (S,141). With the raising of the Island of Numenor for the faithful Edain comes a major linguistic separation. Those Edain who take to the sea at the behest of the Valar, come to the star-shaped Island of Numenor and dwell there for centuries while their kindred (later to be called the Middle Men or Men of the Twilight) remain in Middle-earth. The separation brings about natural linguistic divergence.

The so-called "Wild Men" had a variety of languages and dialects. The Woses (or Druedain) seem to be linguistically unique as do the Dunlendings of Dunland. The other Dunlendings generally speak Westron as their native tongue. Tolkien gives only a few examples of the language of the Haradrim, not nearly enough, however, to allow analysis of their system, but enough to show that it differs somewhat from the other Mannish languages. Of the Easterlings next to nothing is given except for a few hints which have been treated in an earlier issue of *Mythlore* (ML-38).

Of the many languages of Men alluded to in Tolkien's fantasies, only three, Dunlending, Woses, and Adunaic are presented in their genuine form in the narratives. Westron, Beorning, Rohirrim, Hobbitish, together with the minor dialects and languages of the men of Mirkwood, Longlake, and Dale are, for the most part, represented by historical languages of the Primary World.

Information concerning the historical development of the Halflings is also quite scant. Tolkien does not tell a great deal about their origin, but he does suggest that they are somehow related to Men (L,158). In the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien says of the hobbits:

Their earliest tales seem to glimpse a time when they dwelt in the upper vales of Anduin, between the eaves of Greenwood the Great and the Misty Mountains. Why they later undertook the hard and perilous crossing of the mountains into Eriador is no longer certain. Their own accounts speak of the multiplying of Men in the land, and of a shadow that fell on the forest, so that it became darkened and its new name was Mirkwood.

Before the crossing of the mountains the Hobbits had already become divided into three somewhat different breeds: Harfoots, Stoors, and Fallohides. The Harfoots were browner of skin, smaller and shorter, and they were beardless and bootless; their hands and feet were neat and nimble; and they preferred highlands and hillsides. The Stoors were

broader, heavier in build; their feet and hands were larger, and they preferred flat lands and riversides. The Fallohides were fairer of skin and also of hair, and they were taller and slimmer than the others; they were lovers of trees and woodlands.

The Harfoots had much to do with Dwarves in ancient times, and long lived in the foothills of the mountains. They moved westward early, and roamed over Eriador as far as Weathertop while the others were still in Wilderland. They were the most normal and representative variety of Hobbit, and far the most numerous. They were the most inclined to settle in one place, and longest preserved their ancestral habit of living in tunnels and holes.

The Stoors lingered long by the banks of the Great River Anduin, and were less shy of Men. They came west after the Harfoots and followed the course of the Loudwater southwards; and there many of them long dwelt between Tharbad and the borders of Dunland before they moved north again.

The Fallohides, the least numerous, were a northerly branch. They were more friendly with Elves than the other Hobbits were, and had more skill in language and song than in handicrafts; and of old they preferred hunting to tilling. They crossed the mountains north of Rivendell and came down the River Hoarwell. In Eriador they soon mingled with the other kinds that had preceded them, but being somewhat bolder and more adventurous, they were often found as leaders or chieftains among clans of Harfoots or Stoors. Even in Bilbo's time the strong Fallohidish strain could still be noted among the greater families, such as the Tooks and the Masters of Buckland. (I,12-13)

The Hobbits adapted to the languages of the men around them and, as a result, the Hobbitish dialects are flavored by Westron, Dunlending, and Rohirrim. Tolkien says that once the Hobbits arrive in Eriador their languages change:

It was in those early days, doubtless, that the Hobbits learned their letters and began to write after the manner of the Dunedain, who had in their turn long before learned the art from the Elves. And in those days also they forgot whatever languages they had used before, and spoke ever after the Common Speech, the Westron as it was named, that was current through all of the lands of the kings from Arnor to Gondor, and about all of the coasts of the Sea from Belfalas to Lune. Yet they kept a few words of their own, as well as their names of months and days, and a great store of personal names out of the past. (I,13)

To be Continued

## *New Address*

The Society has a new mailing address: P.O. Box 6707, Altadena, Ca. 91001. Do not send any mail to the old Whittier box. Actually it is even better to write directly to the departments concerned. For addresses, see page 2.

# THE 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MYTHOPOEIC CONFERENCE

JULY 24~27, 1987 MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

Scholar Guest of Honor

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CHRISTOPHER TOLKIEN JOHN BELLAIRS

"Looking Back from Weathertop: A Fifty Years' Retrospective"  
Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the publication of  
*The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien

## Location

Marquette University is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (90 miles north of Chicago), and is the home of the Marquette University Archives' J.R.R. Tolkien Special Collection. This includes the original manuscripts of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, variants, unpublished material, and many other kinds of Tolkien related materials.

## Membership

The total room and meals package, including three nights (double occupancy), nine meals (Friday dinner to Monday lunch, including the Banquet) and registration is \$130 until December 31, 1986; \$145

until June 1, 1987; \$160 thereafter. Space may be limited; please make your reservations early.

Registration for those providing their own lodging and meals is \$30 until June 1987, \$40 thereafter.

## Special Exhibits

There will be a display of Tolkien's original manuscripts of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings courtesy of University Archives' Special Collection.

J.R.R. Tolkien's original illustrations from The Hobbit will be displayed, courtesy of the Bodlean Library, Oxford.

There will also be translations of The Hobbit and other works by Tolkien in 24 languages, with illustrations, courtesy of Glen H. GoodKnight, Founder of the Mythopoeic Society.

## Call for Papers

The Conference especially welcomes papers that deal with all aspects of The Hobbit, as well as other works by J.R.R. Tolkien such as The Lord of the Rings, and The Silmarillion. Papers dealing with other authors and topics are sought. A brief description of the intended paper should be sent as soon as possible to Papers Coordinator: Richard C. West, 1918 Madison St., Madison, WI 53711.

Besides papers and panels, there will be films, an art show, an auction, a masquerade, dealers' room, awards (the Mythopoeic Fantasy and Scholarship Awards), a banquet, and Bardic circles.

## 20th Anniversary

1987 is also the twentieth anniversary of the Mythopoeic Society, the sponsoring organization of the Conference, and special program items are planned. The Society is interested in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and the genres of Myth and Fantasy from which they have drawn and then enriched. For a descriptive brochure and order form, listing the many publications and other items available, write to the Mythopoeic Society, Box 6707, Altadena, CA 91001



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