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Paul Nolan Hyde

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Quenti Lambardillion

Abstract

Discusses and translates the Elvish “Lúthien’s Song” in *The Lays of Beleriand*.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages; Christine Lowentrou

Quenti Lambardillion

A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

Paul Nolan Hyde

The Principle of Language-Legend

The recent publication of The Lays of Beleriand (Volume III of The History of Middle-earth) undoubtedly spoke "peace" to those who have labored beneath the enormous philological weight of The Book of Lost Tales (I and II), Unfinished Tales, The Silmarillion, and the Lord of the Rings. Missing are the Appendices, Indexes, and Dictionaries of the former works, unless one counts the useful "Glossary of Obsolete, Archaic, and Rare Words and Meanings" just before the Index. Frankly, I was a little disappointed. When I finally obtained my copy with its more than beautiful dust-cover, I immediately turned to the back of the book (as if I were an Arab or a Hebrew) to find that which was of most import: the linguistic section. I had anxiously waited six months for the publication of Volume III, anticipating another 1500 entries or so to insert into my "word-ward", the Tolkien Dictionary. But, alas, I had to be satisfied with actually reading the poems themselves. Maybe Christopher is trying to tell me something. It is easy to forget that the language without the literature is dead. It was this insight which brought Tolkien himself to the discovery of Middle-earth.

It was just as the 1914 War burst upon 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. (For example, that the Greek mythology depends far more on the marvellous aesthetic of its language and so of its nomenclature of persons and places and less on its content than people realize, though of course it depends on both. And "vice versa". Volapuk, Esperanto, Ido, Novial, etc. etc. are dead, far deader than ancient unused languages, because their authors never invented any Esperanto legends.) (Letters, p. 231)

It was with joy, then, that I began The Lays of Beleriand, knowing that my understanding of the languages depended at least in part to an understanding of the legends that support them. Toward the end of the volume, however, Christopher Tolkien made his "coup de grace". It was not planned for my benefit, I am certain; perhaps it just worked out that way. In any event, on page 354, we are given five lines of untranslated Elvish.... (If Nancy-Lou Patterson, the Reviews Editor, will pardon me, I would now like to digress for a moment or two).

In a late emendation of Canto III of "The Lay of Lethian", Tolkien describes Luthien at the time she and Beren first meet:

Her long hair as a cloud was streaming 85
about her arms uplifted gleaming,
as slow above the trees the Moon
in glory of the plenilune
arose, and on the open glade
its light serene and clear was laid. 90

Then suddenly her feet were stilled,
and through the woven wood there thrilled,
half wordless, half in elven-tongue,
her voice upraised in blissful song 95
that once of nightengales she learned
and in her living joy had turned
to heart-enthraling loveliness,
unmarred, immortal, sorrowless.

Ir Ithil ammen Eruchin
menel-vir sila diriel 100
si loth a galadh lasto din!
A Hir Annun gilthoniel,
le lennon im Tinuviel!

Although the story line apparently differs slightly in timing from the Lay, the description in The Silmarillion is enchantingly informative:

It is told in the Lay of Leithian that Beren came stumbling into Doriath grey and bowed as with many years of woe, so great had been the torment of the road. But wandering in the summer in the woods of Neldoreth he came upon Luthien, daughter of Thingol and Melian, at a time of evening under moonrise, as she danced upon the unfading grass in the glades beside Esgalduin. Then all memory of his pain departed from him, and he fell into an enchantment; for Luthien was the most beautiful of all the children of Iluvatar. Blue was her raiment as the unclouded heaven; her mantle was sewn with golden flowers, but her hair was dark as the shadows of twilight. As the light upon the leaves of trees, as the voice of clear waters, as the stars above the mists of the world, such was her glory and her loveliness; and in her face was a shining light.

But she vanished from his sight; and he became dumb, as one that is bound under a spell, and he strayed long in the woods, wild and wary as a beast, seeking for her. In his heart he called her Tinuviel, that signifies Nightingale, daughter of twilight, in the Grey-elven tongue; for he knew no other name for her. And he saw her afar as leaves in the winds of autumn, and in winter as a star upon a hill, but a chain was upon his limbs.

There came a time near dawn on the eve of spring, and Luthien danced upon a green hill; and suddenly she began to sing. Keen, heart-piercing was her song as the song of the lark that rises from the gates of night and pours its voice among the dying stars, seeing the sun behind the walls of the world; and the song of Luthien released the bonds of winter, and the frozen waters spoke, and flowers sprang from the cold earth where her feet had passed. (S, p. 165)

Beren and Luthien Tinuviel are mentioned only in passing in Unfinished Tales, as is the case in Volume I of The Book of Lost Tales. Volume II begins with "The Tale of Tinuviel". In this account Beren is enchanted by Luthien's dance:

... now he did see Tinuviel dancing in the twilight, and Tinuviel was in a silver-pearly dress, and her bare white feet were twinkling among the hemlock stems. Then Beren cared not whether she were Vala or Elf or child of Men and crept near to see; and he leant against a young elm that grew upon a mound so that he might look down into the little glade where she was dancing, for the enchantment made him faint. (LT-II, p. 11)

Later, after she had fled from him:

... he wandered in the wood growing wild and lonely for many a day and searching for Tinuviel. By dawn and dusk he sought her, but ever more hopefully when the moon shone bright. At last one night he caught a sparkle afar off, and lo, there she was dancing alone on a little treeless knoll and Dairon was not there. Often and often she came there after and danced and sang to herself,... (*Ibid.*, p. 12)

Of most interest, however, is a rather intriguing description of her mother, Melian, from whom she obviously obtained many attributes. In this account Eriol has just asked Veanne what Queen Melian was like:

'Slender and very dark of hair,' said she, 'and her skin was white and pale, but her eyes shone seeming to hold great depths. Clad she was in filmy garments most lovely yet of the hue of night, jet-spangled and girt with silver. If ever she sang or if ever she danced, dreams and slumbers passed over the heads of those that were nigh, making them heavy as it were with a strong wine of sleep. Indeed she was a sprite that, escaping from Lorien's gardens before even Kor was built, wandering in the wild places of the world and in every lonely wood. Nightingales fare with her singing about her as she went -- and t'was the songs of these birds that smote the ears of Thingol... the music of the magic birds of Melian seemed to him full of all solace, more beautiful than other melodies of Earth,... (*Ibid.*, p. 42)

Returning to The Lays of Beleriand and the original version of "The Lay of Leithian", we find a synthesis of all of the above, and then finally:

Then clearly thrilled her voice and rang;
with sudden ecstasy she sang
a song of nightingales she learned
and with her elvish magic turned
to such bewildering delight
the moon hung moveless in the night.
And this it was that Beren heard,
and this he saw, without a word,
enchanted dumb, yet filled with fire
of such a wonder and desire
that all his mortal mind was dim;
her magic bound and fettered him,
and faint he leaned against a tree.

(LB, p. 175)

We have come, now, full circle to the Elvish piece

itself. A careful analysis demonstrates that the language is Sindarin, although which dialect it is difficult to say.

Luthian's Song

dwell;stay rising moon say (past) (1st per.)
1 2 3 4 5
ir ithil amm e n

Eru;one;single child region star jewel shine
6 7 8 9 10 11
eru chin men el -vir sil

(pres.) watch;gaze (perf.) (past) (2nd per. sing.)
12 13 14 15 16
a dir i e l

now;here blossom and tree listen (imp.) silence
17 18 19 20 21 22 23
si loth a galadh last o din

O;and lord of the sunset bright spark kindle (perf.)
24 25 26 27 28 29
a hir annun gil thon i

(past) (2nd per. sing.) to thee sing (imp.)
30 31 32 33 34
e l le linn o

(1st per. sing.) I, myself spark;star-- (perf.) (past)
35 36 37 38 39
n im tinuv i e

(2nd per. sing.)
40
l

There are some interesting, if not controversial, morphological elements in these few lines. #1 is most likely a derivative of *IRI, a root element which Christopher supposes means "dwell" (LT-II, p. 343). "irin" is glossed as "town" (*ibid.*) and "irmin", although unglossed, probably means "dwelling-tower". While it is true that "ammen" can be interpreted as "up-region" or "heaven", I have a feeling that it functioning as a verb much in the same fashion that it does in Gandalf's commands for fire discussed in ML 34. Christopher Tolkien glosses "Eruchin" as "Children of Eru" (LB, p. 379), but it is apparent that "-chin" is closely related to "hin" in the same fashion as "chor" and "hor". "hin" is "child"; "hini" would be "children": Thus, #7 is in the singular. In LT-II, on page 379, "virin" is glossed as a "magic glassy substance". "-vir" is not just a "jewel", but a magical one; a perfect metaphorical allusion to the full Moon. #14-#16, together with #29-#31 and #38-#40 can be glossed as "female;maiden", but I have chosen the more esoteric interpretation in order to emphasize the semantic richness of Luthien's lines. Both #34 and #22 are imperatives, I believe. "lasto" appears in Gandalf's Command to the West-Gate of Moria (I, p. 320) and a similar command form, "noro", is given by Glorfindel to his horse, Asfaloth, at the Ford of Rivendale (I, p. 225). Admittedly, it seems odd to have a first person imperative unless it means something like "I must". "din" is also glossed elsewhere as "beneath, under, overwhelmed by" (Allen, p. 75). "im" is often glossed as "between; deep", but I have followed the form used on the West-Gate; thus, "Im Narvi" means "I, myself, Narvi". This form also shows

Redeemed City," written by Williams in 1941, foreshadows All Hallows' Eve in some interesting ways. He uses the term the City, and opposes that to the Infamy. The former is free redemptive exchange, Christianity, and love, and is identified with England, while the latter is forced substitution, selfishness, and hatred, and is identified with the Nazis. "There is, in the end," writes Williams, "no compromise between the two; there is only choice." [12] This is the essential truth of All Hallows' Eve. The Infamy is truly parodic, and bears certain resemblances to the City, but this just makes it more dangerous -- and the City, more precious.

NOTES

- [1] C.S. Lewis, Arthurian Torso (London, 1948), p. 123, cited George P. Winship, Jr. "The Novels of Charles Williams," in Shadows of Imagination ed. Mark R. Hillegas (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 121.
- [2] Charles Williams, Descent into Hell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 98.
- [3] Charles Williams, "The Way of Exchange," in his The Image of the City (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 151-52.
- [4] Charles Williams, "The Cross," in his The Image of the City (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 131-39.
- [5] Lewis, cited in Winship, op. cit., p. 121.
- [6] Alice Mary Hadfield, An Introduction to Charles Williams (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1959), p. 190.
- [7] J'n'an Sellery, "Fiction Modes in Charles Williams' All Hallows' Eve, Genre, No. 1 (1968), p. 323.
- [8] Edmund Fuller, Charles Williams' All Hallows' Eve (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 28.
- [9] Charles Williams, All Hallows' Eve (New York: Noonday Press, 1971), p. 146. Hereafter cited in text.
- [10] T.S. Eliot, "Introduction," Charles Williams' All Hallows' Eve (New York: Noonday Press, 1971), p. xvi.
- [11] Mary McDermott Shidler, The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 138.
- [12] Charles Williams, "The City Redeemed," in his The Image of the City (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 103.

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Smith, Patches of Godlight: The Pattern of Thought of C.S. Lewis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), Ch. 2 and 4.

[33] "Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages," Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p.60.

[34] "Myth: A Flight to Reality," The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts, ed. Leland Ryken (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 203-4.

[35] The Achievement of C.S. Lewis (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1980), p. 39

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ostentatious display of historical facts. Every word, every gesture of her tenth-century characters seems right. Details of behavior are used eloquently to express the contrast between the Celtic and Norse cultures. Most welcome is her vivid and sympathetic portrayal of Celtic Christianity (although it may be that she gives pre-Roman Church practices a greater prominence than they would have had at that late date). For this journey back to a pristine ancient Ireland is, in the end, a journey to spiritual sources, to an unveiling of inner truth, wonderfully articulated in the climatic duel of poetry between the Odinst berserker and the Celtic Christian bard. One closes the book with after-images of pure delight. It is hard to imagine a Celtophile who would not be charmed by this story, or indeed any sensitive fantasy reader who would remain cold to its simple, quiet evocation of joy.

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up in last word of Gilraen's lament to Aragorn; "anim" means "for myself" (III, p. 342). #37 is undoubtedly a concatenation of two or more morphemes, but other than "tin" as "spark;star" it is difficult to say.

There are, however, glossings for "nef", "nev", and "niv" meaning, respectively, "on this side of", "hither", and "west". Could it not be that western shore of Middle-earth is the "hither" shore "on this side of" the "sundering seas" between Beleriand and Valinor. Indeed, we are told that it is so (S, p. 343). It is the land and shore of the Sindarin, the Grey-elves, the "twilight Elves". They are not Calaquendi, "Elves of the light" who had lived in Aman; nor were they Avari, the Unwilling, the Darkest of the Moriquendi; they were those who came as far as they could out of the dark without being completely in the light (S, p.348). Thus, "tinuv-" may simply mean "twilight-spark", a poetic enough kenning for Nightingale (literally meaning "singer in the dark").

A loose, but semantically reflective translation could be:

"O thou rising Moon, Child of the One, magical jewel of the region of stars, thou who hast watched ever shining, I say to thee, Stay! Dwell where thou art! Now flower and tree, listen in silence here beneath. [To Gilthoniel] O Lord of the Sunset, of the Twilight, Star-Kindler, I must sing to thee; for I am, myself, Tinuviel, a spark of the Twilight, a Star ever in Twilight, the Nightingale."

A simple principle "language-legend and legend-language". I am glad Christopher reminded me of it.

