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### Essë and Narn: Name, Identity, and Narrative in the Tale of Túrin Turambar

#### Abstract

Examines the importance and significance of character names in Tolkien's First Age narratives, especially those of Túrin Turambar. Names are "capsule narratives" of character and background. Names also demonstrate social connections, and have a magical component.

#### Additional Keywords

Names in J.R.R. Tolkien; Onomastics; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Túrin Turambar; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Silmarillion; Tolkien, J.R.R. Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth

# Essë and Narn

## Name, Identity, and Narrative in the Tale of Túrin Turambar

Elizabeth Broadwell

Both as a philologist and as an author of fiction, J.R.R. Tolkien professed an intense interest in words and especially in names. The multitude of invented appellations in his works delights some readers and annoys others, but no one denies the skillful care with which he crafted each one. We have only to skim the pages of his dictionary of Elvish word-elements, "The Etymologies," to see it at work. A name such as *Menegroth* — whose final syllable is derived from *rod-* (cave), thus: "...*roth*, pl. *rodhin*, as in *Meneg-roth* is probably from *roda* > *rodh* > *roth*" ("Etymologies" 384) — is no phatic string of mellifluous syllables, but part of the detailed linguistic structure which is the keystone of Tolkien's fictional world. This facet of his art has engaged the attention of many critics (notably John T. Algeo, John Tinkler, and Jim Allan) who analyze the linguistics of Middle-earth's nomenclature with great perspicacity. Few commentators, on the other hand, choose to focus on the philosophical and artistic functions of names and naming in Tolkien's works — issues in which the author himself clearly took a great deal of interest. I propose to take up these neglected aspects of Tolkien's onomastics and examine them with reference to the tale of Túrin, the great human hero of the First Age Narratives.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, the manager of a Christian bookstore questioned Tolkien about the metaphysics of Middle-earth. In the course of drafting a reply to this inquiry, Tolkien touched upon "the mystery of names," stating:

You may be able to conceive of your unique relation the Creator without a name — can you: for in such a relation pronouns become proper nouns? But as soon as you are in a world of other finities with a similar, if each unique and different, relation to Prime Being, who are you? (Carpenter, *Letters* 192)

The import of this difficult passage is that names are necessary indices of identity within human society. As a Christian, Tolkien believes that there is only one God; hence he conceives a relationship between a self-conscious finite entity and that God in which "I" and "Thou" are the only signifiers. Each pronoun has only one possible referent (Tolkien implicitly postulates a human "I") so that further onomastic elaboration is unneeded. As forms of address among finites, however, pronouns have far too many applications: everyone within hearing distance turns at a shout of "Hey, you!" A greater range of signifiers — names — is required to distinguish individuals at this level. "Who are you?" Frodo asks Tom Bombadil in *The Lord of the Rings*, who replies, "Don't you know my name yet? That's the only answer. Tell me, who are you, alone,

yourself and nameless?" (I.142). Every appellation properly denotes a particular self, a "similar" yet "unique and different" identity.

In emphasizing the named one's place in "a world of other finites," Tolkien grants naming an integrative as well as an individuating function. The denizens of his fiction demonstrate through their onomastic practices a sense of what psychologist Paul Tournier has called the "two movements" of selfhood, separation and union: "What separates and distinguishes me from other people is the fact that they call me" (5). Given this idea, it is logical to conclude — as Tolkien does in an unpublished essay summarized in *Unfinished Tales* — that *what* someone is called further manifests his or her relationship to the name-giver:

It is said... concerning the customs of name-giving among the Eldar [i.e. Elves] in Valinor that they had two "given names" (*essi*), of which the first was given at birth by the father; and this one usually recalled the father's own name, resembling it in sense or form.... The second name was given later... by the mother, and these mother-names had great significance, for the mothers of the Eldar had insight into the characters and abilities of their children.... In addition, any of the Eldar might acquire an *epessë* ("after-name"), not necessarily given by their own kin, a nickname — mostly given as a title of admiration or honor; and an *epessë* might become the name generally used and recognized in later song and history....

(C. Tolkien, Appendix E 266)

Name-giving here encompasses an individual and a social aspect; besides representing someone's unique "character and abilities," his or her name (or names) also denotes his or her place in a family and in society at large. (The neat division of the individual, familial, and larger social components of identity among three separate signifiers is, however, no absolute rule in the tale of Túrin, as we shall see.) The elves are only one people among many in Middle-earth, but the attitude toward naming described in this passage applies almost universally. We see, for example, that Men (Théoden *Ednew*), Dwarves (Thorin *Oakenshield*) and even Hobbits (Saradoc "Scattergold") acquire names analogous to Elven *epessi* (*LotR* III. 351, 355, 382). In general, Tolkien's characters bear appellations which express the quality of their existence both in their own right and in relation to their fellows.

Because of their descriptive orientation, these names are powerful tools of characterization in works like the First Age narratives where "[i]nward characteristics are manifested outwardly..." (Hyde 385). Both Dale Morgan and John Tinkler have analyzed Tolkien's onomastics

from this perspective, with the latter noting that a figure's appellation often functions as a "capsule characterization" (164). In the Tale of Túrin, for example — of all First Age narratives the most concerned with the significance of names for an individual — the protagonist's given name expressed the crux of his personality. Renderable as "mood of mastery" or masterful heart, the name Túrin befits this character's role as both a born commander and an intractable human being.<sup>2</sup> Wherever he goes Túrin earns positions of leadership, official (as, for instance, one of the Two Captains of Dor-Cúarthol) and unofficial (as among the Woodmen of Brethil, whose chieftain he all but deposes) ("Of Túrin" 252, 271). Yet his natural magistrality, his consciousness of his own power, often leads Túrin to pursue his own course heedless of the advice of wiser minds. As Tolkien states of this hero in the earliest version of his tale: "[A]t no time did he give much heed to words that were spoken to him" ("Turambar" 75). Túrin: a masterful heart: a figure of innate authority who will be neither counseled nor brooked.

To conclude that Tolkien's names are *merely* "capsule characterizations," however — and Tinkler, to his credit, does not do so — grossly oversimplifies their function in the text. The appellations of the major figures in the tales of the First Age are less "capsule characterizations" than they are "capsule narratives." A name like Túrin tells a story about its possessor, a story which includes some (not all) of what could be related concerning him. Identity in Middle-earth can, in fact, be defined as a tale recounted about an entity which is originated and symbolized by his or her name.<sup>3</sup> When Túrin introduces himself to the Elves of Nargothrond as "Agarwaen the son of Úmarth (which is the Bloodstained, son of Ill-fate)" he creates a new identity for himself by establishing a new "reading" of his history ("Of Túrin" 257). This reading is extremely selective; the name "Agarwaen" focuses on its possessor's blood-guilt in the death of his best friend Beleg without regard for any other episode in his past. To borrow a phrase from David L. Jeffrey, the name Agarwaen "constitutes a present gloss on an absent text" — the "text" of Túrin's life (113). Further, while both Túrin and Agarwaen refer to the same *entity*, by no means do they designate the same *identity*. Compare the reactions of the citizens of Nargothrond to these two personae: Agarwaen is accepted for the sake of his companion Gwindor, but to Túrin, revealed at last, King Orodreth himself "gave... great honour, and Túrin became mighty among the people of Nargathrond" ("Of Túrin" 257, 259). The name Agarwaen, encapsulating a new edition of the hero's history, creates an identity for its possessor exclusive of those elements (such as lineage) which determine the Elves' response to the name Túrin. The alias tells, in effect, somebody else's story.

Even if in his letter to the Christian bookseller Tolkien had not set naming firmly within a social context, it would be obvious from the foregoing example than any analysis of Túrin's names must consider his social identity as well as his identity as an individual. Not only do their

names/narratives establish the ground on which characters in the tales of the First Age interact, but these interactions themselves render their participants' narratives to some extent mutually inclusive: in the history of Beleriand, Túrin is as much a part of Beleg's story as Beleg is of Túrin's. Hence the nomenclature of the First Age narratives reflect the bonds which exist among characters, particularly the bonds of kinship and allegiance. To consider the former first, we see in the passage concerning Eldarin names quoted previously that the first name an Elvish child receives designates him or her in terms of lineage. Familial identity, signified by the "father-name," takes precedence over individual identity, as expressed in the "mother-name," and over all other forms of social identity which might later be encapsulated in *epessi* (C. Tolkien, Appendix E 266). The fact that the child's first given name generally resembles its father's derives, as Allan has noted, from medieval Germanic literary nomenclature, which achieves "continuity between names" — symbolizing the continuity of the family line — by "retaining one element in a name and varying the other" (186). the similarity between Túrin's given name and that of his father Húrin might be considered a textbook example of the onomastic technique. Túrin preserves the *-in* (mood, heart, mind) of Húrin, but replaces *hûr* (vigor) with *tur* (power, mastery) ("Etymologies" 361, 364; C. Tolkien, Appendix: Names 458).<sup>4</sup> The appellation thus integrates the hero's personal and familial narratives: while in form (or style) it embodies the lineal bond he shares with his father, in content (or meaning) it characterizes him as an individual.

In the First Age narratives, then, names are the fundamental link between genealogy and history; what Anthony Ugolnik calls "a rich genealogical procession of names" is an onomastic subtext which pervades and organizes the history of Middle-earth. This concept is central to the tale of Túrin, whose protagonist is always aware of the familial responsibilities attendant on his name/narrative. "Did my father not say that I am the Heir of Hador?" The young Túrin asks his mother Morwen when she decides to foster him outside his family's realm of Dor-lómin. "The heir should stay in Hador's house to defend it" ("Narn" 71). As a son of the House of Hador, Túrin has a specific role to play in the ongoing drama of his family history. But what if history turns to tragedy? What becomes of the tale of Túrin when his father is captured and cursed by the Enemy: "Then Morgoth stretching out his long arm toward Dor-lómin cursed Húrin and Morwen and their offspring, saying: 'Behold! The shadow of my thought shall lie upon them Wherever they go, and my hate shall pursue them to the ends of the world'" ("Narn" 66)? This malediction perverts the beneficent narrative which is Túrin's family history into a snare, so that the hero's every attempt to fulfill his duties to his kin results in disaster. Because his name is Túrin, because his identity includes a genealogical component as well as a personal one, he shares in the curse upon the family.

Of the extra-familial relationships which influence the nomenclature of Middle-earth, the bond of fealty between



chieftain and vassal is the most prominent. The metonymic *epessë* **Mormegil** ("Black Sword") which Túrin receives from the people of Nargothrond, for example, not only recognizes his "great... prowess and skill in warfare," but also the terms of allegiance under which he fights ("Of Túrin" 258). A sword does not slay by itself; it must be directed to that end by the one who wields it. Similarly, Túrin is no free agent among the warriors of Nargothrond. The condition of his acceptance in this community, as the "the Tale of Turambar states, is a pledge of fealty to Orodreth, the lord of the citadel: "Orodreth... bade [Túrin] dwell among the Rodothlim [an early name for the people of Nargothrond] and he be faithful to him" (82). Allegiance integrates the human outsider into the Elvish community and licenses him to act on its behalf, but also requires him to be guided by the policy of its king. As Gurthang, the black sword which inspires his name, is an instrument in Túrin's hand, so the Mormegil is — at least in theory — an instrument in Orodreth's hand, a vassal; who carries out the commands of his lord.

In practice, however, the Mormegil comes to dominate Orodreth, creating (as one draft text reports) a politically and onomastically confusing state of affairs:

In the spring there came two Elves, and then named themselves Gelmir and Arminas of the people of Finarfin, and said that they had an errand to the Lord of Nargothrond. They were brought before Túrin; but Gelmir said: "It is to Orodreth, Finarfin's son, that we would speak." ("Narn" 159)

Titles and epithets function much like proper names in Tolkien's fiction; they identify their possessors in terms of a specific (usually social) role. Since the lordship of Nargothrond is the birthright of the House of Finarfin, confirmed by a bond of fealty with the inhabitants of the citadel, the identity of this chieftain should be self evident. Yet Gelmir and Arminas must clarify their request to see "the Lord of Nargothrond," as if Orodreth son of Finarfin were only "a Lord of Nargothrond." In *The Silmarillion*, it is with Orodreth's tacit approval that Túrin "would order all things as he wished" ("Of Túrin" 260), but the implication that he has usurped the title/identity of this king imputes a certain hollowiness to both his service and his *epessë*.

Throughout his tenure as (war)leader of Nargothrond, however, Túrin retains the name **Mormegil**: "[A]t Túrin's prayer his true name was not spoken, and... rumour spoke only of the Black Sword of Nargothrond" ("Of Túrin" 259). His occasionally vehement insistence on this point is not, I believe, a hypocritical gesture. "Usurper of Nargothrond" is one of the half-truthful epithets "misshapen by malice" with which Glaurung the dragon tortures Túrin; had no hero no qualms about his position, he certainly would not have been affected to self-loathing by the taunt ("Of Túrin" 262-63). It appears, rather, that he clings to the name Mormegil and its reading of his behavior to hide his ascendance over Orodreth as much as from himself as from the people of Nargothrond. Recognizing that naming is an act of interpretation and not a statement of fact, Túrin (like many other Tolkien characters) often

chooses his appellations in accordance with how he *wishes* to perceive himself and be perceived by others.

As in many of Tolkien's works, the *dramatis personae* of the tale of Túrin are intensely interested in attaching the correct names to each other; "Who are you?" is a recurrent question in the narrative. Few in Nargothrond agree, for example, that **Agarwaen** is the proper appellation for the stranger in their midst: they call him **Mormegil** or, because of his Elvish speech and bearing, **Adanedhel** (man-elf). In one late draft Finduilas, the Elven woman who loves Túrin, tells him, "I do not think that Agarwaen is your true name, nor is it fit for you, Adanedhel. I call you Thurin, the Secret" ("Narn" 157). And when Gwindor, who loves Finduilas, discovers her affection for Túrin, he warns her against the hero in the strongest possible (onomastic) terms: "Though he be indeed *agarwaen* son of *úmarth* [i.e. guilty of manslaughter and the son of an ill-fated father], his right name is Túrin son of Húrin, whom Morgoth holds in Angband, and whose kin he has cursed" ("Of Túrin" 258-59). Common to all these incidents is the desire to confirm Túrin's identity in his name, and discover (or in Gwindor's case, reveal) how his personal narrative affects a larger plot. Is he a murderer, or a noble warrior? A threat, or simply an enigma? Or choice E: none of the above? Each role entails different consequences not only for the hero, but for his entire community. And considering that one consequence of the Mormegil's actions is the destruction of Nargothrond, "Who are you" is clearly no question to be settled lightly.

Another of Túrin's appellations, **Turambar**, comes under discussion in the "Narn" when Níniel, Túrin's beloved (and his sister, although neither of them know it), asks him to interpret it to her. He obliges with a detailed explication:

"It means," said he, "Master of the Dark Shadow. For I also, Níniel, had my darkness, in which dear things were lost; but I have overcome it, I deem.... I fled for many years, and I escaped when you did so. For it was dark when you came, Níniel, but ever since it has been light." ("Narn" 124)

**Turambar** is rendered elsewhere in the First Age narratives as "Master of Doom," from *Quenya* *tur-* (power, mastery) and *ambar* (doom) (C. Tolkien, Appendix: Elements 445, 458). The tenor of the latter element is distorted in Túrin's translation; *ambar* should be understood as "destiny" or a "fated end," rather than "doom" in its modern, negative sense.<sup>5</sup> The hero's choice of words, however, indicates more about his state of mind than it does about his philological competence. Constant misfortune has led Túrin to believe that the "dark shadow" of Morgoth's curse dominates his destiny to such an extent that his life must end in calamity. Even as he asserts that he has overcome this drive toward disaster, he imbues the neutral word *ambar* with a negative connotation, undermining the optimistic appraisal of his situation which follows the interpretation of his name.

This particular name is unique among Túrin's many

appellations in its prolepsis; it does not confirm a change in his identity which has already taken place, as *Agarwaen* does, but anticipates a change to come: "[A]nd he arose, and he thought that he would remain... hidden, and put his shadow behind him, forsaking the past. He took therefore a new name, *Turambar*..." ("Of Túrin" 266). Resolved to free himself from the curse once and all, the hero chooses an appellation which looks forward to his status at the completion of this task — "Master of Doom." There is no certainty in this name, however, only defiance. Not until he and Níniel have fallen in love does Túrin state categorically that he has overcome his "darkness." This conclusion rests implicitly on the fact that his past misfortunes have always involved the destruction of his personal relationships: alienation from his foster-parents, the loss of family, and the death of his friends. That he and Níniel love and marry without interference convinces Túrin that he has escaped Morgoth's curse and (not incidentally) that he has chosen the correct name. As he exclaims in the earliest version of the tale: "'Twas well that I did name myself *Turambar*, for lo! I have overcome the doom of evil that was woven about my feet" ("*Turambar*" 102)!

Taken together, the concepts of proleptic naming and "naming well" point up another facet of Tolkien onomastics: the magic of names. Although several critics, including Simpson and Walter Scheps, note the respect and caution with which the inhabitants of Middle-earth treat names, the basis of this phenomenon has never been examined in detail. Scheps conjectures that the names of evil beings are taboo because "the names themselves are powerful sources of evil" (49), while Simpson mentions "a folk belief that regards the name as almost the thing itself" (1), yet neither pursues the subject further. A mystical connection between the name and the thing named, however, is supposed throughout the tale of Túrin and never ceases to be a primary concern for its protagonist. He rebukes his friend Gwindor sharply, for example, for revealing his given name to Finduilas: "Now when Túrin learned from Finduilas what has passed, he was wrathful, and he said to Gwindor: '...[Y]ou have done ill to me, friend, to betray my right name, and call my doom upon me, from which I would lie hid' ("Of Túrin" 259). Not simply angry, but "wrathful," the hero seems excessively agitated by Gwindor's action unless we grant both Túrin's name and Morgoth's curse the status of magical objects. Magic assumes the power of the symbol over the reality it signifies, and the reality of a person, his or her identity, is signified by his or her name (Cavendish 1940). Since, as I have said, the curse is part of the hero's familial identity, it is bound to the appellation which encapsulates that identity: *Túrin*. Hence his conviction that his given name must be concealed so that he himself may "lie hid" from the power of Morgoth.

One commentator on onomastic sorcery has written that the name "is an integral part of the person, it participates in it. If the name is discovered, the person is mastered..." (L. Levy-Bruhl, qtd. in Morgan et al. 6). In Middle-earth as in many real-world cultures, the power an

appellation holds over its possessor demands its concealment from all but a trusted few. Those characters in Tolkien's fiction who, like Túrin, or Treebeard in *The Lord of the Rings* (II. 67-68), prefer to remain pseudonymous appear to be protecting themselves against those who seek to dominate and destroy other identities through their names. For Túrin, however, secrecy alone is never a viable option: the Enemy knows his name, and his misfortunes often seem proof enough to him that the curse was mastered him ("Of Túrin" 252, 257). In order to salvage this situation, the hero resorts to a time-honored method of thwarting a magical attack: he changes his name, redefining his essence in terms which hostile sorcery attuned to the former definition (his given name) cannot recognize. When Túrin becomes *Agarwaen*, in theory a new person is created to whom nothing connected with his original identity applies. Unfortunately, Túrin never manages to leave the old self behind when he takes a new appellation. *Agarwaen* is only a mask which Túrin wears; he upbraids Gwindor for revealing his "right name," not his former name. His vehemence in this matter makes the (magical) futility of adopting a mere alias doubly clear: it promises Túrin no protection against whatever malevolent forces cling to his given name.

Because Morgoth's curse attaches to its victim's name, the threat which it poses also takes an onomastic form. Both of Túrin's encounters with the curse's chief exponent, Glaurung, include the element of "name-calling" — the dragon never in fact refers to the hero by his given name. When they meet before the doors of Nargothrond, for example, Glaurung hurls a barrage of abusive epithets at this opponent: "Evil have been all thy ways, son of Húrin. Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of thy friend, thief of love, usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of thy kin" ("Of Túrin" 262). Because the line between epithet and appellation in Tolkien's works is very fine, and often simply a matter of translation (e.g. *Turambar* is a name, but "Master of Doom" is an epithet), each of these sobriquets is a potential name — a potential defining course for Túrin's identity. Their essential truth renders them even more compelling: "And Túrin being under the spell of Glaurung harkened to his words, and he saw himself in a mirror misshapen by malice, and loathed that which he saw" ("Of Túrin" 263). However distorted, a mirror reflects only what stands before it: the outlaw who disowned his foster-family, the killer who struck down Beleg, the interloper in Gwindor's relationship with Finduilas, the man who has not seen his mother or sister in over ten years, the son of Húrin, whose legacy to his children is doom. That these "evil ways" have followed from anything but an evil will, however, Glaurung ignores entirely. His aim is to persuade the hero to accept an identity/narrative controlled by Morgoth's curse — a kind of anti-name<sup>6</sup> which encapsulates a self-destructive sense of self, denying the potential for positive action and acknowledging no possibility of change.

From the foregoing paragraphs it should be clear that nomenclature is a fundamental point of dispute in the



conflict between good and evil in Middle-earth. Since naming is a form of narration, creating meaning through the perception of plot in a series of events, to take or accept an appellation is to acknowledge the purposefulness of existence. Tolkien, writing from a Christian perspective, believes this purpose to be divinely ordained ("Ainulindäle" 3ff); each of his characters occupies a unique place in the providential order on every front, attempts to subjugate the identity of his enemies as well as break down their resistance in arms. As Katharyn Crabbe writes in her perceptive analysis of Túrin's story, the hero must face both the Orc ("an external or physical violence visited upon the world") and the dragon ("who works his evil by perverting the mind and will") in the course of his battles against evil (211). But while death awaits the individual who cannot prevail against the former, failure to overcome the latter extracts the higher price — the deformation or even the destruction of one's sense of self. "Who are you?" Túrin asks his companion at Ethel Ivrin, and the other's reply is terrible: "A wandering Elf, a thrall escaped.... Yet once I was Gwindor son of Guilin, a lord of Nargothrond, until I... was enslaved in Angband [Morgoth's stronghold]" ("Of Túrin" 257). Morgoth and his minions seek to efface the names of those whom they conquer, to take from them their sense of purpose and leave them slaves to another will or wanderers bereft of direction.

Though Gwindor dissociates himself from his appellation, he is not truly nameless. He still knows who he is (or was). It is Nienor, defeated in a contest of wills with Glaurung, who exemplifies the plight of an individual without a name: "[The dragon] laid a spell of utter darkness and forgetfulness upon her, so that she could remember nothing that had ever befallen her, nor her own name, nor the name of any other thing; and for many days she could neither hear, see, nor stir by her own will" ("Of Túrin" 268). Stripped of her name and history, Nienor is extinguished as a personality; she is completely isolated, bereft of all knowledge, unable to act or to communicate. Her recovery from this initial trauma is marked by a resumption of activity, but it is activity without purpose, empty, futile: "[S]he went warily as a hunted beast, and became famished, for she had no food and knew not how to seek it" ("Of Túrin" 269). Though reduced to a level of an animal, she lacks the animal instincts which would enable her to care for herself. "A nameless thing," comments Joyce O. Hertzler, "is something vague, incomplete, uncanny" (qtd. in Adler 93). Nienor, nameless, is neither human nor animal, but an alien creature leading a compromised and tenuous existence until rescued and renamed by Túrin.

Túrin never confronts the horror of namelessness in his own person; despite all the assaults which circumstances and/or the curse make on his identity, he never loses his sense of self. He invokes his own name even in the final moments of his life, as he begs his sword to kill him: "Hail Gurthang! No lord or loyalty dost thou know, save the hand that wieldeth thee. From no blood wilt thou shrink.

Wilt thou therefore take Túrin Turambar, wilt thou slay me swiftly?" ("Of Túrin" 278). Clinging to his name even *in extremis*, the hero refutes the idea that a conviction of his life's meaninglessness has driven him to suicide. His plethora of appellations, in fact, suggest that he finds a multiplicity of meanings in his existence until the moment he chooses to end it. Perhaps the most obvious onomastic question which this narrative raises, particularly in its latest forms, is *why* the hero collects so many different names. I believe that this question is susceptible of analysis on at least two levels: an issue of character development, and as an issue of cosmology.

Compared to that of other Tolkien characters, Túrin's identity is remarkably unstable; none of the many names/narratives which he acquires endures for more than a few pages. As Kocher writes, Túrin has "no one continuing conception of himself, but, rather, a series of temporary conceptions governed by the circumstances of the changing moment" (*Guide* 160). Rather than reevaluate his persona in the light of new experiences, or "reread" it, the hero prefers to redefine, or "rewrite," himself entirely. Or almost entirely: beneath his every alias the name Túrin remains, as if he finds some meaning in it even when he proposes to reject it. The cause of this ineluctable fascination is difficult to ascertain in most versions of the hero's story. In the "Narn," however, Tolkien explicitly depicts Túrin's early life as the breeding ground for this onomastic quirk, assigning to his given name a narrative of tangled lineal rights and realities.

Tolkien traces the origins of this narrative to the hero's eighth birthday, when the boy Túrin receives from his father the title "Heir of the House of Hador" ("Narn" 64). This epithet encapsulates a familial and a liege identity — the heirs of Hador are the hereditary chieftains of Dor-lómin — and spurs the first significant expansion of Túrin's persona: "[I]n his heart there was a warmth like the warmth of the sun upon the cold earth that sets growth astir. He repeated to himself his father's words, Heir of the House of Hador..." ("Narn" 64). Although this metaphor does not figure a connection between name and narrative, neither does it refute one. Reception of a new name is a catalyst for self-development, whether that self be conceived narratively or (as it is here) organically. When Túrin becomes also **Heir of the House of Hador**, he begins to grow toward the role, name and story for which his lineage destines him — a warrior-chieftain, the Lord of Dor-lómin.

Morwen's decision to foster Túrin in Doriath, however, interrupts the development of this name/narrative, much to her son's confusion. The boy's protest, "Did my father not say that I am the Heir of Hador? The heir should stay in Hador's house to defend it" ("Narn" 71), marks the beginning of a crisis of identity which is never fully resolved: is he in fact whom his name signifies — the future Lord of Dor-lómin — if he cannot behave accordingly? No essentialist, Túrin thinks not. The demand that he act a role outside his interpretation of himself and the enforced separation from family and homeland leave an enduring

mark upon him; in the "Lay," Tolkien describes these events as "the sundering sorrow that seared his youth" (116). The hero's identity troubles are further exacerbated by the fact that his persona as Hador's Heir is never entirely superseded. When he arrives in Doriath, Túrin receives no new appellation from his foster-parents, but rather the reassurance that "the time may come when you shall regain the lands of your father" ("Narn" 74). His position as Hurin's successor is thus held in abeyance until an (undefined) future moment when he may take it up once more. However necessary such a suspension of identity may be at this point of his tale, it caused Túrin to be less sure of who he is than of whom he has the potential to become — an exile from his identity as well as his homeland.

The hero's search for himself, the inevitable result of these conditions, is hence directed by the existence of a name/narrative which he alternately reacts against and tries to recreate. His first alias, *Neithan*, means "the Wronged" or "one who is deprived" (C. Tolkien, *Index of Names* 427); he chooses it in under the impression that he will be held responsible for the accidental death of one of his foster-father Thingol's retainers. With this appellation Túrin begins his life as an outlaw, depriving himself of his "good name" in more ways than one and abdicating his heritage as Hador's Heir ("Of Túrin" 244-45; "Narn" 85-87). By contrast, *Gorthol* — the appellation Túrin employs as a Captain in Dor-Cúarthol — speaks directly to his lineal/liege identity. Translated as "Dread Helm," it refers to "the Dragon-helm of Dor-lómin, greatest of the heirlooms of the House of Hador which the hero wears throughout this period" ("Of Túrin" 252, 243). His choice of this alias is unsurprising in light of his apparent conception of Dor-Cúarthol as a training ground for the reconquest of his patrimony. "I wish to rule a land, but not this land," he tells Beleg in one draft text. "Here I desire only to gather strength. To my father's land in Dor-lómin my heart turns, and thither I shall go when I may" ("Narn" 154). But although *Neithan* and *Gorthol* each relate differently to Túrin's "right name," neither escapes it. *Neithan* cannot deny that he is Túrin once he learns that the latter name bears no stigma, while *Gorthol* is absorbed by the prospect of reclaiming Túrin's inheritance. Again and again Tolkien suggests that until the hero can claim his inheritance, he pursues a half-existence as neither wholly Hador's Heir nor wholly someone else. His development of any permanent self-concept is always curtailed by the need to allow for the potential one lurking in the background.

To this tangled onomastic web the curse adds yet another twist, bringing to the surface the desire for control latent in Túrin's early name-changes. Morgoth, like all of Tolkien's villains, desires to override the wills of his opponents (Kocher, *Master* 52-74 *passim*). His influence on the hero's destiny is always represented as violence, entrapment, and exhaustion: captured by Orcs, Túrin is "fettered hand and foot and tied to a withered tree; and all about him knives that had been cast at him were embedded in the trunk, and he was senseless in a sleep of

great weariness" ("Of Túrin" 254). The hero is left with no choice but submission to the hostile, all-devouring power of the Enemy. Likewise, he is not asked to cooperate in the realization of his anti-name; he is to be press-ganged into accepting it. Glaurung compels Túrin to listen to that string of ugly epithets, confusing his judgement so that he abandons Finduilas to her death ("Of Túrin" 262-63). Although the hero refuses to surrender without a fight, asserting by word and action that "[a] man's name is his own" ("Narn" 161), his frenetic displays of self-will seldom lead to triumph.

Túrin employs two onomastic defenses against Morgoth's doom: concealment of his given name, which I have already discussed, and an even more intense search for the name which is properly his. Victory, he believes, lies in self-knowledge developed and confirmed by action; if he can prove his right to a name other than Morgoth's anti-name, he will prevail. The most dramatic illustration of this belief takes place in "Turambar and the Foalókë," where Túrin adopts the appellation *Turambar*, not in peaceful Brethil as he does in the later versions, but while confronting Glorund (Glaurung) before the doors of Nargothrond:

Then Túrin leaping suddenly to his feet and avoiding that beast's baleful eyes raised aloft his sword and cried: "Nay, from this hour none shall name me Túrin if I live. Behold, I will name me a new name and it shall be Turambar!"... Then uttering these words he made a second time at the drake, thinking indeed to force the drake to slay him and to conquer his fate by death... (86)<sup>7</sup>

When the self is debatable territory, taking a name is as bellicose a gesture as brandishing a sword. Yet the conflict between these antagonists hinges not on the hero's right to call himself *Turambar*, or even *Túrin*, but anything other than accursed. Against the dragon's sneering certainty that "a fate of evil is woven about thee, and thou mayst not untangle thy footsteps from it," the hero pits his own determination to be free — if not in life, then at least through death ("Turambar" 86). He rejects entrapment by his enemy's will, symbolized by the entrancing power of Glorund's "baleful eyes," and asserts the sense of purpose Morgoth and his minions strive to leech away. *Turambar*, glossed in the text as "Conqueror of Fate," is a Joshuic blast of defiance in the face of an apparently invincible enemy.

Unfortunately, this enemy's defences do not fall down flat. "Nay, get thee gone, O Turambar Conqueror of Fate!" laughs Glorund. "First thou must meet thy doom and thou wouldst o'ercome it" ("Turambar" 87). The success of Túrin's onomastic revolt depends upon his ability to silence his opponent; as long as both namer and anti-namer have something to say, a counter-interpretation with which to refute the other's interpretation, the conflict between them cannot be resolved. Túrin's long series of name-changes can be read, finally, as the search for an irrefutable argument — a tragically fruitless search, although the invocation of his own name is part of every major extant narrative of the dragon-slaying. In "Turambar and the Foalókë" the hero uses the name *Turambar*



(108), but in both *The Silmarillion* and the "Narn" it is his given name with which he taunts his dying foe: "Hail, Worm of Morgoth! Well met again! Die now and the darkness have thee! Thus is Túrin son of Húrin avenged" ("Of Túrin" 274; "Narn" 135). The hero announces his triumph each time under the name concerning which he and the dragon contended (openly or by implication) at their first meeting. In the later stories, however, Túrin appears to believe that by killing Glaurung he has finally earned the right to his given name and "avenged" its misappropriation by the curse. Silencing the curse's spokesman in death is concomitant to silencing the curse itself through a declaration of true identity. But Túrin is unable to stifle Morgoth, and as long as its author has breath, the curse always finds a mouth from which to speak.

As Túrin's search for an appellation continues, therefore, he becomes convinced that not only must his true name properly encapsulate his narrative, but all traces of Morgoth's anti-name/narrative must be eradicated from it. Both interpretative and executional problems threatened the realization of this goal, but Túrin does not appear to concern himself with them. The difficulty of distinguishing chance from the curse, for example, he brushes aside; as Kocher notes, Túrin simply concludes that his every misfortune proceeds from the malice of Morgoth (*Guide* 162).<sup>8</sup> Rather than simplifying his task, however, this attitude requires him to attempt an even more difficult feat: to obliterate all of his unfortunate deeds (or the memory of them) from his story. When he takes the name **Turambar**, for example, he asks the Woodmen "to forget his name of old, and to count him as born in Brethil" ("Narn" 112). He is obsessed with the idea of recreating himself *tabula rasa* — free of his past, freed from the curse — by changing his name. His new life in Brethil (or Nargothrond, or wherever) is to replace his old life in every respect; he wishes to efface Túrin from history.

Although the Woodmen (particularly Brandir and, in the "Narn," Dorlas) ponder and discuss Turambar's past in spite of his charge they forget it, Túrin himself is the first to undermine the independence of his new persona: "Yet with the change of name he could not change wholly his temper, nor wholly forget his old griefs against the servants of Morgoth..." ("Narn" 112). The hero finds it impossible to erase all the associations on which his former identity is based. Certain aspects of his self are either incompletely under his control — as Tolkien indicates by writing that Túrin "could not change wholly... nor wholly forget" — or out of his control altogether. The ties of kinship which bind him to Nienor/Níniel his sister do not dissolve when they are denied, as both he and she attest before taking their own lives ("Narn" 138, 142ff). And although Túrin overtly denies his family again and again, covertly he remains attracted to the patrimony signified by his given name even after the curse has rendered it terrible. Troubled self-knowledge together with knowledge of the curse drives him in two irreconcilably different directions. Túrin hides his right name, but refuses to reject it; he denies

his past, but cannot forget it; he flees himself even as he tries to determine who he is.

The preceding analysis by no means exhausts the topic of Túrin's onomastic fertility. Since it centers on the character and actions of the hero himself, it accounts only for the appellations he claims as his own, i.e. all those which he creates for himself (in the latest versions, **Neithan**, **Gorthol**, **Agarwaen**, **Wildman of the Woods**, and **Turambar**) and two given him by others (Túrin and **Mormegil**). Each of these names is clearly invested with meaning according to its participation in the hero's search for a "true" narrative of identity. Of his remaining *epessi*, it is impossible to deduce whether any have a place in that search. Though others call Túrin Woodwose, Adanedhel or Thurin, he never seems to refer to himself by those names;<sup>9</sup> their significance, if any, can only be established through their relation to some other source of meaning. I believe, however, that Túrin's entire collection of appellations — given name, aliases, and *epessi* alike — is explicable in terms of the unstable integration of his narrative into the cosmology in which it unfolds.

In the "Ainulindalë," the account of creation which stands at the head of the mythology of Middle-earth, Tolkien defines the metaphysical "shape" of his world through the metaphor of music: "Then the voices of the Ainur, like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words, began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar to a great music, and a sound arose of endless interchanging melodies woven in harmony..." ("Ainulindalë" 3-4). The great song of the Ainur, the angelic powers, under the direction of Eru Ilúvatar becomes a figure for the way in which the universe whose plan it engenders operates once it is brought into being. Ideally, the many and diverse elements of creation — events as well as creatures and objects — work in concert toward a common end. Each one is a "melody," complete in itself, but in the cosmic order all are interrelated and interdependent.

Unfortunately, this model is only imperfectly realized. While the overriding themes of the Music of the Ainur are propounded by Eru, their elaboration is left to created beings with the free will to embellish it however they please, even for selfish and self-aggrandizing purposes: "But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor Morgoth to interweave matters of his own imagining which were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself" ("Ainulindalë" 4). His composition, "a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying on a few notes," is the antithesis of the ideal; as Melkor previously chose to wander alone, now he isolates himself and those who decide to follow him from the grand polyphony of their fellows ("Ainulindalë" 4,5). The discord which they create, though still subject to the will of Ilúvatar and through that will "but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory, nonetheless marks a fall from unity in diversity, order, and universal harmony into disunity, disorder, and cacophony" ("Ainulindalë" 6). All

things remain interconnected, but in a perversion of the original design. It is this aspect of the metaphysics of Middle-earth with which Túrin is most intimately acquainted, and against which he fights his bitterest battles.

Because Túrin plays so many different roles, his identity is to a certain extent fragmented into a series of personae signified by various names. Such fragmentation is not in itself a problem, as the "Ainulindalë" shows, but the apparent lack of an overriding theme in the text to draw these names/narratives into harmony is unsettling. Unlike those of other Tolkien heroes (e.g. Frodo or Beren), Túrin's story does not have a great quest as its organizing principle; it does not, in fact, appear to be goal-directed at all. Neither the reconquest of Dor-límon — an early objective — nor the slaughter of Glaurung — Túrin's final deed of valor, which, from its primacy among his achievements, might appear to be a goal — finally governs the course of his actions.<sup>10</sup> In a world filled with people trying to get somewhere in order to do something, Túrin stands out by continually redefining himself in terms of the place he just left, regardless of where he is headed. His desultory movement through the narrative space lends itself to episodic, almost disjunctive, treatment: the story of Túrin is overshadowed by the *stories* of Neithan, Gorthol, Agarwaen, and so on.

On the other hand, these names/narratives are interrelated by virtue of referring to the same entity, the hero; we might say that the tale achieves unity through character rather than, as is more usual in Tolkien's works, through action. This focus, combined with the characters' tendency to use one name to commend on another, encourages the reader to see the interplay among the hero's appellations. In one late draft of the "Narn," for example, Finduilas' new *epessë* for Túrin is deliberately connected to two of his other names: "But you are kingly... even as the lord of the people of Fingolfin [High King of the Noldor].... And I do not think that Agarwaen is your true name, nor is it fit for you, Adanedhel. I call you Thurin, the Secret" ("Narn" 157). The links between this new name and its counterparts are not identical. As her style of address indicates (cf. "Narn" 159), Finduilas intends **Thurin** to supersede **Agarwaen** but supplement **Adanedhel**. The former she considers unfit because of its intimations of criminality; **Thurin** acknowledges the hero's habit of concealment but suggests nothing about its source. In conjunction with this appellation, **Adanedhel** depicts the hero as a half-Elven man of mystery rather than a blood-guilty human — a significant improvement. Obviously Finduilas' love for Túrin prompts her to amend his negative self-presentation. But for whose good? Note the disparity between their racial and social positions: she Elvish, he human; she royal, he nobody-in-particular (his lineal identity has not yet been revealed). Her choice of appellations may indeed be an attempt to mitigate Túrin's opinion of himself, but it also creates a persona which could love the Princess Finduilas with better grace and greater social acceptance.

Túrin, however, is oblivious to the fact that he has

wandered into a romance. He responds to the imputation, not of love, but of kingliness: "At this Túrin started, but he said, 'That is not my name; and I am not a king, for our kings are of the Eldar, as I am not'" ("Narn" 157). This denial recalls Túrin's insistence on using the name **Mormegil** to camouflage his ascendance over King Orodreth. He clings to a humble persona, refusing to legitimate his rising status through a new appellation. What certainly strikes the hero most about the name **Thurin**, however, is its startling resemblance to his given name. His immediate denial of this appellation resonates on several levels. His name is not Thurin, of course, because his name is Túrin, but his name is also not Thurin because his name is Agarwaen; still considering himself guilty of Beleg's murder, he will not allow that name/narrative to be set aside. And, finally, his name cannot be Thurin *because* that sounds too much like Túrin, the appellation he strives so desperately to keep "secret."

Despite his onomastic fertility, Túrin's attitude toward naming is far more rigid and confining than Finduilas'; he repeatedly submerges all but one (or, in Nargothrond, the few) names presently in use as irrelevant or dangerous. Each of the aliases which he adopts rejects the past as much as it rereads it. When he asks the Woodmen "to forget his name of old [i.e. **Mormegil**]" in favor of the name **Turambar**, he disclaims the power of his former identity to affect his present situation ("Narn" 112). Túrin appears to believe that the curse denies his life unity through any agency but his own; since he cannot accept that, he must — he thinks — forfeit all continuity of existence. But it is impossible to live in Middle-earth without taking the interdependence of contexts, the interweaving of individual narrative lines into a greater whole, into account. When Robely Evans remarks of the structure of history in *The Lord of the Rings* that "[t]he past never dies; it keeps coming forward into the present and demanding response, decision, courage, perhaps death" (52), he points up the dynamic which shapes Tolkien's fictional cosmos. Neither the past nor, in many cases, the present which takes place elsewhere will go away and leave Túrin alone; his best response — the only correct response — is to accept and use them.<sup>11</sup> His great victory over Glaurung, for example, becomes possible only through the application of memory:

"...I do not believe that this Dragon is unconquerable.... I know somewhat of him. His power is rather in the evil spirit that dwells within him than in the might of his body.... For hear now this tale that I was told by some that fought in the year of the Nirnaeth.... In that field the Dwarves withstood him and Azaghâl of Belegost pricked him so deep that he fled back to Angband. But here is a thorn sharper and longer than the knife of Azaghâl,"

And Turambar swept Gurthang from its sheath... ("Narn" 128)

The knowledge gained from his first encounter with the dragon — from the memory of the **Mormegil**, whom he previously disowned! — and from history enables Túrin to succeed where before he failed: he hides in a ravine and stabs Glaurung's vulnerable underbelly as the



dragon crosses above him ("Of Túrin" 273; "Narn" 134-35). In order to defeat evil, Tolkien's characters must resist the tendency to regard the here-and-now as cut off from the then-and-there — cast out the pride of fear or laziness which prefers "unison without harmony" to a disconcerting diversity.

For the most part, however, Túrin cannot exorcise his fear that Morgoth must dominate any coherent narrative of his career (Kocher *Guide* 164). He spends his life in a vain pursuit of authority over his name/narrative — vain not only because of his opponent's power and inaccessibility, but also because his desire for total control runs counter to the polyphonic shape of the universe. In the last analysis, the plan of creation, pulled between Ilúvatar's ideal and Morgoth's perversion of it, is too much for any being but Eru to manage. The hero himself cannot eliminate the medium for the curse's most devastating strikes: the interrelating episodes of his story. Túrin and Nienor, separated before she was born, are reunited some twenty-five years later as Turambar and Níniel in a grotesque distortion of their true relationship. Hence when the hero dies calls himself **Túrin Turambar**, he expresses his failure to prevent the curse from organizing the events of his career to its own pattern. He has been, he believes, "[b]lind, blind, groping since childhood in a dark mist of Morgoth!" ("Narn" 144).

The same name, somewhat articulated, is also placed on the stone which marks his grave: "A great grey stone was set upon the mound, and thereon was carved in runes of Doriath: **TÚRIN TURAMBAR DAGNIR GLAURUNGA**" ("Of Túrin" 278). In the latest version, this inscription — which reads "Túrin Turambar, Glaurung's Bane" (C. Tolkien, *Index of Names* 401) — is the final verdict both of Elvish and human society and of the text itself on the hero's life, summing up his career in a much more positive fashion than he does. Rather than condemn him for his unwitting crimes, his fellows celebrate the deed which is regarded as the foundation of his fame. "You have slain the Great Worm!... Praised for ever shall your name be among Elves and Men!" exclaim the Elves of Doriath who have been searching for Nienor, the last people with whom Túrin speaks before his suicide ("Narn" 144). Their opinion does not alter even after they hear the whole story; the laments sung for the fallen man depict "the valour of Turambar," not his failings or failures ("Narn" 145). The presence of the epithet **Dagnir Glaurunga** on the grave stone, however, betrays a certain anxiety as to whether the name **Túrin Turambar** by itself will command the desired laudatory response. If Morgoth's foes concede that although Túrin won a tremendous come-from-behind (or beneath) victory against the Enemy, he still lost the war, they undercut his career as an exemplum of hope for their own eventual triumph. They do not want to see him as a villain or a victim, but a hero, Glaurung's Bane. At the same time, by including in the inscription both the appellation by which Túrin announces his defeat and the epithet by which the rest of the world commends his victory, Tolkien reminds us of the limitation of naming.

The text cautions against the assumption that a character's entire history is encapsulated in his or her name — or in this case, in a few out of the many names which Túrin bears.

For Tolkien, naming is not a matter of inventing appellations with the proper onomatopoeic ring; neither is his concern with them wholly linguistic. Every name in the First Age narratives is both a symbol of identity and a word of power, and Túrin's many name-changes result as much from his fear of Morgoth's curse as from an unstable sense of self. The hero's onomastic development in further affected by his participation in (and revolt against) a complex cosmology. Clearly, however, a name's strongest affiliation in the First Age narratives is with narrative. Each of Túrin's appellations, aliases, and *epessi* tells part of his story, and together they form an onomastic subtext which enhances the main thread of the plot. The last word on this subject — and indeed on the onomastic web which pervades all the tales of Middle-earth — has yet to be written. It is to be hoped that literary scholars consider Tolkien's names more closely, since they were, after all, his gateway into story.<sup>12</sup> ☛

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### Notes

1. I have chosen this term rather than "*Silmarillion* narratives" in recognition of the fact that *The Silmarillion* is only one form among many in which Tolkien composed his tales of the First Age. The story of Túrin itself was rewritten over a fifty-year period in at least five different "traditions" — as a "lost tale," as a narrative poem, as a major free-standing prose narrative, and as part of *The Silmarillion*. Although I may appear to leap back and forth rather freely between these texts in this article, my analysis concentrates on the latest versions — the chapter "Of Túrin Turambar" in *The Silmarillion* and the "Narn i Hîn Húrin from *Unfinished Tales* — with reference to the other narratives only when they elucidate significant or tricky points. Unless otherwise noted, the storyline under discussion is that of the above-named versions.
2. These interpretations, while accurate according to the information concerning Tolkien's Elvish languages presently available, are tentative. The element *tur* is defined in the list of name elements appended to *The Silmarillion* (485), which I assume is applicable to the latest versions of the Túrin story. The element *-in(n)*, however, is defined only in "The Etymologies" (361), which was written forty years before "Of Túrin" or the "Narn." But Túrin is one of the few names in the First Age narratives which retained the form in which it first appeared, so it is entirely possible that it also retained its original meaning.
3. Tolkien himself recognized the significance of the relationship between name and narrative in his creative process. "Names," he stated on one occasion, "always generate a story in my mind" (Carpenter, *Tolkien* 193). Explorations of this idea, however, lies beyond the scope of this article.
4. The element *hûr* is defined only in the "The Etymologies," but the name Húrin (originally Úrin) has attained its final form by the time that the text was written. See note 2.
5. Its Sindarin cognate *amarth* requires an affix to form the negative, e.g. *úmarth* (ill-fate), *naeramarth* (dreadful doom) ("Of Túrin" 257, 276).
6. This term was suggested to me by Professor William Vesterman.



7. It has been pointed out to me that the logic of this passage is unclear: if Túrin dies as he wishes, conquering his fate, he will not be called **Turambar** (Conqueror of Fate) but **Túrin**. He may be trying to conceal his desire for death from the dragon, but it is equally possible that Tolkien, striving for a grand rhetorical effect, has become a little muddled — not unusual in this version (see C. Tolkien, Commentary 120).
8. I, too, have avoided the question. See Kocher, *Guide* 162-64, 173-75, 270 and Crabbe 121-22, 184-87 for an analysis of some of the difficult points raised by the curse's presence in the tale of Túrin.
9. **Woodwose** in the "Narn" is a possible exception. Christopher Tolkien translates this insulting name, bestowed upon Túrin by his rival Saeros, as "wild man of the woods" (Notes 147), which is precisely the alias which the hero adopts when he first meets the Woodmen of Brethil ("Narn" 110). The text is silent, however, as to whether Túrin recalls the former name when he takes the latter.
10. The dragon, in fact, seeks out the hero, rather than the other way around ("Of Túrin" 271).
11. Cf. Gandalf's rebuke of Denethor's narrow-mindedness in *The Lord of the Rings*: "You think, as is your wont, my lord, of Gondor only... Yet there are other men and other lives, and time still to come" (III.87).
12. See note 3.

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