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## Quenti Lambardillion: The Laborer-Asthete: Tengwar on the Title Page

### Abstract

Considers the Runic and Tengwar letters on the title pages of *The Lord of the Rings* as compared to *The Silmarillion* and other subsequent titles edited by Christopher Tolkien.

### Additional Keywords

Tolkien, Christopher—Editorship; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages



# Quenti Lambardillion

## A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

### Paul Nolan Hyde

#### The Laborer-Asthete: Tengwar on the Title Page

When personal acquaintances discover that I have advanced degrees in English language and literature they are impressed; when they discover that both my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation treat J.R.R. Tolkien's invented languages, their reactions vary, but almost always accompanied by a smile. I have generally been left to surmised precisely what the smile implies. Being an optimistic sort by nature, impervious to epithets (veiled or otherwise), I assume that the smile means, "Wonderful! Finally I know someone who received a PhD in something that was undoubtedly fun." In all candor, it *was* fun. The great delight, however, has been to realize that after more than twenty years of studying Tolkien's linguistics, it is still fun. There is an exhilaration associated with arriving at an insight about what he created that is aesthetic in nature, a special kind of appreciation of an extraordinary mind at work. Behind every aesthetic experience, however, there is an enormous amount of "horse work", tedious laboring that seems endless. I have come to believe, as a result, that all things that generate truly satisfying aesthetic pleasure involve meticulous, grueling work. In conjunction with this laborer-aesthete principle is the idea that one can only write powerfully, convincingly, from a position of strength. Simply put, one has to know what one is talking about. This often requires pursuing an idea or task almost *ad nauseam*. The Title Page inscriptions of the published works of Middle-earth provide such an opportunity.

Deciphering the Runic and Tengwar letters of the title pages is what I would call "Quick Fun". Almost every Tolkien fan I know has spent at least a few moments laboring over the inscriptions, if for nothing more than idle curiosity. I will now dismiss the idle curious by giving a transcription for each, thus dispensing with "Quick Fun".

The Title Page of *The Lord of the Rings* implements both Certhar runes and Tengwar script. The runic portion is italicized:

*The Lord of the Rings translated from the Red Book of West March by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien: herein is set forth the History of the War of the Ring and the Return of the King as seen by the Hobbits<sup>1</sup>*

The inscription for *The Silmarillion* may have been in part formulated by J.R.R. Tolkien, but certainly put in its final form by his son Christopher.

The tales of the First Age when Morgoth dwelt in Middle-earth and the Elves made war upon him for the recovery of the Silmarils: to which are appended the Downfall of Numenor and the History of the Rings of Power and the Third Age in which these tales come to their end

The volume *Unfinished Tales* signals Christopher Tolkien's visible emergence as the editor of his father's literary treasury. The Title Page is undoubtedly completely his.

In this book of *Unfinished Tales* by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien which was brought together by Christopher Reuel Tolkien his son are told many things of Men and Elves in Numenor and in Middle-earth from the Elder Days in Beleriand to the War of the Ring and an account is given of the Druedain of Istari and the Palantiri

As one might guess, the two volumes of the *Book of Lost Tales* have similar Title Page inscriptions. *Part One* is as follows:

This is the first part of the Book of Lost Tales of Elfinesse which Eriol the Mariner learned from the Elves of Tol Eressea the Lonely Isle in the Western Ocean and afterwards wrote in the Golden Book of Tavrobel: herein are told the tales of Valinor from the Music of the Ainur to the Exile of the Noldoli and of (the) Hiding of Valinor.

*Part Two* continues the original composition:

This is the second part of the Book of Lost Tales of Elfinesse which Eriol the Mariner learned from the Elves of Tol Eressea the Lonely Isle in the Western Ocean and afterwards wrote in the Golden Book of Tavrobel: herein are told the tales of Beren and Tinuviel of Turambar of the Fall of Gondolin and of the Necklace of the Dwarves.

The Title Page of *The Lays of Beleriand* follow in the same vein:

In the first part of this book is given the Lay of the Children of Hurin by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien in which is set forth in part the Tale of Turin: in the second part is the Lay of Luthien which is the Gest of Beren and Luthien as far as the encounter of Beren with Carcharoth at the gate of Angband







spelled "war", Christopher apparently giving up the phonetic spelling. In *Unfinished Tales*, *Druedain* is spelled "Druedain", but I believe this to be a scribal error, probably arising from a use of the diphthong "ai" (see "Ainur" and "Ainurlindale" in *Lost Tales, Part One* and *Lost Road*) and then inadvertently adding the stroke for "i" when adding the "n". There is, however, always the outside possibility that this is a special case of indicating vowel lengthening, but I am dubious. It is also interesting to note that Christopher apparently invents the methodology of superscribing full characters as a spelling device for vowel combinations, although it is possible that it came from JRRT himself. In the inscriptions for the word "Middle-earth" in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*, the "e" is superscripted over a carrier meaning vowel-preceding, and the "a" is sub-scripted meaning vowel-following. This technique is used in the words "learned", "Eressea", and "Ocean" in *Lost Tales*, and in "road" in the *Lost Road* inscription, superscripting the "o".

**b** : universally Tengwar #6

**c** : universally Tengwar #4 when representing "hard c", that is, the sound of "k". In *Lost Tales, Part One*, the "c" of "Ocean" is represented by Tengwar #30, as is the second "c" of "necklace" in *Lost Tales, Part Two*, notwithstanding the fact that phonetically they represent the two separate sounds of "sh" and "s" respectively.

**d** : universally Tengwar #5

**e** : once Christopher makes the decision to use the superscripted dot as the *tehta* for "e" it is universally so throughout the rest of the volumes.

**f** : universally Tengwar #10, including the phonetic combination "ph" in "Christopher" in *Unfinished Tales*.

**g** : there is a universal distinction made between "soft g" and "hard g" by using Tengwar #7 and #8 respectively. In *The Silmarillion*, the "g"s "age" and "Morgoth" are so distinguished. In *The Lays of Beleriand*, "Gest" and "given" are examples of the same principle. Tengwar #7 is also used for "j", as in "John", essentially the same sound as "soft g". The combination "ng" is universally represented by Tengwar #20. The rather odd combination "gh" of "brought" in *Unfinished Tales* is represented by Tengwar #8 with an extended *telco*. Normally, this extension signifies extreme aspiration; here it seems to soften the "g" into non-existence. In the Hugh Brogan letter, J.R.R. Tolkien uses Tengwar #16 for the apparently vacuous "gh" of "Hugh". The character in *Unfinished Tales* appears to be of Christopher's construction.

**h** : universally Tengwar #33 when standing alone (initially, except in "Lhammas" in *The Lost Road*). When the character is in vacuous combination with another character, as "Ch" in "Christopher" (the sound is "k" not "ch") in *Unfinished Tales*, Christopher's spelling "John" in *Unfinished Tales* and *The Lays of Beleriand*, then it is spelling represented with an extended *telco* with no *luva*.

When it is in contributive combination, distinct characters are used: Tengwar #11 for "sh", Tengwar #34 for "wh", Tengwar #3 for "ch" (except for "Carcharoth" in *The Lays of Beleriand*, a Quenya word using Tengwar #12, indicating a pronunciation that belies the spelling), "gh" and "ph" as mentioned above, and "th" which is phonetically distinguished depending on whether or not the sound is voiced or voiceless (hence, "this" using Tengwar #13 and "things" using Tengwar #9 in *Unfinished Tales*).

**i** : once the change from superscripted dot to left-to-right ascending stroke is made, the usage is virtually universal except for diphthongs. In these combinations (like "ai" of "Ainur" and "Ainulindale" in *Lost Tales, Part One* and *Lost Road*, and "ei" of "their" in *The Silmarillion*), the "i"-break of the diphthong is represented by Tengwar #35.

**j** : as indicated above, "j" is universally Tengwar #7.

**k** : universally Tengwar #4 including the combination "ck" of "necklace" in *Lost Tales, Part Two*.

**l** : universally Tengwar #27

**m** : universally Tengwar #18

**n** : universally Tengwar #17 except when in combination as "ng" as indicated above.

**o** : universally an ascending left-to-right down curl stroke except for two instances in *The Silmarillion*. The word "to" uses a sub-scripted curled stroke which may just as well be a "u". This particular usage is unique to *The Silmarillion* and the vowel of the word "to" in other inscriptions is a regular superscripted character over a simple carrier. Double "oo", as in "book" has two distinct representations. In *Unfinished Tales* and in *The Lays of Beleriand*, a single "o" stroke is superscripted over a long carrier; in the two volumes of the *Lost Tales*, the carrier and stroke are doubled as if striving for a spelling rather than a phonetic representation. The combination with "a" was mentioned above.

**p** : universally Tengwar #2 except in combination with "ph", sounding "f".

**q** : universally a mirror image of Tengwar #2. To my knowledge this is a unique character appearing in "Quenta" (or "Qenta") in *The Shaping of Middle-earth* and the *Lost Road*.

**r** : the uses of the two forms of "r" are really quite disconcerting at first blush, the main problem occurring in the Title Page inscription of *Unfinished Tales*. Generally, Tengwar #28 is used preceding vowels; Tengwar #21 is used before consonants or finally. The only exceptions to this (other than *Unfinished Tales*) are Quenya words ("Ainur" in *Lost Tales, Part One* and *Lost Road*; "Carcharoth" in *The Lays of Beleriand*; and "Ambarakanta" in *The Shaping of Middle-earth*), which I suspect reflect pronunciation of the language rather than that of English. In *Unfinished Tales*, Tengwar #25



is used universally for "r" without consideration for position; hence "together", "Christopher", "Numenor", "Elder", "war", and "Middle-earth" all use Tengwar #25, whereas in the other Title Pages they would have used (and some indeed did use) Tengwar #21 ("Numenor" in *Silmarillion* and *Lost Road*; "Elder" in *Shaping of Middle-earth*; "war" in *Lord of the Rings* and *Silmarillion*; and "Middle-earth" in *Silmarillion*). One can only speculate as to why *Unfinished Tales* diverged, but the return to the original system suggests to me a momentary lapse in *Unfinished Tales*.

**s** : beginning with *Unfinished Tales* the system for "s" is consistent. If "s" is initial, or follows a consonant, or is so placed as to not have the preceding vowel superscripted over it, Tengwar #29 is used. Thus, "first" and "tales" in *Lost Tales, Parts One and Two*; "first", "set", and "second" in *The Lays of Beleriand*; and so forth. If the "s" is to carry a preceding vowel, then a shortened special character, probably related to Tengwar #29, is used. I suspect that this is another of Christopher's inventions. If "s" is final, following a consonant, without a superscripted vowel, it may be attached to the preceding consonant as a horizontal hook. This is universally true throughout all of the inscriptions; hence "Elves", "rings", and "Silmarils" in *The Silmarillion*, and so forth. The only exception is when the preceding consonant is an "l". "Tales" in *The Silmarillion* is drawn with the hook, but Christopher does not use it again for "Tales", apparently preferring Tengwar #29. In *The Silmarillion*, the horizontal hook and the unshortened Tengwar #29 are used, the latter functioning with superscriptions. In *The Lord of the Rings* inscription, the hook is used in "hobbits", Tengwar #29 is used with phonetic "s" ("history", "West", "set", and "seen"), and Tengwar #31 and #32 are used for phonetic "z" ("is" and "as") one being preferred over the other depending on the ease with which the vowel might be superscripted (see III, 399). Again, the introduction of the shortened form obviated the need for the distinction in spelling.

**t** : universally Tengwar #1 except when in combination with "h" as noted above.

**u** : the direction change of the stroke was described above. In addition, "u" as the second element of a diphthong is represented as Tengwar #36, with the superscripted vowel. Thus, "brought" in *Unfinished Tales*, "encounter" in *Lays of Beleriand*, and "account" of the *Lost Road*.

**v** : universally Tengwar #14

**w** : universally Tengwar #22 except when in combination with "h".

**x** : the opportunity for "x" only transpires once in the Title Page inscriptions and that in *Lost Tales, Part One* as "Exiles". I believe that this is Christopher's invention as well; I cannot recall having seen it before or since in print. "x" is phonetically the sound "ks" and the character reflects that: Tengwar #4 with a modified Tengwar #29 superimposed on the lower left-hand corner. Note that there is no superscripted "s"; the power-

ful phonetic construction of the character itself is sufficient.

**y** : in *The Lord of the Rings*, "y" is represented as a long carrier with a superscripted dot, a "long i" as it were. In *The Silmarillion* and the two parts of the *Lost Tales*, the carrier bears the left-to-right ascending stroke, reflecting Christopher's switch of the *tehtar* for "e" and "i", as indicated above. In *Unfinished Tales*, *Lays of Beleriand*, *Shaping of Middle-earth*, and *Lost Road*, "y" is indicated by Tengwar #23.

**z** : is not spelled in any of the inscriptions as a letter.

**of** : a convention in writing using Tengwar #14 ("v") with a *telco* extension.

**of the** : the convention for "of" with a subscribed macron, attached to the *telco* in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, gradually being written separately. The subscribed macron generally means to double the letter, but this unusual *telco* usage in English precludes any real confusion. There is, however, one instance in *The Silmarillion* where the separate conventions for "of" and "the" are used instead of the combined convention.

**the** : another convention that modifies Tengwar #13 ("dh"), the voiced version of "th") with the extended *telco*.

**and** : a convention using Tengwar #5 with a superscripted macron, indicating nasalization (the "n" corresponds to "d" as "m" does to "p". In *The Lord of the Rings*, the "and" convention possessed a subscribed dot, probably representing the "mid-central" phonetic value of the vowel. It is not used in any of the other inscriptions.

**syllabic consonants** : both final "ed" ("unfinished" in *Unfinished Tales* and "er" throughout the inscriptions from *The Silmarillion* on, do not have accompanying *tehtar*. This is most likely a residual phonetic representation. It could be simple scribal error such as is probably the case in *Unfinished Tales* and *Lays of Beleriand* where "which" is not provided with its superscripted "i"; in *The Silmarillion* and *Lost Tales* the superscription is there. Another such accidental elision may be in "are" in *Unfinished Tales* where the subscripted dot for "e" appears to be missing. There is no question that the superscripted dot in "second" is missing in *Lost Tales, Part Two* and is present in the same word in *Lays of Beleriand*. The syllabic consonants are probably all legitimate, however.

There is at least one other problem with some of the inscriptions, however, that is really frustrating to "ad nauseum-philens". Sometimes in the process of collating the gatherings, and the binding itself, hides portions of the inscriptions on the Title Pages. Fortunately, the opposing page replicates the inscription, so that that which cannot be read because it is tucked into the binding or covered with glue can usually be found on the edge of the page. My copy of *Lays of Beleriand*, how-