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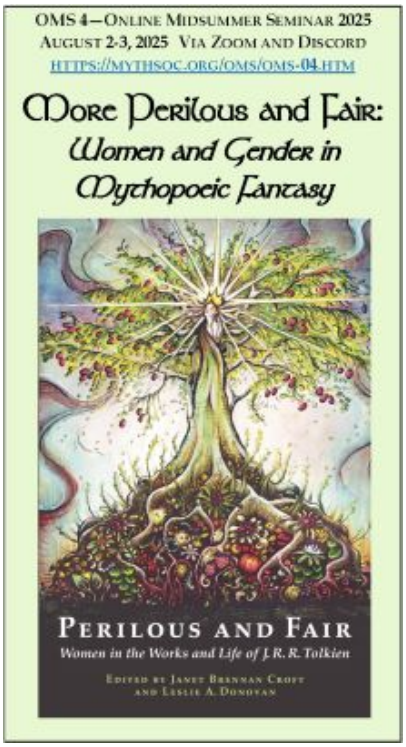

The Enigmatic Loss of Proto-Hobbitic

Abstract

This paper investigates two questions. First, why did Tolkien assign the Hobbits “a Mannish language of the upper Anduin, akin to that of the Rohirrim” (LotR, Appendix F 1130) as the first language of which we have some knowledge? Second, why does Tolkien deny the Hobbits a distinct linguistic identity and turn them into linguistic chameleons?

Additional Keywords

Mythlore; The Enigmatic Loss of Proto-Hobbitic; Thomas Honegger; Tolkien, languages, sub-creation

The Enigmatic Loss of Proto-Hobbitic

Thomas Honegger

Scholars investigating Tolkien's linguistic universe have usually focused on his Elvish languages or, if they want something even more challenging, they have tried their luck with the few known samples from Black Speech or Khuzdul in order to reconstruct the principles of those enigmatic tongues.[1] The Hobbits and their languages have played a very minor role in all these discussions,[2] not least since the general impression seems to be that there is nothing interesting to be said about this inobtrusive, loveable, quaint, but also (linguistically) not very exciting people. It may thus come as a surprise that the Hobbits' linguistic history contains something of a mystery. This linguistic puzzle, like Poe's Purloined Letter, lies hidden in plain sight in the seemingly clearly and squarely set out history of the Hobbits. In the following pages, I will attempt to investigate this mystery and to illuminate some of the complexities of Tolkien's linguistic universe.

Hobbit Pre-History and the Migration

The main sources of information for both the legendary and the more recent history of the Hobbits are the Prologue and Appendix of *The Lord of the Rings*. The former tells us that

> It is plain indeed that in spite of later estrangement Hobbits are relatives of ours: far nearer to us than Elves, or even than Dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men,[3] after their own fashion, and liked and disliked much the same thing as Men did. […] Their own records began only after the settlement of the Shire, and their most ancient legends

[1] See, for example, Kloczko's *Dictionnaire des langues des hobbits, des nains, des orques*.

[2] Kloczko (*Dictionnaire* 132), for example, devotes a bit more than three-quarters of a page to "La varieté de langue commune parlée par les Hobbits."

[3] The earlier drafts (P 1 & P 2) have: "For one thing, they spoke a very similar language (or languages), and liked […]" (*Peoples of Middle-earth* [*Peoples*] 8). As Christopher Tolkien notes, Tolkien qualified this 'similarity' in another text as follows: "It is said that Hobbits spoke a language, or languages, very similar to ours. But that must not be misunderstood. Their language was like ours in manner and spirit; but if the face of the world has changed greatly since those days, so also has every detail of speech […]" (*Peoples* 20; see also Christopher's discussion of this passage in *Peoples* 27).

> hardly looked further back than their Wandering Days. […] Their earliest tales seem to glimpse a time when they dwelt in the upper vales of Anduin, between the eaves of Greenwood the Great and the Misty Mountains. (*The Lord of the Rings* [*LotR*] Prologue.2-3)

The linguistically relevant information is given some 1127 pages later, namely that the language spoken by the Hobbits during that period

> was evidently a Mannish language of the upper Anduin, akin to that of the Rohirrim; though the southern Stoors appear to have adopted a language related to Dunlendish before they came north to the Shire. (App.F.1130)

The short account tells us clearly that any Proto-Hobbitic[4] is beyond recovery and that the linguistic history of the Hobbits is one of adaptation and borrowing. In a draft to Appendix F, Tolkien presents two different theories about Proto-Hobbitic:

> §22 Among Hobbits [*added:* now] there are two opinions. Some hold that originally they had a language peculiar to themselves. Others assert that from the beginning they spoke a Mannish tongue [> Mannish tongues], being in fact a branch of the race of Men. But in any case it is agreed that after migration to Eriador they soon adopted the Westron under the influence of the Dúnedain of the North-kingdom. The first opinion is now favoured by Hobbits [> is favoured by many Hobbits], because of their growing distaste for Men, but there is in fact no trace to be discovered of any special Hobbit-language in antiquity. The second opinion is clearly the right one, and is held by those of most linguistic learning. Investigation not only of surviving Hobbit-lore but of the far more considerable records of Gondor supports it. All such enquiries show that before their crossing of the Mountains the Hobbits spoke the same language as Men in the higher vales of the Anduin, roughly between the Carrock and the Gladden Fields. (*Peoples* 37-38)

The first theory, unlikely according to the narrator, would suggest the existence of a potentially non-Mannish tongue, which stands in contradiction to the categorization of the Hobbits as "relatives of ours" (*LotR* Prologue.2). Since Tolkien himself did not pursue this line of thought, we can concentrate on the second hypothesis, where we are on firmer linguistic ground. According to this theory, which is also the one found in the published text of *The Lord of the Rings*,

[4] Tolkien, to the best of my knowledge, never uses the term '(Proto-)Hobbitic' for the language (originally) spoken by the Hobbits. 'Hobbitic' is, however, used by people discussing the languages of Middle-earth (see, for example, https://notionclubarchives).

the Hobbits spoke "a Mannish language of the upper Anduin" (App.F.1130). And this even "from the beginning" (*Peoples* 37). Any attempt to reconstruct their linguistic identity before this first known appearance in the upper vales of Anduin is doomed to fail due to a lack of information.[5] We are free to speculate about an unrecorded and lost language that would predate even the Proto-Hobbitic of these earliest mentions—yet the results would remain conjecture. As a consequence, the "Mannish language of the upper Anduin" (App.F.1130) must constitute the point of departure for our discussion.

Yet the Mannish language of the Hobbits even at this earliest stage does not differ substantially from that of the neighboring Mannish population and is, as Tolkien points out, "akin to that of the Rohirrim" (App.F.1130). This lack of linguistic autonomy even at that early stage is noteworthy. Tolkien himself, in one of his drafts to Appendix F, comments on this lack of evidence for any identifiable distinctive native language and calls it *remarkable*: "Yet it remains remarkable that in all such traditions, if any tongue other than the Common Speech is mentioned, it is assumed that Hobbits spoke the language of Men among whom, or near whom, they dwelt" (*Peoples* 37).[6] This proclivity for trading one's current language for any other language "of Men near whom, or among whom, they lived" (*LotR* App.F.130) is, measured against real-world standards, remarkable indeed. In our world, as well as in Tolkien's sub-created one, this is the exception rather than the rule and usually occurs only because of massive external influences, such as prohibitions and sanctions against the use of a language, or as a means to emulate and adopt a superior culture. We find, of course, instances of bilingualism or diglossia, but in all those cases the speakers do not give up their original native language. The Dwarves, for example, are another short-of-height people who use the languages of Men near whom they live or with whom they trade.[7] However, they take recourse to these Mannish languages merely for communication with non-Dwarves and continue using their own language Khuzdul as an in-group tongue among themselves. There is, however, no indication for a similar in-group language phenomenon among the Hobbits nor that there existed any outside pressure making them abandon their language[8] during the period after they had crossed the Misty

[5] See Footnote 58 (*Peoples* 327) where Tolkien talks about "unrecorded ages."

[6] See *Peoples* 311, where Tolkien discusses the relationship between Hobbits and Men, and points out that "it is remarkable that the western Hobbits preserved no trace or memory of any language of their own."

[7] See the paragraph on Dwarves in Appendix F (1132-1133). Incidentally, it was Tolkien's desire to account for the presence of this "rabble of Eddaic-named dwarves" (*Peoples* 71) in his world that suggested to him the concept of 'outer names' (see *Peoples* 70-71).

[8] This differentiates the Hobbits from other peoples who have (almost) lost their original languages under outside pressure, such as the Jews with Hebrew, the Welsh with Welsh,

Mountains and begun to settle down in the westlands of Eriador. The account given in the Prologue indicates a peaceful and harmonious immigration: "There was room and to spare for incomers, and ere long the Hobbits began to settle in ordered communities" (Prologue.4). Furthermore, the formulation suggests no complete absorption of the Hobbits but the continuation of their communities as intact social groups, though often in close contact and exchange with Men.[9] If we had to choose an image for the situation, it would be neither the melting pot nor the salad bowl, but rather the bento-box with clearly separate elements that don't mix.

The descriptions of the Hobbits' migration and their linguistic development as given in the Prologue and Appendix F raise two questions. First, why did Tolkien assign them "a Mannish language of the upper Anduin, *akin to that of the Rohirrim*" (App.F.1130; emphasis added) as the first language of which we have some knowledge? Second, why does Tolkien deny the Hobbits a distinct linguistic identity and turn them into linguistic chameleons?[10] The answer to the first question can be given with some confidence and has its origin in Tolkien's translation conceit. The second question requires that we look even beyond the paratextual framework and consider the function of the Hobbits from a narrative point of view.

HOBBITIC, ROHIRRIC,[11] AND THE WESTRON

Tolkien's sub-created world of Arda is full of complexities big and small. One feature that contributes significantly to the feeling of depth is the way Tolkien arranged the different peoples and cultures. The reader enters Middle-

or the Scots with Scottish Gaelic. There was, as far as we know, no comparable outside pressure on the Hobbits for a wholesale trade-in of their language.

[9] See also the discussion in *Peoples* 311.

[10] Tolkien expresses this a bit more carefully: "the rapid adoption of the Common Speech in Eriador shows Hobbits to have been *specially adaptable* in this respect" (*Peoples* 311; emphasis added). There are other languages, such as English, that have borrowed extensively from other languages. Yet they retained a linguistic core that guaranteed their survival as a distinct language. The Hobbits, however, seem to have shed their original language (Proto-Hobbitic) completely and 'dressed' themselves in new linguistic clothes almost entirely. I don't think Tolkien was thinking about Hobbits when he wrote that "[l]inguistically we all wear ready-made clothes" ("English and Welsh" [E&W] 190), but their wholesale adoption of the Common Speech may possibly be seen within such a framework, too.

[11] The language of the Hobbits that was spoken while they still dwelt east of the Misty Mountains does not play any role and is referred to only once. The language of the Rohirrim, by contrast, is mentioned several times. It has, however, not been given a proper name, though one could think of several, such as Rohanese, Rohan, or, my favourite, Rohirric.

earth by means of the rural, pre-industrial yet in many ways modern world of the Hobbits and then comes gradually into contact with other civilizations and peoples, be this the ancient and highly sophisticated Elves, the enigmatic and taciturn Dwarves, the Byzantine Gondorians, the heroic Anglo-Saxon Rohirrim, or the primitive Drúedain,[12] to name just a few. This cultural layering finds, to some extent, its counterpart in Tolkien's web of languages.[13] Furthermore, Tolkien made use of the translation conceit to present *The Lord of the Rings* as a translation of the Red Book of Westmarch from the Westron, the Common Speech, into English and endeavored to map the relationships between the major languages of Middle-earth onto our world. By February 1942, i.e. the time he was working on the chapters introducing the Riders of Rohan, he had worked out the following list of correspondences:[14]

> Language of Shire = modern English
> Language of Dale = Norse (used by Dwarves of that region)
> Language of Rohan = Old English
> 'Modern English' is *lingua franca* spoken by all people (except a few secluded folk like Lórien)—but little and ill by orcs. (*Peoples* 70)

Or, as we find the situation described in Appendix F ('On Translation') of the published text:

> Having gone so far in my attempt to modernize and make familiar the language and names of Hobbits, I found myself involved in a further process. The Mannish languages that were related to the Westron should, it seemed to me, be turned into forms related to English. The language of Rohan I have accordingly made to resemble ancient English, since it was related both (more distantly) to the Common Speech, and (very closely) to the former tongue of the northern Hobbits, and was in comparison with the Westron archaic. In the Red Book it is noted in several places that when Hobbits heard the speech of Rohan they recognized many words and felt the language to be akin to their own, so that it seemed

[12] See Drout, Honegger "Rohirrim," Librán-Moreno, and Vink for informed discussions of specific correspondences and cultural layering.

[13] See Honegger "Westron" for an in-depth and detailed discussion of Tolkien's construction of a web of languages and its implications.

[14] This primarily linguistic framework of correspondences is very likely to have influenced Tolkien's further depiction of some of his peoples, such as the Rohirrim, although he explicitly denies this. See Honegger "Rohirrim" for an in-depth discussion of this question.

> absurd to leave the recorded names and words of the Rohirrim in a wholly alien style. (*LotR* App.F.1136)

The important point for us is that the Hobbits are linked directly to the Rohirrim—a fact that is brought to the reader's attention at the first meeting between the King of Rohan and Merry and Pippin. Théoden is intrigued by them and wonders: "Are not these the Halflings, that some among us call the Holbytlan?", to which Pippin replies: "Hobbits, if you please, lord" (III.8.557). As Tom Shippey (*Road to Middle-earth* [*Road*] 66-67) has pointed out, Tolkien thus provides the reader with the etymology of the (linguistically) enigmatic *hobbit*, a word he believed to be the product of spontaneous philological inspiration.[15] And even though the Hobbits have forgotten the language spoken by their ancestors while they had dwelt in neighborhood of the Rohirrim east of the Misty Mountains, they have retained a few expressions and terms that go back to that distant time. The narrator informs us:

> Of these things in the time of Frodo there were still some traces left in local words and names, many of which closely resembled those found in Dale or in Rohan. Most notable were the names of the days, months, and seasons; several other words of the same sort (such as *mathom* and *smial*) were also still in common use, while more were preserved in place-names of Bree and the Shire. The personal names of the Hobbits were also peculiar and many had come down from ancient days. (App.F.1130)

It may be noted that in keeping with the translation conceit, those peculiar terms are not rendered in the original Westron,[16] but represented by their Old English equivalents: *mathom*, for example, is the common Old English word *māðum*, with a slightly modernized spelling, which means 'treasure, object of value, gift'.[17]

What, then, is the possible authorial intention behind having the Hobbits and the Rohirrim speaking two chronologically distant yet, within the

[15] See Carpenter (175) for the well-known account on how Tolkien happened to write down what would become the opening sentence of *The Hobbit*: "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." Furthermore, Appendix F claims that "*Hobbit* is an invention" (1137). On its possible origin of *hobbit* in the *Denham Tracts*, see Shippey (*Road* 66).

[16] The interested reader can find some information on and specimen of the Westron language in the section "On Translation" in Appendix F (1133-1138). It is, of course, impossible to find out to which extent Tolkien would have liked to develop the Westron in the Appendix but was prevented from doing so by the restrictions imposed by the publisher. The known relevant information on the Common Speech has been conveniently put together by Fauskanger. Also of interest are Tolkien's own "Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*" and Nagel's monograph *Hobbit Place-Names. A Linguistic Excursion through the Shire*.

[17] See also Tolkien's comments in Appendix F (1136).

translation conceit framework, clearly related languages? The answer is most likely to be found in Tolkien's desire to present and contrast two aspects of Englishness: the heroic-epic qualities in the Riders of Rohan,[18] and the yearning for the lost (partial) idyll of a rural, pre-industrial, and pre-mechanical England in the low-mimetic Hobbits.[19] On a narrative level, this differentiation works very well and contributes considerably to the emotional accessibility of Tolkien's sub-created world by having the reader experience the world of Middle-earth primarily from a Hobbit point of view.[20] However, there are some queries pertaining to the linguistic framework that have to be addressed.

First, the relationship between the language of the Rohirrim and the Westron of the late Third Age parallels that of Old English and 20th-century Modern English only from a typological point of view. The language spoken by the Rohirrim seems to be an archaic tongue,[21] which is reflected not only in the way they speak, but also in the way they behave and interact.[22] Although we have very little concrete information about the language of the Rohirrim at the end of the Third Age, it is likely that Tolkien, by choosing Old English as its equivalent within the translation conceit, meant it to have retained much of its original character. This implies that it had escaped large-scale import of

[18] They are, to quote Tom Shippey (*Road* 126), Tolkien's answer to the question: "What would have happened had they [i.e. the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes] turned East, not West to the German plains and the steppes beyond?"

[19] Tolkien repeatedly identified the Shire as being inspired by "a Warwickshire village of about the period of the Diamond Jubilee" (*Letters* 230, #178). This is corroborated by Johannesson's analysis of the dialect of the Shire (Johannesson). See also Curry for a more comprehensive analysis of Tolkien's critique of modernity, part of which is reflected in his depiction of the Shire. This does not mean that Tolkien intended the Hobbits as 'perfect' specimen of the human race. He repeatedly pointed out the existence of parochialism, vulgarity, and stupidity (in varying degrees) among them (e.g. *Letters* 158, 232, 240, 262, 365). Even his unmitigated characterisation of Sam Gamgee, whom he calls "a more representative hobbit than any others" (*Letters* 329, #256), may seem, at first sight, overly harsh for a generation of readers who grew up with Peter Jackson's interpretation of the character. According to Tolkien, Sam is characterised by "a vulgarity […] a mental myopia which is proud of itself, a smugness (in varying degrees) and cocksureness, and a readiness to measure and sum up all things from a limited experience, largely enshrined in sententious traditional 'wisdom'" (*Letters* 329, #256).

[20] Shippey (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* [*Author*] 6) points out that Hobbits are "essentially modern in their attitudes and sentiment" and that their main function is "to guide the reader's reactions, to help the reader feel 'what it would be like' to be there."

[21] See Lass's illuminating discussion of criteria for a categorisation of languages as 'archaic.' See also Tolkien's own thoughts on classifying the periods of languages in "English and Welsh" (176).

[22] See Shippey. *Author* 90-102 and *Road* 122-131, for a discussion of how the culture of the Rohirrim is presented.

loanwords from other languages and also managed to avoid the many and fundamental changes in morphology and syntactic organization that have rendered Modern English so different from its Anglo-Saxon ancestor. Furthermore, Tolkien limits himself for the characterization of the Rohirrim to the early heroic-pagan framework as evoked by the *Beowulf*-poet, which means that he can concentrate on the traditional heroic language and doesn't need to consider the effects of Christian learning which introduced loanwords and calques into Late West-Saxon Old English. The Westron, on the other side, has been exposed to multiple influences from numerous languages and cultures. Also, due to its widespread use as a *koine* and its adoption as native language by many of the peoples of Middle-earth,[23] the Westron developed varieties that existed side by side in the late Third Age.[24] Its history and development seems therefore typologically comparable to that of the English language after the Norman Conquest. English, too, experienced a massive influx of loanwords and underwent a radical re-structuring.[25] Furthermore, it became the *koine* of the Western world due to the rise of first the British Empire and, afterwards, due to the American hegemonic power. Tolkien was very critical of this development and considered it detrimental for all parties involved. Indeed, he saw the rise of 'English' (Tolkien's scare quotes) as the universal language for all and sundry as a "damn shame" since the "bigger things get the smaller and duller or flatter the globe gets. It is going to be all one blasted little provincial suburb" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* [*Letters*] 65).

Tolkien does not mention explicitly why he is so set against the universal use of English, yet his son Christopher, the addressee of the letter, is

[23] On the Westron as a kind of *koine*, see the following statements: "But the Westron was used as a second language of intercourse by all those who still retained a speech of their own, even by the Elves, not only in Arnor and Gondor, but throughout the vales of Anduin, and eastward to the further eaves of Mirkwood" (*LotR* App.F.1127). In the Third Age, the Westron "had become the native language of nearly all the speaking-peoples (save the Elves) who dwelt within the bounds of the old kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor" (1127). The Westron has therefore been called a "creole language" ("Westron"), which is probably correct for those instances where it replaced another language.

[24] Hobbit Westron is "for the most part a rustic dialect, whereas in Gondor and Rohan a more antique language was used, more formal and more terse" (*LotR* App.F.1133). And the older tribes of the Orcs in the North and the Misty Mountains "had long used the Westron as their native language, though in such a fashion as to make it hardly less unlovely than Orkish" (App.F.1131).

[25] English developed from a synthetic language, relying heavily on inflections to express grammatical relationships, into a largely analytic one where inflectional endings were mostly lost and their function was taken over by word-order and prepositions. We don't know whether the Common Speech had also gone through similarly far-reaching changes, but it would be at least possible.

very likely to have known the reason(s). They can be found, if not in Tolkien's letter, then in his lectures and other comments on the nature and qualities of languages. In "English and Welsh" [E&W], a paper given originally as the inaugural O'Donnell Memorial Lecture on 21 October 1955, he writes: "For though cultural and other traditions may accompany a difference of language, they are chiefly maintained and preserved by language. Language is the prime differentiator of peoples[26] […]" (E&W 166). He then goes on by quoting the early 19th-century Icelandic nationalist Sjéra Tómas Sæmundsson:

> Languages are the chief distinguishing marks of peoples. No people in fact comes into being until it speaks a language of its own; let the languages perish and the peoples perish, too, or become different peoples. But that never happens except as the result of oppression and distress. (qtd. in E&W 166)

By quoting Sæmundsson's ideas about language and identity, Tolkien publicly endorses the Romanticist tradition[27]—a tradition that had also given birth to philology and whose most famous representatives, the Grimm Brothers, could be seen as Tolkien's spiritual-scholarly ancestors.

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Tolkien's ideas about language and identity are indeed indebted to an essentialist tradition that found its most prominent expression in the ideas of European Romanticism. In his lecture on "English and Welsh," Tolkien praises Welsh as the senior language of the British Isles:

> It [i.e. Welsh] has, and had long ago, become, as it were, acclimatized to and naturalized in Britain; so that it belonged to the land in a way with which English could not compete, and still belongs to it with a seniority which we cannot overtake. (E&W 177)

We find similar ideas expressed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Riding towards Meduseld, Aragorn fills in his two companions about the Rohirrim and also recites a poem in the language of Rohan:

> Then he [i.e. Aragorn] began to chant softly in a slow tongue unknown to the Elf and Dwarf; yet they listened, for there was a strong music in it.

[26] Tolkien repeatedly stresses that peoples must not be equated with races (eg E&W 166, 167).

[27] The Romanticist philological-scholarly influences on Tolkien have been discussed best by Tom Shippey in his *The Road to Middle-earth*, while Julian Eilmann's monograph *J.R.R. Tolkien: Romanticist and Poet* explores the literary-poetic and philosophical aspects.

> 'That, I guess, is the language of the Rohirrim,' said Legolas; 'for it is like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains.' (*LotR* III.6.507-508)

Legolas recognizes that the language of the Rohirrim has, like Welsh in Britain, become acclimatized to and naturalized in Rohan, so that it has entered into a quasi-symbiotic relationship with the land. The Elf's astute comments highlight a central aspect of what could be called 'Tolkien's philosophy of language', though the Professor never formulated such a theory in an explicit and coherent form.[28] The two basic assumptions that can be deduced from Tolkien's published writings are, on the one hand, the idea that there exists a close relationship between language and communal as well as individual identity, and, on the other, that we have a correspondence between the aesthetic qualities of a language and the moral qualities of its speakers; or, crudely put: Good people talk nice and pleasant languages, whereas the languages of bad people sound nasty and horrible.[29] The implications of the latter have been explored elsewhere[30] and are not relevant for our current discussion. The linking of language and identity, however, is central for our investigation and raises important questions, the most pressing of which is: Why has Tolkien deprived the Hobbits of their original, distinctive (*vis-à-vis* their new linguistic environment) language which they had brought with them west over the Misty Mountains? There are, in my mind, two possible reasons for such a step.

First, he wanted to avoid having the Hobbits and the Rohirrim speak the same language when they would finally meet again towards the end of the Third Age. The archaic tongue of the Riders of Rohan would feel wrong when coming out of the mouths of the low-mimetic Hobbits. Second, Tolkien wanted to retain the memory of the shared linguistic heritage between the two peoples. These two aims are not exactly mutually exclusive but require some additional effort to make them compatible. In order to preserve evidence of the shared linguistic past of the Rohirrim and the Hobbits, Tolkien could have simply subjected Proto-Hobbitic to a similar number of influences and changes as found in the variegated history of the English language. Yet in order to live up to the

[28] Key-elements of such an unwritten 'philosophy of language,' like his idea of a 'native language' (which is different from what is usually called 'mother tongue') or his theory of phonaesthetics (cf. Smith "Fitting," Smith *Inside Language*, and Fimi 76-121) can be found in his lectures "A Secret Vice" and "English and Welsh," and his only recently published "Essay on Phonetic Symbolism" (63-80).

[29] Prime examples for this linguistic stereotyping are, on the one hand, the Elves who speak the mellifluous Sindarin and Quenya, and, on the other, Sauron, whose harsh and unlovely Black Speech is represented by means of the Ring-inscription.

[30] This linguistic differentiation constitutes a subcategory of the larger phenomenology of good and evil, which has been discussed by Honegger "Zur Phänomenologie."

high expectations of his sub-created world, Tolkien would have felt obliged to provide at least a short sketch of the relevant historical events that caused all these linguistic developments. Anyone familiar with the complexities of the real-world history of the English language is able to gauge the enormity of such a task. Undoubtedly, Tolkien would have relished the challenge of constructing such a pedigree for yet another of his languages, as his ample notes on his Elvish languages prove. Yet he would also have realized that Proto-Hobbitic and the Hobbits are no appropriate subjects for such an 'expense of spirit'—not least since they are late additions to his *legendarium* and his sub-created world and do not seem to fit in without major adjustments.[31] They may be given their own (half-) heroic age with figures such as the founders of the Shire, Marcho and Blanco, who are reminiscent of the leaders of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, Hengest and Horsa, or Bandobras 'the Bullroarer' Took. The latter, due to his extraordinary height (four foot five), was even able to ride a horse. However, this sounds to me rather like a typically Tolkienian joke since I strongly suspect that Tolkien is implicitly contrasting Bandobras Took with *Göngu-Hrólfr* (Hrólf the Walker) from the Old Norse tradition,[32] who is exceptional because he is so tall that he CANNOT ride a horse.

Yet apart from a few light-hearted parallels and analogues to the history of the English, Tolkien wisely abstained from burdening the Hobbits and their ancestral tongue with a long and complex development comparable to that of the English and their language.[33] His solution to the problem strikes me as a bit of a sleight-of-hand:[34] he has the Hobbits simply abandon their language and adopt the Westron, a post-imperial language that can look back upon a

[31] See Rateliff for a knowledgeable discussion of the influence of *The Hobbit* on the further development of Tolkien's *legendarium*.

[32] See the *Saga of Olaf, Tryggvi's Son*, where we read about Hrólf, the son of Earl Rögnvald and his wife Ragnhild, who is said to have conquered Normandy and who "was so big that no horse could carry him, and he was therefore called *Gönguhrólf* (Hrólf the Walker)" (Appendix to *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 203). Many thanks to Allan Turner for helping me to track down the proper reference.

[33] It would have meant to fit in at least two invasions of the Shire with partial and full conquests respectively, the building of an empire and trade relations that span the known world, and a royal dynasty.

[34] Tolkien is usually very careful in constructing his sub-created world within the parameters of what is common in the real world. To have a people give up their language without external pressure is rather exceptional and would require further explanation since, as Sæmundsson argues: "let the languages perish and the peoples perish, too, or become different peoples. But that never happens except as the result of oppression and distress" (quoted in E&W 166).

development as complex and long as that of English.[35] This way Tolkien achieves his main aim, namely of having the Hobbits of the late Third Age speak a language that is sufficiently different from the archaic tongue of Rohan, yet that retains some shared elements. And, as a welcome side-effect, the shedding of the archaic and heroic tongue in favor of a more 'modern' one is also an indication of the Hobbits' domestication. They may have been once part—not only linguistically—of a heroic world, yet they have long since developed into a peaceful, low-mimetic and, to some extent, 'modern' people. And although they were once immigrants to both Eriador and the *legendarium* respectively, they have become naturalized to such an extent that they seem to have been there for ever—like the rabbits in Britain, as Tom Shippey's perceptive comment points out:

> Rabbits have been naturalized […]. Now it seems as if they have always been there. This is the fate which I think Tolkien would like for the hobbits. […] [They] are imports, [… but] they can be made to seem harmonious, to settle in, to look as if they had been there all along—the niche which Tolkien eventually claimed for hobbits, 'an *unobtrusive* but *very ancient* people' (my [i.e. Shippey's] emphasis). (Shippey, *Author* 46)

The adoption of the Common Speech is thus a logical and fitting step and, from a narratological point of view, constitutes part of Tolkien's attempt to mark Hobbits as 'normal' and to contrast them with the Dwarves and Elves, who are marked as 'exotic' or 'other', amongst other things by having a language of their own. Thus, the adoption of the Westron goes hand in hand with the development of the Hobbits towards becoming Everyman figures. And yet the replacement of their archaic tongue by the Common Speech does not mean that all of them have become 'common' in the negative sense of the word. Deep down, hidden amongst many layers of Victorian and Edwardian respectability, some vestiges of the distant heroic heritage have survived and though the slow-kindled courage of the Hobbits rarely makes them act heroically, they can still hold their own—also linguistically[36]—in the archaic and heroic world that surrounds the Shire.[37]

[35] The historical and linguistic information on the Westron provided in Appendix F (1128-1130 and 1133-1138) is not exhaustive, but clearly suggests such a development.

[36] See, for example, the exchange between Théoden, King of Rohan, and Meriadoc, son of Saradoc (aka Merry) amid the wreck of Isengard (*LotR* III.8. 556-559).

[37] See Klarner, who provides the most recent summary and synthesis of research on this topic.

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