Quenya Phonology: Comparative Tables, Outline of Phonetic Development, Outline of Phonology (review)

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Book Reviews

Quenya Phonology: Comparative Tables, Outline of Phonetic Development, Outline of Phonology, by J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Gilson. Mountain View, CA: Parma Elderlamberon, 2010. 108 pp. $35 (oversize paperback) [no ISBN]. *Parma Eldalamberon XIX*.

Tolkien first set out the phonology or sound laws governing his eldest Elvish language in 1915, in "The Sounds of Qenya" (*Parma Eldalamberon XII* 3-28); and during a second phase of work on the subject in Leeds in the early 1920s he produced another "Qenya Phonology" (*Parma Eldalamberon XIV* 60-70). The current *Parma Eldalamberon* covers two further phases of work on the topic: from 1937, a set of "Comparative Tables" and an "Outline of Phonetic Development"; and from about 1951, a revision and expansion of the latter, titled "Outline of Phonology." In glorious technicality, these show Tolkien's ideas on the sound laws of Quenya just before and just after the composition of *The Lord of the Rings*: at the point when he set aside his work on the Elder Days and at the point when he resumed it. There is a hint that in 1937, just as he hoped that the "Silmarillion" might be published in the wake of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien imagined that his Quenya phonology might also see the light of day as part of a full historical grammar of the Elvish tongues. Although that did not happen, he seems—despite his tendency to niggle with his creation—to have remained largely satisfied by the 1951 phonology for the rest of his life.

The "Comparative Tables" are dense charts showing the outcomes, in a dozen languages, of each of the range of permissible sounds or sound-combinations in Primitive Quendian, the original Elvish language derived (at this stage in Tolkien's conceptions) from Valarin. The charts are accompanied by a cursory survey of some general trends in the individual languages, with a few comments on tengwar orthography and some broadbrush pointers towards chronology ("probably in the first century of the Sun"). Amid all the complexities and corrections that are to be expected in an edition of Tolkien's unpublished writings on Eldarin, there is one note here that illuminates his creative processes briefly and brightly. This "torn half-slip of paper" compares each tongue of Beleriand (as imagined in c. 1937) with a real-world language. Most Tolkien readers with the remotest interest in Elvish know that Sindarin is inspired by Welsh and Quenya by Finnish. Here (22) we find Sindarin's predecessor Noldorin compared to Welsh, but also Telerin compared to Latin, Danian to Germanic, Ossiriandic to Old English, and East Danian to Old Norse. The three languages imagined for the Avari are likened to Irish, Lithuanian and (curiously) Finnish again. Taliska, the Mannish

language derived here from Elvish in Beleriand, is likened to Gothic—a source of creative inspiration for Tolkien since his schooldays, when he "reconstructed" words that might have existed in this East Germanic language but have not survived in the recorded corpus. It will be interesting to see how Taliska, of which more material remains to be published, reifies Tolkien's love of Gothic. In the current publication, however, the evidence is typically tantalizing. Armed with the "Comparative Tables" and some examples of Primitive Quendian, you could generate plausible words in Taliska or any of the other tabulated languages. Tolkien perhaps used these tables to generate some of the vocabulary of the minor languages in the contemporary *Etymologies* (*Lost Road* 341-400, *Vinyar Tengwar* nos. 45 and 46), which conform to the fully revised sound-change charts.

Tolkien, as the ever-efficient C.S. Lewis observed, worked "like a coral insect" (Lewis 1579): painstakingly constructing vast complexes of information to form the foundation and background of his legendarium. It appears that he envisaged giving each of these many languages the depth of treatment that he tried to give Quenya: one set of pages is marked, "To be revised when the individual langs. are done." In practice he could not "do" even Quenya fully to his satisfaction, and continued to work away at it for his entire life.

Yet Tolkien could also make swift and large-scale alterations, and while working on the "Comparative Tables," he reassigned entire languages to different peoples. With remarkable acuity, Christopher Gilson notes that one string of reassignments may have arisen from a desire to make the invented languages conform to the styles of real ones (7). Tolkien had intended the language of Doriath to sound something like Old English and that of Ossiriand to sound similar to Old Norse. But OE and ON both descend from Proto-Germanic, and he realised his scheme would likewise require the languages of Doriath and Ossiriand to share a closer kinship with each other than his account of the Elder Days would allow. Not wishing to waste the effort he had put into devising all the sound-changes for these two languages, he took the OE-style tongue off the Elves of Doriath and handed it lock, stock and barrel to those of Ossiriand; and the ON-style tongue was transferred, in turn, to the Danian Elves east of Eredlindon. At a stroke of the pen, the problem vanished: as the contemporary "Lhammas" tells us, Ossiriand had been people by Danians (*Lost Road* 175), providing just the degree of kinship needed for Tolkien's scheme. Concomitantly, the Gothic-style speech of the East Danians was given to Men as Taliskan; and to fill the vacuum left in Doriath, Tolkien simply cooked up an additional language. Thus the correspondences outlined above were achieved. All this hocus pocus came long before his most drastic act of language-juggling, when he resumed

his work on "The Silmarillion" in 1950-1 and decided the Welsh-style language he had been crafting since 1916, hitherto "Noldorin," should be the native language of Doriath (renamed "Sindarin"), and the Noldor's only by adoption.

That change of Noldorin to Sindarin is reflected in some of the differences between the two texts that dominate this issue of *Parma Eldalamberon*, the "Outline of Phonetic Development" begun in 1937 (OP 1) and the "Outline of Phonology" (OP 2), its 1951 successor. Tolkien's titles are rather misleading, for where the "Comparative Tables" give only a long-distance overview, these so-called Outlines provide a close-up account of "all of the possible sounds and sound-combinations that occur in Quenya," as Gilson puts it (10). The Outlines are complementary to the equally hefty "Tengwesta Qenderinwa" (*Parma Eldalamberon XVIII*), which deals with morphology—the rules of word building—and which also exists in 1937 and 1951 versions. Together, OP 1 and the contemporary "Tengwesta" replace the much briefer Leeds "Qenya Phonology" (which also covered morphology), and show Tolkien in 1937 massively enlarging his conception of Quenya. An enigmatic phrase explaining the conventions used "in this book" (34, footnote 28) may suggest that at this stage he even envisaged publication, extraordinary though that seems for material so technical. Of course, that did not happen, and even the 1951 version was never finished. However, these later conceptions remained relatively stable: Tolkien continued to make revisions even into his final years, but let much of OP 2 stand without alteration.

Tolkien opens both Outlines with a statement of scope and "editorial" treatment, in which as usual the fiction is maintained that these writings are based on real documents (just as *The Lord of the Rings* purports to derive from "The Red Book of Westmarch"). The main analysis covers consonants and then vowels, and these two sections take as their starting point the relevant sounds that existed in the "original Quenderin" that all Elves spoke before their Tower of Babel event, the Great March. In the Outlines the sound-changes undergone by consonants are described exhaustively for all scenarios: when the consonant stood alone (other than at the end of a word), when it appeared as part of a consonant cluster at the start of a word, or when medially, and when it stood at the end of a word. (The creation of consonant clusters is a frequent result of many of the processes of syllabic accentuation and suffixion described in the "Tengwesta," as well as occurring when words are compounded together.) Within each scenario, the consonants are classified according to standard phonetic practice in ways which will be familiar to anyone who has examined the tengwar chart in *The Lord of the Rings* Appendix E: stops, continuants; voiceless, voiced; aspirated, nasal, oral, spirant. After many pages of this, Tolkien usefully provides a ready-reference summary

(50-2). The section in OP 1 on vowels covers what happened to short vowels, long vowels and diphthongs, paying particular attention to the effect of Quenya's changing patterns of accent or stress (necessarily recapitulating some of the "Tengwesta"). It also deals with what happened when two vowels were separated only by a semi-vowel (*y* or *w*). Tolkien planned a section on vowels in final syllables, but left only a smattering of notes on the topic. Unfortunately this lack is not made up in OP 2, where the vowels section is not so much unfinished as barely begun.

In addition to Quenya, OP 1 traces some of the developments of Lindarin, Telerin and Noldorin, the languages of the Elves who went to Valinor: far less attention is given to the tongues of Beleriand and beyond. OP 2 covers the revised versions of the same languages, although Lindarin was by now called Vanyarin while Noldorin had been reassigned as Sindarin. The Outline distinguishes between two "dialects" of Quenya: the classical version spoken in the noontide of Valinor and later surviving only as "book-language" or *Parmaquesta*; and the *Tarquesta* or "high speech," a later spoken form. In OP 1 Tarquesta is "in effect simply *Quenya* used after its obolescence as a native language, as a high speech of ceremonial and song, and as a language of intercourse among the *Kalaquendi* in later days after their various tongues had diverged" (29). In OP 2, composed when Tolkien had made major changes in the history of the Elves and their languages, Tarquesta is the spoken form of Quenya taught in Beleriand among the Noldor after they had adopted Sindarin, the language of the Grey-elves of Doriath, as their day-to-day speech. In either version of the story, Parmaquesta and Tarquesta can be compared—in their interrelations, in their relative ages and in their disparate functions—to Latin in its classical and medieval forms. There is also "Ancient Quenya," which has its counterpart in Ancient Latin. This comparison of *functions* is a quite different matter from the *phonological* comparison of *Telerin* to Latin in the "Comparative Tables." Although aesthetically Quenya embodies Tolkien's love of the sound of Finnish, it performs in Middle-earth the role that Latin played in Europe for two millennia—though largely divested of the mantle of empire. Considering this, and Quenya's interplay with (Welsh-inspired) Noldorin/Sindarin, "elf-latin" stands as a thoroughly fitting epithet for the language. (In another parallel with the real world, the ceremonial Tarquesta closely follows the spelling of the old "book language," but, according to OP 2, its pronunciation is affected by the Noldorin contacts with other speech-groups in Beleriand; such a divergence between written and spoken form is a feature of English, particularly after the "Great Vowel Shift" in the late Middle Ages, and of many other actual languages.)

Tolkien attributes the epithet "elf-latin" to Ælfwine, the Anglo-Saxon Elf-friend who serves as the legendarium's Marco Polo and Alan Lomax

combined. The "Outline" details how Ælfwine transcribed Elvish using Latin orthography with some Old English spellings (see *Shaping* for his "translations" into OE); and how this has been adapted in turn for modern eyes. Tolkien uses the opportunity to justify his own past vacillation between such spellings as *Qenya* and *Quenya*, explaining (76) that *qu* is used on the Latin model but Ælfwine also used roman *q* because it happens to look much like the tengwar sign for the same sound. This fiction of transmission through the mortal Ælfwine, part of Tolkien's grand framing-device for the legendarium, plays a curiously double-edged role in respect to the material about Elvish languages. Real philologists, who reconstruct dead languages such as Proto-Indo-European by comparing their living descendants, may be brilliant, but they pale beside the Elven loremasters (such as Ælfwine's tutor Rúmil). Undying and equipped with superhuman memory, the Elves have preserved an actual oral record of the language spoken on the Great March from Cuiviénen—so that "knowledge of 'Common Eldarin' . . . is often seen to be more precise and detailed than the deductions of comparison could be" (68). The Elves' total potential knowledge, of course, has its real-life analogue in Tolkien's potential simply to invent everything that could be known about Elvish (if he had time). However, no storyteller was more acutely aware than Tolkien of the value of a misty distance; and as a philologist who delighted in puzzles he would doubtless have found a complete, perfect account of Elvish fundamentally unsatisfying. Enter Ælfwine—not only the conduit through which the lore has reached us, but also the stopcock or valve which helps keep that lore within credible limits: "Older stages of Quenya . . . were, and no doubt still are, known to the loremasters of the Elves, but of these we know only such incidental notes and statements of the grammarian Rúmil as Ælfwine reports" (29). In addition, phrases such as "but some hold that . . ." (45) indicate that the Elven loremasters were (and no doubt still are) a fractious bunch, so no final consensus is to be expected of them.

Nor can finality be expected of Tolkien. OP 1 is an extensively reworked manuscript, with drafts, replacements and riders galore. OP 2 is a beautiful piece of calligraphy; the opening page is reproduced on the cover; but it carries later annotations a-plenty, even in that most uncalligraphic medium, ballpoint pen. There now must be enormous scope, in the material published on Q(u)enya since *Parma Eldalamberon XII*, for the competent linguist and sedulous textual scholar to trace the development of Tolkien's ideas about the language, both as a whole and by focusing on a single feature of (for instance) phonology, up to the period when Tolkien was finishing *The Lord of the Rings* and sometimes beyond.

As one would expect from a writer who derived story from language-invention, the historical account of Quenya which opens the "Outline" is

already ripe with social and dramatic implications. The passing years did nothing to diminish Tolkien's capacity for nurturing the seeds of story in the seemingly stony ground of linguistics. Take for example the dry "fact" that original Quenya *th* (þ, the voiceless sound in English *thin*) became *s*, an idea that went all the way back to 1915 (*Parma Eldalamberon XII*, 19). OP 1 tells that the Noldor, however, kept *th* and so were called the Lispers. Further detail appears in OP 2, in which Sindarin was now part of Tolkien's changed conceptions:

> later many among the Exiles restored the sound [þ], after their adoption of Sindarin as their diurnal speech, a language which favoured the sound [þ]. Some retained it in imitation of the Vanyar . . . (71)

But late in life, when Tolkien seems to have found it necessary to knock holes in many of his longest-standing conceptions, he felt that the change of original *th* to *s* needed a special explanation. This led to "The Shibboleth of Fëanor" (*Peoples*, 331ff.) the c. 1968 account of how the two pronunciations, conservative *th* and innovative *s*, become symbols of bitter division between Fëanor and the sons of Indis.

Each of the two Outlines is presented in its final form, taking in all alterations; the footnotes provide all earlier readings, including entire rejected passages. It should be noted that this is the reverse of the treatment of the 1937 "Tengwesta Qenderinwa" in the previous issue, where the main text was given as first written, with alterations in the footnotes. The main text of OP 1 contains much from 1937, but also much from a great deal later. There is, for example, an extraordinary reference to *Rothinzil* (49), which first appeared as an Adunaic name for Eärendil's ship in the 1946 story "The Drowning of Anadûne" (*Sauron* 360); although in OP 1 there is no indication that it is meant to be anything other than Quenya.

Much of OP 2 dovetails satisfyingly with the detailed work Tolkien did in the years immediately after he completed the narrative proper of *The Lord of the Rings*. The discussion of Eldarin sounds includes much about tengwar usage that elaborates on Appendix D, a text from the same era. Particular developments are charted against the detailed chronological framework of the closely contemporary "Annals of Aman," in *Morgoth's Ring*. It is surprising amid all this to encounter the England-pun *Ingolondë*, "country of the Noldor" (77), the name for Beleriand which in *The History of Middle-earth* is last recorded in the c. 1937 "Quenta Silmarillion." And on the other hand, OP 2 contains many alterations from later than 1951. As Gilson points out, revisions to particular sound-change laws meant neither the Quenya word *tengwa* "sign" nor Sindarin *haudh* "mound" should exist as products of the roots from which Tolkien had originally formed them; yet both words had been published in *The*

Lord of the Rings so Tolkien, for once the pragmatist, simply invented new roots for them.

Gilson uses the footnotes not only for earlier readings of the Outline, but also to provide cross-references, particularly to *Parma Eldalamberon XVIII* and to illustrative examples in the "Etymologies." For utility, there could be no better arrangement. However, the effect on the eye, and on the mind already battling with the innate complexity of Tolkien's subject, can be bewildering. Tolkien organized this material under numbered subheads, which might usefully have been incorporated in the page headers as a navigational aid. This aside, however, Gilson's editorial apparatus is as impressive as ever, and also includes a very full and wide-ranging introduction describing the texts, explaining their purpose and interrelations, and providing numerous insights. All of this would be commendable at the best of times, but it is all the more so in the circumstances: during the final stages of editing, Chris Gilson's father passed away (the issue is dedicated to him).

Previous descriptions of Eldarin phonology including the "Comparative Tables" had been dessicated and terse affairs, charting sound changes with what often resemble algebraic formulae. But in the "Outline of Phonetic Development" and the "Outline of Phonology," Tolkien meticulously examines a whole laboratory of collisions and explains their results in depth. Common tendencies are highlighted in the way the Elves came to favour or disdain certain sounds; many curious details of pronunciation are revealed for the various forms of Tarquesta as spoken by the different branches of Elfinesse and even the Númenóreans. As a piece of technical writing, each Outline is (incompleteness aside) as informative as the most demanding linguist could wish. But each is also an artistic endeavour, unprecedented in conception and likely to remain unique in scope: the detailed portrayal of a fictional people, through their language and its many changes in time, as they diversify into distinct peoples. Taken together with the "Etymologies" and the "Tengwesta," in other words, the Outlines describe the roots, growth and branchings of a tree. If in 1937 Tolkien was indeed cherishing hopes of publishing this material as part of a compendious "historical grammar" of Eldarin—the wellspring of his mythology—perhaps the central conceit of "Leaf by Niggle" reflects his anxieties in 1943 not only over "The Silmarillion" and the "Hobbit" sequel, but also over the fate of his laboriously and passionately crafted languages.

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Hither Shore is the annual bilingual journal of the *Deutsche Tolkien Gesellschaft* (the German Tolkien Society), with articles in English as well as in German. The English articles are summarized in German, and the German articles in English. The English titles shown in square brackets for the German articles are those used in the English summaries, and not the reviewer's translation of the German title. The first three volumes were reviewed in *Tolkien Studies* 5 (2008). *Hither Shore* has a particularly strong tradition of addressing philosophical topics, and the two issues reviewed here below are no exception.

The theme of volume 4 (2007) is "Tolkien's Lesser Works." Vincent Ferré's "The Rout of the King: Tolkien's Readings on Arthurian Kingship" offers a cogent political analysis of the Arthurian in Tolkien's works. Ferré sees Arthur as "an embodiment of a vision of Middle-Ages that Tolkien rejects," offering "a counter model for a kingship based on merit, with noble characters like Aragorn, or comic ones like Giles" (20). "Speaking with Animals: A Desire that Lies at the Heart of Faérie" by Guglielmo Spirito presents a theological examination of the human need to belong, discussing the interdependency of distance and closeness in relationships, illustrating the discourse with examples from *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* and *Farmer Giles of Ham*.

In "Die Metaphysik der Zweitschöpfung: Zur Ontologie von *Mythopoeia*" [On the Ontology of *Mythopoeia*], Frank Weinreich gives a cogent metaphysical approach to the examination of the ontology of Tolkien's poem "Mythopoeia" that points to Platonism as one of its roots. The