

## J.R.R. Tolkien Writing Tengwar

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There exists – to my knowledge – a single example of video material that actually shows JRRT writing tengwar. It is a television scene on BBC from 1968.

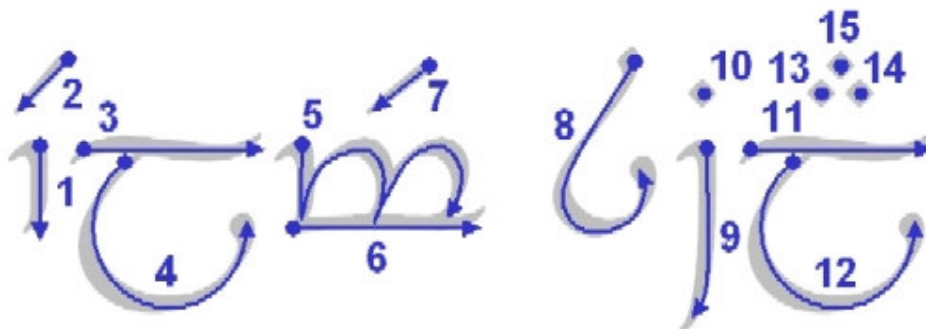
Tolkien is shown inscribing a book with (part of) the famous Quenya phrase *Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo* – “A star shines on the hour of our meeting”. As the scene starts, the short carrier and the *e*-tehta have already been written; we then see Tolkien's fountain pen drawing the remaining strokes for the first two words of the inscription.



JRRT starting to write the SILME

The orthography is irregular – compared to what we know of standard Quenya spelling – in that the second *e*-tehta goes on the *n*, not on the *l*, and that the *n* is written with a MALTA tengwa, not NÚMEN. The word *síla* is regularly spelled.

The order of the strokes and the dots is as shown below (strokes 1 and 2 are inferred from 9 and 10).



The process of writing strokes and dots 3-14 takes 143 frames during 11 seconds. Their distribution is as follows, including periods when the pen is off the paper (\*):

<i>No.</i>	<i>Frames</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Frames</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Frames</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Frames</i>
*	9	<b>6</b>	3	<b>9</b>	2	*	5
<b>3</b>	5	*	7	*	8	<b>13</b>	1
<b>4</b>	11	<b>7</b>	1	<b>10</b>	1	*	2
*	15	*	10	*	7	<b>14</b>	1
<b>5</b>	13	<b>8</b>	9	<b>11</b>	3	*	3
*	6	*	11	<b>12</b>	9	<b>15</b>	1

Below are shown enhanced details of the frame at the end of stroke 12 – when all tengwar can be seen – and the last frame, when JRRT’s pen partially obscures the tengwar.



A few remarks may be made on Tolkien’s way of writing tengwar:

- The *e*-tehta – an acute accent – and SILME are written from the top down.
- The *a*-tehta – three dots in a triangle – is written with the bottom dots first, left to right, then the top dot.
- The tengwa MALTA has its telco and lúvar written in one continuous stroke; we may conjecture that the same applies to NÚMEN, and maybe even to ANTO, less probably to ANGA and similar letters.
- When writing LAMBE, the bow follows immediately after the horizontal stroke, probably without lifting pen from paper.
- Tengwar are written first, then tehtar; this applies even in the case of MALTA + *e*-tehta (as shown), where the *e* is pronounced before the *n*.

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