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The influence of ancient languages
and cultures in J.R.R. Tolkien's work

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1. INTRODUCTION:

In the vast tapestry of literature, few names stand as tall as J.R.R. Tolkien, the mastermind behind the vast realm of Middle-earth. His magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings,* along with *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion,* has captivated millions of people with its complex world-building and profound themes. However, beneath the surface of Tolkien's fantastical tales lies a deep reverence for languages and ancient cultures, which served as the foundational stones upon which Middle-earth was built. In fact, he created many languages prior to the birth of his novels. He invented a whole world in which there would be room for the use of his languages, and provided it with different creatures and cultures that had their own systems of communication. Tolkien even gave shape to languages in its ancient forms and depicted their evolution through time and through contact between different peoples around Arda, the world in which all the events of Tolkien's stories take place.

Tolkien's love for languages dates back to his childhood. Born in 1892, he grew up surrounded by the linguistic diversity of England, where remnants of Old English, Old Norse, and Celtic were found with considerable frequency. These early encounters awakened a passion within him to not only study these languages but also to create his own. His fascination with the complexities of phonetics, grammar, and etymology would later become a defining aspect of his literary legacy.

As a philologist and professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University, Tolkien delved deep into the roots of ancient tongues, unearthing lost words and forgotten dialects. His expertise in Old English, Old Norse, Gothic, and other languages from the past provided him with enough linguistic knowledge that he could use to model the languages of Middle-earth.

Tolkien's skill with languages and devotion for different cultures and their mythologies were not just shown in making near-complete languages like Quenya and Sindarin, but also in the names, phrases, and sayings that are found across

his writings. Every Elvish word, Dwarvish symbol and location name reflected his careful work, carrying layers of significance and backstory. Such is the case of the very name of the continent where most of his earthly creatures live, Middle-earth (the human-inhabited world), which comes from the Anglo-Saxon term *middangeard*, cognate of the Old Norse word *miðgarðr*. With all these linguistic and cultural elements, Tolkien brought Middle-earth's cultures and societies to life, giving them a level of realism and richness that is rarely seen in fantasy literature.

In this essay, I will attempt to approach Tolkien's keen interest in languages and ancient cultures, examining the impact that they had on his imagination and their role in shaping Middle-earth. I will provide relevant data about the cultures that significantly influenced Tolkien's imagination, covering in each comparison two main topics. The first one will focus on language-related aspects, exploring similarities and differences between real languages and the ones invented by the author, while the second one will delve into the mythological aspects of the culture in question. At times, these two levels of analysis may be distinctly separated, while in other instances, they might converge and be treated simultaneously. I will use languages as a main guiding thread to structure the research, and I will explore other relevant issues arising from them. By analysing how language, tradition, and mythology interact in Tolkien's writings, a better understanding of the complexity and depth of his literary contributions will hopefully be achieved.

2. QUENYA AND FINNISH

During his stay in Oxford as a student, Tolkien developed a great passion for languages. He discovered Finnish through the reading of *Kalevala* (López Martínez, 2022), a Finnish epic compiled in the 19th century. He read an English translation of this epic, but from that moment onwards, he became curious about the original language and how the words pronounced in it would sound. He wanted to read the original version, so he studied arduously, and, with this incentive, he approached for the first time a language that would leave him so captivated that he would base the biggest part of his great and most talented creation on it: Quenya (Carpenter, 1977). Quenya is one of the two main languages that the elves of

Middle-earth would speak, along with Sindarin, which will be covered later in the essay. In a letter addressed to W.H. Auden on August 17, 1955, Tolkien spoke the following words after his first encounter with Finnish, proof of the impact that this language had on his professional and creative growth:

"It [discovering Finnish] was like discovering a wine-cellar filled with bottles of amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before. It quite intoxicated me." (Tolkien, 1955).

Finnish is characterized by having a melodic sound, meaning that the concatenation of phonemes that make up its words and phrases are pleasing to the human ear, nearly in the same way that music is. It makes perfect sense in this case, for the language of the elves is a fluid language that somehow harmonizes with the image we have of them, their mannerisms, culture and customs. Through them, life runs indefinite and eternal, and their movements, according to Tolkien's descriptions and audio-visual representations, are natural, fluid and harmonious. They are in constant touch with nature, a force that Tolkien was in love with (López Martínez, 2022) and regarded as powerful and great. Elves are elegant and beautiful, and almost as old as the very world. It is logical that their language similarly exhibits these characteristics. The mildness of the language perfectly matches with elven elegance and wisdom. Naturally, this matter is largely subject to individual interpretation. However, when listening to a person speak Finnish, it gives the feeling of words flowing naturally from the speaker's mouth, with no abrupt interruptions in the concatenation of phonemes uttered. The same occurs when we hear or read elves communicating in their own tongue. Elves were the first sons of Iluvatar, who symbolizes the divine entity within Tolkien's legendarium; hence they are the closest creatures to this deity, and these spotless beings could not communicate with anything but a near-divine language, at least at the beginning.

Let us dive into the grammar of Quenya to shed some light on the similarities between these two languages, and on their differences too. It is important to highlight the prominence of Helge Fauskanger, a Finnish author who runs a

website dedicated to the study of Tolkien's constructed languages. In his publication *Quenya – The Ancient Tongue,* he makes an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of this language, and on this publication I will base the notions that are to be presented. Fauskanger states that "The grammatical structure [of Quenya], involving a large number of cases and other inflections, is clearly inspired by Latin and Finnish." (Fauskanger, 2012). Nonetheless, the fact that he was inspired by it does not mean that he takes elements exclusively from a single language. We must understand that Tolkien's complex language creation system draws on many different languages, and in this case, he took elements from Latin and Greek as well. That being said, Finnish is the language from which he drew the most to shape this constructed language, and the one that functioned as his initial inspiration.

Considering their syntax, although Tolkien had a predilection for the languages of the past such as Latin and Greek and their immense structural variability, both Quenya and Finnish share the Subject-Verb-Object syntactic order as a rule. Not only do they share this feature, but both languages can also present this order altered for aesthetic purposes, to accomplish stylistic emphasis on words that would normally follow another order. Such is the case of the first sentence of the poem recited by Aragorn during his coronation, echoing the words spoken by Elendil, the ancient king of men, following the submergence of Númenor and his journey to Middle-earth: "Et Eärello Endorenna utúlien." (Tolkien, 1954). The official and correct translation would be "Out of the Great Sea to Middle-earth I have come." As we can spot, it does not follow the SVO structure, but in the same way that in languages like English itself the order can be modified at will, Quenya is vulnerable to change as well. Proof of this is that if we translate into Quenya the modified and still grammatically correct phrase "I have come from the Great Sea to Middle Earth", the final result would not remain faithful to the original form: "Utúliëni Eärello Endorenna". It is hard to provide evidence of the accuracy of this translation but, if it is correct, it would substantiate this thesis. Perhaps it would be clearer if we take a close look to the meaning of each part of the sentence. "Et" means "out of"; "Eärello" stands for the construction "the Great Sea", "Ea" meaning

"sea"; in the same way, "Endoreanna" has a complex meaning built up with "Endor" or "Endórë" (meaning "Middle-Earth") and "-nna" (meaning "to"); the las word "utulien" means "I have come", and it is constructed with "utúlië", which means "to come", and the suffix "-en", which makes it first person. The original Finnish translation of the poem is "Suurelta mereltä Keski-Maahan olen tullut", but if we translate the modified version it would result in "Olen tullut Suurelta Mereltä Keski-Maahan", which means that Finnish can also change its usual syntactic order if necessary.

Both languages present case systems that mark the grammatical function of the words within the sentence. Nouns suffer declensions depending on the grammatical category they perform. Quenya presents different declensions for the nominative, accusative, instrumental, genitive, allative, locative, ablative, dative and respective cases (Baixauli, 2012). It is interesting to note that Tolkien's mastery in the linguistic field even allowed him to create cases, such as the one in question, although its function is not entirely clear. The genitive case, for instance, is common in Finnish and Quenya, denoting a possession relationship between two nominal complements. In Quenya, genitive singular is formed by adding *-o* to the noun: "Lómië" (night) turns into "Lómiëo" (night's); on the other hand, genitive plural is formed by adding *-ion* to the noun: "Valar" (vala, gods) turns into "Valarion" (gods'); or "Silmaril" into "Silmarillion". In Finnish, for the genitive singular, "-n" is added to the end of the base word: "Yö" (night) turns into "Yön" (night's); for the plural genitive, "-en" is added: "Jumalat" (gods) turns into "Jumalien" (gods').

I have mentioned the similarities that I have considered to be most significant, to which we could add the fact that both Finnish and Quenya lack grammatical gender. Nevertheless, if there is a significant difference between Quenya and Finnish, it lies in their writing. Finnish makes use of the common Latin alphabet just like many languages across the world do. On the other hand, the alphabet that the elves use is the Tengwar, which was invented in its entirety by Tolkien and was designed to represent specific phonetic sounds. It is not known what exactly inspired him, but it is not unreasonable to assume that the ancient Germanic runic

alphabets played an important role, although the final result of the Tengwar is not very similar since, compared to the rigidity of the runes, Tolkien presents a more elegant and curvilinear writing. As mentioned before, this also helps to portray this image that the high elves give of elegance and taste for the aesthetics, as opposed to the taste for the practical and functional of the dwarven culture which, as we will see later, follows a writing system made of simpler and more functional runes with minimal ornamental embellishment.
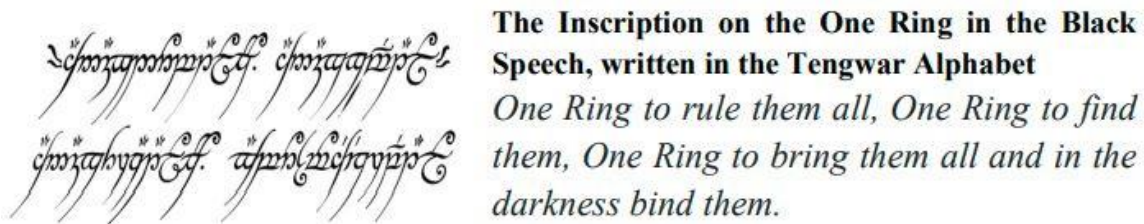

The Inscription on the One Ring in the Black Speech, written in the Tengwar Alphabet
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.

Illustration 1 (Barron, 2022)

If in structure Quenya is reminiscent of Finnish, in accentuation it has more in common with Latin, since they follow the same accentuation rules. The accent mark in Quenya indicates lengthening of the syllable and not the stressed syllable per se (Baixauli, 2009). It follows the prosodic rules, with two-syllable words almost always being paroxytone. If they have three or more syllables, they are proparoxytone provided that the penultimate syllable is short (as in the case of the word *Eldameldor*, which means "elf-lover"); or paroxytone if the penultimate one is long, as in the case of Soronúmë, which is the name of an eagle-shaped constellation, since in Quenya, "Soron" means "eagle" (Baixauli, 2009).

Finland not only gifted Tolkien a language that served as inspiration to create much of his universe, but also provided him with stories and mythology that would help him shape some of the characters in his work. The aforementioned *Kalevala* has turned out to be of vital importance, not only for the construction of the

mythology of the Norse peoples, but for Tolkien and his legendarium[1]. Väinämöinen is the name of one of the main characters in *Kalevala*, who gave Tolkien some hints to the conception of Gandalf the wizard (Aldo, 2007). Many careless eyes overlooked this fact, attributing the Istar's qualities only to deities like Odin. Let us take a look to how Emilio Vivó Capdevila explains this in his article *Tolkien y la Mitología de los Países Nórdicos: El "Kalevala" finlandés*:

> Between Gandalf and Väinämöinen there is also an enormous similarity, traditionally assigned only to Odin by those outside the "Kalevala". From Odin and Väinämöinen we can extract the shamanic essence of Gandalf, a link between magic and war, and the appearance of a helpless old man, in many cases dressed in beggar's rags. However, in Väinämöinen we find the same concerns for the inhabitants of their respective lands, Arda and Kalevala itself. (Capdevila, 2009, Translation made by me).

Even so, this character from Finnish mythology not only served to give life to a character, but also shares some features with another also created by Tolkien: Tom Bombadil. This hypothesis is attributed to academic David Elton Gay, who, in his essay *J.R.R. Tolkien and the Kalevala: Some Thoughts on the Finnish Origins of Tom Bombadil and Treebeard,* mentions that

> As has often been noted, much of what Tom says is, in fact, sung. As with Väinämöinen's song. Tom has power, and the power of his singing is clearly similar to that of Väinämöinen. When we first meet Tom, he saves Merry and Pippin from Old Man Willow through the threat of his singing […] And as Tom's conversations with the Hobbits reveal, his mastery of his land, like that of Väinämöinen, it is through knowledge and experience rather than ownership. If, as I propose, Tom Bombadil is based in part on Väinämöinen, then it is to be expected that Tom controls his world through knowledge expressed in song. (Gay, 2004,Translated by me).

There is an aspect that has drawn my attention in relation to the format of both works. Elias Lönnrot, a 19th century Finnish botanist, dedicated himself to preserving Finnish folk culture by collecting the oral tradition of the Runot in the *Kalevala.* His meticulous work eliminated discrepancies and created a coherent work that is not only a great literary one, but also a complete mythological

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[1] The legendarium of Tolkien refers the complete body of literary works created by J.R.R. Tolkien, encompassing all the stories, myths, languages, geographies, and characters created within the framework of his fictional world (Carpenter, 1981).

compendium, which is unavoidable to compare to the exhaustive compilation that Christopher Tolkien, third son of J.R.R. Tolkien, carried out for the posthumous publication of his father's *Silmarillion*. But since this does not deal with J.R.R. Tolkien himself, it is not part of the object of study of this work. Emilio Capdevila makes a very coherent and reasonable parallel between the form of *Kalevala* and the form of the *Red Book of Westmarch*, the manuscript written by the hobbits which narrates the events of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, among others:

> When Tolkien began to write his proto-"Silmarillion", he found inspiration in the "Kalevala", not only linguistic and mythological, but a format model that he would admire and want to capture in his "Silmarillion" and even in his own work within the context of the "Red Book of the Western Border", which contains the "Silmarillion" itself (translated by Bilbo in Rivendell), "The Lord of the Rings" (written by Frodo) and Frodo's march to Aman (finished and guarded by Sam). (Capdevila, 2009).

The Lord of the Rings is built upon the literary device of the author translating into English a significantly older text called *The Red Book of the Westmarch*, which was originally written in Westron, the common tongue of Middle-earth. To reach a better view and a clearer understanding of the significant of this fact, we must take a look at the end of one of the greatest television and literary series of recent years. The man who has been considered Tolkien's successor in fantasy literature, George R.R. Martin, has made use of this same resource several decades after the British author. At the end of the last episode of *Game of Thrones*, Sam Tarly hands Tyrion Lannister a book written by Grand Maester Ebrose which tells everything that happened after the reign of Robert Baratheon (this being all the events that take part in the whole series). This manuscript is called *A Song of Ice and Fire,* which is indeed the title of George R.R. Martin's saga. Barely five years separate the present day from the airing of said episode, and the structure of great works of the past still remain palpable.

3. KHUZDUL AND OLD NORSE

Khuzdul is the secret language of the dwarves. When the Vala Aule created these creatures, he provided them with a language with which they could communicate. Since it was secret, the dwarves avoided sharing it with the rest of

the world, not even sharing their actual names with peoples that were not of their kind (Tolkien, 1976). For this reason, it is not encountered very often throughout Tolkien's work, a fact that contributes to creating that mysterious and dark aura characteristic of the dwarven people. Unlike Quenya or Sindarin, languages on which Tolkien conscientiously worked until he was able to give them a near-definitive form, Khuzdul is much closer to its prototypical version than to a practicable language. If the structure and form of Quenya was easy to confront with other languages, that of Khuzdul is, to a degree, more difficult to break down. Nevertheless, the few occasions in which we hear or read words in this language can help us synthesize some of its characteristics and compare them with Old Norse, a language from which it draws significantly, even though it is a language with properly documented grammar and vocabulary, whereas the dwarf language is little more than an outline.

Possibly the most prominent similarity between them lies in their respective writing systems. At first, Khuzdul was an exclusively an oral language, hence it lacked writing. The dwarves, accustomed to carving in stone and metals, developed a runic writing system to which Tolkien gave the name of "Cirth", meaning "runs" in Sindarin. The resemblance to the Old Norse alphabet is undeniable.
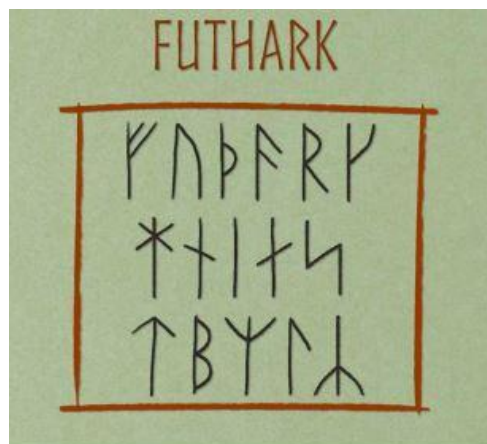

Illustration 2 The Main Runic Letters of the Viking Age Futhark (Lisa LaBracio).

Illustration 3 (Tolkien, 1955)

Similar to the case observed with the Finnish language, the impact of Old Norse on Tolkien's literary work extends beyond linguistic considerations of the constructed languages. The rich Norse mythology plays, in fact, a considerably greater role in the construction of Middle-earth than its language does. The most remarkable case is that of the dwarves, for the ones created by Tolkien showcase many of the features that we can spot in the dwarves of Norse legends, even in their names (López Martínez, 2022).

Both Tolkien's dwarves and those appearing in the *Völuspá* are skilled in the art of weapon forging and craftsmanship (Darvell, 2014). An exemplar from which Tolkien might have drawn this notion is Sindri, a dwarf renowned for his involvement in the forging of various highly significant magical artifacts, such as Thor's hammer or Odin's spear, items created in collaboration with his brother, Brokk (Dronke, 1997).

Greed arises as another shared trait among these creatures, displaying a deep devotion toward gold and objects crafted from luxurious materials or gemstones. Indeed, the central plot of *The Hobbit* closely relates to this. The dwarven kingdom of Erebor succumbed to the flames of the dragon Smaug who, attracted by the vast treasure lying beneath the Lonely Mountain, usurped the kingdom, thus condemning the dwarves to wander Middle-earth. The dwarf king Thror had spent much of his life amassing wealth, the loss of which ultimately drove him to such obsession that he met his downfall in a failed and deranged attempt to reclaim it. The dragon guarded the treasure until he met his demise at the hands of Bard the Bowman (Tolkien, 1937). It is inevitable to find certain reminiscences of Norse mythology here. The dwarf Fafnir, about whom we are told in the *Völsunga Saga* and *Poetic Edda,* protected a valuable treasure alongside his brothers. Following his father's death and due to his greed and thirst for power, Fafnir was transfigured into a dragon and hid in a gloomy cave, fervently guarding his wealth until he was killed by Sigurd (Dronke, 1997).

Both mythologies contain prophecies regarding important battles that would determine the fate of the world. In the *Poetic Edda,* the gods meet their end in Ragnarök, a contest that would bring the utter destruction of the world. The outcome of the battle and its events are foretold (Stookey, 2004). In Tolkien's legendarium, we find the equivalent in the Dagor Bragollach, a conflict between the Valar (gods) and Morgoth's creatures. In an attempt to vanquish the darkness in Arda, the forces of good ally against the evil (Tolkien, 1977). Tolkien's battle, as opposed to the fatality of Ragnarök, would be followed by a purification and the beginning of a new era, but still the echoes of Norse mythology resonate.

4. SINDARIN AND WELSH

Tolkien has admitted to drawing substantial inspiration from Welsh to shape Sindarin, the second most important language of his legendarium alongside Quenya. While Quenya was the language of the High Elves or Eldar, Sindarin was the language of the Sindar Elves of Middle-earth, thus making Sindarin the most spoken language. The relation between these two languages resembles the relation between Latin and British, respectively (Doughan, 1993). There is linguistic and cultural evidence that suggests a significant connection between Sindarin and Welsh. As mentioned earlier in the part concerning the creation of Quenya, Tolkien was passionate about the aesthetic properties that he considered beautiful in languages, transcending their meaning (Tolkien, 1931). In his book *The Road to Middle-Earth*, Tom Shippey states that

> It had been on his mind since 1926, when in his 'General Philology' chapter for The Year's Work in English Studies vol. 5 he had hinted there might be such a science as Lautphonetik, translatable as 'a phonology of sounds'. But all phonology is about sounds. Tolkien seems to have meant 'an aesthetics of sounds', a science that would explain why certain sounds or combinations of sounds produced different effects from others. (Shippey, 1982)

Tolkien found in Welsh a language that was extremely pleasant to his ears. In his lecture "English and Welsh" Tolkien mentioned that

Most English-speaking people, for instance, will admit that cellar door is 'beautiful', especially if dissociated from its sense (and from its spelling). More beautiful than, say, sky, and far more beautiful than beautiful..." (Tolkien, 1955).

Quenya and Sindarin exhibit certain resemblances, as Tolkien regarded them as related languages (Wangberg, 2023). They share lexical similarities, but they diverge significantly in terms of syntax and morphology. Sindarin never reached a fully functional state. This implies that, despite the extensive creative effort invested in it, it is not a language suitable for regular conversation. Tolkien primarily employs this language for composing poems or for simple dialogues between his characters. Indeed, decades later, for the big screen adaptation directed by Peter Jackson, there would be a deep dive into the study and innovation of these languages for the creation of scenes in which two characters (mostly between elves but between other Sindarin-speaking characters as well) engage in conversations in languages of this nature. This task became notably significant with the involvement of linguist and expert in Tolkien's created languages, David Salo. Salo stated in an article for the Los Angeles Times that "He gives little hints here and there. So you look at that, you look at the patterns, and you extrapolate," (Salo, 2002).

Writer Paul Harry Barron delved into the analysis of Welsh influence in Tolkien's Sindarin. In his essay *Tolkien: Esperanto, Sindarin and Welsh* (2022), he makes an extensive comparison between Welsh and Sindar phonetics. He provided some examples of consonants that are found both in Welsh and Sindarin:

<c>	/k/.
<ch>	/χ/. Tolkien will note that the digraph <ch> is the same sound in Welsh.
<dh>	/ð/. Written as <dd> in Welsh.
<f>	/f/ and at the end of words /v/. The Welsh <f> = /v/, which often disappears at the end of a word in spoken Welsh.
<lh>	/ɬ/. Written as <ll> in Welsh.
<ng>/<ñ>	/ŋg/ and at the end of words /ŋ/.
<ph>	/f/. To indicate the /f/ phoneme at the end of words.
<rh>	/r̥/. Written the same in Welsh.
<s>	/s/. Sometimes, <s> is used to represent /z/, as in the word *sŵ* /zu:/ (zoo).
<th>	/θ/ Written the same as in Welsh.

Illustration 4 Welsh and Sindarin consonants (Barron, 2022)

Sindarin features both long and short vowels, just as Welsh does. Long vowels are marked with a diacritic circumflex, mirroring the notation used in Welsh. Additionally, there are half-length vowels (a feature present in certain North Wales dialects), denoted by an acute accent:

<a> = [ɑ]; <á> = [ɑˑ]; <â> = [ɑː]
<æ>[6] = [ɛ]
<e> = [ɛ]   <é> = [ɛˑ]   <ê> = [ɛː]
<i> = [ɪ]   <í> = [ɪˑ]   <î> = [iː]
<o> = [ɔ]   <ó> = [ɔˑ]   <ô> = [ɔː]
<œ> = [œ][7]
<u> = [u]   <ú> = [uˑ]   <û> = [uː]
<y> = [y]   <ý> = [yˑ]   <ŷ> = [yː]

Illustration 5 Sindarin vowels (Barron, 2002)

Tolkien was familiar with many of the Celtic languages besides Welsh, as we will see below, and this could interfere with the notion that Sindarin is specifically based upon Welsh rather than in Celtic languages in general. Nonetheless, one aspect that indicates Tolkien's preference for Welsh is the incorporation of consonants /ɬ/ and /r̥ /into Sindarin, which we cannot find in any other Celtic language. That being said, let us examine a key notion when comparing the language of the Sindar Elves with Welsh, and in this case, with all Celtic languages: the system of initial consonant mutation.

One common feature among all Celtic languages is the alteration, or mutation, of numerous consonants at the beginning of certain words, depending on the morphological and syntactic connections between them.

> One of the characteristics of all Celtic languages is that many consonants at the beginning of words change, or "mutate" due to morphological and syntactic relationships between words. Tolkien also created a system of mutations to show syntactic relationships within Sindarin. Sindarin has more paradigms of mutations than Welsh or even any other of the Celtic languages. (Barron, 2022).

In Welsh, there are three types of mutations: Lenition (Soft) Mutation, Nasal Mutation and Aspirate Mutation, as we will see in the following table (Barron, 2022):

Lenition (Soft)	Nasal	Aspirate
t > d	t > nh	t > th
c > g	c > ngh	c > ch
p > b	p > mh	p > ph
d > dd	d > n	
g > -	g > ng	
b > f	b > m	
m > f		
ll > l		
rh > r		

Table 1 Consonant mutation in Welsh (Barron, 2022)

Tolkien had good comprehension of the mutation systems present in Celtic languages, including not only Welsh but also Cornish and Irish Gaelic. In Sindarin, Tolkien incorporated various types of mutation, such as Lenition, as well as Nasal, Mixed, Long Mixed (a subset of Mixed mutations), Liquid, and Stop mutations. A significant portion of the syntactic rules concerning phonological changes closely resemble those of the Welsh system. However, several mutation paradigms present in other Celtic languages, like Irish, are absent in Welsh. (Barron, 2002):

	Lenition	Nasal	Stop			Lenition	Nasal
B >	V	B	M		LH >	THL	́L
C >	G	CH			M >	V	M
D >	DH	N	ND		P >	B	PH
G >	'	NG	G		R >	R	RH
H >	CH	H			RH >	THR	'R
HW >	CHW	'W	HW		S >	H	S
L >	L	LH			T >	D	TH

Table 2 Consonant mutation in Sindarin (Barron, 2022)

As a final remark as to the similarities and differences between Sindarin and Welsh, it is worth mentioning that they lack lexical similarities. Nonetheless, there is one aspect that is common to these languages, and it is the formation of plural nouns by using vowel shifting within a word, as in the case of the word "dog/dogs" in Welsh *ci, cŵn*, which finds its equivalent in Sindarin's *hû, hui* (Barron, 2002).

5. ROHAN AND OLD ENGLISH

The literary fiction upon which Middle-earth is based gives us the feeling that it is our own world in a distant past, beyond the memory of men. Rohan is the most significant and distinct illustration of the Old English imagery present in the novel. All Rohan names and words stem directly from Old English, except for the terms *Rohan, Rohirric* and *Rohirrim*, which are terms derived from the Gondorian translation of *Eotheod* (from the Old English *horse-folk*, the name that the people of Rohan gave to themselves). As opposed to what happened with the rest of the languages covered so far, Tolkien not only used Old English as a linguistic reference to create Rohirric (the language spoken in this region), but he used it as a paradigm to create this medieval realm in its entirety (Bueno Alonso, 2004).

Absolutely all the names of people, places, and institutions belonging to this place are terms extracted from literal translations of Old English.

By employing Old English here, Tolkien established a direct linguistic link between this fictional realm and the culture and history of England, his own homeland and a place which he repeatedly mentioned that he wanted to provide with a mythology (Tolkien, 1981). The culture of Rohan in the novel is closely related to Anglo-Saxon and Germanic culture (López Martínez, 2022), for Old English (also known as Anglo-Saxon) was spoken in England between the 5th and 12th centuries. Making use of it, Tolkien achieves a sense of authenticity and realism within the novel's world, perfectly matching with the medieval way of life of this realm, resembling similar mannerisms of medieval England's society, upon which Tolkien based to bring this folk to life.

Among the countless instances of Old English that we can find in Rohan, I have decided to select a few that are of more interest and relevance, mostly names of characters, although there are some creatures worth mentioning whose names also come from Old English, such as the Mearas. This extraordinary horse race from Rohan gets its name from the word *mēaras* (Tolkien, 1954), which means simply "horses". It is, indeed, a word that carries much weight in the culture and way of life of this country. Nonetheless, Tolkien opted for a more poetic version of it for the creation of names: *eoh* (from Old English "horse", "steed"). Many of the names of the inhabitants of the Mark[2] derive from this root, providing them with equine-related meanings. Thus, we encounter names of main characters like Éowyn, whose meaning is "horse-lover" resulting from the combination of the Old English words *eoh* and *wynn* (meaning "joy"); Éowyn's brother Éomer, whose name come from *eoh* and *mǣre* ("grand, excellent, famous"); Rohan's rider Éothain, meaning "horse warrior" combining *eoh* + *thegn* ("warrior, chieftain"), and many more examples of names of this nature. Other characters' names come as well from Old English, although they branch off from the root *eoh* to adopt others with corresponding medieval meanings. Such is the case of Captain Gamling, who

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[2] The native name of Rohan was Riddermark, or simply the Mark. (Tolkien, 1954).

has an Old English name derived from the stem *gamol*, which means "old", but is only found in Old English in verse-language (Tolkien, Hammond, Scull; 2005). The case of king Théoden is a particularly interesting one, since it comes from the Old English word *þeoden*, which means "lord, king" (Tolkien, *The Appendix on Languages*). Théoden's chief counsellor Grima Wormtongue owes his name to the word *gríma* in Old English or Icelandic, which means "mask, visor, helmet" or "spectre, larva", while his byname is a modernised form of Old English *wyrm-tunge*, meaning "snake-tongue" (Tolkien, Hammond, Scull; 2005). It is easy to misunderstand the term "Wormtongue", since we can assume that it could indeed refer to the English word *worm*. But if our intent is to track the Old-Englishness, we should take into consideration the personality and actions of the character, cunningly injecting poison into the king's tormented mind with sick words and disastrous advice. This way we can find more snake-like characteristics rather than of a worm. And if that is not enough evidence, the translation of Wormtongue to Spanish is "Lengua de serpiente", which in English would mean "Snaketongue". This character acted under the orders of Saruman, the white wizard, who was corrupted by greed for power and for the One Ring. Saruman was skilled in the deep arts and was considered the wisest and most powerful wizard of his order, even more so than Gandalf initially. His name perfectly reflects his condition, as it is derived from the Old English word *searu*, which means "device, design, contrivance, art". (Tolkien, Hammond, Scull; 2005).

In spite of the enormous prominence that the English society had on Rohan, the influence of medieval England is not limited to this people, but also extends to the Shire and the hobbits in a certain way. Tolkien's intention was never to directly correlate objects or peoples in his fictional world with those of the real world. Nonetheless, he made an exception with the hobbits, who symbolize the inhabitants of the English countryside. The writer aimed for his English audience to perceive Middle-earth through the perspective of these creatures. Hence, their culture mirrors that of the rural England (Wangberg, 2023), as opposed to Saruman fortress, Isengard, which was the cradle of industrialization of Middle-earth,

evoking the industrial neighbourhoods of Birmingham where Tolkien was forced to live in his early days (López Martínez, 2022).

We can find examples of that Old English reminiscence in the names and family names of many hobbits and in some places in and around their dwelling. They are, at times, challenging to spot, and it might be clearer If we rely on the translation into Spanish[3] of some of those terms. Such is the case of the family name "Hardbottle". If we take a look to its translation ("Casadura") we can spot that the second part of the name alludes to the Old English word *botl* (meaning "house") and not to the current English word "bottle" (Márquez, 2018).

A similar case occurs with the Gladden Fields, a place located in the periphery of The Shire. The translation into Spanish was "Campos Gladios". The term "Gladden" is not interpreted as the homonymous verb in English, but instead it is more related to the Old English word *glædene*, which alludes to an aquatic flower that finds its equivalent in the Spanish word "gladiolo". The evidence that we get for these considerations is that the Sindarin name for this place is *Loeg Ningloron*, which Christopher Tolkien translated to the common tongue as "Pools of the golden water-flowers" (Tolkien, 1989).

Bamfurlong was a farm in the eastern Shire, home of Farmer Maggot. Its name represents Old English *Beanfurlang*, a "bean-field". The meaning of *furlong* is "forrow-length" and is a division of a common field. (Salo, 1998).

As a fourth and final example for the Old-Englishness in the hobbits, I would like to point out the word "halflings", a term that is frequently used by the characters to refer to the hobbit kind. The translation to Spanish was "medianos", and it has to do with the height of these peoples, which is half the height of men. The suffix "-ling" is probably related to the Middle English word *lĕnğe*, the meaning of which would be related to the length of something. Combined with "half" we get a literal sense that very well depicts hobbits' appearance.

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[3] The task of the translation of *The Lord of the Rings into Spanish* fell to Francisco Porrúa, to whom we owe names like "Bolsón" (originally "Baggins"), or "Samsagaz" (originally "Samwise").

The last character I want to mention in relation to Tolkien's Anglo-Saxon influence is Beorn. In *The Hobbit*, this character is introduced with the pretext of saving Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves from the orcs and provide them with weapons and food so they can reach Mirkwood safe and sound. He is a Beorning, the last of a race of large Men that had the ability to assume the form of animals (Tolkien, 1937). He was a skin-changer, for he had the ability to change into a bear at will, and when he did not, he appeared in the form of a human of larger-than-average size. He cared for animals and acted as a protector of his small territory, and in his bear form, he was gigantic and lethal, making him feared by the forces of evil. This character is a direct reference to Beowulf, the protagonist of the homonym Anglo-Saxon epic poem that probably constituted the heaviest influence for Tolkien in his conception of Middle-earth, as writer Tom Shippey puts it:

> He [Beorn] is in a way the least invented character in the book. His name is an Old English heroic word for 'man', which meant originally 'bear', so that naturally enough he is a were-bear, who changes shape, or 'skin' as Gandalf calls it, every night. He has a very close analogue in […] Beowulf himself, whose name is commonly explained as Beowulf = 'bees' wolf' = honey-eater bear, and who breaks swords, rips o arms and cracks ribs with ursine power and clumsiness. Beorn keeps bees too; is surly in disposition; not to be trusted after dark; and 'appalling when he is angry', a description not altogether dierent from being 'kind enough if humoured'. The dwarves and Bilbo see both sides of him, but perceive them as one. (Shippey, 1982).

Apart from the direct influence of *Beowulf*, both in the senses of presenting archetypal characters and in the epic form of storytelling, Tolkien introduced in his writings (and specially in *The Lord of the Rings*) actual Anglo-Saxon poetry. That is the case, for instance, of an excerpt of the poem *The Wanderer*. The "Lament for the Rohirrim", recited by Aragorn in *The Two Towers*, shows clear similarities with this poem in terms of theme and structure (Bueno Alonso, 2004):

> *Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?*
> *Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?*
> *Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?*
> *Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?*

They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow;

The days have gone down in the West, behind the hills into shadow.

Who will gather the smoke of the dead wood burning,

Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning? (Tolkien, 1954).

Compare with:

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?

Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær cwom seledreamas?

Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!

Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,

genap under nihthelm swa heo ne wære.

Illustration 6 Excerpt of the original version of the poem The Wanderer

Where is the horse? Where the young warrior? Where now the gift-giver?

Where are the feast-seats? Where all the hall joys?

Alas for the bright cup! Alas byrnied warrior!

Alas the lord's glory! How this time hastens,

grows dark under night-helm, as it were not!

Illustration 7 Translation of the poem The Wanderer made by Jonathan Glenn

Both Tolkien and the Anglo-Saxon poet employ the *Ubi sunt* in the motif "Where now", commonly found in Latin and Old English poetry (Nicole, K, 2022). Nicole K. wrote an entry on her blog titled *Tolkien & The Wanderer* in which she analyses these poems nearly piece by piece:

Notice the distinct similarities in the first line, "Where is the horse? Where the young warrior?" which Tolkien rephrases as "Where now the horse and the rider?" The word *mago* "young warrior" is right next to the word *mearg* "horse," so it is tempting to translate *mago* as "rider" like Tolkien did. In fact, the young warrior probably was riding a horse. Though the direct similarities end here, the inspiration continues. Tolkien lumps the themes of the hall, "feast-seats," "hall joys," and

"bright cup," under "Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?" The "byrnied warrior" he inserts earlier as "Where is the helm and the hauberk?" (Nicole K., 2022).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

Reflecting on after completing this research project, I have observed certain aspects and reached some conclusions. As stated in the introduction, J.R.R. Tolkien's profound passion for languages is evident. Being a philologist myself and having dedicated years to studying English extensively, I found it fascinating to explore how language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as an essential means for crafting entire worlds and narratives. Tolkien's vast literary works owe much to his expertise as a philologist. Had he possessed a more limited understanding of the languages covered here, his legendarium would not have reached the levels of popularity and excellence it did. The brilliance of his work lies in its creative sophistication, enabling the existence of a fictional world that exuded verisimilitude, even when inhabited by fantastical creatures impossible to find in reality.

Professor Tolkien endowed his stories with great complexity, meticulously tracing genealogical trees back to the dawn of time. His worldbuilding would have been to some extent less plausible if all the different races, cultures, and regions with their own histories had not been provided with living languages that would undergo natural changes due to syncretisms born from encounters between different cultures over the thousands of years of Middle-earth that Tolkien wrote about. The people who inhabited Arda were not so different from those dwelling on our planet Earth, and Tolkien's intention was for this to be somehow reflected, as Middle-earth was conceived as an iteration of our world. In this way, Tolkien drew upon languages he was familiar with to make the ones invented by him not so separated from reality.

Throughout the execution of this research, it has been unavoidable for me to encounter curiosities and ideas regarding potential future inquiries within this field of study. It would be useful to look up information about how Tolkien's languages and cultures have influenced literature, linguistics, fantasy, and popular culture in general. This could involve studying adaptations, translations, derivative works, and the Tolkien fan community, as well as exploring how other authors have somehow been influenced by Tolkien's approach to creating fictional worlds and languages, such as George R.R. Martin's Dothraki and High Valyrian or James Cameron's Na'vi language.

The purpose of this essay was to facilitate the initiation in this area for everyone interested, being a fan of Tolkien or a language enthusiast. Due to its length, this research would constitute a synthesis of the key points when comparing these languages and cultures, and hopefully, readers might feel encouraged to delve deeper into this branch of knowledge. Perhaps in this way, anyone who finds the topic too dense and gets lost in the convoluted explanations of scholars or experts may find more accessible content here and have a good time while learning. I have greatly enjoyed and learned a lot from doing this.

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