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SYNCRETIC IMMERSION: TOLKIEN'S LANGUAGES AS HISTORY, ARTIFACTS, AND META-NARRATIVES

BY

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SYNCRETIC IMMERSION: TOLKIEN'S LANGUAGES AS HISTORY, ARTIFACTS, AND META-
NARRATIVES

BY

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

2020

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DEDICATION

To my Father, who read Tolkien's marvelous stories to me before I was able to read on my own.

To my Mother, who pushed me to read even when I thought I had better things to do.

And to my Wife, for patiently listening to my rants, ideas, and endless edits.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special Thanks to my classmates and friends for their endless support and kind words, to my wife, Nikki, for always being willing to help me rework endless pages and edits, and a special thanks to my Thesis Committee members: Dr. Gerald Nachtwey for assuaging my anxieties but being firm in your expectations, Dr. Dominic Ashby for always being willing to listen when you had countless other things that needed your attention, and Dr. Brent Shannon for always being kind, attentive, and intensely critical in all of the ways that I needed you to be. I could not have accomplished this without any of you.

ABSTRACT

J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth has been dissected and researched by philologists, medievalists, and literary theorists for decades. Though his work with languages (both historical and invented) has garnered attention over the past few decades, few scholars have looked at his languages in terms of their rhetorical functions within the narrative (as history), with the narrative (as artifacts), and without (as cultural participation). Mark Wolf's theories on immersion is applied to Tolkien's legendarium and illuminates his works as uniquely fixated in several modes of immersion at once. Narrative immersion is utilized to understand Tolkien's works as a furthering of cultural values, languages, and traditions. As these elements of narrative are explored, Tolkien's legendarium can be seen through conceptual, perceptual, and physical lenses, culminating into a syncretically immersive experience.

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[Introduction]

Born twenty years and a day after the death of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, my love of fiction in all of its forms quite possibly stems from my father reading Tolkien's stories to me as a child. Though my father attempted to pacify my questions about the elvish words which he read from the page, my curiosity was never sated. As my research has discovered, I was not alone in my curiosity. Fans and scholars alike have worked hard to understand the languages of Middle-earth and their connections to the fictional world that Tolkien forged. The stories read, of Fingolfin, elven King of the Noldor, or of the wandering maiar, Gandalf, or even the small hobbit, Frodo, could feel real to those lost within the narrative. Immersed within such stories, readers can easily imagine the endless halls of Khazad-Dûm, the slopes of the Caradhras, or the great island city of Númenor. Such narrative immersion is not unique to Tolkien, but his works offer another layer of immersion through use of his created languages. These languages hint at a more complex form of narrative immersion that his readers can participate in. His work with languages (both historical and invented) has garnered attention over the past few decades, yet few scholars have looked at his languages in terms of their rhetorical functions within the narrative (as history), with the narrative (as artifacts), and without (as cultural participation). By placing so much emphasis and focus onto created languages, Tolkien has imbued his languages with greater cultural value and purpose within his narrative.

Integral to understanding the value of Tolkien's literary works is the concept of *narrative immersion*. Narrative immersion is a practice in which the reader engages

with an element of storytelling that transcends merely understanding what the text is conveying and instead takes on a participatory role. By engaging with a narrative and imagining the events of the narrative as they unfold, the reader can then begin to participate in the story and play a vital role in its conclusion. While many scholars and fans of fiction might use the word *immersion* to refer to the level of escapism that readers can achieve, the word contains further connotations for literature, and for Tolkien's work specifically because of his meta-narrative and how his languages play into that narrative. For instance, many fan readers use the term to describe a state of being by which the real world briefly fades away in the mind for the fictitious world, such as when reading a novel. For many fan communities, *immersion* is about how closely tied to reality the fiction can become. Such *immersion* can happen through any form of production connected to the narrative, including fan-art, fan-fiction, cosplay, and language play.

Academically, the discourse regarding *narrative immersion* is fairly new. Mark Wolf has helped to dissect various modes of narrative immersion and coined several narratological terms to describe them. Explaining narrative immersion in his book *World Building*, Wolf discusses the various states of being that immersion can take. He begins with *conceptual immersion*:

Imaginary worlds, which provide places for the audience to go vicariously, greatly aid the act of conceptual immersion and give us some of the best examples of immersion. Yet, when one considers the process of experiencing an imaginary world, as well as the process that goes into the building of one, what we call "immersion" is really only the first step in the experience. (2)

Wolf goes on to illustrate the other forms of immersion, such as physical immersion (theme parks, Cons, etc.), and perceptual immersion (movies, video games, etc.) (2). An example of these forms might be understood by engaging with a stage play. A fascinated fan reading a play would engage with *conceptual immersion* because the reader must conceptualize the events within their mind, whereas a fan watching the play would be engaging in *perceptual immersion*, merely perceiving the events as they unfold. Finally, to take the next step would be to engage with *physical immersion*, or to participate in the play itself, taking on some *physical immersion* into the world of the narrative. In this way, going to a con or theme park allows the participant to become physically immersed in the narrative to a certain degree.

Although these terms are extremely useful in defining connections between consumers of art and the art itself, the term *immersion* has evolved to hold new meanings over time, carrying with it many connotations. The connotations (or previously understood meanings) of *immersion* are surprisingly relevant to Tolkien's work when observed historically. Tolkien's academic work as a lexicographer during the early composition of his novels seems more than coincidental to the emergence of *immersion* as a reading practice. Until 1965, the word was primarily used in its literal sense: to describe a state of being in which something is submersed in a liquid. According to the OED, the first time the term *immersion* was used metaphorically was in the London-based news magazine the *New Statesman* in 1965. The magazine was advertising the Berlitz school's "total immersion" language courses. Though Tolkien retired from Oxford in 1959, the proximity of *immersion's* altered meaning and use

within the academic community seems relevant, especially when considering the various ways in which Tolkien's created mythos works through language to provide a method by which his readers can become students, scholars, and, finally, participants of the narrative itself. The languages that Tolkien has littered throughout his narratives invites readers to engage with those languages in ways that requires significant study and linguistic research in a way that mirrors his own academic work.

Tolkien's love of language is legendary. From creating secret code words in his childhood, to creating entire languages in his spare time, to teaching and studying languages in his professional life, his whole life seemed centered on language. Therefore, understanding the necessity of language within this process of conceptual immersion is essential. The more than twenty languages that Tolkien invented at varying levels of "completion" (Cheyne) and various scripts, styles, and dialects that pervade his enormous legendarium, do much to produce what Mark Wolf describes as "immersion overflow" (6). Immersion overflow occurs when the level of a person's immersion into the narrative is absorbed beyond the saturated state and the knowledge base of that created world becomes too large for any one person to entirely consume and hold. Wolf explains,

If the world is too small, the audience may feel that they know all there is to know, and consider the world exhausted, feeling there is nothing more to be obtained from it. A world with an overflow beyond saturation, however, can never be held in the mind in its entirety; something will always be left out. (6)

When *immersion overflow* happens, it requires readers to go back to a source for those forgotten facts. Finding these sources, then, becomes a necessary practice for fans and scholars to fully engage with all of the available information.

Always having something more to learn or absorb encourages readers to become active scholars of the fiction that they are attempting to consume by marking connections between the texts and the “paratexts” (Genette). Paratexts are the texts standing outside of the primary narrative— from appendices, letters, notes, images or other related content— that often formulate the boundaries of the mythos studied. Genette states that, in relation to the book, paratexts “surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book” (1). Genette’s explanation of paratexts illustrates an importance to recognize all that is connected and imbedded in the text. For example, one such paratext in Tolkien’s works could include any of the maps, appendices, and introductions that address basic non-narrative information regarding the peoples, cultures, and languages of Arda, Tolkien’s created world encapsulating Middle-Earth.

Much of the accumulated paratextual information in Tolkien’s works serves as a conduit for his framework narrative or meta-narrative. The narrative concerns the events of the story, but the meta-narrative describes the narrative concerning the collection, formulation, and events related to the primary text. In this case, Tolkien has created a narrative framework that surrounds his own fiction and creates an access point by which reality connects to the meta-narrative, which connects to the narrative itself. For instance, in the meta-narrative, Tolkien acts as the first to decipher Bilbo, Frodo, and Samwise’s writings within the *Thain’s Book* which in turn is a copy of Bilbo’s

original *Red Book of Westmarch*. Tolkien uses these fictional books as a rhetorical device to explain his relationship to Middle-Earth itself as a scholar and translator of the text, rather than its creator. Thus, reaching back to the connotations of *immersion*, by reading Tolkien's "deciphered translations," the reader becomes both student and scholar as they engage further with the narrative. Tolkien's language(s), both the invented languages and narrative prose, becomes a course of study, or a kind of immersion by which the text surrounds and encapsulates the reader with its language(s).

Wolf's trichotomy of *immersion* does little to fully delineate the complete implications of Tolkien's overarching narrative. The categorization that Wolf illustrates is useful in showing the basic forms of narrative immersion and offers a clearly defined boundary for each. However, the problem with this category is that it leaves out the possibility for static placement within two or all three modes of immersion at once. Thus, because of Tolkien's invented framework narrative surrounding his textual narrative and the way that readers interact with these texts, a new concept should be utilized because of a lack of terminology for both Tolkien and others that have achieved such a position within all three forms of immersion in an unchanging and static way. The kind of immersion that breaks the barriers between conceptual, physical, and perceptual, not at random, but in a way that is static in all three forms at one time has no descriptive term. As readers engage with Tolkien's literature in a way that emphasizes researching the texts (as a student and scholar), the lines between conceptual, perceptual, and physical immersion become blurred and therefore require

new terminology. For the rest of this study, I will refer to such instances of blurred immersion as *syncretic immersion*.

Syncretic immersion is unique in that it requires a narrative that is stationary in all three forms of immersion simultaneously and is extended to intentionally bring to life the narrative through the text. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (conceptual) has been adapted into movies (perceptual) and inspired conventions (physical), but these employ immersion techniques individually, separately, and without any direct cohesion. The movies based on Tolkien's novels, while related to the conventions and inspired by the books, stand apart in form and function. In order to achieve *syncretic immersion*, the films would have to engage with an element currently missing in that medium. The narratives between books and films relate but do not directly connect as a single narrative. Should Tolkien and any other authors be understood as syncretically immersive, these authors and works must utilize all three forms of immersion collectively at once. Therefore, as separate but related entities, these particular vehicles of immersion (books, movies, and conventions) cannot qualify as syncretically immersive.

Tolkien's work fills such requirements because of the strong connections through which language links culture to the scholarly studies, all within the framework of the overarching narrative. The conceptual immersion within Tolkien's tale is evident in the written narrative. Within the framework of the meta-narrative, these written works are essentially histories of long lost, past events. The perceptual immersion lies within the paratexts and (fictional) cultural documents such as the appendices

included within the books. These appendices are presented as reprints of physical evidence of the cultures and their historical artifacts. Finally, the physical immersion lies within the studies of such texts to engage with the fictional languages. Wolf's depiction of this mode of immersion does not explicitly include speaking a language; however, by learning such languages, the represented cultures become physical and real to the speaker and the discourse community at large. Speaking a language is an act of culture, a performed embodiment of that culture. Culture along with language is constantly evolving, and by harnessing those cultures of Middle-earth through use of languages, readers and scholars not only further the narrative of those cultures, but also grant those cultures opportunity to grow. Consequently, by working on all three levels at once, Tolkien's fictional languages become integral to understanding the method by which these forms of immersion work in tandem, becoming syncretic in nature.

The kind of narrative immersion I have been describing is best termed *syncretic* for several reasons. The word has several definitions, ranging from an eclectic collection of religious ideas and practices to the combining of ideas and theories. Both fit with the theory of syncretic immersion in different ways. The most obvious justification is the second definition, wherein different ideas (in this case, different forms of immersion) are brought together. The first definition works just as well but requires further exploration. While not religious *per se*, Tolkien's texts take on a ritualistic realm of study. Arguing that Tolkien's narrative is one of aestheticism, Robert Collins goes so far as to declare that Tolkien's approach to fiction is "is both

radically conservative and highly syncretic" (2), while Verlyn Flieger, in reference to Tolkien's approach to Fantasy fiction, states, "Successful Fantasy is the conscious sub-creation of a Secondary World by man, whose birthright it is to make in imitation of his Maker" (26). A devout Roman-Catholic, Tolkien certainly seemed to find much inspiration from such ideas. John Gough, in an effort to disprove any possibility that Tolkien's mythology is inspired from Norse mythology, claims that for Tolkien himself and his approach to literature, "'moral and religious truth' was essentially Catholic, though he was very tolerant of others' beliefs" (3). Regardless of the religious inspiration that he used to create his work, the seriousness and reverence that many of his readers approach his works with creates a community of fans and scholars in equal measure. Tolkien's readers, in an attempt to emulate his approach to his own works, become scholars of ancient history, just like himself.

Readers participating in Tolkien's meta-narrative framework as scholars of ancient history approach Tolkien's research/fiction as matters of serious scholarly study. The understanding between Tolkien readers is one of ritualistic practice, entering into Tolkien's meta-narrative realm as scholars and researchers. Therefore, by engaging in such ritualistic practices, these readers portray a near religious continuation of the texts and their cultural significance, both within the narrative and without. Readers participate in the extension of that narrative by acting as anthropologists of a long-gone age.

Entering into Tolkien's narratives allows readers to become scholars of Middle-earth and creates a unique work of fiction with extensive histories, documents, and

artifacts, as well as fictitious but lasting cultural influence. These historical and cultural elements laced throughout the narratives act as invitations for readers to occupy a position of scholar engaging with the text. Language is the key to truly understanding the significance of Tolkien's creations as syncretically immersive. In Tolkien's invented history, these languages come from a long line of ancient peoples extending back into the time of the elves. The documents of these languages (appendices and lexicons within the legendarium) are artifacts that, when perceived, offer a clear doorway into the study of these historical cultures. Even the text itself, conceived as an artifact passed down through history (first as the *Red Book of Westmarch*, then as the *Thain's Book*, until this collection which has been found, translated, and presented by Tolkien himself) acts as both history (as text) and historical artifact. Thus, the maps of Arda, Númenor, and Middle-earth, as well as family trees, lexicons of Quenya and Sindarin, and appendices of poems, songs, and scripts of those lands all work together to offer a history of cultures. By studying these cultures, customs, and languages, Tolkien's readership is fully transported into a world where elves not only exist, but where evidence of their presence can be fully realized in the speaking and study of their languages.

The final aspect that should be examined is the interaction between the readers and the historical cultures within the narrative. To work on the level of physical immersion, a passive knowing of language is not enough. Translating offers a closer view of the relationship between text and physical immersion as both conceptual and perceptual immersion are utilized to engage with the text and

physically shift the historical passages from one state of being to another. Yet, nothing of substance is gained by this action aside from access. Nonetheless, because of readership taking on the role of scholars and participating within the meta-narrative, a unique community of fans and scholars has emerged that study Tolkien's languages for the specific purpose of creating (or recreating, within the meta-narrative) vocabulary for those languages.

Adding vocabulary to these languages is not a trivial matter. Strong, educated justifications and textual evidence must be utilized by potential creators to be recognized as viable contributors by other dedicated fans and scholars. Obvious connections to other words within that language must be displayed to justify any additions into these lexicons. Therefore, these languages are not merely an object of study, but also living and growing more than many of the historically attested languages that Tolkien himself studied. As these languages develop and grow, so too do the cultural influences that spawned them. In this way, we see languages and culture as intertwined, and participation in these languages not only extends the culture's influence outside of the given narrative, but also formulates a method by which the readers are then physical manifestations of narrative immersion. The languages act as all three forms of immersion at once. Conceptualized within the pages of Middle-earth's histories, perceived within the paratexts and documents as artifacts accompanying those stories, and fully within the realm of physicality by those physically speaking those languages, the narrative immersion has become syncretic in a way unprecedented in any other form of literature.

[Chapter 1: Language as History]

1.1: Conceptual Immersion

Conceptual immersion, according to Wolf, relies on the imagination to function. As a focus to create and envision fictive worlds “which provide places for the audience to go vicariously, [and] greatly aid the act of conceptual immersion and give us some of the best examples of immersion” (2). Such interaction with the text is explicitly tied to the language written, and the language written within the novel serves multiple purposes. Therefore, for *conceptual immersion* to take place, the language of the text must provide something to suggest more information than what is actually written in the text. For instance, Wolf claims that, “Glimpses of a world’s infrastructures, though they may be tantalizing, must still present a coherent picture, and should also convey a sense of the world’s underlying logic, so as to set up some framework into which the audience can mentally begin placing world information as they learn it” (3). For a work of fiction to exist, it must exist within a realm of historical significance. This historical significance does not have to be thoroughly explored, but it must be understood as present nonetheless. Tolkien’s implementation of historical significance often comes in the form of languages. The purpose of the languages in the text, then, is three-fold: to distinguish between time, to distinguish between cultures, and to provide a rich source of immersion overflow.

To understand the development of the conceptual immersion within Tolkien’s legendarium, consider the character of Faramir in *The Return of the King*. Sherrylyn Branchaw explores a moment between Frodo and Faramir when Faramir, who speaks

Sindarin (Grey-Elvish), does not recognize the meaning behind the Sindarin name *Cirith Ungol*. Branchaw states, “The failure of the people of Gondor to parse Cirith Ungol as ‘Spider Pass’ and remember that it is inhabited by a giant spider-like creature, even when they know that it is a pass in which some dreadful terror dwells, is a failure similar to the forgetting of English names. Gondor is losing touch with its past” (13). Within the narrative framework, language is living and fluid. Faramir’s knowledge of linguistic history is gapped, which illustrates a historical value within the written text, and Branchaw’s observation reveals a text waiting to be studied.

Faramir’s loss of understanding a language that he himself speaks points to a problem all too common throughout history. As use of a word dwindles, only names and records remain to offer clues of those archaic terms and their meanings. A situation similar to Faramir’s occurs in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when The Fellowship attempts to gain passage into the Mines of Moria only to be halted by a riddle which, until answered, seals the doors of Durin. Gandalf, ancient Maiar and leader of the fellowship, explains that these magical doors “are wrought of *ithildin* that mirrors only starlight and moonlight, and sleeps until it is touched by one who speaks words now long forgotten in Middle-earth. It is long since I heard them, and I thought deeply before I could recall them to my mind” (342). Gandalf, as a figure thousands of years old, illustrates the change and shift in language and use within Middle-earth. When Gandalf declares, “words now long forgotten in Middle-earth,” he reveals how archaic the words of the elves have become, and how ancient the lands that they travel through really are. Branchaw offers a clue where language and history truly

merge by explaining that “Gandalf's difficulty interpreting the password to Moria serves a brilliant dual function of both highlighting the perils of thinking too much about philology, while emphasizing the importance of getting the philology right” (10). Only Gandalf has the knowledge to open the door, and it is only through his own philological prowess and knowledge of ancient history that the company pass into Moria at all.

However, according to Branchaw, the ancient aura that Gandalf invokes is not an accident. Branchaw states that “there are numerous instances that show that [Tolkien] wanted a world in which ancient history was immediately relevant. The presence of immortal characters makes this possible in Middle-earth in a way that it is not in real life” (10). In crafting a world that relies upon ancient history, Tolkien made entry Gandalf, Treebeard, the elves, and even Sauron himself all work to create a world where the history is relevant and “immediate” in both the characters and the languages in the world of Middle-earth. Thus, the array of fictive historical artifacts such as manuscripts (appendices), runes (and the languages associated with them), and even the poetic works created by those within the narrative (such as Bilbo’s poetry) work to create a realm where heritage, tradition, and cultural values can be accessed and studied. Verlyn Flieger mentions in his book *Splintered Light, Logos and Language in Tolkien’s World*, asserting, “With and through the elves, their language, and their history, Tolkien makes real the interdependence of myth, language, and consciousness” (69). While Flieger’s focus is on the elves specifically, his claim is no less

accurate for other immortal characters who make references to ages and works long past.

The glimpses that these passages mark to an older time are understood to be references to Tolkien's other works. However, at the time of the *Lord of the Rings's* publication, many of these other works were either unpublished, unfinished, or altogether unwritten. *The Lay of Luthian*, *The Children of Hurin*, and *The Red book of Westmarch* are all works referenced within *The Lord of the Rings* but not actually written or published at the time. Though an argument could be made that *The Red Book of Westmarch* was partly published in the form of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, that argument was not immediately common at the time of the first publishing. Even so, the references to older languages, peoples, and places made strong yet vague conceptual devices to fuel immersion.

Even in the paratexts, there are vague insinuations that are left without answers. In the posthumously published *Histories of Middle-earth, Volume 12*, Tolkien himself states, "If hobbits ever had any special language of their own, they had given it up. They spoke the Common Speech only and every day (unless they learned other languages, which was very seldom)" (72-73). This passage reveals several things at once. First, hobbits had adopted the Common Speech, but the possibility of a native hobbit language is still very conceivable if Tolkien is to be taken at his word. Second, Tolkien's intentional distance from stating facts reveals an academic approach to his own fiction. The latter point will later inform the setting for his meta-narrative framework. The clear indication that Tolkien does not have an answer presents a topic

by which his readers must consider and grapple with. The hobbits' lack of a native language seems important, even though it is never addressed within the legendarium. Thus, as language changes within Middle-earth, the cultures present within the narrative reflect this change.

In Middle-earth, languages are not always natural, though they are cultural. Black Speech offers a glimpse into the inner workings of linguistic study and cultural value in Middle-earth. M.G. Meile explains, "Many artificial languages have been developed for artistic or other purposes, but [Black Speech] is artificial within its own imaginary framework" (219). Although Meile points out that Black Speech was created by the evil antagonist Sauron as a form of communication to unite his minions and their tribes together, he argues that Sauron had a far more insidious motive. According to Meile, "By making the default assumptions of black speech anti-agentive, Sauron hoped to impose these assumptions on its speakers" (222). In other words, Sauron created Black Speech to use language that removes agency and sense of self from its speakers. In doing so, this language was created for the purpose of unifying and brainwashing Sauron's subjects into submission to his will.

Further, Sauron also perverted the ancient Elvish language, Quenya, to achieve his goal. Meile discusses the various ways in which Black Speech is a parody language of Quenya. He even argues that Sauron's devious linguistic construction was inherently tied to the magically pure language of Quenya and could only exist because of the Elven language. Meile explains that "[t]o form a [Black Speech] word Sauron took a morpheme and subjected it to polarity switching" (219). By doing this, Sauron crafted

a language that affected its speakers in ways that promoted his own devious designs. That Sauron was knowingly producing this kind of effect points to his insidious nature, but also to Tolkien's genius. It is no secret that Tolkien's experiences, work, and passions informed his fiction. That his own work as a philologist can be seen within the narrative framework should also be unsurprising. Yet, the very fact that his invented languages form a historical precedent, even from his narrative into his meta-narrative, speaks to the significance of language's importance to the histories of Middle-earth. Meile relates this fact by stating, "For Tolkien, invented languages are central to his thematic program: every detail counts" (219). The details count because they inform a rich world where readers can conceptualize so much that they not only become immersed in the narrative, but also find new information with each subsequent reading/study. The relevance of this world-building technique is evident when considering just the amount of information and detail in these historical narratives of hobbits, dwarves, elves, and men.

[1.2: "Overflow"]

According to the narrative, Middle-earth has existed for over well over three thousand years, and much of that time has been well documented and studied. From the *Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings* to the twelve volumes of *The Histories of Middle-earth*, the factual knowledge of Arda (the world containing Middle-earth) seems inexhaustible and robust. Even those works, with as much information as they offer, are nearly matched in content by those scholarly texts that fall into the

narrative framework, such as David Salo's *A Gateway to Sindarin: A Grammar of an Elvish Language*. The counter-intuitive fact that knowledge is needed for the narrative to feel larger is due to the significant information documented. The more facts of a fiction exist, the less readers feel they know about it. However, the reverse is also true: the fewer facts of a narrative that are available, the smaller the world seems. As the reader creates and absorbs more information, she reaches a saturation point. Wolf explains that this comes only when fictional information fills a reader's mind to the point that they cannot hold any more information without losing some. The moment that information is lost or forgotten due to the size of the fictional world's facts is called *overflow*. Wolf explains,

If the world is too small, the audience may feel that they know all there is to know, and consider the world exhausted, feeling there is nothing more to be obtained from it. A world with an overflow beyond saturation, however, can never be held in the mind in its entirety; something will always be left out. What remains in the audience's mind then, is always changing, as lower levels of detail are forgotten and later re-experienced and reimagined when they are encountered again. (6)

Narrative *overflow* precipitates a yearning for more information. By constantly attempting to engage with the narrative, *conceptual immersion* begins in earnest. Thus, by reaching the point of *overflow*, the need to study Tolkien's works necessitates greater attention to the languages and histories of Middle-earth. *Overflow* lays the groundwork for syncretic immersion because it requires the readers to engage the texts and languages with more attention and elicits deeper studies of the paratexts and the languages that inform them.

The detail-rich histories and languages within Middle-earth provide ample opportunity for readers to continue trying to achieve full mastery of the available knowledge. Wolf clarifies that “builders of imaginary worlds can use the stage of overflow to perpetuate their worlds in the minds of the audience, and bring them back for the challenge of trying to contain it all, to make new connections, and new conceptualizations that reveal new ways of thinking about a world” (6). For readers of Tolkien’s works, that challenge is paramount, for to truly master the world, a reader must become a devoted student of history, philology, linguistics, poetry, and more besides. Flieger suggests, “Tolkien did not keep his knowledge in compartments; his scholarly expertise informs his creative work. He uses regional, cultural, and psychological variations in language with telling effect in his fiction” (6). The challenge for readers, then, becomes knowing the narrative’s facts and understanding their significance to Tolkien and Middle-earth.

Challenging readers is merely the first step in immersive overflow. It is not enough that there exist excessive amounts of information regarding a world, as that information must be at least partially compelling. As more compelling facts are retained by the reader, the more interesting facts that are unknown become, regardless of how grand the information is. Thus, the reader’s aesthetic pleasure which is provided by giving incomplete facts in a narrative like this are similar to those provided by solving a puzzle. To put it differently, presenting information that is not immediately comprehended can be compelling for readers to seek out the answer. Tolkien scholar Carl F. Hostetter states, “It is noteworthy that Tolkien does not seek to

make this decipherment *too easy*" (2). Hostetter remarks on the fact that Tolkien rarely offered deciphered translations within the text and even less often in the paratexts. Tolkien is not only inventor of many languages, but also of unique culturally specific and relevant scripts. Therefore, when Hostetter claims that Tolkien was not making decipherment too easy, he is also claiming that Tolkien is keeping the narrative's history intact and authentic in a way that compels readers to further engage with the text and paratexts and seek out whatever answers there may be.

[1.3: Middle-earth's Historical Authenticity]

Tolkien's works stand in a clearly laid out timeline of events. Branchaw's claim that Tolkien "wanted a world in which ancient history was immediately relevant" (10) proves useful when examining how languages, many of which are already ancient within the narrative, are so key to the syncretic immersion that Tolkien's languages ultimately achieve. One integral point of interest lay within the intermediary world of myth. Myth exists within reality as a distant and far removed possibility. By using myth as a bridge between the fantasy fiction and the reality of readers and scholars, Tolkien makes entering into the narrative framework easier, thereby capitalizing on the conceptual immersion already present within the reader.

Myth provides a clear point of fascination for Tolkien and readers alike.

Speaking about the historical origination of fairytales, Tolkien himself states,

We are therefore obviously confronted with a variant of the problem that the archaeologist encounters, or the comparative philologist: with the debate between *independent evolution* (or rather *invention*) of the similar; *inheritance*

from a common ancestry; and *diffusion* at various times from one or more centres. (47)

Myths and fairytales share much in common and in this way, Tolkien's insight provides a useful lens in which to understand his approach to myth and fairytales and also his own creations. He later explains that "[a]ll three things: independent invention, inheritance, and diffusion, have evidently played their part in producing the intricate web of Story" (47). That "web of Story" includes the variations of myth and fairy tale that has become so integral to modern fantasy. Using that intricate web to integrate his own narratives becomes a practice that allows him to connect his own works to myth. His integration of his own narratives into the "web of Story" works because, as he explains it, "It is now beyond all skill but that of the elves to unravel it" (47). Due to the historical ambiguity of myths, the web of stories that encapsulate myth and fairytale can be manipulated to create connections between them and fantasy fiction. One such connection and perhaps Tolkien's least known yet still interesting myth connection is that of Atlantis.

In Tolkien's world, Arda, the island city of Númenor stood as the greatest human kingdom, dwarfing Gondor as a minor outpost. Yet, after being deceived by Sauron, the city was destroyed, and the island sank below the waves as the remaining humans sailed what few vessels remained, seeking refuge in Middle-earth. At first glance, the Atlantis myth and the isle of Númenor share little in common, aside from the islands sinking. However, in *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, Christopher Tolkien explains a history of relationship between the ancient myth of Atlantis and the great city of Númenor.

The fall of Númenor is also known in Adûnaic (an ancient human language) as Akallabêth (*The Silmarillion* 309). In Quenya (the high elvish language), however, the name of Númenor's fall is Atalantë. Christopher Tolkien described the similarity between Atalantë and Atlantis by stating, "It is a curious chance that the stem *talat* used in Q[uenya] for 'slipping, sliding, falling down,' of which Atalantë is a normal noun-formation, should so much resemble Atlantis" (8). While Christopher Tolkien writes this off as a "curious chance," the reality of this connection is far less uncertain. Christopher Tolkien himself admits that Tolkien had started a story about Atlantis that eventually became Akallabêth in *The Silmarillion*. The blatant connection produces a faint echo of authenticity by attaching Númenor to a well-established myth.

Connecting fictional narratives to established myths is a viable means of immersion into the meta-narrative because of vague references, a general lack of documentation, and the historical exodus of those that could verify the authenticity and truth of any given event. Tolkien used the historically poor documentation of ancient history and general lack of information and emulated the same problems in his fiction. That pre-historical fictive narrative is then used as a rhetorical device to explain away any disconnect between reality and the narrative itself because that pre-history is unattainable. By emulating the same problems that historians face, he was able to drop hidden similarities within his own fiction and subsequently to hint at a history that none but the immortals could truly verify. The men of Númenor that survived the fall of their great city in the waves moved out across Middle-earth. Over many generations, the immortals left Middle-earth and all that remained were stories and

some documents that Tolkien found and translated. Describing Tolkien's role, Matthew Bardowell explains, "After considering the way he weaves elements from these ancient myths into new, vivid creations, one might agree that he, too, has earned his place among them" (16). In Tolkien's meta-narrative, he is not only a discoverer of great artifacts, but his translation work and study has precipitated a new subject to study.

The connections between Middle-earth history, myth, and language are vast, as are the consequences. As these connections are made, the reader's awareness of the world begins to shift. Flieger claims, "Tolkien's mythology is a record of change- change in history, change in language- and of the inevitable result: change in awareness" (151). The change in awareness is a culmination of connected myths and Middle-earth histories realized and brought forward into possibility, if only for the time it takes for readers to engage in Tolkien's works. Flieger further explains, "Language is the outgrowth of and the agent for mythic perception. Language and myth are interrelated manifestations of burgeoning consciousness, of awareness of a world" (67). No one believes that Tolkien's fiction is a true account of the creation of the world, but by allowing this momentary conceptual immersion to take precedence, the importance of Tolkien's work takes on greater value as readers gain awareness of a world where *good* and *bad* have definitive meaning.

Though events in Tolkien's world take place in a fight over fate, the battles occur in the language and words of those residents of Middle-earth and beyond. The elves are representative of this phenomenon. By naming things, elves have used

language to literally present the world through a perspective that they have made. Jane Chance displays this idea clearly, by articulating that knowledge of language is what allows for “the elevation of intelligent life to supernatural being– the Elves– is similarly reflected in their language and song, their ability as Namers, their hold on the past: ‘Elves made all the old words’ (2:85)” (59). Tolkien has created a fictive world in which the active engagement with language in the narrative fosters greater knowledge and, therefore, greater power. Chance’s claim makes more sense on the practical level of the narrative and makes this fact evident when she states that, “In most cases the name of a character, species, weapon, or place had an etymological appropriateness that revealed some hidden or inner reality (for example, ‘Mordor,’ from the Old English word for murder and death)” (14). In this case, Chance’s observations harken back to Branchaw and add clear emphasis and validity to her claims that Faramir, and Gondor more broadly, has lost touch with its past.

Simply speaking language in Tolkien’s world is not enough. Knowing the history of the words spoken is knowing the history of Middle-earth and the world beyond. Sauron’s Black Speech, Faramir’s loss of understanding, Gandalf’s knowledge of the ancient, and even the connections between narrative and myth through Atlantis and Atalantë/Númenor illustrate how language builds worlds. Chance observes that, for Tolkien, “words provide the means to unify and extend the social community, to understand the various species of nature, and to cross the boundaries of time (past and present) and space” (38). While Chance refers to the words of the narrative, her observations also ring true for the created languages. As entities of culture and history,

Tolkien's languages are not only valuable for the cultural distinctions and historical relevance to the characters within the narrative, but also incredibly important to the reader in their collected forms within the paratexts and documents in the extended space of the books. As the understanding of these spoken languages shifts from the characters in the narratives into the lexicons and documents, so too does the kind of immersion engaged.

[Chapter 2. Language as Artifact (With the Narrative)]

[2.1: *Perceptual Immersion*]

Perceptual immersion stands in stark contrast to *conceptual immersion* in that the immersion achieved requires less work from the viewer than it would from the reader. Reading through texts requires the ability to imagine the realms of possibilities that a text provides, working hard to conjure images of things never experienced, viewed, or known. With *perceptual immersion*, the images are already presented and only requires the digesting and interpreting of those images' relevance. *Perceptual immersion*, then, becomes about maintaining knowledge conveyed by the images and interpreting those images, rather than conjuring and maintaining concepts. Though the interpreting aspect of *perceptual immersion* can rely on conceptualized imaginings, these are almost always dictated to large degree by the continuity of those images. An example of this kind of interpreting occurs when characters in a movie discuss an event that took place off screen. Though it is still conceptualized, the primary mode of immersion employed is the perceptual, as we understand that event through the characters discussing such an event on screen. Because of this shift, many texts cannot produce anything beyond the cover that will aid in *perceptual immersion*.

Tolkien's narratives achieve a greater level of *perceptual immersion* because of the narrative and meta-narrative's framework. For instance, the visuals and certain appendices contained within the novel provide visual representation for actual details within the novel. Mark Wolf clarifies,

to the outsider, such works might seem tedious at best and be criticized for being heaps of made-up data and details that have little or nothing to do with the real world, to the person saturated with an imaginary world, they can be seen as the answers to questions and verifications of speculations, that provide a way for the audience to measure the accuracy of their own guesses about a world, as well as further information and glimpses of a world not provided in any previous works. (9)

Though Wolf's explanation on the purpose and importance of paratextual works is sound, he goes too far by insinuating that unless interest is already established, that any internal document or image related to the text would be viewed with boredom or disinterest. An argument should be made that while the text is the primary incentive in approaching a given work, the paratexts hold value within their own right.

While old adages may argue against judging books by their covers, those covers do have telling effects. The appendices can also convey much about a world of fiction that might entice readers to pick it up for closer inspection. The perceptual element of a text is powerful and important. Tolkien's books offer extensive information without ever having to read the prose contained within. For instance, the appendices in *The Lord of the Rings* contain scripts (Appendix E) ordered in a way that emphasizes their semiotic nature, rather than in a way that emphasizes their symbolic nature and semantic relations. Tolkien does this by covering a page in Tengwar (442) and another in the Angerthas (449) without having a direct English equivalent within view. Only once they are deciphered (by going to another page within the book) and reordered (like on the title pages of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy) do they become text in the traditional sense.

The appendices also contain family trees (Appendix C) that visually connect characters and figures together much like a map. In this case, some emphasis is placed on the names as text, but the visual ordering of their names and the connecting lines on the page create a visual, rather than rely on dense prose. In the same way, lines of kingly successions are illustrated (Appendix A) with corresponding years and dates attached. Here, the lines between perceptual and conceptual become muddled; however, the perceptual immersion still indicated by those lines and ordered texts is still present. Some appendices in *The Histories of Middle-earth* offer pictures, drawings, markings, or other visuals that can help to further immerse readers' perceptions. Wolf lends insight into this situation:

World builders who attain this level of interest in their worlds within their audiences have even more options for releasing world information, allowing them to round out their worlds in areas that they might otherwise not have been able to, for example, in the development of languages, geography, technical information, or other data that would be difficult to include within a story (9).

Wolf's observations hit the mark so accurately that it is as if he had Tolkien in mind when writing this section. Tolkien's appendices also neatly fit into the categories laid out by Wolf, with perhaps the exception of the family trees listed in various books. As the appendices, maps, lexicons, vocabularies, and genealogies are examined through the lens of Genette's paratext theory, it should be noted that these paratextual elements were not published alongside the narrative; rather, they were published within the novel, making a pairing of the conceptual and the perceptual. The publication of *The Lord of the Rings* popularized the use of the paratextual elements in fantasy works which had, previously, been very limited.

[2.2: "Paratexts"]

Paratexts, a term coined by Gérard Genette, are any accompanying devices included in the presentation of a book, or in other words, anything on or in a book that is not the primary prose or content that is added for the benefit of "presenting" the book. Titles, author's names, sub-titles, forwards, descriptions, appendices, images, and/or any other element of a book that is not the primary text is considered paratext. The paratextual information is always changing and shifting in accordance with the time. In his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette states, "The ways and means of the paratext change continually, depending on period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition, with varying degrees of pressure, sometimes widely varying" (3). A book presented now looks very different than a book presented two hundred years ago, with elements such as publishers, commentary, images, and even elements like page numbers being added, removed, or altered.

The changes in paratextual information from one element to another are even more pronounced in Tolkien, who added extensive paratextual information, documents, and data. For many Tolkien readers, these items are symbolic of his created legacy. As Tolkien, his son Christopher, and other fans and scholars have found and offered more and more information, they began filling a living world with history, geography, and language. The more they found, the more this information was sought after by readers, fans, and avid scholars. While nearly every paratextual element has been analyzed and studied to some major degree, the extensive body of scholarly research related to Tolkien's languages indicates that the most influential paratexts

are those appendices and lexicons discussing his elvish languages (Sindarin, Quenya) and scripts (Tengwar and Cirth). Carl F. Hostetter has written much on this topic and explains that the study of Tolkien's scripts and languages "began no doubt almost immediately upon publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring* in July, 1954, at the moment that the first reader to notice the rows of *tengwar* (Quenya 'letters') and *cirth* (Sindarin 'runes') that border the title page wondered, 'what does that say?'" (2). The incredible influence that paratexts wield is even greater in works such as Tolkien's, which rely on such questioning from readers to convey information and encourage greater immersion.

The questions that paratexts invite are formed from various elements, such as location. The placement of a paratext is crucial to understanding its purpose in relation to the text. An example might be the title, which proves instrumental for readers to recognize a book because of the title's placement on the cover and/or spine of the book. Genette provides more clarity, asserting that a "paratextual element, at least if it consists of a message that has taken on material form, necessarily has a location that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself: around the text and either within the same volume or at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance" (4). The paratext is better understood in relation to its primary text and the order and distance to and from it, and the reverse is also true. An example could be made of Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, wherein several maps are illustrated before the narrative begins, indicating that geography will play an important factor in the narrative and a general understanding of that geography will help conceptualize events. Yet another paratext

placed after the narrative concludes offers lexicons, definitions, genealogies, notes on writing scripts, and other data relevant to the world at large, but not necessary to understand the narrative.

While the location of the paratext does not necessarily change the meaning of the text (as some readers may jump around through paratexts), the order and location does influence the text and rhetorically conveys meaning that would be lost if altered. Furthermore, these paratextual elements aesthetically utilized by Tolkien in relation to the text began a trend that would later inform the conventions of the heroic fantasy genre. In fact, the paratextual elements act in a semiotic fashion, validating the text as a collection of historical documents and allowing greater perceptual immersion. In the case of the example above, by placing the maps at the beginning, Tolkien provides readers with a reference for conceptual immersion. In contrast, the paratexts placed after the narrative work to illustrate documentation of evidence and data for textual analysis. Genette asserts that the purpose of these paratextual placements when he explains that the overall purpose of paratexts in general are “to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose” (407). The mere existence of the appendices show that Tolkien envisioned a readership that engaged with the narrative not only on the conceptual level, but also on the perceptual level by analyzing the text using the paratextual data as research material.

If taken at face value, Genette’s assertion that a paratext’s purpose is to “ensure” the author’s vision for a text, then the implication that the author had specific outcomes in mind when compiling these textual and paratextual elements

must hold true. These elements can be altered, changed, or warped to suit the needs and desired outcomes by others but not without obvious distinctions. Fans of Tolkien may draw fanart, for instance, and some of those images may end up becoming cover art for a version of Tolkien's works. However, no one assumes that a cover represents the sole perceptual authority, including the artist. In much the same way, even Christopher Tolkien, who gathered his father's notes and published them in collections of narrative such as *The Histories of Middle-earth*, emphasizes his assumptions in contrast to his father's vision. In both cases, fan creators and privileged creators acknowledge that their work is superseded by the original works. In all cases, legitimacy is given to loyal adherence to the original content's continuity.

[2.3: Readers as Scholars]

That Tolkien created his works with the intention that they would be analyzed and dissected should not be surprising. After all, the extensive display of created languages, vague references to missing ancient texts, the deep philological roots of the names and places, the mythical connections to history, and the paratextual elements prepare a body of work that invites close readings and scholarly study. Though one could simply read the narratives and move on, the information regarding the characters and narratives that Tolkien created are spread out among more than twenty works of fiction in various stages of completion. Having so much information scattered throughout such a vast number of related texts stages a setting not unlike

that of a scholar seeking truth and fact among the many manuscripts, letters, and documents from history.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation regarding Tolkien's envisioned "destiny of the text" (Genette 407) is how little of Tolkien's language is used. Yoko Hemmi is quick to point out that Tolkien "wanted to emphasize the importance of Elvish in his stories, so much so that he made the claim that he should have preferred to write in Elvish" (3). That Tolkien used as little as he did shows just how closely he related his own texts to those studied by historians and other medievalists like himself. It seems that, for Tolkien, one of the more important aspects of his narrative involved how compelling his work was as to incite academic discourse the same way that those authors that he studied did. Jane Chance argues that it was this aspect that helped Tolkien's works reach academic "appreciation": "Significantly affecting the academy's estimation of Tolkien has been medieval scholars' realization of both the importance of medievalism in Tolkien's fiction and the catalytic influence of philology on the languages he invented in his fiction" (11). These points of interest, relevant as they were, found less focused interest in Tolkien's fan communities in the same way.

Interestingly, fan communities have often engaged in their own discourse. Henry Jenkins explains that scholars should "recognize that a lot of fans carry a large amount of intellectual capital around with them. They are very good critics; they are very good theorists" (13). Though the approach between these groups may differ, fans and scholars alike have had little conflict. Because of Tolkien's intention to make his works open to study, the lines between scholars and fans often blur or disappear

entirely, such as with David Salo and others who find their footing in both groups simultaneously. In either case, fans and scholars study Tolkien's created fictive languages and their cultures.

Though the cultures that Tolkien invites readers to study are not found in the physical earth like the other ancient inhabitants of the world, their languages are still preserved. Some could (and have) questioned the usefulness in studying languages that have no real-world value. Myra Edward Barnes's answer to this question is compelling. In her dissertation *Linguistics and Languages in Science Fiction-Fantasy*, Barnes asserts that:

If a linguist should take the time to analyze a single sentence from an imaginary language, placed in an obscure corner of an appendix attached to a book clearly labeled as a "fairy tale," and, surprisingly, he should discover that the author has carefully and skillfully made the sentence as linguistically authentic as possible, then it seems that the result should have some value. (113)

Barnes's assertion that the only way for a fictional language to have value is in its authenticity and proximity to a "completed" state proves deeply problematic. Ria Cheyne takes a contrasting view of created languages, stating, "while studies of created languages within the larger context of constructed languages can offer useful information, this approach is limited by a tendency to ignore the role of created languages in fictional contexts" (4). Cheyne takes issue with privileging academic value over narrative practicality. She points out that even if a created language does not have large lexicon, it is still used within the narrative to convey something about the speaker. Although both have valid ideas regarding created languages and how they should be analyzed, neither seem willing to recognize that both aspects of created

languages can work together. In the case of Tolkien's languages, their "value" cannot be so quickly summed up here. However, one value that his languages hold, is that of their immersive quality within and outside of the narrative.

Tolkien's presentation of narrative as an object of study provides a niche for readers with a love of deep lore and a sanctuary for scholars seeking escape. As studious fans and fanatical scholars search for further meaning inside of Tolkien's extensive languages and narratives, a unique happening occurs. With every conversation, linguistic revelation, and every historical context discovered, more of the cultures that are contained within the text begin to emerge. Though the perceptual immersion of Tolkien's works rely on the quiet reflection of the readers, as those readers begin to interact with each other and those around them, they create culturally significant bonds through Tolkien's texts which in turn takes on a physical presence.

[Chapter 3. Language as Meta-Narrative (Without of the Narrative)]

[3.1: *Physical Immersion*]

Physical immersion can be best understood as physically interacting with a narrative in some form. Theme parks, conventions, renaissance festivals, are all examples of this kind of immersion. Another example of physical immersion could be interactions with physical artifacts. Though artifacts can be regarded as a perceptual form of immersion when viewed as an object, by physically interacting with that artifact the immersion is then transformed and fully realized as an interactive artifact and physical manifestation of the narrative. Finally, physical immersion can take the form of cultural interaction. Becoming an active participant of a narrative necessarily relies on that narrative having some kind of physical manifestation. These manifestations bring the narrative to the participant so that the participant can then interact and engage with the physical narrative.

Place plays a large role in physical immersion. Just as myth connects our real to Middle-earth, so too does place. Joseph Ripp states, “Middle-earth is this earth. But to use a term that Tolkien might have employed to distinguish between them, the world he describes remains in places ‘unstained’” (25). Ripp’s understanding of Middle-earth as earth fits into the meta-narrative at large and begs the question, where are these places? J. M. Silk offers, “Tolkien had a fondness for the literal interpretations of metaphors” (6). Silk’s statement does not necessarily offer specifics, yet an argument could be made that Middle-earth as a name refers to a time and place. In his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Tolkien uses the term “middle-earth”

four times in reference to a wild and ancient Wales. Though he is not the first to use this term, as it was used in medieval texts but by employing it in such a way he not only hints at a possibility of Middle-earth's geography and how it might be found, he also offers a slight understanding of when. Connecting the myth of Atlantis to the place of Arthurian court, one could surmise that these hint at a closer relationship between Middle-earth than we are led to believe.

In the posthumously published *The Book of Lost Tales*, Christopher Tolkien explains that Tol Eressëa is England. Though Tolkien initially envisioned this narrative, he abandoned it. His son, Christopher, gathered up the pieces and presented this book because, as he claimed, it is "the first step in presenting the 'longitudinal' view of Middle-earth and Valinor: when the huge geographical expansion, swelling out from the centre and (as it were) thrusting Beleriand into the west, was far off in the future" (xvi). Christopher presented this alternative narrative that Tolkien had left behind to justify his own edits and additions to his father's stories, as well as offer nuggets of insight for readers that might make connections of their own. One revelation that stemmed from this volume was that Tol Eressëa was originally set to become England in the narrative. Even though Tolkien did eventually abandon this story, England was ever on Tolkien's mind and it sprang up all over "Middle-earth" as he continued to rewrite the narrative. That Tolkien wanted England to be present in some form is obvious, but much like the web of Story, the exact truth of England's physical placement in Arda is lost to myth and speculation. Yet, one thing is certain, England and Middle-earth are connected in some form.

Regardless of whether the connection between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Lord of the Rings* was intentional does not negate that there is one. That connection, much like the myths themselves, is far removed and questionable. Even so, such connections between texts are not completely unwarranted and as many others have pointed out (Flieger 6), Tolkien was not known for separating his academic work from his creative work. Whether England was Middle-earth, Tol Eressëa, or some other place in Arda makes no difference. The connection between these places creates a cultural bond that emphasizes their relation to one another. Consciously or unconsciously, the ancient place of “Middle-earth” has remnants in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and, therefore, also has connections to England and the world at large.

Conjecture pertaining to this topic is far from conclusive, and more than a few would take issue with these connections between texts and narratives. However, to simply disregard such possibilities outright seems just as foolish. Discussing Tolkien’s works, John Gough states, “because any writer's imagination inevitably draws on ordinary human experience, such fictive creation cannot be wholly new, is of a different and lower level of originality, and can only be subcreation, working within and from the primal creation of our world” (6). Tolkien’s love of home and country cannot be in doubt. Tolkien created a world that looks much like England, where men and women sat in their cozy cottages and smoked pipes by the fireside. Such characteristics cannot be accidental and should not be considered coincidental.

Following this line of thinking, the whole of Great Britain seems to suddenly possess some measure of Middle-earth to a small degree.

Connections from the British Isles to Middle-earth are far from certain. In whatever way those inherent connections are found (either through Tolkien himself or intentional historical value), his role within the narrative is clear. Vladimir Brljak discusses at length the way that Tolkien creates his works within a frame narrative and presents “them within their fiction precisely as such echoes of echoes: translations of redactions of ancient works, telling of things even more ancient” (3). By drawing out connections to ancient history and myth, Tolkien manages to place himself as both a humble participant in his own creation and as a living descendant of those creations. What’s more, the fact that Tolkien created the meta-narrative to use as connections to and from our world and Middle-earth through philology shows an authenticity to his work. The regional aspect of language and its evolution over time works to supply Tolkien with ample opportunity and viability to be the translator of such an ancient work as that of a long lost copy of the *Thain’s Book*, which is itself a copy of *The Red Book of Westmarch*.

[3.2: Tolkien, Creator and Translator]

As an author, Tolkien created a narrative in which his readers are a continuation of the narrative as active participants, studying and learning about those cultures his narrative and perpetuating their values. Those who claim that *The Silmarillion* reads like a history book are not wrong. For just as his books convey a

narrative, within that narrative they exist as revised translations of books written by Bilbo in a long-forgotten age. Vladimir Brljak offers the best explanation of how readers understand the meta-fictional narrative:

The Lord of the Rings is a translation into Modern English of a late redaction of one part of a heterogeneous, five-volume work, written in an immemorial past, in one of the languages spoken in that immemorial past, specifically the language of hobbits, which was a variant of the language serving as the *lingua franca* of Third-Age Middle-earth, called by its speakers *Westron*, "Common Speech." (8)

Brljak's description illustrates the complexity of the narrative and the meta-narrative and shows just how readers fit into them. If these are an ancient people, then the obvious conclusion is that we, as readers and participators within the narrative, are descendants of those peoples.

Revelations such as these make physical manifestations of the readers as well as the books but more importantly the languages themselves. As living "proof" of Middle-earth's existence, humanity becomes a point of relevant study. After all, Tolkien's work as translator of Bilbo's texts is historical in nature. In this way, his languages are not only evidence of the elvish culture that is no longer present, though they are that as well. His languages illustrate humanity's ancient cultures and their historical value. The connection between ancient languages and modern culture is seen in how those languages still have roots in living languages. In a recent study on constructed languages, the authors suggest that Tolkien's languages are:

both a mix between existing languages and his own invention. This condition implies that mimesis takes a root on his invention of fictional conlangs but he further implies that his languages pose tripolar functions namely communications between characters, between characters and the fictional world, and between characters and the real world.

(Purnomo, Nababan, Santosa, and Kristina 4)

The fact that his languages bear resemblance and share parts of real languages anchors them to real-world languages as further evidence of Middle-earth's existence. In other words, the languages spoken today could be evidence of those spoken by other cultures in Middle-earth that have simply evolved to their current state. Thus, the evidence of Middle-earth's legacy through real places and languages work together to blur further the distinction between reality and fiction, providing greater scope of possibility and allowing readers easier access to immersion.

Much effort has been exerted to peel back Tolkien's influences from each individual source language for evidence of the "ancestor" languages to modern languages. Finnish, Celtic, Latin, Old English, and others have all played some influential part in Tolkien's crafting of the languages that readers know as Sindarin, Quenya, Black Speech, Khuzdul, and Adûnaic. Tolkien created these languages himself but also used his knowledge of real languages to make those languages, pulling concepts and theories that are used to understand real-world languages and applying them to his own. Much like real-world languages, Tolkien also gave them similar familial comparisons. Tim Conley clarifies that "there are also periods in which speech and orthography may or definitely do change, there are significant but not always clear hints about regional dialects, and several of the languages stem from an earlier form of one of the other languages" (116). Creating his languages by using elements and ideas from other real-world languages allowed Tolkien to paint a narrative picture of authenticity. In much the same vein, Matthew Bardowell discusses how Tolkien's

inspirations were not “coarse borrowing, ostentatious allusion, or ideological slavery—it is fertilization” (5). For Bardowell, Tolkien’s using of these small influences is a kind of perfecting of new creations, rather than cheap rip-offs of the originals. Bardowell adds that the materials that Tolkien utilized “are not stripped from their original context and sloppily transplanted in some new creation. On the contrary, these older sources nourish the new, and the seed germinates and grows infused with the qualities of the soil in which it was planted” (5). On the creative side, Tolkien infused his languages with enough natural extract to make them seem and feel organic. On the meta-narrative side, these languages represent ancestor languages that will eventually lead into the languages spoken today.

That Tolkien’s view of the world was deeply seeded in his understanding of language cannot be overstated. Languages reveal otherwise invisible characteristics of their speakers’ identities and the culture that helped craft them. When Tolkien created these languages, the culture came from the languages, not the other way around. Yoko Hemmi makes this clear, stating, “Tolkien, when discussing the pleasure of language invention, had displayed his conviction that language construction would *breed* a mythology” (2). Indeed, many of Tolkien’s works offer further insight into how language can make literal changes in the world. In *The Return of The King*, Aragorn literally releases the army of the dead with his words, stating, “Your oath is fulfilled. Go back and trouble not the valleys ever again! Depart and be at rest!” (157). In Tolkien’s fiction, his words have literal power. However, the effect that language can have on social values makes Tolkien’s creations far more interesting and complex.

Delving into Tolkien's languages offers a unique experience to understanding the cultures that they represent. These clues appear in how they speak, what they say, and how they write. Jane Chance declares, "For Tolkien, words provide the means to unify and extend the social community, to understand the various species of nature, and to cross the boundaries of time (past and present) and space" (38). Chance's claim fits with the cultures from the narratives when she explains that "The Ents' songs- songs that promised the union of Entwives and Ents- reflect their withering nature and history" (61). The metaphor fits, but as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Miele's commentary on how Black Speech was created to undermine individuality and promote unquestioning servitude to Sauron, this line of thinking is not without warrant.

The one common characteristic uniting each of these instances of language as immersion and historical context is the absolute dependence on research. In researching Tolkien's languages, cultures, texts, and influences, Middle-earth enthusiast and scholar Arden R. Smith argues that such relationships between language and culture are not unique to Black Speech, stating, "The use of the various types of writing systems by the peoples of Tolkien's world mirrors their various cultural and intellectual levels" (1242). Smith's comment harkens back to Faramir's loss of historical knowledge as well and builds upon the narrative of history and cultures that are in decline. Smith argues that the "unsystematic changes made to the alphabets by their later users similarly mirror the gradual cultural decay seen elsewhere in the histories of these peoples. The writing systems of Middle-earth thus present a semiotic

reflection, as it were, of Middle-earth as a whole” (1242). The decay of culture and the eventual evolution that transforms those ancient meta-fictional languages into those spoken in modernity offer the clearest point of contact between Tolkien’s fiction and the physical immersion by allowing readers to reclaim their heritage and studiously research those ancient words long left unspoken.

[3.3: Readers and Students of Culture – Continuing the Narrative]

When readers examine Tolkien’s texts, a common response to his creations is to seek out more information. For this reason, the appendices were added within nearly every text that Tolkien published of Middle-earth. Tolkien intentionally crafted his narrative with pieces of information missing from his prose in order to push his readers to utilize his appendices, which were placed in the books as tools for textual research and additional information that expand the narrative’s parameters for greater *immersion overflow*. Those researching these texts have analyzed the pages for cultural insights and clues as to the greater truths of Middle-earth at large. By finding these hidden-away connections, readers uncover the meta-narrative of which they play the key part of students. Their work is not done, for as they study these facts and facets of everyday life in Middle-earth, language becomes all too important and impossible to ignore. These readers would then begin to learn these languages and piece together better understanding of these words and works within the narrative, discourse communities offer a unique way to interact with the text through cultural expansion.

The significance of such discourse communities comes to fruition when understood as embodiments of Middle-earth culture. As the languages are literally utilized outside of the text, readers become speakers and produce cultural interactions directly related to the texts. For example, Sindarin, language of the gray elves, has deep significance within the societies and cultures of Middle-earth and its histories, which offers readers a point of contact for conceptual immersion. Yet, as documents and copies of long-lost texts, they are also artifacts of bygone eras and, therefore, present a visual element to the texts as they are viewed as both knowledge (the written text) and carriers of knowledge (the containers of ancient culture). Finally, as this knowledge is translated and consumed, Sindarin takes on a renewed life as neo-Sindarin communities are created by researchers, scholars, and fans. The renaissance of Middle-earth culture, changes and merges with individuals and as they speak these languages, Middle-earth becomes real. The physical immersion by the speakers draws on knowledge of Middle-earth cultures and the expansion of those cultures into altered forms that produce new scholarship and cultural engagement.

These forms of cultural engagement take on various personas and points of discourse. One such relevant discourse comes from Tolkien/Middle-earth fan and scholar, David Salo, whose work on Sindarin has spawned others to add vocabulary to an ever-growing lexicon of neo-Sindarin. His book *A Gateway to Sindarin a Grammar of an Elvish Language from J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings*, offers a trove of knowledge and carefully edited sections describing the various grammatical and syntactical elements of Sindarin, and provides a growing lexicon of the language. Even so, in his

preface he states, “I bear sole responsibility for the choice and treatment of the material [...]. Any defects– and there are doubtless many– in this book are therefore entirely my own” (xv) and then goes on to restate this point further down the page, declaring, “This book must therefore contain errors large and small” (xv). The great care that Salo takes to point out any possible failures is because his focus is not on *creating* culture as fiction; rather, he is attempting to *expand* the culture that his readers are studying. That distinction is shared by other students of anthropological intent, such as Carl F. Hostetter when he explains, “Just as it was inevitable that errors should creep into so complex and inherently difficult a work as *Etymologies*, so it is inevitable that there would be some in our own revisions” (2). In both instances, incredible care and intentional distinction has been made to illustrate that they are not creators but informers.

In comparing these authors and fan-scholars, it should be noted that a rift has developed in the way that scholars and fans should approach these languages. Hostetter takes a conservative approach by admonishing any changes, alterations, or additions for the sake of applications, stating, “The purpose of Tolkienian linguistics, proper, as a scholarly endeavor is, or at any rate in my mind should be, to understand and describe Tolkien’s languages, and his writings in and about those languages, in *their own terms* and *as they actually are*” (25). Placing his bias for all to see allows for discussion and promotes a weighing of values. However, Henry Jenkins explains this overtly academic approach as problematic, stating, “it was important for these writers to be outside what they were writing about, to be free of any direct implication in their

subject matter” (11). Hostetter’s conservative approach to Tolkien’s language is not problematic, but his insistence that others adhere to his standards ultimately proves academically insightful, but culturally (fictively) stifling. Jenkins further admonishes this view from scholars and academics, stating, “They begin to acknowledge that audiences have an active role, but their prose is very depersonalized; there’s often no acknowledgement of any affection they feel for the objects of study, or if there is, it’s a token gesture.” (11). In this way, Salo’s liberal approach to expanding Tolkien’s lexicons to a speak-able and independent degree better fits the blending of culture that is uniquely physical (as an act of speaking) immersion that transcends many texts and narratives that have come before it.

Both approaches see Tolkien’s languages as use-able, but Salo has worked to make Elvish speak-able to a level not possible before his efforts. In the introduction, he clarifies his work’s position in that regard, stating, “For those who wish to learn Sindarin, such errors as there may be should not affect their ability to read Sindarin texts or to construct their own” (xv). Salo’s efforts have not gone unrecognized, as many fan-sites, academic journals, and scholarly sources have viewed his work as service to those that revere and promote the cultures within the narratives.

The unique opportunity that Tolkien’s narratives offer in terms of physical immersion lies in Tolkien’s construction of the narrative, meta-narrative, and extended fan interactions with the texts. As fans and scholars work within the meta-narrative to expand Tolkien’s languages in ways loyal and authentic to the original texts, they embark on a mission to extend the narrative’s cultural influence, and consequently,

the narrative itself. This extension highlights the vastness that Tolkien's works already achieve. Mark Wolf concedes that

Some of these have been around for decades and grown so enormous, that it seems inconceivable that anyone, even with a lifetime of study, could master all the details that they contain. Such imaginary worlds, then, are the largest and most complex entities ever conceived by the human imagination, and it is no wonder that so much time is spent in contemplating and visiting them. (10)

Tolkien's fandom inspires loyalty and requires adherence to the narrative's continuity for extending the narrative. As the narrative extends to include those actively speaking Middle-earth's languages, fans and scholars alike transform into agents of that expansion. Neo-Quenya and neo-Sindarin are bringing new life to an ancient fictional people who have long left our shores for a better world. Yet, as those languages continue to live on, so too, does Tolkien's vision of a world where ancient history is immediately relevant.

[Conclusion]

The culmination of Tolkien's languages as they fit into the realm of immersion has a profound effect on those engaging with his works. Reading Tolkien's languages within the text illustrates their historical and conceptual nature, while reading the lexicons, appendices, and paratexts perceptualizes their validity as artifacts of cultural significance. By combining the languages' historical and cultural elements and then performing those languages as both anthropologist and historian, the act of physically speaking these languages not only furthers the fictional cultures within the texts in the designed way that the author intended, but also creates a Neo-Elvish culture that functions as a continuation of the narrative in the same vein as the descendants of Númenor. The performance of these speakers is the final stage for the syncretic unification of immersion.

By acting as historian, anthropologist, and linguist, the three forms of immersion converge and take on a new form for the reader. In achieving syncretic immersion, the reader then becomes an expert on Tolkienian cultures while not only participating in those cultures, but also spreading those cultures to others. The intricate complexities that emerge from syncretic immersion highlights just how radical Tolkien's creations and intentions really are. The very fact that *syncretic immersion* as a term must be conjured and utilized for Tolkien's fiction illustrates the incredible influence that Tolkien's inventions have had on genre, fiction, academic scholarship, and popular culture. Operating in a trichotomy of immersion, his languages have inspired literal change to the way society speaks (see *dwarfs vs*

dwarves). Further, the speaking of his languages has inspired a living culture from fictional texts in academic and social settings. Until recently, those boundaries between the academic and the pop-social have been strictly separated with few exceptions. By integrating language in a way that inspires that social fan and the academic scholar to seek out and study his works, Tolkien has created rhetorical devices that makes scholars of social readers and cultural speakers of academic scholars, closing the gap between these often-opposing groups. While the divide between these groups never fades completely, that such a longstanding divide can fade at all is telling of Tolkien's achievements.

Even though language is the primary method in which Tolkien's fiction achieves syncretic immersion, I do not imply nor believe that it is the only method by which a work of fiction can achieve the state of syncretic immersion. Rather, I think it very possible for other authors and works of fiction to achieve a similar state of being in other ways and other forms. However, Tolkien's form of syncretic immersion through languages may be singularly credited to him for some time. Future research might seek other forms of syncretic immersion from other authors. Another question that is of great interest and offers another source of further research is how Middle-earth language communities engage with each other and validate certain creative choices over others.

Whether a newcomer to Tolkien's immersive narratives or a longtime student of his created cultures, all are welcome to participate in the scholarly and fan-driven endeavor that seeks to explore a world of ancients. As more works are created and

added to the legendarium of Middle-earth and the lands beyond, immersion into a rich world of fiction becomes easier. Tolkien was not the first to write fantasy, nor create languages, or to imbue his works with a life outside of the stories told but he may have been the first to do them all together in a way that ensured an experience like no other. With experiences of syncretic immersion available to those that might seek it out, there can be little wonder that such a universe is steadily growing outside of its original narrative frame. Even as the fans, linguists, philologists, and anthropologists engage with and dissect the languages of Tolkien, the cultures contained within are expanding, proving that fiction, even fantasy, has the potential to cross boundaries, grow beyond its frames and become real.

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