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Parma Eldalamberon XXII (2015), by J.R.R. Tolkien

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The Feanorian Alphabet Part I [and] Quenya Verb Structure, by J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Gilson and Arden R. Smith. Mountain View, CA: Parma Eldalamberon, 2015. 170 pp. \$40 (oversize paperback) [no ISBN]. *Parma Eldalamberon XXII*.

In 1992, Christopher Tolkien appointed an editorial group from the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship, an organization devoted to the scholarly study of Tolkien's invented languages, to be the authorized editors and publishers of his father's voluminous and detailed language papers. Since this time the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship has been publishing these papers in fairly chronological order with very helpful and detailed notes and commentary in two Tolkien language journals *Vinyar Tengwar* (Quenya for 'News Letters') and *Parma Eldalamberon* (Quenya for 'The Book of Elven-tongues'). The *Parma Eldalamberon* volumes tend to do more of the "heavy lifting" in terms of publishing some of the larger manuscripts of Tolkien's language work in the form of grammars, lexicons and name-lists; as well as presenting the detailed documents on the various writing systems Tolkien invented to phonetically transcribe and represent passages from both primary world languages and his own invented ones.

Parma Eldalamberon XXII continues this tradition and covers three key groupings of connected manuscripts which Tolkien developed in the late 1930's at roughly the same time he started work on the early phase of his "New Hobbit"—what would become *The Lord of the Rings*. The first set of papers introduces Tolkien's development of a new writing system called "The Feanorian Alphabet." These papers are edited with commentary by Arden R. Smith who offers a very thorough and helpful introduction that sets this particular writing system in the wider context of the conceptual development of Tolkien's Elvish writing systems. Students and scholars studying these pages are in good hands with Smith's meticulous reproduction and deciphering of the various forms of Tolkien's writing systems and his insightful analysis of how they work as phonetic representations of the different Elvish languages that Tolkien developed as his "tree of tongues" took root and grew in his language invention work of the 1930's. As Smith states in his cogent introduction "the specimens of early Elvish writing systems that have been published in the pages of *Parma Eldalamberon* thus far have shown a gradual evolution toward the scripts exemplified in *The Lord of the Rings*" (6). In 1931, Tolkien invented a writing system called "The Qenya Alphabet" and, as Smith has previously edited and published in *Parma Eldalamberon XX*, this was used by Tolkien to phonetically transcribe English prose and poetry (including selections from Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter," "God Save the King," "Te Deum," and "Beowulf"—as well as several of his own poems from the 1930's such as "Tom Bombadil" and "Errantry"). In the late 1930's, Tolkien adapted several elements of the "Qenya Alphabet" (with some modifications) and developed "The Feanorian Alphabet," linking it directly with his mythology by stating that the writing

system was created by the Noldo Fëanor (for some reason the characteristic diacritic over the /e/ does not appear in Tolkien's name of this alphabet). This was not the first time Tolkien performed this type of incorporation. In 1918, Tolkien had invented a writing system for use in his private diary (again phonetically representing English) which he would bring into his emerging mythology as "The Alphabet of Rúmil," in this case attributed to the Noldo Elf lore-master Rúmil from *The Book of Lost Tales* period. As Tolkien would later write "The Feanorian Alphabet" was meant to be the next progression of the older "Alphabet of Rúmil" (see *The Treason of Isengard*, p. 453). This issue of *Parma Eldalamberon* offers one major version of the work Tolkien did on this emerging alphabet which Smith calls "Version A." He also gives a partial revision of this work dating from the early 1940's which Smith calls "Version A1." Future editions of *Parma Eldalamberon* will publish the later versions. Unlike *Parma Eldalamberon XX*, in these documents Tolkien focuses specifically on how "The Feanorian Alphabet" was used to represent the various historical layers and developments of his Elvish languages. Tolkien frames this analysis by outlining five distinct modes for this writing system which Tolkien represents by variations in the bows and stems of the writing system. Tolkien uses these modes to show how the forms of the writing system accommodated different grammatical and morphological elements of various Elvish languages and dialects. The narrative Tolkien weaves around these modes reflect the historical development of the Elvish languages which he explored in such late 1930 texts as "The Lhammas (The Account of the Tongues)" and "The Etymologies" (both published in *The Shaping of Middle-earth*) and Tolkien's detailed work here is also a good example of how fused myth and language-making were in his creative process. The first mode is "The General or Phonetic Form" which Tolkien intriguingly indicates as being used "in works on linguistic history, or in the description of foreign languages" (6); suggesting the script that Pengolod of Gondolin might have used to actually write "The Lhammas" (*The Shaping of Middle-earth*, p. 167). Next is "The Lindarin Use or Old Valinorian Orthography" which was used to express that form of the Qenya language which became abandoned by the Noldor and came to be used exclusively for the Lindarian dialect (otherwise known as the "pure" Qenya that remained in Valinor). Next is the "Parmaquestarin Use" which was developed by the Noldor for the later written form of Qenya (known as "Book Qenya"). One key element of this mode is Tolkien's outlining of two types of ways to represent vowels. There is the "normal mode" which follows the framework of a syllabary in which the vowel /a/ was assumed after every consonantal letter unless another vocalic letter followed it or a dot (called a *putta*) was written below it. The variant mode was the "qanta-tenkele" or "full writing" where vowels were represented by full letters (as in our Roman alphabet). Smith reproduces a page of transcriptions Tolkien made using this version of the mode to phonetically represent such names as "Gondolin," "Angband," "Nargothrond" and "Earendel" in this full writing form which is interesting to compare to the

more shortened form of the more familiar tengwar of *The Lord of the Rings* where vowels are represented by diacritical marks (known as *tehtar*) placed above the consonant. The final two modes, “Old Noldorian Pre-Exilic” and then “The Beleriandic or Exilic Usage” were used by the Noldor before and after their exile for the representation of their own emerging language. This mode has a direct relation to the “Beleriandic” mode which appears in the inscription on the West-Gate of Moria in *The Lord of the Rings*. In this series of documents one can see Tolkien moving closer (but not exactly) to the type of tengwar that will appear in *The Lord of the Rings*. All of the scripts reproduced in these pages reflect Tolkien’s love of calligraphy and his interest in visualizing how he wanted the phonetics and morphology of his Elvish languages to be represented in their own script. Several times in his comments on the actual manuscripts, Smith notes that each page shows Tolkien’s use of different pen-nibs of various widths which conjures up images of Tolkien sitting at his desk, most likely late at night or in breaks between teaching and doing tutorials, using his large collection of pens to sketch out these pages in glorious calligraphic detail; a key source of both philological and aesthetic pleasure for him.

But it is not just the actual scripts in these documents that are interesting. A close read of these papers unearths some interesting nuggets of information in other areas of Tolkien’s creativity. For example, there are some fascinating notes on how the Elves thought about directions including meditations on how an Elvish compass would be oriented. When showing how the four key directions would be represented in the “Parmaquestarin mode” Tolkien states “in naming points of the compass the order in Eldarin languages is always W-S-E-N since West = Valinor and the face is turned thither, South is next most propitious, [E]ast unpropitious because of the hostile Men, and N[orth] evil because of Morgoth” (51). Thus the letter named “formen” (north) is called the “ill-omened letter” (23). Other interesting gems can be mined by looking at some of the names Tolkien gave the different tengwar letters. One example that suggests further exploration is a note Tolkien made for the tengwar letter that is given the name “thule, sule breath” (50). In a footnote Smith indicates “Tolkien wrote ‘spirit’ in pencil above ‘breath’ but did not delete the latter” (ibid). This use of the word “spirit” with “breath” suggests a potential inspiration from Tolkien’s fellow Inklings colleague Owen Barfield. In his work *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (1928) Barfield suggested that word for “spirit” was a metaphorical advancement from ideas of breath or wind. Barfield believed that language started with words that have simple, purely perceptual meanings whose related associations were developed further through metaphor. Tolkien here seems to have contemplated incorporating the idea of the metaphorical nature of this word “spirit” into the two Elvish words “thule and sule” which signified breath. Interestingly these two words are formed from a proto-Eldarin base root THU which is glossed in “The Etymologies” as “puff, blow” from which comes Súlimo the surname of Manwë whom Tolkien calls “wind-god” (*The Lost Road*, p. 393).

The next group of documents moves from visually and phonetically expressing the Elvish languages to exploring how they were spelled and transcribed. In “Qenya Spelling” edited by Christopher Gilson and Arden R. Smith, Tolkien very intriguingly brings in the frame narrative he developed for his mythology: the Anglo-Saxon mariner Ælfwine who comes to Tol-Eressëa, the Lonely Island, and encounters, hears and records the lost tales of the Elves. Tolkien appears to have brought the framework into his language papers to explore concepts around linguistic transmission. How would Ælfwine have heard and interpreted the strange names he heard in the tales the Elves told him which he and his heirs would record and transmit back to their own people where they would need to be understood? For me the stand-out series of documents in the grouping is a collection of six short texts, each recorded as taking up two sides of a single sheet of unlined paper, called “On Ælfwine’s Spelling.” Tolkien scholars should be grateful to the editors for deciding to publish all six versions instead of publishing one with notes on variations because they are in themselves an excellent demonstration of the development of Tolkien’s thought process as he grappled with an idea and used his mythic mind to arrive at a solution. They also reveal some interesting key biographical elements about Ælfwine that are not overtly mentioned in the narratives; namely that in addition to his native Anglo-Saxon language he also was familiar with Latin (not surprising) as well as Irish and Old Saxon (more interesting) and that it was his familiarity with these languages that helped influence how he transcribed and transmitted Elvish words and names to his own people. The primary difficulty that Ælfwine had was in the representation of the hissing sounds or “spirants” such as /f/, /v/, /s/, and /z/. In these documents, Tolkien outlines in specific detail the phonetic rules that were followed by Ælfwine to achieve this transmission. Tolkien focuses on one key example here. In the case of the tale of Turin Turambar, Ælfwine would have heard the Noldorin epithet for Turin “iarvael” which means “blood-stained” and is attested in “The Etymologies” (*The Lost Road*, p. 397). Tolkien explores how, given there was no intervocalic “v” in Anglo-Saxon to both keep faithful to the phonetic sound-sense he would have heard and also be comprehensible to his people who would read the tale, Ælfwine transcribed this name in Old-English as “gearfael,” reflecting the sound made by the voiced intervocalic /v/ with the voiceless /f/ (as seen in the Anglo-Saxon word “seofon” [seven]). In the last two versions of these documents (dating from the late 1940’s–early 1950’s) Tolkien offers a much more detailed report of how Ælfwine actually made his transcriptions from the Elvish documents that he both heard and read in the library of Tavrobel. Tolkien states “strictly speaking, he constructed two systems: one for the transcription of Quenya, and another for Sindarin (and with modifications for other tongues to which he refers)” (77). For Quenya he “used the letters as nearly as possible according to the spelling and pronunciation of Latin as he knew it; for he said ‘the Quenya is indeed the Latin of the Ælfe (the Elves), though it be of greater reverence and age than even the language of Rome or any other tongues of

Mortal Men” (77). Interestingly, in this version Tolkien states that Ælfwine’s knowledge of Irish, a “Celtic” language, is used more for his transcription of the Welsh-inspired Sindarin language: “he followed rather the usage of letters in the English of his own time, though he was obliged to introduce many modifications of English custom; and in the alternations that he made he shows at least some acquaintance with Irish” (77). This collection of documents underscores how Tolkien combined his creative use of myth and language-making with his in-depth knowledge of primary world languages, like Latin, Old-English, Old Saxon and presumably Irish, to explore how these tales would actually have been transmitted; thus reinforcing “the inner consistency of reality” of his overall invention.

When I first found out what the other main area of grammatical development this volume would cover I felt the way the philologist Alwin Lowdham in Tolkien’s unfinished c.1945 novella “The Notion Club Papers” must have felt. After having a dream about a strange language, Lowdham came into a Notion Club meeting exclaiming “‘I’ve got something new!’ he shouted. ‘More than mere words. Verbs! Syntax at last!’” (*Sauron Defeated*, p. 246). This third groupings of papers offers new information on the grammatical form that Tolkien never seemed to get to in the composition of his past historical grammars; namely the verb. Previous to this, excepting what can be gleaned from the various lexicons and word lists, the most “complete” information on the conjugation of Elvish verbs is the detailed and intricate charts Tolkien composed in the early phase of his Elvish language invention in “Qenya Verb Conjugations” which were published in *Parma Eldalamberon XIV*. There are also some tables of conjugations from the late 1920’s–early 1930’s in the section “Qenya Conjugations” published in *Parma Eldalamberon XVI*. However, in this new collection of papers we not only get complete conjugations of Qenya verb forms but also several explorations by Tolkien of the historical origin of these forms. Tolkien uses his development of an Elvish tree of tongues to ground the development of the verb form in the Common Eldarin roots from which they sprang and many of the documents in this set of papers traces the origins of the verbal endings from these roots. These documents, excellently edited by Christopher Gilson, are arranged in four groupings under the collective title “Qenya Verb Structure”: “Quendian & Common Eldarin Verbal Structure,” “Qenya Verbal System,” “Common Eldarin: Verb Structure” and this collection concludes with a series of very late documents (c.1969-70); collectively called “Late Notes on Verb Structure.”

In the “Qenya Verbal System” papers Tolkien outlines the different aspects, moods and conjugations of the Qenya Verb progressing these conjugations from the work he did on the Qenya Verb in the early 1930’s; published in “Qenya Conjugations” (*Parma Eldalamberon XVI*: pp. 124,127). One interesting nugget to be mined in this section is the apparent emergence of a new conception by Tolkien of the Qenya perfect tense, evidence of which appears in the latest manuscript version of *The Lord of the Rings*

chapter “The Steward and the King” composed in 1948 (*Sauron Defeated*, pp. 12-13; 56-7). The immediacy of Tolkien’s invention is attested several times by Gilson’s indication of Tolkien changing his mind or “niggling” by marking the page with “wavy pencil strokes”; indeed these pages show language invention in action! A good example of Tolkien changing his mind and a link to his work on *The Lord of the Rings* (in this case his work on Appendix D “Calendars”) is his rejection of an earlier conception of the always elusive verb ‘to be’ coming from the proto-Eldarin base root YE which does not appear in the published “Etymologies” but was published in “Addenda and Corrigenda to the Etymologies” in *Vinyar Tengwar* 46 where it is called “stem of verb to be” (*Vinyar Tengwar* 46, p. 22). However, in the late 1940’s Tolkien decided that this base root would now form words like “yeni” meaning “year” which he introduced in c.1949 or 1950 in the second draft of “The Calendar” appendix of *The Lord of the Rings (The Peoples of Middle-earth*, p. 119). Tolkien then created a new proto-root for the verb to be “E” from which the Quenya stem “eä” (be!) is derived. The “Common Eldarin: Verb Structure” papers from 1951-52 that follow are the second part of what Tolkien intended to be a larger document given the collective title “Common Eldarin Morphology” which was to include sections on noun structure, verb structure, pronouns, demonstrative and correlatives, prepositions and numerals (88). The editor notes that these were carefully written pages composed in ink and suggest that when Tolkien turned back to his work on the “Silmarillion” materials after *The Lord of the Rings* he also started another historic and comparative grammar of Common Eldarin.

Although Tolkien must have had his earlier work on the verb form in front of him when he worked on these pages, there are new inventions to be found. For example, when describing the future tense of verbs, Tolkien suggests the Quenya ending -uva to indicate future tense derives from a proto- base UB meaning “ponder, have in mind”—so that the primitive formation underlying the Quenya phrase “matuvanye” “I shall eat” was “mat-uba-nje” which signified “I intend to eat.” Several of the documents in this section also show Tolkien’s key change during his composition of “The Grey Annals” in 1951 that the Noldor did not retain their own language for daily use during their exile in Beleriand but adapted the Sindarin language instead.

The volume concludes with “Late Notes on Verb Structure” a collection of papers dating from c.1969-70 in which Tolkien revised his thoughts on verbal inflexion for tenses, conditional expressions, negation and participial forms and thus represents the latest and last conceptual development of the verb form in Tolkien’s language invention. He did this by making revisions to the “Common Eldarin Morphology” documents he had worked on in the 1940’s-50’s. These documents reinforce the importance of treating the different conceptual phases of Tolkien’s language invention as separate inventions. Any attempt to conflate this very late material into the earlier work will cause great confusion and contradiction. One of the most helpful passages I found in this section is Gilson’s description of how Tolkien actually filed his Eldarin

language papers in seven box files which in ordering the language papers Christopher Tolkien labelled “Quenya A through Quenya G” (141). Gilson’s description of Tolkien’s use of cardboard sub dividers and notes underscore the importance of the organization of this work to Tolkien and is well worth studying by Tolkien scholars. These are dense notes which are made easier to understand due to Gilson’s forensic introduction and analysis of each of these documents. These documents also reveal a much older Tolkien looking back on his earlier work and making fundamental changes to his language-invention. For example, when reviewing his earlier use of *û* at the start of a word to express negation (e.g. *únótima* “impossible to count”) Tolkien now writes “*û* will not do. It is not necessary to avoid at all costs similarities with known European languages—Eldarin is deliberately devised to resemble them in style—but here the resemblances either to Greek *ou* (phon. *û*) or to the unrelated Norse *ú*, as a prefix, is too close” (160). Tolkien then goes on to suggest several new alternative versions of negation (including the stressed *lá*). Another document reflects Tolkien’s work on the etymology of the name of Aragorn’s mother Gilraen (meaning “star-net”) which caused Tolkien to develop a new series of notes on verb forms (159). It is quite interesting to study these pages as some of the latest work Tolkien did on his Elvish languages where like much of his later texts Tolkien took the role of a scholar looking back on his own previous work and both commenting on and, in many cases, emending what he had written previously.

This is just a short analysis of some of the incredibly rich material that this as well as all volumes of *Parma Eldalamberon* contains. *Parma Eldalamberon XXII* offers this information to the student and scholar in a highly organized way with incredibly helpful introductions, commentary and footnotes that faithfully report on all the changes and modifications that Tolkien made as he exercised his very personal “secret vice” of language invention intertwined with his myth-making.

How this information can be used suggests several different avenues of exploration and study. One is just to read the documents as interesting narratives of Tolkien’s creative development. In this case I would suggest reviewing the introduction first which gives a good contextual overview of what the documents cover and then read through the main body of the text. I would suggest then going back and reading the footnotes which report on the changes and modifications Tolkien made to a given passage (often from a later time). Another method is to use the volumes of *Parma Eldalamberon* that have been published to date (as well as those issues of *Vinyar Tengwar*) to follow through a specific grammatical or syntactical element or thread in Tolkien’s language invention (for example Tolkien’s changing thoughts on the verb “to be” or the negation of verbs). One could also explore how these documents link to the mythic texts Tolkien was developing during this conceptual period and indeed can be contextualized as another “leaf” in his creative thought at this time. Given Tolkien’s manifesto that “mythology is language and language is mythology” (*Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, p. 181) I

would suggest and encourage students and scholars to dig more into these volumes. Contained within them are not just the complex and detailed elements of Tolkien's language invention but also the myths and stories that they told and visually represented.

It will not necessarily be an easy path but the rewards will be illuminating and thanks to the incredible care and scholarship of the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship the journey through each of these volumes, including this one, is well worth it—may they long continue to be published!

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