

What Makes the Names of Middle-earth So Fitting? Elements of Style in the Namecraft of J. R. R. Tolkien

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What makes a name “fitting”? Or, in closely related formulations, what makes a name “sound right” or “ring true”? From the *Cratylus* to present-day studies in literary onomastics, the usual answer is that a name is fitting, right, or true for the person, place, or thing that bears it. The names in J. R. R. Tolkien’s fiction are fitting in this sense, reflecting by way of their source words, sound symbolism, or etymology some characteristic of their designees. At the same time, however, Tolkien insists that a name fit not only its designee, but also the phonological and morphological style of the nomenclature to which it belongs, as well as the linguistic scheme of his invented world. These elements of style are determined at the level of the nomenclature as a whole, independently from concerns with the motivation of individual names. The personal and place names of Middle-earth are thus fitting in more than the usual sense.

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Introduction

One of the greatest namesmiths in all of modern literature, Tolkien began creating languages as a child. He continued as an adult, nourished by his academic work as a linguist together with his increasingly keen sense of the intrinsic beauty of languages. “Many children make up, or begin to make up, imaginary languages,” he once wrote. “I have been at it since I could write. But I have never stopped, and of course, as a professional philologist (especially interested in linguistic aesthetics), I have changed taste, improved in theory, and probably in craft” (2006a: 143). In his working life, Tolkien was a research associate for the *Oxford English Dictionary* and a Professor at Oxford University, where he established himself as a reputable scholar of Old and

Middle English before he became known as a celebrated writer of fantasy. His first linguistic creations, described in the essay “A Secret Vice,” were little more than “code-like” systems based on alterations of English syllables and words (2006b: 205). But, by the time he was an undergraduate, Tolkien began to develop a full-fledged idiom that would eventually become what he considered to be his crowning achievement, Quenya. In addition to developing a phonology, lexicon, and grammar for this entirely invented language, he gave it a history and mythology (2006b: 210). It was from out of the latter that tales of the elves and heroes of Middle-earth would evolve, providing the background for his best-known writings, *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Closely related to Quenya in both construction and in the history of its development is Sindarin. Tolkien notes that, while Quenya serves as the ultimate source for the linguistic evolution of Middle-earth, Sindarin provides the majority of personal and place names that appear in his fiction (2006a: 176). In all, Tolkien created fourteen languages for Middle-earth, though some amount to little more than an isolated phrase or a list of names.

The usual sense

In the author’s own words, the nomenclature of *The Lord of the Rings* “is the product of very considerable thought and labor” (2006a: 379). The care which he lavishes upon his namecraft concerns not only their meaningful contents or symbolism, but also the material and formal elements of his onomastic inventions. In both cases he seeks to create fitting names. Many if not most of the names in Middle-earth are fitting in the usual sense, sounding just right for the person, place, or thing they designate (Finke, 1995: 67), while presenting “a relation of reflective analogy (imitation) between ‘word’ and ‘thing’ that *motivates*, or justifies, the existence and the choice of the former” (Genette, 1994: 5). Tolkien explains that most of his constructions are derived from stems and words found in his own invented languages Quenya and especially Sindarin (2006a: 380). These invented idioms thus provide a lexical and morphological trove of motivated source materials which the namesmith draws upon when creating names for the persons and places of Middle-earth. Tolkien provides a partial inventory of these onomaturgic building-blocks in “The Etymologies,” an alphabetical listing of some of the historical base syllables or stems of the Elvish tongues (2002: 341–400). Another useful reference is Ruth S. Noel’s “Tolkien Dictionary,” which provides glosses on numerous names together with their source words (1974: 93–207). To give a few well-known examples, *Aragorn*, the name of the king who returns from exile to heal the people and land of Gondor, combines *ar(a)* (“high,” “noble,” “royal”), *g-* (an augmentative prefix), and *orn* (“tree”) to signify the “Lord of the Tree” (Noel, 1974: 114). *Arwen Undomiel*, the name of Aragorn’s bride, combines *ar(a)* with *wen* (“maiden”) and *undomë* (“twilight”) with *-eil* (a feminine suffix that sometimes signifies “daughter of”) to yield “Royal Maiden” and “Daughter of Twilight” (116–117). Finally, *Elendil*, or “Star-Lover,” the name given to the king of Númenor who first sailed to the shores of Middle-earth, combines *elen* (“star”) and *dil* (“friend,” “lover of”) (137).

Some of the names in Middle-earth may also be motivated by sound symbolism. Noel gives several examples of what she considers to be onomatopoeia, or mimetic sounds, with the Elvish words *sul* (“wind”), *hwesta* (“breeze”), and *lalaith* (“laughter”)

(60). Another Tolkien scholar, Ross Smith, examines the sound symbolism at work in the word *wilwarin*, which means “butterfly” in Quenya. This common name is derived from *wilwa*, a verb that signifies a “fluttering to and fro” action. In Smith’s analysis, “two phonetically similar syllables,” *wi* and *wa*, are deliberately employed here “to reflect the repetitive nature of the action” signified by the verb. As such, “the name *wilwarin* sounds well suited to the insect which in English we call a butterfly” (2006: 8). He also suggests that a similar device is employed in *Withywindle*, “a slow, winding, magical river overhung by willows,” and *Tom Bombadil*, a “jolly” and “rumbustious” character (5). To lend support to his analyses, Smith draws upon Tolkien’s comment in the essay “A Secret Vice” that the invented “word-form itself” and “the word-form in relation to meaning (so-called phonetic fitness)” are the principal focus of his craft (2006b: 211). Latching onto the term “phonetic fitness,” Smith argues that Tolkien sought to establish a “direct relation between sound and sense” in his onomastic creations, and that the appropriateness of the individual names given to characters and places as well as the sense of aesthetic pleasure provoked by an entire language is “largely caused by the fitness of its phonetics to its meaning” (4). Yet, Tolkien himself specifically states that meaning is not intrinsic to sound, but rather must be attributed, either arbitrarily by way of “accidental non-linguistic associations,” or because of a “feeling for “phonetic fitness” and/or preferences in the individual for certain phonetic elements of combinations” (2006a: 375). What he means by “phonetic fitness” is therefore not quite so clear-cut as Smith would have it. Perhaps it does in some cases refer to something akin to phonosemantics, but there are other ways of interpreting what it means for a name to be fitting in terms of sound and form, as we shall see.

At any rate, explicit examples of sound symbolism in the names of Middle-earth are rare. A more prevalent means of motivating names in Tolkien’s fiction is etymology. An excellent study by T. A. Shippey illustrates the variety in the author’s use of etymologies drawn from natural languages, predominately Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) and Old Norse. In some cases the namesmith simply borrows an ancient vocable intact. The first name of Gríma Wormtongue, a servant to the treacherous sorcerer Sauruman, is taken from *gríma*, which means both “specter” and “helmet” or “mask.” Shippey suggests that this association testifies to “an ancient fear, perhaps, of things without faces. It is a threatening word” (1979: 301). Tolkien also frequently modifies and/or combines source words. The name of Gríma’s master is taken from the Anglo-Saxon *searu-man*, which means “the cunning man.” This etymological association is quite fitting for a character who, in the words of Shippey, “relies on will-power and more on mechanical contrivance than any other major personality in *The Lord of the Rings*” (300). In some cases, historical layers of meaning can reveal hidden layers of character to whom an etymologically derived name has been given. Shippey provides a good example with *Beorn*, the werebear in *The Hobbit*, which is derived from an OE word for man, *beorn*. This ancient form, however, is derived from an even older Norse word meaning bear (301). Hence, the hidden inner nature of the grumpy yet generous and likeable character is hidden in the condensation of etymological forms in his name. Yet another example is *Sméagol*, the name given to Gollum before his body and mind were corrupted by the One Ring. The name is taken from the OE word *sméagan*, which means “to enquire.” This word, it turns out, developed from an older one, *smúgan*, which means “to creep.” Put the two together, Shippey argues, and you arrive at “the Snooper” (301).

These analyses illustrate the wealth of etymological resonances in Tolkien's namecraft. Yet, the author himself raises caveats about carrying etymological speculation too far.¹ In one letter in particular he vents his irritation at the guesswork of readers and critics concerning the sources and meanings of the names in his novels, or what amounts in his eyes to a form of private amusement that is "valueless for the elucidation or interpretation of my fiction" (2006a: 379–380).² He then goes on to complain that

Investigators, indeed, seem mostly confused in mind between (a) the meaning of names *within*, and appropriate to, my story and belonging to a fictional "historic" construction, and (b) the origins or sources in my mind, *exterior* to the story, of the forms of these names. (380)

Though they often choose to ignore it, the author feels he has given his readers sufficient information in the narrative and appendices of *LOTR* concerning the meanings names acquire within the literary and linguistic context of the novel. Moreover, the bulk of the nomenclature is derived from invented languages created prior to his stories, which means it would be "idle" to compare chance resemblances between names in Elvish tongues with words found in real languages outside the narrative (380). In other words, the significations of names derived from the Elvish languages are to be discovered in the attributed meanings of the stems and bases in Quenya and Sindarin, rather than any lexical or etymological associations with words and names in natural idioms.

Tolkien admits several exceptions to this general rule. The first set of exceptions is found in the Anglo-Saxon origins of names used by the Rohirrim and the Hobbits, which he identifies as a field of inquiry that is not only "fertile," but also the only one that is consistent with the linguistic scheme described in Appendix F of *LOTR* (381).³ This same scheme, which will be discussed in detail below, also explains the influence of Scandinavian tongues on the names among the dwarves and related communities in the far north (382). A second set of exceptions includes the ad hoc borrowings, conscious or unconscious, of words and names of diverse provenance. Tolkien insists that these outside source materials provide only "a sound-sequence (or suggestions for its stimulus)" (380). These "audible forms," moreover, receive meaning and significance only when transferred into "the prepared linguistic situation in [the] story" (383).⁴ For example, he once encountered *Moria* in a tale and liked it. At the time of writing his novel, he recalled the name and found it alliterated with "mines" in the construction *Mines of Moria*. Its meaning in *LOTR*, however, is not to be found in association with the place name that served as an auditory stimulus, but rather in the pre-existing MOR structure in Quenya, which means "dark" or "black" (384). Tolkien admits of only two cases where the meaning of a borrowed sound-form has been carried over into the onomastics of his fiction. The first is *Eärendil*, derived from the Anglo-Saxon *éarendel*, the name of a star or perhaps constellation. Tolkien retained the meaning of the source vocable in his own invention, but the sound and form "had to be accommodated to the Elvish linguistic situation" (385–386). In a different letter Tolkien gives a further exception with *Gondor*. The name, he explains, is "fitted to the style and phonetics of *Sindarin*," and "has the sense 'Stone-land' sc. 'Stone(-using people's) land'" (409). Tolkien surmises that the stem on which the name is based, **gon(o)* or **gond(o)*, originated from an hypothetical vocable he encountered as a child while reading a book about primitive

languages that claimed *ond* was a prehistoric word for “stone” (410). In those few cases where Tolkien borrows the phonetic envelope of a name or word, then, meaning is rarely ever imported into the new construction. Furthermore, regardless of whether the content is retained or not, the sounds of the original source vocable must be integrated into the previously devised phonological, morphological, and semantic systems of Quenya and Sindarin (387).

The elements of style

In these comments, Tolkien insists that the actual sound and form of a given name are equally important to its meaning. Moreover, that which determines the sound-shape of a name may have less to do with its motivation by way of source words, etymology or sound symbolism than with the style he imposes upon the construction of entire ensembles of names.⁵ As developed in his essay “English and Welsh” linguistic style covers two dimensions. The first includes the phonological and morphological patterns, and even the spellings that are proper to a given idiom. These elements, Tolkien argues, give rise to the sensual pleasures of vocal production, hearing and sight, as in the case of Welsh:

If I were pressed to give any example of a feature of this style, not only as an observable feature but a source of pleasure to myself, I should mention the fondness for nasal consonants, especially the much favoured *n*, and the frequency with which word-patterns are made with the soft and less sonorous *w* and the voiced aspirants *f* and *dd* contrasted with the nasals: *nant*, *meddiant*, *afon*, *llawenydd*, *cenfigen*, *gwenyn*, *crafanc*, to set down a few at random. (2006b: 193–194)

Style also includes the ways in which the sound-patterns of a language are linked to a conceptual universe by way of linguistic convention and drift, or in how the language comes to be shaped by historical, geographical, and social factors. These relationships can give rise to impressions such as the “antiquity and alien remoteness” that Tolkien perceives in ancient Greek (191), or to the relations between Welsh and English which result from the geographical proximity and philological continuity of the two tongues (194). Tolkien’s observations on his own tastes and predilections emphasize how a speaker’s sense of proximity to or distance from a given language also creates powerful emotional and kinship ties. This being the case, the perception of linguistic style takes as its starting point the speaker’s “cradle tongue” (190). This is why, Tolkien claims, the aesthetic appreciation of linguistic style is most clearly perceived in the discovery of a foreign language or even simply a nomenclature. His own attraction to Welsh, for example, was first “stirred by contacts no nearer than the names in Arthurian romance that echo faintly the Celtic patterns of their origin” (194). Both dimensions of Tolkien’s concept of style are relevant to the invented names in his fiction. The first concerns the phonology, morphology, and orthography of the Elvish languages from which the majority of the anthroponyms and toponyms in Middle-earth are derived. The second concerns the geographical, historical, and cultural map that has been imposed upon the construction of his imaginary world, together with the linguistic scheme Tolkien has devised to fit this map. This scheme is founded upon a distance from and proximity to English, the language in which the novel is written.⁶

The first dimension of idiomatic style can help to explain the sense of linguistic verisimilitude in Tolkien's nomenclatures, that which gives them a ring of authenticity. The real-like qualities of his onomastic inventions are achieved by imitating the "real-life models" found in natural tongues. This linguistic mimesis draws upon not only the phonologies, morphologies, and orthographies of these idioms, but their historical developments and interrelationships as well. Quenya, for example, is based upon the phonology and morphology of two of the namesmith's favorite languages, Finnish and Greek, and is modeled upon the spelling of Latin. The role of Quenya in the history of Middle-earth and its relationship to the other vernaculars, moreover, is meant to be similar to that of Latin with respect to European history and languages (2006a: 176). Sindarin, meanwhile, is derived from and thus "etymologically" related to Quenya within the historical frame of *LOTR*, though its sonorities have been modified to resemble those of another of Tolkien's fetish idioms, Welsh (176). As John Algeo demonstrates in his study of the place names in Middle-earth, Tolkien's namecraft employs the morphological patterns of Quenya and Sindarin in a rigorously systematic fashion. The toponyms derived from the Elvish tongues typically include a generic term indicating the type of place — such as mountain, forest, or river — and a specific term identifying the salient feature or perceived character of a precise geographical location. In constructions where the generic term appears first, the two are written as separate words, but where the specific term appears first the two are written together as a single word (1985: 83). Hence, when the Sindarin word for water, *nen*, appears in initial position, the resulting construction is written as *Nen Echui* ("Water of Awakening"), the name of the lake where the elves first came into consciousness, or *Nen Girth* ("Shuddering Water"), a waterfall (87). When it appears in final position, the name is written as *Carmen* ("Red Water"), a river flowing from the Iron Mountains, or *Harnen* ("South Water"), a river to the south of Gondor (88).

The second dimension of style applies to "the carefully devised scheme of nomenclature" and "feigned linguistic history" that Tolkien has imposed upon the cultural geography of his fictional world (1975: 156). He describes this scheme in the frequently cited Appendix F of *LOTR*, which suggests the novel is in fact the translation of an ancient manuscript, the Red Book of Westmarch, written by the hobbit Frodo Baggins. It additionally explains the linguistic device used to translate the book from the language of the hobbits, Westron, also known as the Common Speech, into English. Posing as a translator and editor, Tolkien writes,

In presenting the matter of the Red Book, as a history for people of today to read, the whole of the linguistic setting has been translated as far as possible into terms of our own times. Only the languages alien to the Common Speech have been left in their original form; but these appear mainly in the names of persons and places. (2004: 1133)

The latter names to which he refers are mostly Elvish (especially Sindarin), though the reader will also encounter an occasional Dwarvish or Orcish one, too. The feigned history and translation of Westron personal and place names are developed with remarkable care and sophistication. Place names of the Shire are recognizably English in construction, though they retain a quaint flavor due to the use of old-fashioned forms, some of which are survivals from Old English sources, such as the suffix *-bottle* ("dwelling") in *Hardbottle* and *Nobottle* (1134). For the older region associated with the Bucklander hobbits and the human town of Bree, Tolkien employs

Celtic elements that have survived in the place names of England, such as the *bree* (“hill”) and *chet* (“wood”) found in *Bree*, *Archet* and *Chetwood* (1134–1135). Some of the hobbit personal names are also quaint in like fashion, such as the “high-sounding” first names used by the Bolgers and Took. These have been turned into “those old names, largely of Frankish and Gothic origin, that are still used by us or are met in our histories,” such as *Rudigar*, *Fredegar*, or *Peregrin* (1135). The “Mannish” nomenclatures in the land of Rohan are strictly derived from Anglo-Saxon or Old English, the idea being that Westron was historically and geographically related to Rohirric in the same way that English is related to Anglo-Saxon in the British Isles (1136). Thus, Noel explains, the name of King Théoden is taken from an OE word that can be paraphrased as “chief of a people,” while that of his royal abode, Meduseld, is taken from one that means “mead-hall” (1974: 28). Names found in the adjacent and much more ancient land of Rhovannion employ both OE and also Scandinavian source-materials. Some of these overlap etymologically, as illustrated by the example of *Beorn* above, a construction which is taken from an Anglo-Saxon word for man, but is also related to the Old Norse word for bear, *bjorn*.

Tolkien’s linguistic scheme is based upon a proximity to and distance from English. Hence, the Shire names are drawn from English source-words that contain a hint of the past, while those of Bree, a geographical region of greater antiquity than the Shire, draw upon even older Celtic sources. Likewise, Rohan names draw upon Old English, while those of Rhovannion draw upon both OE and the older Nordic tongues that would develop into Anglo-Saxon. Critics have likewise underscored this play of distance and proximity. Noel observes that

[t]o indicate both similarities and contrasts of other languages with Westron, once English is established in Westron’s place, the other languages have to evince the relationship to the English ear. Closest are the archaic, obsolete, and dialect English words. Foreign languages such as Old Norse represent a greater distance, in time or geography, from the Hobbits’ Westron. (1974: 7)

Marion Gymnich notes that, even if the reader’s perception of the aesthetic qualities of the different languages and nomenclatures is subjective, “preferences for certain sounds and sound sequences are strongly influenced by his/her native language, by its sounds and sound sequences, since these influence what sounds familiar or even ‘possible’” to an individual (2005: 14). The aesthetic qualities of the respective styles of the nomenclatures, moreover, fit the cultures and moral characters of the different peoples of Middle-earth. Euphonic constructions are used for Elvish names, just as anti-aesthetic constructions are used for the orcs. As Gymnich observes,

The underlying assumption clearly is that the aesthetic qualities of a language (or the lack thereof) indicate how civilized its speakers are. The Elves, representatives of an ancient civilization, are portrayed as possessing extraordinary dignity and grace. (12)

In comparison, names in the Common Speech used by Men and Hobbits possess less luster, while those in the Black Speech of Mordor are treated as hideous and abominable (12–13).

Shippey similarly explains that the Hobbits’ speech, which is “translated” into the modern English in which the narrative is written, “sets up a standard of naturalness” against which the other invented languages are to be measured and perceived (1979: 303). The speech of the Riders, for example, comes across as “solemn and

old-fashioned” in comparison, and the “odd” words and names they use, such as *Dwimordene*, *Éomer*, *Gamling*, *Grima Wormtongue*, *Wetwang*, or *Woses*, “show their difference from the longer-established peoples of the West” (303). In contrast, names in the languages of the dwarves and northern men, such as *Durin*, *Dáin*, *Gimli*, *Gandalf*, or *Glamdring*, sound “harsher and sterner,” which is appropriate given the “‘dour’ and ‘thrown’” character of the speakers (304). Against all of this, and at the furthest remove from the English of the Hobbits, the Black Speech of Mordor is “entirely alien, marked off by its use of grammatical suffixes (durbatulúk), its apparent post-positions (burzum-ishi, Saruman-glob), its constant back-vowels and consonant clusters.” To the English-speaking reader, names in this dreaded tongue, such as *Lugbúrz*, *Nazgûl*, *Ufthak*, *Gorbag*, or *Uglúk*, sound “thick, guttural, clumsy” (304).

Tolkien himself explains that one of the names in this list, *Nazgûl*, which is given to the terrifying servants of Sauron known as the Ringwraiths, is constructed from the base *nazg*, which signifies “ring” in the Black Speech. This source word “was devised to be a vocable as distinct in style and phonetic content from words of the same meaning in Elvish, or in other languages that are most familiar: English, Latin, Greek, etc.” (2006a: 384). He thus emphasizes how distance and proximity work both within the fictional setting, in reference to Elvish tongues, and outside the fiction, in reference to the natural idioms with which his readers are likely to be familiar. At the opposite remove from the Orcish names are the euphonic constructions of Elvish words and names, which illustrate how Tolkien’s scheme involves, not only an estrangement from the sounds and forms of English, but also the poetic enhancement of sound patterns the namesmith considers pleasant. Smith illustrates this euphonic enhancement with his analysis of a poem written in Quenya, “*Oilima Markirya*” (“The Last Ark”).⁷ The poem presents a prevalence of front vowels (such as /i/), together with an avoidance of “brusque consonant clusters” and “hard, guttural phonemes.” The “potentially harsh” fricatives, meanwhile, are limited to /f/, /v/, and the unvoiced /s/ (2006: 7). Gymnich likewise observes that the Elvish languages privilege mid and front vowels, as well as nasal consonants (2005: 14). The latter is a set of phonemes that Tolkien himself notes he is fond of in Welsh (2006b: 173).

All of these elements of linguistic style overlap in a rigorously systematic fashion and work together to create that sense of coherency and consistency that Tolkien himself boasts of in his namecraft, and which he feels other writers, such as Swift or Dunsany, fail to achieve in their own (2006a: 26). These elements, moreover, are determined independently of any considerations concerning the motivated contents or symbolism of individual names, as can be illustrated with the example of *Smaug*, the name of the dragon Bilbo confronts in *The Hobbit*. The name is derived from what Shippey calls the “mysterious” *sméah-wyrm*, or “penetrating worm” of Anglo-Saxon lore. The form actually chosen by Tolkien, however, is based upon the hypothetical Norse word *smáugr*, which he arrived at by analogy: just as OE words such as *dréam* and *gléam* developed out of Norse *dráumr* and *gláumr*, so then *sméah* should have its origin in *smáugr*. This latter word, Shippey explains, is “a regular formation, though one that does not happen to be recorded” (1979: 301). But one may then ask why Tolkien chose to use this hypothetical reconstruction from Old Norse as opposed to the known OE word. The answer is found in the linguistic scheme of Middle-earth: the dragon’s name must be in the older Norse tongue because of the

beast's hoary age and, more importantly, because the Lonely Mountain where it hoards its treasure is located in the far north of Rhovannion. In sum, the meaning of the name would be the same whether Tolkien used the hypothetical OE or Norse reconstructions, which means that the choice of the source idiom, that which determines what the material form and substance of the name actually sounds and looks like, is based not upon semantic considerations, but rather upon stylistic ones.

Conclusion

As the example of *Smaug* and the many other onomastic inventions given above illustrate, the names in Middle-earth can be considered as fitting for multiple reasons. First of all, most of the names do appear to fit their designees in the usual sense, reflecting one or more significant characteristics of the person, place, or thing they designate. Arwen Undomiel is the Daughter of Twilight, the *wilwarin* a fluttering insect, and Gríma Wormtongue a specter who haunts King Théoden and whispers false counsel into his ear. But the names are also made to fit into the phonological and morphological style of the ensemble to which they belong, as well as the linguistic scheme Tolkien has superimposed upon the construction of his imaginary world. Within this stylistic framework, Peregrin sounds just right for a hobbit of the Took family, which uses quaint old-fashioned and high-sounding first names, while Uglúk and Grishnákh sound appropriate for creatures whose speech is clumsy and abominable. One may also say these names ring true or hold a ring of authenticity in the sense that they are real-like in their phonological and morphological construction, and they possess an etymological history. Then, the aesthetic qualities of the respective nomenclatures match the culture and moral character of the different peoples of Middle-earth. Drawing upon not only motivated contents, symbolism, and etymology, but the elements of style as well, Tolkien's namecraft thus broadens our understanding of what it means to say that a name is fitting, sounds right, or rings true.

Notes

¹ David Lyle Jeffrey, for example, probably goes too far with his glosses on *Aragorn* and *Arwen*. As noted above, both names are derived from stems and bases in Quenya and Sindarin. Ignoring their roots in the Elvish tongues, Jeffrey begins by identifying the shared first syllable in the two names, *ar*, as "one of the most richly meaningful monosyllabic words in the Old English language" and he associates it with cognates from Greek, Gothic, Old Norse, and other Scandinavian tongues (2004: 71). He then defines the semantic range of these cognates, which apply to a person (messenger, apostle, angel, minister), a quality of character (honor, dignity, glory, magnificence, honesty, reverence), and a personal action (kindness, mercy, service, succor). He relates the last two syllables in *Aragorn's* name, *agorn*, to OE *agangan*, which means "to pass by unnoticed," "to surpass," "to travel quickly," "to come forth," and "to come to pass." Turning next to *Arwen*, Jeffrey connects the second syllable of her

name with OE *wyn*, which means "joy", to yield "the joy of ar." The OE word can also be associated with meanings such as "prospect," "conviction," "belief," and "expectation," and can furthermore be used in the sense of "faith" and "hope" (71–72). Jeffrey lists these qualities in Latin and illustrates them with short snippets of texts that range from the opening words of *The Silmarillion* to ancient texts such as the Bible, the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and Anglo-Saxon religious poetry.

² Tolkien's complaints here echo what Michel Grimaud once disparagingly referred to as "treasure-digging" in literary onomastics (1989: 23).

³ Contrary to Jeffrey's glosses, which seek to establish semantic associations between the Elvish names of *Aragorn* and *Arwen* with words in various ancient tongues, Shippey's etymological analyses are consistent with Tolkien's own strictures.

⁴ What Tolkien describes here is similar to what I call "blank association," a relationship in which the

sound and form of an invented name resembles that of a pre-existing vocable, but without any semantic or symbolic significance (Robinson, 2010a: 106).

⁵ I first sketched out Tolkien's notion of linguistic style and its applicability to invented nomenclatures in a study of Lovecraft's teratonyms (Robinson 2010b: 128–129).

⁶ This formulation recalls Valesio's argument that the aesthetic quality of a neologism can be judged only in terms of its "distance" from the ordinary words

and names of a given lexicon, which furnish the norm upon which any comparisons are to be made (1973: 28–53). While distance and estrangement are important, Tolkien's comments on Welsh, as well as Valesio's own notion of "phonological admissibility," emphasize that proximity and familiarity are equally important factors.

⁷ Tolkien's poem, which he uses to illustrate the poetic potential of his invented language, appears in "A Secret Vice" (2006b: 213–214).

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