

Jewish influences in Middle-earth

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J.R.R. Tolkien's relationship with Jews and with Judaism is complex and intriguing. It is also, I hope to show, important for a complete understanding of the legendarium of Middle-earth. Midrash is at the very heart of the legendarium and there are Hebrew components in the languages not only of Dwarves and Men, but also of Elves. Tolkien's mythology has been shown to have Nordic and Anglo-Saxon roots,¹ Catholic themes,² even Persian influence³ – but there is also a Jewish presence in Middle-earth. Henry Gee has drawn attention to the influence of Hebrew on the languages of Middle-earth,⁴ and Howard Schwartz to Jewish influence on *The Silmarillion*.⁵ This paper will follow their suggestions and explore Middle-earth through Jewish eyes.

A personal grudge, a German Hobbit, and Jews

Before moving to the subject at hand, however, we must first consider the larger subject of anti-Semitism, which cannot, unfortunately, be entirely ignored in our context.

Tolkien made very clear statements against racism and anti-Semitism in letters from two different occasions. In a letter⁶ he wrote in 1941 to his son Michael, who was at that time still a cadet at the Royal Military College in Sandhurst, he complains to Michael of a personal grudge against Hitler. He calls it a “burning private grudge” ...

...against that ruddy little ignoramus, Adolf Hitler ...Ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making forever accursed, that noble northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved, and tried to present in its true light.

Jews and Judaism are not mentioned directly in the 1941 letter, only implied. Jews are, however, directly mentioned in two earlier letters from 1938.⁷ Tolkien's publisher, Allen & Unwin, was planning a publication of a German translation of *The Hobbit* with Rutten & Loening of Potsdam. It seems that the German firm had asked for a statement of the author's Arisch (or Aryan) origins. Tolkien actually wrote three letters in response to this request, one to his own publisher, Stanley Unwin, and two to the German publisher. Only one of the letters written to the German publisher has been preserved, in Allen & Unwin's files along with the letter he wrote to Stanley Unwin. The third letter was sent to Germany. But Tolkien makes his views sufficiently clear in the two letters we have. In the letter to Stanley Unwin, Tolkien refers to Germany's “lunatic laws,” and he says that he is inclined to “let a German translation go hang,” going on to say:

I do not regard the (probable) absence of all Jewish blood as necessarily honourable; and I have many Jewish friends, and should regret giving any colour to the notion that I subscribed to the wholly pernicious and

unscientific race-doctrine.

In the letter to the German publisher he writes:
... if I am to understand that you are enquiring whether I am of Jewish origin, I can only reply that I regret that I appear to have no ancestors of that gifted people ...

And he later says:

I have become accustomed, nonetheless, to regard my German name with pride ... I cannot, however, forbear to comment that if impertinent and irrelevant inquiries of this sort are to become the rule in matters of literature, then the time is not far distant when a German name will no longer be a source of pride.

These statements are significant. They were not made casually. They were made in a context in which Tolkien had something to lose – at the very least, the income from a German publication.

These examples should dismiss any thought that Tolkien's love of northern literature, language, and myth should cause us to associate him with the racist and anti-Semitic movements of his time, in Germany or elsewhere. He spoke out against those movements, and against the use, or misuse, to which those movements put the literature he loved. This said, however, we shall see that Tolkien made a statement in one interview which can be said to be, at best, ambiguous. We cannot ignore it. It was occasioned by Tolkien's consideration of the Dwarves and the manner in which they reminded him of Jews.

Jewish Dwarves: with subtexts?

Khuzdul, the language of the Dwarves, mimics Hebrew, with its guttural consonants, trilateral roots, and typical constructions. To give but one example,⁸ Gimli's battle cry at the siege of the Hornberg is *Baruk Khazad!* (**Axes of the Dwarves!**). *Baruch* means **ble**ss in Hebrew and Gimli's war cry recapitulates the traditional form of a Jewish blessing – orthodox Jews can be heard saying *baruch HaShem* many, if not hundreds, of times a day. It means something like **ble**ss (or **thank**) **God**.

In an interview with the BBC in 1965,⁹ Tolkien clearly stated that Khuzdul is intended to sound Semitic, and that this language family was, in his mind, associated with Jews:

But the Dwarves are, of course, quite obviously, couldn't you say they remind you of the Jews? All their words are Semitic, obviously-constructed to be Semitic.

And in a letter to Naomi Mitchison in 1955,¹⁰ Tolkien wrote:

I do think of the 'Dwarves' like Jews: at once native and alien in their habitations, speaking the languages of the country, but with an accent due to their own private tongue ...

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This reference to a private tongue describes Khuzdul, which the Dwarves spoke amongst themselves, but did not generally use with outsiders.¹¹ Similarly, the names by which the Dwarves were known to outsiders, the names by which we know the Dwarves in *The Lord of the Rings* and in *The Hobbit*, are not their true names. Their true names, which were from Khuzdul, were also private.¹²

These linguistic associations are both interesting and innocent, but Tolkien went further. The 1965 BBC interview was not broadcast until 1971 and it was broadcast in an edited version. In the original and unedited 1965 BBC interview,¹³ Tolkien did not confine himself to observing that Khuzdul contained Semitic constructions. He adds a description of what he thought were Jewish characteristics:

But the Dwarves are, of course, quite obviously, couldn't you say they remind you of the Jews? All their words are Semitic, obviously-constructed to be Semitic. There's a tremendous love of the artefact, and of course the immense warlike capacity of the Jews, which we tend to forget nowadays.

Even after Israel's 1967 war, which so impressed the world with Israeli "capacity," it is difficult to know, exactly, what Tolkien meant by "warlike," or whether we should understand this to have been, in his mind, a compliment or a slur. The reference to Jewish "love of the artefact" is no less uncertain. It may have been an entirely innocent remark. Because of our admiration for Tolkien as a scholar and a creative artist and as a deeply moral and religious thinker, and because of his stated opposition to anti-Semitism, we are inclined to dismiss it as such. Certainly, one would not indict a great man on the basis of only a few possibly misunderstood words.

On the other hand, it has to be faced that the phrase recalls anti-Semitic libel. It would seem to make the "desire of the hearts of dwarves"¹⁴ into something uniquely Jewish. Tom Shippey has pointed out that it is this desire that leads to Thorin's entanglement with the treacherous "bewilderment of the treasure"¹⁵ in *The Hobbit*. Did Tolkien, thus, think of Thorin as like a Jew?

The seductive power of bright objects is a central motif throughout the legendarium. Addiction to such power is the tragic flaw of Elves and Men, as well as Dwarves. It is the central sin upon which Morgoth and then Sauron build their kingdoms. The issue of whether Thorin reminded Tolkien of Jews is an important one. Did Tolkien consider the chief sin in his fantasy world as one that, in the real world, was especially associated with Jews? How much should we regard such suggestions? What weight should we give to that single 1965 statement, as versus Tolkien's categorical rejection of anti-Semitism in his 1938 letters to his publishers, or against his personal "grudge" with Hitler?

A full discussion of this problem in the context of the social background is beyond the scope of this paper. My purpose here is, for the sake of completeness, to ask what must be considered a reasonable question. But also, more importantly, I want to show that, whatever Tolkien's feelings may have been concerning Dwarves and Jews, the influence of the Hebrew language and of Jewish myth on his writing was not confined to Dwarves. In fact, that influence was pervasive and, for me at least, completely overwhelms any misgivings about Jewish-Dwarf equations. Let us then turn now to look further at that influence.

Numenor and Israel, Adunaic and Hebrew, echoes and intent
Khuzdul is not the only language spoken in Middle-earth that is inspired by Hebrew. There are Hebrew elements to be found in Adunaic, Sindarin, and even in Quenya. We will look first at Adunaic, the language of Numenor.

In the summer of 1966, Clyde Kilby worked with Tolkien, helping him with his correspondence and papers in the hopes of furthering *The Silmarillion* into publication. In his memoir,¹⁶ he says:

The Numenorean language, he informed me, is based on Hebrew.

As with Khuzdul, this statement refers, of course, to the language's internal structure and not to its semantic content. But there are semantic pointers: even the very name Adunaic is Hebraic. In Hebrew *adon* means **lord** and is used both as a divine title as well as a human honorific. The country name Numenor is Quenya, and means **the land of the west**, and Adunaic means, in Adunaic, **speech of the west**. But the resonance with Hebrew *adon* and the sense of Numenor as the land of lords cannot be ignored. The Numenoreans were the lords of Middle-earth in the second age. And their descendents were lords in at least the beginning of the third age and, through the line of Elessar (or Aragorn), in the fourth age as well.

Furthermore, the Numenorean civilization in the second age is a religious civilization, explicit religious ritual being otherwise very unusual in the legendarium. This religion was, like Judaism, monotheistic. In 1954 Tolkien composed a letter to Father Robert Murray¹⁷ in which the Numenoreans are, at least with respect to their religion, said to be "like" Jews. Tolkien writes:

The Numenoreans thus began a great new good, and as monotheists; but like the Jews (only more so) with only one physical centre of 'worship': the summit of the mountain Meneltarma ...

Both the religion and the language of Numenor are resonant with the flavour of the ancient Near East. They are, for the peoples of the third age of Middle-earth, the classical civilization forming the background of their historical consciousness. Perhaps more significantly for Tolkien's Christian beliefs, it was from the Numenoreans that the kings of Gondor and Arnor were descended and it was from that line of descent that the return of kingship was looked for.

However, in another letter composed in 1967,¹⁸ Tolkien writes about his knowledge and interest in ancient Near Eastern languages, but backs away from acknowledging any intentional relationship between Numenor and the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia. This is the famous Drafts for a letter to 'Mr. Rang'. In it, he says:

I may mention two cases where I was not, at the time of making use of them, aware of 'borrowing', but where it is probable, but by no means certain, that the names were nonetheless 'echoes'. Erech, the place where Isildur set the covenant stone ... as one interested in antiquity and notably in the history of languages and 'writing', I knew and had read a good deal about Mesopotamia, I must have known Erech the name of that most ancient city ...

But:

In any case the fact that Erech is a famous name is of no



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importance to The L.R. and no connexions in my mind or intention between Mesopotamia and the Numenoreans or their predecessors can be deduced.

Borrowing is contrasted with echoes, and unconscious use is contrasted with intention and meaning. I am inclined to regard Tolkien's dismissal of such intentions as disingenuous. That much of the infrastructure of world building, both linguistic and thematic, may come in the form of echoes and unconscious influence, I do not doubt. That these echoes are as often as not unintended – perhaps. But I cannot believe that they have no significance.

In this same letter (to Mr. Rang) Tolkien holds forth at length against those who, like the author of this paper, look for real world sources for his fictional languages. He describes such a search for sources as “private amusements” and “valueless for the elucidation or interpretation of my fiction.” They are “irrelevant” and betray “little understanding of how a philologist would go about it,” that is, about how a philologist would invent languages.

Indeed, any author wishes for his fiction to be taken for fact and does not like anyone to look too closely at anything else. What's more, Tolkien rightly directs our attention to the greatest aspect of his art: the internal (and fictional) histories, etymologies, and relationships of his various languages. The internal, fictional philology does deserve our attention – it is magnificent and I do not know of anything else quite like it – but it does not deserve our undivided attention.

Tolkien's acknowledgement of linguistic echoes in his work should encourage us to take them seriously, even if Tolkien himself did not. Whether or not this is anything more than a personal amusement, I will have to leave to other readers, both Tolkien's and mine, to decide. Tolkien says that the religion of Numenor is like Judaism, not that it *is* Judaism. Similarly, we should appreciate the fact that Adunaic is like the language of ancient Israel, not that it *is* the language of ancient Israel. Numenor has its own unique identity and character, but that character is formed out of an echo that has a referent in our world and history, an echo whose resonance adds a feeling of reality and significance to the fantasy landscape.

Elvish and Hebrew, Elves and Jews

Tolkien was a student of the history of the English language and, also, of what he called the “northern” languages, literatures, and mythologies. He particularly admired the Finnish language, which inspired Quenya, the language of the Noldorin Elves, and Welsh, which inspired Sindarin, the language of the Grey Elves.¹⁹ It is difficult to find a biography of Tolkien, however brief or in depth, which does not recite these facts. I do not contest them in any way, except to say that, when treated as a final statement of Tolkien's knowledge and interests, they do not do justice to his learning or his imagination. Tolkien's scholarship and art had a breadth and richness and depth of meaning that such limited descriptions leave unrecognized. Tolkien was a philologist and a linguist of the first rank, and his interests as such were not limited to the area of his immediate expertise. Nonetheless, the image persists of Tolkien as a scholar of northern literatures only. This approach to Tolkien has indeed been very useful and has produced a rich harvest of insights to be found in the works of many Tolkien scholars. But such a characterisation of the work and the man is not alone sufficient to exhaust the rich tapestry of language and meaning that is the legendarium of Middle-earth.

I have found that the recognition of Hebrew and pseudo-Hebraic forms in Khuzdul and Adunaic is acceptable in academic discourse. But the statement that there is also a significant Hebraic component in Elvish has been met with less agreement. Such a component is, indeed, surprising. It is one thing for Dwarves and Numenorean Men to speak Semitic languages, but the Elvish languages are the premier languages of Middle-earth. They are the sexy languages, the languages that in my day every college student tried to learn. To say that these also have significant Semitic components, deeply and skillfully interwoven with their other “northern” elements, comes as a surprise to many Tolkien readers.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo and his companions attempt to cross the Misty Mountains over the Redhorn pass, under dread Caradhras. In the mountains, Gimli treats us to a recitation of place names in Khuzdul.²⁰ This eruption of Semitic sounds into the text of *The Lord of the Rings* initiates a pattern that only increases and intensifies as the fellowship crosses the mountains into the lands of the east. The place names all become, not surprisingly, eastern sounding. The casual reader might think that place names in Mordor like *Barad-dur*, *Gorgoroth*, and *Sammath Naur* are, like the place names mentioned by Gimli, names foreign to the Common Speech and to the west – in this case, names from the Black Speech. But they are not. Those are all the Elvish names for those places. *Barad-dur*, for instance, in the Black Speech is *Lugburz*.²¹ The feel of the east that one gets in names like *Harad* (and *Haradrim*), *Lebennin*, and *Rammas Echor* is real enough – these forms are all vaguely Semitic – but the language in every one of these cases is Sindarin.

The name *Rohirrim* clearly has Hebraic inspiration. While the language of Rohan, at least as presented in the “translated” text of *The Lord of the Rings*, is clearly inspired by Anglo-Saxon,²² the name *Rohirrim* is not native to that language – it is the Sindarin word for that people. In Hebrew, nouns and verbs are largely built up out of a system of three letter, or trilateral, roots. When *im* is added to a root of this kind, it is the standard way to make a plural or collective noun. *Rohirrim*, *Galadhrim*, and *Haradrim* are all typical of this very normal Hebrew construction.

Tolkien's fictional *Etymologies* divide words of this kind differently, seeing *rim* as a root suffix, rather than the Hebraic *im*.²³ But we should not confuse fictional etymologies with real world inspiration. Indeed, once again, Tolkien may have wanted us to take his fictional world with its fictional linguistic history for fact. But we are here nonetheless concerned with the real world inspiration of a literary creation. *The Etymologies* are fictional constructions of fictional histories of fictional words in a fictional world. Of more interest to us is the real world contention that the words discussed above are from languages inspired by Welsh or Finnish. Such a contention invites us to consider real world resonance, despite *The Etymologies*. Neither Welsh nor Finnish produces words of the *Rohirrim*, *Galadhrim*, or *Haradrim* type as regularly as Hebrew does.

Elvish Hebraisms are not limited to place names or collective nouns. *Galadriel*, *Tinuviel*, *Amroth*, *Gilthoniel*, *Iarwain Ben-Adar*, *Melkor*, and *Elessar* are only a few examples of Hebraic sounding personal names from Elvish languages.

Names like *Galadriel*, *Tinuviel*, and *Gilthoniel* are typical of Hebrew names that are constructed by adding the Hebrew word for **God**, *El*, as a suffix to a root word. *Michael*, *Gabriel*, *Raphael*, *Ariel*, and *Uriel* are all well known examples of this



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naming tradition.

With the Sindarin name *Galadriel* and the name of the people she rules, the *Galadhrim*, despite the appearance of the one root as *galad*, with a *d*, and of the other as *galadh*, with a *dh*, we can clearly see the relationship between the two, with the addition of the *im* suffix to form the plural noun, and the addition of the theophorous suffix to form the name.

In a letter that Tolkien wrote to Sigrid Fowler, dated December 29, 1968,²⁴ preserved in the archives of Unwin & Allen, Tolkien talks about the relationship of his fictional vocabulary to William Blake's. Tolkien says that he had just been reading Blake's prophetic books and:

... discovered to my astonishment several similarities of nomenclature ... eg: *Tiriël, Vala, Orc* ... most of Blake's invented names are as alien to me as his 'mythology' ... nor due to any imitation on my part: his mind ... and art ... have no attraction for me at all. Invented names are likely to show chance similarities between writers familiar with Greek, Latin, and especially Hebrew nomenclature ...

Tolkien would seem to be saying, here, that "chance" similarities between Blakian names (like *Tiriël*) and Tolkienian names (like *Galdriel* and *Tinuviel*) are because both authors (Blake and himself) are familiar with classical languages – especially Hebrew!

The letter goes on to talk about how the word *orc* is, in any case, derived from Middle English. But is it really not obvious that the reference to Hebrew is about the name *Tiriël*?

Hebrew names such as *Gabriel* and *Raphael*, and their Sindarin echoes like *Galadriel* and *Tinuviel*, are examples of a naming tradition that has been used since ancient times for angels.²⁵ Medieval literature is filled with angels and, I suspect, it is in these Hebrew angel names that we should look for the origin of many of the traditions in the names of faerie and in modern fantasy and science fiction.

That the same sound is, with an entirely different history and unrelated etymology, found in the English word *elf*, should not blind us to the Hebraic nature of names like *Galadriel*. In fact, the coincidence of sound between English *elf* and Hebrew *El* seems to have been of great interest to Tolkien, as evidenced in the pseudo-autobiographical book *The Lost Road*. That book tells the story of a young man, who, like Tolkien, loved the study of northern languages more than Latin and who, also like Tolkien, "hears" in his head words from some long lost language of another time and place. The young man has a visionary experience of ancient Numenor and brings the knowledge of that land back to our world.

The young man's name was *Alboin*. In the story, his father explains to him that this is a Latin form of the Old English *Aelfwine*, which means **Elf Friend**. This is an important name. The king who begins the line of which Aragorn is born is named *Elendil*, again meaning **Elf Friend**.²⁶ And we see Frodo hailed as *elf friend* when he meets Gildor Inglorion in the Woody End of the Shire.²⁷

Tolkien's middle name was *Reuel*, a Hebrew name of the same type as *Galadriel*. *Reuel* means, in Hebrew, **God's Friend**, or, more to the point, **El's Friend**. It was a family name inherited from his father. Tolkien in turn gave it to each of his four children, who gave it to their children.²⁸ It is hard to imagine that Tolkien, so interested in language and names, would not take an interest in his own middle name, or that the coincidence in sound and meaning between his own name and

the name of a character in an autobiographical story is not intentional. This coincidence of names – *Reuel*, *Aelfwine*, *Elendil*, and *elf friend* – is like the proverbial chance-meeting that Gandalf refers to in *Unfinished Tales*.²⁹ That is, whatever providence guided the coincidence of sound in the English *elf* and the Hebrew *El*, it clearly delighted Tolkien and he made good use of it. I do not mean to suggest that *Elendil* should be thought of as meaning friend of God, but rather that there exists a powerful resonance and echo of the Hebrew meaning behind the fictional *Elvish*.

In the Hebrew cadence of the language and names of the Elves, I hear the voices of rabbis and Midrashim echoing across the divide that separates our world from Middle-earth. For me, the Elves often seem like some kind of fantastic woodland Jews. Their ancient culture, literature, and history, their sense of exile, their Biblical sounding names, and their Hebraic language, all combine to enormously echo the Jewish experience. If, instead of being a combination of Hebrew and German, Yiddish had been a combination of Hebrew and Finnish, then it might have looked something like *Quenya*. Or, if it had been a combination of Hebrew and Welsh, it might have resembled Sindarin.

Biblical and Midrashic themes: The Tzohar and the Silmarils

A paper on Jewish influences in Middle-earth would not be complete without some mention of the Biblical background for so much of what Tolkien accomplished. Much that might be said here is too obvious to belabor at any great length: the Biblical style of *The Silmarillion*, the echoing of Cain's murder of Abel³⁰ in Feanor's kinslaying³¹ and in Smeagol's murder of his friend Deagol,³² the two trees of Valinor³³ and the two trees of Eden,³⁴ and salvation on the back of eagle's wings.³⁵ All of these and many other Biblical echoes can be ascribed to Tolkien's Christianity, without reference to anything specifically Jewish. Not so with the *tzohar* and the *Silmarils*.

The word *tzohar* is what Biblical scholars call a hapax legomenon,³⁶ that is, a word that occurs only once in Biblical literature and whose meaning is obscure. It should not be confused with the word *zohar*, a word that means **light** or a **bright flash** and is the title of a famous kabbalistic book. The words *tzohar* and *zohar* may be related, but they are not the same.

The word *tzohar* occurs in the Book of Genesis³⁷ as part of the divine instructions given to Noah for the building of the arc. Noah is told to put a *tzohar* in the arc. Some Biblical scholars, associating *tzohar* with other words connected with light, like *zohar*, have suggested that it means **window**.³⁸ But rabbinic tradition gave the word a very different meaning. In the Talmud and in Midrashic tradition,³⁹ the *tzohar* is a jewel that contains a ray of magic light, often said to be the primordial light created on the first day of creation. Rabbinic tradition thus solved two problems at once: what happened to the primordial light, and what is the *tzohar*.

The Biblical text describes the creation of light on the first day,⁴⁰ but the creation of the sun and the moon on the fourth day.⁴¹ Like the difference between the light of the trees of Valinor and the later light of the sun and moon, so also in rabbinic tradition the light of the sun and moon is utterly different from the primordial light created on the first day.⁴² So, asked the rabbis, what happened to the primordial light? It was hidden away, says the Midrash, for the righteous in the world to come. But some of it reappeared in history in the

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form of the *tzohar*, a magic stone that contained a ray of the first light. And Midrashic texts recount innumerable stories of what became of it. It was given to Noah to provide light during the forty days of the flood. It was the eternal light hanging in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple. It had many adventures, passed down since that time secretly amongst the wise, and will no doubt come into the possession of the messiah – who, we pray, should come speedily in our time.

Did Tolkien know this Jewish legend? Are the Silmarils inspired by or an echo of the *tzohar*? Is Earendil, the mariner who carries a Silmaril over the sea, an echo of Noah, who carried the *tzohar* across a flooded world? Perhaps it is sufficient to say that great minds think alike. That is, both the rabbis and Tolkien confronted the Biblical mystery of the primordial light and what happened to it after the creation of the sun and the moon. And both the rabbis and Tolkien solved the problem in similar ways. Be this as it may, the Silmaril does nonetheless recall to anyone familiar with Jewish legend the stories of the *tzohar* and is just one more way in which the Elves, longing for the lost light of the west captured in the Silmarils, remind me of Jews, wandering through the long exile of the Children of Israel, telling of the magic stone that contained the first light of the world and of the world to come.

Mannish languages of the Third Age – linguistic reality or literary conceit?

In a letter that Tolkien wrote to Rhona Beare on October 14, 1958,⁴³ he talks about the five Istari. He tells us about three of them (Saruman, Gandalf, and Radagast), but he doesn't know what happened to the other two. Tolkien thinks maybe these other two went east or south. He even speculates (an attack on gnostic heresies?) that they there failed, as did Saruman, and established "secret cults and magic traditions." But what's interesting here is the way he says it:

I think they went as emissaries to distant regions, East and South, far out of Numenorean range ...

The West, the region of the Common Speech, is figured as the "Numenorean range", just as Westron, or the Common Speech, is derived from Adunaic, the language of Numenor. In Appendix F,⁴⁴ Tolkien tells the story of how Adunaic evolved into what became known in the Third Age as the Common Speech, and in a letter dated December 17, 1972, to Richard Jeffrey,⁴⁵ Tolkien describes Westron as:

... a language about as mixed as modern English, but basically derived from the native language of the Numenoreans ...

The language the hobbits spoke after coming to the Shire was the Common Speech,⁴⁶ although their calendar names and some of their personal names were preserved from older sources – sources that were, presumably, related to archaic Mannish languages.

The language spoken in Rohan was not Westron and, like the older sources of Hobbit calendar names, also came from "an archaic Mannish language".⁴⁷ But the Common Speech was spoken in Rohan also, and the lords of that people used

the Common Speech.⁴⁸

These other, archaic, Mannish languages, moreover, including both the speech of the Shire and of Rohan, are also in the same family of languages that includes Adunaic and Westron. In Appendix F to *The Lord of the Rings*,⁴⁹ the whole history of Mannish languages is recounted, from the tongue of the archaic "Fathers of Men", through Numenorean, to the Common Speech of the Third Age.

We have already seen that Tolkien stated that the Numenorean language, Adunaic, is based on Hebrew. The temptation is strong to say that all the languages of the West are Hebraic, one way or another. If these were real languages, such a revelation would be important. But Tolkien described at great length⁵⁰ how, for the purposes of *The Lord of the Rings*, he translated the languages of Rohan and the Shire and the Common Speech into English – various kinds of English – the various relationships of the different kinds of English mirroring the actual relationships of these three languages. Despite some very suggestive examples of words from these languages (*Banazir* for *Samwise*⁵¹), we do not really know very much about them. So far as the reader of *The Lord of the Rings* is concerned, there is certainly little or no experience of these languages. Here, again, we must remind ourselves that we are dealing with the literary analysis of a novel, not the linguistic analysis of real languages. The background existence of these languages is a literary conceit. Unlike Khuzdul and Sindarin and, for reader's of *The Silmarillion* at least, Adunaic and Quenya – the Mannish languages do not have real existence for the reader. Rather, it is the masterful juxtaposition of the various forms of English that, here, take centre stage. Although the Numenorean, and thus Hebraic, background of all these languages is suggestive, they do not have the literary force that Adunaic, Khuzdul, and the Elvish languages have. Whatever language the hobbits "really" spoke – my experience as a reader is that they are very English.

Conclusion:

The Jewish influences in Middle-earth that I have drawn attention to in this paper can be thought of as a kind of encyclopedia of traditional Western attitudes towards Jews. In the section on Dwarves, we have wrestled with questions of anti-Semitism. In the section on Numenor, we have thought about ancient Jewish civilization in its role as the classical source from which Tolkien's real-world religion, Catholicism, came. And in the section on Elves, we have considered the spiritual Yiddish culture of the Diaspora – a culture of memory, mysticism, and light. Did Tolkien actually intend such a catalogue? We cannot know, of course, but I think it unlikely. Rather, I suggest that part of the greatness of Tolkien's art is in its complexity – a complexity that mirrors Tolkien's own mind, interests, beliefs, and extensive knowledge. This is why narrow readings of Tolkien as Nordic, or as a mythology for England, or some such, are wanting. My offering here has been in an attempt to contribute to a much more complex view of Tolkien, as well as celebrating what I, as a Jew, have experienced in my own personal journey there and back again.

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Notes and references

- 1 Shippey, 2002, 2003
- 2 Birzer, 2003
- 3 Allen, 1985
- 4 Gee, 2004, 43-48
- 5 Schwartz, 88
- 6 Carpenter, 1981, 55-56
- 7 Carpenter, 1981, 37-38
- 8 *RK*, Appendix F, 411
- 9 Tolkien, 1965
- 10 Carpenter, 1981, 229
- 11 *RK*, Appendix F, 411
- 12 *RK*, Appendix F, 411
- 13 Tolkien, 1965
- 14 *The Hobbit*, 45
- 15 Shippey, 2002, 170
- 16 Kilbey, 24
- 17 Carpenter, 1981, 204
- 18 Carpenter, 1981, 384
- 19 Carpenter, 1977, 59, 94
- 20 *FR*, II, iii, 296
- 21 *TT*, III, iii, 49
- 22 Shippey, 2002, 91-93; and Carpenter, 1981, 381
- 23 *HoME*, V,428
- 24 Hammond & Scull, 25
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- 28 McClusky, 9
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