


J.R.R. TOLKIEN :

LEXICOGRAPHY

AND OTHER

EARLY LINGUISTIC PREFERENCES



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he short note (p.10) in *Amon, Hen* No.28 (1977) by S. Wood on 'Tolkien and the O.E.D.' prompts some further reflexions with regard to J.R.R. Tolkien's early lexical work, particularly in relation to the emerging patterns of his formal academic scholarship and, perhaps, as that work may well indicate, to its significance as the seedbed for his later linguistic, aesthetic and major imaginative work.

The brief piece by S. Wood is correct in its reference to J.R.R. Tolkien's stint on the *Oxford English Dictionary* under Henry Bradley,¹ in a team which worked on *ST*, 1914-19, and on *W-WE*, from 1920-1923. This is discussed on pages xix and xxiv of the 'Historical Introduction' to Volume I of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as issued in the revised version of 1933. There is no reference to Tolkien in two other places where he might have rated a reference, namely in the 'Preface' (pp.v and vi) to the 1933 *Supplement* (Volume 13), and in the 'Preface' (pp.v and vi) of *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, also issued in 1933 in the first place, in the 'Historical Introduction'. Tolkien is listed as one of the six assistants in the third group, the least important class, 'indicative of the relative length of time during which they were engaged on the work' (p.xxiv).

Yet that he knew Bradley and appreciated the value of his work very clearly is indicated by the fact that he was asked to write an Obituary for him by the Modern Humanities Research Association, and this appeared under the heading, 'Henry Bradley, 3 December 1845 - 23 May 1923' in its *Bulletin* No.20 in October 1923.

The best known of the other five Bradleian helpers listed with him is Kenneth Sisam, 1887-1971, a New Zealand-born Rhodes Scholar of Warwickshire stock, who had been Assistant to A.S. Napier, Professor of English Language from 1912 to 1915. Sisam had also been employed on the *Dictionary* at various times from November 1915, when he joined Bradley's staff and worked particularly on *STER*- words and *STEWARD*. As H. Carpenter tells us (p.63), Tolkien had Sisam as a tutor from 1913 to 1915 and the biographer adds (p.

¹S. Wood follows Paul Kocher (in *Master of Middle-Earth* [London, 1973, p. 181]), in noting the verbatim 'blunderbuss' quotation from the *Dictionary*, Vol.1 p.947 column 3, in *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949), p.15, from 'the Four Wise Clerks of Oxenford', and suggests that this may very well have been by Bradley. (See 'Historical Introduction', p.xvii.)

64) that the student, only four years younger than his tutor, "was particularly interested in extending his knowledge of the West Midland dialect in Middle English because of its associations with his childhood and ancestry". From Hilary Term 1912, Sisam gave university lectures or classes five or six times a week, and in the obituary to Sisam,² by Neil Ker, that writer adds:

Professor Tolkien has told me how fortunate he considers he was to have been able to go to Sisam's lectures.

(P.B.A., Vol.LVIII, 1972, p.414.)

The other tutor of his language studies (Old Norse, etc.), was William Craigie, who had joined the *Dictionary* in 1897 as an assistant, and had been doing separate editing from 1901, in which activities he continued until 1927.

In his obituary tribute to Sisam (p.410-11), Ker stresses how the publication of *L-R* and half of the *S* fascicules of the *Dictionary* issued in the years 1901-1910, had roused the youthful Sisam, still in New Zealand, to linguistic awareness, and how, in mid-1915, the now young Oxford don had produced in three weeks for the Clarendon Press a revision of Skeat's edition of the East Midland Middle English poem, *Havelok*. Although he became a permanent official of the Press from 1922, Sisam never forgot his lexical apprenticeship, and he remained a friend to the 1933 *Supplement to the O.E.D.* where he is listed (p.vi) as one of those "who have made noteworthy contributions or have maintained a continuous interest in the collection of evidence".

Tolkien's friendship with Sisam continued after the former's return to Oxford in 1919, and they collaborated on the production of a reader issued by the Clarendon Press in 1921 under the title *Fourteenth Century Prose and Verse*, a volume with a very healthy emphasis on the West Country and the West Midlands. For this work Tolkien contributed a glossary, at first (1922) printed separately and at various later times to 1946. Of the reader, alone or, as in the majority of cases, combined with the glossary, more than 60,000 copies had been printed in the first 50 years, and it has remained the most stimulating and widely used of all the Middle English readers ever produced. In the best sense, it is an example of the 'haute popularisation' which both men encouraged in others, whether scholars or antiquarians.

In his preparation for the separate work, *A Middle English Vocabulary*, Tolkien was concerned to be thorough and, as Carpenter observes, "this meant in effect compiling a small Middle English dictionary, a task that he undertook with infinite precision and much imagination" (pp.104-5). The prefatory 'Note' by Tolkien indicates alike the effect of his own training on the *Dictionary* and his creative writer's feeling for language. The first paragraph may be quoted in full:

This glossary does not aim at completeness, and it is not primarily a glossary of rare or 'hard' words. A good working knowledge of Middle English depends less on the possession of an abstruse vocabulary than on familiarity with the ordinary machinery of expression — with the precise forms and meanings that common words may assume; with the uses of such innocent-

²Their later duel in 1925 for the chair of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford is discussed by N. Ker (*loc.cit.*), and by Humphrey Carpenter (*op.cit.*), p.108.

looking little words as the prepositions *of* and *for*; with idiomatic phrases, some fresh-minted and some worn thin, but all likely to recur again and again in an age whose authors took no pains to avoid usual or hackneyed turns of expression. These are the features of the older language which an English reader is predisposed to pass over, satisfied with a half-recognition: and space seldom permits of their adequate treatment in a compendious general dictionary or the word-list to a single text. So in making a glossary for use with a book itself designed to be a preparation for the reading of complete texts, I have given exceptionally full treatment to what may rightly be called the backbone of the language.

(p.iii).

Apart from the cross references to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, some thirty languages or dialects are utilized to indicate relevant etymology or cognate forms. They range over the Germanic, Celtic, and Latin and Romance groups. But the most interesting aspect of the *Vocabulary* is the sensitivity of the nuances given to the glosses on specific lines.³ The work also remains today as the only completed Middle English Dictionary whose entries have any degree of subtlety.

Other work published by him in those years is best represented by his unhasty 'Some Contributions to Middle-English Lexicography', published in 1925 in the *Review of English Studies*.



As to Tolkien's personal work for the *O.E.D.*, we need not doubt a contribution to the various words given by Carpenter (p.101) — *warm*, *wasp*, *wick* and *winter*, even if the last two do not equate exactly with the sections reserved for Bradley's team. They were words in the C.T. Onions' section, *WH-WO*, completed in the period 1922 to 1927; but it is made clear by Carpenter that there was a close relationship with Onions (*op.cit.*, pp.101, 120), one which did indeed continue until the latter's death in Oxford in 1957.

That Tolkien was personally interested in all work in the last part of the alphabet is made clear if we read his chapters, each entitled 'Philology: General Works', in the English Association annual, *The Year Book in English Studies* (Volume IV, 1923 [which appeared in 1924]; Vol. V, 1924 [issued in 1926]; and Vol. VI, 1925 [issued in 1927]). His opening section (for 1923) may be quoted at some length:

³This desire for precision and subtle glossing Tolkien held to be as much a product of his many years' use of Lewis & Short's *Latin Dictionary* (1879) or of the Cleasby & Vigfusson *Icelandic-English Dictionary* (1874), as of his use of English dictionaries or of the slips of Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1961). In his O'Donnell lecture, 'English and Welsh' (given earlier but published in 1963), he recalled his momentous change of studies: "Under severe pressure to enlarge my apprentice knowledge of Latin and Greek, I studied the old Germanic languages... when generously allowed to use for this barbaric purpose emoluments intended for the classics..." (p.39).

Of the directions in which English Philology has principally progressed lexicography is the chief; the study of place-names, which is in many respects closely akin, has also in recent years been gathering force and acquiring precision ... though ... it has not yet acquired the same precision here as that study has in Scandinavia... In lexicography, and in English philology generally, the appearance of new sections of the *Oxford English Dictionary* remains the chief annual event, though the Dictionary is too universally familiar to call for detailed review here. This year there is, however, a special reason for mention of the new sections: *Wash-Wavy* forms the last completed and official contribution of Dr. Bradley to the Dictionary and to English studies, and is, fittingly, full of lexicographical problems. The suggestion of wetness made by the title-words of this section is not deceptive; thirty of its sixty-four pages are occupied by *Water* and its compounds; much of the remainder is given up to *Wash* and *Wave*. The number of primary words is comparatively small, but nearly all of them are of native origin. It will no doubt be a blow to some to find *Wassail*, that typical Saxon pastime in the legendary land of our heptarchic 'Saxon forefathers', among the six exceptions. The origin of this word is one of the chief points on which new light is here thrown. The very difficult words, both in etymology and in sense-development, of the *Wave*-group here find a new and careful investigation; if neither their etymologies nor the history of their senses are now made completely clear — they are not — this is because of the tangle that the language has itself devised. In this section occur one or two exceptions to the general rule of the exclusion of proper names. The most interesting of these is *Watling Street*. Beyond the OE. *Wæclinga stræt* (the *c* not the *t* forms are here held the correct ones, at least in the name of the Roman road) it does not seem possible to go, nor does it appear doubtful that the interesting sense 'Milky Way' that appears in ME. is an application of the same name; but it seems to the present writer that the usual assumption, apparently also made in the Dictionary, that it is a secondary application, is not so certain, in spite of its later record and of apparent parallels as the widespread European name of the galaxy, the Way of St. James (the pilgrims' road to Compostella). *Ermine Street*, another Roman road name, is not recorded at all until ME., but it is at least noteworthy that it corresponds to the German *Irminstrasse* = Milky Way. This, coupled with the fact that *Vatland Streit*, if we are to credit the author of the *Complaynt of Scotland* and Gavin Douglas, was a name given to the Milky Way by Scottish sailors, unlikely to draw their descriptions from the land-traffic of the North-West route away south in England, suggests that we have here an old mythological term that was first applied to the *eald enta geweorc*⁴ after the English invasion. Its original sense is probably lost forever. The section *WH-WHISK-ING* is perhaps even more severe in its demands on both lexicographical skill and patience: it is infested by the difficult

⁴For a gloss on his understanding of this phrase, see J.S. Ryan, 'German Mythology Applied — The Literary Extension of the Folk Memory', *Folklore*, Vol.77, Spring 1966, pp.45-59.

but important 'interrogative' words; these (which include such problems as *What* and *When*) taken together with *While*, occupy three-quarters of this section. Most of the words are native, few of them have wide exterior connexions or even well-established etymologies; some are long-standing etymological puzzles. Of these *Whig* and *Wheedle* remain unsolved.⁵

The second such review, Chapter II of *The Year's Work in English Studies*, Vol.V (1924), contains some interesting lexical remarks. There is an appeal for more study of Modern Colloquial English (p.45), and approval of European recognition of the 'completion of Bosworth-Toller' (i.e. their *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*) by the issue of a *Supplement* in 1921, as well as the statement of a need—still to be filled—of "the 'real Old English dictionary'" with full etymologies and in one alphabet.

Again he is concerned to discuss (pp.47-49) the newest section of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*Whisking - Wilfulness*: some 64 pages), drawing attention to: interrogative words; *whole*, *white*, *wild*, *wold*, *whisper*, *whist*, *whistle*, *whitler*, *whizz*, *whoo*, *whoop*, *whoosh*, *widdendream*, *whitlow*, *wich* (saltworks), *width*, *wick*, and *wile*. The first edition of *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, compiled by F.G. and H.W. Fowler, is also noted as an "admirable little dictionary ... including

neologisms and everyday colloquialisms and reasonable slang... We are inclined ... to think that the rudimentary or vestigial etymologies ... were better away... It is arguable that there is not much use in etymologies unless they are fairly full and can have space to hesitate." (p.49).

There follows a two page discussion of E. Weekley's *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (published that year by Murray). This is filled with intriguing linguistic remarks on such words as *sufi*, *grig* (with reference to *Punch*), *irk*, *brimstone*, *minnow* and *blimp*. His comments on the last item, where Weekley had followed an air-officer's etymology from 'bloody' + 'limp', are of particular interest. The 1933 *Supplement* gave the word the meaning (p.87, col.3) of 'a small non-rigid dirigible airship invented early in the war of 1914-18', supported by quotations from 1916 (*Rosher*), 1918 (*Illustrated London News*), and 1928 (*Gamble's North Sea Air Station*). The second of these gave the origin as 'an onomatopoeic name invented by that genius for apposite nomenclature, the late Horace Shortt'. While not rejecting this outright, the editor R.W. Burchfield (himself a pupil of Tolkien's) in Vol.I of the new *Supplement* (1972), p.289, interpolates between the second and third illustrative quotations:

1926 J.R.R. Tolkien in *Year's Work in English Studies*, 1924, 52: It is perhaps more in accordance with their looks, history, and the way in which words are built out of the suggestions of others in the mind, if we guess that *blimp* was the progeny of *blister* + *lump*, and that the vowel *i* not *u* was chosen because of its diminutive significance—typical of war-humour.

⁵ *Wash - Wavy*: pp.129-62 of Vol.X of *N.E.D.*, by H. Bradley. O.U.P.
Wh - Whisking: pp. ii+64, by C.T. Onions.

Tolkien's third chapter, published in 1927, opens with a passage which is remarkable for a philologist and anticipatory of *The Lord of the Rings*, but peculiarly satisfying to the reader who knows 'Leaf by Niggle', that fable of an artist first published in *The Dublin Review* (p.432ff) in 1945:

It is merry in summer 'when shaws be sheen and shrads full fair and leaves both large and long'. Walking in that wood is full of solace. Its leaves require no reading. There is another and a denser wood where some are obliged to walk instead, where saws are wise and screeds are thick and the leaves too large and long. These leaves we must read (more or less), hapless, vicarious readers, and not all we read is solace. The tree whereon these leaves grow thickest is the *Festschrift*, a kind of growth that has the property of bearing leaves of many diverse kinds. To add to the labour of inspecting them the task of sorting them under the departments of philology to which they belong would take too long. With a few exceptions we must take each tree as it comes.⁶ (p.32).

After listing several such congratulatory volumes and noting the peculiar facilities which they offer for highly idiosyncratic research, he observes, ent-like, of these volumes of piety,

Chiefly they are due to affection and honour for great names and figures, and are a melancholy reminder of the age of the older generation of giants who have laboured in the service of *Philologica* and have deserved so well of her. (p.33).

There follow several musings on the Dutch language and on Celtic and Germanic roots, notably in the scholarship of M. Förster, W. Keller, E. Sievers and Hoops, and including with approval a quotation which saw the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a time when the making of German-English dictionaries became impossible, due to the

general haste and fever of modern life, grasping at sensation, tearing ideas to pieces, turning ethical values upside down, and introducing finer nuances into the language of poetry, art, and science. (p.35).

He goes on to observe that the volume *Germanica*, a tribute to Sievers at the age of 75, "is a tree of altogether larger girth and bigger branches — a not unworthy reminder of the honour and affection, the great tale of years, and the great work achieved by Sievers" (p.36). After many self-indulgent excursions on "interesting side-issues", he continues,

Of specially English lexicography the year under review is barren. But more of *W* is doubtless under active preparation at the Old Ashmolean for the delight and troubling of next year. None the less, this seems the place to record a new edition of

⁶ Apart from the obvious link with Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, one feels that the lines of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*, which Tolkien was co-editing with E.V. Gordon in 1923-24, are in his mind:

After þe sesoun of somer wyth þe soft wyndez
Quen Zeferus syflez hymself on sedez and erbez,
Wela wynne is þe wort þat waxes þeroute,
When þe donkande dewe dropez of þe leuez,
To hīde a blysful blusç of þe bryzt sunne. (II. 516-520)

[Continued on p.19...]

[...Continued from p.15]

Roget's *Thesaurus*. It is hardly lexicography, of course. Rather the pre-eminent example of the spirit of philately in words — with a side-glance at the assistance of authors in search of the *mot juste* or *recherché*.

(*Y.W.E.S.*, Vol.VI [1927], pp.57-58.)

This 'philatelic attitude' to their language Tolkien also finds in L. Pearsall Smith's *Words and Idioms: Studies in the English Language*, and he deplures this attitude, which denies the existence of semantics and seems to see philology as concerned "only with a limited phonology" (p.58). He then makes the assertion,

it is difficult to discern wherein lexicographer and word-historian is ultimately to be distinguished from the student of literary ideas. The boundary line between linguistic and literary history is as imaginary as the equator. (pp.58-59).



The three essays, covering as they do some 94 pages (19, 40 and 35 respectively) of culturally rich material, cogently and dynamically presented, as in the breathy style of his own lectures, contain a wealth of insights, aphorisms, and sudden glimpses of Tolkien's aesthetic philosophy of creativity. While lexis, semantics, loan words and a grand conception of philology are the dominant tones, there are many illuminations of the young professor's mind. Some of these — subjects of an editorial nature, and which are indicative of his thought and emerging sensitivity — may be listed here:

Volume IV: Names invented by Dickens (p.23); the Christian name *Edith* (p.23); Middle Kentish vocabulary (p.23); Essex speech (p.25); words in Roxburghshire (p.26); the importation of *spondulicks* (p.26); slang in Thackeray (p.28); *bumf* (p.28); *Billingsgate* (p.29); *tiffin* and Anglo-Indian words (p.30); shadowy persons behind Anglian settlement place-names (pp.30-2); approval of 'Wright' grammars (p.33); the revival of Gaelic (p.34); René Huchon's ideas on the character of English prose (p.36); and the great philological epoch in England from 1850-1900 (p.37).

Volume V: The mountain walls now confronting eager philologists (p.26); the shocks applied to Indo-European philology by Tokharish and Hittite (p.27); the fact that

the pre-history of Europe and nearer Asia looms dark in the background, an intricate web, whose tangle we may now guess at, but hardly hope to unravel. All this we ought to take account of, however distant and cursorily. If our present linguistic conceptions are true, there is an endless chain of development between that far-off shadowy 'Indo-European' — that phantom which becomes more and more elusive, and more alluring, with the passage of years — and the language that we speak today.⁷

⁷Apart from odd references in his paper, 'Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics' (1936), his most extended critical study is to be found in 'English and Welsh' (1963), where he explores the English and Welsh languages, particularly in relation to "the difficult and absorbing problems that are present-

Germanic and Indo-European philology are part of the history of the English. (pp.27-28);

Jespersen's ability to analyse the exact meaning of various English expressions (p.28); *-th* suffixes, such as Ruskin's unsuccessful *illth* and F. Thompson's *spilth* (p.30); Tolkien's observing Jespersen's work "devoured on the top of a tram to the oblivion of fare-stages" (p. 31); "the need for the study of language as it is instead of bullying it for not obeying rules drawn up without its consent" (p.32); irregular preterites to (West) Germanic verbs of motion (p.35); dialect conflict in Low German (p.36); the difficulties of Lappish (p.37); Baltic place names (p.38); the astonishing digging up of Hittite after an oblivion of over 3,000 years (pp.38-9); the curious position of the pre-history of the Indo-European languages stretching in a line NW-SE on both sides of the Armenian highlands, where their weakest point lies (p. 39); references to "the dark mystery of ancient Western Europe" (p.39); *cow*, having come "some 5,000 years ago from Sumerian" (p.40); or *star*, some 4,000 years ago from Accadian *istara*, 'Venus' (p.40); Sievers' theories of the 'motor' aspect of voice (pp.41-2); a scholarly aside on academic gossip, with the comment that "rumour is mythopoeic" (p.43); some general remarks, and a statement of *Silmarillion* significance:

Here a point of interest is the evergreen problem of the relations of the 'Germans' (speakers of Germanic languages) to the rest of the 'Indo-Europeans' (speakers of Indo-European languages), and especially to the Slavs on the one hand and the Celts on the other ... and [the question of] bringing home to the reader how complex are the linguistic and cultural events of Europe before the dawn of history. (p.44);

the problems of the origin of the 'Standard English language' (p.45); the interesting question of Old English influence upon Old Norse (p. 46); mining terms being influenced by possible (reciprocal) miner and dialect migration between Derbyshire and North Wales (pp.46-7); the Anglo-Manx vocabulary of c.2,400 main words (p.47); *An Elementary New English Grammar* by Professor and Mrs Wright and its helpful inclusion of some 4,000 different words (p.52); the phonetics of Siamese (p.53); British river-names of Welsh, Goidelic origin and of Greek, Latin and Cornish form (pp.53-55); of the foundation of the English Place-name Society and of the issue of its first volume, *Introduction to the Survey of English Place-names*, ed. by A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton (pp.55-60); his general comment is that

This study requires specialists in Scandinavian, Old and Middle English, Celtic, Mediaeval History, and Archaeology, not forgetting the local enthusiasts who know and love their ground, and the willing drudgery of many searchers. (p.56);

a discussion of the element *helm* — 'protective covering, especially overhead' (compare *Helm's Deep* in Vol.II of *The Lord of the Rings*) (p.57); "the difficulties and toils of historico-philology"⁸, with his own comment that

Probably the imagination of most people reacts quickest to

ed by the linguistic and archaeological evidence concerning the immigrations from the European mainland..." (*op.cit.*, p.14).

⁸This is an admirable description of his O'Donnell lecture, 'English and Welsh', being pp.1-41 of *Angles and Britons* (1963).

the glimpses that are gained of England before the English-speakers and to the dark years of the new settlement. (p.58);

Germanic gods (p.58); village colonisation (p.58); the coming of the English to Britain (p.59); early Germanic personal name elements, e.g. *Hob* (p.59); Anglo-Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman names (pp.59-60); 'mixed' dialect areas and the shifting of considerable groups of people, caused by natural barriers, important centres, political divisions (p.61); the mingled conservatism and innovation of Middle English spellings (p.62); the 'Life of St. Editha' and Wilts. dialect (pp.62-3); some charming remarks on 'Place-names and Archaeology' (pp.64-5), including specific reference to the expression on *fānge flōr* in *Beowulf* l.725, plus comments on enclosure words, mounds and ruins. He quotes with approval Professor O.G.S. Crawford's stated aim and intention:

We are gradually collecting facts in order to construct a series of maps of England, or parts of England, as it appeared in past ages. (p.65).

Tolkien's own conclusion on this vastly illuminating essay is as follows:

In other words this study is fired by two emotions, love of the land of England, and the allurement of the riddle of the past, that never cease to carry men through amazing, and most uneconomic, labours to the recapturing of fitful and tantalizing glimpses in the dark — 'Floreant Philologia et Archaeologia'. (p.65).

From the third essay it is again possible to offer a form of catalogue of the items presented:

Celtic forms in English (pp.33-4); the verbal noun and its uses in Celtic and English (p.34); the gentle self-revelation in the phrase, "knowing how these little lexicographical chases open vista after vista, and one complication after another" (p.35); the cluster of names for the pole-cat in Germanic and Romance languages of Northwest Europe (p.38); *hawk* words in Old Norse; a new etymology of the name *Beowulf* as 'windwolf' (p.39); new baptismal names for the native English, such as *Edmund*, *Edgar*, *Edith* (again!), etc. (p.39); the critical issue of the treatment of O.E. verbs in *-ian* in Middle English (p.40); the treatment of phonology in Middle English (pp.40-3), with a comment on difficult if useful theories, that:

The *Anfänger* need not rejoice. It will not make the bog less treacherous for tender feet to walk on; it will only learnedly expound to one up to his neck in it how the bog came there and what it is made of! In fact it seems that it may even tell him 'the bog is not bog, because of the dry land'!.... (p.43);

Scandinavian influence on the inflexions of English in occupied areas of Britain (p.45); the Old English charm against elfshot (p.46); the scholarship as to the history and character of Richard Coeur-de-Lion (p.47); the basic etymology behind O.E. *wīcing* (p.48); the first county-volume of place-names, that on Buckinghamshire (pp.48-50), including indication of a personal obsession with mounds, heathen Saxon settlement, Celtic survivals and continental Germanic settlers; place-names in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (p.50); English place-names "in a French garb" (p.51); the rise of initial *Sh-* in place-names, etc. (p.

52); a questioning of the work of de Saussure and other French language scholars, which contains

an inexplicable weakness the compensation, perhaps, for their wide range, penetrating thought, and imaginative vision ... the book [having] an indefinable sense of hastiness [since] ... the pace must be a gallop, the country is so wide. (p.53);

the syntax of the Indo-European simple sentence (p.55); Holthausen's Old Frisian dictionary (p.57); the structure of English (p.59); the origin of the gerund (p.62); compounds of the Blue-beard/Greenmantle sort (pp.62-63).



Two more general views of Tolkien the man may be given more space. The first is his disquiet at the possibility (prefigured by L.P. Smith, p. 59) of English as the coming world-language, and his feeling that he must make a cultural stand.

Wherever it occurs we think it is time somebody said that as prophecy it is as valuable and certain as a weather-forecast, and as an ambition the most idiotic and suicidal that a language could entertain. Literature shrivels in a universal language, and an uprooted language rots before it dies.

And it should be possible to lift the eyes above the 'language of Shakespeare', or to tear them from visions of the Parliament of Man, sufficiently to realize the magnitude of the loss to humanity that the world-dominance of any one language now spoken would entail: no language ever possessed but a small fraction of human speech, and each language presents a different vision of life.

In the past the dominance of a language has been due to the often sheerly accidental, and even undeserved, material success of its speakers, rather than to its own merits as a medium. This was certainly the case with Latin, and expansion was bad for it. Few prefer the ΚΟΛΥΜΗ to Attic. However imminent such a calamity to English may be imagined, it should be alluded to not with self-complaisance, but in alarm and as a summons to resistance. The curse of Babel is no less fundamental than that of Eden. Man's brow must sweat over the everlasting spade, and over the everlasting grammar too. Without their pain there shall be neither food nor poetry. (pp.59-60).

The above stern declamation ended with a further sentence: "If we say nothing about American English here, it is only reserved for the end." He observes quite mildly that: "It is impossible to teach [British students] American (though it might be good for them) as a preliminary to Old and Middle English." (p.62).⁹

⁹Despite one offer of a lecture tour, Tolkien never visited the United States of America, although many American Rhodes scholars did some language work with him in the English Language and Literature School, Course III. Similarly Auden made many return visits from New York to see him.

The last three pages of the third essay (64-66) are concerned with G. P. Krapp's *The English Language in America*, treated there in "a place of honour". While he is not uncritical of this work of more than 700 large pages, he is sympathetic to

the varied information and curious detail; [the treatment of] literary dialects (e.g. rustic, Negro, Indian), American place-names, and American dictionaries; the remarkable interest of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century town records;

and

the supreme philological event of which we have certain knowledge, the transportation of the language of a small country and its spread and ramification over enormous regions to find not one but a thousand new soils, atmospheres, and homes. (p.64).

His concluding reflections are more personal and concerned to rally the English nation. After finding that Krapp seems disappointing "on the subject, not unimportant, of the relations of the American and 'British' varieties of English in the most recent period," probably due to "the very judicial and non-committal spirit of his utterances" and to an apparently intentional minimizing of the real differences, Tolkien then launches into a deliberate peroration:

If in careful and studied writing, of which this book is an excellent example, the differences are not very obvious, it is still possible to see in its very coldness and formality the dangers of an artificial uniformity veiling fundamental divergence.

To some it seems obvious that petrification and death ultimately await it, if the attempt is made too long to maintain a language as a literary or cultural medium over areas too wide and of too divergent a history to preserve any permanent community. Whether we endeavour to maintain the different varieties of English in vigorous life now, or in the future seek to restore life after 'English' has become a universalized but dead book-Latin, divergence into distinct idioms is ultimately the only thing that will achieve the object.

To the American author, of course, it does not appear so clear as it does to us that the problem is no longer that of the freedom of America and her 'illustrious vernacular', but of the freedom of England. Sir Walter Raleigh in a speech on 'Some Gains of the War' made in February 1918 did not escape the notice of Dr. Spies when he said: 'the clearest gain of all is that after the War the English language will have such a position as never before. The greatest gain of all, the entry into the War of America, assures the triumph of our common language and our common ideals.' We have indicated above what we feel about linguistic triumph. Some even now are found to criticize the expression 'common language'; more might question 'common ideals' (and without necessarily implying any judgement concerning relative values); but to all it should be apparent that this triumph, if it takes place, is only likely to be 'common' if it is predominantly or wholly American. Whatever the special destiny and peculiar future splendour of the language of the United States, it is still possible to hope that our fate may be kept distinct. And it is possible in *The English Language in America* to find reasons for making that hope more earnest. (pp.65-66).

These sentiments reflect not so much his active dislike of American speech as distaste at the actual eclipse of a living language of long pedigree and his horror at the (linguistic) oppression which caused and still works to produce social uniformity. He was to say the same thing some thirty years later, when, after lamenting the Tudor oppression of Welsh, under such 'far-seeing civil servants' as Thomas Cromwell, he went on,

Governments — or far-seeing civil servants ... understand the matter of language well enough, for their purposes. Uniformity is naturally neater: it is also very much more manageable. A hundred-per-cent Englishman is easier for an English government to handle. It does not matter what he was, or what his fathers were. Such an 'Englishman' is any man who speaks English natively, and has lost any effective tradition of a different and more independent past. For though cultural and other traditions may accompany a difference of language, they are chiefly maintained and preserved by language. Language is the prime differentiator of peoples — not of 'races', whatever that much-misused word may mean in the long-blended history of western Europe. ('English and Welsh' (1963), pp.5-6.)



The overall impression of this early linguistic scholarship shows Tolkien to be a student: of words, and of their changing meanings even before their actual etymology; of place-names and personal names, both historical and literary; of the scholarship of ideas and of the men who 'shepherded' these concepts into print and into literature; of man in relation to his physical landscape as well as to his (potential) mental climate.

Indeed it may be fitting to close this brief survey of his first decade of his academic work and writing with a glance at his great love for the Western Marches which manifested itself alike in his Mercian studies from the Old English period to that of the *Anciene Riwle*. Indeed, it was of the great cluster of West Midland (homiletic) texts written over the period c. 1180 to 1220, that albeit unconsciously he gave a self-characterization which is also prophetic of his later literary position and style.

There is an English older than Dan Michel's [c. 1340] and richer...; one that has preserved something of its former cultivation. It is not a language long relegated to the 'uplands' struggling once more for expression in apologetic emulation of its betters or out of lack of compassion for the lewd, but rather one that has never fallen back into 'lewdness', and had contrived in troublous times to maintain the air of a gentleman, if a country gentleman. It has traditions and some acquaintance with books and the pen, but it is also in close touch with a good living speech — a soil somewhere in England...

[The] language is self-consistent and unadulterated. It is a unity. It is either a faithful transcript of some actual dialect of nearly unmixed descent, or a 'standard' language based on one. ('*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meithhad*', p.106, in *Essays and Studies* by Members of the English Association, Vol.XIV, 1929.)

This was also the decade of his successful modification of the university's undergraduate English syllabus. As many of these quotations from

his scholarly work make clear, he was a most unorthodox teacher of language, but was declaring publicly the perspectives and philosophies on which his creative work would be so firmly based.

It is more than true of this decade that, as his Obituary in *The Times* has it,

...he was, more than any other single man, responsible for closing the old rift between 'literature' and 'philology' in English studies at Oxford and thus giving the existing school its characteristic temper. His unique insight at once into the language of poetry and into the poetry of language qualified him for this task.

Thus, the private language and its offshoot, the private mythology, were directly connected with some of the highly practical results he achieved, while they continued in private to burgeon into tales and poems. (*Op.cit.*, September 3, 1973, p.15.)



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