

Gildor warns Frodo that the Shire isn't as safe from the outside world as the hobbits think ("The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot forever fence it out"), but I'm inclined to disagree, at least at this early point in the narrative. Granted, the hobbits ultimately return to the Shire, and one of the troubling moments in the whole long story is the moment we realize the evil from Out There has infiltrated Home. But even if the safety of trees and the friendliness of fellow wayfarers is just parallel happenstance on the initial Shire-side end of the journey – and I'll say again that I don't think it is – this is a fine way to begin an adventure tale. Indeed, this is storytelling that's very neat and fine, crafted consistently enough to stop and take a second look at before continuing on – in the manner, perhaps, of a forest fox pausing to wonder over hobbits sleeping outdoors at night. Or in the manner of one Frodo Baggins, lingering over a last, fond look at Hobbiton before bravely heading on into the dangerous unknown.

**Rebecca Martin** holds a Masters in English from the University of Georgia (2003), where her research focused on Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and related writings under the guidance of Dr. Jonathan Evans. She has written for journals including *The Other Journal*, *Christ and Pop Culture*, and *Art House America*, and is a staff writer for the *Curator*. Most of her essays and reviews can be found at <http://www.rebarit.blogspot.com/p/essays-reviews.html>.



## Tolkien's First Notebook and its Destruction

NANCY BUNTING

I never read an autobiography in which the parts devoted to the earlier years were not far the most interesting (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, *The Shape of My Early Life*, viii).

Hilary Tolkien had a notebook in which he wrote stories beginning at the age of five in 1899 (*Black and White Ogre Country*, *The Lost Tales of Hilary Tolkien* iv, v). He clearly treasured it and kept it throughout his life, adding material in his adult years. His older brother, J.R.R. Tolkien, must have had a similar notebook. Tolkien kept an unbelievable amount of papers, as seen in the recent publication of "The Story of Kullervo" written while he was in college at Oxford, the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*, plus skits, essays, speeches, minutes, a program of a concert he attended during his college years, and even his childhood sketchbook, but he reported that he destroyed this notebook (Flieger, "The Story of Kullervo" 211-245; Garth, "The

road from adaptation to invention': How Tolkien Came to the Brink of Middle-earth in 1914" [Adaptation] 7, 36, 38; *J.R.R. Tolkien, Artist and Illustrator* [Artist] 13; *J.R.R. Tolkien, Architect of Middle Earth* [Architect] 18). The story of this notebook, its significance, and its destruction are the focus of this paper.

Tolkien's mother, Mabel Tolkien, taught J.R.R. Tolkien to "read by the time he was four" and he soon learned to write proficiently (*J.R.R. Tolkien, A Biography* [Bio] 21). Hilary Tolkien's notebook was clearly an exercise book to encourage writing. Tolkien's mother would have also encouraged J.R.R. Tolkien's writing with a notebook, and he recalled that when he was seven he began to create a story about a dragon. "I remember nothing about it except a "philological fact," that "My mother said nothing about the dragon, but pointed out that one could not say 'a green great dragon,' but had to say 'a great green dragon' [...] I do not think I ever tried to

write a story again for many years, and was taken up with language” (Bio 23).

Tolkien also reported, “I invented several languages when I was only about eight or nine, [...] but I destroyed them. My mother disapproved. She thought of my language as a useless frivolity taking up time that could be better spent in studying” (Architect 18). This report of inventing languages as a child in Sarehole is confirmed in the 1968 Plimmer interview in *The Telegraph*. Tolkien was talking about living in Sarehole, and he added, “As a child, I was always inventing languages. But that was naughty. Poor boys must concentrate on getting scholarships.”<sup>1</sup> An interview with Henry Resnik in 1967 also supports the existence of this early activity with Tolkien saying, “The real seed” of his mythology “was starting when I was quite a child by inventing languages, largely to try to capture the esthetic mode of the language I was learning.”<sup>2</sup> Further, after his mother’s death, when J.R.R. Tolkien was 12, he found that his first cousins, Mary and Marjorie Incledon, had invented a language, ‘Animalic’. Then Tolkien and Mary invented another language, ‘Nevbosh’ (Bio 36). However, in his paper on inventing languages, which he called “A Secret Vice,” Tolkien reveals, “Though I never confessed it, I was older in secret vice (secret only because apparently bereft of the hope of communication or criticism), if not in years, than the Nevbosh originator,” i.e. his cousin, Mary (Secret, 203). This would then also confirm Tolkien’s earlier language invention.

The little notebook, which contained the dragon story, also contained invented languages. Tolkien’s precocious interest in anything to do with language can be seen in his report in a letter of June 1971 that when he was “about 8 years old I read in a small book (professedly for the young) that nothing of the language of primitive peoples (before the Celts or Germanic invaders) is now known, except perhaps *ond*=‘stone’ (+ one other now forgotten)” (*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* [Letters] 410). While Tolkien’s mother introduced him to Latin and French while they were living in Sarehole, it was the “fluidity of Greek, punctuated by hardness, and with its surface glitter, [that] captivated me, even when I met it first only in Greek names, of history or mythology, and I tried to invent a language that would embody the Greekness of Greek (as far as it came through that garbled form)” (Bio 22; “English and Welsh,” 191). The Carpenter biography notes that when Tolkien was “beginning to learn Greek he had entertained himself by making up Greek-style words” (Bio 36). However, Tolkien’s reference to learning “Greek names, of history or mythology” clearly refers to a time prior to his return to King Edward’s School in 1903 at the age of eleven when he was placed in the sixth class and first learned Greek (Bio 27, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*. [Guide] Guide1 8).

Whether this language activity was just the construction of names or the creation of a more complete language, these language “games cannot take up all one’s time with Latin and mathematics and such things forced upon one’s notice” (Secret 203). This seems to refer to the time in 1899-1900

when Tolkien was studying to take the scholarship exam for King Edward’s School in Birmingham. This was the finest secondary school in the region, and the school J.R.R. Tolkien’s father had attended. It would eventually prepare him for a university education. Mabel Tolkien’s goal was to prepare her son to perform well enough to earn a scholarship because there was no money to pay for his education (Architect 18, Bio 17). At that time his aunt, Emily Jane Suffield, his mother’s sister, tutored him in mathematics (Letters 377). He again refers to this period of time by referring to a scholarship by his aunt, when he laments in “A Secret Vice” that “linguistic playfulness” is lost because of its “obvious unremunerative character [...] - it can earn no prizes, win no competitions (as yet) - make no birthday present for aunts (as a rule) - earn no scholarship” (Secret 207). In November, 1899 at the age of seven, J.R.R. Tolkien sat for the entrance examination for King Edward’s and failed (Scull and Hammond, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*. [Guide] 1 6). Carpenter comments, in the official biography, that Tolkien failed probably because “his mother had been too easy-going in her teaching” (Bio 24). Mabel Tolkien had been justifiably proud that she had been able to teach her son, J.R.R. Tolkien, to “read by the time he was four” and then begin writing soon after. However, this failure would have called her abilities into question. This situation clearly had to change.

Grotta-Kursla’s biography reports that after “repeated remonstrations, Tolkien reluctantly abandoned his youthful intellectual pastime and studiously applied himself” (Architect 18). However, this report underestimates the young Tolkien’s fascination with language, and that he was “naughty.” What has now been revealed to us with access to more and more of Tolkien’s corpus is that “his output in grammars, morphologies, phonologies, vocabularies, and philological disquisitions is a matter for inexpressible staggerment to rival Bilbo’s on seeing Smaug’s hoard. It begins to look as if the nitty-gritty of the languages was at least as absorbing to him as the actual stories of Middle-earth and may even have consumed more of his time.” In the 1967 interview Tolkien allowed himself to regret about the notebook’s destruction saying, “It’s really too bad. The languages were rather crude attempts, but it would be interesting to see them.”<sup>4</sup> It seems likely that Tolkien just could not stop playing his language games, as evidenced in his later adult output. Instead he was “naughty” and continued inventing even after what we can assume were the inevitable broken promises to his mother and her lectures. It would be really hard to believe that Tolkien would have initiated destroying his notebook containing his invented languages. Would the hand that had created these linguistic gems willingly destroy them? Could the destruction of the notebook have been his punishment and his mother’s way of making sure he would stop his language games from interfering with his studying?

After the examination failure of November 1899, he had to buckle down and sometime in late 1899 or early 1900, the notebook was probably destroyed. In June, 1900 Ronald Tolkien retook the entrance examination and obtained a



place with a Tolkien uncle paying his fees (Guide 1 6, Bio 24).

Tolkien states that he destroyed this notebook. Given his love of languages, this must have been incredibly painful. This event and its memory clearly are in his mind when he was writing “A Secret Vice” in the early 1930s, almost thirty years after the examination that precipitated the destruction of his notebook, as seen in the quotations above. Further, in 1939 at the age of 37 Tolkien wrote in Manuscript B of his lecture “On Fairy-stories:” “I can vividly remember, re-feel, the vexation (such emotions bite deep and live long) caused me in early childhood by the assertion of instructive relations,” and this relative is likely to have been Tolkien’s Aunt Jane Neave (née Suffield).<sup>5</sup> These feelings clearly originated during the time in Sarehole when the notebook was destroyed. This was the period of time when Tolkien was thinking about fairy-stories. Tolkien states his reading and thinking about fairy-stories ended at the age of eight, i.e. in 1900 (“On Fairy-stories” 135). Another example of having to hide early angry feelings can be seen in the children’s story, *Roverandom*, first begun in the summer of 1925 (*Roverandom* [R] xi). In that story Tolkien presents the puppy, Rover, as having been turned into a toy by the wizard Artaxerxes and “because he had not said ‘please’ to the wizard, now all day long he had to sit up and beg.” However, Tolkien also presents the puppy’s real feelings: “and all the while he had to sit up and pretend to beg, though really in his inside he was very angry indeed” (R 5). The puppy learns to be very polite to everyone, saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’ because some characters can be “touchy” (R 15). Tolkien’s partial identification with Rover is suggested by the fact that Rover experiences Tolkien’s dream of drowning which began during the years in Sarehole (Bio 23, R 12). This ability to hang onto anger is also noticed by Tom Shippey, when he reflected on Tolkien’s attitude to academic matters, commenting that Tolkien was “by all accounts as capable of keeping up a grudge as the next man, and his minor writing often showed it” (*The Road to Middle Earth* [Road] 6). Tolkien’s pain and anger may have resurfaced in a puzzling episode in the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Between early 1941 and March 1947 while Tolkien was living at 20 Northmoor Road, he created three facsimiles of pages from the ‘Book of Mazarbul’ that is found in Balin’s tomb in Moria (Guide 1 791, *FR* II iv 333). The first sketch of the first ‘facsimile’ page was on the final manuscript leaf of the original Moria chapter, written in late 1939 (Artist 163). He made at least four preliminary sketches of the first of the three pages and one sketch of the other two, mostly in colored pencil. The second sketch of the first page was drawn on a penciled grid, which made it easier to distribute the runes and leave room for damaged areas (Artist 163). Tolkien “spent many hours making this facsimile, copying



out the pages in runes and elvish writing, and then deliberately damaging them, burning the edges and smearing the paper with substances that looked like dried blood” (Bio 217). He stabbed ‘binding holes’ along the side through which the leaves of the ‘real’ book had once been sown together (Artist 162). Fimi notes that the “result is indeed quite ‘physical’ as if the leaves might fall apart if touched” as in the story (Fimi, *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History* [Culture] 194). Tolkien had previously drawn various landscapes, maps, and scenes for *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the *The Silmarillion*, but in *The Lord of the Rings* he first created ‘facsimiles’ of manuscripts described in the book. While Tolkien created three different tengwar versions of the letter that Aragorn, the King Elessar, writes to Sam Gamgee in the rejected epilogue to the book (*Sauron Defeated* 132), the ‘Book of Mazarbul’ was the most remarkable example of this creation of ‘facsimiles’ (Artist 201).

As Fimi notes Tolkien got “carried away” with the ‘Book of Mazarbul’, not only in the investment of all the time and effort to create this object from Middle-earth, but also in his “excitement to produce such a wonderful ‘artefact’ he made a mistake (Culture 194). Tolkien asserted that *The Lord of the Rings* was based on ancient records he had translated, a position known as his ‘theory of translation’. The ‘theory of translation’, as presented in Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings*, stated that though the book was written in modern English, this was not the language spoken by the hobbits who spoke in ‘Common speech’. However, the ‘Book of Mazarbul’, though written in runes and Elvish script, was actually a transcription of Modern English (Culture 193). This was completely inconsistent with the ‘theory of translation’. This error

was such a concern for Tolkien that in October 1969 or later he wrote about his realization that the ‘Book of Mazarbul’ transliterates into English and not ‘real’ Common speech (Guide 2 746, *Peoples of Middle Earth* 298-9). Both the quite uncharacteristic mistake of transliteration, by a philologist known for his attention to detail, and his remarkable investment of time and energy into the pages of the book might indicate that some intense emotion was being channeled into the creation of these pages.

In September, 1952 Tolkien delivered the final revision of *The Lord of the Rings* to Stanley Unwin (Guide 1 389). “Of all the art he attempted for LOTR, nothing occupied his attention more than these three ‘facsimiles’, and his effort to include them in his book rivaled his earlier battle with Allen and Unwin over *Thror’s Map*” (Artist 163). On April 11, 1953 Tolkien wrote his publisher proposing the use of the facsimile of ‘Book of Mazarbul’, and on August 8, 1953 Tolkien again inquired about the publisher’s position in regard to the ‘Book of Mazarbul’ pages. Unwin replied that the “expense as with fire writing” on the Ring was too great (Guide 2 544, Guide 1 404). “These pages were too

expensive to print as colour halftones, and Tolkien was unwilling to convert them into plain line as his publisher suggested" (Artist 163).

Tolkien was very disappointed that for reasons of cost, the pages could not be included in the way he wanted (Bio 217, Letters 186, 248). However, Tolkien had already had an education about the expense and difficulties of publishing illustrations from his experience with *The Hobbit* (Letters 16-17). Given that history and the fact that he knew Unwin was making a gamble publishing this book, what could he have realistically expected (Bio 215)? Hammond and Scull suggest that in creating the facsimile perhaps "Tolkien was thinking of the Cottonian *Beowulf* manuscript, which was scorched and made brittle by fire in 1731" (Artist 163). Instead, perhaps what we may be seeing in Tolkien's getting "carried away" with all his time and activity creating pages of a burned book and being so excited that he made a mistake in his 'theory of translation' is an echo of something much more personal, the long ago destruction of his beloved notebook from Sarehole. Could it have been burned and ripped so that he could never use it again, when he himself had to destroy it?

Further, there is another implication to the destruction of the notebook. Tolkien clearly knew that people did not understand his language games and he became rather protective, and even defensive, about his "mad hobby" (Letters 8). His joking tone and his self-depreciation showed Tolkien's good social judgment in handling this difficulty. In "A Secret Vice" when he reveals some of his invented language, he confesses that "I experience the pain of giving away myself" (Secret 213). What is most uniquely, idiosyncratically, and essentially John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was his exquisite sensitivity, awareness, and enjoyment of languages. This intimate pleasure in language games was hidden and protected as Tolkien knew only too well that this 'art' "is also-like poetry- contrary to conscience, and duty; its pursuit is snatched from hours due to self-advancement, or to bread, or to employers" (Secret 207). Thus, Tolkien's words defending his friend, G.B. Smith at Oxford, seem applicable here. Smith was "extremely (excessively, if you like) reticent and shy of exposing [himself] unnecessarily especially in the face of certain very definite crass atmosphere. The veil of superficiality is merely protective."<sup>6</sup> This would also have been Tolkien's strategy in shielding these languages which "were constructed deliberately to be personal, and give private satisfaction [...]. For if there is any virtue in this kind of thing, it is in its intimacy, in its peculiarly shy individualism" (Secret 213).

This reticence and embarrassment about language creation seem to be the basis of Tolkien's odd and repeated claim that the game of language invention is common in children though this dies off in adults because "they become shy, ashamed of spending the precious commodity of time for their private pleasure" (Letters 374; Secret 207). In a letter of February 8, 1967, Tolkien insisted that "the amusement of making up languages is very common among children" (Letters 374). However, this is misleading because Tolkien

was focused on "inventing a language for pleasure [...] I am not concerned with slangs, cantos, thieves' argo, Norwelsch, and things of that sort" (Letters 374). The 'Animalic' invented by his first cousins, Mary and Marjorie Incledon, was probably a code, but Tolkien denies that the inventors of 'Animalic' used their language to "bewilder or hoodwink the adult" (Bio 36, Secret 201). But both J.R.R. Tolkien and his cousins had a special maternal grandfather, John Suffield, known for his jokes, puns, and doggerel, who may have encouraged them to have fun and play with language (*Tolkien's Gedling, 1914, The Birth of a Legend* 12). However in general, Victorian and Edwardian girls, especially, were restricted in their activities to a dreary routine, and intelligent children "could compensate for a lack of toys with make-believe games, and even concoct their own sub-culture of a secret language that kept the adult world at bay. In Maurice Baring's nursery days the children infuriated the servants who had charge of them with a gibberish chant; thus, for instance, 'shartee' was 'yes', and 'quilquinino' was 'no.'<sup>7</sup> What interests most children is precisely a code, and this specifically was what did not interest Tolkien. Pig Latin is the most obvious example. Elvish seems to have been put to this use as a secret language by boys at Winchester.<sup>8</sup>

What we may have here is a situation analogous to Tolkien's claim in "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics" that "more than one poem in recent years [...] has been inspired by the dragon of *Beowulf*" (16). However, as Tom Shippey points out in *Roots and Branches: Selected Papers on Tolkien*, "more than one poem" means "exactly two, his own 'Tumonna Gold Galdre Beweunden' and C.S. Lewis' 'Once the worm-laid egg...'"<sup>9</sup> This seems to be a good example of Shippey's insight that "Tolkien's mind was one of unmatched subtlety, not without a streak of deliberate guile" (Road 5).

While Tolkien admitted in a letter of August, 1967 that language inventors are rare, and his example offered in "A Secret Vice" of the young man talking out loud to himself in an Army camp, "Yes, I think I shall express the accusative case by a prefix!" is not persuasive as Tolkien was being trained in signaling (Letters. 380, Secret 199). Tolkien learned Morse code, the use of flags and lamps, signal-rockets, field phones, and carrier pigeons (Bio 78). There is nothing in this overheard comment that would indicate that it partook of the "Art" or "Game" of language invention as opposed to a simple code. Tolkien says the man smiled like when someone sees "suddenly the solution" of a problem, but Tolkien learned nothing more of this language. However, in this age of the internet, "artlang" and "conlang" (constructed language) forums bloom bringing together far-flung creators who construct "conworlds" or "concultures" that produce settings and literature for their languages.<sup>10</sup> They would believe Tolkien's statement "that my long book is an attempt to create a world in which a form of language agreeable to my personal aesthetic might seem real" (Letters 264). Even though there are artists dedicated to language play with its accompanying stories and cultures, these language lovers remain rare birds.



Carpenter acknowledges that in the official biography he portrayed Tolkien “very much as he saw himself, and leaving out several difficult issues.”<sup>11</sup> On the last page of the official biography, Carpenter states, “His real biography is *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*; for the truth about him lies within their pages” (Bio 260). Consequently, it would not be surprising that the story of J.R.R. Tolkien’s notebook, in which he kept his first invented language or languages when he was growing up in Sarehole around 1899 and 1900, would not have been reported by Carpenter. The need to stop playing language games and pass his examinations for King Edward’s School brought Tolkien in conflict with his mother, who was also his teacher and his guide to what Tolkien saw as the only true religion, Catholicism. Tolkien could only speak of his mother in the most positive and idealized terms “as a martyr indeed, [...] who killed herself with labour and trouble to ensure us keeping the faith” and “a gifted lady of great beauty and wit” (Bio 125, Letters 54). The pain of having been in conflict with his beloved mother may have led him to minimize how unusual his activity of inventing languages was by characterizing this as a common activity of children, when in fact it is common for children to use codes, not play elaborate language games. His assertion that this was not “peculiar” became part of the ‘biographical legend’, the way he wanted to present himself (Culture 6-7). The “difficult issue” of having been “naughty” which led to his destroying his notebook, coupled with his hiding his clearly remembered anger and pain, feelings that “bite deep and live long” underneath outward compliance, seems to have resurfaced and fueled his getting “carried away” in creating the ‘Book of Mazarbul’, the extravagant creation which he carefully created and then burned and ripped, when he should have known that this was too expensive to publish. This could be one of the episodes where “the truth” about Tolkien appears in *The Lord of the Rings* from the “sad and troublous” time growing up in Sarehole (“On Fairy-stories” 135).

## NOTES

1. In the Plimmer article Tolkien continues this thought talking about when he was at Oxford “When I was supposed to be studying Latin and Greek, I studied Welsh and English. When I was supposed to be concentrating on English, I took up Finnish.”
2. Resnik, Henry, “An Interview with Tolkien,” *Niekas* 18 (Spring 1967), 41.
3. Garth, John. Ed. “Book Reviews.” *Tolkien Studies*, Vol XI., 2014. 233.
4. Grotta-Kurska visited Tolkien when he was 74, so the interview was almost certainly in 1967 as Tolkien’s birthday is in early January (Architect 17). Tolkien also regretted that ‘Nevbosh’, the language he and his cousin, Mary, invented was “foolishly destroyed” (Secret 208). However, this would have occurred in his teen years.
5. Fliieger and Anderson, *Tolkien on Fairy-stories, Expanded Edition, with Commentary and Notes* 233-234; Bunting, “Tolkien in Love: Pictures from Winter 1912-1913.” *Mythlore* 32.2, Spring/Summer 2014. 8.
6. Garth, John. “‘The road from adaptation to invention’: How Tolkien Came to the Brink of Middle-earth in 1914.” *Tolkien Studies*, 12.
7. Rose, Lionel. *The Erosion of Childhood, Child Oppression in Britain*

1860-1918 227-228.

8. Pearce, Joseph Ed. *Tolkien: A Celebration*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999. 15.
9. *Roots and Branches*, 3; Drout, *Beowulf and the Critics by J.R.R. Tolkien* 56-8, 110-114.
10. Okrent, Arika. *In the Land of Invented Languages, a Celebration of Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius*. New York: Spiegel and Grau Trade Paperbacks, 2010. 285, 287.
11. Carpenter, Humphrey. “Review: Cover book: Tolkien and the Great War by John Garth,” *The Sunday Times*, November 23, 2003. This is confirmed by Rayner Unwin who reports that Christopher Tolkien “tore Humphrey’s draft to pieces;” and Humphrey “re-wrote the whole book, which in its revised form, Christopher approved” (Unwin, *A Remembrancer* 249).

**Nancy Bunting** is a practicing Clinical Psychologist. She will be presenting “*Fairies, Fairy Queens, and the Character of Guinevere in The Fall of Arthur*” at Mythcon 2015 in Colorado Spring, Colorado, U.S.A.

