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## The Silmarillion: An Examination of Secondary Belief in Tolkien's Seminal Fantasy Mythos

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# **The Silmarillion**

**An Examination of Secondary Belief in J.R.R. Tolkien's Seminal Fantasy**

**Mythos**

Senior Capstone: Fall 2019

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## Intro

Perhaps one of the most astounding aspects of J.R.R. Tolkien's work in *The Silmarillion*, and by extension, the entire mythos encapsulated within, is not found within its storytelling - though to be sure his legendarium greatly benefitted from his deft skill as a storyteller - but within its power to create a sense of belief within its readers of its existence. Verifiably, none of the stories or characters found within Middle Earth have ever existed or occurred; and yet, we find ourselves as readers deeply magnetized, attracted to this mythos on a level that many other works of writing fail to achieve. This alone can be illustrated by the megalithic affect that Tolkien's fantasy structures have had on the basis for Western Fantasy Literature, as nearly all cultural depictions of western fantasy ascribe to Tolkein-based structures of a fantasy world. We find ourselves believing in the work in a much deeper fashion than with other works of fiction. To many readers, Middle Earth as an idea is not too far removed from the pseudo-historic religious accounts of the origins of mankind and the Earth that can be found across all corners of the Earth. The key question is how Tolkien is able to achieve an affect such as this within his writing to a literary degree? What modes are employed, and to what ultimate effect?

The answer lies within Tolkien's own writings on the matter: An ideological approach to writing known as Secondary Belief, and its application to deconstruct his own work - to attempt to find the roots of Secondary Belief within *The Silmarillion*. To this end, the primary three influences found while deconstructing *the Silmarillion* were that of philology, Christianity, and Norse Paganism.

The following sections will deconstruct their overall roles in creating a sense of Secondary Belief within J.R.R. Tolkien's, *The Silmarillion*, and the overall gravity that the presence of such a writing style has on the effectiveness of a work.

### **Secondary Belief**

One of the strongest aspects of writing presented within Tolkien's work is that idea of Secondary Belief, or Subcreation. The idea is both simple and complicated in its implications towards fiction as a medium. At its core, Secondary Belief revolves around the creation of a completely immersive environment for a reader to immerse themselves in. By evoking both historical, religious, cultural, linguistic, or other literary factors through which a story can achieve a sense of realism, the need for a suspension of disbelief can be discarded.

As Tolkien noted himself:

"the story-maker's success depends on his ability to make a consistent Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true', it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside"  
(Clute and Grant 132)

It is in this idea that on a surface level, one world can be presented while making use of historical and/or religious tools as a structural framework by which to achieve a higher sense of immersion and belief in the reader. By adopting a Biblical structure, for example, *The Silmarillion* is better able to distinguish itself as a massive, worldbuilding text. In doing so, and connecting itself to historical vectors of faith, a literary bedrock against the foundations of disbelief can be established. To prevent the feeling of disbelief in the reader, the shrugging off of questions is important to Tolkien's writing in that:

"the moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken, and more specifically of fairy-stories, the "magic" or rather, the art has failed. You are then outside in the Primary World again" - J.R.R. Tolkien

By itself the idea of Secondary Belief is no particularly strong tool if not in the right hands. However, it is the effusive use of the primary three influences within *The Silmarillion* that Tolkien is able to achieve a level of thoroughness in his approach to worldbuilding that it can rival claims to literary authenticity as many other religious texts. As a text so thoroughly infused with worldly influences, yet so clever at hiding their undue presence *The Silmarillion* is able to create a sense of *belief* within the reader - an important distinction from simply suspending one's disbelief. Within his biography, Carpenter recalls a quote of Tolkien:

'Middle-earth is *our* world' he wrote, adding: 'I have (of course) placed the action in a purely imaginary (though not wholly impossible) period of antiquity, in which the shape of the continental masses was different' (Carpenter 98)

In doing so a more satisfying and enriching story can be told, as no reliance to the real or observed world is felt or necessitated upon by the reader within the available text. The world exists within its own right, and can fully explain its existence without the outright influence or explanation from the Primary World. However, this is only achieved through Tolkien's deft use of Christian, Nordic Pagan, and Philological influences. In deconstructing his seminal work, the tools for crafting Secondary Belief within one's own work may be better found at hand. Tolkien's belief, and therefore his commitment to fully realizing the power of his work, can be seen here:

When he wrote *The Silmarillion* Tolkien believed that in one sense he was writing the truth. He did not suppose that precisely such peoples as he described, 'elves', 'dwarves', and malevolent 'orcs', had walked the earth and done the deeds that he recorded. But he did feel, or hope, that his

stories were in some sense an embodiment of a profound truth...Certainly while writing *The Silmarillion* Tolkien believed that he was doing more than inventing a story. He wrote of the tales that make up the book: "They arose in my mind as "given" things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew...Yet always I had the sense of recording what was already "there", somewhere: not of "inventing" (Carpenter 100)

Tolkien believed in the power that his written work could have, and went to every conceivable length as an author to ensure that justice was done to his work. In the creation of Secondary Belief, a stronger connection between the reader and the ideas expressed within *The Silmarillion* and other works, can be felt.

To this end, examining the tools Tolkien uses in order to invoke a sense of Secondary Belief within his work, as well as how these techniques can be applied in both one's own reading and writing, is of a primary focus within the following paper. By engaging with and garnering a better understanding of the modes in which Secondary Belief is achieved within a text, an overall stronger connection to our own contemporary historical myths may be achieved as well.

## Connections to Christian Theology

For those who possess cursory biographical information on Tolkien, his religious devotion to the Catholic church, and the many rituals that accompany said belief system, is readily apparent throughout his works. As such, it is ultimately unsurprising that much of the theological miasma that forms *the Silmarillion* is rendered from this area of his life. For Tolkien, the inclusion of Catholic influences not only personalized his mythos, but also served to ‘rewrite’ a parallel history that is mutated into his own ideations on human nature. One must ask themselves, as to why one would craft a mythos from a structural combination of other historical religions? The answer is both deeply personal, and pragmatic. In the line of pragmatism, it is easier to invoke Secondary Belief if the base structural undercurrents of a work are quietly familiar. On the personal end, the death of Tolkien’s mother, and the effect that the fallout of her death had on his life as a young boy, cemented a relationship between Catholicism and the author’s mother within his mind’s eye - a connection that would lead to his own devotion to the Church - to which it is of no surprise then that Catholic elements would subsequently appear in his adult writing.

While Christian influences within *The Silmarillion* are generally acknowledged by works discussing Tolkien’s written work, there is an overall lack of an in-depth deconstruction for many of

these stores and structures. Ultimately, it is not just the inclusion of those elements but the mode in which they are used or transformed that both differentiate Tolkien's mythos, and assist in the creation of a new one founded upon Tolkien's own tenets of Secondary Belief. The following section will explore the Judeo-Christian influences within his mythos - what those influences are, how they have been changed within the context of the work, how they are used, and how borrowing various structures and tales are critical in the foundation of Secondary Belief within his mythos.

### **Ainulindalë: Genesis Through Song**

The most glaring of structural influences is also arguably the most important in differentiating itself from the aspects of Christian mythos that are borrowed throughout. *Ainulindalë*, as the first section of *the Silmarillion* is known, is also of critical importance as it is instrumental in incorporating many of the philological aspects of Tolkien's legendarium into the integrated fabric of Middle Earth's Genesis analogue.

In much the same vein as the beginnings of Genesis, the Universe as it is known in *The Silmarillion*, (Arda) exists as empty, formless space occupied by a sole all-powerful being. The following excerpts from Genesis 1-5 in the New International Version of the Bible, as well as the first few lines from *Ainulindalë* share a bevy of similarities, as well as distinct differences:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. **3** And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. **4** God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Genesis 1-5, New International Version)

When these lines of Genesis are compared with the first few of *Ainulindalë*:

There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else



was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad. But for a long while they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony”  
(Tolkien, 15)

Each section begins with a solitary, all-powerful beings birthing creation via omnipotency. Both figures are both incorporeal, and possessing traits that belong to corporeal beings to some degree (ie - voice, gesture, movement). To this end both sections of theological work are paralleled in their beginnings of creation. However, it is the mode in which each figures specifically goes about doing so that creates a unique distinction between the Catholic-influenced mythos and the contemporary religion.

Whereas the Bible’s introduction begins with the creation of the physical world at-large, *The Silmarillion*’s is much smaller in scope to begin. Rather, Eru first brings into creation his pantheon of incorporeal, angel analogues, although even in this regard their purpose is hybridized between that of Angels in Christian theology, and that of Norse Pantheon Gods, serving the function of both keepers and rulers over the physical realm, with Eru offering little in terms of direct intervention once his children, the Ainur, had coalesced into being. And, while it is abundantly clear that Eru has the omnipotence to will into being a physical realm, the general labors of this God are gradually put to rest, and the task of creating a physical realm from the void of Arda was left to the Ainur, unbeknownst to them at that time. In the following section, Eru instructs the Ainur to join together in choral song. The voice of each Ainur is then joined together in song, and the world as it is known in Tolkien’s mythos is wrought into primordial being:

Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth

your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.’

Then the voices of the Ainur, like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words, began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar into a great music...and the music and echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not Void...It has been said that greater still shall be made before Ilúvatar by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Ilúvatar after the end of days...

But then they were come into the Void, Ilúvatar said to them: ‘Behold your Music’ and he showed to them a vision giving them sight where before there was only hearing, and they saw a new WORld made visible before them, and it was globed amid the Void, and it was sustained therein, but was not of it. And as they looked and wondered...Ilúvatar said again: ‘Behold your Music’ This is your minstrelsy; and each of you shall find contained herein, amid the design that I set before you, all those things which it may seem that he himself devised or added. And thou, Melkor, wilt discover all the secret thoughts of thy mind, and wilt perceive that they are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory.

(Tolkien 15-17)

With this passage there is a further unfurling of the list of differences between the two texts.

While it is true that in Genesis, the phrase ‘let there be light’ is uttered into existence, the connections to a philological root in the Bible, compared to that of *The Silmarillion*, are scant. Meanwhile, the entirety of creation within Tolkien’s work is predicated on song and language as a means to creation. The importance of philology within Tolkien’s work is evident in even the most fundamental theological basis’. Not only does Tolkien’s omnipotent figure take a more subdued, directorial role - leaving the physical arrangement of the universe to the voices of his Valar - but the way in which the world comes about is entirely through song. In this sense, language within Tolkien’s work holds power - power that contains the capabilities to wring existence into being - thought, landscapes, ideas, people. In Arda, language is the root of theological power.

It is also important to note that Eru as a God is quite different individually from that of our contemporary Abrahamic analogue. It is already evident within the above texts that there is a great deal of agency and trust bestowed upon the children of Ilúvatar - particularly his wayward child (and analogue to Satan) Melkor - who are, even in their most selfish actions, only gently redirected back

on course. One of the most interesting points of illustration to draw a divide between the Abrahmic God and that of *The Silmarillion* is in viewing how dissent, or turning against one's God, is punished. Within the Bible, there is a plethora of stories of God intervening within human matters personally and with cataclysmic power. Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, being one. It is in this case mirrored with the destruction of the Isle of Numenor. In both cases, cities are destroyed by omnipotent might. However, in the case of the Isle of Numenor, the destruction of the Isle, followed by the exodus of its people, only came about after the distinct corruption and turning of their leaders by Melkor. In this sense, Eru is not seen punishing the Numenorian in particular, but rather their actions - being that of attempting to land on the sacred shores of Aman - which have led to their own corruption. The capture of Sauron and subsequent regard for Melkor during this period compounds this notion.

During the period of Numenor in which Melkor's influence caused great "storms of rain and hail in those days, and violent winds; and ever and anon a great ship of the Numenoreans would founder and return not to haven" the influence of darker powers ultimately held sway over the leadership of the Isle until their king would speak:

The lords of the West have plotted against us. They strike first. The next blow shall be ours!' These words the King himself spoke, but they were devised by Sauron (277)

The resulting destruction of the Isle of Numenor, and the expulsion of Aman from the physical world of Arda, are written in a way not intended to seem as though delt by a wrathful God, but rather as a response to an insidious, growing corruption from the settings analogue to Satan.

Once it is revealed to the Valar that their song has wrought the world into existence, they are almost immediately given full domain over it. Eru, even at this point, watches. Eru is seen as gentle and warm, yet detached. An unknowable being of immense wisdom and power - but not anger, jealousy, or fear. He is not represented as the wrathful Abrahamic God to which so many parallels are drawn, and that Tolkien was so familiar with. No, instead the image of this being is pivoted, renewed and reinvigorated. The tale of *The Silmarillion* as that of an alternate account of Earth's mythic history cannot afford to be shackled by the realities of religion. These values are rewritten and reforged. When comparing the tone of the two texts, it is quite clear that there is much more altruism and kindness displayed by Eru as compared to their contemporary parallel. In fact, this God is almost entirely different from the Abrahamic one. Punishments are rarely meted out upon mortals. Unlike our Christian God, who is constantly meddling in the affairs of mortals within the Bible, Eru delegates these responsibilities to the Valar.

One of the most distinguishing instances in how a divide can be drawn between Eru and the Biblical God, is how they react when faced with their creation forging life/belief of their own. Within Exodus, upon the discovery that the Israelites had forged a Golden Calf in idolatry, God insists upon a violent retribution towards the Israelites. Moses is able to quell the wrathful God, and instead metes out punishment himself. Within *the Silmarillion* however, upon the discovery that one of his favored Valar, Aulë, had forged the race of Dwarves in secret deep below the mountains;

Ilúvatar said to him: 'Why hast thou done this? Why dost thou attempt a thing which thou knowest is beyond thy power and thy authority? For thou hast from me as a gift thy own being only, and no more; and therefore the creatures of hand and mind can live only by that being, moving when thou thinkest to move them, and if thy thought be elsewhere, standing idle. Is that thy desire?' ... Then Aulë took up a great hammer to smite the Dwarves; and he wept. But Ilúvatar had compassion upon Aulë and his desire because of his humility; and the Dwarves shrank from the hammer and were afraid and they bowed down their heads and

begged for mercy. And the voice of Ilúvatar said to Aule: ‘Thy offer I accepted even as it was made. Dost thou not see that these things have now a life of their own, and speak with their own voices? Else they would not have flinched from they blow, nor from any command of thy will’ Then Aule cast down his hammer and was glad, and he gave thanks to Iluvatar saying, ‘May Eru bless my work and amend it!’ But Iluvatar spoke again and said: ‘Even as I gave being to the thoughts of the Ainur at the beginning of the World, so now I have taken up thy desire and given to it a place therein; but in no other way will I amend thy handiwork, and as thou hast made it, sho shall it be. (Tolkien 43-44)

Here we see a level of empathy unknown to our contemporary Biblical counterpart. There is instead a parental, guiding tone between these two individuals. With Eru, on the one hand, scolding his child Aule for brashly attempting to create new sentient life himself. The results as indicated by Eru are less than desired, more a race of lifeless puppets than anything else. With this knowledge, Aule turns to destroy the Dwarves to find them imbued with souls, cringing from his hammer. It is an important note that during this exchange Aule was never directly informed to destroy the Dwarves. However, even in this moment where his creation has been caught red-handed deviating from the planned course of creation, Eru instead amends and adapts the world to this change. Eru, as depicted here, does not express a sense of jealousy of power or creation. *The Silmarillion* depicts an omnipotent force that possesses many Abrahamic traits, yet these traits are also amended to create a character that exercises altruism and sureness in a way that our contemporary counterpart often does not. In this, a sense of paternalism within the array of powers is woven throughout the text.

### **Elf and Human**

While the Dwarves of Tolkien’s work are indeed of great importance to the overall narrative of the world, their influence is largely drawn from Paganistic folklore, and as such their utilization in the reconstruction of an alternate, feigned history, is relatively focused on their relation to Nordic

Paganism. However, the races of Elf and Human are used to both play out and contradict their Biblical and historical counterparts.

Within the mythopoeic foundations of Tolkien's legendarium, the race of Elves occupy a seminal position within the theological, historical, and cultural foundations of Middle Earth. However, their origins and usage within the pages of Middle Earth can be found powerfully manifested within both Christian and Nordic influences. In this section, however, their roles within the Christian framework of *The Silmarillion* will be examined.

In this sense, Elves occupy the role of the 'chosen' peoples of Middle Earth. Their race is the first to awaken after the arrival of the Valar, and occupies a critical role in the theological foundations that comprise the bulk of the text of *The Silmarillion*. Indeed, there is no other race as theologically significant in regards to their transcribed actions within the text than the Elves. While the human race occupies a mysterious, prophetic role within the theology of Middle Earth, the Elves are the primary actors within the active theology and mythopoeic foundations of Middle Earth. Within his notes that would later inform the biography, Tolkien is noted to have written the elves as an analogue to an un-fallen humanity. Whereas the humans in Middle Earth are created with the expectation to exercise their free will, and thus have no fall, the Elves present a depiction of a human state of elevated thought and culture, if a pre-fallen world like that found in Eden were allowed to flourish into being. As noted in the biography:

"They are Man before the Fall which deprived him of his powers and achievement. Tolkien believed devoutly that there had once been an Eden on earth, and that man's original sin and subsequent dethronement were responsible for ills of the world; but his elves, though capable of sin and error, have not 'fallen' in the theological sense, and so are able to achieve much beyond the powers of men... They are made by man in his own image and likeness; but freed from those limitations which he feels most to press upon him. They are immortal, and their will is directly effective for achievement on imagination and desire.

(Carpenter 101)

In this sense, the Elves represent Tolkien's ideation on the perfect human life. Long-lasting, cultured, and relatively free from the evils of the world. Tolkien's Elves represent an unimpeachable moral representation of a civilization modeled after the likeness of an unfallen Edenistic race. Their origins as both residing in, and moving in exodus of, two Edenistic analogues is also of note. Their first dwelling, a tranquil, starlit glade relatively untouched by the outside world, was promptly abandoned at the coming of the Valar. Ages later, their home amongst the Valar would once again be abandoned en-masse or Middle Earth proper. As such, their position within Tolkien's mythos is useful for both drawing parallels to Tolkien's connection to Christianity, as well as to the Elves' role within Middle Earth as sagaic actors. As Tolkien said himself:

‘The Quendi shall be the fairest of all earthly creatures, and they shall have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my children; and they shall have the greater bliss in this world.’  
(Tolkien 41)

The role of the Elves within Middle Earth is therefore not only to elevate themselves as an idealized human form, but to provide a working, pseudo-historical example of what humanity could perhaps have achieved had we adopted, or maintained in Tolkien's mind, those values. Their existence alongside humans of Middle Earth does not strictly serve to draw a divide between traditional human perceptions on moralism (ie. humans of Middle Earth being prone to the pitfalls of free will) but to instead perhaps create the depiction of a near-perfect, idealized form next to that of one which is less-so, yet still ultimately perhaps un-fallen in Tolkien's mind. And while the two may have many differences, Elves and humans both share a core necessary kernel of moral 'goodness' that Tolkien has imparted into the theological optimism of his work.

Humanity as represented by Tolkien within his works arrive at an interesting intersection between classical theological moral application, and a core kernel of Tolkien's own ideations on the possibilities for a 'better' human state. As such, humans as they are portrayed within Tolkien's writing are able to fulfill a unique niche of morality. Whereas in classical Biblical theology, it is generally accepted that humanity has experienced a great 'falling' from grace, humans in Tolkien's world are created with the idea that they are free agents whose actions ultimately - good or bad - serve to purpose Eru's plans to the second 'Music of the Ainur' which has yet to be composed within the setting of Middle Earth. To this end, there is a sense that humans within Middle Earth are fundamentally different than that of our own.

‘To the Atani [humans] I will give a new gift’. Therefore he willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in form and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest. But Ilúvatar knew that Men, being set amid the turmoils of the powers of the world, would stray often, and would not use their gifts in harmony; and he said; ‘These too in their time shall find that all that they do redounds at the end only to the glory of my work.’...It is one with this gift of freedom that the children of Men dwell only a short space in the world alive, and are not bound to it...Death is their fate, the gift of Ilúvatar, which as Time wears even the Powers shall envy...Yet of old the Valar declared to the Elves in Valinor that Men shall join in the Second Music of the Ainur; whereas Ilúvatar has not revealed what he purposes for the Elves after the World's end.

(Tolkien 41-42)

This idea that humans within Middle Earth are created unlike those of our own reality is also essential in crafting this idea of Secondary Belief. It speaks to the greater ideological message of the work, as well as the intrinsic differences between the Abrahamic portrayal of the human condition, and Tolkien's. While steeped in Christian mythos, it is these subtle differences in the moral framework of the denizens of each theology that allow a separate yet equally powerful conceptual



belief in the human condition arise. By painting humanity's moral compass through the lens of a mythopoeic legendarium, a more effective communicative structure between author and reader can be established. Humans aren't just different, there's a base theological reason justifying these changes, and a moral ideology behind it.

Free will is of extreme importance in the moral makeup of humans of Middle Earth in contrast to those of our Biblical counterpart. There is no original temptation, rather Eru creates humans with the intention that they "should seek beyond the world" and though they would "stray often, and would not use their gifts in harmony" these acts are ultimately not seen as those lashing out against the authority of a god, but rather as aspects of his projection of it. By creating humans with the intention that they do both good and ill to further the ultimate theological ends of the universe, a challenge to that authority is not needed, and thusly largely not a point of contentment, within the substructure of this text.

Value is placed in the mortality of a human life within Middle Earth. Instead of being cursed with mortality, as it is seen within the Christian mythos, Tolkien's mythos declares the inherent importance on mortality, and the bright, flaming passion it can bring into the world. Death, in this sense, is also not treated as a reward, or passage into the halls of afterlife. Unlike Elves, which dwell within the purgatic Halls of Mandos until their spirits return to the world, the spirits of humans are bound to a fate kept secret to all but the Omnipotent force Eru, and Manwë.

By using two primary races - elves and humans - to occupy his world, an interesting vessel is created within Tolkien's mythos. Their roles as both accentuating, and in many aspects sharply contrasting traditional Christian portrayals on human morality ultimately serves to weave a stronger theological tapestry from which Secondary Belief can be drawn.

## Secondary Belief as Established Through Christian Influence

By using a multitude of Christian influences within his work, Tolkien is able to achieve Secondary Belief in a manner that employs drawing both parallels and dichotomies between his own created work, and the Christian mythos that partially informed it. As written in his biography:

Tolkien cast his mythology in this form because he wanted it to be remote and strange, and yet at the same time *not to be a lie*. He wanted the mythological and legendary stories to express his own moral view of the universe; and as a Christian he could not place this view in a cosmos without the God that he worshipped. At the same time, to set his stories 'realistically' in the known world, where religious beliefs were explicitly Christian, would deprive them of imaginative colour. So while God is present in Tolkien's universe, He remains unseen.  
(Carpenter 99-100)

Thusly, Tolkien's work finds itself at an obvious crossroads of theological ideas - that of his own - and those that he had carried with him through his *actual* religious beliefs throughout his life. However, it is the ways in which he reinterprets his own religion through the analogues of his own races and structures, that his ultimate ideas regarding human reality, and the creation of a pseudohistory, can fully form.

By using a familiar theological framework - one that a large portion of the Western reading audience at the time was deeply entrenched in - these ideas are made easily communicable. The structures of religious texts are predicated on the foundation of Secondary - or in the case of contemporary world religions, primary - Belief, which in turn can be used as frameworks to inform a sense of Secondary belief in our own fictitious writing. The stories of the Bible have crafted a sense

of belief for many throughout the centuries - by adopting those structures, a similar sense can be instilled in the reader - even in a fictitious fantasy text.

In this regard, the Christian influences on *The Silmarillion* are critical in establishing a sense of Secondary Belief in the theological, and therefore moral framework of the world. It is one thing to establish a belief in the chronicity of the world through tools such as language and culture, but to effectively communicate a strong moral message, the retrofitting of familiar Christian structures with invented and informed characters and stories is indeed a required component to fully impart these ideas upon a reader.

## **Nordic Paganism**

As a scholar of language - particularly those language of the Northwestern European variety - Tolkien seeded much of his writing with influences from traditional Nordic myth. While the base theological structure of *The Silmarillion* aligns more with Christian structures, much of the world - and the stories and characters that exist within - are populated by figures of Nordic influence. Of the texts examined, the various Prose Edda of Iceland, and the Finnish Kalevala were of the most evident in their connection to Tolkien's text.

This serves to both sharply divide his mythos from that of a purely traditional Christian tracing, as well as to provide enough familiarity and secondary belief to the reader. There are glimmers of historicity within Tolkien's staggering mythos, neatly ensorcelled within layers woven from our own history. By infusing tendrils of historical mythic works, a sense of familiarity can be lent to an otherwise alien setting. Within this work, the primary Nordic influences

## **The Valar**

The most logical place to begin within the work is with the angelic Valar. These beings, as discussed in the section on Christian mythos, occupy a hybridized role as both angel and Pantheonic God. On one hand, their characterization as children and servants of Eru align more with that of the Abrahamic portrayal. On the other, after their creation a near-omnipotence is seen in the collective

as they begin to administer to a nascent world. It is here that their Nordic influences are seen most readily.

Æsir, the multiple gods composing Old Norse myth, hold a deep connection to the Valar on a conceptual level. There are no easy comparisons one-to-one between the Valar and the Æsir, rather their structural arrangement within the theology of Middle Earth - as well as their theological roots found in works of Norse Paganism - can be mined for their connection to establishing Secondary Belief.

The most direct parallels can be drawn between the Æsir of Loki and Odin, and Manwë and Melkor. In the Old Nordic myth, Odin occupied the seminal seat of the pantheonic array, whereas Loki was a cast-out, constantly scheming against the other gods. A similar dynamic can be seen within *The Silmarillion* in Manwë and Melkor.

In regards to Melkor, he is regarded as a trickster figure, similar to the depictions of Loki within the prose of the Poetic Edda, which holds a great portion of the shared influence of Nordic Paganism. Within the poem, *Lokasenna*, the following phrase is spoken by Loki in regards to his relationship to Odin:

*Loki spake:*

9. "Remember, Othin, | in olden days

That we both our blood have mixed;

Then didst thou promise | no ale to pour,

Unless it were brought for us both."

( *Poetic Edda, Lokasenna 9* )

Whether there is an actual relationship between Odin and Loki is debatable within the literature of the Prose Edda, however it is clear that the two are inextricably linked as polar figures within the theological nexus of Nordic Paganism. In regards to Tolkien's figures, their relationship is more clearly defined within *The Silmarillion*. It is clear that the two share a figureship of brotherhood, sharing a level of power and knowledge comparable to naught but Eru himself. Compare the following sections regarding each individual:

Manwë and Melkor were brethren in the thought of Ilúvatar. The mightiest of those Ainur who came into the World was in his beginning Melkor; but Manwë is dearest to Ilúvatar and understands most clearly his purposes. He was appointed to be, in the fullness of time, the first of all Kings: lord of the realm of Arda and ruler of all that dwell therein. In Arda his delight is in the winds and the clouds, and in all the regions of the air, from the heights to the depths, from the utmost borders of the Veil of Arda to the breezes that blow in the grass.

Last of all is set the name of Melkor, He who arises in Might. But that name he has forfeited; and the Noldor, who among the Elves suffered most from his malice, will not utter it, and they name him Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World. Great might was given him by Iluvatar, and he was coeval with Manwë. In the powers and knowledge of all other Valar he had a part, but he turned them to evil purposes, and squandered his strength in violence and tyranny. For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwë and dominion over the realms of his peers.  
(Tolkien 28, 31)

Within this passage it is clear that there exists an inherent rivalry in the mind of Melkor between himself and Manwë, much the same as with Loki and the host of Aesir. In

this regard, these two figures represent one of the most traceable connections between Norse Paganism, and Tolkien's crafted mythos.

While it is clear that the two hosts share some similarities - pantheonic arrangements set among a number of habitable 'worlds' - the fundamental personalities and actions of the primary bulk of the Valar in Tolkien's fiction are too far removed from the scant bits of 'personality' regarding the Gods of Nordic Paganism to draw any clear parallels. Thusly, it can be seen that the arrangement took inspiration in structure from the Norse form, and worked to improve its general characterization and stratification of power and theological structure within the defined cosmos.

### **Theological Geography**

Within the setting of Tolkien's universe, a clear link can be seen between the conceptualizations of the ordering of the cosmos as viewed by Nordic Paganism, and the arrangement of the world and those who dwell within - or without - it found in Tolkien's text. In particular, there are the clear comparisons that can be seen in the relationship between Asgard and Valinor, as well as Midgard and Middle Earth. On a surface level, immediate parallels can be drawn between the 'Mid' of Midgard, the middle realm of Nordic Paganism wherein humans dwell, and Middle Earth, which occupies much the same position between the heavens and the depths of the cosmos.

Asgard and the isle of Valinor are the two foremost examples provided within *The Silmarillion*. In the case of Valinor, it is shown as:

Behind the walls of the Pelori the Valar established their domain in that region which is called Valinor; and there were their houses, their gardens, and their towers. In that guarded land the Valar gathered great store of light and all the fairest things that were saved from the ruin; and many others yet fairer they made anew, and Valinor became more beautiful even

than Middle-earth in the Spring of Arda; and it was blessed, for the Deathless dwelt there, and there naught faded nor withered, neither was there any stain upon flower or leaf in that land, nor any corruption or sickness in anything that lived; for the very stones and waters were hallowed  
(Tolkien 37-38)

As characterized within the Prose Edda, Asgard is seen as a primordial dwelling-place of the Gods. However, Tolkien takes this structure and calls upon its order to inhabit corporeal space. As such, it also serves as a way for Elves, another one of Tolkien's creations that owe a great deal of inspiration to Nordic myth, to further integrate themselves within the theology of Middle-earth and create a fuller sense of Secondary Belief.

In a similar vein, Midgard and Middle-earth share a similar role within their respective mythos' as a primary setting containing humanity. Without any further similarities outside of their names and purpose, it is easy to see how Tolkien conceptualized an ordering of the beings within his world.

### **Elves**

The races of Elf and Dwarf occupy vastly different theological roles within Tolkien's work. For the Elves, their lot is more theologically significant to the dwarves, who, while appearing within *The Silmarillion* and its stories, do not ultimately serve to craft the same mythopoetic theology as others within the work. Dwarves, from their near-direct connection to Nordic Paganism's model aside from their origin, do not share the same level of mythopoetic establishment within the *The Silmarillion*, and are thus too differentiated from their base inspiration as actors within Tolkien's universe to do sufficient justice in profiling the two.

Elves derive their base inspiration from that of the Prose Edda. While their ultimate form may take a great deal of a different shape than that which is presented within Nordic myth, their



ultimate roles can be greatly gleaned from these ancient depictions. From the section *Gylfaginning* of the Prose Edda:

That which is called Álfheimr[1] is one, where dwell the peoples called Light-Elves; but the Dark-Elves dwell down in the earth, and they are unlike in appearance, but by far more unlike in nature. The Light-Elves are fairer to look upon than the sun, but the Dark-Elves are blacker than pitch. Then there is also in that place the abode called Breidablik,[2] and there is not in heaven a fairer dwelling. There, too, is the one called Glitnir,[3] whose walls, and all its posts and pillars, are of red gold, but its roof of silver. There is also the abode called Himinbjörg;[4] it stands at heaven's end by the bridge-head, in the place where Bifröst joins heaven. Another great abode is there, which is named Valaskjálf;[5] Odin possesses that dwelling; the gods made it and thatched it with sheer silver, and in this hall is the Hlidskjálf,[6] the high-seat so called. Whenever Allfather sits in that seat, he surveys all lands. At the southern end of heaven is that hall which is fairest of all, and brighter than the sun; it is called Gimlé.[7] It shall stand when both heaven and earth have departed; and good men and of righteous conversation shall dwell therein: so it is said in *Völuspá*.--

(Gylfaginning)

Within the context of *The Silmarillion*, elves that have made the journey to Valinor can be drawn as near-direct parallels to the 'light' elves found in the prose. They are described as being 'bathed' in a strange light throughout Tolkien's work, a facet that the elves which did not make the journey lack. These elves who occupied the same space as the Gods are heavily informed in this regard from Nordic Myth, as the relationship between Elf and Aesir is deeply familiar.

Ultimately, while Tolkien drew base inspiration for the elves from a collection of Nordic Myths, their ultimate purpose within *The Silmarillion* are vastly different than their paganistic counterpart. Rather, the elves within Middle-earth act as a conduit for theological ideologies, and rather base their aesthetic appearance and general sense of mythic mystique on the influences derived from Nordic Paganism.

### **Secondary Belief As Established Through Nordic Paganism**

In comparison to the vast impact that both philology and the Christian mythos had on Tolkien's overall mythopoetic legendarium, the influences of Nordic Paganism on the overall whole contribute the least of the three individually. Rather, it is the ways in which the influences of bygone Nordic legends and figures within are reimagined and integrated into a world actualized by the primary tools of Christianity and Philology. This is not to discount the overall impact, however, that the various influences of Nordic Paganism had upon the work in establishing Secondary Belief.

Through the parallelism found between the primary actors within the setting, to the obvious inspiration drawn from elves found within Nordic Paganism, as well as the geography that occupies the physical sphere of Tolkien's universe, a richer setting can be established. By differentiating his own universe from that of one which is too closely connected to the Christian mythos, or too alienated by its own linguistic bedrock, a balance between familiarity and alien ideology can be struck. Implementing these moralistic ideas through these vectors not only lends the story a more naturally pseudo-historic and organic feel, but also establishes itself in a way in which readers can feel comfortable enough in the familiarity in the structure of the story, to explore its new ideas through various means of Secondary Belief.

Ultimately, the Nordic Paganism works to influence Tolkien's work by peppering the mythos with paganistic aspects, thus disrupting an entirely Christian narrative and allowing the story to explore and elucidate its own ideological arguments through a more natural means.

## **Philology**

While the dual influences of Catholicism and Norse Paganism are clearly vital keystones, and among the most outwardly featured influences found within *The Silmarillion*, it is the latter subject that can trace much of its usage back to Tolkien's obsessive passion for Philology; a vocation, it is important to note, that Tolkien had founded his entire academic and professional career upon. As such, it is of no surprise that Tolkien's invented languages are among the most powerful ideatic currents found within the text. The philological aspects of *The Silmarillion* heavily influence - and therefore fundamentally alter - the structure and moral systems found within the foundational fantasy mythos. Tolkien not only reverse-engineers a fantasy mythos through the invented languages of Quenya and Sindarin, but through his effusive use of wordplay, and a mastery of his own invented language, Tolkien is able to craft a seminal fantasy mythos, whose claims on authenticity are equally matched by the writings of contemporary world religions.

*The Silmarillion*, a text born from fascination with the bounds of the written and spoken word, is ultimately hewn into shape through Tolkien's effusive use of his invented tongues as a structural base to the mythos. As a result, Tolkien creates his ideal creation myth, weaving in influences from various religions, but always relying on his languages and love of Philology as the bedrock to his work. As the languages Quenya and Sindarin are not bound by the baggage of history and real people, they are therefore free to express only those features which Tolkien desires to convey through his language - and the world created from it.

As a result, Tolkien is able to invoke his own principles of language, and project them onto a creation of his own. With these syntactic forces taken root, a religious text that both draws heavily from other religions, and is concurrently unfettered by their own histories and moral attachments is formed. Due to these factors, it is a text and 'religious manuscript' that finds itself in a singularly unique position compared to many other fantasy mythos', as Tolkien's mastery over philology is critical in rendering the text as a real, worldly mythos as compared to the cornucopic array of fantasy mythos' that ultimately lack the sense of legitimacy and scope that *The Silmarillion* does.

### **Quenya and Sindarin - The Two Trees**

Just as with Iluin and Ormal, the primordial orbs that lit Arda's celestial firmament, or Telperion and Laurelin, the twin gold and silver trees that stood watch over Valinor before their sundering, Tolkien employs a dual set of tools from which much of the structure and peoples of *The Silmarillion* are realized. Quenya and Sindarin were the two primary in-world languages that Tolkien worked most diligently on during his career, and while both underwent many drastic

changes over time, their relative consistency in both form and syntax are reliable enough to track throughout the work.

Indeed, while *the Silmarillion* was composed in English, it is a text engineered from his invented languages, and serves as a vehicle through which Tolkien was able to employ his lexicon in as much a practical way as a writer and philologist possibly could. Before delving too deeply into how the languages fundamentally shape the text, it is important to discuss their key differences and therefore ultimate roles within Tolkien's work. In turn, these languages are incorporated into the text, layered in such a way to invoke a manner of Secondary Belief that can be found in contemporary religious texts. As described in his biography:

Since the existence of these languages was the *raison d'être* for the whole mythology, it is not surprising that he devoted a good deal of attention to the business of making up names from them. Indeed the name-making and the linguistic work associated with it came (as he said in the passage quoted above) to occupy just as much if not more of his attention than the writing of the stories themselves. (Carpenter 101)

The first language to take form in Tolkien's mind, and as a result the first one to be employed within the manuscript, was Quenya. Formed from scattered remnants of previous languages meant to be used in *the Silmarillion*, it can be defined as the softer and more lyric of the two languages. A brief breakdown of the language reveals few consonant clusters, with the primary bulk of words ending in vowels as well, with only the consonants R,L,N, and sometimes S and T occasionally ending words. The result is words such as *quesse, laurea, laurelindorenan*, and so on. The primary purpose of Quenya within *the Silmarillion* is as a ceremonial or poetic language, and rarely is dialogue exchanged between characters in anything but Sindarin elvish. However, it is important to note that before the sundering of Valinor, or the analogous Mount Olympus-Eden hybrid, that all first-arrival elven clans dwelling on the Island except the Teleri (Noldor and Vanyar)

spoke in Quenya. As such, within the universe Tolkien created, Quenya is relegated to a high, historical status - a language of deep poetics and flowing lyricism, spoken only by the oldest elves of surviving Valinor, or as a ceremonial language.

He called it Quenya and by 1917 it was very sophisticated, possessing a vocabulary of many hundreds of words (based albeit on a fairly limited number of word-stems). Quenya was derived, as any 'real' language would have been, from a more primitive language supposedly spoken in an earlier age; and from this 'Primitive Eldarin' Tolkien created a second elvish language, contemporary with Quenya but spoken by different peoples of the elves. This language he eventually called 'Sindarin', and he modelled its phonology on Welsh, the language that after Finnish was closest to his personal linguistic taste (Carpenter 101)

The primary phonological influence on Quenya is Tolkien's favorite language (both written and spoken), Finnish. These similarities are quite clear when comparing the examples of Quenya above, with the following of Finnish: *huominen, voida, nauraa, buono*. The two both employ the frequent use of umlauts to alter the sound of their English-transcribed words, generally enjoy multisyllabic words strung together by soft consonants or vowels, and end frequently in vowels or soft consonants. As a result, it is a language that is employed most thoroughly during the ancient, legendary years of the First Ages, where it could best be used as a religious, poetic tongue. The words find themselves to be quite long and complex (or at the very least difficult to pronounce for the average English speaker) and therefore are most often used in their written form when not spoken.

The second language to be used within *the Silmarillion* and the works that sprung from it is, as noted, Sindarin. It is spoken by all elves who had never made the journey to Valinor, and by the bulk of elves who eventually emigrated back to the mainland. To that end, within Middle Earth, Sindarin finds itself as the longest lasting colloquially spoken language among the elves, and is what most readers and in-world individuals would refer to as "Elvish". Unlike Quenya, it employs the

frequent use of consonant clusters, has an extra vowel [y], and about a dozen more consonant sounds. In terms of range, Sindarin finds itself to be the much more versatile and conversational of the two. Most words range from mono to trisyllabic, and employ consonants over vowels as the preferred syllable-joint. As previously mentioned, Sindar is the common spoken tongue, although it is referred to as the 'noble' tongue. Due to its phonological influences, lexicon, and word structure, it is best defined as the 'harder' of the two languages (both in complexity and phonetics). As a result, it translates better into the spoken word of Middle Earth, and enjoys much more common usage within Tolkien's works, as it offers a larger pool of grammatical possibilities from which to craft sentences. What Quenya lacks in its structuring of sentence (as it relies mainly on verse) Sindarin more than makes up for in a variety of bite-sized words that can be placed within a highly modular language system. As a result, Sindarin is much more 'alive' and organic, lending to its common usage.

In order to craft a language that could be spoken by an ancient, high culture, Tolkien looked to Welsh. An ancient, poetic, and deeply familiar language to the author. His second favorite language outside of Finnish, it was the obvious choice to use a tongue of his homeland to best voice his creations. Some common Sindarin words in comparison to Welsh are: *morn*, *aglareb*, *elenath*, and *gwanur*, with some common Welsh words being *gwraig*, *saim*, *ceg*, and *gwybod*. The superficial similarities between the languages are quite clear. Densely packed, syllabically vibrant shorter words that speak to a function in daily usage.

### **Functions of Tolkien's Languages**

Using Finnish and Welsh as building blocks for the two primary respective languages found within *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien is able to strike a balance in invented language that is extremely

rare. It is both practical enough to be both written and spoken in complex sentences, and it is differentiated enough from its base linguistic influences as to not find itself merely reskinning pre-existing words and syntactic rules under a new guise. Tolkien spells out this sentiment in one of his many letters:

“It must be emphasized that this process of invention [of elven languages] was/is a private enterprise undertaken to give pleasure to myself by giving expression to my personal linguistic ‘aesthetic’, or taste, and its fluctuations. It was largely antecedent to the composing of legends and ‘histories’ in which these languages could be ‘realized’; and the bulk of the nomenclature is constructed from these pre-existing languages, and where the resulting names have analyzable meanings (as is usual) these are relevant solely to the fiction with which they are integrated.”

(Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien (1981) p.380)

As languages, they are closely enough related to their roots to create a sense of geographic localization, yet are not inherently tied to the subliminal cultural influences of Welsh and Finnish that would tint or skew a reader’s perception of the world out of Middle Earth and into our own. As such, Quenya and Sindarin not only function as a mere tool to flesh out the denizens of Middle Earth, but also as tools to help ratify the manuscript as its own form of linguistic canon.

To expand on this, it is the idea that while the two languages share many commonalities with their base historic languages, they can be differentiated to such a degree that both can be considered wholly realized standalone languages that are bound entirely to either the realm of Middle Earth, nor its foundational bedrock, Earth.

At this point, Tolkien’s work diverges radically from both contemporary writers in this field (of which there were perilously few at this point) as well as distinguishing itself as a seminal work of



mythos-weaving - one which would continue to overshadow almost every fantasy text to be published in its wake. Truly, while Tolkien's work lit the braziers in the arena of fantasy many years ago, it is primarily his works that still bear the torch of ideological fullness in this respect. The question, as partially explored previously, is that of *how* and *why* this was done. Surely it would have been equally easy for a skilled writer and Philologist such as Tolkien to simply invent the bare facade of a language and supplant it into a fantasy setting, without the decades of foundational work. Yet, would the end result have ultimately been the same? Would the works to follow such as *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of The Rings* have left such a compelling, long lasting effect on readers? I think not. The combination of his intense passions for language, both historic and bespoke, as well as his deep connection to Catholicism and Nordic myth creates the perfect combination of factors to create a manuscript that not only crafts a fantastical world, but does so in a way that insists upon, *demand*s its realness from viewers. And while one may very well know that Middle Earth does not exist, it becomes apparent that it existed to Tolkien, as real as any other land.

By populating this scape with a rich array of peoples and languages, with histories attached to their development, not only does it lend believability to the reader, but like manuscripts such as the Bible, the philological aspects found within *The Silmarillion* serve to reinforce a sense of legitimacy. Just as popular religious texts such as the Bible explore the root of languages spoken around the world, so does *The Silmarillion*. These parallels between rather non-religious elements of secular manuscripts not only serve to highlight the similarities between works, but also to showcase the ways in which Tolkien used those similarities to much different effect.

But why bother creating a new religious system if it is so heavily influenced by Catholicism and other contemporary and historic religion? To use those templates as a wiped vessel to present his

own parallel moral systems. The answer as to whereabouts he arrived to these systems is as complicated and storied as the man's life.

While both Sindarin and Quenya function to various degrees within the setting of Middle Earth, both languages share a common written system. This system, as with the languages, was entirely formulated by Tolkien. Known as Tengwar, it is a sprawling, intensely ornamented scripting system that reflects the elegant and complicated languages. Unlike Cirth, Tengwar's rune-oriented cousin, Tengwar is another system that both lends validity to *The Silmarillion* as a foundational religious text in context with other religions, due to Tolkien's particular approach to its creation.

As with all things found within Tolkien's work, the details as to the *origins* of the Tengwar within Middle Earth are nearly as important as Tolkien's conception of the language himself as he scribbled away in his Oxford home. The Tengwar originate in-world as the preferred writing system of the Elves, namely from the saga'd smith, Feanor. Built upon the blocks of another, less developed writing system from Tolkien's earlier forays into alphabet crafting known as the Sarati, the Tengwar developed by Feanor serve as the alphabetic base of the bulk of languages used within Middle Earth. Indeed, outside of Sindarin and Quenya, there are a multitude of different spelling modes that Tolkien employed for various cultures populating Middle Earth. The figure below represents the basic alphabetic table for the Tengwar script - though it does not account for the various different modes in which the language is written depending on what language, and when said language is being spoken in-world.

		<i>Témar (Series)</i>			
<i>Tyeller (Grades)</i>		I Dentals	II Labials	III Palatals Velars	IV Velars Labiovelars
1.	Voiceless plosives	ᵽ t	ᵽ p	ᶑ c/tʃ k	ᶑ k kw
2.	Voiced plosives Nasalized voiced plosives	ᵽᵽ d nd	ᵽᵽ b mb	ᶑᶑ j/dʒ g ŋg	ᶑᶑ g ŋgw
3.	Voiceless fricatives	ᵽ θ	ᵽ f	ᶑ ç/ʃ x	ᶑ x ʍ
4.	Voiced fricatives Nasalized voiceless plosives	ᵽᵽ ð/z nt	ᵽᵽ v mp	ᶑᶑ j/ʒ ŋk	ᶑᶑ y ŋkw
5.	Nasal Nasal long	ᵽᵽ n n:	ᵽᵽ m m:	ᶑᶑ ɲ ŋ	ᶑᶑ ŋ ŋw
6.	'Weak' Nasal short	ᵽᵽ r n	ᵽᵽ w m	ᶑᶑ j o	ᶑᶑ a w

  

ᶑ	r / w	ᶑ	ʀ / rd	ᶑ	l	ᶑ	l̥ / ld
ᶑ	s	ᶑ	s / y	ᶑ	z	ᶑ	z
ᶑ	h	ᶑ	ʍ	ᶑ	e / i	ᶑ	u / o

(Björkman)

Within the context of Middle Earth, the alphabet was invented in the Valian year of 1250, and continued to see marked changes and modifications throughout the First through Third age, where the Tengwar as we know them exist in their current, varied formats across in-world cultures. Perhaps the most important note about the Tengwar is their similarity to one of Tolkien's most well-combed areas of study - Old English. Indeed, though there is little in the way of confirmation,

the similarities between the alphabet of Old English, as shown below, and that of the Tengwar, are quite apparent:

<b>A</b> a	<b>Æ</b> æ	<b>B</b> b	<b>C</b> c	<b>D</b> d	<b>Ð</b> ð	<b>E</b> e	<b>F</b> f	<b>G</b> ġ
a	ash	be	ce	de	eth	e	eff	yogh
a	æ	b	c	d	ð	e	f	3 (g)
[a]	[æ]	[b]	[k/tʃ]	[d]	[θ/ð]	[e]	[f/v]	[g/ɣ/j/ʒ]
<b>h</b> h	<b>I</b> i	<b>L</b> l	<b>M</b> m	<b>N</b> n	<b>O</b> o	<b>P</b> p	<b>R</b> r	<b>S</b> s
há	i	ell	emm	enn	o	pe	err	ess
h	i	l	m	n	o	p	r	s
[h/ç/x]	[i]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[o]	[p]	[r]	[s/z]
<b>T</b> t	<b>U</b> u	<b>Ʒ</b> Ʒ	<b>X</b> x	<b>Y</b> y	<b>þ</b> þ			
te	u	wynn	eks	yr	thorn			
t	u	p (w)	x	y	þ			
[t]	[u]	[w]		y	[θ/ð]			

(Omniglot.com)

During his professional career Tolkien forged a reputation for his mastery of archaic language modes such as Old English, even translating scripts such as Beowulf into the modern form. This fixation on the ancient language of his homeland may have bled into his ideations on language crafting, as a way to both revitalize and drastically transform a dormant language system such as Old English into something that could form a linguistic pillar within the created reality of Middle Earth.

## **Overall Effect of Invented Language on Silmarillion.**

While it may be easy to discount the overall effect of his invented languages at surface level, the fundamental ways in which they functioned within Tolkien's self-described legendarium, coupled with his biographical reasons cited for crafting Middle Earth, serves to fundamentally alter the way in which we interpret the text as a pseudo-historical legendarium, rather than a book of pure fiction.

In using a bevy of fully fleshed out languages, as well as the Tengwar as a preferred system of writing in-world, a careful balance is struck up by Tolkien between the realms of his myth, and that of the historic world. In his essay on the idea of Faerie, Tolkien notes that language has the power to bend the reader's perception of a world. By altering the language used within the crafted legendarium, Tolkien is fundamentally altering the reader's very base level perception of the world.

The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval. The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalisation and abstraction, sees not only green-grass, discriminating it from other things (and finding it fair to look upon), but sees that it is green as well as being grass. But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faërie is more potent. And that is not surprising: such incantations might indeed be said to be only another view of adjectives, a part of speech in a mythical grammar.  
(Tolkien "On Fairy-Stories" 133)

The system of languages employed within Tolkien's world relies not on the contemporary sphere, nor the sphere of fantasy, but exists within a liminal zone that straddles the line between belief and disbelief. This Secondary Belief is readily achieved by the reader due to the proliferation and insistence of in-world grammar.

In this regard, it is the idea that the legendarium relies on its own internal systems of language, even in their birth, foundations, and development throughout the internal mythos, rather than historic languages such as English. While some fantasy mythos' born after Tolkien's work may have basic structures for internal languages, none rise to the level of complexity and thoroughness of use in-world to that of Middle Earth's languages and writing systems. Tolkien himself seemed quite aware of the affects his particular system for making language, noting in one of his collected letters:

“Behind my stories is now a nexus of languages (mostly only structurally sketched). But to those creatures which in English I call misleadingly elves, are assigned two related languages more nearly completed, whose history is written, and whose forms (representing two different sides of my linguistic taste) are deduced scientifically from a common origin. Out of these languages are made nearly all the names that appear in my legends. This gives a certain character (a cohesion, a consistency of linguistic style, and an illusion of historicity) to the nomenclature, or so I believe, that is markedly lacking in other comparable things.”  
(Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien p.143)

By inventing a language system that could be given historical context in-mythos, Tolkien crafts a world in which the foundational linguistic bedrock is both familiar enough to the reader to function as a learnable, practical sounding language with roots in real-world languages, and is yet alien enough to not rely on a reader's connection to historical influences. Rather, the language points the readers inward, to the histories and deepening stories within the vast legendarium of Middle Earth.

This idea of secondary belief not only helps cement the reader within the world itself, but in doing so, subliminally legitimizes the text as 'real' in the sense that many other fictional fantasy texts utterly fail to attain. To this end, Tolkien's musings regarding the foundations of a strong story set within a fictitious world, are apt:

One writes such a story not out of the leaves of trees still to be observed, nor by means of botany and soil-science; but it grows like a seed in the dark out of the leaf-mould of the mind: out of all that has been seen or thought or read, that has long ago been forgotten, descending into the deeps. No doubt there is much selection, as with a gardener: what one throws on one's personal compost-heap; and my mould is evidently made largely of linguistic matter.' - J.R.R. Tolkien (Carpenter 131)

This passage from Tolkien's biography serves to highlight the fundamental processes in which he approached his writing. Rather than approaching his world with a story in mind, he rather focused on the 'compost', the bedrock his mythos that would ultimately serve to inform the later stories and ideological musings. In doing so, and establishing a world that is so entirely complete, down to the very history of its grammar system, it is difficult for a reader to conceptualize a feeling of disbelief at any point in the work. Rather, readers find themselves actively engaging and believing in, on a secondary level, the work in which they are reading. *The Silmarillion* and the works informed by it do this masterfully by combining the rich historical and cultural carpet of Middle Earth with the stagings of ideologically primed stories. Words, and the objects, people, places, and stories to which they are applied, carry great weight within the minds of a reader. Tolkien summarizes this point well in a recorded conversation between himself and author C.S. Lewis:

'You call a tree a tree, he said, and you think nothing more of the word. But it was not a 'tree' until someone gave it that name. You call a star a star, and say it is just a ball of matter moving on a mathematical course. But that is merely how *you* see it. By so naming things and describing them you are only inventing your own terms about them. And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention of truth.' - J.R.R. Tolkien (Carpenter 151)

Tolkien does exactly this. *The Silmarillion* and Middle Earth embody Tolkien inventing his own terms on every aspect of the world from human nature, to language, to history, and even religion. By using speech to invent his own world, and therefore creating a world that is fully

informed by his thought alone, Tolkien is able to create myth - and therefore a sense of truth - through seeding this landscape with stories that ring true to his own conceptions of reality. By inventing a convincing alternate reality, Tolkien is able to craft a convincing myth, and therefore convincing sense of truth.

As a tool, language is mightily powerful, and one that is seen to have had a great impact on the overall effectiveness of his work within *The Silmarillion*. Without the philological influences as the core underpinnings of Middle Earth, the text would likely fail to render a sense of Secondary Belief so readily from its readers - and thusly be much less poignant overall. Where the influences of Christianity and Norse Paganism serve to inform the ideological core of Middle Earth, language is the beating heart and nervous system through which the body of text truly comes alive to the reader.



## In Conclusion

Throughout the course of this paper, the primary components by which Secondary Belief within *The Silmarillion* have been thoroughly established and discussed. It is clear that both the idea of Secondary Belief, and the tools conducted in its construction within a text, are powerful literary devices that can enable a work to transcend the bounds of fiction, and enter a more liminal zone between fiction and reality - a pseudo-reality. The methods by which Secondary Belief are achieved are rigorous and taxing, lending to the fact that so few works of fiction have risen to the level of 'thoroughness' that Tolkien's seminal works of Western Fantasy do.

By harnessing the power of religion and cultural myth in the form of Nordic Paganism and Christian theology, Tolkien is able to anchor the text between two worlds - the primary and the fictitious. Their utilization as a means of subliminal cultural and religious familiarity to the time's intended audience affects a great sense of belief within the established pseudo-reality of the world. Using historical structures and stories reimagined and re-wrought with ideological meaning, serves the reader an exotic dish upon a familiar plate - a combination meant to acclimate readers to Tolkien's alien world is Primary tethering points, while still using those same structures to insert his own ideologies.

It is, however, Tolkien's lifelong obsession with all things language that have fundamentally shaped the course of the text. Without it, *The Silmarillion* as it is would not exist today - or at least not in the complete state of creating Secondary Belief. To this end, even the religious influences found within the text are fundamentally altered by language as Tolkien's primary tool for creating a unique identity for his own world. Perhaps, then, it is this idea of language and the stories, cultures,

and peoples attached to it - fictional or not - that creates a sense of Secondary Belief most fully. By isolating itself linguistically from our contemporary world, it eschews the shackles of a contemporary reading. A new world, one composed of an ideologically blank slate can be attached. As our languages contain deep histories and cultural expressions, so to do Tolkien's. By creating a language that is phonetically familiar to ( Finnish or Welsh) those spoken in our contemporary sphere, yet not relying upon their structures, a mythical, alternate past can be established.

In using these tools to create a sense of Secondary Belief, a technique so thorough in its approach to mythopoetic foundations, Tolkien is able to create a work that rivals the ideological potency of contemporary world religious texts. By adopting the referential structures found within these texts, and how they establish belief, as well as creating ones of his own, Tolkien crafted a work that stands as a seminal achievement of Western Fantasy. To this end, the study of the bedrock of modern Western fantasy has yielded the methods by which this success was achieved, and how it has managed to serve as a cultural reference to many depictions of fantasy since. With this information, new avenues of literary critique and observation can be explored within the realms of fiction, and reveal entire avenues of thought in dissecting a text.

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