The Rhetoric of the Constructed Language in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract

Most of the time, fantasy literature can be pictured as escapist literature of an illusionary world with an imagined order offering an escape to a secondary world where problems can be confronted and solved. It offers a chance to 'recreate existence' and this desire for a near-perfect world, a secondary, wonderful world, heightened in the wake of the World Wars which catapulted fantasy as a genre in the mainstream literary world. The same was the inspiration behind J.R.R. Tolkien when he wrote his masterpieces The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. For Tolkien, in these secondary or alternate worlds, the presence of fantastic elements and the creation of new languages is the most crucial. This paper will be an attempt to specifically look into the poetics of the constructed languages of modern fantasy literature invented by Tolkien which makes it stand out from other forms of fantasy literature. In the world of modern fantasy, language is used and constructed to bring credibility to the alternate world. It can be seen as a literary device to bring out the magical and mystical elements in the literature. In J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (LOTR) and The Hobbit, we see a secondary world (Middle-Earth) coinciding with the presence of various constructed languages. Tolkien's constructed languages are inspired by a variety of literary traditions and the history of the English language with a harmonious blend of old and new languages.
Keywords: *Fantasy Literature, Tolkien, language, secondary worlds, hobbits*

Most of the time, fantasy literature can be pictured as escapist literature of an illusionary world with an imagined order offering an escape to a secondary world where problems can be confronted and solved. It offers a chance to 'recreate existence' and in some sense discover ways to make the present or the future better. This desire for a near-perfect world, a secondary, wonderful world, heightened in the wake of the World Wars which catapulted fantasy as a genre in the mainstream literary world. The same was the inspiration behind J. R.R. Tolkien when he wrote his masterpieces *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*

Ronald Curran argues that modern fantasy is not an escape through "some sleight-of-hand trick on the sleepy-eyed ego" (Curran 517). It rather reflects a world where the ordinary is suspended and potential ones proliferate. Modern fantasy constructs a world that is strange threatening and discontinuous which provokes fear, anxiety and uncertainty. In this world, as Ronald points out, "the reader is left stranded in a forest of possibility." Then he further states "in this perspective, fantasy literature has the telling birthmark on its shoulder." Ronald quotes Raymond Federman whom describes modern fantasy as 'postmodern' or 'surfiction' (517). The two most decisive characteristics of Fantasy literature, that is the constructed languages and a parallel or secondary world.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his book *Biographia Literaria* defined three terms 'fancy' 'primary' and 'secondary' imagination. We will, however, focus on the 'secondary imagination' which is described as 'a voluntary act of will' found primarily in poets. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate.' Coleridge also distinguishes between 'phantasia' and 'imaginatio' which are active functions of the mind that comprehends and on the other hand, 'imaginatio', the passive function of the mind, receives impressions. (Sammons71).

Tolkien was influenced by the terminology of Coleridge though he had deviated from its meaning. For Tolkien, fantasy is the sub-creative art, it is used in image making and is a natural human activity. His notion of fantastic narrative stems from the powers of vision and sound through words. He describes Imaginationas the "mental power of image-making"("OFS" 59). Verlyn Fleiger talks about Tolkien's inspiration from The Romantic ideas of imagination and how Tolkien differed from Coleridge's idea of "Fancy" and how Tolkien connects Fancy with the

olden word "Fantasy" and combines its power with imagination (Fleiger 25).

The creative process of knitting together the fantastic and the real with that of the parallel world takes recourse to certain strategies like the use of magic, wizards, witches, supernatural or mythical creatures and elements etc. As C. W. Sullivan III in his article "Folklore and Fantastic Literature" writes:

"Some part of the creative process through which the mimetic and the fantastic elements are combined--or reconciled—into a logically-cohesive Secondary World must also include a strategy or strategies by which the reader will be able to connect with, be able to understand and be able to decode any meaning inherent in the story set in that Secondary World and also decode that Secondary World itself " (281).

There are certain common elements in fantasy literature which include consistent use of magic as well as supernatural elements and the presence of the 'virtual' setting primarily drawing on mythology and folklore. The stories and narrative are mostly set against the backdrops which are often medieval in character, accentuated through the specific use of language, clothing, tone etc. as well as some other societal features. However, there is a noticeable difference in the traits, style, and tone of fantasy literature written in the 20th century and the works written before the 20th Century.

For Tolkien, in these secondary or alternate worlds, the presence of fantastic elements and the creation of new languages is the most crucial. Subversion is usedas part of the narrative strategy, executed through the intense manipulation of the lexical and the semantic protocols of language, where the authors are at liberty to transcend the normative proprieties of narrative structures, linguistic expressions and even modes of presentations or story-telling. This has been one of the major obsessions of the authors of modern fantasy.

This paper is an attempt to specifically look into the poetics of the constructed languages of modern fantasy literature invented by Tolkien which makes it stand out from other forms of fantasy literature. It has the objective to focus on the narrative structure, language, coinages of new words and the creation of an alternate or secondary world that have been evolved into tools of transactions between reality and the virtual world.

Language offers endless possibilities to the author to create a space for them. How do we know a world is different from our own? How do we know a world is magical? We can, through language and the surroundings of that world. Tolkien was fascinated by the power and magnificence of written and spoken languages. He was also a philologist, which helped him dig deep into the roots of his inspired languages and create something magical on its own. In fact, according to popular theory language was so significant in his works that he created worlds and characters and a storyline to fit into the languages he constructed.

In the world of modern fantasy, language is used and constructed to bring credibility to the alternate world. It can be seen as a literary device to bring out the magical and mystical elements in the literature. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*(LOTR) and *The Hobbit*, we see a secondary world coinciding with the presence of various constructed languages. Tolkien began to create languages for his secondary world the Middle-earth like 'Goldogrin' and 'Qenya' which later developed into mature languages like 'Quenya' and 'Sindarin' which are languages of the Elves.

As David Salo in his article "The Language of fantasy" states:

"It was not until *The Lord of the Rings* was published in 1954-5 that the public had any idea of the scope of Tolkien's invention. Behind the galaxy of invented nomenclature which readers found (and sometimes stumbled upon), there was a remarkably subtle and detailed construction, not just of a single language, but of an entire language family, with its own self-consistent internal history. *Primitive Quendian*, its more developed descendant, *Common Eldarin*, and its various descendants including *Quenya, Telerin, Sindarin, Ossiriandic*, and *Silvan* share a great deal of basic vocabulary that originates from Quendian roots, but the pronunciation of words varies in predictable ways from language to language, as does the grammar" (N.p).

The paper studies the syntactic features and neologism in the construction of new languages especially in *The Lord of The Rings (LOTR)*and *The Hobbit.* Tolkien's constructed languages are inspired by a variety of literary traditions and the history of the English language with a harmonious blend of old and new languages. Languages create a form of order and disorder in the texts. Tolkien meticulously invented languages so that the readers could escape the banality of reality of a war-torn world and the normal, everyday language. Tolkien's texts have that archaic touch of medieval literature with medieval settings, uses and inversions of old languages. The main characters (especially the Hobbits) are rustic which is apparent from their choice of clothing, food habits and speeches. Gandalf the wizard dress in cloaks and knows about several different languages of Middle earth.

T. Kullmann and D. Siepmann in their book *Tolkien as a Literary Artist,* talk about the archaic quality in *LOTR* which is partly because of three lexical factors like the 'overuse' of words borrowed from nineteenth-century fiction like yonder, gape, thickets, or his use of words like 'valour', valiant', 'corslet' (borrowed from his translation of Beowulf) or avoidance of the words which are associated with the modern world. His use of the words to describe the people of Middle Earth dwarves, herdsmen, lore-masters, gafer, hornblower, horsemen, riders, wolf-riders; dragon, steed which enhances the magical and archaic sense (6). His invented languages consistof new coinage of words, unusual grammatical patterns and the use of some rare words. It is also imperative to notice the tweaking of the spellings of some of the words to fit into his constructed world of Middle Earth. Both the texts *The LOTR*and *The Hobbit*are written in medieval style alluding to early mythological texts like the *Illiad* and the *Kalevala*.

Tolkien produced the literature of Middle Earth in form of three books *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The LOTR*from his inclination to linguistics and his desire to recreate language. Much of Tolkien's youth was spent studying various languages. From an early age, he taught himself Middle English, Greek, Anglo-Saxon (also known as Old English), Welsh and Finnish. He also had knowledge of several other languages like Spanish, Italian, Norwegian, Russian, Swedish, Danish, Dutch and Lombardic. Middle Earth alludes to ancient Europe. Later he was much inspired by the Finnish language which became reflected in his work. In Medieval English there is word 'middle-erde' or the Anglo-Saxon word 'middan-geard' or 'Midgard' in Scandinavian mythology are all influences for the world of Middle Earth. (Neol 6)

Humphrey Carpenter talks about Tolkien's fervour in developing names for his Middle Earth. He would use Sindarin to develop the names. He would frequently create a name, revise it, and formdifferent synonyms in his invented languages. He would constantly analyse his invented names, also from a philological standpoint and study their unique and strange forms (Carpenter 94). The emphasis on the creation of names is important to establish that sense of realism in the invented languages. Tolkien would also use different spellings for some of his mystical characters of Middle Earth. The invention and inversion of spellings are important tools of his literary style (eg; he uses the spelling 'Dwarves' not 'Dwarf' in describing a special race who are short, taller than Hobbits and lives under the mountains guarding enormous treasures).

Ruth S. Noel talks about Tolkien's invented words indicating their meaning through sounds and part of which is done by onomatopoeia. She talks about how Tolkien consciously and unconsciously chooses words which have English equivalents like 'ruth'(anger) sounds like 'wrath', 'lalaith' sounds like 'laughter', ngol (wisdom) sounds like knowledge. Tolkien uses pleasant-sounding words for his characters portrayed in a positive light and harsh-sounding words are reserved for characters and places indicating darkness like 'Orcs', "Moria', 'Mordor'. 'Mordor' is an Old English word which means murder or torment. 'Earendil' in Old English means 'light', 'first dawn' and in Quenya (Elvish) it means 'Lover of the sea' (Neol 60).

He developed Quenya (the language of the Elves) based on the Finnish language and Sindarin (another language of the Elves) based on the Welsh language. Tolkien invents fifteen languages across his legendarium with variations of the Elvish tongue and languages, the Hobbits, Men, Dwarves, Ents, Orcs and other mythical creatures. Tolkien would constantly develop and recreatethe Elvish tongue;which was in a constant state of

change and they diverged in grammar, sound and vocabulary. The growth of Elvish helped him create the tales for *The Silmarillion*. We find the evolution of languages all through *The Silmarillion*. Quenya was the speech of the High Elves initially and some of the High Elves upon travelling west of Middle Earth became the Gray-Elves (Sindar) who later developed and spoke Sindarin.

Tolkien made Elvish one of the most powerful languages of Middle Earth. The power of words is very significant in *LOTR*. Gandalf the wizard,(one of the main characters in both *The Hobbit* and *LOTR*) uses spells and incantations to evoke certain magic in the text, especially when they are in danger. We see all through LOTR, Gandalf is a source of power and saviour through his use of magical words.He uses his power of words to create fire and to ward off the wolves that attacked them in Caradhras. He uses Sindarin to cast his spell.

"Naur an edraith ammen!" (Fire) "Naur dan I ngaurhoth!" (Fire take the werewolves!) (LOTR 389).

While working on the phonetics of such invented languages, Tolkien based his sounds on his inspiration from the Finnish language. Quenya which is based on the Finnish language does not use the letter 'c' except for a few exceptions rather the letter 'k' is used broadly. Tolkien makes use of the Finnish 'k' in *LOTR* and *the Silmarillion*. The letter 'k' is made alien to the Elvish tongue and has the sound of 'k' in 'kin' while it is used for languages like Orkish (the language of the Orcs), Khuzdul (the language of the Dwarves) and Adunaic/ Numenorean (the language of Men). The letter 'kh' has again been used differently in Orkish and Numenorean where it is more like the 'ch' in Scottish 'loch' or the German word 'buch' but not the English word 'church' (Noel 96-97). The invented language/word 'khuzdul' spelt as Khuzdûl in Tolkien's manuscripts and it is composed ofthe roots (kh-z-d, b-n-d, z-g-l) and is written in runes.

Tolkien also uses ancient Anglo-Saxon runes, especially in the drawings of his maps. We find the use of runic symbols and variations and inversion for the alphabet called Cirth or Angerthas which means runes or in literal meaning engraved letters. The runes used in the map of *The Hobbit* are similar to several types of runes used by Old English writers and in a few Germanic languages. Tolkien uses Cirth or runes in his texts as a means to show what his invented languages looked like in the illustrations. Runes in Tolkien can be used to write in Elvish, Dwarvish or also used in English to write the title pages of *LOTR* and *The Silmarillion*. Mostly, runes were used as a written script for Elvish, Black speech and Dwarvish.

Tolkien uses Westron, the language of the hobbits in both *The Hobbit* and *LOTR* as the common language across the texts. The characters mostly correspond in Westron across the texts even among different types of creatures. The 'hobbits' are the original creation of Tolkien and the protagonist of the two texts. Bilbo Baggins is the protagonist in *the Hobbit* and his nephew Frodo takes the part of the lead character in *LOTR.* Tolkien gives a graphic description of hobbits in *The Hobbit*, chapter 1: An Unexpected party. "What is a hobbit?... They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than bearded Dwraves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly." (4).

Tolkien invents about thirty-five various types of creatures, mortal, immortal, magical and monstrous across his legendarium like 'Ents' which are tree-like creatures who are entrusted to protect the forests,'Wargs' who are wolf-like, intelligent creatures, Orcs who are similar to Goblins but separate species, 'Shelob' the huge and fearsome spider are some of the few. He invented fifteen languages all across his legendarium but the complexities of invented languages are hardly present in *the Hobbit,* as the characters don't engage in other languages other than Westron. In *LOTR* everything is recorded in Westron, the common speech or the language of the hobbits. Westron is established as the equivalent of English for the readers as the hypothetical original manuscript of the *LOTR* was in Westron which was foreign to the readers.

In *the Hobbit,* the narrative structure and style are simple and easy for the readers. When we move to *LOTR*the language becomes complex and the plot takes a much more sinister and intricate turn. We find words from his invented languages elaborately included across the text which is divided into three books but it is not a trilogy

but a continuation of one book to the others and is published in three parts.

In the world of modern fantasy, language is used and constructed to bring credibility to the alternate world. It can be seen as a literary device to bring out the magical and mystical element in the literature. In Tolkien's *LOTR* and *The Hobbit*, we see a secondary world coinciding with the presence of various constructed languages.Tolkien also uses European languages and dialects of different periods in the texts emphasing on the inter-relationship of languages across his work. His stories were envisioned to provide historical and cultural insight so that the reader could better understand the languages he created. For Tolkien language creation and myth-making are dependent on creative acts as many of these invented languages are intertwined with his invented secondary world. The invented languages are not random creations but meticulously crafted linguistic recreations and most importantly they lend Tolkien's legendarium a dimension of realism.

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