

**J.R.R.TOLKIEN'S LEGENDARIUM: THE INTERSECTION OF LINGUISTICS,  
MYTH, AND FANTASY****Burieva Nargiza Kuchkarovna***PhD, associate professor Jizzakh state pedagogical university,  
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**Abstract:** This article explores the deep connection between J.R.R. Tolkien's linguistic research and the creation of his Middle-earth legendarium. It examines how Tolkien's early fascination with languages like Old English, Welsh, Finnish, and Gothic influenced his invented tongues and myth-making. Drawing on philological studies and the theoretical work of Owen Barfield, the article highlights language's aesthetic, nominative, accumulative, and myth-creating functions in Tolkien's work. It also situates Tolkien's legendarium within the broader context of 20th-century fantasy literature and cultural studies, emphasizing the role of imagination in bridging ancient mythological consciousness and modern storytelling.

**Keywords:** J.R.R. Tolkien, Middle-earth, linguistic research, invented languages, philology, Old English, Welsh, Finnish, Gothic, myth-making, Owen Barfield, fantasy literature, legendarium, language functions, imagination

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqola J.R.R. Tolkinning lingvistik tadqiqotlari bilan uning O'rta yer afsonalar to'plami yaratilishi o'rtasidagi chuqur bog'liqlikni o'rganadi. Tolkiennig eski ingliz, velsh, fin va got tillariga bo'lgan dastlabki qiziqishi uning ixtiro qilingan tillari va afsonalar yaratilishiga qanday ta'sir qilganini tahlil qiladi. Filologik tadqiqotlar va Owen Barfieldning nazariy ishlari asosida maqola tilning estetik, nom beruvchi, yig'uvchi va afsona yaratuvchi funksiyalarini yoritadi. Shuningdek, Tolkinning afsonalar to'plamini 20-asr fantastika adabiyoti va madaniy tadqiqotlar kontekstida joylashtirib, qadimgi mifologik ong bilan zamonaviy hikoya san'atini bog'lovchi tasavvurni ta'kidlaydi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** J.R.R. Tolkin, O'rta yer, lingvistik tadqiqotlar, ixtiro qilingan tillar, filologiya, eski ingliz, velsh, fin, got, afsona yaratuvchilik, Owen Barfield, fantastika adabiyoti, afsonalar to'plami, til funksiyalari, tasavvur.

**Аннотация:** В данной статье исследуется глубокая связь между лингвистическими исследованиями Дж.Р.Р. Толкина и созданием его легендарiums Средиземья. Анализируется, как ранний интерес Толкина к таким языкам, как староанглийский, валлийский, финский и готский, повлиял на его искусственные языки и мифотворчество. Опираясь на филологические исследования и теоретические работы Оуэна Барфилда, статья выделяет эстетическую, номинативную, аккумуляционную и мифотворческую функции языка в творчестве Толкина. Кроме того, легендарium Толкиена рассматривается в контексте литературы фантастики XX века и культурологических исследований, подчеркивая роль воображения в соединении древнего мифологического сознания и современного повествования.

**Ключевые слова:** Дж.Р.Р.Толкин, Средиземье, лингвистические исследования, искусственные языки, филология, староанглийский, валлийский, финский, готский,

мифотворчество, Оуэн Барфилд, фантастическая литература, легендарииум, функции языка, воображение.

## INTRODUCTION

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was an English writer, poet, and professor of Anglo-Saxon. He is best known as the creator of the cycle of books about Middle-earth, which came to be known as the Legendarium.

It is impossible to pinpoint exactly when the idea of the Legendarium began to take shape, since, according to Tolkien himself, it had existed in his subconscious since childhood. As a young boy, the future writer was fascinated by the fairy tales of George MacDonald and Andrew Lang. These stories about distant, unexplored worlds stirred the boy's imagination and eventually became the foundation for his own fantasies.

His own experiments in fantasy began with attempts to create a new language. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed that the author's linguistic experiments served as the foundation for his creative work. To achieve this goal, the following tasks should be addressed:

- Analyze Tolkien's own linguistic research;
- Trace the origins of influences on his work;
- Identify the characteristic features of the functioning of linguistic means.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To address the stated objectives, the following research methods were used: biographical, historical-cultural, comparative, and hermeneutic. The theoretical foundation includes works by both Russian and foreign literary scholars, such as J.R.R. Tolkien by S. Alekseev, The Road to Middle-earth by T. Shippey, and J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography by H. Carpenter [1; 4; 12].

The findings of this research can be used as material for specialized courses on 20th-century foreign literature and cultural studies.

Mabel Tolkien taught her children to read from an early age and, noticing Ronald's interest, began introducing him to the basics of Latin. For his curious mind, this was not enough, so the boy started inventing new words for the various phenomena around him. For example, by analogy with the word "somebody", he coined the word "youbody" to mean "some-you" [8, p. 701]. The number of ideas grew, and the game was no longer seen as something insignificant.

Already in King Edward's School, John Ronald was deliberately writing full phrases in languages unknown to anyone and was the top student in Ancient Greek and Latin. At the same time, he also began studying Old English, Norse, and Welsh. Together with his friends Rob Gilson, Geoffrey Smith, and Christopher Wiseman, Tolkien founded a secret society called the TCBS (Tea Club and Barrovian Society), whose goal was to change the world through art. Tolkien saw his contribution primarily in the realm of linguistic experimentation and his early poetic works.

"Returning, if I may, to the human touches and the question of when I began all this — it's like asking someone where language itself comes from. It is an inevitable development, though shaped by external circumstances, of something innate from birth. It has always been with me: a sensitivity to linguistic patterns that affect my emotions like color or music; a passionate love for all things that grow; and a deep response to legends (for lack of a better word) that contain what I would call the north-western temper and atmosphere. In any case, if you want to write that kind of story, you must go back to the roots..."

— wrote Tolkien in a letter to the English poet W. H. Auden [ibid., p. 356].

A love for language study determined the writer's future path. In 1913, he enrolled at Exeter College, Oxford University, initially in the Classics department, later transferring to the more suitable Faculty of English Language and Literature. As a student, Tolkien not only enjoyed learning new languages (he studied German, Latin, French, and Greek simultaneously), but also exploring works written in ancient tongues.

One of his professors, George Brewerton, noticing this interest, gave the young man a textbook on the Anglo-Saxon language, the study of which was not part of the required curriculum. Upon close examination, Old English poetry and the literature of medieval England reminded him of the dialect spoken by his mother's ancestors [4, p. 42]. Thus, the future of the writer was determined — he would go on to dedicate his academic career to the study and teaching of Anglo-Saxon.

Tolkien's interest extended beyond just the Anglo-Saxon language. In order to read the poem *Kalevala*, he studied the basics of Finnish grammar. Finnish would later serve as the prototype for the language of the Dwarves. The Elvish language Sindarin, on the other hand, was based on grammatical structures borrowed from Welsh.

Referring to Tolkien's lecture *English and Welsh* [11], one may assume that in creating his languages, the writer focused primarily on the external form of words rather than their internal meaning. For instance, when describing the Welsh language, Tolkien wrote:

"I will not now attempt to explain what I mean by calling a language as a whole 'beautiful,' or what precisely it is that makes Welsh beautiful to me, since for my conclusion it is sufficient to state the personal, subjective, if you will, experience of a strong aesthetic pleasure derived from the Welsh language — whether I hear it or read it" [ibid., p. 196].

In his lecture, while explaining the subjective reasons for his perception of the Welsh language, Tolkien also pointed to one of the motivations behind creating new languages:

"Most English-speaking people, for instance, will admit that cellar door is beautiful, especially if dissociated from its sense (and its spelling). More beautiful than, say, sky, and far more beautiful than beautiful. Well, in Welsh I find an extraordinary number of such 'cellar doors'; and beyond that, on a higher plane, a wealth of word-forms that are pleasing in their connection of sound and sense." [ibid., p. 198]

Thus, the Elvish language — created based on Welsh — captivated the author primarily through its sound. Evidence of this can be found in the poetry written in Sindarin. While some songs were presented in *The Lord of the Rings* [7] along with translations, the song "A Elbereth Gilthoniel," which is dedicated to the goddess of light Elbereth, is given only in Elvish. This emphasizes the aesthetic function of the language.

Another language Tolkien used in his linguistic experiments was Gothic. In particular, its roots can be found in the dialect spoken by the rulers of Rohan (Ristan) before the rise of the Éorlings, whose language was based on Old English. In this way, the author emphasized the idea that the land had once been inhabited by a different civilization with its own culture, traces of which could still be detected in the modern speech of the Rohirrim.

In *The History of the Goths* by Jordanes [3], there is an account of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, where the Gothic king Theodoric was trampled to death by his own cavalry. Tolkien describes a similar death for the Rohirrim king Théoden during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. Tolkien was drawn to the Gothic language and Gothic culture primarily because it was the first Germanic language to be recorded in written form. Through the study of Gothic, philologists were able to trace the development of the modern English language based on linguistic kinship.

Tolkien closely followed all new research on the Gothic language, and in his classes, students studied Gothic “as a primary source of poetic inspiration, just as it was for the ancient English and Scandinavians” [15, p. XCVII].

Thus, the use of Gothic reflected the accumulative function of language.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experiments continued but were considered merely a pastime of a philology student. Everything changed when some words required a context: Tolkien decided to create stories in which he could use the various speech constructions he invented based on the languages he studied. In a conversation with his close friend C.S. Lewis, he admitted that he had “discovered that it is impossible to invent a language without simultaneously inventing a mythology” [1, p. 36].

By synthesizing elements from different languages, Tolkien created new words and phrases that needed tangible representations. Since these could not be found in reality, Tolkien began to create them himself, in his imagination. In total, Tolkien created five artificial languages spoken by his characters: “I am a philologist, and all my works are philological in nature” [8, p. 362].

The English version of the fantasy genre, within which Tolkien’s secondary world was created, was theoretically shaped during meetings of the Inklings—a literary club founded by Tolkien and Lewis along with their colleagues from Oxford. The theorist of the Inklings was Owen Barfield—a poet, writer, and philosopher, recognized as the “first and last Inklings.” His contribution to the development of the fantasy genre lies not only in defining the concept but also in understanding modern myth-making as a whole.

In his works *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (1928) and *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (1957), Barfield argued that myth is “the product of the mental labor of humanity from the dawn of time” [6, p. 384]. According to him, myth reflects the direct perception of an ensouled world. This ensoulment is conveyed through the meanings of words as reflections of attitudes toward natural (literal meaning) and supernatural (figurative meaning) forces.

In this context, myth originated before the rise of civilizations, when human consciousness was different and characterized by what Barfield called “original participation.” Modern humans have lost this kind of understanding of the world, and its echoes are reflected in myth.

Barfield’s idea traces back to the philosophy of French philosopher and ethnologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and his theory of the law of mystical participation (participation mystique). In his work *Primitive Thinking* (1922), Lévy-Bruhl suggested that the thinking of ancient humans was based on identifying objects of different orders with one another, which also allowed the same object to be represented in several places simultaneously.

According to Barfield’s theory, the human world was inhabited by “others” — beings that humans contrasted with themselves — animals, trees, plants, various experiences, and phenomena. In human understanding, everything, like the human being himself, was alive. From this arises the modern understanding of the concept of deity, which Barfield consciously avoids because, in his theory, all things are equal and no hierarchy exists. Simply put, humans felt the presence of a living soul in these very “others.”

It is important to note that the “soul” was not perceived by humans as a separate entity; rather, it was an unknown category distinguishing the living from the non-living. These souls existed throughout the world in relationships of participation. Through this participation, humans of ancient times connected their lives with the rest of the world; through participation, all elements of the world were present alongside one another and interacted:

“Participation is a supersensory relationship between a person and a phenomenon” [13, p. 40].



Reflecting these relationships, the original myth embodied a multiplicity of meanings that modern consciousness tries to grasp and decipher. Similarly, ancient words contained several meanings that today are considered distinct. Thus, language at its early stages primarily embodied the literal meaning of words, since abstract concepts did not exist in human consciousness:

“Mythology is the ghost of a concrete meaning” [Ibidem, p. 92].

As an example, Barfield cites the concept of “soul” (“pneuma”), which was originally understood simultaneously as “breath,” “life,” “wind,” “air,” and “spirit.”

The philosopher argued that the divide between ancient and modern consciousness could not be bridged by reason alone, as scholars had previously attempted, but rather through imagination, which would lead to a balance between human self-awareness and the world perceived by it. In his concept, this synthesis was called “final participation.”

Barfield primarily emphasized that the creation of a modern myth by an author is only possible if one abstracts away from all kinds of abstract ideas. At its core, myth is concrete and therefore as far removed as possible from metaphor and allegory. To support this view, he cited phenomena of language and the theory of a single universal language.

The unity of sound and meaning in words made it possible to find a material embodiment of the human mind — speech. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his work *On Music and Words*, explained this synthesis by stating that human sensations are first reflected in the speaker’s intonation, which then gives rise to the sound of specific words.

The gap between the meaning of a word and its sound, which has occurred in modern times, is due to the separation between its inner content and its external form, a process in which scientific and technological progress plays a significant role.

Thus, in his scholarly research, Owen Barfield sought to show that humanity, increasingly distancing itself from nature—the primary source of creative energy—“limits itself within the narrow confines of metaphorical thinking and idolatry” [14, p. 5].

Tolkien came to the same conclusion in his youth, as modernization and urbanization increasingly took over more territory, thereby taking away places cherished from childhood memories. The idea of the negative impact of progress fully took shape during World War I, when scientific and technological advancements in the form of new types of weapons caused the deaths of many people.

Barfield’s theory broadened Tolkien’s understanding of a return to natural roots, which also found expression in the creation of the world of Middle-earth. Any tools and weapons used by the protagonists were forged by hand, while the dark forces relied on military technology to equip their armies.

But what Tolkien liked most was the idea of the intersection between language and myth. At the same time as the founding of the Inklings club, Tolkien was in the process of searching for ways to develop his languages. Therefore, the desire to recreate an originally English mythology found practical expression in his linguistic experiments.

It was at the Inklings meetings that, intentionally, the first serious works—according to the author himself—were brought to life, such as the story of Beren and Lúthien, *The Children of Húrin*, excerpts from *The Ainulindalë*, as well as a playful tale about a small and unassuming hobbit. These had not yet formed a unified cycle about Middle-earth at that time, but the very idea of his own mythology had firmly taken root in the writer’s soul.

Oxford professor of Old English language and poetry Tom Shippey, in his work *The Road to Middle-earth*, called Tolkien's entire multi-volume work a "philosophical-linguistic epic," noting that "philology is the only suitable guide to Middle-earth" [12, p. 16].

Deliberate simplicity and etymological multidimensionality coexisted in the creation of new words, which is most evident when analyzing the toponyms of Middle-earth, where names such as the Hill or the Long Lake stand alongside major human settlements like Gondor or Rohan, each having their own translations in other languages of Tolkien's world, thereby revealing the nominative function of language.

Rohan, also known as the Riddermark, is the name of the Land of Riders in Westron (the common tongue), while the Rohirrim themselves called their lands the Mark. Shippey considered two possible sources for the borrowing of this toponym: the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, in whose territory Tolkien's native Birmingham was located; and the common name "Mierce," used by the neighboring West Saxons for all Anglo-Saxon lands, which was meant to be pronounced as "Mark" or "Marka" [Ibid., p. 58].

"But one should not think that philologists, in chasing details, neglect the author's intent and thereby differ from literary critics. Their profession simply requires them to pay attention not only to the behavior of a word in its immediate context but also to its roots, its equivalents in other languages, its relatives and descendants, as well as the cultural metamorphoses that the history of a given word may reveal," wrote Shippey, pointing out that understanding the characters' images requires attention to their speech [Ibid., p. 79].

As an example, one can consider the development of the main character in the tale *The Hobbit*, or *There and Back Again* — Bilbo. Throughout the narrative, Bilbo's speech pattern remains unchanged, thus portraying him as a simple and guileless character: "You see, it's a completely unbearable situation. I'm personally quite tired of it. I'd like to be back at home in the West, where the people are not so stubborn" [10, p. 32]. However, this does not mean that his character remains static. This is evidenced by his monologue upon the death of the leader of their company, the dwarf Thorin Oakenshield: "Farewell, King under the Mountain. Truly a sad adventure that must end so; and no mountain of gold is worth it. Yet I'm glad I shared its hardships with you — that's more than any Baggins has deserved" [Ibid., p. 49].

Thus, passing through a series of trials, the small hobbit undergoes an initiation and becomes a true hero. The story begins and ends with a tea scene. But whereas at the very beginning Bilbo was quite displeased with unexpected guests, at the end of his journey he is genuinely happy to see his friends. Despite the internal changes the hero undergoes, Tolkien's beloved character remains just as simple-hearted, exclaiming at the arrival of guests: "That's nice!" [Ibid., p. 53].

The image of the main character, as well as the entire tale, reveals Tolkien's key stylistic innovation as a writer. This innovation later became the foundation for all his creative work. C. S. Lewis called this technique the "shift of tone" [Quoted in: 5, p. 49], which is explained by the transition from everyday, mundane storytelling to the epic, and a return to the original beginning — as if "There and Back Again." Such a "shift of tones" can be observed both in individual works (the same pattern of journey and hero's development in *The Lord of the Rings*) and throughout the entire concept of the *Legendarium*: from the children's story about a little hobbit to the grand mythological canvas depicted in *The Silmarillion* [9], which is built on influences and borrowings from ancient cultures, most notably seen in the creation of artificial languages.

Tolkien's own personal experiences became the foundation for many stories in the *Legendarium*. For example, the story of his own love is reflected in the tale of Beren and

Lúthien, while the death of his father and the subsequent sleep (the “Atlantis complex”) found their logical conclusion in the story of the fall of Númenor. However, Tolkien never set out merely to describe his own life. As the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze asserted, “to write is not to tell one’s memories, journeys, loves, and griefs, one’s dreams and obsessions. That would mean committing the sin of excess realism or imagination” [2, p. 15]. By coexisting in balance, the author’s fantasy and life experience, synthesized together, made it possible to create a world where invented languages could acquire meaning.

Shippey noted that all the phenomena of Middle-earth, as products of Tolkien’s philological research, were primarily born under the influence of the philological discoveries of the 19th century [12, p. 37]. The century preceding Tolkien’s work was characterized by a vast number of discoveries of linguistic laws, such as Kuhn’s law, Grimm’s law, Werner’s law, and so on. A natural result of this was the growing popularity of lectures on comparative philology, which sparked interest not only among scholars but throughout London’s high society: “The English word invention (meaning ‘invention, fabrication’) originates, as is well known, from the Latin *invenire* — ‘to find.’ Once upon a time, invention also meant ‘discovery,’ which Tolkien was perfectly aware of. If someone were to say that the foundation of 19th-century philology was the invention (finding, discovery) of languages, they would not be straying from the truth at all. Tolkien often engaged in wordplay, comparing the languages he invented with those that were ‘discovered’ or reconstructed by scholars worldwide. In doing so, he aligned himself with his own professional heritage... Tolkien’s personal history here appears simply as a separate, concrete embodiment of the same overarching generalized idea looming in the background” [Ibid., p. 38].

Thus, Tolkien’s Middle-earth was created based on invented languages; however, it was only through the creation of this secondary world that these languages gained their vitality:

“Writing is a process of becoming that is never finished and is always in a state of doing, transcending any inhabited or experienced material. It is a process—that is, a transition of Life passing through the inhabited and experienced. Literature is inseparable from becoming: in the act of writing, one becomes a woman, becomes an animal, a plant, becomes a molecule up to the point of becoming indistinguishable. These becomings interlock with one another, following, as in Le Clézio’s novel, some special line, or coexist on all levels, following, as in Lovecraft’s mighty work, through doors, thresholds, and passages that make up an entire universe” [2, p. 25].

The philological principles that underlie Tolkien’s poetological features are described in essays such as “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,” “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” “English and Welsh,” “On Fairy-Stories,” and “The Secret Vice.” All these lectures, later published in the collection “Beowulf and the Critics and Other Essays,” highlight the linguistic nature of his research. In particular, the essay on Beowulf includes a detailed analysis of the poem’s translation and its meter. What began as philological analyses laid the foundation for Tolkien’s own fantastic stories, whose theoretical justification was presented in “The Secret Vice” and “On Fairy-Stories.” In this context, language performs aesthetic, accumulative, and nominative functions. Theoretical reflections by O. Barfield played a significant role in the development of Tolkien’s work. His idea of the intersection between language and myth became the key to understanding not only Tolkien’s Legendarium but also C. S. Lewis’s fantasy cycle The Chronicles of Narnia, who, alongside Tolkien, is considered a founder of the English variant of the genre.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, in addition to the functions mentioned above, language performs a myth-making function, the fulfillment of which can be traced throughout Tolkien's entire body of work. This function places reality and fiction on equal footing. The secondary reality created on the pages of his works, despite its fictional foundation, has roots that reach back to the period before the dawn of civilization. Therefore, only the myth-making function of language is capable of bridging the gap between meaning-making elements that have since given rise to modern existential problems. The global problems of the universe, which originate in language, cannot be comprehended through reason alone but require imagination. By constructing a worldview that spans from mythological consciousness to historical time, Tolkien fills a gap in the history of his own country, reinterpreting human development through artistic invention. The *Legendarium* is a complete system in which the author not only follows ancient traditions but also revives and transforms them, creating a synthesis of archaic elements with later narrative techniques inherited within the stream of English culture.

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