

A COMMENTARY ON J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S
TENGWAR TRANSCRIPTION OF
NAMÁRIË

BY
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Note: This revision is admittedly long overdue. I have decided to revise the style of the text to make it less idiosyncratic and corrected inadvertent errors that came out subsequently, as well as new information that came out.

INTRODUCTION

Back in 1968, *The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle*, a collection of musical pieces for piano by musicologist Donald Swann, with words by J.R.R. Tolkien from his works *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* was published. This book proved to be of interest to those who study the Elvish languages as it contained notes written by Tolkien concerning the song-poems *Namárië* and *A Elbereth Gilthoniel*, as well as their rendering in *tengwar*. In fact, prior to the publication of the King's Letter in *Sauron Defeated*, the rendering of *Namárië* in *tengwar* was the longest text in Elvish script made by Tolkien of the Eldarin languages.¹



For reference, here is its transliteration, corresponding to the words of the *Tengwar* version.

NAMÁRIË

Altariello nainië Loriendesse

Ai laurië lantar lassi súrinen · yéni únótime ve
rámar aldaron! · Yéni ve linte yuldar avánier ·
mí oromardi lissemiruvóreva · Andúne pella Vardo
tellumar · nu luini yassen tintilar i eleni ·
ómaryo airitárilírinen ::

Sí man i yulma nin enquantuva? ::

An sí Tintalle Varda Oiolossëo · ve fanyar máryat
Elentári ortane · ar ilye tier unduláve lumbule ·
ar sindanóriello caita mornie · i falmalinnar
imbe met · ar hísie untúpa Calaciryo míri oiale: sí
vanwa ná Rómello vanwa Valimar!

Namárië! Nai hiruváye Valimar!

Nai elye hiruva! Namárië ::

Helge Fauskanger had already written an excellent line-by-line exegesis of *Namárië* in his *Ardalambion* website,⁴ so I deem it unnecessary to repeat much of it here. However, delving in etymological analysis in many instances is inadvertent, if only to prove point or justification. Therefore, this commentary can be regarded as supplement to Helge's article.

It is assumed that the reader is familiar with Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings*, in particular the forms of the *tengwar* and their corresponding names, and their values in Quenya.

COMMENTARY

Namárië: The word, as rendered in *Tengwar*, already tells us three things: first, that in Quenya the *tengwa* (consonant letter) is written first, then the following vowel sign or diacritic (*ómatehta*) is written above the consonant. Therefore to Quenya in *Tengwar* script one would read each *tengwa*, then the *ómatehta* above it (in an upward motion), before proceeding to the next *tengwa/ómatehta* combination.

Second, whenever a long vowel follows the *tengwa*, as in the case of the second *a* in *Namárië*, this is written as an *ómatehta* over a single long carrier, which is the usually the preferred way to write it. For an alternate way to express a long vowel, see commentary under the entry *yéni*.

Third, in the case of dissyllabic vocalic clusters as in *-ie* the first *ómatehta* is written above the preceding *tengwa*, and then the next vowel sign is written above a single short carrier.

Altariello: Because this word begins with a vowel, the *Tengwar* script version begins with the vowel diacritic for *a* written above a short carrier. Note that in the original version the *a*-diacritic is simplified to look like a circumflex.

The obvious reason for this is that writing three dots with a nib pen would be difficult if one is writing small letters and even smaller diacritics; but Tolkien also wrote that this practice was common among scribes because the *a*-sound occurs so frequently that writing the simplified form is much more convenient, especially if one is in a hurry — or if no confusion would occur, eliminated altogether. Tolkien gives the word *calma* “lamp” as an example: one can actually dispense with writing the *a*-diacritic altogether (𐌚𐌗𐌚), because the word *calama* does not exist.

It is also in this word that we first encounter the use of the under-stroke under a *tengwa* to indicate that the consonant is doubled: 𐌗 = *ll*.⁵

nainië: This word illustrates that diphthongs — in this case *ai* — are written by writing the *preceding* vowel sign over the following semi-vowel *tengwa*, in this case the *tengwa yanta*. Such is also the case with the interjection *ai!* But not always so; see the commentary under **caita**. See also **laurië**.

laurië: As in the entry *nainië* above, the diphthong *au* is written with the vowel sign for *a* above the semi-vowel *tengwa úre*.

lantar: This is the first time that one encounters the *tengwa óre* representing *r*, whereas *r* in the words *Namárië*, *Lóriendesse* and *laurie* above is represented by *rómen*. The latter letter is a modification of *óre*, used originally to represent a trilled *r*, while *óre* was used to represent a weak (untrilled) *r*, originally occurring in Quenya. However, as Tolkien noted, this distinction was later lost, and the *r*-sound is trilled in all positions and not lost pre-consonantly. In theory, therefore, one can use either *óre* or *rómen* to represent *r* in any position, but in practice among scribes to use *óre* to represent pre-consonantal and final *r*, while *rómen* is used to represent intervocalic *r*.⁶

lassi: Note here that Tolkien used the usual *ómatehta* for *e* to represent *i* in this case. Although this is allowed, the use of one or the other should be consistent throughout.

súrinen: I have written before that the *s* in *súrinen* should have been rendered with the *tengwa súle* (older *thúle*), not *silme*. I had made this assumption because of the existence of the root THŪ “blow”.⁷ However, it turns out that there exists a variant stem SŪ “wind”,⁸ therefore the use of *silme* is indeed correct.

Yéni: This is the first time one encounters the *tengwa anna* with *y*-diacritic written below the letter to represent consonantal *y*. The *tengwa anna* does have any value in Quenya though in early Quenya it had the value of the back spirant ʒ, which later became lost.⁹ But by the Third Age this had the value of consonantal *y* when combined with the *y*-diacritic: 𐌚.

The other way to write a long vowel in diacritic-style *tengwar* is to write the vowel twice over the preceding *tengwa*. This is usually practiced when writing long *e*, less usual when writing long *o* and *u* (as in the Ring-inscription), but never with *a* and *i*. But in the other occurrence of *yéni* in the poem, Tolkien wrote long *e* by using the long carrier.

únótime: This word, like *Altariello* above, begins with a vowel, but this time, beginning with a long carrier.

ve: The use of the *tengwa vala* here suggests that it descended from a primitive form **bē*. However, Tolkien variously derived *ve* from *wē* or *vai* as well.¹⁰

rámar: The long carrier in this case (indicating that the *a* above the *tengwa rómen* is long) can be seen below the letter.

avánier: The word *avánier* is the plural perfect form of the verb *auta-* “go away, leave (the point of the speaker’s thought)”; in turn this is descended from the root *AWA*.¹¹ So it stands to reason then that the *v* in *avánier*, written with the *tengwa vala* (said to represent *v* that descended from primitive *b*), should instead be written with the *tengwa vilya* (*v* from primitive *w*, though it still represents *w* when it occurs in later Quenya), thus: $\hat{\text{r}}\hat{\text{a}}\hat{\text{m}}\hat{\text{a}}\hat{\text{r}}$.¹²

mí: As in *lassi* above, Tolkien used the *ómatehta* that usually represents *e*.

lisse-miruvóreva: It has been determined that the possessive-adjective suffix *-va* is an allomorphic form of *-wa* as in *hwesta sindarinwa*. Therefore the *v* here should be written with a *vilya*: $\hat{\text{m}}\hat{\text{i}}\hat{\text{s}}\hat{\text{s}}\hat{\text{e}}\hat{\text{m}}\hat{\text{i}}\hat{\text{r}}\hat{\text{u}}\hat{\text{v}}\hat{\text{o}}\hat{\text{r}}\hat{\text{e}}\hat{\text{v}}\hat{\text{a}}$.

Iuini: Note here that the diphthong *ui* is written with the *ómatehta* for *u* above the semi-vowel *tengwa yanta*.

ómaryo: Note here that Tolkien omitted the *y*-diacritic below the *tengwa rómen* (which he repeated in *maryat*).

enquantuva: The phoneme *nqu* (*nkw*) is written with the *tengwa unque*. While this may be correct, it is my opinion that it should be written with a *númen* and a *quesse*. The reason for this is in order for the reader to be aware that *enquantuva* is a compound of *en-* “re-, again” and *quantuva*, the future tense form of *quanta-* “fill”.¹³ The use of two *tengwar* instead of one preserves this construction, thus: $\hat{\text{e}}\hat{\text{n}}\hat{\text{q}}\hat{\text{u}}\hat{\text{a}}\hat{\text{n}}\hat{\text{t}}\hat{\text{u}}\hat{\text{v}}\hat{\text{a}}$.

The use of *vala* in *enquantuva* suggests that the future tense suffix *-uva* has **-ubā* as its ulterior form.¹⁴

Oiolossëo: The diphthong *oi* is written with the *ómatehta* for *o* above the semi-vowel *tengwa yanta*.

ar: This suggests — and confirmed in later published material — that the conjunction is descended from Common Eldarin *AS*.¹⁵

sindanóriello: Note here that Tolkien used the *tengwa silme nuquerna* to represent *s*. This is often used to accommodate *tehtar* written above the letter when it otherwise cannot be seen or discerned if the normal form of *silme* is used. However, *silme* should not have been used — *nuquerna* or otherwise — to represent *s*; the word *sinda* or *sinde* is derived from the base *THIN-*, thus the use of *súle/thúle* instead of *silme* in this case: $\hat{\text{s}}\hat{\text{i}}\hat{\text{n}}\hat{\text{d}}\hat{\text{a}}\hat{\text{n}}\hat{\text{o}}\hat{\text{r}}\hat{\text{i}}\hat{\text{e}}\hat{\text{l}}\hat{\text{l}}\hat{\text{o}}$.

caita: Note here that the diphthong *ai* in this case is written with the *a*-diacritic above the *tengwa calma*, followed by the semi-vowel *yanta*.

hísie: The *s* here should not be written with a *silme* (or again in this case, a *silme nuquerna*), but rather with a *súle/thúle*, as the word *hísie* (S. *hith*) is descended from a base KHITH- (cf. *Hísime* = S. *Hithui*, the name of the eleventh month of the Númenórean calendar). Thus it should be rendered as *λjśí*.¹⁶

vanwa: Like *avánier* above, this is derived from AWA. Therefore the *v* should be written with a *vilya*, not a *vala*, thus: *ṽṽṽ*. Note also that Tolkien used the tengwar *númen* and *vilya* to represent the digraph *nw*. One could have used the tengwa *nwalme* instead, but strictly speaking, this can only be used to represent the sound *ñw* (< **ηgw*).

Aside from this, note also that Tolkien used “Quenya capitals” when writing proper nouns such as *Varda*, *Oiolosse*, *Andúne*, *Rómen*, *Valimar*. It is also in this poem that some Tengwar punctuation marks have become known for the first time. Tolkien used the symbol *Ḃ* to represent the query mark, and *Ḣ* to represent the exclamation point.

NOTES

- 1 Facsimiles of the letter (both in diacritic mode and in the Mode of Beleriand (MoB)) can be found in IX:130-131. But I would like to take this opportunity to comment on this transcription as well: in the *tengwar* version of *A Elbereth Gilthoniel* (using the Mode of Beleriand) as well as the Moria-gate inscription, *ṽ* represents *n* (*ṽ* being *nn*), but in the MoB version of the King’s Letter, *ṽ* was used to represent *r* as well, thus *ṽṽṽṽṽ* = Elessar.
- 2 The dust cover is a scan of the First Edition. The Second and Third Editions have a different color scheme and appearance but retain the *tengwar* text. It must be noted that the page references in this article are of the First Edition.
- 3 In the first version of my rendering of the text, I used Måns Björkman’s *Tengwar Parmaite* font as Johann Winge’s font was of yet unavailable. The editors of *Vinyar Tengwar* likewise use Winge’s font.
- 4 The URL is <http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf/namarie.htm>.
- 5 Compare this to the Moria-gate inscription, where *ll* is rendered as two *lambi* as seen in *mellon* “friend”: *ṽṽṽṽṽ*.
- 6 But strangely enough, if one would write the word *óre* in *tengwar*, *rómen* is used to represent *r*, and not the *tengwa óre*! See *The Lord of the Rings* p. 1088 s.v. *R*, and *ibid.* pp. 1094 and 1095.
- 7 See V:393, s.v. THŪ.
- 8 See VT47:35.
- 9 See esp. VT39:17 note 2.
- 10 See VT49:10,32 and PE17:189.
- 11 See XI:366.

- 12 Tolkien wrote: “Both *v* and *w* are used in the transcription of Quenya, in spite of the assimilation of its spelling in Latin, since the two sounds, distinct in origin, both occurred in the language.” *The Lord of the Rings* p. 1088 s.v. *W*.
- 13 Both the verbs *quanta-* and *quat-* coexist to mean fill, the former the verbal derivative of the adjectival form *quanta* “full, filled”. Furthermore it seems that *quanta-* is the more usual form of the verb. See PE17:68.
- 14 This is confirmed in VT48:32, continuation of note 15, wherein the future suffix *-uva* is sometimes (but not always associated) with a base UB “have in mind”.
- 15 See VT43:30. Also VT47:31, note 44 and VT48:32, continuation of note 15.
- 16 This opinion is shared by Jim Allan and many other scholars. See for example, *An Introduction to Elvish*, p. 244.