

A Glossary of Elvish Terms in *Fragments on Elvish Reincarnation*

by Carl F. Hostetter

Introduction

The following is a glossary of Elvish terms encountered in a collection of late notes by J.R.R. Tolkien (spanning the late 1950s to 1972) concerning Elvish reincarnation and related metaphysical matters, and recently published by editor Michaël Devaux as *Fragments on Elvish Reincarnation* in the volume *J.R.R. Tolkien, l'effigie des Elfes (La Feuille de la Compagnie, Cahier d'études tolkieniennes, N° 3; Paris, Bragelonne, 2014; pp. 94-161)*. Dr. Devaux invited me to prepare this glossary, and incorporated its contents, in French translation and with expansions, into his commentary on Tolkien's texts (see pp. 41-47). I provide here my original English text, for those who (like myself) do not read French with facility.

It should be noted that I made this glossary some years ago, before the publication of certain other texts by Tolkien that cite or bear on some of these same forms; particularly:

- *mene* 'proceed' and **mēnie* 'determination' (in the phrase *á mene ammēnie* 'proceed with more determination', PE17:94), and the base √MEN- 'have as object, (in)tend, proceed, make for, go towards' (PE17:93); suggesting that *ermenie* (q.v.) may convey a sense of intentionality that its English gloss "one beginning" otherwise does not.
- *nasse* 'a person, an individual' (VT49:30); and *nassentar* 'their true-being' (PE17:174), which can be analyzed as *nasse* 'true-being' + 3rd pl. poss. *-nta* 'their' + pl. *-r*).

Glossary

All forms are Quenya, unless otherwise noted.

- **erma** ‘primary substance’ appears to be a noun derived from the Eldarin base ER ‘one, single, alone’ (VT42:10, 24). Tolkien draws a sharp distinction between the bases ER and MIN ‘one, first of a series’, stating specifically that ER “cannot be used for ‘first’” and “was not used in counting in series” (ibid.). This distinction seems to have been made throughout Tolkien’s long development of his languages, even from the earliest *Qenya Lexicon*, which gives the root ERE⁽¹⁾ ‘remain alone’ with derivatives *er* ‘only, but, still’ and *eresse* ‘singly, only, alone’, etc. (PE12:36). *The Etymologies* gives a similar base, ERE- ‘be alone, deprived’, whence *er* ‘one, alone’, *erya* ‘single, sole’, etc. (V:356). The ending *-ma* is found most frequently in concrete nouns derived from verbal bases, such as *calma* ‘a light, lamp’ < KAL- ‘shine’ (V:362), *harma* ‘treasure, a treasured thing’ < 3AR- ‘have, hold’, *parma* ‘book’ < PAR- ‘compose, put together’ (V:380), *tyulma* ‘mast’ < TYUL- ‘stand up (straight)’ (V:395), etc.; but *-ma* is also used to derive nouns from nominal and (as here) adjectival bases, such as *hwarma* ‘crossbar’ < SKWAR- ‘crooked’ (V:386), *kulum* ‘an orange’ < KUL- ‘golden-red’ (V:365), and *talma* ‘base, foundation, root’ < TAL- ‘foot’ (V:390); and it is probably cognate with the neuter pronoun *ma* ‘something, a thing’ (VT42:34 n.3). Therefore, *erma* is perhaps best understood as literally the ‘one’ or ‘single thing’, or less literally as the ‘homogeneous, undifferentiated substance’ of the initial state of Creation. Cf. *erma* ‘(basic) matter’, X:338; also cf. VT34:13, 29.
- *ermenie* is referred to as the ‘one beginning’ from which all life proceeds. The initial element *er-* ‘one, single’ is identical with that in *erma* (q.v.); while *menie* is most likely the gerundial form of a verb **men-* derived from the base $\sqrt{\text{men}}$ ‘move, proceed’ (VT41:6); cf. *en-yalië* ‘re-calling’ < *yal-* ‘summon’ (UT:317 n.43). Therefore, *ermenie* is perhaps literally the ‘one’ or ‘single moving’. As such, it bears a striking resemblance to the *Primum Mobile* ‘Prime Mover’ or ‘First Cause’ of Aristotelian metaphysics. (It should be noted that there is an identical, and probably related, ending *-ie* seen in abstract nouns derived from basic verbs — such as *lätie* ‘openness’, VT39:33, and cf. LAT- ‘lie open’, V:368; *nāmie* ‘a single judgement or desire’, VT41:13, and cf. the aorist verb *namin* ‘I judge’, ibid. and p. 18; and *sangie* ‘necessity’ < *thag-* ‘oppress, crush, press’, VT44:8, 23 — but as these examples show, the lack of a long root vowel in *menie*, which would be expected in an abstract noun in *-ie* derived from $\sqrt{\text{men}}$, sc. **ménie*, favors the interpretation of *menie* as a gerund).

- *estel* ‘trust, faith’; see X:320, 332, 338.
- *fëa* (pl. *fëar*) ‘soul, indwelling spirit, of an incarnate being’; see X:349, 470.
- *Imbar* “‘The Habitation’, the Earth’ < MBAR- ‘dwell, inhabit’ (V:372); see X:337.
- *nassë* ‘material’ (pl. *nassi*) appears to be a noun derived from the Eldarin base *NĀ*²- ‘be’, whence also the noun *nat* ‘thing’ (V:374). The derivative ending *-sse* is found in both concrete and abstract nouns, such as *aikasse* ‘mountain peak’ < AYAK- ‘sharp, pointed’ (whence also Q *aika* ‘sharp’; V:349); *eresse* ‘solitude’ < ERE- ‘be alone, deprived’ (V:356); *erkasse* ‘holly’ < ERÉK- ‘thorn’ (V:356); *handasse* ‘intelligence’ < KHAN- ‘understand, comprehend’ (V:363); etc.
- *únehtar* (pl. noun) are said to be the “smallest quantities possible in which the interior pattern that distinguishes [a *nassë*] from other *nassi* is exhibited”. The initial element *ú-* of this noun appears to be the prefix *ú-*, denoting impossibility; cf. the noun *únat* ‘a thing impossible to be or to be done’ (VT39:26), and the adjectives *úquetima* ‘unspeakable, impossible to say, put into words, or unpronounceable’ (WJ:370 s.v. *ABA) and *únótima* ‘not possible to count, countless’ (VT39:14 s.v. *ú*). The element *nehta-* appears to be a verb-stem (in *-ta*, here used substantively, and pluralized as a noun, with *-r*), and indeed among unpublished documents of c. 1969 is found a verbal base *NEK* ‘divide, part, separate’, which would yield a verb **nehta-* ‘divide, part, separate’ by regular phonological and morphological development. If this is the right derivation, then an *únehta* would be literally ‘a thing impossible to divide’, or ‘a thing that cannot be divided’, and thus have the same literal meaning as the English word “atom” (< Greek ατομ-ος, a substantive use of adj. ατομ-ος ‘indivisible’ < α privative + -τομ-ος ‘cut’).

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