

## A SECRET VICE

Some of you may have heard that there was, a year or more ago, a Congress in Oxford, an Esperanto Congress; or you may not have heard. Personally I am a believer in an 'artificial' language, at any rate for Europe – a believer, that is, in its desirability, as the one thing antecedently necessary for uniting Europe, before it is swallowed by non-Europe; as well as for many other good reasons – a believer in its possibility because the history of the world seems to exhibit, as far as I know it, both an increase in human control of (or influence upon) the uncontrollable, and a progressive widening of the range of more or less uniform languages. Also I particularly like Esperanto, not least because it is the creation ultimately of one man, not a philologist, and is therefore something like a 'human language bereft of the inconveniences due to too many successive cooks' – which is as good a description of the ideal artificial language (in a particular sense) as I can give.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the Esperantist propaganda touched on all these points. I cannot say. But it is not important, because my concern is not with that kind of artificial language at all. You must tolerate the stealthy approach. It is habitual. But in any case my real subject tonight is a stealthy subject. Indeed nothing less embarrassing than the *unveiling* in public of a secret vice. Had I boldly and brazenly begun right on my theme I might have called my paper a plea for a New Art, or a New Game, if occasional and painful confidences had not given me grave cause to suspect that the vice, though secret, is common; and the art (or game), if new at all, has at least been discovered by a good many other people independently.

The practitioners are all so bashful, however, that they hardly ever show their works to one another, so none of them know who are the geniuses at the game, or who are the splendid 'primitives' – whose neglected works, found in old drawers, may possibly be

purchased at great price (not from the authors, or their heirs and assigns!) for American museums, in after days when the 'art' has become acknowledged. I won't say 'general'! – it is too arduous and slow: I doubt if any devotee could produce more than one real masterpiece, plus at most a few brilliant sketches and outlines, in a life-time.

I shall never forget a little man – smaller than myself – whose name I have forgotten, revealing himself by accident as a devotee, in a moment of extreme ennui, in a dirty wet marquee filled with trestle tables smelling of stale mutton fat, crowded with (mostly) depressed and wet creatures. We were listening to somebody lecturing on map-reading, or camp-hygiene, or the art of sticking a fellow through without (in defiance of Kipling) bothering who God sent the bill to; rather we were trying to avoid listening, though the Guards' English, and voice, is penetrating. The man next to me said suddenly in a dreamy voice: 'Yes, I think I shall express the accusative case by a prefix!'

A memorable remark! Of course by repeating it I have let the cat, so carefully hidden, out of its bag, or at least revealed the whiskers. But we won't bother about that for a moment. Just consider the splendour of the words! '*I shall express the accusative case.*' Magnificent! Not 'it is expressed', nor even the more shambling 'it is sometimes expressed', nor the grim 'you must learn how it is expressed'. What a pondering of alternatives within one's choice before the final decision in favour of the daring and unusual prefix, so personal, so attractive; the final solution of some element in a design that had hitherto proved refractory. Here were no base considerations of the 'practical', the easiest for the 'modern mind', or for the million – only a question of taste, a satisfaction of a personal pleasure, a private sense of fitness.

As he said his words the little man's smile was full of a great delight, as of a poet or painter seeing suddenly the solution of a hitherto clumsy passage. Yet he proved as close as an oyster. I never gathered any further details of his secret grammar; and military arrangements soon separated us never to meet again (up to now at any rate). But I gathered that this queer creature – ever afterwards a little bashful after inadvertently revealing his secret – cheered and comforted himself in the tedium and squalors

of 'training under canvas' by composing a language, a personal system and symphony that no else was to study or to hear. Whether he did this in his head (as only the great masters can), or on paper, I never knew. It is incidentally one of the attractions of this hobby that it needs so little apparatus! How far he ever proceeded in his composition, I never heard. Probably he was blown to bits in the very moment of deciding upon some ravishing method of indicating the subjunctive. Wars are not favourable to delicate pleasures.

But he was not the only one of his kind. I would venture to assert that, even if I did not know it from direct evidence. It is inevitable, if you 'educate' most people, many of them more or less artistic or creative, not solely receptive, by teaching them languages. Few philologists even are devoid of the making instinct – but they often know but one thing well; they must build with the bricks they have. There must be a secret hierarchy of such folk. Where the little man stood in this, I do not know. High, I should guess. What range of accomplishment there is among these hidden craftsmen, I can only surmise – and I surmise the range runs, if one only knew, from the crude chalk-scrawl of the village schoolboy to the heights of palaeolithic or bushman art (or beyond). Its development to perfection must none the less certainly be prevented by its solitariness, the lack of interchange, open rivalry, study or imitation of others' technique.

I have had some glimpses of the lower stages. I knew two people once – *two* is a rare phenomenon – who constructed a language called *Animalic* almost entirely out of English animal, bird, and fish names; and they conversed in it fluently to the dismay of bystanders. I was never fully instructed in it, nor a proper *Animalic*-speaker; but I remember out of the rag-bag of memory that *dog nightingale woodpecker forty* meant 'you are an ass'. Crude (in some ways) in the extreme. There is here, again a rare phenomenon, a complete absence of phonematic invention which at least in embryo is usually an element in all such constructions. *Donkey* was *40* in the numeral system, whence *forty* acquired a converse meaning.

I had better say at once: 'Don't mistake the cat which is slowly emerging from the bag!' I am not dealing with that curious phenomenon 'nursery-languages', as they are sometimes called –

the people I quote were of course young children and went on to more advanced forms later – some of which languages are as individual and peculiar as this one, while some acquire a wide distribution and pass from nursery to nursery and school to school, even country to country, in a mysterious way without any adult assistance, though new learners usually believe themselves in possession of a secret. Like the insertion type of ‘language’. I can still remember my surprise after acquiring with assiduous practice great fluency in one of these ‘languages’ my horror at overhearing two entirely strange boys conversing in it. This is a very interesting matter – connected with cant, argot, jargon, and all kinds of human undergrowth, and also with games and many other things. But I am not concerned with it now, even though it has affinities with my topic. A purely linguistic element, which is my subject, is found sometimes even in this childish make-believe. The distinction – the test by which one can discriminate between the species I am talking about, from the species I am leaving aside – lies, I think, in this. The argot-group are not primarily concerned at all with relations of sound and sense; they are not (except casually and accidentally like real languages) artistic – if it is possible to be artistic inadvertently. They are ‘practical’, more severely so even than real languages, actually or in pretence. They satisfy either the need for limiting one’s intelligibility within circles whose bounds you can more or less control or estimate, or the fun found in this limitation. They serve the needs of a secret and persecuted society, or the queer instinct for pretending you belong to one. The means being ‘practical’ are crude – they are usually grabbed randomly by the young or by rude persons without apprenticeship in a difficult art, often with little aptitude for it or interest in it.

That being so, I would not have quoted the ‘animalic’-children, if I had not discovered that secrecy was no part of their object. Anyone could learn the tongue who bothered. It was not used deliberately to bewilder or to hoodwink the adult. A new element comes in. The fun must have been found in something else than the secret-society or the initiation business. Where? I imagine in using the linguistic faculty, strong in children and excited by lessons consisting largely of new tongues, purely for amusement and pleasure. There is something attractive in the thought –

indeed I think it gives food for various thoughts, and I hope that, though I shall hardly indicate them, they will occur to my hearers.

The faculty for making visible marks is sufficiently latent in all for them (caught young enough) to learn, more or less, at least one graphic system, with severely practical object. It is more highly developed in others, and may lead not only to heights of illumination and calligraphy for sheer pleasure, but it is doubtless allied in many ways to drawing.

The linguistic faculty – for making so-called articulate noises – is sufficiently latent in all for them (caught young as they always are) to learn, more or less, at least one language with merely or mainly practical object. It is more highly developed in others, and may lead not only to polyglots but to poets; to savourers of linguistic flavours, to learners and users of tongues, who take pleasure in the exercise. And it is allied to a higher art of which I am speaking, and which perhaps I had better now define. An art for which life is not long enough, indeed: the construction of imaginary languages in full or outline for amusement, for the pleasure of the constructor or even conceivably of any critic that might occur. For though I have made much of the secrecy of the practice of this art, it is an inessential, and an accidental product of circumstances. Individualistic as are the makers, seeking a personal expression and satisfaction, they are artists and incomplete without an audience. Though like this or any other society of philologists they may be aware that their goods have not a wide popular appeal or a market, they would not be averse to a competent and unbiassed hearing in camera.

But I have somewhat interrupted my argument, and anticipated the end of my line of development, which was to lead from the cruder beginnings to the highest stages. I have seen glimpses of higher stages than *animalic*. As one proceeds higher in the scale doubtless diverse ramifications begin: 'language' has more than one aspect, which may be specially developed. I can imagine developments I have never met.

A good example of a further stage was provided by one of the Animalic community – the other (notably not the originator) dropped off and became interested in drawing and design. The other developed an idiom called *Nevbosh*, or the 'New Nonsense'. It still made, as these play-languages will, some pretence at

being a means of limited communication – that is, in the lower stages the differentiation between the argot-group and the art-group is imperfect. That is where I came in. I was a member of the *Nevbosh*-speaking world.

Though I never confessed it, I was older in secret vice (secret only because apparently bereft of the hope of communication or criticism), if not in years, than the *Nevbosh* originator. Yet, though I shared in the vocabulary, and did something to affect the spelling of this idiom, it remained a usable business, and intended to be. It did become too difficult to talk with Animalic fluency – because games cannot take up all one's time with Latin and mathematics and such things forced upon one's notice, but it was good enough for letters, and even bursts of doggerel song. I believe I could still write down a much bigger vocabulary of *Nevbosh* than Busbecq recorded for Crimean Gothic,<sup>2</sup> though more than 20 years<sup>3</sup> have gone by since it became a dead language. But I can only remember entire one idiotic connected fragment:

Dar fys ma vel gom co palt 'hoc  
 Pys go iskili far maino woc?  
 Pro si go fys do roc de  
 Do cat ym maino bocte  
 De volt fac soc ma taimful gyróc!

Now this vocabulary, if ever I were foolish enough to write it down, and these fragments, of which the only surviving native can still supply a translation, are crude – not in the extreme, but still crude. I have not sophisticated them. But they already provide quite instructive matter for consideration. It is not yet sufficiently developed to present the points of interest for a learned society which I hope may yet arise; the interest is still chiefly discoverable by the scientific and the philological, and so only a side-line with me tonight. But I will touch on it, because it will, I think, be found not altogether foreign to the present purpose of this absurd paper.

One of the points I see is this: What happens when people try to *invent* 'new words' (groups of sounds) to represent familiar notions. Whether the notion becomes in any way affected or not we will leave aside – it is negligible at any rate in a case like

*Neubosh*, which is entirely dominated by an established natural idiom. This 'invention' is probably always going on – to the distraction of 'etymology', which more or less assumes, or used to assume, creation once for all in a distant past. Such a special case as *Neubosh*, supported by others like it, of which no doubt one could find many examples if one knew where to look, might throw light on this interesting problem, which is really part of a more advanced etymology and semantic. In traditional languages invention is more often seen undeveloped, severely limited by the weight of tradition, or alloyed with other linguistic processes, and finds outlet chiefly in the modification of existing sound-groups to 'fit' the sense ('fit' begs a large question, but never mind), or even modification of sense to 'fit' the sound. In this way, in either case, 'new words' are really made – since a 'word' is a group of sounds temporarily more or less fixed + an associated notion more or less defined and fixed in itself and in its relation to the sound-symbol. Made not created. There is in historic language, traditional or artificial, no pure creation in the void.

In *Neubosh* we see, of course, no real breaking away from 'English' or the native traditional language. Its notions – their associations with certain sounds, even their inherited and accidental confusions; their range and limits – are preserved. *Do* is 'to', and a prefixed inflexion marking the infinitive. *Pro* is 'for, four' and the conjunction 'for'. And so on. This part is not then of any interest. Only on the phonematic side is there much interest. What directed the choice of non-traditional sound-groups to represent the traditional ones (with their sense-associations) as perfectly equivalent counters?

Clearly 'phonetic predilection' – artistic phonetic expression – played as yet a very small part owing to the domination of the native language, which still kept *Neubosh* almost in the stage of a 'code'. The native language constantly appears with what at first sight appears casual unsystematic and arbitrary alteration. Yet even here there is a certain interest – little or no phonetic knowledge was possessed by its makers, and yet there appears an unconscious appreciation of certain elementary phonetic relations: alteration is mainly limited to shifting within a defined series of consonants, say for example the dentals: *d, t, þ, ð, &c.* *Dar/there; do/to; cat/get; volt/would.* Or where this is broken, as in *ym/in,*

we have recognition of the fact that *m/n*, though technically made at different contact points, have in their nasality and resonance a similarity which overrides the more mechanical distinction – a fact which is reflected, shall we say, both in the case of *m/n* interchange in real languages (such as Greek), or in my inability to feel greatly wounded by *m/n* assonances in a rhyming poem.

The influence of learnt languages – or since all are learnt, better ‘lesson-languages’ – is unfortunately prominent in this *Neubosh* example, an influence which weakens its interest in some respects, though it brings in an additional point for consideration. The intricate blending of the native with the later-learnt is, for one thing, curious. The foreign, too, shows the same arbitrary alteration within phonetic limits as the native. So *roc*/‘rogo’ ask; *go*/‘ego’ I; *vel*/‘vieil, vieux’ old; *gom*/‘homo’ man – the ancient Germanic languages did not contribute;<sup>4</sup> *pys*/can – from French; *si*/if – pure plagiarism; *pal*/‘parler’ speak, say; *taim*/‘timeo’ fear; and so on. Blending is seen in: *volt*/‘volo, vouloir’ + ‘will, would’; *fys*/‘fui’ + ‘was’, was, were; *co*/‘qui’ + ‘who’; *far*/‘fero’ + ‘bear’, carry. And in a curious example: *woc* is both the native word reversed, and connected with *vacca*, *vache* (I happen to remember that this is actually the case); but it bred the beginnings of a code-like system, dependent on English, whereby native *-ow* > *-oc*, a sort of primitive and arbitrary sound-law: *hoc*/how; *gyroc*/row.

Perhaps it was not worth going into so deeply. A code is not an interesting subject. Only those words which have no obvious association in traditional or school-learnt languages would possess a deeper interest – and one would have to possess a very great number of documented examples to learn anything of value from them, more than the arousing of a passing curiosity.

In this connexion *iski-li* ‘possibly’ is odd. Who can analyse it? I can also remember the word *lint* ‘quick, clever, nimble’, and it is interesting, because I know it was adopted because the relation between the sounds *lint* and the idea proposed for association with them gave *pleasure*. Here is the beginning of a new and exciting element. Certainly, just as in real languages, the ‘word’ once thus established, though owing its being to this pleasure, this sense of fitness, quickly became a mere chance symbol dominated by the notion and its circle of association,



not by the relation of sound and sense – thus it was soon used for mental quickness, and finally the normal *Newbosh* idiom for ‘learn’ was *catlint* (become ‘lint’), and for ‘teach’ *faclint* (make ‘lint’).

Generally speaking, however, only the incipient pleasure found in *linguistic invention*, in getting free from the necessarily limited scope invention has for any individual within a traditional sphere, makes these rude fragments of interest.

This idea of using the linguistic faculty for amusement is however deeply interesting to me. I may be like an opium-smoker seeking a moral or medical or artistic defence for his habit. I don’t think so. The instinct for ‘linguistic invention’ – the fitting of notion to oral symbol, and *pleasure in contemplating the new relation established*, is rational, and not perverted. In these invented languages the pleasure is more keen than it can be even in learning a new language – keen though it is to some people in that case – because more personal and fresh, more open to experiment of trial and error. And it is capable of developing into an art, with refinement of the construction of the symbol, and with greater nicety in the choice of notional-range.

Certainly it is the *contemplation* of the relation between sound and notion which is a main source of pleasure. We see it in an alloyed form in the peculiar keenness of the delight scholars have in poetry or fine prose in a foreign language, almost before they have mastered that language, and long after they have become reasonably familiar with it. Certainly in the case of dead languages no scholar can ever reach the full position of a native with regard to the purely notional side of the language he studies, nor possess and feel all the undercurrents of connotation from period to period which words possess. His compensation remains a great freshness of perception of the word-form. Thus, even seen darkly through the distorting glass of our ignorance of the details of Greek pronunciation, our appreciation of the splendour of Homeric Greek in word-form is possibly keener, or more conscious, than it was to a Greek, much else of other elements of poetry though we may miss. The same is true of Anglo-Saxon. It is one of the real arguments for devoted study of ancient languages. Nor does it mean self-deception – we need not believe we are feeling something that was not there; we are in a position to see some things better at a distance, others more dimly.

The very word-form itself, of course, even unassociated with notions, is capable of giving pleasure – a perception of beauty, which if of a minor sort is not more foolish and irrational than being sensitive to the line of a hill, light and shade, or colour. Greek, Finnish, Welsh (to name at random languages which have a very characteristic and in their different ways beautiful word-form, readily seizable by the sensitive at first sight) are capable of producing this pleasure. I have heard others independently voice my own feeling that the Welsh names on coal-trucks have stirred a sense of beauty, provided you have the barest knowledge of Welsh spelling sufficient for them to cease to be jumbles of letters.

There is purely artistic pleasure, keen and of a high order, in studying a Gothic dictionary from this point of view; and from it a *part*, one element, of the pleasure which might have been gained from the resplendent ‘lost Gothic’ poetry may still be recaptured.

It is then in the *refinement of the word-form* that the next progress above the *Neubosh* stage must consist. Most unfortunately above this second still crude *Neubosh* stage the development tends to dive underground, and to be difficult to document with examples. Most of the addicts reach their maximum of linguistic playfulness, and their interest is swamped by greater ones, they take to poetry or prose or painting, or else it is overwhelmed by mere pastimes (cricket, meccano, or suchlike footle) or crushed by cares and tasks. A few go on, but they become shy, ashamed of spending the precious commodity of time for their private pleasure, and higher developments are locked in secret places. The obviously unremunerative character of the hobby is against it – it can earn no prizes, win no competitions (as yet) – make no birthday presents for aunts (as a rule) – earn no scholarship, fellowship, or worship. It is also – like poetry – contrary to conscience, and duty; its pursuit is snatched from hours due to self-advancement, or to bread, or to employers.

This must be my excuse for becoming more and more autobiographical – regretfully, and from no arrogance. I should much prefer the greater objectivity of studying other people’s efforts. The crude *Neubosh* was a ‘language’ in a fuller sense than things we are coming to. It was intended in theory for speaking, and writing, between one person and another. It was shared. Each

element had to be accepted by more than one to become current, to become part of *Nevbosh* at all. It was therefore hampered in 'symmetry', either grammatical or phonetic, as traditional languages are. Only the handing on to a wider group, going on during a long time, could have produced in it some of those effects of partially achieved and overlaid symmetries which mark all the traditional human tongues. *Nevbosh* represented the *highest common linguistic capacity* of a small group, not the best that could be produced by its best member. It remained unfreed from the purely *communicative* aspect of language – the one that seems usually supposed to be the real germ and original impulse of language. But I doubt this exceedingly; as much as one doubts a poet's sole object, even primary one, being to talk in a special way to other people.

The communication factor has been very powerful in directing the development of language; but the more individual and personal factor – pleasure in articulate sound, and in the symbolic use of it, independent of communication though constantly in fact entangled with it – must not be forgotten for a moment.

*Naffarin* – the next stage of which I have evidence to put before you – shows very clear signs of a development in this direction. It was a purely private production, partly overlapping the last stages of *Nevbosh*, never circulated (though not for lack of the wish). It has long since been foolishly destroyed, but I can remember more than enough, accurately and without sophistication, for my present purpose. One set of individual predilections – governed powerfully as is inevitable by accidents of knowledge, but not made by them – comes to some sort of expression. The phonetic system is limited, and is no longer that of the native language, except that it does not contain elements entirely alien to it; there is a grammar, again a matter of predilection and choice of means. (With regard to phonetic system one may say in an aside that the absence of alien elements is not of first-class importance; a very alien word-form could be constructed out of purely English elements; since it is as much in habitual sequences and combinations as in individual 'phonemes' or sound-units that a language, or a language-maker, achieves individuality. A fact which can be readily appreciated by turning English backwards – phonetically, not by spelling. Such a 'native' word as

*scratch* becomes *štærks*,<sup>5</sup> each ‘phoneme’ being perfectly native, the total entirely foreign owing to the fact that English rarely has the sequence *št* – only when it is clearly analysable as *š* + suffix (*crushed*), and never initially; and never has *ær* + consonant. It is this fact, of course, which gives English scholars’ ‘Greek’ still a Greek phonetic character – a representation of Greek with other counters, as *Neubosh* was a representation of English on the notional side – in spite of its purely English detail. Such scholars need not, however, be unduly comforted – their usage still misrepresents Greek in vital ways, and might be improved vastly still using only English phonetic detail.)

To return – I will give you a brief sample of *Naffarin*.

O Naffarínos cutá vu navru cangor  
 luttos ca vúna tíranar,  
 dana maga tíer ce vru encá vún’ farta  
 once ya merúta vúna maxt’ amámen.

I don’t mean to subject this example to the tedious consideration of origins which I inflicted upon you and *Neubosh*. Etymologically, as you would see if I bothered to translate, it has no greater interest than *Neubosh*; *vrú* ‘ever’ – a curiously predominant association in my languages, which is always pushing its way in (a case of early fixation of individual association, I suppose, which cannot now be got rid of) – is the only word of interest from this point of view. In inventing languages one inevitably develops a style and even mannerisms – even though it is one of the elements of the game to study how a linguistic ‘style’ is composed.

In *Naffarin* the influences – outside English, and beyond a nascent purely individual element – are Latin and Spanish, in sound-choices and combinations, in general word-form. These influences no longer preclude the expression of personal taste, because French and German and Greek, say, all of which were available, were not used or not much used; phonetic taste in individual phonemes is also present, though chiefly negatively: in the absence of certain sounds familiar in English (*w*, *p*, *š*, *ž*, &c). Allowing oneself to be influenced by one pattern rather than another is a choice. *Naffarin* is definitely a product of a ‘Romance’

period. But we need not trouble about this specimen any more.

From here onwards you must forgive pure egotism. Further examples must be drawn solely from isolated private experience. My little man, with his interest in the devices for expression of word-relations, in syntactical devices, is too fleeting a glimpse to use. And I should like to represent to you the interest and delight of this domestic and private art, of many facets, as well as to suggest the points for discussion which it raises (other of course than the question whether practitioners are quite right in their heads).

Practice produces skill here, as in other more useful or more exalted pursuits; but skill need not be expended solely on canvases of 80 square feet; there are smaller experiments and sketches. I will offer some specimens of at least one language that has in the opinion of, or rather to the feeling of, its constructor reached a highish level both of beauty in word-form considered abstractly, and of ingenuity in the relations of symbol and sense, not to mention its elaborate grammatical arrangements, nor its hypothetical historical background (a necessary thing as a constructor finds in the end, both for the satisfactory construction of the word-form, and for the giving of an illusion of coherence and unity to the whole).

Here would be the place, perhaps, before submitting the specimens, to consider what *pleasure* or *instruction* or both the individual maker of a play-language in elaborated form derives from his useless hobby. And then, what points worthy of discussion his efforts may suggest to the observer, or critic. I originally embarked on this odd topic because I somewhat dimly grasped at questions which did seem to me to arise, of interest not only to students of language, but to those considering rather mythology, poetry, art. As one suggestion, I might fling out the view that for perfect construction of an art-language it is found necessary to construct at least in outline a mythology concomitant. Not solely because some pieces of verse will inevitably be part of the (more or less) completed structure, but because the making of language and mythology are related functions;<sup>6</sup> to give your language an individual flavour, it must have woven into it the threads of an individual mythology, individual while working within the scheme of natural human mythopoeia, as your word-form may

be individual while working within the hackneyed limits of human, even European, phonetics. The converse indeed is true, your language construction will *breed* a mythology.

If I only toss out, or lightly suggest these points it is due both to the fact of my slender grasp of the things involved, and to the original intention of the paper, which is simply to provoke discussion.

To turn to another aspect of language-construction: I am personally most interested perhaps in word-form in itself, and in word-form in relation to meaning (so-called phonetic fitness) than in any other department. Of great interest to me is the attempt to disentangle – if possible – among the elements in this predilection and in this association (1) the personal from (2) the traditional. The two are doubtless much interwoven – the *personal* being possibly (though it is not proven) linked to the traditional in normal lives by heredity, as well as by the immediate and daily pressure of the traditional upon the personal from earliest childhood. The *personal*, too, is doubtless divisible again into (a) what is peculiar to one individual, even when all the weighty influence of his native language and of other languages he has learnt in some degree has been accounted for; and (b) what is common to human beings, or to larger or smaller groups of them – both latent in individuals and expressed and operative in his own or any language. The really *peculiar* comes seldom to expression, unless the individual is given a measure of release by the practice of this odd art, beyond perhaps predilections for given words or rhythms or sounds in his own language, or natural liking for this or that language offered for his study rather than for another. Of these well-known facts of experience – including doubtless many of the tricks of style, or individuality in say poetic composition – this *individual linguistic character* of a person is probably at least in part the explanation.

There are of course various other interests in the hobby. There is the purely philological (a necessary part of the completed whole though it may be developed for its own sake): you may, for instance, construct a pseudo-historical background and deduce the form you have actually decided on from an antecedent and different form (conceived in outline); or you can posit certain tendencies of development and see what sort of form this will

produce. In the first case you discover what sort of general tendencies of change produce a given character; in the second you discover the character produced by given tendencies. Both are interesting, and their exploration gives one a much greater precision and sureness in construction – in the technique in fact of producing an effect you wish to produce for its own sake.

There is the grammatical and logical – a more purely intellectual pursuit: you can (without perhaps concerning yourself so closely, if at all, with the sound-structure, the coherence of the word-form) consider the categories and the relations of words, and the various neat, effective, or ingenious ways in which these can be expressed. In this case you may often devise new and novel, even admirable and effective machinery – though doubtless, simply because the experiment has been tried by others, your human ancestors and relatives, over such a large area for so long a time, you are not likely really to light on anything that in nature or in accident has never anywhere before been discovered or contrived; but that need not bother you. In most cases you won't know; and in any case you will have had, *only more consciously and deliberately, and so more keenly*, the same creative experience as that of those many unnamed geniuses who have invented the skilful bits of machinery in our traditional languages, for the use (and too often the misunderstanding and abuse) of their less skilful fellows.

The time has come now, I suppose, when I can no longer postpone the shame-faced revelation of specimens of my own more considered effort, the best I have done in limited leisure, or by occasional thefts of time, in one direction. The beautiful phonologies, thrown away or mouldering in drawers, arduous if pleasant in construction, the source of what little I know in the matter of phonetic construction based on my own individual predilections, will not interest you. I will offer some pieces of verse in the one language which has been expressly designed to give play to my own most normal phonetic taste – one has moods in this as in all other matters of taste, partly due to interior causes, partly to external influences; that is why I say 'normal' – and which has had a long enough history of development to allow of this final fruition: verse. It expresses, and at the same time has fixed, my personal taste. Just as the construction of a mythology

expresses at first one's taste, and later conditions one's imagination, and becomes inescapable, so with this language. I can conceive, even sketch, other radically different forms, but always insensibly and inevitably now come back to this one, which must therefore be or have become peculiarly mine.

You must remember that these things were constructed deliberately to be personal, and give private satisfaction – not for scientific experiment, nor yet in expectation of any audience. A consequent weakness is therefore their tendency, too free as they were from cold exterior criticism, to be 'over-pretty', to be *phonetically and semantically* sentimental – while their bare meaning is probably trivial, not full of red blood or the heat of the world such as critics demand. Be kindly. For if there is any virtue in this kind of thing, it is in its intimacy, in its peculiarly shy individualism. I can sympathize with the shrinking of other language-makers, as I experience the pain of giving away myself, which is little lessened by now occurring for a second time.<sup>7</sup>

*Oilima Markirya*

Man kiluva kirya ninqe  
oilima ailinello lúte,  
níve qímari ringa ambar  
ve maiwin qaine?

Man tiruva kirya ninqe  
valkane wilwarindon  
lúnelinqe vear  
tinwelindon talalínen,  
vea falastane,  
falma pustane,  
rámali tíne,  
kalma histane?

Man tenuva súru laustane  
taurelasselindon,  
ondoli losse karkane  
silda-ránar,  
minga-ránar,



lanta-ránar,  
 ve kaivo-kalma;  
 húro ulmula,  
 mandu túma?

Man kiluva lómi sangane,  
 telume lungane  
 tollalinta ruste,  
 vea qalume,  
 mandu yáme,  
 aira móre ala tinwi  
 lante no lanta-mindon?

Man tiruva rusta kirya  
 laiqa ondolissen  
 nu karne vaiya,  
 úri nienaite híse  
 píke assari silde  
 óresse oilima?

Hui oilima man kiluva,  
 hui oilimaite?

*The Last Ark*<sup>8</sup>

Who shall see a white ship  
 leave the last shore,  
 the pale phantoms  
 in her cold bosom  
 like gulls wailing?

Who shall heed a white ship,  
 vague as a butterfly,  
 in the flowing sea  
 on wings like stars,  
 the sea surging,  
 the foam blowing,

the wings shining,  
the light fading?

Who shall hear the wind roaring  
like leaves of forests;  
the white rocks snarling  
in the moon gleaming,  
in the moon waning,  
in the moon falling  
a corpse-candle;  
the storm mumbling,  
the abyss moving?

Who shall see the clouds gather,  
the heavens bending  
upon crumbling hills,  
the sea heaving,  
the abyss yawning,  
the old darkness  
beyond the stars falling  
upon fallen towers?

Who shall heed a broken ship  
on the green rocks  
under red skies,  
a bleared sun blinking  
on bones gleaming  
in the last morning?

Who shall see the last evening?

*Nieninque*

Norolinde pirukendea  
elle tande Nielikkilis,  
tanya wende nieninqea  
yar i vilya anta miqilis.  
I oromandin eller tande

ar wingildin wilwarindeën,  
 losselie telerinwa,  
 tálin paptalasselindeën.

This of course has an air or tune to it. The bare literal meaning is intended to be: 'Tripping lightly, whirling lightly, thither came little Niéle, that maiden like a snowdrop (Nieninqe), to whom the air gives kisses. The wood-spirits came thither, and the foam-fays like butterflies, the white people of the shores of Elfland, with feet like the music of falling leaves.'<sup>9</sup>

Or one may have a strict and quantitative metre:

*Earendel*

San ninqeruvisse lútier  
 kiryasse Earendil or vea,  
 ar laiqali linqi falmari  
 langon veakiryó kírrier;  
 wingildin o silqelosseën  
 alkántaméren úrio  
 kalmainen; i lunte linganer,  
 tyulmin talalínen aiqalin  
 kautáron, i súru laustaner.

'Then upon a white horse sailed Earendel, upon a ship upon the sea, and the green wet waves the throat of the sea-ship clove. The foam-maidens with blossom-white hair made it shine in the lights of the sun; the boat hummed like a harp-string; the tall masts bent with the sails; the wind 'lausted' (not 'roared' or 'rushed' but made a windy noise).'

*Earendel at the Helm*<sup>10</sup>

A white horse in the sun shining,  
 A white ship in the sea gliding,  
 Earendel at the helm;  
 Green waves in the sea moving,

White froth at the prow spuming  
 · Glistening in the sun;  
 Foam-riders with hair like blossom  
 And pale arms on the sea's bosom  
     Chanting wild songs;  
 Taut ropes like harps tingling,  
 From far shores a faint singing  
     On islands in the deep;  
 The bent sails in the wind billowing,  
 The loud wind in the sails bellowing,  
     The road going on for ever,  
     Earendel at the helm,  
 His eyes shining, the sea gliding,  
     To havens in the West.

Or one can have a fragment from the same mythology, but a totally different if related language:

Dir avosaith a gwaew hinar  
 engluid cryd argenaid,  
 dir Tumledin hin Nebrachar  
 Yrch methail maethon magradhaid.  
 Damrod dir hanach dalath benn  
 ven Sirion gar meilien,  
 gail Luithien heb Eglavar  
 dir avosaith han Nebrachar.

‘Like a wind, dark through gloomy places the Stonefaces searched the mountains, over Tumledin (the Smooth Valley) from Nebrachar, orcs snuffing smelt out footsteps. Damrod (a hunter) through the vale, down mountain slopes, towards (the river) Sirion went laughing. Lúthien he saw, as a star from Elfland shining over the gloomy places, above Nebrachar.’<sup>11</sup>

By way of epilogue, I may say that such fragments, nor even a constructed whole, do not satisfy all the instincts that go to make poetry. It is no part of this paper to plead that such inventions

do so; but that they abstract certain of the pleasures of poetic composition (as far as I understand it), and sharpen them by making them more conscious. It is an attenuated emotion, but may be very piercing – this construction of sounds to give pleasure. The human phonetic system is a small-ranged instrument (compared with music as it has now become); yet it is an instrument, and a delicate one.

And with the phonetic pleasure we have blended the more elusive delight of establishing novel relations between symbol and significance, and in contemplating them.

In poetry (of our day – when the use of significant language is so habitual that the word-form is seldom consciously marked, and the associated notions have it almost all their own way) it is the interplay and pattern of the notions adhering to each word that is uppermost. The word-music, according to the nature of the tongue and the skill or ear (conscious or artless) of the poet, runs on heard, but seldom coming to awareness. At rare moments we pause to wonder why a line or couplet produces an effect beyond its significance; we call it the ‘authentic magic’ of the poet, or some such meaningless expression. So little do we ponder word-form and sound-music, beyond a few hasty observations of its crudest manifestations in rhyme and alliteration, that we are unaware often that the answer is simply that by luck or skill the poet has struck out an air which illuminates the line as a sound of music half-attended to may deepen the significance of some unrelated thing thought or read, while the music ran.

And in a living language this is all the more poignant because the language is not constructed to do this, and only by rare felicity will it say what we wish it to, significantly, and at the same time sing carelessly.

For us departed are the unsophisticated days, when even Homer could pervert a word to suit sound-music; or such merry freedom as one sees in the *Kalevala*, when a line can be adorned by phonetic trills – as in *Enkä lähe Inkerelle, Penkerelle, pänkerelle* (Kal. xi.55), or *Ihveniä ahvenia, tuimienia, taimenia* (Kal. xlviii.100), where *pänkerelle, ihveniä, taimenia* are ‘non-significant’, mere notes in a phonetic tune struck to harmonize with *penkerelle*, or *tuimienia* which do ‘mean’ something.

Of course, if you construct your art-language on chosen

principles, and in so far as you fix it, and courageously abide by your own rules, resisting the temptation of the supreme despot to alter them for the assistance of this or that technical object on any given occasion, so far you may write poetry of a sort. Of a sort, I would maintain, no further, or very little further, removed from real poetry in full, than is your appreciation of ancient poetry (especially of a fragmentarily recorded poetry such as that of Iceland or ancient England), or your writing of 'verse' in such a foreign idiom. For in these exercises the subtleties of connotation cannot be there: though you give your words meanings, they have not had a real experience of the world in which to acquire the normal richness of human words. Yet in such cases as I have quoted (say Old English or Old Norse), this richness is also absent, equally absent or nearly so. In Latin and Greek even it seems to me that this is more often true than many realize.

But, none the less, as soon as you have fixed even a vague general sense for your words, many of the less subtle but most moving and permanently important of the strokes of poetry are open to you. For you are the heir of the ages. You have not to grope after the dazzling brilliance of invention of the free adjective, to which all human language has not yet fully attained. You may say

*green sun*  
or *dead life*

and set the imagination leaping.

Language has both strengthened imagination and been freed by it. Who shall say whether the free adjective has created images bizarre and beautiful, or the adjective been freed by strange and beautiful pictures in the mind?

## NOTES

(All notes to this essay are editorial except note 6)

- 1 In what was either a draft for the opening passage of this essay or (more probably) a draft for its rewriting, my father wrote that he was 'no longer so sure that [an artificial language] would be a good thing', and said that 'at present I think we should be likely to get an *inhumane* language without any cooks at all – their place being taken by nutrition experts and dehydraters'.

- 2 Busbecq was a Fleming who recorded some words of 'Crimean Gothic', an Eastern Germanic language still spoken in the Crimea in the sixteenth century.
- 3 'more than 20 years' was the original reading of the manuscript, changed in pencil to 'almost 40 years'; see the Foreword.
- 4 The reference is to the word in the Germanic languages that appears in Old English as *guma*, 'man'.
- 5 The phonetic sign *ʃ* = 'sh' of English spelling; the sign *æ* = 'a' in 'scratch'.
- 6 Coeval and congenital, not related as disease to health, or as by-product to main manufacture. [Author's note.]
- 7 The concluding phrase is part of the original text; see note 3.
- 8 This version in English is not part of the manuscript text, but a typescript inserted into the essay at this point. As typed, the title was 'The Last Ship'; 'Ship' was changed to 'Ark' later, and at the same time *Oilima Markirya* was written above the English title. In another text of this English version 'green rocks' and 'red skies' in the last verse were emended later to 'dark rocks' and 'ruined skies'. – Other versions of the poem in both languages are given at the end of these notes.
- 9 The maiden *Nieliq(u)i*, *Nielikki* appears (only) in the earliest form of the mythology, *The Book of Lost Tales*, where she is the daughter of the Valar Oromë and Vána; there also appear 'the Oarni and the Falmaríni and the long-tressed *Wingildi*, spirits of the foam and the surf of ocean'.
- 10 This poem is a typescript inserted in the manuscript at this point. In another text of the poem there are later emendations: 'Chanting wild songs' > 'Speeding the ship', and 'The loud wind' > 'The east wind'.
- 11 The name *Nebrachar* occurs nowhere else, and whatever story may be glimpsed in this poem cannot be identified in any form of the mythology that is extant. The poem and its translations are found also in a preliminary draft: in the poem *Luithien* appears in this as *Lúthien*, and in the translation the 'Stonefaces' are explained to be 'Orcs', and *Nebrachar* 'a place of [?goblins]'.

#### Other Versions of *Oilima Markirya*

Another version of *Oilima Markirya*, with translation, was placed with this essay. The title of both is 'The Last Ark', not 'The Last Ship'; but a note to the 'Elvish' text calls this the 'first version' of the poem (see note 8).

#### *Oilima Markirya*

#### 'The Last Ark'

Kildo kirya ninqe  
pinilya wilwarindon  
veasse lúnelinqe  
talainen tinwelindon.

Vean falastanéro  
lótéfalmarínen,  
kirya kalliére  
kulukalmalínen.

Súru laustanéro  
taurelasselindon;  
ondolin ninqanéron  
Silmeráno tindon.

Kaivo i sapsanta  
 Rána númetar,  
 mandulómi anta  
 móri Ambalar;  
 telumen tollanta  
 naiko lunganar.

Kaire laiqa'ondoisen  
 kirya; karnevaite  
 úri kilde hísen  
 nfe nienaite,  
 ailissen oilimaisen  
 ala fuin oilimaite,  
 alkarissen oilimain;  
 ala fuin oilimaite  
 ailinisse alkarain.

*The Last Ark*

A white ship one saw, small like a butterfly,  
 upon the blue streams of the sea with  
 wings like stars.

The sea was loud with surf, with waves  
 crowned with flowers. The ship shone with  
 golden lights.

The wind rushed with noise like leaves of forests,  
 the rocks lay white shining in the silver moon.

As a corpse into the grave the moon went down  
 in the West; the East raised black shadows out of  
 Hell. The vault of heaven sagged upon the  
 tops of the hills.

The white ship lay upon the rocks; amid red  
 skies the Sun with wet eyes dropped tears of  
 mist, upon the last beaches after the last night  
 in the last rays of light – after the last night  
 upon the shining shore.

A greatly changed version of the poem comes from a much later time – I would judge, from the last decade of my father's life. This is extant in two texts, clearly more or less contemporaneous; the earlier of the two has a glossarial commentary. I give here the second text, with variants from the former in footnotes, and follow it with the commentary.

Men kenuva fáne kirya  
 métima hrestallo kúra,  
 i fairi néke



ringa súmaryasse  
5 ve maiwi yaimië?

Man tiruva fána kirya,  
wilwarin wilwa,  
ëar-kelumessen  
rámainen elvië,  
10 ëar falastala,  
winga hlápula  
rámar sisílala,  
kále fifírula?

Man hlaruva rávëa sùre  
15 ve tauri lillassië,  
ninqui karkar yarra  
isilme ilkalasse,  
isilme píkalasse,  
isilme lantalasse  
20 ve loikolíkuma;  
raumo nurrula,  
undume rúmala?

Man kenuva lumbor na-hosta  
Menel na-kúna  
25 ruxal' ambonnar,  
ëar amortala,  
undume hákala,  
enwina lúme  
elenillor pella  
30 talta-taltala  
atalantië mindoninnar?

Man tiruva rákina kirya  
ondolisse morne  
nu fanyare rúkina,  
35 anar púrëa tihta  
axor ilkalannar  
métim' auresse?  
Man kenuva métim' andúne?

Variant readings from the other text: 3 *i néka fairi*; 16 *ninqui ondor yarra*; 31 *atalantiëa*; 35 *tihtala*; 37 *métima amaurëasse*; 38 *andúnie*.

A few changes were made subsequently to the second text: 21 *nurrula* > *nurrua*; 22 *rúmala* > *rúma*; 23 *na-hosta* > *ahosta*; 24 *na-kúna* > *akúna*; 31 *atalantië* > *atalantiëa*; 31 *mindoninnar* > *mindonnar*.

The glossarial commentary to the first text is as follows:

- 1 *ken-* 'see, behold'      *fáne* 'white'  
2 *métima* 'ultimate, final'      *hresta* 'beach'

- 3 *fairē* 'phantom; disembodied spirit, when seen as a pale shape' *nēka*  
 'vague, faint, dim to see'
- 4 *sūma* 'hollow cavity, bosom'
- 5 *yaimē* 'wailing', noun, *yaimēa* adjective
- 7 *wilwa* 'fluttering to and fro' *wilwarin* 'butterfly'
- 8 *kelume* 'flowing, flood (tide), stream'
- 9 *elvēa* 'starlike'
- 10 *falasta-* 'to foam'
- 11 *winga* 'foam, spray' *hlapu-* 'fly or stream in the wind'
- 12 *sistla-* frequentative of *sil-* 'shine (white)'
- 13 *kāle* 'light', noun *fifīru-* from *fir-* 'die, fade': 'slowly fade away'
- 14 *rāvēa* < *rāve* 'roaring noise'
- 15 *lillassiē* plural of *lillassēa* 'having many leaves'
- 16 *yarra-* 'growl, snarl'
- 17 *isilme* 'moonlight' *ilkala* participle of *ilka* 'gleam (white)'
- 18 *pika-* 'lessen, dwindle'
- 20 *loiko* 'corpse, dead body' *likuma* 'taper, candle' < *liko* 'wax'
- 21 *raumo* '(noise of a) storm' *nurru-* 'murmur, grumble'
- 22 *rīma-* 'shift, move, heave (of large and heavy things)'
- 23 *hosta-* 'gather, collect, assemble'. When the bare stem of the verb is used (as after 'see' or 'hear') as infinitive *na-* is prefixed if the noun is the object not the subject. So *na-kīna* 24 < *kīna-* derivative verb < *kīna* 'bent, curved'
- 30 *talta-* 'slip, slide down, collapse'
- 31 *atalante* noun 'collapse, downfall', *atalantēa* 'ruinous, downfallen'
- 32 *rākina* past participle of *rak-* 'break'
- 34 *fanyare* 'the skies – not heaven or firmament – the upper airs and clouds'  
*rīkina* 'confused, shattered, disordered'
- 35 *pūrēa* 'smeared, discoloured' *tīhta-* 'blink, peer'
- 36 *axo* 'bone'
- 37 *amaurēa* poetic word for 'dawn, early day'

It will be seen that while the vocabulary of this version is radically different from that given in the essay, the meaning is precisely the same (with the changes to 'dark rocks' and 'ruined skies' mentioned in note 7).