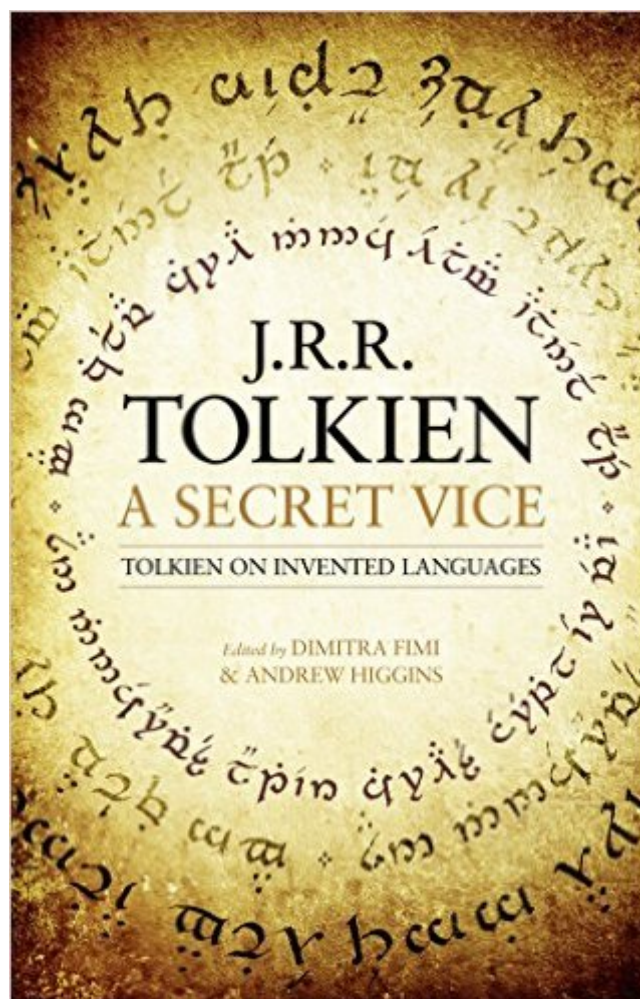


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## A Secret Vice



## Synopsis

First ever critical study of Tolkien's little-known essay, which reveals how language invention shaped the creation of Middle-earth and beyond, to George R R Martin's Game of Thrones. This is an annotated edition of Tolkien's seminal 1930s essay 'A Secret Vice', in which he first revealed his 'vice' of inventing languages in his fantasy fiction. Tolkien's linguistic invention was a fundamental part of his artistic output, to the extent that later on in life he attributed the existence of his mythology to the desire to give his languages a home and peoples to speak them. As Tolkien puts it in 'A Secret Vice', 'the making of language and mythology are related functions', in fact 'coeval and congenital'. In the 1930s Tolkien composed and delivered two lectures in which he explored these two key elements of his sub-creative methodology. In 1931 he gave a talk to a philological society entitled 'A Hobby for the Home'. In this talk, later published as 'A Secret Vice', Tolkien unveiled for the first time to a listening public the art which he had both himself encountered and been involved with since his earliest childhood: 'the construction of imaginary languages in full or outline for amusement'. 'A Secret Vice' would be edited by Christopher Tolkien for inclusion in *The Monsters and the Critics* and serves as the principal exposition of Tolkien's art of inventing languages. But it has often been neglected by critics and this new critical edition will go some way towards re-opening the debate on the importance of linguistic invention in Tolkien's mythology and the role of imaginary languages in fantasy literature. In addition to all previously unpublished notes and essays by Tolkien connected with the essay, the book discusses the subject of Tolkien's languages in the wider context of modern fantasy, including the Peter Jackson *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* films and *Game of Thrones*.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 300 pages

Publisher: HarperCollins (February 11, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0008131392

ISBN-13: 978-0008131395

Product Dimensions: 9 x 1 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (5 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #452,237 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #249 in [Books > Literature &](#)

Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Science Fiction & Fantasy #279 inÂ Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > History & Criticism #453 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Logic & Language

## Customer Reviews

As something of a Tolkien completist (and most definitely a Tolkien enthusiast of the deepest dye), and as someone very interested in language, I was delighted to find that the notes for J.R.R. Tolkien's lecture 'A Secret Vice' have now been published in this comprehensive, unabridged edition. I pre-ordered the book without hesitation and plunged straight into it the moment it arrived. Quickly beginning to suspect that the editors' 55-page introduction (that it is longer than Tolkien's text is telling) is a superfluous regurgitation of what follows and consists largely of spoilers, I skipped it after 6 pages and moved on to the far shorter main course. I still remember how taken I was by Tolkien's magnum opus *The Lord of the Rings* when first I persevered through it at the age of nine ('blown away' is the current, popular term). The unquenchable thirst it provoked in me led me to read countless other works of fantasy, especially aged 10-12 when my general attitude was that more is more. But even at such an early age it quickly became obvious that one of the factors placing Tolkien light-years ahead of his imitators (and, as I was to discover years later, contemporaries and predecessors) is his use of language, and especially his use of all manner of names that, though he may have invented them, 'pierced my linguistic heart' (as Tolkien writes about Welsh) as if they had been real, though cruelly severed from me in time and space. This is where most other authors of fantasy fail, whether it be Raymond E.

This is a fascinating and very well written account of the history and development of Tolkien's invented languages. It has the virtues of the old scholars: clarity, sharp focus, detail, careful examination and analysis of the evidence, and an absence of the clogging jargon that has become a disfigurement of academic writing and often a substitute for thought and insight. (A strategy of writers who need a PhD but lack the knowledge or ideas for one.) The range of knowledge revealed here is extraordinary, yet it is lightly worn and is subordinated to underpinning the conclusions which the two authors reach. The bibliography and chronology alone are as helpful as anyone could ask for. This book makes an interesting contrast to another very recently published work on Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger's edition of *Kullervo*, which is often repetitive, less focussed, and written in a style that veers between an inappropriate colloquialism and academic jargon. Fimi and Higgins have a more cultivated ear, and students of Tolkien will be grateful for it. This book contains a Foreword clearly

and briefly explaining the scope and methods of what follows, followed by a more extensive Introduction that sets out the facts Tolkien's 'language invention and mythmaking' without ever simply repeating the tired clichés of Tolkien criticism. Instead we are given a clear, wide-ranging and close examination of what he did and what he said or wrote about it, with examples. (Speaking as one who had the advantage of studying, under his son Christopher, the History of the English Language syllabus established by Tolkien, I can say that those examples are still very necessary and helpful.

Titling my review "Tolkien as Professor" is somewhat misleading, because Tolkien the Oxford professor and philologist and Tolkien the creator of Middle-earth are really inseparable: his scholarly life as well as his fictional creations developed and flourished out of his love for language. This book contains a lecture on invented languages he delivered to the Samuel Johnson Society of Pembroke College at Oxford University in 1931 as well as related material and essays, all ably edited and annotated by the notable scholars Dr. Dimitra Fimi and Dr. Andrew Higgins. Although it is less than 150 pages long *A Secret Vice* contains much new and fascinating information. I've barely scratched the surface thus far, and I anticipate many happy hours of further reading and study. Fimi and Higgins provide a lengthy introduction in which they discuss the fascination the idea of inventing languages held for Tolkien from his earliest childhood, continuing through his school and university days and providing some needed mental relief while serving in the British Army during World War I. Tolkien was not alone in this interest, because he was born at a time when many people believed that developing a universal language could help reduce the likelihood of conflict. Tolkien was familiar with many of these International Auxiliary Languages or IALs like Esperanto and Volapük. The introduction goes on to describe the process by which Tolkien came to write *A Secret Vice* and eventually to deliver it, and then covers his subsequent efforts in the field. This includes a discussion of the lengthy process by which Tolkien created the elven tongues and dialects of Middle-earth and Valinor.

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