

Dheghōm

Matter 4

Summary

Four Encounters with Ansnā

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Report

As many of you will know, I took early retirement last year. Released from the obligations that accompanied my standing as Professor of Philology, I am now in a position to write freely about my work. It is in this personal capacity that I shall be presenting over the coming weeks a succession of posts concerning the Proto Indo-European (PIE) language. The reconstruction of PIE as it currently

stands is almost wholly correct in terms of grammar and is largely correct in terms of pronunciation; that said, there are some extremely jarring faults that – despite my repeated attempts to argue against them over the years – remain accepted by the majority of researchers in the field. It is these misconceptions that I shall be addressing in this series of blog entries.

Although what I wish to outline is not based on citable sources (quite the contrary!) and is therefore unpublishable even as a conference paper, one might nevertheless ask why I waited over a year following my transformation from Professor to Emeritus Professor before presenting my findings. The answer is that my decision to do so has only come as a result of much soul-searching, for reasons which will shortly become apparent. I am fully aware of how, to put it charitably, ‘unlikely’ what follows will seem. Nonetheless, it is the truth – as future researchers will learn when they derive the same conclusions by more traditional methods.

In brief, I know what PIE sounds like because I have heard it from the mouth of a native speaker, or close enough.

In this first post, I shall relate the gist of my encounters with this native speaker, whose name is Ansnā (the terminal *a* is long). In subsequent posts, I shall explain the nature of those errors in the current reconstruction of PIE that I hope to correct – such as its dismissive treatment of the

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phoneme *a* – drawing upon my conversations with Ansnā both to illustrate and to justify my arguments. The most egregious fallacies will be dealt with first, followed by lesser ones until either I begin to sound petty or my blog sheds the entirety of its readership.

As promised, though, I shall commence by sketching out the strange circumstances surrounding each of the four occasions when I and Ansnā conversed.

When I say ‘strange’, by the way, I mean strange.

April/May 1962

I’m not certain of the exact date in 1962 when I first met Ansnā, but Easter was late that year and I encountered her one or two weeks after that, so it was probably late April or early May. I was in the first year of my DPhil in PIE morphology, still reading around the subject but coming to focus on declension (which eventually became the topic of my thesis and made my name as a researcher).

Language has always fascinated me. I am something of a polyglot, and at the time was fluent in English, German, Dutch, French, Spanish and Italian, with a conversational-level understanding of Portuguese, old English, classical Latin and classical Greek (I had yet to delve into the Scandinavian languages). My passion was PIE, however, which in my early teens I had worked out for myself must exist. Over the next few years, I

learned all I could about it and began to get enough of a feel for the tongue that by the time I graduated I could both think and communicate in it with relative ease, albeit using only the documented vocabulary. It was this ability that led Ansnā to me.

I'd like to say that the evening she knocked upon my door was that of a Thursday, but sad to say it could well have been a Friday. Unlike my friends, who viewed Friday evenings as an opportunity to socialise in town and Saturday mornings as a period for regretting the consequences of this, I was often rather too consumed by my work to join them.

I recollect being irritated by the knock's interruption, so opened the door in something of a poor mood. The sight that greeted me was extraordinary.

Ansnā, you have to understand, was beautiful. Not in the same way that a sunset is beautiful, or a mathematical formula is beautiful, or that the older girl you had a crush on who worked in the local cinema was beautiful: Ansnā was the very definition of beauty. It was as if God had used her as His model for the concept. Her dark, wavy hair was tied in braids so intricate that they looked to be stitched together and her eyes were such a dark brown as to be almost black. Her skin was soft and without blemish, yet strongly tanned as if she spent all her days idling in the sun.

I stood there in astonished awe, quite forgetting to speak.

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"Alā", she said. "Ansnā kluwējō."

What? She spoke PIE? How perfect could she be?!

"Alā", I replied. "Meghei Clive nōmn. En sode."

I gestured for her to come in, for which, I believed, she rewarded me with a smile; I was later to learn that it was a reaction to my poor pronunciation of *sode* (meaning 'come').

"You speak Proto Indo-European very well", I said, by way of attempting to compliment her while avoiding any shallow reference to her stupendous looks.

She stared back, blankly. "Wéqesa ta nē pretō."

She didn't understand these words?

Thus began a vibrant, thrilling and extensive conversation that went on long into the night, the linguistically-important details of which I shall relate in later posts. For now, though, I shall simply state that my knowledge of PIE was enhanced immeasurably in these too-few hours, and I learned many words and turns of phrase that had appeared in no PIE dictionary to date (until I later 'derived' them from formal sources and published my findings).

As I have so far described this first meeting with Ansnā, well it does seem odd but perhaps not entirely implausible. It isn't every day that a charming and immensely beautiful young woman knocks on one's door and speaks fluently in a dead language while professing to understand no live one, but it could conceivably happen.

There are three additional points I would like to make before I move on, however, which are less easy to explain away.

Firstly, there was the manner in which Ansnā dressed. She was not wearing the clothes of a young woman, but that of an older woman – and not just any older woman, but a very particular older woman: Mrs Stevenson, a friend of the Dean's wife, whom I had earlier observed from my windows crossing the quad in defiant disregard of regulations. Mrs Stevenson had something of a conservative view of fashion, still dressing as she did in the inter-war years. Ansnā was wearing an exact copy of her outfit – and I mean *exact*, even down to the hummingbird brooch she displayed on the left lapel of her jacket. I fleetingly considered that Ansnā might actually have robbed the older woman of her clothing, but Mrs Stevenson was a stout individual several sizes larger than Ansnā, so that couldn't have been the case: every component of Ansnā's attire was a perfect fit.

Secondly, there was the nature of Ansnā's departure. I was attempting to present an unbiased history of England and had just reached the Tudors when suddenly Ansnā seemed not so much to freeze as to zone out, to use a modern expression. She had been gently correcting my use of PIE all evening, so I had viewed my exposition as more dialogue than monologue, but at this point everything changed. I sensed that something was wrong

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and stopped talking, but she simply gazed her gorgeous eyes unfocused in my general direction.

After perhaps thirty seconds or so, she snapped out of it and told me that she had to go. I asked whether we could meet again – truth be told, I was falling in love with her – and she said yes, but it might be a while. With that, she walked to the door, opened it, went through, then closed it behind her.

Naturally, I was a little taken aback by this abrupt end to our evening. Having followed her to the door in the full expectation of opening it for her, after she had gone through I opened it anyway to wave her goodbye. She was nowhere to be seen. Three seconds earlier she had passed through that same opening yet now she was absent. I would have doubted my sanity, had it not been for the third point that I wish to raise before I continue.

This third point was what Ansnā revealed about herself over the course of that evening.

At first, she would talk about nothing other than me, and how glad she was to have found someone who could understand her words. I soon ascertained that PIE was the only language she spoke fluently, although she could make some slight sense of certain older languages such as classical Greek. She initially rebuffed questions about herself, saying that she had come to learn from me – even though from my perspective, it was I who was learning from her.

As the evening wore on, however, she opened up. I'd offered her a glass of wine, which she had

declined, but she seemed to grow more at ease of her own accord anyway as she developed a greater understanding of our world. I use those words 'our world', quite deliberately: Ansnā, you see, claimed to hail from another world entirely. She called this place Bhéwonom – 'reality' in English. The links between Bhéwonom and our world used to be strong, but had recently weakened. She'd arrived in our world to assess how much had changed in the interim. Her assessment was: almost everything.

I asked her to tell me more of Bhéwonom, but she refused on the grounds that she couldn't foresee what would happen if she did. I asked her if there were other visitors from Bhéwonom, or if she was alone. She replied that at the moment there was only her but others would come very soon. These would not be like her. Her name, Ansnā, was her own name; the others would use invented names. I asked if her appearance was her own, too. She smiled demurely and changed the subject.

1st July, 1976

The summer of 1976 is burned affectionately into the memory of all residents of the British Isles who lived through it, for it was long, hot and glorious.

I was 38 years old, married, with two young children. While not quite yet a professor, I held a tenured post at Oxford teaching Classics to scions of the wealthy while writing well-received research papers on PIE. The well of information on this topic

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that had been filled by Ansnā was now almost dry, but my zeal to learn more of the language of our late-Neolithic ancestors remained unassuaged.

Metaphorically, I had put my memory of Ansnā's visit into a private mental compartment, which I frequented myself (with decreasing regularity over time, admittedly) but never mentioned the existence of to anyone else. It was my secret – or mine and Ansnā's, if she wasn't the psychotic symptom of over-work that I now suspected she must be, created by my subconscious mind to give voice to my emerging theories.

My cosy rationalisation of the events of that night fourteen years earlier were shattered on the morning of the first day of July, which definitely was a Thursday. I arrived at my office at around half-past nine, with the temperature already rising. My intention upon entering was to go immediately to the windows and fling them wide open, but I stopped in my tracks the moment I beheld the room.

There, seated in the armchair by the second bookcase, was Ansnā.

"Ansnā!" It was all I could say.

She looked no older than she had done in 1962, but this time she was dressed more appropriately for her apparent age – although not for the context of Oxford University. She had adopted a rather more informal look, as might befit a young woman taking a day off in the expectation of enjoying a great deal of sunshine. It was rather less decorous

than many of my peers would find acceptable; had one of them seen her entering my office, there would be some explaining to do – but I rather suspected that they hadn't. She retained one item of the outfit she had worn on the occasion of our first encounter: the hummingbird brooch, which she now wore at the top of her left sleeve where a sergeant's stripe would go.

"Clive", she replied, at least approximately (the vowel *i* does not feature in PIE).

I'll relate in English translation the fragments of our exchange that now follow; were I to render them faithfully in PIE, I would need to use several terms that appear in no extant PIE dictionary, nor indeed could do so. You'll see what I mean shortly.

"You haven't aged", I said.

"I *have* aged, but only by a day", she replied, smiling. She rubbed her cheek with the back of her hand.

"Time runs differently in Bhéwonom?"

"In a way", she answered. "When there is at least one visitor from Bhéwonom in Dheghōm, your time is our time. When there are no visitors, your time is faster than our time."

I knew *dʰéǵʰōm* to be the PIE word for 'earth' – it's one of the most securely-reconstructed elements of the language. I also knew *Dʰéǵʰōm* to be the name of the Earth goddess of PIE mythology. Ansnā did not stress either the *e* or the *g*, however, and both the *d* and the *g* were far breathier than on the other occasions when she'd used those conso-

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nants. The vowel sounds were as usual – *e* was still pronounced like a capital 'A' in English and *ō* was like 'aww' – but it sounded to me as if she was using a dialect of PIE, rather than PIE itself. *Dhegh-ōm* is the best way I can express the word in standard phonetic symbols.

I digress.

"How did you get into my office?" I asked. "Did one of the cleaners let you in?"

She thought for a moment. "I started here", she replied.

I could have pressed her on this, but had an idea that supernatural physics was perhaps involved, and after a decade and a half of persuading myself that I wasn't deranged I had no desire to reconsider the possibility that I might be.

"What brings you back to Dheghōm?" It couldn't be that she was missing me.

She seemed distracted. "What is that object you wear over your eyes?"

"These? These are glasses." I removed them and showed them to her. "They help correct my vision."

"There is a fault, I understand." She nodded. "You wish to see clearly?"

"Yes, that's why I –"

I stopped. Although she still held my spectacles in her hands, everything was completely in focus.

"Is that better?"

"Er, yes", I replied, both grateful but somewhat fazed by what had just happened. "How, er, how did you –?"

She handed me my glasses back. "These are ingenious devices", she said. "Are they your own invention?"

"No, we've had them for hundreds of years." I put them on, but they now made everything look blurry so I took them off again.

She frowned in thought. It didn't affect her beauty one iota.

"I need to know how much has changed since we last spoke", she announced.

"I shall answer all your questions with the greatest of pleasure", I told her, sitting at my desk as I did so. "May I take notes?"

"Yes, but not a recording", she answered.

It should come as no surprise that the concept of recording sound did not feature strongly in the lives of our late-Neolithic ancestors. I had to ask her what the word she had used meant.

In the course of our conversation, I also learned the PIE words for colour television, hovercraft, space rocket, nuclear power and computer.

We talked until around 1 p.m., during which time I gained further knowledge of PIE and Ansnā gained further knowledge of contemporary British life.

As before, she was delightful. She was engaging, patient, inquisitive and understanding, although not, sad to say, imaginative. Now you might expect that with access to the kind of technology that seemed to be available to her she would be some kind of supra-genius, but this was not the case: she

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was intelligent but in a methodical rather than quick-witted way, putting her roughly on a par with my weakest students – unless she was so intelligent as to be able to conceal the fact. She laughed at my awkward jokes and descriptions of life's absurdities. She frequently admitted to being surprised by what I was telling her, but doubted me not once. She kept on-topic, though, never straying from her purpose by offering anecdotes of her own or glimpses into her personal life.

I was getting hungry by now, so suggested we went somewhere to eat.

"I do not need to eat in Dheghōm", she confessed, "but I shall come with you to the eating place."

"You're not really dressed for where I had in mind", I said, worried that my colleagues might see me with her and draw the wrong conclusion. To be fair, any conclusion would have been a wrong one, but not all would impact my social standing in quite the same way.

"How about now?"

She was wearing the Mrs Stevenson outfit from 1962.

I tried to keep calm. A woman had changed her clothes in front of me while I blinked. It takes my wife at least half an hour.

"That's – that's a bit old-fashioned", I managed to say. "You – "

"Now?"

She was dressed as me, except the humming-bird brooch was back on her upper sleeve.

"No, no", I said hastily. I picked up the full-length photograph of my wife that I kept on my desk. "Like her."

Ansnā looked at the image, pursed her lips, rocked her head from side to side as if thinking about it, then a moment later was dressed exactly the same.

"The brooch is acceptable?" she asked, turning her arm to glance at it. "I like the brooch."

"It's a bit of an odd place to wear it, but yes", I said, trying to put her impossible transformation out of my mind. "Come on, I'll take you to the Eagle and Child, it's not far."

I was half-hoping that Ansnā might regard a lunch break as time off work, whatever work for her may have been (I was about to find out); I was pleasantly satisfied to learn that this was indeed so.

We chatted as we walked. I'll warn you now that what I'm about to relate makes barely any sense to me and will probably make even less to you.

"Do people in Bhéwonom need to eat?" I asked.

"Of course", she replied. "More often than you."

"So does that mean you are hungry, but you'll have to return to Bhéwonom to eat?"

"I've already eaten", she informed me. "I had something while we were talking."

"Really? I didn't notice. Can you eat as fast as you can change clothes?"

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She laughed. "No, our times are locked together while I'm here, remember? I ate in Bhéwonom."

"When did – ?" I suddenly realised the implication. "Wait, are you saying that you're in both Bhéwonom and Dheghōm at the same time? You don't come to Dheghōm, you", I struggled for a word, "connect with it?"

"Yes", she replied.

"Why do you come here?"

"It's my job."

The kind of jobs that we have PIE words for tend to be rather basic – shepherd, potter, herdsman, that kind of thing. I was intrigued to find out what it was she did.

Her explanation was vague, but to summarise she was like some kind of cross between a tour guide and a police officer, and she was quite junior.

I wanted to ask her how old she was, and (again) whether in Bhéwonom she looked like she did in Dheghōm, but I was concerned that if I pried too much she might cut our conversation short.

"If your job is to manage the visitors to Dheghōm from Bhéwonom", I asked, "does that mean there are many visitors here at the moment?"

She stared into the distance for a few seconds, as if trying to recall the information. "There are seventeen."

"Is seventeen a lot?" I didn't know.

"No. We need at least two thousand."

The thought of two thousand people with Ansnā's abilities roaming the planet was disturb-

ing. "Can they all do the same things that you can do? Change their clothes instantaneously and appear from nowhere, that kind of thing?"

"They can do some things, but not others."

"What if we don't get two thousand visitors?"

She looked at me, as if deciding whether to tell me or not. "You needn't worry", she replied.

I took this to mean that she knew but either she didn't want to tell me or she wasn't allowed to tell me.

"Can I visit Bhéwonom?" I asked.

She smiled. "Here is better."

"But could I go there all the same? To hear everyone speaking this language – it would be my life's dream!"

She shook her head, still smiling. "This language is not spoken in Bhéwonom."

At the pub, we continued our conversation in PIE, which one might suppose would seem odd but no, this was Oxford.

I'd usually think about having a beer on such a hot day, and believe me, what Ansnā had casually revealed provoked in me a strong desire to have several; I refrained, however, as I wanted to keep a clear head.

After lunch, we went for a walk. I had been thinking about taking Ansnā to the meadows but she preferred the streets; she said it was so she could observe more life and ask me about what she saw. She was like a small child, brimming with

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unending questions, except that hers had rather more depth to them.

"What fuel do those vehicles use?" she asked, after I'd explained what automobiles were and how long we'd had them.

"Petroleum gasoline", I replied, then had to tell her how it was the result of a refining process. She figured out what I meant and disclosed the PIE for (I believe) hydrocarbon, expressing some concern that its use had not been predicted but confessing that she didn't know enough about how Dheghōm worked to be able to tell if it was a bad or good invention.

All of a sudden, she said "I must go now. I will be back tomorrow."

She stopped walking, opened the door of the building we happened to be passing – Pusey House – and went in.

"Wait!" I called, but no sooner had I followed her inside than she was gone.

I quickly exited back to St Giles' and returned, mind whirling, to my office.

Later that afternoon, one of my colleagues, Bill James, popped by and mentioned that he'd seen me at lunch with "a handsome young woman", asking if she was one of my students. I told him she was a prospective postgraduate from Italy, but that she was probably going to study in the USA instead. He expressed some disappointment at this news.

Sadly, Bill is no longer with us so is not in a position to verify that part of my story. However,

the mere fact that he'd seen Ansnā was, at the time, something of a relief to me: it meant that she was real, not some constructed figment of an ill or injured mind.

21st November, 1990

If you think what I've told you so far is weird, well, it's about to get weirder.

Ansnā had said she would return 'tomorrow', but given that few people from Bhéwonom were visiting our world there were sure to be periods when none of them were present; tomorrow for her remained, therefore, several years for me.

It was less than a month to Christmas, 1990, when Ansnā next reappeared in my office. The following day, the media would be full of the news that Margaret Thatcher had resigned as Prime Minister, but none of that would have made the headlines had the editors been privy to what was about to unfold before me.

Ansnā was not alone. With her was another individual, a man, stereotypically dark and broody as if intending to project an aura of mystery to someone with sensibilities differently-attuned to mine. I took an immediately dislike to him.

Three things are worth noting from the outset.

Firstly, Ansnā and the man (whom she was to introduce as Weghtrowénts) materialised out of nothing instantaneously, but not quite together; Ansnā arrived a split-second earlier. No pretence was made that they had arrived at my office natur-

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ally. There was no accompanying sound: they merely came into being.

Secondly, both Ansnā and Weghtrowénts were too tall. I'd estimate that Ansnā was perhaps 120% or 125% her previous height. She wasn't elongated, just scaled-up. If my office had been in a more modern building, her companion's head might have shared volume with the ceiling.

Thirdly, the pair were dressed identically in what I took to be a uniform. It's hard to describe because I couldn't distinguish between the components. I believe it was in two parts, corresponding to a jacket and trousers, but I was unable to tell because it appeared to be made out of bearskin, like a busby of the Coldstream Guards. The shoes were similarly constructed. I had previously speculated in idleness that Ansnā didn't feel temperature; this outfit confirmed it. Even in the middle of November, I'd have been roasting if I'd worn something similar myself.

Ansnā sported her hummingbird brooch discreetly on her left cuff, but this was the only departure from her companion's uniform that I noticed.

As before, I won't spend time in this already too-long blog post diving into the nuances of PIE that emerged during the conversation that ensued. I will, however, confirm that the name Weghtrowénts translates into English as something like 'endowed with plot' or 'plentiful in script'. It wasn't

his personal name, but more of a job title – his status was much, much higher than that of Ansnā.

Weghtrowénts spoke first. "You are the human who understands us", he set forth, in PIE.

"Yes", I replied. I didn't wish to trouble him with the fact I'd had to guess that *dheghōmon* meant 'human'.

"This is Weghtrowénts", said Ansnā. "He is here to make a very important decision. I have told him about you and your world. Please answer his questions. It is", she repeated herself, "very important."

She rubbed the backs of her palms against each other, nervously.

"I shall of course answer to the best of my abilities any questions you might ask", I said, reassuringly, but in a way that showed off my understanding of PIE tenses.

"It speaks Third Language well", said Weghtrowénts.

"It?" I interjected.

Ansnā cast me a pleading look, as if to tell me I shouldn't argue.

"Why do so few humans speak Third Language?" asked Weghtrowénts.

"It's reconstructed", I replied. "Thousands of years ago, it was spoken by a single group of nomads who spread across the land. As they separated from one another, each sub-group's use of the language gradually changed until it became a new language. Today, many such languages are spoken, but by comparing them we can work out

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the rules of change and calculate what the original language of our ancestors must have sounded like.”

Weghtrowénts was frowning. “How many thousands of years ago?”

“From around six and a half thousand to four and a half thousand.”

Weghtrowénts turned to Ansnā. “Is this true? So much in two weeks?”

I, too, was taken aback. Ansnā had visited our world in 1962 and 1976, fourteen years apart, so at most one Bhéwonom day was roughly fourteen Earth years. Two weeks – Bhéwonom uses the same time periods as we do – would be maybe 200 years ago, not 4,500.

“What has changed since Ansnā came yesterday?” asked Weghtrowénts.

From my conversations with Ansnā, I took this to be a question about technological advancement.

“Computers are far more commonplace”, I said, gesturing to the PC on the desk before me.

“They’re also connected together, so we can use them to send messages and data.”

Weghtrowénts looked towards Ansnā. “Two weeks ago, they barely had writing.”

“I believe that the more the humans advance, the slower their time becomes”, said Ansnā, very deferentially.

Weghtrowénts was deep in thought.

He said something to me in a language I didn’t understand.

“I don’t understand”, I said.

He said something else in a different language.

"Is that Proto Sino-Tibetan?" I asked. It didn't have tones, but the syllables seemed vaguely familiar.

After a permission-seeking glance at Weghtrowénts, Ansnā explained. "First Language split into ten thousand pieces in Africa. Second Language and Third Language were created to replace it."

"Has First Language been reconstructed? Has Second Language?" asked Weghtrowénts.

"Not First Language, but attempts are being made", I replied. "More of Second Language has, but nowhere near as much as for Third Language."

Weghtrowénts and Ansnā both looked as if they were waiting for something.

They stayed like this for half a minute or more, and I began to wonder that I'd said or done something offensive.

Then, it hit me. "Are you communicating in Bhéwonom?"

Three or four more seconds passed, then Ansnā answered. "Yes, I apologise, it's easier in our own language."

"The language you use to speak to me isn't your own language?" I knew it wasn't, as she'd mentioned this before.

"No. I speak in my own language to you, but it is translated so you hear it in Third Language. When you speak to me in Third Language, it is translated into my language."

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"Your lips move as if you're speaking the language I hear."

She seemed distracted. "That is part of it."

"You correct me when I make errors."

"They are detected."

Weghtrowénts' attention returned to Earth.

"Why can you speak Third Language when so few other humans can?"

"I'm a scholar", I replied. "I study what you call Third Language."

He nodded. "Do you have a list of words in Third Language and their associated meaning in a commonly-spoken language?"

"Yes, I have a translation dictionary for English and Third Language – in fact, I have several."

"Where are they?"

"Here in the bookcase", I said, rising to my feet.

"Will you be able to read them?"

"Is there a way to hear what the symbols sound like?"

"Hmm, well it uses a phonetic alphabet so – ah, of course, yes, I have a set of recordings for my students." I opened a drawer and removed some cassette tapes.

"Is there a device to convert these recordings to sound?"

"Yes, here." I handed him a player.

"Is it enough?" asked Ansnā, anxiously.

"I doubt it", replied Weghtrowénts.

"Are you hoping to learn English?" I enquired.

"If we can't, I will have – "

"Yes", interrupted Ansnā, hastily. "We are."

Weghtrowénts glared at her.

"Then you'll need a regular dictionary, too", I offered. "Many of the words we use, we do not know in Third Language."

Weghtrowénts turned to me in mild surprise.

"That is a good suggestion."

I went over to the bookcase and selected some volumes.

He paused a moment. "That will help. You may put them back."

"Would a pictorial dictionary be useful? Or a book of words with similar meanings?"

"Only books with words."

I handed him a copy of *Roget's Thesaurus*.

He looked inside. "This may also help."

He handed it back.

I waited while another conversation took place in the Bhéwonom backchannel.

After about a minute, Weghtrowénts disappeared and Ansnā regained her Earth-based self-awareness.

"He will make a decision tomorrow", she said.

"A decision about what?" I asked.

"Dheghōm", she replied. "I must go."

With that, she vanished too.

"See you in 2004", I said to empty air.

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11th November, 2005

Ansnā did not reappear in 2004. It was a Friday in November, 2005 when, just as I was about to head for home, she materialised in my office.

It was a different, bigger office now, because I was entitled to one; Ansnā seemed not to have been expecting this, and took a moment to take the place in.

She looked as beautiful as ever and back to her normal height; she dressed as a female-undergraduate clone. I, of course, was by now in my late sixties and starting to feel decrepit; only my mind and my inexplicably-perfect eyesight seemed for the moment resistant to my creeping decline.

"Hello, Clive", she said – in English. OK, so her accent was an amalgam of many accents, but it was undeniably English.

"Ansnā!" I smiled. I was genuinely happy to see her. "I was wondering where you'd got to."

"It's late", she said. "I came to say goodbye."

"In English? You managed to build a translation system in a day?"

"Not me, the engineers. Because of this, Dheghōm is safe now."

"It wasn't safe before? You told me I needn't worry!"

"It is safe now."

I sensed that she was in a rush. "Is there any way that I might see your translations from Third Language to English?" I wasn't hopeful, just desperate.

"I'll ask for your dictionary to be updated tomorrow", she replied.

"Tomorrow? That's fifteen years away!"

She smiled, apologetically. "As I said, it's late."

"Will I see you again?"

"No. I've been assigned to a different world – with a promotion, too! I prevented a calamity yesterday. I shan't be returning to Dheghōm any time soon."

I noticed how well the translation was contracting words – 'it's', 'I've', 'shan't'.

"Congratulations", I said – I meant it, too. "Will others from Bhéwonom still visit, though?"

"Yes, but how many, when and for how long has yet to be decided. An experiment is about to begin. Oh!" She pointed a finger in the air as she remembered something. "I have a present for you. Here."

She held out her left hand. In it was the hummingbird brooch.

"Don't you want to keep it?" I asked.

"I do, but I can't take it out of Dheghōm. I thought you might like it, as a keepsake."

I accepted the gift. "Thank you, Ansnā", I said, quite touched. "I shall treasure it. Could I take your photograph, too, before you – "

"I have to go!" she announced, interrupting me. "I'm sorry, Clive – enjoy being human!"

She kissed me, full on the lips, then was no longer there.

Dheghōm

Now I know that this sounds crazy. It will sound even crazier when, in 2020 or thereabouts, my Proto Indo-European dictionary miraculously expands to include translations of every word present in my *Collins English Dictionary, Millennium Edition*.

Hear me out, though.

The Dean's wife's friend from 1962, Mrs Stevenson, was born Maria Shuyalova. Her family were Russian nobility, who fled Petrograd during the Bolshevik revolution. Among the few possessions they escaped with was a hummingbird brooch designed by Carl Fabergé, the only one of its kind. Records from Fabergé's workshop attest to this: the singular piece was manufactured for the wife of Count Shuyalov in 1879. No others were made, at his insistence: it was unique. Eventually, it was inherited by Maria, who upon marriage to an Englishman became Mrs Stevenson. When she died, her widower donated it to the Victoria and Albert museum, where it now forms part of their collection of Russian costume jewellery. I saw it there once, at an exhibition in 1998.

Nevertheless, sitting before me as I type this is an identical hummingbird brooch, indistinguishable from the one now in the vaults of the V&A.

I don't believe I shall sell it.

Notes

Professor Phillips removed this blog entry six days after posting it, having found the near-universal ridicule of his peers too much to endure. He now refuses to discuss his experiences or to answer questions on the topic.

[Update 17 May 2022]

According to his daughter, Anna Phillips-McBride, her father's PIE dictionary remains as it was in 2005. He now expects it to be updated circa 2035, when he will be aged 97. He intends at that time to publish all his post-2004 work on what he now calls Third Language.