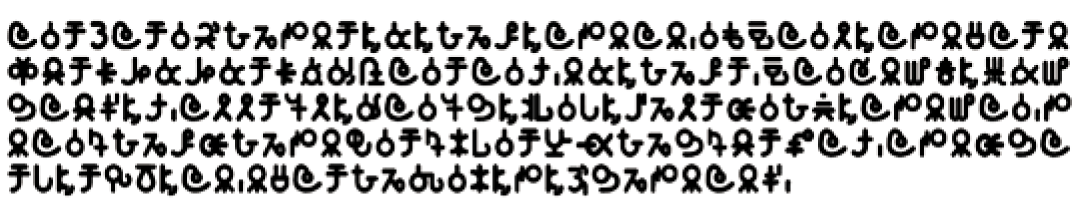
WORDS & LANGUAGE

Ferxao, the Fernalese language, is the Pristine Speech that reflects and responds to the bounteous pleasures and surreal delights of the Garden. It is spoken by all living creatures in the Fernal Cosmos: singing trees, spirit ancestors, stars, animal tricksters as well as people and God/desses.This playful language is aesthetically beautiful, lilting and redolent with magical intent.

FERXAO



Ferxao "Fernalese"

Ferxao, the Fernalese language, maps out the principles of *ferzen*, the way of 'fer', which refers to the sublime processes of nature and the ideals of taking joy in being alive. The word *fer* is fundamental with an array of meanings from 'pristine, verdant' and 'healthy, lively' to 'natural, attractive, sublime' and even to feel sexually aroused! It also enfolds into a bewildering array of derived words whose meanings range from 'relating to the Fernalese language' to 'life energy' and 'give birth', 'inspire, awake' and 'care for' as well as Afer, the sacred name of the Fernal Creatrix who created the Garden.

Fernalese has 24 sounds, and is represented by a syllabary rather than an alphabet: characters stand not for letters but for syllables like 'ba' and 'ca'. These characters have an English transliteration which helps with pronunciation, which is broadly similar to Spanish or French, with pure clear vowels, but more lilting and softly-articulated than most European languages. Most letters in the transliteration are pronounced as you would expect in English, but a few are different, and are pronounced as follows:

'ch'	sounds like	'k'
'd'	sounds like	'th' in 'then'
'h'	sounds like	glottal stop in 'uh oh'
'hu'	sounds like	'w'
'n'	nasalises the preceding vowel, as in French	
'u'	is often pronounced as 'w'	
's'	sounds like	'sh'
'tx'	sounds like	'ch'or 'j'
'x'	sounds like	'zh'
'z'	sounds like	's'
'i'	is often pronounced like 'y'	

Structurally, Fernalese is agglutinative and synthetic. This means that, unlike English, units of meaning are added together like building blocks and words blur into each other so that a single Fernalese word can carry the meaning of a whole sentence in English. We can see this in action:

noh	'stay, settle, live in a place'
nohai	'stay here, live in this place'
nohaina	'I am staying here'
dahnohaina	'I want to (be) stay(ing) here'
dahcairenohaina	'I want to stay, enjoying here'

Fernalese is also a verbal, rather than nominal, language and includes long sequences of verbs strung together which are preferred over inter-related nouns in a sentence. This lends Fernalese a greater sense of flow when expressing actions:

dahferxaota	'I want to speak Fernalese' (literally – I want-pristine-speak)
imecatarta	'I sing the First Word' (literally – I first-sing)

The heart of the language is also egalitarian. There are no structures expressing politeness or formality, no words expressing hierarchy or rank such as 'Master' or 'Lord', and no way to express comparitives or superlatives. Instead, Fernalese idealises statements of colour, self-expression and quality.

painting by Roku Sasaki

This may at times give the speaker of a non-Fernal language cause to think: what do I really want to say here? Consider the English expression 'Master Artist, Maestro', a hierarchical statement which is impossible in Fernalese. Note how the language tackles this with colour and novelty rather than through elevating rank or superlatives.

birrianchartze	birrianchartze	'greatly talented artist' (literally – talented-craft-image-person)

Fernalese also lacks any word equivalent to the English verb 'to do', and instead a range of more precise words, equivalent to English words like perform, complete and even delight in doing are used. Fernalese grammar also recognises neither plural or gender, but marks verbs for animate/inanimate and individual/collective distinctions:

catarta	catarta	'I sing'
catartiz	catartiz	'you sing'
catarte	catarte	'he, she sings'
catartec	catartec	'it sings'
catarton	catarton	'we all sing together, everyone sings, all the people sing'
catarten	catarten	'someone sings, something sings'
catartoc	catartoc	'it is sung naturally, the song sings of itself'

Lexically-speaking, however, Fernalese recognises three genders: *ona* 'woman, female', *tlai* 'man, male' and *yia* 'queer-identified, transgender, homosexual', and given the shapeshifting nature of everything in the Garden, gender can be a personal choice of self-expression.

Everything in the Garden is celebrated as delightful aspects of a wondrous cosmos and no evil exists here. The nearest word in Fernalese that relates to this concept is *diat* 'unexpected, imbalanced, turned around', but rather playfully, a similar-sounding word *daet* means 'maintain, cherish, orient as expected' while *diatuia* 'trickster who turns things around' is a creative figure in Fernal mythology. A third word *cuan* means 'strangely- or interestingly-oriented, forever moving' and the word *fercuan* relates to the whole Fernal Garden itself.

Blessings (daetxai) are also common, not just as rituals but even as greetings, and as evil doesn't exist here, blessings take on life-affirming qualities of wellness, creativity and magic. In bestowing a blessing, the speaker is also blessed by the same words.

Written blessings are circular: the one to the right reads io charrian sai, io tuairian sai 'we bless the crafting of creativity, we bless the emergence of crafting'.

Such sublime strangeness propels us into a curious linguistic world different from anything we know. It has been a veritable Fernal Delight to craft this Pristine Speech!

The Fernalese language is written with a set of characters called *ferchir* 'Fernal Writing'. It is a syllabary, but there are also a few letters for single consonants at the end of syllables or words, as well as vowels. It is told in the Fernal mythology that Achir, the spirit of writing, created each letterform from the bodies of snakes, so they are sometimes called *bicteferbiai* 'Little Fernal Serpents'.

a		e		i		o		u		ai	
ba		be		bi		bo		bu			
ca		che		chi		co		cu		-c	
da		de		di		do		du			
fa		fe		fi		fo		fu		-f	
ha		he		hi		ho		hu		-h	
hua		hue		hui		huo					
la		le		li		lo		lu		-l	
ma		me		mi		mo		mu		-m	
na		ne		ni		no		nu		-n	
pa		pe		pi		po		pu			
ra		re		ri		ro		ru		-r	
sa		se		si		so		su			
ta		te		ti		to		tu		-t	
tla		tle		tli		tlo		tlu			
txa		txe		txi		txo		txu			
tza		tze		tzi		tzo		tzu			
xa		xe		xi		xo		xu			
ya		ye		yi		yo		yu			
za		ze		zi		zo		zu		-z	

The only punctuation mark is ᛬ used as a full stop or a comma. Numbers in Fernalese only go up to ten thousand, *miria* in Fernalese, a word that also means 'innumerable, myriad', and which can be seen in the word *fermiriadintzon*, 'Myriad Fernal Things Gathered' – the Fernalese title for this very book!

siru	zero		se	five		lio	ten	
ih	one		beo	six		ban	100	
zo	two		ler	seven		tzai	1000	
io	three		feir	eight		miria	10,000	
huai	four		nue	nine				

image by Even Oldridge & David Heskin