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Translating Tolkien. The thin line between translation and misrepresentation. An italian case-study

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Introduction

The considerations in this article are inspired by the recent publication of a new Italian translation of *The Lord of the Rings*.¹ Since the present article is not dedicated to Italian native speakers, nor to translation specialists, we will provide several examples but renounce a thorough analysis of them, redirecting those interested in them, to a more extensive essay on the subject, from the writer, to be published later this year,² or to a shorter article already published.³

We believe that this topic is not limited to the technical aspect of translation: it is of primary interest to Tolkien's scholars of all nationalities. In fact, this translation represents an occasion for reflection on the risks of potential misrepresentation of Tolkien's work, the implications of which could also arise in similar contexts relating to other countries, for which this episode could constitute an interesting case-study.

To better understand the situation, we briefly summarize the history of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in Italy. A first partial publication of the book took place in 1967, when the publishing house *Astrolabio* published the first volume, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in the translation of Vittoria Alliata di Villafranca. The operation enjoyed little success, to the point that the publisher decided not to publish the remaining two volumes. Only in 1970 did the publisher *Rusconi* finally print the complete work (with an introduction by Elémire Zolla). The text was still the one used by *Astrolabio*, but was revised by the editor Quirino Principe, who did not adopt some of the former translation choices.⁴ In 2000, the rights for publication were acquired by the publisher *Bompiani*, who maintained the previous translation, including the corrections by Principe. In October 2019, again from the publisher *Bompiani*, *The Fellowship of the Ring* was published with a new translation by Ottavio Fatica, which we analyze in this article. The publication of the remaining two books by the same translator is expected in 2020. At present, it is no longer possible to purchase the previous translation, which has been withdrawn from the market by the publisher.

Following the analyses carried out on the recent translation, comparing it to the original English text, we believe we can indicate, for the purpose of synthesis, and premising that this summary should not replace a more detailed analysis of the texts, some problematic aspects that seem to constitute a recurring trend. Analyzing the new translation by Ottavio Fatica, in fact, we found two constant tendencies which, due to the repetitiveness and frequency that characterize them, rather than being mere episodic events, seem to reflect, at least in part, an intentional choice by the translator.

These trends can be summarized as follows:

- Introduction of a low and strongly colloquial tone without justification from the original text
- Introduction of modern technical and/or jargon terms without justification from the original text

It is not to be excluded that in some of these occurrences, the translator, performing the (self-assigned) task of making the language of Tolkien more "linear" and "flowing" in his perspective, used

¹ The edition we are referring to is: Tolkien, J.R.R., 2019. *La Compagnia dell'Anello*. Milan: Bompiani.

² Savelli M., 2020. *Tradurre Tolkien*. Viareggio: La Vela.

³ Savelli, M. 2020. "Questo è un grande libro, non un fantasy" *A proposito di una recente traduzione del Signore degli Anelli*. <https://www.francocardini.it/minima-cardiniana-268-5/> Accessed March 1, 2020.

⁴ In a curator's note attached to all the editions of the translation curated by him, Principe explains that his intervention was mostly aimed at keeping the original version of some English names, especially Hobbit surnames, and at the poetic texts and the appendixes.

terms unsuitable for the context, because connected to a language too modern and contemporary, often linked to science or technology, without fully realizing the mistake. In other words, we believe there is reason to doubt that the translator was always aware of the semantic implications of some Italian terms, even regardless of their lack of correspondence with the English term used by Tolkien; in particular, it is possible in our view that some jargon terms have been included because they had been mistakenly considered archaisms. In the following charts we offer several examples, taken from different parts of the book, which we consider to be indicative of the trends mentioned above. All the examples refer only to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, as only this volume of the new translation has been published so far. For the benefit of the reader, we have chosen to juxtapose the corresponding passages from both the old and the new translation, in order to provide an example of translation which should not certainly be considered the only possible, but, at least in the vast majority of the cases, an acceptable one. The old translation by Vittoria Alliaata, although not free from errors, does not present the macroscopic and frequent semantic shifts that we have identified in the new one. It mostly limits itself to some objective oversights of a very different nature, (and endowed with a much more rarefied frequency), which we will not cover in the present analysis. This qualitative difference can be explained, again, simply by different levels of “technical prowess” of the translators, but rather in the intentional approach carried on by the more recent translator. That is the topic of the present article.

From *Concerning Hobbits*

In the following chart, the terms “gronda”, “contropartita”, “attività di sussistenza”, “cotica”, are jargon words that sound very out of place to the Italian ear. The remaining examples are colloquialisms. The term “cotica” (for “turf”) recurring five times in the new translation, is a mistake that sounds even comical in Italian. The technical term, (still completely unsuitable for the task because of its status of technical term) would be in fact “cotica erbosa”, whereas “cotica” alone, only refers to a delicious (but rather heavy) traditional dish based on pork skin.

Tolkien	Old Translation	New Translation
For they are little people...	Essi sono infatti minuscoli...	Per esser piccoli lo sono...
Their height is variable, ranging between two and four feet of our measure. They seldom now reach three feet; but they have dwindled, they say, and in ancient days they were taller.	La loro statura è variabile, ed oscilla da un braccio a un braccio e mezzo; Ma ormai è raro che qualcuno arrivi a quella misura giacché pare che col tempo si siano rimpiccioliti e che in passato fossero più alti.	Secondo le nostre misure l'altezza può variare tra il mezzo metro e il metro e venti. Di rado ormai arrivano a un metro, ma a sentir loro sono rimpiccioliti e anticamente erano più alti.
...They Dwelt in the upper vales of Anduin, between the eaves of Greenwood the Great and the Misty Mountains.	Dimoravano nelle alte vallate dell'Anduin, tra la Grande Foresta Verde e le Montagne Nebbiose.	Dimoravano nelle alte valli di Anduin, tra la gronda di Boscoverde il Grande e i Monti Brumosi.
Indeed, a remnant still dwelt there of the Dunedàin, the Kings of Men that came over the Sea, out of Westernesse; but they were dwindling fast, and the Lands of their north kingdom were falling far and wide into waste.	Vi erano persino gli ultimi numenoreàni, i re degli uomini giunti per Mare dall'Ovesturia, in tempi remoti; ma poiché stavano velocemente sparendo, le terre del loro Regno del Nord erano in un pietoso stato di abbandono.	Ci vivevano ancora gli ultimi Dunedàin, i re degli uomini giunti per mare dall'Occidenza; ma andavano scemando in fretta e le terre del loro Regno del Nord finivano in malora un po' dovunque.

All that was demanded of them was that they should keep the Great Bridge in repair, and all other bridges and roads, speed the king's messengers, and acknowledge his lordship.

Fu loro solamente chiesto, come compenso, di riparare tutte le strade e i ponti, in particolar modo il Grande Ponte, di augurare buon viaggio ai messi del re e di riverire la sua regalità.

Come contropartita dovevano soltanto tenere in buono stato Ponte Grande e tutti gli altri ponti e le strade, agevolare il passaggio dei messi del re e riconoscere la sua signoria.

The land was rich and kindly, and though it had long been deserted when they entered it, it had before been well tilled, and there the king had once had many farms, cornlands, vineyards and woods.

La terra era ricca e generosa, e prima dello stato di abbandono in cui l'avevano trovata, aveva conosciuto bravi coltivatori che curavano le fattorie, le piantagioni di granturco, i vigneti ed i boschi di proprietà del re.

La terra era ricca e generosa e, pur se da molto abbandonata al loro arrivo, in precedenza era stata coltivata a dovere e il re a suo tempo ci aveva posseduto fattorie, coltivazioni di cereali, vigneti e boschi a profusione

...and there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living...

Conducevano in quel ridente angolo della terra una vita talmente ordinata e bene organizzata...

...e in quell'amenico angolo di mondo svolgevano le loro ben organizzate attività di sussistenza...

Had long been accustomed to build sheds and workshops

Solevano costruirsi laboratori e botteghe.

Erano abituati da molto a costruirsi rimesse e officine.

The oldest kind were, indeed, no more than built imitation of *smials*, thatched with dry grass or straw, or roofed with turves, and having walls somewhat bulged.

Il tipo più antico non era che un'imitazione degli *smial*, dai tetti di paglia, di erba secca o di muschio, e dai muri leggermente curvi.

Quelle più antiche, a dire il vero, imitavano nella conformazione gli *smial*, con il tetto d'erba secca o paglia, coperto di cotica, e le pareti alquanto rigonfie.

One example from *The Council of Elrond*

Tolkien

In that time he planted the last sapling of the White Tree in memory of his brother

Old Translation

A quell'epoca piantò l'ultimo giovane Albero Bianco in memoria di suo fratello

New Translation

A quell'epoca piantò l'ultima matricina dell'Albero Bianco in memoria del fratello.

The term “matricina” is a word belonging to the modern jargon of agronomy and sheep breeding, completely unsuitable for the context, and moreover, precisely because of its nature of word belonging to a very, narrow, sectorial environment, incomprehensible to most Italian readers. The old translation has simply “young tree”, which seems rather free but acceptable. The word “virgulto” – a not particularly rare term, with the same meaning – would have been more advisable.

From *A Long-Expected Party*

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | There was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton | Tutta Hobbiville si mise in agitazione | I commenti e i fermenti a Hobbiton si sprecarono |
| 2 | <i>At ninety-nine</i> they began to call him <i>well-preserved</i> | A novantanove incominciarono a dire che <i>si manteneva bene</i> . | A novantanove anni iniziarono a definirlo <i>ben conservato</i> |
| 3 | But he had no close friends, until some of his younger cousins began to grow up. | Ma non ebbe amici intimi fino a quando alcuni suoi giovani cugini non incominciarono a diventare grandi. | Ma per avere amici intimi dovette aspettare che diventassero grandi alcuni cugini più giovani |
| 4 | At that time Frodo was still in his <i>tweens</i> , as the hobbits called the irresponsible twenties between childhood and coming of age at thirty-three. | A quell'epoca Frodo era ancora negli <i>enti</i> , come gli Hobbit chiamavano gli irresponsabili anni tra l'infanzia e la maggiore età (33). | All'epoca Frodo era ancora <i>prepubere</i> , come gli Hobbit chiamano l'irresponsabile ventennio tra l'infanzia e la maggiore età raggiunta a trentatré anni |
| 5 | No one had a more attentive audience than old Ham Gamgee, commonly known as the Gaffer. He held forth at the <i>Ivy Bush</i> , a small inn on the Bywater road; and he spoke with some authority... | Il pubblico più attento era certo quello del vecchio Ham Gamgee detto il Gaffiere, alla piccola osteria <i>L'edera</i> sulla via per Lungacque. Parlava autorevolmente... | Nessuno aveva un pubblico più attento del vecchio Ham Gamgee, meglio noto come il Veglio. sproloquiava al <i>Cespo d'Edera</i> , una piccola locanda sulla via di Acquariva; e parlava con una certa autorevolezza... |
| 6 | "There was never much to tell of him, till he was drowned". "Drowned?" said several voices. | "Non ci fu mai niente da dire sul suo conto fin quando non annegò". "Annegato?" Chiesero parecchie voci. | "Non c'è mai stato niente da ridire sul suo conto fino a che non è affocato". "Affocato?" Fecero varie voci |
| 7 | Orders began to pour out of Bag End for every kind of provision, commodity or luxury that could be obtained in Hobbiton | Migliaia di ordinazioni si riversarono da Casa Baggins, con richiesta di ogni tipo di attrezzi, provviste ed oggetti di lusso che fossero disponibili ad Hobbiville. | Cominciarono a fioccare ordinazioni per ogni tipo di fornitura, derrata, o bene voluttuario disponibile a Hobbiton |

8	The sun got up, the clouds vanished, flags were unfurled, and the fun began.	Il sole ascese in tutto il suo splendore squarciando le nubi; si alzarono le bandiere e fu dato il via ai divertimenti.	Spuntò il sole, le nuvole svanirono, si spiegarono le bandiere ed ebbe inizio lo spasso
9	Bringing up young hobbits took a lot of provender	Tirar su i giovani Hobbit richiedeva enormi provviste alimentari.	Tirar su giovani hobbit richiedeva foraggio a palate
10	All the one hundred and forty-four guests expected a pleasant feast; though they rather dreaded the after-dinner speech of their host (an inevitable item).	I centoquarantaquattro ospiti aspettavano con ansia il succulento pasto, malgrado temessero il discorso commemorativo del padrone di casa (inevitabile conclusione).	Tutti e centoquarantaquattro gli ospiti pregustavano un piacevole banchetto, pur paventando il discorso postprandiale dell'anfitrione (numero immancabile)
11	<i>I don't know half of you half as well as I should like; and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve.</i>	Conosco la metà di voi soltanto a metà; e nutro, per meno della metà di voi, metà dell'affetto che meritate	<i>Metà di voi non la conosco neanche per metà come mi piacerebbe; e meno della metà di voi mi piace la metà di quanto merita</i>
12	Silly old fool	Vecchio scemo	Vecchio scemo
13	<i>Well-preserved</i> indeed!	"E poi dicono che mi mantengo bene!", sbuffò.	"Ben Conservato, come no!" sbuffò
14	"It has been called that before", he said, "but not by you".	"Qualcuno già prima di te l'ha chiamato il suo tesoro".	"C'è chi lo ha chiamato così anche prima" disse. "Ma non eri tu".
15	Indeed it would take away the only point I ever saw in the affair	"Verrebbe meno l'unico aspetto positivo in tutta questa storia".	Direi che verrebbe a mancare l'unico motivo valido per aver montato tutto questo <i>bailamme</i> .
16	Expect me when you see me!	Non ti meravigliare quando mi vedrai arrivare quattro quatto.	Tanto prima o poi ci si rivede!

In the examples above, n.1 is a semantically incorrect colloquialism, as “fermenti” (for “excitement”) does not make sense as a plural, and “si sprekarono” (literally: “were wasted”) is a rather vulgar colloquialism. The unpleasantness of the solution is intensified by its appearance in the very first phrase of the first chapter of the book. In n.2 and n.13, “Ben conservato” (too literal translation of “well preserved”) cannot be referred, in Italian, to a person, but only to objects. The Italian reader might be misled, by this and several other examples from the same chapter, into

mistakenly detecting a nuance of cynic irony by the narrator. This is the case of n.5: “sproloquiava” is derogatory, to “hold forth” is not. In Italian it is contradictory to “sproloquiare” “with some authority”. “Teneva banco” would have been the most precise solution. Unjustified cynicism is inserted also in n.9, where the English “provender” certainly not without a paternal, ironic nuance, can refer to sentient beings *as well as* to animals, but the Italian “foraggio” can only refer to the latters. This is also the case of n.10, where the cold and obscure technicality “postprandiale” for the simple “after dinner”, and the term “numero” for “item”, where “numero” is here semantically implying a “circus show”, concur to suggest that the narrator himself is ironic about Bilbo, with an aggressiveness not justified by the source text. Example n.3 makes Bilbo appear like a pathetic character, who *in order to have intimate friends*, has no choice but to wait until his relatives grow up. The concept in the English might be not that far, but the Italian rendition is too aggressively derogatory. In n.4, “prepubere” is an Italian modern technical term (not a neologism as Tolkien makes clear for his “tweens”, although apparently, later on, the word came into use), strictly referring to biological, sexual “coming of age”. It is incorrect in terms of semantic register but also in terms of meaning, since it can be assumed that the maturity of the hobbits from a strictly biological point of view preceded by nearly twenty years, as in humans, the threshold of thirty-three years of age. Tolkien does not refer to a biological, but rather to a cultural threshold. In n.6, “affocato” (instead of the normal correct Italian term “affogato”) is a failed attempt to render the regionalism “drowned”. The problem here is that “drowned” is attested in the spoken language, whereas “affocato” is an invention of the translator. Moreover, “affocare” actually happens to exist in Italian, but it has a completely different meaning, not etymologically related to water but, comically enough, to fire (in Italian : “fuoco”, therefore, “to be on fire”). The term recurs three times in the chapter. In n. 7, “fornitura”, “derrata” and “bene voluttuario” are much colder technical terms than their English supposedly corresponding terms in the text. In n. 8, “spasso” for “fun”, that could have been easily translated with “divertimento”, is a colloquialism that suggests a patronizing detachment by the narrator towards his subject. In n.11, the rendering of the famous Bilbo's “tongue twister” appears grammatically incorrect (“per metà come mi piacerebbe”), perhaps due to an attempt to mark a distance at all costs from the previous translation, whose rendering is very difficult to improve because strictly imposed by the necessity of maintaining the parallelisms. In n.12, “vecchio scemo”, (that appears in both translations), is a major discrepancy of tone, as this Italian rendition is way too aggressive and vulgar and does not maintain any nuance of affectionate reprobation. N.14, n.15, and n.16 are colloquialisms, all appearing in phrases by the character Gandalf: n.14, in particular, is an incorrect *consecutio temporum*, where one verb in the English could have easily been rendered with the same construction in Italian, as happens in the old translation. The attempt to introduce an unjustified colloquialism induced the mistake; “tanto prima o poi ci si rivede” is a low and rather jovial colloquialism, completely out of context, considering the speaking character *and* the gravity of tone for the whole scene.

One example from *Three is company*

Tolkien	Old Translation	New Translation
Touched with gold and red, the autumn trees seemed to be d'oro e di carminio, parevano sailing rootles in a shadowy sea.	Gli alberi autunnali, pennellati Pittati d'oro e rosso, gli alberi autunnali sembravano nuotare in navigare senza radici in un mare umbratile.	d'ombra.

The adjective “pittati”, a grammatically incorrect colloquial term, deserves to be highlighted as one of the most cacophonous mistakes in the entire translation. It is a term that a reasonably well-educated Italian person would avoid even in spoken language, let alone in a written text of any nature.

From *The Mirror of Galadriel*

Tolkien	Old Translation	New Translation
1 Night came beneath the trees as they walked, and the Elves uncovered their silver lamps.	La notte discese sotto le fronde mentre avanzavano, e gli Elfi accesero le loro lampade d'argento.	La notte scese sotto le piante mentre procedevano, e gli Elfi tirarono fuori le lanterne d'argento.
2 In their many-tiered branches	Tra i rami frondosi	Tra i rami multistrati
3 They were clad wholly in white	Le vesti erano bianche	Vestivano di bianco da capo a piè.
4 May it be a sign that though the world is now dark, better days are at hand, and that friendship shall be renewed between our peoples.	Possa ciò essere un presagio che, malgrado l'odierna oscurità del mondo, giorni migliori ci attendano, e che l'amicizia sia rinnovata tra i nostri popoli.	Possa esser questo un segno che, pur se oggi il mondo è oscuro, giorni migliori non sono lontani, e che l'amicizia tra i nostri popoli rinverdirà.
5 But I cannot see him from afar, unless he comes within the fences of Lothlórien.	Non posso vederlo da lontano, a meno ch'egli non passi i cancelli di Lothlórien.	Ma da lontano non posso vederlo, se non subentra nelle recinzioni di Lothlórien
6 If our fold had been exiled long and far from Lothlórien, who of the Galadhrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and would not wish to look upon their ancient home, though it had become an abode of dragons?	Se il nostro popolo avesse conosciuto un lungo esilio lontano da Lothlórien, quale dei Galadhrim passerebbe nelle vicinanze senza il desiderio di rivedere l'antica dimora, fosse anche divenuta un covo di draghi?	Se il nostro popolo avesse conosciuto un lungo esilio lontano da Lothlórien, quale dei Galadhrim, persino Celeborn il Saggio, ci passerebbe vicino senza desiderar di rivedere l'antica sede, foss'anche divenuta ostello di draghi?
7 "Dark is the water of Kheled-Zâram, and cold are the springs of Kibil-Nâla, and fair were the many-pillared halls of Khazad-dûm in the Elder Days before the fall of mighty kings beneath the stone".	"Oscura è l'acqua del Kheled-Zâram, e gelide le sorgive di Kibil-Nâla, ma splendidi erano i saloni dalle mille colonne, a Khazad-dûm nei Tempi Remoti, prima della caduta dei potenti re della roccia profonda"	"Oscura è l'acqua del Kheled-Zâram, e gelide le polle di Kibil-Nâla, e belle le sale pluricolonnate a Khazad-dûm nei Giorni Antichi anzi la caduta dei potenti re sotto la pietra."
8 Maybe it was only a test, and she thought to read our thoughts for her own good purpose	Forse non era che una prova, ed ella volle leggere i nostri pensieri	Forse è solo una prova e lei ha creduto di

		per un suo recondito fine.	leggere i nostri pensieri per una buona causa.
9	Haldir had bidden them farewell and gone back again to the fences of the North	Haldir, dopo aver loro augurato buon viaggio, era tornato ai confini settentrionali	Haldir li aveva salutati ed era tornato alle siepi del Nord
10	<i>A lord of wisdom throned he sat</i>	<i>In sapienza ed in saggezza egli era signore</i>	<i>Saggio vecchio intronizzato</i>
11	Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say	É difficile dire se siano stati loro a creare la terra o viceversa.	Difficile dire se loro hanno fatto così la terra o se è la terra che li ha fatti così.
12	And don't think I'm finding fault.	E non crediate ch'io non sia d'accordo con voi	E non dovete pensare che ho qualcosa da ridire
13	Down a long flight of steps	Scesa una lunga scalinata	Scesa una lunga rampa di scale
14	They've dug up Bagshot Row, and there's poor old Gaffer going down the hill with his bits of things on a barrow. I must go home!	Hanno messo sottosopra via Saccoforino, ed il povero vecchio Gaffiere se ne sta scendendo la Collina con la sua roba su una carriola. Devo tornare a casa!	Hanno sventrato vico Scarcasacco e c'è il povero Veglio che scende la Collina con le sue carabattole su una carriola. Devo tornare a casa!
15	"I pass the test", she said. "I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel."	"Ho superato la prova", disse. "Perderò i miei poteri, e me ne andrò all'Ovest, e rimarrò Galadriel".	"Ho superato la prova," disse. "Mi sminuirò, andrò all'Ovest e rimarrò Galadriel".

In this chart we selected 15 examples from the chapter *The Mirror of Galadriel*. In n.1, “piante” is an imprecise and too prosaic translation, “uncovered” is misinterpreted. In n.2, “multistrati” is a technical term that refers to modern, industrially produced plywood. In n.3, “da capo a pie” is a low colloquialism, unsuitable for a king and a queen, (or even for anybody in a written text). N. 4 is a colloquial and grammatically incorrect *consecutio temporum* (omission of the *modo congiuntivo*, as well as in n.12). That is partially the case for n.5, which also includes “subentra” and “recizioni”, the first being a semantically incorrect translation of “comes” (probably wrongfully intended as archaism), the second being a modernistic rendition of the subtly ambiguous “fences”. In n. 6, “sede” is a disheartening rendition of the term “home”, more suitable for the headquarters of a commercial company, and “ostello”, for “abode”, just means “youth hostel” out of a metaphorical use, (that is not the case in the English text). In n.7, “multicolonnate” and the very flat “belle” for “fair” completely deprives the important phrase of its poetic *pathos*. In n. 8, we have again a case of colloquial incorrectness with *consecutio temporum* (a present followed by a past, referring to the same action), and a complete misunderstanding of the idiomatic expression “for her own good purpose”.

In n.9, “to bid farewell” is translated as it were “to say bye”. Of this kind of “micro-fluctuations” in the new translations, hundreds of examples could be produced; in n.10, (from the poem by Sam dedicated to the memory of Gandalf), “vecchio” (instead of “anziano”) in Italian is disrespectful, not encomiastic, and “intronizzato” is a very obscure technical term, absent from the use and out place in a poetic text. Technical term with strong modern semantic implications is also “rampa di scale” (n.13); “carabattole” (n.14), is a colloquial and derogatory term that introduces a derisive nuance not appropriate for the tragic context and the speaker: Sam referring to his father. Examples n.11 and n.15 would deserve a more thorough analysis, as they constitute serious misrepresentation of the meaning of what are perhaps the two key passages of the entire chapter.

The problematic elements in the new translation become particularly perceptible in a text like *The Lord of the Rings*, not only by virtue of Tolkien's mastery of languages and attention to linguistic aspects at multiple levels – phonetic, morphological, semantic etc. – with consequent obligation for the translator to take account of it, but also by virtue of the "meta-cultural" characteristic of the work, in which fictitious civilizations and cultures bring their imprint to expressive forms, etymologies, different rhetorical and communicative styles etc., superimposing them on similar needs connected to the original and arrival languages of the text itself. There have been, especially in recent years, interesting contributions⁵ dedicated to the theory of translation of Tolkien's work, which have shown the nature of these difficulties and proposed solutions on how to solve them.

If confronting Tolkien presents a more complex challenge for the translator than what the case would be for other authors, on the other hand, this task presents an unusual element of advantage: the presence of a cohesive and organic corpus of legends in which everything is contextualized, allowing the prepared translator to never feel abandoned by the author in carrying out his task. As always, however, the necessary prerequisite for any translation choice is the correct understanding of the meaning between the lines, the spirit, the intentions of the original author, the only true creator of the work, and the acceptance, by the translator to put himself at the service of them. The aspects of translation technique, although very important, are to be understood as a corollary of this essential prerequisite: understanding the text, not only in terms of content but also in terms of style (and having the will to be faithful to it).

In fact, if one reaches the extremes of denying that the function of translation is to respect the intentions of the author of a work, (thus allowing readers of another language to be able to read the text of that author), the question ends before trying at further examinations. But there is a difference between interpreting the author's text in the way the author wanted and bending it to one's views; between hermeneutic freedom and duty to respect the starting text on which this hermeneutic freedom will be exercised by many.

In light of these considerations, it is of primary importance not to limit the perception of this translation to the comparison of texts in a philological sense, in search of technical errors. To be more precise, we should say that the lack of “technical” expertise demonstrated by the translator, which we hypothesized linked to an ineffective ability to determine the semantic connections of a word, especially in the target language, mistakenly led to consider acceptable the introduction of certain jargon words or terms in other ways connected to contemporaneity, therefore unsuitable to a text such as *The Lord of the Rings*. But at the same time, some degree of ideological bias has, in our opinion, encouraged this practice. The density and the recurrence of the interpretative differences between the two Italian versions, not only linked to different semantic understandings, but also and above all to different choices of register and tone, indeed require further reflections. The major contribution that

⁵ Thomas Honegger (editor). 2011, *Translating Tolkien. Text and Film*, Zollikofen: Walking Tree Publishers; Allan Turner, 2005. *Translating Tolkien: Philological Elements in The Lord of the Rings*, Bern: Peter Lang.

can be made to this debate is therefore, in the writer's opinion, the transport of the terms of the judgment from the superficial, epiphenomenal level of the alleged "philological fidelity" to that of the intentions, not even too cryptic, which underlie.

From this emerges a clear picture, connected to the attempt to make the Tolkienian text more digestible to an audience not interested in the "Fantasy" genre, as expressly stated, in an interview, by the author of the new translation⁶: "This is a great book: not a fantasy genre book". We believe that this particular statement, the meaning of which can be clearly understood by reading the full text of the interview, manifests the translator's conviction that *The Lord of the Rings* should be "freed" from stylistic elements that he considers dated and have made the book popular within a niche audience, that of "fantasy genre" fanatics, towards which he assumes a paternalistic attitude. For example, he expresses his desire to remove Tolkien's works from the bookstore shelves dedicated to the fantasy genre, to transfer it to that of the classics of literature. This desire is *per se* admirable, but should have been motivated by the poor quality of many books that appear in bookstores alongside Tolkien's texts, rather than by the need to redefine the meaning of the Tolkienian work itself, by the means of altering its lexicon and style. To make the text enjoyable to a wider audience as well as to "well educated" people, he seems to maintain, the English text must be "rejuvenated" by eliminating the old Italian translation, towards which he expressed a very harsh judgment, in our opinion not corroborated by factual proof (to the point of having been sued for defamation by the author of the latter)⁷. The result is a translation where the characters often seem to speak a language more typical of the contemporary world than one suitable for an epic and "medieval" context. It is a language rich in slang and dialectal expressions. This transformation, perhaps tolerable in the case of some Hobbit characters – but in any case exasperated beyond the intentions of the English text – is particularly striking in the case of the Elves, and characters like Gandalf, who, in this translation, often make use of colloquial and sometimes rather coarse terms, way distant from the author's intentions. "*Gandalf, please, should not 'splutter'. Though he may seem testy at times, has a sense of humour, and adopts a somewhat avuncular attitude to hobbits, he is a person of high and noble authority, and great dignity*"⁸. This Tolkienian warning seems to have been perfectly ignored in the examples that follow, related to this character, in which he appears as an "old grumbler" rather than as the individual of deep wisdom that can be appreciated in the original text.

Chapter	Tolkien	Old Translation	New Translation
A long expected party	Indeed it would take away the only point I ever saw in the affair	Verrebbe meno l'unico aspetto positivo in tutta questa storia	Direi che verrebbe a mancare l'unico motivo valido per aver montato tutto questo <i>bailamme</i> .
The shadow of the past	It is many a year since the Nine walked abroad	Quanti anni sono passati dal giorno in cui i Nove si allontanarono!	Quanti anni sono passati da che i Nove presero il largo?
The shadow of the past	I had weary days of it	Ho penato giorni e giorni	Me li sono sciropati per giorni e giorni

⁶ *La Repubblica*, April 29, 2018. For an extended version of the same interview: <https://www.jrrtolkien.it/2018/04/29/tradurre-il-signore-degli-anelli-lintervista/> Accessed March 1, 2020.

⁷ Source: <https://www.francocardini.it/minima-cardiniana-230-4/>

⁸ *Letters*, n. 210.

The shadow of the past	The woodmen said that there was some new terror abroad, a ghost that drank blood	I boscaioli dicevano che un nuovo terrore sgomentava le popolazioni, un fantasma assetato di sangue	I boschivi parlavano di un nuovo spauracchio in circolazione, un fantasma assetato di sangue
The shadow of the past	I have paid for it since with many dark and dangerous days	Numerose, interminabili giornate oscure e pericolose mi hanno fatto pagare da allora il mio sbaglio	Da allora l'ho scontata con una sfilza di giorni bui e pericolosi
The shadow of the past	Wretched fool!	Povero diavolo!	Povero idiota!
The shadow of the past	Even if you took it and struck it with a heavy sledge-hammer, it would make no dint in it.	Anche colpendolo con una mazza da fabbro, non lo scalfiresti nemmeno.	Anche se lo prendessi a mazzate, non lo scalfiresti.
The Ring goes south	It may be nothing, only a wisp of thin cloud	Potrebbe non esser niente, solo una nube leggera.	Forse non è niente, soltanto una sfilaccica di nuvola.
A journey in the dark	From the outside nothing will move them save the spell of command	Da fuori nulla le sposterà, se non il magico comando.	Dall'esterno nulla le muoverà salvo la formula di rito.
A journey in the dark	We may not have a chance to fill our skins and bottles till we come down into Dimrill Dale	Potremmo non aver modo di riempire otri e bottiglie, prima di arrivare giù nella Valle dei Rivi Tenebrosi.	Non avremo forse modo di riempire otri e bottiglie finché non arriviamo alla Vallea dei Riombrosi
A journey in the dark	But we are not through yet, and it is a long way down to the Gates that open on the world	Ma non siamo ancora all'uscita, e vi è ancora molta strada prima di giungere ai Cancelli che si affacciano sul mondo.	Ma non abbiamo ancora finito ed è lunga arrivare ai Cancelli che si aprono sul mondo
A journey in the dark	The Dwarves tell no tale	I Nani non narrano alcuna storia.	I Nani hanno la bocca cucita.
The bridge of Khazad-dûm	There are Orcs, very many of them.	Sono Orchetti, e sono una moltitudine	Ci sono gli Orchi, una caterva.
The bridge of Khazad-dûm	For the moment they are hanging back.	Per il momento stanno ancora indugiando	Per il momento traccheggiano.
The Ring Goes South *(Narrator, referring to Legolas)	He alone of the Company remained still light of heart	Era l'unico della Compagnia ad avere il cuore leggero.	Era l'unico della compagnia ad essere ancora su di giri.

Among all, “montare un *bailamme*” (gallicism) deserves an honorable mention as it is at the same time an extremely inelegant colloquialism (montare un...) *and* makes use of a french word in

the Italian text, inducing the reader to think that this appears also in the source text. It is hard to think that Tolkien would have approved it. The English text is in this case rather colloquial, too, but still distant from the mentioned rendition. “Wretched fool”, referred to Gollum, becomes “povero idiota”, a rather vulgar insult, that maintains no trace of the sense of human pity that can be detected in the source text throughout the entire scene. For example, “povero diavolo”, in the old translation, succeeds in preserving that nuance. The last example did not refer to Gandalf, but we reported it because it seems to be particularly indicative, since it is a metaphor semantically connected, astonishingly enough, to automobile engines, whereas the expression “to be light of heart” would have had a simple and direct equivalent in Italian. “Presero il largo”, “sciropati”, “spauracchio”, “l’ho scontata”, “sfilza”, “prendessi a mazzate”, “sfilaccica”, are all examples of coarse colloquial expressions that often surprise for how far the translator opted to diverge from the original in order to “force them in”. For example, “with a heavy sledge-hammer” disappears entirely, to make place to a colloquial expression without reference to the utensil itself. “Sfilaccica” is a very obscure and long-time disused dialectal expression, used to translate the rather clear “wisp” of cloud. “Formula di rito” (for “word of command”) is a cold technicality linked to insurance jargon. The following example represents an incorrect *consecutio temporum*, a mistake common in the spoken language, not suitable for the character and in any case not reflecting a similar mistake or colloquialism in the English text. “È lunga arrivare” is a colloquialism, (that strictly speaking is grammatically incorrect). “Bocca cucita”, “una caterva” and “traccheggiano” are colloquialism that would be better suitable for a modern detective movie or action movie.

One of the serious consequences of the inclusion of these colloquialisms is that they introduce, precisely by virtue of their discrepancy with respect to the dramatic intensity of the contexts and the seriousness of the characters, an ironic nuance that the Italian reader could mistakenly attribute to the author of the text. The narrator, by the way, has had similar treatment, where the constant emergence of technical or colloquial terms, sometimes linked to modern scientific jargon, deprive the text of the elegance and solemnity that characterize it, while mistakenly suggesting a detachment by the narrator. In this we seem to find the attempt to make the text sound less pompous, less resonant, more “accessible”. But this intent, superfluous to say the least, ends up creating unpleasant and very unlikely dissonances of tone, even regardless of the comparison with the original text, because the text is characterized by constant oscillations of linguistic register, well perceivable by the Italian ear. The publisher’s decision to remove the Middle-earth map from the text, and to use an extremely impersonal cover image, depicting a photograph of the soil of the planet Mars, maybe more suitable for a science fiction text, must be reported, too. In this, it seems possible to find an intention to eradicate Tolkien’s work from the fantasy genre, or at least from the fantasy genre *bookstore shelves*, in the hope, perhaps, of acquiring new market shares. It is to be feared that, in the absence of adequate vigilance, the appendixes might be the next victim.

Another very delicate theme is that of the translation of place and person names. This constitutes a very peculiar and characteristic theme of Tolkien’s work. Generally, in the case of literary texts, the names of the characters are not translated, keeping the diction present in the original language. We know instead that Tolkien, albeit following some afterthoughts⁹, decided to create a guide to translation, to allow translators in the various languages to know which names should be translated, and which left unchanged. His declared intent was to restore for the foreign reader, especially in the case of Hobbit characters and toponyms, a degree of familiarity similar to that which the English reader would have felt by reading them in his own language. This theme deserves a more in-depth analysis by Tolkien’s scholars, because, being very tied to the perception and understanding of the English language and culture by other countries and cultures, the use of this translation guide

⁹ *Letters*, n. 190.

could, in our opinion, be called into question in view of a possible update. To today's Italian reader the English names of the Hobbit characters and places appear much more understandable than to the Italian reader of fifty or more years ago, while, for example, the use of Italian surnames for characters so defined by English cultural references, today much more understood also abroad, appears sometimes unnatural. It should also be evaluated that the worldwide popularity of Tolkien's work has led to scenarios that the author himself could not have foreseen, such as the translation of his texts into languages such as Chinese or Japanese, for which the "localization" of certain terms would turn out extremely "artificial" and difficult for the reader to appreciate.

The new translation generally follows the indications in the Tolkienian directive¹⁰ regarding what to translate and what to left unchanged, with a few notable exceptions. In both the old edition (due to the intervention of Principe, as stated by in the curator's note¹¹) and the new one, some Hobbit names and surnames, such as "Baggins", have been left unchanged. Nearly all the names in the new edition, however, have been changed from how they appeared in the previous Italian translation, seemingly in an attempt to mark a distance at all costs. This has been a source of perplexity on the part of many passionate readers, accustomed to using the names present in the previous translation, which had also been used for the Italian version of Peter Jackson's movies. But perhaps this does not constitute, in itself, a reason for demerit. From a stylistic point of view, however, many choices of the new translation relating to the names are not in focus with the author's intentions, and are in continuity with the trends mentioned above relating to linguistic registers. Above all, the term "Boscuro" (translation for "Mirkwood") stands out. It is a neologism, obtained by merging together two Italian words: "Bosco" (Wood) and "Oscuro" (Dark). The previous translation had "Bosco Atro", accepting the fact that, in the Italian language it is not possible to create compound words with the same ease as in English. "Atro" is an uncommon word with an archaic feel that seems appropriate. For the Italian reader, the "Boscuro" solution is perceived as a puerile term, more appropriate for a fairy tale for children than for an epic text: a wood more suitable for Little Red Riding Hood than for the Fellowship of the Ring.

In the case of the Italian situation, which is singular in various aspects, it is also necessary to report the survival of politicized interpretations of Tolkien's work, which has been tried from time to time to link it to "left wing" or "right wing" ideals, in both cases committing, of course, serious exploitation¹². This phenomenon has roots in the peculiar Italian political history, in which some ideological oppositions that are considered outdated in most other European countries still persist to some degree. Also in this case, in the writer's opinion, the presence of political "hermeneutics", so to speak, in the understanding of Tolkien's work,¹³ hidden behind proclamations of philological improvements, might have contributed to some questionable choices, also in an attempt to mark a counter-trend from the previous translation, judged by some to be too "right wing", on the basis of evaluations which frankly overwhelm our understanding, and which perhaps find some fragile hold in the former translator's belonging to a family of noble origins, a supposedly right-wing mentality thought to be displayed in the 'high', occasionally archaic, style of some passages in the original text,

¹⁰ Published in: Hammond, W. and Scull, C., 2005. *The Lord of the Rings: A readers' companion*, London: HarperCollins. The translation guide is also available at <http://www.tolkien.ro/text/JRR%20Tolkien%20-%20Guide%20to%20the%20Names%20in%20The%20Lord%20of%20the%20Rings.pdf> Accessed March 1, 2020.

¹¹ See above, note 4.

¹² For a study on the topic, see Orecchia, A. M., 2008. *"I Cacciatori di Frodo. Tolkien tra destra e sinistra nella stampa italiana*. In: *La filosofia del Signore degli Anelli*, edited by Bonvecchio, C. Milan: Mimesis.

¹³ <https://www.cercatoridiatlantide.it/ottavio-fatica-parma-nuova-traduzione-il-signore-degli-anelli/> Accessed March 1, 2020. In this public conference the new translator Ottavio Fatica stated: *"noi, unica nazione al mondo, avevamo un piccolo gruppo di lettori tolkieniani di destra"*. It can be translated as follows: *"Only in Italy, contrarily from every other country in the world, there has been a small group of right-wing readers of Tolkien"*.

faithfully captured in the earlier translation, and in the presence of a long introduction, always attached to the previous Italian editions of *The Lord of the Rings*, by Elemire Zolla (1926-2002), Italian philosopher and historian of religions, considered close to right-wing positions¹⁴. This introduction does not appear anymore in the new edition.

Conclusions

By proposing a search for the reasons *behind* this operation, which for Tolkien scholars may be a reason of perhaps greater interest than the analysis of the operation itself, we refrain from summarizing here what countless scholars of proven authority and competence have reconstructed with clarity: that is, the difficulty, widespread since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* but still persisting today, by the majority of the so-called "cultured" critics, in understanding, accepting and recognizing the value of an undertaking such as the Tolkienian one, so much in contrast with the dominant thought and therefore difficult to frame in pre-made interpretative categories.¹⁵

Many critics have demonstrated a certain condescension towards Tolkien's work, connected to well-known accusations such as that of youthfulness, escapism etc. In more recent years, with the progress of criticism and knowledge of the subject, it has been possible to demonstrate the groundlessness of many of these commentaries. In this context, the phenomenon linked to this translation appears interesting to the scholar, because it represents an attempt, unusual and perhaps partially new in its specific nature, to indirectly reproduce interpretations capable of diminishing the cultural significance of Tolkien's work in a new guise: no longer by explicitly supporting these condescending theses, but by trying to "transform" the Tolkienian text into something it is not – thus making it more "digestible" by detractors of the Fantasy genre, or even by those who see in certain traits of Tolkien's poetics, such as his cultural and stylistic references to Medieval (and, indirectly, Christian) tradition, to an "archaic" world in terms of values, as well as in terms of literary style, something that should be somewhat mitigated or diminished, because understood as the expression of an "unfashionable" reactionary mentality.

In order to properly evaluate this hypothesis, it should not be forgotten what references are inevitably detectable in a "normal" Italian translation of the Tolkienian language, such as the one by Vittoria Allinata, or the ones of other works by Tolkien, performed by different translators, for example the translation of *The Silmarillion* by Francesco Saba Sardi. If for example, among many others, the style and language of *Beowulf* has deeply influenced Tolkien's prose, in the case of the Italian language, making use of an archaic or "high" language, inevitably means echoing, from a *lexical* as well as *linguistic* (i.e. phrase shaping and construction, etc.) point of view, the great authors of the Italian Medieval literature, first of all: Dante and his *Commedia*. Speaking, for example, of this author, if there is little doubt that no one today would allow himself (at least in public) to criticize his poetic merits, the same cannot be said for the "likes" and "dislikes" that he may still arouse in some, from an "ideological" point of view. But if Dante is an author now consigned to the history of literature, lived in a time far from ours, in the case of Tolkien, the re-proposition of some traditional themes carried out in the heart of an age that seems distant from them, is something destined to encounter some degree of resistance. However largely irrational and based on ideological prejudices, these ambiguous interconnections of "likes" and "dislikes" could have induced someone to prefer "a modernized Tolkien" to a more "medieval" one. The concern therefore arises that operations such as

¹⁴ This removal is, of course, perfectly legitimate, but it should be mentioned that that preface was devoid of even indirect political references, and was limited to the analysis of the text from a strictly literary point of view.

¹⁵ Tolkien himself famously stated: "*This is an age of potted criticism and predigested literary opinion*". See Shippey, T. 2003, *The Road to Middle-earth*. New York: Houghton Mifflin company. (page 4).

this new translation may represent an attempt to transform "from the inside", *id est* through misrepresentation, what could not be incorporated or "normalized" "from the outside", *id est* through patronizing criticism.

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