Translating and Illustrating Tolkien (2023) ed. by Will Sherwood

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Tolkien can be interpreted and appreciated in numerous ways: in film adaptations of his works, in music inspired by his stories and poetry, in fan fiction set in Middle-earth, and so on and so forth. Like Tolkien's works themselves, these interpretations can be the objects of scholarly investigation and discussion. Two specific areas of interpretation were the focus of the Tolkien Society's Autumn Seminar in 2021, namely translation and illustration.

Of the eleven papers read at the Autumn Seminar, six appear in this volume of Proceedings, with three of these presented bilingually, in English and the authors' native languages. Four of the papers deal specifically with problems and issues related to rendering Tolkien's works into languages other than English, one deals specifically with visual representations of scenes and characters from Tolkien's stories, and the last paper deals with both. The papers demonstrate a variety of approaches to the topic, with some concentrating on specific details in specific translations, while others give a more general perspective. While the paper on illustration examines artwork from several countries with different linguistic backgrounds, the authors of the translation papers limit themselves to discussing translations in a single target language: Chinese, French, Marathi, and Spanish (two papers).

In his "Introduction" (1–6), Will Sherwood discusses the role of translation in Tolkien's works, outlining Tolkien's conceit that he was not the author of his legendarium, but rather the translator and editor of ancient works that told these tales of Elves and Hobbits. The intricate fictional translation scheme of *The Lord of the Rings*, in which the Westron or Common Speech was "translated" into Modern English and words and names in languages related to the Common Speech were given forms taken from languages related to Modern English, such as Old English and Old Norse, complicates the rendering of the book's nomenclature into other languages, and Tolkien was acutely aware of the "formidable task" that the translator faced.

Sherwood also briefly discusses Tolkien's role as illustrator of his own stories and his reactions to the work of other illustrators. When Sherwood states that "each reader will possibly bring a different meaning to the artistic product that the author did not intend" (4), he is talking about illustration, but the statement is equally applicable to translation.

In "The Problem of Éowyn's 'no living man am I' in three Chinese Translations" (7–15), Eric Reinders examines how the translators of three different Chinese

versions of *The Lord of the Rings* tackled a particularly difficult bit of English-language wordplay. My own knowledge of Chinese is extremely limited, so I appreciated this in-depth investigation of a specific translation problem.

Reinders begins by discussing Tolkien's old-fashioned, androcentric use of "Men" (mortal human beings, irrespective of gender), contrasted with "men" (adult male people), and how these can be translated into Chinese. As Reinders points out, these cannot be distinguished by capitalization in Chinese, where the logographic script has nothing corresponding to capital letters, nor is there any available Chinese word that can have this ambiguity between "human being" and "adult male". We see "Men" translated as *renlei* (humankind, gender-neutral) and "man" as *ren*, which "has some ambiguity, though not about gender. It can mean 'human' or it can mean 'person,' - Pippin is a person but not a human" (8).

After examining the strategies used to translate the conversation of Gandalf and Pippin with the Gondorian soldier Ingold ("His name is Peregrin, a very valiant man.") and Éomer's "How shall a man judge what to do in such times?" Reinders comes to the "one place where this problem is crucial to the story itself." This is of course Éowyn's confrontation with the Witch-King, of whom Glorfindel prophesied long before: "not by the hand of man shall he fall" (9–10).

Since Éowyn is a woman ("a Man who's not a man") and Meriadoc a Hobbit ("a man who's not a Man"), the prophecy is circumvented *in English*, but how can this be done in other languages? Not very well, it would seem. Reinders examines the gymnastics that the Chinese translators have gone through to try to make sense of all this, but "none of the three translators can catch the trick" (13).

Reinders then looks at the three versions through a different lens: "So pretend now that the first time you are reading this is in the Chinese," he says, "or even, imagine that Tolkien wrote it in Chinese" (14). Disregarding the original English wording, he finds that "the Chinese versions are forced to depict Éowyn as even more despairing and therefore even braver than in the original" (14).

Helena Real's "'*Las*' Silmarils or '*Los*' Silmarils? Approaches to a new Spanish translation of *The Silmarillion*" (16–25) also appears in the volume in Spanish as "*Las* Silmarils o *Los* Silmarils? Aproximaciones a una nueva traducción al español de *El Silmarillion*" (26–34). The paper examines what the author regards as four different problem areas in Rubén Masera and Luis Domènech's Spanish translation of *The Silmarillion* and proposes some improvements.

The first of these is "The Problem of Gender". In Spanish, all nouns have either masculine or feminine grammatical gender. Masera and Domènech decided to make the Silmarils masculine (*Los* Silmarils) in Spanish translation, probably because of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language's "rule" that "the masculine gender is the default and/or neutral" (17). Real, however, argues that

since jewels (*joyas*) are feminine in Spanish, the Silmarils should be *Las* Silmarils (17-18).

The second problem area involves Tolkien's use of archaic and poetic language in *The Silmarillion*, comparable to that of the King James Version of the Bible. Real believes that the translators "have purposefully ignored the writer's word choice" by failing to emulate this linguistic style. For example, they use the common word *antes* 'before' to translate *ere*, which Real thinks would be better rendered as *denante*, "a rarely used adverb in Spanish" (19).

Another area where Real believes the translators have ignored Tolkien's style is in "The Loss of Formal Addressing". In translating Early Modern English pronouns (*thee, thou, ye*) and the corresponding verbal conjugations in *Ainulindalë*, the translators have used forms that are "now common in Spanish spoken in Spain, so Spanish-speaking readers cannot discern a difference between the way Ilúvatar speaks and any other character in *The Silmarillion*" (21). Real also notes that when Ilúvatar addresses Melkor as *thou*, Masera and Domènech have "grossly mistranslated" this as *tú*, which makes it appear that Ilúvatar "disrespects Melkor or treats him especially warmly" (21)

The final problem area is "Introducing New Text". The example that Real gives is the addition of a Biblical "En el principio . . ." at the beginning of *Ainulindalë*. Real's opinion is that "the deliberate choice to add text during the translation process borders on unethical" (22). As we have seen, she is not at all shy about criticizing *El Silmarillion*, calling it a translation "perpetrated" ("*perpetrada*" in the Spanish version) by Masera and Domènech (23 and 34).

The next paper is "Characterisation and depiction of nature in the Spanish translation of *Roverandom*" by Martha Celis Mendoza and Aline Esperanza Maza Vázquez (35–47), with a Spanish translation by Jorge De la Vega, "Caracterización y representación de la naturaleza en la traducción al Español de *Roverandom*" (48–60). This is particularly interesting as a look into a book that is less often translated and even less often scrutinized by Tolkien scholars.

Celis and Maza discuss the difficulties in translating the name Rover, which is a common name for a dog in English but not Spanish, and which is applied (with different connotations) to three different characters in the book. Ibero and Domènech's solution was to use periphrastic explanations, like "Rover, el Vagabundo" and "un rover, un auténtico vagabundo, un pirata" (38).[1] We then turn to the translations of other names, including Psamathos, Artaxerxes, and the difficult case of the PAM (Pacific and Atlantic Magician), where the translators

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[1] Incidentally, I notice in a passage quoted from the Spanish translation of the book that "y me gustaba mucho" (and I loved it) is a mistranslation of "and loved it" in the original, because the subject of the English sentence is the sea Rover's first master, not the sea Rover himself (38).

were forced to engage in some verbal gymnastics to maintain the order of the letters in the abbreviation (39–40).

As Celis and Maza state, "Scull and Hammond's notes . . . are fundamental to understanding the story's wordplay", but since they are absent from Spanish version (a translation of *Tales from the Perilous Realm*, which likewise lacks them), "many things are lost because they do not make sense" (42). For example, Tolkien's wordplay with the sounds and descriptions of the flowers in the second chapter is lost in the Spanish translation (42–43).

The translators sometimes chose to use terms in a higher register than was necessary, and sometimes used "very local" terms from "Peninsular Spanish," a feature criticized by the paper's Mexican authors. On the other hand, Celis and Maza, as Mexican readers, "are able to make text-to-self connections like the one between Roverandom and the [pre-Columbian Mexican] legend of the Moon Rabbit, even if Tolkien did not have the intention to do so" (44).

In "From the Black Gate to the Kṛṣṇā Dvāra: on the curious resonances of Swami Mudrikancha" (61–81), Sonali Arvind Chunodkar discusses Mugdha Karnik's translation of *The Lord of the Rings* into Marathi, one of the circa 780 languages spoken in India and the official language of the state of Maharashtra, entitled *Swami Mudrikancha* (61–62). I own a copy of Meena Kinikar's Marathi translation of *The Hobbit*, but I can't read a word of it, so everything that Chunodkar had to say about Tolkien in Marathi was a revelation to me.

Chunodkar tells us that Karnik "displays hardly any in-depth familiarity . . . with Tolkien's other fictional and scholarly writings" and "repeatedly indicates that she had no interest in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* beyond the translation exercise itself" (62). She adds that "Karnik also confesses that she became weary of translating the poems which disclose the historical dimension of Tolkien's fictional world" (64). The result of this is hardly surprising: "many mistranslations dealing with specific aspects that touch upon Tolkien's history of Middle-earth" (64–65). As examples of this, Chunodkar examines Karnik's "uncertain understanding of the word 'gaffer'" and "the translation's indiscriminate use of the words *rājā* (king) and *mahārāja* (great king/sovereign)" and how these errors will impair the reader's understanding of the text (65). Chunodkar then discusses several passages that were omitted from the translations, as well as the reverse, instances where the translation goes into greater detail than Tolkien's original text (67).

In some places, Karnik displays her command of the rich vocabulary of Marathi by using several synonyms where Tolkien uses one or two more commonly used words. As Chunodkar points out, this "poses an obstacle in engaging younger . . . readers" and "ends up confusing many first-time readers of Tolkien's work" (68–69). Chunodkar also notes some errors that Karnik could have avoided by sticking

with more commonly used words rather than using archaic-sounding Sanskrit loanwords or Sanskritized Marathi (69–70).

On the other hand, Chunodkar approves of the translator's "effort to localize or naturalize Tolkien's work for Marathi readership" (70), as in allusions to well-known Marathi poetry in the translations of some of Tolkien's poems. Sometimes the localization doesn't quite work, however: Chunodkar notes that the word "cloak" is replaced by six different garments, "none of which serves as a fitting equivalent" (78).

Some of Karnik's word choices "also contain the possibility of evoking some very curious - and at times, even jarring - cultural resonances" (75). One of the several examples that Chunodkar presents, also referenced in the paper's title, is the use of the Sanskrit loanword *kṛṣṇa* to translate 'dark' and 'black' in connection with Sauron and Mordor, even though the word is more commonly known as the name of the popular Hindu deity, Krishna.

The one paper in the collection that deals exclusively with illustration rather than translation is Joel Merriner's "A bridge invisible: motif borrowing and dislocation in Soviet bloc illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings*" (82–95). The "bridge invisible" of the paper's title is the Straight Road to the Undying Lands after the world was made round, as described in *Akallabêth*, which Merriner uses as an analogy for the "path of visual interchange" between the Primary World and Tolkien's sub-creation extant within Tolkien illustration, which for the scope of this paper means illustrations of Tolkien's works produced in the countries of the Soviet bloc in the 1980s and early 1990s (82–4). Merriner explains that "decoding the diverse, often cryptic illustrations contained within these books requires an interpretive approach tailored towards the understanding of three types of visual alterity identifiable in the region: motif borrowing, original creation and dislocation" (84).

Merriner dealt with original creation in a 2021 presentation entitled *Hidden Visions*, to which he gives a YouTube link. None of the referenced artworks, such as "the enigmatic, often disturbing, censor defying imagery of the Polish Tolkien illustrator Jerzy Czerniawsky" (84), are reproduced in the book, but they can be seen at the cited timestamps in YouTube videos or on other websites, for which URLs are provided in the footnotes.

The present paper deals with motif borrowing and dislocation. Merriner notes that both are connected and deal with the exchange of motifs. He defines motif borrowing as "the transferal of a visual motif . . . from an earlier work into a new one" (85) but explains dislocation as "rooted in reception, how we as viewers perceived an image based on our own visual literacy" (84).

Merriner gives several examples of motif borrowing in Tolkien illustration, not limiting himself to the Soviet bloc and even including examples from the works of Pauline Baynes and Tolkien himself (85-6). He discusses in detail Győző Vida's

image of the Argonath on the cover of the Hungarian edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, comparing it to the Pauline Baynes version from *A Map of Middle-earth* and discussing possible sources for the "distinctly uncanonical" lions at the feet of the kings. These he finds in sculptures that would have been familiar to Vida as a resident of Budapest (86–8). He notes similarly Hungarian resonances in Vida's illustration of Aragorn on the dust jacket of the Hungarian edition of *The Return of the King* (88). Merriner finds further examples of motif borrowing in the works of Bulgarian artist Yasen Panov, whose illustrations appear to borrow elements from the work of Roger Garland, despite retaining a "distinctly Bulgarian flavour" (89), and Ukrainian artist Sergei Iukhimov, whose "mosaic-like compositions fuse Insular illumination, hagiographic paintings, Antique solar imagery and Noldorin heraldry to create unique, hybrid Tolkienian forms" (90).

Defining dislocation as "the disturbance of a visual signifier from its usual signifier/signified context and function" (92), Merriner exemplifies this with Èduard Zarjanskij's Russian re-creation of *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the Water*, in which Tolkien's familiar landscape has been radically changed: "The road has become a river with a steamboat, the Hill is bare, the Hobbit-holes are gone, the topography is completely askew" (93).

The final paper is Marie Bretagnolle's "From rabbits to Hobbits: illustrating and translating J.R.R. and Christopher Tolkien in France" (96–108), which also appears in French as "Des lapins aux Hobbits : illustrer et traduire J.R.R. et Christopher Tolkien en France" (109–21). Bretagnolle states that this paper "will focus on the instances in which questions of translation meet questions of illustration and map-making, in order to see how one can influence the other, on purpose or not" (96).

She begins with a history of Tolkien translations in France. She examines some of their flaws, such as the inconsistencies in names between Francis Ledoux's translation of *The Hobbit* and his translation of *The Lord of the Rings* (97), as well as some errors due to the translators' lack of familiarity with the rest of Tolkien's legendarium. These errors were collected in online forums and paved the way for new, improved translations by Daniel Lauzon. Francophone Tolkien fans also benefitted from some of the works being translated into French by Adam Tolkien, Christopher's son.

Bretagnolle then discusses two books that were only published in French and how they fit into the broader scope of Tolkien reception in France. These are *Faërie* (1974), a collection of four of Tolkien's shorter works, and *Etymologies* (2009), a separate publication of that chapter from *The Lost Road*, incorporating the "Addenda and Corrigenda" by Carl F. Hostetter and Patrick H. Wynne, which had been published in the linguistic journal *Vinyar Tengwar*.

From there Bretagnolle goes on to discuss how the maps were treated in French editions of *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings,* and *The Silmarillion*. The discussion

of the earlier maps is largely a litany of curiosities and errors, whereas later publications are lauded for their improvement in this area. Bretagnolle especially praises the most recent versions, in which translator Daniel Lauzon "translated every translatable word on the maps and made sure to preserve their aesthetic as well" (103).

The history of illustrations in the French translations comes next, ranging from the "childish" images in French editions of *The Hobbit* in the 1970s and 1980s to Philippe Munch's 1988 *Lord of the Rings* illustrations "in a style reminiscent of comic books" (105). Since 1997, however, the French publishers have followed the English illustrated editions, with the result that "[t]he illustrated French corpus is now dominated by Alan Lee and Ted Nasmith" (106).

Bretagnolle ends her survey with a report on recent publications and current projects that "show the dedication of French fans and scholars to this very English author" (107).

A number of spelling and typographical errors appear in the PDF version of the book that I received for review. Some (if not all) of them may have been corrected before the book went to press. Most of these errors appear in the editorial matter: the table of contents, introduction, bylines, and page headers.

The most notable of these errors are the misspellings in the names of contributors Martha Celis Mendoza and Aline Esperanza Maza Vázquez, whose matronymic surnames appear incorrectly as "Menzoda" and "Vázques" in the table of contents (iii), introduction (4), and bylines and page headers (35–60). Both are spelled correctly in "About the contributors" (122–3).

Other errors in the front matter and the introduction include: "Aapproaches" for "Approaches" (iii); "Y" for "y" [the Spanish word for "and"] (iii and 48); "Ediburgh" for "Edinburgh" (viii); "Publising" for "Publishing" (viii); "Geore" presumably for "George Allen & Unwin" but should be "HarperCollins" (xi); "*The Hobbit* 1939" for "*The Hobbit* 1937" (1); "HarperCollin's" for "HarperCollins'" or "HarperCollins's" (3); "Forward" for "Foreword" (4, but the correct spelling appears two lines below); and "is rendered" for "are rendered" (4). "Rubén Masera y Luis Domenènech Spanish translation" should read "Rubén Masera and Luis Domènech's Spanish translation" (4); there is a similar retention of the Spanish "y" in Real's English bibliography on p. 25.

Errors were far less frequent in the papers themselves: "thou will" for "you will" (10, in a quote from *The Lord of the Rings*); "Doménech" for "Domènech" (single instances on pp. 22, 23, 32, 34, but correct elsewhere in the paper); "Romauld Lakowsky" for "Romuald Lakowski" (36 and 49, but correct in the Bibliography, 47); "appeared" for "appear" (37 n. 1); "sonorted" for "snorted" (39 n. 5 and 53 n. 7); "*Tales of the Perilous Realm*" for "*Tales from the Perilous Realm*" (47, Shippey entry); "Tinúviel's" for "Tinúviel" (85, n. 7); and "D&D" for "D&D" (123).

"Roverandom" (as the title of the work) should be italicized on p. 36; it is correct in the Spanish version, p. 49.

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