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Language and Story: An Argument for the Right Reading of Tolkien's Legendarium

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2008

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University

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Abstract

Current views on the translation of Tolkien are that his works are completely translatable and understandable. The Lord of the Rings has been translated into many languages, and has sold millions the world over.

While an argument cannot be made for the non-translation of Tolkien's works, his tales should be experienced in English whenever possible. J.R.R. Tolkien was by profession a philologist, and by hobby a creator of languages and story. His life work was the creation of a unifying legendarium, spanning thousands of years and dozens of languages. These languages and Tolkien's use of English form the backbone for the intentions and outcomes in the story.

Without a proper understanding of the linguistic and cultural journey that takes place, Tolkien's motives and the narrative thrust of the story are in many ways diminished. Three options are available for a translator, with necessary but qualified translation being the preferred route for translation of Tolkien's works.

An Argument for the Right Reading of Tolkien's Legendarium

“Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story—the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendor from the vast backcloths—which I could dedicate simply to England; to my country.

--J.R.R. Tolkien, in a letter to Milton Waldman, 1951

Much of the literature written in the twentieth century was horrible. Unequivocal, inherently flawed trash. This was probably due in large part to the general explosion in publishing, due, in turn, to the greatly increasing rate of literacy. And yet, through the rubbish of thousands upon thousands of pop fiction, romance novels, and science fiction stories, some stories still managed to break through and place themselves in the running for the title of “classic” in the centuries to come. These books share something in common with the classics still read in schools, and that is their resonance with the human spirit and condition. One of these stories is The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien, fanciful in flight, majestic in scope, and boundless in linguistic richness. It is this linguistic and philological richness, along with the specific purpose of Tolkien's tale, that creates in The Lord of the Rings a special situation, one in which so much is invested in the individual words, structures, and even visual look on the page that any translation of Tolkien's works misses certain pieces of the puzzle and thus that puts the reader and the work at a disadvantage, forcing a hobbled translation that requires an understanding

between the translator and the reader of the translation as to the superior quality of the original language edition.

Sub-creation

To begin with, a discussion of the important terms will be useful. J.R.R. Tolkien was a philologist by profession. Philology is the study of literature and language as it relates to cultural history (“Philology”). Related to historical linguistics, the philology that Tolkien taught at Oxford and the University of Leeds allowed him to study languages, generally historical languages, his whole life. This was indeed his passion, as he spent his life inventing languages (Letters 143). Tolkien viewed his work as not inventing, but as writing down what he merely discovered: “The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as ‘given’ things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew...yet always I had the sense of recording what was already ‘there’, somewhere: not of ‘inventing’” (Letters 145). From this mindset comes Tolkien’s oft-used word “sub-creation”; this word means a completely enveloping world that draws the reader in so well that he does not suspend disbelief, he instead believes with a Secondary Belief that what the story says is true, actually, is true:

Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say *the green sun*. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough—though it may already be a more potent thing than many a ‘thumbnail sketch’ or ‘transcript of life’ that receives literary praise. To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labor and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few

attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed, narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode. (On Fairy-Stories 68)

As Tolkien discusses in the preceding quote from his essay On Fairy-Stories about the creation of fantasy, the goal of story is a very lofty mark—to sub-create and make a completely believable and transfixing story world in which the tale the author wishes to express takes place. It is only in this sub-created world, untainted by leaks from the real world, that a story can truly tell its tale with honesty and completeness. Anything less is failure.

C.S. Lewis discusses his good friend Tolkien's idea of sub-creation in an essay he wrote about The Lord of the Rings. He writes: "The utterly new achievement of Professor Tolkien is that he carries a comparable sense of reality unaided. Probably no book yet written in the world is quite such a radical instance of what its author has elsewhere called 'sub-creation'" (83-84). In this, Lewis is correct. So many stories take the modern world and tweak one or two little facets of it, claiming it is their creative world and that the fanciful flights they use for plot are conceivable in this world; Tolkien, with a story full of magic, immortal creatures and unimaginable evil, invests the time and effort to imagine a world capable of sustaining it all. Lewis further writes:

The direct debt (there are of course subtler kinds of debt) which every author must owe to the actual universe is here deliberately reduced to the minimum. Not content to create his own story, he creates, with an almost insolent prodigality, the whole world in which it is to move, with its own

theology, myths, geography, history, paleography, languages, and orders of being--a world “full of strange creatures beyond count.” (84)

It is in this “reduction to the minimum” argument that Lewis is in a small part wrong.

Tolkien does draw a large amount from the world, the universe, but not the current or real universe; instead, Tolkien draws from the proto-universe. This can be likened to the idea of *la langue* espoused by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure espoused a belief, a now foundational belief in many frameworks of linguistics, that language is divided into two divisions, *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is, in the words of Daniel Chandler, “the system of rules and conventions which is independent of, and pre-exists, individual users”; *parole* is the practical and real use of language (12). All languages that are known to man, that could ever been known to man, are mere extensions, products made from the mold or prototype of *langue*. *Langue* is pure, unadulterated communication, not hampered down by inconsistencies in meaning or expression brought on by the use of symbols and words. So, the current world in which we live could be seen as simply one possible extension of the prototypical universe, and Tolkien’s is another, just as viable extension. Both draw from the same source and are similar in many ways (as many languages are), but the two are in some areas as incomprehensible to each other as, for example, Swedish is to Nahuatl.

Legendarium

From this base of Tolkien’s philological education and vocation and his views on the sub-creation of myth and story, Tolkien crafted his epic legendarium of Middle-Earth. The “legendarium” of Tolkien’s is the name, largely used only in Tolkienian studies today, for the complete collection of tales, stories, and poems that inhabit Tolkien’s sub-

created world of Middle-Earth. Tolkien himself used the term as such, for example in a letter to W.H. Auden: “But the beginning of the legendarium, of which the Trilogy is part (the conclusion)...” (Letters 214). A legendarium as a collection of legends can be traced back far into European language history, at least as far back as Anjou Legendarium of the 14th century. Tolkien’s legendarium encompasses his life work, spanning hundreds of little tales and long books about the peoples, languages, and events of Middle-Earth. Tolkien spends sixteen pages in a letter to Milton Waldman describing in merely shallow detail the broad strokes of his interconnected universe (Letters 146-161). The stories Tolkien wrote do not describe his universe; his universe creates his stories. Tolkien merely shares a few with the world.

An understanding of Tolkien’s background and influences is of special importance to truly understanding the full weight and merit of Tolkien’s linguistic uniqueness. J.R.R. Tolkien was, by profession and personal hobby, a philologist. Philology is a quickly disappearing art today subsumed under Historical Linguistics departments in many universities, but as Shippey points out, it is not historical linguistics; philology is the study of the history and growth of languages as it relates to and works in conjunction with the literature and culture of the civilizations that spoke the languages (The Road 8-10). In linguistics, the grammar and the meanings and the changes therein of words and phrases are often significantly separated from the cultures these develop in; in philology, they are all inextricably linked, for the philologist understands that they influence each other greatly. Tolkien’s philological interests were surely strengthened with his job after the Great War working on the Oxford English Dictionary (then called the New English Dictionary), as this work gave him the practical experience in the

reconstruction of words historically and a renewed passion after the horrible War to continue in his philological interests (Gilliver, Marshall, and Weiner 52-53). This historical approach to words would stay with him his entire life, both in his professorships and his personal scholarship.

Tolkien spent his life engrossed in philology, and wrote many articles and books on ancient texts such as *Beowulf* and the *Ancrene Wisse*. But, in his spare time, Tolkien did not leave his work at the university, devoting himself to a completely unrelated task such as model plane making or modernist painting. Tolkien invented languages. Tolkien himself said this about the issue of his languages and how they affected the stories he wrote, in a letter response to a review of his work:

...the remark about ‘philology’ was intended to allude to what is I think a primary ‘fact’ about my work, that it is all of a piece, and *fundamentally linguistic* in inspiration...[I]t is not a ‘hobby,’ in the sense of something quite different from one’s work taken up as a relief-outlet. The invention of languages is the foundation. The ‘stories’ were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. (Letters 219)

This sentiment Tolkien always defended, and it is truly seen in his works. Tolkien crafted the languages, and could not live with these languages not having a world to inhabit. Tolkien’s philological training is seen here, for in his profession, languages and culture are linked—one cannot be without the other. Hostetter agrees with Tolkien, reinforcing the idea that Tolkien’s sub-creation of his world grew out of the historically rich languages that Tolkien wrote (234). Tolkien felt that the Elvish languages he had

created had a history to them, living and breathing with people that influenced the evolution of the languages.

In a letter in 1967, Tolkien stressed that the languages themselves were created solely for his own personal pleasure to give “expression to [his] own personal linguistic ‘æsthetic’ or taste and its fluctuations” (Letters 380). Ruth Noel discusses Tolkien’s invented languages in great detail in her book, The Languages of Tolkien’s Middle-Earth, discussing and charting the linguistic histories and changes in all of them. From a young age, Noel says, Tolkien had been inventing languages, and the ones included in The Lord of the Rings are not all the ones he invented (Noel 5-6). Tolkien even developed advanced historical grammars for his languages, setting out tenses and declensions, creating word lists and historical changes and events over time—these languages were not simply gibberish letters strung together and put into poems (Hostetter 242). Tolkien often translates the Elvish into the Common Speech so the reader is not left simply scratching his head:

Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise!

Cuio i Pheriain anann! Aglar’ni Pheriannath!

Praise them with great praise, Frodo and Samwise!

Daur a Berhael, Conin en Annûn! Eglerio!

Praise them!

Eglerio! (VI, 932)

So complex and complete are Tolkien’s invented languages that there has been a recent resurgence of interest in them, with Elvish scholars learning to speak the languages, websites devoted to teaching the languages, and even a few scholarly journals that

discuss as their primary topic Elvish linguistics (see www.elvish.org). These peoples' devotion is indicative of the depth of Tolkien's efforts.

Tolkien's Characteristics

The first tenet that must be established to understand the translation of Tolkien is the linguistic uniqueness of The Lord of the Rings. For a good example, the Rohirric language spoken by the Rohan people (seen in The Two Towers and Return of the King), can be examined. In the language of the Rohirric, Tolkien creates a strong resonance with Old English in linguistic structure and in individual names. John Tinkler discusses this, pointing out that many Rohirric names begin with Éo-, an allusion to the Old English word for horse and cavalry (165). And indeed, Tolkien's Rohan civilization is a horse-breeding and riding one. Tinkler further writes: "The earliest name for the people of Rohan which appears in the documents used by Tolkien is *Éothéod* (III 344 ff.). Old English *þeod* means "nation, people." 'Horse-people' is a fitting name for the men of Rohan" (165). When Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli enter the courts of the Rohan King, they are greeted with: "It is the will of Théoden King that none should enter his gates, save those who know our tongue and are our friends" (III, 497). The reversal of King Théoden to Théoden King is directly taken from Old English grammar, where adjectives, including titles, were placed after the name of the person. Elizabeth Burrows, in an essay on Tolkien's distinctive style, says Tolkien's poetic features create a "contemporary equivalent of the Old English heroic style" and "the intimacy of the connection between this high style and the matter it is used for becomes apparent when one lists the places where Tolkien makes use of the high style..." (77). Burrows asserts

that Tolkien specifically borrows and invokes specific Old English stylistic choices and echoes for a specific purpose. But what is this purpose?

The purpose for the intricate echoing and use of Old English elements specifically and particularly in the speech of the Rohirric people is to foster a delicate balance between the hobbits and the Rohan. Tolkien's novel is told through the hobbits, even though the story is literally told through a third-person narrator. The novel begins in Hobbiton, and very rarely has scenes or segments where hobbits are not somewhere nearby. The journey is a journey of hobbits who, happy in their own little community, discover how amazing, scary, and beautiful the grand world beyond their borders is. It is no coincidence that the hobbits are the most human of the cultures in Middle-Earth. The Shire, land of the hobbits, much resembles a pre-industrial England, and none of the hobbit customs seem too far displaced from English traditions. Lobdell spends a whole chapter in his book about Tolkien's work discussing the significance of the real-world locations that Tolkien's places evoke, and Tolkien definitively meant for the hobbits to be the bridge between the reader and the fantastic world of Middle-Earth (71). From this base of the Hobbit-English starting point, all other cultures in Middle-Earth are evaluated. The men of Bree are close neighbors, and they are not too distant linguistically or culturally. Other cultures like dwarves and ents are of very little relation to the hobbits, for their language is harsh and the customs are different. The elves, especially, are totally unlike the hobbits, with a completely different linguistic structure. The men of Gondor speak in a high, cultured style that is not like the speech of the hobbits in many regards, but the men of Rohan are eerily similar to the hobbits. Although they do not look like the hobbits in many regards, the language the Rohirric people speak strikes a chord in the

hobbits as vaguely familiar. Allan Turner investigates this issue in much detail in his work. Turner postulates that Tolkien specifically used archaic terms to show the interrelatedness (or lack thereof) between cultures in his novels (ch. 4 and 5). Tolkien himself comments on this issue in a letter in 1967, stating specifically that Rohirric names (and the occasional hobbit word, since the hobbit language is supposed to be related to Rohirric in a similar way English is to Old English) are supposed to have Anglo-Saxon roots and nowhere else in his works is one to assume a created name or word has Anglo-Saxon roots (Letters 381).

Also indicative of Tolkien's specific linguistic structuring in his tale is the poetic elements. Burrows defines when poetic language is used: "Poetic language comes about when the creator—an oral poet or a writer—makes deliberate use of one or more features of the language which are quite random in ordinary language use" (71-72). Tolkien does indeed do this, and in grand style. Tom Bombadil, the eccentric character in the forest, speaks in poetry without Tolkien even marking it typographically (LeGuin 102). Many of Tolkien's characters break into a poem or song, usually narrative, but occasionally more whimsically (see, for example, Bilbo's song in VI, 965 or Frodo's bar song in I, 155). LeGuin also argues that Tolkien's poetry is in the story for a specific reason—to help flesh out and further create the complete world that Tolkien's characters, environments, and plots inhabit (116). To further the integrity of the world inside the story, Tolkien invented an introductory story where he claims to be a translator, not an author, translating the story from the Common Speech of Middle-Earth into English. Poems are often 'translated' into the Common Speech, such as when Aragorn translates the tale of Tinúviel for the hobbits, but other poems are in completely different tongues

such as Elvish (I, 189). Some of Tolkien's poems have narrative structures related to classic English texts such as *The Canterbury Tales* or *The Fairie Queene* (Christopher 148). As will be discussed later, these, being English-language and English-cultural stories, are of significant importance for the reader of the story is supposed to pick up on these references, even if subconsciously. Geoffrey Russom presents the idea that Tolkien's verses are purposefully not in iambic pentameter, as a way to "register dissatisfaction with the predominance of a single form in the English literary canon" (53). Again, this is a uniquely English feature integrated into Tolkien's style. The historicity of iambic pentameter is well-engrained into the reading soul of an Anglo reader; a Japanese reader of Tolkien would not notice this break from cultural poetic norms. Wynne and Hostetter's essay dissects the three modes of Elvish poetry that Tolkien invented, and at the end discuss his purpose:

It is a marvelous quality of the world that Tolkien created that when one takes the time to examine some small aspect of it more closely, new and unexpected vistas are likely to open up... This, then, is part of the fascination of studying Tolkien's languages, for one is often led 'beyond the purely linguistic evolution of forms' along unforeseen paths into new, sometimes unguessed areas of structure, significance, and insight; indeed, at times, into the heart and soul of the mythology itself. You can look closely at a single word, and be rewarded with a glimpse of 'a World in a grain of sand.' (132-133)

Tolkien placed these special items, such as the poetry and the Old English resonances, in the story for the purpose of crafting a specifically English mythology. Tolkien wanted to

fill in the gap left behind in England's literary history, for there is no pre-Christian mythology such as there is for many other people groups. It is this purpose that sets Tolkien's work apart from the rest and makes it a special issue in the theory and practice of translation.

In Tolkien's mind, verisimilitude was extremely important within the text world. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," he espouses the idea of sub-creation. Sub-creation is integral to story:

What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed.

(Tolkien 60)

Directly confronting the idea of a willing suspension of disbelief, Tolkien argues that real, secondary belief is necessary to create a truly great fantasy, which all fiction stories inevitably are, though the argument is truer in realms such as fantasy and science fiction. It is for this reason that Tolkien invested so much meticulous effort and painstaking care to craft a perfectly logical, organized, and realistic world in the small details. If one is to believe the incredulous large details, one must see no flaw in the small details that make them up.

Mythology

Also of note are the resonances in Tolkien's work to mythologies, specifically Celtic and Norse. Due probably in part to England's recent claiming of its Teutonic

heritage, Tolkien's English mythology (for that is what he was meaning to create in The Lord of the Rings) is in many ways Norse (Burns 9). Burns isolates two key Norse ideals that "permeate Tolkien's mythology and his stories of Middle-Earth": undying heroism and inevitable doom (12). But the Celtic is also seen in Tolkien's work, often in the role of females, such as Galadriel, who is full of "Celtic power and Celtic enchantment" (Burns 150). Both of these historical cultures are related in tangential, yet important, ways to English. An Englishman clearly would not be able to feel right at home in a Celtic or old Norse village, yet he would feel much more at home in one of these than in say an African tribal village, or even an ancient village in India or the Middle East. English language and society has developed over the centuries from Germanic and Celtic influences above all else, and the reader is meant to feel this tangential affiliation to these created cultures.

Indeed, The Lord of the Rings is peculiarly written for an English audience. There are direct and indirect references and allusions to classic English-language tales such as *Beowulf* (Evans 25, 27). There are, as discussed above, specific resonances with Old English culture and language structure, something that is uniquely thought provoking to English-speaking readers. German, African, or Chinese students do not spend their high school days reading *Beowulf* and would simply miss the distinct relation between Smaug the Dragon and *Beowulf*'s dragon or the striking resemblance of the Rohirric people to Anglo-Saxon tribes of old.

Tolkien on Translation

Tolkien himself in fact did support translation by providing one guide at the end of the story (Appendix F, II) for translators and further publishing a secondary, more

inclusive guide given to all publishers after he found many problems in the Swedish and Dutch translations. But the restraints on a writer are much more than those on a reader decades after publication. Tolkien may have simply accepted the inevitable that if his works were well known and wanted, they would have to be translated and widely read in non-English editions. On many occasions, however, Tolkien was disgusted with the attempts at translation undertaken during his lifetime. Turner writes that Tolkien's "attitudes toward consultation of the author" on translation:

shows his awareness that the potential problems lie in the philological nature of the text, so that they operate at a more fundamental level than the 'niceties' of style...When in spite of this warning the publishers simply presented him, apparently for the mere formality of his approval, with a list of Dutch version of the place-names—the very field which was likely to raise the most philological problems—he wrote to Rayner Unwin to say that he was 'very angry indeed'. Nevertheless exactly the same situation arose just over a year later, with the Swedish translation, when Tolkien was sufficiently annoyed to voice personal criticism of the Swedish translator, Dr. Åke Ohlmarks. (47-48)

Tolkien wrote documents such as the guide given to publishers because he could not trust a translator to make decisions involving his deep linguistic systems without him.

Translators tended to dramatically underestimate the depth of his nomenclature systems, translating every phoneme that seems translatable into the target language. Tolkien tells his publisher, "The translation of *The Lord of the Rings* will prove a formidable task, and I do not see how it can be performed satisfactorily without the assistance of the author,"

and “I regard the text (in all its details) of *The Lord of the Rings* far more jealously [than *The Hobbit*]. No alterations, major or minor, re-arrangements, or abridgements of this text will be approved by me—unless they proceed from myself or from direct consultation” (Letters 248-249). Tolkien’s work and forethought put into the language and choices in wording etymology are diverse and deep enough that any translation done by a person other than Tolkien himself would be dampeningly flawed. At the least, any translation undertaken after Tolkien’s death is, by his word, illegitimate because he did not have a hand in assistance.

Translating?

What can be done for those whose cultural heritage is other than Anglo?

Translations are the main avenue for getting Tolkien’s works in some approximation to these readers. Translations of Tolkien’s works have been undertaken, and have sold well. Many of the Romance languages have Tolkien translations. According to Tolkien’s official publisher’s website (<http://www.tolkien.co.uk/information/faq.asp#12>), The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings has been translated into at least thirty-eight languages, certainly a feat for a book less than a century old. And yet, do these readers from Poland, Turkey, or Indonesia understand most of what is implied in Tolkien’s work? Yes, they can grasp a word-by-word conception of the story, and surely many of the idioms or English phrases may have generally related idioms in the target language, but what about the relationship between the hobbits and the people of Rohan? How can a translator for the Indonesian edition of The Lord of the Rings successfully illustrate (without being obvious and outright stating the relationship, for that is not what Tolkien did and not what he meant to do) the barely-there kinship between the cultures? The only real answer is to

make both the hobbitic culture and the Rohirric culture Indonesian, or cousins of Indonesian. But, to do this would be to then lose the uniquely Celtic, Norse, and English feel that Tolkien invested in the story. As mentioned above, Tolkien wrote his story so as to create a mythology for England (Lobdell 71), not an Indonesian mythology or a Dutch mythology. Although England has Arthur, Tolkien felt that these Arthurian legends did not suffice, and were too engrained with Christianity to be a true mythology that could resonate through the ages. And so, this fact must be preserved in every worthwhile edition of Tolkien's text, as it was one of his main aims.

His other major aim was to create a linguistic adventure for himself, and this he did as well. Individual names are full of small tidbits from one root word thrown in with another piece here to create a new compound word that, had it been real, may have evolved over time through natural linguistic change to the word Tolkien uses (Jeffrey 111-112). According to Jeffrey, "Philology and allegory both offer ways of looking back. Tolkien is, most of us would agree, heartily interested in looking back, and it is in keeping with this interest that by retrospective and synthetic definition he should offer us access to an understanding of his subcreation's force..." (107). Indeed, Tolkien imagines his Middle-Earth as actually being a kind of proto-Earth, its events taking place in the real world before modern-day humans developed. For example, in the Prancing Pony at Bree, Frodo sings a song that sounds a lot like an elongated version of the Cat and the Fiddle nursery rhyme. And indeed, the narrator says just before Frodo sings, "...he began a ridiculous song that Bilbo had been rather fond of (and indeed rather proud of, for he had made up the words himself)...Here it is in full. Only a few words of it are now, as a rule, remembered" (I, 154). As it seems, Tolkien attributes the famous nursery

rhyme to Bilbo Baggins himself, and argues that it is shorter now because most of it has been lost or degraded over time, similar to how words or phrases change and lose parts throughout time.

Returning to the important question, can a Thai-speaking reader grasp this joke? Granted, this is a philological joke here, but that is not always the case, as in the oft-mentioned Rohirric peoples, where Tolkien invested much meticulous effort into creating precisely balanced and planned relationships between the cultures and races. If one sees no difference in cultural distance between the peoples of Rohan and hobbits versus Orcs and hobbits, something very integral there is lost, for it is always meant to be clear that the Rohan are to be trusted much more than the Orc peoples, if for nothing else than their shared heritage. Turner, in his book on translating Tolkien, sets up a system of opacity; certain things such as Rohirric names are more opaque to the English-reader than, say, Elvish names, which contain little to no roots that the English reader would understand (ch. 2). Turner says that the important issue is to not mess up this balance of opacity by, for example, making the Rohirric people as opaque as the Elvish people. And this is simply what every translation of Tolkien's work does to some extent, if not a large degree.

This is not to say, by any means, that any one translator or group of translators are to blame for purposely distorting, sacrificing, or disregarding the intricate balance systems in place in Tolkien's works. The truth is that it is simply a matter of necessity. Lawrence Wong discusses the difficulties in translating across language family lines:

The sense units have been brought over, but the steady mounting of tension in the original, made possible by the continuous flow of language,

is no longer there. To 'transport' all the original sense units into Chinese, one has to ferry them over stage by stage, taking a break here and there before one can start again, so that the uninterrupted flow in the original has to be sacrificed. As a result, much of the poetic effect is lost. (129-130)

His discussion is a specific example of translating the Italian of Dante into Chinese as opposed to translating it into an Indo-European language, but the ideas are true of any bridging with any text. The distance between languages, especially between those of totally different genetic strains, can create an enormous lexical, morphological, and syntactic gap that simply cannot be magically filled by even the greatest of translators. Jacques Derrida, literary theorist and critic, defines an impossibly high bar for translation: "Translation, a system of translation, is possible only if a permanent code allows a substitution or transformation of signifiers while retaining the same signified, always present, despite the absence of any specific signifier" (210). What Derrida argues for here is the idea that unless there is a direct, distinct, and clear one-to-one relationship between every possible expression, word, or lexical unit in the source and target language, translation fails. The gap between languages in translation is even larger, and sometimes impassible, in poetry. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies introduces its section on the possibility of translating poetry by stating, "It is widely maintained that poetry translation is a special case within literary translation and involves far greater difficulties than the translation of prose. The language of poetry will always be further removed from ordinary language than the most elaborate prose, and the poetic use of language deviates in a number of ways from ordinary use" (Connolly 171). Connolly

discusses many literary figures who agree to the impossibility of the translation of poetry, from Nabokov to Robert Browning to Roman Jakobson (171). While these men may differ in the details as to the reasons for their position, they all agree that the complexities and unique features of poetry largely disallow it from being transported out of its original language container. Tolkien threads poetry and rhyme throughout his works, as has been seen in excerpts above. Tolkien himself does not always translate some of his Elvish poetry, and much of the English poetry would translate poorly or not at all. The poetry would, therefore, be a major hurdle to any translation of Tolkien's works into another language.

The options, then, to the potential translator of a Tolkienian work are few. The first option would be to leave the status quo intact and translate Tolkien's works similar to how has been done for decades. A book is a book, and a tale is a tale; getting the story to as many people at any expense is the key aim here. Sacrifices would be required, but these sacrifices have been made before in Tolkienian translation, and no new abuses would be committed. One more translation that does not irrevocably scar the works of Tolkien would not be a literary or linguistic crime.

The second option would be to not translate Tolkien's works. This option sounds abrupt and harsh, and it is. What then would be lost if it was decided to not translate Tolkien, and do these losses outweigh the benefits? Of course, lost will be the readers who enjoy Tolkien's work in other languages—and there are surely millions. Gone will be the joy they receive in reading Tolkien's works and gaining what they can from them. The benefits of the non-translation of Tolkien would be theoretically beneficial but non-practical. For one, there would be no more sacrifice of essential elements in Tolkien.

Readers would not be left wondering what a certain phrase means that just was not translated right because it could not be translated right. But this would of course be because they do not have the story to read at all. It would not be preferable to deprive readers of gleaning what they can from Tolkien's works merely to preserve the textual integrity for the readers who are able to access the story in its original language and cultural background. Many probably do not even realize now when the cadence and flow of one of Tolkien's poems is totally destroyed, replaced by a non-rhyming, non-flowing attempt by the translator to merely reconstruct the ideas and words of the poem, but any essence of Tolkien leaking through the translation is still beautiful and classic. They also probably do not miss the intricate opacity balance between the varying cultures in The Lord of the Rings; yes, the reader may unknowingly relate more to the Elves than the Rohirrim, but it is highly doubtful that a cultural group would be so far estranged from Tolkien's own that the story would be perverted in a way that they relate to the Orcs more than any other group of Tolkienian characters.

To not produce translations of Tolkien's works would be devastating to the international spread and impact of good Western literature. Tolkien tales sell millions upon millions in their primary English editions, but translated editions are what most of the world requires. English is the lingua franca of the modern world and schoolchildren all over the globe are taught English, but this is not reason to create only English editions. These people may miss the cultural references such as the Beowulf insinuations in an English edition that a skilled translator may be able to cultivate into a similar experience for the non-English speaking reader. On a smaller note, restricting the publication of such a popular story as this may increase the desire to learn English for some, as they may

want to learn the language to better enjoy Tolkien's tale. Although this would sound preposterous for most books, when a story such as Tolkien's has the impact on whole genres that it has had (not to mention the recent hubbub from the movies), this idea is not completely out of the picture. Above all, with the second option of not translating Tolkien, the textual integrity of Tolkien's tale would be preserved, but this is not of supreme importance ahead of getting the work into the hands of readers everywhere. With all of the meticulous effort that Tolkien placed into creating a uniquely English tale, the integrity and authenticity of the text is important; but what would be the value of Tolkien writing and publishing his works if only a small segment of the world were able to read it?

The third, and preferred, option is one of compromise and practicality. The translator should translate Tolkien's works, yes, but encourage when possible the reading of Tolkien's works in their original language. A translator's preface or some introductory note is all that is necessary to alert the reader to the complexity and philological depth of Tolkien's works and the ability of even the most skilled translator to capture only a section of the meaning imbued by J.R.R. Tolkien into the works of his meticulous legendarium.

This idea of translation when necessary but original when available is not a new concept to the world of literature or translation. Don Paterson writes that the one thing to avoid is "pretending that both the meaning and the music of the original poem can be carried into the new language. Because a poem works on the heretical principal that sound and sense are the same thing, a poem is locked forever in its original form. The poem's effect, which is all there is of it, can no more be 'translated' than can a piece of

music” (56). While this is directly applicable for pieces such as the poetry in Tolkien’s works, the same idea is applicable for works of linguistic art, be they Russian, English, or Swahili. Great masters such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, while translated and read widely in translation, are oft considered much more powerful and of grander scale in their original Russian. The plot gets across, the characters are understood, but the little nuances that work together to create pure beauty in word are often lost in translation. Schleiermacher, a German theologian and philosopher of the 19th century, posited this same compromise; allow for the truth that the source language is unique and says it best, but still translate, admitting to the fact that the translation is a translation, and does involve a relationship with the translator (Pym and Turk 274). Shakespeare is another great example of this practice. William Shakespeare is widely recognized in the English-speaking literature community as a pioneer and a rule-breaker of the English language. His plays are so full of puns, word plays, and other linguistic tricks that his works will be forever tied to the English canon, if not for their sheer control of the English language. Yet, Shakespeare has been translated into languages the world over; his work is too well-known and widely-discussed to not be translated. The same is, to a lesser extent, true for Tolkien. All of the elements discussed above, from his philological creation of names to the unique inter-relationships between people groups to hidden allusions of Anglo mythologies, come together in a similar enough way in any language with a good translator to get the general thrust of the story; Frodo is still a hobbit, Lothlorien is still beautiful, good still triumphs over evil, and butterbeer still tastes good.

The unique elements of J.R.R. Tolkien’s monumental story of myth and legend, full of allusive literary references and implied cultural balancing, is clearly seen to be

most fully and appreciatively read and understood in the original English language that Tolkien crafted it in. Any approximation, for that is truly what a translation of Tolkien's work often is, in some ways fails to live up to the original and loses much between the source text and the target text. Yet, while an English understanding of Tolkien's legendarium is to be preferred above all, this cannot always be the case. This explains the multitude of popular translations. Although the loss of precision in the text is very regrettable, the readers who enjoy and understand Tolkien's work in any degree in any language can in as much as possible appreciate and grasp the strands that Tolkien used to weave England's new mythology, The Lord of the Rings.

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