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**Fantasy in Translation:**  
an Analysis and Comparison of the English  
Chapter *The Council of Elrond* from J.R.R.  
Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and its  
Chinese Translation.

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*May it be the shadow's call will fly away*

*May it be your journey on to light the day*

*When the night is overcome*

*You may rise to find the sun*

*Mornië utúlië*

*Believe and you will find your way*

*Mornië alantië*

*A promise lives within you now.*

*May It Be - Enya*

## 摘要

本论文主要研究 J.R.R.托尔金的《魔戒》第二部第二章 The Council of Elrond 英文篇章及其 2002 年出版的中译本，同时对奇幻文学进行了概述，并对两个文本进行了分析与比较。本论文分为三个章节。

第一章节由两部分组成：第一部分介绍了奇幻文学流派及其在东西方日益流行的趋势，以及两种文化之间可能产生的影响。第二部分介绍了原著作者 J.R.R. 托尔金及其学历与文化背景，特别是哪些因素促使他创作出畅销奇幻作品《魔戒》，以及这些因素以何种方式影响了他创作故事的方式。本节旨在说明幻想文学在当今文学界的现实意义，以及上述著作在使这一文学类型得到适当认可方面所发挥的重要作用，由此对翻译领域产生的影响。

第二章节介绍了英文章节 The Council of Elrond 及其中文译本《林谷会议》。之所以选择这一章，是因为它在传奇中具有复杂性，更重要的是，它提供了大量的信息和描写了许多人物。

在第三章节中，笔者对源文本和目标文本进行分析和比较，以呈现与分析它们之间的异同，研究使用的翻译策略，并审视翻译过程中可能遇到的困难。

最后，笔者将本论文的参考书目附于本文末尾。

# Abstract

This thesis focuses on the English chapter *The Council of Elrond*, the second chapter of Book II of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and its Chinese translation published in 2002, accompanied by an overview of fantasy literature and an analysis and comparison of the two texts.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section consists of an introduction on the fantasy literary genre and its growing popularity in both the West and the East, as well as the influences that might have occurred between the two cultures. Following this part there will be a brief introduction on the author of the original text that was taken into account, J.R.R. Tolkien, to determine his background and in particular which elements brought him to write his bestselling fantasy work *The Lord of the Rings* and in which way these factors influenced his way of creating the story itself. This section aims at showing the relevance that fantasy has inside the literary world nowadays, as well as the importance that the aforementioned book gained in giving this type of literature a proper recognition and, consequently, the way it influenced the translation field.

The English chapter *The Council of Elrond* and its Chinese translation 林谷会议 are presented in the second section in their full-length form.

The third section consists on the analysis and comparison of both the source and target texts, to show and highlight their differences and similarities, examining the translation strategies that have been used and inspecting the difficulties that might have occurred during the process.

A bibliography can be found in the appendix at the end of the paper.

# Index

摘要.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Index.....	5
Introduction.....	6
1. The Evolution of Fantasy From Ancient Myths to J.R.R. Tolkien.....	8
1.1 Western Fantasy Literature.....	8
1.2 Eastern Fantasy Literature.....	11
1.3 John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.....	14
1.3.1 The Hobbit.....	16
1.3.2 The Lord Of The Rings.....	17
2. The Council of Elrond.....	21
3. Texts Analysis and Comparison.....	84
3.1 Proper Nouns.....	85
3.2 Other Lexical Features.....	90
3.3 Invented Languages.....	91
3.4 Poems.....	92
3.5 Cultural Features.....	96
3.6 Nuance of Meaning.....	98
3.7 Stylistic Features.....	100
Conclusions.....	103
Bibliography.....	104
Sitography.....	107

# Introduction

*“Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don’t we consider it his duty to escape?...if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we’re partisans of liberty, then it’s our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can.”*

(Le Guin, 1979:204)

In recent times, specifically during the second half of the twentieth century, people began using the English term “fantasy” to refer to a literary genre mainly addressed to a young audience. Dwarves, elves, pixies, sorcerers and many more magical characters, however, were already living inside old stories and myths passed on among people: Homer, Ovid and Apuleius are just some examples of authors whose works could be viewed as fantasy works (Nikolajeva, 2003:139). Nevertheless, the first name that comes to mind when thinking about this genre and its success is John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, who is considered, in fact, the forerunner of fantasy as a literary genre (Treccani, 2005).

Three main periods of time in which fantasy literature had its peak of success can be identified. The first one is placed in the Thirties, mainly characterised by the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937, “Tolkien’s first publishing success” (Drout 2023:18), and *The Sword in the Stone* by the British writer T. H. White in 1938. The second phase begins in the Fifties with the release of various sagas, such as Tolkien’s famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (a series of seven books published between 1950 and 1956) by C. S. Lewis. The third period, instead, starts in the Nineties and still continues today. Taking into account these three moments in time, it can be noticed that those were periods of considerable changes as well as crisis, such as the approaching of the Second World War and today’s crisis and acts of terrorism (Silva, 2008:3). A reason why this happens could be found in the words written by Tolkien in his essay “On Fairy Stories”:

First of all: if written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms. But fairy-stories offer also, in a peculiar degree or mode, these things: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation, all things of which children have, as a rule, less need than older people. (Tolkien, 2001:46)

*Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation.* Escapism was heavily criticised in fantasy literature for the fact that it distracts people from the world they are living in; however, according to Tolkien, escape from sorrow and ugliness is, indeed, a worthy desire (Drout, 2023:41).

When mentioning this genre, Western people tend to think about Anglo-Saxon literature, along with the aforementioned works. It is important to notice, however, that even though Western culture influenced and helped the East with the development and success of fantasy, Eastern literature on its own should be taken into consideration as a fundamental part of world literature as a whole. Escapism is what Chinese new literature is also about: genres like fantasy and science fiction, first appeared as Internet products for a young audience, became a way to imagine fictional worlds and take a deep breath, away from their mundane lives (Denton, 2016:395).

These characters and their adventures gifted children and adults with an escape from their daily life, which should not necessarily be seen as something negative, but rather a helpful tool to search for the light during the darkest times and find a way to move on.

This thesis aims at showing the development of fantasy literature in both West and East, taking *The Lord of the Rings* as an example of the difficulties that might occur during the translation of novels, in particular of fantasy novels, according to the fact that these kind of works contain magical characters, places and object which only exist in the author's imagination.

It will first start with an overview on fantasy literature and its growing popularity in both the West and the East, followed by an introduction on the author of the original text taken into analysis, J.R.R. Tolkien, in order to determine his historical and cultural background and in particular which elements brought him to write the bestseller *The Lord of the Rings*. The second section of the thesis will present the two texts taken into analysis, the English chapter *The Council of Elrond* and its Chinese translation *lingu huiyi* 林谷会议. The third - and last - section will consist on the analysis and comparison of both source and target texts, analysing their differences and similarities, the translation strategies that have been used, as well as inspecting the difficulties that might have occurred during the translation process.



# 1. The Evolution of Fantasy From Ancient Myths to J.R.R. Tolkien

The following chapter aims to provide an overview on the development of fantasy literature, starting from Western literature, to later describe the growth of the genre in the East, which is much less recognized than the Western one. Following, there will be an introduction of the author J. R. R. Tolkien, to better understand the life experiences that brought him to write, in particular to write fantasy works. There will be a brief mention to his first bestseller *The Hobbit*, as the first step towards fantasy and the drafting of his main work, *The Lord of the Rings*, which will be discussed in the last part of the chapter.

## 1.1 Western Fantasy Literature

In their book, Dickerson and O'Hara (2006:95) state that fantasy writers are “part of a long tradition dating at least back to Homer”. The first titles that come to readers' mind when mentioning fantasy literature are Western bestsellers such as *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*. However, taking a look back in time, even before the birth of fantasy as an actual acknowledged genre, it could still be possible to find fantastic elements used by authors who did not even consider the presence of magic and monsters as something particularly unexpected. One of the main examples are Homer's works, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, epic tales full of monsters, magic herbs, prodigious beings and giants.

Researching for the term “fantasy”, in fact, one of the definitions that occur is:

Fantasy, from the Greek φαντασία meaning ‘making visible,’ is a genre of fiction that concentrates on imaginary elements (the fantastic). This can mean magic, the supernatural, alternate worlds, superheroes, monsters, fairies, magical creatures, mythological heroes—essentially, anything that an author can imagine outside of reality. With fantasy, the magical or supernatural elements serve as the foundation of the plot, setting, characterization, or storyline in general. (Literary Terms, 2005)

This suggests that whenever facts that are thought to be improbable in the real world appear in a literary work, the reader is exposed to a fantastic element. Many classicist authors could be

mentioned, among which the Roman poet Virgil and his poem *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. Overall, texts from Latin and Greek authors all present elements like deities and magic.

In the eighth century there is the emergence of *Beowulf*, an epic poem written in Old English. The people and events mentioned in the poem cannot be found in any Anglo-Saxon manuscript, but rather in Scandinavian ones. Both Scandinavian works about northern traditions and *Beowulf* itself largely influenced many fantasy writers such as J. R. R. Tolkien, William Morris and Neil Gaiman.

According to Dickerson and O'Hara (2006:126), "if we acknowledge the influence of *Beowulf* on modern fantasy, we must also acknowledge a legend – or rather a set of legends – that has an even more noticeable influence: the body of work known collectively as Arthurian romance". The term "Arthurian romance" refers to the body of mediaeval stories and romances focusing on the character of the legendary King Arthur. The flowering of this type of romance along with children's literature – works such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, at times hyperbolically considered "the greatest children's story of all" (Drout, 2023:10) – during the Victorian age added the element of nostalgia to fantasy literature, the idea that the past used to be simpler and beautiful and that nothing could help to bring that beauty back. This brought to the foundation of a more modern tradition for fantasy works. For instance, they set the basis for the creation of J.R.R. Tolkien's books. The author was, in fact, born at the end of the Victorian era and he, as well, had this great sense of nostalgia derived by his idyllic infancy destroyed by the arrival of World War I, which shattered any possibility to bring back such a peaceful past (Drout, 2023:12).

The beginning of the twentieth century marked the birth of two subgenres: *urban fantasy* and *portal fantasy*. The first one was taken over by the writer Edith Nesbit, who published *Five Children and It* in 1902. The author took inspiration from different predecessors and "renewed and transformed fantasy tradition" (Nikolajeva, 2003:139), writing a story which linked together the magic element with the ordinary, realistic urban life. *Portal fantasy*, instead, refers to a story in which the character enters the fantastic world and typically ends with their returning home; it is usually a kind of quest-type narrative, in which the main "mission" is to travel through this new world. A representative of this subgenre is *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, written in 1900 by L. Frank Baum. The two aforementioned authors were just two examples of the great blooming of children's books during those years; *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (published in 1908) is another work worth mentioning, as it became one of the most beloved children's classics (Pardini, 2012:18). Or else, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* written and illustrated by Beatrix Potter in 1902 and *Winnie-the-Pooh*, written by the English author A. A. Milne in 1926, were both translated in more than 30 different languages and among the best-selling books in history.

During this time in America, a writer called Howard Phillips Lovecraft was publishing some of his most famous stories such as *The Call of Cthulhu*, written in 1928, which introduced the monster Cthulhu, which has now become an important figure of Western popular culture. The country also experienced the creation of a new subgenre: the *heroic fantasy*, whose initiator was Robert E. Howard with his Kull the Conqueror stories, the first one being *The Shadow Kingdom*, written in 1929.

During the Thirties the fantasy genre had already reached its peak of success, which grew further with the publication of books such as *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien in 1937, the first two books of the series dedicated to Mary Poppins by P.L. Travers, *Mary Poppins* (1934) and *Mary Poppins Comes Back* (1935) and T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938). Moreover, this period saw the great impact of fantasy inside the cinematic culture, worth mentioning is the American musical fantasy film *The Wizard of Oz*, adaptation of the book from 1900 (Pardini, 2012:21).

The Fifties and Sixties are considered by Nikolajeva (2003:139) as the "Golden Age of the English-language fantasy". All the authors protagonists of these years were undoubtedly indebted to Nesbit, though they brought fantasy to a much higher level. After *The Hobbit*, J.R.R. Tolkien published his famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, which became one of the most successful books of the twentieth century. Four years before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, another famous saga came into life: the first of the seven books of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (another example of *portal fantasy*) by the British author C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In these two worlds, the link between magic and reality is represented in two different ways: while Lewis uses his story as an allegory of Christ through the figure of the lion Aslan, Tolkien decides to represent his feeling of nostalgia of a pre-World War life in the land of Middle-earth, in which ancient races and magical kingdoms are now beginning to fade (Cahill, 2012:8). Other sources from this period of time include the series of *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton (the first publication being in 1952), as well as Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, 1960, which takes elements from the author's local British folklore and sets them inside a plot in which the core of magic resides in a stone. Moreover, during the Sixties Ian and Betty Ballantine's publishing work was crucial for the commercial growth of the genre, as they started the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series in 1969 after releasing the paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. Between this year and the first years of the Seventies, more than sixty different titles (both classics and new releases) were published (Pardini, 2012:24).

The Seventies marked the official separation between the genre of fantasy and science fiction (Pardini, 2012:25). Ursula K. Le Guin together with Robert Holdstock succeeded in creating a kind of fantasy which reaches the same level as Tolkien's. Just like Tolkien who uses philology and his literary knowledge to write his stories, Le Guin takes advantage of her anthropology education to create

literature. She created the *Earthsea* books, originally meant as a trilogy, a work which had great success and fame. Robert Holdstock, instead, is majorly remembered for the incorporation of the traditional culture of the British Isles – shamanism, the Morris Dances etcetera - into his works, such as *Mythago Wood* (Drout, 2023:50). The Seventies saw the birth of many movies – *Star Wars* by George Lucas primarily - and even board games which would later inspire the creations of various books and sagas.

Fantasy never stopped growing during the years and many more authors could be mentioned as well as new subgenres, for instance *dark fantasy*, which collects stories with a predilection for particular characters such as vampires and werewolves. Worth mentioning is the publication in 1997 of the first book of the *Harry Potter* saga by J.K. Rowling, one of the biggest successes in fantasy literature. The work became so popular that it even had a great impact on the popular language and culture: as an instance, words created by the author such as “muggle” became part of the English language and were recognized internationally (Łaszkiewicz, 2019:17). Rowling’s success contributed to the re-evaluation that publishing houses had towards all kinds of fantasy authors (Pardini, 2012:33). The release of the *Harry Potter* movies as well as the ones based on *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in the early 2000s had such a great recognition that brought many people to get to know better fantasy literature, buying books and making research on the matter. Nowadays fantasy is still growing through books, movies, TV series, videogames and board games, many more subgenres are emerging and scholars are treating it as a matter of great importance.

## 1.2 Eastern Fantasy Literature

The first issue that a person might encounter when searching for Chinese fantasy literature, is the presence of different words to refer to the topic and it is somewhat difficult to really distinguish them at first, considering also the various opinions that might occur between different Chinese authors.

In his paper, Ye Yonglie 叶永烈 (2005) explains the classification of fantasy literature: it is divided into two categories, *huanxiang xiaoshuo* 幻想小说 (fantasy novels) and *tonghua* 童话 (fairy tales), and fantasy novels are, in turn, divided into three major categories, namely *kehuan xiaoshuo* 科幻小说 (science fiction), *mohuan xiaoshuo* 魔幻小说 (magic fiction) and, lastly, “*qihuan (xuanhuan) xiaoshuo*” 奇幻 ( 玄幻 ) 小说, fantasy novels. The most common words used to refer

to this third category, fantasy novels, are three: *da huanxian xiaoshuo* 大幻想小说, *xuanhuan xiaoshuo* 玄幻小说 and *qihuan xiaoshuo* 奇幻小说.

Furthermore, the writer explains the origins of the three last aforementioned terms. *Huanxian xiaoshuo* is a term that originated in Japan with the works written by Naoko Awa. The characteristics of her modern fairy tales, which made her win the Noma Children's Literature Prize in 1982, were really similar to the ones used by the Chinese author Pu Songling 蒲松龄 in his collection of short stories *Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊斋志异 (in English known with the title *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* or *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*), published in 1740. For this reason, Chinese people sometimes tend to call Naoko's works as a "contemporary Liaozhai", while considering Pu Songling 蒲松龄 as the actual originator of this kind of novels.

The term *xuanhuan*, instead, seems to have been originated in Hong Kong, along with the publication of *Yue mo* 月魔 ("Moon Demon") written by the novelist Huang Yi 黄易 in 1988. The editor of the novel described it as the start of a new genre, which mixes together mystery, science and literature. Altogether, Huang Yi's production is classified as *xuanhuan wuxia xiaoshuo*, which indicates a combination of science fiction with the traditional cloak-and-dagger fiction (Xu Shuang, 2017:78). The term *xuanhuan* evolved with time, and it now acquired the meaning of a kind of novel which does not have any reference to the reality; in specific, it could be said that such term refers to novels which do not imply a basis of Chinese or Western tradition, but on a world completely invented by an author. The genre comprehends also elements from Japanese mangas and American and Korean videogames, though, despite the external influences, it still reaches for local roots. For this reason, when a novel is actually based on a Chinese background, it is considered a *dongfang xuanhuan* 东方玄幻, an "eastern fantasy" (Xu Shuang, 2017:78).

The *qihuan* is a genre which, according to Ye Yonglie (2005), has to do with novels from foreign countries. The main representative of this genre is *The Lord of the Rings*, though people trace this kind of fantasy novels way back in time, to Greek and Latin mythology. The term *qihuan* was first used by the Taiwanese translator Zhu Xueheng 朱学恒 with his translation of the J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy. Since then, the term has been used in all Chinese-speaking places. A Chinese representative of this genre is, in Ye Yonglie's opinion, Guo Jingming's *Huancheng* 幻城 (*City of Fantasies*). The

novel presents a great influence from “Western epic fantasies, Japanese manga, and Chinese martial arts romances” (Denton, 2016:395). First published in 2002 as a short story in the journal *Mengya* 萌芽, the author decided to rewrite it as a proper novel due to the great success it had among online readers. The work can now count more than a million copies sold and Guo Jingming is considered one of the youngest and most popular author in China (Mingozzi, 2014:1), becoming a model for fantasy novelists, made with “fragmented narrative, introverted characters, lyrical prose, and shallow sentimentalism (Denton, 2016:395).

It is noticeable that there is still no clear distinction between the terms *qihuan* and *xuanhuan* and many novels in China are still referred to as part of both genres. This happens due to the fact that there is a considerable lack of academic materials about the matter and the two categories are still in their development phases (Xu Shuang, 2017:79): at the beginning of the 2000s in fact, as Ye Yonglie (2005) points out, it was still impossible to find the entries for *xuanhuan* and *qihuan* in a dictionary.

As mentioned in the previous subchapter, it is possible to find fantastic elements in times in which fantasy as a genre was not yet existing. Myths, legends and religious stories have always been part of Chinese literature as well. One of the best examples is *Xi youji* 西游记 (*Journey to the West*), part of the Chinese classics, published in the sixteenth century and attributed to the novelist Wu Cheng'en 吴承恩. These type of works flourished during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and were defined by the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun 鲁迅 as *shen mo xiaoshuo* 神魔小说, literally “novels of gods and demons”, i.e. the supernatural novels (Ma Rui, 2008:29). Fantasy can also be seen as a way to view the world and search for explanations: in the Chinese folklore there are stories such as *Niulangzhinu* 牛郎织女 (*The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl*), which was created from people's worship of celestial phenomena, in this case the stars of Vega and Altair in the sky, separated by the Milky Way. The Chinese culture itself, from the concept of *yin* and *yang* to the Buddhist's five elements, presents a fantasy features (Ma Rui, 2008:30).

The actual genre of fantasy, along with *kehuan* 科幻 (science fiction) and *xuanyi* 悬疑 (mystery), is yet a rather new component of the Chinese literature field. Genre fiction in general is very different from any “state-supported and author-centred literary practices” (Denton, 2016:394): many of these works, in fact, appeared under the influence of Western literature and were first approached in the form of serials published on the Internet; later on, once the amateur author was receiving enough recognition by fans online, the novel was published in a paper form. As an online development, most of the audience, as well as the authors, was part of a young generation. Ye Yonglie (2005) mentions

how recent Chinese reforms and opening to the West world let the country enter years of “relaxation” and so youngsters’ imagination was released to its full level. Imagination can now run wild, people can and want to escape from reality for a while, and that is the reason why so many titles have been published and are having such great success. Since the twentieth century, in fact, fantasy elements were imported from the West, not just from its literary production, but also movies and games. The first important influence for the fantasy production was the import of Anglo-Saxon fantasy novels at the end of the nineties, which were translated into Chinese. The main influence came from the translation of *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel was first translated by two different Taiwanese publishing houses; one of these, Lianjing, later published a third version made by Zhu Xueheng, which became really popular especially due to the fact that it was released while the related movies also reached the Chinese theatres. The second influence came from the introduction in Taiwan (in 1998 in mainland China) of the table top role-playing game of *D&D (Dungeon & Dragons)*, originally created in America in 1974. Three years later, in 2001, the book saga based on the game called *Dragonlance* was translated and imported in China by the same translator of Tolkien’s trilogy. All these elements determined a great help for the growth of this new genre (Xu Shuang, 2017:76).

Overall, it is still complex to really define fantasy literature in the Chinese world. As a genre in the middle of its development, there are still few materials to give proper answers. Nevertheless, it is possible to define the main characteristics that the current productions follow: they can be regarded as youth literature, both for the authors and their audience; the Internet culture is undoubtedly a huge influence for the publications and appreciation of the works; it has a really distinct folk feature (Ma Rui, 2008:30). Surely, the globalisation of this process gives the audience the opportunity to live many different worlds and, mainly, to never feel isolated.

### **1.3 John Ronald Reuel Tolkien**

J. R. R. Tolkien is a worldwide famous author, mostly remembered for his masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*, which laid the foundation for all the fantasy works that came along after his own. Mentioning briefly his biography could help to better understand the way his books were conceived and written.

Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, in 1892, the first child of Arthur Tolkien, descended from German immigrants moved to England, and Mabel Suffield. His stay in South Africa, however, was not that long, according to the fact that in 1895 he moved to England with his mother and little brother, first in Birmingham and the countryside in Sarehole later on. Mabel Suffield raised the two

children, as Tolkien's father never reached them back in England due to a fever he died of while still in South Africa. During the years spent with his mom, Tolkien grew a great passion for foreign languages and old fables, as well as his belief in Roman Catholicism, following his mother's conversion from the Anglican Church to the aforementioned one. The latter episode caused Tolkien's family to be completely cut off from the rest of the family and any economical help. Consequently, Mabel Suffield, alone and helpless, died prematurely in 1904 (Società Tolkeniana Italiana).

The premature departure of his mother and his staying in the countryside in England played an important role in Tolkien's writings. The English rural area and its farms were an enormous inspiration for his characters, especially in the description of the Hobbit's Shire, the Hobbits being protagonists of his main works. At the same time, the nostalgia coming from these events, but also influenced by the World War I atmosphere (during which he, as well, served as second lieutenant) became the central emotion in his storytelling: his characters in the Middle-Earth have seen better days and they all wish they could go back to them. Everything is in ruins, and the inhabitants of the present days do not have the capacity to rebuild that glorious past.

His religious faith contributed to the absence of the strong atheism and rejection of morality characterising many works during his time, and so it helped him with being well accepted by an even larger group of readers, with strong religious beliefs (Drout, 2023:15).

More importantly, his passion for foreign languages brought him to be fluent in many languages, among which Greek, Latin and German. Furthermore, his studies in philology, Middle and Old English and especially Gothic grammar gave him the basis for the creation of brand new languages. Through the rules at the bottom of phonology, primarily that of Finnish and Welsh, Tolkien invented and gifted his characters with two languages that became somewhat famous for fantasy readers: *Quenya* and *Sindarin*, the languages used by the Elves. Many more Elvish languages were then invented by the author, and many more fantasy authors used his new languages as an inspiration to create their own, for instance the Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski for *The Witcher* saga.

Languages lose their richness without literature, following Tolkien's thought, and that is why he chose mediaeval literature to walk side by side with his philology studies. Thanks to his interest in literature and his readings on Anglo-Saxon and Middle English works, he shaped together his imaginary world. In 1951, Tolkien wrote a letter to his friend Milton Waldman in which he also mentioned his writing purposes. According to Tolkien:



I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished cheap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. (Carpenter, 2006:167)

His objective was to create a unique English epic-mythological literature.

### 1.3.1 The Hobbit

*The Hobbit*, first published in 1937, was Tolkien's first publishing success and, with more than 140 millions copies sold, one of the bestsellers of the twentieth century (Libreriamo, 2015). It was conceived as a children's book, though it also served as a link between juvenile literature and fantasy, from which the author developed his later work and masterpiece (Drout, 2023:18).

The book is essentially the story of Bilbo Baggins, who is a Hobbit, people living in The Shire, in Middle-earth. Also known as *Halfling*, they are roughly half the size of humans, their physique similar to that of children, with big and furry toes and a great passion for wine and food. Bilbo is enjoying his tranquil life at Bag End, until one day a wizard named Gandalf arrives at his house and convinces him to embark on an adventure with thirteen dwarves. Their goal is to take back their treasure from the evil dragon Smaug, and they need someone to act as their burglar. The dwarves are not satisfied with Gandalf's decision to bring Bilbo in their adventure, and Bilbo himself, as a calm and house life lover Hobbit, is reluctant to depart. However, the wizard manages to let them open their eyes on the fact that small creatures just like Hobbits embody much more than what someone can see at first sight. The adventure eventually starts, and the protagonist encounters elves, goblins, magic swords, giant spiders and talking eagles. At the end of the story, after a final battle which resulted in their victory, Bilbo can finally return home. Not welcomed anymore by the people living there due to this adventure, Bilbo does not care and, actually, now prefers the company of his new friends, composed by dwarves, elves and wizards, though staying in the comfort of his house.

To write *The Hobbit*, Tolkien was deeply influenced by his studies in mediaeval literature, and especially his reading of *Beowulf*, an epic poem of the eighth century. His passion for this poem and his experience in the field led him to introduce many elements from epic and Old English in his work. In one specific part of the book, the protagonist steals the dragon's golden cup and that brought editors

to question whether this was a direct reference to *Beowulf* or not. To this specific matter, Tolkien wrote a letter:

As for the rest of the tale it is, as the *Habit* suggests, derived from (previously digested) epic, mythology, and fairy-story – not, however, Victorian in authorship, as a rule to which George Macdonald is the chief exception. *Beowulf* is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing [...] (Carpenter, 2006:39)

*The Hobbit* was one of Tolkien's means to learn how to use his mediaeval knowledge in a book, connecting it with his audience, middle-class readers. Bilbo is, in fact, a middle-class character, just a normal Hobbit living his normal life. He is not the typical hero of an epic poem, but he is brought into an heroic adventure with epic characters, becoming a link between normal life and the epic world. This made it possible for Tolkien to publish an epic adventure in the twentieth century without the much harder style of an epic poem. This is what the author taught the fantasy writers that came after him: a simple children's book can actually become a more sophisticated yet still enjoyable one.

All of these techniques, as well as the heroic elements and the vast secondary fantastic world invented by Tolkien built the path to his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings* (Drout, 2023:20).

### 1.3.2 The Lord Of The Rings

Tolkien used the narrative core of *The Hobbit* to develop his new work, which came to life approximately twenty years later. *The Lord of the Rings*, the famous fantasy trilogy, was not actually perceived as a three books saga by the author, however, due to economic reasons, it was published as so. In 1954 the first volume was published, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. It then followed *The Two Towers* in November 1954 and *The Return of the King*, in 1955. The overall work is divided into six sections, and so each volume presents two "books" inside.

The story takes place during the Third Age of Middle-earth, a continent in the world of Arda. A magic ring found by Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* served Tolkien as a link with his new story. The new narration, in fact, takes place sixty years after the end of Tolkien's previous book. One day, the Hobbit Frodo Baggins, the protagonist of the story, inherits the ring from Bilbo without knowing what kind of object it might actually be, until a wizard named Gandalf (the same wizard from *The Hobbit*) meets him years later to tell him the truth: that object is the long-lost One Ring, secretly forged by the Dark Lord

Sauron in order to take control of the Middle-earth. Lost long ago during a battle, the Ring is now searching for his master. Gandalf advises Frodo to leave the Shire, the place where Hobbits live, as Sauron's servants have been sent to search for the magical object. The Hobbit goes away with three of his friends: his loyal gardener Sam and two other companions, Merry and Pippin. Following a long series of encounters and vicissitudes, the group reaches Rivendell, a magical Elvish settlement, where the Half-elf and lord Elrond takes them under his care. During their stay, a council takes place: the main representatives of the different races in Middle-earth - Elves, Men and Dwarves - attend as well, to discuss the next step to take in order to stop Sauron from his evil plan. The answer is unanimous: the Ring has to be destroyed and there is only one way to do it, that is, going to Mordor, the realm of the Dark Lord, and throwing it in the lava of Mount Doom. The journey is not going to be easy, especially because the Ring can corrupt whoever wears it with desire for it and its power, which then causes the bearer to suffer greatly psychologically. Frodo seems the only one who is not attracted by its desire for power and is then designated as the Ring bearer. Eight characters taking part of the Council are assigned as his companions for the journey: his three Hobbit friends, Gandalf, the Elf Legolas, the Dwarf Gimli and two Men, Aragorn and Boromir. All together, they become the *Fellowship of the Ring*. The trilogy traces the course of the War of the Ring through the perspective of all its characters.

In different parts during the whole adventure, the narrative will present the same kind of pattern: the main characters will have some underground journeys, they will visit houses and encounter unexpected figures. However, these repetitions, the "pattern of action and rest, stress and release" (Drout, 2023:22) do not create a monotonous atmosphere, but rather serves the author to build some layers in his story, which rendered it a unique fantasy product in the literary world of his time (Drout, 2023:22).

Reading *The Lord of the Rings* gives the readers no doubts about the great amount of attention and details that Tolkien put into his story. All matters - geography, weather, even the phases of the moon - are mapped out (Bergmann, 2017:46). The uniqueness of his work is also represented by the capacity to create a new mythology, with its own characters and their backgrounds, places and relations. Each race in Middle-earth also present their own language, which was actually Tolkien's starting point to write his mythology:

The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stones' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. (Carpenter, 2006:233)

As previously mentioned, Tolkien created two Elvish languages which appear in *The Lord of the Rings*, *Quenya* and *Sindarin*. The first one, *Quenya*, also called *High-elven*, was meant to be a sort of “Elven-latin” (Carpenter, 2006:194), and so it was composed by a Latin basis with the phonetics of Finnish and Greek, which sounded just right for the task. *Sindarin*, or *Grey-elven*, instead, is the language of the so-called “Western Elves”. As he mentioned (Carpenter, 2006:194):” The ‘Sindarin’, a Grey-elven language, is in fact constructed deliberately to resemble Welsh phonologically and to have a relation to High-elven similar to that existing between British and Latin”. To better make it more realistic, Tolkien created a completely new alphabet, different from the one readers are familiar with, though most of the time the languages are still written in the Latin alphabet, with just a few exceptions throughout the trilogy.

Elvish languages are not the only languages created by the author, who actually gifted all the different races in Middle-earth their own language. The Black Speech, for instance, is only used in Mordor, created by Sauron, and, being an evil language, no one else willingly uses it, which is why all the names of places that are set in Mordor are still transcribed in English or in their Elvish form. One of the few exceptions in which this language occurs is in the One Ring inscription. According to Tolkien (2007:11) “the Black Speech was not intentionally modelled on any style, but was meant to be self-consistent, very different from Elvish, yet organized and expressive, as would be expected of a device of Sauron before his complete corruption”.

Tolkien added some appendices at the end of his trilogy, to give the readers more details about the mythology, history as well as language structures of his world. The author used a particular literary device which consisted in pretending to use real languages to “translate” the ones used by his characters. In the Appendix E of the book (Tolkien, 2005:1113), he explains that he translated all words from the *Westron* or Common Speech – a universal language used by all peoples of the north-western region of Middle-earth – into its English equivalents. Using the same device, he “translated” the *Rohirric*, the language of Rohan, kingdom of Men in the Middle-earth, into Old English, in specific the Mercian dialect, spoken in the Anglian kingdom of Mercia. Or else, the Mannish names used for the Dwarves have been translated using Old Norse forms.

When it comes to the translation of his own work, instead, Tolkien provided some comments on translation in his appendices, and went even further with the extension of these details publishing the “Guide to the Names in The Lord of the Rings” in 1967, in order to better assist translators around the world. Since it was first published, the trilogy has been translated into more than 60 languages. At the end of the nineties, Taiwan’s publishing houses, Wanxiang Tushu and Lianjing, published the first

Chinese translations of *The Lord of the Rings* introducing the work in the market for the first time. In 2001, Yiling Publishing House published the first edition of the trilogy in mainland China. Since then, all Tolkien's works have been translated one after another, due to the great success the author had in the country. In 2012, Shanghai's People's Publishing House and Century Publishing Group have obtained the copyrights to the entire series and new translations have appeared on the market (Wang Jin, 2020).

## 2. The Council of Elrond

The following chapter will present the texts that have been taken into analysis. The first one is the original English chapter from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. As previously mentioned, each volume of the trilogy is composed by two “books”. In specific, the chapter that was chosen, *The Council of Elrond*, is a part of Book Two inside the first volume.

*The Council of Elrond* is considered the most difficult chapter of the saga (Drout, 2023:23). Here Elrond, half-elf and Lord of Rivendell, an Elven settlement, convenes a council of all representatives of the free peoples of Middle-earth, that is Men, Dwarves and Elves, together with the wizard Gandalf and the four Hobbits. They discuss the best way to destroy Sauron, the Dark Lord of Mordor, and its Ring. The only solution in order to succeed is to throw the Ring inside Mount Doom, a volcano in Mordor where it was forged by Sauron himself and so the only place where it can be destroyed. During the meeting, and this is where the difficulty of the text is more visible, the reader gets to know the history and the politics of Middle-earth, the forging and loss of the Ring, and the sorrowful story of the Elves, whose Three Rings would be getting Sauron’s control if he actually recover his One Ring, though if the One Ring gets destroyed, so will their Rings, and they will have to leave Middle-earth. Another important character in this chapter is Bilbo Baggins, who talks about his story and the discovery of the Ring during his adventure: this is how the reader is able to connect the dots and see the link between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. At the end of the Council, it is decided that Frodo Baggins will be taking the Ring, as the character who is less likely to be taken over by its evil essence. Elrond assigns eight companions to help him during his journey: the other three Hobbits, Gandalf, the dwarf Gimli, the elf Legolas and two men, Aragorn and Boromir.

Its complexity and, more importantly, the amount of information and characters deriving from *The Council of Elrond* are the reasons why the text is so important in the trilogy and was consequently chosen as the analysis for this paper.

The second part of this chapter will present its Chinese translation, *lingu huiyi* 林谷会议. The translation was made by Ding Di 丁棣 and it was first published in 2001. Despite the fact that there have been more and different editions and translations of the trilogy during the years, the decision to introduce this specific one was taken because of the importance it had, as the very first Chinese edition of *The Lord of the Rings* in the country, and as a pioneer in introducing Western fantasy literature in China, giving an important reference for the future generations (Wang Jin, 2020).

### 3. Texts Analysis and Comparison

The following section will provide an analysis and comparison of the two texts which have been presented in the previous chapter.

Translation took quite some time before being recognized as an actual respected academic field and such difficulties were to be overcome by the fantastic genre as well. As Howden pointed out:

“For a long time, fantasy has been seen either as silly stories about monsters or a genre packed with stories so mammoth and dense that viewers or readers needed an encyclopaedia of that world to understand what is going on.” (Howden, 2012:57)

Fantasy was not taken seriously, and this kind of situation lasted until the early 2000s, when Peter Jackson - director, screenwriter and producer - rendered the trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings* a successful movie production. The first movie, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, came out in 2001, followed by *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* the following year and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* in 2003. The viewers were so enthusiastic that they were enticed to the genre and its entire literary production. It was the beginning of conventions and cosplay events, as well as the creation of fan made stories about their favourite characters, board games and computer games to relive the magical experience. Many people started reading fantasy novels thanks to these movies and, consequently, movie producers were inspired to bring more films of the same genre in theatres in order to attract a larger audience (Bergmann, 2017:22).

The hardships in fantastic literature translation could be even bigger than other types of literature, due to the fact that fantasy contains elements that only live in the writer's imagination. It is not just about translating a story, but also its wonder. The reader has to feel the magic, and has to enter the imaginary world. Fantasy authors enrich their work with new places, new kinds of beings, new worlds, new cultures, new languages and, in order to do that, they commonly make use of neologisms, compounds and complex words (Kolev, 2016:1). A reader might have many difficulties in understanding and picturing in their mind the world described, because it will necessarily be different from their own; imaging and accepting different environment structures and laws, having to deal with monsters, dragons, magic wands, but also with the “big questions of life” such as choosing between good and evil, heroism and anti-heroism, will oblige the person to read the text more closely and

participate actively in this author-to-readers process. At the same time, it makes them reflect and consequently develop their own opinion about these topics (Fabrizi, 2016:2).

As previously mentioned, Tolkien published a guide to assist translators with the nomenclature contained in his trilogy. As he stated in a letter from 1956 (Carpenter, 2006:265):“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”. The introduction of Tolkien’s writings in China helped the emergence of more cross-cultural comparative studies and translation studies on the matter (Wang Jin, 2020:178). Although the publication of the trilogy in mainland China was very successful, many readers were slightly concerned about the translation made by Ding Di, as it was mostly resembling a fairy tale rather than high fantasy (Li Hong-man, 2010:21).

The analysis takes into consideration the lexicon and the syntax of the two texts. It also compares and highlights cultural factors which inevitably appear in a target text during a translation process and that might sometime give a different meaning to the text itself. The analysis focuses on the way names have been translated, especially considering the importance Tolkien puts in the sounds and/or possible meanings behind them (as explicated in his Guide), the way of dealing with Tolkien’s invented languages that appeared in the chapter, poems – another typical feature in *The Lord of the Rings* -, and on the rendering of the nuance of meaning.

### **3.1 Proper Nouns**

One of the features which render fantasy novels much harder than other types of works to be translated is the presence of names of places and characters which come from the author’s imagination. Fantasy works usually present names which sound absurd and that better emphasizes the fact that those specific figures or places are not part of the daily life, but rather come from another world. Moreover, as stated by Li Hong-man (2010:23), the names of species – or, as also called in *The Lord of the Rings*, of different ‘races’ – are usually cultural-bound words. According to this, when translating a Western fantasy, the Chinese translators should take into consideration the Western fantasy tradition and vice versa, not to incur in mistranslations. Tolkien’s novel is full of figures, especially considering the fact that the author created a whole mythology and history behind the actual narration of the saga. Overall, in this Chinese edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, the majority of names and places are translated following the transliteration process, which not always seems to be the right decision. Surely, there are some exceptions.



The chapter's title can be discussed: *The Council of Eriand* and 林谷会议. The literal meaning of the Chinese title is "wooded dale". While the English version contains the name of the character who holds the meeting, the Chinese translation omits the information and rather includes the name of the place where the meeting is held, Rivendell. The title results in a four-character phrase, which is a common convention in the Chinese literary field (Reinders, 2014:5). As for Rivendell, in his "Guide to the Names in The Lord of the Rings", Tolkien gives translators some useful information about the name of the Elven settlement:

*Rivendell*. 'Clove-dell'; Common Speech translation of *Imladris(t)* 'deep dale of the cleft'. Translate by sense, or retain, as seems best. (Tolkien, 1975:18)

Ding's translation follows Tolkien's suggestion accurately.

The saga takes place in the Middle-earth. The term derives from the Old Norse *Miðgarðr*, which indicated the Earth in Germanic cosmology. The Chinese translator uses the term 中州, which gives an equivalent translation. Nowadays, the recognized term to refer to Middle-earth is 中土; however, according to Wen Yixin (2021:149), the translation made by Ding Di seems more appropriate. The reason is that 中土 is also a term that already exists in the Chinese vocabulary, as it refers to a Chinese place, the historical Zhongyuan, perceived as the birthplace of Chinese people. According to the critic, 中土 gives an immediate association to the target culture and so deletes the alienation that the reader should have, as the Middle-earth should be the name of a whole new world in their imagination. Following some research, it was possible to understand that the historical place nowadays also includes the appellative "中州". Some online and paper dictionaries (MDBG and the Zanichelli dictionary) were consulted and it was possible to see that the first meaning of the character 州 is "prefecture". For this reason, 中土 seems to be more suitable as an actual literal translation.

The main topic discussed during the Council is the One Ring. The capital letter is used because this is the actual proper name that is given to the object, anyone hearing about the Ring or One Ring knows that it is referring to that specific one. In Chinese, the word used to refer to Sauron's Ring is 魔戒, literally "Magic Ring". 戒 simply means "ring". The character *mo* 魔 stands for "magic". However, the Western conception of "magic" is something that is not specifically bad or good – unless it is specified, such as in the difference between Dark Magic and Light Magic – while in Chinese this specific term has also a negative connotation. 魔, in fact, also includes the meaning of demon and evil

spirits (MDBG, 2023) and can be the abbreviation of *Moluo*, also known as Mara, the Buddhist personification of evil and death (Reinders, 2014:4). In the English version, the Ring has other appellatives: at times it is also called “the Ruling Ring” (Tolkien, 2005:268) or “the One” (Tolkien, 2005:269). In Chinese, it is either called 魔戒 or using a simple 戒指, which do not highlight the greatness and power that the Ring has. Additionally, the One Ring is also referred to as the “Great Ring” (Tolkien, 2005:243) in one occasion. Ding Di translates it as 巨戒 (Ding Di, 2002:205). The greatness given by the One Ring is not completely reproduced, considering that the character 巨 rather refers to something large in size.

Many times throughout the whole book, a mention to a “Shadow” approaching the characters can be found:

For the Shadow grows and draws nearer. (Tolkien, 2005:241)

The term is actually written in capital letter in the original text, because it is a reference to the enemy Sauron and the darkness that he is using to destroy everything. In Chinese, a detail such as the capital letter cannot be used:

黑影 在蔓延,逼近 (Ding Di, 2002:204)

The literary device of the capital letter, which gives a new nuance of meaning that can be recognized while reading the English version, cannot be used in Chinese, where the term 黑影 might at first not be captured as a straightforward reference to the enemy.

Other appellatives for Sauron used in the saga are “the Enemy” and “the Nameless Enemy”. These specific expressions are used by the people coming from Gondor, who, according to the story, never wanted to pronounce such an obscure name. The Chinese text does not reproduce the terms in the way English does, starting by the fact that the capital letter – which is helpful to highlight the fact that it is referring to a specific being – is not used in Chinese. Ding Di just uses 故人 for both of the expressions, which makes the text lose the fear of the characters when mentioning the Dark Lord.

The character who has the responsibility to be the Ring’s bearer is a Hobbit, Frodo, main protagonist of the story. “Hobbit” is a word which Tolkien suggests leaving the way it is – and so, to

use transliteration during the translation process as the Chinese version does with 霍比特 -, as the term “is supposed no longer to have had a recognized meaning in the Shire” (Tolkien, 1975:7). This latter name, the Shire, is an inland area where Hobbits live. The English author says that “Shire” comes from Old English and that it has the meaning of “district”, which is the suggested term to refer to when translating it. In the Chinese chapter taken into analysis, the Shire is at first erroneously translated with 大地, which has the meaning of “earth”:

他本来还想讲到他的生日宴会及从大地消失的经过,但埃尔隆德举起了手。(Ding Di, 2002:211)

He would have given also an account of his party and disappearance from the Shire, if he had been allowed; but Elrond raised his hand. (Tolkien, 2005:249)

If translated back into English, the Chinese text would be “he was going to talk about his birthday party and the disappearance from the Earth, but Elrond held up his hand”. The word 大地, in fact, is used in other parts of the text when the characters are simply mentioning the land, but in this case the term distorts the original meaning. Later on, the translator uses the transliteration *xia er* “霞尔” (Ding Di, 2002:213). Frodo and Bilbo’s house in the Shire is called Bag End. According to Tolkien, the house’s name is associated by the Hobbits with the “end of a bag”, a cul-de-sac, and the translators are asked to maintain this “bag” meaning. Ding Di uses the phonetic translation “贝格恩” (Ding Di, 2002:223), which loses the meaning behind the original term and does not sound particularly easy for readers to understand and remember.

The translation of “Elf” is a particular case. In Chinese, “elf” is 精灵. According to Reinders (2014:6), this was a traditional term used for the first time in the Yijing (also known as the Classic of Changes), one of the oldest Chinese classics. In the ancient text, the term had the meaning of 鬼神, which is “spirit”. In modern times it was then used as a translation of the fantasy characters, literally meaning “agile spirit” or “refined soul”. In common speech, the Chinese language tends also to add 小 as a prefix, 小精灵. In general, the characters used, and especially the addition of the prefix 小, which tend to give the readers the idea of a figure similar to little gremlins or pixies, do not really make justice to the elegance and nobility that Tolkien wants his characters to have.

The Elves also have a second appellation, which is “Firstborn”. The name derives from the fact that Elves were the first race to be born in Tolkien’s imaginary world. In the chapter, the appellation is also used:

For Men multiply and the Firstborn decrease, and the two kindreds are estranged. (Tolkien, 2005:244)

In Chinese it is not used, and doing so the information given by the term itself is not reproduced in the target text:

人类不断地繁衍,小精灵却在不断地减少,两大类彼此疏远了。(Ding Di, 2002:207)  
As humans continue to multiply, the Elves continue to decrease, and the two species are estranged from each other.

After some research, there were found some comments about this edition’s translation of “Orc”. Apparently, Ding Di’s translation of “Orcs” was the transliteration *aokesi* 奥克斯:

就在那个月黑风高的夜,奥克斯袭击了我们。(Ding Di, 2002:217)  
It was that very night of summer, yet moonless and starless, that Orcs came on us at unawares. (Tolkien, 2005:255)

The “official” Chinese translation of Orcs in fantasy novels is actually *ban shouren* 半兽人 and that is why some critics commented on it as an error that could be symbol of the translator’s lack of knowledge about Western features in *fantasy* novels (Li Hong-man, 2010:23). In his guide, Tolkien (1975:9) explains that the Orcs imagined by him do not share all the same traditional features to the fantasy characters that the readers know. However, the word “orc” was chosen by the author as its sound seems the more appropriate and, for this reason, “it should be retained” (Tolkien, 1975:9). Taking into account Tolkien’s suggestions, Ding Di did not actually make a mistake. As a Western audience, it is surely easy to have an image in mind when reading the word “orc”, as opposed to China, in which a reader can hardly figure it out from a mere transliteration. However, considering that Tolkien’s orcs are

just “partly made out of traditional features” (Tolkien, 1975:9), this might be a way for the reader to build up the image of this character following Tolkien’s descriptions throughout the saga.

Another character attending the council is Aragorn, who was a Ranger of the North. The Rangers were a secretive and skilful group of warriors whose job was to defend their territory from evil forces. In the Chinese translation, the term is translated as 游民, “vagabond”. The word does not portray the correct meaning, as usually what people think of a vagabond is a person who wanders, with no house nor job.

One of the times in which using transliteration ends up with losing the real and important meaning behind a word is the term referring to the Nazgûl. Nazgûl is one of the very few words from the Black Speech that Tolkien reports in his story and that indicates the Ring-wraiths (in Black Speech, *nazg* stands for “ring”), Sauron’s servants. The use of *nazhige’er* 纳芝戈尔 does not incorporate any hidden reference.

Among the few places translated by their meaning there is Mirkwood, the greatest forest of Middle-earth. The name is composed by “mirk”, an older spelling of “murk” (“gloomy darkness”) and “wood”. The word is translated by Ding Di as 黑林子, which is exactly equivalent to the original term and gives the reader the idea of what this place is.

### 3.2 Other Lexical Features

Many times during the narration, the author uses some words which seem to refer to a general object or period in time, but are actually reported in capital letters with the intention of hiding a specific meaning, as examined in the previous subchapter with the example of the Ring.

When Elrond speaks about the history of Middle-earth to the rest of the group, he recalls the “Elder Days”:

It recalled to me the glory of the Elder Days and the hosts of Beleriand, so many great princes and captains were assembled. (Tolkien, 2005:243)

它使我想起了上古的荣耀和伯勒里安德的铁军,那么多杰出的王子与将领聚集在一起。(Ding Di, 2002:205)

The expression “Elder Days” refers specifically to the events occurred at the end of the First Age of Middle-earth. As Tolkien specifies in his Guide, “this, meaning 'Days of the Seniors', might help in devising a translation that is not just the equivalent of 'the older days'” (Tolkien, 1975:22). In the Chinese version, the term is translated as 上古, which has the meaning of “ancient times”. The Chinese reader might not think that the term used by the character could be referring to a specific period in time. This is a passage from a specific term to a general one.

### 3.3 Invented Languages

As previously mentioned, Tolkien spent most of his attention on the creation of new languages to assign to each of the “races” in his story. While some of these languages only present some words and phrases, others are entirely developed, with their own lexicon, grammar and syntax. Possibly, a reader might be able to learn and actually hold a full conversation in Elvish. Taking into account Tolkien’s comments in Appendix F of his trilogy, a translator should leave words and phrases from all languages which are “alien to the Common Speech” (2005:1133) into their original form, while all the other parts of the text – which Tolkien “translated” in modern English – should be in the target language. The Chinese translation follows this path. For instance, in the chapter taken into analysis, the wizard Gandalf pronounces the words inscribed on the One Ring:

“Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatulûk agh burzum-ishi krimpatul.” (Ding Di, 2002:216)

The inscription is in the language talked by Sauron and his servants, the Black Speech. The sentence is reported exactly like the original one. In a language just like Chinese, the suggestion of keeping the “alien languages” as they are helps to achieve the same effect that Tolkien was searching for in the original text, which is the feeling of alienation that the reader has when incurring in a new strange language during their reading. However, in Tolkien’s imagination, another important feature of the Black Speech was the feeling of having to do with a specifically harsh language. This characteristic is easily fulfilled by the Western reader. It is uncertain whether the exact same effect can be reached in Chinese, where the transliteration remains in Roman letters rather than Chinese sounds. Surely, the feeling strangeness is obvious.

### 3.4 Poems

*The Lord of the Rings* is also famous for the great amount of poems, songs and verses throughout the whole narration.

The most famous poem inside the saga is the one related to the One Ring. The whole poem describes the relations occurring between all the different rings that have been forged and the power of the One Ring in relation to the others. It gives the readers a sort of history on the creation and gifting of all the magic rings found in the Middle-earth:

Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,  
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,  
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,  
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne  
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.  
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,  
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them  
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.' (Tolkien, 2005:50)

The sixth and seventh verse are the Common Speech version of the words inscribed in the One Ring, that were translated in Chinese as:

一枚戒指统领众戒,尽归罗网,  
一枚戒指禁锢众戒,昏暗无光。(Ding Di, 2002:216)

The target version can be roughly translated as “One ring to rule all the rings, all in the net. One ring to confine all the rings, in the dusk with no light”. The translation explicits the English “them” with the use of 戒. The pronoun used in the source text leaves the reader wondering whether it referred to the other Rings or to the Middle-earth “races”, while a reader of the target text does not get the same experience due to the explicitation.

During the Council, Boromir learns the truth about the history of the One Ring. Before letting Elrond finish the narration, he asks Elrond to talk about Gondor, the kingdom he comes from, and about the reason that brought him to Rivendell, which is the desperate need of allies and the occurrence of a prophetic dream that both him and his brother had:

Seek for the Sword that was broken:  
In Imladris it dwells;  
There shall be counsels taken  
Stronger than Morgul-spells.  
There shall be shown a token  
That Doom is near at hand,  
For Isildur's Bane shall waken,  
And the Halfling forth shall stand. (Tolkien, 2005:246)

寻找断刃之剑，  
它在伊姆拉德里斯之野。  
忠告来自该地，  
远比莫古尔咒语灵验。  
指示来自该地，  
厄运就在眼前。  
伊西尔德的灾星将醒，  
哈夫林人挺身向前。(Ding Di, 2002:208)

Overall, the English poem presents a repeated and pleasant rhythm, given by the alternate rhymes that occur throughout the verses, while the Chinese version does not follow a similar structure. The repetitions, instead, of “there shall be” are presented in Chinese as 来自该地 in the third and fifth verse. The English expression “Isildur’s Bane” refers to the One Ring. According to the story that



Elrond narrates in the chapter, the Ring was taken by Isildur. During a battle against some Orcs, Isildur tried to use the Ring's power of invisibility, but it slipped away from his finger and that caused his death. From that moment on, the Ring was also called "Isildur's Bane". In Old English, the word "bane" referred to something which causes death, and in particular poison. In the Chinese text, "Isildur's Bane" is translated as 伊西尔德的灾星. 灾星 stands for a "comet or supernova viewed as evil portent" (MDBG, 2023). According to the old beliefs in celestial phenomena, an abnormality occurring in a star was a sign of future disasters in the world. The word sounds more like an omen rather than an effective cause of death like the English "bane". Moreover, the target text's verse actually presents a euphony: the *xing* 星 in 灾星 and the *xing* 醒 as in "to wake". According to Reinders (2014:13), this is a case of euphony in Chinese which changes the meaning of the target text. In the last verse, the poem mentions the "Halfling". In Tolkien's imaginary, the term is the "Common speech name for *Hobbit*" (Tolkien, 1975:7). According to this, the sense given by it is that of a "half-sized man", which is the actual physical description of Hobbits. Tolkien's intention for the translators is to render the meaning of a "half creature" in their own translations. In this way, it would be also more immediate for the reader to understand that it is another reference to Hobbits. However, the Chinese translator decided to use the transliteration of the term, which does not help the reader in making a fast connection to the Hobbits.

Another example found later in this chapter is a poem spoken by Bilbo Baggins, when the character of Boromir expresses some doubts about Aragorn being the Heir of Isildur:

All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are lost;  
The old that is strong does not wither,  
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.  
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,  
A light from the shadows shall spring;  
Renewed shall be blade that was broken:  
The crownless again shall be king. (Tolkien, 2005:247)

The first sentence, "all that is gold does not glitter", is a clear reference – though with a reversed meaning – of William Shakespeare's line from *Merchant of Venice*, Act II Scene 7 "All that glisters is

not gold”. Tolkien wants to emphasize that many times gold is not shown on the surface but rather hides or is mistaken for something else. In specific, the poem refers to Strider, who appears to be a simple Ranger, but is actually Aragorn, future king of Gondor, Heir of Isildur.

金子未必都闪光,

游民未必是流氓。

老树益壮精神旺,

根深蒂固经风霜。

死灰复燃火势旺,

昏天暗地光清扬。

宝剑锋自断鏖出,

无冕之王又做庄! (Ding Di, 2002:210)

In the second line, the translator uses the word *liumang* 流氓, whose literal meaning is rogue, gangster. This particular case is an example of how the target language culture appears during the translation process: Tolkien simply implies not to worry when there are people walking around with no actual purpose because it does not mean they are lost, but rather that they are purposely wandering around as they enjoy it or they are actually doing something good, such as Rangers, whose work is to wander around their territory and fight to defend it. A Chinese traditional belief was that wandering people were instead up to no good. According to the translation, the Chinese version expresses to the public that people travelling do not always have bad intentions. The presence of *chengyu* such as 根深蒂固 in the fourth verse – “deep-rooted” – gives the poems a higher literary quality. This strategy could help the readers to understand better the character of Bilbo better and his level of erudition that the figure actually entails, but using too many *chengyu* might also give a lack of poetic creativity in Bilbo himself (Reinders, 2014:10). Similar to the first aforementioned poem, the English version also presents a rhyming scheme (ABABCDCD) which gives the text a good-sounding rhythm, that the Chinese version does not follow.

### 3.5 Cultural Features

As it is inevitable in any translation process, the Chinese culture and tradition can be rather visible in the text and sometimes it could slightly – or even totally – change the original meaning in the source text.

Gloin, one of the Dwarves attending the council, mentions Khazad-dûm, also known as the Mines of Moria, the ancient underground kingdom of the Dwarves:

for no dwarf has dared to pass the doors of Khazad-du`m for many lives of kings, save Thrór only, and he perished. (Tolkien, 2005:240)

In the Chinese version, the verb “to perish” has been translated into a particular form:

还没有一个小矮人胆敢越过卡扎德-都姆之门,当然除了瑟罗,但他已经一命归西。  
(Ding Di, 2002:203)

Ding Di uses a *chengyu*, 一命归西, “one life returns to the West”. 西 refers to the so-called “Western Heaven”, 西天, which is the concept of the Pure Land in Buddhism, where one hopes to be reborn in the next life. “It is typologically similar to the Western term ‘Paradise’” (Akimov, 2022:128). Surely, in common speech, this *chengyu* can be just a politer way of saying the verb “to die”.

Furthermore, in Chinese culture and philosophy, fate and destiny are very important concepts. According to the traditional belief, the concept of 天命 signifies that a person’s life and experiences have been already decided by higher forces that they cannot control:

You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world. (Tolkien, 2005:242)

但你们在这危难之时不请自来,这似乎是一种巧合,但其实并非如此。我倒认为更像是天命的召集,要我们在座的各位,而不是别人,找出拯救世界的办法来。(Ding Di, 2002:205)

In the original version, the passive voice “it is so ordered” is used many times to refer to the reason why the council occurred that specific day or why some specific decisions have been made. In the Chinese version, instead, the translator changes the sentence and eliminates the passive form. What was a general third person singular becomes a specific Mandate of Heaven, 天命的召集. Again, the target language culture is explicit in this part, mentioning the traditional idea of the will of Heaven as an explanation for the right of a specific person to become an emperor, or king. The character for Heaven is also present in other parts of the text, for instance as a translation of the English exclamation “alas”:

‘Alas! alas!’ cried Legolas, and in his fair Elvish face there was great distress. (Tolkien, 2005:255)

“天哪,天哪!”小精灵莱戈拉斯叫了起来,白皙的脸庞愁云密布 (Ding Di, 2002:217)

The exclamation of pity is now an interlocutory “Heaven!” (Reinders, 2014:11)

Or also:

‘It does not belong to either of us,’ said Aragorn; ‘but it has been ordained that you should hold it for a while.’ (Tolkien, 2005:247)

“它不属于我俩中任何一人。”阿拉贡说,“不过现在命运注定暂由你保管。”  
(Ding Di, 2002:209)

In this sentence, Aragorn talks to Frodo about the Ring. None of the rest of the company can hold it, the only one who can have the Ring is Frodo Baggings. Again, the passive voice used in the English language, “it has been ordained”, is changed into an active voice. Fate, 命运 becomes the subject: it is Fate that decided that Frodo should take the Ring.

### 3.6 Nuance Of Meaning

The Chinese translation presents some change of words and expressions which sometimes might end up overturning the original meaning in an erroneous way. For instance, when Boromir breaks and stops Elrond's speech as he is shocked by the fact that the Ring was actually stolen and did not perish years and years before, he says:

I have heard of the Great Ring of him that we do not name (Tolkien, 2005:243)

The character does not want to mention the name of the owner of the Ring, Sauron. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the people of Gondor – where Boromir comes from – do not want to pronounce Sauron's name, who was then typically called “the Nameless Enemy” or using similar expressions. The Chinese translation of this sentence, though, completely loses this meaning:

我听说过索隆的巨戒,但我们不知道它的名字。(Ding Di, 2002:206)

The translator uses the name 索隆, Sauron, and this choice already deletes the traditional knowledge of people from Gondor and the censorship done in the original text. Furthermore, the sentence continues with the addition of the adversative conjunction 但 and the erroneous sentence “we do not know its name”, with the use of 它 which then refers to the Ring itself.

In another part of the chapter, the translator makes an addition which again distorts the text and the meaning behind calling Sauron as “nameless”:

The Nameless Enemy has arisen again. (Tolkien, 2005:245)

敌人正东山再起,而我们连他们的名字都不知道。(Ding Di, 2002:208)

By doing so, the Enemy, written in a singular form as it is a reference to Sauron himself, is now in a plural form (understandable by the use of 他们), and it gives the reader the sense that the people

from that place are unaware of someone's name. Following the story, considering the great power that Sauron had in the world and the terror he still inspires, as well as the situation in which the characters are in the chapter, it is somewhat unimaginable that they have not even heard of his name.

The figure of Boromir is created in a way that he seems emblematic at first:

And seated a little apart was a tall man with a fair and noble face, dark-haired and grey-eyed, proud and stern of glance. (Tolkien, 2005:240)

The first impression that the reader has of Boromir is that of a noble, solemn and good looking character, and this could be either an indication of virtue or an indication of a person who is hiding a darker side (Beebout, 2018:2).

He ceased, but at once Boromir stood up, tall and proud, before them. (Tolkien, 2005:245)

他刚停下,博罗米尔立即站起身。在众人面前,他显得鹤立鸡群,傲气逼人。(Ding Di, 2002:207)

The ambiguity that the English sentence “tall and proud” has when describing Boromir is not reproduced in the Chinese translation, which divides the phrase in two: “Boromir stood up. In front of the crowd, he appeared like a crane in a flock of chickens, an air of arrogance and intimidating”. The translator decides to use a *chengyu*, 鹤立鸡群. This four characters expression literally means “standing like a crane in a flock of chickens”, and it is a metaphor for a person's talent which stands out in a group of people surrounding him. The use of 傲气逼人 – “an arrogant and threatening air” gives a harsher view of Boromir, which is not specified in the original version, that tends to be more generic in order to let the reader build a personal first impression of the character.

### 3.7 Stylistic Features

The Chinese version seems easier to read than the English version. This occurs because of Tolkien's style, who prefers using a more archaic writing style considering his literary and linguistic influences, while the Chinese seems to be more direct, as typical of a more modern language (Reinders, 2014:8). Even when the translator uses specific expressions such as *chengyu*, the text still appears easy and fast to read. Most probably, that is a reason why the text resulted more like a fairy tale rather than an actual high fantasy novel. This implies as well that the differences that might occur between characters of different places and "races" are missing in the Chinese translation. Tones and registers might differ between peoples, for instance Hobbits tend to have more of a dialectal talk, rather than a person coming from Rohan, whose style is more formal.

Here, my friends, is the hobbit, Frodo son of Drogo. Few have ever come hither through greater peril or on an errand more urgent. (Tolkien, 2005:239)

In this example, Elrond presents Frodo to the rest of the people participating to the Council. His way of talking is undoubtedly formal and sophisticated.

朋友们,这就是那位霍比特人,德洛戈之子弗拉多,他身负重任,历尽艰险赶到这里,很不易呀 (Ding Di, 2002:203)

My friends, this is the hobbit, Drogo's son Frodo, he carries a heavy responsibility and has gone through many hardships to get here, it was not easy.

The Chinese version is much simpler when compared to the style used by Tolkien. In this way, the sense of respect and seriousness that the character can communicate through his speech is completely missing in the target text.

According to Tolkien, "Hobbits indeed spoke for the most part a rustic dialect, whereas in Gondor and Rohan a more antique language was used, more formal and terse" (Tolkien, 2005:1133).

'Hullo! Good morning!' said Bilbo. 'Feel ready for the great council?'" (Tolkien, 2005:239)

'Give me leave, Master Elrond,' said he, 'first to say more of Gondor, for verily from the land of Gondor I am come.' (Tolkien, 2005:244)

In the two examples above, it is possible to notice the difference in tone and register that two characters, namely Bilbo Baggins in the first example and Boromir in the second one, present in the saga.

“嗨,早上好!” 毕尔博说, “准备好参加会议了吗?” (Ding Di, 2002:202)

“请允许我,尊敬的阁下,” 他说, “我是从冈多来的,所以首先补充说一些冈多的情况。” (Ding Di, 2002:207)

The greeting 嗨, as the translation of the English “Hullo” in Bilbo’s speech, makes the sentence more informal. However, Boromir’s speech, should be highly sophisticated compared to Bilbo’s, and sometimes even slightly difficult for the reader to comprehend. The Chinese translation fails to capture the spirit and style of the original text, and the huge difference between the Hobbit’s speech and the Gondorian is not visible.

Ding Di’s translation of *The Lord of the Rings* was the first edition published in Mainland China and, even if presenting many mistakes – some of which considerably change the comprehension of the text -, it was still a symbol of an important step forward in the Chinese literary field. Following the introduction of Tolkien’s works in the country, many scholars started analysing them through cross-cultural comparative studies and translation studies. Consequently, many more Chinese translations were published throughout the years and the translation quality continued to vary. The main difficulty in translating Tolkien’s works derives from the presence of proper nouns. Surely, the original text is remarkably difficult and introduces characters and places whose names also come from Germanic myths and Norse mythology, which renders the vocabulary even harder to be understood (Wang Jin, 2020:178). In his book *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, the translator and theorist Lawrence Venuti (2008) introduced the translation strategies of *domestication* and *foreignization*. In the foreignization process, translators try to maintain the linguistic and cultural elements of the source



text, bringing the readers closer to the original author and highlighting the differences between the two languages. On the contrary, domestication renders the target text much easier to comprehend, due to the fact that all the exotic elements are explained. According to Wen Yixin (2021:145), twenty-first century's translations have undergone a transformation from a tendency of mostly using the domestication strategy to the foreignization one. This is visible in both Chinese-to-English translations and English-to-Chinese works. In his *Guide*, Tolkien suggested his translators to maintain the original form of the names inside the saga, with the exception of a few words. It can be seen that the author tends to apply a foreignizing translation. Wen Yixing (2021:151) stated that using this strategy can maintain the originality of the text, but also that, whenever there occurs a lack of cultural connotation, the translator can supplement it with the use of the domestication strategy. Ding Di's translation follows this method.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed at illustrating the development of fantasy literature in both the West and the East and the challenges that may arise during the translation of fantasy novels, using J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as an example.

Even before the actual birth of fantasy as an acknowledged genre it could still be possible to find fantastic elements in works such as Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* or Wu Cheng'en's *Xi youji* 西游记. Nowadays, the first titles that come to readers' mind when mentioning fantasy literature are Western bestsellers such as *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The latter, in fact, marked the beginning of a higher quality of fantasy novels and is now one of the most successful books of the twentieth century. The trilogy inspired authors all over the world to publish new works, and also brought his audience to read more books and create fan fictions, conventions and board games to relive the experience.

Ding Di's translation of *The Lord of the Rings* was the first edition published in Mainland China. His work contributed to the introduction of Tolkien's masterpiece in the country and the subsequent beginning of several cross-cultural comparative studies and translation studies on the matter. The text presents both a *foreignizing* and a *domesticating* strategy. The method of transliteration used at times by the translator introduces new characters and places in the Chinese fantasy world, and creates the feeling of strangeness that this type of novel leaves to its readers. Other times, instead, it is possible to find some terms which entail the cultural connotations of the target language, as it is inevitable during the translation practice.

The text was chosen as the subject matter of the research due to its complexity and its amount of information and characters, which renders it one of the most notable chapters in the saga. Despite several errors – some of which produce a distortion of the original text's meaning -, this Chinese edition of *The Lord of the Rings* is important as it marked a new era for the country's fantasy production.

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