

Francesca Raffi

## Paratexts and retranslation

### The journey of *The Lord of the Rings* in Italy from 1967 to 2020

#### Abstract

This paper focuses on retranslation from the point of view of paratexts by following the evolution of the Italian translation and reception of Tolkien's most famous work, *The Lord of the Rings*: from the first translation in 1967 to the latest in 2020. The theoretical framework is based on the concept of paratext as defined by Gérard Genette (1997) and will be discussed within the context of (re)translation studies. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the packaging created by paratexts affects the reception of a work in the receiving culture, showing that a text can be read and interpreted in different ways, depending on the context in which it is introduced and on the manner in which the paratexts present it.

## 1 Introduction

The concept of paratext was first analysed by Gérard Genette, who defines the term as “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (Genette 1997: 1). According to the author, in fact, a literary work not only consists of the main text itself, but is also surrounded by other elements, such as the title, cover, preface and all those elements that help to present it to the public and that “ensure the text's presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption” (Genette 1997: 1). By framing the core text in a certain way, these added elements present a work to the reader with the potential to influence its reception.

Within the macro-category of paratexts, Genette makes a further distinction between peritexts and epitexts; peritexts are made up of what is “around the text and either within the same volume or at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance” (Genette 1997: 4). Thus, the title, preface, notes, etc. belong to this category. Epitexts, on the other hand, consist of “those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others)” (Genette 1997: 5). It is useful to reconstruct the author's perspectives on his own work, how he describes it and what he wanted to convey to his readers; in this sense, authorial epistles are an essential source of information, since they give direct access to an author's own words and thoughts (Genette 1997: 374).

The functions of the paratext cannot be described theoretically, as it would be too broad a category to define a priori. In general, Genette claims that paratexts are a very broad category of elements that are “fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself” (Genette 1997: 12). Paratexts are thus subordinate to the text, which constitutes their *raison d’être*, and their main function is “to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author’s purpose” (Genette 1997: 407).

The paratexts of (re)translations are elements that offer interesting insights from many perspectives, with retranslation intended as “the act of translating a work that has previously been translated into the same language, or the result of such an act, i. e. the retranslated text itself” (Gürçağlar 2009: 233). Batchelor, for example, stresses the importance of “paying attention to paratexts as sites of translator intervention or adaptation of the text to its new environment” (Batchelor 2018: 25). Paratexts, being flexible, versatile and transitory can thus be a tool for adapting a text to a dynamic and ever-changing target culture, while also offering a place for the translator to claim their presence and visibility. According to Deane-Cox, “by exploring how the (re)translations have been packaged, marketed and received, insights can be gained into the individuals and institutions involved in the circulation of the target texts, their attendant motivations and constraints” (Deane-Cox 2014: 24). Thus, when examining the retranslations of a work, it is interesting to focus on how the paratexts reframe the work for the public. Such an analysis would serve to reveal “the strategic (ideological, cultural, economic, etc.) manoeuvrings via which a given work presents itself to a given readership [and the] dynamics of how (re)translations might interact with one another and how they are positioned in relation to constantly evolving socio-cultural contexts” (Deane-Cox 2014: 26). Albachten and Gürçağlar agree that in retranslation studies, a paratextual analysis is of paramount importance, as it represents “a gateway between the text and its context and the micro and macro levels” (Albachten/Gürçağlar 2019: 7). Studying the paratexts of retranslations can highlight their “transformative power” (Albachten/Gürçağlar 2019: 7), i. e. their ability to readapt a text to a new context and to “provide spaces for retranslators and other agents in the publishing field to express their views and guide the reading of the works in question” (Albachten/Gürçağlar 2019: 7).

Since the early 2000s, several studies have examined retranslations by taking into account their paratextual aspects to investigate issues related to the context and reception of a given literary work (Gürçağlar 2008; Deane-Cox 2012, 2014; Badić 2020, among others<sup>1</sup>). As for the specific Italian context, Wardle (2012, 2019) analyses the paratexts of the numerous Italian retranslations of *Alice in Wonderland* published between 1872 and 2010, examining how they affected the reception of the work (2012), and he also studies 15 Italian translations of *The Great Gatsby* to see how the paratexts have transformed interpretations of the work over the years. Framattei (2015), on the other hand, examines the paratexts of two Italian translations of Camara Laye’s novel *L’Enfant*

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning the volume entitled *Studies from a retranslation culture: The Turkish context*, edited by Albachten and Gürçağlar (eds) (2019).

*noir*, addressing the issue of post-colonial literature and how African culture was presented through the paratexts of the retranslation. Regattin (2016) analyses three Italian translations of Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu: journal d'une escouade* to highlight how the paratextual elements reflect the different approaches of publishers in presenting the work.

These studies have confirmed that paratextual aspects reflect the context in which a retranslation is produced and highlight the dominant ideologies and norms of a target culture. By subjecting a work to a repackaging process, paratext can make some elements stand out from others, completely change the way it is presented visually (using cover art) or bring in other factors that may have an impact on the reader's perception of the work. In doing so, paratextual materials are an essential element to be taken into account when assessing the reception of a work, an author and a culture in general.

While several scholars have already explored the textual and translational aspects of Tolkien's works, no study so far has focused on their paratexts within (re)translation studies. Therefore, the present paper traces the path of *The Lord of the Rings* in Italy through an analysis of the paratexts of its first translation by Vittoria Alliaia and of its latest retranslation by Ottavio Fatica, this being the only existing Italian retranslation<sup>2</sup> of the book, published by Astrolabio (Tolkien 1967) and Bompiani (Tolkien 2019, 2020), respectively.

After this introductory section, Section 2 will discuss Tolkien's conception of his own work through the prism of epitexts in which his point of view is expressed. In Section 3, the focus will be on the Italian context; through an analysis of the paratexts of the first (Section 3.1) and latest (Section 3.2) (re)translation of the work, the journey of *The Lord of the Rings* in Italy will be traced. We will examine the different ways in which the work has been presented to Italian readers and how the perception of Tolkien has changed from the 1960s to the present day. Furthermore, by comparing the original paratexts with the paratexts of the Italian re-translations, examples of congruence and incongruity with respect to the author's original conception will be highlighted. Finally, some conclusions are drawn (Section 4).

## 2 *The Lord of the Rings* according to Tolkien

Tolkien began writing *The Lord of the Rings* around 1937, encouraged by his publishers Stanley and Rayner Unwin, of Allen & Unwin, to offer his audience a sequel to *The Hobbit*. Stanley Unwin, in fact, wrote to Tolkien, assuring him that "a large public" would be "clamouring next year to hear more from you about Hobbits!" (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 23). Tolkien then started writing the sequel and on 19 December 1937 informed Allen &

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<sup>2</sup> The editorial history of *The Lord of the Rings* in Italy also includes revisions, such as that by Rusconi in 1970 or by Bompiani in 2003. A distinction should therefore be made. While retranslation consists in a total renovation of the text, revision consists in "making changes to an existing TT whilst retaining the major part, including the overall structure and tone of the former version" (Vanderschelden 2000: 1).

Unwin that: “I have written the first chapter of a new story about Hobbits – ‘A long expected party’” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 27).

This reconstruction is based on Tolkien’s presentation of *The Lord of the Rings* through his letters or, as Genette call them, “authorial epitexts” (Genette 1997: 374). The first reference to the title of the work is found in a letter a few months later to C. A. Furth, a member of the publishing house: “I have begun again on the sequel to the ‘Hobbit’ – The Lord of the Rings” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 40). The extremely complex plot underwent numerous revisions over time and often had to be supported by background information on the history, peoples and languages of the mythological universe Tolkien had created. As discussed later, Tolkien was particularly dedicated to building a series of paratexts around the text to help the reader immerse themselves in the fictional setting of Middle-earth.

In a letter the author wrote to Waldman around 1951, Tolkien presented his work to the publisher, in the hope of publishing *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* together. In the letter, Tolkien tries to make a “brief sketch of my stuff that is connected with my imaginary world” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 143). Besides providing a “long and yet bald summary” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 143) of the story, introducing the main events and characters, the author also reconstructs the genesis of his work, the reasons behind its writing and the messages he wanted to express. Tolkien states that “this stuff began with me” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 143), in particular his passion for inventing languages. Behind his stories there would be a nexus of languages, which according to him would give the nomenclature (and the whole story) character, cohesion, consistency and an illusion of historicity.

Another fundamental passion that led him to write *The Lord of the Rings* was his love for mythology. Tolkien told Waldman that he had always felt that England lacked a tradition of myths such as the Greek, Celtic, Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian and Finnish legends. The Arthurian cycle existed, but apart from being related to the whole of the United Kingdom and not exclusively to England, it contained references to the Christian religion that were too explicit. Tolkien’s aim was therefore to give his country, England, its own mythology.

Tolkien expounds these same concepts in other letters. On the one hand, there was his passion for the invention of languages, a “private enterprise undertaken to give pleasure to myself by giving expression to my personal linguistic ‘aesthetic’” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 380). On the other hand, there was his desire to “restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 231). Thus, since for him legends are closely linked to the language to which they belong, Tolkien writes: “I began with language, I found myself involved in inventing ‘legends’ of the same ‘taste’” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 231).

Regarding the literary genre of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien generally thought that “Affixing ‘labels’ to writers, living or dead, is an inept procedure” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 231). However, there are recurring terms the author uses to refer to his work. One of the

first pieces of information Tolkien shared about his new work was that, unlike *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* was not a book for children; “It is more adult”, he wrote to Stanley Unwin in 1938, at the beginning of the writing process – a work that would prove to be “quite unfit for children” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 136). In fact, Tolkien was writing a fairy-story, not a fairy tale. As he later pointed out, his story was written “according to the belief I once expressed in an extended essay ‘On Fairy-stories’” that adults are “the proper audience” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 136). In the “extended essay” to which Tolkien refers, the author states that fairy-stories (as opposed to fairy tales) “deserve to be written for and read by adults, who will naturally put more into them and get more out of them than children can” (Tolkien 1964: 60).

Therefore, Tolkien conceives *The Lord of the Rings* as a book for adults, a work that stems from his linguistic passion and that lies between fairy tale, myth and mythology. He frames the work using the following terms: “heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history”, “great romance”, “a tale”, “heroic legends and high romance” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 346), “not a ‘novel’, but an ‘heroic romance’” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 414).

Regarding the ultimate goal of his work, Tolkien states that *The Lord of the Rings*, far from having a “didactic purpose” or “allegorical intent” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 297), was written “to please myself (at different levels), and as an experiment in the art of long narrative, and of inducing ‘Secondary Belief’” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 412). Apart from being an enjoyable activity for him, the work was also meant to “excite, please, and even on occasion move” its readers, catapulting them into an imaginary world that would be “accorded (literary) belief” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981: 233).

In the following sections, we will see how the first and latest translation of Tolkien’s have been (re)read and (re)interpreted, depending on the context in which they have been introduced and on the manner in which the paratexts have presented them.

### 3 The Lord of the Rings in Italy

#### 3.1 First translation: *Edizione Astrolabio, 1967*

Tolkien’s work was not published in Italy until 1967, and this was thanks to Mario Ubaldini’s publishing house, Astrolabio, which had been in contact with Allen & Unwin for some time. The English publishing house, on 11 January 1967, proposed “a truly extraordinary novel” (Cilli 2016: 110; translation mine)<sup>3</sup> to the Roman publisher, echoing the success of *The Lord of the Rings* in England, America and other countries. Astrolabio specialised in the publication of works on philosophy, psychology and sociology, genres far removed from Tolkien’s work. However, as Ubaldini’s daughter stated, “the publishing house has always experimented” and her father, “a keen reader of publishing dynamics abroad” (Arduini 2021),<sup>4</sup> was determined to broaden the range for his readers. Mario Ubaldini

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<sup>3</sup> “un romanzo davvero straordinario”. All translations from Italian into English are mine.

<sup>4</sup> “la casa editrice ha sempre sperimentato”; “un lettore attento alle dinamiche editoriali all’estero”.

therefore launched a new series of fantasy fiction, *Fuori Collana*, which he chose to inaugurate with Tolkien's works.

On 27 February 1967, Ubaldini informed Allen & Unwin that "we have decided to publish Tolkien's work: *The Lord of the Rings*" (Cilli 2016: 112).<sup>5</sup> Finally, after two refusals, the work arrived in Italy thirteen years after the first publication in the English-speaking world. The two publishing houses, in addition to contractual issues, immediately discussed translation issues. Tolkien cared a great deal about the way his books were translated and produced a guidance document for translators. This document was an annotated name list based on the index, indicating those names that were to be left unchanged and giving information of the meaning and origin of those that it was desirable to render into the language of translation, together with some tentative advice on how to proceed.

Alina Dadlez, Allen & Unwin's foreign rights manager, immediately pointed out to Ubaldini that Tolkien was very careful about the way proper names and place names were translated, and therefore wrote:

We enclose Professor Tolkien's Commentary with the index which gives full instructions on the nomenclature your translator should follow. I would be grateful if you would confirm that this condition will be observed by you, and that your translator will contact Professor Tolkien if he has any problem. (Cilli 2016: 114)<sup>6</sup>

The Commentary, i. e. the nomenclature guide, was first sent to Giuseppe Sardelli, who may have been in charge of the translation at first. Finally, it came into the hands of the translator who produced the first Italian translation of *The Lord of the Rings*: Vittoria Alliata di Villafranca, a 17-year-old student of Islamic law at the time with a diploma from the School of Interpreters in Rome.<sup>7</sup> As she was looking for a challenging translation project, Alliata herself contacted Astrolabio, who proposed "a book that created a lot of problems" (Cilli 2016: 127).<sup>8</sup> Alliata thus found herself translating the first chapter and the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, after which she was finally entrusted with the rest of the translation. With regard to her own translation choices, Alliata has asserted that she always used the guide written by Tolkien, following the author's indications in order to best render his work, and careful observation of the translation seems to confirm this. Alliata affirmed that "in order to translate the book better, I began with the appendices, in agreement with Ubaldini, since it helped me to understand the text better" (Cilli 2016: 137);<sup>9</sup> it was Tolkien himself who advised translators to "read Appendix F, and follow the

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<sup>5</sup> "abbiamo deciso di pubblicare l'opera di Tolkien: The Lord of The Rings".

<sup>6</sup> Alleghiamo il Commento del professor Tolkien con l'indice che fornisce istruzioni complete sulla nomenclatura che il vostro traduttore dovrebbe seguire. Le sarei grato se volesse confermarci che questa condizione sarà da lei osservata, e che il suo traduttore si metterà in contatto con il professor Tolkien se ha un qualsiasi problema.

<sup>7</sup> As she recounted in an interview for *Stilos*, an insert of the Italian newspaper *La Sicilia*, Alliata worked as a translator and simultaneous interpreter in order to finance her travels with the eventual aim of settling in Lebanon.

<sup>8</sup> "un libro che ha creato parecchi problemi".

<sup>9</sup> "Per meglio tradurre il libro cominciai con le appendici, in accordo con Ubaldini, poiché mi aiutava a comprendere meglio il testo".

theory there set out” (Hammond/Scull 2014: 751). The Italian translator also said that “Nothing had to remain in English at the author’s express wish, and in fact I translated, for example, Sackville-Baggins into Borsi-Sacconi” (Adragna 2002).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in the nomenclature guide, Tolkien expressed the wish that the English terms be translated into the respective target language, since this represented the idiom of the hobbits. Thus, with regard to the entry ‘Baggins’, the author specified that the term in the target language “should contain an element meaning ‘sack, bag’” (Hammond/Scull 2014: 753).

Moreover, Tolkien explained that he used terms that were “obsolete or dialectal, or are worn-down and obscured in form” (Hammond/Scull 2014: 752) to render other languages than the one used by the hobbits, and asked translators to use a similar strategy to achieve the same effect. In this regard, Alliata explained:

If a name had to seem exotic, I adopted Greek or even Arabic etymologies; if it had to be familiar or evocative, Latin or Italian etymologies: always, however, Italian origins that were plausible. (Adragna 2002)<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, it seems that Alliata’s translation choices reflect Tolkien’s intentions, and a desire to be faithful to the author is evident. Moreover, it would seem that approval of her translation came from Tolkien himself. Alliata has recounted how the first translated pages were sent to Tolkien who “approved them with enthusiasm” (Adragna 2002), before she was officially given the job. Moreover, the translator contacted the author several times, through Ubaldini, to discuss certain translation choices, and at the end of the process Tolkien “told Ubaldini that he considered it one of the best translations made” (Adragna 2002).<sup>12</sup>

Alliata has insisted that there had been “correspondence between the English publisher Allen & Unwin and Ubaldini [...] that proves the Professor’s active participation in my work and enthusiastic approval of the final text” (Cilli 2019).<sup>13</sup> However, there is no trace of this correspondence today. The only evidence of Tolkien’s approval of the Italian translation of *The Lord of the Rings* can be found in a letter from the author to Alina Dadlez, in which he informed her that he was “comforted by a letter from someone he knows, and whose opinion he respects, praising the Italian translation” (Scull/Hammond 2006: 718).<sup>14</sup>

Ubaldini decided to publish the work in three volumes, like the original Allen & Unwin edition. The publishing house presented the work to Astrolabio as a trilogy and “it was Rayner Unwin himself who suggested publishing the volume in three separate parts, as

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<sup>10</sup> “nulla doveva restare in inglese per preciso volere dell’autore, ed io infatti tradussi per esempio, Sackville-Baggins in Borsi-Sacconi”.

<sup>11</sup> Se un nome doveva sembrare esotico, io adottavo etimologie greche, o addirittura arabe; se doveva essere familiare o evocativo, etimologie latine o italiane: sempre comunque origini italianamente plausibili.

<sup>12</sup> “comunicò ad Ubaldini che la considerava una delle migliori traduzioni realizzate”.

<sup>13</sup> “corrispondenza fra l'editore inglese Allen&Unwin e Ubaldini [...] che provano l'attiva partecipazione del Professore al mio lavoro e l'approvazione entusiasta del testo definitivo”.

<sup>14</sup> This is therefore indirect approval given by an acquaintance of Tolkien, and not by Tolkien himself.

had initially happened in Great Britain itself” (Arduini 2021).<sup>15</sup> In fact, Allen & Unwin “from the beginning, had always proposed, even to Mondadori, to verify the interest of readers after the publication of the first, and then proceed with the remaining two” (Cilli 2016: 113).<sup>16</sup>

*The Fellowship of the Ring* was published in Italy in December 1967. The volume was presented in a medium format (22 x 16 cm), in a hardcover with a dust jacket. Thus, like the first Allen & Unwin edition, it was presented to the public as a quality book. However, the paratextual approach differs from the original edition in many respects. The first element is visual, pertaining to the cover. The English publishing house had sent Astrolabio the illustration created by Pauline Baynes for the deluxe edition of 1964, in order to be used by the Italian publishing house for advertising purposes. Later, Alina Dadlez added that if Ubaldini wanted to use it as the cover of the Italian translation “it could be agreed upon for a modest sum” (Cilli 2016: 118).<sup>17</sup> However, Ubaldini decided not to use either Baynes’ illustrations or Tolkien’s original drawings, but to use a drawing by R. Conti. The image shows a green dragon flying towards a village situated on the banks of a watercourse, while behind it rise mountains against the background of an orange sky. The name of the author, the title of the general work and the title of the first volume are also indicated on the front cover, specifying that it is part of a trilogy. The spine again shows the name of the author, the title of the work and the name of the publishing house. The back cover, in white, contains a long description of the trilogy in which the general plot of the work and more specifically of each volume is presented.

In the book flaps, the publisher provides the reader with further information on the story and on Tolkien. First of all, it presents the “extraordinary number of different beings” (Tolkien 1967)<sup>18</sup> that populate Tolkien’s tale: hobbits, gnomes, orcs and Nature, which is presented as a personified character in the story. Ubaldini then adds a biographical note on the author in which he underlines his passion for the invention of languages and quotes Tolkien’s own words: “The invention of a language is the foundation. The stories were made rather to provide a world for the languages than reverse” (Phelpstead 2014: 81).

The last part of the back flap then mentions the translator Vittoria Alliata, whose “current and faithful translation [gives] the Italian version the same impression of narrative happiness as the original” (Tolkien 1967).<sup>19</sup> Finally, reference is made to the subsequent volumes of the work, which will follow in the spring of 1968. Therefore, in addition to the front cover

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<sup>15</sup> “fu lo stesso Rayner Unwin a far suggerire di pubblicare il volume in tre parti separate, come era avvenuto inizialmente nella stessa Gran Bretagna”.

<sup>16</sup> “fin dall’inizio, aveva sempre proposto, anche alla Mondadori, di verificare l’interesse nei lettori dopo la pubblicazione del primo, e successivamente procedere con i restanti due”.

<sup>17</sup> “la si potrebbe pattuire per una modica cifra”.

<sup>18</sup> “straordinaria quantità di esseri diversi”.

<sup>19</sup> “corrente e fedele traduzione” è riuscita a dare “alla versione italiana la stessa impronta di felicità narrativa dell’originale”.

illustration, the text on the dust jacket differs from the Allen & Unwin edition in that it is denser, containing much more information.

Additionally, the Preface to Tolkien's second edition was omitted and the book opens directly with the Prologue. According to Cilli's account, Alliata used the 1966 second edition and the 1967 second impression for her translation, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that she had direct access to the Preface to the second edition written by Tolkien. The decision not to translate the Preface was perhaps motivated by the fact that "it speaks of the Hobbit, which had not yet been translated in Italy" (Cilli 2016: 136),<sup>20</sup> but there are no certain sources. In fact, many other translations of *The Lord of the Rings* do not include the Preface to Tolkien's second edition, such as the French, Serbo-Croatian, Armenian and Bulgarian versions. However, since Tolkien clarified many aspects of his work in his preface, it would have been helpful for the Italian readership and might have avoided many interpretative misunderstandings.

As far as the maps are concerned, the Astrolabio edition is very accurate and quite faithful to the original edition, since it shows two of the maps Tolkien wanted, keeping Christopher's original drawings. The map of the north-western part of Middle-earth is reproduced in red and black on a fold-out sheet at the end of the book, as in the original English editions. The Astrolabium edition was also the only Italian edition, until 2020, to contain the original map of part of the Shire. The map of Rohan, Gondor and Mordor is absent, but only because it was contained in the third volume, and never published. This, too, would not be published in Italy until 2020. The appendices, according to Alliata, were assigned to her along with the first chapter before she received the official assignment, as a test of her translation. However, since they were to be included in the third volume, they were never published by Astrolabio.

As for the translation, the texts show how Ubaldini tried to bring his audience closer to the translation of *The Lord of the Rings*, presenting it as a work to be considered on a par with the original. In fact, it is interesting to note that on the front cover there is no reference to the original title of the work, let alone the name of the translator. Only the name of the author and the Italian translation of the title are given. The translator's name is repeated within the book, but only in the colophon. In this case, after the titles in Italian, the original titles in English are also given, followed by the indication: "Translated from the sixteenth English edition by: Vicky Alliata" (Tolkien 1967).<sup>21</sup> In this way, Astrolabio tried to minimise any sense of alienation that readers might feel. However, this meant that the translator's visibility was somewhat reduced.

It is also interesting to examine certain documents produced by Ubaldini that show how the work was presented to the Italian public in 1967. Mario Ubaldini worked hard to promote this edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. First of all, he printed "an adequate number of brochures that give brief but fairly complete information about the masterpiece

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<sup>20</sup> "parla dello Hobbit, che non era stato ancora tradotto in Italia".

<sup>21</sup> "Tradotto dalla sedicesima edizione inglese da: Vicky Alliata".

we are publishing” (Cilli 2016: 145).<sup>22</sup> Ubaldini urged people to read these leaflets carefully and to distribute them widely to all bookshops, even the smallest ones. This document falls into the category of “the please-insert” (Genette 1997: 104), which, as seen above, has since evolved into text on the cover, moving from epitext to peritext. It contained additional information about the book that was not already included on the back cover or in the book flaps. The brochure text was divided into five parts: *La storia*, *I luoghi*, *La vicenda*, *La critica* and *Le traduzioni* (i. e. The Story, The Places, The Affair, The Criticism, and The Translations) (Cilli 2016: 146–148). Interestingly, the first section of the leaflet, ‘The Story’, was the translation of the text appearing on the front flap of the first Allen & Unwin edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. It described the work as a heroic novel, in which Tolkien creates a new mythology with a touch of super-fantasy (Cilli 2016: 148), quoting the positive reviews of the work that were cited by Allen & Unwin (Ubaldini, however, removed the critics’ names).

The presentation of the work was thus consistent with the way it was presented by Allen & Unwin to the English-speaking public in the 1950s. One might wonder why the publisher used this text for the brochure and not for the book’s dust jacket. The text in ‘The Story’ has a very promotional tone: reviews and praise of the work are presented, but nothing about the plot is specified. Ubaldini probably preferred to present readers with hints of the plot of the story and other useful information on the covers, and instead chose to use this text to promote the work in bookshops. Furthermore, in the brochure Ubaldini specified that Tolkien’s work was free of allegorical messages. In the section ‘The Affair’, the publisher stated that even if “one cannot help but see in *The Lord of the Rings* a great wealth of applications to the life of our world”, nevertheless “Tolkien decisively denied any ‘meanings’ other than the immediate value of his epic novel” (Cilli 2016: 148).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the author stated several times in letters and especially in the Preface to the second edition that *The Lord of the Rings* is not an allegory, but “that there is no allegory does not, of course, say there is no applicability” (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981). This leaflet is therefore very faithful to Tolkien’s conception of his work and how he presented his work to the English-speaking public.

### 3.1.1 Reception

The first reviews of the first translated volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, collected by Cilli (2016), have some elements in common. First of all, the critics in *Giornale d’Italia* praised Tolkien’s incredible imaginative power, with which he was able to make a fabulous world concrete (Cilli 2016: 150). Critics grasped the importance of the paratextual elements created by Tolkien to facilitate the reader’s immersion in his fabulous land, with its own history, its own geography, its own system of values (Cilli 2016: 154). For example, de Turrís mentioned the long appendages and a non-existent language with its syntax and

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<sup>22</sup> “un congruo numero di *depliants* che danno un’informazione breve, ma abbastanza completa, sul capolavoro che stiamo pubblicando”.

<sup>23</sup> “non si può non scorgere del Signore degli Anelli una grande ricchezza di applicazioni alla vita del nostro mondo”.

rules that succeeded in making Tolkien's world as 'real' as possible (Cilli 2016: 157–158). A few months later, de Turrís praised the suggestive charm of the nomenclature and the complex background behind the actual plot (Cilli 2016: 159). *Il Tempo* also underlined Tolkien's meticulousness: "he is not content with creating characters, [...] but he imagines and names their historical traditions, genealogies, folklore, languages and songs" (Cilli 2016: 153).<sup>24</sup>

Another element in common with the English-speaking context is an attempt to define the genre of *The Lord of the Rings*. This might have been a response to Ubaldini's appeal to create a new genre, given that the publisher was unable to place the book among the novel genres (Cilli 2016: 149). Vanni, in *Il Resto del Carlino*, gave a very coherent reading of it in keeping with Tolkien's conception, presenting it as a new mythology, a heroic novel and a fable (Cilli 2016: 155). Other critics evoked the genre of the fable: de Turrís defined the book as the longest fable of all time (Cilli 2016: 158), Pagetti described it as an endless fable (Cilli 2016: 154) and Tedeschi mentioned Tolkien's fable techniques (Cilli 2016: 153). Some critics pointed to the new genre of the fanta type proposed by Ubaldini (Cilli 2016: 149). *The Lord of the Rings* was also defined in *Momento Sera* as a fanta-legend (Cilli 2016: 150), a fantamitologia (Cilli 2016: 152) in *Il Tempo* and a book that is automatically placed in the field of 'fantasy heroic' or of the 'moto-poetic fantasy' (Cilli 2016: 159). *The Lord of the Rings* was also described in *Paese Sera* as an exponent of the wizard-science fiction genre (Cilli 2016: 152) and said to be full of science fiction ideas in *Giornale d'Italia* (Cilli 2016: 150). However, as Pagetti wrote:

*The Lord of the Rings* belongs more to fantastic fiction than science fiction. Although it has an exceptional internal logic, the myths of the future, of technological development, of the cosmic journey are completely foreign to it. (Cilli 2016: 177)<sup>25</sup>

In the first reviews of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the theme of translation was also mentioned. Ubaldini wondered what criterion presided over the rendering of the names of places and characters, which are half accepted from the originals and half translated (Cilli 2016: 152). According to Cingoli, the translation does not fully preserve the highly refined style of the original (Cilli 2016: 153). Pagetti also argued that Tolkien's philological and literary knowledge is a bit lost in the translation (Cilli 2016: 155). De Turrís was of the same opinion, suggesting a more thorough revision of the translation which in the first volume appears here and there adorned with oversights and errors (Cilli 2016: 158). On the contrary, others praised Allia's translation, describing it as accurate and faithful with almost always excellent results (Cilli 2016: 153–157). Finally, in the epitexts of *The Fellowship of the Ring* no allegorical reading was given that could distort or politicize its meaning. The critics understood that the work, completely devoid of allegories, was rather

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<sup>24</sup> "Egli non si accontenta di creare personaggi, [...] ma ne immagina e ne nomina anche le tradizioni storiche, le genealogie, il folclore, le lingue e le canzoni".

<sup>25</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* appartiene più alla narrativa fantastica che alla science fiction. Benché essa abbia una eccezionale logicità interna, i miti del futuro, dello sviluppo tecnologico, del viaggio cosmico le sono del tutto estranei.

the fruit of the imagination of a cultured man and lover of philology and legends (Cilli 2016: 157).

However, despite the enthusiasm of Astrolabio and the first positive reviews, Ubaldini's editorial courage was not rewarded. In fact, only a few hundred copies of the first volume were sold (Cilli 2016: 160), and the remaining two were never published. It would take a few more years to see Tolkien's work achieve the same success it had experienced abroad.

### **3.2 Latest translation: *Bompiani Edition*, 2019–2020**

Tolkien's redemption in Italy came in 2019, with a new edition of *The Lord of the Rings* published by Bompiani, which marked a definitive departure from the first one. It was not a revision of the translation, like that of Principe in 1970 or that of Bompiani in 2003, but an actual retranslation by Ottavio Fatica. The paratexts of this edition deserve careful analysis, as they mark a clean break with the past and a further step towards Tolkien's rediscovery. The edition was presented in 14 x 20 cm format, with a hardcover and dust jacket. As in the past, therefore, the format and the binding reflect the intention to present *The Lord of the Rings* to the public in an elegant and prestigious fashion.

On the peritextual level, the first novel element to underline is the presence of the translator's name on the front cover. In fact, after the name of the author and the title of the work, Bompiani specifies that this is a "Translation of Ottavio Fatica" (Tolkien 2019). Therefore, the translator's name and surname appear both on the cover and on the dust jacket, intimately linked to the book. This was a real novelty which gave the translation aspect and the translator's visibility more importance than ever. The name of Fatica is repeated on the title page, and the colophon mentions the name of an expert who had collaborated with Fatica on the new translation: Giampaolo Canzonieri, a member of the Italian Association of Tolkienian Studies.

Another new element that was brought in at the peritextual level was the cover illustration, to replace the previous artwork by Alan Lee. The first cover of the volumes shows golden photographs of the soil of Mars, in particular of the "Superficie di Marte ripresa dal Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO)" (i. e. the surface of Mars taken by the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter) (Tolkien 2019), as indicated in the back flap. The rest of the dust jacket is very elegant and sober, featuring little text, in contrast with the first Italian edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. The golden surface of Mars also extends over the spine, where Tolkien's name, the title of the work and the name of the publisher are shown. The back cover, brown-beige in colour, in tune with gold, simply shows the Poem of the Ring. The work is presented in the text on the front flap, with a brief synopsis of the plot of each volume. On the back flap, there is a brief biographical note on Tolkien. It is important to note that no connections are made with any allegorical or symbolic interpretation of the Tolkienian text. Indeed, it was the director Masini herself who stated in *Il Giornale* that the publishing house does not believe in any ideological interpretation of Tolkien's work (Masini 2019).

Bompiani presents all three of Tolkien's maps, in their original design, as in the first edition of 1967 but, in this edition, *The Lord of the Rings* opens exclusively with the Preface to the second edition written by Tolkien. Another interesting novelty concerns the second part of Appendix F. Fatica kept all references to the English language, translating, for example, 'Englished' and 'Modern English' as *inglesizzati* and *inglese moderno* (Tolkien 2020: 695), respectively. Although this could create confusion in the reader, introducing an element (English) that is actually foreign to the Italian text, this is at the same time an indication of greater fidelity to the author's meaning. In fact, in this way Fatica restored Tolkien's original thought, reconstructing the linguistic strategy of the author without Italianizing it. Unfortunately, the Index is not present in this edition, perhaps because it is still under revision.

The new Bompiani project came to an end in 2020 with the release of the single volume edition in 16 x 24 cm format and with hardcover binding. This is truly a prestigious edition that reflects the Tolkenian concept more than any other Italian edition. First of all, the fact that it is in a single volume reflects the original intention of Tolkien, who had conceived his work as "indivisible and unified" (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981). Furthermore, the front cover displays two elements that are a synthesis of the 2003 and 2019 editions: together with the author's name, the title of the work and the name of the publishing house, it is specified that the book is illustrated by Alan Lee and that this is a translation by Ottavio Fatica. These same elements are emphasised on the back cover, where instead of the Poem of the Ring there is a short text that reads: "The new edition of the classic by J. R. R. Tolkien in the translation by Ottavio Fatica in a precious volume enriched by 50 illustrated plates by award-winning artist Alan Lee" (Tolkien 2020).<sup>26</sup> Quoting the name of an illustrator who is famous in Tolkenian circles was a promotional tool. The translator's name also features on the front cover, as in the 2019 edition, and in this case on the back cover too. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of the plot or any allegorical messages; the new edition was therefore promoted by focusing exclusively on the novelty of the translation and on the paratexts of Alan Lee. In this edition, the Index is also finally present, an updated version of the one created in 2005 by Hammond and Scull for the celebratory edition marking the fiftieth anniversary of the original publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in the United Kingdom.

Therefore, the editions of 2019 and 2020 finally represent a full rediscovery of Tolkien's project and of the true essence of *The Lord of the Rings*. The desire to restore the lost elements of Tolkien's original project is also evident in the epitexts generated, as discussed in the next section.

### 3.2.1 Reception

The new translation generated great controversy that spread to newspapers and online blogs, thus creating a real buzz about the issues of retranslation. It all began with an inter-

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<sup>26</sup> "La nuova edizione del classico di J. R. R. Tolkien nella traduzione di Ottavio Fatica in un prezioso volume arricchito da 50 tavole illustrate dal pluripremiato artista Alan Lee".

view with Fatica conducted by Loredana Lipperini, published in *La Repubblica* on 29 April 2018, in which the translator spoke about the new retranslation that had been entrusted to him. In the interview, Fatica expressed his views on Vittoria Allinata's translation which, for him, had all the flaws of an improvised adventure and five hundred errors per page (Arduini 2018). Furthermore, Fatica added:

There are no verbs, adverbs, or whole sentences, sometimes it is translated by ear. Allinata often removes parenthetical elements, which also mean something, give nuance to the character. Instead, it adds explanation upon explanation. It becomes a paraphrase, downright ugly. It also has its own curious style: it doubles the adjectives. (Arduini 2018)<sup>27</sup>

Speaking about his own translation, however, Fatica stated that the translation will be different because trying to reproduce the English scheme in Italian would be “a masochistic pleasure for the translator” (Arduini 2018).<sup>28</sup> These comments offended Allinata, who sued Fatica for defamation and responded to his accusations in an interview conducted by Cilli (2019) in *Il Giornale*. Allinata also informed readers that Bompiani continued to keep hold of her translation without having the rights, since her contract had not been renewed. Beatrice Masini, the editorial director of Bompiani, responded to Vittoria Allinata's accusations with another article in *Il Giornale*, in which she explained that they proposed to Vittoria Allinata not only to renew the translation contract (recently expired, and due to an oversight not immediately renewed) but also to review her work, as it is right to do after so many years, in view of a new edition, and that they did not obtain any definite answer from her lawyers (Masini 2019). At that point, Vittoria Allinata wrote another letter where she proposed her version of the facts, stating that Bompiani had included in her contract two vexatious clauses. This was for her a grave defamation and a betrayal of Tolkien's intentions; therefore, she decided to reject Bompiani's proposal, and requested the withdrawal of copies of her translation.

Allinata again defended her translation on the basis of the alleged approval of Allen & Unwin and of Tolkien himself, although, as previously mentioned, there is no concrete proof of this. Allinata also claimed that the Tolkien Estate knew nothing of the new translation, whereas Federico Guglielmi (2018) claimed to have received the ‘yes’ of the Tolkien Estate for the new translation, and Bompiani asserted that Ottavio Fatica had been chosen in agreement with HarperCollins.

Regardless of the legal issues, however, the controversy surrounding the retranslation had a decidedly positive outcome. Indeed, thanks to the debates generated, discussion of translational issues was given unprecedented attention. Articles on the topic spread in newspapers and blogs, and everyone had their say about the different choices of the two translators. In addition to the translation, the changes made to the paratexts of *The Lord of the Rings*, and the messages thus conveyed, were also discussed.

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<sup>27</sup> Mancano verbi, avverbi, intere frasi, a volte si traduce a orecchio. Allinata toglie spesso l'inciso, che significa pur qualcosa, dà sfumatura al personaggio. Invece, aggiunge spiegazioni su spiegazioni. Diventa una parafrasi, decisamente brutta. Inoltre ha un suo curioso stilema: raddoppia gli aggettivi.

<sup>28</sup> “Un piacere masochistico del traduttore”.

Santoni (2019), in *Il Corriere della Sera*, in addition to examining the new translation choices, also commented on some other elements of the Bompiani edition: the absence of maps, which, even if present in the following volumes, was an unjustifiable choice, and the omission of Zolla's Introduction, which was, conversely, judged to be a choice, indeed, commendable, given its controversial interpretation of Tolkien's work. Santoni (2019), regarding the retranslation, stated that some of the epic aura was lost, but that the choices were winning and the new translation, even with its limitations, was indeed better than the old one.

Roberto Arduini (2018) also supported the new translation of Tolkien's work, claiming that it had finally met the challenge of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, casting a generous, exuberant, playful spell. On the contrary, according to Cesare Catà, the two translations reflected two different conceptions of Tolkien's work:

What Alliesta had delivered to the Italian reader decades ago was, and is, an epic text [...]. Ottavio Fatica's, on the other hand, is a daily Tolkien, fluent in reading, dry, realistic; his is a work that (consciously, I believe) removes Tolkien from the epic genre to place him in the contemporary genre of Young Adult Fiction. (Catà 2019)<sup>29</sup>

Catà (2019) also insisted that Bompiani's project to eradicate Tolkien from the epic was demonstrated by two paratextual choices: the new cover and the omission of Zolla's Introduction. The new cover, according to Catà (2019), portrayed an image of the work as a contemporary classic with fantastic accents, and not as a heroic saga modeled on the ancients. Regarding the preface, however, Catà stated that Alliesta's translation was consistent with Zolla's Introduction, which presented Tolkien's text as a new chivalric epic. The author of the article claimed to share Zolla's vision and, for this reason, he did not appreciate Fatica's new translation. According to Luca Ricatti (2019), on the other hand, the new translation of *The Lord of the Rings* is more accurate from a philological point of view and free from the arbitrary interpretations that have been stuck to it for decades. Federico Guglielmi (2019) also expressed himself in this regard, saying that Fatica's version has rescued Tolkien from the swamp where he had been relegated to Italy for forty years and has given him back the dignity he deserves (Guglielmi 2018). Indeed, Guglielmi claimed that Fatica has grasped the centrality of archaisms for the Tolkienian style and has made an effort to render it (Guglielmi 2019).

The merit of Bompiani's edition therefore lies in the way it has opened a new perspective of the Tolkienian work. Luigi Mascheroni (2020), in *Il Giornale*, reported some of the comments found on the net in which readers claimed that they could finally read Tolkien as he deserves and that, in this new version, they have been able to absorb more of what the Professor intended.

Notwithstanding the conflicting opinions in this regard, the discourse around the retranslation brought Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* back into the spotlight,

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<sup>29</sup> Quello che Alliesta aveva consegnato decenni fa al lettore italiano era, ed è, un testo epico [...]. Quello di Ottavio Fatica, invece, è un Tolkien quotidiano, scorrevole alla lettura, asciutto, realistico; il suo è un lavoro che (coscientemente, credo) toglie Tolkien dal genere epico per porlo nel genere contemporaneo della Young Adult Fiction.

increasing the popularity of a text that has already provoked many different reactions over time. Furthermore, the debate foregrounded the translation itself, along with its paratextual discourse, and no other issues related to politics.

Thus, *The Lord of the Rings* was discussed in a much more in-depth manner, with attentive comments on translation choices in the light of the internal structure of the original text and the author's project, better known to readers now than in the 1970s. Regardless of judgments on the translation of the core text itself, its epitextual elements have also come to be seen as fundamental as they sanction the rediscovery of the essence of *The Lord of the Rings*.

## 4 Conclusions

Through Tolkien's letters and the paratexts he himself produced with his collaborators on the first edition of the work, the author's conception and the purpose of his work can be reconstructed. The *Lord of the Rings* was born out of Tolkien's passion for languages and his desire to give England its own mythology. Tolkien wanted to write a fairy-story for adults, with the desire to "excite, please, and even on occasion move the audience" (Carpenter/Tolkien 1981).

By examining the way in which *The Lord of the Rings* was first presented in Italy in 1967 and then again in 2019–2020, it is clear that the work has undergone various repackaging processes and has been interpreted in the light of the two different sociocultural contexts from which it has emerged. The evolution of the paratexts reflects the journey of Tolkien's work in Italy from the 1960s to 2020. In particular, two types of evolution can be observed: one linked to the conception of Tolkien's work and the other to the visibility of the translator.

On the one hand, paratexts are a tool through which authors may convey their vision and purpose. On the other hand, paratextual elements can change the 'appearance' of the text and, together with a new image, invite new interpretations, sometimes departing from the author's original vision. Text and context cannot be separated from each other, so when a work is introduced into a new culture, it will inevitably be influenced by the receiving context. Paratexts are a site of this exchange of influences. Indeed, they give the work a new packaging, determined by the context and the ideologies of those involved in the process, and many other factors. This means that the text takes on a new image, new meanings and a new reception. It is therefore clear that one cannot analyse the reception of a work without taking into account the paratexts and the context. Finally, the paratext is also an important place where the translator can claim their role.

*The Lord of the Rings* is a cultural phenomenon that has captured the imagination of generations of fans through literature and the big screen. As such, it offers a very fertile ground for research and analysis from an infinite number of points of view, and this paper attempts to move a step forward in this direction.

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Leona Van Vaerenbergh  
University of Antwerp  
Arts and Philosophy  
Applied Linguistics / Translation and Interpreting  
O. L. V. van Lourdeslaan 17/5  
B-1090 Brussel  
Belgien  
[Leona.VanVaerenbergh@uantwerpen.be](mailto:Leona.VanVaerenbergh@uantwerpen.be)

Klaus Schubert  
Universität Hildesheim  
Institut für Übersetzungswissenschaft  
und Fachkommunikation  
Universitätsplatz 1  
D-31141 Hildesheim  
Deutschland  
[klaus.schubert@uni-hildesheim.de](mailto:klaus.schubert@uni-hildesheim.de)

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*Author*

Francesca Raffi is a Senior Research Fellow in English language and translation at the University of Macerata (Italy). She holds a PhD in English for Special Purposes from the University of Naples Federico II (Italy) and she is a Chartered Linguist of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (UK). Since 2019, she is Honorary Fellow at the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Liverpool (UK). Her detailed list of publications is available on her website.

E-Mail: [f.raffi@unimc.it](mailto:f.raffi@unimc.it)

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