

Translating the Fantastic: *A Wizard of Earthsea* as an Example

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This is a product-oriented descriptive translation studies paper that examines a single source text, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, by the American fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin and its Arabic translation, ساحر من إيرثسي (*sahir min Earthsea*), published by the National Center for Translation in Cairo and translated by myself. In translation studies terms, this paper poses a function-oriented question as to what influences the Arabic translations of *Harry Potter* have on the position of Arabic fantasy translations, of which the present translation is one. It is a personal testimony and analysis of translating *A Wizard of Earthsea* in the domain of descriptive translation studies. Together with discussing the personal reasons behind this translational choice and the process of having the National Center for Translation as a publisher, it also tackles the difficulties of translating such an important fantasy work and the strategies adopted in dealing with these challenges. Limitations of and mistakes in translation are also discussed. This paper claims that the Arabic translations of *Harry Potter* have moved fantasy translations from the periphery to the center, encouraging the appearance of other fantasy translations into Arabic, including the work of JRR Tolkien and Ursula K. Le Guin. I would hope a further study would examine the effect of *Harry Potter* on fantasies written primarily in Arabic, given that a development is also taking place in this direction. A closer look at the data provided by the publisher of *Harry Potter*'s Arabic translations indicates that the *Harry Potter* influence extends itself to the translation process of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, supporting the "polysystem theory" of Itamar Even-Zohar. To Even-Zohar, translated works correlate in two ways to the current literary system (in any society or culture, I would say). First, they correspond with the system in the way their source texts are basically selected. Second, they are consistent with the system in the way the translated texts themselves deal with specific norms, behaviors, and policies of the target culture.¹ This can clearly be seen in the examples discussed of the work in question.

A Wizard of Earthsea is a *bildungsroman* written in 1968 primarily for English-speaking young adult readers, although it is a tale that engages readers at any age. A naturally gifted young wizard in a wizardry school, Ged, boastfully displays his magical powers in front of his peers and summons the dead spirit of a mythical figure. With the spirit comes another dark force that is loosed upon the world. He looks for its name and nature in order to control it, for; when one knows the name of a thing, one can dominate it—that is the rule of the Earthsea world. It transpires that this dark force has Ged's name and face: it is his dark side. By embracing his evil nature, and becoming fully responsible

¹ Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," *Poetics Today*

for it, Ged regains his integrity and the wound he has caused the earth is healed. Ged and the readers learn that by accepting the evil inside of humans, people become integral characters; integrity is not an inherent trait, evil is. Although Le Guin wrote science fiction and fantasy, she found fantasy more suitable for delivering the message of the coming-of-age journey because of its archetypal symbols (that of the labyrinth, shadow, ghost, ring, journey, and wizard). These images convey the psychic journey taken by youth in an attempt to understand and face the world.

I started translating *A Wizard of Earthsea* during the last months of 2011, and actual publication was in November 2015. It took a year and a half to finish the first and second drafts of translation, before I submitted the manuscript in July 2013. Editing and publishing at the National Center for Translation took one year and a half.

1. Fantasy

Fantasy is a fiction genre that uses magic and/or other supernatural elements as a main plot element, theme, or setting. Many works within the genre take place in imaginary worlds where magic and magical creatures are common. It is one of a few genres under the general term speculative fiction. Contrary to the common, simple commercial stereotype about fantasy literature that is adopted by Hollywood and many publishing houses, fantasy provokes the reader to speculate, think, and eventually become transformed. As Le Guin writes: "Fantasy is a journey. It is a journey into the subconscious mind, just as psychoanalysis is. Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous; and it will change you."²

When I came across such a rich and valuable work, and when I saw how it addressed humanity in general and would help young adult readers understand the meaning of growing up, I felt an urge to make it available in my own language. *A Wizard of Earthsea* is a work that teaches the reader that all humans contain evil and good, and that maturity is about coming to observe and understand that. While the story is concerned with the responsibility of a talented young wizard toward his talent, it is symbolically about the responsibility of any talented person. This could be a writer, an artist, or even a translator! This is how I felt while translating *Earthsea* into Arabic.

2. Why *Earthsea*?

The previous section partly answers this question, but to be more specific, I chose *A Wizard of Earthsea* for three main reasons. Firstly, I had been enriched by Le Guin's body of work for twenty years since I started doing my PhD on her science fiction in 1998. Having been personally nourished by communicating with her during most of that time, I decided to introduce her fantasy in Arabic translation, just as I introduced her science fiction in Arabic academia. The *Earthsea* world is definitely the heart of her fantasy work, and I had fallen in love with the story. It would be madness to give one's soul, mind, and creativity to a work that one does not love.

² Ursula K. Le Guin, "From Elfland to the Poughkeepsie," in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Sudan Wood (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979), 135.

Furthermore, *Earthsea*, an older fantasy and possibly a germinal story for *Harry Potter*, was ageing without being known in Arabic. The one book that I wished to see my children influenced by was disappearing into obscurity. On the other hand, the impact I could see of *Harry Potter* on my son and his generation was that they were more comfortable with fantasy worlds than the older generations. He could always see more things in *Earthsea* than I could; things inherent to the nature of fantasy. For instance, he had a special theory about Segoy, the first Mage in *Earthsea* and the one who raised the islands and created the world. For him, Segoy is Le Guin herself. However, as a middle-aged mother of Islamic Oriental background, I was brought up to believe that children's literature must educate and teach as much as entertain. On similar lines, Wafa Dukmak argues in her unpublished PhD thesis that "certain culture specific items, represented by Islam in the first place and Arab nationalism in the second, in addition to certain political and ideological opinions contribute heavily to the didactic and moralizing nature of Arab children literature."³ For me, *Earthsea* contained important values that a young adult would certainly benefit from while growing up that I wished to see become as widespread as *Harry Potter*'s themes. Thus, as a translator I had a personal and sociocultural agenda in translating *Earthsea* into Arabic.

Secondly, the young, vain, impulsive wizard of *Earthsea* of part one ends up becoming the Archmage of all *Earthsea* later in the series. Eventually he loses much of his magical power but discovers in himself other enchanting traits, such as the ability to let a woman he loves travel, discovering the world and fulfilling herself. He also realizes the magical mastery needed to take care of the house in her absence; that is to say, he realizes that housekeeping is an art; a kind of magic and not something to be looked down upon. The Archmage matures on a human level until he becomes a feminist! This was crucial to me as a female translator. I have always disliked the wrongness of the dominant masculinity of the speculative genres of fantasy and science fiction. It is true that Ged's feminist traits do not manifest themselves in the part I translated, but I hoped that translating that part would lead to translating later volumes so that the Arabic reader, young or old, would reach the final installment of the story. I wished to see Ged, the main hero, as famous and influential as Potter. And although I knew it was fairly difficult, I wanted to try.

Thirdly, there is a sociological reason pertaining to the phenomenal effect of the *Harry Potter* series in Arabic (first translated in 1997). This series affected young adult fantasy literature in Arabic that was either originally written in Arabic or translated from other languages. Arabic *Earthsea* is a result of this influence. In a nutshell, *Harry Potter* has achieved phenomenal popularity around the world, either in book or movie form and/or as a complicated cultural product. The cinematic versions of the books have added to this international commercial phenomenon. There is a big industry in Britain affiliated with

³ Wafa Dukmak, "The Treatment of Cultural Items in the Translation of Children's Literature: The Case of Harry Potter in Arabic," (PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2012).

Harry Potter: souvenirs, guided tours suitable for all possible budgets, and sites that are visited by tens of thousands of tourists yearly. *Harry Potter* has become what might be called “a transmedia phenomenon.”

2.1 *Harry Potter* and the Sociological Reasons behind Translating *Earthsea*

Harry Potter has surely revived the genre of young adult fantasy in its original language, English, and consequently revived the genre altogether. Similarly, its Arabic translations have introduced new models and filled a gap in Arabic young adult fantasy. Thus, *Harry Potter* is responsible for the prominence of young adult fantasy as well as young adult fantasy translations in Arabic-speaking countries because of the movement this series had caused in the strata of fantasy, according to Even-Zohar’s theory. To confirm this, I visited Nahdet Misr publishing company, the only publishing house that translated and published *Harry Potter* in Arabic, asking for information. I was provided by with the information in the following table.⁴

عدد الطباعات Number of editions	تاريخ الطبعة الأولى Date of first edition	الصنف Item	
Harry Potter series (JK Rowling)			
طبعة 13 13 Editions	2002/07/29	هارى بوتر و حجر الفيلسوف <i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</i>	الجزء الأول Part one
	2008/01/25	هارى بوتر و حجر الفيلسوف (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (hardback)</i>	
10 طباعات 10 editions	2003/06/09	الأسرار هارى بوتر و حجرة <i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>	الجزء الثاني Part two
	2008/01/25	هارى بوتر و حجرة الأسرار (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (hardback)</i>	
8 طباعات 8 editions	2003/08/08	هارى بوتر وسجين أزكابان <i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	الجزء الثالث Part three

⁴ Interview with Nahdet Masr, Sept. 28, 2016.

	2008/01/26	(هارى بوتير وسجين أزكابان) مجلد Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (hardback)	
طبعتات 8 8 editions	2004/05/22	هارى بوتير و كأس النار Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	الجزء الرابع Part four
	2008/01/26	(هارى بوتير و كأس النار) مجلد Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	
طبعتات 10 10 editions	2005/01/25	هارى بوتير و جماعة العنقاء Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	الجزء الخامس Part five
	2008/01/25	هارى بوتير و جماعة العنقاء ((مجلد) Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (hardback)	
طبعة 11 11 editions	2006/01/21	هارى بوتير و الأمير الهجين Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	الجزء السادس Part six
	2008/01/26	هارى بوتير و الأمير الهجين ((مجلد) Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (hardback)	
طبعة 12 12 editions	2007/12/29	هارى بوتير و مقدسات الموت Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows	الجزء السابع Part seven
	2007/12/31	هارى بوتير و مقدسات الموت ((مجلد) Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (hardback)	
The Lord of the Rings trilogy (JRR Tolkien)			
طبعتان Two editions Hardpack and paperpack	2008/01/05	رفقة الخاتم The Fellowship of the Ring	الجزء الأول Part one
	2009/01/16	(رفقة الخاتم) مجلد The Fellowship of the Ring	
طبعتان Two editions	2008/01/05	البرجان The Two Towers	الجزء الثاني Part two

Hardpack and paperpack			
طبعتان Two editions Hardpack and paperpack	2009/01/17	(البرجان) مجلد <i>The Two Towers</i>	
طبعتان Two editions Hardpack and paperpack	2008/01/05	عودة الملك <i>The Return of the King</i>	الجزء الثالث Part three
طبعتان Two editions Hardpack and paperpack	2009/01/17	(عودة الملك) مجلد <i>Return of the King</i>	

I learned that there had been thirteen editions of the first part of *Harry Potter*, the first of which was published in 2002; that is to say, an edition was published almost every year. The translations have been in such demand that parts five and six were translated and printed in the same year, 2008. The phenomenal success of *Harry Potter* in Arabic translation has encouraged Nahdet Misr to publish translations of Tolkien's fantasy works in 2008, that is to say, six years after the first *Harry Potter* appeared in the Arabic market. Two editions of Tolkien's works have been printed since that time. However, the demand for *Harry Potter* is still high enough for the publishing house that it has launched a project of editing all the previous translations. As of 2018, the first three edited volumes have been published and the fourth is soon to come. Nahdet Misr encountered certain difficulties during this editing process, primarily because different *Harry Potter* books had been translated by different people, some of whom were not *Harry Potter* fans or readers to start with. As a result, Nahdet Misr saw it necessary to adjust the translated books and smooth out the irregularities. If it had not been for the increasing attention given to fantasy in translation, the publishing house would not have been likely to engaged in such a painstaking editing process. In fact, I believe that Nahdet Misr caused this change in the market by translating *Harry Potter* into Arabic in the first place. *Harry Potter* fandom has been steadily growing in Egypt since the publication of its Arabic translations. My son and his generation have been loyal fantasy fans ever since they could read *Harry Potter* in Arabic.

The latest update of *Harry Potter*'s printing and marketing information sent to me is as follows:⁵

⁵ Data obtained from Nahdet Misr. 09 September, 3, 2018.

عدد الطباعات Number of editions	تاريخ الطبعة الأولى Date of the first issue	الصنف Item	
Harry Potter series (JK Rowling)			
15 طبعة 15 editions	2002/07/29	هارى بوتر و حجر الفيلسوف <i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i>	الجزء الأول Part one
	2008/01/25	هارى بوتر و حجر الفيلسوف (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (hardback)</i>	
11 طبعة 11 editions	2003/06/09	هارى بوتر و حجرة الأسرار <i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>	الجزء الثاني Part two
	2008/01/25	هارى بوتر و حجرة الأسرار (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (hardback)</i>	
10 طبعات 10 editions	2003/08/08	هارى بوتر وسجين أزكابان <i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	الجزء الثالث Part three
	2008/01/26	(هارى بوتر وسجين أزكابان (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (hardback)</i>	
9 طبعات 9 editions	2004/05/22	هارى بوتر و كأس النار <i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>	الجزء الرابع Part four
	2008/01/26	(هارى بوتر و كأس النار (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>	
12 طبعات 12 editions	2005/01/25	هارى بوتر و جماعة العنقاء <i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>	الجزء الخامس Part five
	2008/01/25	هارى بوتر و جماعة العنقاء (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (hardback)</i>	
13 طبعة 13 editions	2006/01/21	هارى بوتر و الأمير الهجين <i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i>	الجزء السادس Part six

	2008/01/26	هارى بوتّر و الأمير الهجين (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (hardback)</i>	
14 طبعة 14 editions	2007/12/29	هارى بوتّر و مقدسات الموت <i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</i>	الجزء السابع Part seven
	2007/12/31	هارى بوتّر و مقدسات الموت (مجلد) <i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (hardback)</i>	
3 طبعات 3 editions	2017/1/15	هارى بوتّر والطفل الملعون <i>Harry Potter and the Cursed Child</i>	الجزء الثامن Part eight
<i>The Lord of the Rings trilogy (JRR Tolkien)</i>			
4 طبعات 4 editions	2008/01/05	رفقة الخاتم <i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	الجزء الأول Part one
	2009/01/16	(رفقة الخاتم (مجلد) <i>The Fellowship of the Ring (hardback)</i>	
4 طبعات 4 editions	2008/01/05	البرجان <i>The Two Towers</i>	الجزء الثاني Part two
	2009/01/17	(البرجان (مجلد) <i>The Two Towers (hardback)</i>	
4 طبعات 4 editions	2008/01/05	عودة الملك <i>The Return of the King</i>	الجزء الثالث Part three
	2009/01/17	(عودة الملك (مجلد) <i>The Return of the King (hardback)</i>	

Comparing the two tables suggests there has recently been an even greater increase in translating and publishing fantasy works. The eighth *Harry Potter* book was translated and published, further editions of the previous books appeared, and new editions of Tolkien's trilogy were published. In less than two years, a noticeable mobilization in the field of fantasy translation and publishing has taken place.

3. Literary Translation

The major difficulties that face a literary translator are the same problems that face any translator: finding the right equivalents and producing a translation that satisfies the purpose (which varies as the theories and strategies of different agents/translators vary).

But terms like “equivalence” and “purpose” are quite controversial. Bahaa-eddin Abulhassan Hassan explores this intricate concept:

“Equivalence is the relationship between the ST (source text) and the TT (target text). Its main goal is to produce a text in the TL [target language] that will have the same effect as the original text had on the receivers belonging to the SL [source language] culture. Formal equivalence is the rigid adherence to the form of the original language. On the contrary, dynamic equivalence is the complete disregard for the form (not the message) of the original language. In fact, there are no complete or full equivalent texts. The concept of equivalence is relative because of linguistic and cultural differences.”⁶

Some writers and critics argue that an equivalent text is the one that delivers the original message of the SL the clearest form for the target culture, while others think that equivalence means adhering to the literal meaning of the original text. Safia Boushaba explains that “the word ‘equivalence’ is a major terminological ambiguity in the field of translation. Contrary to its precise meaning in mathematics and logic, this term becomes ambiguous, vague and subject to various interpretations when used in the field of language and translation.”⁷ In all cases it depends on the policy of the translator/agent; thus it ends up by being more or less a political decision. There is never a perfect literary equivalent, not to mention the issue of style. Writers have peculiar ways of saying things which make their writings different from each other and from ordinary discourse; namely, their own particular form of creativity. Safia Boushaba quotes Jacobson in her thesis, saying “that equivalence cannot be defined in terms of sameness and synonymy in translation theory. He sees that no translation can be a complete version of the original, for translation is no more than “a creative transposition.”⁸ Thus, to try to provoke the same effect that a literary text has in its original source culture is an ambition any translator is entitled to have, but almost very few can perfectly claim. Translating literature necessitates more creativity on the part of the translator compared to other kinds of translation.

4. Translating speculative fiction

⁶ Bahaa-eddin Abulhassan Hassan, *Between English and Arabic: A Practical Course in Translation*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 11.

⁷ Safia Boushaba, “An Analytical Study of Some problems of Literary Translation: A Study of Two Arabic Translations of Gibran’s *The Prophet*” (PhD thesis, University of Salford, 1988), 20.

⁸ Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *On Translation*, ed. R.A. Brower (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), quoted in Boushaba, 21.

Bahaa-eddin Abulhassan Hassan argues that “A fully competent translator isn’t only bilingual, but also bicultural.”⁹ Within speculative fiction, translators are not only dealing with the original source language and culture, but also deal with special cultures of the genres which tend to be accumulative, interrelated, and intricate. So, what are translators of speculative fiction genres supposed to do?

First, translators of science fiction and fantasy must seriously study these speculative genres and learn the special vocabulary related to their cultures. These particular genres tend to contain specific ideas, terms, images, and symbols which expand ~~since~~ as the writers continue to build the fantasy world over the course of the series. A translator of speculative genres should have knowledge of the fantasy world’s history and development. This is, however, still not enough. They also have to be exceptionally creative in order to grapple with names for things that do not exist in reality.

Translators of science fiction and fantasy must deal with everything from food names to names belonging to different life forms, places, objects, military ranks, or even names of drinks or institutions. In any literary translation there are always culturally specific references to different aspects of everyday life such as education, politics, history, art, legal systems, units of measurement, sports and national pastimes, and so on, as experienced in different countries and nations of the world. In the case of fantasy, these places and cultures do not really exist, and there is always bound to be some loss of meaning. To counter this inevitable loss, creativity is key when translating in order to retain as much of the ambience of the original text as possible. Here arises the question of loyalty to the text; is it better to present a “literal” but boring translation, or to keep the magic of the created world? This takes us to another important question; that of style.

Translators of science fiction and fantasy should pay particular attention to style. If style is generally important in all literary translations, it is most important in fantasy. As Le Guin herself says,

“In fantasy there is nothing but the writer’s vision of the world. There is no borrowed reality of history, or current events, or just plain folks at home in Peyton Place. There is no comfortable matrix of the commonplace to substitute for the imagination, to provide ready-made emotional response, and to disguise flaws and failures of creation. There is only a construct built in a void, with every joint and seam and nail exposed. To create what Tolkien calls “a secondary universe” is to make a new world. A world where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation. The only voice that speaks there is the creator’s voice. And every word counts.”¹⁰

5. Difficulties of Translating *A Wizard of Earthsea*

5.1 Translation Process

⁹ Hassan, *Between English and Arabic*, 2.

¹⁰ Le Guin, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie,” 154.

As I was totally new in the translation market and only had academic affiliations with the National Center for Translation, that was where I decided to start. The process of accepting the book went through an extremely long line of committees. First, there was the dilemma of classifying the work. It was not a children's story, nor was it not a novel in the familiar canonical literature. In reality, it is a separate genre that needed to be acknowledged in the Egyptian target culture by this governmental institution ~~that is~~ as a fantasy book. It was finally adopted by Dr. Khairy Douma in the fictional creativity series (سلسلة الإبداع القصصي) (silsilat al-ibda'a al-qīṣaṣī). The acceptance process took about eighteen months before the entire book was submitted in June 2013. More than two years were needed for the editing and to resolve the rest of the technical publication issues. Professional literary editing (in the sense of working closely with the author and discussing the quality of the translation and its suitability for the specific genres, and so on) was surely needed but clearly lacking in most of the publishing houses in Egypt, not to mention the National Center for Translation. Thus, I resorted to professional translators and friends who kindly helped me from the very beginning. I deeply acknowledge their generous help and efforts and would especially like to thank my son Yousef Mohamed Aly, the well-known journalist, critic, and translator, Marcia Lynx Qualey, Dr. Abdulwahab Khalifa, and Kate Goodwin.

5.2 Difficulties of Translating Earthsea

As for the difficulties faced in translating the text, the first challenge was coming up with acceptable equivalents for many "invented" fantasy terms. Some of these are explained in more detail later in the series, while others are never explained at all, and include:

- "The Old Powers." This necessitated a strategy of addition based on connotations of the term. I translated it into قوى الكون العتيقة, which literally means "Old Powers of the universe" (quwa al-kawn al-'atiqa).
- References to names of mythical figures such as Elfarren, Erreth Akbe, and Morred, for which I used preservation and transliteration strategies. They are transliterated into إلفارين, إيريث أكبي, موريد, respectively.
- Invented plants like "white hallows," which required preservation, addition, and transliteration. I translated this as زهرة الهالوز البيضاء. It literally means "the white flower of Hallows" (zahrat al-haluz al-bayḍa').

I also translated all the synonyms and categories of "wizard" in English, which was challenging because there are relatively few in Arabic, and most Arabic equivalents have negative connotations:

Archmage: الساحر الأكبر (al-saḥir al-akbar), which means "the greatest of all mages," elected to be the headmaster of the School of Wizards. I used the superlative form of the Arabic adjective كبير (kabir) which is الأكبر (al-akbar) so that the whole term literally means "the highest mage of all."

- Mage: ساحر كبير (saḥir kabir), which literally means a "big" or "great" wizard; in the novel it refers to an experienced and acclaimed wizard. Here I could have used ساحر عليم (saḥir 'alim), which means a "knowledgeable wizard," and exists in the Arabic repertoire in Qur'anic references to the wizards facing Moses in chapters al-A'raf and Yunus, verses 112 and 79 respectively. However, because of the negative cultural connotations associated with the term, I decided to use ساحر كبير.
- Wizard: ساحر (saḥir), which means a wizard who is experienced enough to gain his magical wand.

- c. Sorcerer: مشعوذ (musha‘widh), which means an “apprentice wizard,” without a wand.
- d. Weather-worker: محرك الطقس (muhrik al-taqs), one who can change the directions of wind and clouds.
- e. Enchanter: منشد (munshid), one who sings the sagas of heroes and wizards.
- f. Heal-all: معالج (ma‘lij), one who heals by spells and herbs. Sorcerer, weather worker, and enchanter are fairly equal in power and rank.
- g. Witch: ساحرة (sahira) is a female wizard.
- h. Wizard child: ساحر طفل (sahir tifi), a term given to Ged only in part one.

5.3 Translating Invented Words for Invented Animals, Herbs, and Objects

All five of the examples below were transliterated and then explained in footnotes.

- a. The Otak: الأوتاك
- b. The Werelight: الويرلايت
- c. The Periot leaves: أوراق نبات البيريوت الشافية (awraq nabat al-bayriut al-shafia)
- d. The language of the Kargs who attacked Ged’s village was again an invented language, so I likewise just transliterated it in Arabic. “Wuluha! Atwah!”: ولوها! أتواه
- e. The first spell in the book consists of some words the child Ged utters without understanding. Because the spells may repeat themselves in the coming books of the series, I thought it was better to keep them as they are. They are transliterated without any explanation, for there was none! Preserving the spells’ foreignness increases the credibility of the magical atmosphere.
Noth hierth malk man: نوث هيرث مالكمان
Hoilk han merth han!: هويلك هان ميرث هان!

A strategy of preservation and transliteration has been used in these cases.

5.4 Compound Nouns

Translating compound names whose constituent parts are not invented but become semantically loaded when unexpectedly combined together presented another challenge.

Examples are:

- a. “Earthsea” was transliterated and kept as it is because it was the proper name for this particular universe; a trademark. But on the inside cover I added the explanatory phrase بلاد البر والبحر (bilad al-bar wa-l-baḥr), which literally means “a place that consists of lands and seas.”
- b. Sparrowhawk is a small bird of prey whose name in Arabic is الميسان (al-maysan). It was used in transliteration to become سباروهوك because it is one of Ged’s names, and it is rather musical. This strategy is called preservation that tends towards foreignization.

5.5 Special difficulties

Translating the intricate word “shadow” has been another challenge. In the first chapters it meant a simply “shade”: a darkness cast upon the earth. This is why I translated it into ظل (zil). But this shadow turns into an external power dissociated from Ged’s body and acquires the ability to insert itself into other people’s bodies and act for them. Here it becomes شبح (shabah), a ghost. Then in the final chapters it follows Ged as a shadow that moves away from him as it pleases, doing what it wants. Here I had to come up with a different term, ظل شبحي (zil shabḥi), or a “shadow-like ghost.” During the lecture, a

respectable attendee suggested the word طَيْف (tayf) to literally mean “specter.” I did not use this word because it referred to something dream-like and romantic in a positive way, while the thing that attacked Ged was vicious.

5.6 Translating names of professors

Translating names of professors was another challenge. There are ten professors in the School of Wizards whose names indicate their powers or roles. Translating these telling character names and keeping the same significance needed consultation and wit:

Master Chanter: الأستاذ منشد (al-ustadh munshid).

Master Windkey: الأستاذ مفتاح الريح (al-ustadh miftah al-riḥ).

Master Herbal: الأستاذ عشبي (al-ustadh ‘ushbi).

Master Hand: الأستاذ كف (al-ustadh kaf).

Master Changer: الأستاذ المحول (al-ustadh al-maḥul), “he who can change.”

Master Door Keeper: الأستاذ حارس بوابة المدرسة (al-ustadh ḥaris bawabat al-madrasa).

Master Patternner: صاحب الأنساق (ṣaḥīb al-ansaq), “he who possesses the patterns.”

Master Summoner: الأستاذ المستحضر (al-ustadh al-mustahdir), “he who summons.”

Master Namer: صاحب الأسماء (ṣaḥīb al-asma’), “he who possesses the names.”

Archmage: الساحر الأكبر (al-sāḥir al-akbar), “the greatest of all mages.”

5.7 Additions of the translator

There are some footnotes in my translation that were not a direct translation of any textual elements, but rather helpful explanations. I intend to edit them and add them to the introduction when the time comes for a second edition.

- a. The first note explains the word “archipelago” in Arabic, which is a rather uncommon word. Because it is repeated several times in the novel and since it is the geographical shape of this invented universe, it is essential that the reader visualize it correctly. Thus, I thought of inserting this footnote:¹¹ الأرخيبيل هو أحد أشكال (21) سطح الأرض التي ترمز إلى مجموعة متجاورة ومتقاربة من الجزر (ص).

“An archipelago is one of the earth’s geographical formations and consists of adjacent groups of islands.”

- b. I also inserted a footnote to explain the concept of the “true name” of things in Earthsea. Though this is already explained in the introduction, I do not count much on the young readers to stop and read it. A footnote is perhaps much more immediate to them. Again, this addition does not give word-for-word equivalence, but a deeper kind of translation of the writer’s philosophy of the Earthsea world in general.¹²

الاسم الحقيقي للأشياء أو الأشخاص في الرواية هو الجوهر الذي يمكن من خلاله إحداث السحر أو التأثير (25) في أي شيء أو السيطرة عليه وحبسه في ماهيته (ص).

¹¹ ترجمة منى النُموري (القاهرة: مركز القومي للترجمة، سلسلة الإبداع القصصي، رقم ٢٠٠٠ “ساحر من إيرثسي” [أورسولا ك. لوجوين]

ص 21 (2015، 2548).

¹² Ibid., [ص 25].

- “In Earthsea, the true name of things or persons is the essence through which magic can be worked on anything or anyone, or be used to control or bind them.”
- c. Another line requiring explanation was “the Master Hand looked at the jewel that glittered on Ged’s palm, bright as the prize of a dragon’s hoard.”¹³ The idea of the dragon’s hoard refers to one of the basic tropes in fantasy genre; the hoard of the dragon is its protected treasure. The footnote gives information not provided in the text:¹⁴

في حكايات الفانتازيا للتنتين كنز من الجواهر الثمينة يحتفظ به في مكان من المستحيل الوصول له

“A dragon has a hoard of precious jewels that it keeps in an unreachable place.”

The strategy used in the three previous examples tends to make the source text clearer and the target text more acceptable and enjoyable to the reader. However, if those footnotes are deleted, no harm will be done to the source text. This strategy is called addition.

Now, three years after publishing *Earthsea*, I know I could still edit many a part and perhaps think of better solutions for some of the translational problems I encountered. In fact, right now I am in the middle of negotiating a translation of the second book in the series with the help of a talented young fantasy writer and translator, Ahmed Al-Mahdi, who was among the Center for Translation Studies lecture audience in 2016. With Al-Mahdi’s talent and passion for fantasy, and my academic background and accumulated experience in the speculative genres, perhaps the first part of *Earthsea* could be edited as we continue with translating the sequel.

5.8 Translating the Cover

A book cover is also a part of the text. Looking at *Earthsea*’s original covers, one can see the repetition of certain elements: dragons, falcons, the sea, a castle, a man with a stick and a shadow. The National Center for Translation asked a designer to work on something similar. The suggested design looked attractive generally, especially to an inexperienced reader. However, it could not “translate” the ideas conveyed by the text; in fact, it contradicted them. Though there was a dragon and a young man in the picture, something was seriously wrong with them. Ged is not a dragon knight or rider in the first book, so he cannot be pictured riding the dragon. More importantly, the dragon in the picture was very unlike the dragon of Pendor. The dragon of Pendor was ancient, cunning, free, and primitive, while the dragon in the illustration was young, strong, tamed, and armored. The other problem with the proposed cover was that it gave the impression that this was a children’s story while the novel, as we have discussed, is more complex than that.

In addition to the abovementioned mistakes that betrayed a designer who was both inexperienced in the field of fantasy and too lazy to exert any effort to remedy that, the whole illustration was reconstructed from other illustrations.

To create a suitable cover for the Arabic *Earthsea*, I had to find a young fantasy-lover artist who could understand the story and translate its elements into the design

¹³ Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 56.

¹⁴ [74 ص]. ساحر من إيرثسي، "ترجمة مني النموري، المركز القومي للترجمة"، إورسولا ك. لوجوين

(figure 1). I found such an artist in Mostafa Negm. In the following cover there are major elements of Ged's story: his cloak, stick, small boat, his faded features representing every young man or woman, and his courage in the face of the unknown. Moreover, the type of font Mostafa used to write the titles conveys a mysterious feeling.

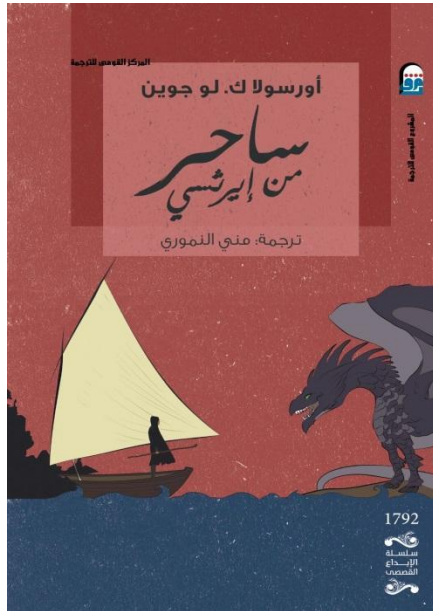


Figure 2. Arabic Earthsea cover by Moustafa Negm; a work much admired by Le Guin herself.

The timing of the publication of the Arabic translation of *A Wizard of Earthsea* is significant. Appearing in the midst of the phenomenal success of *Harry Potter* in Arabic, it indicates a direct influence of *Harry Potter* culture on Arabic fantasy culture, according to Even-Zohar's "polysystem theory." The strategies and solutions I used in the *Earthsea* translation vary (addition, deletion, transliteration, and so on) as do the major policies adopted (sometimes tending towards keeping the foreign elements of the source text, while at other times explaining a great deal so that the readers could follow the essential points as much as possible). The policies and strategies have one objective: to establish *Earthsea* as an important and influential work in the field of Arabic fantasy. Although it is an imperfect translation of a perfect book about a world full of wizardry and magic, this leaves room for other scholars of translation studies to tackle the *Earthsea* series and further enrich the literary translation field.

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