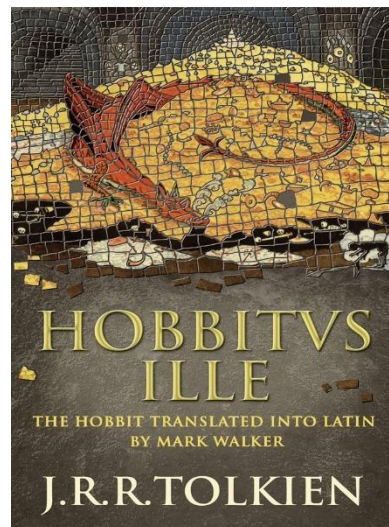


HOBBITVS ILLE

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, translated into Latin by Mark Walker

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I'm new to Latin, but I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Hobbitvs Ille* (It helped that I had read and heard it many times in English).

If you are experienced with Latin, at what level of proficiency would you say this book is written? Would it be suitable for students in Latin III or IV? If so, would you use it for whole class reading or for independent reading?

GEMS IN THE TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I knew I had encountered a kindred spirit as soon as I read this paragraph in the translator's introduction:

There is, as anyone who has taken the trouble to study Latin knows, a curious gap in the available reading material. On the one hand are simplified stories for classroom use, on the other the glories of high Latin literature – but remarkably little in between... What for the reader who just wants to read Latin – the very idea – for *fun*? ... it is a Latin text whose principal aim is to be read solely for the pleasure of reading. p. V (underlining mine)

He wrote the translation to be read for pleasure—the best way for students to voluntarily acquire language and stick with it.

Later, he explains that his aim in translating *The Hobbit* was:

... to present Tolkien's words as faithfully and as comprehensibly as possible for the enjoyment of contemporary Latinists. (p. VI)

The phrases jump out to anyone that is familiar with teaching with comprehensible input: “the pleasure of reading”, “comprehensibly”, and “for the enjoyment” of readers. Stephen Krashen couldn't have said it better. I've always liked *The Hobbit*, but as a new Latin learner, this approach of reading for enjoyment appealed to me. That's the way I believe language should be taught and that's the way I teach.

REASONS TO READ *THE HOBBIT* IN LATIN

Other reasons I was attracted to *HOBBITVS ILLE*:

- *The Hobbit* is well known, one of the most well-known children's books, a classic of children's literature and fantasy fiction.

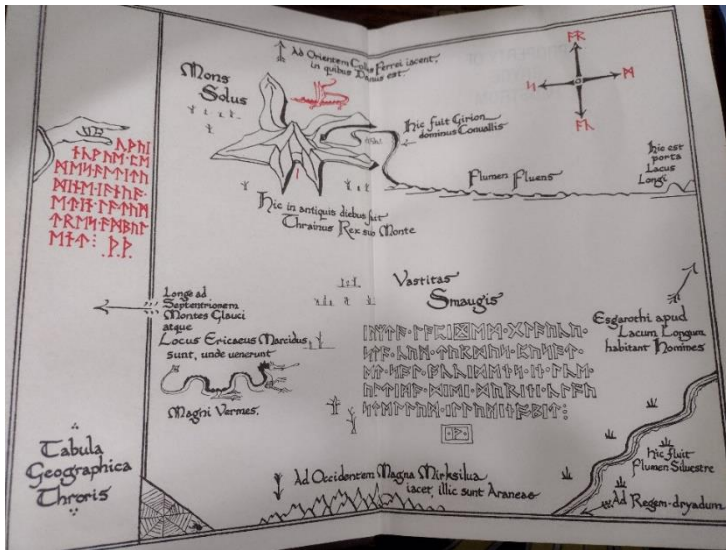
- Tolkien did not use trendy language or slang.
- Being written by an Oxford Don, the language use is eloquent.
- It was written for Tolkien's own children, so even though the vocabulary is not controlled *per se*, it is much simpler than classic Latin and therefore easier to read in translation.
- The expressions are eloquent, but uncomplicated and sound natural—many seem to be well-suited for rejoinders in a Latin class (See the upcoming section).
- Tolkien's translator, Mark Walker, shows he understands the Roman maxim **Repetitio mater studiorum est**, because it is by repetition we learn. Some words and expressions are repeated over and over. For example, I started noticing the word **nihilominus**, often translated as "nevertheless" when I was about a third of the way through the book. That word appears three times in two pages (pp. CLII-CLIII), and again soon thereafter (p. CLVIII) and it caught my attention.

Using that one word when the original English used several different expressions was helping me. In the English translation, Tolkien used several different words that are translated as **nihilominus** by Mark Walker. When I reread the book I noticed **nihilominus** all over. Here are just a few examples and the way this word was written in the original English:

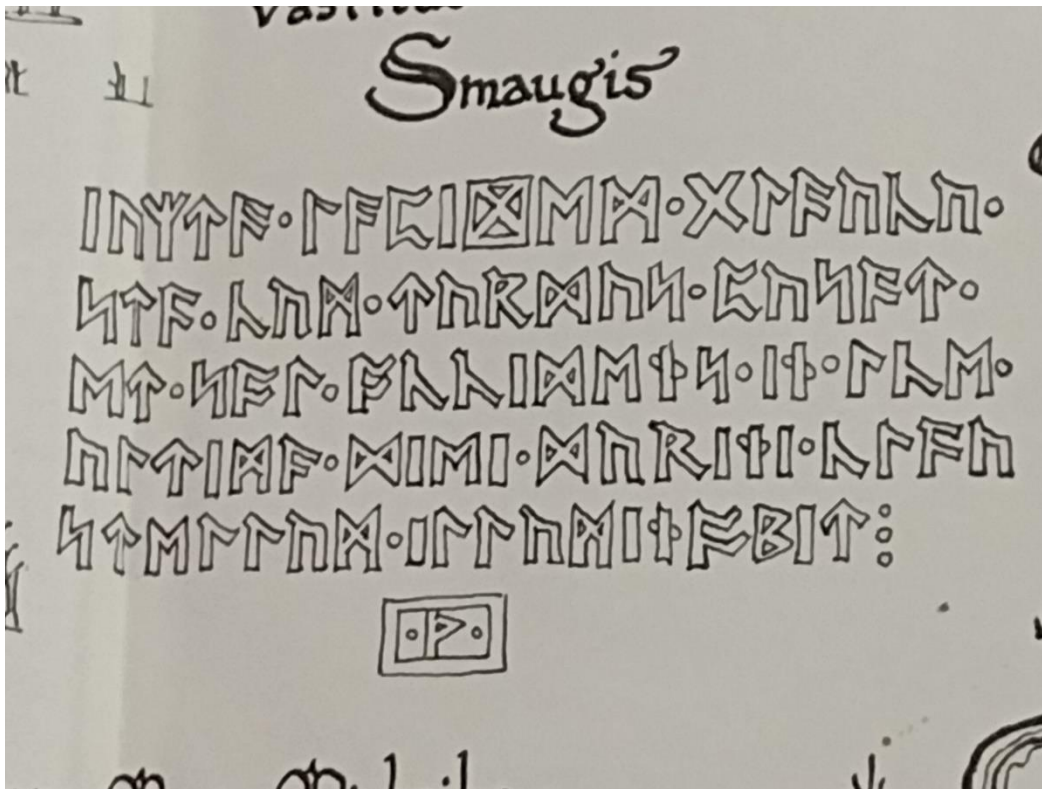
- **certainly** (p. XVI / p. 11)
- **still** (p. XVII / p. 11)
- **all the same** (p. XX / p. 14)
- **even so** (p. CLII / p. 153)
- **still** (p. CLII / p. 154)
- **all the same** (p. CLII / p. 154)
- **all the same** (p. CCLX / p. 266)
- **at the same time** (p. CCLXXIII / p. 279)
- **yet** (p. CCLXXIV / p. 280)
- **well** (p. CCLXXVII / p. 284)
- **anyway** (p. CCLXXVII / p. 284)
- **all the same** (p. CCLXXXII / p. 288)
- **yet** (P. CCXCVI / p. 304)
- **yet** (P. CCXCVII / p. 304)

In addition, these three factors **Attention to Detail, Rejoinders**, and **Interesting and Wise Sayings** drew me deeper into the novel and made me admire it even more the further I read.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

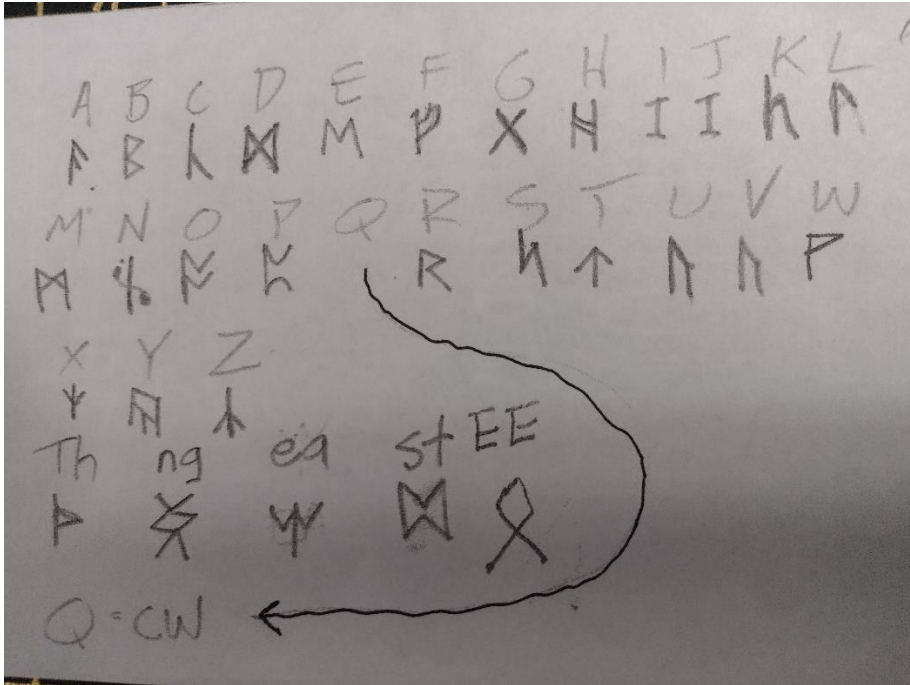


The work and attention to detail involved in the making of this book is impressive. Perhaps few readers of the English version of *The Hobbit* will have noticed that the language written with runes on Thorin's map are not written in an invented language, but in English. Once you know the rune code, you will be able to read the words on the map. Mark Walker, the translator, used those runes to write on the map in Latin using the same code invented by Tolkien.

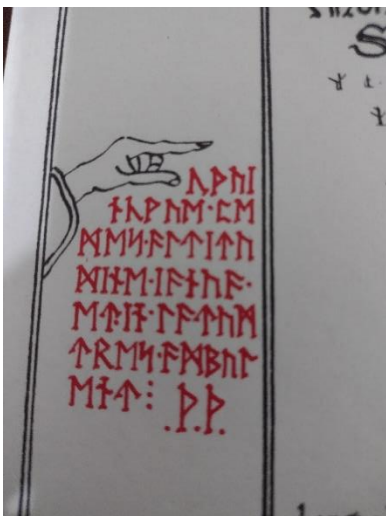


**iuxta lapidem glaucum
sta cum turdus pulsat
et sol occidens in luce
ultima Diei Durini
claustellum illuminabit.**

*Stand by the grey stone
 when the thrush knocks,
 and the setting sun
 with the last light of Durin's Day
 will shine upon the key-hole.*



Here is the code I wrote out years ago while reading *The Hobbit* in English. Many of the “runes” are just angular, flipped or sideways versions of English script—just look at B, E, H, M, R, S, T, and U for example. I was delighted that the editors of *HOBBITVS ILLE* went to the trouble of using the same rune code to write the “secret messages” in Latin on the map that Gandalf gave to Thorin.



Translating the runes into Latin:

**quinque pedes altitudine ianua et in latum tres
 ambulant.** (p, XXXIV)

Five feet high the door and three may walk abreast.

Convivium?

I was puzzled right from the start by the title of chapter 1 in Latin: *CONVIVIVM INOPINATVM* when I saw the word *convivium*. I remembered reading this passage in Cicero:

**Bene enim maiores accubitionem epularem amicorum, quia vitae
coniunctionem haberet, convivium nominaverunt**

I had assumed that *convivium* was a passé word in Latin, even in Cicero's time. But I was pleased it was used because what happens in that unexpected party matches closely with Cicero's description of a *convivium*. Turns out *convivium* is still used. My bad.

REJOINDERS

Here are 52 rejoinders, or short pithy responses, from *HOBBITVS ILLE* that would be handy for teachers or students to use and say. Students could blurt them out during class, especially during stories, or the teacher could say them to students. Either way, rejoinders cut down on the amount of English needed in Latin class. Read more about using REJOINDERS in class [here](#).

Page numbers with Roman numerals are from *HOBBITVS ILLE*, Harper Collins, 2012.

Page numbers with Arabic numbers are from *The Hobbit*, Easton Press, 1984.

bonum mane! (p. XVIII)	<i>Good morning!</i> (p. 12)
quid vis? (p. XVIII)	<i>What do you want? What do you wish? "What do you mean?"</i> (p. 12)
o me felicem! (p. XIX)	<i>Makes me happy! How happy I am! Good gracious me!</i>
me miserum! (p. XIX)	<i>Woe is me!</i>
scilicet! (p. XXX)	<i>Of course! Certainly!</i>
misellum salaputium (p. LI)	<i>Poor little blighter!</i> (Not a phrase from classical Latin)
noli interrumpere! (p. LVIII)	<i>Don't interrupt!</i>
tacite, tacite! Homines Boni! (p. LXIV)	<i>Hush, hush! Good people!</i>
	In class, I might change this to: tacite, tacite! Discipuli Boni! <i>Hush, hush! Good students!</i>
tibi servio! (p. LXXXVII)	<i>At your service!</i>
opportunitatem nobis da. (p. LXXXIX)	<i>Give us a chance.</i> (p. 86)
servus tuus. (p. CVI)	<i>Your servant, I am your servant.</i>
gerrae! (p. CX and p. CCXXV)	<i>Nonsense!</i> (p. 108) (This does not seem to be a classic Latin expression.)
quid agemus? (p. CXI)	<i>What shall we do? What are we going to do?</i>

válete quocumque valetis! (caput VII, p. CXXV)	<i>Farewell, wherever you fare! Goodbye, wherever you go!</i>
di me ament! (caput VII, p. CXL)	<i>Bless me! May the gods favor me!</i>
 nolite a semita abscedere! (caput VII, p. CXLVIII)	<i>Don't leave the path! (p. 150)</i>
postremus semper sum , quod non mihi placet. (p. CLIV)	<i>I'm always last and I don't like it. (p. 155)</i>
quodcumque agemus? (p. CLIX)	<i>Whatever shall we do? (p. 160)</i>
lente sed constanter (p. CLXXIII)	<i>Slowly but steadily (p. 176)</i>
nihil temporis nunc! (p. CLXXXVII)	<i>No time now! (p. 190)</i>
pro fidem! (p. CLXXXVII & p. CCXXXI)	<i>Upon my word! Bless me! (p. 191)</i> <i>Literally, "For the faith!" Used to emphasize sincerity or trustworthiness.</i>
pergite laborare! (p. CXC)	<i>Get on with the work! (p. 194)</i>
facite quod dico! (p. CXC)	<i>Do as I say! (p. 194)</i>
nihil temporis nunc! (p. CXCVI)	<i>No time now! (p. 200)</i>
pro fide! (p. CCXVI) <i>Literally, "For the faith!"</i>	<i>Good gracious! (p. 222) A way of expressing mild shock.</i>
quidcumque acturus sum? (p. CCXVI)	<i>Whatever am I going to do?</i>
feliciter tibi! (p. CCXXI)	<i>Good luck! (p. 225)</i>
qui es tu et unde venis, quaeso? (p. CCXXIX)	<i>Who are you and where do you come from, may I ask? (p. 235)</i>
melius est! (p. CCXXX)	<i>That's better! (p. 235)</i>
maxime! (p. CCXXX)	<i>Very well! Absolutely! Certainly! (p. 236)</i>
scientia tua est obsoleta. (p. CCXXXIII)	<i>Your information is antiquated. (p. 238)</i>
id coniecerim (p. CCXXXIII)	<i>I might have guessed it. (p. 238)</i>
ianuam claudite! (p. CCXXXVIII)	<i>Shut the door! (p. 244)</i>
quid postea? (p. CCXLVI)	<i>What next?</i>
vera dicis! (p. CCXLVI)	<i>You speak the truth!</i>
rectissime! (p. CCXLVIII)	<i>Quite right!</i>
me miserum! (p. CCXLIX)	<i>Dear me!</i>
aliquid insolitum fit! (p. CCLXII)	<i>Something strange is happening!</i>



ita credo (p. CCLXXIV)	<i>I believe it ("I dare say!") (p. 280)</i>
fiat lux! (p. CCLXXV)	<i>Let's have a light! (p. 281) Same as "There be light!" in Genesis 1.</i>
ita vero (p. CCLXXVI)	<i>Quite so! (p. 283)</i>
ita putau (p. CCLXXVII)	<i>I thought as much (p. 283)</i>
noli festinare (p. CCLXXVII & CCLXXXIII)	<i>Don't be so hasty! (p. 283), Not so hasty! (p. 289)</i> <i>Reminds me of the saying by Julius Caesar: festina lente Make haste slowly.</i>
macte virtute (p. CCLXXVIII)	<i>Well done! (p. 284)</i>
sunt semper plura de te quam aliquis expectat! (p. CCLXXVIII)	<i>There is always more about you than anyone expects! (p. 285)</i>
omnia in tempore! (p. CCLXXVIII)	<i>All in good time! (p. 285)</i>
me miserum! me miserum! (p. CCLXXXI)	<i>Dear me! Dear me! (p. 287)</i>
rebus etiam mutari licet (p. CCLXXXII)	<i>Things may change yet. (p. 288)</i>
iterim, vale! (p. CCLXXXIII)	<i>In the meanwhile, farewell! (p. 289)Thori</i>
Thorinus multos cognatos habuit (p. CCLXXXIV)	<i>Thorin had many relatives. (290)</i> <i>I didn't realize that the Latin word cognatos meant relatives.</i> <i>Makes sense because related words across different languages are cognates.</i>
desistite! (p. CCLXXXVI)	<i>Halt! (p. 292)</i>
benignissimus es (p. CCXCVII)	<i>Very kind of you (p. 304)</i>

INTERESTING AND WISE SAYINGS

These sayings from *HOBBITVS ILLE* seem wise or useful:

The page numbers come from these editions: *HOBBITVS ILLE*, HarperCollins, 2012, and *The Hobbit*, Easton Press, 1984.

est multum de eo quam divinatis, et multo magis quam ipse cognoscit. (p. XXXIII)

"There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself"

nunc est res inolita, sed de rebus quae sunt bonae habere atque de diebus qui sunt boni agere celeriter dici possunt, minime audiri, dum res incommodae, palpitantes, etiam crudeles, fabulam bonum fieri possint atque nihilominus diutiores narrati. (p. LXIV)

Now it is a strange thing, but things that are good to have and days that are good to spend are soon told about, and not much to listen to; while things that are uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome, may make a good tale and take a deal of telling anyway, (p. 61)

This reminds me of something a student said in a story we made up in class. He said he wanted to “write gory stories.” According to Tolkien, those kinds of “uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome” stories are more interesting.

domus eius fuit perfect, utrum tibi optime placuit cibus, aut somnus, aut labor, aut fabulas narrare, aut cantare, aut solum sedere et cogitare, aut mixtura iucunda omnium eorum. (p. LXV)

His house was perfect, whether you liked food, or sleep, or work, or story-telling, or singing, or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all. (p. 61)

I want to make my house this kind of house.

et thesaurum sapientiae atque dictionum sapientum, quas homines plerumque aut numquam audiuerunt aut quarum iam dudum obliti sunt, habent. (p. LXXXIV)

And they (Hobbits) have a fund of wisdom and wise sayings that men have mostly never heard or have forgotten long ago. (chapter 5, Riddles in the Dark, p. 81)

One goal I have for my Latin students is to give them “a fund of wisdom and wise sayings” from the treasury of tried-and-true ancient Latin wisdom. This is done with well-known Latin mottoes that are used as daily passwords at the classroom door.

subito in semita in fronte aliquae cervae albae apparuerunt, una cerva et hinnulei tam nivei quam cervus era ater. (p. CLVI)

Suddenly on the path ahead appeared some white deer, a hind and fawns as snowy white as the hart had been dark. (p. 157)

This remark reminds me of **La corza blanca** (*The White Deer/Doe/Hind*), a short story from Medieval Spain retold by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. His story was based on a Spanish legend about a beautiful shape-shifting trickster fairy. In European folklore a white deer was a harbinger of both good fortune and impending danger—both of which happened soon in *The Hobbit*.

nihilominus, est ventus malus qui pro nemine bene flat p. CCLX

It is an ill wind, all the same, that blows no one any good. (p. 266)

Seems like there are similar sayings in Latin but none come to mind at the moment...

quomodo vos sine amicitia benignitateque terrarum circum pascemini? (p. CCLXXIII)

How shall you be fed without the friendship and goodwill of the lands about you? (p.279)

Independent Americans railing against the culture would perhaps do well to keep this in mind. We can fight for our values, but maintaining the friendship and goodwill of those about us is important.

est plus boni in te quam tu intellegis (p. CCXCIV) *There is more in you of good than you know. (p. 301)*

si plus nostri cibum atque iucunditatem atque cantum maioris quam aurum aceruatam aestimet, orbis iucundior sit. (p. CCXCIV)

If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world. (p. 301)

So true. So true.

Nunc tu vero putas omnia facinora effugiaque tua casu ipso gest esse, quae tibi prodessent? (p. CCCX)

You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?