

BotNS in German

The Urth list — 31 messages, 11 voices, 03 Dec 2004

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4266>

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Hmpf MacSlow — 03 Dec 2004, 14:00

But first: print-on-demand Lexicon Urthus? Very good news. :-)

Yeah, I know I said I'd go back to lurking, but circumstances drive me to posting again... circumstances being these: I have this habit of giving my mom who, fortunately, is really open-minded my favourite book of the year for Christmas. By this self-imposed 'rule' I should have given her BotNS last year already, but I was somewhat daunted by the task of finding copies of the German version. (I usually read books that were written in English in English, but my mom reads mostly German, and I certainly wouldn't ask her to read *Wolfe* in English.) But this year, I've found copies of all the five volumes, and one of them, UotNS, arrived today. I've only had a quick glance at it so far, but even so it is painfully obvious that the translation is, well, less than satisfactory. Severian's '... what I've done *to* Urth.' has been turned into a '... what I've done *for* Urth*', Apheta is addressed as 'woman' instead of 'lady', etc. Unfortunately all the volumes have been translated by the same translator, so there's little hope of the other four volumes being any better.

Add to that the fact that the books have been out of print for years, and you can see why I as a German Wolfe fan feel both vaguely ashamed and enormously frustrated. I want to recommend this book to people I know, but it's unavailable! (I'm translating the book myself now, as 'therapy' for that frustration, but of course there is little chance of me finishing that work, much less finishing it within any kind of useful timeframe. It clearly is a mammoth task.)

In my opinion it is a crying shame that The Book of the New Sun is not currently available in a German edition. I don't know if there is any chance of us lowly readers influencing the decisions of big publishing houses, but maybe it's worth a try. Are there any other German Wolfe readers on this list? Maybe a few well-argued letters to Heyne, the 'current' publisher, and perhaps to Suhrkamp and Klett-Cotta, which IMO would be much better suited to Wolfe than Heyne is, couldn't hurt... and if we're asking for a reprint, we can just as well ask for a new translation, too...

The worst that can happen is that they tell us 'no', in which case we'll be no worse off than we are now.

Hmpf

Maru — 03 Dec 2004, 15:55 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

Good grief! How on earth do you plan to replicate his vocabulary? Does German even have an analogue to the OED? Will you add critical information? ~Maru Even if you stop tomorrow, I admire the scope of your dreams and devotion.

--- Hmpf MacSlow <hmpf1998 at gmx.net> wrote:

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Hmpf

Hmpf MacSlow — 03 Dec 2004, 16:51 · in reply to Maru

At 12:55 AM 12/4/2004, you wrote:

Good grief! How on earth do you plan to replicate his vocabulary?

Uhm... I dunno. Consulting a really good dictionary would be my first guess. Hey, I've only just started, and I'm not sure yet how serious I am. Thing is, I want to teach myself how to translate literature, and have in fact been doing the odd little translation job (not literature, though) on the side for a while now, and translating Gene Wolfe certainly is one hell of an efficient way of learning to translate.

Does German even have an analogue to the OED?

I'm pretty sure we do, and I'm pretty sure that theological, architectural, military etc. dictionaries would/will be a great help, too. I'm lucky, too, as I happen to live in the city where the Deutsche Bibliothek is - that's our equivalent to the Library of Congress. So, whatever book I might need, I could get - at least to look at. They don't give books away there. Our university library isn't half bad, either.

A more difficult problem might be that German, as far as I am aware of - and my German vocabulary is pretty big, even for a native speaker, or so I'm told - does not have as many foreign words as English. In English, you can always find a more complicated way to say something simple (E.g. 'barbican' for 'watchtower'). I'm not sure that's always possible in German. So, a bit of the special flavour of the book will definitely get lost. But then, something is always 'lost in translation'.

Will you add critical information?

What kind of information? I **have** no critical information! Besides... if I'm doing this, I'm doing it purely for my edification, not for publication. I mean, I sure wouldn't mind if someone wanted to publish it, but the problem - apart from the fact that there are probably better translators out there than me, and I'm not a recognized 'pro' - is that it's already been published. It's just out of print.

~Maru

Even if you stop tomorrow, I admire the scope of your dreams and devotion.

LOL... yeah, 'delusions of grandeur' is my middle name. I'm also thinking about planning a convention right now (not Wolfe-related). I should try to remember that I'm supposed to be a student... and that I need to set some time aside for uni, and for earning a living... *g*

Hmpf

Christopher Culver — 03 Dec 2004, 17:50 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

Have you written to Wolfe and asked for permission? Translating something requires the permission of the copyright holder, even if you do not intend on making any money from the work.

Christopher Culver

From: Hmpf MacSlow <hmpf1998 at gmx.net>:

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Maru — 03 Dec 2004, 17:50 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

What I meant was like exegesis, hermeunetics, critical interpretation... stuff like a dramatis personae, perhaps an introduction on just what was lost in translation, perhaps some background info on wolfe... etc. ~Maru And yeah, annoying as it is sometimes, the promiscuity of English comes in handy sometimes.

--- Hmpf MacSlow <hmpf1998 at gmx.net> wrote:

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time aside for uni, and for earning a living... *g*

Hmpf

James Wynn — 03 Dec 2004, 18:06 · in reply to Christopher Culver

Have you written to Wolfe and asked for permission? Translating something requires the permission of the copyright holder, even if you do not intend on making any money from the work.

Even if you don't publish it? Maybe Hmpf just a good copy for Mom to read?

Hmpf MacSlow — 04 Dec 2004, 01:11 · in reply to James Wynn

At 03:06 AM 12/4/2004, you wrote:

Have you written to Wolfe and asked for permission? Translating something requires the permission of the copyright holder, even if you do not intend on making any money from the work.

Even if you don't publish it? Maybe Hmpf just a good copy for Mom to read?

AFAIK I don't need a permission to translate it for purely my own (and possibly, you're right, my mom's) use. I mean, I'm doing this purely for practice, really.

Hmpf

Matthew Malthouse — 04 Dec 2004, 01:23 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

At 00:51 04/12/2004, Hmpf MacSlow wrote:

In English, you can always find a more complicated way to say something simple (E.g. 'barbican' for 'watchtower').

Except that barbican and watchtower each have specific and disparate meanings which should bring quite different images to a reader's mind.

Matthew

Matthew Malthouse — 04 Dec 2004, 01:44 · in reply to James Wynn

At 02:06 04/12/2004, you wrote:

Have you written to Wolfe and asked for permission? Translating something requires the permission of the copyright holder, even if you do not intend on making any money from the work.

Even if you don't publish it? Maybe Hmpf just a good copy for Mom to read?

The distinction is indeed in publication not profit.

A translation as a private exercise requires no permission but even placing such a document in a university library would.

Article 8 of the Berne Convention:

Authors of literary and artistic works protected by this Convention shall enjoy the exclusive right of making and of authorising the translation of their works throughout the term of protection of their rights in the original works.

Their "rights in the original works" being elsewhere defined.

Complications can arise because the various signatory states implement the convention by national law and there are consequently differences in interpretation. Under United Kingdom statute http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga_19880048_en_1.htm giving a fair copy of your translation to mother might indeed be considered a form of publication but I have a fair

confidence that any attempt to prosecute on such a basis would be judged mischievous, possibly malicious and certainly not in the public interest.

Matthew

Hmpf MacSlow — 04 Dec 2004, 01:53 · in reply to Matthew Malthouse

At 10:19 AM 12/4/2004, you wrote:

At 00:51 04/12/2004, Hmpf MacSlow wrote:

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Except that barbican and watchtower each have specific and disparate meanings which should bring quite different images to a reader's mind.

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Okay... but my point kind of was - we don't have two different words for it in German. (Though of course I'll only know for sure when I've checked a specialised dictionary, I guess. There may be a word I just don't know.)

For the sake of curiosity: what *is* the difference? All my dictionary would offer me for 'barbican' (I never looked it up before I had to translate it, being used to not understanding the occasional word in Wolfe, and usually just going by context) was, well, 'watchtower'.

Hmpf - always eager to learn new English vocabulary

Matthew Malthouse — 04 Dec 2004, 04:34 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

At 09:53 04/12/2004, you wrote:

At 10:19 AM 12/4/2004, you wrote:

At 00:51 04/12/2004, Hmpf MacSlow wrote:

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Barbican is specifically a defensive construction protecting a gate. It might be a single tower or formed of several, it might have no individual towers at all but be a massive projection no higher than the walls. Some are so extensive that they might be considered forts or castles in their own right were it not for their function in relation to a superior structure such as a fortress, castle, city, monastery and so on.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbican>

A watchtower is also defined by function: to keep watch or guard. Its defining characteristic in terms of fortifications would be height and access, or perhaps vantage if topography provides the height. There might also be strength and defensibility but those are not direct requirements. The medieval towers along the Pyreneese between France and Spain would be watchtowers although few if any are as large or tall as Baldanders' castle is described.

So when Severian tells of Roche "And try to get through the barbican without a safe conduct? They'd send to Master Guloes." it is a gate both fortified and guarded.

(That was easy, being on the first page, but reminds me that I'd love an electronically searchable text!)

Wolfe's use of language is subtle and sometimes Baroque but I can't think of an example where precision is sacrificed to ornament. If he uses two words for apparently similar things I think one can be confident that he intends to evoke different images in the reader's mind.

Matthew

James Wynn — 04 Dec 2004, 11:05 · in reply to Matthew Malthouse

(That was easy, being on the first page, but reminds me that I'd love an electronically searchable text!)

Does the British Amazon.com have a Search Inside feature yet?

I've found the one available on the American side invaluable.

Unfortunately after a certain number of page views it won't let me read whole pages from the same book anymore. But it will let me search words and provide excerpts indefinitely. So as long as I know what I'm looking for or if I have a copy of the book handy...

Personally, I'd be glad to split up the task of copying Wolfe's novels to a text document, but that would probably be a violation of copyright in itself.

~ Crush

James Wynn — 04 Dec 2004, 11:16 · in reply to James Wynn

Personally, I'd be glad to split up the task of copying Wolfe's novels to a text document, but that would probably be a violation of copyright in itself.

Of course I mean "electronic text document"

~ Crush

Maru — 04 Dec 2004, 11:54 · in reply to James Wynn

Well... I probably shouldn't say this, but floating around on the edonkey network is a zip file containing the BotNS, the BotLS, teh doctor death & island stories, war beneath the tree & seven american nights. ~Maru

--- James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:
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text document, but that would probably be a violation of
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Stanisław Bocian — 05 Dec 2004, 14:19 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

Saturday, December 4, 2004, 10:53:03 AM, Hmpf MacSlow wrote:

HM> Okay... but my point kind of was - we don't have two different words for it HM> in German.
(Though of course I'll only know for sure when I've checked a HM> specialised dictionary, I
guess. There may be a word I just don't know.)

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HM> would offer me for 'barbican' (I never looked it up before I had to
HM> translate it, being used to not understanding the occasional word in Wolfe, HM> and
usually just going by context) was, well, 'watchtower'.

HM> Hmpf - always eager to learn new English vocabulary

Barbican according to Oxford English Dictionary

barbican 1: 1. An outer fortification or defence to a city or castle, esp. a double tower erected
over a gate or bridge; often made strong and lofty, and serving as a watch-tower. b. Retained
as name of a street in London. †2. A temporary wooden tower or bulwark. †3. A loophole in the
wall of a castle or city, through which missiles might be discharged. Obs.

According to my dictionaries, the German for barbican is Barbakane, die; Torvorwerk, das

Some photos and a drawing of a Barbican in Cracow (Barbakan in Polish)

http://www.wawel.net/images/forty/archiw_miasto/1.htm

<http://www.wawel.net/images/forty/styczen2003/2.htm>

<http://www.wawel.net/images/forty/styczen2003/1.htm>

<http://www.wawel.net/images/forty/styczen2003/3.htm>

<http://www.wawel.net/wojsko.htm>

Stanisław Bocian

Startuj z INTERIA.PL!!! >>> <http://link.interia.pl/f1837>

Hmpf MacSlow — 05 Dec 2004, 14:43 · in reply to Stanisław Bocian

According to my dictionaries, the German for barbican is
Barbakane, die; Torvorwerk, das

Wow. Methinks I need a better dictionary!

But, as I said, checking all kinds of dictionaries at the university library and the Deutsche

Bibliothek will probably help a lot. For the time being, I just put the 'strange' words in brackets behind my temporary translations of them. When I've collected enough of them I'll make a trip to the library to check them all.

Just curious: how well known is the word 'barbican' among native speakers of English with an 'advanced' vocabulary? My German vocabulary is pretty extensive, or so I'm told - I'm a native speaker, I've always read a lot, I've had thirteen years of 'normal' school, five years of university, three and a half years of professional training as a goldsmith (including art history classes), I visit museums and am interested in all kinds of 'cultural stuff' - yet I've never in my life heard or read the word 'Barbakane' anywhere, I think.

(Part of the 'problem' may be that I've been reading more English than German for years now...)

I'm just curious if that word, and others that Wolfe is using, could be said to be slightly more 'common' in English than they are in German, or if they're just as obscure.

Hmpf

maru — 05 Dec 2004, 15:00 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

Well, barbican, to me, is pretty familiar- familiar enough I didn't even notice that it was supposed to be obscure. This is probably because I used to read a lot about castles and barbican is about the only other word used to describe 'gate'. But some are pretty obscure- previously I'd never seen 'autarch' used as a noun (only as a small area of political theory-'autarchy') & I'm still not sure if 'licitor' is a real word. And 'cacogen'? Dunno. ~Maru

Hmpf MacSlow wrote:

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Hmpf

Hmpf MacSlow — 05 Dec 2004, 15:01 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

I'm just curious if that word, and others that Wolfe is using, could be said to be slightly more 'common' in English than they are in German, or if they're just as obscure.

I just thought of one thing that seems to indicate that 'Barbakane/barbican' may be more obscure in German than in English: the fact that my English-German dictionary (PONS Globalwörterbuch in two volumes) does not know the word 'Barbakane' - I tried to look it up in the German-to-English volume - but *does* know 'barbican'.

This, of course, would confront the translator with an interesting conundrum: choose the exact translation, 'Barbakane', and risk that (if cases like that are frequent) the resulting German text will be hugely more obscure to German readers than to English readers; or choose an approximate translation that will lose the special flavour but possibly convey the meaning better to German readers? I've always held that, even or perhaps especially in the light of my not understanding quite a few words in TBotNS, these words still were essential to the book's effect. Like Elvish and other strange languages in Tolkien's works, the obscure and archaic words in Wolfe's help to create **atmosphere**, they help to make Urth feel strange, different from our present world, but real, as well. Since they are real words that even if we do not understand them anymore carry a kind of diffuse memory of past times, they also give us an impression of the depth of time. I wouldn't want to lose that in a translation, but on the other hand, I wouldn't want a German version of the text be that much more inaccessible than the original...

Well... fortunately for me, I'm only doing this translation for myself and not for other readers. This way, my decision doesn't really carry that much weight. **g**

Hmpf

Hmpf MacSlow — 05 Dec 2004, 15:03 · in reply to maru

At 11:59 PM 12/5/2004, you wrote:

Well, barbican, to me, is pretty familiar- familiar enough I didn't even notice that it was supposed to be obscure. This is probably because I used to read a lot about castles and barbican is about the only other word used to describe 'gate'. But some are pretty obscure- previously I'd never seen 'autarch' used as a noun (only as a small area of political theory-'autarchy') & I'm still not sure if 'licitor' is a real word.

AFAIK, a licitor was some kind of Roman official.

Autarch, I think, may be Wolfe's creation, though. It's 'Autarch' in the German translation, too.

Okay, and it definitely looks like the German version of the word is more obscure...

Well, of course there's still the option of translating it as 'Torvorwerk', but that would also lose the flavour...

Hmpf

maru — 05 Dec 2004, 15:06 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

Shouldn't that be 'Autark'?

~Maru

Just seems like having a k is the way to germanicise it.

Hmpf MacSlow wrote:

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Hmpf

Matthew Malthouse — 05 Dec 2004, 15:10 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

At 22:42 05/12/2004, you wrote:

Just curious: how well known is the word 'barbican' among native speakers of English with an 'advanced' vocabulary?

I suspect that this is going to vary with location but for English English speakers I'd have thought the word if not commonplace at least not particularly rare.

A number of cities other than London have areas and institutions named Barbican because of a historic link with such a structure, Plymouth, Gloucester and York immediately come to mind.

Matthew

Hmpf MacSlow — 05 Dec 2004, 15:11 · in reply to maru

At 12:05 AM 12/6/2004, you wrote:

Shouldn't that be 'Autark'?

~Maru

Just seems like having a k is the way to germanicise it.

Nope. We like 'ch', in Germany. ;-) We also have 'Monarch' - as well as 'Monarchie', 'Hierarchie', etc.

Interestingly, 'autark' does exist as a German word - but it's an adjective and it means 'self-sufficient'.

Hmpf

Matthew Malthouse — 05 Dec 2004, 15:23 · in reply to maru

At 22:59 05/12/2004, you wrote:
'lictor'

Dictionary.com : A Roman functionary who carried fasces when attending a magistrate in public appearances.

Fasces; A bundle of rods bound together around an ax with the blade projecting, carried before ancient Roman magistrates as an emblem of authority.

So Severian being what the mob might term an official enforcer is quite reasonably termed a lictor; most especially when he describes attending the Archon in court because of the the magisterial nature of that duty.

For cacogen there is no direct reference but the adjectival form cacogenic means pertaining to or causing degeneration in the offspring produced.

Now as the servants of the servants (of the servants?) of the Increate, each are created and with each creation each is debased from their creators.

Interestingly Severian knows them by that name long before he has any inkling of their nature. A very erudite reader (more clever than I) might from that word and other hints have divined that facet of their nature before it is made clear to Severian.

Matthew

Matthew Malthouse — 05 Dec 2004, 15:50 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

At 23:03 05/12/2004, you wrote:

Autarch, I think, may be Wolfe's creation, though. It's 'Autarch' in the German translation, too.

No, the meaning given in the book "self ruler" is actually very accurate and more literally accurate than the usual meaning given of sole or single ruler. Or perhaps ruler of the whole contrast Tetrach, ruler of a fourth part. It's the form that Wolfe uses that is odd

Autarchy is a political system governed by a single individual, also autarky and autocracy.

There is a wonderful Lupine irony there because the Autarch is not singular but legion.

\Au"tar*chy\, n. [Gr. — independence; a'yto`'s self + 'arkei^n to be sufficient.] Self-sufficiency. [Obs.] --Milton.

<http://www.hyperdictionary.com/search.aspx?define=autarchy>

Now it's interesting to me that the alternative "monarch" which started with the same political meaning, the rule of one, would not have the same weight because subsequent changes in the office mean that, at least in the West, remaining monarchs are emphatically not autarchs there not having been a working autocracy since the fall of the Tzars.

Yes Wolfe does use the word monarch. He uses it colloquially "monarch of bears" as we might say "king of beasts" - Wolfe does not have people of Urth describe Severian as "king" but the cacogens use that word for him. Then monarch occurs in Severian's dream of Master Malrubius where he is asked to set out the forms of government and again in describing Typhon. Perhaps perversely it seems that both instances one is intended to read absolute ruler as in autarch rather than the new-fangled constitutional variety so I suppose that these monarchs, the first

abstract the second historic, are so called to distinguish them from the Autarch of the Commonwealth.

Matthew

Matthew Malthouse — 05 Dec 2004, 15:52 · in reply to Hmpf MacSlow

At 23:11 05/12/2004, you wrote:

Interestingly, 'autark' does exist as a German word - but it's an adjective and it means 'self-sufficient'.

Wow! The same sense in which Milton used "autarchy" in English in the 17C.

Matthew

Dan Rabin — 05 Dec 2004, 21:23 · in reply to Matthew Malthouse

Hmpf MacSlow asks about the familiarity of the word "barbican" to native speakers of English. It's a really important question, because Wolfe's use of unfamiliar words and neologisms is an essential part of the style he adopted for *The Book of the New Sun*. It gives a feeling of remoteness in time and place.

Wolfe discusses his choice of words in his "translator's notes" at the ends of the volumes. These are worth considering.

I've noticed several categories of odd words in TBotNS. I'll comment on how these categories affect me as a native reader of English with a good vocabulary, born and raised in the United States of America in the late 20th century:

1. Authentic English archaisms, especially from subjects no longer much studied. "Barbican" is in this category, as are "falchion" and "destrier". I have to look these up, but it's possible to get a lot from context, such as "barbican" and "bartizan" being parts of defensive walls, "falchion" being a type of sword-like weapon, "arbalest" being something like a crossbow, "destrier" having the role of a horse, and so forth. Is "hetman" in this category?

2. Derivations from Latin or Greek scientific terminology, such as "baluchither" from "baluchitherium" or "smilodon" taken as is. "Arctother" might be in this class. These are decipherable if one has seen the science. Here the effect is that things from our fossilized past are everyday animals in Severian's time and place. Wolfe-as-"translator" comments on this technique.

3. Latin and Greek neologisms or rarities, such as "alghedonic" ("pain-pleasure"), "chrisos" ("gold"?), "archon" (ruler), "cacogen" ("ugly origin"?), "hierodule" ("holy slave")
Wolfe-as-translator says he uses Latin to represent languages that seem learned but extinct to Severian (as in the name "Terminus Est"). Unfamiliar words with classical roots can at best be decoded by present-day readers--they give the feeling that Severian's environment retains much that is ancient, like coming across a Greek or Roman ruin in the middle of a European town (something we don't have here in America).

It's worth noting that English went through a period a few hundred years ago of introducing Classical terms into the language, many of which have fallen by the wayside, but many of which remain. I have the impression that German prefers not to make Classical borrowings, but the cultural relationship of Classical civilization to the reader's milieu is probably much the same for German as for English.

4. Authentic religious and philosophical terms: "theodicy", "theanthropos", "monstrance"; occasional Hebraisms ("Adonai"). I'm not familiar with Christian theology, but here again I'm generally able to deduce the subject of discourse from context without being precisely correct.

Now I have a question: is "pinakotheken" recognizable in contemporary German? If so, it certainly shouldn't be translated as itself! It's very obscure in English, and serves to give the feeling that Severian's milieu has some very unfamiliar names for very familiar things. Odd, though, that the word occurs near the episode in Ultan's library, which is called a "library", not a "bibliothek".

Since we've discussed Tolkien recently, it's worth noting that

A. Wolfe corresponded with Tolkien concerning the etymology of "warg", B. Tolkien played this game of preserving linguistic relationships across a "translation", except he actually invented some of the languages of the imaginary locale. He knew that a Gondorian accent in Westron sounded archaic and elevated to Hobbits of the Shire, and he knew that Galadriel's chant "Namarie" was in a poetic register of Quenya. Nobody like Tolkien, not in *my* Book of Gold anyhow.

-- Dan Rabin

James Wynn — 06 Dec 2004, 02:14 · in reply to Dan Rabin

Regarding the problems in translating Wolfe in to other languages, is it the case that French and Germans *do not* borrow from other languages? I understand that the French have a governmental standards board that determines whether words are "French" or not but does this prohibit French or Germans from using them in literature?

I ask this because in "Castle of the Otter/Days" Wolfe compares his use of obscure words to the use of science fictiony made-up words. Would there really be a problem with using a word like "barbicon" if no exact such word existed in German?

~ Crush

Stanisław Bocian — 06 Dec 2004, 03:21 · in reply to Dan Rabin

Monday, December 6, 2004, 6:23:31 AM, Dan Rabin wrote:

DR> Is "hetman" in this category?

According to Oxford English Dictionary

"hetman 1: A captain or military commander in Poland and countries formerly united or subject to it; whence subsequently retained as a title among the Cossacks. Under the suzerainty of Poland, 1592-1654, 'the hetman of the Cossacks' was a semi-independent prince or viceroy. His title and authority were at first continued after the acceptance of Russian suzerainty by the Cossacks in 1654; but the power and privileges of the office were gradually curtailed and abolished. In the late 19th c. the title 'Hetman (ataman) of all the Cossacks' was an appanage of the Czar, who was represented by a 'hetman by delegation', for each of the territorial divisions. Subordinate Cossack chiefs had also the title (ataman). Hence "hetmanate", "hetmanship"

According to Polish dictionaries, "hetman" comes from a Czech word "hejtman" meaning

commander, headman, which in turn comes from older German Hoefftmann or Heubtmann (modern der Hauptmann - captain, leader).

In Poland till XVIII century a Hetman was a Commander-in-chief. (There were four of them - Grand and Field Hetmans for Crown of Poland and for Grand Duchy of Lithuania.) Among Cossacks ataman was any leader, not necessarily a Commander-in-chief.

It is a favorite word of Jack Vance, used usually to mean a headman of a primitive tribe or village. Its use by Wolfe is clearly a kind of homage to Jack Vance (cf. deodand), since the village hetman in the "Sword of the Lictor" is a very Vancian character. There are many just such village hetmans in books of Vance, from the Dying Earth to Ports of Call.

Jack Vance, the Dying Earth, Guyal of S

"A gaggle of surly louts appeared and surrounded him with expressions of curiosity. Guyal, no less than the villagers, had questions to ask, but none would speak till the hetman strode up-a burly man who wore a shaggy fur hat, a cloak of brown fur and a bristling beard, so that it was hard to see where one ended and the other began. He exuded a rancid odor which displeased Guyal, who, from motives of courtesy, kept his distaste concealed.

"Where go you?" asked the hetman.

"I wish to cross the mountains to the Museum of Man," said Guyal. "Which way does the trail lead?"

The hetman pointed out a notch on the silhouette of the mountains. "There is Omona Gap, which is the shortest and best route, though there is no trail. None comes and none goes, since when you pass the Gap, you walk an unknown land. And with no traffic there manifestly need be no trail."

The news did not cheer Guyal. "How then is it known that Omona Gap is on the way to the Museum?"

The hetman shrugged. "Such is our tradition."

Guyal turned his head at a hoarse snuffling and saw a pen of woven wattles. In a litter of filth and matted straw stood a number of hulking men eight or nine feet tall. They were naked, with shocks of dirty yellow hair and watery blue eyes. They had waxy faces and expressions of crass stupidity. As Guyal watched, one of them ambled to a trough and noisily began gulping gray mash.

Guyal said, "What manner of things are these?" The hetman blinked in amusement to Guyal's naivete. "Those are our oasts, naturally." And he gestured in disapprobation at Guyal's white horse. "Never have I seen a stranger oast than the one you bestride. Ours carry us easier and appear to be less vicious; in addition no flesh is more delicious than oast properly braised and kettled."

Standing close, he fondled the metal of Guyal's saddle and the red and yellow embroidered quilt. "Your deckings however are rich and of superb quality. I will therefore bestow you my large and weighty oast in return for this creature with its accoutrements." Guyal politely declared himself satisfied with his present mount, and the hetman shrugged his shoulders."

Additionally notice the use of giants as mounts.

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Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 06 Dec 2004, 08:09 · in reply to James Wynn

Not allowing a language to change is the surest way to make it irrelevant. That's why all the moaning about the death of the english language makes me laugh. IMO it's as vital a language as ever because it's mutable. An obsession with words is like loving a dress more than the woman it adorns. Fortunately for us, Wolfe loves the woman AND has exceptional taste in dresses.(this metaphor of course is gender reversible) As far as German and English, they are closely related in both vocabulary and in sentence structure, closer than english is to any romance language. With a little digging I think a good translation would be doable. Where there are latin, greek, and hebrew words, just use them as is. The equivalents to obscure english words should be easily available, (as in the barbican example). Getting the right feel might be hard, since German is such a straightforward language, and Wolfe is anything and everything but. Then, if it was easy, someone probably would have done it by now, huh?

Don

On Monday, December 6, 2004, at 02:14 AM, James Wynn wrote:
Regarding the problems in translating Wolfe in to other languages, is it the case that French and Germans *do not* borrow from other languages? I understand that the French have a governmental standards board the determines whether words are "French" or not but does this prohibit French or Germans from using them in literature?

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~ Crush

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 06 Dec 2004, 11:41 · in reply to Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

James:

French does indeed borrow words, at least from English, like fer example "le week-end." French academic purists rail against such things. Probably the funniest example arose when they damned "le pique-nique," which came back to hit them in the face - the English word "picnic" was a borrowing from an old French word.

Matthew:

Whatever else "cacogen" may mean, it's a dead cert. that GW was very much conscious of its originary sense, "shit-born."

--Dan'l

Andrew Bollen — 06 Dec 2004, 11:56 · in reply to James Wynn

Crush says:

Regarding the problems in translating Wolfe in to other languages, is it the case that French and Germans *do not* borrow from other languages? I understand that the French have a governmental standards board the determines whether words are "French" or not but does this prohibit French or Germans from using them in literature?

I ask this because in "Castle of the Otter/Days" Wolfe compares his use of obscure words to the use of science fictiony made-up words. Would there really be a problem with using a word like "barbicon" if no exact such word existed in German?

The biggest problem might be what to do with "Baldanders", who I think is a reasonably well-known chracter in German literature.