"For it's all in some language I don't know": "Jabberwocky" in Translation

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Translation is at the heart of "Jabberwocky." In the first chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass*[1], Alice (in what is already an act of interpretation) identifies "Jabberwocky" as a piece of writing, "in some language I don't know" (190). Next, Alice cleverly mirror-reverses the text, a step which allows her to spell out the poem, even if she finds it "*rather* hard to understand". The reading fills her "head with ideas," where the only thing she is sure of is that "*somebody* killed *something*" (197). But she enjoys it: "it seems very pretty." Alice in this situation is like any reader and novice language learner. She struggles to translate the poem, to make sense of it as far she can, and eventually, in chapter six, she asks Humpty Dumpty to help explain the poem and the "hard words." A language lesson ensues. Characteristically, perhaps, for some types of language instruction, his explication has actually nothing to do with the content of "Jabberwocky," but focuses entirely on details of vocabulary (although, arguably, each word in turn gives rise to its own mini-narrative). Besides the parodic effect, it is an approach that privileges the technical translation of single words over story. Thus, "Jabberwocky" in itself and as narrative turns out to be unimportant for the plot development of *Through the Looking-Glass*. This is no doubt a reason – along with the poem's complexity – why many translators of *Through the Looking-Glass* have chosen *not to* translate "Jabberwocky." For strictly speaking, it is not necessary for the plot, and as we shall see in some of the commentaries, the language-play and translation games can be expressed more or less successfully in alternative ways. The main quality

1 We will use abbreviated titles for both Alice books: *Through the Looking-Glass* for *Through the Looking-glass, and What Alice Found There* and *Alice in Wonderland* instead of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

of "Jabberwocky" is not the story (fine as it is), but the enjoyment in language it provides, and the way in which it prompts further translation, creativity, and reflection.

In that capacity "Jabberwocky" goes beyond the book. So, just as *Through the Looking-Glass* can do without "Jabberwocky" from the point of view of storytelling (as witnessed in some translations and versions in English), the opposite is true as well: "Jabberwocky" is larger than the book. While it certainly comes to its fullest expression in the context of *Through the Looking-Glass*, it does work quite well independently too. Already in *Mischmasch*, Carroll's hand-written family periodical, the first four lines appear for the first time as "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry." Here too the translation context is inscribed. In this proto-"Jabberwocky" Carroll helpfully provides the verse with a glossary, where the definitions partly correspond and overlap with the translations offered by Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Just like with Humpty Dumpty's explications, the translations in *Mischmasch* are actually integral to the poem itself; they are an essential part of the reading experience. In addition, Carroll gave "Jabberwocky" an extratextual afterlife as well, by referring to it again – notably in *The Hunting of the Snark* – and by offering new interpretations of the nonsense words (ref). Carroll also encouraged others to translate "Jabberwocky" separately into Latin, Greek and German (see Miller, Panaou, and Brown respectively, in this volume).

Post Carroll, "Jabberwocky" has continued to stimulate translation and exegesis, the most influential contribution no doubt being Martin Gardner's *The Annotated Alice*, first published in 1960, and translated into half a dozen languages. In *The Annotated Alice* the annotations to "Jabberwocky" take up far more space than the poem itself (several pages, in fact). All of the nonsense words are copiously explicated and given alternative meanings and etymologies. As we can see in many of the commentaries in this volume, Gardner's annotations, either in translation or directly from one of the numerous English editions, have had a decisive impact, since it first appeared, on how "Jabberwocky" has been translated. There is reason to believe that for many translators and interested readers *The Annotated Alice* has worked more or less as a dictionary of Carrollian neologisms. This is for better and worse. There is no arguing that *The Annotated Alice* boosted the status of Carroll's work from the 1960's and on, and also provided necessary context and insight. At the same the notes do defuse some of the nonsense; they provide an easy way out for some translators, who may prefer word to word equivalence rather than try to catch the spirit of the poem. This is something that some of the commentators have noted in their analyses (among others, Alaca on the Turkish translations, and Malilang on the Indonesian). But

the most important point to be made here is of course that Gardner's pioneering work on the Alice books, web pages devoted to the poem, and a number of studies on translations of "Jabberwocky" into different languages, have contributed to iconic status of the poem as an object of translation and as a critical touchstone in Carroll scholarship, Translation Studies, theories of nonsense, and children's literature research (see bibliographies under respective commentary).

Yet, despite its undeniable importance, the 150-year history of "Jabberwocky" in translation (1871-2021) has not been told – until now, that is! It is precisely, such an overview that we propose to achieve with this volume – the first to assemble scholars, critics, translators from across the world to comment on one or more translations of "Jabberwocky" into their own language. For the first time, it will be possible to compare translation strategies and solutions between more than 40 different languages. Having said that, it is true that this "Jabberwocky" companion does not provide a comprehensive account. The material is far too great for that. Some languages, like Spanish, French, and Russian, can boast myriad trans- lations of *Through the Looking-Glass.* Moreover, if one includes stand-alone translations, it becomes almost impossible to keep track.

Instead, the ambition here has been to select one or a few important and critically interesting translations from each language that has a "Jabberwocky," old or new. Another selection criterion has been to prioritize translations that have appeared in complete and unabridged versions of *Through the Looking-Glass.* This is important in order to shed light on how translators have dealt with Alice's and Humpty Dumpty's own "translations" of the poem. It is one thing to translate just the poem, and quite another to make it work with Humpty Dumpty's explanations. In a few cases, however, where we have been unable to find an Alice-contextualized "Jabberwocky," we have included stand-alone translations. For instance, the very first translations of "Jabberwocky" were independent exercises in German and Latin, some written within weeks of the publication of *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). In this volume, Carl F. Miller discusses one of these early Latin translations, Augustus Vansittart's "Mors Iabrocchi." There are some other stand-alone translations discussed in this companion, notably the five Indian "Jabberwocky"-translations discussed by Sumanyu Satpathy – Bangla, Odia, Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit – all of which are stand-alone translations, since none of the regular translations of *Through the Looking-Glass* into these languages include "Jabberwocky." And, at the close of this 150-year translation chronology we find Vaughan Rapatahana's recent, free-standing version of "Jabberwocky" into Māori, "E Hapawauki."

Rapatahana's commentary also gives us a glimpse into how the creative

work of translation can be carried out in practice. Further firsthand translation-insights are also provided by two other "Jabberwocky" (and *Through the Looking-Glass*)-translators represented in this collection, Gia Gokieli (Georgian) and Risto Järv (Estonian), two translators have chosen to follow different paths. While Gokieli, in his "T'art'alok'i" has striven to approximate "the epic character of an ancient, Anglo-Saxon ballad" Georgian, Järv with his "Jorruline" has applied a domesticating approach, by stressing Estonian elements and taking the Runosong metre found in the national epic *Kalevipoeg* as inspiration.

Translation goes beyond language. Just as John Tenniel's illustrations have affected readers' appreciation and interpretation of the poem, since the very first publication of *Through the Looking-Glass,* translations that make use of other illustrator's visualizations inevitably colour the way in which readers in different countries understand and enjoy their "Jabberwocky." This is why we have included a large number of illustrations, and encouraged our contributors to comment on these visualizations of Mome Raths, Jubjub Birds, Bandersnatches, and Jabberwocks. A couple of the commentaries stand out in this respect, Kapka Kaneva's analysis of Petar Chuklev's two versions of his "Jabberwocky"-illustration for two Bulgarian editions, and Adriana Peliano's of Rita Vidal's illustrations for a Brazilian translation. Peliano also discusses some of her own illustrations of *Through the Looking-Glass.* Finally, in a piece focused on illustration as part of the translation process, Riitta Oittinen discusses her own illustrations of "Jabberwocky" in the context of a recent Finnish translation.

In a sense, script is also illustration. Writing, alphabets, letters, scripts, fonts, typeface, are all visual elements of language. And as we know by now, it only takes a mirror-reversal of words to experience a *Verfremmdungs*-effect to make your own mother tongue appear as utterly "other." In realization of the importance of the visual side of language, we have therefore labored to include as many samples as possible of the way in which "Jabberwocky" is scripted in each language. How does the poem appear on the page – in Georgian, in Arabic, in Odia? One of the best examples of the marriage between the pictorial, the graphic, and the verbal is given by You Chengchen in her discussion of Chao Yuen Ren's translation, which includes the invention of new Chinese characters, and his calligraphic interpretation of "Jabberwocky."

The main emphasis in this collection, however, is not on the visual (illustrations or alphabets) but on the verbal. How has "Jabberwocky" fared in translation over the years? Excepting stand-alone translations, the first complete versions of "Jabberwocky" and *Through the Looking-Glass* appeared in 1899, and were made by Louise Arosenius (Swedish) and Hasegawa Tenkei (Japanese) respectively. The

two publications are quite different both in approach and publication form. As Yuko Ashitagawa writes in her commentary, Tenkei's translation was published in a periodical in eight instalments and made use of a great deal of domesticating translating strategies. Tenkei's "Jakkerurocky" is very loosely inspired by the original. Arosenius's translation of *Through the Looking-Glass*, on the other hand, was published in book form, and her "Jabberwocky" (she uses the English title) stays close to the source text with regard to narrative content, verse form, and use of nonsense words (see Sundmark "Uffish"). Thus, the two pioneer "Jabberwocky"-translators can be said to represent two contrasting translation ideals:

In the following three decades, up to 1930, there are complete translations into another four languages: Italian (1913), German (1923), Russian (1924), and French (1930). Then the translation acceleration rate increases somewhat. Still, given the now canonical status of the Alice books, and of "Jabberwocky," the progress is notably slow. In this context, it is worth pointing out what individual researchers writing from different language backgrounds have long known: that although *Alice in Wonderland* may be present in a great many variations and translations across the world, the same is not true about *Through the Looking-Glass.* The ratio can be something like five *Wonderlands* for one *Looking-Glass*. By cross-checking with *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* (Lindseth), one can easily see that this pattern is quite consistent across languages. What the present volume can add to this, however, is that many apparently complete translations actually also refrain from translating "Jabberwocky," either by deleting that part of the first chapter (the zero option) or exchanging it for another verse altogether (substitution). One combination strategy is to present an alternative poem in the first chapter, but then make use of single, translated words from the first stanza of "Jabberwocky" anyway, in chapter six, for Humpty Dumpty's explanations (see, for instance, Kaniewska's discussion of the first, incomplete Polish translation). The consequence of these reductive strategies is that the number of languages which have complete in-context translations of "Jabberwocky" are fewer than one would perhaps assume. A rough estimate is that, 150 years after the original publication of *Through the Looking-Glass*, there are around 40 languages which have at least one complete "Jabberwocky." We are aware of a few missing languages in this collection, and others we may have missed altogether. In those cases we have not been able to procure expert commentaries yet.

A different challenge is when a language has many translations to choose from. A first translation is almost always interesting in itself. There is nothing to go on for a first translation, no precedence, no "anxiety of influence" from previous

translators. A first translations sets the tone. If there are original illustrations, that could also provide a reason to choose a particular translation. Personally, I took the opportunity to mention Louise Arosenius' 1899-translation above, since, together with the Japanese translation, it is the first complete rendition into any language of "Jabberwocky." In my own commentary of "Jabberwocky" in Swedish, however, I have chosen instead to write about Gösta Knutsson's translation and Robert Högfeldt's illustrations. In this case, the illustrations did affect my choice, as with some of the other commentators we find on the following pages. Influential translations could be another selection criteria. Some languages have famous translations (and translators), and this can certainly be a good reason to pick them. In this category we find, for instance, André Brink's Afrikaans translation, analyzed here by Karen de Wet. But fame can also be a reason to put the focus on alternative translations, or ones that have been composed in response to often quoted translations. Thus, Virginie Iché makes a case for not commenting on Henri Parisot's classic French translation, but focuses instead on Laurent Bury's more recent "Bavassinade."

Retranslation and intertextuality is of course easier to study in the context of one language rather than in a multi-language project like this. But several of the expert contributors to this volume comment on how the translations into their own language complement each other in different ways. We can also see how traces of older, influential translations, are sometimes incorporated in newer versions. A very interesting case of such intertextual carry over *between* languages is brought up in Anna Wegener's discussion of Kjeld Elfelt's Danish translation, where he apparently used (and improved on) some of Knutsson's Swedish translation choices.

Frequently an early, target-language, child-oriented translation, is eventually replaced by a source-language, adult-friendly version, which tends to be more scholarly and critical. Halyna Pavlyshyn's analysis of two Ukrainian translations presents a rather special variation of this pattern. The first Ukrainian translation seems to be a typical first translation, targeting a child audience and domesticating the text in the process. The second translation presupposes an adult and politically aware audience. It presents "Jabberwocky" as "a political satire written during the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity" (the *Maidan*).

Finally, a note on the text: the commentaries are between 1000 and 2000 words. Most of them focus on one particular translation, but some have chosen a broader approach. The entries are preceded by one or two translations of "Jabberwocky" in that language. In some cases texts in non-Western alphabets are shown transliterated in the second column. The commentaries are followed

by a list of references to translations into each language, and sometimes secondary sources, separately. In some cases, the list of translations is complete, in others, it only mentions the primary text discussed in the commentary. For a comprehensive, global bibliography of the translations (complete and incomplete) of *Through the Looking-Glass* we refer the reader to *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* (Lindseth).

This has been a collaborative effort of huge proportions. There are poets, translators, artists, and scholars from different disciplines and from more than thirty different countries represented in this volume. We are a motley crew. We speak many languages, and represent different cultures and traditions. This means too that this "Jabberwocky"-companion is not perfectly uniform in language and academic presentation. Instead, it is a horn of plenty with something in almost any language about "Jabberwocky." We hope you will find it as frabjous as we have!

References

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