

Afrikaans

Brabbelwoggel

Dis brillig en die glyme likkedis
Drool en drindel in die weib;
Bibberkolies is die borogis
En die vniere rode sneib.

“Pas op vir die Brabbelwog, my seun!
Sy tande byt, sy kloue gryp!
Pas op vir die Joepjoepvoël se dreun
En die wroedige Ribberkny!”

Hy vat sy swerpe sabel vas
En soek die afgemankste ding –
By die Toemtoemboom met die ronde kwas
Gaan staan hy eers en dink.

Hy staan nog daar en drommeldroom
Toe kom die Vuuroog-Brabbelwog:
Hy swiep daar uit die warboelboom
En borbel boonop nog!

Een, twee! Een, twee! Die swerpe swaard
Vlym heen en weer dwarsdeur
Hy gryp die kop vas aan die baard
En galuppel huis toe weer.

“Het jy die Brabbelwog verslaan?
Kom, dit moet ons eers vier.
O praglik dag! Hoerê! Hef aan!”
Hy gig-lag van plesier.

Dis brillig en die glyme likkedis
Drool en drindel in die weib;
Bibberkolies is die borogis
En die vniere rode sneib.

André P. Brink

Die Flabberjak

Dis gonker en die vore garings
Fruip en gronkel in die bloof;
Ja, grimvol was die kilderboom,
En die ploert wil kroof.

‘O wee die Flabberjak, my seun!
Die kaak wat kou, die klou wat klap!
O wee die Flikflokvoël, en flak
Die frose Blakkerdap!’

Sy hand omsluit die fredel swaard:
En soek, soek hy die frap voorwaar–
Hy rus onder die Kloringboom,
En dink ‘n bietjie daar.

Hy staan nog daar so friep te dink,
Toe kom die Flabberjak al aan–
Sy oge vlam deur brose bos,
Sy mond die skuim en traan!

Hoera! Dis da’! Hy’s deur, reg deur!
Die fredel swaard maak klikker- klak ...
Hy los die lyf en vat die kop
En vlieg daar weg op ‘n galop.

‘En is die Flabberjak nou dood?
Kom skud my blad, my frawe seun!
O flore dag! Floera! Floerag!’
Kon hy van blydschap kreun.

Dis gonker en die vore garings
Fruip en gronkel in die bloof;
Ja, grimvol was die kilderboom,
En die ploert wil kroof.

Linette Retief

“Jabberwocky” in Afrikaans

Karen de Wet

Three Afrikaans translations have been published of Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” – the classic nonsense poem that Alice discovers in mirror-writing in *Through the Looking-Glass*. The three translations are “Brabbelwoggel” (Brink 1968), “Die Flabberjak” (Retief 1992) and “Die Jabberwok” (Cloete 2012). Of the three, two are stand-alone translations, translations of the poem in isolation, while the version that enjoys classical status in Afrikaans literature was published in 1968 as part of André Brink’s translation of *Alice deur die spieël*. Brink’s “Brabbelwoggel” hence offers a contextual translation in which elements of the story not intrinsic to the poem are honoured – notably the explanations Humpty Dumpty offers to Alice in his commentaries to the poem.

Internationally esteemed novelist, translator and literary scholar André P. Brink was responsible for the Afrikaans translations of both the Alice books: *Alice se avonture in Wonderland* (1965) and *Alice deur die spieël* (1968) and in 1987 a combined edition of these two titles were published as *Alice se avonture*. In his short preface to the books Brink indicates that the translations (which include the “Jabberwocky”) were prepared in the hope that it will charm child readers and motivate them to read the original. This is reflected in Brink’s translation of “Jabberwocky” where he stays close to the original in the translation of portmanteau words, rhythm and rhyme. Both books included the original illustrations by John Tenniel. In 2010 a revised edition of Brink’s *Alice se avonture in Wonderland* was published in celebration of his 75th birthday (Van Heerden). In this edition the illustrations are by Marjorie van Heerden (Brink & Van Heerden) but the revised edition did not include *Through the Looking-Glass* and subsequently Brink’s “Brabbelwoggel” from 1968 is still the only contextual translation in Afrikaans of “Jabberwocky.” In 1970 Brink was awarded the prestigious *SAAWK*¹ prize for translated work for his *Alice deur die spieël* (including “Jabberwocky”) (cf Anonymous 2020b).

¹ Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns: *South African Academy for Science and Arts*.

The other two Afrikaans translations of “Jabberwocky” were published significantly later and were arguably written mainly due to an interest in the challenges and possibilities when translating nonsense verse. The first of these appeared in the literary supplement of the newspaper *Die Burger* on the 25th of August 1992. It was written by copy writer Linette Retief in response to a challenge by an English-speaking colleague who argued that it would prove impossible to translate the Carroll poem to Afrikaans (cf Kotze 59). Although Retief’s translation offers some wonderful finds and can be recommended for the portmanteau words and onomatopoeic finds, but also for the rhythm and rhyme, a comparison with the original shows that however clever and ingenious the translation might be in coining terms and maintaining wordplay, rhythm and sound, it remains a standalone translation of the poem where the context of the book, and specifically the interpretations by Humpty Dumpty, are not taken into account. Apart from Kotze who compared the Brink and Retief translations to the original, only one other commentator, Wilhelm Grütter paid some attention to Retief’s “Die Flabberjak” in a brief discussion. Twenty years after Retief’s “Die Flabberjak”, another translation was published in the online literary journal LitNet: Chris Cloete’s “Die Jabberwok”. Despite the possibility to react via the online forum, no comments were made on the translation.

Nonsense verse, including limericks, are well-established in Afrikaans poetry; Lessing-Venter (36) lists 8 published volumes of nonsense verse (not children’s books) by Philip de Vos whilst numerous examples can also be found in the vast volume of children’s poems by Jaco Jacobs (cf Anon a.). In translation several of Roald Dahl’s children books, and hence also the nonsense verse included in these, are available in Afrikaans.

In this regard Fouché (73) notes similarities between “Jabberwocky” and Roald Dahl’s “In the quelchy quaggy sogmire” (*Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*) and discusses differences in two translations of the poem (by Mavis de Villiers and Kobus Geldenhuys, respectively) but finds that both excelled in the way the translations made use of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm and the creation of suitable neologisms. This is similar to the approach Kotze used to compare “Brabbelwoggel” (Brink) and “Die Flabberjak” (Retief) to the original “Jabberwocky” in order to evaluate the translations. Kotze (pp. 64-71) remarks on the close proximity to the original that is maintained by Brink’s translation inter alia the direct speech, the structural order of the words, the equivalence achieved in terms of sound and semantics as well as the invention of portmanteau words. The exception is that due to Afrikaans being a flecional language, Brink had to use the historic present in “Brabbelwoggel.” It should also be noted that despite staying

true to the original in terms of the indicated aspects, elements of domestication can be found in Brink's translations of portmanteau and onomatopoeic words. De Roubaix (149) remarks on how Brink chose combinations of sounds and syllables in Afrikaans that fulfills the same function of those used by Carroll. An example is the onomatopoeic neologisms "whiffing" and "burbled" that Brink successfully domesticised with the likewise onomatopoeic "swiep" and "borbel."

A few adaptations of the Alice books have been published, but none of these include translations of "Jabberwocky". The canonised translation in Afrikaans remains Brink's "Brabbelwoggel" but it might be time for a new contextual translation aimed at a post-millennial readership.

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