

Catalan

El Xerrapetaire

Rostillejava, I l'actillís teixó
giroscava furant pel gesperbatge
i el misfluix era com un papaó.
I els perds xiulablen a l'escatge.

“Compte amb el Xerrapetaire, fill ;
té urpes i ullals, esgarrapa i mossega ;
compte amb l'ocell, lliga'l amb un cordill
i fuig del frumiós Capitanega”

Pregué l'espasa d'acer amb la mà,
perseguí el manxol enemic molts anys
i sota un arbre de timbala reposà
per pensar una estoneta en els paranys.

I tingués un pensament molt oficiós,
i amb ulls de flames el Xerrapetaire v
enia arrufegat entre el boscós
galopejant de l'avencada al caire.

Un, dos, un dos, i a través i endavant
l'acerespasa feia ziga-zagues
i el deixà mort i amb la testa mostrand
va tornar triomfant les les amagues.

“El frumiós Capitanega, has mort?
Vine als meus braços, nen radianenc!
O, dia gloriand, i felixfort”,
Digué jubilanec i somrient.

Rostillejava, I l'actillís teixó
giroscava furant pel gesperbatge
i el misfluix era com un papaó.
I els perds xiulablen a l'escatge.

Salvador Oliva

Salvador Oliva's Catalan Translation of "Jabberwocky"

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Nonsense literature has not been very popular in Catalan literature. There are no traditional works in the style of English nursery rhymes, based on the absurd, and this might explain the relative lack of popularity that Lewis Carroll's books have had in our society. In my personal experience, my Education students usually display many comprehension problems reading Carroll's books. Two of the key reasons are the inclusion of English references and the use of nonsense.

Currently, we can find more than 30 editions of *Alice in Wonderland*, most of them, adaptations from the original book, addressed to make the text comprehensible for small children. These adaptations, as can be expected, convert Carroll's work into a simple tale since they use the main storyline without the nonsense background and are, very often, disconnected from the principal plot. *Through the Looking-Glass* has had even less luck, since only two faithful translations to Catalan can be found: by Salvador Oliva (1996) and Víctor Compta (1990).

When talking about Lewis Carroll in Catalan, however, it is necessary to name the first translation of *Alice in Wonderland*, made by the famous Catalan poet Josep Carner, in 1927. Carner was a precursor of *Noucentisme*, that is, an artistic and social movement that aimed to recover the prestige of Catalan language as a tool for creators after centuries of repression. Carner's translation was rather an adaptation to the Catalan culture and some characters were changed in order to be closer to the children of this period. However, the precious language used has become a reference for further translations. Unfortunately, Carner did not translate *Through the Looking-Glass*.

The poem “Jabberwocky” has been translated twice included as a part of the entire *Through the Looking-Glass*, but two additional translations of the poem have been found, these being stand-alone exercises of poets Josep Maria Albaigés (1997) and Amadeu Viana. Since the original text is, on the one hand, a poem, and on the other hand, a nonsense text, there needs to be a focus on rhythm and rhyme, and at the same time all translations try to combine the poetic shape with the nonsense content. Authors look for choices that accommodate these two conditions. We must add that Albaigés and Viana’s versions – not intended to be included in the translation of *Through the Looking-Glass* – intentionally lack a link with the book.

The choice here is Oliva’s version since it is the most widely read version and, in our opinion, the most faithful to the original text. However, the same author explains in a footnote that he stressed the sound effects rather than the meaning, since it has none. Oliva is a prestigious Catalan translator who has translated many classic works into Catalan, like Carroll’s books, and William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde work.

The first word translators had to deal with was the title. Three of them decided to respect the first part of the word, “jabber,” but chose different solutions in translation. Oliva used “Xerrapetaire” (a combination of “chat” and one verb use for starting a chat) as a title of the poem. Somewhat confusingly Alice asserts in Chapter 6 that a “Jabberwock” is a “Galimatoies” (a transformation of the word “galimaties”, gibberish). In general, Oliva appeals to both the English and Catalan traditions. For instance, Oliva translates “brillig” as “rostitllejar,” the time when the oven is turned on for the dinner’s roast.

Another smart choice in Oliva’s version is the parallelism of word formation in Catalan and English. Carroll’s “wabe,” a pun from the homophony of “wabe” and “way,” is transformed in “gesperbatge” a combination of “gespa” (“grass”) and “herbatge” (“weed”). “Mome raths” becomes “perds”, “porcs” (“pigs”) and “verd” (“green”). The parts of the poem not explained by Humpty Dumpty are more randomly translated, but still tries to recover homophonies and puns, and combine them with Catalan references: “Vorpal” with its associations to “mortal,” and “acerespasa” (“steel” and “sword”) for “sword”; “frabjous” becomes “gloriant” (“glorious”) in combination with a suffix indicating gerund; the “Tumtum tree” is the “arbre de timbala” (timbala sounds like “timbal”, “drum”) and “arbre” means “tree”); or “beamish” is “radianenc” (an invented form that suggest “radiantly”).

Still, often Oliva could find no equivalent nonsense words in Catalan the poem and many times, as he asserts in the footnote, he just followed the poem sounds and imitated Carroll’s words. One example of this is with “frumiós” for

“frumious,” where “frumiós” lacks the portmanteau qualities of the original. Considering this lack of meaning, he also used words similar to the sound of the English word, but with a different meaning, as in the case of “manxol” (“able”) for “manxome” or “oficiós” (“non official”) for “uffish”.

More intriguing is his translation of “Bandersnatch” (a bird that has a long neck and snapping jaws) by “Capitanega”. This word has a clear relation with “capità” (“captain”) and more ambiguous with “capitaneja” (“he commands”); it does not look for a phonological similarity and does not allude to a bird or any other kind of creature. Besides, Oliva uses this word twice, the last one replacing, surprisingly, the word “Jabberwocky” in verse 21: “El frumiós Capitanega, has mort?” for “And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?” It is probably Oliva’s translation’s most incomprehensible choice, and may even suggest confusion on the part of the translator.

As far as the form of the poem is concerned, Oliva respected the quatrain form, which is also very common in Catalan poetry, as well as the ABAB rhyme scheme. He adopted the decasyllabic verse, which is more traditional in Catalan poetry than Carroll’s ballad stanza form, and he also tried to find a rhythm more in accordance with Catalan standards.

As with most of the original translations of Carroll’s works in Spain, publishers included John Tenniel’s illustrations to stress a kind of canonical message. This arrangement might be calculated to foster children’s feelings of reading an incomprehensibly old book, while letting adult readers know that they are dealing with a classic work. More coloured, transgressive or innovative illustrations are limited to adaptations for children, adaptations that usually change the original text considerably. It can be considered that the final result, in Oliva’s translation, carefully reflects Carroll’s intention, though adapted to the Catalan language in many ways.

Translations into Catalan

Carroll, Lewis. *A través de l’espill i tot allò que Alicia hi va trobar*. Transl. Amadeu Viana. Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1985.

Carroll, Lewis. *Les aventures d’Alicia* [including *A través del mirall i allò que Alicia va trobar a l’altra banda*]. Transl. Víctor Compta. Barcelona: Editorial Barcanova, 1990.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alicia a través del mirall*. Transl. Salvador Oliva. Barcelona: Ed. 62, 2012

Carroll, Lewis. “Jabberwocky.” Transl. Josep Maria Albaigès. *Quimera*, Núm. 175, 1997.