

Estonian

Jorru-line

Väljas vaikne praeline,
libavaida sugrusida
uherles ja vurles kehus,
olid härmetud hugudrud,
viugusivad kaustjad karvid.
“Jookse, poega, Jorru-lisest,
kihval kisub, küünel kraabib,
lenda Lag-Lag linnu eesta,
vihkjast Viiruvilbusesta!”
Mõistis poega tähist mõõka,
taples tüki tule mehi,
sädemete saare mehi,
siisap puhuks puhkamaie
peatus alla Pum-Pum puie.
Pidas aru sürgel silmil –
kuulis laanest uhinada,
nägi silmi süttivada,
tuli tõrmav Jorru-line.
Siuh! ja säuh! säääl mõõtis mõõka,
tükiks täkkis, surnuks sakkis,
koolja peaga poega pöördus
hõissidessa kodoje.
“Jõle Jorru-line surnud?
Tule, kallid erav poega!
Suurväärt päeva! Hurah! Huruh!”
rohkes rõõmus rõkerdas ta.
Väljas vaikne praeline,
libavaida sugrusida
uherles ja vurles kehus,
olid härmetud hugudrud,
viugusivad kaustjad karvid.

Risto Järv

“Jorruline:” The Runo-Song-Format “Jabberwocky” from Estonia

Risto Järv

As in the case of many other target languages, Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* was translated into Estonian considerably later than *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*: the first volume appeared in Estonian in 1940, while the sequel was published only in 1993. “Jabberwocky” has only two Estonian translations. “Jorruline” was translated by Risto Järv in 1993; its revised translation appeared in 2008, and several reprints followed; the most recent one dates from 2018 (-- henceforward I shall refer to this version as J1993/2018). Later “Vadalukk” appeared in Anna-Liisa Tiisma’s translation in 2015, in an international edition with John Tenniel’s original illustrations published for the 150th anniversary of the first publication of Carroll’s classic (referred to as J2015 below). In contrast, the full text of *Alice in Wonderland* has four different Estonian translations. The best-known among them is the second one, made by the renowned novelist Jaan Kross in 1971. The abovementioned, third full translation by Anna-Liisa Tiisma was followed by a fourth by Mari Klein in 2018, as well as numerous adaptations.

In writing this short survey I find myself in a slightly ambiguous position: on the one hand, in that of a translator who performed the role of artistic and cultural mediator years ago; and on the other hand, that of a researcher who has studied the material both out of scholarly interest as well as for the purpose of scrutinizing translation practices. Due to this personal relation to the material, the present lines will necessarily turn out to be somewhat biased. Acknowledging this, we could just as well start with a small trip down the memory lane. The inspiration behind the translation of “Jabberwocky” (J1993/2018) was a fascination with

the first translation of *Alice in Wonderland* into Estonian that I read¹. Reading the translation and comparing it to the one by Kross led me as a student of language and literature to writing a seminar paper on translating puns in the two Estonian versions of the Alice books, and then committing myself to translating the sequel. I self-published the translation at the time when small publishers initially started to thrive in the newly independent Estonia side by side with other types of budding private enterprises after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991².

The reception of the first “Jabberwocky” translation was ambivalent – some critics praised the use of the Kalevala or runosong metre (also used in the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*), others were critical of it. Still, the translation has been reused as a new, revised version appeared at the major publishing house Tänapäev in 2008. It comprised both Alice books and used Tenniel’s illustrations for the first time in Estonia. In comparison with the 1993 version, some changes were made regarding characters’ names and some poems, but the Estonian version of “Jabberwocky” remained unchanged.³

I am not going to offer any evaluative comparisons of the two main translations of “Jabberwocky” as I am necessarily too biased to do this. The most important difference lies in the verse system. The J2015 translation is in the original verse form, the J1993/2018 translation follows the structure of the so-called Kalevipoeg verse from the Estonian national epic whose style in its turn imitates the composition of the traditional Estonian runosong. The choice of the Kalevipoeg verse as the model for the translation of “Jabberwocky” was suggested by the need to solve the difficulty of referring to its Anglo-Saxon origin where Carroll had used the description “Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry,” and in many aspects the translation is informed by an Estonia-related background.⁴ In creating the translation of “Jabberwocky” I intended to create a form that would be memorable and could speak to the reader within the Estonian cultural sphere. The national epic *Kalevipoeg* is known to everybody as a set text at school. The Kalevipoeg verse is characterised both by using the traditional end rhymes of lines as well as the internal lines typical of the runosong. At the same time, there is an important difference in comparison with the source text regarding the arrangement of lines which are not divided into stanzas as they are in Carroll’s original. Thus, the individual verses are presented in the form of one long song in the translation, and no end rhyme has been employed. The J2015 translation generally proceeds from the source text’s rhythm and its ABAB rhyme scheme, but if Carroll has refrained from rhyming the second and the fourth lines in Stanzas 3 (‘hand’/’tree’), 5 (‘through’/’head’) and 6 (‘Jabberwock’/’Callay!’), J2015 has no rhymes at all in Stanza 1 and Stanza 6.

¹ I discovered Alice while going through other texts at the University library on fourteenth of March – on the very day and month when it all began even according to the Mad Hatter in the AIW chapter XI, which seemed elating for a youthful enthusiast of portents and coincidences.

² With the Estonian audiences of 1991, the character of Alice seemed to be much more popular than at the time of the publication of Kross’s translation of 1971 – an additional reason may have been the audio version on LP record and cassette, read by the well-known actor Tõnu Aav. ³ This work remained Risto Järv’s one and only attempt at dabbling in translation; since then he has been active in the academia as a folklorist. Ann-Liisa Tiisma, the author of the J2015, however, has been involved in translating several children’s books and adaptations of these.

⁴ Actually, it goes even further than that – the original refers to Haigha and Hatter, Anglo-Saxon messengers of bygone times, and here, the reference concerns a time even further back in history, as Ancient Roman Messengers Janus and Kybrius appear in the translation. The solution was adopted as it appeared difficult to continue with characters whose names would start with an H in Estonian (the 2015 translation retains the names and uses references to (March) Hare and (Mad) Hatter in the footnotes).

Still, in addition to enabling an added dimension of meaning, the use of the Kalevipoeg verse in J1993/2018 also caused some problems as limits were set to the translation not only by the necessity of forwarding the pre-given ideas and nonce-formations, but also that of following the characteristics of the Kalevipoeg verse. It is for this reason that the translation acquired one of its two added lines that are missing from the source text. In the poem's signature stanza all important characters described by Humpty Dumpty⁵ have to be mentioned. Due to the archaic language and quaint long expressions, the obligatory components did not fit into the number of lines and an additional line had to be created.⁶

Estonianness characterises the first translations of the Alice books. If the first translation of *Alice in Wonderland* (1940) preferred a domesticating approach to translation, the following one from 1971 favoured foreignisation. The earlier version of translation of *Through the Looking-Glass* from 1993 contains both approaches, but while domestication was prevailing in this earlier variant, such domesticated elements were retranslated for the second version of *Through the Looking-Glass*⁷. The translation of the “Jabberwocky”'s title character's name, “Jorruline,” was inspired by a menacing guttural sound, additionally, the word “joru” (“grumble”) has been drawn on. Due to the alliterative system characteristic of the runosong and the Kalevipoeg verse, the J1993/2018 translation has replaced the tree name “Tumtum” with “Pumpum” in order to retain the alliteration with the “puu” (tree), while the Jub-jub Bird has also been given a more alliterative rendering as “Lag-lag lind.”

The same logic has replaced the character Bandersnatch with the new construction “Viiruvilbus.” Mati Soomre's translation of Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* that appeared in 2015 repeats several elements from the 1993 *Through the Looking-Glass* translation (e.g. the portmanteau word “vihkjas,” standing for “frumious”), but rebaptised Bandersnatch as “Krahmatümp,” while the 2015 translation proceeds from the similarities between sounds and uses “Bandernaps.”

As the 1993 translation venture was solely grounded in enthusiasm, it was also illustrated by a friend Kati Kerstna, a student at the Academy of Arts who later specialised in glass art. The illustrations portrayed all the



Kati Kerstna, 1993

⁵ Humpty Dumpty has been translated as *Küügel Müügel* in Estonian since 2008 – the translation was made to contain references to the egg dessert called ‘koogel moogel’ as well as the omniscient Google.

⁶ As regards the other line added to the J1993/2018 translation, it derives from a small joke – playfully, a line has been added in which parallelism introduces a fight with “some men of fire, men of the Isle of Sparks”). Here, the original ‘manxome man’ has been replaced with men from the Isle of Sparks mentioned in Song XVI in Kalevipoeg in the line “*Sädeme saart silmamaie*” – “to go and look at the Isle of Sparks”). The Isle of Sparks is not a concept known from folklore, but was devised by Johann Lagos, a land surveyor from the Tarvastu Parish in South Estonia and creator of pseudomythology. At the time, to the young translator such translation additions seemed to imitate the original author's passion for parody and playfulness with a twist.

⁷ The earlier Looking-Glass translation from 1993 contained also other typically Estonian elements, e.g. the portmanteau word ‘*suitsupääsusaba*’ that combines the Estonian national bird the barn swallow (‘*suitsupääsuke*’, *Hirundo rustica*) with the swallowtail butterfly (‘*pääsusaba*’, *Papilio machaon*), and their relative importance was reduced in the 2008/2018 translation.

key characters of *Through the Looking-Glass*, but in the case of the Jabberwock our discussions lead to the conclusions that the monster should not be represented, calling the readers to use their imagination. However, the artist represented a couple of elements from the signature stanza, namely the slithy toves who gyre and gimble in the wabe – that is, the beings to be found around the sundial.

Thus, there are currently two different versions of “Jabberwocky” in Estonian translation – the more domesticating “Jorruline” (1993/2018) that lays an emphasis on Estonian elements, and “Vadalukk” (2015) whose verse system derives from the original verse. Hopefully, this minority language and its translation tradition will gain even more exciting monsters riddled with a plethora of allusions as has happened in the case of several other nations.

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