

French

Bavassinade

C'était grailord : les prueux toves
Sur la loinde chignaient, vortaient ;
Frêtifs marchaient les borogoves
Et les ourroux égrés snortaient.

« Mon fils, prends garde au Bavassin !
Sa gueule mord, sa serre griffe !
Prends garde à l'oiseau Jubjub, crains
Le par trop frumieux Bandarsnif ! »

Il prit sa vorpaline épée,
Chercha longtemps l'ennemi glame
Et puis, plongé dans ses pensées,
S'endormit sous l'arbre Tamtam.

Comme il méditait gloustrement,
Le Bavassin à l'œil de feu
Surgit, toussard, du bois tulgeant
Et s'approcha, tout borbouilleux !

Une, deux ! Trancha d'outre en outre
La Vorpale de part en part !
Ayant éliminé le monstre,
Il prit sa tête et le départ.

« As-tu occis le Bavassin ?
Viens dans mes bras, radieux enfant !
Ô jour frabieau ! Callou ! Callin ! »
Glouffa le vieillard galomphant.

C'était grailord : les prueux toves
Sur la loinde chignaient, vortaient ;
Frêtifs marchaient les borogoves
Et les ourroux égrés snortaient.

Laurent Bury

Laurent Bury's French Translation of "Jabberwocky"

Virginie Iché

There are so many French translations of *Alice in Wonderland* that it is hard to keep track (it is estimated that there have been over thirty). *Through the Looking-Glass*, however, has not been as widely translated. So far there have been fifteen French translations, since Marie-Madeleine Fayet's 1930 translation, and four translations of "Jabberwocky" by itself (including Antonin Artaud's well-known "anti-grammatical attempt against Carroll"). Jacques Papy's 1961 and Henri Parisot's 1969 translations of *Through the Looking-Glass* are regularly republished, the prestigious leather bound Pléiade edition using Parisot's. This is why Laurent Bury asserts in his prefatory note to his own translation that translating this classic anew is a daunting enterprise. He nonetheless thought it was brilliant to translate *Through the Looking-Glass* again. Not only did he hope he would come up with frabjous translations of the Carrollian puns and neologisms, but he had also always been unsatisfied with the translations of the names of the various characters of *Through the Looking-Glass*. Some translators unhelpfully kept the names (more or less) intact (Parisot calls Tweedledum "Twideuldeume", Tweedledee "Twideuldie") and others dramatically altered the language register of Carroll's text. (Elen Riot calls Humpty Dumpty "Boumbadaboum", an onomatopoeia French speakers use when talking with children to describe people/children tumbling down.)

Like Carroll who was Mathematical Lecturer and wrote a dozen books in the fields of geometry, logic, algebra, but was also an amateur photographer and a writer of children's fiction, Laurent Bury is everything but a one-track mind. He is the editor-in-chief of a French online magazine devoted to opera, a professor of Victorian literature and a translator. He has translated more than a hundred

books: biographies (including Cohen's biography of Lewis Carroll), sociological, economic and historical essays, and many 19th century British novels, including the *Alice* books. His keen interest in opera may account for his determination to respect not only the meaning of the source text, but also the musicality and the rhythm of the target language. No doubt that is why he translated Carroll's "Callay!" with the typically French-sounding suffix "-in" (in "Callin!"), turned Carroll's "Tumtum tree" into "l'arbre Tamtam" (which both sounds more French and will remind any French speaker of the African music instrument called tomtom in English), and used two synonymous expressions with parallel structures for verse 5 "*Trancha d'outré en outré / La Vorpale de part en part*" ("The vorpale blade went right through the monster, right through it").

His taste for music may also explain his determination to use octosyllabic verses, which are deemed to be very musical compared to other types of verses – octosyllabic verses being relatively short and accordingly drawing attention to their rhymes. Bury prides himself on his respect of prosody in his translation of the many poems that pepper the *Alice* books, though it leads him to slightly distort the first verse of "Jabberwocky" and erase the coordinating conjunction "and" in "Did gyre and gimble" ("Sur la loinde chignaient, vortaient"). Bury is as meticulous about the regularity of the octosyllabic verses as he is about the rhyming scheme – he does not alternate between ABAB and ABCB like Carroll, but unwaveringly employs the ABAB-pattern – which interestingly leads him to turn the scary "Bandersnatch" into a sniffing "Bandersnif" (since the name of the creature had to rhyme with "griffe," the French word for "claw").

As a specialist of Victorian literature, Bury logically pays particular attention to the nonsense words of Carroll's poem and to Humpty Dumpty's explanations for them. He coins the portmanteau word, "prueux", to translate "slithy", "preste et visqueux" being a word-for-word translation of Humpty Dumpty's "lithy and slimy". Bury forges the adjective "frétif", a very clever combination of "frêle" (frail) and "chétif" (sickly). He comes up with the adjective "égré" to translate "mome", which Humpty Dumpty says probably means "short for 'from home'" and implies that the raths in question got lost on their way home, because "égaré" means "lost" and is, according to Rondu-Pondu (Bury's Humpty Dumpty), the longer version of the word "égré". Like Parisot and many other French translators, Bury keeps the words "toves", "borogoves", "Jubjub" and only Frenchifies the suffixes of "frumious" (which becomes "frumieux"), "tulgey" ("tulgeant"), "frabjous" ("frabieau") and "galumphing" ("galomphant"—the "o" in the root of the verb mimicking the way French speakers would actually say "galumph").

Bury also tries to translate the mock-heroic undertone of the poem. He resorts to archaizing sounds to translate “brillig”, which becomes “graillord”, in other words “graill-heur”, the time (“l’heure”) to start broiling (“griller” in French) things for dinner. Instead of using the modern spellings “griller” and “heure” (as Parisot did, when he suggested “grilheure”), Bury uses the 12th-century pronunciation and spelling “grailler” and the Latinate “or” for “heure” (presumably to remind readers of the Latin origin of “hour”, that is “hora, horae”) and adds a “-d” at the end to make the suffix look more French. He also places a few descriptive adjectives before the nouns they qualify, something that, in French, is limited to intensive or affective adjectives (such as “sacré” in “Sacrée journée!” meaning “What a day!” or “De bien belles années.” meaning “These were wonderful years.”). The vorpal sword is not merely “le glaive vorpalin” (as in Parisot’s translation), but “la vorpaline épée”, which sounds even grander thanks to the adjective placement; similarly, the “slithy toves” become “les *prueux* toves” and “my beamish boy” “*radieux* enfant”. Furthermore, Bury uses the archaic verb “occire” to both translate “slain” and compensate for the impossibility to translate the archaic register of “hast thou” in French. Finally, to insist on the parodic dimension of the text, he adds a humorous zeugma in verse 5 “Il prit sa tête et le départ”, which literally means “He took its head and his leave”.

What is perhaps most intriguing and revealing about this version is Bury’s translation of the name of the monster, and consequently of the poem, “Bavassin” and “Bavassinade”. At the end of the prefatory note to his translation, Bury explains that when he was young, he was so scared of Tenniel’s illustration of the poem that his parents decided to cover it with a sheet of paper for him not to see it anymore—and one recalls that Carroll himself decided not to put this image on the book cover of *Through the Looking-Glass* precisely because he was told that it was far too scary. Just like the reader finds out that the Snark was (only) a Boojum at the end of “The Hunting of the Snark”, Bury says that his translating “Jabberwocky” helped him realize that he need not be afraid of the Jabberwock any more, because the Jabberwock is only a “Bavassin,” a creature that “bavasse”, ie. jabbbers on. Bury’s translation, just like Carroll’s own poem, is, therefore, very much a metalinguistic poem.

Translations into French

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Secondary Sources

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