German

Die Zipferlake

Verdaustig war's, und glaße Wieben
rotterten gorkicht im Gemank.
Gar elump war der Pluckerwank,
und die gabben Schweisel frieben.

»Hab acht vorm Zipferlak, mein Kind!
Sein Maul ist beiß, sein Griff ist bohr.
Vorm Fliegelflagel sieh dich vor,
dem mampfen Schnatterrind.«

Er zückt' sein scharfgebifftes Schwert,
den Feind zu futzen ohne Saum,
und lehnt' sich an den Dudelbaum
und stand da lang in sich gekehrt.

In sich gekeimt, so stand er hier,
da kam verschnoff der Zipferlak
mit Flammenlefze angewackt
und gurgt' in seiner Gier.

Mit Eins! und Zwei! und bis auf's Bein!
Die biffe Klinge ritscheropf!
Trennt' er vom Hals den toten Kopf,
und wichernd sprengt' er heim.

»Vom Zipferlak hast uns befreit?
Komm an mein Herz, aromer Sohn!
Oh, blumer Tag! Oh, schlusse Fron!«
So kröpfte er vor Freud'.

Verdaustig war's, und glaße Wieben
rotterten gorkicht im Gemank.
Gar elump war der Pluckerwank,
und die gabben Schweisel frieben.

Christian Enzensberger

Jabberwocky in German

Celia Brown

The first rendering of the poem in German was published very shortly after the original, coupled with the astonishing claim that Lewis Carroll had adapted German words to make English nonsense. The translator was no less than Robert Scott, the co-publisher of the Greek Lexicon (1843) with Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church, the Oxford College where Carroll lived and worked. "The Jabberwock Traced to Its True Source" appeared in MacMillan's Magazine in February 1872. It was a joke rather than a serious proposition (Fleming 324). There is little evidence for a good adaptation, apart from a few words such as "wabe" in the first and identical last verses. In German this term means honeycomb, and here Scott envisaged "Toven" swarming ("wimmeln") like bees. Unfortunately for Scott's interpretation, these insects are a far cry from Humpty Dumpty's identification of identification of toves as badgers, lizards or corkscrews in Chapter Six of *Through the Looking-Glass*.

I find Christian Enzensberger's "Der Zipferlake" in his oft-reprinted *Alice hinter den Spiegeln* 1963 more interesting. His translation treats portmanteau words and eccentric grammar in a manner worthy of the original. The threatening atmosphere of the poem comes to the fore, whereas most German translations of the Alice books are addressed mainly to a child audience, and often toned down accordingly (Lamparielo 339-340).

Nonsense is a form of poetic licence, when found in a poem. Utter nonsense would be gibberish, but Carroll's non-sense in his Alice books is a refined mix of meaninglessness and allusions (cf. Brown). Humpty Dumpty's diagnosis, that the poetic method exploits the portmanteau concept of combining two meanings in one word, does not function straightforwardly in German, where it is normal practice to piece words together to create lengthy but standard terms. The nonsensical element depends on combining incompatible meanings or subverting the grammar. Enzensberger's "Goggelmoggel", the egg-shaped expert on all

poems that have ever been written, explains that "verdaustig" – the first word in *Der Ziperlake* – means four o'clock in the afternoon, when one has already digested ("verdaut") but is already thirsty ("durstig") again. Alice finds this convincing, although there is not enough of "durstig" to distinguish the full word from the adjectival or adverbial ending "-ig". The opening of the poem rather suggests a state of digesting, implying that all the creatures mentioned have had a good meal. Who was the victim?

The danger of being eaten refers back to Alice's concerns in *Alice in Wonderland*, where she sometimes changes shape as a result of incautiously eating a cake or imbibing a potion, or when she is threatened by various creatures. For their part, the Wonderland beasts are often afraid of Alice. The Jabberwock's big teeth and sharp claws are reminiscent of the appearance of the Cheshire Cat in Wonderland: the Mirrorland monster's jaws can bite, "sein Maul ist beiß", and his clutch can gouge, "sein Griff ist bohr". Here the words are easily identifiable as standard German terms; the only deviation is that the verbs have been turned ungrammatically into adjectives by cutting them short: "beißen" (to bite) and "bohren" (to bore or puncture). The truncation serves its purpose in suggesting the potential to cut short the victim's life too.

Thus, Enzensberger's translation aptly opens and closes with the threat posed by the Jabberwock monster. Lewis Carroll specifically drew attention to the frightening aspect of the image of this creature, when deciding not to use Tenniel's illustration as the frontispiece, out of respect for the sensibilities of his child readers (Cohen 132). The Enzensberger translation is complemented by Tenniel's original illustrations, indicating that the images work in the German cultural context as well. The Jabberwock appears to be a legendary bipedal dragon, a wyvern, of the kind that also makes its mark in German heraldry (German "Lindwurm"). A dragon-like being with wings and sharp claws appears as a heraldic beast in coats of arms across Europe, as the protector of several German towns, such as Jevenstedt in Schleswig- Holstein or Rheden in Lower Saxony.

The "jabbering" loquacity of the Jabberwock is captured in verse two, rather than in the title. Carroll's "frumious bandersnatch" becomes the "mampfe Schnatterrind"; in Enzensberger's translation, a chomping chattering cow or ox. The title of the poem introduces other dangers emanating from the monster, in addition to its rapacious hunger: "Zipferlake" incorporates the word "Zipfel", which means the "tail" (of a shirt), presumably referring to the Jabberwock's anthropomorphic waistcoat, while also suggesting the phallic term "willy" in the vernacular. For Enzensberger, the eyes of flame in verse four are "Flammenlefze",

flaming lips burbling with greed (Gier). The hero destined to kill the "Zipferlak" is "hier" and thus in danger from the creature's rhyming "Gier". This term can also designate "lust" when qualified as "sexuelle Gier". Enzensberger leaves the implication open, so it is not clear whether the "-lake" in "Zipferlake", a gastronomic term for "brine", is a liquid connected to the "Zipferlak's willy? The "Schweisel" ("Schweine?") possibly referring to Humpty Dumpty's green pig, also have phallic connotations in German.

Enzensberger's monster can embody various vices. Its wings substitute for the Jubjub bird in verse two when it is described as a "Fliegelflagel": a fly that can fly, perhaps by way of flagella. Pronouncing the word demands some deft gymnastics of the tongue, anticipating the noisy lip-smacking in verse four.

Celia Brown

The Jabberwock as a kind of arthropod joins the other Looking-Glass insects in Chapter Three, such as the bread-and- butterfly, translated by Enzensberger as "eine Schmausfliege" – "a nosh-up fly" (Carroll 48). Again the food analogy supplies a surface reading, but at a deeper level the implications are more sinister. A gigantic Jabberwock insect could point to the demon Beelzebub, sometimes known as Lord of the Flies. This interpretation is compatible with Michael Hancher's observation that Tenniel's drawing is remarkably similar to a rendering of St.Antony's confrontation with the devil in Hone's *Every-Day Book* 1826 (Hancher 83). The position of the poem prior to Alice's journey across the chessboard suggests that she will be confronted with various forms of Victorian vice on her way to becoming Queen.

Translation into German

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