

Hungarian

Hergenyörciád

Kotyvalla már, s a nyéren ucc
Izsegtek krákos nyágerok.
Nyöszölt a csámborult mumuc,
S a bordacs bávadott.

„A Hergenyörc elől kibújj!
Állkapcsa csattog, karma ránt!
Kerüld a Dzsubdzsubot, fiú,
S a vérbósz Marmaránt!”

Vevé az öldökös vasat:
Rég űzte rémhedt ellenét –
Megállt a Dumdum fák alatt,
S méházva elhenyélt.

S míg ott henyélt ühötten ő,
A Hergenyörc, a szeme öl,
Bihálva csörtetett elő
Az éjlő sűrüből.

No rajta hát! És vágva vág,
Cikkant az öldökös gyilok.
Folyott a vér, fejét vevé,
S elüdvivallagott.

„Hát porba hullt a Hergenyörc?
Karomba fényes egy fiam!
Dínomnap, ó! Lihej-lihó!”
Fölhikkantott vigan.

Kotyvalla már, s a nyéren ucc
Izsegtek krákos nyágerok.
Nyöszölt a csámborult mumuc,
S a bordacs bávadott.

Dániel Varró



István Lakatos

“Jabberwocky’s” Hungarian Translations

Anna Kérchy

Although *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) has six Hungarian translations (Altay 1927, Juhász 1929, Kosztolányi 1935, Szobotka 1958, Varró and Varró 2009, Szilágyi 2013), its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) was only translated twice into Hungarian (Révbíró and Tótfalusi, 1980, Varró and Varró, 2009). Both *Through the Looking-Glass* translations are products of creative cooperations: one author took charge of the prose narrative and another adapted the embedded poems. In the 1980 edition, translator Tamás Révbíró was assisted by poet István Tótfalusi (who also translated Charles Perrault, AA Milne, JM Barrie, Astrid Lindgren, among others), and the text was enhanced by Tamás Szecskó’s illustrations (with no image of the Jabberwock). The 2009 joint translation of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* decorated by John Tenniel’s original illustrations is a collaboration of the Varró siblings, children’s writer Zsuzsa Varró and her brother Dániel Varró, one of today’s most popular Hungarian children’s poets and author of *Beyond the Splotch Mountain* (Túl a Maszat hegyen) and other bestselling volumes. This is the only edition that features the “Jabberwocky”-text accompanied by an illustration, hence the only complete rendition of the original Carroll-Tenniel image-text design. Two more stand-alone Hungarian “Jabberwocky” translations occupy the high and low end of the cultural spectrum. One was published in the 1970s by a prestigious publishing house in a volume of poetry targeting adult audiences, authored by Sándor Weöres, a master of language games and word magic, an outstanding lyricist of the 20th century Hungarian literary canon, nominated several times for the Nobel prize. The other was uploaded online in 2011 on a website for amateur poets by young blogger Balázs Zs Jónai who also shared on the internet

his translations of *The Hunting of the Snark*, and the omitted chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* (“Wasp in a Wig”), along with several Carroll poems.

The Carrollian language games, neologisms, and portmanteaux are easily integrated into Hungarian because of the extremely metaphorical and lyrical nature of the Hungarian language. Hungarian abounds in new coinages due to the 19th century Language Reform, whereby the forging of an independent national identity coincided with the creative lexical expansion of the Hungarian vocabulary by leading poets, linguists and translators.

The most remarkable subgenre of nonsense in the Hungarian literary canon, increasingly popular from the early 20th century, is the so called “halandzsa” that creates gibberish words which sound real but are eventually unintelligible. As its founding father poet Frigyes Karinthy opined, the genre’s ambiguous aim is to tease readers/listeners with a humorous confusion of meaning and meaninglessness, as well as to stage anxieties related to losing the reliable ground of reason and becoming mad, while conceiving the highest form of poetry that enables language to speak the unspeakable. Like dada, halandzsa mingles stylistic bravado, with the anarchic spirit of children’s games, and political protest against tyranny (of the common-sensical). Two of the translators of Carroll’s nonsense rhymes, Weöres and Varró, are halandzsa poets gifted with a rare linguistic ingenuity: besides many children’s rhymes (often set to music), Weöres wrote poems in invented languages and created their mock Hungarian translations (as in “Barbaric Song” / Barbár dal), whereas Varró devoted whole volumes to playing with baby language as surfacing in the discourse of adults (*Whose feet are size six = Akinek a lába hatos; Whose teeth just came through = Akinek a foga kijött*)

All four Hungarian “Jabberwocky” translations respect the original poem’s formal, structural outlines. They keep the strong rhythm, the iambic meter, the ABAB rhyme scheme, the atmosphere setting frame of the repeated first and last stanza, the conventional ballad form, the simple syntax and the straightforward storyline (including the retrospective account of the preparative warning, the heroic quest, the defeat of the monster, and the laudation of victory).

The Hungarian “Jabberwocky” versions stress the transverbal acoustic qualities of Carrollian nonsense: alliterations, onomatopoeia, vocal play allow sounds to precede sense, conforming to the logic of the genre. The kinetic verbs of vehement action describing the violent wrongdoings of the Jabberwock are associated with monstrous noise in the English original. (“Came *whiffing* through the tulgey wood/ And *burbled* as it came!) The variety of sounds in the different Hungarian translations make subtle allusions to the beast’s actual physical embodiment. In Tótfalusi onomatopoeia are turned into neologisms referring to

the sounds of flapping wings and snoring-muttering noises which accompany the advent of the monster (“hussongva és mortyogva jött”). In Weöres “it is foaming/gurgling while shaking” as if arriving on water (“bugyborékolva ráng”). In Varró it is “panting/moaning and clomping” (“bihálva csörtetett elő”) the sound of its heavily treading footsteps complementing its strange vocal performance. In Jónai it simply “arrives grunting” (“morgva érkezett meg”). Hence, depending on the translator’s choices, the Jabberwock can take the shape of a creature of air, of land, or of water. Its strange sounds evoke those of the Hungarian folkloric dragon that can alternately use human language, emit an animal howl, or simply spit fire for brutal non-verbal communication.

The sonoric quality of nonsense is foregrounded in the title choice of three of the four Hungarian translations which all play puns on bird names. Birds are metonymically identified with the song or cry they make, they function as common metaphors for artistic creativity, and they fulfil a major role in Hungarian folkloric imagery as protective spirits of the dream realm (Turul). Weöres’s “Szajkóhukky” combines the word for jay/magpie (“szajkó”) (and the idiomatic expression for the repetitive rambling of a chatterbox (“szajkózik”/ “to jay”) with the phonetic transcript of hiccups (“hukk”) and adds an “y” to the end to reach an archaic, obsolete, or alien effect. This figure fuses oververbalization and silencing. Tótfalusi’s “Gruffacsór” is a (mock)mythical griffin (“griff”) with the difference of a single letter (“gruff”) and the second part of the name evoking beak (“csőr”), “snatch/steal” (“csór”), and a miserable tramp (“csóró”). This demythologisation resonates with Carroll’s pastiche of heroic poetry. Jónai’s “Vartarjú” cuts the word “crow” (“varjú”) into two syllables, inserting the word “bald” or “barren” (“tar”) in-between the segments to invest the name with ominous implications augmented by the first syllable meaning “scar” (“var”).

The Varrós’ translation of the two Alice books was driven by the agenda to produce a Hungarian text more truthful to the original source language narrative than its predecessors. Varró’s title, in line with the fidelity criteria, is the only one that respects the Carrollian distinction between the name of the monster (the Jabberwock/ “Hergenyörc”) and the title of the heroic ballad about the slaying of the monster (“Jabberwocky”/ “Hergenyörcciád”). The title “Hergenyörcciád” will sound familiar to Hungarian youngsters because Homer’s epic poem *Iliad* (“Iliád”) about the siege of Troy is a compulsory reading in the secondary school curriculum; yet the word remains gibberish as a referentless signifier unrelatable to any meaningful notion. Random acoustic associations include the words “hergel” (to tease), “kerge” (crazy), “nyérc” (mink), “gerle” (dove), and “görcs” (spasm).

The Varrós’ intertextual allusion to ancient Greek epic poetry indicates a

change in the target readership. This translation was published in the same year as Tim Burton's 3D CGI adventure film adaptation of Carroll's classic. Far from the initial Dreamchild, both Burton and Varró feature a postmillennial Alice figure, a rebellious teenager who boldly fights against social conventions and believes in the power of her fantasy. (István Lakatos' illustration to a forthcoming edition of *Through the Looking-Glass* also resonates with Burton's mock gothic style.) Contending that the grotesque world of Carroll might scare younger children, the Varró translation strategically addresses a young adult audience endowed with more mature interpretive skills, able to decode a colourful yet complex figurative language. The Jabberwock is not simply slayed, but it "bites the dust" ("porba hullt") with a metaphor, the vorpal sword is a "ravaging iron" ("öldöklő vas") with a metonymy, the poem uses a mock-archaic conjugation and distorted word-coinages of a very sophisticated vocabulary ("kotyvalla már"). This maximalist translation occasionally even multiplies Carroll's puns: "wabe" (in Humpty Dumpty's explanation, "the grass spot around the sundial" in the first stanza) becomes with a nonsense word "nyér" and when the Eggman grounds his etymological explanation in acoustic analogy (it is called "nyér" because it is located on "fenyér" (heath)), Alice elaborates on the homophonic play by adding that "nyér" is the exact size of a palm ("tenyér"). (In Martin Gardner's view, "wabe" is a pun on "way beyond" and "way behind" and Alice's mundane looking comment "and a long way beyond it [goes] on both sides" is a proof of her quick logical reasoning.)

In order to appreciate the linguistic humour, one must recognise the original expressions from which the new forms deviate. It is fair to say that Varrós' jokes playing on loan words of Latin origin remain inaccessible for smaller children, but might rather delight curious teen interpreters who gladly identify with the implied reader Alice-alterego beamish boy knight, defeating the beast of meaninglessness. Varró's translation thematises a gory but glorious victory: instead of "galumphing back", the young warrior – who is easy to identify with Alice because of the lack of gendered pronouns in Hungarian – departs the blood-soaked ("folyott a vér") scene with a "joyful cry of hosanna" ("elüdvivallagott") that also seems to greet all those who listen to her ("üdv" meaning "hail"), thus, eliciting readerly involvement in the fictitious narrative experience.

Translations into Hungarian

- Alice a Csodák országában.* Transl. Margit Altay. Ill. Anonymous in Arthur Rackham's style. Budapest: Pallas, 1927.
- Alíz kalandjai Csodaországban.* Transl. Andor Juhász. Budapest: Béta Irodalmi Rt, 1929.
- Évike Tündérországban.* Transl. Dezső Kosztolányi. Ill. Dezső Fáy. Budapest: Gergely R, 1935.
- Alice Csodaországban.* Dezső Kosztolányi's translation revised by Tibor Szobotka. Ill. Tamás Szecskó. Budapest: Móra, 1958. (with new set of illustrations by Tamás Szecskó in 1974)
- Alice Tükörországban.* Transl. Tamás Révbíró and István Tótfalusi. Ill. Tamás Szecskó. Budapest: Móra, 1980.
- Alíz kalandjai Csodaországban és a tükör másik oldalán.* Transl. Zsuzsa and Dániel Varró. Ill. John Tenniel. Budapest: Sziget, 2009.
- Alíz Csodaországban.* Transl. Anikó Szilágyi. Cathair na Mart: Everytype, 2013.
- Jónai, Zs Balázs. "Vartarjú" *Napvilág* Íróklub, 2012. <http://iroklub.napvilag.netiras/39957>Weöres, Sándor. "Szajkóhukky." *A lélek idézése: Műfordítások*, Budapest: Európa, 1958.