

Italian

Il Lanciavicchio

Era la brilla, e i fanghilosi tavi
Ghiravano e ghimblavano nel biava.
Mensi e procervi erano i borogavi,
E il momico rattoo superiava.

— Alma dell'alma, fuggi il lanciavicchio!
E la zannante zanna, e l'arpionante
Arpione; fuggi il giubbio picchio
E il frumido Banderiscione.

In mano prese la spada vorpale:
A lungo il mastinio nemico cercò.
Ripiegò stanco sull'albero tuntunnio:
Riguardò, contemplò, meditò.

E mentre ristava in uffoso pensiero,
Il lanciavicchio, con occhi di fuoco
Vifflando scese dal tulgido maniero
Boforinchiando con il fiato roco.

E uno e due: a fondo e a fondo
La lama vorpale snicchiò e snacchiò.
Ucciso il mostro, con il tronco capo
Galompando all'ostello tornò.

- Te benedetto, uccisti il lanciavicchio!
Ah, che ti abbracci, brimante spadiero!
Giorno di fraggia e di calleia è questo!
Gaudiosamente gorgottò il messero.

Era la brilla, e i fanghilosi tavi
Ghiravano e ghimblavano nel biava.
Mensi e procervi erano i borogavi,
E il momico rattoo superiava.

Guido Almansi

Italian Translations of “Jabberwocky”: “Il Lanciavicchio” Translated by Guido Almansi (1978)

Daniela Almansi

Translations of Carroll are often assessed based on the translator’s talent in reproducing his puns and portmanteaus, but personal preference can also play a role, including which version one has read first as a child. This point must be mentioned because the translation that I selected was my father’s, and my first encounter with the “Jabberwocky”. Setting aside the family bias, however, I also believe that “Il Lanciavicchio” is worth of note among the ten-or-so existing Italian translations of the poem (see Cammerata).

Children’s literature in Italy was long driven by educational priorities, and before the 1950s English Nonsense was generally regarded as frivolous – especially under the Fascist regime, when condescendence was paired with nationalistic hostility against foreign authors (Sinibaldi). Among the various reasons for this early diffidence, the linguistic factor is particularly relevant to the “Jabberwocky”: in order to play with words, you need a shared idea of a standard language – something that Italy, scattered into dialects, lacked for a long time. Italy’s dismissive attitude toward Nonsense is reflected in the rather childish tone of the early translations of the “Jabberwocky”, such as Silvio Spaventa Filippi’s “Giabervocco” (1914): “S’era a cocce e i ligli tarri / girtrellavan nel pischetto...”.

In the second half of the 20th century, Italy not only embraced Carroll and Nonsense (the Disney cartoon, released in 1951, clearly played a role), but also started taking it seriously, mostly under the impulse of the children’s writer and

educator Gianni Rodari. The change of attitude is evident if we compare Giuliana Pozzo's "Giabbervocco" (1947), still similar in tone and meter to Spaventa Filippi's version ("Era listro e le calimbe / che tragavan nel poschetto..."), to Tommaso Giglio's "Il Cianciaroccio" (1952), the first to resort to the 11-syllable meter, the epitome of Italian epics ("Era cocino e i vivacciosi avini / Vorticavano e intevano il latò").

The popularity of Nonsense peaked in the 1970s, when two important editions of the Alice books came out: the first was the Italian version, published by Longanesi and translated by Masolino D'Amico, of Martin Gardner's *Annotated Alice*. The second, from which "Il Lanciavicchio" is drawn,¹ was published by Einaudi and comprised Ranieri Carano's translation of *Alice in Wonderland* (1967), Giuliana Pozzo's translation of *Through the Looking-Glass* (1947), and the additional "Wasp in the the Wig" episode ("rediscovered" in 1974), translated by Camillo Pennati. All the parodies and poems of both Alice books were re-translated by Guido Almansi. While equally important, these two editions differed in aim and tone: the Longanesi edition, extensively annotated, was a tool for scholars; the Einaudi edition, with no footnotes, was a "well-assorted editorial collage addressed to both adult and young audiences".²

D'Amico's "Ciarlestroniana"³ and Almansi's "Il Lanciavicchio", along with Milli Graffi's beautiful "Ciciarampa" (1975),⁴ are the best-known versions of "Jabberwocky" in Italy, possibly because they were translated by Carrollian scholars and enthusiasts⁵ who approached the poem with both playfulness and respect. Of the three, D'Amico's version is the most philologically accurate in terms of both meter and reconstruction of the portmanteaus ("Era brillosto, e i tospi agiluti / Facean girelli nella civa / Tutti i paprussi erano mélacri / Ed il trugòn striniva"); Graffi's is particularly creative in terms of nonce words ("Era cerfuoso e i viviscidi tuoppi / Ghiarivan foracchiando nel pedano. / Stavano tutti mifri i vilosnuoppi / Mentre squoltian i momi radi invano"); as for Almansi's translation, I would argue that it is the most irreverent of the three.

Whereas D'Amico and Graffi make a visible effort to recreate the portmanteaus and abide by Humpty Dumpty's explanations, Almansi uses plenty of calques ("brilla", "ghiravano", "ghimblavano", "borogavi", "momico rattoo", "uffoso"), then takes advantage of how their meaning changes from English to Italian and adapts, if necessary, interpretation of the poem (in chapter VI of *Through the Looking-Glass*): "brilla", unlike "brillig", does not evoke "the time when you begin "broiling" things for dinner", but the verb "brillare" (to shine), and hence "nine in the morning, when your house is sparkling clean". Similarly, "uffoso" (from uffish) irresistibly evokes "uffa", an Italian expression of boredom.

¹ The poem first appeared in *Il Caffè*, nn. 3-4, 1972.

² Cammarata, cit. Unless otherwise stated, the translations are my own.

³ D'Amico's translation was re-published separately in 2012.

⁴ Graffi's translation was used in the Italian dubbing of Tim Burton's film *Through the Looking-Glass*.

⁵ D'Amico and Almansi curated two separate editions of Carroll's correspondence: *Le lettere di Lewis Carroll* (1984), and *Le bambine di Carroll* (1974).

Milli Graffi also wrote on Carroll and translated the *Hunting of the Shark* in 1985.

Although “Il Lanciavicchio” is sometimes criticized for its cavalier attitude toward portmanteaus (the touchstone of “Jabberwocky” translations), it also makes excellent use of the translation process in order to continue the game rather than trying to reproduce it.

Compared to other translations (and indeed to the original poem), the linguistic inventiveness of “Il Lanciavicchio” relies more heavily on a comically emphatic tone (“te benedetto...!”), fake archaisms (“uccisti”⁶), and redundancies (“la zannante zanna”). This might explain why it is sometimes described as the parody of a medieval ballad (Caruso 88) – starting from the title, which evokes a medieval weapon (“lancia” = spear) or hero (“Lancillotto” = Lancelot).⁷ The parody reflects the original intent of the “Stanza of Anglo-Saxon poetry” on which the “Jabberwocky” is based, and is therefore in tune with other choices of the Einaudi edition, which pays tribute to different facets of Carroll’s work by using his original drawings for *Alice’s Adventures Underground* to illustrate *Alice in Wonderland*, and his photographs of young girls for *Through the Looking-Glass*.

When it comes to translating nonsense, the adage “the more the merrier” holds true. Every Italian translation of the “Jabberwocky” (including bad ones) reflects a particular aspect of the poem and of its Italian destiny. The contribution of “Il Lanciavicchio” lies in the tribute to the poem’s original parodic intent, which is blown up to grandiloquent (dare I say “Italian?”) proportions. Moreover, following Carroll, it “take[s] care of the sounds and let[s] the sense take care of itself” and is therefore truly poetic, which is to say truly nonsensical: after all, to conclude with a quote by my father, “the language of the Nonsense authors in its purest form [...] is one of the most natural evolutions of poetry and literature” (Almansi 49).

Translations into Italian

Carroll, Lewis. “Il Giabervocco.” *Attraverso lo specchio*. Transl. Silvio Spaventa Filippi. Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1914.

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Carroll, Lewis. “Il Tartaglione.” *Attraverso lo specchio magico*. Transl. Adriana Valori Piperno.

⁶ “Uccisti” instead of “uccidesti” is a deliberate mistake that brings the word closer to Medieval French “occire” (= to kill).

⁷ This suggests a reconstruction of the monster’s name based on the verb “to jab” (something you can do with a spear), whereas Tommaso Giglio’s “Cianciaroccio” (1952), Adriana Valori Piperno’s “Tartaglione” (1954), Milli Graffi’s “Ciciarampa” (1975), D’Amico’s “Ciarlestrone” (1978) and Alessandro Ceni’s *Farfuciarbuglio* (2003) are all based on verbs that mean “to jabber”.

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