

# Latvian

## *Rifkarīlis*

Krēslojās. Slipīgie nāpšļi  
Stirinājās pa zāli.  
Un pēdīgi šķita cītari  
Kā zaļi tupučī tālē.

Bīsties, Rifkarīļa, mans dēls!  
Viņš ir briesmogs no pekles!  
Krūmos kašņājas maitasputns cēls,  
Šausmonīgs blandīteklis.

Viņš ņēma vairogu, zobenu, draugs,  
Pilns varonības līdz malām,  
Un gāja turpu, kur tumtumkoks aug,  
Uz otru pasaules galu.

Tur tas zem koka nostājās skaists  
Un ilgi gaidīja, protams,  
Līdz Rifkarīlis briesmīgais  
Šurp laidās burbuļodams.

Viens, divi, trīs! Un dūmi kūp,  
Un zobens šņāc caur liesmām,  
Un galva krāc, un galva drūp,  
Un gals ir visām briesmām.

Ak, Rifkarīļa pieveicēj,  
Nu nāc pie manas krūts,  
Urā, mans varoni, hei, hei,  
Un savus laurus plūc!  
Krēslojās. Slipīgie nāpšļi  
Stirinājās pa zāli.  
Un pēdīgi šķita cītari  
Kā zaļi tupučī tālē.

*Dagnija Dreika*

# “Jabberwocky” in the Latvian language

*Ilze Stikāne*

There is only one translation of “Jabberwocky” in the Latvian language. It was published in 1981, when *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll was first published in Latvian. The same translation appears in all three following editions (1998, 2006, 2014).

“Jabberwocky” was translated into Latvian by Dagnija Dreika (born in 1951). She is a Latvian writer, translator and an editor of more than 250 books. Dreika has translated stories, novels and poetry from many languages including English (books by Agatha Christie, Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling and others), French (books by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Jules Verne, Stendhal, George Sand and others), Polish (works by Pope John Paul II, Henryk Sienkiewicz and others), Swedish (Erik Johan Stagnelius and others), Russian, Spanish, Bulgarian and Croatian. She received the Annual Latvian Literature Award (2004) for her translation of *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville. Her latest work is translation of the Swedish authors Esaias Tegnér, Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, and Viktor Rydberg for an anthology of romanticism (in preparation).

Dagnija Dreika translated only the verses as the prose of both Alice’s books (“Alises piedzīvojumi Brīnumzemē”, 1975, “Alise Aizspogulijā un ko viņa tur redzēja”, 1981) was translated by Elfrīda Melbāržde (born in 1937). Today Dagnija Dreika remembers:

It was ages ago, I was a young girl then. It was clear that a translator of prose could not translate those verses. At first publishers addressed Vizma Belševica [a famous Latvian poet and translator, 1931-2005, I. S.], but she answered that the only person who could do it was me, because I could do such tricks “naturally.” And it was true [...] After many years, preparing a new edition,

publishers asked me if I wanted to change anything. I said that nothing, not a word. Something similar also happened with *Moby Dick*. Knuts Skujenieks [a famous Latvian poet and translator, born 1936, I. S.] once taught: “You have to create a translation in Latvian as if you were that author and he could write in Latvian.” I followed that advice. [...] After the book was published, I received an invitation from the Lexington University in the USA to give a lecture on my method, entitled “Intuition in the translation of verses”. But I was not allowed to go – it was still Soviet time.” [Dreika 2019]

The Latvian translation strives to retain the original verse pattern of “Jabberwocky”. Like “Jabberwocky”, “Rifkarīlis” consists of 7 four-line stanzas with a cross-rhyme scheme – abab, cdcd etc. – throughout the whole poem with minor exceptions. The rhyme is even more regular in Latvian than in the original poem, and only once, namely, in the first (and the identical seventh) stanza, the first and the third line does not rhyme. In contrast, “Jabberwocky” lacks rhyme between the first and the third line three times. Both poems are mostly composed with half rhymes. Moreover, only masculine rhymes are present in the original poem, whereas in the Latvian version both masculine and feminine rhymes alternate rather regularly.

In “Rifkarīlis” we see a greater variety of stanzaic forms and line lengths. In comparison with “Jabberwocky”, which is written mostly in regular iambic meter of four (the first three lines in each quatrain) and three (the fourth line in each quatrain) feet, “Rifkarīlis” is freer. The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stanzas are rather regular – there are iambic lines of four (the first and the third lines) and three (the second and the fourth lines) feet. But the famous 1<sup>st</sup> (and the identical 7<sup>th</sup>) stanza contains lines of 7-9 syllables with 3 stresses. The 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza differs – it contains lines of 7-9 syllables with 4 and 3 stresses.

Overall, the content does not differ significantly from that of the original. The differences are in details, micro-images, names, words. The translator made no effort to create direct and phonetic similarity, but she created a text which evokes a similar image, feeling and atmosphere. As Alice says: “*somebody* killed *something*: that’s clear, at any rate –” (Carroll 197)

Similarly to the original poem, the translation contains many of the translator’s self-made words (though fewer than in the original text.) Firstly, the Latvian title “Rifkarīlis” is a new word for a monster which likes to gobble, to devour, to engulf. Secondly, the first Latvian stanza contains 6 neologisms (11 words in the original) and their explanation by Oliņš Boliņš (Latvian Humpty Dumpty) is given in Chapter VI. More neologisms are found in other stanzas.

Most of them are made following the same principle as in the original poem – merging two words together and making “portmanteau words” with more than one meaning.

There are no original Latvian illustrations not for “Rifkarīlis” nor the whole book. All four editions are decorated by the original illustrations of Sir John Tenniel.

Although “Rifkarīlis” contains no remarks to specific traits of time or Latvian culture, some features are universal. For example, many Latvian fairy tales describe brave heroes who fight devils, dragons and witches, defeat them and rescue people from peril. This storyline is familiar to most Latvian children.

Although books by Lewis Carroll are loved by Latvian readers, nonsense literature is not common. New nonsense books and translations appear rarely; and those which are published are not especially well received nor widely acknowledged. It is clear that most adults who were brought up on realistic literature during the Soviet era do not understand nonsense literature. The younger generations, however, are more open; children are more willing to appreciate fantasy, absurdity, wonders, miraculous transformations, and word play characteristic of nonsense genre. Alas, since book reviewers are grownups, there is scarce critical reflection on nonsense books.

However, there are some good Latvian writers of nonsense poems and fairy tales (e. g. Viks, Dagnija Dreika, Guntis Berelis). Dagnija Dreika claims that she liked nonsense literature before translating Carroll’s poems, but this job inspired her to write her own books for children: “Before “Alice” I did not write for children, although some poems were popular among them. [...] .. I can agree that Carroll stirred my interest in nonsense. Although I usually mix up genres and target audiences (some of my writings for children are also suited for adults and vice versa).” (Dreika 2019).

In Latvia the appraisal of Lewis Carroll is rather unanimous. Latvian researchers and translators usually emphasize its connection with folklore tradition. They notice that figures, images, and situations in the Alice books reflect the British Victorian world view and traditional character types, while the mad creatures and nonsensical wordplay gained inspiration from the English literary and folkloric heritage. As Melbārzdē formulates it: “stemming from English folklore, English traditions and realia of the Victorian era, the [Alice tales] appear as the most fairy-tale-like fairy-tales in the world; what is more, this [fairy realm] all surfaces as seen through the child’s eyes” (146).

## Translations into Latvian

Kerols, Luiss. *Alise Aizspogulijā un ko viņa tur redzēja*. Transl. Elfrīda Melbārzde and Dagnija Dreika. Rīga: Liesma, 1981.

## Secondary Sources

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Melbārzde, Elfrīda. "Aizspogulija", Anglija, Alise. In: Kerols, Luiss. *Alise Aizspogulijā un ko viņa tur redzēja*. Rīga: Liesma, 1981. 145-148.