

Norwegian

Dromeparden

Det løystra. Lanke lågmælt sjar
hang darne frå det tarve lap.
So stige låg den rumse kor
i sovepaskens gap.

«For Dromeparden du deg akt,
min djerne son! Med ilske klør
fyk Starefuglen ut på jakt
i bygdene mot sør.»

Sitt virpe sverd han spende fast
um midja som var mjuk og mjas.
Han kvilde under Burkestrast
og leistene han las.

Og som han låg i bakkehald,
ein Dromepard frå dolme skog
kom fregande med augeeld
og spuldra der han drog.

Fram kongsmenn! Fram med snipedov!
Det virpe-verje hogg og stakk.
Han skar det ramse hovud av,
og galdre-blodet drakk.

«Min gjæve son som slo i hel
ein Dromepard frå Råme-land!
Å, gledesdag! Å, nott so sæl
då du vart Snjoskens banemann!»

Zinken Hopp

“Dromeparden” – The First Norwegian “Jabberwocky”

Sissil Lea Heggernes

Lewis Carroll’s work holds a canonical status within Western children’s literature. Its continued relevance for a 21st century Norwegian audience is reflected in the success of the National Theatre’s staged and modernized adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* in 2023. *Through the Looking-Glass* is perhaps regarded as a work for the more avid Carroll fans. However, the playful quality of the nonsense poem “Jabberwocky” wields a powerful attraction for translators. The five translations into Norwegian I have located range from Knut Johansen’s faithful translation “Jabberokk” (2006), to Zinken Hopp’s more independent translation or transposition “Dromeparden” (1951).

The Norwegian translation of *Through the Looking-Glass* came about during a period of innovation in Nordic children’s literature (Lund-Iversen 2005). Zinken Hopp, born Signe Marie Brochmann, was a suitable translator. Her children’s book *Trollkrittet* (*The Magic Chalk*) from 1948, has been called an original Norwegian version of *Alice in Wonderland*. It was the first book of its kind in Norway, and brought her international fame as a writer of nonsense poetry.

Whereas *Alice in Wonderland* was translated into Norwegian already in 1903 as *Else i Eventyrland*, Hopp was the first translator of *Through the Looking-Glass* (*Gjennom speilet*) in 1951. The conventions for translating classical works into Norwegian up until the 1950s required adaptations to the taste of a modern audience. Zinken Hopp, who also translated *Alice in Wonderland* in 1946, takes a more pious approach. Yet, she laments the untranslatability of some of the word play, and chooses to rewrite entire poems (Jensen 2005).

Hopp’s choice of title mirrors her stance to translation. Perhaps sensing that a phonetically similar translation, chosen decades later by Knut Johansen

“Jabberokk” (2006) and Hagerup “Jabbervakken” (2004), would not make sense to her readers, she creates a “portmanteau” word: “Dromeparden”. “Dromeparden” is created from the names of two animals: “dromedar” (dromedary) and “leopard”. Despite changing the meaning entirely, the ambiguity of the word is retained. The combination of the word for one domestic and one wild animal leaves the reader unsure what to make of this creature.

Like the other Norwegian translations, “Dromeparden” maintains the regular form, metre and main content of “Jabberwocky.” However, “Dromeparden” only has six stanzas in *Gjennom Speilet*, whereas other renderings repeat the first stanza. Perhaps this is due to pragmatic considerations of fitting the poem onto one page, next to Tenniel’s illustration. Nevertheless, it deviates from the structure of the original, which is “symmetrical around the middle” (Rose 1995, 8).

Jean Jacques Lecercle (2002) states that “Jabberwocky” is eminently readable at the phonetic, morphological and syntactic level: it sounds English, the words can be divided into morphemes (slith-y), and its sentence elements can be analysed. It is the semantic level that poses challenges: What are “the slithy toves,” exactly? In this respect, “Dromeparden” is more challenging. It sounds Norwegian. Hopp has chosen to use Nynorsk, a written standard based on Norwegian dialects, in addition to old dialect words, mirroring Carroll’s ancient-sounding expressions.

Arguably, “Dromeparden” is morphologically sound. However, this depends on the syntactic analysis. The first sentence is readable on the first three levels. The subject “det” means “it” and “løystra” is a verbal. If “løystra” could be looked up in a dictionary, the infinitive would be “løystre”. “Løystre” might be a portmanteau word, from “løyse” = “solve” and “lystre” = “obey”, but based on the original “brillig”, I interpret it as a variety of “lysne” = “give light”. The second sentence reads:

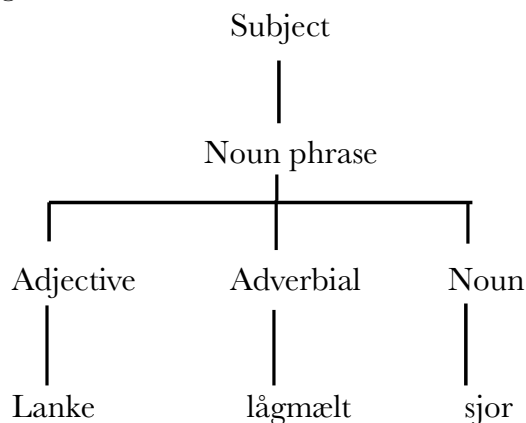
quietly hung from the
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
 “Lanke lågmælt sjør hang darne frå det tarve lap.”

Some words are easily translated such as “lågmælt” which means “quietly.” However, we have to determine if “Lanke lågmælt sjør” can be analysed as an independent clause with the following structure:

Subject Adverbial Verbal
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 “Lanke lågmælt sjør”

or has a noun phrase.

In the former case “Lanke” is a common or proper noun¹. “Sjor” can be a nonsense word resembling a dialect form of the verb “skjære” = “cut”, the present tense of the onomatopoeic “sjoe”, which means the sound of cascading water: “[The] Lanke cascaded quietly” / ”Lanke buldret lavmælt”. In the latter case, “Lanke lågmælt sjor” could be a noun phrase, functioning as a subject preceding the verbal “hang”:



“Sjor” can also be a dialect form of “skjære” = ”magpie”. One way of making meaning of the sentence, considering the possible etymology of the other words is: “[The] shining, quiet magpie hung shaking from the nasty (lips)”.

The next sentence poses similar challenges, which I for reasons of space will not go into. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Hopp does not stop at changing “Jabberwocky’s” phonetics², morphology and syntax, but also the semantics. Whereas three creatures are introduced in the first stanza of “Jabberwocky”, the ambiguous syntax of “Dromeparden” makes it difficult to determine what words represent creatures, how many they are, not to mention what they look like and what they are doing. This leaves many gaps for the reader to fill!

The second to sixth stanza maintains the story of a son who kills a magic creature. The main elements are kept: The Dromepard has claws and fiery eyes, the son enters a wood, kills the creature with a sword and brings the head back to his overjoyed father. Yet, Hopp takes such great liberty with the details, that “Dromeparden” can be characterized as a transposition rather than a translation. In addition to the use of Nynorsk, Hopp introduces both old dialect words and neologisms. Rose (1995) states that the strict form of nonsense poetry allows readers across time and space to make their own meaning out of the seemingly nonsensical words. The ambiguity of the syntactic and semantical level of “Dromeparden” poses greater challenges to the reader than more faithful

¹ As a common noun, it should be preceded by an article or take a suffix, e.g. “En lanke” (which means “hand”) or “Lanken/lanka”, but poetic freedom might lead to ungrammatical forms.

² Johansen (2006) choose to create similar sounding words to the original in Norwegian, e.g. “brillag” and “tovene” and stays closer to Carroll’s sentence structure

translations do. However, in return, we are granted more freedom to fill in the gaps.

Translations into Norwegian

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