Slovene

Žlabudron

Zmrzlak pa tak in gravže tacne
propoti vrtko zasvrdlé;
ves host odmeva huje štracne,
ojejhe lame srž prhné.

"Sin, Žlobudrona ogni se,
grize čeljug in krempljev stik!
Ptiča Kljujusa se izogni,
Šavravsu hajdi v izumik!"

Vojevni meč fant v roko vzame,
dolgo sovraga je iskal i
n ob drevesu Hudejame
tiho zamišljen je obstal.

In ko je tam čul zatopljen,
je Žlabudron prišvrlotal
Kremplji na boj, pogled ognjen,
sredi Drevukov je pristal.

En-dva, en-dva! meč zafrlí,
klok-klok! lije kri zmajeva;
fant tamkaj mrtvega pusti,
z glavo k očetu odhrjá.

"Je res premagan Žlabudron?
Brž sèm v objem – da si le cel!
O skrasni dan! Huri! Huron!"
je od veselja brbolel.

Zmrzlak pa tak in gravže tacne
propoti vrtko zasvrdlé;
ves host odmeva huje štracne,
ojejhe lame srž prhné.

Gitica Jakopin

Čebŕnjka

Zažára je spolživa zbav
girjála, durgljajoč vodnjel,
borgov'c vsak bil je kržlobav,
podgnjač pak momno cvilborel.

„Čebŕnjka dobro var' se, sin!
čekljátih lap, krempljátih šap!
Da b' bil Čapčap ti ne v pogin,
ne ogenjusni Besograb!"

Svoj bojstri meč je vzel v rokó,
mrnjaka je iskal vsevdilj –
ko ni več vedel kam, kako,
je pod tumtumovko počíl.

Ko v senci tuhta še mrgost,
Čebŕnjk z ognjenimi očmi
prisapiclja skoz zmraščni gozd –
in gredši brboči!

En-dva, en-dva! in križemkraž
ga bojstri meč šlikšlaka.
Trup obleži – glavó drží
v galumfu pest junaka.

„Čebŕnjka res si pokončal?
Roké, moj bliščni fant, razkreči!
O, krajbsni dan! Hurú! Hurán!"
je zaprhljal v sreči.

Zažara je spolživa zbav
girjála, durgljajoč vodnjel,
borgov'c vsak bil je kržlobav,
podgnjač pak momno cvilborel.

Branko Gradišnik

"Jabberwocky" Translations in Slovene

Barbara Simoniti

There are three different translations of "Jabberwocky" in the language of Slovenia, while the language itself can boast two names: Slovene and Slovenian, of which the former will be used in this article. The first one to take up the challenge to translate the Alice books into Slovene was Bogo Pregelj. He published *Alice in Wonderland* in 1951 under the naturalized title Alice in the Ninth Country, thus making use of the idiom "ninth country" denoting fairyland ("deveta dežela"). The publication was not illustrated. Using the terminology of Maria Nikolajeva from her study *The Magic Code*, I can say that the "ninth country" is a fantaseme from Slovene folk tales, a "narrative device used to introduce magic surroundings" (Nikolajeva 113). Its fantastic or, rather, fairy-tale character is indicated by the use of alliteration, "deveta dežela," with alliteration not being a prominent stylistic figure in the Slovene language, where rhyme is predominant. I would venture to say that alliteration in Slovene fairy-tale fantasemes is indicative of their ancient origin.

My point here is that Pregelj had to reach far back into the oral tradition since there was no other tradition he could rely upon, let alone any proper fantasy literature. Pregelj's translation of Alice was hampered by archaic language and riddled with explications crucially diminishing the literary qualities – let alone the idiosyncratic nonsense – of the text. It is therefore not surprising that the translation by Pregelj was of marginal importance and had not stimulated anything further by Lewis Carroll to be translated – let alone something as intricate as "Jabberwocky." It is important to bear it in mind that the translation by Pregelj was the last reflection of the pre-war cultural atmosphere in Slovenia (within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes,

and Yugoslavia, in succession), in which English was considered to be a far-off as well as an alien language of a distant culture. However, the cultural context of the post-war Slovenia within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (under Tito) soon opened up, and the work of numerous translators introduced new literary worlds to the reading public through a network of public libraries. My purpose in drawing a relevant frame of the Slovene literary tradition is to establish a necessary tool to put the translations of "Jabberwocky" into perspective that will finally enable me to evaluate them.

The first worthy literary translations of the Alice Books were made by Gitica Jakopin: her *Alice in Wonderland* appeared in 1969 and was followed by *Through the Looking-Glass* in 1978. Helena Biffio made a new translation of *Through the Looking-Glass* in 1994. The latest translation of "Jabberwocky" was the work of Branko Gradišnik (2007), as an addition to his translation of *The Hunting of the Snark*. However, Gradišnik stated that his first attempt to translate the "Jabberwocky" reached back into his youth.

Before I can compare the three Slovene translations of "Jabberwocky" with the original, something must be said about nonsense itself. According to the prevailing theory established by Wim Tigges, there are four defining characteristics of nonsense: "an unresolved tension between presence and absence of meaning, lack of emotional involvement, playlike presentation, and an emphasis, stronger than in any other type of literature, upon its verbal nature" (55). It is easy to see that "Jabberwocky" is an especially fine example of nonsense – so much so that we celebrate it in the present anthology of translations. What is more, "Jabberwocky" is even an extreme case of nonsense, since half of the poem consists of words that only remind us of similar words, while their meaning is not quite known. Thus, the tension between the presence and absence of meaning is highly unresolved, and even heightened by Carroll's explanations that do not explain anything, but, rather, even intensify his playful attitude to language.

Let us now begin at the beginning of "Jabberwocky." The first nonsense styleme Carroll used in it is the written form of the title and the first stanza in their mirror image – the way Alice would have seen them after her passage through the Looking-Glass. Our first translator, Gitica Jakopin, introduced this styleme only in her final edition of 1990, having disregarded it in her former publication. The second translator, Hellena Biffio, on the other hand, had no difficulty in understanding this to be a styleme of the text, and observed it in her translation. The third translator, Branko Gradišnik, nevertheless, translated the "Jabberwocky" without it once again.

The name "Jabberwocky" is clearly a compound noun consisting of two

parts: the first is "jabber" meaning to "babble" or "blabber," while the latter is supposedly the name of an ancient Saxon family, "Wocky." This is the finest explanation I have come across so far, in the House of Names, online. Thus, the fantastic dragon-like animal drawn by Tenniel is a "Blabber-Beast of Noble Birth." There are no coincidences in Carroll's intricate nonsense, merely intentional playfulness. All the points of Tigges' definition are fulfilled. However, if I take a step further towards my theory of how nonsense is verbalized, I can say that the name "Jabberwocky," in which such nonsense effects take place, is in itself a nonsense styleme – a stylistic feature indicating the presence of nonsense. The verbalizing procedures that brought about this nonsense styleme are the use of a compound noun with two units suggesting two distinct meanings (cf. Simoniti).

The first translator, Gitica Jakopin, used the root "Žlobud-" derived from the verb "žlobudrati" (to "blabber") as translation of the first part of the name "Jabberwocky". With the initial consonant "ž-" sounding like "j-" in the French name "Jacques," this was an almost perfect translation. However, the second part of her translated name was done without proper consideration: she added a less common ending "-ron" devoid of any actual meaning as the final part of the name "Žlobud-ron." The second translator, Helena Biffio, coined a name consisting of two nouns, "Žlaber-žljak," with a consonant variation derived from the same verb, "žlobudrati." In such a form, however, the parts are two exclamations rather than two nouns, and, consequently, the nonsense effect of tension between the presence and absence of meaning is utterly lost. The third translator, Branko Gradišnik, however, strove primarily to distance himself from all former translations and, instead, to introduce something original: he coined a neologism, "Čebrnjka', which is a unique tongue-twister of his own, with its meaning unknown, thus referring the reader to his own commentaries. Apart from that, it is a decisive step away from Carroll. – If we draw the line here, it is obvious that the suggested noble origin of "Jabberwocky" is lost in all three translations, while only one of them attempted to preserve the compound-noun form – yet falsely – as a compound of two exclamations. My conclusion is that all three translators disregarded the verbalizing procedures here, thus loosing the nonsense styleme. The nonsense effect in this particular case is therefore eradicated from the text of their translations.

The third prominent nonsense styleme in "Jabberwocky" is the use of the narrative formula – a fantaseme – with which olden stories and histories usually begin: "It was…" Carroll shortened it to 'T'was', that fitted his chosen metrical form better. However, the expected continuation of meaning in the sense of a story is immediately thwarted with the neologism "brillig" and the further

continuation making persistent use of words that only suggest known meanings without ever delivering them. Pure nonsense, to be sure. In Slovene translations, however, Gitica Jakopin and Branko Gradišnik disregarded the styleme entirely at the expence of their aim to follow the metrics of the poem perfectly. It is only Helena Biffio who began the poem with "It was a day...", thus using something resembling the Slovene standard opening fantaseme in story-telling, "Sometime long time ago..." Again the suggested meaning of ancient – i.e. Anglo-Saxon – origin was disregarded.

It is only the fourth nonsense styleme in "Jabberwocky" that is actually tricky, even devious in its nature. A fact generally known is that the commentaries in the Annotated Alice that "Jabberwocky" originated from a supposed "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry" that young Carroll used to write in runic letters for the family magazine Mischmasch, intended for the amusement of his brothers and sisters (cf. Gardner 157, n. 16). Later writing a book for Alice Liddell, Carroll made use of the idea and developed it into a lengthy poem. It is therefore not surprising that "Jabberwocky" is written in clearly defined verses of iambic rhythm, with the metrical scheme of four iambs in each line, $U-U-U-U-$, thus lulling the reader into the pleasant reading rhythm. However, after the initial three lines of regular metrics, the rhythm breaks up abruptly: $U\ U--U-$, leading the reader to blunder into a tongue-twisting halt, before the second stanza continues once again in its pseudo-Saxon regularity. The nonsense styleme in this case is thus the break in rhythm, thwarting the lulled expectations of the reader and throwing them with new zest into the verbal playfulness of the continuation. Anything can be expected in nonsense – except expectedness. For the final coup de gr a c e the nonsense styleme is even enforced with the repetition of the entire stanza at the end of the poem.

All Slovene translations fail to recognize the mischievous nonsense styleme that Carroll employed in such a devious way. Branko Gradišnik delivered a translation with a perfect metrical pattern, devoid of any imperfections that Carroll himself allowed, while Gitica Jakopin made use of some minor extensions of the lines in the first (as well as last) and third stanzas. Helena Biffio blundered somewhat on her own, yet unaware of Carroll's intention with the prominent break. The only possible conclusion here therefore is that the translators erroneously believed the break in rhythm to be a mishap on Carroll's part, to be improved upon in their respective translations – thus wiping out the most Carrollian nonsense styleme so far.

Having thus compared the translations of only four initial nonsense stylemes of "Jabberwocky," I can say that none of the Slovene translations pays proper

attention to the idiosyncrasies of Carroll's nonsense. The main focus of all three translators was on the metric pattern as well as the rhyme scheme of the poem, with regular metrics and rhymes being the familiar structures of Slovene poems or songs. However, such a familiarization of the original text had led them to disregard the actual verbalizing procedures of nonsense stylemes in Carroll's original. I could say that only those nonsense stylemes were respected that had not upset their prospective idea of the formal characteristics imposed upon the original from their literary background. Thus the unexpectedness of nonsense could not be accepted by any of them. The actual effects of their translated texts are therefore significantly transformed and disturbed in an utterly arbitrary way. I can therefore only suggest that the best translation could be, according to some criteria, that by Gitica Jakopin, and, according to others, that by Branko Gradišnik.

The conclusion can only be, on the one hand, that nonsense texts cannot be translated as arbitrary texts with their idiosyncrasies disregarded by the translators. In my experience this happens in languages/literatures devoid of a recognised nonsense tradition of their own. On the other hand, however, the definition of nonsense established by Wim Tigges brings such a decisive in-depth understanding of nonsense that knowledgeable translators are empowered by it to create target texts that are still nonsense – the real thing. It is therefore of vital importance to evaluate various native/national examples of nonsense as a genre, so that the translations of Carroll's texts can consequently be respected for what they actually are: a genre in its own right, defined by a form of communication rather than by its formal characteristics. And it is precisely this idiosyncrasy that makes nonsense so vibrant and vital that the present anthology is dedicated to it.

Translations into Slovene

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