

Bulgarian

Джаберуоки

Бе сгладне и честлинните комбурси
тарляха се и сврецаха във плите;
съвсем окласни бяха тук щурпите
и отма равапсатваха прасурси.

„От Джаберуока бой се, сине мой!
От нокти хищни, зъби що раздират!
От Джубджуб бой се птицата и крий,
та зракът мощни да не те съзира!“

Той грабна своя остър меч в ръка
и дълги дни врагът заклет иска,
възправен сред безмеждната гора,
замислен край митичната река.

И както той замислено стоеше,
ей Джаберуока с огнени очи
цвифейки във леса довтасал беше,
рикае, мята снопове лучи.

Напред! Назад! Напред! Удри! Режи!
Свистеше мечът остър в синий вдух.
Остави звяра мъртъв да лежи,
препусна бързо коня остроух.

„Уби ли Джаберуока, сине мой?
Ела в прегръдките ми, храбра младост!
О, славен ден, охей! Охей! Охой!“
Той скачаше и цвифеше от радост...

Бе сгладне и честлинните комбурси
тарляха се и сврецаха във плите;
съвсем окласни бяха тук щурпите
и отма равапсатваха прасурси.

Stefan Gechev

The Looking-Glass World: A Future in the Past

Kapka Kaneva

The first stanza of “Jabberwocky” translated into Bulgarian from English by Stefan Gechev (1911-2000) under the title “Dzhaberuoki” and quoted by my mother, marked my very first acquaintance with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice*. The melody of the neologisms fascinated me – I had never heard anything like that before. It seemed to me they tinkled about noon light (“sgladne”, a combination between the words “glad” – hunger and “pladne” – noon, I would associate with lunchtime; “chestlinnite” – sounding a lot like “svelinnite” that means “made out of light”), sliding (“tarlyaha se” – similar to “tarkalyaha se”, which means “to roll”) through the branches of a knotty tree (“svretsvaha” which fonetically speaks of being stuck), peacefully standing next to a shallow (“plite” I would associate with “plitchinite” – shallows) riverside. The content, wrapped into the strange words, sounded both amusing and soaked with melancholy, but definitely intriguing. I felt the desire read more, so Alice soon became a close friend. I must have been four; it must have been the early 1980s in a Socialist Eastern-European country, Bulgaria.

Although *Alice in Wonderland* (“Алиса в Страната на чудесата”, translated by Lazar Goldman) remains more popular in Bulgaria than its sequel, “Алиса в Огледалния свят”, literally meaning *Alice in the Looking-Glass World*, (translated by Stefan Gechev) but the poem “Jabberwocky” is indubitably the most beloved of all the verses from the two parts. The first Bulgarian edition was published in 1965 by Narodna Mladezh, illustrated by Petar Chuklev (1936-), a well known illustrator, graphic artist and a former professor at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia. Many of my generation first met Alice in the succeeding 1977 revised reprint: an eye-catching, large paperback volume, published by *Otechestvo*,

with four full-page illustrations in color, three dividing half-page decorative panels which aesthetically rhymed with the vibrant cover image, a mature artwork in the artist's recognizable style, complemented by several black and white images, in sepia print, in which even the main character is not depicted the same way (the proportions of the body speak sometimes of a very young girl and sometimes of a more mature one and the hairstyle is represented differently) .



Petar Chuklev, 1965

I had the opportunity to compare the illustrations from my childhood times with the ones in the 1965 publication by *Narodna Mladezh*, which has a smaller size and a hard cover. The full-color page-sized images in *Through the Looking-Glass* are identical, but in the earlier publication we find eight of them – two in the first part of the book and six in the second one. They are all printed on a thicker paper on the one side of the sheet and embedded into

the one-color book body. The graphic illustrations are printed in black. Some of them were used in the 1977 edition unchanged, some were removed, and some brand new ones have appeared. The illustrator has remade others, with the same or very similar composition but with more details and/or with a different stylization, including the image of the Jabberwock.

Judging by its size and cover, one would decide the 1977 publication was supposed to be a representative one. However the low-quality once white showing-through paper of the interior, with the help of the pale contrast sepia ink and the terrible printing, typical for the Bulgarian book publishing of the period, has obviously taken away much of the readability; the illustration is quite saturated and loaded with graphic details. Probably this is the reason why I don't remember being impressed by the image of the Jabberwock as a child at all. Still my research showed that for many years the two illustrations of Petar Chuklev were the only ones that offered a vision of the monstrous creature to the Bulgarian reader. The more recent visually impressive versions of *Through the Looking-Glass*, illustrated

by Viktor Paunov (*Trud*, 2002, translated by Svetlana Komogorova – Koma) and Yassen Ghiuselev (*Helicon*, 2015, translated by Stefan Gechev) do not include one.

In both variations of his illustration Chuklev presented the Jabberwock dead, lying on his back on the top of a mountain, pierced in the left eye by a spear. Its long tongue hangs out from the mouth of its skull shaped lamb-like



Petar Chuklev, 1977

head. Its reptilian body has four legs with claws, but lacks wings and moustaches, and hence differs from Tenniel’s famous vision of the dragon beast. The figure of the creature’s much smaller defeater is represented on a horse’s back in the lower sector of the image. While in the first illustration we can distinguish a bridge under the knight’s horse’s legs, in the second, filled with decorative elements, the bridge has been neutralized by the details, and features a Chagallian female figure with wings, carrying a laurel wreath above white clouds in the right top corner.

As for the historical and political context, Gechev’s foreword – published both in the 1965 and 1977-editions – is interesting since it is a typical a “politically correct” paratext, the kind expected from Socialist era Bulgarian translators. It defends the translation of nonsense with Marxist ideological statements, arguing that kings, queens “and other nobles” in the Alice stories were meant to satirize and mock “the foolish and dumb” representatives of the tyrannical privileged elite class and thus help children in becoming “technicians, scientists, true builders of the most complete Communist society”. Still some lines of Gechev’s introductory passages still sound relevant today:

And then you will recall that if your imagination is flexible and rich, if you easily get a grasp of complicated scientific theories, if your way of thinking is brave and innovative it must be, among all, because of all the wonderful

stories about Alice, which you read when you were little.

Alice stayed a close friend of mine and remained by my side in every important stage of my life. She was there in my school years in records, audiocassettes, school plays and movies. As a teenager, in the attempt of getting to know more about others, I found her in theoretical books, explaining the unexplainable in Lewis Carroll's words. She even accompanied me during my doctor's thesis research, dedicated to books as spatial objects, where I was the one who chose to use quotes of her story to illustrate my ideas. Not to mention that stories about Alice were probably the ones most often interpreted in a spatial book form.

In the past few years, I met Alice for the first time once again: by sharing the melody of Stefan Gechev's "Jabberwocky" with my daughter – a reflection of my own childhood in a totally different Looking-Glass. Because our past comes back to life for us with our future and it is our love and desire to give our children both wisdom and freedom we must learn to run twice as fast to get somewhere else.

Translations into Bulgarian

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