

# Romanian

## *Trăncăniciada*

Era friglind, linsoase zăvi  
Se tot girau, gymblau în ob –  
Numai minsoare borogăvi,  
Când momii sor deşciob.

Păzea, vrag fiu, de Trăncăvici!  
Fălci care muşcă, Gheară-Rea!  
Hădul Bolbor zboară spre-aici,  
Frumoaznicul! Păzea!

El spada o luă cât ai clipi –  
Lung îl câtă pe scârţălat –  
Popas făcu la Dum-dum-tri,  
Pe gânduri cufundat.

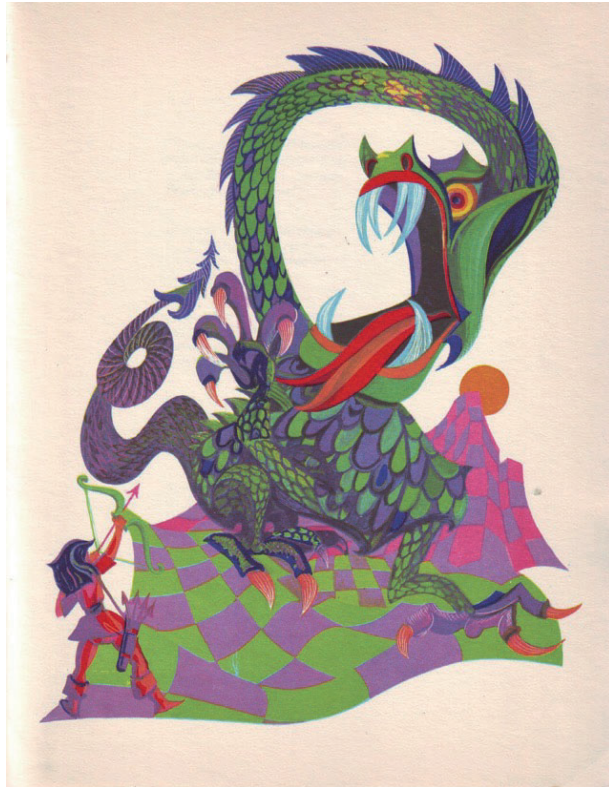
Şi cât pe gând el sta hătdus  
Cu ochii-n flăcări, Trăncăvici,  
Şuflând venea-n halop pe sus,  
Volvor prin grosdesiş.

Un-doi! Un-doi! Ca-n oase moi  
Graval tăiş străpunge: Zgrunţ!  
Mort îl lăasă şi tigva-i luă –  
Glapă 'napoi zglobunţ.

Şi-ai omorât pe Trăncăvici?!  
O, fătul meu gloluminos!  
O, zi fruslavă! Ohei! Ohu!  
Hulubăia voios.

Era friglind, linsoase zăvi  
Se tot girau, gymblau în ob –  
Numai minsoare borogăvi,  
Când momii sor deşciob.

*Frida Papadache*



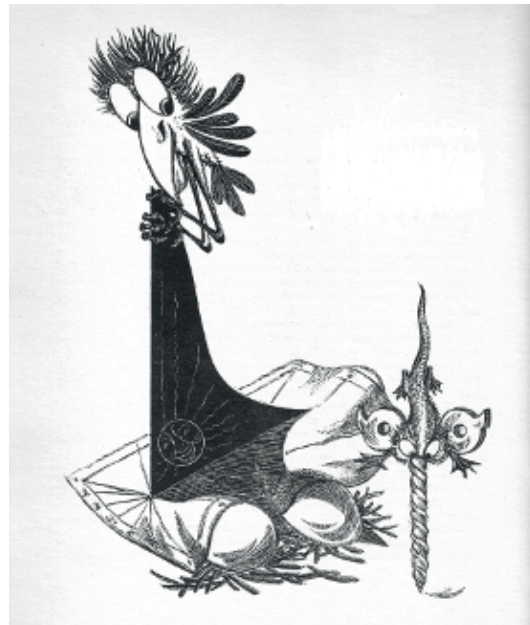
Petre Vulcănescu, 1965

# Frida Papadache's Romanian Translation of Jabberwocky

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The history of the Romanian translations of “Jabberwocky” begins more than seven decades after the original poem was published, but it is rather fruitful, with no less than seven versions. Five of them are part of a Romanian translation of Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*: Nora Galin (1945), Frida Papadache (1971), Constantin Dragomir (1982), Mirella Acsente (1997), and Ioana Ieronim, (2007), although in this case the text of *Through the Looking-Glass* is translated by another person, Antoaneta Ralian. The other two (Leon R. Corbu, 1977; and Nina Cassian, 1991) were published as distinct translations. The best known, and for good reasons, as we shall further see, is Papadache’s translation.

Frida Papadache (1905–1989) began her career as a translator after the end of the second world war, when she was already 40 years old. She translated writers such as Theodore Dreiser, John Steinbeck, Virginia Wolf, and James Joyce. (She was the first who translated Joyce into Romanian.) Although she was mostly interested in realistic and introspective novels for adults, Papadache also translated literature for children: Mark Twain (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 1957); Robert Louis Stevenson (*Kidnapped*,



Petre Vulcănescu, 1965

1960; *The Master of Ballantrae*, 1967; *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1974); and, of course, Lewis Carroll: *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. Papadache's translation of Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* is accompanied by several full colour plates and pen drawings made by Petre Vulcănescu. A Romanian painter, potter, and graphic designer, Petre Vulcănescu (1925-1978) made his debut in 1962, and became known for his woodcuts and book illustrations. In the abovementioned edition, two illustrations are in connection with the poem "Jabberwocky." In a colour plate (shown above), the Jabberwock, a dragon-like creature, with no wings though, is represented not in a wood, but on a tridimensional chessboard. Also of interest is the fact that the boy is shown drawing a bow, ready to shoot an arrow and kill the monster, although in the original poem, as well as in Papadache's translation (and in all other Romanian translations and the illustrations that accompany them, to my knowledge) the hero slays the Jabberwock with a sword. Vulcănescu also contributed with a pen drawing of a borogove and a tove, nesting under a sun-dial.

Papadache strives to retain the original verse pattern of "Jabberwocky." As in Carroll's poem, four out of the Romanian translation's seven stanzas follow this regular rhyme scheme: ABAB, although they are not exactly the same stanzas (in Papadache's translation, 1, 2, 3, 7, while in Carroll's poem, 1, 2, 4, 7). A secondary, but very similar, rhyme scheme characterizes stanzas 5 and 6 of Papadache's translation: ABCB (in "Jabberwocky", this rhyme scheme characterizes the remaining three stanzas). As in Carroll's poem, the third line of the fifth stanza is characterized by internal rhyme: "luă" does not rhyme with any of the other ending words, but rather has internal rhyme with "lășă." And finally, the fourth stanza of Papadache's translation has a different rhyme scheme: ABAC, one which does not exist in "Jabberwocky."

Papadache also retains the original meter of *Jabberwocky*. So, the meter of the Romanian translation is mostly iambic tetrameter, as in line 5, for example: "Păzea, | vrag fiu, | de Trăn | căvici!". As in Carroll's poem, the exception to this pattern is that the last line of each stanza has only three feet, making it an iambic trimeter. Look at line 20: "Glapă | 'napoi | zglobunț." In general, this rather straightforward meter complements the translation's diction well. Many words are either just one or two syllables, allowing them to fit snugly into this iambic form. The overall metrical regularity helps Romanian readers better understand the translation, which otherwise is as strange to them as is that of "Jabberwocky" to modern English readers.

In general, the Romanian translations of "Jabberwocky" published as literature for children tend to produce as many connected sounds as possible,

paying little attention to the poem's (non)sense. For example, Nora Galin's translation (1945) uses a recognisable ABAB rhyme scheme throughout, which allows the poem to make sense on a basic auditory level. In order to make Carroll's text more readable for children, some translators choose not to include at all the poems in their translation of *Through the Looking-Glass*. Such is the case of the Oana Telehoi's translation (*Alice în țara oglinzilor*, 2008). On the other hand, those translations of "Jabberwocky" published as stand-alone works, which were not intended for a child audience, tend to be more preoccupied with the meaning of words and the playful usage of language. For example, Corbu translates "Jabberwocky" with "Ciorbobocul" a nonsense word meaning, as the translator notes, "a blind baby crow ("cioară"), which lives chiefly on borscht ("ciorbă"); he is well fed, chubby, short and fat: a "costoboc" (an ancient Thracian tribe, who lived between the rivers Prut and Dniester). Exploring the many different ways in which nonsense could be translated, Ioana Ieronim chooses to translate in two different ways the same stanza (the opening and the closing stanza in Carroll's poem).

Even though her translation was published as literature for children, Frida Papadache manages to keep a balance between the carefully structured sounds of the poem and its (non)sense. Starting with the translation of the title, "Trăncăciada", the playful tendency of Papadache is obvious: she adds to the verb "a trăncăni" ("to jabber") the affix "-ada", used to name an heroic poem, thus poking fun at the heroic questing tale.

With one or two exceptions, Papadache comes with equivalents to all of the nonsense words and expressions found in the original. Thus, in the first verse, "brillig" is translated with "friglind" (from the verb "a frige", "to broil"); the portmanteau "slithy" is translated with another portmanteau, "linsoase", a combination of "lin" ("smooth"), "lins" ("sleek") and "osos" ("bony"); and "toves" is translated with another nonsense word, "zăvi", with the same meaning, explained by Coco-Cocou (Humpty Dumpty), as in Carroll's poem. Papadache translates "gyre" as "gira" (a word that has, alongside others, a meaning similar to the one explained by Humpty Dumpty), and "gimble" with "gymbła"; as Humpty Dumpty explains, this word means: "a umbla în pas de gimnast, sfredelind cu botul" (walking like a gymnast, piercing with their snouts as if with a gimlet). "Wabe" is translated with "ob" (because it goes "o bună bucată înainte, o bună bucată înapoi și o bună bucată de jur împrejur" ("a long way before it, a long way behind it, and a long way beyond it on each side")). "Mimsy" is given as a portmanteau as well, "minsoare", but with a different meaning than in the original: "cu oase mici și cu pene ca soarele" (having small bones and feathers like

the sun). “Borogoves” is adapted as “borogăvi” to sound more like a Romanian (non-existing) word (in Romanian, an *a* with breve is used for the sound /ə/ and some nouns form the plural by adding -i to the singular). Papadache is even more playful in translating the final verse of the first stanza: “momii sor descioab”, where “momii”, the Romanian adaptation of “momes”, have the meaning that “raths” have in Carroll’s poem (a sort of green pig), “raths” is translated as “sor” (short for “they left their home at dawn and lost their way”), while “descioab” has the same meaning as “outgrabe” (in the words of Coco-Cocou (Humpty Dumpty based on “ou” Romanian for “egg”): “ceva între a mugi și a șuiera, cu un fel de strănut la mijloc” (“something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle”).).

The next stanzas also shows Papadache’s playfulness when translating the invented words used by Carroll. The “Jubjub bird” is translated with “hâdul” (ugly, deformed), “Bolbor” (an onomatopoeia that imitates the sounds made by a turkey). “Frumious Bandersnatch” is rendered as “Frumoaznicul”, an interesting choice, since it can be seen as a compound of “groaznic” (meaning “fearful, gruesome”, a word whose usage to describe the monstrous Jabberwock seems appropriate), but also “frumos” (meaning “beautiful”). “Vorpall” is left untranslated in line 9, but in line 18 is given as “graval”, a combination of “grava” (“to engrave”) and “letal” (“lethal”). “Manxome” is translated with “scârțalat”, from the verb “a scârțâi”, meaning “to squeak” (“scârț” is also used as an onomatopoeia in colloquial speech when something is regarded as unworthy of one’s notice or consideration), and “tumptum” with “dum-dum” (a colloquialism referring to the sound of a drum). In the fourth stanza, “uffish” is translated with “hăt” (an informal word used to form the superlative), “whiffling” with “șuflând” (a compound of “șuiera”, “to whistle” and “sufia”, “to blow”), “tulgey wood” is translated with “grosdesiș” (a combination of “desiș”, “a dense forest” and “gros”, “thick”), and “burbled” is translated with “volvor” (similar to “bolborosi”, “to bubble”). The word used to translate “snicker-snack”, “zgrunț” (meaning “a piece of solid, crumbly material, like a friable rock”), brings before the readers’ eyes the image of the Jabberwock crumbling into small pieces, as the sword cuts into it. Any hint of whimsy that the original onomatopoeia had is thus lost.

The choice of translating “galumphing” (a combination of gallop and triumphant) with two words, “glapă” and “zglobunț” is determined by the need to retain the original verse pattern of the poem: “galopa” (a three syllables word meaning “to gallop”) becomes a two syllables non-existing Romanian word (“glapă”) so that the line could be an iambic trimeter, and the word “zglobiu” (“sprightly”, “playful”) receives the affix -unț, so that it could rhyme with the

last word in line 18, “zgrunț” (the word “triumfător”, which is a more faithful translation of the English “triumphant” would not have worked here).

Papadache seems even more readily than Carroll to use neologisms, portmanteaus, and nonsense words. Sometimes she chooses invented words in her translation, even though Carroll used words that can be found in an English dictionary. Thus, “beamish” is translated with “gloluminos” (a combination of “glorios”, “glorious” and “luminos”, “radiant”). Other neologisms are “Fruslavă” for “frabjous” (a combination of “frumos”, “beautiful” and “slavită”, “praised”), and “hulubăia” for “chortle” (a verb derived from the noun “hulub”, “pigeon”). Papadache, however, has not proven as successful as Carroll in having these new words work their way into the dictionary of the Romanian language.

Just like in the original poem, the invented words Papadache uses in her translation work convey meaning even though they are nonsense. Whether by sounding similar to words Romanian readers would know –like “șuflând”, “halop”, “volvor”, and “glapă” – or by making use of onomatopoeia – like “bolbor” – sense is communicated. This quality allows for consistent reader engagement and fascination throughout the poem. Papadache certainly succeeds to make her translation sound interesting enough for the readers’ imagination to wonder and wander.

## Translations into Romanian

Carroll, Lewis. *Peripețiile Alisei în lumea oglinzii* [“Alice’s Adventure in the Land of the Mirror”]. Transl. Frida Papadache. Ill. Petre Vulcănescu. București: Ion Creangă, 1965.