

Russian

Бармаглот (Barmaglot)

Варкалось. Хливкие шорьки
Пырялись по наве,
И хрюкотали зелюки,
Как мюмзики в мове.

О, бойся Бармаглота, сын!
Он так свирлеп и дик!
А в глуше рѣ мит исполин —
Злопастный Брандашмыг!

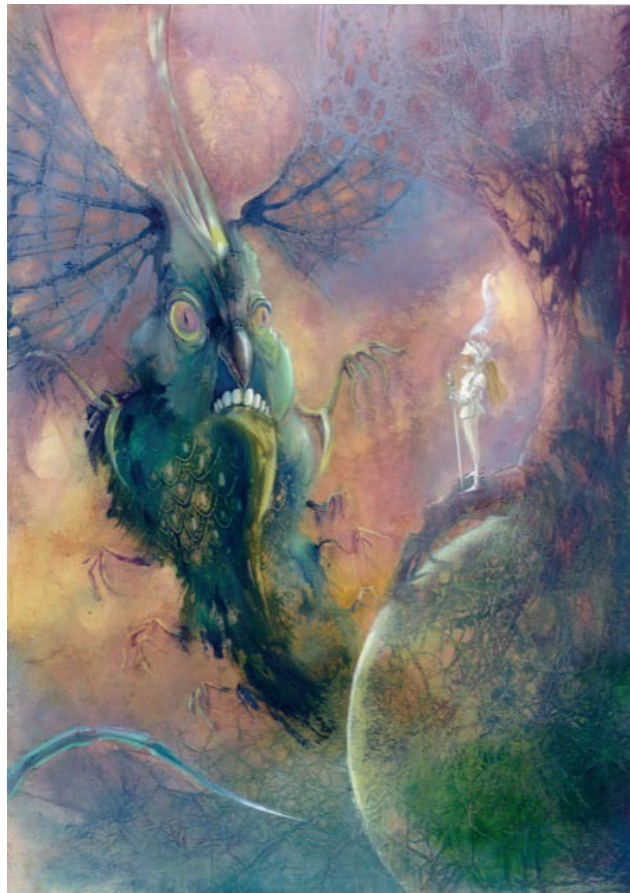
Но взял он меч, и взял он щит,
Высоких полон дум.
В глущобу путь его лежит
Под дерево Тумтум.

Он стал под дерево и ждѣт.
И вдруг граахнул гром —
Летит ужасный Бармаглот
И пылкает огнѣм!

Раз-два, раз-два! Горит трава,
Взы-взы — стрижаёт меч,
Ува! Ува! И голова
Барбардаёт с плеч!

О светозарный мальчик мой!
Ты победил в бою!
О храброславленный герой,
Хвалу тебе пою!

Варкалось. Хливкие шорьки
Пырялись по наве.
И хрюкотали зелюки,
Как мюмзики в мове.



Ekaterina Kostina

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Dina Orlovskaya

A Very Large Family of Russian Jabberwocks

Olga Bukhina

The history of the Lewis Carroll's Russian translations goes back to the nineteenth century. *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) was anonymously translated into the Russian as *Sonya in the Realm of Wonders* only fourteen years after its original publication. In the first fifteen years of the twentieth century four more translations were published (Hellman 251- 252). The Soviet twentieth century also produced several translations of *Alice in Wonderland* as well as *Through the Looking-Glass*. Carroll's *Alice* has been a cult book in Russia for more than a century, and that is why "Jabberwocky" soon became a household item of Russian children's literature. Two of the "Jabberwocky" translations are well-known and well-respected. The first one was done by a translator and a playwright Tatiana Shchepkina-Kupernik as a part of V. A. Azov's translations of *Through the Looking-Glass* published in 1924. The second, and probably most famous, translation was by Dina Orlovskaya; her translation was a part of the most widely spread Russian translation of Carroll by a very well-known translator, Nina Demurova. It was first published in 1967. Demurova produced the most "accurate" renditions of both *Alice* books (if the word "accurate" may be applied to translations of Carroll). Demurova also translated Martin Gardner's annotated version and added her own comments to both books and to Gardner's text. Her translation became "canonical," and has been published not only as a children's text but also as an academic endeavor. Demurova wrote several articles about Carroll's works as well as about the problems she encountered in translating his books. For poetry, she invited other translators to contribute; thus, "Jabberwocky" was translated by Dina Orlovskaya.

It is difficult to calculate the total number of the Jabberwocky translations.

The challenge of the poem invites many translators to try their skills once or, sometimes, even twice, and to render it using different types of absurdist language. Some websites have collected dozens of classical and contemporary translations of “Jabberwocky” and keep adding new ones.¹ The versions of the Russian name of the title character are countless. Shchepkina-Kupernik uses the name “Verlioka” that is a character from the Slavic fairytale. Folkloric Verlioka is a one-eyed tall evil monster who kills the old grandmother and her two granddaughters. After that, the grandfather, with the help of some magic creatures, kills Verlioka. Orlovskaya named the Jabberwock differently; her “Barmaglot” is probably a fusion of two words: the name of a very famous character of Russian children’s literature, Barmalei, and the verb *glotat* (“to gobble up”). Barmalei is a title character of two poems by Kornei Chukovsky, a leading Soviet children’s author and a theoretician of literary studies and translation. Barmalei, an African outlaw and a cannibal who wants to eat children, has been known to every child in Russia since the 1920s when the first poem was written.

Other translators suggested the following names (this is not, by a long way, a complete list): Spordodrak (“an argument with the fight”), Zmeegryz’ (“snake eater”), Tarbormot, Umzar, Burnozhor (“devouring fast”), Zrakonakh, Konkolet, Ktulhk, Glukhomorr, Ispepelin (“one who incinerates”), Bormochun (“mumbling one”), Vurdalak (“vampire”), Korchubei (an allusion to a powerful historical character from a famous poem of Alexander Pushkin), Lukomor (another allusion to Pushkin), Borchardes, Zhabervolk (a mixture of a toad and a wolf), Ubeshchur, Mordolak (a mix of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Mordor and a vampire). Recently, a new translation by Eugeny Kluev was published. It is the first Russian *Alice* of the twenty first century, and Kluev translated both the prosaic and poetic parts of both Carroll’s books. He produced his own rendition of “Jabberwocky” calling it the “Zhilbylwolk” (“once upon a time, a wolf”). In this translation Kluev skillfully brings into play the very specific Russian tradition of absurdist linguistic games. In the late 1920s or in the early 1930s, a Russian linguist Lev Shcherba suggested that linguists may use a particular phrase as an example of a fully grammatically correct sentence that does not have any conventional meaning. The suggested phrase “Glokaya kuzdra shteko budlanula bokra i kudryachit bokryonka” consists of words whose roots do not exist in Russian but, at the same time, has a correct construction in terms of Russian morphology and syntax.² Kluev uses nouns from the “Glokaya kuzdra” to animate and to domesticate his translation of “Jabberwocky”. He populates the first four lines of the poem with the “kuzdra” and the “bork” (they are some kind of animals, just like the “borogove” and the “rath” of the original poem). Kluev also uses the verb “kudryachit” (present time)

¹ For example, <http://centrolit.kulichki.net/centrolit/jabberwocky/index.html>; <http://www.wonderland-alice.ru/public/kurij2/JABBERWOCKY>.

² This sentence is constructed in a way that is similar to Noam Chomsky’s phrase *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously* that illustrates the distinction between grammar and vocabulary.

and transforms it into “kudryachilis” (past time).

The Russian reader is well aware of various translations of the Alice books. The version of “Curiouser and curiouser!” dates the person who quotes it. Often, the first translation one reads is the favorite, so my favorite “Jabberwocky” is of Shchepkina-Kupernik. Shchepkina-Kupernik’s and Orlovskaya’s translations are done in a similar style with the use of some ordinary words and changing a letter or two in each of them to create a sense of absurd. Both translations tend to follow the original verse pattern of “Jabberwocky”, including, in Orlovskaya’s case, a similar iambic metre. Russian children’s poetry tends to prefer the strict rhyme schemes, and both translations, as well as the Kluev’s one, use the exact rhyming with the strict ABAB rhymes in each stanza, even though the original English metre is sometimes irregular. All three translators follow the story line quite accurately and portray most of dramatic events and gory details of the original “Jabberwocky”. They do not omit “One, two! One, two!” and “Callooh! Callay!” The latter is rendered through the various derivations of “Hurray”. The “beamish boy” is positively shining in the translations. So, the English “Jabberwocky” is easily recognizable in these Russian texts.

The tradition of absurd poetry for children has a long history in Russia starting with Daniil Kharmis and Alexander Vvedensky, the members of a group of absurdist poets who called themselves OBERIU.³ Kharmis and Vvedensky published a number of absurdist poems in children’s magazines in the 1920s and the 1930s. This tradition proliferated for a while but with the total victory of Socialist Realism by the mid-1930s it ceased to exist. Both, Kharmis and Vvedensky, were accused of anti-Soviet activities and arrested in 1931, released, and arrested again in 1941. Both died in prison soon after (Hellman 374). Later, in the 1980s, the children’s poetry of Kharmis again became publishable, and a few poets of that time, Oleg Grigoriev, Genrich Sapgir, Vadim Levin, and Renata Mukha, returned to absurdism. Some contemporary Russian poets, such as Mikhail Esenovskiy, German Lukomnikov, and Artur Givargizov, also often use an absurdist style in writing for children.

Carroll’s humor, absurdism, and philosophical depth never ceased being attractive to the Russian reader, young and old, and multiple editions of *Alice* have been published and republished regularly by various publishing houses. In December 2019, at the Moscow Non/Fiction Bookfair, I counted at least a dozen different *Alices* with mostly Demurova’s translation (and Orlovskaya’s “Barmaglot”). In terms of illustrations, these publications tend to be a bit conservative by choosing the familiarity of Tenniel’s or other famous Western illustrations (for example, by the British writer and artist Mervyn Peake). Kluev’s

³ *Ob’edinenie Realnogo Iskusstva* (*The Association for Real Art*) with the letter ‘u’ in the end added just for fun.

translation was published with a new set of illustrations by a young Dutch artist Floor Rieder, but she was not very interested in portraying the Jabberwock. Still, over the years, plenty of Russian artists tried their hand at picturing different scenes of *Alice* with the Jabberwock envisioned as a reddish-brownish ancient reptile (Ksenia Lavrova), a skinny dragon connected to the armed knight by a thin thread (Yury Vashchenko), or a clay crocodile in a tall hat, necktie, and checkered pants that just lost its head under the Tumtum tree (Nikolai Vatagin). The newest Russian Jabberwock is done by Ekaterina Kostina who sees it as a huge scary cockatoo bird with sharp teeth and a multiple set of feet and claws. A tiny delicate white knight holds the sword straight up and is about to start a fencing match with the monster. This edition uses Orlovskaya's translation, and in her "Barmaglot", the Jubjub bird does not find its place. The artist who is clearly familiar with the English original combines the Jabberwock and the Jubjub bird in one terrifying image. A careful look at the knight reveals that it is a girl, probably Alice herself. The overall result is quite impressive, and an already large family of the Russian Jabberwocks is now expanded even further.

Translations into Russian

- Lewis Carroll. *Alisa v Zazerkal'i*. Transl. V. A. Azov (V. A. Ashkenazi). Poems by T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik. Ill. John Tenniel. Cover image by D. I. Mitrokhin. Moskva- Petrograd: Izdatel'stvo L.D. Frenkelya, 1924.
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- Lewis Carroll. *Alisa v strane chudes. Alisa za zerkalom*. Transl. E.V. Kluev. Ill. F. Rieder. Moskva: Samokat, 2018.
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