

ANTI-PARKER

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Abstract

This paper is a critique of the book “Lewis Carroll in Russia: Translations of *Alice in Wonderland* 1879–1989” by Fan Parker, Ph.D., which reviews eleven Russian versions of the children’s classic. Detailed analysis of Dr. Parker’s book has led the author to conclude that most of its principal arguments and findings are unsubstantiated, mistaken, biased or inexpert, and that it cannot possibly be seen as a source of authority in literary translation studies.

Keywords: Fan Parker, translation studies, literary translation, Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, children’s literature, Russian translation, Demurova, Shcherbakov

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Preliminary Notes

This paper is a critique of a book by United States scholar Fan Parker (1994), which reviews eleven Russian versions of Lewis Carroll’s “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” (hereinafter, AAIW).

The title of this paper may not be seen by some readers as typically academic, so an explanation would not be out of place. By entitling it in the style of certain polemical works of the past, such as Friedrich Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*, I intend to give the reader immediate clarity about the critical nature of my discussion.

I also feel the need to explain the *raison-d’être* of this paper. It is probably a belated response to a 1994 work by a deceased scholar (Dr. Parker died in 2004), but I have only recently been able to obtain and analyze the original edition of her book. The reason why it still calls for an argumentative response is that it is sometimes referred to, in a rather unquestioning manner, by authors who have apparently not consulted the actual source.

Here is an indicative example. The Russian version of Wikipedia contains the following statement in the page dedicated to AAIW:

Доктор Ф. Паркер, написавший книгу «Льюис Кэрролл в России», утверждал, что перевод Щербакова является одним из самых лучших.¹

(*Translation:* Dr. F. Parker, the author of the book “Lewis Carroll in Russia,” maintained that Shcherbakov’s translation was one of the best.)

The verb in this statement is notably used in the masculine form, indicating that the authors of the Russian text believe Fan Parker to be a man — a sign that they have obviously not held her book in their hands.

Background Facts

Though it is only one work by Dr. Parker we are discussing, it is certainly helpful to form a wider picture of the scholar’s research and sphere of interests.

The most comprehensive summary of Fan Parker’s life and academic work that I have been able to come across was given by her son, Stephen J. Parker, in 2006:

¹ https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Алиса_в_Стране_чудес — accessed on November 17, 2018.

“Fan Parker (Fania) was born in Riga, Latvia, lived in Moscow, and came to the USA through Ellis Island as the traditional immigrant. She received her BA and MA at NYU, and her PhD in Slavic Studies at Columbia University in 1945... She founded, developed, and chaired the Russian Department at Brooklyn College, which is part of the City University of New York. She was there for nearly 4 decades teaching an array of courses in Russian language, culture, and 19th and 20th century Russian literature... She was the author or co-author of five books, the first being *Vsevolod Garshin: A Study of a Russian Conscience* published in 1946 and the last being *Lewis-Carroll in Russian: Translations of Alice in Wonderland, 1879-1989*, published in 1994... Her other writings – books and articles – were in regard to Dostoevsky, the Russian artist Ilya Repin, Soviet literature, and children’s literature.”²

I have been able to identify the three other books not mentioned by Stephen Parker among the five that his mother authored or co-authored in the nearly four decades of her academic career. They are listed in the References section as Parker (1961), (1963) and (1980). The first two of those, a Russian ABC book and a reader, can hardly be considered as research papers; the third one, co-authored with her son, is about a Russian painter and has little to do with language or literature.

As for the three short articles (between 2 and 4 pages long) published by Fan Parker in peer-review academic journals, all of them treat the subject of Russian and English language teaching at middle and high schools (Parker, 1952; 1957; 1960).

These facts are not given here in an attempt to diminish the significance of Dr. Parker’s oeuvre, but merely as evidence that, apart from the work reviewed in this paper, her name is not associated with any research or publications relating to either Lewis Carroll or translation studies.

Another clarification has to be made here. The work I am going to discuss is referred to as a “book” and indeed has the form of one, numbering 89 pages and being almost half an inch thick. Considering, however, that it is printed in large-type wide-spaced text on extra-thick paper, interspaced with numerous drawings by John Tenniel, and contains an appendix with long excerpts from translations, it is probably more appropriate to classify it as a pamphlet or even as a long article. Dr. Parker’s own text is about 6,300 words long, which is equal to 21 standard pages, a length that might appear somewhat limited for a study of 11 books.

Let us, however, analyze the paper on its merits now.

² <https://slavic.drupal.ku.edu/sites/slavic.drupal.ku.edu/files/docs/parker-openingremarks.pdf>

Purpose, content and structure of Parker's pamphlet

The closest to what can be seen as the author's stated purpose of study can be found in a short Introduction to the pamphlet:

This first critical study of the Russian translations of *Alice* has been prompted by the need to clarify a subject that has long been in a state of confusion (Parker 1994, p. 3).

The author does not explain, however, what precise "subject" it is or why she believes it to be "in a state of confusion." We are told, instead, that Carroll's book was seen by Russian translators as... a way for each to display his or her individual credentials and talents as a translator... [They] did not exemplify any particular theories of translation" (Parker 1994, pp. 3-4).

This last assertion can easily be refuted at least in the case of one translator who described her conceptual approach to translating the *Alice* books in an article twice as long as Dr. Parker's pamphlet (Demurova, 1970; 1978). That article, initially published as part of a literary translation yearbook, which circulated in 100,000 copies, was read by an extremely large audience of intellectuals and had an impact on all subsequent Russian translations of Carroll's works, widely different as they were.

Dr. Parker does not mention whether there is a translation theory she herself adheres to or expects to see "exemplified." One might feel that identifying the major translation challenges and developing uniform assessment criteria would be the conventional basis on which a researcher might build her study. But none of these steps have been taken.

The Introduction ends with the categorical remark that

...in the course of events, the translations reflected the vulgarization and impoverishment of the mighty Russian language (Parker, 1994, p. 4).

As this contention is reiterated later in the pamphlet, I will come back to it again.

Coming after the Introduction is a section entitled "The Alice Tale," a compilation of rather well-known facts about the book, its author, illustrator, etc. In passing, Dr. Parker deplores that "the nymph quality of Alice Liddell" was lost in Tenniel's drawings. Other than that, there is no analysis of the tale's content or meaning.

The section is followed by eleven chapters, each a short review of one Russian version of AAIW. The pamphlet has no concluding section or summary. Whatever findings the author comes to are stated in individual reviews.

The First Version

The first Russian version of AAIW was published anonymously (Carroll, 1879). As we now know, it was created by Yekaterina Boratynskaya, a niece of biologist Kliment Timiryazev (Fet, 2016).

It was a Russified adaptation, in which Alice was turned into Sonja. Dr. Parker has many nice words to say about it. She praises it, for instance, for the translation of the famous phrase “Curiouser and curiouser,” “because it takes advantage of the full sentence” (Parker 1994, p. 10). She does not go into detail, so let us take the Sonja book from the shelf and look at what there is to applaud:

„Чуднѣе и распречуднѣе“, закричала Соня! Отъ удивленія она даже путалась въ словахъ, и выражалась какъ-то не по-русски (Carroll, 1879, p. 15).³

Dr. Parker offers no explanation of what she means by “taking advantage of the full sentence” or how that contributes to a good translation. Even more puzzling is her claim that this rendition is “the best to be found in any later translations” (Parker, 1994, p. 10).

Well, no. It is a poor translation if only because it doesn’t reproduce what we find in the original: a surprised little girl’s natural slip of the tongue. Sonja’s remark sounds weird, but in a very different way: it’s a labored and stilted mannerism invented by a struggling translator.

Dr. Parker also commends the first translator for the way she deals with puns, including her “ingenuity in the tail/tale pun” (Parker 1994, p. 13). Let us look at that, too:

„Ахъ, грустная и длинная повѣсть моей жизни“, вздохнула мышь, глядя на Соню.

„Длинная-то, длинная“, подумала Соня, оглядываясь на мышиный хвостъ, „но почему грустная, любопытно знать,“ продолжала она про себя. (Sonja, 1879, pp. 33–34).

For non-speakers of Russian, the above lines *do not contain any* attempt at reproducing the *tale/tail* pun or at creating the slightest humorous effect. Both *tale* and

³ Excerpts from (Sonja 1879) are spelled according to pre-1918 reform rules, as in the original edition.

tail are given their direct dictionary equivalents (*повесть* and *хвост*, respectively), which differ not only in form, but also in grammatical gender. The latter of the two cannot combine with the feminine forms of adjectives *длинная* ('long') or *грустная* ('sad'), so the assumption that Sonja might ever mistake *повесть* for *хвост* is inherently false.

Dr. Parker goes on to say:

In a similarly humorous vein, we find the transformed image of the three little sisters—Sasha, Pasha, and Dasha—living in a dense forest under a key, or perhaps a waterfall, depending on the meaning one assigns to the Russian *kliuch*." (Parker, 1994, p. 12)

One should have a very peculiar sense of humor to smile at the idea of someone "living under a key." Carroll's fantasy never degrades into incoherent absurdity. But the Russian phrase *жить под ключом* cannot even mean 'to live under lock and key,' it evokes an irrational vision of a huge key literally forming a shelter for the sisters. Nor can *ключ* ever mean 'fountain' in this infelicitous word combination.

Dr. Parker, however, has not failed to see that many fragments of the original text ...are completely omitted, condensed, or poorly rendered... Some poems are left untranslated, puns and jokes are omitted, and the ending is reduced to a single abbreviated paragraph" (Parker, 1994, p. 13).

This amounts to a recognition of the fact that "the first translation" is not a translation at all, but an arbitrary retelling. In Dr. Parker's own words, it is "not [a] successfully sustained rendering of the children's classic" (Parker, 1994, p. 14).

Early 20th-century Translations

In 1908–1909, three Russian versions of AAIW were published by Matilda Granstrem, Aleksandra Rozhdestvenskaya, and Poliksena Solovyova⁴. Neither of the three does credit to the original, especially because those by Granstrem and Solovyova are heavily Russified. But it is their review that interests me in this paper, and I cannot help pointing to Dr. Parker's glaring misconceptions as she discusses them.

One incongruence is that she calls the first of the three authors "*Mr.* Granstrem" — which is ironic, considering that, as has been mentioned, Parker herself is referred to as a *male* professor in Russian Wikipedia.

⁴ Her name is spelled as Solov'eva by Parker (1994).

In a three-paragraph review of Rozhdestvenskaya's translation," Dr. Parker finds the following non-existent fault with it:

She [Rozhdestvenskaya] softens Carroll's sharp adjective and nouns (e.g. "screamed," "idiot," "off with her head"). (Parker, 1994, p. 20)

This is simply *not* true to fact. The "sharp" words have received full-fledged equivalents in Rozhdestvenskaya's translation: screamed — *крикнула, взвизгнула*; idiot – *идиот*; off with her head! — *отрубить ей голову!* And, in some instances, even more emotional words are used than those found in the original. For example, the word "said" in the sentence

"I see!" said the Queen, who had meanwhile been examining the roses

is translated as *воскликнула* ('exclaimed'); and "shouted" in

"That's right!" shouted the Queen

is rendered as *заркнула* ('roared, barked').

On the other hand, some of Fan Parker's praises are as unfounded as her criticism. She asserts, for example, that Rozhdestvenskaya's "versification lacks poetic brilliance but is good overall" and that the success of her translation "rests in her adept use of the Russian language" (Parker, 1994., pp. 20–21). The renderings of "Father William" and the Lullaby are singled out in this context.

Let me quote two stanzas from Rozhdestvenskaya's version of "Father William":

«Ты старик уж, отец, — снова сын завёл речь, —
И ты толст, слишком толст уж теперь,
Так зачем же, скажи, кувыркаешься ты,
И спиной отворяешь ты дверь?..

Ты уж стар, ты уж сед, слабы зубы твои. –
Сын сказал. — Тебе кашу есть!
Как же гуся всего — объясни это мне —
Мог с костями и клювом ты съесть?»

This versification is not only far from being "good," it is below par, with wrong word stresses (*как же гуся всего*), multiple filler words (*уж, слишком, же, это*), repetitions (*ты толст, слишком толст; ты уж стар, ты уж сед*), unnatural sentence structures (*тебе кашу есть*); sequences that mismatch the rhythmic pattern (like «*снова сын завёл речь*», where the ever-accented *ë* is forced into an unstressed syllable), and so on.

All of that is exacerbated by extremely bad rhyming. More than once, a word is rhymed with a form of itself, an inadmissible blunder in Russian poetry, e.g. *есть* ('eat') - *съесть* ('eat up'), *его* - *него* ('him'). Most of Rozhdestvenskaya's "rhymes" are either not rhymes at all (like *все* - *нигде*, *мне* - *дворе*, *мне* - *судьбе*, *жару* - *могу*, as just one common sound is not enough to make a Russian rhyme) or are what is called "weak" or "watery" rhymes based on verb endings (*надевать* - *держатъ*, *отвечал* - *прогнал*, etc.). These facts call into question Dr. Parker's expertise in Russian prosody.

On the other hand, the far more skillful Poliksena Solovyova is subjected to hair-splitting criticism:

[In Solovyova's translation,] Pat turns to "Pet," the Cheshire Cat to "Chesterskii" Cat, and so forth. Misunderstanding the English construction, "I must have been changed several times," she renders it as "it seems that I was changed [by others] several times." (Parker, 1994, p. 23)

All of that faultfinding is subjective and basically wrong. To begin with, the rendition of *Pat* as *Пэм* is a perfectly legitimate re-spelling of the name, in which the letter *э* stands for the English *a* just as it does in the rendering of *Carroll* as *Кэрролл* and of thousands of other names (e.g. *Sam* — *Сэм*, *Nancy* — *Нэнси*, *Thatcher* — *Тэтчер*).

Now, "Chesterskii" (*Честерский*) means 'coming from Chester' and, considering that Chester is the county town of Cheshire, the choice of the adjective is hardly a mistake.

Finally, if one attentively reads the original phrase "I must *have been changed* several times," it means exactly what Dr. Parker believes to be a "misunderstanding"—that is, a change effected by others, as opposed to "I must *have changed* [myself]."

Here I must add (while running ahead), that the same interpretation to this construction was given by another translator, Aleksandr Shcherbakov, who wrote:

Но, по-моему, с тех пор *меня* несколько раз *превращали* в кого-то другого. (Carroll 1977, p. 68)

(Back translation: "But, I think, since then *they have* several times *turned me* into someone else.")

This, however, goes altogether unnoticed by Dr. Parker who, as we will see later, is very enthusiastic about Shcherbakov's work. An inconsistent approach, to say the least.

D'Aktil and Olenich-Gnenenko

Yet another Russified version of AAIW was published by D'Aktil (Anatoly Frenkel) in 1923. While admitting that D'Aktil displays “overall a good command of Russian and English,” Dr. Parker reproaches him for replacing the content and characters of Carroll’s poems with inventions of his own.

I cannot fail to note the contradictory nature of such criticism because a Russified version of an English story is liberal by definition, and one can hardly expect the translator’s *Marfushas* and *Yahskas* to relate to English folklore or history.

This contradiction is all the more surprising that Dr. Parker takes almost diametrical approaches to essentially similar distortions in different translations. When analyzing Solovyova’s version, she had good words to say about the replacement of Father William with *Borovik* (‘cep, or boletus edulis’) — she calls it “a splendid poem in tribute to the rare mushroom” (Parker, 1994, p. 25). But D'Aktil, according to her, “takes great liberties” by replacing the same character with “a dragonfly hard at work gathering food for the winter” (p. 27). Why a mushroom is seen as a smaller liberty and a better substitute for Father William than a dragonfly remains unexplained.

D'Aktil is also criticized for his grammar, as he

...often replaces the relative pronoun ‘which’ (kotoryi) with participles... It is not... fitting in regard to Carroll’s direct, economical use of English and leads to extended, wordy phrasing. (Parker, 1994, p.27)

Now this sounds exceedingly strange. A Russian participle combines the meanings and functions of two words, a relative pronoun and a verb, so it inevitably makes the phrase shorter, i.e. *less*, not more, “wordy” than a relative clause.

As Dr. Parker gives no quotations in support of her criticism, I had to look myself for contexts showing how D'Aktil actually translates relative clauses. The results were surprising. In reality, *only one* participle phrase in the whole of D'Aktil’s translation corresponds to a *which*-clause in the original, and here it is:

She found herself in a long, low hall, which was lit up by a row of lamps hanging from the roof. — Алиса очутилась в длинном низком зале, освещённом рядом свисающих с потолка ламп.

Nowhere does the Russian equivalent contain “extended” or “wordy phrasing,” as Dr. Parker puts it. On the contrary, this 12-word 69-character sentence is, perhaps, even more concise and succinct than the 21-word 75-character English original. As for being “fitting” in regard to the original, this sentence is an exemplary translation: it is accurate semantically and syntactically, and is written in impeccable Russian.

I must add here that, while not at all giving up the word *который* in translating *which*-clauses, the translator uses it economically. His work only benefits from that, as frequent repetition of *который* (‘which, who, that’) is considered bad style in Russian.

Two other findings by the reviewer, that “the Mock Turtle soup is praised for being a ‘fashionable’ soup of fine ingredients” (Parker, 1994, p. 27) and that “the translation ends with Alisa relating her dream to her sister in italicized block letters” (p. 28), cannot really be taken seriously as “faults.” But that is all the academic has to say before summarizing that “D’Aktil’s translation is not among the best” (p. 28.). Not convincing, I am afraid.

That said, I am not trying to give any assessment of my own, favorable or unfavorable, of the D’Aktil version. The point I am making is that Dr. Parker’s critical arguments against it happen to be partial, untenable, and sometimes even untrue.

The critic goes on to review the translation by Aleksandr Olenich-Gnenenko, first published in 1940, which is said to “follow the original as far as the Russian language permits, perhaps too tenaciously at times” (p. 29). The translator is praised for his good command of English, but his success with puns is characterized as limited (p. 30).

As for his poems, they are seen as “fairly successful approximations of the originals” (p. 31). Again, no samples of those “successful approximations” are given. It is obvious that Dr. Parker was not familiar with Efim Etkind’s brilliant and crushing analysis of Olenich-Gnenenko’s versifications, who wrote (in reference to the translator’s version of “Father William”):

А. Оленич-Гнененко не справился с заданием, которое сам же себе и поставил: внешность «баллады» он скопировал, но за пределами перевода остались — естественность вольной и хитроумной шутки, энергичная, свободная интонация оригинала. Уродлив и фальшив оборот: «То полезно ль...?» А как ритмически невыразительна спотыкливая строка «Ты, однако, весь день ходишь на голове», где ударение зачем-то выпячивает предлог «на»! (Etkind, 1963, p. 348)

(*Translation:* Olenich-Gnenenko failed the task he had set himself: he did copy the form of the “ballad,” but his translation lacks the naturalness of an unfettered and clever joke and is devoid of the original’s energetic, free intonation. The construction «То полезно ль...?» is ugly and false. And how rhythmically expressionless is the stammering line «Ты, однако, весь день ходишь на голове», where the [rhythmic] stress singles out the preposition *на* for no reason!)

In his extensive discussion of Olenich-Gnenenko’s verse, the internationally renowned philologist and translation theorist (the author of more than 550 published academic papers) uses such terms and expressions as: «мертвенно скопированы» (lifeless copy), «неприятно приблизительное созвучие» (unpleasantly imprecise consonance), «строка эта бесформенна, интонация в неё не вписана» (the line is shapeless and has no intrinsic intonation), «даже искушённый взрослый ничего тут не поймёт» (even a sophisticated adult reader won’t understand anything here), etc. His summary is as follows:

...поэт-переводчик не имеет права не видеть за деревьями леса. Поэт-переводчик, гонящийся за каждым отдельным деревом, сбивается с ног и теряет дорогу... Так произошло со стихами из «Алисы в стране чудес», - переводя их после С. Маршака, А. Оленич-Гнененко сделал решительный шаг назад. (Etkind, 1963, p. 351)

(*Translation:* ...a translator of poetry has no right not to see the wood for the trees. A translator of poetry who goes after every individual tree will stumble around and lose track... This is what happened with poems from *Alice in Wonderland*: by translating them [in this way] after Samuil Marshak, Aleksandr Olenich-Gnenenko took a decided step backward.)

To this I would add that, in my opinion, no review of Russian poetic translations from Carroll can be valid if the reviewer is not familiar with Dr. Etkind’s analysis.

Demurova

As Dr. Parker comes to her next object of review, the translation by Nina Demurova, she blasts it right from the beginning as “a classic demonstration of the vulgarization and impoverishment of the Russian language during the decades of Soviet rule,” a version “plebeian in tone and nuance, the choice of words and idioms taken solely from poor Soviet stock” (Parker, 1994, p. 32).

It would, of course, be naïve to expect Dr. Parker to explain what exactly she means by “the vulgarization and impoverishment” of the language during Soviet rule, or to cite a linguistic or literary authority who might have supported, with any convincing

evidence, such a sweeping statement about the Russian language. And not surprisingly so: no serious expert in language would ever uphold this view, because 20th-century Russian literature with its world-famous giants like Bulgakov, Pasternak, Chukovsky, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky, to name just a tiny few, revealed a language treasury no less inferior to any earlier period.

Let us now look into why the academic calls Demurova's translation "plebeian." She writes:

This is embodied in her persistent use of "ty," the second person singular form of "you," a predominant form of address among Soviets, which creates a particularly harsh ambiance diminishing Alice's stature as a person. (Parker, 1994, p. 32)

I feel really embarrassed at having to explain some elementary facts about Russian grammar and usage so as to demonstrate the falsehood of this assertion. But if we have to go over the basics, so be it.

Let me begin by saying that, like all European languages except English, Russian has two distinct forms of the second person pronoun: singular (*ты*) and plural (*вы*). The singular pronoun (which goes with corresponding verb forms) is used to address a good friend, a close family member, a child or an animal (we do talk to pets and beasts, don't we?). In addition, it may also serve to vent a person's anger or to show disrespect for someone who would expect a politer treatment under normal circumstances. The plural form is reserved for conversations with people beyond the circle of family and close friends, especially if they are significantly older.

In pre-1917 Russia, the singular form was also the accepted way of addressing any member of the "lower" classes (such as a servant, a worker, a waiter, a cook, a coachman, or a peasant) regardless of their age. It was with the downfall of the monarchy that this disparaging use of *ты* was finally abandoned. One can say many unfavorable things about Soviet rule in Russia, but it is undeniable that in official Soviet parlance all citizens were to be addressed in the same manner using the respectful plural pronoun *вы*.

So it is absolutely incorrect to say that *ты* was "a predominant form of address among Soviets." It was not, and if "Soviets" stands for "Soviet people" here, there were

different kinds of people who would use one or the other pronoun depending on who they talked to and in what situation.

It is equally wrong to allege that the pronoun *ты* “diminishes Alice’s stature as a person.” Let us recall that Alice is a seven-year old girl. In Russia, small children have always been addressed with the familiar form, whether before, during or after the Soviet period. And what “stature” is Dr. Parker talking about? Alice’s perceived status changes depending on the situation she finds herself in and, more specifically, on how her interlocutors treat her.

When the White Rabbit takes Alice for his housemaid in Chapter 4, it is altogether natural that, in Demurova’s translation, he addresses her as *ты*, exactly as masters would treat their servants in the 19th century. One can find plenty of examples of this usage in the writings of Dr. Parker’s favorite Russian author Vsevolod Garshin (1855–1888; her doctoral thesis was about his works).

On the other hand, when, in Chapter 4, Alice imagines herself being talked to by her nurse, i.e. a servant, who says:

“Miss Alice! Come here directly, and get ready for your walk!” (AAIW, ch. IV) —

it is the polite plural *вы*, not *ты*, and corresponding verb forms that we find in the translation:

«Мисс Алиса! *Идите* скорее сюда! Пора на прогулку, а *вы* ещё не одеты!».

I would even say that the Russian wording is politer than the original (*directly* ‘немедленно’ is rendered as *скоро* ‘quickly,’ and the command “*get ready*” is replaced by a mild complaint: «*вы ещё не одеты*» ‘you are not dressed yet’). In no way is Alice’s “stature” as a member of the upper class compromised in this translation.

That said, there are situations in the book where the choice of the informal singular form is open to discussion, as when the King questions Alice at the trial. The King, who is also the judge, is more likely to use the formal mode of address (*вы*) when speaking to a witness in court.⁵

⁵ In my own translation of the book, I have used the pronoun *вы* in that context (Carroll, 2018, p. 88).

But, on the other hand, Alice's interlocutors are aware of her young age ("Consider, my dear, she is only a child," says the King in Chapter 8; "Tut-tut, child," says the Duchess in Chapter 9). As the singular-number second-person pronoun has always been the predominant way of addressing children in Russian, it easily explains Demurova's choice of *ты* over *вы*. There is nothing "plebeian," "vulgar," or "Soviet" in that.

Dr. Parker's reference to Stuart Collingwood's words that "Mr. Dodgson possessed an intense natural appreciation of the beautiful" (Parker, 1994, p. 33), cited in support of her criticism of Demurova, is completely off the point. Lewis Carroll's sense of the beautiful did not prevent him from making many of his characters speak to Alice in a very uncivil way. The Gryphon rudely calls her a "simpleton," and the Mock Turtle, "very dull"; flowers tell her things like "you never think at all" or "I never saw anybody that looked stupider," and so on and so forth. The tone of such remarks agrees quite well with the Russian familiar form of address.

So much for the pronouns. What else does Dr. Parker find fault with? "Demurova," she says, "is impervious to the child's [i.e., Alice's] charms" (Parker, 1994, p. 33). I am afraid, there exists no reasonable academic way to react to this assessment, especially because no further explanation of it is given.

Some more specific criticism, however, is found in the following passage:

For "kick" [in "I think I can kick a little"], Demurova employs "liagat" which is a verb pertaining only to four-legged animals, such as a horse who throws his hind legs wildly. (Parker, 1994, p. 35)

Let us begin by correcting a mistake: it is not the imperfective verb *лягать* (or *liagat'*, as Dr. Parker spells it), but the perfective *лягнуть* (*lyagnut'*) that Demurova's Alice uses in her speech:

«Камин здесь, конечно, невелик, особенно не размахнёшься, а всё же лягнуть его я сумею!»

It is true that the verb corresponds to *kick* and, like the English word, can be said of an animal (such as a horse). But, also like the English word, it can easily be used to describe the foot movement of a human being. Examples of that are plenty in Russian classic literature — let me cite one from Fyodor Dostoyevsky:

На этот раз проходил известно кто, то есть шельмец, интригант и развратник, — проходил по обыкновению своим подленьким частым шажком, присеменявая и

выкидывая ножками так, как будто бы собирался кого-то *лягнуть*. (Dostoevskij, 1846).

This time someone he knew well was coming — that is the scoundrel, the intriguer and the reprobate — he was approaching with his usual mean, tripping little step, prancing and shuffling with his feet as though he were going to *kick* someone. ⁶

Here's one more piece of criticism:

When the Caterpillar says “What do you mean by that?... Explain yourself!” Demurova phrases the question with the verb “vydumat” which implies falsehood on the part of Alisa, a child of great honesty and integrity. (Parker, 1994, p. 35)

The falsehood that I can see here lies in the analyst's understanding of words and line of thought. In the translation, the Caterpillar's question («Что это ты выдумываешь?» — literally, “What are you fantasizing about?”) implies not so much “falsehood” as disbelief and skepticism.

In addition, logic fails Dr. Parker here. Alice's assumed honesty and integrity have nothing to do with what the Caterpillar may think of her. It is the Caterpillar's words, not anyone else's. Let us recall how Lewis Carroll described the situation: “She [Alice] had never been so much contradicted in all her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper” with the Caterpillar. To contradict, by definition, means to “deny the truth of (a statement).” (Contradict, 2017) So Demurova is no more at fault than Lewis Carroll himself for allowing Wonderland creatures to doubt Alice's truthfulness.

Demurova is also under attack for using the word *ругать* instead of *бранить* (both mean ‘scold’). Yes, we know that 19th-century lexicographer Vladimir Dal wrote that «ругать пошлѣе и грубѣе, чѣм бранить» (*rugat'* is more vulgar and rude than *branit'*) (Dal' 1882, p. 108). But that is a didactic exaggeration: *rugat'* just *may describe* the use of strong language, but *not necessarily* at all. In any case, there is nothing rude about the word itself, especially in the reflexive combination *ругать себя* (*rugat' sebya*), which means simply ‘to scold, blame or reprimand oneself’ and is perfectly neutral. Ample evidence of that can be found in classic Russian literature, such as Gogol's or Dostoyevsky's works, and in the Russian versions of other English classics by distinguished translators, e.g.:

...Elizabeth, though *blaming herself* for her own weakness, could not go on. ⁷

⁶ Translated by Constance Garnett

⁷ Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813

...у Элизабет, как она ни *ругала себя* за своё малодушие, не хватило решимости пойти дальше.⁸

The award-winning writer and translator Samuil Marshak (1887–1964), who edited these lines, had the perfect ear for style and knew better, of course, than to use a vulgarism here. But even without this example, it is easy for any Russian speaker to see that the following lines by Dr. Parker sound simply preposterous:

Where a proper translation renders “ona branila sebia tak strogo” (she scolded herself so severely), Demurova gives “[ona] rugala sebia tak besposhchadno” (she swore at herself so unmercifully), crediting Alisa inappropriately with *a number of regularly employed swear words*.⁹(Parker, 1994, p. 35).

Dr. Parker is openly “doctoring” word definitions: *ругать себя* does not mean ‘swear at oneself’ here, and her accusation that the translator credits Alice with “a number of swear words” is a glaring untruth. The reviewer lays it on thick in a clear effort to justify her devastating verdict:

Demurova’s unrelenting use of a vulgar style remains constant throughout, demonstrating unerringly that Soviet modes of expression are wholly inappropriate for Carroll’s cultured English and England. Bit by bit, her translation of the Alice text exemplifies the general Soviet butchery of the mighty Russian language. (Parker, 1994, p. 35)

With this, I believe, we have come to a point when it can be said with enough confidence that many (if not most) of Dr. Parker’s assessments do not, regrettably, demonstrate her good grasp of the Russian language. It may be attributable to her extended loss of contact with a genuine Russian-speaking environment. Her resettlement to the United States in her early teens and the time when she wrote her pamphlet were divided by a span of nearly eight decades. Another reason could be the superficial nature of Dr. Parker’s research, if her writing deserves that name. Further examples of that superficiality will be given below.

I am not writing this to eulogize Nina Demurova’s translation, as I see many faults in it myself — as did, incidentally, the renowned children’s writer and translator Kornei Chukovsky, despite the generally favorable tone of his review (Chukovsky, 1968)¹⁰. But any analysis must be fair, consistent, method-based, and unprejudiced. None of that appears to be the case with Dr. Parker’s pamphlet.

⁸ Translated by Immanuel Marshak and edited by Samuil Marshak

⁹ My emphasis

¹⁰ Notably, Dr. Parker was familiar with Kornei Chukovsky’s review, but grossly misrepresented it as if it were exclusively critical (Parker, 1994, pp. 84).

Two More Translations Dismissed, Two Extolled

I will now just passingly touch upon the reviews of two more “Soviet” versions of AAIW, one by popular children’s writer Boris Zakhoder and another by etymologist Vladimir Orel. Dr. Parker dismisses the former as “a strange amalgam of an English *Alisa*, improper Russian forms, and the translator’s intrusions [which] makes this a quite poor rendition” (Parker, 1994, p. 38), and the latter as “a thoroughly forgettable translation” full of “miscomprehensions and deviations from the original” as well as “contemporary Soviet jargon” (pp. 47–48).

Even though there are good objective reasons to give those translations a low rating indeed, Dr. Parker’s arguments are scarce and mostly inadequate, and sometimes entirely wrong. For example, she criticizes the use by Zakhoder of the interjection «*Oŭ!*» (which she translates as *Oy!*, but which more often corresponds to *Ouch!*, *Ooh!* or *Oh!*), believing that “in Russian, as in English, [it] is more appropriate for an elderly person” (p. 37) — again, a gross misconception about Russian word usage.

As another example, Orel is condemned for alleged “frequent use of abusive epithets from Russian common speech” (p. 48). Not one such “abusive epithet” is cited, however, and no explanation is given of how they differ from Carroll’s own “abusive” epithets, such as *stupid*, *idiot*, and the like.

One other “Soviet” translation, however — that by electrical engineer Aleksandr Shcherbakov, which was published in 1977 shortly after Zakhoder’s version and the revised edition of Demurova’s text — surprisingly earned Dr. Parker’s appreciation as “the best of the Anglicized versions of *Alice*” (p. 46). As Mr. Shcherbakov’s supporters grasped at this flattering characteristic in an effort to put his work on a pedestal, Dr. Parker’s arguments deserve a detailed analysis.

The reviewer begins by praising Shcherbakov’s text for being “free from Soviet jargon and solecism” (p. 39). As no examples or clarifications are given, this contention cannot be discussed seriously. Then she passes on to character names:

Shcherbakov keeps Carroll’s nomenclature with only a few variants, such as Dodo into “Dodo-Kakikh-Uzhe-Bol’she-Net” (Dodo-of-the-sort-which-are-no-more), accenting the extinction of the large bird, and Caterpillar into “Cherepakha-Shelkopriad” (silk-spinning caterpillar), of greater stature than a mere worm. (p. 40)

The reader may remember Dr. Parker's displeasure with Solovyova's "Chester Cat" (in place of Cheshire Cat) and alleged misspelling of the name *Pat*. Against that background, the academic is surprisingly indulgent toward a whole phrase of Shcherbakov's own invention attached to a very short original name. We are told that it accents the extinction of the bird, but why make such an accent at all? There is nothing to indicate that Lewis Carroll ever meant or would welcome such an accent — he simply made a character out of a familiar sight for the Liddell sisters: a picture of the bird by John Savory they saw at the Oxford University library. And if the reader looks up the word *dodo* in any dictionary, the words "extinct bird" will pop up immediately, so the addition is totally unnecessary.

As for the Caterpillar, Dr. Parker makes a mess of two characters, calling it, for some strange reason, *Cherepakha-Shelkopriad* ("Turtle-Silkworm"): in reality, it is just *Шелкопряд* (Silkworm) in Shcherbakov's translation. The reviewer, as can be seen from the quote above, is concerned with "stature" here too, claiming that a silkworm is "of greater stature" than a mere worm.

Well, it is not. But even if it were, the character in the original is not a worm, but a *large blue caterpillar*. And, evidently having learned that silkworms are never large nor blue, Shcherbakov changes the epithets to *fat* and *gray* («толстая сизая гусеница Шелкопряд»), thus significantly distorting the original image. But that goes unnoticed by Dr. Parker.

Next, Shcherbakov's handling of puns is discussed. Dr. Parker finds "special ingenuity" in his version of the tale/tail pun — a play on the word *канцонетта* ('canzonetta') and the phrase *конца нету* (*konca netu*, 'no end').

In my opinion, this is a poor pun for several reasons: first, the pair is difficult to confuse because of different stress patterns; secondly, *канцонетта* is a rare musical term not even found in general Russian dictionaries, so a child reader is unlikely to understand it, let alone find the pun funny. But, finally, even if it were a hilarious pun, it is in no way related to the idea of a tail, so the intended joke falls apart and the tail-shaped poem makes no sense anymore.

As another example of Shcherbakov's "ingenuity," Dr. Parker cites his translation of the Lobster Quadrille song:

Shcherbakov's choice of fish, "sig" (a variety of salmon) and "lin" (a huge freshwater fish), is fitting and unusual. (Parker, 1994, p. 45)

Unusual? Yes. *Сиг* (*sig* 'cisco') and *лунь* (*lin* 'tench') are not among the most common fish species caught or served as food in Russia or England. But fitting? Definitely not. The words are so rare that Dr. Parker has not even provided their exact English equivalents.

Shcherbakov used *сиг* instead of *whiting*, and *лунь* instead of *porpoise*. But why replace well-known names of marine wildlife with something that few readers have seen or heard of? Dr. Parker does not explain that, so let me fill the gap: the translator tries to make a pun out of *лунь* ('tench'). He takes the obsolete adjective *предлинный* ('very long') and reinterprets it (in Mock Turtle's words) in a rather abstruse way as *пред-линный* 'coming before a tench.'

This pun sounds even more artificial, far-fetched and labored in Russian than its literal translation into English you have just read. It is miles apart from what it is intended to be an equivalent of — a light and witty play on common words: *purpose* and *porpoise*, *whiting* and *blacking* (yes, it replaces both those puns).

Dr. Parker is obviously partial when she praises Shcherbakov for his "special ingenuity" in choosing the equivalent for the "*beat time/Time won't stand beating*" pun — *провести время*, where *провести* carries the double meaning 'to spend' and 'to cheat' (Parker, 1994, p. 40). Boris Zakhoder used exactly the same solution in his earlier translation, but nowhere in her review does Parker make any mention of that or any of his other puns (some of them not bad at all), let alone compliment his "ingenuity."

On the other hand, she has no objections to (actually, never mentions) the occurrence of the interjection *Ой!* in the speech of Shcherbakov's Alice («Ой, простите, пожалуйста!», «Ой! Я опять её обидела»), for which she groundlessly criticizes Zakhoder.

Let us look at another of Shcherbakov's solutions that Dr. Parker finds "deft": his translation of the chapter title "A Mad Tea-Party" as «*Чаепитие со сдвигом*»,

...which evokes the Russian custom of having tea with something (sugar, jam) or with someone, and by using the instrumental form of "sdvig" ("so sdivgom," displacement) the connotation is drinking with those who are somehow displaced or "off," that is, the mad ones. (Parker, 1994, p. 42)

This passage again raises questions about Dr. Parker's grasp of the Russian language. She has detected a non-existent analogy between Shcherbakov's *чаenumue со сдвигом* (literarily, 'drinking tea with a shift') and expressions like *чай с сахаром (с вареньем)* 'tea with sugar or jam.' What Dr. Parker has overlooked is the translator's attempt to play on the fact that the Hatter, the Hare and the Dormouse move (i.e., shift) around the table.

As for the figurative meaning of the phrase *со сдвигом*, 'crazy,' it is a colloquialism that took shape precisely in the late Soviet period so much abhorred by Dr. Parker. The phrase is not, and has never been, common in educated speech (there are just three contexts with the expression cited in that sense in the National Russian Corpus (n.d.)), and is at odds with Lewis Carroll's style and lexical texture.

When pondering over Dr. Parker's partiality toward Shcherbakov's text, I came to the conclusion that it stems from his ample use of the plural pronoun *вы* — something that Parker appears to consider as the hallmark of a good translation. That partiality is so strong that even when Shcherbakov's Alice inconsistently switches over to the informal pronoun *ты*, Dr. Parker goes to great lengths in order to justify the departure, permitting herself an avalanche of verbosity quite uncharacteristic of her short brochure:

At the end of the second chapter, as the Mouse swims away from Alisa, infuriated by her affectionate remarks about cats and dogs, Alisa pleads an informal form for the Mouse's return. It is precisely how Alisa would address the Mouse had she been in a wakeful state. By his translation, Shcherbakov unobtrusively introduces a psychological twist in Alisa's consciousness, as if for the moment she was leaving the world of dreams, the Mouse becoming what she is, a mere little mouse. Afterwards, both Alisa and the Mouse revert to the formal mode of address. (Parker, 1994, p. 42)

For the sake of clarity, let me quote the relevant lines directly:

А Мышь, подняв целую бурю, торопливо отплывала в сторону. Тогда Алиса тихо и жалобно сказала:

— Мышка, милая! *Вернись*, пожалуйста. Я больше не слова не скажу ни о кошках, ни о собаках, раз *ты* их не любишь.

Услышав эти слова, Мышь повернула и медленно поплыла обратно. (Carroll, 1977, p. 46)

With Alice trying to appease a large angry animal (who, may I remind the reader, seems the size of a walrus or a hippopotamus to the diminished girl), her sudden

rollback from the polite form *вы*, coupled with a diminutive (*мышка* ‘little mouse’), is a highly questionable “twist.” It looks more like an illogical mistake on the translator’s part than a psychological subtlety.

But all right, let us believe for a moment that the informal pronoun indeed reflects a “twist” in the girl’s consciousness. We will then have to classify it as a needless and pointless departure from the original. Never, during her stay in Wonderland, does Carroll’s Alice question the reality of what is happening to her; she does not leave her dream until she wakes up at the end of the book. Moreover, in Lewis Carroll’s world, Wonderland was not only Alice’s dream, it was a dream he himself cherished and wanted to remain in. As he wrote in the concluding poem of “Through the Looking-Glass,”

Ever drifting down the stream —
Lingering in the golden gleam —
Life, what is it but a dream?

Ленивый дрейф счастливым дорог.
Что наша жизнь? Волшебный морок
Да сон, без всяких оговорок. (Carroll, 2018, p. 259)

In short, the presumed “twist of consciousness,” if it was really meant by the translator, would go against Lewis Carroll’s concept and intent.

Incidentally, there are more cases of erratic use of formal/familiar modes of address by the translator. In Shcherbakov’s version of the Mouse’s tale, Furry is as inconsistent as *Alisa* when talking to the Mouse:

‘I’ll be judge, I’ll be jury,’ said cunning old Fury: ‘I’ll try the whole cause and condemn you to death.’ (AAIW, Chapter 3)

Наши законы — *ваша* вина. *Будешь* немедля *ты* казнена. (Carroll 1977, p. 55)

[*Back translation: Our laws, your (polite form) guilt. You will be (familiar form) executed immediately.*]

I must also comment on Dr. Parker’s remarks that “Shcherbakov is equally ingenious with his rendition of verse” (Parker, 1994, p. 44) and that he “maintains Carroll’s refinement” in language (p. 45). My analysis shows that the opposite is true.

Most poems in the *Alice* books — whatever their original style or meter — have been rendered by Shcherbakov in the trochaic rhythm, which is associated in Russian culture with merry folk songs and dances. The translator seems indifferent to the style of the verse he renders. He turns the Jabberwocky poem, which is styled as a grim

medieval hero epic and should be recited in a slow, solemn rhythm, into a *chastushka* — a genre of a jocular (often obscene) peasant song:

Розгрень. Юрзкие хомейки
Просвертели весь травас.
Айяяют брыскунчейки
Под скорячий рычисжас. (Carroll, 1977, p. 178)

The Mock Turtle’s song, which parodies a romantic lyrical song by James Sayles of the style performed in 19th-century musical salons, is rendered by Shcherbakov in the same rollicking rhythm evoking the image of a rosy-cheeked peasant woman singing loudly, waving her scarf and tapping out a *chastushka* during a village feast:

Суп горячий и густой,
Весь от жира золотой!
Мы всегда готовы уп-
Уплетать подобный суп! (p. 133)

But the vernacular is not the only register of speech into which Shcherbakov plunges his Alice (should I call it “plebeian,” to use Dr. Parker’s term?). He easily falls into bureaucratism as well. Consider the way he translates a clear and simple sentence preceding the Mouse’s story:

And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this... (AAIW, Chapter 3)

Но Мышь изогнула дрожащий хвостик, сжала его лапками и исполнила нижеследующие стихи, которые в памяти Алисы были теперь неразрывно связаны с движениями мышиноного хвоста. (Carroll, 1977, p. 54)

[*Back translation:* But the Mouse curved its trembling little tail, grasped it with its paws, and recited the poem following hereinafter, which in Alice’s memory was now inextricably associated with the movements of the Mouse’s tail.]

Apart from extensive arbitrary additions, the translator has not stopped short of using two bureaucratic clichés: *нижеследующие* ‘following hereinafter’ and *неразрывно связаны* ‘inextricably associated’. The crowning infelicity here is the word *память* (‘memory’) for “idea” in the original: it creates the impression that the Mouse’s tale was something Alice already knew but now began to link, for some strange reason, with the movements of its tail. In summary, the sentence is a gross, poorly styled mistranslation.

This example, along with many others that could be given, illustrates the degree of “refinement” and “fidelity to the English text” (quotations from Dr. Parker’s review)

that one finds in Shcherbakov's translation — a phenomenally inferior one if analyzed without bias. Dr. Parker's assessment of it as "the best of the Anglicized [i.e. non-Russified, *D. Ye.*] versions of *Alice*" just doesn't hold water.

I believe that I have familiarized the reader sufficiently with Dr. Parker's "method" so as not to discuss her review of Vladimir Nabokov's "Anya in Wonderland." Her opinion of his work is enthusiastic, but does that opinion deserve being taken into account any more than her other reviews? I believe not.

Like Yekaterina Boratynskaya, Matilda Granstrem, and Anatoly Frenkel (*D'Aktil*), Vladimir Nabokov produced a strongly Russified version of Carroll's tale in a genre that contemporary philology cannot view as translation proper. But in that niche of Russianized adaptations of foreign children's books, this early work of one of the world's most famous authors, "Anya in Wonderland," is a unique phenomenon which merits attentive and competent academic analysis in a separate study.

Findings and conclusions

My study of the paper "Lewis Carroll in Russia" by Dr. Fan Parker has given me sufficient evidence to make the following conclusions.

- In her pamphlet, Dr. Parker tried to give credible ratings to 11 Russian versions of *AAIW*, but failed to do so due to the lack of method, objectivity, consistency, and sufficient competence from her analysis.
- Two different types of works — books Russified in accordance with now obsolete traditions of literary adaptation, and translations proper — should be studied and reviewed in accordance with different principles, and not mixed up together.
- Dr. Parker was obviously not guided by any theory of, or any authority in, literary translation.
- Dr. Parker used no set of uniform criteria in comparing each version of *AAIW* either with the original or with other versions. Her paper is a conglomerate of highly selective, fragmentary, and arbitrary comments.

- Proper review criteria should have included, among others: translation correctness and accuracy; fidelity to the original concept, imagery, and style; global handling of humor, puns, and parodies; literary and poetic merits from the perspective of the target language.
- Dr. Parker's paper abounds in sweeping and unsuitably emotional judgments that are not substantiated with any examples or arguments. Most of the reviewer's opinions, whether favorable or unfavorable, are biased, and many of the comments she makes are not true to fact.
- Many of Dr. Parker's statements reveal her profound misconceptions about Russian grammar, style and word usage, probably due to her prolonged loss of contact with the living language.

These findings lead me to assert that the pamphlet (Parker 1994) cannot be deemed a serious or trustworthy piece of academic research. Dr. Parker's criticism, whether eulogistic or disparaging, rests on bias, misconception, broken logic, and insufficient competence.

It is with great relief arising from resolving a long-standing misapprehension that I conclude: Dr. Parker's work can be safely excluded from the circle of respectable academic sources in translation studies and discarded from responsible consideration.

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