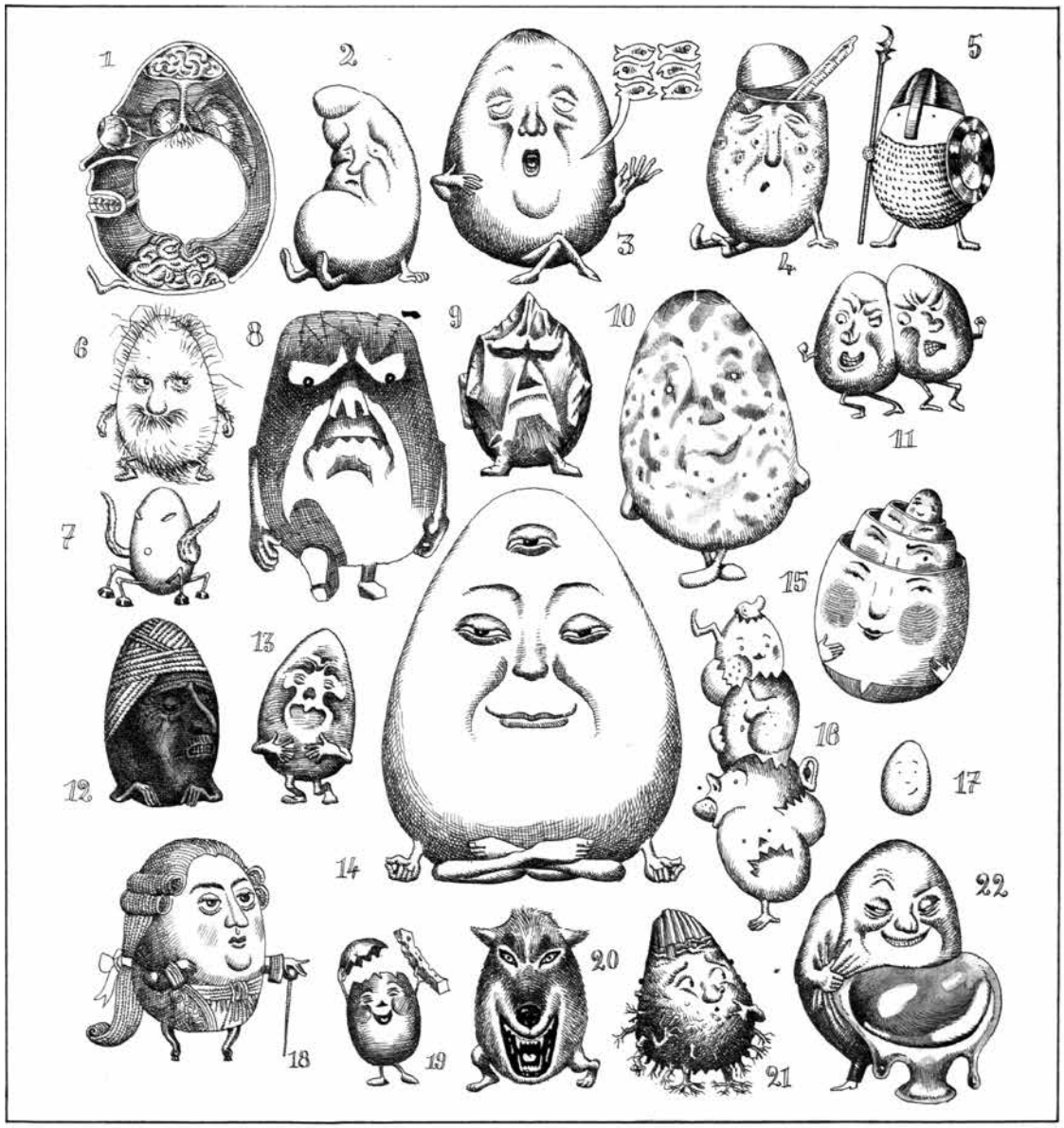
Knight Letter

The Lewis Carroll Society of North America



1. coupe d'œuf ; 2. œuf mollet ; 3. œuf poète ; 4. œuf contagieux ; 5. œuf médiéval ; 6. œuf poilu ; 7. œuf d'ailleurs ; 8. Frankenstœuf ; 9. œuf de cromagnon ; 10. œuf camouflé ; 11. œuf siamois ; 12. œuf de la 13e dynastie ; 13. œuf brouillé ; 14. œuf zen ; 15. œuf russe ; 16. œuf mutant ; 17. œuf de poule ; 18. œuf rococo ; 19. œuf à la coque ; 20. œuf-garou ; 21. œuf végétal ; 22. œuf exhibitionniste

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OF BOOKS AND THINGS

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editions of *Alice*. According to Lovett, "The article is the only place, apart from the prefatory poem to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and allusions in the prefatory and concluding poems of *Through the Looking-Glass*, where Dodgson discusses in print the genesis of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*." When Carroll writes, "Many a day had we rowed upon that quiet stream" he recreates the liminal dream world that gave him his tale. He describes the story as full of ideas "which seemed to grow of themselves upon the original stock," contrasting its ease of composition with having to get up in the middle of the night or stopping on a walk to write it down. The organic inspiration contributes to the story's charm and explains why his imitators' efforts seem so laborious.

One of the silliest pieces is "Wilhelm von Schmitz," originally published in *The Whitby Gazette* in 1855. It is a combination of literary styles, with the wordiness of Bulwer-Lytton and the goofy excess of some of the Romantics. While the publisher of the *Gazette* was not particularly impressed with this effort ("...he cannot but own that the literary department as a whole, has not been of a high or especially attractive nature..."), it is engagingly nutty. It also contains some expressions we will see again:

> Visions of his early days; scenes from the happy time of pinafores, treacle, and innocence; through the long vista of the past came floating spectres of long forgotten spelling-books, slates scrawled thick with dreary sums, that seldom came out at all, and never came out right. . . .

Later on the narrator speaks of singing and falling off a roof, so clearly Lewis Carroll had a fondness for certain motifs.

Carroll dealt with a serious issue affecting children in his letter to the *St. James's Gazette* of July 25, 1885. Titled "Whoso Shall Offend One of These Little Ones," it was an objection to what he considered prurient journalism, albeit in the service of something he would support, the raising of the age of consent to sixteen years. The flamboyant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, William Thomas Stead, wrote a series of articles about the sex trafficking of female children in London. They were quite graphic, and in one of them Stead detailed how easy it was to purchase a young girl. That's because he did it himself and wrote about it. (He was sent to prison for three months for this.) The child was not harmed, but Stead wanted to shock the public into making Parliament pass the Criminal Law Amendment Bill that had been stalled. He succeeded, but Carroll's objection was that Stead's style of journalism was simply too salacious. There is one thing for certain: Stead knew how to sell papers. He warned readers that what they were about to read over the next four days would disturb their peace if they were ". . . squeamish . . . foolish . . . in a fool's paradise . . ." and so of course the papers flew off the shelves. Lovett states that there are stories of the papers going for twenty times the cover price. For Carroll, the question was "whether this mode of rousing public opinion is, or is not, doing more harm than good." The demand for Stead's stories must have horrified him, prompting him to write, "Above all, I plead for our pure maidens, who souls are being saddened, if not defiled, by the nauseous literature that is thus thrust upon them." Of course, the nauseating nature of the crimes against children makes one wonder how it could be discussed without giving offense. It is amazing that the Criminal Law Amendment was passed, under those circumstances.

The Victorian age was not so long ago, and it was an era of rapid change, similar to our own. Carroll approved of the advancement of knowledge, just as he was an early adopter of the newer technologies (e.g., the camera). He had his limits, however. In "Natural Science at Oxford," Carroll objected to the dropping of a required classical language for people who took degrees in science. This reminds me of my own friends in the humanities, who wake up to find their departments strip-mined in favor of a computer lab for a new business program. Carroll believed that the loss of one classical language could have fatal consequences for literacy in general. "It used once to be thought indispensable for an educated man that he should be able to write his own language, correctly, if not elegantly; it seems doubtful how much longer this will be taken as a criterion." Indeed.

The reader can dip in and out of Volume 6 at leisure. It is a fascinating insight into the breadth and depth of Lewis Carroll's interests, as well as a study of his world. But—perhaps this is not really the last volume. Maybe someone will unearth a package of old letters from underneath Grandmother's bed or find some in a trunk in the attic of a castle. (This has happened.) Perhaps the missing diary pages are hidden away in a plum-cake tin! One can only hope. In any case, the pamphlet series is a landmark in Carrollian scholarship, and everyone who took part in it should be proud.

Алиса в Стране Чудес
Illustrated by 13 artists
Gorbushin, 2020
ISBN 978-5-6044757-0-6

Andrew Ogus & Dmitry Yermolovich

Oleg Gorbushin has ambitiously made a new translation of *Wonderland* into Russian and commissioned thirteen artists to illustrate the thirteen chapters in this unusual edition. Rather than assigning a specific artist to illustrate the events of a specific chapter, or putting variously illustrated incidents into their proper places, the producer decided "to put an illustration of only one artist into each chapter so that the reader could better see and trace each illustrator's style, manner, and idea of the book." That is, each illustrator has his or her own chapter, each randomly illustrated with scenes from anywhere in the entire book. One of their ideas of the book seems to have included characters from *Looking-Glass*.

The result is the failure of a basic tenet of publishing: The layout must

serve the author and the reader, not the designer, not the illustrator, and not a driving concept. While one can usually guess context in a foreign-language *Alice* by the pictures, in this case the non-Russian reader (and possibly even the Russian reader) will be left completely at sea.

Only the cover reflects the spiky flavor of much Russian illustration. There is some consistency in the thirteen harsh interior styles, seemingly created by brooding high school students who've discovered the even lines of a Rapidograph pen. There is some consistency in the use of the classic combination of black and white and sometimes red. A few interesting ideas might have worked if they had been better rendered.

The production qualities of the book are excellent, and the paper is heavy and bright. A pleasant grayish-green tint begins halfway across each left page and mostly bleeds right, with a large white area for those pictures that are not full bleeds. The publisher has maintained great control over the typesetting and printing process: the tints on the left pages fall squarely in the middle of tiny, centered page numbers, and generally avoid splitting individual letters in the text. Their position varies quite a bit in the biographical pages at the back, where photos of the illustrators show them to be surprisingly mature.

"The Mouse's Tale" poem is not configured as a tail, leading one to wonder about the text. On another spread, facing dodos fall on either side of "How Doth the Little Crocodile," one in grayish-green-on-white, and the other barely visible, reversed to white-on-grayish-green. They're rather charming, but why are they here? On this particular page (the only one of its type in the book) words above the poem span the width of the page, but the remaining text is inexplicably repeated in two columns. In one case, the mirroring of color and white does work well, when aspects of the Cheshire Cat fall from the white area to the tinted area, appropriately hard to see on either side.

Overall, an ambitious but thoroughly misguided attempt.

Here are Dmitry's comments on the translation itself:

Oleg Gorbushin is a book illustrator not known to have done any translation work before. So the first questions that come to this reviewer's mind are: (1) Why translate a world-famous classic anew? and (2) What does one hope to achieve—without being a language specialist, let alone a professional translator?

This is what I found on the edition's website:

> The modernism of the writer . . . leads the translator to become a modernist and approach the text of the tale not from the position of semantic accuracy, but the accuracy of the method or model used by the author.
>
> In this *Alice* project, the text is aimed primarily at the reader of the twenty-first century: the tale is easy, free, fluent and quick to read, and is linked to the Russian (rather than English) linguistic tradition and to widely known examples of Russian culture. That is, the modernist model of Lewis Carroll himself and the translation model of Vladimir Nabokov are taken as the literary model of the text.

The reference to Nabokov gives me a clue. Simply put, Gorbushin's *Alice* is another "Russianized" translation: The Victorian poems parodied by Carroll are replaced with samples of Russian literature.

But Nabokov populated his version of *Wonderland* with Russian characters (turning Alice into Anya, in the first place), which makes their readings from Russian poets perfectly natural. Mr. Gorbushin's characters remain English and in a Victorian setting. That they recite parodies of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and poems by Mayakovsky (a Soviet avant-garde poet of the 1920s) is quite out of place and time. Instead of his "Turtle Soup," the Mock Turtle (or, more precisely, his weird modification I'll describe later) sings a twisted version of the 1952 Soviet song "Suburban Moscow Nights." This "modernist" repertoire crosses all limits of Carrollian nonsense and lapses into absurdity, a point I will return to.

Poetry aside, let's turn to the prose. Is the new Russian version as "easy, free, fluent, and quick to read" as we are told? Alas, not even close to that. What first strikes the reader's eye is the abundance of dashes, slicing sentences into short fragments, as if they are pronounced in a stutter. Thus, Carroll's phrase "the Queen merely remarking that a moment's delay would cost them their lives" is translated:

> Королева—только появившись—
> вскользь—но громко—
> обмолвилась,—что—если они
> все не начнут играть быстрее,—
> поплатятся—она всем прикажет
> отрубить голову.
> *The Queen—as soon as appearing—in passing—but loudly—let it slip—that—unless all of them started to play faster—they'd pay—she'd have everyone's head off.*

Such "multiple fractures" run through the entire Russian text.

Here's what Gryphon's remark "This here young lady, she wants for to know your history, she do" sounds like in translation, apparently in line with the "21st-century-oriented method":

> "*This young lady—wants—here and instantly—to hear about your life. Why—no idea, her interest—a comedy. But—she does. Brought her by order of the Queen.*"

You must have noticed numerous additions to the original message. Modernist or not, the common Russian name for them is *otsebyatina*—a word coined by nineteenth-century artist Karl Bryullov that translates approximately as "stuff off the top of one's head," or, in some contexts, "padding." The whole book is strewn with such unwarranted and incongruous additions. Here is another sample (with the "padding" set in bold):

> ...the King and the executioner ran wildly up and down, looking for it [the Cat].
> Король и палач **ещё долго бегали по площадке**—туда—

сюда—**взад—вперёд—слева—направо—справа—налево—туда и обратно**—разыскивая осуждённого...
The King and the executioner ran ***still a long time about the ground—*** *up—down—****backwards—forward—from left—to right—from right—to left—there and back—*** *looking for the sentenced one*.

That said, the "padding" goes hand in hand with omissions and distortions. I found the Queen of Hearts stripped of her most vivid characteristics. She no longer "tosses her head impatiently," "glares like a wild beast," "stamps on the ground," speaks "severely" or "in a voice of thunder." Gone is the famous remark: "The Queen had only one way of settling all difficulties, great or small."

On the other hand, when asking Alice for her name, the Queen also demands to know the child's "title" (really?). Two simple spices named by Alice—vinegar and chamomile—have been turned into three exotic dishes: couscous, goulash, and tarator. The Queen's soldiers, rather than "walking two and two," as Carroll had them, form an "equilateral square of three by three." "Cupids in white tunics" and "cavaliers" have been added to the royal procession. How do these characters fit into a pack of cards?

Vera Glazkova

Some additions are meant to be jokes — see if they make you laugh:

I'd prohibit all piquant dishes, so nobody could prick themselves.

Thoughts in Alice's head whispered quietly among themselves.

The Duchess mixed things up and gave the Queen a box on the ear instead of a fan.

And what has happened to the aphorisms and sayings? Again, see for yourselves:

The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours.
Не копай яму другому — станешь копушей.
Don't dig a hole for another, you'll become a dawdler.

Birds of a feather flock together.
У каждой птицы свои сестрицы.
Every bird has its sisters.

Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.
Не связывай себя словами, а связывай мнением о словах.
Don't bind yourself with words, but bind with an opinion of words.

The translation leaves practically nothing of the puns and jokes. To illustrate the dire result, let's take the part where Alice is told why the whiting is called by that name. Here is the corresponding narrative (with a few comments of mine in brackets):

"...Sardines are very musical. Sir Dine used to say that." ["Sir Dine" is an attempt at playing on "sardine," but it works as poorly in Russian as it does in English.]

"Who is he?"

"The first sea-weeper of the Sirdine Sea. [This must be a jocular distortion of "Sardinia Sea," though there is no such sea on the maps. "Sea-weeper" (*moreplakatel*), a meaningless invented word, is a distortion of "seafarer" (*moreplavatel*).] *He gave the sardines his own name because he loved the way they sing*.

"Do fish sing? I thought they were always silent," said Alice.

"Fish of all kinds are needed, fish of all kinds are important," Gryphon smiled. [The remark parodies the lines "All mothers are needed, all mothers are important" from a 1935 poem by Sergei Mikhalkov, a children's writer and the author of the Soviet anthem.]

I have promised to return to the difference between literary nonsense and absurdity. The former consists in the deconstruction and unconventional reassembly of the meanings of words and phrases; the resulting nonsense has a logic of its own, and this is what makes it funny and witty. The emergence of the Mock Turtle from "mock turtle soup" is the epitome of the trick.

The translation under review is based not on *deconstruction*, but on the *destruction* of all sense and meaning, leading to sheer absurdity. Again, this is graphically illustrated by the way Mr. Gorbushin introduces his version of the Mock Turtle, compared with the original:

"Have you seen the Mock Turtle yet?"

"No," said Alice. "I don't even know what a Mock Turtle is."

"It's the thing Mock Turtle Soup is made from," said the Queen.

"I never saw one, or heard of one," said Alice.

— А ты встречалась с морской Квазизвездой?

— Нет, никогда. Я не знаю, кто это.

— Ты никогда не ела звёздный суп?

— Нет, даже не пробовала.

"Have you met with the Quasi-Starfish?"

"No, never, I don't know who that is."

"You haven't eaten star soup?"

"No, not even tasted."

What "star soup" is, and why the "Starfish" has the prefix *Quasi-*, is anybody's guess. The nonsense of the original is delightfully witty; the absurdity of the translation is depressingly obtuse.

But there is a problem that makes it worse. As you read the text further, you realize that the translator does have a hidden agenda—and one that has nothing to do with Carroll or even with

what is believed to be appropriate children's reading.

As you know now, the Mock Turtle has become Quasi-Starfish, a female. This is what the Queen tells the Gryphon (notice the part set in bold):

> Проводи эту юную леди к квазизвезде. Пусть она послушает, как та **звездит** о своей звёздной жизни.
>
> *Take this young lady to the Quasi-Starfish. Let the girl look at the* ***cunning stunt as she blabs*** *about her life of stardom*.

This back translation should give you an approximate, but close enough, idea of how the text sounds to the Russian ear. The verb *zvesdit* (here, "blabs"), like many other derivatives of *zvezda*, "star," is actually a see-through euphemism for a very dirty word, classified as so-called *mat*, or profane language. *Mat* is officially banned in the media and (mostly) in print, so euphemistic rhymes are used by some speakers and authors to circumvent the ban. It is much like saying "what the *fudge*..." in English, but the effect such language produces in Russian is only slightly less offensive than plain *mat*.

Mr. Gorbushin really lets himself go with derivatives of *zvezda,* the transparent veil of a rhyming unprintable word, strewing the text abundantly with them (including the untranslatable *zazvesdit'* and *zvezdanutyi*).

I believe I know where the Quasi-Starfish comes from. It's a thing Mock Translation Soup is made with. But the soup is not made only with that. It's a mishmash of broken sentences, misplaced references, arbitrary omissions, insipid distortions, additions off the top of one's head, pathetic jokes, and sordid double entendres intended to be spicy, but predictably unsavory.

[*This is a shorter version of the review; its full text can be accessed at http://yermolovich.ru/index/0-248*.]

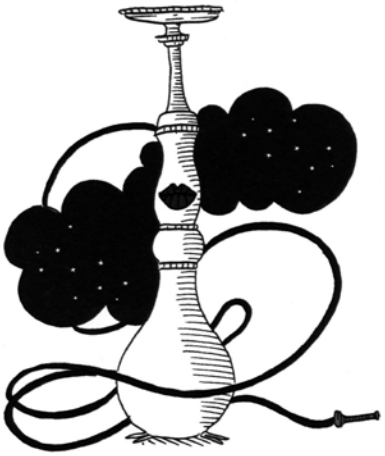
Alice au Pays des Merveilles
Illustrated by Aurélie Castex
Translated by Patrice Salsa
Editions du Chêne, 2020
ISBN 978-2812303500

Andrew Ogus

Yes, Wonderland is a surreal place, and it's fine to include floating mouths and other surrealistic elements. But what has been done here with the pictures makes them seem more important than the conversations, which is perhaps unfair to the new translation. The imaginative die cutting that shapes the pages appears to be the driving force, with attenuated figures, somber, matte colors, and stiff lines that serve its purposes, rather than the text's. Leafing from page to page (finding an edge to make the turn is sometimes difficult) often reveals a transition from a detail on one page to a fuller image on the next. It's endlessly clever.

At first the drawings may appear to be chaotic, but they are actually carefully and sometimes symmetrically composed. Alice is almost always a tiny figure seen from behind; eventually we see her exaggerated eyes. She wears a sophisticated slip dress and red shoes—a tribute to Oz, perhaps? The human caterpillar is another sophisticated lady. Other creatures, even the apparently male pigeon, are often elegantly dressed. The cards are headless or faceless. How do they speak?

The small type is elegant, but black text on full-bleed, somberly tinted pages that lack reversed white areas is difficult to read. Rather than the traditional small caps at the beginning of a chapter, the elegant script used for the opening words matches the chapter titles. It's visually attractive but a bit confusing. Even without the ingestion of magical substances, this edition grows on and off one, more an object to enjoy than a book to read.



Aurélie Castex

The Life of Edwin Dodgson, Brother of Lewis Carroll and Missionary to the South Atlantic Islands
Edward Wakeling and Caroline Luke
The Choir Press, U.K., 2020
ISBN 978-1-78963-147-0

Cindy Watter

Edwin Dodgson is the least known and most adventurous of the entire Dodgson family. Most of them stayed close to home (although Charles did make an uncharacteristic trip to Russia). Edwin's missionary work was more than mere voluntourism—it was a commitment to living and serving in the most remote area of the world that contained inhabitants. Tristan da Cunha is in the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately halfway between Africa and South America. It sounds like a fascinating place, with an active volcano and an extraordinary assortment of wildlife, but very few people. Even today, there is no air landing strip, and the rare visitors arrive by boat. The island is less than eight miles wide. After reading this book, it was clear to me that Edwin was motivated by his religious beliefs as well as a rigorous sense of duty.

That came naturally to him. Although the Anglican Church was not his first choice as a career—he had passed the Civil Service exam—many men in his family were clergymen. His father was an archdeacon and an important figure in the Church. Brother Skeffington became a vicar, and Charles was a deacon (although he never completed holy orders). The only Dodgson sister who married, Mary Charlotte, had a clergyman husband. The six unmarried sisters did their bit, too, as the Anglican Church could not have functioned, much less flourished, without