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# ARCANE ILLUSTRATORS: MARIA BUBLEVA

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MARK BURSTEIN WITH DMITRY YERMOLOVICH

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**A**h, here is an illustrator so arcane that her name does not even appear on her own book! It is a tale of Cold War intrigue, marital exploitation, and tragedy whose story began for me, as is often the case, with Adriana Peliano’s “falling in love” with some illustrations on Pinterest and posting them to her fine blog.<sup>1</sup>

The book itself, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in the Boris Zakhoder (Б. Заходер) translation and *Through the Looking-Glass* translated by Vladimir Oryol or Orel (В. Орёл), was published by the Far Eastern Book Publishing House (Дальневосточное книжное издательство) in Vladivostok in 1989. The illustrations are credited to one “S. Goloshchapov” (С. Голощчапов), but according to a Web posting by Pyotr Goloshchapov, the son of S[ergei] Goloshchapov, the actual artist is Maria Bubleva (Мария Бублева)!<sup>2</sup> Pyotr says the publisher later issued a retraction.

How could this have come to be? Dmitry Yermolovich, as one who has lived most of his life in the Soviet Union (1989 was two years before its collapse), at first theorized that the misattribution was an editorial blunder. “In Soviet times, copyright protection was not even thought of as an issue, and rights owners were not credited as such.”

The game was afoot. Fortunately, this is 2015, and there’s such a thing as the Internet. We discovered that Pyotr and Maria were credited as co-creators of a “project” entitled *Multifaceted City*, which was shown at a 2007 exhibition at the Moscow International Art Salon in the Central House of Artists.<sup>3</sup> We then contacted Pyotr through Facebook, and he kindly gave us Maria’s phone number, which Dmitry soon called. As another survivor of Soviet Union, she was at first understandably reluctant and suspicious of strangers with questionable inquiries, but Dmitry managed to

smooth things over. In his words:

Maria is a professional artist. She graduated from the Art Department of the Moscow Polygraphic Institute in 1978, a very old and respected institution whose alumni mostly specialize in graphic arts and design.<sup>4</sup> Apart from book illustrations, she also paints and produces graphic works.

Sergei Goloshchapov is, in fact, her ex-husband, and Pyotr is their son. Both are also artists. In the late 1980s, they were still a family.

The order for Alice book illustrations came to her from Vladivostok through her professional network of colleagues, and her husband, Sergei, acted as her manager, taking on himself all the formalities and contacts. Maria’s role was purely creative; she did the illustrations, but never concerned herself with any associated legal, business, or administrative matters. Of course she had been familiar with Carroll, and the Alice books were among her favorites.

It was not until quite a while later that Maria learned from an acquaintance that her husband had gotten himself credited as the book’s illustrator. Also, when she finally got

hold of a copy, she was appalled at the book’s poor quality and at what had been done to her pictures. She said that what one can see in the book has almost nothing in common with the originals, and that the publisher all but “mutilated” her works, which is why she doesn’t particularly like those illustrations reproduced or discussed anywhere.

She later divorced Sergei. When Pyotr grew up, at some point he decided to clarify the issue





of the illustrations' authorship by commenting on a message on the Internet.

Sadly, the originals of the illustrations were not destined to stay long in the artist's possession. In 1991, Maria and a number of other Russian artists were invited to show their works at an exhibition in Japan, "The Breath of White Spaces" (Дыхание белых пространств). She sent all of them there. The show was a great success, but after it closed, none of its 2,000 exhibits were returned to their creators, which caused quite a scandal and turned into a protracted conflict.<sup>5</sup>

Shades of Walter and Margaret Keane! And how very sad that her original artwork was treated so cavalierly. But even in less-than-first-rate reproduction (and what image on the Internet is first rate?), they are still very charming, and a lovely addition to the Alice canon.



When Adriana first turned me on to this book, I naturally turned to the Net for help in finding a copy for the Burstein Collection. I found only one Russian bookstore that listed it, but it was "not available." Dmitry did some further sleuthing and came up with the ISBN (5-7440-0108-5) and a "rare books society" that claimed to have a copy for sale. He contacted them, and arranged to meet a lady in a Moscow subway station (shades of George Smiley!) who would sell him the book. It was in good condition, though the paper

on which it was originally printed was of pulp quality, and the pages had turned yellowish with age. DHL consummated the deal by delivering the book to California.

I asked Adriana to comment on what appealed to her about the artwork:

Alice's provocative question about pictures or conversations still reverberates in each new illustrated *Alice* I meet in my "time machine" travels. If Virginia Woolf was right when she wrote that the *Alices* are not books for children but books in which we *become* children,<sup>6</sup> we are challenged to face each fresh set of *Alice* illustrations with the potential wonder, imagination, and curiosity of a dreamchild.

In treasure-hunting in labyrinthine weblands following the clues gave me by a friendly white rabbit, I met the queer, golden-gleamy images of Maria Bublova. Love at first sight! Her illustrations are carriers of Woolf's call. They nourish the source of children's enchantment in their becomings of Alice and her longing to reach the loveliest garden ever seen. She calls not the youngsters we were—or a formula or recipe—but the children we become while constantly reinventing ourselves.

I began to analyze the aesthetic choices and formal structures of each picture, when suddenly, my mind fell through the page as if it were a looking-glass vortex, a deck of portals in a vibrant quest, following their magical topography. I found out that the paths in these pictures are also hosts, conductors, which invite us to enter the picture, expanding the landscape beyond the margins of the pages, a travel that continues invisibly, following the golden river.

In a sensuous contemplation of their color palette, there is something magical about her colorful skies in their blend of yellows, reds, and oranges, contrasting with vegetable greens. Alice herself does not dress in blue, but in a yellow, chessboard-patterned dress, integrating herself into the environment of the dream that we are also able to partake in. Walter Benjamin once suggested beautifully, "The colored picture immerses the child's imagination in a dream state within itself."<sup>7</sup>

When I face these images by Maria Bubleva, they evoke the sensation that we can dive into them with the conviction that their story continues beyond the borders. It tickles me to be able to dream together with her. The pictures bring the once-upon-a-time mist that invites the imagination to go through. Now I must call again upon the arcane master Walter Benjamin, who

knew how to inhabit old children's illustrated books and find their hidden treasures:

The objects do not come to meet the picturing child from the pages of a book; instead, the gazing child enters into those pages, becoming suffused, like a cloud, with the riotous colors of the world of pictures. Sitting before his [illustrated] book, he makes the Taoist vision of perfection come true: he overcomes the illusory barrier of the book's surface and passes through colored textures and brightly painted partitions to enter a stage on which fairy tales spring to life.<sup>8</sup>

Maria, we profusely thank you for your delightful interpretation. Although the physical book is difficult to come by, your pictures are easily found on the Web. We understand that they are not in ideal reproduction, but their light shines through nonetheless.

*Dmitry Yermolovich (Дмитрий Ермолович) is a Professor of Translation at Moscow State Linguistic University. His bilingual Охота на Угада и прочие странные истории ("The Hunting of the Snark" and Other Strange Tales) can be ordered through our blog.*



<sup>1</sup> [alicenations.blogspot.com/2015/01/if-im-mad-hatter-you-are-you.html](http://alicenations.blogspot.com/2015/01/if-im-mad-hatter-you-are-you.html).

<sup>2</sup> [tapirr.livejournal.com/1306372.html](http://tapirr.livejournal.com/1306372.html).

<sup>3</sup> [dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/1568520](http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/1568520).

<sup>4</sup> Now the Moscow State University of Printing Arts (МГУП), it is Russia's largest university specializing in printing and publishing.

<sup>5</sup> [www.mk.ru/editions/daily/article/2005/10/07/190789-vernite-vinnipuha.html](http://www.mk.ru/editions/daily/article/2005/10/07/190789-vernite-vinnipuha.html).

<sup>6</sup> Woolf, Virginia. "Lewis Carroll." *New Statesman* (December 9, 1939), reprinted often.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "Old Forgotten Children's Books." In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, editors (Harvard University Press, 1996). First published in *Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1924. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books." In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, editors (Harvard University Press, 1996). First published in *Die literarische Welt*, 1926. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.

